

Some Thoughts on Modesty / Immodest Dress

***"The Church knows and teaches that the human body, which is God's masterpiece in the visible world, and which has been placed at the service of the soul, was elevated by the Divine Redeemer to the rank of a temple and an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and as such must be respected. The body's beauty must therefore not be exalted as an end in itself, much less in such guise as will defile the dignity it has been endowed with."*(Pope Pius XII, "Moral Problems in Fashion Design", 1957)**

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Today's Fashions

Think today's fashions are "no big deal"? Think that following the dress of the crowd is okay? Think again! Many (*most?*) popular fashions today are offensive to God, sinful, scandalous, occasions of sin, enticements to sin, and display a lack of regard for the body as "a temple of the Holy Spirit". Everywhere we see tight, form-fitting clothes, bare skin, exposed undergarments, etc. We also see women dressed like men (e.g. wearing men's trousers - and now even men's undergarments) and young girls dressed like women of ill-repute (e.g. skin-tight clothes, exposed midriffs, low-cut tops, etc.). It seems that many people today have completely lost the sense of modesty.

We can't say we weren't warned. In the early 1900's, Our Lady of Fatima told us that "Certain fashions will be introduced that will offend Our Lord very much." She added that "More souls go to Hell because of sins of the flesh than for any other reason." One of the three shepherd children of Fatima, Bl. Jacinta, confirmed "The sins which hurl most souls into hell, are the sins of the flesh. Certain styles will be introduced that will offend Our Lord very much. Those who serve God must not follow these fashions."

Before that, St. Nilus prophesied: "After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable. When the time for the Advent of the Antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will become unrecognizable. People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair."

At least one saint has had "frightful visions of souls suffering in hell due to their immodesty in dress and its consequences." The wonder-working stigmatist priest (St.) Padre Pio wouldn't allow women into his confessional if they weren't wearing modest dresses. Recent popes have also lamented and warned us against immodest dress:

"[T]here is a sad forgetfulness of Christian modesty especially in the life and the dress of women" (Pope Pius XI, "Misericordissimus Redemptor", 1928)

"We lament, too, the destruction of purity among women and young girls as is evidenced by the increasing immodesty of their dress and conversation and by their participation in shameful dances" (Pope Pius XI, "Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio", 1922)

"The good of our soul is more important than the good of our body; and we have to prefer the spiritual welfare of our neighbor to our bodily comforts. If a certain kind of dress constitutes a grave and proximate occasion of sin, and endangers the salvation of your soul and others, it is your duty to give it up... O Christian mothers, if you knew what a future of anxieties and perils, of ill-guarded shame you prepare for your sons and daughters, imprudently getting them accustomed to live scantily dressed and making them lose the sense of modesty, you would be ashamed of yourselves and you would dread the harm you are making for yourselves, the harm which you are causing these children, whom Heaven has entrusted to you to be brought up as Christians." (Pope Pius XII)

"But the Christian, whether he be creator or client, should be careful not to underestimate the dangers and spiritual ruin spread by immodest fashions, especially those worn in public, because of that continuity that must exist between what one preaches and what one practices, even in the sense of externals. He will remember the high purity which the Redeemer demands of His disciples even in glances and thoughts. And he will remember the severity which God shows to those who give scandal. We might call to mind on this subject the strong words of the prophet Isaiah, in which was foretold the infamy that was to befall the holy city of Sion because of the immodesty of its daughters (cf. Isaiah 3, 16-21). And one could

recall those other words with which the greatest of all Italian poets expressed in vehement terms his feeling of indignation for the immodesty creeping into his city (cf. Dante, *Purgatorio*, 23, 94-108)." (Pope Pius XII, "Moral Problems in Fashion Design", 1957)

"From this point of view one cannot sufficiently deplore the blindness of so many women of every age and condition; made foolish by desire to please, they do not see to what a degree the indecency of their clothing shocks every honest man, and offends God. Most of them would formerly have blushed for those toilettes as for a grave fault against Christian modesty; now it does not suffice for them to exhibit them on the public thoroughfares; they do not fear to cross the threshold of the churches, to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and even to bear the seducing food of shameful passions to the Eucharistic Table where one receives the heavenly Author of purity. And We speak not of those exotic and barbarous dances recently imported into fashionable circles, one more shocking than the other; one cannot imagine anything more suitable for banishing all the remains of modesty." (Pope Benedict XV, "Sacra Propediem", 1921 A.D.)

"By virtue of the supreme apostolate which he wields over the Universal Church by Divine Will, our Most Holy Father Pope Pius XI has never ceased to inculcate, both verbally and by his writings, the words of St. Paul (1 Tim. xi, 9-10), namely, 'Women...adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety...and professing godliness with good works.' And on many occasions the same Supreme Pontiff has reproved and sharply condemned the immodesty in dress which today is everywhere in vogue, even among women and girls who are Catholics; fashion which not only offends the dignity of women and against her adornment, but conduces to the temporal ruin of the women and girls, and, what is still worse, to their eternal ruin, miserably dragging down others in their fall. It is not surprising, therefore, that all Bishops and other Ordinaries, as is the duty of ministers of Christ, should in their own dioceses have unanimously opposed this licentious and shameless fashion, often bearing with fortitude the derision and mockery leveled against them for this cause. Therefore this Sacred Council, which watches over the discipline of clergy and people, while cordially commending the action of the Venerable Bishops, earnestly exhorts them to continue in the purpose and undertaking they have so well begun, and to pursue them with even greater vigor, until this contagious disease be entirely uprooted from decent society." (Letter of the Congregation of the Council, 1930 A.D.)

The Importance of Modesty/Proper Dress

Saints & Scripture speak clearly of the importance of modesty and proper dress of our bodies:

"Similarly, (too.) women should adorn themselves with proper conduct, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hairstyles and gold ornaments, or pearls, or expensive clothes, but rather, as befits women who profess reverence for God, with good deeds." (St. Paul, 1 Tm. 2:9-10)

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy." (1 Cor. 3:16-17)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

"The dress of the body should not discredit the good of the soul." (St. Cyprian of Carthage)

"Purity is a precious jewel, and the owner of a precious stone would never dream of making a display of his riches in the presence of thieves." (St. John Bosco)

"The desire to please by outward charms, which we know naturally invite lust, does not spring from a sound conscience. Why should you rouse an evil passion? [Tertullian ("an excellent early Christian writer" - although he would ultimately fall into heresy), 3rd century A.D.]

"Further we must speak as we dress, or dress as we speak. Why do we profess one thing and display another? The tongue talks of chastity, but the whole body reveals incontinence." (St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church)

"A holy woman may be beautiful by the gift of nature, but she must not give occasion to lust. If beauty be hers, so far from setting it off she ought rather to obscure it." [Tertullian ("an excellent early Christian writer" - although he would ultimately fall into heresy), 3rd century A.D.]

"But those women who have no husband nor wish to have one, or who are in a state of life inconsistent with marriage, cannot without sin desire to give lustful pleasure to those men who see them, because this is to incite them to sin. And if indeed they adorn themselves with this intention of provoking others to lust, they sin mortally; whereas if they do so from frivolity, or from vanity for the sake of ostentation, it is not always mortal, but sometimes venial. And the same applies to men in this respect." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")

"You carry your snare everywhere and spread your net in all places. You allege that you never invited others to sin. You did not, indeed, by your words, but you have done so by your dress and your deportment, and much more effectively than you could by your voice. When you have made another sin in his heart, how can you be innocent? Tell me whom does this world condemn? Whom do judges in court punish? Those who drink poison or those who prepare it and administer the

fatal potion? You have prepared the abominable cup, you have given the death-dealing drink and you are more criminal than those who poison the body; you murder not the body but the soul. And it is not to enemies you do this, nor are you urged on by any imaginary necessity, nor provoked by injury, but out of foolish vanity and pride." (St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church)

In consideration of the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ...

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Mt. 5:27-28)

...we must realize that those who dress scantily or otherwise immodestly - even if unintentionally - make themselves an "object of lust" and may cause others to commit adultery in their hearts. Those who dress immodestly may even be culpable in the loss of other's souls. They offend Jesus, tempt others into mortal sin, create scandal - both inside and outside the Church, "profane the temple of the Holy Spirit", set a bad example for others, degrade society, and may cause the loss of souls. Think that's no big deal?

Such dress also tends to promote promiscuity, fornication, rape, incest, and other sins of the flesh (e.g. adulterous affairs). It may lead to increased use of contraception, and even to abortion. In fact, nothing you do may lead more people to sin than the very clothes you wear! So why dress this way?

- To attract attention? *What kind of attention do you think you'll receive? Respect? No! Instead, you are likely to receive sinful, lustful attention from those who have no regard for you whatever, but only see your body as an object for their pleasure.*
- Because you think it's stylish? *Had you lived a few decades earlier, you may even consider your very own wardrobe of today to be the wardrobe of a woman of ill-repute of years gone by!*
- Because it's comfortable or easy? *How comfortable or easy is it really? Don't you find yourself tugging on it frequently? Doesn't it sometimes get a little chilly - and isn't it a bit unsanitary - where skin is exposed? Even if it's truly comfortable or easy for your body now, how comfortable or easy is it for your soul? For your future? Do you not expect to suffer consequences for immodest, sinful clothing? "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness... I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21) Also remember Bl. Jacinta of Fatima's words: "Oh! If men only knew what eternity is, how they would make all possible efforts to amend their lives!"*
- To fit in? *If you are part of the crowd, you are part of the problem! Don't forget our Lord's words: "How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few" (Mt. 7:14). You should also be aware that there really is evidence to support a "conspiracy theory" by enemies of the Church to institute and promote immodest dress. Why do you want to "fit in" with this?*

Immodest dress has been most aptly called "advertising for sex"! Is that really what you intend? Whether or not you actually intend this, you may be practicing it if you wear scanty, short, tight / form-fitting, transparent, skin-showing, or otherwise immodest clothing. Do you consider that the purpose of clothing is really to protect the body? Is your clothing more geared to this purpose or does it tend more to "seduce and arouse concupiscence"? Don't forget that your clothing may give you culpability in the sins of others - sins that you will suffer punishment for either in this life or after death (e.g. in Purgatory or Hell).

Proper Dress For Women

If a woman has evaluated her wardrobe according to the above and, thankfully, finds that her clothes are *not* tight, scanty, transparent, skin showing, etc., she still must look one step further. Does she wear trousers (that is, pants)? If so, she should be aware that the Church has - for good reason - condemned the wearing of such clothes for women as follows (emphasis added):

"When we see a woman in trousers [that is, pants], we should think not so much of her as of all mankind, of what it will be when women will have masculinized themselves for good. Nobody stands to gain by helping to bring about a future age of vagueness, ambiguity, imperfection and, in a word, monstrosities." (Notification Concerning Men's Dress Worn by Women, Cardinal Siri, 1960 A.D.)

Continued on reverse...

"The first signs of our late arriving spring indicate this year a certain increase in the use of men's dress by girls and women, even mothers of families. Up until 1959, in Genoa, such dress usually meant the person was a tourist, but now there seems to be a significant number of girls and women from Genoa itself who are choosing, at least on pleasure trips, to wear men's dress [men's trousers - that is, slacks/pants]. The spreading of this behavior obliges us to give serious consideration to the subject, and we ask those to whom this Notification is addressed to kindly give this problem all the attention it deserves, as befits those aware of being answerable to God... **The wearing of men's dress by women affects firstly the woman herself, by changing the feminine psychology proper to women; secondly, it affects the woman as wife of her husband, by tending to vitiate relationships between the sexes; thirdly, it affects the woman as mother of her children by harming her dignity in her children's eyes...** In truth, the motive impelling women to wear men's dress is always that of imitating, nay, of competing with the man who is considered stronger, less tied down, more independent. This motivation shows clearly that **male dress is the visible aid to bringing about a mental attitude of being 'like a man'**. Secondly, ever since men have been men, the clothing a person wears conditions, determines and modifies that person's gestures, attitudes and behavior, such that from merely being worn outside, clothing comes to impose a particular frame of mind inside. Then let us add that a woman wearing men's dress always more or less indicates her reacting to her femininity as though it were inferior [to masculinity] when in fact it is only diverse. The perversion of her psychology is clearly evident. These reasons, summing up many more, are enough to warn us how wrongly women are made to think by the wearing of men's dress... Experience teaches us that when woman is de-feminized, defenses are undermined and weakness increases... **The changing of feminine psychology does fundamental and - in the long run - irreparable damage to the family, to conjugal fidelity, to human affections and to human society. True, the effects of wearing unsuitable dress are not all to be seen within a short time. But one must think of what is being slowly and insidiously worn down, torn apart, perverted.** Is any satisfying reciprocity between husband and wife imaginable, if feminine psychology be changed? Or is any true education of children imaginable, which is so delicate in its procedure, so woven of imperponderable factors in which the mother's intuition and instinct play the decisive part in those tender years? **What will these women be able to give their children when they will so long have worn trousers that their self-esteem is determined more by their competing with the men than by their functioning as women?** Why, we ask, ever since men have been men - or rather since they became civilized - why have men in all times and places been irresistibly borne to differentiate and divide the functions of the two sexes? Do we not have here strict testimony to the recognition by all mankind of a truth and a law above man? **To sum up, wherever women wear men's dress, it is be considered a factor, over the long term, in disintegrating human order.**" (Notification Concerning Men's Dress Worn by Women, Cardinal Siri, 1960 A.D.)

Scripture also says:

"A woman shall not wear an article proper to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's dress; for anyone who does such things is an abomination to the LORD, your God." (Deut. 22:5)

Further, when a woman wears pants - always considered "masculine apparel" ...

- She is treated like a man
- Her gestures and way of walk are less feminine (women are shown to sit and walk differently in skirts than in pants)
- She tends to confuse the roles of men and women
- And, as one author recently pointed out, marketing research has shown that a man's eyes are directed right to a woman's private parts when she wears pants - both in the back and in the front! They can't even help it - the angles automatically direct their eyes there! So each time a woman wears pants, she causes men everywhere to look at her most private areas, both in the back and in the front! *Like it or not, this is a fact!*
- So if you are a woman or girl who wears pants, stop *now!* Change your wardrobe and begin to dress appropriately as a woman (e.g. skirts, dresses). Be sure to use Mary as your standard. When choosing clothes, ask yourself if Mary would wear them. And don't just use your personal opinion, look to how Mary has dressed in her apparitions (the ones approved by the Church). Her dress is always very modest and feminine. Note that her clothes don't become "trendy" because earthy styles have changed.

When evaluating clothes, be sure to also consider the following:

- The following are unacceptable: low cut tops, high cut bottoms, see-through clothing, and tight/form-fitting clothing
- It is unacceptable to expose one's undergarments
- It is unacceptable to see undergarment lines
- Bare skin is unacceptable (including shoulders, stomach, back, thighs, etc.)
- Skirts / dresses should go below the knee and should completely cover the knees when sitting
- Buttons in front are unacceptable if they "pop open" or if they expose (or appear to expose) skin or undergarments.

- Large sleeves are unacceptable if the torso or shoulders or other body parts may be seen (e.g. when lifting up or otherwise moving one's arms).
- Low necklines are unacceptable
- Clothing with advertising is inappropriate ("you turn your body into a 'walking billboard'")
- One should always wear a slip, as appropriate
- Slits on skirts / dresses are unacceptable if they are too high. Slits on other articles of clothing are generally unacceptable (e.g. back of top, front of top, etc.) unless they do not expose skin and are otherwise modest.
- If you must constantly adjust an article of clothing, it is probably unacceptable.
- Skimpy / revealing bathing suits are unacceptable. *[Note: With some creativity, it is quite possible to dress modestly and comfortably for swimming. One appropriate outfit includes modern swimwear (which acts as the undergarments), covered by various layers of other modest clothing of appropriate fabric which may be worn in the water. However, it should be noted, that mixed bathing (bathing between men & women and boys & girls) should be rejected.]*

Also consider these dress standards:

- "By Padre Pio's explicit wish, women must enter the confessional wearing skirts at least 8 inches below the knee. It is forbidden to borrow longer dresses in church and to wear them to confession." [Sign on door of (St.) Padre Pio's church]
- "[A] dress cannot be called decent which is cut deeper than two fingers breadth under the pit of the throat, which does not cover the arms at least to the elbows, and scarcely reaches a bit beyond the knees. Furthermore, dresses of transparent material are improper" [Sacred Congregation of the Council (under Pope Pius XI), January 12, 1930]
- "Yet, no matter how broad and changeable the relative morals of styles may be, there is always an absolute norm to be kept after having heard the admonition of conscience warning against approaching danger: style must never be a proximate occasion of sin." (Pope Pius XII, "Moral Problems in Fashion Design", 1957)
- "More basically, the immorality of some styles depends in great part on excesses either of immodesty or luxury. An excess of immodesty in fashion involves, in practice, the cut of the garment. The garment must not be evaluated according to the estimation of a decadent or already corrupt society, but according to the aspirations of a society which prizes the dignity and seriousness of its public attire. It is often said almost with passive resignation that fashions reflect the customs of a people. But it would be more exact and much more useful to say that they express the decision and moral direction that a nation intends to take: either to be shipwrecked in licentiousness or maintain itself at the level to which it has been raised by religion and civilization." (Pope Pius XII, "Moral Problems in Fashion Design", 1957)

Modest dress does not mean that one neglects one's appearance or cannot dress nicely. On the contrary, modest dress is quite attractive and may be very feminine. [Note: Modest dress also applies to men, who should not wear tight pants, immodest bathing suits, or go shirtless (unless truly necessary).]

You can and *must* dress modestly! Although it may be difficult at first - and may even require radical changes - you should get used to, and even appreciate the change, in a short while. As Pope Pius XI has said, "Christian women can never be at too great pains to abolish [immodest dress]." Not only will you be pleasing God, setting a good example, and respecting and protecting yourself, but the difficulties you face and overcome may help to make up for some sinful past behavior.

Proper Dress For Church

The immodest dress seen in the world today has also, sadly, infected those who attend Mass. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see people wear low cut tops, high cut skirts, shorts and tee-shirts and other inappropriate items to church. This scandalous adornment of those in the Lord's house must be stopped. Even if the priest is lax about enforcing the rules, women and men are called to special standards of dress in Church...

"Women must be decently dressed, especially when they go to church. The parish priest may, with due prudence, refuse them entrance to the church and access to the reception of the Sacraments, [each] and every time that they come to church immodestly dressed." (General Pastoral Directive, 1915 A.D.)

"Girls and women dressed immodestly are to be debarred from Holy Communion and from acting as sponsors at the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation; further, if the offense be extreme, they may even be forbidden to enter the church." [Decree of the Congregation of the Council (by the mandate of Pope Pius XI), 1930 A.D.]

"Can. 1262 § 2 Men, in a church or outside a church, while they are assisting at sacred rites, shall be bare-headed, unless the approved mores of the people or peculiar circumstances of things determine otherwise; women, however, shall have a covered head and be modestly dressed, especially when they approach the table of the Lord." (1917 Code of Canon Law)

"Give to the LORD the glory due his name! Bring gifts, and enter his presence; **worship the LORD in holy attire.**" (1 Chron. 16:29, emphasis added)

Note that wearing of head coverings in church is Scriptural and traces back to the earliest days of the Church (emphasis added)...

"But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife, and God the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered brings shame upon his head. **But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled brings shame upon her head,** for it is one and the same thing as if she had had her head shaved. For if a woman does not have her head veiled, she may as well have her hair cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should wear a veil. A man, on the other hand, should not cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; nor was man created for woman, but woman for man; for this reason **a woman should have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels.** Woman is not independent of man or man of woman in the Lord. For just as woman came from man, so man is born of woman; but all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears his hair long it is a disgrace to him, whereas if a woman has long hair it is her glory, because long hair has been given (her) for a covering? But if anyone is inclined to be argumentative, we do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God." (St. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 11:3-16) *[Note that the "exemption" indicated by St. Paul is for those women who wish to be argumentative.]*

Parents' Duty to Protect Modesty

Remember that modesty is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and should be sought after by all of us. Parents (and other responsible adults) have a special responsibility to guard the modesty of children and to provide a good example:

"Let parents keep their daughters away from public gymnastic games and contests; but if their daughters are compelled to attend such exhibitions, let them see that they are fully and modestly dressed. Let them never permit their daughters to appear in immodest dress." [Decree of the Congregation of the Council (by the mandate of Pope Pius XI), 1930 A.D.]

"The practice of decency and modesty in speech, action and dress is very important for creating an atmosphere suitable for the growth of chastity... Parents, as we have said, should be watchful so that certain immoral fashions and attitudes do not violate the integrity of the home, especially through misuse of the mass media." (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995)

"The parish priest, and especially the preacher, when occasion arises, should, according to the words of the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. iv, 2), insist, argue, exhort and command that feminine garb be based on modesty and womanly ornament be a defense of virtue. Let them likewise admonish parents to cause their daughters to cease wearing indecorous dress." [Decree of the Congregation of the Council (by the mandate of Pope Pius XI), 1930 A.D.]

"These principles, with due regard to time and place, must, in accordance with Christian prudence, be applied to all schools, particularly in the most delicate and decisive period of formation, that, namely, of adolescence; and in gymnastic exercises and department, special care must be had of Christian modesty in young women and girls, which is so gravely impaired by any kind of exhibition in public." (Pope Pius XI, "Divini Illius Magistri", 1929 A.D.)

"O Christian mothers, if you knew what a future of anxieties and perils, of ill-guarded shame you prepare for your sons and daughters, imprudently getting them accustomed to live scantily dressed and making them lose the sense of modesty, you would be ashamed of yourselves and you would dread the harm you are making for yourselves, the harm which you are causing these children, whom Heaven has entrusted to you to be brought up as Christians." (Pope Pius XII)

"Parents, conscious of their grave obligations toward the education, especially religious and moral, to their offspring, should see to it that their daughters are solidly instructed, from earliest childhood, in Christian doctrine; and they themselves should assiduously inculcate in their souls, by word and example, love for the virtues of modesty and chastity; and since their family should follow the example of the Holy Family, they must rule in such a manner that all its members, reared within the walls of the home, should find reason and incentive to love and preserve modesty." [Decree of the Congregation of the Council (by the mandate of Pope Pius XI), 1930 A.D.]

Those who do not take this responsibility seriously will have to answer for their conduct.

"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." (St. Paul, Rom. 12:1-2)

Sources: Various

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