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Sophie Cunningham Faces Christian Pushback Over Topless Maxim Photoshoot After Baptism

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Sophie Cunningham CALLS the SHOTS,"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

WNBA star Sophie Cunningham, 30, of the Indiana Fever, is facing pushback from Christians after posing topless in Maxim magazine's November/December 2026 issue, just months after she was rebaptised at Christ's Church of the Valley, a Phoenix megachurch. The cover, headlined "Sophie Cunningham CALLS the SHOTS," includes one photoshoot image in which she appears topless, her hair covering her breasts. The backlash broke on 23 November, five days after the cover was published on 18 November.

Picture the whiplash for the Christians who had been cheering her on. Seven months ago she was stepping into the baptismal waters, telling the world her faith was real and public. This week those same supporters opened their feeds to find her on the cover of a men's magazine, posed in a way that has nothing to do with basketball.

The sharpest rebuke came from Princeton professor Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and a conservative Catholic legal scholar who had publicly championed Cunningham for her stand on women's sports.

Writing on Facebook, George said that while he is grateful for her stand, "I can no longer... Share the view of those who urge young women to regard her as a role model." Then came the sentence that stung: "Her pornifying herself in photographs for Maxim magazine makes that impossible."

That word - "pornifying" - is doing a lot of work. George is not saying Cunningham has stopped believing, or that her stand on women's sports was wrong. He is saying something narrower and, for a public figure held up to young women, heavier: that the example she sets with her body in public now cancels the example she set with her convictions.

It is a withdrawal of an endorsement, issued publically, by a man who does not hand out praise lightly.

Evangelist Justin Peters piled in on X on Sunday, reacting to a post from Texas megachurch Pastor Josh Howerton. On 16 November, Howerton had called Cunningham "a GREAT example" for Christians who "don't know how to share the gospel with people," praising her recent Theo Von podcast interview for its "truth bombs." Peters called that kind of praise "typical" and warned: "There is such a persistent lack of discernment, even (and often especially) among leaders in the evangelical world, we automatically praise and platform any celebrity who can even pronounce the name Jesus without giving them time to see if their profession has any fruit." He added that it "always, always comes back to bite us."

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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