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

The bishops as juggernaut

Robert McClory | Jul. 30, 2012 NCR Today

I do not understand what is going on in the upper echelons of the Catholic church.

It seems that there's a new radical theology of obedience being foisted on us. I am alarmed, and I believe you should be, too. The presentation by Bishop Leonard Blair during his lengthy discussion [1] with Terry Gross on public radio regarding the LCWR takeover runs contrary to what hundreds of thousands of Catholics have come to believe about their faith and their right to be treated as adults. Blair and presumably the other bishops who will be working with him in an effort to rein in these rebellious, free-thinking sisters are taking the church to a dark place where submission to episcopal teaching is expected to be automatically accepted -- always and without exception.

This is not the church as I understand it since it bypasses the lessons of history and presents its authority as unquestionable, without reference to the checks and balances that have become an essential part of Catholicism today. Things like:

- The hierarchy of truths (not all doctrines are created equal).
- The sense of the faithful (the Holy Spirit present and working in the whole church).
- The reception of teaching (without which a proposed doctrine is like a tree falling in the forest and nobody's around).

The replies of Blair to Gross' questions made no mention of the above considerations. They were devoid of nuance or distinction other than to move all thinking in the direction of the bishops and only the bishops as decision-makers and protectors of fundamental doctrines -- without discussion and without example provided of what these fundamental doctrines are.

I can only imagine what will occur when and if LCWR representatives sit down with the episcopal investigators to "dialogue" about the charges. The sisters are likely to face a juggernaut of authority rolling over them in the name of obedience. This is, of course, just the latest manifestation of the Vatican-ordered campaign to reform the reform of Vatican II. But this time it's hitting home, hitting people dedicated to living the really fundamental doctrines.

I have rarely been so embarrassed to be a Catholic as I was while listening to the one-note presentation by Bishop Blair. Where are the thoughtful bishops who know what's going on here? Where are the thoughtful Catholic theologians who have been writing and talking about the rights of conscience, the sense of the faithful and the reception and non-reception of doctrine in Catholic universities, books and articles for years? Is all that destined to be run over and crushed by the juggernaut that confronts the LCWR? And who after that? This not a time for polite silence.

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