Fœderatio Internationalis *Una Voce*

***Positio* N. 22**

HEADCOVERINGS IN CHURCH IN THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM

DECEMBER 2014

From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics 'attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition', and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

Headcoverings in Church in the Extraordinary Form: Abstract

The Apostolic custom of headcoverings for women is maintained by many Catholics attached to the Extraordinary Form. St Paul laid down that women should cover their heads, and men uncover them, and explained this in terms of his analogy between the relationship between bridegroom and bride, and between Christ and the Church. As Pope St John Paul II taught, female members of the Church represent the Church in a particular way; thus they represent the bride, veiled, both as a symbol of obedience and sacredness. Appendices examine the claim that the custom of the primitive Church was taken from other cultures, and the experience of women recovering the tradition of head coverings today.

Comments can be sent to

positio@fiuv.org

POSITIO 22: HEAD COVERINGS IN CHURCH IN THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM

Introduction

1. The custom of women covering their heads, and of men uncovering them, as expressed in the 1917 Code (Canon 1262 §2),[1] is an Apostolic tradition stressed by St Paul.[2] The tradition is maintained in the Eastern Churches, and by many attached to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite; in the Western cultural context, head coverings can take the form of hats, scarfs, hoods, or mantillas ('chapel veils'). [3] Although the 1983 Code makes no reference to it,[4] the tradition has been described by Raymond, Cardinal Burke, then Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura, as an 'expectation' in celebrations of the Extraordinary Form.[5] In the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* Pope Benedict XVI quotes the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

> As from time immemorial, so too in the future, it is necessary to maintain the principle that "each particular Church must be in accord with the universal Church not only regarding the doctrine of the faith and sacramental signs, but also as to the usages universally received from apostolic and unbroken tradition. These are to be observed not only so that errors may be avoided, but also that the faith may be handed on in its integrity, since the Church's rule of prayer *(lex orandi)* corresponds to her rule of faith (*lex credendi)*."[6]

---

[1] Canon 1262 §2: 'Men, in a church or outside a church, while they are assisting at sacred rites, shall be bare-headed, unless the approved mores of the people or peculiar circumstances of things determine otherwise; women, however, shall have a covered head and be modestly dressed, especially when they shall approach the table of the Lord.' ('Viri in ecclesia vel extra ecclesiam, dum sacris ritibus assistunt, nudo capite sint, nisi aliud ferant probati populorum mores aut peculiaria rerum adiuncta; mulieres autem, capite cooperto et modeste vestitae, maxime cum ad mensam Dominicam accedunt.')

[2] 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

[3] Practice at the Extraordinary Form varies between and within countries. Where the use of the mantilla or chapel veil specifically for church was established by the 1960s, it has proved easier to restore than the use of hats, which have gone out of fashion in almost all contexts.

[4] The force of the obligation is already dismissed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the 1976 Instruction *Inter insigniores:* 'Another objection is based upon the transitory character that one claims to see today in some of the prescriptions of Saint Paul concerning women, and upon the difficulties that some aspects of his teaching raise in this regard. But it must be noted that these ordinances, probably inspired by the customs of the period, concern scarcely more than disciplinary practices of minor importance, such as the obligation imposed upon women to wear a veil on their head (1 Cor 11:2-16); such requirements no longer have a normative value. However, the Apostle's forbidding of women to speak in the assemblies (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Ti 2:12) is of a different nature, and exegetes define its meaning in this way: Paul in no way opposes the right, which he elsewhere recognises as possessed by women, to prophesy in the assembly (1 Cor 11:15); the prohibition solely concerns the official function of teaching in the Christian assembly. For Saint Paul this prescription is bound up with the divine plan of creation (1 Cor 11:7; Gen 2:18-24): it would be difficult to see in it the expression of a cultural fact.' The question of the veiling of women at prayer being 'inspired by the customs of the period' is addressed below.

[5] In a private letter, dated 4th April 2011, made available on https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/head_coverings_in_church.htm (accessed 15th October 2014).

[6] Pope Benedict XVI (2007) motu propio *Summorum Pontificum*: 'Ab immemorabili tempore sicut etiam in futurum, principium servandum est «iuxta quod unaquaeque Ecclesia particularis concordare debet cum universali Ecclesia non solum quoad fidei doctrinam et signa sacramentalia, sed etiam quoad usus universaliter acceptos ab apostolica et continua traditione, qui servandi sunt non solum ut errores vitentur, verum etiam ad fidei integritatem tradendam, quia Ecclesiae lex orandi eius legi credendi respondet»' The internal quotation is from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002) 397. Cf. Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei 2011 Instruction *Universae Ecclesiae*: '27. With regard to the disciplinary norms connected to celebration, the ecclesiastical discipline contained in the Code of Canon Law of 1983 applies. 28. Furthermore, by virtue of its character of special law, within its own area, the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* derogates from those provisions of law, connected with the sacred Rites, promulgated from 1962 onwards and incompatible with the rubrics of the liturgical books in effect in 1962.' ('27. Quoad

In light of all this it would seem that to maintain the tradition is both highly congruent with the ancient liturgy, and laudible in itself as an expression of fidelity to an Apostolic tradition. This paper seeks to provide this practice, which is almost completely unknown in the Ordinary Form, with a rationale.

St Paul on the Complementarity of the Sexes

2. St Paul's explanation of the practice he mandates turns on the complementarity of the sexes.[7]

> But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered disgraceth his head. …The man indeed ought not to cover his head: because he is the image and glory of God. But the woman is the glory of the man.[8]

3. The passage needs to be read in conjunction with St Paul's description of the relationship of marriage in his letter to the Ephesians:

> Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. He is the saviour of his body. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ: so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things.[9]

4. The authority of Christ over the Church, to which the authority of the husband over the wife is an analogue, suggests the further analogy of the relationship of the head to the body. The woman being the 'body' of the family, and by analogy the body of the Church, is related to the idea of Our Lady as the Icon, the image, of the Church, in a phrase of St Ambrose[10] which is quoted in *Lumen Gentium*[11] and reiterated in Pope St John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem*.[12] Again, the woman being the bride of her husband, the Church as bride is represented by the female. Pope St John Paul II taught:

> This spousal dimension, which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.[13]

---

regulas disciplinares ad celebrationem *formae extraordinariae* pertinentes, applicetur disciplina ecclesiastica Codicis Iuris Canonici anno. 1983 promulgati. 28. Praeterea, cum sane de lege speciali agitur, quoad materiam propriam, Litterae Apostolicae *Summorum Pontificum* derogant omnibus legibus liturgicis, sacrorum rituum propriis, exinde ab anno 1962 promulgatis, et cum rubricis librorum liturgicorum anni 1962 non congruentibus.')

[7] See Positio 1: *The Service of the Altar by Men and Boys*

[8] 1 Cor 11:3-4, 6: 'Volo autem vos scire quod omnis viri caput Christus est caput autem mulieris vir caput vero Christi Deus. Omnis vir orans aut prophetans velato capite deturpat caput suum. … Vir quidem non debet velare caput quoniam imago et gloria est Dei mulier autem gloria viri est.'

[9] Ephesians 5:22-24: 'Mulieres viris suis subditae sint sicut Domino, quoniam vir caput est mulieris sicut Christus caput est ecclesiae; ipse salvator corporis sed ut ecclesia subiecta est Christo. Ita et mulieres viris suis in omnibus.' The Greek word 'kephale' used in these passages was used to mean both 'head' and 'master' by the Fathers.

[10] S. Ambrosius, Expos. Lc. II, 7: PL 15, 1555

[11] *Lumen Gentium* 63

[12] MD 27 'Mariam Nazarethanam Ecclesiae esse "figuram"' Cf. Pope St John Paul II Encylcical *Redemptoris Mater* (1987) 44: Mary is a 'model and figure of the Church' ('exemplar ac typus Ecclesiae')

[13] Vita consecrata 34: 'Hac in sponsali ratione quae praecipua est omnis consecratae vitae, mulier, propriam quasi indolem detegens suae cum Domino coniunctionis, se reperit ipsa.' This could be rendered more

5. Summarising this long tradition, Manfred Hauke notes, having referred to the Blessed Virgin Mary as 'archetype of "Mother Church"':[14]

> In an analogical way, therefore, women, too, are representative *and* embodiments of the Church. As opposed to men and the male priesthood, they symbolise a reality with which they are themselves identical.[15]

6. In short, the head covering of women in church is a symbolic assertion both of the complementarity of the sexes within marriage, and also of the subordination of the Church to Christ. The Church, represented by the female members of the congregation, effaces her own glory—the natural beauty of the head—to give glory to God. The uncovered heads of the male members of the congregation are an assertion of Christ's authority, to which, as members of the Church, the men are themselves subordinate.

Veiling and the Sacred

7. St Paul's understanding of the meaning of veiling is indicated in a later passage of 1 Corinthians, which returns to the analogy of the Church as a body.

> And such as we think to be the less honourable members of the body, about these we put more abundant honour: and those that are our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.[16]

Although the veiling of the head is a symbol of being under authority—St Paul writes that a woman should 'have a power over her head' (I Cor 11:10)[17]—veiling is nevertheless a way of giving honour to what is veiled. The Church, as represented by the female, is veiled as subordinate and as holy: the spotless Bride of Christ.[18]

8. The veiling of the holy is something very familiar to those attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition. While hiding a thing, veiling also, in a certain sense, draws attention to it, underlining its importance. Thus, most obviously, the Blessed Sacrament is veiled in the Ciborium inside the Tabernacle; the use of the Chalice veil is another example.[19] The Church as Bride is veiled to underline not only her submission to Christ, but her purity and holiness.

9. In the modern West, as in other cultures, this symbolism remains in use, notably in the wedding ceremony. Veiling indicates the Bride's reserve, and at the same time her purity and beauty. Veiling as an indication of sacredness is emphasised by Alice von

---

literally: 'In this spousal way of thinking, which is the foremost consideration of all consecrated life, woman, discovering the as it were particular character of her union with the Lord, finds herself.'

[14] Manfred Hauke *Women in the Priesthood? A systematic analysis in the light of the Order of Creation and Redemption* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 1986) p322

[15] Hauke *ibid.* p324; emphasis in the original.

[16] 1 Cor 12:23: 'Et quae putamus ignobiliora membra esse corporis his honorem abundantiorem circumdamus et quae inhonesta sunt nostra abundantiorem honestatem habent.'

[17] 'debet mulier potestatem habere supra caput'.

[18] Ephesians 5:22: 'Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of his body.' ('Quoniam vir caput est mulieris sicut Christus caput est ecclesiae ipse salvator corporis.) Cf. 2 Cor 11:2: 'For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.' ('Despondi enim vos uni viro virginem castam exhibere Christo.'); and Rom 7:3-4.

[19] Another scriptural example is the veiling of Moses to hide the radiancy of his face, after he had been speaking with the Lord, from the people: Exodus 34:33f.

Hildebrand,[20] and this understanding is also found in the Islamic world.[21] By contrast, embarrassment, shame, or degradation are symbolised by stripping: to expose is to dishonour and shame.[22]

Headcoverings and men

10. From a cross-cultural perspective, the practice of male Christians uncovering their heads in church is far more surprising than the practice of females covering them. The fact that men and women in the West no longer commonly wear hats or other head coverings has obscured the fact that, on entering a church, it was men who needed to take off their hats, for most of Christian history, and not women who had to cover them, since they were already covered.

11. A related issue worth mentioning is that, while Protestants generally followed St Paul's instructions on head coverings into the 20th century[23] (and a minority still do), a noticeable contrast in practice was that, rejecting the theological category of a consecrated building, Protestant men would not uncover their heads in church unless actually praying.[24]

The modern relevance of veiling

12. The maintenance of this Apostolic tradition in the West, even if only in the context of the Extraordinary Form, is a valuable link with the primitive Church, and a mark of solidarity with the Eastern Churches.[25] As the Instruction *Il Padre* expressed it:

> For historical and cultural reasons, they have maintained a more direct continuity with the spiritual atmosphere of Christian origins, a prerogative that is ever more

[20] Alice von Hildebrand *Man and Woman: a Divine invention* (Ave Maria FL: Sapientia Press, 2010) p41 and *passim*.

[21] The ethnographer Fadwa El Guindi comments that, although the word 'modesty' has been appropriated by Muslim women in the West as expressing their aim in veiling, a more accurate formula would be 'Sanctity—Reserve—Respect.' Fadwa El Guindi *Veil* p82. She notes the veiling of the Ka'ba, the holiest site in the Muslim world and the centre of the Haj pilgrimage (p95).

[22] In the Biblical tradition, this is most notable in Numbers 5:18, when the veil of a woman suspected of adultery is removed by the priest; cf Song of Songs 5:7. In Islam, as the dress of a respectable woman, veils often become more elaborate for women of higher status, and simpler or non-existent for women of lower status, and sometimes even forbidden for the latter: see Guindi p104.

[23] The Church of England formally abolished the requirement for women to cover their heads when approaching Communion in 1942 (Canon 18 of the Canons Ecclesiastical of the Church of England).

[24] They would, for example, put their hats on to hear the sermon; they can be seen in many paintings of the 17th century visiting fine churches with their hats on. Doffing a hat on approaching a church door could even be, within Anglicanism, a sign of a Catholic mentality.

[25] Pope St John Paul II Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen* 8: 'Today we often feel ourselves prisoners of the present. It is as though man had lost his perception of belonging to a history which precedes and follows him. This effort to situate oneself between the past and the future, with a grateful heart for the benefits received and for those expected, is offered by the Eastern Churches in particular, with a clear-cut sense of continuity which takes the name of Tradition and of eschatological expectation.' ('Captivos hodie saepius nos temporis praesentis esse sentimus: quasi si notionem homo amiserit sese esse particulam alicuius historiae praecedentis et subsequentis. Huic magno labori, quo contendit quis ut se inter praeteritum collocet futurumque tempus cum grato sane animo tam de acceptis quam de donis postmodum accipiendis, clarum praestant Orientales Ecclesiae sensum continuationis, quae sibi Traditionis atque eschatologicae exspectationis nomina sumit.')

> frequently considered even by the Occident not as a sign of stagnancy and backwardness but of precious fidelity to the sources of salvation.[26]

The fidelity of the Oriental Churches, and of those attached to the Extraordinary Form in the Latin Church, can be a sign and an inspiration for the whole Church, as the Rechabites' fidelity to tradition was a sign to Israel in the time of the prophet Jeremiah.[27]

13. In the West, the counter-cultural nature of the tradition amplifies its power, as a witness to tradition and to the sacredness of the context in which it is worn.[28]

14. In relation to non-Christian societies, which have maintained or rediscovered the use of head coverings, the traditional Catholic practice presents an opening for genuine dialogue. It was in the context of a drive for 'modest and respectful' dress in places of worship of all faiths in Sri Lanka that head coverings for women were again enforced in St Lucia's Cathedral, Columbo, in 2011.[29]

15. Throughout Europe, as well as in traditionally Islamic countries, the sight of Muslim women[30] veiled in public has become commonplace, and the Islamic critique of Western women as lacking in reserve, and therefore dignity, is well established. The veiling of Catholic women in church is an indication, however small, that the concerns of Islamic critics of the West are not entirely incomprehensible to Catholics, and that we do not endorse the loss of feminine dignity, the loss indeed of the sense of feminine sacredness, which has followed the Sexual Revolution.

---

[26] Congregation for the Oriental Churches: Instruction *Il Padre, incomprensibile* (1996) 9

[27] See Jeremiah 35

[28] See Appendix B, and Positio 11: *Evangelisation and Western Culture.*

[29] 'Colombo Cathedral requires women to use a veil during Mass': photograph caption in a news report by UCA News, 20th January 2011. The story added: 'The Catholic National Association of Laity (CNAL) in Sri Lanka has backed calls for people of all faiths to dress modestly in places of worship.' …In an appeal to worshippers, Victor Silva, secretary of CNAL, noted "with great sadness and dismay the unfortunate trend among some Catholic lay faithful to be dressed in an immodest and most disrespectful manner when participating in liturgical services, with scant attention to the sense of the sacred."…The Sri Lankan government has set up a panel of different faiths to prepare a dress code for places of worship.' http://www.ucanews.com/news/sri-lankan-lay-catholics-call-for-dress-code/3230 accessed 21st October 2014.

[30] Veiling in Islam is most associated with women, although head coverings are worn by both sexes in public and for prayer, and veiling of the face is not unknown among men.

Appendix A: Head coverings in St Paul's cultural context

The claim that the practice of the primitive Church in relation to head coverings reflects the wider cultural context is widely made, and generally regarded as undermining the authority of St Paul's mandate: it is dismissed, for example in the 1976 Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Inter insigniores,* as simply a 'cultural fact'.[31] The difficulty for this approach, however, lies in identifying any culture with which the primitive Christians were in contact as making use of the practice described in 1 Corinthians 11.

Depictions of pagan sacrifice, as well as literary references, make it clear that the Roman custom was for a person, of either sex, to cover the head while performing sacrifices, for example with a part of the toga. It does not appear that onlookers, or those in the sacrificial procession, did the same thing, although they are often depicted wearing garlands. It should be remembered that sacrifices (including libations) were carried out not only by priests in temples, but in a domestic context on a daily basis.

When we consider the no less numerous depictions of the pagan sacrificial cult in a Greek cultural context, commonly shown on Greek vases, it is evident that head coverings were not used, though again garlands, for both sexes, are often in evidence.

In neither case can we find a precedent for the insistence that women cover their heads in the context of worship, and that men should uncover them.

Turning to the Jewish practice, the traditional practice maintained today by Orthodox Jews, and universal until the 20th century, is for men to cover their heads, and even to use a double head covering.[32] The yarmulke (or kippah: a skullcap) is worn throughout the day, by men and boys,[33] and a tallit (prayer shawl), in addition to the yarmulke, during prayers, especially the Shema, by married men.[34]

Women are not obliged to wear these coverings,[35] and for this reason it is traditionally regarded as inappropriate for them to do so. Married women are obliged to cover their heads as a matter of modesty,[36] but this is not tied either to times of prayer or to a specific ritual garment.[37]

---

[31] Quoted in context in note 3 *supra.*

[32] This is maintained by the Ultra-Orthodox, with a hat over the yarmulke, and during prayers a tallit over it.

[33] Most commonly, from the age of three.

[34] This is connected with the commands of Deuteronomy 22:12 and Numbers 15:37-8. The latter passage forms part of the Shema, which makes the use of the tallit particularly appropriate. The large tallit is related to the small tallit worn under the shirt, which does not cover the head, and is worn all day. For married men, the large tallit is worn over the head when praying the Shema in addition to this. The Shema is said during both morning and evening prayers.

[35] As a 'time bound' commandment (since it does not apply at night), it applies only to men. This general interpretive principle is found as early as the first century: "All positive commandments that are time-bound, men are obligated but women are exempt. And all positive commandments that are not time-bound, the same holds for men and women, they are both obligated. And all negative commandments, whether or not time-bound, the same holds for men and for women, they are obligated." (Mishnah Kiddushin 1:7)

[36] This may take the form of a wig (sheitel) among Orthodox Jews in public.

[37] Although the requirement of modesty is naturally heightened in a religious context.

It is impossible to establish definitively what was observed in the first century, but it seems clear that then, as for Jews in later centuries, head coverings during prayers were more closely associated with, and ritually significant for, men than with women.

Priests who officiated in Temple worship were commanded to wear a linen mitre or turban, the High Priest having an additional, gold ornament on his.[38] Moses[39] and Elijah[40] veiled themselves in the presence of the Divine. Scriptural references to the veiling of women, such as Rebecca when she first sees her betrothed,[41] and the beloved in the Song of Songs,[42] are outside a specifically religious context.

Midrash references to the covering of the head in the context of prayer are to men: Mordechai,[43] Nakdimon ben Gurion,[44] and in general Rabbis and Sages.[45] The last point is reflected in the reference to the phylacteries and tassels of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5, and the depiction of Moses closely wrapped in a tallit among the murals in the third century synagogue at Dura Europos.

To conclude, what is striking about the primitive Christian custom is the contrasting practices of men and women. This is not found, in this context, in contemporary pagan practice, and Jewish custom tended in a direction directly opposite to the Christian one. It would seem perverse to insist, in light of this, that the Christian practice simply reflected a widespread cultural norm, and thus that St Paul's theological explanation was a mere rationalisation. On the contrary, there is every indication that the Christian practice was distinct from that of the surrounding cultures, and that it was new and deliberately chosen.

If a further explanation is needed, beyond St Paul's theological account, it would be natural to relate it to the conscious differentiation from the practice of others characteristic of Judaism itself, on the principle 'do not walk in their ways.'[46] Other examples of Christian differentiation from Jewish practice would include the direction of prayer,[47] weekly days of fasting,[48] and the suppression of Jewish feast days.[49] This differentiation itself has enduring theological, and not merely passing cultural, significance, and has given us the mixture of continuity and discontinuity which characterises the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

---

[38] Ex 28:4, 36-7. Cf. Ex39:26, 30; Lev 16:4
[39] Exodus 34:33f.
[40] 1 Kings 19:13
[41] Genesis 24:65
[42] Song of Songs 4:1. See also the passages already noted on the removal of head coverings: Numbers 5:18 and Song of Songs 5:7
[43] Mid. Rab. *Leviticus* 23:6
[44] See Juday Goldin, trans. *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan ['Abot deRabbi Natan],* (Yale, 1995), 45
[45] Mid. Rab. *Ecclesiastes* 2:15; 4:1. The Midrash examples are discussed by Tim Hegg, 2001: "Should I remove my Kippah? A Jewish perspective of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16"
http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/1Cor11_Kippah_Final.pdf accessed 29th October 2014
[46] Proverbs 1:15. The Douai translation has: 'My son, walk not thou with them, restrain thy foot from their paths.'
[47] Christian prayer was directed towards the Mount of Olives, and later the East, rather than the Temple. See Fr Uwe Michael Lang *Turning Towards the Lord* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2004) pp37-8.
[48] From the pious Jewish practice of fasting on Mondays and Thursdays (see Luke 18:12), still observed by Ashkenazi Jews, to a practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. (Although a short fast on Friday is also found in the Jewish tradition: see Talmud Pesachim 99b.)
[49] See Galatians 4:10

Appendix B: The Testimony of Young Women on Veiling today.

The use of head coverings for women in church, particularly at the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, has generated a great deal of discussion, and many blog and video explanations and defences of head coverings are available online.[50] These tend to focus on the experience of young women who have adopted the use of head coverings in church, generally in the form of a lace mantilla or 'chapel veil'. The symbolic connection with the bridal or spousal nature of women is often noted in these explanations, something emphasised by the connection between the mantilla and traditional (and still very popular) bridal attire. These also make a number of points not made in this Position Paper, which are worth noting, specific to the cultural context in which these women find themselves.

The use of a head covering is a strongly counter-cultural sign for a modern Western woman, and this is particularly so when a mantilla is used, since today this is identified as something specifically religious. The presence of women wearing mantillas at Mass is therefore a highly effective witness to the sacredness of the Mass and to the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. This witness is more powerful than in a cultural situation where women would wear the same head covering in church as elsewhere.

It is also an effective witness to the wearer's fidelity to tradition; a putting aside of both personal preferences and the pressures of contemporary fashions, in favour of the immemorial wisdom of the Church.

In terms of fashion, the emphasis today on women having loose hair, and its connection with modern notions of beauty and sexuality, underlines the significance of covering the head. This is connected with the idea sometimes expressed that young women covering their heads in church are less distracting to men.

Many young women also testify that a mantilla helps to free them from distractions during Mass, and creates an enhanced sense of privacy. The act of covering the head on entering church, like that of crossing oneself with holy water, can, again, help to focus the mind on the sacredness of the building, the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and the liturgy.

In these ways, the young women recovering the tradition of headcovering today are responding to the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

> The Greek word for converting means: to rethink—to question one's own and common way of living; to allow God to enter into the criteria of one's life; to not merely judge according to the current opinions. Thereby, to convert means: not to live as all the others live, not do what all do, not feel justified in dubious, ambiguous, evil actions just because others do the same; [to] begin to see one's life through the eyes of God; thereby looking for the good, even if uncomfortable; not aiming at the judgment of the majority, of men, but on the justice of God—in other words: to look for a new style of life, a new life.[51]

---

[50] Examples of videos can be found at the following urls: http://youtu.be/lFqSae_ZwRY ; http://youtu.be/Q9d4eLBAPFA ; http://youtu.be/zoNovGyyuKI : accessed 21st October 2014. Many more can be found using suitable search terms within video-sharing websites.

[51] Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger) 'Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers', Jubilee of Catechists, 12th December 2000.