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Sr. Sophia Hart: Vatican II Interactions

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Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Sophia in January 2019 regarding her experiences and interactions in the Catholic church along with being involved in sisterhood. This paper includes sections of that interview along with discussion of Vatican II and its relationship to its people.

Growing up, Sister Sophia's family consisted of five people in a small house. She never had her own room or even a bed to call her own, yet she still displayed an extraordinary amount of kindness towards those around her. From a young age, Sister Sophia was surrounded by the excellent character of women religious. Throughout this time, she always saw these women as remarkable people and considered them very close and dear to her heart. When asked what appealed religiously to her from such a young age, she replied, "I was very attracted to the community and lifestyles of the sisters. I was also very interested and drawn to God and the Bible." It seemed as though she was very intrigued by, and wished to explore what it really meant to be Catholic and to be connected to God. As time went by, her interest in the Bible remained constant as she proceeded through her journey to explore Catholicism. Her time as a sister has been spent largely as a teacher of mathematics and religion, and has spent over 30 years in finance for her community.

In 1959 an immense movement took place in the Catholic Church. On January 25th, religious leaders came together to discuss the modernization of Catholic practices. Among these

discussions, the involvement of women within the church was brought up. In a periodical written by Dennis M. Linehan, he describes a conversation had in a meeting between the bishops, “The end of the second session of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens of Belgium asked his fellow bishops: ‘Why are we even discussing the reality of the church when half of the church is not even represented here?’” Before the meeting of Vatican II, the involvement women had with the church was almost nonexistent. They were not allowed to speak in meetings (or be there for that matter of fact), become ordained, and so forth. But, with the recognition that the world is changing, manifested the thought that women should be involved in decision making processes, and not solely the male bishops. As the Cardinal pointed out, half the population of Catholics were not being allowed to include their voice or have any say within church proceedings. Sister Sophia was excited when speaking on the topic of Vatican II because it marked the start on the road of women becoming equal to the men in the church, which traditionally has never been seen. She had mentioned that she “loved the interaction Vatican II had with its people.” It is very important for the Catholic Church to recognize they need to include women into the mix because in order to “modernize” and “liberalize” they must have woman involvement because they have a voice that needs to be heard as well.

When speaking with sister Sophia, she had experience with the type stubbornness people can show towards one another. While Vatican II was releasing its findings, and establishing that they would like a more open form of communication including the decision to get women more involved with the church, many people did not see this as a fit decision. When in church sister Sophia described seeing people in the pews consciously not sing along during mass, stand up, and more. This was their silent way of letting the church know they did not accept what was

being carrying out. These kinds of people do not accept change as a good thing, or simply do not agree with the conclusions the church has made. Sister Sophia also stated even though some individuals visibly did not approve of the Catholic Church's actions, they would not leave the church. They would stay, still come to mass, and participate within the church. All the while, still letting it be known how they feel. A majority of the time the pastor of the church would be able to sway the people in the pews to accept Vatican II. These pastors worked very closely within their communities so they would realize how to get through to their people. In other instances, however, pastors who did not agree with Vatican II would not attempt to change the opinion of its people. Sister Sophia had mentioned her pastor seeming to be like one of those people who had their doubts, and therefore the church was divided when it came to practicing the very important decisions.

Works Cited

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