

DISCUSSION OF RELIGIOUS DRESS

Handwritten notes of Mary Abbott, SSND

Taken from the Acts and Documents of the International Congress of Superiors General, Rome, 1952, Generalate Archives.

These notes were shared at the General Chapter of October 1-15, 1956

M. Bettina asked M. Theophora to speak as she had heard from a competent person what the Holy Father [Pope Pius XII] lately said about changes in religious dress.

At the first Conference for Religious in Brazil, Father Larrona from the Secretariat of CRIS (Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes) spoke about this topic to representatives of 147 congregations.

“The Holy Father does not want uniformity. He wants only 2 things: that the religious habits that create difficulties for health be lighter and that each habit which is no longer suitable and acceptable for modern service be brought up to date and made simpler.”

At the end of this brief report American and Bavarian sisters showed different models of habits which met the Holy Father’s criteria.

Some were in accord: some pushed for non-acceptance for in general, our habit is very beautiful and not impractical or unhygienic.

M. De Sales suggested that we go slowly in deciding about a change in habit and that we let all the Sisters decide on the basis of photos.

This suggestion was emphasized by M. Bettina and Annunciata and accepted by all.

M. Basil contributed a very important idea: the Sisters want a change in the sense that they be seen as neat and clean, for this plays a great part today in vocations. At the same time, as much as possible we should keep the distinctive quality of our habit.

Finally, M. Rafaela cited a second word from Fr. Arcadie Larrona when he spoke about religious dress to the congress of general superiors in Rome on September 13, 1952.

“The Holy See allows full freedom to each institute concerning the details of their dress. The Sacred Congregation strives before all else for peace and quiet in the congregations. The only question which Rome asks in such cases is: “Are all of you in agreement?”

The desired changes will be approved; it is enough that they be supported by the general chapter and that the minority, when such exists, be not excessive in their opposition. In this case the Holy See advises waiting patiently.”

