

A PAPAL DECREE CONCERNING MODESTY

HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI

12 January 1930

By virtue of his supreme apostolate, whereby the universal Church is founded, by divine institution, Our Most Holy Lordship, Pope Pius XI never tires of reiterating the words of St. Paul, to wit: "...women also in decent apparel: adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, ... but as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works..." (I Tim II: 9-10)

Frequently, when the occasion has presented itself, the selfsame Holy Pontiff has reproved and bitterly condemned immodesty of dress pervasively introduced into use these days amongst Catholic women and girls, a thing which not only gravely offends feminine beauty and ornament, but leads most lamentably to the temporal and worse still the eternal ruin of these same women and unto the ruin of others still.

It is no wonder then, that the bishops and other ordinaries, as befits the ministers of Christ, and each in his respective diocese, have opposed, by all means and with unanimous voice, such misguided license and brazen impudence, and tolerating the while with calm fortitude, on account of this, frequent derision and abuse, brought against them by souls of ill will.

So let this sacred consilium of the clergy and of the people, pursue the same sort of vigilance and action regarding the propagation of discipline as the holy bishops, with deserved approbation and praise and let it earnestly exhort these same men that they implement the counsels and the undertakings begun in due season, and urge them on generously and to the best of their ability, until this pestiferous sickness be completely rooted out from amongst the honest affairs of men.

That this aim might be brought the more easily and securely to effect, this sacred congregation, by the mandate of Our Most Holy Lord, decrees what follows to be enacted:

1. May parish priests especially, and preachers when the occasion presents itself, and according to the words of St. Paul "...demand, reprove, beseech and rebuke..." women to wear clothes that redolent of modesty and such other things as are the ornament and vanguard of virtue, and may they warn parents not to permit their children to wear unseemly dress.

2. Parents, being ever mindful of the most awesome obligation which binds them of caring firstly and foremostly for the moral and religious education of their children, are to apply particular diligence, that their daughters be firmly grounded in Christian doctrine and that those same daughters also zealously foster in their souls, by words and example, the love of virtues of modesty and chastity; may parents also, in imitation of the Holy Family, busy themselves about so ordering and governing their family, that each and every individual within the family home has a cause and incentive to love and guard modesty.

3. Let those same parents prohibit their children from public athletic events and gymnastics competitions, or at least, if their daughters must be involved in them, that they take care to exhibit clothing which is fully in

keeping with modesty and that their parents never permit them to wear immodest clothing.

4. May the governesses of colleges and instructresses of schools strive so to imbue the souls of young women with the love of modesty that these same young women are led efficaciously to modesty of dress.

5. May those same governesses and instructresses, with no exception even to their own mothers, forbid admission to colleges and schools, to such women as wear unseemly clothing, and once admitted, if they fail to come to their senses, that they dismiss them.

6. Let not religious, according to the letters given by the Sacred Congregation concerning Religious on August 13, 1928, admit young women into their colleges, schools, oratories, or gymnasia, who do not observe a Christian manner of dress, or if they have already been admitted, that they not tolerate those who do not observe a Christian manner of dress. May they moreover take special pains in the education of their female students, so that the love of Christian modesty and holy reserve take deep root in their hearts.

7. May pious associations of women be established and fostered, organizations which, by their counsel, example and deed, set before themselves the goal of checking the abuse of dress, which is not consistent with the dictates of Christian modesty, as well as the goal of promoting purity of morals and modesty of dress.

8. Into the pious associations of women, let not those women be admitted who put on immodest clothing; and once admitted, if afterwards they commit a sin in this regard, and come not to their senses when admonished, may be expelled as well.

9. Women and girls who wear immodest clothes are to be prohibited from Holy Communion and from the office of sponsor in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and in certain cases, they are to be prohibited even from entry into the church.

10. When feasts occur throughout the year, which supply a particular opportunity to inculcate Christian modesty, and especially feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may parish priests and priests of pious associations and heads of Catholic societies not fail, by means of a sermon for that occasion, to recall and encourage women, to a Christian manner of dress. Every year, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let special prayers in all the cathedrals and parish churches be made, and, where possible, may timely exhortation be given to the people in the church.

11. May diocesan counsels, discussed in a declaration of the Holy Office of March 22, 1918, in a spirit of vigilance, and at least once a year, openly deal with finding ever more suitable means and methods of effectively giving counsel on feminine modesty.

12. To which point may salutary action, effectively and safely lead. May bishops and other local ordinaries keep this sacred congregation informed, every third year, together with a report on religious institution given of our own accord in letters in the *Catholic World* on June 29, 1923, even concerning the condition of things and the state surrounding feminine manner of dress, and concerning works carried out in accordance with the rule of this instruction.

THE MARYLIKE STANDARDS FOR MODESTY IN DRESS

“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 materials are improper.” (The Cardinal Vicar of Pope Pius XI).

1. Marylike is modest without compromise, “like Mary,” Christ’s mother.
2. Marylike dresses have sleeves extending at least to the elbows; and skirts reaching below the knees.

[N.B. Because of impossible market conditions quarter-length sleeves are temporarily tolerated with Ecclesiastical Approval, until Christian womanhood again turns to Mary as the model of modesty in dress.]

3. Marylike dress requires full coverage for the bodice, chest, shoulders and back; except for a cut-out about the neck not exceeding two inches below the neckline in front and in back and a corresponding two inches on the shoulders.
4. Marylike dresses do not admit as modest coverage transparent fabrics — laces, nets, organdy, nylons, etc. — unless sufficient backing is added. However, their moderate use as trimmings is acceptable.
5. Marylike dresses do not admit the use improper of flesh-colored fabrics.
6. Marylike dresses conceal rather than reveal the figure of the wearer; they do not unduly emphasize the parts of the body.
7. Marylike dresses provide full coverage — even after the jacket, the cape or the stole are removed.
8. Slacks or ‘jeans’ are not to be worn to church.

Marylike fashions are designed to conceal as much of the body as possible rather than reveal it. This would automatically eliminate such fashions as tight fitting slacks or ‘jeans’, sweaters, shorts; shorts which do not reach down at least to the knees; sheer blouses and sleeveless dresses, etc. These Marylike standards are a guide to instill a sense of modesty. Women and girls who follow these standards and who look to Mary as their ideal and model will have no problem of modesty in dress. She who follows these standards will not be the occasion of sin nor a source of embarrassment or shame to others.