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Instead of gratitude, this

by Thomas C. Fox



Patricia McQuire, president of Trinity Washington University, writing for

the Huffington Post, addresses the "true radicalism" of the U.S. sisters. They were the bricks and mortar of our Catholic school system and our Catholic hospital system. Now they are aging, numbers declining, with an the average age being 75 years. This is the time to be grateful to the sisters, she writes, adding,

Now come some bishops, miters in high pique, arrayed across the line of Church authority known as the Magisterium, staring down this increasingly small, elderly and impoverished group of determined, dignified religious women. Rather than reaching out to say, "How can we help you, sisters?" in these declining years -- How can we begin to repay you for all that you contributed to the life of the Church and her flock? -- the men have nailed an indictment high on the cloister door, damning the nuns for being, somehow, disobedient, suspiciously feminist, radically unfaithful to

the Magisterium, a word that appears often enough in the indictment to tell us that they really mean business.

...

These women deserve our respect and veneration. If they have used their voices to express challenges and even doubts, from time to time, they have earned the right to do so. The men of the Church might be more open to the wisdom of the women, and less fearful for perceived threats to their positional authority.

The men are aging out, too. To the rest of the world, including many faithful lay Catholics, the hierarchy's current preoccupations seem obtuse, an inwardly focused race to stanch the bleeding of modernity into this ancient institution. The fights are really not about faith, at all -- Catholics across the spectrum of political belief remain fairly ardent about their faith -- but about organizational issues that often seem arcane, even irrelevant in the face of the awesome challenges of contemporary life on this planet.

We live in a world of pain. Why must the Church fathers inflict even more on the very people who have devoted their entire lives to trying to heal the pain?

Certainly, if there is a need for dialogue about differences, have that dialogue in earnest and in private. But it must be a dialogue, not a threat, and dialogue assumes that both sides are open to hearing the other and even learning from the other.

Whatever the sisters might have done to cross invisible lines of vowed obedience according to Church rules, they have done so with courage and conviction. They deserve reverence, not retribution.

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