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Women religious speak - and our clerics don't get it

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NCR Today

The International Union of Superiors General, the church's top women religious leadership organization, this week issued a strong supportive statement for U.S. women religious.

"We affirm unequivocally our support for our sisters in the United States," the statement reads. The union issued the statement after meeting last week.

U.S. women religious are under investigation in the form of an Apostolic Visitation initiated by Rome last December.

Backing away from this week's much appreciated statement, and even from the visitation/investigation itself, it is increasingly clear that this whole thing is no longer about liberal versus conservative interpretations about the Second Vatican Council and its mandates. Many women religious superiors are, by nature, conservative. Most of us Catholics are both conservative and progressive. We want to conserve the essentials of our faith as we progress to live out the gospels in the contemporary world.

No, this split we live with and feel, like stakes driven into our hearts, is not "conservative" versus "liberal," though it might once have been one.

As we get deeper into the 21st century, now more than 40 years after the Council, our split is a gender split with our increasingly isolated male (only) Catholic leadership failing, seemingly without an iota of self-awareness, to understand how women think and "what makes them tick."

But, in full disclosure, what our top clerics fail to understand is not just how women think, but also how men, liberated from old male paradigms, think.

Our clerics don't get it.

What most of the rest of us "get" in, well, legions, is this: the Apostolic Visitation (investigation), by its very initiation, has already revealed, and embarrassingly so, far more about the current state of our church's male leadership, or rather lack of it, than it will ever reveal about women religious today.

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