

## Cardinal sees 'no theological obstacle' to women priests

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 27, 2011 NCR Today

Cardinal José da Cruz Policarpo of Lisbon, Portugal, a veteran European prelate at one point considered a contender for the papacy, reportedly has said there's "no fundamental theological obstacle" to the ordination of women as priests in the Catholic church.

According to the text of an interview with a legal publication in Portugal called *Oa*, Policarpo said that women's ordination will happen only "when God wants it," although not in our lifetimes, and that now is not the time to raise the question.

"Theologically there is no fundamental obstacle," Policarpo was quoted as saying. "We could say there's a tradition, because it's never been done."

"There's a fundamental equality among all the members of the church," the cardinal said. "The problem lies in a strong tradition, which comes from Jesus and from the fact that the churches of the Reformation conceded the priesthood to women."

Those comments were highlighted over the weekend by "Vatican Insider," a new on-line news source on the Catholic church operated by the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*.

Policarpo's claim that there is no theological bar to women priests would seem to be at odds with various recent Vatican declarations.

In 1994, Pope John Paul II issued the document *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* reaffirming the ban on women priests. A subsequent clarification released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger asserted that the teaching on "has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium," and therefore belongs to the "deposit of faith."

More recently, Pope Benedict XVI referred to the teaching as "infallible" in a letter informing Australian Bishop William Morris of the Toowoomba diocese that he had been removed from office, in part for raising the question of women's ordination in a 2006 pastoral letter.

Policarpo also reportedly said that the debate over women's ordination is to some extent a "false problem," because the same young women who put the question to him usually demur when he asks if they themselves would be willing to become priests.

Policarpo, 75, has been the Patriarch of Lisbon since 1998. Although he has reached the usual retirement age for bishops, Benedict XVI recently confirmed him in office for another two years.

A former dean of the theology faculty at the Portuguese Catholic University, Policarpo was considered by some a dark-horse candidate for the papacy during the late John Paul years. He is generally seen as a theological and political moderate, and a bridge-builder between the church in Europe and in Latin America.

The text of the interview with Policarpo, in Portuguese, [may be found here](#) [1].

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