

DECENCY and MODESTY

A PASTORAL LETTER OF

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST REVEREND
ALBERT G. MEYER, S.T.D., S.S.L.
ARCHBISHOP OF MILWAUKEE

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TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS, AND FAITHFUL LAITY OF THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE: GREETINGS AND BLESSING!

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

I. INTRODUCTION — SUBJECT MATTER OF THIS PASTORAL

1. In the discharge of his pastoral office, a Bishop frequently remembers the solemn words which he heard chanted in the rite of his consecration as a Bishop: "Let him not put light for darkness, nor darkness for light; let him not call evil good, nor good evil."

In the desire to fulfill the charge given to us as your pastor, whose duty it is to protect his flock against the enemy (cf. Jn. 10:11-13), and as an appointed watchman of God, who must speak out in clear and explicit warnings, lest the sins of those who err be charged to his account (cf. Ezech. 33:8-9), we have decided to address this letter to you, on the occasion of the annual convention of our Christian Mothers' Confraternity. In this letter, it is our thought to consider the general subject of Decency which has been a part of the special apostolate of this Confraternity. We wish to treat this subject only in several of the more obvious areas of everyday life, leaving to future pastoral letters the further development of other topics which come under the general subject matter.

a) *Statements of Our Holy Father*

2. We are impelled to do this as we recall some of the recent forceful statements of our Holy Father, the Chief Shepherd and Teacher of the Church, particularly a special letter which he com-

manded to be written on this subject through the Sacred Congregation of the Council, under date of August 15, 1954. In this letter, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation, writing in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, solemnly charged the Bishops of the world "by all means to consider the matter carefully, and to take under your care and promote with all your power everything which has to do with the protection of modesty and the furtherance of Christian morals."

This solemn charge was in keeping with the whole purpose of the Marian Year of 1954, which was intended "not only to serve to revive Catholic Faith and earnest devotion to the Mother of God in the souls of all, but also . . . that each one of us should according to his condition in life, avail of it for the acquisition of virtue. (For), the commemoration of the mystery of the Most Holy Virgin, conceived immaculate and immune from all stain of original sin, should, in the first place, urge us to that innocence and integrity of life which flees from and abhors even the slightest stain of sin" (*Fulgens Corona*, September 8, 1953).

In the course of that Marian Year of 1954, our Holy Father referred many times to this important crusade for the revival and flowering of Christian morals. Moreover, he did not confine his statements to general exhortations, but specifically pointed to practical areas of everyday life, where the application of Christian principles especially needs to be made.

Thus, for example, writing on January 1, 1954, in a letter to the Bishops of Italy, on the general subject of television, he called attention to the fact that this marvel of our modern day "is very intimately bound up with the education of youth and even the sanctity of the home." Without in any way minimizing the actual, or, even more so, the potential good of television, the Holy Father warns nevertheless that there is much that it is failing to do. He says, therefore, that "We cannot fail to proclaim to all who have any position of responsibility in television that their duties and responsibilities are most grave before God and society." There rests upon public authorities, the Holy Father continues, "the duty of taking every precaution that the air of purity and reserve which should pervade the home be in no way offended or disturbed."

In connection with television, he mentions that he has constantly in mind "the painful spectacle of the power for evil and moral ruin of cinema films." He is "horrified at the thought that the poisoned atmosphere of materialism, of frivolity, of hedonism, can by means of television be brought into the very sanctuary of the home." Television, he says, requires a greater vigilance for securing telecasts

unobjectionable from the moral point of view than is required for public entertainment, precisely because this modern invention "penetrates the sanctuary of the family." Here, in the bosom of the family, higher values are at stake "than the pretended rights of absolute freedom of art, or of having recourse to the pretext of freedom of information and of thought."

Agam, in a notable address to the Swiss National Catholic Convention (May 16, 1954), our Holy Father spoke of the great dangers of materialism. Among other things he said: "Material progress through research and the exploitation of natural forces continues its unceasing advance. The Church approves of this advance, even in regard to its principles. But, she adds an urgent warning concerning it: When material progress is not counterbalanced by powerful religious and moral forces, it risks becoming the cancer of human society."

The Marian Year, our Holy Father further stated in the same address, was intended to help strengthen our faith "as a dam against the rising tide of materialism." This materialism he defined as "the process of the secularization of all life." He stated that "it is spreading in the spiritual and religious domain. The idea of God, respect for and fear of God are more and more being banished from public life, from the family, and, almost inevitably, therefore, from the life of the individual as well. THE PROCESS IS ALREADY FAR ADVANCED."

Hence, there falls upon us the duty of confronting this evil "by our prayers, our love for Christ, our struggle against sin, and for purity of soul in every sense, by all those supreme values of the religious life and the things which are its fruit, and by our public enlistment in the cause of God, of Christ, and of His Church . . . In the fight against materialism the watchword must be, 'Let us return to the Christianity of early days.' This is especially applicable now. The Christians of those early times were confronted by a pagan and materialist culture, which reigned as mistress. They dared to attack it and, finally, to overcome it, thanks to their stubborn tenacity and by means of heavy sacrifices. IMITATE THEM!"

3. Most pertinent to our present letter is the point frequently made by our Holy Father that the spread of so much immorality is due not to the lack of regulations, but "to the lack of reaction or the weakness of reaction of good people, who have not known how to make timely denunciations of violations against the public laws of morality."

This lack of the proper kind of public reaction is referred to agam

in the letter of August 15, 1954, and applied specifically to the matter of dress: "All can easily see, the current mode of dress among women and especially among girls (during the summer months particularly) constitutes a serious offense against decency." Because he is convinced of the intimate relationship between the decent and the modest, and between the modest and the chaste, the Holy Father exhorts: "Therefore, it is altogether imperative to admonish and exhort, in whatever way seems most apt, people of all stations, but particularly youth, to avoid the dangers of this kind of vice, which is so directly opposed and potentially so hazardous to Christian and civic virtue."

Hence, the letter continues: "It is the earnest desire of the August Pontiff that this cause be taken up enthusiastically. He desires that bishops in particular leave no stone unturned which can help remedy the situation; and that with their counsel and leadership the rest of the clergy work prudently, assiduously, and earnestly within their own jurisdiction, toward the happy attainment of this goal."

Further, "he wishes fathers and mothers of families to remove their children from these dangers, first by their own example, and then also by timely admonitions which come from a stern firmness of spirit as befits Christians; and that they never be satisfied until they see the faces of their children shine with the splendor of modesty."

As may be seen, the language of this letter constitutes a real challenge. It is directed to us in the form of an "imperative," to "people of all stations," to the Bishops and Clergy, to fathers and mothers of families. It is a cause to be taken up "enthusiastically," in which "we leave no stone unturned which can help to remedy the situation."

b) Our Own Former Statements

4. In keeping, therefore, with this and other repeated exhortations of our Holy Father, we have wished in various ways to fulfill our duty, and to bring this subject to your attention, either directly or indirectly.

Thus, for example, toward the beginning of the Marian Year, we addressed a pastoral letter under date of February 5, 1954, on the general subject of modesty. At that time we wished particularly to give encouragement to the program of the Legion of Decency, and to the work which the various organizations of our Archdiocese were doing to promote the ideals of Christian modesty in the movies, in

literature, and in dress. Also, we called especially upon our fathers and mothers to defend the castles of their homes against the inroads of pagan standards of morality.

Annually, we have exhorted you to take the pledge of the Legion of Decency, in the full realization of the meaning of this pledge. We have tried to make it clear that decency involves more than motion pictures; that it extends to the whole realm of living. We have stressed the truth that decency in a special way is involved with public morality, and with the creation of strong public opinion in favor of the moral order. Hence, we have insisted that the Pledge of the Legion of Decency is a call to crusade for decency in all walks of life, not merely in the field of motion pictures, but also in all related fields of public communications and public living. There is need today, we stressed, to apply the spirit of the Pledge to the matter of dress, of reading material, of radio and television, and of company-keeping.

To further implement these exhortations concerning the true meaning of the Pledge, we have organized a special Archdiocesan Legion of Decency, which is intended to exert its influence and extend its help through other existing organizations of our men and women. Thus we have endeavored to give more practical direction and efficacy to the general crusade for decency.

Again, a few months ago, we addressed a pastoral letter to you on the subject of the Catholic Family, in which we appealed, through the Holy Name Society, and especially to fathers of families, to lead the way within the bosom of their own families for this much needed crusade on behalf of decency. We begged you to make the home a true sanctuary, so that those who live in it "will be guided by the spirit of reverence, in the decorations which hang on the walls, in the dress which is worn, in the magazines and papers which are read, in the words which are spoken, in the company which is kept, and in the manner itself of company-keeping."

In our Lenten Pastoral of this year, we spoke at length upon the dignity which is conferred upon us by our Baptism, and we appealed to you to remember this dignity as Baptized Children of God: "Parents and educators," we stated, "are urged to develop in children a profound sense of their dignity as children of God, and to teach them to recognize this dignity in others. Thus our children will develop that sense of personal conscience and individual responsibility which is the fundamental solution to the problem of juvenile delinquency."

5. Because this subject is from many different viewpoints so con-

tinuously urgent, we have wished to seize the occasion of this annual meeting of the Archdiocesan Confraternity of Christian Mothers to speak to you, and especially to the mothers of our families, about it. This meeting is being held close to the Sunday which our nation has set aside to honor our human mothers. In the words of a former president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, "the mother is the one supreme asset of national life, she is more important by far than the successful statesman or businessman or artist or scientist. In other words, we cannot as a nation get along at all if we haven't the right kind of home life. Such a life is not only the supreme duty; but also the supreme reward of duty."

More significant even than these considerations for us is the fact that this meeting is held in the month of May dedicated to our Blessed Mother. As Catholics we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, Who willed to receive His own true membership in the human family through Mary, and Who also willed to confide to her maternal protection the whole human race in the person of John, when He said: "Behold thy mother." We turn, therefore, to Mary in our modern days of crisis and peril, and call upon her to save us from ourselves. We ask her to bless us in our efforts to contribute toward the solution of the moral crisis as it affects our own individual lives, and those of our family and our community.

II. THE PROBLEM

6. One phase of this problem in the moral crisis was described in the letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Council of August 15, 1954, and referred to above in our letter. "Everyone knows," this letter states, "that during the summer months particularly, things are seen here and there which are certain to prove offensive to anyone who has retained some respect and regard for Christian virtue and human modesty. On the beaches, in summer resorts, almost everywhere, on the streets of cities and towns, in private and public places, and, indeed, often even in buildings dedicated to God, an unworthy and indecent mode of dress has prevailed. . . . Add to this fact that newspapers, magazines and every kind of publication blatantly publicize all the evil happenings in public and private life. Motion pictures, also well attended as they are, present their attractions in such glowing light that not only weak and unwary youth but even the adult is swayed by their evil allurements."

7. This problem is referred to from another viewpoint in the annual statement of the American Bishops of 1953, on the general subject of the Dignity of Man, in the following words: "Heedless that his nature has God for its origin and destiny, and reason and revelation for its divinely commissioned guide, man will do what no other creature can — he will deny his true nature and will destroy all that is good within himself. Such a process of degradation is viciously at work in our own country, where the deification of the flesh continues to enlist new devotees. Through its liturgy of advertisement, entertainment and literature, this cult bids fair to corrode our national sense of decency. . . . The Catholic Church has never failed to accord the human body an immense measure of honor. She affirms that it was originally created by God; in one instance actually assumed by Him; in every instance meant to be on earth His special temple, and destined eventually to rejoin the soul in His Beatific Presence. Whatever is uncompromising in her teaching about the body stems from her realism on two points: The body, though good, is not the highest good; and the undisciplined body is notoriously bad."

a) Concern for the Problem

8. This is a problem, then, which concerns the individual, the family, and society at large. Chastity, and the means of preserving it, have a tremendously important bearing on the family, on the eternal and temporal happiness of every individual, and indeed on the welfare of society at large.

History is replete with the story of nations that once were great and that collapsed because the morals of the race ceased to control the lives of the people. The poet of ancient pagan Rome wrote: "Vice necessarily follows upon public nudity," while its great orator, Cicero, lamented the decadence of civic virtue precisely because "we see too often those who are stripped of shame and who are past all hope of reformation."

9. We do not mean to imply that others, outside the Church, are not also concerned about chastity, as well as the defensive virtues of decency and modesty. They are, even though their concern may not stem from the same motivation which impels us. A government report has this to state: "Pornography is big business. The extent to which the profit motive has brushed aside all generally accepted standards of decency and good taste and substituted inferior moral

standards, has become not only a national disgrace but a menace to our civic welfare as well."

This report stems from the criterion of decency and good taste, and is based on sound interest and responsibility for the good name of our nation and the civic welfare of our people. As Christians and Catholics, however, we must proceed from a higher standard, and a more powerful motive. We proceed from the recognition of sin as a violation of the law of God, and we are motivated by the eternal salvation of souls; it is the welfare of souls, whom we wish to save from hell, that is at stake.

There is indeed much discussion of the topic of chastity in our secular magazines, but generally only to the extent that the spectacularly tragic forms of unchastity are highlighted, while little or no interest is shown in the virtue itself. The attitude of the world seems to be that if only we could do away with such things as juvenile delinquency in its external forms, unmarried motherhood, venereal disease, ugly degeneracy and rape, there would be no problem of unchastity left at all. As a matter of fact, many in the world have adopted and promote certain forms of unchastity, such as contraception and multiple successive marriages, not to mention the crime of abortion, without recognizing the inevitable connection between these things and the breakdown of chastity all along the line. In some of the very magazines and newspapers that carry articles deploring sex delinquency, there will often be found inflammatory incentives to lust in the form of seminude and suggestive pictures, or advertisements for the movies, or cartoons with suggestive dialogues, or even news stories with suggestive overtones. Even, at times, feature stories, highlighted by perfectly proper pictures, will suggest, with amusing (to them) toleration or approval for public consumption, the bawdy attitude of the peek show or the burlesque performance—something which no self-respecting newspaper or magazine would have dared to do in former years when a less secularistic way of life prevailed. Such papers lead their readers to the doorstep of impurity and unchastity through these stories, pictures, cartoons, and advertisements, and then bewail the fact that so many of them step across the threshold.

10. Others show their concern for and recognition of the problem by advocating an indiscriminate dissemination of knowledge, in the thought that knowledge alone will solve the problem. Surely, it is most important that our growing youth be properly instructed. All solid moral guidance is based upon adequate instruction. This is basic for the practice of the faith in general, and specifically for

the practice of the virtues under consideration in this letter.

Nevertheless, we wish to seize this opportunity of calling attention to a fatal trend of our times which takes prerogatives that belong essentially to the family out of the home, and invests them in the State or an agency of the State. Here we would like to remind our people of the statement of the American Bishops in their pastoral letter of 1950: "We protest in strongest possible terms against the introduction of sex instruction into the schools. To be of benefit such instruction must be far broader than the imparting of information, and must be given individually. Sex is more than a biological function. It is bound up with the sacredness and uniqueness of human personality. It can be fully and properly appreciated only within a religious and moral context. If treated otherwise, the child will see it apart from the controlling purpose of his life, which is the service to God."

This statement is not to be construed to mean that educators have no function whatsoever along these lines. Carrying through with the basic concept of the school as an extension of the home, we do recognize also in this field a place for the educator to assist the parent. But the obligation rests primarily with the parent; and education in these matters must always be within the religious and moral context which the home should give to it. That the Church is not opposed to the proper kind of instruction in these matters should be clear from this one quotation from our Holy Father: "Modesty will suggest and provide suitable words for parents and educators by which the youthful conscience will be formed in matters of chastity. 'Wherefore,' we said in a recent address, 'this modesty is not to be so understood as to be equivalent to a perpetual silence on this subject, nor as allowing no place for sober and cautious discussion about these matters in imparting moral instruction.' In modern times, however, there are some teachers and educators who too frequently think it their duty to initiate innocent boys and girls into the secrets of human generation in such a way as to offend their sense of shame. But in this matter a just temperance and moderation must be used, as Christian modesty demands" (Encyclical on Holy Virginity, March 25, 1954).

b) Challenge and Opportunity for Our People

11. In confronting the problem, in the dimensions outlined in our present letter, we do so primarily for the guidance of our own

people, through an appeal particularly to our Christian Mothers. We are realistic enough to recognize that the simple writing of a letter of this kind is not going to change over those whose view of life sharply disagrees with our own. We think, however, that it is important to point out the truth that our society has become secularistic and materialistic to a degree that many of us have failed to recognize. In the words of Pope Pius XII, quoted above, "the process is already far advanced."

Therefore, we address this letter primarily to our own people. We Catholics constitute a minority group in the general society in which we live and move. This fact places before us both a challenge and an opportunity. In many ways, it is not unlike the situation which faced the early Christians.

The challenge may be expressed in these words of our Holy Father: "The civilization of the Western people cannot sink into a materialism which, at least implicitly, finds its ideal in the enjoyment of the comforts of life. On the contrary, it must dedicate itself to liberating those spiritual values which are so bitterly opposed in many modern institutions" (September 18, 1955).

This challenge must be met by a willingness on our part to be different. We cannot compromise our traditional Catholic moral and cultural values, but rather we must bring these values to bear on public and private life, and must defend them as modern witnesses (martyrs) to Christ. Again, to quote our Holy Father: "If it is more than evident that evil tendencies and the forces of degradation and destruction are unceasingly attacking the hearts of individuals and the collective conscience of nations, is it not necessary to work at all levels of the social structure — the family, places of employment and amusement, political and cultural organizations — to eliminate demoralizing factors and all that keeps egoism alive and encourages a spirit of pleasure or power? Certainly, men are not lacking who are eager to meet the demands of their consciences" (*ibid.*).

Hence we are pleased to encourage our Christian Mothers to recall here the challenging statement found in the resolutions drawn up by the National Council of Catholic Women at the close of their 1952 convention:

"Offenses against decency are not only the cause of personal offense to women but give them serious concern for the welfare of their loved ones and their fellowmen. Not overlooking the praiseworthy exceptions, for which we are profoundly grateful, we are confronted on all sides, in newspapers, magazines, in every type of advertising

media and displays, in all fields of entertainment, including radio and television, in beauty contests, and elsewhere, with constant affronts to public decency and good taste.

"This can only result, and has already resulted, in the lowering of ideals of modesty and decorum, assaults on purity and chastity, the degradation of womanhood, evil consequences for the sanctity of married life, stimulation of unworthy thoughts and desires, morbid emphasis on sex, with consequent corrupting influences on youth — and especially on the youth in the Armed Forces — an increase of sex crimes among adolescents, whose moral stamina has been undermined by constant pictorial assaults, scandal to the people of other countries, who obtain an entirely false impression of the American way of life, and the exploitation by communists of such pictures in their propaganda against the United States.

"As individuals and organizations of Catholic women, we here express our determination to put a stop to the irresponsible or deliberately-evil flood that has had these alarming consequences. We are happy to acknowledge not only the concern of Catholics, but also of other men and women in private and in public life who have the discernment to see the extremely serious harm that is the result.

"We pledge full support of corrective action programs that are suggested by the National Council, and assume individual responsibility for doing everything possible to restore decent standards where they have become debased.

"Producers, publishers and distributors have a real and definite obligation to the nation that has made possible the opportunities that are theirs. If they make financial advantage their main end, they are unworthy of this great nation. If they cannot see higher considerations in these critical times, then at least they should open their eyes to what is at stake: Life in the fulness of moral integrity and responsible freedom, or slavery under a despotic state which forces all men and all media to serve its ends."

12. We appeal, then, to our people to be, both through word and through example, a leaven in the modern world. It is up to us to prove ourselves useful for the spiritual and moral progress of the environment in which we live. In the specific matter under consideration in this pastoral letter, this challenge and this opportunity will prompt us to proclaim in every possible way the truth of the Christian virtue of purity and chastity, and the beauty of the Christian virtue of modesty and decency. "Thus may we hope to see emerging more clearly the true countenance of man, master

not only of things but above all of himself and aware of his transcendent destiny, individual and social, as well as his responsibilities as a creature made in God's image" (Pius XII, September 18, 1955). Thus may we show to all the world our complete acceptance of the teaching of St. Paul, that "the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor. 6:13).

III. THE VIRTUE OF CHASTITY

13. We cannot, Dearly Beloved, write intelligently about the virtue of modesty, unless we emphasize first of all in strong and clear terms the universal importance of chastity. For, modesty, by its very definition, is looked upon as the shield and safeguard of chastity. The breakdown in modesty is due fundamentally to a disregard of the virtue of chastity as a necessary virtue for all, in all the circumstances of life.

The only right approach, therefore, to modesty is through a reaffirmation and a re-emphasizing of the universal importance of chastity, not merely for the sake of preventing sex crimes and tragedies, but for the eternal and temporal happiness of every immortal soul.

Hence, we would like to explain briefly three incontrovertible teachings of our holy Faith, which impose a corresponding threefold obligation upon us.

a) Teaching of Our Faith

14. The first teaching of our Faith is that the law of chastity is imposed on every human being. It binds him in public and in private, in marriage and outside of marriage, in youth and in old age. It is one of the serious laws that God has made, which means that it is one on which the salvation of our soul depends.

It is quite obvious that this law of chastity forbids the evil deed and the evil word. St. Paul says: "Do you not know that neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor sodomites will possess the kingdom of God?" (1 Cor. 6:9-10.) And again: "But immorality and every uncleanness, let it not even be named among you" (Eph. 5:3).

However, it is most important to remember that the same law of chastity equally forbids the unchaste thought and the unchaste desire. The words of Christ in this regard are crystal clear: "I say to you that anyone who even looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:28).

Unchastity, therefore, in thought and desire, as well as in word and in deed, is a serious violation of God's law, and a transgression of the right order of nature, established by God Himself. Unchastity is seriously wrong precisely and primarily because it transgresses the law of God. The evil effects of unchastity, remote or proximate, private or public, spectacular or ordinary, merely confirm that it is a serious violation of God's law. Whether these evil effects follow or not, the important point is that unchastity is a serious violation of God's law.

Moreover, the external act, which seems to be the sole concern of the world, when it is concerned at all, is merely the fruit of the internal thought and desire. It is this internal thought and desire which is the source of the external act: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, immoralities, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt. 15:19).

15. The second teaching of our Faith which we ask you to recall here is the doctrine of original sin. Every human being, except the Immaculate Mother of God, has through original sin inherited a tainted nature, which manifests itself more intensively perhaps in inclinations to unchastity than in any other way. The resulting battle with concupiscence is not limited to a given age or state of life; it must be waged by all and at all times.

It is fashionable to deny original sin. But to the Catholic, the doctrine of original sin is fundamental for the true understanding of the whole economy of grace and salvation. The denial of original sin ultimately leads to a denial of Christ and the purpose of His Incarnation and Redemption. The denial of original sin leads to a completely false appraisal of the meaning of life. Such a tragic denial, for example, underlies much of the theory of some progressive educators. And such a tragic denial is implicit in much of the ostrichlike approach to the very real connection between modesty and chastity, between unchaste thoughts and unchaste deeds, between the unchaste picture or book or dress or film and these unchaste thoughts, desires, and deeds.

It is the teaching of our Faith that through original sin man's nature has been wounded, although not totally corrupted. The wound in our nature is universally experienced through the struggle which

we have to control our imagination and our passions. Imagination by itself, we know, is simply a picture-making power. It certainly is of real use to the intellect of man, but because of original sin it plays a part in the mind's affairs totally out of proportion to its merits, and has passed far beyond the condition of a useful servant. Hence, to feed the imagination with all sorts of pictures which serve to excite the passions in man's bodily nature is obviously against God's plans and God's will. Such pictures tend to make the passions rebel against the control of the intellect and will, and to draw the will itself away from conformity to God's will. That is sin. Original sin and its consequences in our fallen nature impose upon us the obligation of keeping the imagination in proper subordination to the intellect and the will.

16. The third teaching of our holy Faith is that this weakness of human nature, which is the result of original sin, can be met only by following the natural counsels of prudence and right reason, and by using the plentiful means of supernatural graces that have been provided for us by our Divine Savior. The world uses neither.

Prudence tells us that we must reasonably avoid whatever tends to make the imagination rebellious to the intellect and will, and to draw both of these away from God. Prudence is a dictate of the natural law. Prudence sees the intimate and necessary connection between the thought and the deed, between the sensory impression of the imagination and the thought and desire. The prudence, therefore, which sees that the virtue of chastity is a desirable and necessary good, also sees that certain things must be avoided to assist the will in the pursuit of that good. The world does not use prudence in the matter of chastity, because, instead of avoiding, it provides a constant flow of incentives to lust, completely heedless of the intimate and necessary connection between modesty and chastity, and indeed often denying the sin of unchastity itself.

Emphasizing the dictates of prudence, Christ requires that we also have recourse to both natural and supernatural means. How forceful are those warning words: "If thy hand or thy foot is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off and cast it from thee! It is better for thee to enter life maimed or lame, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if thy eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee! It is better to enter into life with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into the hell of fire" (Mt. 18:8-9).

The world does not heed this admonition of Christ because it denies the reality of the sin of scandal, and because it ignores or

despises the supernatural means for preserving chastity, and the helps which come through the sacraments and prayer.

b) Our Obligations

17. These three incontrovertible facts of our holy Faith point to a threefold obligation on our part. First, to love chastity for itself, as binding on all of us in all the public and private relationships of our lives, as necessary for the salvation of our immortal souls. Second, to use prudence and common sense to protect it. Third, to use the supernatural means of prayer and the sacraments to preserve chastity.

Listen to these words of our Holy Father in this regard: "It is abundantly clear that with this warning [quoted above from Mt. 18:8-9], our Divine Savior demands of us above all that we never consent to any sin, even internally, and that we steadfastly remove far from us anything that can even slightly tarnish the beautiful virtue of purity. *In this matter no diligence, no severity can be considered exaggerated.* . . . Flight and alert vigilance, by which we carefully avoid the occasions of sin, have always been considered by holy men and women as the most effective method of combat in this matter. Today, however, it does not seem that everybody holds the same opinion. . . . Moreover, to preserve chastity unstained, neither vigilance nor modesty suffice. Those helps must also be used which entirely surpass the powers of nature, namely prayer to God, the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, a fervent devotion to the most Holy Mother of God" (Encyclical Letter on Sacred Virginity, March 25, 1954).

IV. THE VIRTUE OF MODESTY

18. This brings us to a consideration of the virtue of modesty in the general scheme of virtues, and more especially as it relates to the virtue of chastity.

The virtue of modesty, in general, may be described as that virtue which prompts us to be decorous, proper, and reserved, in the way we dress, stand, walk, sit—in general in the way we behave exteriorly. This virtue of modesty bears a relation to other virtues besides that of chastity, especially to the virtue of humility. In a special manner, however, the virtue of modesty is particularly

regarded as the guardian of chastity in thought, word, and action.

St. Thomas says that it is the virtue by which we rightly regulate our conduct in respect to those things that can lead to impure thoughts, desires, and actions, in ourselves and in others. He says that, while chastity deals with the regulation of difficult things, powerful passions and strong desires for pleasure, modesty deals with the regulation of easy things, the remote and proximate occasions and conditions that lead to unholy desires. Thus we see that modesty is a virtue allied to the virtue of temperance, or the general habit of self-restraint.

It is this virtue of modesty, in its relation to chastity, which prompted the Holy Father to address himself to the Bishops of the world, through the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and to remind them that "it is altogether imperative to admonish and exhort, in whatever ways seem most apt, people of all stations, but particularly youth, to avoid the dangers of this kind of vice which is so directly opposed and potentially so hazardous to Christian and civic virtue. 'How beautiful then is modesty and what a gem among virtues it is!' Therefore, let it not be offended or violated by the easy allurements and attractions of vices which arise from that manner of dressing and from other actions what we have mentioned above and which decent people can but lament." Again, in his encyclical letter on Holy Virginity, our Holy Father writes about modesty: "Educators of the young would render a more valuable and useful service, if they would inculcate in youthful minds the precepts of Christian modesty, which is so important for the preservation of perfect chastity, and which is truly called the prudence of chastity. For, modesty foresees threatening danger, forbids us to expose ourselves to risks, demands the avoidance of those occasions which the imprudent do not shun. It does not like impure or loose talk, it shrinks from the slightest immodesty, it carefully avoids suspect familiarity with persons of the other sex. . . . He who possesses the treasure of Christian modesty abominates every sin of impurity and instantly flees whenever he is tempted by its seductions."

Now, there are three areas of human life in which modesty particularly must exercise its influence on those who would be chaste and to help others preserve this virtue: in dress, in deportment, in the printed and pictured word. We would like to discuss these three points with you.

V. MODESTY AND CLOTHES

19. The first of these areas is in regard to dress and clothing. It is this matter which was specifically treated in the letter of our Holy Father referred to immediately above. It is not our purpose in this letter to give you an essay on clothing. Clothing unquestionably serves other purposes besides modesty, especially protection and adornment: "Clothing in addition to its obvious utilitarian aspect, has a truly esthetic character, visibly and in a permanent way expressing the position of a person" (Pius XII, Address to Tailors, September 10, 1954).

Nevertheless, our Holy Father deplors "the materialistic spirit that inspires so great a part of today's civilization, which has not spared the field of fashion. . . . Instead of ennobling the human person, clothing sometimes tends to degrade and debase it" (*ibid.*).

Indeed, the Pope does not hesitate to write through the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council: "Yet as all can easily see, the current mode of dress among women and especially among girls constitutes a serious offense against decency, and 'decency is the companion of modesty, in whose company chastity herself is safer.' Feminine adornment, if it can be called adornment, feminine clothing, if that can be called clothing which contains nothing to protect either the body or modesty, are at times of such a nature that seem to serve lewdness rather than modesty."

a) Two Principles

20. With regard to clothing, modesty requires especially two things: first, care that one does not make chastity difficult for oneself, or for others, by one's own mode of dress; and, second, a prudent but firm and courageous resistance to the styles and customs, no matter how popular or widespread, or adopted by others, which are a danger to chastity.

In setting down these two general principles, there is no thought on our part to attempt to define details. In general, that form of dress may be said to be immodest which serves to arouse the lust of men, or which serves as a scandal, that is, a stumbling block, to the practice of virtue. With an honest respect for the innate sense of shame with which every human being is endowed, and with

ordinary knowledge of human nature tainted by the effects of original sin, one can with fair accuracy determine what is modest and what is immodest in given circumstances. Unquestionably, custom does help to establish some norms which can be safely followed up to a certain point.

It is here especially that our young people need to be guided by their elders, especially their mothers, and the mothers themselves need to remember that custom and style and fashion do not justify everything. Listen to these pointed words of the Holy Father: "How many young girls there are who do not see any wrongdoing in following certain shameless styles like so many sheep. They certainly would blush if they could guess the impression they make and the feelings they evoke in those who see them" (July 17, 1954, Discourse to Children of Mary).

Here, then, is also a call to parents to lead the way in encouraging their growing children not to make any compromise with immodest beach and summer wear, no matter how many thousands make use of such; with immodest evening gowns, though such may be seen in the most fashionable social gatherings; with immodest styles of dress that have been a feature of so much of the television entertainment almost from the beginning; with picture magazines that exploit nudity and suggestiveness in every issue; with dangerous associations, readings, shows.

As our Holy Father exclaimed in the same context of the discourse quoted above: "*How lax have consciences become, how pagan morals!*"

21. We wish to repeat again: there is no thought on our part to attempt to define details. But we do hold that there are standards of modesty which are also objective, simply because of the fact of original sin. The very fact of the freer relationships which are tolerated in our environments, far from excusing submission to the pagan styles of the day, merely emphasizes the greater obligation that Christians and Catholics have to resist these pagan and materialistic trends. It simply is not true to human nature, tainted by original sin, to say as some do: "that one can become used to anything in matters of dress"; or, to say, "to the pure all things are pure."

Remember that our Lord condemned not only the act of adultery, but everything that leads to it. It is a fact of human nature that undue exposure and emphasis act as stimuli to evil thoughts and desires. The cult of nudism is promoted today in varying degrees. It is to be found not merely in the extreme form of those few who defend the belief that both sexes should live together in the state

of complete nudity. Such an aberration is indeed an ominous sign of corruption of our public morals and manners. More significant, possibly is the constant partial exposure, and emphasis on such exposure, promoted and tolerated by dress, by picture, by the printed story, and the leering cartoon. Nourished by the sights of such exposure, the passions of fallen man constantly grow stronger. This is the teaching of all experience. Though it may be true, in some instances, that external sins do not follow as readily as formerly because of the familiarity of the sight, still it cannot be denied that evil desires are fostered and even solicited by such exposure, or such emphasis in picture and print, which evil desires easily lead to external deeds of impurity. Again, we must emphasize in the strongest possible language that it is Catholic teaching, based on the most clear words of Christ Himself, that impure thoughts and desires freely indulged are serious sins. To invite such impure thoughts and desires through dress, action, or the printed and pictured story cannot help but participate of the grave sin of scandal and co-operation.

Hence, the grave sinfulness of certain features of beauty contests, particularly those which emphasize the undue exposure of the body, as the great majority of these contests do. It is encouraging to note that such emphasis is condemned in these words of a prominent columnist: "This new and current obsession with a girl's measurements, put into a news story, seems to me to be vulgar, even degenerate and a mark of a decaying civilization" (George Sokolsky, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 14, 1956). For the Catholic, we add the most important consideration: it is not only vulgar, or degenerate, it is sinful.

In this connection, it seems possible to apply a principle which our Holy Father stated about books: "You should be persuaded that there are bad books — books which are bad for everyone, like those poisons against which no one can claim immunity." Thus, also, it seems to us we can say: there are certain modes of dress in vogue today, notably in summer time, or in beauty contests, or other similar exhibitions, which are a source of temptation to every normal person, who is a child of Adam, and against which no one can claim immunity.

b) Higher Christian Standards

22. Here, we would like to go a step further, and also assert that there are standards of modesty in dress, which are rooted in our

traditional Christian cultural values, centering in the Blessed Mother of God. These are standards which view the whole problem not merely from the standpoint of what is actually sinful or leading to sin, but from the positive standpoint of what is truly helpful in assisting fallen man to observe the difficult virtue.

Hence, as Catholics, we have a tradition to preserve which looks at the whole problem from the higher vantage point of virtue. On the basis of this consideration, we appeal to our Catholic people to maintain a firm and courageous resistance to pagan standards of naturalism in this matter. This does not mean a one-sided or wrong emphasis on a problem which admittedly extends to areas of greater significance than dress. Neither does it mean that we Catholics must retire from the world, or adopt a purely negative attitude of condemnation.

Our Holy Father met the difficulty head-on when he spoke to a group of master tailors. He pointed out to them the truth of history and of human nature that "it is altogether normal for man to try to enrich through the exterior brilliance of his clothes the extraordinary occurrences of life, and through them to show his feelings of joy, pride, or even grief." Nevertheless, he insisted that we must "instead of following the materialistic current which is leading so many people astray today, deliberately put ourselves at the service of spiritual ends."

Here, then, we have a program which is positive, and which best defines the traditional ideals of the virtue of Christian modesty with regard to clothes. Those clothes are truly modest in the Christian tradition which serve spiritual ends. Clothing should have the purpose and effect of "elevating and ennobling the human person." Speaking again to the tailors and to all those who participate in this kind of work, the Pope exhorted them: "As the maternal hands of the Blessed Virgin busied themselves to make Christ's clothes, so it is God Whom you continue to clothe in the men of today."

c) *Organized Efforts*

23. It is our wish, therefore, through this letter to give encouragement to the efforts which various organizations, both here and elsewhere, are making to promote these traditional ideals of Christian modesty in the matter of dress. We do not believe that these organizations are creating oversensitiveness and confused consciences with regard to chastity, nor are they overemphasizing one aspect of

virtue at the expense of others. We recognize that their zeal may at times lead them to some undue excess in the promotion of their cause, and we caution against such excess, urging them to be guided by the norms set forth in statements of the Holy Father and of their Bishops.

We wish, nevertheless, to give every encouragement to such organized efforts, because it is only through such united efforts that most individuals can achieve the moral courage not to succumb to the tyranny of custom. Listen to these clear words of Pope Pius XII on this point: "In your association, you will find not only light but strength. . . . You must give yourselves wholeheartedly and conquer human respect. A group of girls who have reflected and prayed together will fearlessly accept a clear-cut attitude which one girl by herself would hardly dare to adopt." Such united effort is necessary, the Holy Father further stated, because "you live in a world which is constantly forgetful of God and the supernatural, where the only interest of the crowd seems to be the satisfaction of temporal needs, well-being, pleasure, vanity" (July 17, 1954).

Therefore, we do not look upon such organizations as pressure groups to impose upon others a moral code which these others do not wish to accept. We look upon them as associations of our own, who are determined through united action to be willing courageously to set an example in defense of traditional standards — who are willing to be different, as the early Christians were different when they challenged the moral standards of the pagan world of Greece and Rome; who are unwilling to sit idly by while the evil spirit of immodesty goes about brazenly seeking whom he may devour. We look upon them as particularly needed forms of Catholic Action, to exemplify to the world the teaching of St. Paul: "Do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a great price. Glorify God and bear him in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

24. In this wise, we will carry out the injunction of our Holy Father "not to leave a stone unturned which can help remedy the situation." "Let those," he continues, "who serve in the ranks of Catholic Action take up the promotion of this wholesome enterprise as a principal duty. First, let them take care that everyone with whom they come into contact, whether close associates or not, can see in their manner of dress and action the shining beauty of Christian morals. Let their innocence of soul shine forth from their eyes. Let their words and deeds savor of virtue. For only then can

they easily move others by their persuasion and counsel to decent and proper dressing and a good life" (August 15, 1954).

In seconding these words of the Holy Father, we earnestly remind parents of young and growing children that boys and girls must be taught as tiny tots to love modesty and must be corrected for immodesty. Even though they are too young to sin, they can and ought to be impressed with the beauty of modesty. Training in modesty is pre-eminently the function of the home, to be begun from earliest childhood.

d) Sacred Places and Functions

25. In this matter of dress, we would like finally to call your attention to the even higher standards of modesty required by the added consideration of the respect due to sacred places and sacred occasions. Our Holy Father mentions that "indeed, often even in buildings dedicated to God, an unworthy and indecent mode of dress has prevailed."

In this letter, we do not propose to lay down precise regulations, which it would be our right to do where matters regulating the House of God and Liturgical functions are concerned. In general, we are confident that our good people are fully conscious of these higher standards befitting the House of God. We appeal to them, therefore, to observe carefully that sense of propriety which is in keeping with the inspired words: "Holiness befits your house, O Lord, for length of days" (Ps. 92:5).

26. Nevertheless, we feel constrained to call special attention to the decorum required in the House of God on the occasion of weddings, and we call upon our pastors to be insistent on preserving that decorum. Our attention has been called from time to time to the fact that some bridal parties come to the Church attired in gowns which perhaps do not even satisfy the requirements of modesty, much less that decorum which befits a sacred place, and a sacred occasion such as the holy Sacrament of Matrimony. We cannot but deplore such a lack of the reverence due to the Church of God, and we wish to insist in earnest language that the dress of the bridal party be in all ways befitting the sacred place and the sacred occasion.

In this connection we may also mention other solemn occasions such as First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Generally, there is no difficulty on the former occasion, since traditional standards

of dress are being maintained. Occasionally, however, it is a source of great embarrassment to notice how an innocent child has been allowed to present herself for confirmation in a style of dress not befitting the sacred occasion.

These same general principles are easily applied to less formal occasions, and to the simple attendance at Church services. From time to time, we receive letters from people asking us whether we cannot do something to impress people with the importance of observing a special etiquette in this matter. We can only put it up to the people themselves, reminding them that there is a decorum befitting the Church of God, which is entirely compatible with simple and even poor clothes, and with the ordinary requirements of ease and comfort, even though the Church may not be air-conditioned.

VI. MODESTY AND BEHAVIOR

27. The second general area in which modesty particularly must exercise its influence on those who would be chaste and help others to preserve chastity is in regard to behavior with others.

a) Good Manners

28. Modesty is something more than good manners, but it is important first of all to stress the usefulness and necessity of good manners and the rules of politeness. These can and should serve as the natural basis for modesty of behavior. Good manners and the rules of politeness are fundamentally natural virtues. They are a partial recognition of our social obligations in our dealings with our fellow men, and also an exemplification of the golden rule. To tolerate or to neglect the correction of bad manners and impoliteness, particularly among the young, is to invite a disregard also of virtuous habits. For, grace builds upon nature, and presupposes nature. Good manners, and the rules of politeness, are intimately related to the Christian virtues of obedience, modesty, and charity, which ennoble and elevate the natural, and, where necessary, also correct it. Hence, good manners, important as they are, are in themselves not enough. In fact, when not elevated and directed by Christian virtue, good manners can merely serve as the cloak for hiding evil intentions.

b) Occasions of Sin

29. It is an old saying that people do not plunge into impurity without first having cast modesty aside. Now modesty of behavior with others is intimately bound up with the question of the occasions of sin. Our catechism teaches us that we are seriously bound to avoid what is called the near or proximate occasion of sin, unless there is a proportionately serious reason for exposing ourselves to such an occasion. When such a serious reason does exist, we are nevertheless bound to use all the natural and supernatural means needed to help us not to fall into sin. The near or proximate occasions of sin are, in general, all persons, places, or things that may easily lead us into sin. Hence, an occasion of sin is called near or proximate when the person, place, or thing constitutes either in general a great danger of sin, or is such for some particular person because of his individual disposition. Such a near or proximate occasion of sin may be a free one, that is, one freely chosen by us without there being any necessity; or, it may be a necessary one, because of certain grave reasons, i.e., when it is physically or morally impossible to avoid it without danger to life, health, or reputation. Experience teaches us that there are various intermediary stages between the near and the remote occasions of sin. The greater the danger of sinning, the more serious must be the reasons to justify one in not avoiding the occasion of sin.

Whoever does not want to avoid a near or proximate free occasion of sin, i.e., an occasion which is not justified by any serious reason, is not disposed to receive absolution in the sacrament of Penance. Again, one who finds himself in the near occasion of sin because of some necessity as mentioned above, but refuses to use the natural precautions of prudence and the supernatural means of grace, commits sin by that very fact.

c) Company-Keeping

30. These principles on the occasion of sin may be briefly considered in their application to the important question of "company-keeping." We call it an important question, because there are many loose and false ideas on this subject, many of them proposed by way of advice to the teen-ager, the couple contemplating marriage, or

the person separated from a lawful spouse. In applying these principles, we do not wish to enter upon details, but merely to set forth some well-defined conclusions.

WHAT IT IS

First of all, we would like to make clear what we understand here by "company-keeping." We refer here to the "regular and frequent companionship of man and woman which in the normal course of events leads to falling in love and wanting to marry." In this description, the key words are "regular" and "frequent." By the former, we mean to imply the kind of company-keeping which is based upon either a mutual understanding or an explicit planning to devote the time spent together to each other and morally to exclude others; generally, such company-keeping is referred to in popular language as "going steady." The word, "frequent," may vary from almost nightly to weekly, either personally or by letters.

Now, company-keeping in this sense is looked upon by all moral theologians in the Church as a near or proximate occasion of sin. It should be noted that we have not said that it is looked upon as sinful, but only as the occasion of sin. It is so looked upon as an occasion of sin simply because of the facts of experience based upon human nature in its fallen condition. Because it is a near or proximate occasion of sin, this kind of company-keeping can be justified only when certain circumstances are present. These circumstances are: (1) if the parties involved are keeping company with a possible view to marriage within a reasonable time; (2) if they use the means necessary to prevent undue familiarities, namely the natural means of prudence, and the supernatural means of prayer and the sacraments.

The possible view to marriage can be based only on the desire to marry and the freedom in the eyes of the Church to marry. If either of these conditions is not present, company-keeping as described cannot be justified morally.

1) Company-Keeping and the Teen-Ager

31. These principles need to be carefully weighed, first of all, in the guidance given to the teen-ager, and must be conscientiously realized by the Catholic teen-agers themselves. It is well known that teen-agers often "go steady" simply because it is convenient, or because it is a matter of pride, to have a steady partner to the exclusion of others. In keeping this kind of "steady company" they

have no intention or desire of looking toward marriage. Again, even though such a desire or intention may be present, teen-agers often cannot contemplate marriage within a reasonable time, for a variety of reasons, such as lack of the necessary parental consent, economic conditions, and the like.

Hence, despite the views of so many who look with indulgence on this practice, we cannot condone it, and we must raise our voices against it, to let both parents and teen-agers know what we think about it, and what is the approved teaching of moral theologians of the Church. This kind of steady company-keeping on the part of teen-agers is the source of neglect of schoolwork, and of the serious preparation for life that schoolwork implies. More than this, however, it carries with it the grave dangers of sins against modesty, chastity, and purity, and ultimately also of attempted marriages contrary to the laws of the Church. As a free near occasion of sin, which is not justified by other circumstances, the practice of such company-keeping in itself must be classified as sinful.

We wish, therefore, seriously to exhort parents to instruct their children more fully in these matters, to urge them to be interested in group activities, and to exercise prudent supervision over the conduct of their growing children. We are not unmindful of the grave burdens which the responsibilities of parenthood place upon fathers and mothers. Such responsibilities can be met with the help of God's grace, Who will assist parents to be kind and understanding, to be generous and loving, and yet at the same time to be prudent and firm in the direction which they give to the lives of their growing youngsters. In the words of our Holy Father: Let "fathers and mothers of families remove their children from these dangers, first by their own example, then also by timely admonitions which come from a stern firmness of spirit as befits Christians" (August 15, 1954).

32. For the teen-agers themselves, we wish to remind them of the obligations placed upon them by the fourth commandment. The law of obedience binds children as long as they are minors and unmarried. Disobedience is a grievous sin if it concerns an important matter and the parents have given a real command. Even adult children, as long as they stay at home, must obey in all things necessary for domestic order, e.g., to return home at a reasonable hour of the night.

Obedience to the law of God, of course, must be the supreme motive. It is obedience to God's law which obliges us in conscience to avoid the free near occasions of sin, and to take the proper pre-

cautions in the necessary near occasions of sin. "He who loves danger will perish in it" is the inspired word of the Wise Man (Ecclus. 3:27); while the Apostle St. John writes: "Do not love the world, or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; which is not from the Father, but from the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16).

No one, surely, wishes to deprive our young people of the legitimate diversion and recreation which come from association with others. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that there are many ways in which this legitimate diversion can be had without recourse to company-keeping as described above. It should also be noted that, aside from the kind of company-keeping described above, there is also such a thing as immodesty of place and circumstance. Suffice it to mention the out-of-the-way parked car, or the intimacies which so many in the world look upon with indulgence and condone in the name of experience or of growing up. Modesty of behavior with others must govern all so-called expressions of affection. The kissing and embracing which so many defend under the name of affection, or simply because it is the accepted thing, are in reality but a surrender to immodesty that destroys the last defense of chastity in the world. Thus also the type of dancing indulged in by some lovers is but an invitation to the spirit of impurity to take possession of their souls.

In defense, therefore, of Christian virtue, and in the discharge of our pastoral duty to our people, both young and old, we must state in certain and clear terms the teaching of the catechism which insists: "We must avoid as far as possible any person, place, or thing that is likely to tempt us to immodesty and impurity, and special care must be taken to avoid the near occasions of sin." Let us always recall the exhortation of St. Paul: "I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God — your spiritual service" (Rom. 12:1).

2) *Company-Keeping and Divorced Persons*

33. These principles need to be carefully weighed, in the second place, in connection with the question of company-keeping by or with divorced persons. Since the prospect of a future valid marriage alone makes company-keeping, as described above, licit, it follows that such company-keeping is illicit and sinful when marriage is not possible either permanently, or for a long time, or probably

impossible. A penitent who persists in such kind of company-keeping is not properly disposed to receive absolution.

It should be recalled here that all marriages are presumed to be valid until proved invalid by due process of Church law. Only Catholics and those marrying Catholics are bound to be married before a priest. Non-Catholics marrying non-Catholics before a civil official or minister contract valid marriages unless there is present an invalidating impediment. Divorced persons are still married in the eyes of God and must regulate their conduct with others accordingly. There are indeed marriages which are invalid from the beginning. The clearest of such cases are those which involve Catholics who have attempted marriage before a civil official or a minister. Nevertheless, the possibility of eventual freedom of a divorced person, based on a founded hope or not, does not change the nature of the voluntary proximate occasion of sin. Only the due process of Church Law can state definitely whether or not a given marriage was invalid from the beginning. No individual may use a private opinion, either his own or that of another, in this matter, as the basis for excusing company-keeping with such divorced persons.

Company-keeping with or by divorced persons shows a public disregard of God's law and the sacredness of the marriage vows. It is an invitation to others to act in like manner, and an encouragement to those already acting in this manner. Company-keeping with or by divorced persons carries with it all the dangers referred to above — the danger of committing sins against the sixth and ninth commandments, the danger of attempting a merely civil marriage with a consequent life of public sin, and of dying in this state. In fact, pastoral experience abundantly proves that it is the failure to apply these principles on company-keeping which more than anything else leads to so many invalid marriages involving divorced persons.

Again, as we stated above, we would like to repeat here that these principles are based upon the law of God, and are bound up with the commandments of God and the doctrine of original sin. The doctrine of the morality involved in an occasion of sin is simply the logical conclusion which flows from the application of these principles to areas of practical living. It is obedience to God's law, therefore, which obliges us in conscience to avoid the free near occasion of sin, and to take the proper precautions in the necessary near occasions of sin.

It may be noted here in passing that it is also wrong to encourage or to abet such company-keeping by others. Even more so, it is

wrong to give encouragement or approval to any marriage attempted invalidly by or with a divorced person. Such encouragement and at least tacit approval is given by those who attend such weddings, or offer gifts on such an occasion, or otherwise through their words or actions seemingly approve of the sinful action.

We fully realize the demands of Christian charity. Charity is the supreme law and criterion, but charity begins with the love of God. Love of God is expressed above all in the keeping of the commandments: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Again: "He who says that he knows him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:4). True love of neighbor can never give approval, therefore, of our neighbor's sin, since love of neighbor is based upon love of God. Moreover, true love of neighbor considers especially the spiritual welfare of our neighbor. It is not true love of neighbor, therefore, which either explicitly or implicitly conveys to him the impression that we approve of his sinful action. It is also true that we should not judge lest we ourselves be judged (cf. Mt. 7:1). It is not however an act of rash or hypocritical judgment of the actions of others to recognize the clearly sinful character of such actions. The subjective imputability of an action we must always leave to the judgment of God, Who alone can read the consciences of men. But over and above such subjective imputability, the actions of men have an objective morality according as they are, or are not, in conformity with the law of God. We not only have a right, but a duty to recognize this fact, and to regulate our own conduct accordingly. It is necessary that we state these principles in clear and precise terms, so that the proper application may be made to individual cases.

d) *The Church and Pleasure*

34. Nothing, therefore, of what we have said in the above, should be construed to conclude that pleasure in itself is wrong. It is not. Neither, therefore, that pleasure which is derived from association with others. Quite the contrary, our love of neighbor is an essential part of the great commandment (cf. Mt. 22:37-39), and the proof of the true follower of Christ (cf. Jn. 13:35). The notion that pleasure in itself is wrong is heretical in origin, and most harmful to the spiritual life of man. God made pleasure; man made pain. All pleasure that is not inordinate, no matter how intense it is, can be offered to God. It is only when pleasure becomes inordinate,

that is, contrary to the will of God, that it is wrong. No one can live without some pleasure, just as no one can live without some food and some rest.

Hence, the Church does not make the mistake of condemning pleasure as evil. In fact, during the long course of her history the Church has been frequently accused of both extremes of laxity and of rigorism. The Church teaches that man is not evil or totally corrupted, even though he has within himself the effects of original sin. Nevertheless, the Church teaches that the passions of man need to be held in check by man's spiritual nature, that his free will be guided by reason, and reason and conscience be guided by revelation. Hence, in her teaching about the obligation of avoiding the near free occasion of sin, the Church is merely insisting on the minimum mortification needed in order to avoid mortal sin.

We fully realize that the viewpoint of many in the world runs counter to what we have been saying. The spirit of secularism, and of a militant paganism, resents the law of God for interfering with the full expression of human freedom. Even more so, the spirit of secularism resents and rejects the guiding hand of authority which is evident in the obedience to the law of the Church required of every Catholic. Nevertheless, we speak out, because the heart of a shepherd is deeply moved by the sight of so many who are led astray by the viewpoint of secularism in these important matters.

VII. MODESTY AND THE PRINTED WORD

35. The third general area in which modesty must particularly exercise its influence on those who would be chaste and help others to preserve this virtue is that of the printed and pictured word.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are influenced by the books, magazines, and papers which we read, and all of these leave their imprint on us as individuals. Back in the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson expressed the same idea when he said: "Books have always a secret influence on the understanding; we cannot at pleasure obliterate ideas; he that reads books of science, though without any fixed idea or desire of improvement, will grow more knowing; he that entertains himself with religious treatises will imperceptibly advance in goodness; the ideas which are offered to the mind, will at last find a lucky moment when it is disposed to receive them."

Add to these observations the truth about our imagination already

referred to earlier in this letter. Our imagination is the power which we have of making mental pictures of the material universe. The imagination can reproduce whatever our senses have experienced, either as these sense experiences came originally through the senses, or in any variety of combinations. The imagination cannot make pictures of what the senses cannot experience. Obviously, then, the picture-making power of the imagination is in direct proportion to the stimulation of the senses. Now, as a result of original sin, the imagination of man constantly tends to get out of hand. It is a commonplace of experience how the imagination can storm the will by conjuring up pictures to solicit and entice; and it is likewise commonplace to experience the interference of the imagination in the process of thinking by way of distraction, or by censoring or substituting for whatever the intellect is to accept.

All these observations are true of adults, and even more so of children and young people, who have, as we say, impressionable minds. And these observations need to be kept in mind in applying the general principles discussed in this pastoral letter on decency applied to the printed and the pictured word.

36. Again, we wish to point out that it is not our purpose to attempt to detail every possible application of these principles to the printed and pictured word. Thus, for example, there would be much that should be said with regard to this problem as it is involved in the ethics of advertising. Limiting ourselves to the problem of decency and modesty in the printed and pictured word, whatever is said about books and magazines in this regard can readily be applied to the field of advertising.

a) *The Problem of Indecent Literature*

37. "Literature mirrors the times." No better proof of the urgency to return to the living of God's law is provided than by a visit to the local newsstands. We do not expect a sinless literature in a sinful world. Evil is not something new in the world. This is a sinful world, and the reading habits of people will all too frequently reflect this sad condition. But we have a right, and a duty, to call sin by its proper name, and to recognize it for what it is. Adultery is not romance, business cheating is not success. Love is more than sex, and religion more than a funny feeling. Civilization and culture are based on the dignity of man and his living, and not on the sordid elements of life.

Now, the moral and mental attack made by much of the current literature is well calculated to promote the advance of irreligion and atheism, and thus also foster communism. This literature is a contributing factor to types of crimes progressively troubling our lawmakers and the great body of our people. Under the guise of art, or romance, or travel, or science a vast output of books, booklets, magazines, and comics continues to stream forth from the printing presses of our nation, to become, in the words of an objective governmental survey, "the media for dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion and degeneracy." In fact, according to this same report, "so great is the exaltation of passion above principle, and so prevalent is the identification of lust with love that the casual reader of such literature might easily conclude that all married persons are habitually adulterous and all teenagers completely devoid of any sex inhibitions" (U. S. Cong. Committee, Union Calendar, No. 797, House Report No. 2510, p. 3). Thus are our national morals sabotaged and our nation's moral tone brought lower and lower.

As we have stated above several times, we wish to repeat here again. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Divine Savior condemns not only adultery, but everything that leads to it — all impure looks, desires, thoughts and actions. "Anyone who even looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:27-28). In the light of these clear words, there can be no misunderstanding about the gravely sinful nature of reading material, or movie and television fare, which pander to such lustful thoughts, desires, and looks. This means, therefore, that generally speaking such material is sinful for all, and not merely for the young. "We would warn you that there are books which are bad for everyone" (Pius XII).

b) Scandal and Co-operation

38. On another occasion, when our Lord had dramatically placed a small child before the Apostles, He solemnly said: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandals! For it must needs be that scandals come, but woe to the man through whom scandal does come!" (Mt. 18:6-7.)

Scandal is any word, act, or omission that is in itself evil or has

the appearance of evil and which can be the occasion of another's sin. Closely allied to the sin of scandal is the sin of co-operation, by which one concurs in the sinful deed of another. Such co-operation can take place either by concurring in the evil intention of the one committing sin, and then it is called formal co-operation; or it can take place by concurring only in the sinful act, without agreeing with the evil intention, and then it is called material co-operation.

There are many different ways in which one can co-operate with the sin of another. Whether or not we are allowed to co-operate in the sinful act of another (material co-operation), without of course making his evil intention our own, will depend on different circumstances, and especially on the measure of our co-operation. There are some things which from their very nature can have only an evil use. When such is the case, no matter what our intention may be, we cannot co-operate with another, even under grave moral pressure, precisely because it is impossible to dissociate ourselves from the evil nature of the thing or the act.

Thus, material co-operation in the dissemination of some books and magazines is permissible only for a grave reason. But professedly immoral literature cannot be disseminated at all without committing grave sin. This is the clear teaching of our Faith, enforced by the Canon Law of the Church, which states that "booksellers shall not sell, lend, or retain books designedly treating of obscenities" (Canon 1404).

c) The "Designedly Obscene"

39. That much of the stuff which is being peddled through pocket-size books, the magazines, and comics is "designedly obscene" can hardly be denied. This conclusion is true, despite the difficulties which the courts may have in arriving at a satisfactory definition of the word "obscene." The teaching of both experience and competent theologians makes it abundantly clear that the "designedly obscene" would probably include a great deal more than our legislative statutes and our courts would or could include. Moreover, it is also evident from experience and the teaching of moral theology that even though much of this material might not qualify as "designedly obscene" in the strictly legal or canonical sense, it does serve as the proximate occasion of grave sin for the greater majority of people, both adults and young. In other words, no Catholic publisher, or distributor, or reader could guide himself in this ques-

tion of scandal, or co-operation, or sin, on the basis of what a legal statute or a court decision may state is the meaning of the word "obscene."

d) *The Current Situation*

40. There are some hopeful signs that the comic book industry has initiated a movement to regulate itself. How sincere this effort is or how effective it will be can only be judged after it has been in operation for several years. While comic books have been and continue to be detrimental to the welfare of our children, it does not seem to us that they have been the principal source of the harm being done, although certain types of publicity (especially that promoted by the publishers of other kinds of literature) have tried to make it seem so.

The magazines, in recent years, it seems to us, have become worse rather than better. The reason is to be found in the doleful fact that "pornography is big business." The pressure of other types of publications, particularly the pocket-size books, has induced many magazines to lower their standards in order to meet "competition." Even the best family magazines run occasional articles along these lines. Also, it is to be noted that some court decisions have opened the way to the adoption of these lower standards, by granting the use of the mails to magazines containing the pictures of untouched nudes. Thus the sensational type of picture or photography magazine has been economically pressured to become even more sensational in their photography and display. Added to these magazines is another type which specializes in gossip, slander, and the revelation of the secret facts of people's lives, thus adding calumny and slander to the degrading list.

The worst offenders continue to be the pocket-size books. This situation is at once the most difficult and the most pernicious. It is the most difficult because of the constant flux and quick turnover in the market, and because of the deceptive appearances of the covers. Sometimes, some of the finest classics bear very salacious frontpieces — a trick of advertising also noticeable in the film industry. It is the most pernicious, because the content of the bad pocket-size books continues to be very bad, and their number does not seem to diminish. It is the most pernicious, because this type of book is being sought out not only by our young people but by adults as well.

e) *Our Challenge*

41. In striving to do something about this grave menace to the morals of our nation, it is important to begin with a recognition of the fact that there is a serious problem, and that we cannot remain silent or inert in the face of this problem, and thus by our silence to condone or to approve the evil.

For some time now, our Christian Mothers' Confraternity, together with other organizations in the Archdiocese, have engaged themselves to cope with this problem in one way or another. We are grateful for what has been accomplished in the past, and we wish to encourage them in their united efforts for the present and the future. From reports which reach us from time to time, we are convinced that it is necessary through these organizations to continue to bring this matter again and again to our people as a whole.

For this reason, we wish to encourage our Christian Mothers in their particular apostolate, asking them to continue their co-operation with the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL) and to bring the principles, classifications, and applications of the NODL work to other organizations in the Archdiocese, to parish societies, and to families and individuals as well.

For this reason, also, we encouraged the establishment of an Archdiocesan unit of the Legion of Decency. The principal aim of the Legion of Decency, which was set up by the American Bishops in 1934, is to discourage the production and patronizing of films which are "not worthy of the rational nature of man" and "which are not morally healthy." For this reason the Legion criticizes and classifies entertainment solely and exclusively from the viewpoint of Christian morality and decency. It is a fact that too many of our Catholics are frequenting motion pictures without being sufficiently informed as to the religious and moral quality of the film being shown. Some even do not seem to have any consciousness of their duty in this matter, particularly in protecting the young.

The classifications of the Legion of Decency, as those also of the NODL, represent a practical application of the norms of moral theology, especially those dealing with the occasion of sin, the sin of co-operation, and the sin of scandal. These classifications enable the individual person to determine readily, promptly, and easily whether or not a certain film involves an occasion of sin, or the sin

of scandal or co-operation. In speaking of the right of the Church, through the Pope and the Bishops, to guide the faithful, our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, calls that theory "reprehensible" which denies the Church the right to make such practical applications in the realm of moral conduct (November 2, 1954).

We take this occasion, therefore, when speaking of the program of the Christian Mothers in the field of indecent literature, to encourage them and all our people to continue their co-operation with the Pledge of the Legion of Decency in the related fields of the movies and television entertainment. We remind them that our late Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, warmly praised the Pledge, and called upon all pastors of souls "to obtain each year from their people a pledge similar to this one, in which they promise to stay away from motion pictures which are offensive to truth and Christian morality" (*Vigilanti Cura*, June 29, 1936). We also call to the attention of our people, and particularly of our various Study and Group Discussion Clubs the complete address of Pope Pius XII on "The Ideal Film" (June 21, 1955, and October 28, 1955), and we ask them to make a study of this significant discourse.

Hence, in presenting the challenge of Decency to our people, we do so in the realization that decency in all walks of life is most intimately bound up with the spirit of reverence, which has frequently been called the soul of religion. This reverence is a consciousness of the infinite holiness of God, which serves to make us remember our dignity as children of God, and temples of the Holy Ghost through divine grace, which is a participation in the holiness of God. We do not look upon our efforts, whether individually or through organizations, as "pressure movements" or as "censorship imposing our way of life on others, who disagree with us." Rather, we look upon our efforts as the articulate voices of our people, of all good people, who band together for the strength that comes from union, and who stand up in defense of the holiness of God, and the standards of Christian morality.

f) Recommendations

With regard to the problem of Indecent Literature under discussion in this point of our pastoral letter, we would like to make the following recommendations.

42. FIRST, we ought to face the fact that the problem is local

as well as national. In the words of one of our Representatives: "The thing that has appalled me is that this stuff is very big business, that it is going out in millions." Almost any visit to a local store, newsstand, or other place of distribution, will make anyone aware of the fact that some of these millions have reached the local scene.

43. SECOND, the important work has to be done on the local level as well as on the national level. We readily grant with a Congressional Committee Report that "the source of this pornographic stream is the publishing house, and while the distributor, the wholesaler, and the retailer all participate as purveyors, it is the publisher who is primarily responsible, since he is the architect and creator without whom the chain of distribution could not function."

These powerful sources, of course, have also to be reached on the national level, through some action resulting from Congressional investigations. It is hopeful to note here that the National Organization for Decent Literature, of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, has had its influence felt through certain indications of some further attempt at self-regulation within the publishing industry. It is most hopeful that the concept of self-regulation has finally been mentioned and considered, since legal statutes will never suffice in matters of this kind. The NODL, and all who co-operate with it, subscribe wholeheartedly to the principle of self-regulation, and sincerely hope that it progresses from the correction of salacious covers to the much more important correction of salacious content.

On the local level, we have both the responsibility and the opportunity of achieving definite results. It is on the local level that the nation-wide protest began, which led to certain congressional investigations. Through such local protests, public opinion has been aroused, and can continue to be aroused. Through such local activity, greater diligence on the part of local prosecuting agencies, in enforcing statutes already on the books, is brought about.

We are happy here to commend the work which has been done by our Metropolitan Commission on Crime Prevention, which instructed its secretary to write to more than one hundred organizations in the Milwaukee area urging the formation of committees to attack the problem. These committees, the commission said, should carry out educational programs to arouse parental action to combat this ever increasing blight on the youth of our community.

We are also pleased to note the Ordinance No. 662, to create Section 106-7.5 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances, relating to

the sale or distribution of obscene literature in the City of Milwaukee, which was passed and approved by the Common Council and the Mayor on March 7, 1956, and March 9, 1956.

A great many communities in Wisconsin have now begun organized action to cleanse the newsstands and other points of distribution of this sort of thing. Effective representations have been made by a number of our local organizations to our representatives and senators. We repeat, the Federal Government can and must continue to do its part to help preserve civic virtue. The post office, also, can take legal action wherever this is indicated, and law-enforcement officers can prosecute according to the tenor of the law. But there is no substitute for effective local enforcement and effective action, by groups such as our Christian Mothers, and all the other organizations of men and women — parents and citizens who are truly interested in the welfare of their children, of themselves, and of the community at large.

Most important on the local level, the small distributor of such reading material can be reached and influenced. Perhaps with all the promises that the publishers give, there is little hope of obtaining lasting effective results from that quarter. But at least we can do our utmost to try to remove this occasion of sin on the local level. Without trying to minimize the evil which is done by the publisher, as indicated above in the words of the congressional report, or by the printers, the distributors, and wholesalers as well, in the last analysis, it is the retailer who actually unleashes the flood of filth on the reading public. The retailer has the right to refuse to accept them. He can refuse to display them. He can refuse to sell the dirty ones.

That there are many retailers who are co-operating, is evident from the fact that the Congressional Report states that the amount of unsold salacious material returned by dealers to the distributors, in some instances, runs as high as 40 per cent. The report further states that this action is due, in part at least, to local protests. The records also show, in other sources, that such local action has influenced the stores on the local level which are controlled by national chains.

We submit that it is our conviction that the great majority of local dealers, the country over, are honest, God-fearing men. Even though many of them do not share the same Catholic Faith which we cherish, they believe in the natural law and in the ten commandments, and are also bound by them. When we protest against this salacious literature, we are not trying to impose some specific

“Catholic teaching” on them. We are appealing to their own sense of decency and belief in the natural law, and to their concern for the morals of their own children.

44. Finally, when we speak of the local level, we are thinking first and above all of the homes of our own people. This pastoral letter, we have said several times, is primarily directed at our own. What we have said about this particular point is therefore also an appeal to our own people to safeguard their own homes against this type of literature. And here may we mention again that we are thinking not merely of the evidently or designedly bad or indecent literature, but also of that vast output which mingles so much of the indecent with what is otherwise proper and decent. Hence, lest our recommendations be considered merely negative we exhort our people as follows.

There are two principal ways in which we can safeguard ourselves against the worldly influence of secular reading. First, we can reduce the amount of such secular reading; and, second, we can increase the amount of our spiritual reading. It is almost impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule. Certainly, the layman in general must keep in touch with the world and modern society in which he lives and moves. But he must do so prudently, and in keeping with his Christian vocation. The amount of secular reading will surely vary according to the particularized vocation that we have. Professional people, such as teachers and lawyers, will surely be required to do a great deal more. For all, however, it seems that we can lay down this general rule: we must be resolved to avoid that which is indecent and salacious, and that which endangers our faith. More positively, we must be resolved never to cease from regular reading of the right type.

45. THIRD, we should always remember that we are working for the cause of Christ. Hence we should not become discouraged. We are working for the purity and the integrity of our children, and of ourselves. This is the kind of virtuous effort which requires constant renewal of intention, and the manly determination not to be discouraged by the lack of success on a large scale, or the seemingly impossible odds. If we succeed in persuading even one dealer to eliminate the distribution of such literature, we shall have done something very worthwhile. Nay much more, if we are God's instruments in helping to prevent the commission of even one mortal sin, we shall be blessed by our Lord. We are also working for the welfare of our country, which can become greater and stronger only in proportion to the moral health of its citizens. Above all,

however, we are working for Christ, and therefore we must perform our work with great charity.

In the light of these exhortations, we caution our Christian Mothers, and all others who unite with them in this work, not to expect too much from legal statutes and court decisions. These never will, nor can they take the place of the intensive personal, local activity, and the follow-through on such efforts which count. We urge them not to lose heart, in the remembrance that spiritual works of mercy are of greater value than corporal works of mercy. Hence, of spiritual works of mercy the words of our Lord apply with even greater force: "As long as you did it for one of these the least my brethren, you did it for me." Most earnestly, do we caution against the resort to threats or recriminations. Charity, in the language of St. Paul, is tactful, charity is patiently persistent. We must not forget that there are many people who honestly disagree with us in fundamental issues. The fact that these people are sincere in their opinions does not mean that we must concede these opinions themselves, or that we ourselves should be less vigorous in the defense of what we hold to be the truth. But it does mean that we must treat them with charity and with respect, and that we cannot use force successfully in a cause of this kind.

VIII. CONCLUSION

46. Thus, Dearly Beloved, we have wished to bring these matters to your attention in conjunction with the annual convention of our Archdiocesan Confraternity of Christian Mothers. We have concluded the writing of these various points at the beginning of this month of May, which we dedicate to the Immaculate Mother of God. The convention of our Christian Mothers itself is annually held during this month, during which also our nation sets aside a special Sunday on which to honor mothers. Hence, we have felt that it is most fitting to appeal especially to mothers to give us the greatest possible assistance in the important matters discussed in this letter.

We have not indeed touched upon all the subjects which are of concern to us in the general matter of decency and modesty. Neither, as we have stated several times in this letter, have we attempted to spell out the detailed application of principles. Like St. John the Baptist, we have wanted, however, to be a voice crying out in defense

of our cherished Christian standards of modesty and purity. We realize fully that the aggressive attitude of modern materialism and exaggerated freedom will dispute, or even scorn what we have said. Lest it be thought, however, that silence gives consent to these modern trends, as a shepherd of souls, heeding the call of our Chief Shepherd, the Vicar of Christ, we have felt obligated to proclaim to our people that we cannot approve these violations of Christian modesty and decency: "If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked man from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou tell the wicked man, that he may be converted from his ways, and he be not converted from his way, he shall die in his iniquity but thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezech. 33:8-9).

Dearly Beloved, the struggle against immodesty is only part of everyone's battle against the world, the devil, and the flesh. We do not say that modesty and purity are the chief virtues of the Christian. The chief virtue and adornment of the Christian soul is charity — love of God above all things, and love of neighbor for the love of God. Charity is the essence of Christian perfection. But we do say that the struggle for purity is a most important element in the warfare against the enemies of charity. Immodesty and indecency are the chief means of enslaving men to the vice of unchastity and impurity, and this vice is particularly corrosive of true charity. Let us heed, therefore, the warnings of our Divine Savior to pluck out the eye that causes us scandal (cf. Mt. 18:7-9). Let us hold high the true ideal of the Christian who accepts fully the charter of Christian perfection: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:3-12).

In calling particularly upon our Christian Mothers to assist us in this crusade, we ask them in their prayers, in their studies, and in their activities to strive to reduce what we have said to the practical level of everyday living. To encourage them further not to lose heart in the daily battle, I would like to recall these following words of Pope Pius XII, addressed several years ago to a gathering of Catholic Mothers:

"You have to prepare your sons and daughters so that they may pass with unflinching step, like those who pick their way among serpents, through that time of crisis and physical change; and pass through it without losing any of the joy of innocence, preserving that natural instinct of modesty, with which Providence has girt them as a check to wayward passion. That sense of modesty, which in its spontaneous abhorrence from the impure, is akin to the sense

of religion, is made of little account in these days. BUT YOU MOTHERS WILL TAKE CARE that your children do not lose it through anything unbecoming in dress or self-adornment, through unbecoming familiarities of immoral spectacles; on the contrary, you will seek to make it more delicate, more alert, more upright, more sincere."

47. Finally, we ask our people to make the following pledge to our Blessed Mother, with a prayer for her abiding maternal assistance:

a) *Pledge of Modesty*

"I believe in the virtue of modesty as the guardian of chastity. I pledge myself to live and fight for the ideals of the virtue of purity and the observance of modesty. In particular, I pledge myself to live and fight for more decency in the printed and spoken word, and for a Mary-like modesty in dress and action. I promise also to set an example for my family and my associates, and to let others know where I stand in such matters, in the hope of leading them to greater purity of life. I hope to maintain these ideals by cultivating a strong personal devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

b) *Prayer*

"O Mary, thou art the most fruitful of mothers, and the most chaste of virgins. With the most profound respect, I venerate the mysterious union of these prerogatives in thee; and I congratulate thee on thy exemption from all these miseries of our condition — on thy spotless purity, and on thy divine motherhood for which it prepared thee.

"O Virgin Mother! protect me through thy heavenly purity, and defend me against so many enemies who surround me, and seek to deprive me of this most precious possession. Obtain for me, most pure Virgin, the grace to aim at the perfection of this virtue, by cautious vigilance over my unruly passions, and by carefully avoiding whatever might render me unworthy to be called thy child.

"Help me to assist others, as far as it lies in my power, in the practice and observance of modesty and purity. I am resolved never to give scandal to others, and to do what I can to remove the occasions of sin. O Mary, Mother of pure souls, show thyself a mother

to me now and at the hour of my death, and bring me to the blessed happiness promised to those who are clean of heart — the contemplation and enjoyment of God in Heaven. Amen."

With blessing upon all, I remain

Very sincerely yours in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

✠ ALBERT G. MEYER
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Given at the Chancery Office
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
May 1, 1956