

# Modeling Dignity

by Barbara Fitzgerald



Recently my family attended an open house at an all-girls Catholic high school. When you calculate the four-year cost, the school essentially is asking parents to make a minimum \$40,000 investment based on your trust in their institution.

Now if you were the school's representative, wouldn't you want to close that deal and "dress for success?"

Instead, some teachers seemed oblivious to their marketing mission. While the male teachers all wore nothing less than shirt and tie, some of the women's dress ran the gamut from plunging necklines to low-cut, mini-dresses.

Is the casual attire an automatic deal breaker? Well no, but I couldn't help but wonder, "What are they thinking?"

Honestly ask yourself this question - is there anywhere in corporate America that you would pool dozens of investors together with hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake and make the sales pitch in a sleeveless, floral mini-dress?

Granted the teachers aren't CEO's but they are the sales force. And at a Catholic institution, they are not only the role models for young women; they must also convey an understanding of church teaching on the dignity of women, who are never to be objectified or trivialized.

Catholic women — above all — are lights to the world, not mirrors of a culture, which sees no problem with showing us bra straps, burgeoning hip lines and bulging breasts. In the world, tattoos, body piercing, unruly hair all screams, "I got to be me," but while you are what you are, you are certainly no mystery. You are not the kind of beauty

that points us to heaven. When you reveal most of your body, are you truly set apart for God?

As it is, young women are constantly bombarded with pressure to fit into the cultural whims of fashion. Look at any

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young women's clothing store. Skinny jeans, ultra-low rise pants, flannels and camis, (pjs in public), v-neck dresses cut to show cleavage are ever-present.

What are we thinking, or are we thinking at all?

Let's think. Let us challenge and educate our young women to be critical thinkers, not sponges of a pagan culture that has no truth to endure.

Impressionable years in a young women's life are fleeting. Good example is paramount. As teachers, mothers,

grandmothers or sisters, young women — and men — are constantly looking up to us, like it or not. What enduring impression do we make?

I am not suggesting that women wear floor-length skirts and turtlenecks. Yet is it so hard for Catholic women, especially mature women, to dress in a simple, fresh and neat manner that bespeaks a mysterious beauty and purity within?

Isn't that what attracts us to images of our Blessed Mother? When we look at images of Mary, we acknowledge that such beauty was never equaled, so suffused is she with the Son of God. Whatever the artist depicts Our Blessed Mother wearing it is as if she lends her beauty to the clothing, not the other way around.

Our beauty as Catholic women is much like Mary's. It is found in our unique ability to create, sustain and nurture life. It is found in our Communion with Jesus, the ability to house The Trinity within our souls, to reflect — in our delicate lines and curves — the ineffable, whimsical, timeless beauty of heaven.

Our bodies are not glorified yet. Let's not give up the mystery by being so much in the flesh, we're no longer guideposts to heaven.

*Barbara Fitzgerald is a Women of Grace® member, freelance writer and former Associated Press reporter.*