

Hopefully, a Meeting of Minds

A celebrated and most valuable outgrowth of the Second Vatican Council has been the rise in the number of “apostolic movements” that have sprung up in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each centered in a unique spirituality, these movements nourish strongly committed laity with the teachings and sacraments of the Church, thus enabling them to carry out their vocation “to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in tempered affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 898). Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Communion and Liberation, Opus Dei and Focolare are several of the many worldwide movements within the Church that continue to attract and enrich the spiritual lives of millions of Catholic faithful.

Newcomers on the scene, the lay movements are often compared to the rise of the clerical orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans of the 13th century, the working of the Holy Spirit ever inspiring new initiatives of evangelization to respond to the varying challenges faced by the Church through the centuries. Like then, so now, tensions can arise as these new movements interact with the centuries old traditions and structures of our Catholic communion.

One of a number of such apostolic movements in our Archdiocese has been Regnum Christi (the Reign or Kingdom of Christ), the lay branch of the Legion of Christ, founded in Mexico by the recently deceased Father Marcial Maciel. The movement is worldwide and has operated with the blessing of the Holy See. Its activities have not been without certain tension, however, at least in parts of the United States, including our Archdiocese.

During the five years prior to my arrival as Archbishop, Cardinal Keeler had shared correspondence and meetings with the leadership of the Legionaries of Christ on a number of occasions reflecting many of our pastors’ valid concerns: for instance, regarding a lack of pastoral transparency at times and a tendency to conduct parallel programs within our parishes without the knowledge of local pastors. In some cases undue pressure was placed on individuals to conform to the rule of Regnum Christi and in a context of secrecy. In addition, some youth programs tended to alienate parents from their children, and various clubs and activities for

high-schoolers often presented the vocation to priesthood and consecrated life as an obligation rather than an informed choice. In short, a lack of necessary transparency.

The call to priesthood or consecrated life requires a discernment process that rightly should involve parents and other family members. This deeply personal, life-changing decision requires the love and support that can only come from family and close friends, and their caring involvement is crucial for anyone who feels he or she has been called by God to serve as a priest or a consecrated man or woman.

I have met a good number of Regnum Christi members who lead exemplary Catholic lives and see this movement as a God-send. But I also am well aware of the challenges that have led a number to leave the movement, some angrily insisting that Church authority must act to correct the excesses they claim have endured. Hence, the dialogue these last five and more years.

At a meeting last week between the Superior General of the Legion and our staff, it was agreed that he would appoint a liaison to oversee the activities of Regnum Christi and keep our Chancery and appropriate pastors fully informed. This includes programs and methods of vocation recruitment. (The text of the full letter agreed to can be found on our own website, www.archbalt.org.)

For some time I have wondered whether the flaws of the Legionary movement were endemic to the movement itself. By this final step, I hope to have been proved wrong.

May the goal of all who are involved be guided by the counsel of Pope Benedict in his address to a worldwide gathering of "Ecclesial Movements and New Communities" in 2006. He stated that the Church "... is also grateful for you for your readiness not only to accept the active directives of the Successor of Peter, but also of the Bishops of the various local Churches who, with the Pope, are custodians of truth and charity in unity. I trust in your prompt obedience ... [The] Movements must approach each problem with sentiments of deep communion, in a spirit of loyalty to their legitimate Pastors."

I am particularly grateful to present and former members of Regnum Christi, to the

priests and leadership of the Legion, as well as to our own priests and Chancery staff whose concerns have led to what I pray will be a graced path forward that addresses our concerns and leads to the best service for all God's people.