NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Stem cell research and the Francis papacy

Pat Perriello | Apr. 15, 2013 NCR Today

Since the heady days of the elevation of Pope Francis, the barrage of news surrounding the new pope has slowed to a trickle. The early stories continue to be recycled and commentators continue to focus on the first moves of Francis and what they may mean for the future of the Catholic church. The only new news has been the appointment of a Franciscan [1] to oversee the work of male and female religious. The attempts to mine this one appointment for information about where the church is headed have commentators tripping over one another. I should add that at least one exception to this trend has been *NCR*'s own John Allen, who traveled to Argentina to do serious background work [2] on Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis.

At any rate, I put forward my own attempt to fill the void with a look at an article from Religion News Service [3] on a stem cell research conference at the Vatican.

I guess no one was shocked that Pope Francis didn't come out in favor of embryonic stem cell research in his first month in office. It is also true that the conference described was clearly planned and organized well before Pope Francis took office.

Yet could there be a couple of hints at least in a change in tone in this RNS news article? There is a positive tone in the write-up concerning the conference as a legitimate venture into science. It promotes the value of scientific research and stresses the importance and even the successes of adult stem cell research. The tone of apologetics is still there, of course. Only data that support the church's position are highlighted and other important data is ignored, but it does try to avoid the conflict between science and religion. Fundamentally, it takes a positive stance in favor of something rather than expressing strong condemnation of something it is against.

Additionally and even more importantly, there is clearly more respect indicated for those who disagree with the church's position. Msgr. Tomasz Trafny, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said, "We don't want to stigmatize those who do research on embryonic stem cells." He prefers a more positive stance that focuses on the value and success of adult stem cell research.

There will, of course, be significant news coming out of the Vatican in due time. Necessary key appointments, public events and leaks of information will be part of this papacy just as it has been in every other papacy. My impression at this point, however, is we are going to see a low-key papacy with a minimum of high-profile dramatic pronouncements. Instead, if there is movement, it is likely to come in tone, a change in attitude, a greater willingness to be engaged with the world and its people.

It will likely come from seeing how others pick up on the pope's intentions and begin to carry out his agenda. Whether he is leading by example or making clear to clerics throughout the world what he expects, the real clues will likely be seen in how church officials throughout Rome and the world begin to change their way of interacting with Catholics, world leaders and other communities around the world. For American Catholics, the real changes need to take place in Kansas, Maryland, New York, California and all across this land.

Note: As I was preparing to send this piece to *NCR*, I saw the article in which the pope has appointed eight cardinals [4] to work on church governance. It seems to be a major and potentially positive development. Yet this group will apparently hold its first meeting six months from now. So it seems we are still "making haste slowly."

Source URL (retrieved on *02/05/2016 - 18:09*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/stem-cell-research-and-francis-papacy

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/49236
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/49631
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/49716/
[4] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-taps-eight-cardinals-lead-reform)