

Priest writes in support of Catholic nuns

Dennis Coday | May. 3, 2012 NCR Today

In a statement emailed to *NCR*, a California priest praises the work of Catholic nuns:

Oblates of St. Francis de Sales Fr. John Kasper*
Pastor of St. Perpetua Parish
Lafayette, Calif.
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Dear Friends,

Two weeks ago on a Friday, I went to the California Museum in Sacramento to view a traveling exhibition of special interest to us Catholics. "Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America" is an exhibit sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). It tells the story of a small group of innovative American women who helped shape the nation's social and cultural landscape.

The wide-ranging exhibit follows the history of women religious in the United States, from the arrival of the first order (Ursuline Sisters who came to New Orleans in 1727), through their history as outstanding educators, to their involvement in more contemporary issues such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the care of patients with HIV/AIDS, and the environment. Part of the exhibit highlights the California history of women religious.

I discovered so many facts I didn't know about women religious, even though my oldest sister belongs to a religious community and I've had lifelong affiliations with many nuns. I didn't know, for instance, that a medical sister was responsible for devising an early form of an incubator for premature babies. A Catholic nun, Sr. Ignatia Gavin, co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935, and initiated practices still used today in AA.

Sacramento is the exhibit's ninth and final stop. The show includes photos, videos and objects collected from more than 400 religious orders in the United States. The artifacts are not only interesting, but demonstrate the contribution of religious women to American history. It made me proud to be Catholic.

The following Friday, to my surprise and shock, news came out about the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issuing a "doctrinal assessment" saying the Holy See would intervene with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious to correct "serious doctrinal problems." My guess is that members of the Vatican office haven't seen this exhibit, or their assessment would be very different.

A tension exists between "orthodoxy" (correct belief) and "orthopraxy" (correct action). It seems that Jesus usually came down on the side of "orthopraxy." His story of the Good Samaritan is a prime example. The Samaritan didn't have the correct beliefs. He wouldn't have passed a "doctrinal assessment" test, but he took the correct action when he helped the man who had been beaten by robbers. Thus he received Jesus' praise. The characters in Jesus' parable who had the right beliefs, the Levite and the priest, the religious officials, failed the test of Christian love because they walked by the man in need without stopping to help him.

If you have a relative who is a nun, if you were taught by the "good sisters," if you have been inspired by the religious women who have had an influence on your own faith and religious formation "or if you're as disturbed as I am about the Vatican's misplaced action against American women religious" I encourage you to go to Sacramento and be inspired by the exhibit "Women & Spirit." It will only be at the California Museum until June 3. Further information can be found at <http://womenandspirit.org>.

If you would like to send a statement of support on behalf of LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious) you can mail your comments to Archbishop J. Peter Sartain at 710 9th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104.

If anyone sees other notes of support in parish bulletins, diocesan newspapers, etc., please let us know at NCR. We will verify them and post as many as we can.

The original version of this post incorrectly listed the religious order of Fr. John Kasper.

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