

Value natural world as God does, theologian tells LCWR-CMSM assembly

DENVER - The summary of faith contained in the Nicene Creed makes clear that “the Maker of heaven and earth is still in business” and values creation “for its own sake,” Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson told a gathering of leaders of men’s and women’s religious orders.

Sister Johnson, a professor of theology at Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York and a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, made the comments Aug. 2 in an address to a joint assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in Denver.

“Contemporary scientific discovery is bringing a dynamic edge with its awareness that the world was not made once for all in a static way, but has evolved through a dazzling array of forms to the state we inhabit today,” she said.

But looking at those changes through the eyes of faith shows us that “the world, far from being just a backdrop for our lives or a stage for our drama, is a beloved creation valued by God for its own sake,” she added.

Decrying the destructive effects on the world of “human practices of consumption, pollution and reproduction” and the disproportionate harm to the poor from such practices, Sister Johnson said, “Why have Christians who confess that God created this world not risen up en masse in defense of the natural world?”

“One reason is that ... we have inherited a powerful dualism that splits all reality into spirit and matter, and then devalues matter and the body while prizing the spirit as closer to God,” she said. “The task now is to develop a life-affirming theology of the earth/matter/bodies, one that will do better justice to the world that God makes and so loves.”

Following Jesus also involves “a terrific countercultural challenge,” Sister Johnson

said.

“The challenge is not only to bind up wounds, as centuries of magnificent deeds of Christian charity have done, but to prevent wounds being inflicted in the first place,” she said.

She criticized “exploitative economic structures on a global scale” and “attitudes, actions and inactions” by white U.S. Christians “that diminish the well-being of immigrants from other nations who are struggling to live with human dignity, to say nothing of African-Americans, Latino and Latina peoples who were born here.”

The Aug. 1-4 joint assembly in Denver drew about 700 members of LCWR and about 150 CMSM members.