

Modesty and Women's Dignity

If women don't want to be viewed as a sex object,
why do we so often dress like one?

by Rev. T. G. Morrow

Monsignor Josepi Roncalli once found himself seated at a banquet next to a woman who was dressed with little regard for the virtue of modesty. Others observed him, wondering how he would deal with his predicament, given his moral convictions and his reputation for diplomacy. After the dinner, Roncalli obtained an apple and offered it to the woman in question. She declined his offer, considering it odd in light of the fine dinner they had just enjoyed. Nonetheless, he persisted in his offer, to the point that the woman asked why he was so interested in having her eat the fruit. He responded with a twinkle in his eye, "Because when Eve ate an apple, she realized she was naked."

Roncalli went on to become Pope John XXIII, and is now "Blessed John XXIII." It's not known what the woman went on to become.

Our Lady of Fatima spoke to Jacinta Marto, age 11 at the time and told her, "Fashions will arise which will greatly offend God." It seems that she was speaking of today.

It appears that the sexual revolution in the 1960s brought about some rather shabby treatment of women by their men, with whom they were sleeping. This is because a woman bonds with a man after having sex with him, while he does not bond with her. Thus, it seems that women put up with more bad treatment because they didn't want to go find someone else, once they had given themselves to a man. The feminists correctly identified this bad treatment, but alas, their solution was worse than

the problem: they tried to be like men with regard to sex, to ask men out themselves, etc. Abortion would insure their new "freedom." The treatment got worse, the divorce rate continued upward (it is now double that of 1960) and many, alas, just ended up opting for lesbianism.

The point of all this is that women got a raw deal in the sexual revolution and came to be seen as "objects of enjoyment" (Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*). And, in this age when both men and women are tuning in to John Paul II's Love and Responsibility (henceforth LR), and his Theology of The Body; when young people are getting a good dose of solid Catholicism at universities like Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ave Maria and Christendom; and just when young families are finding strong support for their faith in Opus dei, Regnum Christi, and the Neo-catechumenal Way, the

concept of modesty seems lost on just about everyone, including some of these very same people. It seems that although many are digesting good words about chastity, the pictures portrayed by women's dress speak a different message. And, one picture is worth 1,000 words.

If we promote chastity out of one side of our mouths and by our silence give tacit approval to the immodesty in our midst, we are kidding ourselves. By saying nothing about the immodest dress among women (not to mention among men) we are perpetuating the image of women as objects of enjoyment. We are prolonging the denigration of women.

Pope John Paul II wrote (LR), "The evolution of modesty in woman requires some initial insight into the male psychology." This insight has been sadly lacking, since we have not explained to women just how the male psyche



responds to women’s dress. And, when we explain it, we must be specific, since generalities on modesty are not working.

I feel I have a pretty good understanding of how men react to women, but just to be sure, I designed an informal survey for men to indicate their natural responses to various types of women’s dress. They were to rate certain clothing as to whether it elicited lustful thoughts or whether it inclined them to think of the woman, or all women as objects of enjoyment. They were to give a number, one to six for each mode of dress, six being a strong reaction, one being no reaction. Here are the average results from 237 Christian men, single, mostly between the ages of 25 and 55, 65% of whom have thought about chastity a good deal.

How many truly Christian women are fine with even 26 percent of the men having a negative moral reaction to her dress? (Incidentally, those who complain there are no modest bridal gowns, etc.

should see bridalonlinestore.com, beautifullymodest.com, or fairygodmothersbridal.com, most under \$600. Or, google “modest wedding gowns.”)

It’s rather strange to see women who are enthusiastic about chastity and the Theology of The Body show up at a wedding with spaghetti strap dresses or strapless dresses. Have they been watching too much TV, to think that they have to show their shoulders to be formal? Women are not even allowed in St. Peter’s in Rome with bare shoulders. And then there’s the girl attending a solidly Catholic high school or college who arrives at the beach wearing a bikini. What gives? I don’t expect much modesty from non-believers but from hard-core Catholics, I do.

I guess they just don’t get it. And, whose fault is that? Partly mine, if I don’t speak up and spell out for women just what is going on in men’s minds. It is the responsibility of priests, bishops,

educators, and parents to pass on to women the facts on how they are being seen by men (“insight into the male psychology”—JP II) and their responsibility for the plight of all women, not just themselves. There is much work to be done.

Modesty is an integral part of chastity, and until we are ready to speak of both in rather specific terms, the moral renewal of John Paul II will be stymied. Until the chic chastity group gets very serious about modest dress and begins to live it, the dignity of women will not be restored, and they will continue to be seen, consciously or subconsciously, even by men who seek out chaste women, as objects of enjoyment.

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Survey of Men’s Reactions to Women’s Dress

Type of dress	Caused lustful thoughts	Saw woman/all women as object(s) of enjoyment	Total Negative effect
Low cut top in which 20% of breasts are showing - top & sides (Hollywood/Miss America cleavage look)	58%	18%	76%
Bikini at the beach (1" or less at the hips)	47%	19%	66%
Tight fitting “clingy” dress (synthetic material)	31%	22%	53%
Halter top with the breasts 10% visible & back exposed	30%	22%	52%
Top which reveals about 5" of stomach including navel	29%	22%	51%
Low cut dress (showing 10% of her breasts)	25%	24%	49%
Tight-fitting slacks and a snug top	27%	22%	49%
Dress or skirt cut 3" or more above the knee	24%	22%	46%
Top which reveals about 2" of stomach including navel	22%	19%	41%
Spaghetti strap top with bra straps showing, informal event	14%	18%	32%
Spaghetti strap dress at a wedding reception (for example)	14%	14%	28%
Strapless gown at a wedding reception or formal party	14%	12%	26%