

A Sermon on Dress Codes

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for January 21st, 2024 (and beyond)

Malta is 93.3% Catholic and bans the sale of denim (Source: <https://malta.desertcart.com/products/537632911-banned-check-skinny-jeans>), but residents can order it to be shipped to them even if they find it difficult to find a place to wear it. In 2023, A Catholic Radio Station in Poland asserted that women should abandon wearing pants of any sort and should solely wear dresses and skirts. Source: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/04/27/catholic-broadcaster-challenges-women-to-wear-dresses-not-trousers-to-honour-virgin-mary/> In 2023, if visiting Italy, “Often, a sign outside indicates what you can and can’t wear. It is forbidden for both men and women to enter with uncovered shoulders, midriffs or knees. That means no spaghetti straps, sleeveless tops, crop tops, shorts, or above-the-knee dresses. Some attractions may offer shawls or cover-ups if you are dressed inappropriately, but others may turn you away at the door...Lipari, the largest of Sicily’s Aeolian islands, has a similar rule. Since 2013, wearing swimming costumes or flip-flops could land you a fine of up to €500 (\$546).” Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccahughes/2023/06/26/italy-is-cracking-down-on-dress-codes-here-are-the-clothing-rules-you-need-to-follow/?sh=3c9034cd5681> In the US even, denim has been banned by Catholic run churches and schools. Sources: <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/cathedral-catholic-high-school-no-skirts-dress-code-san-diego/134727/> and https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1565012482/chsvborg/rcavxctoqdhd24n2zwoh/DressCode_2019-20.pdf But, Catholic businesses also disallow their employees to wear denim, leggings, and other items banned by the church and ask their female employees to wear skirts or dresses. "Malta Women’s Lobby Chair Anna Borg had words of condemnation for Judge Consuelo Scerri Herrera’s 20 March ruling on the Msida police station rape case, saying it creates “a culture of impunity” when contacted by The Shift. She said, “The system punishes the victim while emboldening perpetrators to continue harassing and raping women, fearing no consequence.”” Source: <https://theshiftnews.com/2023/03/27/msida-police-rape-trial-symptomatic-of-a-culture-of-impunity/> What does raping women have to do with dress codes?

“April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Sexual violence is a public health and safety issue that affects both women and men alike. It is difficult to discuss, and it often goes unmentioned, leaving many to suffer in silence. This year, the Department of the Interior (DOI) is recognizing Sexual Assault Awareness Month with the Denim Day campaign. This year, Denim Day will be commemorated on April 29.

Denim Day began more than twenty-one years ago, after the Italian Supreme Court overturned a rape conviction because the justices felt that since the victim was wearing tight jeans, she must have helped the person who raped her remove her jeans, implying consent. The following day, women in the Italian Parliament came to work wearing jeans in solidarity with the victim.” Source: <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eo/doi-denim-day-campaign>

“Denim Is The Fabric Of The People, & Levi's Has A Long Legacy Of Supporting Equality” Source: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/viva/fashion/denim-is-the-fabric-of-the-people-levis-has-a-long-legacy-of-supporting-equality/IKNPLZKNLDUOQO46JJ4E53EVNQ/>

“Through another societal shift, jeans became symbolic of independence, freedom and a move away from the traditions of the past. On top of that, denim was something that both men and women could wear, making it a sartorial symbol of gender equality.” Source: <https://fashionista.com/2017/03/levis-jeans-womens-denim-history>

So, I appreciate that the US Congress took action in support of gender equality and in opposition to sexual violence by embracing denim. Source: <https://apnews.com/article/senate-dress-code-fetterman-schumer-1175eec2cc270e22848da891865134d3> That's a dress code I can support.

In addition, supportive clothing is helpful to those with arthritis and therapeutic in pain management. ““Compression clothing can help some patients by giving them a sense of joint stability. Depending on the symptoms, it can be worn almost all day.”” Source: <https://www.everydayhealth.com/psoriatic-arthritis/compression-clothing/> To compress is to “flatten by pressure; squeeze or press” and leggings as well as “stretchy” jeans or even some tights do help relieve arthritis pain. I know from experience. So, when someone bans denim it both triggers my trauma as a sexual assault survivor and feels threatening to my overall comfort where I find compressing clothing alleviates arthritis pain.

Beyond the above, some companies, whether Catholic or just unduly influenced by Catholics or not, will not hire someone with a tattoo. The Medusa tattoo (mine is a scorpion with words that say “Release the Titans” of which Medusa was/is one on my right wrist which is difficult to completely cover without losing some mobility and I’m allergic to make-up with very few exceptions and the make-up that fully covers I’m allergic to, I can only wear sheer without a reaction that may require medical attention) is also a symbol of empowerment for victims of sexual assault. Source: <https://carefl.org/the-medusa-tattoo/> For me my left wrist and front left shoulder tattoo represent Eastern philosophy and my right wrist and right back shoulder tattoo represent Western philosophy and harmonize together in a #TaoFu way which is why I find them representative of my religion, faith, and at times social justice commitments.

I find bans on denim and tattoos to represent misogyny and oppression, so would prefer not to work for anyone who would ban them, blame victims, and ignore their own lack of self-discipline while proving their own hypocrisy by accepting no personal responsibility and promoting inequality.

25% of US employers won’t hire someone who has a tattoo. Source: <https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/tattoos-in-the-workplace-considerations-and-policies>
23.1% of the US identifies as Catholic (2018). Source:

<https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/RRA%20Catholic%20presentation.pdf>

COPE Ministries is a Wycliffite church, which means Protestant though arguably also revolutionary. This is the USA and I'm free to practice my religion without being discriminated against because of it. Banning denim and banning tattoos are discriminatory micro-aggressions. Levi-A-Thon Now!

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.