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Former LCWR leader: Pope should open door to women priests

Joshua J. McElwee | Jul. 31, 2013 NCR Today

A key former leader of U.S. Catholic sisters said Pope Francis should reconsider the Catholic church's ban on women priests, likening the male-only priesthood to "a form of inequality which is a form of idolatry."

Commenting to *NCR* on Francis' remarks on the papal plane [1] Monday that the late Pope John Paul II had "definitively ... closed the door" to Catholic women priests, Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane said Francis has a chance to "begin a whole new movement and a whole new philosophy."

"John Paul II was definitive, but John Paul II is dead," said Kane. "You don't just bury it because John Paul II said it. I wonder what [Francis'] own feeling is."

Kane served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in 1979-80. During that time she made headlines across the world when she welcomed Pope John Paul II on his first visit to the United States in 1979 and pointedly asked him about the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood.

LCWR, first founded in 1956, is an umbrella organization which represents about 80 percent of the approximately 57,000 U.S. sisters.

Women's ordination, said Kane, "is a matter of justice."

"If there's any inequality there's always injustice, whether it's racial or cultural or religious or gender," she said. "Not only is it a social justice, I've always said it's a form of inequality which is a form of idolatry actually -- that we idolize the ideas, we idolize the traditions, we idolize the way it has been."

Referencing Pope Francis' remarks on the plane that women have a special role in the church akin to that of Mary's as the Queen of the Apostles, Kane said Catholic leaders sometimes put women on a pedestal but don't see them as equals.

"They continue to say Mary was so important, but we pedestalize her and we want to pedestalize women," said Kane. "We either pedestalize women or we condemn them. We never see them as equals, or we never have to look eye to eye and be equal with each other."

Kane said Pope Francis has to open the door to the question of women priests and to "bring the church into the 21st century for the very significant equality of women and men."

"Wouldn't it be a marvelous experience for Catholics to have him open the door again to it?" she asked.

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