



April 29, 2012

Fourth Sunday of Easter—Good Shepherd Sunday

“...a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man...works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.”
—John10:11-13

Dear Friends;

Did you know that it was a medical sister (member of a religious community) that was the first to develop an early form of an incubator for premature babies? Did you know a scientist-nun was one of the first to work with DNA? Did you know a Catholic nun, Sr Ignatia Gavin, co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous back in 1935?

The California Museum in Sacramento has a traveling exhibit entitled: *Women and Spirit—Catholic Sisters in America* which will be there until June 3rd. The exhibit tells the story of a small group of innovative American women who help shape the nation’s social and cultural landscape. This extensive exhibit surveys the history of women religious in the United States, from the first community—the Ursulines who arrive in New Orleans in 1727, through their history as outstanding educators to their involvement in the civil rights movement of the 1960’s the care of HIV/AIDS patients and the ecology. A smaller companion exhibit highlights the history of California’s women religious.

The Sacramento exhibit is its ninth and final stop. The show includes photos, videos, and objects from more than 400 religious orders in the United States. The artifacts document the rich contribution women religious have made to Catholics and American history. These good women truly shepherded the immigrant and nascent American Catholic people. It is a moment for Catholics to be proud.

So it is very sad that the men of the Vatican’s Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (formally the Office of the Holy Roman Inquisition, this name is still on the building) has issued a ‘doctrinal assessment’ of the leading organization of women religious—The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). The statement indicated that the Holy See would intervene in the LCWR to correct what it says are “serious doctrinal problems.”

My guess is the men of the Vatican haven’t visited the *Women and Spirit* exhibit. If they had they might have a very different assessment. A tension exists between two poles within the Church. On the one hand we have orthodoxy which means correct belief. Orthodoxy is concerned with dogma, formulating doctrine and making sure people have “correct thoughts.” On the other hand we orthopraxy which means “correct practice.” Orthopraxy is more concerned with doing the right thing.

Jesus seems to fall more on the side of orthopraxy. His parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke shows us his bias. In the story the priests who were maintaining right beliefs walked on the other side of the road from the wounded man, who they left there to die. They fail in right practice of love because they hold rigidly to right ideas. The Samaritan, who from a Jewish point of view, did not have right belief yet was the one who acted correctly—with compassion. For Jesus this was good orthopraxy.

Sometimes in our ideologies we behave like totalitarian regimes. People are rewarded and promoted not because they have talent, knowledge, experience or ability. They are promoted merely because they have correct ideology. Others are punished for incorrect ideology. That is always disastrous look, for example, what that did for the Communist party in Poland.

If you have a family member who is a nun, if you were taught by women religious who you admired, or they had influence on your life in school or religion classes or you are just upset about this misplaced Vatican action against these faithful women tell them of your gratitude. Then go see *Women and Spirit* in Sacramento info at <http://womenandspirit.org>. And if you would like to send a statement of support on behalf of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious you may email them to Archbishop Peter Sartain c/o mary.santi@seattlearch.org or via post at 710 9th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these women who have so faithfully shepherded the faith of the Catholic Community over the last two hundred years. They deserve our thanks not an investigation.

Peace,

Fr Ron