

SHOULD WOMEN COVER THEIR HEADS IN WORSHIP?



A Brief Examination of the Doctrine of Christian Liberty

On Women Covering Their Heads
for The Divine Service at Our Savior

When you attend The Divine Service at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, you'll notice that there are a number of women in our congregation who cover their heads with beautiful veils, hats, etc. This reverent and appropriate practice is based on the Words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, which read in part "... *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.*

For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered." St. Paul continues " For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels... But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God."

The Words of the Apostle are clear, and need no explanation. Like many assertions of Scripture, these Words conflict with what is taught and believed in the world today. Personal rights, individuality, freedom and equality have been the watchwords of the secular culture. The Order of Creation is rejected by the world, as are the Biblical roles of man and woman in the church and home. It is no small wonder that these Words of St. Paul, and the practice at Our Savior, are difficult for some. To compound the problem, for many years women were compelled to cover their heads in worship services as if they had no liberty in the matter.

Pastor McCall fully supports, and is in favor of, the tradition of women covering their heads in The Divine Service. Therefore, our congregation provides a collection of free head coverings in the narthex for any female to take and make reverent use of in the worship of her Lord in the bold confession of the good Order of His Creation.

Neither Our Savior as a congregation nor Pastor McCall as its shepherd *require* women to cover their heads in The Divine Service. It would be wrong to do so. Scripture supports this assertion. St. Paul writes to the Church in Rome about adherence to dietary

traditions "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things... Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean... Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Rom 14:1-19)

Our Confessions treat this question. In Article XXVII of the Augsburg Confession, we read: "...it is lawful for bishops or pastors to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the Church, not that thereby we should merit grace or make satisfaction for sins, or that consciences be bound to judge them necessary services (*cultus*), and to think that it is a sin to break them without offense to others.

So Paul ordains, 1 Cor. 11, 5, that "women should cover their heads in the congregation", 1 Cor. 14, 30 that "interpreters be heard in order in the church," etc.

It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility, so far that one do not offend another, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion... but so that consciences be not burdened to think that they are necessary to salvation, or to judge that they sin when they break them without offense to others; as no one will say that a woman sins who goes out in public with her head uncovered, provided only that no offense be given."

It is in this context, our freedom in the Gospel, that women (and girls) are invited, but not required, to cover their heads during The Divine Service. Let it be at Our Savior that pious, faithful Lutheran women, catechized by the Scriptures, loving and respecting one another in Christ, may elect not to cover their heads, or to cover their heads, as their personal piety leads them, prayerfully giving due consideration to the tradition being established at Our Savior and the consciences of their Christian sisters. But let Christ and Him crucified and risen for us, and the saving Gifts that He alone can give, remain the focus and center of our worship and our life together.

For more information about head coverings/ veils, including a link to an inexpensive online veil shop, a good article on the topic, and a couple of insightful podcasts, too, visit our website at

oursaviornorthroyalton.org/head-coverings-veils/

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