



# MODESTY MATTERS

*Embrace the Theology of the Body*

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM

**RECENTLY A MIDDLE-SCHOOL STUDENT** told me that *modesty* is an old-fashioned word for an out-of-date idea. Well, that teen was half right! The term is at least as old as the Scriptures. It is one of the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23. But modesty is as necessary today as it was back then. Modesty is a perennial virtue. *Perennial* means “enduring, permanent, unchanging” — always in style!

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that body and soul unite into a single nature to form a human person (see CCC, 364–366). Parents create the body, and God creates the immortal soul. The soul does not die when it separates from the body at earthly death, and it will reunite with the body at the final resurrection.

Human beings are made in the image of God. Our bodies provide a temple for God’s Spirit — our soul. We are precious, unrepeatable images of God. When we make choices of body, mind, and spirit that show reverence and respect for our bodies, especially our sexual organs, we

honor God’s plan by safeguarding our divine dignity. Similarly, if we are irreverent and disrespectful of our bodies or the bodies of others, we distort the image of God. We frustrate God’s will when we reduce a person to an object of sensual pleasure.

*Modesty and respect for the body* are two sides of one coin. The *Catechism* explains that modesty:

- “protects the intimate center of a person”
- refuses to expose intimate body parts
- inspires choice of clothing (fashion), words, behavior, and body language
- keeps silence, reserve, or restraint where there is evident risk of *unhealthy* sexual curiosity (see CCC, 2521–2522).

Modesty guides how we present ourselves, how we behave toward others, and what kinds of things we read, view, or speak. A modest person makes choices that respect the intimate, sexual part of other human beings and strives to uphold

his or her sacred dignity and that of others.

Some contemporary fashions, advertising, movies, music, and entertainment promote immodesty by over-sexualizing styles of dress, ornaments, body language, or manners of behavior and speech. Viewers may easily become desensitized to what is reverent, holy, and wholesome. We must guard against the many ways today’s culture disrespects human dignity by reducing the human person to an object rather than promoting the image of God within each person.

St. John Paul II called us to recognize how the *cult of the body* negatively affects our attitudes and behaviors. He urged us to replace this contemporary trend with a *theology of the body*. Let the study of God’s divine nature lead you to demonstrate respect for your body and the bodies of others. **✠**

SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EdD, is an international consultant and public speaker on issues of whole-person formation.

## For discussion

**NAME VIRTUES**, attitudes, or behaviors that are perennial values (always in style).

**PAY ATTENTION**, throughout the month ahead, to your experiences of entertainment, entertainers, music lyrics, performers, fashion, movies, TV shows, or books. Rate each situation as modest or immodest and explain your decision.

