

BRIGIDINE LIFE and MISSION UNFOLDING

... Making the Connections 1

The 2014 Council of the Congregation challenged us to look more deeply at the underlying and connecting vision and spirit at the heart of the 2011 Congregational Forum

What is at the foundation of this call to a more integrated way of living, praying and working?

Everything in our world is intimately connected. We now know we share the same stardust and that we are but one part of the global community of life deeply interconnected with all other species and life systems. This complex web of relationships is both beautiful and awe-inspiring. Simultaneously this community of life faces multiple global crises: degradation of the planet and its biospheres; political and institutional ineptitude, including the church with its many problems despite the enlightened efforts of Pope Francis; exploitation and displacement of peoples to name a few. With the breakdown of so much that is familiar there is a call to pay attention to the major shifts occurring in world views, theology and our cosmology. Our theological understandings are being redefined: concepts like love, divine presence and incarnation. As Nancy Schreck expresses it, *"We are together learners in this new moment of the mystery of God's unfolding revelation"*.

The theologian Elizabeth Johnston CSJ offers some reflection on changing theology and cosmology that are at the heart of *'this new moment of the mystery of God's unfolding revelation'*. This provides some foundation for the call to take a more integrated approach to the implementation of the Forum Directions, and indeed our whole lives. Extracts from Elizabeth Johnson's recent book, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* might provide us with common material for reflection and discussion.

Elizabeth Johnson summarises the interrelationship of all fields of knowledge by asking: "What could the beast, the birds of the air, the plants of the earth and the fish of the sea teach us?"

◇*Scientifically*, they have come into being, grown into complex, beautiful forms and fit into their diverse ecologically niches through a powerful and unscripted evolutionary process that has lasted hundreds and millions of years.

◇*Theologically*, they are the work of the Spirit of God who vivifies the community of creation from which we humans have also emerged. The ineffable holy mystery of Love creates, indwells and empowers plants and animals, delights in their wise and funny ways and grieves their suffering. In the unexpected Christian view, the living God even chooses to become part of their story in Jesus Christ, a member of the community of life on this planet whose death and resurrection pledges a hopeful future for all.



**This
Graced
Moment:

Divine
Energy
animating
fresh
possibilities**

◇*Ecologically*, the community of living creatures is now under terrible threat due to human action.

A commitment to ecological wholeness in partnership with a more just social order is the vocation which best corresponds to God's own loving intent for our corner of creation. We are all kin in the evolving community of life now under siege; our vision must be one of flourishing for all. A flourishing humanity on a thriving planet rich in species in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us at this critical time of Earth's distress, to practical and critical effect. Ignoring this view keeps people of faith and their churches locked in irrelevance while a terrible drama of life and death is being played out in the real world. By contrast, living the ecological vocation in the power of the Spirit sets us off on a great adventure of mind and heart, expanding the repertoire of our love. (p.285-286)

The spirituality we embrace, our vision of church, the use of our resources and the social and ecological justice initiatives we support and the structures that keep us together are all influenced by the '*learnings in this new moment of the mystery of God's unfolding revelation*'.

The **Christ event** reveals how God acts, and this rolls over into other contexts. Since gracious divine action expressed in incarnation and the giving of grace reveal the character of God, then holy Mystery who recreates, redeems and sanctifies the world brims over with the most profound respect for creatures. Seen through the gospel, divine love unfailingly manifests itself not as a "coercive power" but as "power with" that energises others. **Love** becomes the paradigm. (p158)

Theological reflection highlights the insight that the Creator loves the rich diversity of the tree of life, embedded in the whole tapestry of the cosmos for its own sake, and not as a stage on the way to the human species. Rather than a mere backdrop, it is the locus of divine activity deeply involved in, with and under its open-ended evolutionary processes. It is the dwelling place of God. (p179)

The **incarnation**, a densely specific expression of the love of God already poured out in creation, confers a new nearness to God on the whole of earthly reality on all Earth's creatures, on plants and animals, and on the cosmos in which planet Earth dynamically exists. (p.198)



The doctrine of **creation** posits a relationship of origin for all creatures. Their existence, in and of itself, is totally owed to the free act of an incomprehensibly loving Other. The evidence points to the Big Bang theory dated about 13.7 billion years ago... All life evolved through the interplay of chance and law, and as life emerged it became more complex. Life's explosion into species with their distinctive beauty and nimble interrelationships with other species and the environment finds its ultimate ground in the God of love as creating source. (p217-218)

What ideas expressed here evoke further thinking? Why”
What changes does the invitation to ‘expand the repertoire of our love’ call us to at this time?

“As Earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will God’s integrity and justice spring forth.”