

Catholic Fashion Blogs: Unite Modest with Fashionable, Catholic with American

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Excerpt

While not all of these blogs are officially connected to each other under a program, they are all united by the desire to reconcile modesty with mainstream, trendy fashion for women. The bloggers highlight that they have deep connections to fashion and do not want their faith to make them unable to feel stylish and attractive. However, many women believe dressing modestly cannot be fashionable, which poses a problem for the bloggers' and readers' passion for fashion. Emily from "The Stylish Saint," describes the dilemma:

"There are quite a few god people who think that holiness consists in wearing the ugliest clothes you can possibly find...Then there are the women who dress so stylish but so immodest. The problem is that the last group cannot figure out to dress modest stylish. Why? Because the first group of women who are modest are not stylish. The last group is stylish but not modest. I think that often this leads a lot of secular women to believe that you cannot dress both stylish and modest."¹

This problem is echoed by various other fashion bloggers, as many of them have personal predicaments between their love of faith and fashion. Andie from "Style with Andie," writes, "Sometimes it seemed my faith and hobby were very much opposed... I knew I could be a fashionable young Catholic and I knew being fashionable did not mean being unfaithful."² Andie's words highlight not only a tension between faith and fashion may exist for many religious women, but also that she is confident that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. However, at the same time, her comment reveals that for some reason she feels as though she cannot reconcile the two. For Andi and her readers, the blog can be understood as a tool that bridges together the two seemingly separate worlds. So, Catholic fashion blogs are motivated by disproving that one cannot be both modest and fashionable.

¹ Emily Hartung, "Why the Stylish Saint?" *The Stylish Saint* (blog), <http://thesylishsaint.blogspot.com/p/ab.html>

² Andie Sims, "About Andie," *Style with Andie* (blog), <http://stylewithandie.blogspot.com/p/about-andie.html>

The question of the compatibility between Catholic female modesty and style in America is not new, as groups of women before fashion bloggers have advocated for an increase in modest styles available in stores. Kathryn Jay's article "In Vogue with Mary: How Catholic Girls Created an Urban Market for Modesty," analyzes how Catholic teenage girls between the late 1940's and early 1960's formed the group Supply the Demand for the Supply, or SDS, to try to change mainstream fashion to be more modest. The Virgin Mary served as a role model "who combined spiritual modesty with an enthusiasm for looking attractive and participating in consumer culture."³ In addition to spiritual motivations, which included pledges for modesty, the political climate influenced how these women approached their "modesty crusades," as consumer spending, especially on clothing, following World War II became an important part of teenage urban culture. The SDS teenagers desperately wanted to be involved with the youth culture that placed high value on style even though they disassociated with the mainstream fashion trends. The movement grew and was successful in convincing some department stores, such as Sachs, to "stock modesty," or include SDS-approved styles.⁴ Although the Catholic SDS dissolved in the 1960s, the movement highlights how Catholic adolescents used fashion to construct an identity that was both devoted to their faith as well as American youth culture.

Although there is no official mandated religious covering in Catholicism, the Catholic women involved in SDS during the mid century and today's Catholic fashion bloggers believe that all women, not just Catholics, should remain modest for various reasons. For the SDS members in the 1950's, "clothing stood as a stark symbol of moral resolve," as immodest clothing was understood by many as unfaithful to religion, responsible for the moral decay of teenage boys and overall lacking good taste and class.⁵ Moreover, this transcended the religious sphere, as SDS's call for modesty had a larger goal of convincing non-Catholic women to join.

³ Kathryn Jay, "In Vogue with Mary': How Catholic Girls Created an Urban Market for Modesty," in *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*, ed. John M. Giggie and Diana Winston. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 177.

⁴ *Ibid* 185.

⁵ *Ibid* 180.

Catholic fashion bloggers today also seem to have various reasons for wanting to be dress modestly, which includes both religious and secular motivations. June Cameron in her article “Modest Motivations: Religious and Secular Contestation in the Fashion Field,” found that, “while many Christian women discussed their reasons for dressing modestly in relation to practical issues, such as the weather, work requirements or merely wanting to cover what they considered to be unsightly parts of their body, for others modesty in dress was an obligatory part of being Christian.”⁶ Cameron’s words reveal that both secular and religious sensibilities motivate women to dress modestly. This diverse mindset is seen in the Catholic fashion blogs, as the subsequent paragraphs show how the bloggers are influenced by both Catholic and American secular values.

Some Catholic fashion bloggers support their modest dressing desires with explicit Catholic references. In order to be part of “It’s Fun to be a Girl” program, one must comply with the 4 rules listed. One rule is: “Your outfits beautifully and fashionably reach for the collarbone, elbows, and knees; our bloggers offer a visually coherent and easily recognizable look, in order to provide an effective Catholic fashionista missionary “label” in response to the following Magisterial guideline: “Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden.” (CCC2521).”⁷ Moreover, the top of the page reads “Evangelize Through Beauty,” which suggests how the modesty and beauty promoted by the blogs will inspire faith in readers. The name of the blog “The Evangelista” also implies how fashion and Catholicism are connected, merging Evangelism and fashionista. The Evangelista writes, “I am Catholic, and as such, I look at all of life through the lens of my faith,” which suggests that her focus on modesty is rooted in her faith.⁸ Religious figures also play an integral role in some of the bloggers’ interest in modest fashion. “The Stylish Saint” looks to Saint

⁶ Jane Cameron, “Modest Motivations: Religious and Secular Contestation in the Fashion Field,” in *Modest Fashion: Styling Bodies, Mediating Faith*, ed. Reina Lewis (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2013), 151.

⁷ Katie Rose, “Catholic Fashion Bloggers,” *It’s Fun to Be a Girl* (blog), <http://itsfuntobeagirl.com/catholic-fashion-bloggers/>

⁸ Christina Grace, “Another style blog?” *The Evangelista* (blog), <http://theevangelista.com/post/28479985955/another-style-blog>

Gianna Molla for inspiration for reconciling modesty with fashion. She writes, “Saint Gianna Molla, was a saint who loved fashion and stylish clothing... So this blog is in honor of her and I hope to follow in her footsteps to be a stylish yet modest saint!”⁹ In addition to the Virgin, Saint Gianna Molla is another figure who demonstrates how Catholic women do not have to feel guilty about being fashionable. Indeed, she serves as a figure that demonstrates how one can even reach sainthood while being stylish. Thus, like the Virgin for SDS, Saint Gianna Molla serves as a role model for both the author and followers of the blog.

⁹ Emily Hartung, “Why the stylish saint?” *The Stylish Saint* (blog), <http://thesytlishsaint.blogspot.com/p/ab.html>

Fellow Commentary

Cameron Langford

The strength of this excerpt of Miranda Kalvaria’s paper, “Catholic Fashion Blogs: Unite Modest with Fashionable, Catholic with American,” is the way that she seamlessly interweaves evidence into this strong analytical framework, never letting the evidence overshadow her own argumentative voice. When a piece of evidence is presented, it is never left undigested; rather, we feel as though Miranda’s own synthesis is propelling us through the piece, and evidence is simply there incidentally to bolster her point.

One reason for this effect is the confidence and clarity of her topic sentences: Isolated from the rest of the paragraph, the first sentences could form an outline of her paper. Another, equally crucial reason is that Miranda ends each paragraph with a sentence – often demarcated by an indication like “thus” or “so” – that summarizes the evidence in her own words. The cumulative effect of this local analysis is that, by the end of each paragraph, the author has proved her point to us on both the micro and macro levels, connecting her analysis of individual sources back to the paragraph’s – and the paper’s – larger argument.

It is not always advisable to be as transparent about our analytical moves when writing as Miranda is in this paper, but we have included it in *The Tortoise* as an example of signposting done well. Without the substantial analytical work Miranda has done, each paragraph might well have read like an “evidence-sandwich,” with each quote only superficially digested and stretched in order to prove some larger point. But Miranda does not succumb to this strategy in “Catholic”; instead, she fully unpacks each piece of evidence so that her conclusions feel organic and cumulative rather than imposed.