

Indecent Dressing in the Catholic Church: a Misdirected Enthusiasm

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Abstract

Our society is experiencing decline in morality. The moral lives of our people these days are in its lowest ebb. This moral laxity especially on our dressing code nowadays is nothing but a show of shameless generation. The indecent dressing of our youths seems as if modesty is no longer valued. It is just enough to see what some boys and girls wear in public, half-naked, to display their private parts, pants and bra, to attract the opposite sex and then we know that morality has collapsed. Many of us keep quiet over immoral/indecent, sexually provoking wears, either because they enjoy such or they are encouraging it or it does not matter to them. The Catholic Church of St. Peter's Chaplaincy of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) frowns over such indecent dressing especially when coming to the church. It is a sin and we should not allow others commit sin because of our dressing. This paper discusses indecent dressing as it concerns the Catholic Church within its environs and the implication of such indecent dressing to the society if it continues.

Introduction

It is indubitably true that the present society is facing the hydra-headed challenges of moral decadence, global economic crises, political instability, terrible cultural erosion and materialism. Describing the situation, Iyidobi (1987) wrote that;

The lifestyle and value system of Nigerians over the years have changed and are continuously changing: from a veritable sense of unity to an indisputable spirit of discord. From a strong traditional political set up to an uncomfortable imbroglio; from a communalistic and materialistic one: from a people with a scrupulous moral mentality to an almost lawless, profligate group of persons; from a people who understood the value of education and hardwork to a people who loathe education; loafers who wish to do or get things only through unacceptable but facile means (p.16)

From the foregoing it is palpable that our contemporary generation is suffocating in the hands of various shades of ethical aberrations fashioned by morally bankrupt deviants who enthrone moral depravity over virtues of our traditional systems and the hallowed teachings of religion. This age has recorded the most explosive religious crusades, the most populous religious pilgrimages, the most resurgence of the phenomenon of proliferation of churches and the most dynamic witness concrete structure and flamboyant edifices that manifest the existence and physical vitality of various faiths. Yet the society of this 'religious' magnitude launches herself into the self-destructive forces of moral laxity as evidenced in the bizaire facts of indecent dressing codes.

The main thrust of this paper therefore is to present overt cases of moral laxity in form of indecent dressing in our society today and how St. Peter's Chaplaincy, a Catholic Church in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) view such dressing. It also highlights the obvious implications of this evil craze for fashion if our people who pursue immorality with vigor and impurity do not retrace their ugly steps.

Dress Code for the Catholic Church: St. Peter's Chaplaincy U.N.N.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2004) dress refers to wearing cloths of a specified kind or in a specified way. It also describes dress as formal or ceremonial attire that is worn in the morning or evening. Hence when we talk of dress code we are simply attempting to spell out recommended and acceptable wearing of cloths in a fashion that would suite our various daily activities. Example: Going to a religious function required good attires, so also attires for social gathering, sporting attires, working and other various activities should fit their purposes.

Onoyima (2006) laments that

Dressing code and habits are nowadays often treated with disdain. This is a result of many wars universally waged on code and values. The traditional authorities have been challenged, indeed. A trip to most social or religious centers leaves no one in doubt of these facts. People put on all sorts of things in the name of dressing. Dressing is the first thing that tells much about someone's personality. It is proactive and post active as it supplies what one can amply do (p. 6).

In our society today, along the streets and in the house, in the church or higher institution, it is very common to see some people go almost nude all in the name of modern fashion. According to Richard (1980), they parade themselves without any life of shame as they expose the vital organs of their physical frame to lookery. It is not only the ladies who dress indecently today in our place, as even boys do.

It follows that for the purpose of this discussion, we shall be emphasizing the dress code as it affects the St. Peter's Catholic Church Chaplaincy, U.N.N. in relation to its environment. Sexual self-consciousness, shame and covering up of the body follow the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:10-11). The wisdom of Biblical literature warns against the snares of feminine shamelessness. In the New Testament, modesty in looks, is inculcated and generally speaking, sexual modesty "a gentle and quiet spirit" should characterize the Christian women. We could look at it from two main parameters of holiness and social custom. They are intertwined. We ought not to put a stumbling block before our brothers. Now

clearly if a woman is just so beautiful that no matter what she wears you have a problem with it, the problem is not hers. But today such standards about sexuality and dress are so much distorted. Men are visual mostly, but women are relational. We are all frail. So, healthy respect for that is an important part of Godly fellowship.

The Bible says; Women should dress modestly and that does imply certain parameters. There is really no debate. A long dress won't get you to heaven, but a very short one outside a romantic evening with your spouse is probably evidence that you're not going there or at least that you are thinking more about the earth than about heaven.

The Chaplain Rev. Onoyima made it clear that any mother coming to worship in the church should wear good clothes to cover herself well. A mother he said should wear such blouse that will cover her chest well. Weather you have hairs on you chest or not irrespective of your status to avoid embarrassment in the church. If a woman so decides to wear long gown, she should do so but not the one to tight her so much. For the young ladies, who can tie rappers are free to do so but if you want to wear gown it must be long enough or if it is skirt, it will reach to your knees or below your knees and not the one with open at the back to show your inner wears. There is no show back or show chest or my bra or my pant in the church. Girls are not allowed to wear trousers into the church. Every woman should cover her hairs very well. Boys should not wear such shirts that are too tight on the body or the type to show hairs on the chest or wear such trousers that only cover half-buttocks to show that you are a guy. No cap for boys inside the church and this runs across the whole men. No transparent wears is allowed for both male and female within the church premises.

According to Emile (2007), the society in which we belong should be respected especially in the academic environment because we know what we are supposed to do. In line with Emile, Eze (2002) made the similar assertion when he said that the society is corrupt because we want it so. We can stop any bad habit in the society if we all want it. When Onoyima came to the Chaplaincy newly, people taught that he can not change the dressing code of the university environment in the church premises but today many have given him kudos for the good step taken.

Agha (2003) maintained that evils are gaining ground in the society because those who suppose to say it kept quiet and when such evil stays for a long time it becomes a norm. Perhaps we have to look at motives in the ordinary sense. If you were to meet the president for a dinner or if you were invited to Aso Villa, you would probably not show up in ripped/torn jeans, flip flops and a gap t-shirt. People will usually get dressed up for special occasions such as meeting special people, attending special events and some sort of ceremony, but won't dress up well when coming to worship God.

A curious mind according to Achunike (2000) would be wondering why it would be more important to dress up for any of the above reasons, but not to worship God who created all things. It boils down to respect, reverence and knowledge of "whose" presence you are in. If we find it important to follow a dress code for work, an interview or for a special date, then it would be appropriate to at least match that or dress respectfully. God far supersedes all those above situations combined. So the issue here would be respect for God when you uniquely gather together for corporate worship. We can as priests, religious or laity accommodate people to a certain point, after which we must, by the authority of God demand that they follow us, as we follow Christ. According to Omake (2002), those who refuse to abandon

their unbiblical and brutish ways of thinking and living, then it means that they are reprobates and ordained to damnation. There are many different ways in which we can sin or cause others to sin such as our words, actions, neglects and immorality; however, in this day and age the most frequent way we cause ourselves to sin is by our immorality of being immodestly dressed.

Reactions of the Catholic Church over the Dressing Code in St. Peter's Chaplaincy, U.N.N.

The chaplain of St. Peter Champlaincy Rev. Onoyima and his fellow priest are merciless enemy of feminine vanity. He never tolerated low-necked dresses, short and or tight fitting skirts, and forbade his spiritual children to wear any transparent clothes. When fashions became more and more immodest, he unrelentingly dismisses from his confessional, before they could step inside, all women he judged to be incorrectly dressed.

In the church the women who are not modestly dressed are refused to receiving Holy Communion. Ladies who wear show back or show chest or see my bra are also affected because they will not be allowed to enter into the church and if you snicked yourself inside and was seen by the church warders, you will be embarrassed. Many people have been embarrassed and the lessons learnt. Ele (2005) reacted profusely to this when he as a priest officiated in one of the services that we are by our dressing offending God claiming that we have come to worship God. It is good thing to note that our student and even the parents within the university environment have changed their code of dressing when going to worship and at the chaplaincy. Rev. Onoyima have in several occasion asked some bridal train in a wedding to leave the church premises for him because they chose to wear sleeveless, low v-necks with half the melon patch flying in the breeze. He used to get

disappointed and always order you out of God's house until you are able to dress properly. It is not only in the church service or wedding that women or ladies were embarrassed. They receive the same treatment even during the infant baptism. Some mothers on several occasions were asked to cover their opened chest or get their children out of the baptismal arena. He will ask the madams not to start teaching their children how to dress indecently.

According to Ele (2006), one would assume that at least our Catholic women and girls would have the good sense to always wear clothes that tend to conceal, rather than reveal or call attention to the body. A growing phenomenon in Nigerian Catholic Church is the disparity in decent dressing. It has been observed that while those in the rural areas embrace the moral dress code, same cannot be said of their urban counterparts. This moral dress code should be universal just as our church is universal or Catholic. There should be no excuse for moral dress codes being different just because of people living in different part of the country or different locations. According to Okwueze (2003), it is either that a person is dressed decently or he is not. True Roman Catholics should wear decent clothes that would show they are conscious of the fact that their bodies are "temple of the Holy Ghost". Several Popes are known to have spoken out with authority on the subject of modesty in dress. Onoyima (2010) lamented that

One cannot sufficiently deplore 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 for such apparel as for a grave fault against Christian modesty. Now it does not suffice to exhibit themselves on public

thoroughfares; they do not fear to cross the threshold of churches, to assist at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass, and even to bear the seducing food of shameful passions to the Holy Altar, where one receives the Heavenly Author of purity. (p. 18).

This shows the extent our Catholic Christians put themselves to the shameless dressing especially in this our contemporary society.

Also the need for us to promote standards of attire for Catholic women and girls was amplified by His Lordship Catholic Bishop of Nsukka in his preaching when he said:

A dress cannot be decent which is cut deeper than two fingers breath under the pit of the throat, which does not cover the arms at least to the elbows; and scarcely reaches a bit beyond the knees. Further more, dresses of transparent materials are improper (Okobo, 2010).

The church, like a vigilant mother, full of tender care for the holiness and eternal salvation of her children, has often been obliged to warn the faithful so that they might avoid the errors of fashion, and to take the measures necessary to ensure that they Holy place and sacred things should not be profaned by immodesty in dress.

Implication of Indecent Dressing on the Society

The feminine loss of the sense of modesty was indicated by Pope Pius XII who said: Now girls do not see anything wrong with following certain shameless styles (fashion) like so many sheep. O Christian mothers, if only

you knew the future distress, peril and ill-restrained shame that you prepare for your sons and daughters by imprudently accustoming them to live barely clothed, and permitting them to lose the sense of modesty, you would be ashamed of yourselves and of the harm done to the little ones entrusted to you by Heaven to be reared in a Christian dignity and culture. Man himself does not escape from the inclination of exhibiting his flesh. Some go in public stripped to the waist, or in very tight pants or in very scanty bathing suits. They thus commit offence against the virtue of modesty. They may also be an occasion of sin (in thought or desire) for our neighbour.

Our Lady said to Sister Lucy at Fatima: “There will be fashions which will greatly offend my Divine Son”. Today’s fashions prove our Lady’s words true for these fashions are occasions of sin, by reasons of sinful thoughts and desire which they provoke. Those who expose their nakedness to others never knew that they are the people to suffer it at last. For instance, girls who wear all sorts of dressing in the name of fashion are being mocked whenever they pass by. According to Onaiyekene (2004), those who corrupt others through their dressing will have double punishment here on earth and in heaven. Many things are going wrongly and according to Nnadi (2005),

The society itself has lost its values, people no longer pay attention to or reward good values. There is generally a non-challant attitude to decadence in the society. Hence decent dressing is not rewarded but indecent dressing is considered to be the norm. (p. 22).

Nudity is not the sign of a good Christian and mothers who are sexually very weak are advertised by that and they want men to chase and invite them. Such mothers can hardly correct their daughters if the daughters do not dress

modestly. Every dress is a language, speaks to some people and shows who the person is.

Conclusion

Modesty in dress and behaviour is an indispensable way of being a good Christian. Generally, clothes should hide the shape of the body rather than accentuate it. The importance of the role of Christian mothers according to Ebo (2006), in teaching their children, their daughters especially, and from the time that they are very little, a true sense of Christian modesty cannot be overemphasized. Men are lost through women and they are saved through women, a preacher said one day, by their vanity, they will make a man fall, by their modesty, they will save him. As long as modesty is not practiced, the society will not rise from its decadence. May devotion to the Holy Family helps us in our crusade for purity. Numerous complaints about distracting skimpy attire of some parishioners during mass have prompted the chaplain of St. Peter's Chaplaincy U.N.N. to issue a dress code. The guidelines are reminders to dress appropriately because other people are scandalized

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