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There is hope in Brazilian cardinal's statement on LCWR

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NCR Today

I read with fascination Joshua J. McElwee's story about Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and his talk to the International Union of Superiors General in Rome. And in it, I saw some glimmers of hope.

After all, how often do cardinals complain about their fellow cardinals in public? And how often do they suggest the need for women's leadership in the church? Braz de Aviz did both.

First, Braz de Aviz made public his personal "pain" over the fact that he was "left out" of the discussions about the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the mandate that came down last year from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

That issue was no doubt on the minds of the 800 women attending the meeting. Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, the current president of LCWR, gave a presentation to the group detailing the "serious misunderstandings" between LCWR and the doctrinal congregation.

Going even further, Braz de Aviz talked about a "lack of trust" among the cardinals and made a serious call for change. I was left wondering, What is he really trying to say? What does this suggest about his relationship with Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller of the doctrinal congregation?

"We have to change this way of doing things," Braz de Aviz continued, referring to distrust among the cardinals. I thought to myself: "This Cardinal feels 'outside the loop' in the Vatican."

Braz de Aviz did mention the reported reaffirmation by the Pope of the LCWR mandate without

indicating if this was the result of a detailed meeting or a five-minute conversation. But he also said he believed the pope would be willing to meet with the LCWR leaders. It is not at all clear how much the pope knows about the mandate and its problems or the uproar it caused in the U.S. church.

Later, he said that "women's leadership needs to grow a lot in the church." Now that is certainly the understatement of the year, but from a cardinal in his position, it's a rare remark.

Now, granted, the fact that Braz de Aviz is Brazilian may or may not mean anything, but I suspect he and Pope Francis know each other as neighbors on the South American continent. They probably knew each other as colleagues at meetings of Latin American bishops. That connection could mean a lot in the ongoing struggle of LCWR. Let's hope it does.

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