

Objections



You Cannot Condemn Women Wearing Trousers Today

Steps of this Controversy

- In an article published in *The Remnant*, November 15, 2002, [Three Photos Tell The Story: Good Ideas Fit with Good Customs](#), Marian T. Horvat analyzes difference in clothing between some leftist demonstrators of the 1950s and some rightist demonstrators today to show how the customs have become more revolutionary.
- [Objection](#) - A reader in London accuses the author of being narrow-minded in her moral judgments and without charity toward the young pro-life demonstrators.
- [Response](#) - Dr. Horvat brings strong documentation by Popes and Saints on the contested points.

Objection to the Article "Three Photos Tell the Story: Good Ideas Fit with Good Customs"

Letter to the Editor of *The Remnant*

Dear Editor:



I am writing in protest at Marion Horvatt's article "3 Photos Tell the Story" (15th Dec 2002) in which she saw fit to criticise the appearance of those taking part in a pro-life rally.

I was appalled by the bitterness and lack of Christian charity shown by Dr Horvatt. How dare she criticise women on a pro-life demonstration! A demonstration is not the time when a woman's elegance is of any real relevance to the issue. I took part in a Rescue in London in the late eighties when I was a student at London University in which Joan Andrews also took part. As we were being carried away by policemen I was glad that I was wearing trousers.

Horvatt cites a letter Cardinal Siri written in 1960, but the voice of one Cardinal is not the voice of the Church. There is a great danger in traditionalists setting themselves up as arbitrators of Catholic teaching. Some traditionalists carry this argument to an extreme, in saying that women should not go to University because, among many other things, their education would, apparently, make it difficult for them to obey their husbands. (SSPX website for Canada). While asking what it would actually say of Catholic teaching if it were indeed true that the success of a marriage can only be built on the ignorance of women, I also ask where does that leave Ms. Horvatt with her PhD, if this is the type of extreme thinking that she adopts?

In our cold climate I regularly wear trousers as a way of keeping warm. I can assure Ms. Horvatt that my gender has never been called into question. Those who distort the issue into a question of gender identification gratuitously insult women. If one morning I suggested to my husband that he wear a pair of my trousers he would give me the most weird look imaginable! If I went into a local men's store and asked to be measured for a pair of trousers, they would direct me to the women's store where I would find WOMEN'S trousers.

If women wearing trousers is women cross-dressing, then men shaving is men imitating women. Dr. Horvatt cannot have it both ways. A blanket condemnation of trousers is out of proportion, and is turning young people away from the traditional movement since it does not reflect reality.

However, what alarms me the most about Dr. Horvatt's article is her distinct lack of charity. One of the women's crimes in the top photo is that she is "not as pretty" and is shorter and fatter than the woman on her right.

The poor young man who's spending his free time at a pro life demo is accused of vanity since Dr. Horvatt speculates "his sleeves are rolled under for vanity's sake (to give an even tan on his arms)." Horvatt does seem possessed of quite a fertile imagination when it comes to the people's motives for what they are wearing, and she always imparts uncharitable motives to them.

No, that's not quite true. The woman from the 1972 demonstration calling for divorce in Italy is praised for her "well-coiffed hair..pulled back into what would be an elegant twist or roll. Her outfit is distinguished by tasteful jewellery that reflects a desire to appear distinguished and noble." The poor young pro-lifers and other Catholic demonstrators way of being and walking is later contrasted with the pro-divorce woman's "Catholic way of being and walking".

So women who are pro-divorce Horvatt sees fit to praise with the adjective "Catholic" and the pro-lifers of 2002 are described as "vulgar". What sort of twisted values are these? Perhaps instead of spending so much time analysing photographs Dr. Horvatt should spend some time reading the Bible where Our Lord in his life on earth condemns the Pharisees more than any other single thing and the Our Lord in the Divine Mercy apparitions (which are accepted by the Conciliar Church and traditionalists alike) condemns those who lack mercy.

No one escapes Dr. Horvatt's arrogant and obsessive censure! She comments on one young lady's "not so elegant legs". She also condemns this young woman for drinking "straight from a gallon jug container." I advise Horvatt never to go on the Chartres Pilgrimage. I can only speak for the one organised by the SSPX, not that organised by the SSPeter so enthusiastically promoted by the Remnant, but I can assure Horvatt that, horror of horrors, women actually drink from wine bottles, and yes, wear trousers...

Horvatt ends her article with a warning that "I hope these photos will serve as a warning to traditionalists...". Sadly, it is not the photos which serve as the warning but her article, which shows that we are becoming those "ugly traditionalists" which I recall the editor, some issues ago, was

Yours sincerely

Julia Howell, London, England

The Response

Marian Therese Horvat, Ph.D.

Objections

For brevity' sake, I will divide the objections into parts. According to Mrs. Howell:



1. The use of trousers for women would be acceptable because:

- A. Only Cardinal Siri condemned it, and he does not represent the thinking of the Church.
- B. Women need to wear them in cold weather.
- C. To condemn the use of trousers would set the youth against the Church.
- D. Mrs. Howell felt more comfortable wearing trousers when she was carried out by the police during a pro-life demonstration.

2. It is a lack of charity to point out that the two young people in the photo are badly dressed because:

- A. They are defending a good cause, the pro-life position;
- B. One cannot judge the intentions of a person from his or her gestures and clothing;
- C. Clothing should not be a matter of concern at a rally or demonstration.

Answers

1. Let me respond to the first block of objections.

A. The quoted text of Cardinal Siri represents the moral teachings of the Church perfectly until Vatican II. In the History of Western Civilization, the use of trousers has been characteristic apparel for lay men since the 14th century, with the obvious exception of the Scotch who wore kilts. Here also, however, the clothing of Scotch lasses was different from that of the lads, and there could be no confusion between the two.

Deuteronomy is very clear on this point: "A woman shall not be clothed with a man's apparel; neither shall a man use woman's apparel: for he that doeth these things is abominable before God "(22:5). With this base, the Church consistently and constantly condemned the use of trousers by women.

An example of this teaching is St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine:

"Outward apparel should be consistent with the state of the person according to general custom. Hence it is in itself sinful for a woman to wear man's clothes, or vice-versa; especially since this may be the cause of sensuous pleasure; and it is expressly forbidden in the Law (Deut 22) Nevertheless this may be done at times on account of some necessity, either in order to hide oneself from enemies,

or through lack of other clothes, or for some other such reason” (*Summa Theologiae* II, II, question 169, article 2, reply to objection 3).

Similar orientation can be found in any good book on Morals before Vatican II.

The problem with Mrs. Howell’s criticism of Cardinal Siri’s teaching is that she seems to think that a moral principle can change with the times. Catholic Morals do not change. What changes with the times is the Situation Ethics of the Conciliar Church. However, this “New Morals,” as it was also called by Pius XII, was expressly condemned. Probably Mrs. Howell is like many Catholics today who do not realize that this progressivist system was condemned, and since I believe that her critiques were made in good faith, I think she will no longer defend such a position.

B. I don’t think that the use of trousers is a necessity for cold weather. If this were the case, women would have adopted this style of dress centuries ago in Catholic countries, especially where it is very cold.

I know Mrs. Howell does not like my use of photographs to illustrate for readers various points of how the Cultural Revolution has progressed, but I find it very useful. My generation was called the “generation of the image,” and can understand a principle much better when it is illustrated than when it is explained with words alone. The generations after me have become so image oriented it is almost useless to try to explain the progress of the Revolution in the realm of customs and Morals without pictures. Therefore, I consider the use of pictures a good pedagogical tool.



This picture illustrates, for example, how trousers were not necessary in a cold weather. You can see from this photograph of a sports scene in northern Sweden that the women in the past adapted to cold weather, and even practiced a sport like snow skiing, without the need to don trousers. Further, the ladies in the picture do not seem inconvenienced and appear to be enjoying themselves.



My grandmother, who came to Kansas from Croatia, worked almost every day (except in wintertime) in her large garden -- always, always in a dress. The winters in Kansas can be bitterly cold, and the upper two stories of her house did not have heat until after World War II, but she did not find this a reason to change to trousers.

As for religious women, I have never heard of nuns in very cold countries or missionary sisters in difficult practical situations exchanging their habits for trousers because it would be more convenient.

C. With regard to the question of the youth, who might be alienated from the Church if one insists too strongly on proper dress, I would have this to say:

The youth of the greatest importance for the Catholic cause are not the ones turned toward

pleasures and convenience. The youth who are always attracted to the Catholic Church are turned toward heroism, willing to sacrifice for her and resist the fads and seductions of the modern world. These young people see and admire her grandeur and her immutable Morals, and realize that even though it is difficult to go along with all the moral precepts, they want to follow the steps of Our Lord on the narrow road to Heaven. Adapting Catholic Morals to the Modern World, as Vatican II did, had disastrous effects. Instead of attracting young people to the Church, the seminars, convents and monasteries were emptied.

D. Perhaps the case described by Mrs. Howell - when she wore trousers to avoid immodesty when being carried out by the police at a pro-life demonstration - would fall into one of the exceptions that St. Thomas mentioned above. It could well be the case.

2. As for the second block of objections I will repeat each criticism and then respond:

A. *To the objection:* One should not criticize those who are defending a good cause, e.g., the pro-life position, for the clothing they are wearing;

I answer: When I criticized the valorous young man and women who were dedicating themselves to the pro-life cause, it was not my intention to belittle or despise their persons, but rather, to bring both the young man and the young woman, as well as my readers, to a better and more consistent Catholic position. I was trying to point out the discrepancy between the high idea they were defending, and what certainly is a lack of decorum in their persons. Their clothing and demeanor do not reflect their idealism and the nobility of cause they defend.

Are the points I mentioned in my article defects? Yes, according to Catholic morals and teaching on dress. I would ask Mrs. Howell to refer to the teaching of Pope Pius XII "On Style," of November 8, 1957 for his comments on the importance of decorum and modesty in clothing, and especially for women. He clearly protests against "the frequent attempts of many contemporaries to separate the exterior activities of man from the moral realm as if the two belonged to different universes." He reminds the Catholic of the "consistency that must exist between what one professes and one's external practices."

Are the points I mentioned defects only in this particular young man and woman? By no means. I am not trying to point out here any one particular person or his personal style, but rather a style of our times. Yes, there is a defect, a defect in a whole conception of personal decorum and modesty.

B. Mrs. Howell maintains that one cannot judge the intentions of a person from his or her gestures and clothing.

To this objection, I answer: We know that the bearing and the thinking of a person should harmonize from the clear words of Scriptures: "The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man, show what he is (Eccles 19:27)."

Scriptures tells us we can be even more judgmental than this: "A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance." (Eccles 19:26). We are told that we can know a man just from his look and countenance! The modern notion that a man should not be judged by his appearance contradicts the Gospel, common usage, and good sense.

St. Thomas, the great Universal Doctor of the Church, comments these words of Scripture in his teaching on outward demeanor:

"Outward movements are signs of the inward disposition, according to Eccl. 19:27 'The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man show what he is,' and St. Ambrose says (De Offic. I, 18) that 'the habits of mind are seen in the gestures of the body,' and that 'the body's movement is an index of the

soul” (*Summa Theologiae*, II, II, question 168, article 1, reply to objection 1).

Therefore analyzing the gestures and postures of the body, as well as one's way of dressing we can know the interior of the person. So, I do not think I was violating Catholic practice in my analysis.

With regard to the charity I am accused of violating, I think it was clear in the ensemble of my article that my intention was not to take personal attitudes toward the subjects of the pictures. Following the words of Scriptures and the wise counsels and teachings of the Saints, my aim was to point out the strides made by the Cultural Revolution, and how unwittingly we can go along with postures, attitudes and styles that oppose Catholic culture and Morals.

Is it a lack of charity to instruct and correct? In fact, Scriptures and the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ tell us the opposite. You can find many verses in the Old and New Testament that speak of the importance of instruction and correction of the young. For “charity is this: to walk according to the commandments of God” (2 John 1:6).

It was in the spirit of charity that Pope Benedict XV made this strong critique of women who appeared in public in the kind of immodest clothing many women wear today in the service of good causes, like pro-life rallies, and even going to Mass:

“One cannot deplore sufficiently the blindness of so many women of every age and station.... Made foolish by a desire to please, they do not see to what degree the indecency of their clothing shocks every honest man and offends God. Most of them would formerly have blushed at such apparel as a grave fault against Christian modesty. Now it does not suffice to exhibit themselves on public thoroughfares, but they do not fear to cross the threshold of churches to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass (*Encyclical Sacra Propediem*).”

There is a mistaken idea of charity that has gained ground in our times, that is, to never criticize immodest clothing or make corrections about bad customs for fear of hurting feelings or damaging self-esteem, or other similar reasons. This was not the attitude of the pre-conciliar Popes and the great Saints and Doctors of the Church.

C. Mrs. Howell affirms that a demonstration is not a place to pay attention to clothing and such things.

To this objection, I answer: I positively disagree with her. I think that a Catholic should always be aware of being a Catholic and represent himself as such everywhere and on all occasions, and especially when he is in public.

On this point I could quote innumerable Saints, Doctors of the Church and even simple manuals on Catholic etiquette and behavior. Let me close with only three quotes. *The first* is a line from Scriptures that makes no exceptions of time or place: “In like manner I wish women to be decently dressed, adorning themselves with modesty and dignity.” (1 Tim 2:9)

The second are the words of Pius XII in his allocution on fashion (1957) which clearly shows that a person should always be aware that her clothing reflects her being and way of thinking:

“One cannot minimize the importance of style's influence for good or for evil. The language of clothing, as we have already said, is the more effective when it is more ordinary and is understood by everyone. It might be said that society speaks through the clothing it wears. Through its clothing it reveals its secret aspirations and uses it, at least in part, to build or destroy its future.”

The third is from St. Francis de Sales' famous book of counsels for a laywoman, *Introduction to the Devout Life*. In his chapter on attire, he instructs devout women to follow the advice of St.

Paul, that is, to always be “attired in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety (1 Tim 2:9).” The shorts and form-fitting clothes worn today in public offend both modesty and sobriety.

I imagine that St. Frances de Sales would speak even stronger to the young women of our days, given the bad customs and styles in vogue. But even then he had this to say about how a Catholic should appear in public:

“I would have devout people, whether men or women, the best dressed of the company, but the least pompous and affected. I would have them adorned with gracefulness, decency and dignity.”

This are the answers I would like to make to the objections of Mrs. Howell. I did not comment on the education of women, since I have always maintained in public and private that girls should be properly educated and receive a good formation.

I can assure Mrs. Howell that although the tone of her critique was not very friendly, I enjoyed having her as my correspondent. If she would like to reply to my points, I certainly would continue our interesting exchange.



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