

Pope's children's book ignores women, says advocacy group

British advocacy group We Are Church claims Pope Benedict highlighted only male disciples his new children's book, *The Friends of Jesus*, saying it implied women are second-class citizens in the Christian religion.

Pope Benedict XVI is described by the Vatican Information Service as the author of the 48-page book about Jesus's 14 friends who are listed as Peter, his brother Andrew, James the older, John, Thomas, Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew, James the younger, Simon, Judas Thaddeus, Judas Iscariot, Matthias and Paul, according to a report by *The Times*, published in *The Australian*.

No mention was made of Mary Magdalene or any other female friends of Jesus, the report said.

Valerie Stroud of the British Catholic organisation We Are Church, a support group for Catholics, said: "In giving children the idea that Jesus only favoured men, Pope Benedict sends a very strong message that women are second-class citizens in the Christian religion."

"This was never Jesus's intention. The Supreme Pontiff completely abandons the modern idea of equality within relationships."

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said the book was put together by an editor but admitted that the Pope had sanctioned the use of his name on the cover. "The Pope has done explicitly a catechism about the many women in the service of the Gospel who were disciples of Jesus and helped him in his life," he said.

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