

Re-writing the Gospels

Cardinal Ladaria's Argument against Ordaining Women



You would be forgiven for thinking that leading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) requires a thorough knowledge of theology. And yet that does not appear to be currently the case.

In a recent interview, the head of the CDF, Archbishop **Luis Ladaria SJ**, made a series of affirmations that are either groundless or downright mistaken. "Christ wanted to confer this sacrament [i.e. Holy Order] to the Twelve apostles, all men, who in turn passed it on to other men," the Spanish Jesuit stated.

It would be hard to pack more mistaken affirmations in such a short sentence. Did Jesus "ordain" the Twelve? He didn't. Did the Twelve "ordain" successors? They didn't. Were the Twelve at least the original model for an institutional ordained ministry? Again, they were not.

Instead, the New Testament (NT) witnesses to a variety of functions, ministries, and institutional arrangements (itinerant preachers, teachers, and apostles; deacons; [councils of] elders; house patrons; etc.), many if not all of which were open to women to fill (including "deacon" and "apostle"!).

Even more remarkable is the way Ladaria jumps from the tacit, erroneous assumption that the Twelve were the original and exclusive model of "ordained" ministry, to the equally mistaken conclusion that their "maleness" was essential to the very "substance" of said ministry. Again, this is entirely baseless: Ladaria might

as well have argued that only circumcised Jewish men can be ordained ministers.

What similar statements from the Vatican routinely pass under silence is that **the NT mentions many women as prominent disciples** – Mary Magdalene being perhaps the foremost – **and important ministers in the primitive church**. At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul greets a number of women, some of whom he designates by title: **Junia, an "outstanding apostle" (!); Priscilla, a "co-worker in Christ" (a term Paul uses as a synonym of "apostle"), as well as Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all of whom are said to "have worked very hard in the Lord."**

Few lines earlier Paul greets **Phoebe, a "deacon"; and 1 Tim 3:11 even has a list of character requirements for women deacons** (at times mistakenly translated the "[male] deacons' wives"). As we know from elsewhere in the NT, "deacons" fulfilled important and high-profile functions such as preaching, teaching, as well as distributing alms and food during the common meals.

As Paul reminded the Galatians (3:28) **"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"**: this is one of the Apostle's most revolutionary passages, and it is immensely regrettable that 2,000 years on it is still contradicted in practice within the Catholic Church, due to an ideological position based on ancient misogynistic prejudices, contrary to evidence from the new Testament and deaf to Jesus' liberating message.

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Towards A Church that Lives in Community



Virginia Saldanha, a theologian and free lance writer based in Mumbai

The vision of Jesus for his followers is to live united as a caring community (Jn 17:21). "Rooted in a Trinitarian God of communion the Church has struggled in the course of her pilgrim journey through history challenged by the world and its rapidly changing value systems. The Second Vatican Council re-projected the image of church as a communion of communities by affirming the local character of the Church, built on faith translated into human relationships."

In 1990, the 5th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), articulated their **vision for the Church in Asia as "a communion of communities"**, where "laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers" (FABC V, 8.1.1), **a participatory and co-responsible Church**. This

"New Way of Being Church", is **based on the servant leadership model exemplified by Jesus washing his disciples' feet**.

The vision requires that "communities take on full responsibility for their life and work. They have to become self-ministering. Lengthy, active experience (of leaders) in their parishes will have distinguished them as 'proven' – probati – community leaders." This should progress to the development of "lay ministry structures so that one day they can become a suitable foundation for the ordination of community leaders."

The early Church formed communities where men and women exercised discipleship through various ministries in service to the community, which later was referred to as the 'common priesthood'. In the early Church women shared in decision making and had leadership and liturgical roles in the community (Acts 18: 26, 21:8-9; Rom 16).

Acknowledging the divine principle that charisms are given to all to offer kenotic or self-emptying service can help facilitate partnership and change the hierarchical structures in the Church. **The priesthood and hierarchy have to be demythologised and demystified, promoting the concept of Church as the People of God who are equal in discipleship.**

This model of being Church is inclusive, welcoming and focuses on love so as to attract all those who would otherwise feel marginalized and excluded.

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News

We congratulate Sarah Mullally on her induction as Bishop of London. London diocese is one of the few areas in which C of E congregations are



growing, but it is a complex diocese with a formidable presence of conservatives, both from the Anglo-Catholic and evangelical traditions, who disapprove of women priests. Mullally told reporters: "I respect those that cannot accept my ministry as a bishop because I am a woman."

She said the diocese was theologically diverse, and she would work with the bishops of Fulham and Maidstone, who minister to clergy and congregations who do not accept female priests.

The previous bishop of London, Richard Chartres, declined to ordain priests of either gender in order to avoid stirring controversy. Mullally became the first female bishop to lead an ordination service two years ago, when she ordained four clergy, three of whom were women.

Meanwhile we in the Roman Catholic Communion are still waiting for the commission of women deacons to publish their report. The Catholic Church has an ambivalent relationship with women. For example, Pope Francis, whose devotion to Mary is well-known, has established a **new feast day for the Catholic Church devoted to Mary as the 'Mother of the Church'** to be celebrated on the Monday after Pentecost but has also described women theologians as 'strawberries on the cake'.

He went on to say that **women should have greater decision-making powers in the Church**. The presence of women, the Pope said, "becomes an invitation to reflect on the role that women can and should play in the field of theology."

"By virtue of their feminine genius, [female] theologians can detect, for the benefit of all, some unexplored aspects of the unfathomable mystery of Christ," the Pope said. "I invite you, therefore, to take the best advantage of this specific contribution of women to the intelligence of faith." This was in 2014 and changes are yet to materialize.



Mary McAleese: "God gave us two wings so that humanity could soar to great heights and feel the power and see the beauty of his creation in all its wonder. Yet our Church insists on flying on one wing, overlooking and wasting the talents and insights of so many wonderful, faithful, Godly women. Why?"

In a keynote address to the Voices of Faith International Women's Day Conference 'The time is now for change in the Catholic Church' Mary McAleese said:

"Back in 1976 we were told that the Church does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination. This has locked women out of any significant role in the Church's leadership and authority structure [...].

Just imagine the normative scenario – Pope Francis calls a Synod on Women and 350 male celibates advise the Pope on what women really want. That is how ludicrous our Church has become. **How long can the hierarchy sustain the credibility of a God who wants things this way, who wants a Church where women are invisible and voiceless in leadership and decision-making [...].**

At the start of his papacy Pope Francis said:

'We need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church'

Let us be clear, women's right to equality in the Church should arise organically from divine justice. It should not depend on ad hoc papal benevolence."

Seeking funding.



Our founder Dr John Wijngaards is on a questing mission in Europe. You may ask why we need to do this – the answer is simple, **we need money to continue the work of building up an online library of high quality academic research on those issues which are the least openly discussed in the Catholic Church.**

In an ideal world the work of the Wijngaards Institute would be carried out in universities, seminaries and theological colleges. Sadly, this is only rarely the case. **Many Catholic authorities are reluctant to allow free public discussion concerning some of those issues, for fear of antagonizing the Vatican or undermining their careers and even jobs.**

Saving our websites.

Our main website www.womenpriests.org is huge and we fear many of the valuable resources are being lost because they are difficult to access. It desperately needs updating using new technology. This will safeguard its future, by making it **more accessible to online visitors (more than 600,000 a year!), and easier to maintain.** We have much that it would be a shame to lose.

The website offers **the most comprehensive collection of relevant scholarly material**, including extracts from the works of the Fathers of the Church, conciliar decrees, papal documents, early, medieval and modern theologians, saints etc. We have also carried out **original research bringing to light previously unpublished primary sources**: for example, **the womendeacons.org website presents evidence of more than 100 women deacons, mostly from headstone inscriptions whose drawings lay for-**

gotten in the British Library!

The more pastoral content, on the other hand, comprises videos, podcasts, picture galleries, on-line interactive courses, historical analyses, agreed statements by renowned Catholic scholars as well as **key-point summaries of the academic content**. Those summaries we have **translated into 26 languages**. We also provide a sympathetic ear' to people who contact our office by phone or email.

Our tiny staff and numerous volunteers ensure small contributions go a long way. Moreover, every contribution helps the lives of thousands of believers. So **please donate generously!**

Here are two testimonies of why our work is so needed:-

"Thank you so much for this. I'm in Ontario, Canada, and they'd rather eliminate some Masses than have women priests. I am in a very difficult period in my life where I'm so angry at the Church for perpetuating the example of women as second class. I still pray, but seeing some of these Deacons and Priests I can't help but feel there's a hypocrisy and smugness there, that has nothing to do with Christ Jesus."

From a letter to us.

*"I am one of the 14 theologically trained religious sisters in India who, in 1994, wrote a strong, well-documented appeal to Pope John-Paul II to ask him to keep the question of women in the ministries open. We never received a proper response from the Vatican. Now, **20 years later, I am grateful that by having published our letter on your website you have kept our appeal alive ever since that time.** The way authority functions in the Church must change."*

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