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Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, relator general of the Synod of Bishops, arrives for a news conference to present an update on the synod process at the Vatican Aug. 26, 2022. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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A newly named top adviser to Pope Francis and leading organizer of the Vatican's ongoing synod process believes that it might one day be possible to revisit Pope John Paul II's prohibition on the ordination of women to the priesthood and said that the church's language of describing LGBT persons as "intrinsically disordered" is "dubious."

While underscoring that Francis is not in favor of the ordination of women, Luxembourg Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich said that it remains an open conversation among some Catholics and that he would like to see women given greater pastoral responsibilities.

"Pope Francis does not want the ordination of women, and I am completely obedient to that," Hollerich said in a wide-ranging interview with the Croatian Catholic weekly, Glas Koncila, published on March 27.

"I am a promoter of giving women more pastoral responsibility. And if we achieve that, then we can perhaps see if there still is a desire among women for ordination," he added.

The Jesuit cardinal, who is serving as the relator, or chairperson, of the 2023 and 2024 Synod of Bishops, said that should the church ever reconsider the question, it should do so in consultation and unity with the Orthodox Church.

"We could never do that if it would jeopardize our fraternity with the Orthodox or if it would polarize the unity of our church," he said. "Love is not something abstract; it is the love for our sisters and brothers that prevents us from doing things that would alienate them."

When asked, however, if a future pope could rule against John Paul II's 1994 apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which said that the Catholic Church does not have the authority to ordain women, Hollerich said it was possible and that the church's teaching could be developed.

He went on to offer a comparison to Pope Pius IX's 1864 "Syllabus of Errors," which was considered infallible and condemned religious freedom and interfaith dialogue. Such practices, the cardinal said, are now common in the church.

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Still, the cardinal, who earlier this month was added to the nine-member body of cardinals who regularly meet with the pope to advise him, stressed his fidelity to the pope: "For the moment, if Pope Francis tells me it is not an option, it is not an option."

Hollerich also commented on conservative Catholics who have historically emphasized the importance of papal fidelity, who are now critical of Francis.

"It is very difficult to be Catholic without obedience to the pope. Some very conservative people always preached obedience to the pope, as long as the pope said the things they wanted to hear," said the cardinal.

"The pope says things that are difficult for me too, but I see them as a chance for conversion, for becoming a more faithful and happier Christian," he added.

On the issue of gay relationships, Hollerich said the church's use of the phrase "intrinsically disordered" to describe LGBTQ persons is "dubious" and that gay persons "must feel welcome in our house. Otherwise, they will go away."

In recent months, several U.S. prelates, including Cardinals Robert McElroy of San Diego and Blase Cupich of Chicago and Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, have called for the church to abandon such language.

Hollerich also emphasized that the church's only response to LGBT persons cannot be to emphasize celibacy. To reduce homosexuality to sexual relations is a "crude way of understanding a human person," he said.

"For some of them it is possible to be chaste, but calling others to chastity seems like speaking Egyptian to them," he said.

"We can only charge people with moral conduct they can bear in their world," he continued. "If we ask impossible things of them, we will put them off. If we say everything they do is intrinsically wrong, it is like saying their life has no value."

"When Jesus meets somebody like Zacchaeus, he does not say: 'You have to change your life, my boy, and then, perhaps, if you do penance, I might consider visiting you.' No; his look on such a person puts them at ease and makes them feel accepted. Then Jesus goes to their house, and only then do they change," he said. "I do not exclude change, but it comes after meeting Jesus."

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