Vatican



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The head of the Vatican's doctrinal office has reaffirmed the Catholic Church's ban on the ordination of women as priests, writing in a new article that the teaching has a "definitive character" and "is a truth belonging to the deposit of faith."

In a short essay available online and that will be published in Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano May 30, Archbishop Luis Ladaria also states that expressing doubt about the barring of women from the priesthood "creates serious confusion among the faithful."

Ladaria, who is to be made a cardinal by Pope Francis in June and is the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, says Jesus decided to reserve the sacrament of priestly ordination "to the twelve apostles, all men, who, in turn, communicated it to other men."

"The church has always recognized herself bound by this decision of the Lord, which excludes that the ministerial priesthood can be validly conferred on women," he continues.

Ladaria's article is given the headline "The definitive character of the doctrine of '*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*,'" referring to Pope John Paul II's 1994 apostolic letter that outlined the reasoning behind the ban on the priestly ordination of women.

The archbishop, who specifies several times in his essay that he is writing only about priestly ordination, says he decided to write "in response to doubt" about John Paul's teaching.

The prelate opens his two-page essay with a short reflection on the church's understanding of the sacrament of ordination. He then notes the debate that has occurred in recent decades over the character of John Paul's letter, especially the question of whether it is to be considered an infallible papal teaching.

Ladaria argues that although John Paul did not formally proclaim the teaching *ex cathedra* -- as outlined by the First Vatican Council document *Pastor aeternus* as part of the process of a pope declaring something infallibly -- the pope "formally confirmed ... what the ordinary and universal magisterium considered throughout the history of the Church as belonging to the deposit of faith."

The prefect says "it is a matter of serious concern to see the emergence in some countries of voices that question the definitiveness of this doctrine."

"To hold that it is not definitive, it is argued that it was not defined *ex cathedra* and that, then, a later decision by a future Pope or council could overturn it," he states. "Sowing these doubts creates serious confusion among the faithful, not only about the Sacrament of Orders as part of the divine constitution of the Church, but also about the ability of the ordinary magisterium to teach Catholic doctrine in an infallible way."

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Francis has reaffirmed John Paul's ban on the ordination of women to the priesthood on several occasions. In a press conference aboard the papal flight back to Rome after his trip to Sweden in November 2016, the pontiff was asked if John Paul's teaching would continue forever.

"The last word is clear," the pope said then. "It was given by St. John Paul II and this remains."

However, Francis has also created a papal commission to study the history of women deacons in the Catholic Church. Details of that commission's work, instituted by the pontiff in August 2016, have not been made known.

The women deacons commission, which has 13 members, is led by Ladaria. The archbishop is one of 14 prelates Francis announced May 20 that he will be making cardinals in a Vatican ceremony June 28.

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