



The Chaste Brilliance of Christian Purity

Having lost our original innocence, the fight against concupiscence of the eyes was mercifully aided by the Supreme Tailor, who, by giving us clothing, granted us a prophetic sign of the heavenly state.



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The virtue of purity is almost entirely forgotten today. In the misguided attempt to ignore the healthy shame experienced by our parents after the first sin, the contemporary world promotes ways of dressing and of personal appearance that are far removed from the modesty counselled by the Holy Church, the perfect and vigilant Mother.

Regarding this, it is opportune to recall the prophecy of St. Jacinta Marto, seer of Our Lady in Fatima: “The sins that lead more souls to hell are the sins of the flesh. Fashions will appear that will greatly offend Our Lord.”¹

The prediction of the young girl is astonishing for its insight and accuracy... But could there be a deeper meaning to this prophecy made in 1918, when apparel was so different? To comprehend the scope of the words of the young shepherd, we ought to recall some crucial points of Christian morality.

Chastity and purity of the eyes

Before all else, a brief outline of Catholic doctrine regarding the concupiscence of the eyes, spoken by St. John in one of his epistles (cf. 1 Jn 2:16) is in order.

The virtue of chastity only reigns peacefully in hearts that are protected by that fortified wall that is custody of the eyes. Without this rampart, chastity will be dethroned and the ruin of the soul will be irremediable. History is witness to this, as the following examples show.

David, the king prophet, cast himself into the abyss of adultery and homicide for having looked sinfully at Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sm 11:2-27). His impure gaze enkindled a devouring flame in his spirit. And, as the Book of Proverbs rightly says, “Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned” (6:27)?

At the time of the prophet Daniel, two wicked elders coveted the

chaste Suzanna in their hearts and tried, unsuccessfully, to sin with her by resorting to threats. When rejected by the virtuous lady, they falsely accused her of adultery, but God came to the aid of His innocent daughter. By means of Daniel, He saved her from their perverse plans, and condemned them to the very sentence they had sought to inflict upon the victim of their lustful passion.

These old men deserved to hear the rebuke of the prophet: “You offspring of Canaan, and not of Juda, beauty has beguiled you, and lust has perverted your heart” (Dn 13:56).

How appropriate it would have been for these two miscreants to have put the wise principles of Sirach into practice: “Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not about upon another’s beauty. For many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire” (9:8-9).

“The eye is the lamp of the body”

The patriarch Joseph was also the target of concupiscence of the eyes. Having become a slave through the betrayal of his brothers, he was sold to the leader of the king’s guard, Potiphar, in Egypt. The latter, impressed with the Hebrew’s virtue, entrusted the care of his goods to him.

Now, Joseph “was handsome and good-looking” (Gn 39:6) and the wife of Potiphar, taken by a disordered passion, “cast her eyes” (Gn 39:7) upon her husband’s slave and made a proposal that was displeasing to the Lord. Faithful to the Divine Law Joseph rejected the woman’s wicked advances and received calumny and prison in return. The fidelity of the great patriarch was later rewarded by God, who helped him to regain the confidence of the Pharaoh (cf. Gn 41: 42-44).

These episodes demonstrate the profound meaning of the teaching of the Divine Master teaching: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” (Mt 6:22-23).

In fact, sight is the gate of the desires, such that “one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). Concupiscence of the eyes stems from the wound opened in the human heart by original sin, which affected all men and women.

How, then, can we possibly ignore the existence of dangerous ways of dressing that are likely to jeopardize the purity of whoever sees those who present themselves in this way? In contrast, clothing designed

with modesty and grace are an aid in maintaining custody of the eyes.

The modesty of our first parents

With tender candour, Genesis narrates the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam. She was to be the ideal helpmate for the first man, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. Gn 2:23).

In her visions, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich observed that the

couple, created in the friendship of God and adorned with the gift of sanctifying grace, emitted a certain splendour: “Eve was standing before Adam, who gave her his hand. They were like two innocent children, wonderfully beautiful and noble. They were luminous, enveloped in light, as if it were a shining garment.”²

Adam and Eve lived in intimacy with God as the sacred author describes, narrating that the Lord appeared at “the cool of the day” (Gn 3:8) to converse with them in Eden. Accordingly, their members reflected the brilliance of the spiritual grace that the Father of all light had impressed upon their souls.³

In addition to the splendour of grace on their bodies, the gazes of Adam and Eve were limpid. Genesis emphasizes the purity of our first parents in the state of innocence in which they were created was so that they would complement one another and be fruitful, in accordance with God’s mandate when He blessed them and said: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gn 1:28).

However, this happy state did not last long, and the power of sight was horribly stained after they both gave ear to the mortal enemy of the human race.

Consequences of original sin

In his cunning, the accursed serpent deceived Eve by promising her that if she ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, forbidden by God, her eyes would be opened and both she and her husband would be “like God” (Gn 3:5).

However, reality was the exact opposite: due to disobedience, the human sense of sight became severely damaged, so that, far from being endowed divine acuity, it became similar to the sinister glance of the dev-



Faithful to the Divine Law, Joseph, rejected the woman’s wicked advances and received calumny and prison in return

Above, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, by Friedrich Overbeck - Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin; on previous page, entrance of the Blessed into Heaven, by Giotto di Bondone - Detail from the Last Judgement fresco, Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua (Italy)

il. Contaminated by original sin, all the fallen children of Eve inherited a vision darkened by the stain of lust, egoism and sensuality.

As a consequence of the fall, their blighted gaze discovered their own nakedness, giving rise to the sentiment of shame – in Latin *pudicitia*, translated as modesty –, which led Adam and Eve to seek a means to cover themselves with all haste: “They knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” (Gn 3:7).

They no longer saw each other as children of God, made in His image and enveloped in light. Their perception of one another was defiled; lost was the brilliance that had given limpidness to the gaze and a diaphanous beauty to the physical features of the first couple.

The horror they experienced at their own degradation after the fall symbolizes not only an exterior phenomenon, but especially the extinguishing of the light of grace in their hearts. As a result, man tends to regard others with sordid interest, for, due to the intimate relationship between the body and soul, it is from the darkening of the mind that the exterior senses are degraded, including the noblest, which is sight.

“Divine garment” made by the Supreme Tailor

Nevertheless, God did not abandon them to their own incompetence, and out of pity for the scanty attire with which they attempted to hide their disgrace, He Himself made “for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gn 3:21). Although He did not heal the wound of shame, the Lord provided them with a swift and efficacious remedy.

And so would Providence act throughout history. The grace given by God in Baptism does not erase the evil tendencies springing from the first sin, such as concupiscence

of the eyes, but it provides strength to overcome them through asceticism, so as to merit an even greater reward in the glory of Heaven.

The art of dressing with restraint, modesty and elegance is not only a safeguard for the eyes, but also a sign of hope in salvation from above, for the clothing with which the Creator covered our parents is a symbol of the grace that reconciles us with Him and of the glory with which our bodies will be clothed in Heaven.



Baptism administered by Monsignor João Clá Dias in the Cathedral of São Paulo

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This close relationship between exterior dress and the clothing of the soul by the grace of reconciliation is manifested in the oracle of the prophet Isaiah: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation” (61:10).

In summary, the “divine garment” made by the Supreme Tailor was at once a merciful covering, an antidote for concupiscence, a promise of Redemption and a pledge of the definitive victory in Heaven.

The breaking of the dawn of an era of modesty

The virtue of modesty,⁴ which teaches the practice of chaste nobility in dressing and appearance, was greatly prized by those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. In contrast with the pagans, marked by moral relativism which led them to worship their own bodies with vestiges of idolatry,⁵ the first Christians distinguished themselves by their high esteem for purity in all its aspects.

In the record of the martyrdom of St. Perpetua, in the year 203 AD, a touching detail is narrated. They put the young woman in the amphitheatre of Carthage together with St. Felicity to be executed as part of the games and entertainment, as was the primitive and brutal custom. They were to be killed by an aggressive wild cow. Perpetua was the first to be tossed into the air by the attacking beast and, as the chronicler narrates, she “fell on her back, but immediately sat up and arranged her tunic so as to cover her leg, more concerned with modesty than with her pain.”⁶

And Saint Agnes, martyr of chastity, gives a beautiful testimony of faith, certain she would maintain her modesty undefiled, when the Roman magistrate wished to induce her to sin: “Do not imagine, Agnes replied, that Jesus Christ so easily abandons His

spouses. He bears for them too much love and solicitude to allow them to suffer with impunity the loss of their modesty, and He is always ready to help them.”⁷⁷

Ambiences not conducive to the practice of virtue

Christian decency also restricted the use of the Roman baths which, in the time of nascent Christianity, was a centuries-old pagan custom that was justified by the need for hygiene and recreation.

City life gravitated around these thermal baths – at one time, there were more than three thousand in the city of Rome –, so that avoiding them was tantamount to cutting oneself off from society. Unfortunately, the ambience that reigned there was one contrary to the modesty taught by the Church. At certain points of particular decadence, they became so scandalous as to cause concern to pagan emperors such as Adrian, who decreed laws prohibiting both sexes from frequenting the official thermal baths of the empire simultaneously.

For Christians, such settings were highly detrimental to the practice of chastity – dangerous and seductive occasions of sin. How to react? The Fathers of the Church showed themselves to be admirably zealous and courageous in their preaching, demanding resolute and intransigent attitudes from their flock. Had not St. Paul said that nothing can separate the faithful from the love of Christ?

It would not be the worldly and sensual environment of the thermal baths that would make the children of the Church capitulate! The baptized would not immerse themselves in that climate of softness and sensuality, opening their hearts to the prevailing spirit, so contrary to that of their Lord!

In this regard, it is useful to recall a passage from the treatise of St.



St. Agnes - St. Mary's Church, Waltham (USA)

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Cyprian dedicated to virgins: “What to say of those who frequent promiscuous baths, who expose their bodies consecrated to modesty and pu-

rity to curious and sensual eyes? [...] They make of the bath a spectacle; going to places more indecorous than the theatre. All shame is stripped away, along with the clothing, they divest themselves of honour and modesty of body; virginity is unclothed to be observed and contemplated. [...] Attend the baths together with women, among whom the bath is modest for you.”⁷⁸

The courageous intolerance of the shepherds and the decrees of several councils so regulated and limited the use of mixed baths that they eventually fell into disuse. The social influx of Christianity had triumphed thanks to the evangelical intransigence of shepherds that were integral and virginal in the Faith, true to the exhortations of the Divine Innocent One: “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away” (Mt 18:9).

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ”

The call to modesty was also aimed at worldly and immoral fashions. St. John Chrysostom, in one of his *Baptismal Instructions*, admonishes the immodest woman: “You are greatly fanning the flames against yourself, for you incite the eyes of youth, attract the gaze of the licentious and breed perfect adulterers, and thence become responsible for their ruin.”⁷⁹

But, in addition to teaching decency and propriety in personal appearance, the virtue of modesty encourages elegance and good taste in dressing, for since attire is the symbol of the sanctifying grace received in Baptism and the sign of the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, it accentuates the dignity of the children of God destined to reign eternally with Him.

Indeed, sanctifying grace is compared by St. Paul to clothing: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). After exhorting the Christians of

Rome to live uprightly, free of vices and censurable passions, he affirms: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14).¹⁰ And to confront the battles of the Faith, he advises the Ephesians to clothe themselves with the armour of God so as to resist the snares of the devil (cf. Eph 6:11-17).

The spirit of darkness, on the contrary, foments a sordid affinity with shamelessness. This is seen in the episode of the demoniac of Gerasa narrated in the Gospel: “There met Him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house” (Lk 8:27). After Our Lord’s exorcistic action, the same person appears fully clothed, seated at his Liberator’s feet, listening attentively to the divine words (cf. Lk 8:35). It becomes clear that Jesus loves chaste attire and the devil incites immodesty.

Wedding garments whitened in the Blood of the Lamb

This divine preference for clothing is expressed in the parable of the wedding banquet narrated by St. Matthew. The Master sets the scene for His teaching by choosing the wedding feast of a king’s son. It is a clear allusion to the festive gathering of the Saints in Heaven, around the glory of the Son.

Nobles and wealthy people were invited to the wedding, but they declined to accept for trivial reasons. And so the servants of the sovereign went out to the thoroughfares to recruit all the passers-by.

When the hall of the palace was filled, the king entered to greet them and noted that one of them was not properly attired. Speaking to him, he asked: “‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth’” (Mt 22:12-13).

The wedding garment reappears in all its splendour in the Book of Revelation by St. John. In fact, in eternal life all things will be renewed (cf. Rev 21:5) and concupiscence of the eyes will be abolished, along with the sentiment of shame of our parents. The garment, however, will not disappear. Quite the contrary!

In one of his magnificent visions, the Evangelist contemplates an immense multitude beyond counting, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (7:9).

The Virgin Apostle continues: “Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed

in white robes, and whence have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night within His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence’” (7:13-15).

The whiteness of the victors’ tunics is undoubtedly linked to the Roman military custom of having the legions parade, after a military triumph, clothed in white tunics and palms, signs of victory. And yet, in light of the episode of the Transfiguration described by St. Mark, a relationship may also be established between the white tunic of the Saints and the raiment of Jesus Himself which, during the epiphany of Tabor, “became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them” (Mk 9:3).

Prophetic sign of our heavenly state

There was, in the act of creation of man and woman in Eden, in their natural innocence, the purpose of emphasizing the complementarity of the first couple in view of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the multiplication of the species. However, in

¹ DE MARCHI, IMC, João M. *Era uma Senhora mais brilhante que o sol*. 8.ed. Fátima: Missões Consolata, 1966, p.291. St. Alphonsus, in commenting on the sixth and ninth precepts of the Decalogue, makes almost the same affirmation: “This vice [lust] is the most common and copious matter in Confessions, the one by which the most souls fall into hell, and I do not hesitate to affirm that solely by it, or at least not without it, are

all reprobates condemned” (NEYRAGUET, Dieudonné [Org.]. *Compendio de la Teología Moral de Santo Alfonso María de Liguorio*. 3.ed. Madrid: Viuda de Palacios e Hijos, 1852, p.230).

² BLESSED ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH. *Visiones y revelaciones completas. Visiones del Antiguo Testamento. Visiones de la vida de Jesucristo y de su Madre Santísima*. Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1952, t.II, p.16.

³ This mysterious luminosity would return later, in an exceptional way, in Moses: “as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (Ex 34:29). And, at the fullness of time, we see it shining in the incomparable glory of the Son of God, Who manifested it on the height of Tabor in a most perfect manner: “His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light” (Mt 17:2).

⁴ The present *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in commenting upon the Ninth Commandment of the Law of God, defines modesty in the following very precise terms: “Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward



Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,
by Jan Van Eyck
Museum of Fine Arts of Ghent
(Belgium)

Heaven, it will not be like this: “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like Angels in Heaven” (Mk 12:25).

This is the significance of the clothing of the Blessed. It is not to mask shame, the offspring of sin, for this will no longer exist. Rather, it will accentuate the new angelic state of humanity! Thus, clothing on this earth is a prophetic sign of our future heavenly state.

It is hope in eternal life, in part, that gave rise to the good taste in clothing that has characterized Christian Civilization, rich in noble, under-

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stated and dignified attire, worn by both rich and poor. In our days, vulgarity, virtually taken to the point of absurdity, dominates fashion and arbitrarily imposes a worn out, torn and scanty style of clothing. Degrading garments are sold at exorbitant prices, and people are willing to purchase them at any cost, so as not to appear outdated...

How much saner and more Catholic it would be to turn our sights heavenward, where Jesus Christ is with His Angels, and, inspired by the desire for eternal life, clothe ourselves decently and modestly, with discreet and chaste grace. ✧

them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity. [...] Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet” (CCC 2521-2522).

⁵ Regarding the rendering of any worship to the body, St. Augustine is very incisive: “It is a crime to render cult to the body or soul in place of the true God, by whose indwelling alone is the soul made

happy. And it is all the more abominable to render cult to them because the body or soul that receives this homage will obtain neither salvation nor human glory!” (ST. AUGUSTINE. De Civitate Dei. L.VII, c.27, n.2. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 1958, v.XVI, p.494).

⁶ RUÍZ BUENO, Daniel (Org.). *Actas de los mártires*. 5.ed. Madrid: BAC, 2003, p.437.

⁷ RUINART, Teodorico (Org.). *Las verdaderas actas*

de los mártires. Madrid: Ioa-chin Ibarra, 1776, t.III, p.24.

⁸ ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE. A conduta das virgens, n.19; 21. In: *Obras Completas I*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2016, p.38-39.

⁹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. Catequesis V, n.37. In: *Las catequesis bautismales*. 2.ed. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2007, p.118-119.

¹⁰ The Apostle of the Gentiles also counsels the Colossians: “Put to death there-

fore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [...] you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. [...] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:5-6,9-10,12).