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### What is the role of the church in modern society?

There are many different, and sometimes conflicting, ideas or definitions of what the church is and stands for. This debate increases when trying to come to the conclusion of what the church's role is in society and how involved it should be in people's lives. Even different theologians have different definitions for what the church is and should be. However, regardless of the different definitions, the major role of the Church in modern day society is to unite and lead believers to God the Father and His Kingdom.

From personal experience, unless you purposely try to seek out information about God and his teachings, you will not hear about it on daily, or sometimes weekly, basis; in fact, you won't even hear about religion in general during that time. For example, during my attendance at a public community college, there was almost no mention of religion or theology or the church. There were classes that students could take that would teach them about the subject, but outside of that class, religion was not really mentioned too much or focused on like it was at other catholic intuitions I have attended.

That being said, it sometimes feels like, unless you go to church, you are not connected with God and in unity with his people. This has also been debated and argued in the past by some theologians. As previously stated, there are multiple, and sometimes contradicting, definitions of what the church is and what their role is in society; there are also different descriptions of what makes up or contributes to a proper church. While this is somewhat expected to happen when

comparing different religions because of their different beliefs, one would not expect this contradicting state to happen within the same religion and same church. However, this happened, and still happens, because theologians come up with different ideas of how the church should contribute to society and how the church should be operated. For example, the Second Vatican Council holds a, what can be described as a traditional, view of what makes up and constitutes to what a church is. They define the church as an organized society which is governed by Peter and the Bishops. The church is also professed as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. This is described in their statement by the following:

This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling towards catholic unity (“The Second Vatican Council on the church.”).

In my experience, this sense of society can also be felt when doing activities for the church. For example, I felt this sense of religious society when I attended a religious camp for my Greek Orthodox church when I was younger. Once a week throughout the entire summer, students learned specifically about the church and took part in helping with the church’s basic duties. It was a fun experience at the time and taught me a lot about the church and how it connected with God the Father and Jesus.

This was not exactly outside of the church since it was with people that go to my same church; however, it connects to Martin Luther’s explanation of what constitutes as a church. According to Martin Luther, it does not matter where an individual is location wise, but as long

as they speak the word of God the Father, the church exists there. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

[...] objects will never teach one to love God, to believe, to praise, or to be pious. They may adorn this bag of maggots, but afterward they fall apart and decay, along with the chrism and whatever holiness it contains, and the bag of maggots itself. [...] But we are speaking of the external word, preached orally by people like you and me, for this is what Christ left behind as an external sign by which his church, or his Christian people in the world, should be reorganized (Luther).

This idea that Martin Luther gives is a great belief for people that don't want or cannot go to church on a weekly basis. In my life, I have experienced this connection of religious community outside of the church in most of the schools I have attended. While in grade school, I attended Greek school which, at many times, brought us into the church and educated us about the Greek Orthodox religion. Although I did not know it at the time, the experience was involving me into the Greek Orthodox community and strengthening my connection with God. After completing and graduating Greek school, I only went to church when my family went. After the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I started attending a private and Catholic middle school. During this time the class was required to take a religion class where we learned basic things about the church and God the Father. I then attended a private and Catholic High School for four years and was required to take a Theology class every year. I learned a lot of information about the church and catholic community during my attendance there. This, I like to think, strengthened my connection with God the Father.

Many years of my life, in a way, has revolved around a church and a religion because of the schools I have attended and am currently attending. Being around people of the same beliefs and goals help strengthen the connection with God the Father; this unity and strengthening of

faith is what the church was originally designed to do. As the Second Vatican Council and Martin Luther have illustrated, there are multiple beliefs on how that strengthening of faith can come about. However, the end result should be the same; there should be a strengthening of faith and a strengthening with God and his people.

Work Cited

Luther, Martin. "On the nature of the church." *Theology: The Basic Readings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed.

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