

Medical Modesty – A dispensable fiction for hopeless hayseeds, or an essential aspect of being Human?

Some Salient Reflections by a Modern Gentleman Priest

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Preamble

As a married one-time Anglican but current Roman Catholic priest with a wife of over a half century, three adult children, and seven grandchildren, I have been very concerned over the years by the nonchalance and cynical manner in which modesty in general, and medical modesty in particular, have been regarded by a large portion of the Western World, and global populations influenced by it. To even bring up the topic is cause for open mirth and disparagement, especially among the so-called “educated” sectors of society, who may better be characterized as “indoctrinated.”

The straightforward argument for medical modesty, to which I will confine myself henceforth, is not only biblical, but natural, human and intuitive, Sense and Sensibility, if you will. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202 A.D.), an early Church Father, famously wrote, “The Glory of God is the Human Person, fully Alive!” If we are fully alive to the meaning of what is sometimes referred to as the Theology of the Body, we will understand the profound significance of particularly the sexual meaning of the body, and its correct orientation to one another and the world in general. With this in mind, I will set forth something of the rationale for observing great respect and reserve as regards to the presentation of the body – including in medical settings – which too many simply and simple-mindedly regard as a “blank check” kind of situation where, as the old song went, “anything goes.”

God’s Revelation in Holy Scripture

Original Man and Woman before the Fall actually were clothed – by the Glory of God. Fascinating depictions in early Asian writings seem to depict the human being as though surrounded by a kind of fire, a glow, that mediated the appearance of the First Couple to themselves and the rest of creation. This Glory, of which

now Historical Man and Woman were deprived by their rebellion against God, was a shock to them upon its loss, and they fled God and one another. Their clumsy attempts to subdue their sense of vulnerability by inventing makeshift clothing out of fig leaves was truly pathetic. God himself had to intervene, slay an animal, and use its skin for clothing, an early anticipation of the Gospel message. Fortunately, over time and by the overwhelming Grace of God, they would begin to properly regard their blessed nakedness between themselves, while diligently guarding it from all others. The Biblical masterpiece, Song of Songs, is a frankly physical as well as metaphorical celebration of Lovers in Love, while earlier biblical literature also was careful to proscribe “uncovering the nakedness” of near relatives, one’s neighbor’s wife, and by extension, society in general. Ridiculous biblical interpretations by people with agendas have tried to utilize the Levitical priesthood as an exception to this principle (not merely a “rule”) by citing the necessity for the ritually impure to obtain a “clean bill of health” from the priest before entering Temple grounds. What they quite fail to mention is that there is no hint that such scrutiny of, say, the now-healed leper involved anything more than empiric evaluation of face, hands, and maybe feet of a fully clothed man or woman of the Covenant. Those who argue otherwise will face their own Day of Judgement.

The Theology of the Body explicitly invests the human body with “Spousal Meaning”, both in this world, and in anticipation to the World to Come when Jesus Christ returns to marry the Church of God. The elevation of the human body to semi-divine status in scripture is truly amazing. Equally amazing is to view the film “Patch Adams”, based on a true story, where a group of newly mustered medical students are lectured by a fatuous dean that “we’re here to burn the humanity out of you!” Unfortunately, medical schools are frequently all too successful in that particular “mission.” Jesus Christ taught his followers a better way, and the Lord even became angry at one point in the Gospel when his spiritual instructions regarding the administration of humanly dignifying healing grace had not been followed. In time, a church that through the biblical writer James had been exhorted to anoint the sick with prayer and confession for recovery from illness fell into disunity, heresy, and ultimately a profoundly fractured witness. While some wings of the church actually founded early centers for healing – women often taking the lead - what was left for the so-called Enlightenment to do about human illness and incapacity led to a dehumanization of the sacred call to

heal the sick, and later 19th and 20th century forays into “scientific medicine” that regarded the human person as essentially a living cadaver for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. This desensitization process was not without its critics. One of the best examples of this are the words of English physiologist Marshall Hall who wrote in 1850 concerning use of the vaginal speculum in examining women involving a risk of “dulling the edge of virgin modesty and the degradation of pure minds of the daughters of England.”

Before moving on to the modern scene, a few observations about nudity in the Bible are in order. The first concerns God’s command to the prophet Isaiah to go about naked for three years. This was not a glorification of exhibitionism, but a stern warning to unfaithful Israel that unless they repented they would be led off as naked slaves to Babylon as punishment. The clear implication is that public nudity is a shameful thing, nothing to be desired. That includes King David’s overenthusiastic “dancing” before the Ark returning to Jerusalem, wherein he inadvertently exposed himself. Never at a loss for words, the glib regent of the Hebrews excused himself when his wife, Saul’s daughter Michal, rebuked him for his behavior. Evidently her motives were mixed, as the marriage seemed to already be in trouble, but basic societal mores had been violated by the king. A more forceful New Testament example is the encounter between Jesus and the Gadarene demoniac, who went about naked, slashing himself and crying out in the wilderness. Jesus heals the man, and we subsequently find him “fully clothed” and peacefully sitting at Jesus feet.

And it is most unlikely that St. Luke, the “beloved physician” at least after his conversion, conducted intimate procedures on women such as the poor lady in the Gospel who had an issue of blood for twelve years, and “had suffered many things from many physicians, losing her money, and none the better, but worse.” We do know that Greco-Roman physicians had already devised some kind of crude speculum (doubtless most unhygienic) with which to ply their trade, which would explain the woman’s extreme distress. Simple contact with the hem of Jesus’ garment (possibly a blue prayer tassel) healed her instantly. Something very similar occurs when just the shadow of Sts. Peter and John fall on sick folks as they walked by in the wake of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. In sum, to a faithful church great healing power was imparted, humanly gracious and most

effective, lost as aforementioned, as the church would grow worldly and impotent over time.

The Modern World

The explosion of irreligiosity and secularism in the 19th and 20th centuries – in spite of continued trappings of lukewarm “churchianity” for want of a better term – set forces in motion have ever since marked, nay besmirched, medical practice, as effective as it has been to address age-old illness. Scientific advances in so many fields of medicine are not to be despised, only the manner in which they have been implemented, starting with the wholesale and aggressive exclusion of women from medical schools by greedy men who wanted the control of the profession.

Physicians, to a greater or lesser extent, wholly warranted or not, are perceived as authority figures, and male practitioners wanted no part of women sharing that authority with them. As nasty as the “Women’s Movement” of the 1960s may have become, at least it radically changed the playing field so that today women function on a virtual equal basis as men as M.D.’s, D.O.’s, and such.

Interestingly, the Roman Catholic Church weighed in on modernity’s growing tendency to subject women to rude “manhandling” in certain medical procedures. A coterie of esteemed canon lawyers, working with Popes Pius X and Benedict XV, produced a masterpiece of collated and comprehensive ecclesiastical law for that church known as the 1917 Code of Canon Law. They utilized an opportunity of the day concerning marriage law to make a very salient point. At the time the matter of non-consummation of a marriage ceremony had become worthy of church scrutiny as spouses would sometimes claim – for any number of reasons or agendas - they weren’t really married because they hadn’t had sex.

In Chapter 4 - On evidence (in marriage ecclesiastical trial), Article 2 – On the inspection of the body (to determine either impotence in the male or intact genital features in the woman), Canon 1979, sub-articles 2 and 3 stipulate the following regarding physical examination of the woman:

“But regarding the inspection of the woman, two midwives who have legitimate evidence of [their] expertise must be designated by office; unless the woman [herself] wanted to be inspected by two physicians also designated by office . . .

“The inspection of the woman’s body must be made fully observing the dictates of Christian modesty and always in the presence of an upright matron designated by office.”

The Canon Law Digest commentary subsequently published in 1934, article 89, re-emphasizes the call to Christian modesty in this matter, even allowing “two mature and faithful matrons, if necessary [in rural settings] to conduct the inspection.”

This is truly remarkable, especially since the Roman Church, in which I serve as a retired but active priest, eventually and practically threw out the wise perspectives of men of God back in the early 20th century, with male OB/GYNs as common as fireflies in Georgia on a summer evening. The powerful forces of secularization have even penetrated my own church, which deeply saddens me.

Today we have state legislatures that have mandated, not only common sense rules concerning immunizations for schoolchildren, but even non-consensual physical examinations of high school students, for what?? purpose? The 1949 Pennsylvania General Assembly even went so far as to include in statutory language the proviso that “sufficient clothing should be removed so as to allow a ‘thorough’ examination.” True enough, a student or a parent could opt – with some logistical difficulty – to take the examination form to a physician of their own choice, or seek a “religious exemption” – whatever that meant – but most often my female classmates in a Philadelphia suburb public school had no idea what was involved until they queued up in the infirmary wearing their blue gym bloomers and blouse for their turn. The male physician, according to the form, was not to conduct a too intimate exam (breasts and genitalia excluded for females) but he nevertheless would conduct an abdominal exam, concerning which one of these young ladies later told a friend of mine she briefly dated, “he ought to keep his hands to himself!”

There really was no need to go any further during these exams than record height, weight, BMI, blood pressure, heart & lung auscultation (through the blouse), and little else. Today scoliosis is an issue, but a school nurse can easily conduct those evaluations. The bottom line is that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was following a dangerous trend in turning the sons and daughters of parents into wards

of the state, flexing power over families and individuals, which incredibly, has never been challenged by legal action.

Even more incredibly, the State of New York even requires periodic evaluation of sexual maturity using the so-called “Tanner Score”, in which an adolescence male or female presents their body – full frontal nudity – usually today to a school nurse, so as to provide a Tanner “Score” of development. I will withhold from mentioning the particulars. Part of all this is to desensitize school children to sexual matters and develop a “clientele” customer base for the medical industry in adulthood, an industry that is very, very powerful. It is truly a form of “grooming”, as in child abuse, so that, as one female member of the clergy of a denomination I once belonged to put it, “You haven’t lived until you’ve had a pelvic exam.” Or another woman writing in a recent blog post, gushing over her OB/GYN, said “Oh, he’s a GOD!” (emphasis hers). (Im)pure idolatry, immoderate immodesty. So are we really surprised today when public schools are secretly providing gender-bending “therapy” to students, parents often totally out of the picture? God help us!

Conclusion

It’s often alleged that male OB/GYNs have a different kind of brain than a female. To which statement I agree, but not for the same reasons. It’s alleged that men can “compartmentalize” their experiences and that intimate examination contexts are put into a different “box” than their emotional/sexual “boxes”. To which I would compare a computer with a single monitor that’s working on two programs in a toggle like fashion – maybe one a document, the other an Excel program. I can minimize one program to focus on the other, **BUT THE CPU IS STILL – LITERALLY – BURNING AND CHURNING THE MINIMIZED PROGRAM ALL THE WHILE, TO BE RETRIVED AT WILL.** Every such interaction between man and woman involves a kind of “quantum entanglement” (as applicable to people as to sub-atomic particles), and a bit of piece of a female patient in an intimate exam stays with the physician, and vice versa, all good intentions aside, unless and until the entanglement is dissolved through spiritual purification. This is NOT a matter of mere intention, but objective, ontological reality. When my wife was birthing our first child in 1975, we had to drive two hours through West Virginia winter weather to get to a facility with a female physician willing to provide pre-natal care and to deliver our precious daughter.

Tough days to be a lady doctor, and Dr. Margaret was tough. I look forward to thanking her again in the Kingdom of God.

We have difficult choices and situations to deal with today, but the Truth is the Truth, and we've always known it, whether or not we close our eyes to it. History, theology, scripture, psychology, common sense, even physics has something to offer in this matter.

Let's do the right thing, remembering Old Testament king Asa who died from his illness because he depended only "on the physicians, and not the Lord" (Second Chronicles 16:12).

Postscript

Let's diligently pray for physicians, nurses, and medical staff of any stripe, anywhere, whether or not they observe medical modesty principles. Perhaps the Lord will be able to give at least some of them a change of heart and mind. Amen!