
The

Modesty Handbook

The

Modesty Handbook

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Goretti Publications

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*Deo meo Iesu Christo
Domino magno et Pastori bono
cuius Cor Sacratissimum passum est
propter me et omnes homines
in remissionem peccatorum
pro instituyente regnum sociale eius
et Matri Suæ, Mariæ semper Virgini,
et Cordi Immaculatæ eius
et caræ Catharinæ uxori meæ
et Donaldto Patricio Quarto filio meo
hoc opus dedicatum*

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Preface

[L]et your speech be “yea, yea”: “no, no”: and that which is over and above these, is of evil.

St. Matthew 5:37.

A PREFACE IN SUCH A SMALL BOOK may well be objected to as unnecessary; there is only a limited amount of preliminary matter that such a minor work could require. However, I deemed it necessary, before embarking on an inquiry into so great a virtue, to “[b]e sober” and “watch”¹ lest I be accused of failing to do what I had no intention of doing, or fail to be accused of failing to do what I did intend to accomplish. Unless my purpose and methods are known, no one may offer either valid or invalid criticism of this work, and consequently any discussion about it must be a failure.

In order to prevent such a calamity, then, I have composed a brief preface to explain what exactly I hope to accomplish and how I intend to do it. In the first place, I do not intend to produce the definitive work on this beautiful virtue. While this small volume does contain a great deal of philosophical discussion, none of it is intended to be authoritative. I have referenced the great Catholic thinkers as far as I have thought necessary to provide a solid basis for the inquiry, no farther. As the introduction also states,² I had neither the intention nor the desire to burden everyday Catholics with the philosophical disputes of wiser men, no matter how important they might be in themselves. Not only is such a discussion beyond my own competence, but it is beyond the purpose of this work, which intends merely to give a reasonably deep, though not necessarily exhaustive, theoretical explanation of modesty and some basic guidelines for its practice. Its inadequacies, though doubtlessly many, must be judged against this

¹I St. Peter 5:8.

²See *infra*, at xi.

basic purpose, not against the deep philosophical discussions in which wiser heads engage.

The only other significant point to be made is one of methodology. I have often quoted from sources whose original language is not English; in one case the language was French, in a few Greek, and mostly, as in all the quotations from St. Thomas and St. Augustine, Latin. The French source is peripheral, but it has been verified in its original language. All my quotations from St. Augustine are my own translations; all my quotations from St. Thomas are taken from another's translation,³ but I have verified them against the original Latin text. The Greek sources I have all taken from translation, partly from the inadequacy of my own Greek and partly from the difficulty of obtaining these sources in Greek. Wherever my own translation is in question, I have provided the text in question in the original. This is my gesture of good faith; since I have no reputation as a translator, I feel that it is only just not to press the faith of the reader, and therefore I provide the original text. While many readers will not understand it, it may at least assuage their doubts about the translations of an unknown writer.

Otherwise, the work can stand on its own. I pray to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary, Ever Virgin, and to all the angels and saints, particularly my own guardian and patrons and those of the readers, that all who read this work may be blessed thoroughly, come to a deeper knowledge of this great virtue, and come to practice it with joy and humility.

DONALD P. GOODMAN III
November 10, 2010

³See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA: COMPLETE ENGLISH EDITION IN FIVE VOLUMES* (English Dominican Fathers trans., Christian Classics 1981).

Introduction

Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.

St. Matthew 18:7.

But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.

St. Matthew 5:28.

THE VIRTUE OF MODESTY has become almost entirely unknown in the last fifty years. Not long ago, it was taken for granted that both men and women were obliged to dress and bear themselves with modesty and discretion. Now such notions are ridiculed as outdated and indicative of unhealthy sexual “hang-ups.” Good Catholics know that men are still obliged to practice modesty, the rantings of a depraved and degenerate age notwithstanding. However, with the Church and the hierarchy which leads it in a state of unprecedented heterodoxy and decline, Catholics have little guidance in the proper practice of this once widespread virtue.

Indeed, Catholics find themselves today in a situation analogous to that of ethical theorists as described by Alasdair MacIntyre.⁴ Imagine that all scientific knowledge had been deliberately expunged from Western culture in a pseudo-luddite binge of antitechnological vandalism. However, Westerners still had just as great a need after this revolution as before to describe the physical world, and consequently began to pick up the pieces of scientific knowledge which still remained. This knowledge, however, was extremely fragmentary, consisting mostly of a few surviving pages from burnt books, bits of destroyed posters depicting the periodic table, and other essential pieces of modern science. While this post-revolutionary Western society would still possess the *language* of science, it would not possess any of the *substance*.

⁴ALASDAIR MACINTYRE, *AFTER VIRTUE* 1–5 (University of Notre Dame Press 1981).

They would merely by mouthing bits and pieces of knowledge, not genuinely exploring the natural world as the pre-revolutionary biologists and chemists had done.⁵

The situation regarding many once commonplace virtues, including modesty, is similar in Western modernity. A deliberate revolution, beginning with Protestantism and extending through the great political revolutions in Britain, America, France, and Russia to the present day, has destroyed the language of virtue that society once took for granted. The revolutionaries still have need of virtues, and consequently speak about civic virtue and similar things, but know nothing and care less about the content which these words once expressed. Thus, MacIntyre's lament of the modern ethicist's position can be echoed for all modern Catholics. Indeed, concerning many of the virtues of daily life, modesty included, the situation is still worse: since little had been written about them before the revolution, even the language used in discussion has been forgotten and lost. This, no doubt, is why even the mention of modesty in non-Catholic company generally produces an uncomfortable silence, if not outright offense: they know nothing of the concept beyond its occasional use by reclusive old biddies, and are happy about their ignorance.

Therefore, the practice of modesty in the modern world is fraught with ambiguity and confusion. Catholics understand that they are bound to practice it, but the hierarchy's nearly complete dereliction of their teaching authority combined with the societal destruction of traditional Christian norms has destroyed all possible avenues of guidance in this virtue's pursuit. Consequently, many Catholics have given up entirely on practicing modesty, satisfying themselves with prohibiting in their homes and entertainment that near-complete nudity which now passes for normal dress. The abundance of other issues which face the sincere and practicing Catholic in our sad days have often pushed the problems of modesty onto the proverbial back burner. Catholics no longer have time for such a virtue; it is simply too minor, when they struggle to maintain such basics as time off from their jobs on Good Friday to mourn the bloody Sacrifice of Our Lord.

However, leaving the virtue of modesty on the wayside is not a satisfactory solution to the difficulties presented by its practice. In these days of indecent and androgynous monstrosities which are daily presented to us (and worn without thought) as appropriate clothing,

⁵*See id.* (explaining the situation of modern ethicists).

the good Catholic must more than ever ask himself how the clothing he wears reflects the state of his soul. Both men and women should face this question without faltering. The Apostle tells us to “with fear and trembling work out []our salvation,”⁶ and that we must do, even if, perhaps especially if, it entails a significant difficulty and adjustment to our way of life. Considering the great changes in dress that the modern age has brought upon us, it seems likely that the question of modesty involves just such a change. It is vital, then, that Catholics have a reliable guide to the practice of the virtue of modesty. This work is an attempt to provide just such a guide.

The question of how to practice modesty in an increasingly degenerate time brings many further questions to the fore, which demand appropriate and complete answers before authentic and reliable standards of modesty can be obtained. These questions can, however, be reduced to two major strains of inquiry:

- What is a virtue? The phrase “the virtue of modesty” has already entered into the discussion; what exactly does the word “virtue” mean, and how does modesty fall under that meaning?
- How is the virtue of modesty pursued? Presuming that modesty is found to be a virtue, how does the faithful Catholic practice it?

Many questions will, of course, present themselves while investigating these two matters, but the entire discussion can be grouped under one or the other of these headings.

However, the good Catholic must ask himself how one can begin to answer these questions at all. If modernity’s situation is indeed as presented above, then there are no sources to which he can appeal in making this inquiry. However, Our Lord promised us that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against”⁷ the Church, and consequently no Catholic can ever despair of moral guidance. While little has been written about modesty in the history of the Church,⁸ the Catholic still has the principles of right philosophy and the One True Faith to guide him through

⁶Philippians 2:12.

⁷St. Matthew 16:18.

⁸This is doubtlessly due to the fact that its practice was so widespread and taken for granted that the great minds of the Church never anticipated that society would fall to the state in which it finds itself today. Consequently, while there has been a great deal written about purity in general, there has been very little concerning modesty in particular.

any inquiry. The teachings of the Greeks, particularly Aristotle, who prepare the way for a knowledge of Our Lord with their thinking,⁹ their successors among the Fathers and doctors of the Church, and the magisterial pronouncements of the Church herself provide the principles necessary to investigate the nature of modesty even in an age in which the very word is barely recognized. Modesty is necessary for a good Christian life, and since the lilies of the field need not concern themselves with raiment, Catholics need not concern themselves with the loss of Christian knowledge.¹⁰

So this work exploring the virtue of modesty begins, and the author prays that the blessings of Almighty God and the prayers of the Holy Virgin and of all the angels and saints will be forever with the reader and all with whom he discusses what is discussed here.

⁹See ST. BASIL, ADDRESS TO YOUNG MEN ON THE RIGHT USE OF GREEK LITERATURE in FREDERICK MORGAN PADELFORD, ESSAYS ON THE STUDY AND USE OF POETRY BY PLUTARCH AND BASIL THE GREAT 99–120 (Yale 1902), available at <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/basil/litterature01.htm> (explaining that in “profane writings” Christians can “perceive the truth as it were in shadows and mirrors,” and can read such writings “so long as our [mental and spiritual] immaturity forbids our understanding their [the Scriptures’] deep thought”). The pagans have always been used in this way by Christians: as a means of understanding the necessarily much deeper insights of Christian thinkers.

¹⁰See St. Matthew 6:28–30. This statement means to say that Catholics need not fret that Christian knowledge will be *forever* lost; they can and should worry that it will be lost for a time due to the lackadaisical indifference of their coreligionists or the active hatred of their persecutors, and work to preserve it against these villains.

Chapter 1

The Nature of Modesty

Outward movements are signs of the inward disposition.

St. Thomas Aquinas, SUM. THEO. IIa-IIæ, Q. 168, Art. 1.

THE FIRST TASK OF AN INQUIRY into the virtue of modesty is discerning what precisely the word “modesty” means. A mere definition will say little concerning the concept; the much more important inquiry is into modesty’s ends, which will tell us what modesty pursues and therefore how those who practice it must behave to be in accord with it. However, a definition is an indispensable part of this process. No inquiry can be made, least of all into ends, until the subject of that inquiry is known. Formulating a good definition of modesty, then, cannot be neglected.

Catholic philosophy, following the Greeks, teaches that a good definition must have two parts.¹ The first part is the genus of the thing defined.² The genus is the type of thing that the thing is. In order to meet this part of the definition, the type of thing that modesty is must be ascertained. The second part is the specific difference.³ The specific difference of the thing is what makes it different from all the other things of its type.

A philips-head screwdriver makes an excellent example. A good definition of this tool will incorporate its genus and its specific difference. First, the definer must ask what type of thing it is. Clearly, it is a tool; more specifically, it is a tool used for twisting screws along their

¹See ARISTOTLE, ANALYTICA POSTERIORA II:12 (R. McKeon ed., G. R. G. Mure trans., Random House 1941) (explaining the two parts of a good definition).

²See *id.*

³See *id.*

threads. That is the genus of things called “screwdrivers.” Second, the definer must determine its specific difference, or what makes it different from other screwdrivers. Since this screwdriver is philips-head, it is different from other screwdrivers in that its head, the part which holds it onto the screw, has cross-grooves rather than a single straight one. So the definition of “a philips-head screwdriver” is “a tool used for twisting screws which has a cross-grooved head.” This definition tells us what we need to know about such a screwdriver to identify one if we saw one.

Defining modesty will be no different. First, modesty’s genus, or type, must be identified; then that genus must be qualified by stating modesty’s specific difference. Modesty’s genus can be easily stated based on the way everyone who cares about its practice speaks about it: modesty is a virtue. Its scope and matter are still very much unknown, but the fact that modesty is a virtue is unquestioned by believing Catholics. The entire Christian experience testifies to this fact. Modesty’s genus is simply “a virtue.” Before this genus is qualified, however, it will be helpful to review what exactly a virtue is; after that discussion, the specific difference of modesty will be examined.

1.1 The Nature of a Virtue

[H]uman good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue.

Aristotle, ETHICA NICOMACHAEA I:7.

[V]irtue is a habit which is always referred to good . . . by which we live righteously.

St. Thomas Aquinas, SUM. THEO. Ia-IIæ Q. 55 Art. 4.

Any given practice has its virtues.⁴ Flute-playing, for example, has certain virtues which help the player perform his task well. Reading music well, learning the fingering, and expelling the right amount of air are virtues which help a man be a good flute-player. Chess is another excellent example. Patience, persistence, attentiveness, and many other traits are virtues which enable the player to play good chess.

Human life itself, however, is also a practice. Aristotle notes that “just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for

⁴See, e.g., ALASDAIR MACINTYRE, AFTER VIRTUE 187–95 (University of Notre Dame Press 1981) (explaining the nature of a practice and that each has its corresponding virtues).

all things that have a function or activity, the good and the ‘well’ is thought to reside in the function.”⁵ He follows by noting that “so would it seem for man, if he has a function.”⁶ Man does, of course, have a function. Aristotle, being a pagan, held it to be happiness, which is contemplation of the highest goods.⁷ Catholics can be more specific, and define the proper function of man as the contemplation of God, Who is the highest good.⁸ For this function, then, there are virtues, qualities which help men attain this end. This is the primary meaning of virtue.

To define what a “virtue” is more closely, the genus and specific difference must be found.⁹ Aristotle holds that the genus of virtue is a state of character, and the specific difference is those states of character which make a man good.¹⁰ One gains virtues by acting in the right way such that it becomes habitual; that habit is then a state of character, and one has possessed the virtue which governs that action.¹¹ St. Thomas’s account of virtue mirrors Aristotle’s precisely, though of course he is a Catholic and consequently sees the end as primarily religious.¹² Virtues are, then, those states of character, gained by habitual action in accordance with such states, which make a man good. In other words, virtues are habits of acting well.

To cut through this philosophical jargon, an example would be helpful. The good of the practice of hockey is to play hockey well. There are many virtues which make the hockey-player a good hockey-player, and thus enable him to attain the good of excellent hockey-playing. Take, for example, the simple wrist-shot. A good wrist-shot is vital for good hockey-playing; that player who has a good wrist-shot may be a good

⁵ARISTOTLE, *ETHICA NICOMACHAEA* I:7 (W. D. Ross trans., R. McKeon ed., Random House 1941).

⁶*See id.*

⁷*See id.* at X:7.

⁸*See* ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* Ia-IIæ Q. 1–2 (that man should do everything for the sake of God, his final good). This is echoed, of course, by the answer that so many Catholics know from the Baltimore Catechism, that God created man “that he might know, praise, and love his Creator” and “to share with us His everlasting happiness in Heaven,” and that in Heaven we “see Him face-to-face.” *See* REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, *THE BALTIMORE CATECHISM* 5–6 (Seraphim 1995).

⁹*See* Aristotle, *supra* note 1.

¹⁰*See* Aristotle, *supra* note 5, at II:5–6.

¹¹*See id.* at II:4 (that “we must become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts”).

¹²*See* ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* Ia-IIæ Q. 55 Art. 4.

player, but that player who does not have a good wrist-shot cannot be a good player. So a man trying to become a good hockey-player practices his wrist-shot. He works on the turn of the wrist, the precise angle at which the stick should hit the ground; he attempts to master gaining sufficient force behind the ball while still keeping control over where it goes. Most of all, he practices doing all of this without thinking, as automatically as he breathes; this is not only because the whole point of the wrist-shot is to send the ball on its way quickly, without any ado, but because unless he internalizes the wrist-shot he will not be a good hockey-player, only an improving one. The good hockey-player has all the virtues of hockey—an excellent wrist-shot, a strong slap-shot, a solid shoulder with which to check opposing players—within him. He need not pay close attention to the form of his shot; he analyzes the situation and acts according to the hockey-playing virtues within him. The practices and forms of good hockey-playing have become habit; they are now states of character for him. In other words, they are the virtues of hockey-playing.

In the same way, human life is a practice by which men come closer and closer to the perfect contemplation of God. There are many virtues which enable men to become good men—that is, men who are coming closer to God. Take, as an example, patience. When a man begins his journey to God, he has no patience; he expects everything that happens to be good and everything that he needs to happen immediately, and when it does not he becomes angry. The world revolves around him. As he improves in the quest for contemplation of the Truth, his patience increases; he no longer becomes angry so quickly, and he is more willing to submit to God's good timing for the things that he needs. When he is old, after a life well-lived, he will be very patient; he knows what he needs, but accepts them when they come, and no longer demands that God conform Himself to his own timing. He has internalized the practice of patience; it has become a state of character. Patience is no longer a chore for him because he has conditioned himself to it, it has become second nature. In other words, he has acquired the virtue of patience.

The virtues which assist men toward their end of contemplating the Truth are well-known to Catholics everywhere. First and foremost, of course, are faith, hope, and charity, infused in the soul by the Sacraments¹³ and increased by their frequent reception. The natural virtues

¹³See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 6 Art. 1 and Q. 24 Art. 3. Hope, being a theological virtue, presumably is similar.

are four in number, traditionally divided into prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. All other virtues can be understood as types of these four, traditionally known as the “cardinal” virtues because of their importance.

Prudence Prudence is the virtue which should “apply right reason to action.”¹⁴ This means that it is responsible for what the good man will do and what he will avoid doing.¹⁵ It is truly a sublime virtue, but not the subject of this handbook. Modesty does not fall under its classification. In this sense, prudence is necessary to practice any virtue, because it applies the reason to deeds. However, it specifically is not the subject of this inquiry.

Justice Justice is giving to each what he is due.¹⁶ Justice is truly a great virtue; indeed, Aristotle states that it is “the greatest of virtues, and ‘neither evening nor morning star’ is so wonderful.”¹⁷ Justice is, of course, the chief virtue which makes living in society, necessary for the life of man,¹⁸ possible. Indeed, justice cannot be practiced except toward another.¹⁹ While it is, therefore, crucial, it is not the subject of this handbook; modesty is clearly not a type of justice.

Fortitude Fortitude “conforms man to reason.”²⁰ It is responsible for preventing the will from being “disinclined to follow that which is in accordance with reason, on account of some difficulty that presents itself.”²¹ In other words, fortitude is responsible for keeping the will focused on the requirements of reason, namely the practice of the virtues, in spite of the obstacles which arise in the

¹⁴ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 47 Art. 4.

¹⁵See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 47 Art. 1.

¹⁶See generally Aristotle, *supra* note 5, at V:2 (explaining the different types of justice, each of which centers around giving to each what is due) and ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 58 Art. 1.

¹⁷*Id.* at V:1 (though here, it must be noted, Aristotle is speaking primarily about “justice” used to mean “complete virtue . . . in reference to our neighbor”).

¹⁸See ARISTOTLE, *POLITICA* I:2 (B. Jowett trans., R. McKeon ed., Random House 1941) (stating that “man is by nature a political animal” and that “he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity”).

¹⁹See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 58 Art. 2.

²⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 123 Art. 1.

²¹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 123 Art. 1.

way. While fortitude, like prudence, is strictly speaking necessary in some degree for the practice of any virtue, it is not our discussion here.

Temperance Temperance is that virtue which mandates “the mean with regard to pleasure.”²² This means controlling one’s appetites and subjecting them to reason. It means moderating one’s use of pleasurable goods by the purpose of those goods; for example, it means moderating one’s enjoyment of food by the amount of food that one truly needs. This is a great virtue, and the one with which a discussion of modesty is principally concerned.²³

That modesty is a virtue has already been determined. It remains, however, to discern what type of virtue it is, and how it leads man to his final end, the contemplation of God. That is, therefore, the next subject of inquiry.

1.2 Modesty as a Virtue

Outward movements are signs of the inward disposition.

St. Thomas Aquinas, SUM. THEO. IIa-IIæ, Q. 168, Art. 1.

The determination of where modesty fits into the scheme of virtues described above²⁴ requires a good definition of modesty. A good definition, as discussed above,²⁵ must incorporate both the genus of the thing (that is, what type of thing it is) and its specific difference (what makes it different from other things of its type).²⁶ The genus of modesty is not difficult to ascertain.

As discussed above, the genus of “modesty” is “virtue,” since modesty is a type of virtue. It only remains to determine the specific difference of modesty, a task much more difficult than that of determining its genus. Since pastors and others in authority with whom Catholics have daily contact have been unprecedentedly derelict in their duty to educate their flocks on this virtue, the only means remaining to determine the specific difference of modesty is to examine the writings of

²²See Aristotle, *supra* note 5, at III:10.

²³See *infra*, Section 1.2, at 6.

²⁴See *supra*, Section 1.1 at 2.

²⁵See *supra*, Chapter 1, before Section 1.1.

²⁶See Aristotle, *supra* note 1.

the Fathers and doctors of the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas in particular explains the doctrine of the virtue of modesty very thoroughly. Before his definition is examined, however, an examination of the way Catholics use the word may be helpful.

Catholics generally use the word “modesty” to refer to covering oneself sufficiently to avoid tempting others to impurity. While Catholics very frequently, sometimes vehemently, disagree as to the proper type and extent of that covering, the fact that modesty concerns the covering is never in doubt. Thomistic philosophy refers to clothing as “habit”; the definition of modesty, then, would be a virtue regarding habit.

However, Catholics also use the word to refer to less obvious ways of safeguarding the purity of themselves and others. Fr. Poage’s beautiful little life of St. Maria Goretti, for example, speaks of the modesty of St. Maria when she was scandalized by another child telling an impure joke.²⁷ A pious legend from the history of the Church speaks of a painter whose single immodest work put him in Purgatory until it was destroyed and could tempt others no more.²⁸ The word “modesty” is being used in these cases much more broadly than the definition “a virtue regarding clothing” would permit. There may well be, then, a deeper truth to pursue.

All of these uses of the word have several things in common. The most obvious of these is that they are all matters of purity. Accepting this common trait, “modesty” would mean “a virtue regarding purity.” However, the word “modesty” is often used to refer to acts of humility, as well. Even in the modern world “modesty” refers to humility regarding one’s own accomplishments, and *Merriam-Webster* defines “modesty” with precisely that meaning.²⁹ “Modesty” must, then, have a broader meaning than simply “a virtue concerning purity.”

The trait that all of these uses have in common is that they all refer to the *outward manifestations* of purity and humility. St. Maria was called modest because she fled from the impure joke, not merely because she refused to be amused by it. A man is called modest because he does not blow his own horn concerning his accomplishments,

²⁷FATHER GODFREY POAGE, C. P., SAINT MARIA GORETTI: IN GARMENTS ALL RED 27 (TAN Books and Publishers 1998).

²⁸FATHER F. X. SCHOUPE, PURGATORY EXPLAINED BY THE LIVES AND LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS 123–126 (TAN Books and Publishers 1986).

²⁹See WEBSTER’S NEW UNIVERSAL UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY 1236 (1996) (defining “modesty” as “having or showing a moderate or humble estimate of one’s merits”).

not because he privately considers them worthless. These considerations indicate that the definition of “modesty” should be “the virtue regarding outward expressions of humility and purity.”

However, no one would call a man modest if he privately considers his accomplishments to be perfect, but publicly denies their worth in an effort to gain further praise. Indeed, such actions are referred to as “false modesty,” even among moderns who have no proper conception of the virtues. Similarly, the man who will not laugh at an impure joke but commits acts of great impurity would not be called “modest”; rather, he would be considered a hypocrite. Defining “modesty” as simply regarding the outward expressions of humility and purity is faulty, then, since it permits false expressions to make authentic claims to being modest. The true definition must be “the virtue governing the outward expressions of inward humility and purity.” By this definition, only modesty which arises from genuine humility and purity in the soul can be properly so called.

Furthermore, these uses of “modesty” are not only expressions of virtue; they are expressions of virtue *to* someone, by which a man presents himself to others. The uses regarding purity all involve how the presentation of oneself or others might incite them to lust; the uses regarding humility all involve remembering one’s proper place and the true value of our own works. Essentially, then, Catholics use the word “modesty” to mean “the virtue which governs the presentation of oneself to others.” As such, it seems to be a species of honesty.

When a man presents himself as having done great works of charity, for example, he is not only being a braggart; he is truly lying. No matter how much charity he may have done, he must remember, following St. Paul, that it is nothing without God, and boasting about it as though one were its source is simply telling a falsehood.³⁰ Similarly, when a woman presents herself indecently dressed, she is presenting herself as an object of lustful desire, rather than as the creature of God and member of Christ that she is. Such presentation is simply lying, and the virtue which goes against such lying would be one of honesty.

Modesty, then, is the virtue which governs honesty in the outward presentation of oneself. This definition, derived from the usage of Catholics, compares rather favorably to that offered by the Angelic

³⁰See II Corinthians 10–12 (explaining that the recitation of his great deeds as an apostle was forced on him, and that “he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” because “not he who commendeth himself, is approved, but he, whom God commendeth”).

Doctor. However, the similarity bears some explanation. St. Thomas calls modesty a type of temperance, the virtue which governs moderation; modesty is temperance in those situations in which moderation is less difficult.³¹

Temperance enjoins moderation. It can be divided into two parts. The first is temperance properly so called, which “brings moderation into those things wherein it is most difficult to be moderate, namely the concupiscences of pleasures of touch.”³² In “other lesser matters where moderation is not so difficult,”³³ modesty is the virtue concerned. St. Thomas defines modesty, then, as “the virtue which governs moderation in matters other than touch.”

At first glance this does not square at all with the definition discerned from the common use of Catholics. However, the two are generally connected. St. Thomas continues to explain that there are four types of modesty: humility, which governs moderation in moving the mind toward excellence; studiousness, which governs moderation in the desire to know; and finally moderation in the bodily movements and moderation in bodily apparel.³⁴ These last two seem more like what Catholics generally call “modesty,” and indeed they are. Humility and studiousness are known by their own names; even St. Thomas, however, did not have a single name for the other two, and consequently the word “modesty” came to signify them primarily, rather than the whole group of four.

Much has been written concerning humility, that great virtue which St. Augustine named the beginning of the search for holiness.³⁵ Studiousness deserves its own treatise, but that is not the topic of this work. This document is concerned particularly with modesty of the third and fourth types, about which too little has been written and too little guidance has been offered by the hierarchy in this sad time. The definition of these two types can be offered as the practical definition of modesty, since in common usage it applies only to them. Modesty, then, is the virtue which governs moderation in the outward bodily

³¹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 160 Art. 1.

³²ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 160 Art. 1.

³³ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 160 Art. 1.

³⁴ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 160 Art. 1.

³⁵ST. AUGUSTINE, SERMO AD POPULUM LXIX:1, *quoted in* ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 161 Art. 5 (asking whether “you think to construct a great thing of height? First, at the base, think of humility”) (*in origine “[c]ogitas magnam fabricam construere celsitudinis? De fundamento prius cogita humilitatis*”). Author’s translation.

movements and apparel.

This is very similar to the definition reached above from the common use of Catholics, that modesty is a virtue regarding honesty in the outward presentation of oneself. First, one presents oneself primarily through bodily movements and dress. Second, the honest presentation of oneself must be moderate; the excess would be giving too great an appearance to oneself, and the defect would be giving too little. Using “moderation” rather than “honesty” in the definition, however, gives modesty a greater scope, incorporating as it does the material pleasures that can come from apparel. It is a better definition, then, since it encompasses all the good and evil that can be done through outward movements and apparel.

Modesty, then, is *the virtue governing moderation in outward bodily movements and in apparel*. While this definition seems to neglect the uses regarding purity which were examined above, those uses are certainly parts of modesty and will be examined in due order.³⁶ This definition reaches the essence of modesty, and therefore will suffice for the remainder of this discussion. A good definition having been acquired, then, it remains to determine the ends of modesty, without which one cannot make good judgements regarding its practice.

1.3 The Ends of Modesty

Modesty is necessary for safeguarding purity.

THE BALTIMORE CATECHISM

[K]now you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God; and you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.

I Corinthians 6:19–20.

Knowing the purpose of modesty is an indispensable part of any discussion concerning the nature of the virtue. The end of a thing, the Catholic must recall, is also its first principle.³⁷ An excellent example is that known and loved by students of Aristotle everywhere: flute-playing. The end of flute-playing is to make beautiful music. Knowing this, the student of music can learn about flute-playing by listening to good flute music. By listening to good flute-playing, flute-playing

³⁶See *infra*, Section 1.3.2, at 16.

³⁷See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA, Ia-IIæ Q. 1 Art. 1.

itself is better understood. Without knowing what the purpose of flute-playing is, however, the student might attempt to learn about flute-playing by listening to the blarings of an inexperienced hack, and his knowledge of flute-playing would be thereby corrupted. In the same way, knowing the end of modesty will provide the principle from which the substance of the virtue can be ascertained.

The knowledge of a thing is weakened without a knowledge of its end because this lack of knowledge precludes any standard for determining which particular examples of that thing are good and which bad. In the above example, the student of music cannot possibly understand flute-playing unless he knows what flute-playing is good and what is bad. However, if he does not know that the end of flute-playing is producing beautiful music, then he will never know which is good and which is bad. Random, dissonant notes might be excellent flute-playing, for all he knows. Once he knows the end of flute-playing, however, he is able to judge all flute-playing against that end. He knows that dissonance is not beautiful, and therefore that the inexperienced amateur's music is not as good as the melodies of the master player. Similarly, if the Catholic does not know the purpose of modesty, he will have no way of judging whether a given practice is modest or not, nor of determining what practices he ought to adopt in order to pursue the virtue of modesty. Once, however, he knows its end, he will be able to make judgements about practices he sees as well as about practices which he should undertake.³⁸

Furthermore, a thing may have many ends. Once again, flute-playing provides an excellent example. Flute-playing's primary purpose is, of course, the thing produced: beautiful music. Also, however, it should produce pleasure in the player, and also pleasure in the listener. In order to really judge which flute-playing is truly good and which bad, the ends of flute-playing must be properly ordered. The inexperienced hack, for example, may really enjoy playing the flute, in which case his playing can be called "good" in a certain sense. However, since the music he produces is terrible, his playing is not fully good, because it fails in the purpose which comes before mere pleasure in the player, which is making beautiful music. Without properly ordering those ends, the standard by which flute-playing is judged is faulty and prevents arriving at accurate judgements concerning particular examples of flute-playing. In the same way, unless the ends of modesty

³⁸For an attempt at making such judgements, see *infra*, Chapter 2, at 21.

are properly ordered, judgements concerning particular practices will necessarily be inadequate.

Therefore, before those judgements about goodness and badness (in this case, modesty and immodesty) can be made, the ends of modesty must be discovered and properly ordered. The best way to discern these ends is by dialectical reasoning from the way the word “modesty” is used³⁹ and by the way the great thinkers of the Church have spoken about it. They can be ordered by keeping in mind the hierarchy of goods which the Church and right philosophy provide to their Catholic descendants.

Fundamentally, modesty’s end can be determined simply from its definition. Modesty is the virtue which governs moderation in the outward bodily movements and apparel. What are the ends of outward bodily movements and apparel? Once again, the writings of the Angelic Doctor give assistance in discerning the truth.

1.3.1 Modesty as Requiring Honesty

First, St. Thomas states that outward movements must conform to the virtue of honesty.⁴⁰ Indeed, this seems to be the type of modesty spoken of most often in Holy Writ, which emphasizes the moderation necessary in the good Christian’s dress.⁴¹ Essentially, this honesty is an aspect of humility, a recognition both of man’s lowliness as a sinner and his dignity as a member of Christ.

Conforming with this aspect of modesty means that one must act in accordance with what St. Thomas calls *taste* and *methodicalness*. Taste means that one must act according to who one is and who one is with; to do otherwise is to lie about the proper place of oneself and others. Methodicalness, on the other hand, “regards what is becoming to the business in hand, and to one’s surroundings.”⁴² In other words, *taste* is modesty in reference to persons, while *methodicalness* is modesty in reference to place and business. Both are essential to the proper honesty which modesty requires.

³⁹By the way the word “modesty” is used by believing Catholics, who retain at least some idea of its significance, rather than by the way it is used by those who hate it without knowing it.

⁴⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 168 Art. 1.

⁴¹For a brief discussion of these verses, see *infra*, the following text.

⁴²ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 168 Art. 1.

Taste, Humility, and Dignity

Taste, as stated before, requires honesty according to who and with whom one is. To be “tasteful,” as regards modesty, one must act and dress appropriately according to oneself and one’s company. Take, for example, the man who acts sarcastically and without respect when meeting His Holiness the Pope. The man is making a statement concerning the worthiness of His Holiness, that he is unworthy of the dignified and respectful behavior that is customary before him. Since clearly His Holiness is worthy of such respect, the man is truly lying; he is telling a falsehood through his actions, both about His Holiness (that he is unworthy of respect) and about himself (that he is somehow higher than respecting the Vicar of Christ on earth). Similarly, the man who wears ripped jeans and an undershirt to meet His Holiness is violating this principle of modesty. Modesty requires dressing and acting in accordance with oneself and one’s company.

The relation of this to honesty, however, is not immediately apparent. It is not clear about what modesty requires one to be honest concerning oneself and others. The answer is simple: modesty requires honesty concerning the dignity of oneself and others, the dignity that comes both from being a rational creature and from being a member of Christ.

In recent times, too much has been said concerning the dignity of man and not enough concerning his lowliness, and consequently talk about the dignity of man tends to elicit either exasperated indifference from traditionalists or smug self-assurance from liberals. However, the fact that man has a certain dignity simply as a member of Christ cannot be denied. The epigraph at the head of this section should suffice to close the matter for any believing Catholic.⁴³ Modesty requires the Catholic to be honest regarding the nature of a member of Christ: that he is not his own, that he has been purchased at a great price. It requires honesty concerning the respect that is owed to a temple of the living God.

The Apostle teaches Catholics that our “members are the temple of the Holy Ghost,”⁴⁴ and that we are to “[g]lorify and bear God in”⁴⁵ our bodies. The immodest man forgets this, and by his actions he presents himself not as a temple of the Holy Ghost, but as an object of lust or

⁴³See I Corinthians 6:19–20.

⁴⁴I Corinthians 6:19.

⁴⁵I Corinthians 6:20.

as something great and admirable in his own right. In doing so, he is truly lying; he is lying about the respect and glory that the Holy Spirit is owed, and he is lying about his own true worth. He is lying by his failure to “[g]lorify and bear God in”⁴⁶ his body.

Modesty in taste requires nothing more than the divine command as given through St. Paul. It is no great effort or hard discipline; it is simply telling the truth. In this age in which lying has become accepted and commonplace⁴⁷ such honesty may seem burdensome; it is, nevertheless, the clear requirement of both right philosophy, as revealed by St. Thomas Aquinas, and the mandates of God, as given by St. Paul. Modesty requires honesty concerning persons; but it also requires honesty concerning the business at hand.

Methodicalness, Modesty, and the Business at Hand

Methodicalness, on the other hand, “regards what is becoming to the business in hand, and to one’s surroundings.”⁴⁸ A good example in this case is a general discussing battle plans with jocularly and mirth. Laughing about the deaths of soldiers is unbecoming to the business at hand; the general is really lying about the gravity of battle, by his actions. Both of these cases are matters of moderation, because they require that outward actions be moderated according to persons and situations. Modesty, then, requires honesty in one’s actions, about both oneself and others and about the business at hand.

Modesty in apparel, on the other hand, requires honesty, as well, in regard to the same things. That would be like a general discussing battle plans in his pajamas. However, there are some additional considerations in regard to clothing. St. Thomas discusses two possible situations in regard to apparel that might go against modesty, aside from the considerations of honesty already discussed above.⁴⁹ One’s dress can be out of proportion to local custom, or it can be out of

⁴⁶*Id.*

⁴⁷See, e.g., Timothy Hoff, *Lawyers in the Subjunctive Mood: Invention of Self and Albert Camus’ The Fall*, 23 LEG. STUD. FOR. 234 (1999), available at <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/lsf/hoff23.htm> (explaining the prevalence of political lying in the United States) and Karen S. Peterson, *Would I lie to you?*, U.S.A. TODAY Feb. 20, 2001, available at <http://www.usatoday.com/educate/college/firstyear/casestudies/20010220-tellingt.pdf> (explaining the prevalence of lies in American culture).

⁴⁸ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 168 Art. 1.

⁴⁹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1.

proportion as regards the pleasure of the wearer (that is, the wearer might take too much pleasure in his attire). Either excess (for example, seeking glory by dressing beyond the custom of one's culture) or defect (for example, paying so little attention to one's dress that one looks like a vagabond) can violate the virtue of modesty.

Conclusion on Modesty and Honesty

These two virtues of taste and methodicalness govern the way in which Catholics present themselves to others; they require honesty concerning one's company and one's business. The Catholic must present himself appropriately to his company and to the matters being accomplished. He must not display himself as something to be looked at, least of all as something to be looked at in lust or in awe; he must not display his wealth or his fashion in a way unbecoming to his position among his company, in society in general, or in the Church. He must remember to remain in his place, and to dress according to that place, keeping always in mind that his true adornment is not his dress or his actions, but his glory as a member of Christ.

The importance of this aspect of modesty should not be underestimated. Indeed, this type of honesty seems to be the primary meaning of modesty when it is discussed in the Scriptures. St. Peter, for example, tells his flock that their outward garb should

not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel: [b]ut the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God.⁵⁰

St. Paul also warns his flock about violating these principles of modesty, telling women to dress

in decent apparel: adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire, [b]ut as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works.⁵¹

These two great apostles, one our first pope, never failed to instruct their flocks on what was good for them. So they rebuked them when

⁵⁰I St. Peter 3:3–4.

⁵¹I Timothy 2:9–10.

they dressed out of proportion to their place, in society and in the Church, and reminded them that their true dignity was not in their worldly properties and attire, but in their membership in Christ.

St. Thomas has, then, very well explained the Scriptural meaning of modesty as honesty in one's outward actions and apparel. He also, however, states another purpose of the virtue, one which he describes as "special,"⁵² in order to set it apart. The Angelic Doctor teaches that modesty must go beyond its proper purpose of moderation for the sake of honesty; it must also protect the purity of the Christian faithful.

1.3.2 Modesty as Protecting Purity

There is a special consideration regarding dress; St. Thomas applied it only to women, but the conditions of our day justify extending it to all men. He explains that after all the normal conditions of modesty have been examined, there remains "also something special, namely that a woman's apparel may incite men to lust."⁵³ He argues that this is acceptable in a married woman to her husband, but that otherwise it is definitely sinful.⁵⁴ This is a "special" consideration because it would not have existed without the Fall.

God, in His infinite wisdom, gave to man certain appetites for the things which are good for him. Man has an appetite for food, for example (indeed, it is to this appetite that moderns primarily apply the word), and an appetite for sleep and for drink. One of his strongest appetites is for the conjugal act. God knew, in His wisdom, that the purposes served by the sexual act—the reproduction of the race and the union of man and wife—were of such paramount importance that He made that appetite particularly strong, and the pleasure associated with satisfying it particularly great. All these appetites, including that for the sexual act, existed before the Fall; they are all good in themselves, because they draw man toward those things which are good for him.

However, before the Fall these appetites were all subject to the reason. Our first parents, before they ate of the forbidden fruit, subjugated their appetites to their reason, and had they not so eaten, their unfallen descendents would have so subjugated them, as well. All appetites would have been moderated by reason. The desire for food, for

⁵²ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁵³ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁵⁴ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

example, would have been limited by the rational knowledge of how much food one needed, and the desire for the sexual act would have been moderated by the purposes of marriage, within which the sexual act ought to occur.⁵⁵ After the Fall, however, man's appetites rebelled, and no longer submit themselves to reason.

It is, of course, still possible, even required, to subject the appetites to the reason. However, man is no longer born with that subjugation in his soul; he must acquire it through hard work and long discipline. This is one of the reasons that Catholics fast, and give up sleep, and even abstain from the marital act: they wish to subordinate these appetites to reason, to accustom themselves to denying the appetites when it is not necessary so that they will be able to deny them when it is. However, these appetites are still strong, and without constant guarding man will allow them to dominate his reason, and thus commit sin. Man is particularly apt to do so with the sexual act, to which the predominance of sexual sins will amply testify. This predilection to surrendering to the rebellious appetites is a great cause of sin; the world, the flesh, and the Devil all appeal to these upstart appetites in their revolt against reason to draw men into the abyss. This predilection is also the source of one of the ends of modesty, one unneeded before the Fall but very necessary in this new vale of tears.

St. Thomas states that "a woman's apparel may incite men to lust."⁵⁶ Today's Catholic, thanks to the depravities of modernity's destruction of proper manners and decency, can restate the principle as "either a man's or a woman's apparel or actions may incite men to lust." They can also be the cause of sin in the self, since the desire to bring others to lust is itself a sin and also indicates a certain lust within oneself.⁵⁷ So another end of modesty is to protect purity, both in oneself and others.

The importance of this end can be considered secondary to the first end only slightly, and only because it is not a natural end of modesty. Furthermore, that lesser importance is only in the order of being; in the order of action, it is less important. Deliberate acts of dishonesty can

⁵⁵And which is the one gift which was not taken from us in either the Fall or the Flood. See the prayer after the *Pater noster* in the Nuptial Service, in SYLVESTER P. JUERGENS, S. M., THE NEW MARIAN MISSAL FOR DAILY MASS 1374 (Veritas Press 1952).

⁵⁶ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁵⁷See St. Matthew 18:7 and 5:28. The desire to bring lust to another is certainly a scandal. However, it probably arises from a real lust within the self, since lust more than any other vice loves company.

be venial sins, depending on the disposition of the sinner⁵⁸; deliberate acts of impurity, however, because of their addictive nature and their appeal to the strongest of the baser appetites, are always mortal sins. The prevention of mortal sin must come before the prevention of venial sin; therefore, in the order of practice this end of modesty is prior to that of honesty. Both ends, however, must be served by any given practice if that practice is to be called modest; failure in either is either lying or lust, and cannot be done deliberately without sin.

1.4 Conclusions on the Nature of Modesty

Modesty, as it has been defined and explained, concerns several principle aspects, which must be considered whenever one is making a judgement about a given practice. These aspects are meant to restate the teaching of St. Thomas on modesty, not replace it; they are merely explanations of the ways that success and failure can come in the practice of this virtue. These aspects are two in number:

Humility Honesty mandates a proper humility and dignity, knowing one's place within one's company and the gravity of one's business. It means dressing and acting appropriately concerning oneself, one's company, and the matter at hand. For this reason, it is not universal; a practice which is modest in one situation may be immodest in another. Good judgement, acquired through the practice of the virtue and guidance from others, is necessary to determine what actions and garb will be modest in a given situation.

Purity Modesty also mandates a proper concern for purity, both as reflecting one's own purity and protecting that of others. It, too, varies somewhat according to situation and activity, but is more limited than modest humility because certain ways of dress and action are always impure and must always be avoided.

With these concerns in mind, the Catholic is able to make good judgements concerning modesty and immodesty, using them as standards against which a given practice can be judged. Some brief expla-

⁵⁸See *infra*, Section 2.4.2, at 48.

nations of their requirements, however, along with the ways in which their standards can be failed, would doubtless be helpful.

1.4.1 Modesty as Requiring and Protecting Humility

Modesty requires humility; its practice demands a proper knowledge of oneself, of one's neighbors, of one's business, and of one's position in the world. In the first place, it forbids dressing or acting as though one's glory were on earth. To pay too much attention to one's dress, or to try to obtain sensual pleasures from it, is the sin of vainglory.⁵⁹ On the other hand, paying too little attention to one's dress is equally blameworthy.⁶⁰ The same would apply to actions; acting stiff because of excessive attention to one's actions, or a lackadaisical indifference to the becomingness of one's actions, are both failures of modesty. As in all the virtues, right action lies in the *mean*; modesty lies in not acting as though one is better than one is, nor acting as though one is worse than one is, but of having a right idea of who one is and acting according to that.

These can all be summed up by the phrase by which St. Thomas describes the meaning of "excessive" in regards to dress: that which "exceeds his estate"⁶¹ is excessive for him. The concept also flows the other way; that is, that which does not measure up to his estate is deficient. is deficient, and therefore just as problematic as what is excessive. One's "estate" is one's place in society and in one's company. A lawyer wearing blue jeans to court would be beneath his estate, while a carpenter wearing a three-piece suit to work would be above it. Contrariwise, a lawyer wearing a suit to go fishing would be above his estate, insofar as it is inappropriate to the business at hand, while a carpenter wearing his dungarees to Mass would be beneath it. Essentially, modesty simply requires dressing and acting appropriately to the situation and to one's place in society and one's company. It is simply being honest to oneself and others about oneself and others.

⁵⁹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1.

⁶⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1. *See also* Aristotle, *supra* note 5, at VII:7 (explaining that a certain care for dress is necessary for virtue, and that accordingly "it is a mark of effeminacy to let one's cloak trail on the ground to avoid the trouble of lifting it up").

⁶¹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1.

1.4.2 Modesty as Requiring and Safeguarding Purity

Modesty also has the necessary role of safeguarding purity. As stated above,⁶² the sexual drive is the strongest of man's many appetites, and consequently it is that to which man most often subordinates his reason and thus commits sin. It is therefore imperative that Catholics assist each other in resisting the many temptations that it offers by acting and dressing in a manner that will not arouse that appetite. The vices associated with this new aspect of modesty are two:

Dishonesty Honesty is still a virtue concerned with this aspect of modesty, since the violation of it involves presenting the self to others as an object of lust and holding others as simply subjects of lust rather than as Catholics struggling to keep their appetites under the control of reason. When considering modesty as the protector of purity, this vice is committed whenever the second vice is, and *vice versa*.

Obscenity Obscenity is committed when certain parts of the body are exposed which tend to arouse the sexual appetite (that is, bring men toward the sin of lust). Obscenity can be committed either by *exposure*, the outright exposure of the sexual parts of the body, or by *emphasis*, drawing attention to those sexual parts.

This aspect of modesty is violated principally, though not exclusively, with the clothing, the hair, and the bearing, with the middle being by far the least guilty of the three. It is examined more thoroughly in Chapter 2,⁶³ when those three topics, along with others, are specifically addressed.

⁶²See *supra*, Section 1.3.2 at 16.

⁶³See *infra*, at 21.

Chapter 2

The Pursuit of the Virtue of Modesty

[T]ake up the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, . . . in all things taking up the shield of faith . . . and take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God.

Ephesians 6:13–17.

Fight the good fight of the faith. . .

I Timothy 6:12.

SPECULATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF MODESTY, the virtues from which it arises, and the goods which it protects is very good; indeed, contemplation of the truth (that is, of God Himself) is the highest end to which man can aspire.¹ However, Catholics living in the world,² to whom this work is primarily addressed, must make that knowledge of the truth issue forth in deeds if they wish to please the God Who made them. No Catholic can doubt that “even as the body without the spirit is dead; so also faith without works is dead,”³ and Our Lord Himself warned us that “[n]ot every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my

¹See, e.g., ARISTOTLE, *ETHICA NICOMACHAEA* X:7 (R. McKeon ed., W. D. Ross trans., Random House 1941) and ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 182 Arti. 1–2. See also St. Luke 10:38–42 (Christ stating that Mary, the contemplative, “has chosen the best part”).

²But not of it, since the world hates Christ and those who love Him. See I St. John 3:13.

³St. James 2:26.

Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”⁴ The Catholic, therefore, having learned about the nature of modesty, still requires guidance on how best to practice it.

Modesty as discussed in Chapter 1 governs moderation in the outward dress and attire, for the purposes of humility and the protection of purity. This virtue can be followed primarily through clothing and bearing; it can also be pursued, however, through the hair, the skin, and other ways. Providing some guidance for Catholics in these matters is this chapter’s principal aim.

Many will wonder why some of these particular ways of practicing modesty were selected over others. Essentially, those were chosen which were considered the most vital and the most widely violated. Clothing, of course, is that which most Catholics think of when they consider modesty, and consequently it was deemed a necessary topic. Hair and the veil were selected because they are contained in a particular command of Scripture, and consequently must be considered of the highest importance. Skin was chosen because of the strength of the condemnations of the Fathers, and also because of its common violation. Finally, bearing is such an extremely important yet widely violated aspect of the virtue that its treatment could not be avoided. Catholics should not take these categories as all-inclusive; there are, of course, many ways of practicing modesty. Any activity which involves the presentation of oneself to others—indeed, any activity, therefore, done in the presence of others—concerns modesty to some degree. These particular topics were chosen merely as the most important, not as the exclusive, domains of modesty. The many ways of practicing modesty are so numerous that a book three times this one’s size could not hope to cover them all.

Indeed, Catholics must be cautioned that no book, however long or complete, could possibly provide complete guidance to all possible situations. As Aristotle stated in his discussion of ethics, we cannot look for a precision which the science does not allow.⁵ This handbook purports only to give general guidelines, suitable for beginning the quest for modesty and the virtues which fall beneath it. Once a Catholic has acquired this virtue, he will be able to make his own judgements as this state of character requires. That is the substance of virtue; this handbook gives only an outline. So, without further ado, some specific

⁴St. Matthew 7:21.

⁵See Aristotle, *supra* note 1, at I:3 (explaining that ethics, like politics, is not an exact science).

requirements of modesty will be examined.

2.1 Pursuing Modesty through Clothing

Honesty pertains to virtue. Now a certain honesty is observed in the outward apparel; . . . [t]herefore there can be virtue and vice in the outward attire.

St. Thomas Aquinas, SUM. THEO. IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1.

Clothing is an extremely important means of pursuing modesty; indeed, when most Catholics use the word “modesty” they are referring to the way a person, generally a woman, dresses. While the description of modesty given above does not limit modesty in this way, clothing is certainly a vital part of this virtue. Furthermore, clothing is the primary means of using modesty to protect purity, both of oneself and one’s neighbors. To explore how clothing can be used to pursue modesty, the purpose of clothing must be investigated; then an inquiry into using clothing to attain that purpose can follow.

2.1.1 The Purpose of Clothing

Moses tells us the story of the origin of clothing in human society. Our first parents, after they had sinned, “perceived themselves to be naked”⁶ and “sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons.”⁷ Neither Moses nor any others of the sacred authors tell us any more about the source of this universal human custom. Scripture, then, tells us that the purpose of clothing is to conceal our shame; it offers no other.

This shame is rooted in the rebellion of the appetites. When our first parents ate of the fruit, they did not suddenly become aware of their nakedness. One may assume that Adam and Eve were not blind as well as innocent. By saying that they “perceived themselves to be naked,” the Scriptures declare that they became ashamed of that nakedness because it induced their passions to rebel against their reason.⁸ They therefore covered themselves, so that their passions would

⁶Genesis 3:7.

⁷*Id.*

⁸*See, e.g.,* Rev. Fr. George Leo Haydock, *Comprehensive Catholic Commentary* in THE DOUAY-RHEIMS OLD TESTAMENT OF THE HOLY CATHOLIC BIBLE 16 (Catholic Treasures 1992).

not rise up against their reason from the mere sight of one another.

The end of clothing, then, is to protect other men from the arousal of the passions against the reason. Scripture offers no other explanation for it. Of course, clothing has many other uses; however, since the Scriptures offer no other justification for putting on outward attire, it must be assumed that this is the most important. No other end for clothing can override this principal concern of concealing nakedness, of protecting our neighbors from the arousal of the passions. The protection of purity is the primary purpose of clothing.

As stated, however, clothing has many other uses, and once this principal end has been fulfilled, the form of dress can be substantially modified to meet these other ends. The other uses for clothing are too many to be exhaustively addressed in a simple handbook; however, some are so evident and common that they immediately suggest themselves, and permit some brief review.

Firstly, clothing is extremely useful as a protection from the elements. This use is extremely important for fallen man, now subject to suffering; living in any climate with a winter would become impossible without the protections offered by warm clothing. This use for clothing, though obvious, should not be overlooked, and it should be remembered that clothing which does not perform this essential function is bad clothing, though for a different and lesser reason than that which does not fulfil clothing's primary purpose.

Secondly, clothing can be used as protection from certain situations, even those not created by nature. The blacksmith, for example, wears a leathern apron to protect himself from the sparks and other hazards of working the forge. The lumberjack wears gloves to protect his hands from the constant abuse of swinging an axe and handling rough wood. If the dress of a smith, a lumberjack, or any other trade did not serve to protect him from the hazards of that trade, insofar as protective dress is obtainable, it would be bad clothing, though again for a different and lesser reason than that clothing which does not protect purity.

Most importantly, however, clothing is useful for showing place in society, for expressing oneself with honesty. Presumably this use would have existed even before the Fall, since even before the Fall society would have had places and roles and men to fill them. Honesty, as discussed above,⁹ means presenting oneself with the humility required by a sinful creature as well as the dignity inherent in a member of

⁹See *supra*, Section 1.3.1, at 12.

Christ. It requires modifying one's dress based on with whom one will be and what business will be conducted. It places limits on vanity and pride, while encouraging humility and self-knowledge.

This use for clothing can be considered second only to the protection of purity, and comes before all the other ends. Indeed, it seems that this purpose is higher than that of purity, since it is a natural use of clothing that would have existed even had our first parents never fallen. However, while it is a higher purpose in itself, it is lower in the order of consideration of proper dress. This is because all violations of purity are of the order of mortal sin, while dishonesty can be venial; it is important, then, that mortal sin be avoided first, while avoiding venial sin can be done later. Only a fool addresses minor dangers when death itself looms above his head.

2.1.2 Protecting Purity with Dress

As stated above,¹⁰ purity can be violated by outward action or dress in two ways. Here the concern is entirely dress; violations of purity in outward action are addressed thoroughly later in this handbook.¹¹ These two ways are *exposure* and improper *emphasis*.

Exposure is committed in dress when the sexual parts of the body are simply exposed. It can be committed by either *exposure of flesh* or by *exposure of form*. Exposure of flesh is the simple exposure of the sexual parts of the body; that is, by uncovering them, by placing nothing in between them and the eyes of onlookers. Exposure of flesh can be committed by removing all covering or by retaining covering which is transparent or translucent. This would include those garments which conceal while revealing, either through many small holes or by simply partly transparent fabric; indeed, it applies even more to them, since full exposure leaves nothing to the imagination, whereas partial exposure of this kind tantalizes the passions and leads to the desire of a fuller knowledge of what is hidden.

Exposure of form, on the other hand, is the revelation of the form of the sexual parts of the body while still keeping them at least nominally covered. The most frequent offender in this regard is clothing that is overly tight. Such exposure falls under the same censure as partial exposure of flesh: it engages the lustful curiosity of the observer, leading him to a more explicit desire and consequently to a greater sin.

¹⁰See *supra*, Section 1.4.2, at 20.

¹¹See *infra*, Section 2.4, at 46.

Improper *emphasis*, on the other hand, is committed when too great an emphasis is given by the clothing to the sexual parts of the body. No clothing will be so perfect as to completely conceal all the sexual parts; there must necessarily be some revelation of the form of the body, for example. However, when that revelation is deliberately increased or maximized by the clothing, improper emphasis has been committed. Patterns or lettering which bring the sexual parts of the body to the attention of the looker are the most frequent means of violating modesty in this way. The current fashion of printing certain statements across the backside, for example, draws the eyes toward that sexual part of the body, and consequently improperly emphasizes it.

Conforming with modesty in dress as regards purity requires simply avoiding these easily avoidable sins. No sexual part of the body can be exposed, either through simple exposure or through improper emphasis. It remains, however, to determine which parts of the body are considered “sexual parts” and which are not. This requires a simple two-step inquiry:

1. Is this part of the body directly part of the sexual act, or so commonly associated with the sexual act that its exposure will bring minds to the sexual act? Obviously the sexual organs themselves are sexual parts; others that qualify are the backside, the female breasts, and the thighs.¹² The fact that a part may have non-sexual uses (the thighs, for example, can be used for walking, or the breasts for feeding children) does not preclude it from being a sexual part. Some will argue that the permission that some cultures give to expose these parts proves that they are not sexual parts by nature, but only by culture. This argument, however, begs the question. It assumes that any part that is culturally permitted to be exposed is not a sexual part, an assumption that is obviously fallacious. The argument is most often given about the female breasts; however, one may as well argue that the American cultural permission to expose the thighs means that Americans do not consider the thighs sexually arousing. Both propositions are clearly erroneous.
2. Is this part of the body so closely proximate to a sexual part that its exposure will bring minds to the sexual act? Clearly qualifying would be the midriff, particularly on females, located

¹²Note that this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

as it is between two clearly sexual parts; the upper parts of the female breasts which are often exposed (and lustfully relished by the indecent under the term of “cleavage”); and possibly other parts.

If the answer to either of these questions is “yes,” then the part must be concealed, and revealing it is leading others to lust.

One must be cautious not to expose parts of the body without intending to, as well. Many Catholic women, for example, sincerely intend to cover themselves modestly, yet regularly expose parts of their torso through their sleeveless shirts. Sleeveless shirts are either tight enough to restrict exposure through the holes through which the arms pass, in which case they probably expose the form of the breasts, or they are loose enough not to expose the form of the breasts, in which case they expose the torso through the sleeves. In general, then, sleeveless shirts are immodest, and they and similar garments which unintentionally (and often unexpectedly) are immodest should be avoided. Careful attention must be paid to every new garment, and care taken that no immodesty is committed, even immodesty which is not immediately apparent when considering the nature of the dress in question. Good intentions are excellent; but good intentions informed by knowledge are still better.

It is important to note, however, what modesty does *not* require. It does not require all Catholic women to dress in burlap sacks, with a hoop around the neck to prevent any revelation of form. As stated above, it is impossible to avoid *all* revelation of form in dress; furthermore, it would not even be desirable to so avoid it, since the human form is not in itself an evil. Indeed, the human body is a great good; the Apostle even calls our bodies “the temple of the Holy Ghost.”¹³ As a great good, it is necessarily a very beautiful thing, and modesty does not forbid the enjoyment of beauty. Consequently, the becoming revelation of the form of the body is not only not immodest; it is a practice of the highest modesty, since it involves honesty regarding the true value of the body. Modesty merely requires that the body be admired for its *beauty*, not for its potential to satisfy lust. The exposure of the body must, then, be of such a kind as to becomingly and decently show the beauty of the human frame, while avoiding the exposure of the sexual parts such that onlookers are tempted to lust. This handbook is not a guide to fashion, and cannot present standards for that

¹³I Corinthians 6:19.

becoming exposure; it can only suggest that the fashions of earlier, happier, more Catholic times be examined as guides to beautiful yet pure modest dress.¹⁴

2.1.3 Honesty and Sexual Specificity

The second end of clothing is, as stated above, honesty about oneself, one's company, and the business at hand. At first glance, this appears to require little reflection; one must simply dress appropriately for one's company and business. The general should wear a uniform when discussing plans for battle; the layman should wear a tie when going to Mass (at least on Sunday, when he presumably has the leisure to dress as he wills). However, modernity's destruction of manners and decency means that this standard requires a somewhat lengthier explanation.

St. Thomas mentions that modesty can be violated by dressing outside the standards of one's culture for a given situation.¹⁵ This is certainly true; far be it from the humble author of this handbook to dispute with the Angelic Doctor. However, in an age like this, when nearly all standards of decency and becoming dress have been thrown by the wayside, it may be necessary to dress beyond one's culture's standards at times in order to prevent the loss of any standards at all.

Take, for example, modernity's abandonment of any sort of etiquette regarding hats. It was once unseemly for a woman ever to be seen with her head uncovered,¹⁶ or for a man to be so when outdoors. The man would be asked where his hat was; the woman would be considered simply unChristian. Men, on the other hand, were expected to be uncovered in churches or when indoors; removing the hat was a sign of respect for the place and those who dwelt within it. Now, women commonly wear nothing on their heads at all, and men either never wear hats or do so whether in or out of doors, never thinking of removing it. While a woman insisting on covering her head at all times is dressing beyond one's culture's requirements, it is not a violation of modesty; it is simply an attempt to restore one's culture's requirements

¹⁴This is not to say that these fashions must be slavishly imitated; only that they doubtlessly provide some guidance in discerning how the beauty of the body can be shown without committing sins of immodesty. Many modern forms of dress without doubt equally accomplish, or with some modification could equally accomplish, this end.

¹⁵ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 1.

¹⁶*See infra*, Section 2.2.3, at 38.

to their former, saner standards. A man removing his hat when coming indoors is similar.¹⁷

It is not always, therefore, immodest to dress out of proportion to one's culture's requirements, but only when one's culture's requirements are reasonable in the first place. For another example, our current culture considers wearing shorts and a T-shirt to Mass to be perfectly acceptable, while going to a graduation requires a suit. Being the only one at Mass in a suit may seem proud or vain, and consequently a violation of modesty; in reality, however, it is merely insisting upon the reestablishment of some reasonable standard, and consequently a practice of modesty. That custom which requires higher standards in court than in church is simply irrational.

A reasonable standard would simply be one which required increased formality as one's company and business becomes increasingly important. There may be many levels of formality, or very few; however, this hierarchy of formality corresponding to a hierarchy of company and business is essential. The cultural standard which permits jeans at Mass, the highest possible human activity, while requiring more formal attire at a graduation, a much lower one, should not be obeyed by the Christian who wishes to practice modesty. If a graduation requires a suit, then a Mass requires at least the same. In all things one's dress must be fitting to one's company and business, even if that means advocating, by one's clothing, the reestablishment of more reasonable standards within one's culture.

Moderation must, of course, be observed in these things, as well. It was once considered bad etiquette for a lawyer to go fishing without a tie, since his position demanded one. To wear a tie fishing now would be immodest, insofar as it is out of proportion to one's culture. The custom of removing the tie for such activities is not unreasonable; indeed, it is reasonable to dress less formally for fishing than for advocating cases in court. This custom and those like it, therefore, are modest and should be obeyed. However, when the custom is itself immodest, it must sometimes be violated for the sake of pursuing the virtue. Honesty demands no less.

Another point on which moderns often fail is using clothing to protect oneself from the elements. Perhaps because of the increasing separation of man from nature, it is now common to see people, particularly ladies, wearing very little clothing even in the dead of winter, when it

¹⁷Indeed, even some older, or at least wiser, moderns are very irked by the current fashion of wearing hats indoors. But that is another question.

must be uncomfortable. Undoubtedly, since they intend to go simply from house to car to work to car to house, they do not worry about it. However, as explained above,¹⁸ that clothing which does not fulfil its function, in this case protection from the elements, is bad clothing, and for our purposes immodest clothing. It is important to remember to dress appropriately, allowing one's clothes to do their work.

Otherwise, however, honesty in dress is a fairly simple requirement; dress appropriately considering one's company and business, using one's clothing to perform the purpose for which it exists. However, one aspect of honesty in dress, as far as dressing appropriately concerning oneself and others is concerned, deserves a more complete and specific treatment. That is the matter of sexual specificity, or dress which is specific to sex; that is, dress which it is appropriate only for one of the sexes to wear. Though such dress is very important for honesty in clothing, it often elicits massive protests from even the more sincere Catholics, and consequently deserves some special treatment.

Sexual specificity is truly a species of honesty; that is, it requires acknowledging the nature of the person, including the sex, and dressing and acting appropriately. It is unseemly for a woman to act like a man, or for a man to dress like a woman; it is, like all violations of modesty, simply lying about oneself. The dress, it is important to remember, is a part of the nature; it is one of the *summa genera*, just as action is, and consequently ought to be reflective of the substance in which it inheres. A woman's dress ought to be feminine, to reflect her femininity; a man's dress ought to be masculine, to reflect his masculinity. This concept can hardly invoke any protest, particularly considering the authority upon which it rests.

The Scriptures, for example, testify unambiguously that men and women must wear separate clothing. Moses states without cavil that "[a] woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel."¹⁹ St. Thomas, of course, agrees entirely with Scripture, stating simply that "outward apparel should be consistent with the estate of the person, according to the general custom,"²⁰ and that therefore "it is in itself sinful for a woman to wear man's clothes, or vice versa."²¹ St. Thomas does provide some exceptions; however, they apply only in extraordinary situations, in which Catholics rarely

¹⁸See *supra*, Section 2.1.1, at 23.

¹⁹Deuteronomy 22:5.

²⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

²¹*Id.*

find themselves.²² Nevertheless, despite these indisputable authorities, any discussion of sexual specificity in clothing tends to elicit enormous protests, so some further justification for the concept would be helpful. Largely, the debate centers around whether Catholic women ought to wear skirts.

At first glance, the specificity of a given piece of clothing to a certain sex appears to be entirely cultural, though there is unquestionably a tendency for cultures to have long, flowing dress for females even where such dress is not commonly worn by males. For example, Scots and Irish wear kilts; in any other culture these would be considered skirts, somewhat short but skirts nevertheless, and unquestionably women's clothing. The Scots and Irish, however, take great offense when a kilt is called a skirt, and insist that such a garment can only be worn by men.²³ A Scotsman wearing a kilt is dressing like a man; a Frenchman wearing one is dressing like a woman. The sexual specificity of a given garment is, therefore, culturally determined. Since pants are culturally permitted for women, Catholic women do not have to wear skirts. The question appears to be solved; did not St. Thomas himself say that women ought to dress like women "according to the general custom?"²⁴

However, authentic philosophy does not find the question so simple. In the first place, it is very fitting, according to the Thomistic way of looking at things, that men and women have different types of dress. Dress, or habit, is one of the *summa genera* of being, and is an accident. An accident is a trait which inheres in a subject; in this case, the accident of dress inheres in the subject of man and woman. Since man and woman are very different subjects, it is fitting that their habit be also different. For this reason St. Thomas argues that a man should not wear women's clothing, and *vice versa*,²⁵ in which he is echoing the command of Scripture.²⁶ This is simply being honest about the distinction between male and female itself, as G. K. Chesterton once observed.²⁷

²²See *id.* (explaining that "this may be done sometimes without sin on account of some necessity, either in order to hide oneself from enemies, or through lack of other clothes, or for some similar motive").

²³Those Scots and Irish, that is, who have maintained some degree of modesty. That, however, is also another question.

²⁴ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

²⁵ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

²⁶See Deuteronomy 22:5.

²⁷See G. K. CHESTERTON, *WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD* 104 (Ignatius Press 1994) (explaining that a woman's right to wear pants is "about as grotesque

So it is fitting that men and women have different types of clothing to correspond to their different natures. This will give society testimony to the particular virtues and roles of each sex. However, the substance of that distinction remains to be seen. It still seems, for example, that male and female dress is an entirely cultural determination.

There is, clearly, no type of dress that is inherently male or inherently female; however, certain types of dress do seem to be more fitting than others. It seems clear, for example, that skirts are more fitting for women than are trousers, as a sign of the silent power which women wield in the world. The great Catholic writer G. K. Chesterton made the important observation that robes are a sign of power:

it is quite certain that the woven mansion [the skirt] is meant for a perambulating palace, not for a perambulating prison. It is quite certain that the skirt means female dignity, not female submission; it can be proved by the simplest of all tests. No ruler would deliberately dress up in the recognized fetters of a slave; . . . [b]ut when men wish to be safely impressive, as judges, priests or kings, they do wear skirts, the long, trailing robes of female dignity. The whole world is under petticoat government; for even men wear petticoats when they wish to govern.²⁸

The skirt is, then, an important sign of the power belonging to women in their natural roles, a power which, while not overt as that of men, is nevertheless unfathomably great. It is not a sign of their dominance, as uncovering their heads would be,²⁹ but it is a sign of the power inherent in their roles, a power comparable to that of kings, but less coarse and obvious. The skirt does seem to be more fitting for women, at least considered in this way.

Even assuming, however, that culture is the sole determination of specific male and female dress, Western women would still do well to wear skirts rather than pants. Since Western culture has been steadily removing all distinctions of sex in any but the most formal dress,³⁰

as the right to wear a false nose,” showing his realization that women in skirts are simply being honest concerning their feminine natures, while women wearing pants, men’s clothing, are lying about it).

²⁸*Id.*

²⁹See *infra*, Section 2.2.3, at 38.

³⁰Except that women’s dress still tends to reveal much more than men’s, which is perhaps a statement about the source of modern fashions.

sometimes even putting women in suits and neckties, it is clear that cultural standards in this regard have themselves collapsed. Catholic women would do well, then, to attempt to reestablish sexual distinction in dress by readopting that which was once accepted without question: skirts as female dress and pants as male.

Whether nature or culture determines specific types of dress, therefore, Catholic women ought to wear the skirt. Skirts are neither burdensome nor oppressive; the discomfort which they sometimes offer is at least equal to that offered by pants at other times. Skirts are, like most modest practices, simply honest; they are simply an expression of feminine nature, that nature which was the source of even the Blessed Virgin's natural virtues. No Catholic woman could have any objection to that.

2.2 Pursuing Modesty through Hairstyles

Does not nature itself teach you that a man indeed, if he nourish his hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman nourish her hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

I Corinthians 11:14–15.

Modesty in hair is almost entirely a matter of honesty; it is the truly rare man who finds himself tempted to impurity by hairstyles.³¹ As such, it's often considered almost an afterthought, if at all, by the modern Catholic, as though it were a subject of no importance. However, modesty in hair is still modesty and still important; indeed, it involves a command from the Scriptures, and consequently its importance cannot be overestimated. God does not make commands lightly.

There are, of course, several aspects by which modesty can be considered in connection to the hair. The first is the Scriptural consideration, which sets the stage for all others. Then there are the other aspects, which are few and simple enough to be grouped together. Finally, there is the matter of the veil, considered with hair because the Apostle himself put them together.³² Each shall be treated in its turn.

³¹Unless, of course, certain hairstyles are accompanied by immodest bearing. See *infra*, Section 2.4, at 46.

³²See I Corinthians 11.

2.2.1 Hair in the Scriptures

The Apostle argues that certain general ways of wearing the hair are due to nature itself, rather than simply to culture.³³ The common argument that hairstyles are entirely cultural is therefore struck down by the plain meaning of the Scriptural verse itself. St. Paul asks whether “nature itself” teaches about these patterns of hairstyle, not whether “Greek and Hebrew culture” agree on it. This aspect of modesty, then, is a matter of nature, not of culture, and the Catholic who refuses to conform himself to it is not being counter-cultural, but unnatural.

Indeed, St. Paul’s word, *fusus*, generally refers not to nature in general, but to the nature of a specific thing. In this case, since he is speaking to men and women, he must be speaking of human *fusus*; his argument, then, is to appeal to *their own, specific natures* rather than to the abstract *cosmos*. Those Corinthians who deny this are denying not some general “nature,” but their own natures; they are, in short, lying both to and about themselves. In other words, they are being immodest.

St. Thomas Aquinas, though he did not know Greek, took the same interpretation of St. Paul’s word (in Latin, *natura*): human nature itself establishes that these customs are fitting for man and woman. He argues that St. Paul appeals to “the natural human inclination, and that is why he says, ‘nature itself.’”³⁴ St. Paul is arguing from human nature, not from custom or even from nature in general, that certain hairstyles are more modest than others.³⁵

No Catholic, of course, will accuse St. Paul of error, for that would be an error in the Scriptures, and consequently in God Himself. However, Catholics are permitted and encouraged to seek further explanations of statements in Scripture. Why St. Paul insists that certain hairstyles are naturally more fitting than others, even if only very generally, is certainly a legitimate field for such inquiry. The essential rea-

³³See I Corinthians 11:14.

³⁴St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura, a capite XI ad caput XIII versiculum XI* in ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, CORPUS THOMISTICUM (Enrique Alarcón ed., Fundación Tomas de Aquino 2005) at <http://www.corpus-thomisticum.org/c1r.html> (*in origine “quia a naturali inclinatione humana, et hoc est quod dicit: nec ipsa natura, scilicet humana”*) [hereinafter *Super I Corinthios*]. All translations from this source are the author’s.

³⁵That he is talking about modesty, even if he did not formulate the concept Thomistically, is beyond doubt. It has already been established that it is a matter of honesty in outward action and attire, which is the very definition of modesty. See *supra*, Section 1.2, at 6.

son for St. Paul's insistence on this point is the subjection of woman to man.

In both his first epistle to the Corinthians and his epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul insists on the analogy of man to woman and Christ to the Church.³⁶ This analogy works on many other levels, of course—speculative to practical reason, God to man—but St. Paul insists on this aspect in particular. His reasoning is that a covering on the head reflects this natural submission of woman to man,³⁷ and that the hair is the first and the natural sign of that subjection.

St. Paul's own words make this conclusion perfectly evident. He states explicitly that a woman's long hair "is a glory to her . . . [b]ecause her hair has been given her as a covering."³⁸ By so saying, St. Paul equates his reasoning regarding the veil with his reasoning regarding hair, which means that a woman ought to have long hair as "a power over her head, because of the angels."³⁹ When referring to this "power," St. Paul means "the veil overshadowing subjection [which] signifies power."⁴⁰ The hair serves as a sort of natural veil, signifying woman's submission to man.

When hair is seen in this way, as a natural representation of the familial hierarchy, St. Paul's statements about men and women and their hair make perfect sense, as indeed all the Scriptures do. If a man grows his hair out long, "it is a shame unto him"⁴¹; if a woman grows it out long, "it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering."⁴² If a man submits himself to the authority of woman, it is shameful, because it is contrary to the order established by God; if, on the other hand, a woman submits herself to the authority of man, it is a glory to her, because she is acknowledging and forming a part of that order. She is being honest about herself; in short, she is being modest.

³⁶See I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5.

³⁷See generally Donald Goodman, *Because of the Angels: A Study of the Veil in the Christian Tradition* (Tradition in Action 2005) at <http://www-traditioninaction.com/religious/dooorpCustomsMainPage.htm> and *infra*, Section 2.2.3, at 38 for a more thorough treatment of both this analogy and the symbolism of the head covering.

³⁸I Corinthians 11:15.

³⁹I Corinthians 11:10.

⁴⁰St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Corinthios*, *supra* note 34 (*in origine "velamen obumbrans subiectionem significat potestatem"*).

⁴¹I Corinthians 11:14.

⁴²I Corinthians 11:15.

In order to be in obedience to the great symbolism which God placed into his nature, men must acknowledge the truth about themselves and their positions through the symbolism of St. Paul. Men must keep their hair short, lest they declare an unseemly, indeed immoral, submission to women; women must keep theirs long, lest they declare a rebellion against the authority of man. Both are required to submit to these customs by modesty, that virtue which governs honesty in the outward actions and attire. Scripture gives testimony to these principles.

It should be remembered, however, in this case as in all others, what modesty does *not* require. In this case, it does not require never letting scissors touch the hair for women, nor does it require crew-cuts for men. St. Paul is referring to general patterns. St. Thomas himself observes that though “in some countries it [growing the hair out] is not the custom, [] even in those lands they [women] have longer hair than men.”⁴³ In so saying St. Thomas has, as always, struck on the essential point. The purpose of the rule is to provide a symbol of the respective roles of male and female. As long as women’s hair is longer than men’s, this purpose is fulfilled. There is, therefore, a great deal of flexibility in actual length and style of the hair, provided that this very minimal conformity to the divine plan has been fulfilled.

2.2.2 Other Aspects of Modesty in Hairstyles

There are some other aspects of hairstyles that have an impact on modesty. The most frequently violated of these is the artificial coloring of the hair. That modesty forbids such false coloring is entirely obvious; it is dishonest, displaying oneself as something other than what one is. It is, furthermore, finding fault with God’s work, disputing with him over what is plainly not at all inferior.⁴⁴ Not only, then, is it dishonest; it is proud, an effort to overcome the power of God Who made one a certain way.

The Fathers considered such dying in exactly this way, arguing that those who dye their hair think themselves somehow improving the work of God, and by so doing fall into pride. St. Cyprian, for example, had some strong words for those who would try to increase the beauty made

⁴³St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Corinthios*, *supra* note 34, Versiculus 15 (*in origine “licet non in quibusdam terris, sed cum etiam in illis terris maiorem habent quam viri”*)

⁴⁴Indeed, often enough it may be superior, as gray hair is a sign of age and wisdom. *See infra*, below.

by God:

[Y]ou, in order to triumph over the word of your Lord, wish to be more powerful than He; in your wanton attempt and sacrilegious insolence you dye your hair; with an evil foreboding of the future you begin now to have flame-colored hair, and you sin—oh the wickedness of it!—with your head, that is, in the nobler part of the body.⁴⁵

St. Cyprian considers this not only proud, but also simply dishonest, arguing that “the work of God and His creature and image should in no way be falsified by employing[, for example,] yellow coloring.”⁴⁶ Words this strong can hardly be ignored, particularly coming as they do from a great Father of the Church.

It is particularly immodest for the Catholic to dye his hair in order to cover up the gray that years and wisdom have brought there. Indeed, this is not only dishonest, but cowardly, a flight from old age like the moderns who have no hope beyond death. In the first place, hiding gray hairs betrays that fear of age and death which so characterizes modernity, which flies from death as from an unmitigated curse, and sees nothing past the confines of the tomb. Catholics should be ashamed to have such fear; we know what the moderns do not, that “we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world; and beyond them is more than memory.”⁴⁷ The true Christian welcomes old age, which “is a crown of dignity, when it is found in the ways of justice.”⁴⁸ He knows that each passing day brings him closer to his Maker, his God. Flying from age and death is unChristian; no Catholic should ever give even the appearance, much less the sign, of doing so.

Secondly, as the Scriptures make amply clear, gray hairs are in themselves something to be valued, not scorned. They are the signs of the wisdom of old age that the sacred writers praise so highly. The King tells us that while “[t]he joy of young men is their strength,”⁴⁹ the joy of old men is something different. Old men may not have the joy of full strength and vigor; but “the dignity of old men [is] their grey

⁴⁵ST. CYPRIAN, THE DRESS OF VIRGINS Chap. 16, available at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/sources/drssvirg.txt> (last viewed April 27, 2005).

⁴⁶See *id.*, Chap. 15.

⁴⁷J. R. R. TOLKIEN, THE RETURN OF THE KING *in* THE LORD OF THE RINGS 1038 (Houghton Mifflin 1994).

⁴⁸Proverbs 16:31.

⁴⁹Proverbs 20:29.

hairs.”⁵⁰ This grayness is a sign of the wisdom and experience that they have accumulated over a life well-lived. Christians should not flee from this dignity; they should embrace it when God sends it, and not argue with the ways of the Almighty.

The hair, then, should be left as God made it, and changes in it should be welcomed as the signs of what they bring in a life well lived. There is still one more matter touching on modesty and hair, however, and that is the custom mentioned by St. Paul of women covering their heads. Since this custom is almost universally abandoned in our degraded time, some examination of the roots of the practice would be helpful.

2.2.3 Modesty, Hair, and the Veil

The veil follows directly from St. Paul’s teaching on the fittingness of certain general hairstyles. Indeed, St. Thomas even observes that by teaching on the hair, “*he teaches* that women should be veiled.”⁵¹ Essentially, this is modest due to the same reasoning that women’s long hair is modest⁵²: because it is emblematic of woman’s submission to man, the heirarchy placed into human nature by God.

That the veil was supported by the vast majority of Christians throughout the Christian era is not open to question. St. John Chrysostom, who earned the name “golden-tongued” for his excellent oratory, stated that “being uncovered is always a reproach,”⁵³ stating explicitly that “not at the time of prayer only but also continually, she ought to be covered.”⁵⁴ He holds to this view even though St. Paul himself stated only that “every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered”⁵⁵ is being immodest, not that every woman with her head uncovered at all was disgraced.

St. John’s interpretation was supported by St. Augustine, however, despite being apparently against the plain meaning of the Scriptures. St. Augustine argued very briefly about the matter, as though assuming that no one could doubt his interpretation:

⁵⁰*Id.*

⁵¹St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Corinthios*, *supra* note 34 (*in origine “docet, scilicet quod mulieres sint velatae”*).

⁵²*See supra*, Section 2.2.1, at 34.

⁵³ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, HOMILIES ON FIRST CORINTHIANS XXVI, <http://www.newadvent.com/fathers220106.htm> (last viewed on April 22, 2004).

⁵⁴*Id.*

⁵⁵I Corinthians 11:5.

those who are of the world think how they are to please their wives, if they are men, or their husbands, if they are women, [and choose their dress accordingly]; except that women, whom the apostle ordered to cover their heads, ought not to uncover their hair, even if they are married.⁵⁶

St. Augustine makes no mention of “only while praying”; he says simply that women must have their heads covered. Indeed, he seems to think this doctrine so evident that the only objection he anticipates is that a woman may wish to use her hair to please her husband, not that a woman need only be veiled while at prayer. St. Thomas, in turn, agrees with St. Augustine; when discussing the veil in the *Summa*, he merely quotes St. Augustine’s statement without any modification.⁵⁷ This interpretation of St. Paul’s words must, then, be taken very seriously.

Essentially, it is based on a syllogism derived from St. Paul’s statements. The major premise is derived from the statement that “if a woman be not covered, let her be shorn.”⁵⁸ The minor premise is derived from the statement that “if a woman nourish her hair, it is a glory to her,” which means that being shaven is the opposite of a glory; namely, a disgrace. The syllogism then runs as follows:

An uncovered woman is like a shorn woman.

A shorn woman is disgraced.

Therefore, an uncovered woman is disgraced.⁵⁹

In this way, the Fathers and St. Thomas conclude that St. Paul intends to say that “[i]f thou cast away the covering appointed by the law of God, cast away likewise that appointed by nature.”⁶⁰ Women ought to

⁵⁶St. Augustine, *Ep. CCXLV Possidio in* ST. AUGUSTINE, AUGUSTINE: SELECT LETTERS 478 (G. P. Goold ed., Harvard University Press 1953) (*in origine “[i]lli autem cogitant quae sunt mundi, quo modo placeant vel viri uxoribus vel mulieres maritis, nisi quod capillos nudare feminas, quas etiam caput velare apostolus iubet, nec maritatus decet*”). All translations from this source are the author’s.

⁵⁷See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2. He actually does specify St. Augustine’s statement, but not concerning when the veil must be worn; he merely adds that “they may be excused from sin [committed by not wearing the veil] if they do it not from a certain vanity, but because of some contrary custom.” He also adds that “[s]uch a custom, however, is not praiseworthy.” These translations are the author’s.

⁵⁸I Corinthians 11:6.

⁵⁹Goodman, *supra* note 37. This article goes through all the material in this section, but in much greater detail.

⁶⁰St. John Chrysostom, *supra* note 53.

keep their heads covered at all times in order to be modest according to the model of the Scriptures.

As mentioned above, however, St. Thomas does hold that it is not sinful to fail to wear the veil because of some contrary custom, though such customs are not to be praised.⁶¹ Nevertheless, there can be no such excuse for failing to wear the veil at least in churches. St. Paul explicitly mentions praying and prophesying when he mandates the veil,⁶² and the Church even specifically mandated wearing it at least in churches until the relatively late year of 1983.⁶³ In churches, at least, the commands of St. Paul cannot be disobeyed without sin, except for strong reasons.

Even outside of churches, however, wearing the veil⁶⁴ is praiseworthy and extremely modest. It serves as a testimony to fidelity to Catholic doctrine in general and to the great hierarchy which God built into our natures in particular. Modesty is the practice of moderation in those matters in which moderation is less difficult⁶⁵; God is not asking a great thing. He wishes a small gesture in acknowledgement of the order which He placed in the world, a testament to His greatness and to the fidelity of His people. Only selfishness and vanity could knowingly refuse Him.

2.3 Pursuing Modesty through the Skin

[W]omen painting themselves ... is a kind of falsification, which cannot be devoid of sin.

St. Thomas Aquinas, SUM. THEO. IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

Modernity commonly jests at the ignorant medievals, who considered something so innocent as make-up, or “painting,” as they called it, evil.

⁶¹See *supra*, note 57.

⁶²See, e.g., I Corinthians 11:5.

⁶³See CODEX IURIS CANONICI (1917), Canon 1262, Section 2, available at http://www.geocities.com/catholic_provide/codex.htm (last viewed April 29, 2004) (commanding that “in a church or assisting with the sacred rites outside of a church” women must have “the head entirely covered, ... especially when they approach the Lord’s table”)(*in origine “in ecclesia vel extra ecclesiam, dum sacris ritibus assistunt ... mulieres autem, capite cooperto [sint] ... maxime cum ad mensam Dominicam accedunt*”).

⁶⁴Not necessarily a veil proper, but at least some type of covering on the head.

⁶⁵See *supra*, Section 1.2, at 6.

For Catholics, however, those “ignorant medievals” must not be taken so lightly. As the men who lived in and formed the most Catholic age in history, their opinions must necessarily be given some weight by those who seek to follow Our Lord. Furthermore, during that “ignorant” time the great Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, lived and wrote, giving us guidance in doctrine and morals and drawing his arguments from the Scriptures and from the Fathers, especially St. Augustine, who was arguably the first great medieval author.⁶⁶ No Catholic can deny the authority of such men, and their words must be heard attentively.

However, this, too, is a matter of modesty. The skin and its adornments are just as much attire as are clothing. Traditionally these have been considered very important matters for a proper and complete Christian life; indeed, even the Scriptures testify to the necessity of these issues, with a condemnation of both the practices which this section examines.⁶⁷ Catholics ignore the guidance of Holy Writ and these great men on the practice of this virtue at their peril. The skin is not exempt from modesty; indeed, among the violations of modesty those of the skin are sometimes the most lasting and consequently the most harmful. Having established the matter’s importance, some specific examples of modesty in skin will be examined.

2.3.1 Modesty and Painting

Prohibiting painting is, as mentioned above, often laughed at by the moderns as the remnant of a superstitious medieval age. Often it is also associated with Puritanism, such that the Age of Faith is falsely connected to the excesses of that heresy which denied the very foundations of Catholic belief. However, Christian thought has always strongly disapproved of painting, commonly called “make-up” or “tattoos” in the modern day, as a bald lie to all who look upon the painted face.

The Fathers of the Church explicitly speak of painting as simply lying; this type of lie is clearly a violation of the virtue of modesty. St. Cyprian, for example, forbade painting along with hair-dyeing in a passage which has already been quoted. He commanded that “the

⁶⁶Though the argument is tangential in the extreme, for this point *see, e.g.*, HENRI-IRÉNE MARROU, *SAINT-AUGUSTIN ET LA FIN DE LA CULTURE ANTIQUE* (Éditions e de Boccard 1983) (arguing that St. Augustine lived at the end of the classical and the beginning of the medieval periods).

⁶⁷*See* Leviticus 19:28 (stating that “[y]ou shall not make any cuttings in your flesh, for the dead, neither shall you make in yourselves any figures or marks”).

work of God and His creature and image should in no way be falsified by employing yellow coloring or black powder or rouge, or, finally, any cosmetic at all that spoils the natural features.”⁶⁸ His use of the word “falsified” indicates unambiguously that painting is simply lying, no more and no less, and consequently is forbidden by Christian virtue.

St. Augustine spoke of painting with similar vehemence, and even more explicitly establishes painting as a sin of dishonesty. He understands that painting is justified by claiming that it makes the painted more attractive; however, he nevertheless considers it a plain lie, unmitigated and inexcusable. Indeed, he considers it such a grievous lie that he forbids it even for a wife seeking to please her husband, which seeking so often provides an excuse for what would otherwise be immodest. St. Augustine argues that “to be dyed or tinted with paints, by which one might appear redder or fairer, is an adulterous deceit, by which I do not doubt even their own husbands themselves do not wish to be deceived.”⁶⁹ As though to ensure that there is no doubt about his opinion, St. Augustine even refers to what moderns so casually call “make-up” as “the liar paint,”⁷⁰ giving testimony to the gravity of this dishonesty.

St. Thomas, too, considered painting to be a lie. He states that it “is a kind of falsification, which cannot be devoid of sin.”⁷¹ However, he does make a statement which is often used by Catholics to avoid the requirements of modesty concerning painting, an avoidance which St. Thomas would have strongly forbidden. He states that “such painting does not always involve a mortal sin, but only when it is done for the sake of sensuous pleasure or in contempt of God.”⁷² Many Catholics simply state that they paint for some reason other than sensuous pleasure or contempt of God, and content themselves with their righteousness. It is certain, however, that St. Thomas did not mean this statement as a reprieve.

To prove this, one need merely observe that St. Thomas cites the same passage from St. Augustine which is cited above,⁷³ referring to painting as “an adulterous deceit.”⁷⁴ This indicates a complete agree-

⁶⁸St. Cyprian, *supra* note 45, at Chap. 15.

⁶⁹St. Augustine, *supra* note 56, at 478–480.

⁷⁰*See id.* at 480.

⁷¹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁷²*Id.*

⁷³*See id.*

⁷⁴St. Augustine, *supra* note 56, at 478–480.

ment with St. Augustine's opinion on the matter; such an agreement should not surprise any Catholic, since the Angelic Doctor nearly always agrees with the great Prince of the Fathers. This means that St. Thomas considers painting to be, just as St. Augustine so considered it, "an adulterous deceit." It is lying, plain and simple; as such, it "cannot be devoid of sin."⁷⁵ However, St. Thomas believes that it may be devoid of *mortal* sin, provided that it is not done for sensuous pleasure or out of contempt for God. Painting is still a *venial* sin; it is a lesser lie but a lie nevertheless.

Painting is not, however, always a sin. St. Thomas, for example, observes that "it is one thing to counterfeit a beauty one has not, and another to hide a disfigurement arising from some cause such as sickness or the like."⁷⁶ Citing to St. Paul,⁷⁷ St. Thomas considers this use of paint not lying, but repairing some damage. Disfigurements are imperfections; painting them is repairing a fault, not trying to manufacture beauty which is not there. Covering disfigurements is a different case, and doing so is not a sin.⁷⁸ However, otherwise, as shown above, painting is nothing more than deceit, a lie to everyone who looks, and is always at least venially sinful.⁷⁹

St. Thomas mentions that a possible motivation for painting is the "contempt of God"⁸⁰. Indeed, painting is quite simply that, a pride which leads men to try to improve what was made by the Perfect One. St. Cyprian condemns painting on precisely these grounds, stating that

God says, 'Let us make man to our own image and likeness.'
And someone dares to change and transform what God has made! They are laying hands on God when they strive to remake what He has made, and to transform it, not knowing that everything that comes into existence is the work of God.⁸¹

Indeed, what other motive could there be for attempting to reshape the work of God? When one rewrites the work of the author, one is correcting that work's faults. When one continues to sculpt the

⁷⁵ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁷⁶*Id.*

⁷⁷See I Corinthians 12:23.

⁷⁸Though neither is it required, and a refusal to do so may well be an excellent cross for the Catholic to bear.

⁷⁹See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁸⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 169 Art. 2.

⁸¹St. Cyprian, *supra* note 45, Chap. 15.

sculpture, one is correcting the sculptor's mistakes. When one covers and reworks oneself, then, what is one doing but attempting to correct God's work? But the God of the Universe makes no mistakes. What is correcting something but contempt for it, but a lack of confidence in its goodness? Can a Catholic really justify such a lack of confidence in God?

Why must man attempt to improve the beauty which God has made? One may as well attempt to paint a mountain to improve its color. Painting not only attempts to display a beauty which is not there; it obscures the beauty which *is* there, the beauty of a creature and image of God Himself. We are, truly, made in His image and likeness⁸²; let us admire His handiwork, not seek to improve what cannot be bettered.

2.3.2 Modesty and Piercings

Piercings are another matter which even Catholics generally do not consider problematic. However, it is clear from the works of the Fathers and doctors that piercings are a matter of modesty, and that they are an immodest practice which must be shunned by believing Catholics.

Many of the Fathers condemned piercings, mostly on the grounds that they were used as a part of pagan worship. St. Augustine condemned the practice on these grounds in the letter from which we have often quoted.⁸³ Many Catholics simply assume that that is the end of the matter; since their piercings have nothing to do with the pagan gods, who are devils,⁸⁴ they need not alter their practices in the slightest.

However, piercing still implicates some matters of modesty, as well as a simple consideration from the Fifth Commandment. St. Jerome, for example, condemned piercings without any mention of the pagan gods, citing the practice by which women "hang from their punctured ears the most precious stones of the Red Sea."⁸⁵ St. Cyprian went even further, condemning piercings as a violation of the will of God:

[B]ut did God wish that wounds be brought to the ears,

⁸²Genesis 1:27.

⁸³St. Augustine, *supra* note 56, at 480.

⁸⁴See Psalms 95:5 (stating unequivocally that "all the gods of the Gentiles are devils").

⁸⁵ST. JEROME, EP. 127, *in* St. Augustine, *supra* note 56, at 481 n.b. Author's translation.

from which infancy still innocent and ignorant of the evils of the age might be tormented, that afterwards from the scars and holes of the ears precious grains [of stone] might hang, heavy not so much from their weight, but from the size of their punishments?⁸⁶

Punching a hole in oneself simply for the purpose of hanging jewels and metals from it, in order to make one more attractive, is unquestionably dishonesty. It conceals the true beauty of the Christian soul with base metals and stones, covering what comes from Heaven with what was dug out of the earth.

The practice is dishonest principally for this reason, that the excessive ornamentation of the body conceals its genuine beauty. As St. Clement of Alexandria put it, “if one thinks himself made beautiful by gold, he is inferior to gold.”⁸⁷ St. Clement follows by exclaiming, “[b]ut to confess one’s self less ornamental than the Lydian ore, how monstrous!”⁸⁸ The beauty of the Christian is deeper than that, and rests in grace, not in stones and shiny metals.

The dissenter will object that this argument would be valid against all forms of jewelry, making any type of adornment dishonest. However, these points only apply to *excessive* use of jewelry, such that mere decoration becomes the concealment of true beauty and thus a lie. Wearing a ring or two, to show marriage or office, is certainly not excessive; wearing a ring on every finger certainly is. In this matter, as in all things, the Catholic must be moderate, and adorn himself with jewelry just as he adorns himself with clothing, according to modesty.

However, the Fathers contend that *all* piercings are excessive. Essentially, they regard it as self-mutilation for the purpose of a more attractive appearance. The Fathers were not strangers to pain; they did not shrink from it, and often inflicted it upon themselves in penance. However, the infliction of pain for the sake of penance is one thing; for the sake of physical appearance is quite another. To cause oneself pain in penance may be moderate; there can be too much, when the penitent hurts himself unduly, and too little, when for fear of pain the penitent does no penance. To cause oneself pain for the sake of physical

⁸⁶ST. CYPRIAN, DE HABITU VIRGINUM Chap. 14 in St. Augustine, *supra* note 56, at 481 n.b. Author’s translation.

⁸⁷ST. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, THE PAEDOGOGUS Book III, *available at* <http://www.newadvent.com/fathers/02093.htm> (last viewed April 13, 2005).

⁸⁸*Id.*

appearance, however, cannot be moderate. The infliction of pain and wounds for the satisfaction of vanity is *per se* excessive.

The Fathers establish this thesis clearly by the way they refer to the practice. St. Jerome says that women who are pierced have “punctured ears,”⁸⁹ clearly intending to convey a sense of injury. St. Cyprian even more strongly refers to it as inflicting “wounds”⁹⁰ on the ears, as mutilating the self for the sake of mere physical appearance. St. Clement describes it as “doing violence to nature by boring the lobes of the ears,”⁹¹ which “[t]he Word prohibits.”⁹² He even explicitly calls piercing being “luxurious to excess.”⁹³ The Fathers of the Church clearly consider piercing to be the deliberate infliction of pain on oneself, even self-mutilation, for the sake of mere physical appearance. Accommodating one’s body to jewelry in this way is certainly immoderate. It is very true, then, that only excessive use of jewelry is forbidden. Piercing, however, is by its very nature excessive, and therefore must be shunned by any Christian people.

Catholics must remember that their home is not in this world, and their beauty is not of this world; it is not those who are of this world that they seek to please. The body is beautiful in itself; it requires no adornment, no alteration to make it so. By using such adornments to excess, beyond what is necessary to show respect for one’s company and station, the Catholic defeats the very purpose of that excess; by seeking to improve what cannot be improved, he degrades what must not be degraded. Sin is often its own punishment; in this case, by seeking to beautify it conceals true beauty. Catholics everywhere must avoid the practice, and forbid it in their homes and families.

2.4 Pursuing Modesty through Bearing

[I]n all your motions let nothing be done which might attract the lust of another, but do that which befits your holiness.

St. Augustine, EPISTULAE ccxi.

The fact that bearing itself is an aspect of modesty no one can deny. Indeed, the very definition of modesty includes the outward actions, of

⁸⁹St. Jerome, *supra* note 85.

⁹⁰St. Cyprian, *supra* note 86.

⁹¹St. Clement of Alexandria, *supra* note 87.

⁹²*Id.*

⁹³*Id.*

which the bearing—the way in which one acts—is the most important part. Modesty requires honesty in the outward actions just as much as it does in clothing; it requires the actions to be appropriate to situation and company.

Modesty in bearing also implicates considerations of purity. While the dangers to purity are not as great as in clothing, they are nevertheless significant and must be considered. St. Augustine famously stated that impurity comes not only from touch and emotion, but also from mere looks.⁹⁴ Subsequent text establishes that he was speaking not merely of looks at immodestly dressed women, for example, but even of simply catching eyes if done impurely.⁹⁵ It is possible to act impurely even if dressed in a burlap sack. It is important, then, not to neglect this vital part of modesty.

There are three primary ways in which man is bound to be modest in bearing. The first is movement; again, one can act impurely no matter how modestly one is dress. The second is speech; immodesty is possible even with mere words, as the example of the saints gives ample testimony. The third is one with a long Catholic tradition, but unfortunately universally neglected in the modern day: modesty of the eyes, placing a guard upon those most vital organs of sensation and ensuring that they do not lead one into sin. Each of these will be addressed in turn, as their importance demands. This field of modesty often confronts the habits which are most difficult to overcome, and often exposes us to the greatest ridicule. If we are to take up our crosses and follow Christ, they must be carefully reviewed and mastered.

2.4.1 Modesty and Movement

Even something as necessary and good as simple movement has been corrupted by human lust into a tool of impurity. That movement is a matter for modesty no man can doubt; modesty being defined, for the purposes of this discussion, as “the virtue governing honesty in the outward motions and apparel,”⁹⁶ movement is an essential part of this virtue. This clearly normal and benign thing is often corrupted; even something as common and innocent as walking is often turned into a

⁹⁴See St. Augustine, *Ep. CCXI* in ST. AUGUSTINE, AUGUSTINE: SELECT LETTERS 388 (G. P. Goold ed., Harvard University Press 1953). All translations from this source are the author’s.

⁹⁵See *id.* at 388–390.

⁹⁶See *supra*, Section 1.2, at 6.

means of communicating lust and indecency.

Particularly women, but also men, are able to walk and move in a way which is in general suggestive and prurient. Since movement is in itself a language, describing it in verbal language is nearly impossible, so it is only possible to say very generally that many movements, and again particularly walking, are used in this way in society. They are used to communicate impure intentions and to attract lustful attention, and as such are violative of the virtue of modesty.

Since movements are, of course, unavoidable, and in themselves necessary and good, they cannot be simply forbidden, like painting or revealing dress. Catholics must, however, be careful to be guided in all things by the purpose of the activity. Walking is simply transportation; it should not be used to advertise lustful intentions, or even to unduly attract attention. All movements should be limited by their ends. Walking should be done naturally, with care taken for nothing but walking. In this way nothing improper can be implied or inferred.⁹⁷

As St. Augustine said, “[i]n all your motions let nothing be done which might attract the lust of another, but do that which befits your holiness.”⁹⁸ Catholics must, therefore, use their motions for their purposes, not for lustful or dishonest ends. Otherwise they are both thwarting the will of God, Who gave them the power of motion, and the salvation of both themselves and others.

2.4.2 Modesty and Speech

This is perhaps the most frequently violated precept of modesty by Catholic men, but it is not unusual to hear even women, who would otherwise shrink in terror from any display of impurity, speak of it without the slightest hint of discomfiture. Speaking and joking of impurity is often seen as perfectly benign, or at least such a minor sin as not to be worth worrying about. The Catholic perspective, however, is very clearly to the contrary. In the first place, such talk is far from benign; in the second, no sin can possibly be so minor as not to be worth worrying about. Furthermore, sins of impurity are always grave matter, as Catholic tradition states unambiguously.

The purpose of speech is to discuss the good. As Aristotle put

⁹⁷This is not to condemn body language in general, but only that which communicates sin. Use of walking to express, for example, disapproval is not only permissible but commendable when the occasion calls for it.

⁹⁸St. Augustine, *supra* note 94.

it, “the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust.”⁹⁹ It is to help one another toward legitimate ends, and most especially toward the final end of all men, Jesus Christ. God gave us speech for this purpose and for no other. Joking about impure matters and lying about even insignificant ones violates this essential principle.

Speech and Impurity

Modesty in speech is most violated as regarding impurity by impure joking. At first glance, such jesting does not seem particularly harmful. Joking, it is said, is a perfectly legitimate end of man. Life is hard in this vale of tears; humor and jocularities are one of the many means that God has given us by which to bear it. Aristotle himself stated that one of the distinguishing characteristics of man is that he is risible, that is, capable of laughter.¹⁰⁰ This unique ability to take humor in things clearly helps make the world bearable. Mere jesting, then, can be no harm to anyone.

As far as the idea that jocularities and playfulness are good, such statements are certainly correct. Play is unquestionably a valid goal; indeed, St. Thomas even argues that too little play is a vice, and therefore a sin.¹⁰¹ However, doing evil for the sake of amusement is *not* legitimate joking. Not only ought the pure and Christian soul not consider such joking funny, but he must realize that he is desensitizing his soul to vices of impurity and consequently bringing himself closer to them.

The Apostle commands us concerning “all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints.”¹⁰² He even mentions “obscenity”¹⁰³ explicitly. He does so because he knows that constant talk, even joking talk, about sins of impurity will lead the soul to consider them less and less shocking. Many of these sins inspire disgust even in fallen men, and consequently there is a natural aversion to them. Joking about sins of impurity, however, makes

⁹⁹ARISTOTLE, POLITICA I:2 (B. Jowett trans., R. McKeon ed., Random House 1941).

¹⁰⁰See ARISTOTLE, ON THE PARTS OF ANIMALS III:10 (William Ogle trans.) available at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/parts_animals.3.iii.html (last viewed August 5, 2005).

¹⁰¹See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 168 Art. 4.

¹⁰²Ephesians 5:3.

¹⁰³Ephesians 5:4.

the thought of them common, even if that thought is not entertained in lust. The natural loathing of impurity is thus eroded, slowly but surely, from the soul; talk about sins of impurity destroys the shock which they rightly should inspire. In former times, that inspiration was nearly universal; now, talk of such sins, in the name of “humor,” has become so widespread that many doubt the existence of such a natural aversion at all.

The example of St. Maria Goretti, who fled in terror and dismay after hearing a girl who had been in her first Communion class tell an impure joke,¹⁰⁴ has already been noted. St. Maria’s modesty is truly touching; “[h]ow could she so soon forget Jesus?”¹⁰⁵ she wept to her mother, horrified at the very idea of impurity, even in jest. This is the true reaction of the Christian soul; laughter at such jokes indicates not a “sense of humor,” but a degraded sense of decency. St. Thomas states that “the pleasure in question [that obtained in games, jesting, and other playful activities] should not be sought in indecent or injurious deeds or words.”¹⁰⁶ Seeking pleasure in evil is in itself evil; the Catholic cannot do so without sin.

The very *mention* of these horrible vices—particularly that which St. Thomas calls “the unnatural vice”¹⁰⁷—ought to fill the Christian soul with disgust and loathing, not happiness and mirth. Jestings about them makes them more and more accepted, such that the natural revulsion to such sins is eroded and the soul accepts thinking of them without protest. When temptation arises, then, the Catholic’s resistance is already severely hampered; rather than immediately flying from sin, as the still sensitive modest Catholic would, he thinks of it without revulsion, and must deliberately stir up that disgust before turning away from the crime. This effort, over time, will become greater and greater, until finally it is too great for the abused soul to undertake. Thus the Catholic falls into sin, a sin which all too easily becomes habitual, and from which he may never escape. “[H]e that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.”¹⁰⁸

Catholics must, therefore, never tell such jokes. This is the first step in restoring modesty in speech. It is, however, by far the most easily

¹⁰⁴FATHER GODFREY POAGE, C. P., SAINT MARIA GORETTI: IN GARMENTS ALL RED 27 (TAN Books and Publishers 1998).

¹⁰⁵*Id.*

¹⁰⁶ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 168 Art. 2.

¹⁰⁷ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 154 Art. 12.

¹⁰⁸Ecclesiasticus 19:1.

done. The next step, and much more difficult, is that the Catholic must refuse to even laugh or be amused by the immodest jokes of others. To the uneducated Catholic, it may even seem impossible; however, “I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.”¹⁰⁹ Just as St. Maria Goretti fled from the immodest joke, we must refuse to be entertained by impurity.

At first, before the Catholic who has been accustomed to making and laughing at such jokes has developed the appropriate habits (i.e., virtues), he will doubtlessly find this task exceedingly difficult. His instinct is to laugh, to participate; those are the habits (i.e., vices) that he has cultivated by his repeated actions. He must cultivate new habits; when he hears such jokes, he must arouse disgust within himself for the horrible sins about which they revolve, cherishing this hatred for sin which is the other side of the coin of the love of God. Over time, laughing at these impure jests will be just as unnatural to him as once it was natural. It is well worth the effort to purify the soul, to remove it far from any possibility of desensitization to the horrible evils of impurity.

As in all practices of modesty, developing these habits will be a powerful witness to the truth which Catholics carry within their souls. The credo of modernity is “relax and enjoy”; “taking things too seriously” is the only cardinal sin. It is, therefore, often an act of great courage to refuse to laugh at impure jokes, so much so that this refusal cannot go unnoticed. To see a Catholic so deeply devoted to his purity that he is willing to foreswear such a commonly accepted practice as impure joking cannot but make an impression. Many, no doubt, will scoff, and claim that such “stiffness” is not demanded by any good religion. Some, however, will admire. It may be a small seed, but God has grown great trees from the tiniest of seedlings.¹¹⁰

Speech cannot, therefore, be used to offend purity. Frequently, however, in all ages under the evil influence of the prince of lies, speech is used to violate the simple precepts of honesty, which, as we have seen,¹¹¹ is the natural purpose of modesty. Such sins have grown more and more commonplace as society has descended farther and farther from the ideals which the Catholic Church has held up for it to imitate. They are truly evil, for they convey falsehood under the name of truth, and thus do to fellow men what the devil himself seeks to do to them.

¹⁰⁹Philippians 4:13.

¹¹⁰See St. Matthew 13:31–32.

¹¹¹See *supra*, Section 1.3.1, at 12.

Speech and Truthfulness

Modesty is frequently defeated by simple lying. Most Catholics understand that large lies about grave matters are mortal sins, and thus this handbook will not concern itself further with them. The most frequent violation of modesty by Catholics is what are commonly called “little white lies.” This nomenclature, however, is inadequate; one might as well say “a little white offense to the Almighty God.” Lies are lies; the only distinction is between mortal and venial. The Catholic tradition unambiguously forbids them all.

It is very clear that Catholic theology considers *all* lies, not just large ones, to be sins. The Scriptures state that believers should “[b]e not willing to make any manner of lie.”¹¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, the basis for all Catholic theological thought for eight hundred years, devoted an entire article of his beginning theological text to showing that all lies are sins.¹¹³ Even pagan philosophers have been able to see this fundamental truth, with Aristotle, for example, arguing that “lying is in itself evil and to be shunned.”¹¹⁴ The difference between big lies and “little white lies” is one of degree, not of kind.¹¹⁵

Many lies, however, are not told out of malice. Many are told for fun, or to protect someone else, or to protect oneself. St. Thomas could not possibly have meant that even *these* lies are sins. Surely he only meant that lies told out of malice, or malicious lies, are sinful. St. Thomas, however, was not one to so lightly abandon the decrees of the Scriptures. As stated above, Holy Writ instructs the faithful to “[b]e not willing to make *any* manner of lie.”¹¹⁶ No lie, then, is moral; since telling any lie is a vice of dishonesty in one of the outward actions, speech, no lie is modest.

A lie is in itself a violation of modesty, being an immoderate use of the power of speech, which is an outward motion. Being immoderate, it is a vice, and therefore falling into it is falling into sin. Catholics are not permitted to do sin in order to obtain a good result, such as amusement or the assistance of others, no matter how badly that assistance might be needed. One cannot do evil that good may result. As St. Thomas says,

¹¹²Ecclesiasticus 7:14.

¹¹³See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 3.

¹¹⁴Aristotle, *supra* note 1, at IV:7.

¹¹⁵See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 4 (explaining that some lies are mortal sins, but that others are only venial sins).

¹¹⁶Ecclesiasticus 7:14 (emphasis added).

[a] lie is sinful not only because it injures one's neighbor, but also on account of its inordinateness, as stated above in this Article. Now it is not allowed to make use of anything inordinate in order to ward off injury or defects from another: as neither is it lawful to steal in order to give an alms, except perhaps in a case of necessity when all things are common. Therefore it is not lawful to tell a lie in order to deliver another from any danger whatever.¹¹⁷

The Angelic Doctor's argument is simple and, as always, unanswerable. A lie is an evil, which "is of a nature to deceive"¹¹⁸; it therefore cannot be done, no matter how good a result is intended.

Many lies are not, of course, told out of an *intent* to deceive. St. Thomas, however, following the Catholic tradition, does not consider them any less lies. As long as they contain an untruth, they are lies and consequently evil. There are some statements which might colloquially be called "lies" but which do not contain an untruth; these are not truly lies, and are not sinful. For example, in order to protect another a Catholic is not permitted to tell an untruth—for example, claiming that an innocent man travelled eastward while knowing full well that he travelled westward—but he may hide the truth by saying nothing about it—for example, claiming that one does not know where the innocent man is, but that one is certain that he is not here. St. Thomas states that "it is lawful to hide the truth prudently, by keeping it back."¹¹⁹ That is not a lie; it is merely an incomplete truth. Telling an untruth, however, is doing evil for the sake of good, and is always a sin.

St. Thomas also approaches a subject very dear to modernity's heart: the "jocose lie," or the lie told for fun and amusement, which moderns refuse to admit could possibly be immoral. St. Thomas does admit that the gravity of the lie is reduced when it is told for this end, just as it is reduced when told for the sake of helping another¹²⁰; it is still, however, a sin. If the useful lie is a sin, then the pleasurable lie is, as well. There is no essential difference between them.

It is true, of course, that some "lies" are told in order to test the ability of the recipient to know that they are untrue. These are not

¹¹⁷ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 3.

¹¹⁸ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 3.

¹¹⁹ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 3.

¹²⁰ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA IIa-IIæ Q. 110 Art. 2.

truly lies at all, as their nature is not to deceive, but to test the ability of another to detect deception. The entire purpose, in fact, is to be amused by the other either detecting the untruth or realizing, upon being told, that he has not detected it. There is never any intention of allowing him to labor under a misconception, and the teller always intends to reveal the truth upon determining whether the other has detected the deception or not. These are not truly lies, but merely games, and are not sinful.

The sheer prevalence of lies, great and small, in modern society is truly staggering. This is one of the greatest of the modern violations of modesty, among the most widespread and common; even Catholics often participate in and defend such sinful practices. Catholics must be scrupulously truthful in all their dealings; only in this way can modesty in speech be restored.

2.4.3 The Custody of the Eyes

The same principles of modesty in speech, by which we keep a “guard on my mouth,”¹²¹ provides the justification for modesty of the eyes. If Catholics expose their eyes to violations of impurity or dishonesty, they will become jaded, their natural revulsion to these evils (and even their cultivated disgust of them) will become eroded, and it will become easier and easier for them to fall into such sins. Catholics must keep a guard not only on their tongues, but also on their eyes.

Furthermore, the eyes can commit sin directly, as well as being the occasion of sin. The eyes speak; through the eyes one can see to the soul, and to expose the soul as enslaved to lust is not only to lie, since Christ has set us free, but to sin in impurity, as well. St. Augustine’s advice to a group of nuns can be applied just as effectively and reasonably to all Catholic laymen. He warns them that “it is not only by touch and feeling that a woman desires and is desired, but also by look.”¹²² The eyes are a means of communication, or outward action; one can sin with them as much as with any other, and perhaps more, since they are so closely connected to the soul.

¹²¹Prayer for the Incensing of the Offerings, in SYLVESTER P. JUERGENS, S. M., THE NEW MARIAN MISSAL FOR DAILY MASS 632 (Veritas Press 1952). The entire text reads “[p]one, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis” (“[p]lace, O Lord, a guard on my mouth, and a surrounding gate on my lips”).

¹²²St. Augustine, *Ep. CCXI*, *supra* note 94, at 388 (*in origine “[n]ec tactu solo et affectu sed aspectu quoque appetitur et appetit femina*”).

Moderns commonly object to such a prohibition on what they salaciously refer to as “window-shopping.” Looking can be no harm, they claim, provided that one does not act on those looks. The Catholic doctrine that outward actions are signs of inward realities is alone sufficient to refute such arguments; looking is simply doing with the eyes what one wishes to do in the soul but still does not. It is conforming to Christian morality on the outside while constantly rebelling on the inside. Christians who indulge in such behavior are “like to whited sepulchres,”¹²³ clean on the outside but completely dead within.

This doctrine about outward actions, however, applies even more strongly to impurity of the eyes. The eyes, as the saying goes, are the windows to the soul; they expose the inward reality more clearly than any other part of the body. Therefore, failure to keep guard over the eyes is a failure to keep guard over the heart. St. Augustine had harsh words for those who deny these obvious arguments, telling them that

[n]either should you say that you have chaste minds, if you have unchaste eyes, for the unchaste eye is the messenger of the unchaste heart, and when unchaste hearts by mutual looks speak to each other according to the concupiscence of the flesh, even with silent tongue, they are each allured by the other’s desire, and even with bodies intact from any unclean violation, chastity itself flees because of these customs.¹²⁴

Indeed, “[t]he unchaste eye is the messenger of the unchaste heart.”¹²⁵ They are truly the windows to the soul.

The Catholic keeps guard over his eyes and lets them show forth only his goodness and the virtues he has acquired in his following of Christ. There are a number of simple things that this aspect of modesty requires. As always, however, it is important to remember what it does *not* require. It does not, despite modern caricatures to the contrary, require women or anyone else to walk around with downcast eyes. It does not require Catholics to avoid ever meeting anyone’s eye, nor does it demand never looking at beautiful women (or handsome men, for that matter). Specious assertions to the contrary by those ensnared

¹²³St. Matthew 23:27 (Our Lord telling Pharisees that they “are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones, and of all filthiness”). See also St. Luke 11:44.

¹²⁴St. Augustine, *supra* note 94.

¹²⁵*Id.*

by the spirit of the world must not discourage Catholics from pursuing this excellent practice.

Custody of the eyes *does* require, however, that the eyes be quickly averted, whenever possible, from anything which would threaten purity. An immodestly dressed woman, for example, or an immodestly acting man should not be granted the dignity of being looked upon by a Christian soul. As a hazard to purity, any immodesty regarding purity must be quickly avoided, as far as possible. Certainly, it means denying the eyes some pleasure; that pleasure, however, is sinful, and must be denied.

Often, of course, with immodesty as widespread as it is, averting the eyes will be impossible. The easiest way to deal with such situations is to focus very carefully on the face, not allowing the eyes to wander, as our passions incline them, down to regions which are best left concealed. There may be other ways, of course; this one, however, can be applied in almost all situations. The Catholic must allow virtue to guide him; no handbook, however detailed, could give a complete map to all situations. It is vital, however, that Catholics cultivate this virtue, the virtue which mandates custody over the eyes.

Chapter 3

Conclusion

I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I, but that it be kindled? . . . Think ye, that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, no; but separation.

St. Luke 12:49–52.

Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword. For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, . . . [a]nd he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me.

St. Matthew 10:34–38.

THROUGHOUT THIS WORK, as stated earlier,¹ the nature of modesty and its practice have been thoroughly investigated in the hope of making good judgements concerning the practices of ourselves and others. Two main questions were presented by that inquiry, and satisfactory answers were acquired.

- What is a virtue, and how does the virtue of modesty fit into the scheme of those virtues as understood by the Church? A virtue is a habit of doing good actions, and modesty falls under the virtue of temperance; specifically, modesty as commonly used refers to those virtues which govern moderation in outward movements and outward apparel. This involves two principle concerns: honesty and, a special concern, purity.
- How is the virtue of modesty pursued? What practical efforts can the contemporary Catholic take toward acquiring this virtue? Modesty is practiced by being honest and by protecting purity

¹See *supra*, at xi.

primarily in the clothing, hair, skin, and bearing. Specifics can, of course, be sought above.²

As concerns the original inquiry, then, this work can be considered complete. However, there remains one more important consideration: the difficulty of practicing modesty in the modern world which so scorns virtue in general and this virtue in particular, and the objections which many, even Catholics themselves, present to the practice of this virtue. These objections largely boil down to two: that physical attractiveness is not itself immoral, and that Catholics must participate in their culture if they hope to evangelize it.

The first objection states a principle which is itself true, but which is cruelly abused when invoked against modesty. Of course it is true that the human body is natural and beautiful; it is further true that it is not wrong to admire that beauty. However, this stands more as an argument in favor of modesty than as an argument against it. Those who make this objection neglect to consider the reality of sin and the Fall. There can be little more pleasant than admiring a beautiful woman, just as there can be little more satisfying than sitting down with a glass of good wine. However, men are inevitably drawn toward sin by whatever is good in itself; it is important to enjoy these things in moderation. Just as the satisfaction of a glass of wine is quickly perverted into drunkenness, the pleasure of admiring a beautiful woman is quickly perverted into lust. It is important that the beautiful woman be modest, so that if that pleasure does turn to lust, she will at least not have contributed to the sin. Sin has, of course, been committed; but her soul at least is clean. Modesty simply requires chastity, and the beauty of the human body only accentuates the need of this virtue.

Furthermore, aside from being simple chastity, modesty is simple charity; little could be more Christian than helping another to resist the temptations to which we are all subject in this vale of tears. As for honesty, this objection cannot, of course, touch it; modesty's requirements as regards it remain whether this objection stands or falls. The beauty of the human body, then, does not mitigate the need for modesty; it accentuates it, indeed provides one of the most important justifications for it. Modesty cannot be ignored.

The second objection is much more serious, and one which is often tempting for Catholics who already feel the painful isolation of the Christian diaspora in their daily lives. Missionaries, of course, speak

²See *supra*, Chapter 2, at 21.

the language of the people whom they wish to convert; they participate in their culture; they often imitate their mannerisms and their ways. Catholics often hold that it would be expedient for them to do the same within modern Western culture, clearly missionary territory that it is. Modesty would substantially limit the ways in which Catholics could enter the culture in this way; it is often felt that it must, then, be rejected as far as possible.

Within certain limits, of course, this idea is praiseworthy. It displays an admirable concern for the salvation of souls and a desire to bring Christ to those who do not know Him. However, the notion of engulfing oneself in one's culture can be, and often is, taken to serious extremes. There can certainly be nothing wrong with taking modern styles, for example, insofar as they are modest, or even modifying them to make them modest. There is no need to adopt medieval garb; simply lengthening a skirt or raising a neckline will often be sufficient. Indeed, such efforts are praiseworthy, since they attempt to dress within custom as far as modesty allows, which is an important aspect of modesty in dress.³ However, when such desire leads Catholics to entering occasions of sin, such as immodest dress, the desire has gone too far.

Too often Catholics forget that Christ came not to bring together, but to split apart. Catholics are not to be signs of conformity, showing men how they need not change if they wish to come to Christ; rather, they are to contradict the world, showing men how they must change. It is written, “[d]o not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword.”⁴ He wishes to split the world into followers of Him and followers of the world, into the City of God and the city of man. Catholics must be unabashedly in the City of God, to give a sign of that separation to the world.

Much of the world will hate us; should that cause any wonder? St. John himself tells us to “[w]onder not, brethren, if the world hate you.”⁵ Christ Himself warns us what it means to follow Him:

If the world hate you, know ye, that it hath hated me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember my word that I said to you: The servant is not

³See *infra*, Section 1.3.1, at 12.

⁴St. Matthew 10:34. See also St. Luke 12:51–52.

⁵I St. John 3:13.

greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.⁶

Indeed, St. John even warns us that we must

[l]ove not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life; which is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever.⁷

We Catholics must not become complacent, or become part of the world, or, as St. John says, “the love of the Father is not in”⁸ us. We must be separate, apart; we must be “a city seated on a mountain”⁹ which “cannot be hid,”¹⁰ and “let []our light shine before men, that they may see []our good works, and glorify []our Father who is in heaven.”¹¹ Catholics cannot, therefore, abrogate, or even subjugate, the clear requirements of Christian virtue in order to avoid giving offense. Doing so may avoid the offense of men, but it gives offense to God. Far from bringing others closer to Christ, it moves the self farther from Him. Catholics need not contradict everything in a culture, but all those things which run contrary to the Faith and to Christian virtue must be fought through our example. Otherwise, we have stopped converting and have become converted.

Our Lord commands us to be signs of contradiction, to be “the salt of the earth.”¹² We must, therefore, ask ourselves if we are truly seasoning the world with our faithfulness to Him. We cannot, of course, season the world if we have become one with it. Our Lord tells us the fate of salt which does not season. “But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men.”¹³ We, then, are “good for

⁶St. John 15:18–20.

⁷I St. John 2:15–17.

⁸I St. John 2:15.

⁹St. Matthew 5:14.

¹⁰*Id.*

¹¹St. Matthew 5:16.

¹²St. Matthew 5:13.

¹³*Id.*

nothing” if we cease to be different from the world. We are worthy only to be cast out, and walked over by men.

Modesty, governing as it does outward motions and apparel, provides a perfect method for separating ourselves from the world, for providing the sign of contradiction that Our Lord demands. Our outward motions and dress are often all that men see of us; the opportunity to discuss the Faith does not always arise, but the opportunity to advertise it by our mere garb and bearing is always there. Modesty, aside from being a vital part of a cardinal virtue, is the universal language of our faith. No one who sees us, modestly dressed and decently carried, can doubt Whom we follow or in Whom we believe.

This virtue therefore obtains an even greater importance in a world broken and collapsed, in which even the great Name of the Christ often invokes discomfort and scorn. Let us be signs of contradiction; let us adhere to the requirements of Christian virtue no matter how much ridicule or hatred it may draw upon us. Our Lord suffered for us; let us suffer for Him, to bring souls to Him, to help those souls who follow Him. Christ Himself and His Mother demand no less.

Appendices

Appendix A

A Synopsis of Modest Practices

Clothing

Purity

Does this clothing reveal a sexual part of the body through either exposure or improper emphasis?

Is this part of the body involved in the sexual act, or so commonly associated with the sexual act that it will bring the minds of those who see it to lust?

Is this part of the body in such close proximity to a sexual part that it will bring the minds of those who see it to that sexual part?

Will I conceal such parts with some other piece of clothing (an overdress, for example, or a sweater)?

Humility

Is this clothing appropriate to the people that I will be with and to myself in my position among them?

Is this clothing appropriate to the business which we will be discussing, insofar as I know it?

Do these clothes reflect my sex? Have I prayerfully considered adopting clothing specific to my sex, or rejected the option out of vanity or for reasons of mere comfort or bearable expense?

Hair

Males

Do I keep my hair short, so as to obey the command of the Apostle and to give testimony to my role in the family and society?

Do I keep my head uncovered while praying, for the same reasons?

Females

Do I keep my hair long, so as to obey the command of the Apostle and to declare my submission to the will of God in my role in the family and society?

Do I cover my head, at least while praying, for the same reasons?

Have I rejected out-of-hand covering my head at all times, or prayerfully considered adopting the practice against cultural norms as a testament to my faith?

Skin

Have I refrained from painting, except in the extreme circumstances enunciated by St. Thomas Aquinas?

Have I refrained from piercing myself, or if I am already pierced, have I ceased wearing rings or other decorations as an advertisement of this inadvertant immodesty?

Bearing

Do I moderate my movements so as to present myself honestly and decently, according to myself, my company, and the business at hand?

Speech

Do I refrain from telling impure jokes and stories, and refuse to listen or laugh when I hear others telling them?

Do I always tell the truth, even when it would be easier to lie and when the lie concerns something small?

Custody of the Eyes

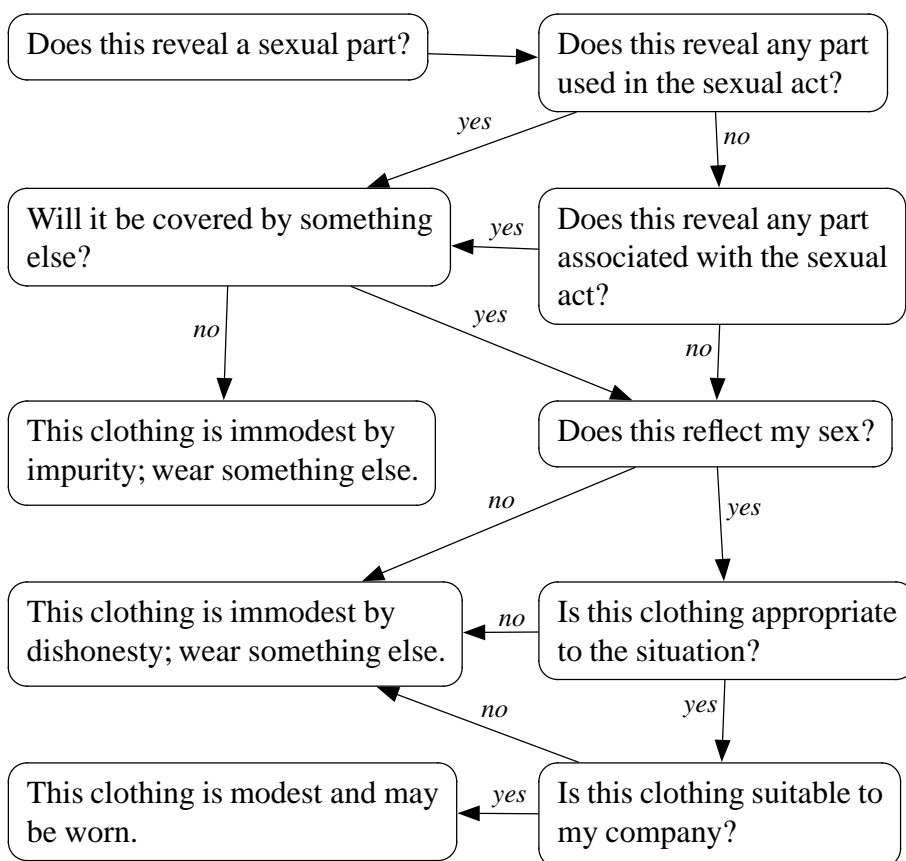
Do I always avert my eyes when presented with something impure or otherwise repugnant to a Christian soul?

Am I careful with how I look at others, and with how I
catch the eyes of those looking at me?

Am I careful about how I try to elicit the looks of others,
lest I be a part of their fall into lust?

Appendix B

A Flow Chart for Modest Clothing



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Colophon

This book was typeset using the $\text{\LaTeX} 2_{\epsilon}$ typesetting system written by Leslie Lamport on top of the \TeX system written by Donald Knuth. It was typeset using the `book` class and the `makeidx`, `booktabs`, `epigraph`, `titling`, `appendix`, `lmodern`, `tocbibind`, `fancyhdr`, `lettrine`, `textcomp`, `fontenc`, and `lmoderno` packages.

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