

## ARTICLE 65

### Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

#### Marriage a gift from God

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#### Marriage and Fashion

##### Latin Union of High Fashion

I want to finish off this look at modesty by returning to Pope Pius XII's address to the Latin Union of High Fashion of November 1957. That the Pope agreed to address this group shows us that modesty and fashion are not mutually exclusive ideas in Catholic thought. The portrayal of modesty as frumpy and old maidish is another lie of the devil which is used to steer people, particularly women, away from modest dress. Let us not allow ourselves to be fooled by these deceitful tactics of the enemy.

##### Clothing: - Hygiene; Decency; Adornment

We have seen that Pope Pius XII notes three reasons for clothing; hygiene, decency and adornment, and we have seen that he describes decency as a “more or less conscious tendency of every person to defend his personal physical good from the indiscriminate desires of others so that he may reserve it, with prudent choice of circumstances, to those wise purposes of the Creator which He Himself has placed under the protective cover of chastity and modesty.” The Pope continues,

“This second virtue modesty, the very word "modesty" comes from *modus*, a measure or limit, probably better expresses the function of governing and dominating the passions, especially sensual passions. It is the natural bulwark of chastity. It is its effective rampart, because it moderates acts closely connected with the very object of chastity.”

##### Modesty is a Bulwark protecting Chastity and Purity

Again we see the importance of modesty as the bulwark and the rampart which protects chastity. In military terms, modesty is like the wall that surrounds the castle of the body. It has a drawbridge to allow intimate access in the case of those who are married. However if that drawbridge is not kept secure through the wearing of modest clothing, then the wall of chastity can be breached, leading to impurity in those who are affected. Modesty governs and dominates the sensual passions in order to keep them under control. We live in a world of fallen men, and we ourselves are fallen, which means that our passions are no longer perfectly subject to our intellect and to our wills. St Paul speaks of this battle to the Galatians.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:16-24)

## **Modesty – The Forward Sentinel**

Pope Pius XII continues “Modesty makes man hear its warning, like a forward sentinel, from the moment he acquires the use of reason, even before he learns the full meaning and purpose of chastity. It accompanies him throughout his entire life and demands that certain acts, which are good in themselves because they are divinely established, should be protected by a discreet veil of shadow and the reserve of silence, in order to confer on them the respect owed the dignity of their great purpose. It is therefore just that modesty, as the depository of such precious possessions, should claim for itself an authority prevailing over every other tendency and every caprice, and should preside over the determination of fashions in clothing.”

## **Modesty is not restricted to Clothing**

Here we have a powerful exposition of the virtue of modesty. Modesty is not restricted to just clothing but it is a way of living and of acting. The gifts of the body, in particular that gift which allows man to partake as a co-creator with God in bringing forth new human life, are precious possessions which need to be protected from all harm. In this regard the Pope gives to modesty “an authority prevailing over every other tendency and every caprice”. When one hears a Pope speaking so eloquently of modesty and of the importance of this virtue, one can only wonder as to why this virtue has been virtually ignored in our present times amongst all age groups.

## **Modesty is a Crucially Important Virtue**

Some of those who do speak on this issue seem to downplay its importance or to loosen the regulations surrounding modesty. Whereas the Church has spoken of women's clothing reaching mid-calf, that is a few inches below the knee, some Catholic groups now state that for sporting events mid-thigh is acceptable. That's a whole lot more exposed flesh than the Church would traditionally allow. In the not too distant past, Catholic girl's schools, would have insisted on the divided skirt which covered the knees, for young women who partook in sports in order that modesty be preserved. Mixed sporting events and mixed bathing would have been prohibited for obvious reasons. Nowadays, such regulations are seen as too restrictive and yet, the problems that we experience in modern society as regards unchastity, such as unplanned pregnancy, abortion, adultery, contraception and the like, are far greater than in the times when these dress codes were the norm. There is a connection between how we dress and the moral conduct of our society.

## **Adornment**

Pope Pius XII next speaks of Adornment with an explanation as to why he uses this specific term. “In order to avoid restricting the scope of this third requirement to mere physical beauty, and, even more, to avoid associating fashion with lust for seduction as its first and only reason, the term adornment is preferable to beautification.”

## **Modesty is not Prudish**

This Pope knows what he is talking about. Today's fashions have largely become associated with the “lust for seduction”. Women are meant to look 'sexy', that is 'sexually desirable' to all who see them. It is no longer deemed necessary to restrict human sexual expression to those who are married. Our Lord's admonition, that to look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery with her in your heart, is cast aside in favour of seductive clothing which leads many souls astray, and which is often the gateway to pornography and to pre-marital sexual behaviour in our young men and women.

In my next article I will continue this look at Pope Pius XII's address on fashion, because I believe that it is extremely important that we get the Catholic concept of modesty correct so that we can become models for modest living and dressing within our culture. We must become the modest leaven within our society, and the older generations must lead the younger generations in this area by our good example and by our good taste when it comes to matters of clothing.

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