

*Notification Concerning  
Men's Dress Worn by Women*

**Giuseppe Cardinal Siri**

Genoa

June 12, 1960

To the Reverend Clergy

To all Teaching Sisters,

To the Beloved Sons of Catholic Action,

To Educators intending truly to follow Christian Doctrine.

**I**

The first signs of our late arriving spring indicate this year a certain increase in the use of men's dress by girls and women, even mothers of families. Up until 1959, in Genoa, such dress usually meant the person was a tourist, but now there seems to be a significant number of girls and women from Genoa itself who are choosing, at least on pleasure trips, to wear men's dress (men's trousers).

The spreading of this behavior obliges us to give serious consideration to the subject, and we ask those to whom this *Notification* is addressed to kindly give this problem all the attention it deserves, as befits those aware of being answerable to God.

We seek above all to give a balanced moral judgment upon the wearing of men's dress by women. In fact, our thoughts bear solely upon the moral question.

Firstly, when it comes to covering of the female body, the wearing of men's trousers by women cannot be said to constitute as such a grave offense against modesty, because trousers certainly cover more of woman's body than do modern women's skirts.

Secondly, however, to be modest clothes need not simply cover the body but must also not cling too closely to the body. Now it is true that much feminine clothing nowadays clings closer than do some trousers, but trousers can be made to cling closer, and, in fact, generally do;

hence, the tight fit of such clothing gives us no less grounds for concern than does exposure of the body. So the immodesty of men's trousers on women is an aspect of the problem which is not to be left out of an over-all judgment upon them even if it is not to be artificially exaggerated either.

## II

However, there is another aspect of women wearing men's trousers which seems to us the gravest.

The wearing of men's dress by women affects firstly the woman herself, by changing the feminine psychology proper to women; secondly, it affects the woman as wife of her husband, by tending to vitiate relationships between the sexes; thirdly, it affects the woman as mother of her children by harming her dignity in her children's eyes. Each of these points is to be carefully considered in turn.

### A

#### *Male Dress Changes the Psychology of Woman.*

In truth, the motive impelling women to wear men's dress is always that of imitating, nay, of competing with the man who is considered stronger, less tied down, more independent. This motivation shows clearly that male dress is the visible aid to bringing about a mental attitude of being 'like a man'. Secondly, ever since men have been men, the clothing a person wears conditions, determines and modifies that person's gestures, attitudes and behavior, such that from merely being worn outside, clothing comes to impose a particular frame of mind inside.

Then let us add that a woman wearing men's dress always more or less indicates her reacting to her femininity as though it were inferior [to masculinity] when in fact it is only diverse. The perversion of her psychology is clearly evident.

These reasons, summing up many more, are enough to warn us how wrongly women are made to think by the wearing of men's dress.

### B

#### *Male Dress Tends to Vitate Relationships Between Women and Men.*

In truth when relationships between the two sexes unfold with the coming of age, an instinct of mutual attraction is predominant. The essential basis of this attraction is a diversity between the two sexes which is made possible only by their complementing or completing one

another. If then this *diversity* becomes less obvious because one of its major external signs is eliminated and because the normal psychological structure is weakened, what results is the alteration of a fundamental factor in the relationship.

The problem goes further still. Mutual attraction between the sexes is preceded both naturally, and in the order of time, by that sense of shame which holds the rising impulses in check, imposes respect upon them, and tends to lift to a higher level of mutual esteem and healthy fear everything that those impulses would push onwards to uncontrolled acts. To change that clothing which by its diversity reveals and upholds nature's limits and defenses, is to level the distinctions and to help pull down the vital defenses of the sense of shame.

It is at least to hinder that sense. And when the sense of shame is hindered from applying the brakes, then do relationships between man and women sink degradingly to pure sensuality, devoid of all mutual respect or esteem.

Experience teaches us that when woman is de-feminized, defenses are undermined and weakness increases.

### C

#### *Male Dress Harms the Dignity of the Mother in Her Children's Eyes.*

All children have an instinct for the sense of dignity and decorum of their mother. Analysis of the first inner crisis of children when they awaken to life around them, even before they enter upon adolescence, shows how much the sense of their mother counts. Children are as sensitive as can be on this point. Adults typically leave all that behind them and think no more on it. But we would do well to call to mind the severe demands that children instinctively make of their own mother, and the deep and even terrible reactions roused in them by observation of their mother's misbehavior. Many lines of later life are here traced out -- and not for good -- in these early inner dramas of infancy and childhood.

The child may not know the definition of exposure, frivolity or infidelity, but he possesses an instinctive sense to recognize them when they occur, to suffer from them, and be bitterly wounded by them in his soul.

### III

Let us think seriously on the import of everything said thus far, even if a woman's appearance in men's dress does not immediately give rise to the same disturbance caused by grave immodesty.

The changing of feminine psychology does fundamental and -- in the long run -- irreparable damage to the family, to conjugal fidelity, to human affections and to human society. True, the effects of wearing unsuitable dress are not all to be seen within a short time. But one must think of what is being slowly and insidiously worn down, torn apart, perverted.

Is any satisfying reciprocity between husband and wife imaginable, if feminine psychology be changed? Or is any true education of children imaginable, which is so delicate in its procedure, so woven of imponderable factors in which the mother's intuition and instinct play the decisive part in those tender years? What will these women be able to give their children when they will so long have worn trousers that their self-esteem is determined more by their competing with the men than by their functioning as women?

Why, we ask, ever since men have been men -- or rather since they became civilized -- why have men in all times and places been irresistibly borne to differentiate and divide the functions of the two sexes? Do we not have here strict testimony to the recognition by all mankind of a truth and a law above man?

To sum up, wherever women wear men's dress, it is to be considered a factor, over the long term, in disintegrating human order.

#### IV

The logical consequence of everything presented thus far is that anyone in a position of responsibility should be possessed by a *sense of alarm* in the true and proper meaning of the word, a severe and decisive alarm.

We address a grave warning to parish priests, to all priests in general and to confessors in particular, to members of every kind of association, to all religious, to all nuns, especially to teaching Sisters.

We ask them to become clearly conscious of the problem so that action will follow. This consciousness is what matters. It will suggest the appropriate action in due time. But let it not counsel us to give way in the face of inevitable change, as though we are confronted by a natural evolution of mankind, and so on!

Men may come and men may go, because God has left plenty of room for the ebb and flow of free-will; but the substantial lines of nature and the no less substantial lines of the Eternal Law have never changed, are not changing and never will change. There are bounds beyond which one may stray as far as he pleases, but to do so ends in death. Empty philosophical fantasizing may let one mock or trivialize these limits, but they constitute an alliance of hard facts and of nature which chastises anyone who oversteps them. Certainly history has taught -- with

frightening proofs from the life and death of nations -- that the reply to all violators of this outline of 'humanity' is always, sooner or later, catastrophe.

Since the dialectic of Hegel, we are fed what amounts to nothing but fables, and by dint of hearing them so often, many people end up acquiescing to them, even if only passively. But the reality of the matter is that Nature and Truth, and the Law bound up in both, go their imperturbable way, and cut to pieces the simpletons who, upon no grounds whatsoever, would believe in radical and far-reaching changes in the very structure of man.

The consequences of such violations are not a new outline of man, but rather disorders, harmful instability of every kind, the frightening dryness of human souls, a shattering increase in the number of human castaways driven out from among us, left to live out their decline in boredom, sadness and rejection. On the beach of this intentional shipwreck of the eternal norms are found broken families, hearths and homes grown cold, lives cut short before their time, the elderly cast aside, our youth willfully degenerate and -- at the end of the line -- souls in despair and taking their own lives. All of this human wreckage gives witness to the fact that the 'line of God' does not give way, nor does it admit of any adaptation to the delirious dreams of the so-called philosophers!

## V

We have said that those to whom the present *Notification* is addressed are asked to take serious alarm before the problem at hand. Accordingly they know what they have to say, starting with little girls on their mother's knee.

They know that without exaggerating or turning into fanatics, they will need to strictly limit how far they tolerate women dressing like men, as a general rule.

They know they must never be so weak as to let anyone believe that they turn a blind eye to a custom which is slipping downhill and subverting the moral standing of all institutions.

They, the priests, know that the line they have to take in the confessional, while not holding women dressing like men to be automatically a grave fault, must be sharp and decisive.

Everybody will kindly give thought to the need for a united line of action, re-enforced on every side by the co-operation of all men of good will and all enlightened minds, so as to create a veritable dike to hold back the flood.

Those of you responsible for souls in whatever capacity understand how useful it is to have for allies in this campaign men of the arts, the media and the crafts. The position taken by fashion design houses, the brilliant designers and the clothing industry, is of crucial importance in the whole question. Artistic sense, refinement and good taste meeting together can find suitable but dignified solutions as to the dress for women to wear when they must use a motorcycle or engage in this or that exercise or work. What matters is to preserve modesty together with the eternal sense of femininity which, more than anything else, all children will continue to associate with the face of their mother.

We do not deny that modern life sets problems and makes requirements unknown to our grandparents. But we state that there are values more in need of protection than fleeting experiences, and that for anyone of intelligence there is always good sense and good taste enough to find acceptable and dignified solutions to problems which arise.

Moved by charity we are fighting against a leveling debasement of mankind, against the attack upon those differences on which rests the complementarity of man and woman.

When we see a woman in trousers, we should think not so much of her, as of all mankind: of what will be should women masculinize themselves. Nobody stands to gain by helping to bring about a future age of vagueness, ambiguity, imperfection and, in a word, monstrosities.

This letter of ours is not addressed to the public, but to those responsible for souls, for education, for Catholic associations. Let them do their duty, and let them not be sentries caught asleep at their post while evil crept in.

Giuseppe Cardinal Siri

Archbishop of Genoa