



nova notes

NOVA Catholic Community

July 2012

Chair Notes...

We Co-Chairs met recently to have one of our last chats *as Co-Chairs*. We talked about the past year, thought about the issues ahead for the NOVA Community and the Catholic Church, and decided to collaborate on these July, 2012 Chair Notes. So here goes...

In recent Notes, we focused on change and the *in-between space* that a person experiences between different periods of life. Teddi described the discomfort and anxiety and even aversion that one might feel anticipating change. Cece described how one needs community during these times; it is in community that one is nurtured and grows with change. Neither of us referred much to the excitement and joy that accompanies the experience. Whether it is simply relief to leave that unsettling, anxious in-between space or actual enjoyment of the difference, change promises growth, joy, renewal, even excitement.

So here we are—relieved, happy, and excited to have experienced change in several ways. The community reached consensus on the new major Peace and Social Justice project for the coming year, Centro Compesina, the Rural Women's Center. We experienced a renewed understanding of the consensus process, especially, as Jerry Barrett put it, by "doing consensus from the beginning without a fixed conclusion in our minds." Members reached inside to reflect, discern, and listen carefully to the Spirit, and we called on the new leadership of Meg Tuccillo. And the community is literally in its new space at Lacey Woods Park these summer Sundays.

At the same time, we continue to struggle with ever-present challenges of Community and Church. Who

We Are remains constant in the sense that we focus on our mission to celebrate and build the Kingdom and take care of each other. But Who We Are should not be blind to what we hadn't thought of or to the growing needs around us.

The Catholic Church seems to be moving, or, perhaps a better description, "scattering." While congregations are concerned about abuse, the need for reform, the priesthood, and the role of women, among other things, the Vatican is moving backward to pre-Vatican II days, focusing on a return to medieval language and ritual, censorship and scolding instead. How can we not be puzzled about the mission of these men? How does one respond?

Christ gave us but two commandments—to love God, and to love others as ourselves, and his example was one of service, not lordship, not power. How is the Vatican following this example? The Spirit is calling out everywhere about the needs of justice, of the poor, and of making peace. Is the Vatican listening? Are church authorities listening? If they aren't—and it seems as if they aren't—what can we do? How can we be more effective witnesses for the poor, for justice, for women?

Our prayer is that the NOVA Community continues to grow in the Spirit, and that our church and world leaders become better listeners so that they can respond to all those who are calling out to them. We never outgrow the need for renewal and the joy and excitement that goes with it.

With love and gratitude from both of us as Teddi moves into a *different space* as a member of NOVA,
~Teddi and Cece

For NOVA photos, click on:

<http://www.novacommunity.weebly.com>

July Birthdays

- | | |
|----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Bernice Todaro |
| 2 | John Cackley |
| | Nick Mele |
| 10 | Laura Goldschmidt |
| 14 | Greg Swanberg |
| 16 | John Birch |
| 17 | Jennifer Carroll |
| 19 | John Veldhuis |
| 20 | Joe Nangle, OFM |
| 21 | Jody Furlong |
| 28 | Scott Christofferson |
| 29 | Carolyn Schmidt |

Please send Judy Christofferson your birthday if you would like it to appear here (month/day only).

Remember in your prayers. . .

Eve Birch, for the success of her work in assisting the needy

Sonja Donahue, who appreciates a card, a call or a visit

Jody Furlong, who also appreciates phone calls or notes

Michael Iskander, who going through a lengthy recovery process from extensive injuries following a car accident last year

Remember these and any other NOVA members and their friends and family who need our prayers.

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

NOVA Message Line	(703) 852-7907
Chairpersons	Teddi Ahrens Cece Michelotti
Treasurer	Joe Formoso
Coordinator, Community Life	Marlene Shade
Liturgy Coordinator	Gloria Mog
Padre Cadre Coordinator	John Mooney
Music Coordinator	Victoria Robinson
Peace and Justice Coordinators	Dianne Carroll Marie Keefe
Christ House Coordinator	Kopp Michelotti
Facilities	John Tarrant
Directory & Yahoo Groups Coordinator; Webmaster	Ken Chaison
Announcements Coordinator	Linda Christie
Newsletter Editor	Judy Christofferson

**August Newsletter Deadline
Wednesday, July 25**

Liturgies: Cycle B

Inclusive Readings and Music Selections are available in the new NOVA Yahoo Group Files. Please give all music selections to the Music Liaison the Sunday before your liturgy and print **65 copies** of the liturgy program. Liturgies at Kenmore School (located on Carlin Springs Rd. off Arlington Blvd.) begin at 10:15 a.m.

July Music Liaison Victoria Robinson

July 1 – 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

John Haughey, S.J.

Planner: Victoria Robinson

Liturgy cancelled because of storm

July 8 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gerry Stockhausen, S.J.

Planners: Peggy Meyer & the O'Tooles

Note: Installation of new Co-Chair, Meg Bread-for-the-World Letter Writing following the liturgy

July 15 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Priest: TBD

Planner: Barbara Formoso

July 22 – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jim Hug, S.J.

Planners: Richard Urban and Marie Schum-Brady

July 29 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joe Kenna

Planners: O'Tooles and Christies

August Music Liaison Victoria Robinson

August 5 – 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dan Madigan, S.J.

Planner: Meg Tuccillo

August 12 – 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jim Coriden

Planners: Cece and Kopp Michelotti

August 19 – 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dan Madigan, S.J.

Planners: John and Carol Reeder

August 26 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joe Nangle, OFM

Planners: Linda and Jack Christie

When possible please arrange any needed exchanges with other Planners on dates near your liturgy. Let Gloria Mog, Liturgy Coordinator, know of any changes to the schedule.

“HOMEWORK” ASSIGNMENT

(For everyone in NOVA who cares about hungry people)

Think of all the good reasons you can for why our government should fund domestic programs to help hungry people and then make a written list of your reasons. TIP: You can find good ideas* on Bread for the World's Offering of Letters website: www.bread.org/go/OL.

Bring your list to the liturgy on July 8. There will be time and supplies for letter-writing afterwards. The letters will be collected and offered at the altar during the Offertory of the mass on the following Sunday, **July 15**. It is important for all of us to keep informed so we can advocate for those who rely on federal assistance programs to keep their families nourished and healthy. **Talk with as many people as you can about this important issue.**

***La Marco Cable**, our new Regional Organizer for Bread for the World, asked me to encourage you to talk with him about this or anything else you want to ask or discuss regarding the ministry of BFW.

~**Peggy Meyer, NOVA liaison for Bread for the World**

Gunston Volunteers Needed

NOVA volunteers distribute bags of nonperishable food and cereal provided by the Community, and perishable items such as eggs, milk, and meat that are picked up at the Arlington Food Assistance Center warehouse on the night of distribution. Produce items are picked up every other week by Eric Carroll at the produce markets downtown (and funded by the NOVA Peace and Justice budget).

The distribution takes place at the Gunston Middle School Recreation Center in Arlington. NOVA volunteers have been active in this project for many years. More than one volunteer is needed. There is a seasoned volunteer every Thursday, so this is your chance to provide needed help. Having someone who speaks Spanish is a real plus for each of the teams. **Please help.** If you are interested in volunteering, contact Dianne Carroll.

June Gunston Schedule

July 5: **Eric; Marie Pinho**

July 12: **Jim; Terry**

July 19: **Need volunteers –Carrolls on vacation**

July 26: **Glen; Syd**



Fr. Hug blesses Community with Mikaela holding water bowl

Kick Off Peace and Social Justice Project Annual “Big” Project: 2012-13

Sunday, July 15

During the liturgy on the liturgy, the NOVA Community will affirm its commitment to help build *the Rural Women’s Center in Cabañas, El Salvador.*

“Mini-Fundraiser”

Following the liturgy, you can purchase a **tropical fruit treat!**

Have you ever eaten a “carambola”? Have you enjoyed papayas and mangos lately? For a healthy mid-morning snack, we’ll Have these as well as familiar favorites, including watermelon, cantaloupe, and pineapple for sale.

What a yummy way to begin our support for the Rural Women’s Center.
Ole!

Editor's Note: *The following article is a "profile" of the Christies, who have been active in NOVA for the past few years. A little background to this article: Rosemarie Annunziata interviewed and wrote a series of articles about NOVA members for the newsletter several years ago. In a recent newsletter survey, several of you requested that we bring back these articles because it's interesting to learn about others members' lives before (and outside of) NOVA. Thanks to Rosemarie for taking the initiative to respond to this request. I am hopeful more profiles will follow in upcoming issues.*

Getting to Know You: Linda and Jack Christie

Ah those Christie voices! Jack's deep mellifluous baritone and Linda's rich, vibrant, clearly audible speaking voice are hallmarks that will immediately identify them to you. I thought the NOVA community would enjoy getting to know them in other ways as well.



Jack was born in the District, but grew up in the Dominion Hills section of Arlington. Before moving to the same area of Arlington in 1954, Linda and her Navy family lived in Moscow, Idaho, Boston and San Diego. Jack is a cradle Catholic. Linda was brought up as a Presbyterian, her mother's faith and then attended a Lutheran church, thanks to a friend. When her mother converted to Catholicism, Linda followed along. She was 11 years old and struck by the Latin, the incense and the rules, together with the kindness of a wonderful priest she met at St. Matthews Cathedral in D.C. Following her conversion, Linda was enrolled by her parents in the sixth grade class at St. Ann School in Arlington where she first met Jack. They had not met before although he lived only a block from Linda's house. The two continued with Catholic education and were members of the second graduating class from Bishop Denis J. O'Connell High School. It was at O'Connell where they started dating.

After high school graduation, Jack attended George Washington University where he studied electrical engineering. Linda went to Longwood College in southern Virginia and majored in history and social science. They graduated

from those respective schools in 1966 and were married in February that year because Linda was able to graduate early in January.

Jack has worked as a civilian electronics engineer for the government for over 40 years; he is getting ready to fully retire in August. Linda taught high school for three years, happily she notes, at Loudoun Valley HS in Purcellville, Virginia. She retired from the position when the couple's first daughter was born. In 1979, Jack's job as an electrical engineer with the Army brought the family to Frankfurt, then West Germany, where they spent the next four years. After the Christies returned from Germany and to their house in Woodbridge in 1983, Linda resumed her teaching career at Aquinas Catholic School, teaching sixth grade, where, she says, "I should have been all along." Not wanting to miss out on being a grandmother, Linda has been retired from teaching since 1998. The Christie family includes two married daughters, Kelly and Shannon, their husbands, Michael and John, and six grandchildren. The grandchildren range in age from six to fourteen. Oldest and only grandson is Steven. The rest are girls: Shelby, Chloe, twins Jessie and Lauren, and Lindsey. The Christies consider it a special blessing that their extended family lives in the area: Kelly and her family in Ellicott City, Maryland, Shannon and her family in Chantilly, Virginia. Father Joe Kenna often says Mass at Kelly's parish near Columbia.

A remarkable, fully engaged religious and liturgical life has characterized the Christies' journey. Their membership in St. Sebastian's American Catholic Community, not unlike NOVA in its community involvement and wonderful Army chaplain priests, was described as a highlight among their experiences in Germany. The Christies made a Marriage Encounter in 1978 right after their 12th wedding anniversary and consider it to be one of the most significant and meaningful gifts they have ever given to themselves, their daughters, extended family and friends. They led Marriage Encounter weekends for several years and since have regularly gathered

with five/now six other couples weekly for almost 30 years, sharing all of life's joys and sorrows, from raising families to attending weddings and funerals. The Christies also became active in the Walk to Emmaus program. One of the first things Linda did when she retired from teaching in 1998 was to make the Walk, an ecumenical version of the Catholic Cursillo. The Walk begins with a Thursday evening through Sunday gathering, during which participants are given a short course on Christianity focused on God's love for all of us and on an exploration of where each person fits into God's plan, on where they are in life and where they are going, given their capabilities. Jack made the Walk the following year and became increasingly involved with Emmaus in the years that followed. The National Capital Area Emmaus community comes together every month to talk, pray and sing!

In addition to Marriage Encounter and Emmaus, the Christies have been either members of or had a strong connection to four parishes in the Woodbridge area, beginning with Our Lady of Angels Parish when it was the only Catholic church in town. Later, Jack literally helped build newly formed Holy Family Parish in Dale City digging ditches, putting in the parking lot lights, installing a public address system, and helping reassemble an old organ that the pastor of Holy Family, Father Roy Cosby (later Monsignor Cosby), had located. The Christies lived in Dale City and were active members of the parish for many years. Jack also helped reopen Sacred Heart Chapel, a small chapel that, lacking parishioners had remained closed for many years. The Chapel, although technically located in Manassas, was within the Holy Family parish boundaries and Jack and Father Cosby began exploring the possibilities of laying the foundation for a new parish church. The work began on August 15th around 1970 when Jack got rid of the hornets and wasps that had made nesting places in the hollows of the chapel's old counter-weighted window sashes as well as in every nook and cranny of the building. It is now the thriving and much larger Sacred Heart Parish in Manassas.

Jack and Linda had moved to Lake Ridge in the Woodbridge area in 1972. As the diocese became more conservative, the Christies became increasingly dismayed and frustrated by the voices they heard from the pulpit as members of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish since 1974. By October 2008, during the height of the presidential election, they found themselves at the end of their "proverbial rope." NOVA's existence was unknown to the Christies, but NOVA's "grapevine" found them through a conversation that began with Bob and Phyllis O'Toole's daughter, Stephanie, who knew her parents were attending NOVA. Stephanie encouraged the Christies and another couple to come to our liturgy and they were at NOVA the following Sunday, arriving about the same time as their friends the O'Tooles and former NOVA members, Ann and Don Arabian, whom they knew for many years going back to the early 1970s. Ann Arabian taught the Christie's daughter, Kelly, in fourth grade CCD, for example. By their report, the Christies have happily remained at NOVA ever since.

As noted in the initial paragraph of this interview, a fine voice is one of the Christies' identifying attributes. Linda has a perfect speaking voice, mid-range in tone, crisp and clearly audible in every circumstance. Jack was too shy to ever sing in public before participating in Marriage Encounter; according to Jack, singing in the pews was about all he could muster at that time. His growing interest in contemporary Christian music, born out of his involvement in Emmaus, his learning to play the guitar Linda gave him one Christmas, his desire to sing a song for each of his daughter's weddings, and his enthusiastic embrace of the NovaTones and their music the very first Sunday the Christies attended liturgy with us, nurtured his confidence and cemented his interest in musical performance.

We are very blessed to have the Christies in our community and I've enjoyed getting to know them better. I hope you have, too.

~Rosemarie Annunziata



Linda (right), enjoying dinner with Carmela at this year's "Men Who Cook" fundraiser

Thank You Letter

Dear NOVA Community:

Thank you for your great generosity to Little Friends for Peace! We received your donation for the TASSC children. We are moved with your support. Now we can say yes to more of the refugee children so they can come to Peace Camp! Thank you for “being the change you want to see in the world.” You are the Beloved Community, the peacemakers and we feel a special bond with all of you as we do this ministry. Please keep us in prayer as we begin a very busy summer of Peace Camps. We want to spread the “infectious disease” of Peace and create a Culture of Peace.

Blessings, Prayers & Peace to all of you!

M.J. & Jerry Park
Co-Directors of L.F.F.P.

Photos of “Dreamers” at the June 17 Liturgy



Diane



Karen



Henry



Community extends a blessing to the Dreamers

Food for Thought

Editor: My apologies to Jerry Barrett, who submitted the following article for publication in the June issue. Jerry originally shared the story of the chimps (below) during the dialog on May 13, Mother's Day. Fortunately, this story is appropriate for all occasions.

Zoo Chimps and the Value of Staying Connected

For several days, a pair of chimps had been separated, as they had on occasions before. Only the zookeeper knew why. The sturdy, concrete wall between their cages kept them from seeing each other. A three by three foot steel door blocked entry between their cages. The door fit so tightly against its frame that it didn't allow even a slight peek between the cages.

During their first separation, they made a discovery. Near the bottom of the door, a small odd shaped piece of concrete was missing. About the size of a half dollar coin, the opening made a sharp turn making it impossible to see between the cages.

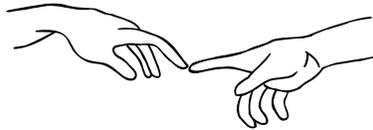
Once they discovered this contact point, they sat for hours each day touching their finger ends together through the wall, as they waited for the door to be opened.

Their stillness disappointed children and their parents, who had come anticipating a lively show.

Visitors wondered and speculated about what the pair was doing sitting motionless with sad faces and making occasional soft guttural sounds with an index finger extended into the wall.

Only the pair knew. They were just staying in touch, keeping their connection during their separation.

~Jerry Barrett



Isabella and Nico at Offertory with grandma, Kate



Blessing Mike and Clyde, taking Communion to the sick

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2012

What does the cosmos say about “the law written on their hearts”? Part 3 (continued)

This essay continues with a response to the skeptics of Vatican II who argue that a broadly based “People of God” vision of the Church can’t work. The response has three parts. The first part discussed a book that provides a rationale for a more participatory model for the Church. The other two parts – from a cosmic perspective, and then a practical approach – follow in this essay and the next.

The Cosmos

It is often said the Church is a mystery, and mystery seems an appropriate term. How will the People of God come to be one in Christ? The Pope is a symbol of that unity, but can that symbol apply to sentient beings elsewhere in the cosmos? Indeed, can that symbol apply to other cultures and religious traditions on planet Earth? And what is the point of a symbol, anyway: Must we not be concerned about how the People of God can work together, in love, and thereby achieve some measure of oneness?

The cosmos has a history, but this is a recent recognition. For most of our time on earth the cosmos has simply been “out there.” The stars in the sky have been in the same constellations for thousands of years – perhaps forever, as far as anyone knew. The changeless and eternal “heavens” seemed an appropriate abode for a changeless and eternal God. Amid the turmoil and uncertainty of life on earth, it is comforting to see in the sameness of the night sky the handiwork of a God who is eternal.

All that changed about fifty years ago, as Vatican II was changing the Church. Two researchers at Bell Labs in New Jersey discovered a peculiar noise in their new antenna. It was peculiar because it was the same in all directions. No matter where they pointed the antenna, they picked up the same low temperature microwave signal. They could not explain it.

This was (and is) the cosmic background radiation. It takes some time to get your mind around the explanation. The signal is the same in all directions because it is coming to us from so long ago. We are used to looking up at the sky and thinking “space,” but the farther away we look the more illusory it is to think of “space.” We are looking back in time, toward what has been called

the Big Bang. We are still inside the Big Bang, which is why we are looking toward the same point of origin – in time and space – no matter where we look.

Amazingly, physicists have gleaned an enormous amount of “history” from the cosmic background radiation. The cosmos does, indeed, have a history. For the last twenty years multidisciplinary courses in “big history” have been taught at a number of universities. These courses trace the history of the cosmos from the Big Bang to the present, and describe a series of still unfolding transitions. Each transition is something of a surprise, because what emerges is a new level of complexity.

The first few transitions are about physics: the formation of stars, which are the furnaces for the creation of all the chemical elements, which are strewn into interstellar space when these stars burn themselves up and then explode; the formation of planets around new stars formed from the interstellar gas that contains this debris. The next several transitions work their way through formation of the earth some four and a half billion years ago, with its molten core and surface tectonic plates, and the evolution of single celled organisms beginning about 3.8 billion years ago. The added complexity of multi-celled organisms doesn’t occur until about five or six hundred million years ago, and human beings don’t appear until two or three hundred thousand years ago.

From that point forward the course covers transitions in human society, including the development of agriculture about ten thousand years ago and the formation of more complex cities and states about five thousand years ago. These further transitions depend upon human capacity to learn collectively, that is, to accumulate learning from generation to generation and build on what prior generations learned.

What is interesting about the perspective of “big history” is the contrast of time scales and change. Changes in physics (like the stars in the night sky) are very slow, but the pace of change picks up as the dominant discipline moves to chemistry, then biology, then sociology. In all these transitions there is movement toward greater complexity, and recent transitions move more quickly. We are all conscious of the dramatic changes in technology over the last hundred years – from horses and buggies to airplanes,

and from pencil and paper to iPads. But do we appreciate similar changes in society, and in particular the society that is the Church? Is not Vatican II a part of these changes. What is next? What the history of the cosmos suggests is that further surprises are in store, and that they will happen faster and faster.

Taking this long view, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Church history should be understood as part of this cosmic unfolding. That is, there is a progression of dominant disciplines. Christ lived in a time of kings and prophets, and temple leaders who lorded their positions over the people. It was a pattern taken from the social hierarchies that grew up in agrarian societies as cities grew larger. The leadership of kings was an “emergent property” not present in the smaller communities of the early agrarian era.

The self understanding of the People of God at the time of Christ is subject to its own unfolding, and this ought not to disturb us. As St. Augustine understood, the cosmos is God’s “book of nature”, from which the Church can learn. The Church is not an institution outside of society, but rather is a leaven from within society. The Church does not learn from the outside, looking at the cosmos as if it were an object to be studied. Rather, the Church itself is part of a pattern of unfolding, with surprises and transitions along the way. The Church is alive.

From this perspective, the changes of Vatican II are of a piece with the history of the cosmos itself. Kings (and Popes) are a form of leadership that emerged to serve the larger communities that developed after the late agrarian era. But the pattern of unfolding continues. There is a reason that kings and social elites have been replaced by a form of politics that is more open and more broadly participatory: more open societies are more productive; more open societies are better at drawing out the energies of the people. This is an age old cosmic pattern, with antecedents in the evolution of cells that could draw energy from the sun. There is real energy in “what is written on their hearts.” The sun waited patiently for hundreds of millions of years for photosynthesis to evolve, but the time came. God is waiting patiently for a Church structure that draws upon the energy of the whole People of God.

Such a structure – such a politics – will be more open and accessible. This was the point of the book discussed in the earlier section, *Violence and Social Orders* (Douglas North). The question raised then – and reemphasized by the dynamic and unfolding history of **the cosmos** – was this: Why has not the governance structure of the Church followed suit? Surely bishops would be interested in followers of Christ more effectively energized toward bringing the reign of God to life on earth. Pope John Paul II called for a rethinking of papal authority in *Ut Unum Sint*, a first step. The history of the cosmos verily cries out for this hoped for empowerment of the People of God.

But the Vatican is stuck in an older model, one that has not yet been schooled in the “book of nature” that is our cosmos. There was a time when it seemed an appropriate expression of awe to suppose that God operates from the outside, from “heaven above,” in *deus ex machina* style. It made sense to suppose that God sent Jesus from the outside in this fashion; it made sense to believe that our very souls come from the outside in this fashion. There was a fixity and a solidity in this view, a certain comfort in knowing that outside the turmoil and uncertainty of life on earth a loving God was a constant for us, a north star in the heavens.

Yet this is a dualistic model, one that separates reality into heaven and earth. And it is our model, not God’s model. The institutional Church – understandably but nonetheless prematurely – has vested itself in the aura of constancy, the rock of Peter, that flows from this model. It is a deceptive comfort that buries the talents of the People of God.

The “book of nature” is telling us that even the Church should be looking for a better model, a model that better serves the reign of God. In some sense, the older model is not being overturned, any more than biology overturns chemistry or chemistry overturns physics. But there is something new that cannot be adequately accounted for by the older model. There is a need for a different focus, and a new discipline. Such a discipline would build upon the current model just as the discipline of biology builds upon the discipline of chemistry, and just as the discipline of chemistry builds upon the discipline of physics. Or, to use a metaphor from scripture, a new focus and a new discipline may be viewed as a new wineskin to replace the old.

So it needs to be with the Papacy. The focus needs to change, so that the People of God more fully participate in bringing the reign of God. There have been signs of this all along. Jesus was born of a woman, not simply sent from above. The early Church struggled with who Jesus was, found human constructs wanting, and ended by preserving the mystery of “fully human, fully divine.” The irrepressible Spirit has showered the People of God with surprises throughout the history of the Church, from saints like Francis to outpourings from the people in the form of confraternities in the cities of the Middle Ages to the *sensus fidelium* given formal recognition at Vatican II.

And we are in the midst of a further sign that Church governance needs a new focus. Consider the role of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). In recent decades they have published “notifications” challenging the orthodoxy of noted theologians, but in a manner that leaves the theological community wondering whether the CDF critique has missed the point of the works being criticized. Roger Haight’s *Jesus, Symbol of God* and Elizabeth Johnson’s *Quest for the Living God* are examples.

Of course, the CDF is charged with addressing doctrine. But one wonders whether the doctrinal emphasis of the CDF is a distraction that diverts the People of God from seeking the reign of God. It is not that doctrine is not important, but rather that the approach to doctrinal discipline needs to be more responsive to “the law written on their hearts.” This presence of the living God within us, for expression and also for cultivation by the community, is central to the Church’s focus on human dignity. The CDF approach comes across as external and unsettling. Something is missing.

The journey toward the reign of God is what the Church is about.¹ There is a dignity and integrity of this journey that is offended by the current CDF approach. This offense to dignity has been repeated in recent times, most recently with the “Doctrinal Assessment” of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). It is difficult to read the “Doctrinal Assessment” and not feel the political arrogance of the document. The sisters have responded with a moderate but forceful

challenge to the lack of collegial process by the CDF. Was this confrontation necessary?

And yet it would appear that the CDF has the authority to do what they are doing. The LCWR was set up by the Vatican (under canon 709), and can be restructured by the Vatican.

A dialogue is in process. On June 12, 2012, Vatican officials met with LCWR representatives. The contrasting hopes for “dialogue” are instructive. Following the meeting, Cardinal William Levada, head of the CDF, expressed concern that this might be a “dialogue of the deaf.” He referred to four years of exchanges with the LCWR in which the CDF position was not taken to heart. This was the reason for laying this position out in the “Doctrinal Assessment.” It is reasonably clear that Cardinal Levada’s conception of “dialogue” is a means to obtain LCWR compliance with the specifics set forth in the written document.

LCWR president Sr. Pat Farrell has a different set of hopes. She would rather not have the outside control by three bishops, as contemplated by the “Doctrinal Assessment.” Yet the LCWR is the vehicle for women religious to have a seat at the table for conversations within the Church, which is what the sisters have in mind by “dialogue.” Finally, the sisters may find hope in the statement by Archbishop Sartain that he was open to considering other ways of reaching the CDF objectives than the specifics stated in the written document.

It is not at all clear that the CDF and LCWR are on the same page, but a dialogue is in process.

Stepping back from this immediate example, is there some change in the approach to this dialogue which would be suggested by reflection upon the “book of nature” that is written by the history of the cosmos?

Perhaps it is time for a new discipline, a new focus that shifts attention from doctrine to the integrity of the journey. Isn’t that already the practice of many priests and bishops, at the pastoral level? And the benefit of such a shift in emphasis might well be a more open and accessible Church, better able to harness the energies of the People of God toward bringing the reign of God to this challenging Earth.

Next time: **practical steps.**

TO BE CONTINUED.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 45.