

Is there a Church Dress Code?

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Introduction

People always ask the question “Is there such a thing like a dress code for church?” My answer is a question: Is there a dress code for any kind of professional work? Their answer is: Yes. So, if work requires dress code and violators could suffer penalty, why not the church? Why don’t we follow a dress code that was given to us by the Lord in His Book, which is called “The Word of God: The Holy Bible?”

The difference between work and church dress codes is that we will receive blessing and crowns for just dressing modestly in reverence of our body that is called a “holy temple” of the Lord and according to God’s commandments discussed below.

However, we Christians work hard to dismiss the issue of modest clothing as *trivial*. We claim that talking about this issue will turn good church members away from the church and that it is really hard on them; especially young generations and new comers to church. This is not true at all because good church members will never get hurt by the Truth, the Way and the Life (**John 14: 6**). Truth only hurts those who are deceived into thinking that they are good church members and listening to the outside world and its deceiving teachers; as the Bible says:

✠ “And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many...Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (**Matthew 24: 4-11**)

✠ “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (**Revelation 12: 9**)

Modest Apparel

If we go back to the beginning of creation, we will see that it was God Who noticed the first clothing ever invented, judged it inadequate, and intervened to replace it with apparel of His own making:

✠ “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings... Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (**Genesis 3:7,21**)

If God replaced this immodest apparel of fig leaves that will wither, break, and fall and keep them uncovered, and then covered them with tunics of skin, shouldn't we take this issue seriously?

Why did God take that measure? To teach us that immodest clothing, can cause others to stumble putting us under this difficult judgment by the Lord when He said:

✠ “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes” (**Matthew 18: 6-7**)

Imagine this! God is telling the person who causes others to stumble in anything; whether it is clothing, food, drink, bad habits, smoking, drinking, doing drugs, etc., “it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”.

Why would God tell a person that it is better for him to be drowned in the depth of the sea, meaning this sinful world that will suffer deeply; as God warned saying “woe”? St. Paul answered this question for us. He explained to us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore we must glorify God in His temple:

✠ “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (**1 Corinthians 6: 19-20**)

He even went further to tell us that our body is not something that we destroy or defile by exposing it in any way to anyone.

✠ “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (**1 Corinthians 3: 16-17**)

Some people, especially women, think that wearing modest apparel will get them out of style, or make them look like old fashioned people, as if elders wear unacceptable attire from outer space. These are very wrong views that Satan implant in your mind to convince you to wear something that doesn't befit God's children. St. Paul warned against this by saying:

✠ “In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” **(1 Timothy 2: 9-10)**

St. Peter totally agrees with this principle and iterates by saying:

✠ “Do not let your adornment be merely outward -- arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel. Rather, let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” **(1 Peter 3: 3-4)**

God's instruction in these passages is clear: God is telling women not to wear immodest clothing that would call attention to themselves, or to dress up to lure others. To do so was to blaspheme the intent of public worship service and further it was ungodly for women to outwardly dress like worldly women. Godly women showed their godly hearts by their outward modest dress.

Poverty was wide spread in the Early Church. Yet some wealthily church members used the service as a place to show off their wealth by wearing expensive clothes to the services and causing a stir when they entered. Also, they would wear expensive and elaborate hair styles. This is totally out of place in a service held to honor and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is not prohibiting women from wearing braided hair, or gold or pearls and fine clothes since the Bible stated that godly women owned such:

✠ “She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple” **(Proverbs 31:22)**

However, the Bible is clearly forbidding wearing them immodestly and for the wrong motives, or wearing clothes that entice or cause lustfully thinking. Modesty means being modest or not being in excess like putting on too much jewelry. It does not reflect godliness for a woman in public or in the church put on a fashion show or a place to show off herself.

We come to church to worship the Lord, right! If yes, then our appearance in public or in church can honor God or dishonor Him by dishonoring ourselves. A godly woman will not bring attention to herself, but dress and live to show her faith in the Lord. Her testimony of her love of the Lord has the first place in her life and she will not do things that will destroy her testimony or send the wrong message about her relationship with the Lord.

Any woman should attract attention to her godly character, not to herself by her actions or clothing. Her clothes show her concern for her husband and her devotion, respect and love for him alone. Wearing immodest clothes or revealing clothes in public is dishonoring to herself and

shows little respect for her husband. Her devotion should be to her Lord and to her husband; as the Bible use this kind of right adornment representing the human soul as a bride waiting for its heavenly groom:

✠ “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (**Revelation 21: 2**)

Women should ask themselves: "Does my clothing indicate an inward desire to worship God?" "Does it honor God?" "Does it stand out or is it inappropriate for the occasion?" "Does it reflect godliness or worldliness?" "Does it show I love and respect my husband and am not interested in other men."

Wearing Sleeveless or Shorts to Church

As Christians we cannot say, "What I look like is no one's business!" because what we look like reflects on our Lord. My house, my car, my personal appearance, my use of time and money, all reflect how the Lord Jesus Christ has changed my life from the inside out. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes into our lives, He does not cover our blemishes with cosmetic powder, but He cleanses us wholly by working from within. This inner renewal is reflected in the outward appearance.

What would you do if you are called for a job interview? Would you go for an interview wearing shorts or any inappropriate dress? I don't think so. So, you care that much about meeting an earthly person and dress the best proper and most modest apparel because you want to get that earthly job that could offer temporal joy but you don't care about meeting the heavenly Father who would grant you eternal happiness?

You want to meet with the King of kings and Lord of Lords, as if you are going to a fitness club with inappropriate cloths or wearing shorts. If this is ok with God, why did God allow Isaiah to describe this glorious scene for us?

✠ “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory” (**Isaiah 6:1-3**)

How many wings do the seraphim need to fly? Two, right! So, why the Bible mentions the other four? Let us look at this symbolic picture of the Seraphim to understand God's purpose of this detailed description.

The Lord wants to teach us a lesson from the angels of covering the upper part and lower part of the body, meaning a proper covering of the arms (no sleeveless dresses) and legs (no shorts) in the presence of God, in His church. Otherwise, the Bible would have left it out until we see them in heaven, God willing.



Wedding Apparel

Christian weddings are becoming a fashion show of clothing and sensuality. In our church wedding and banquet halls, we lose spirituality and commit so many sins of drinking alcohol, dressing improperly, etc. These inappropriate sins do not only displease our Lord; but they also ruin the spirituality of this great mystery and cause disgust to the angels and many righteous people. The Bible describes the reverence of the House of the Lord saying:

- ✠ “Holiness adorns Your house O Lord, forever” (**Psalm 93:5**)
- ✠ “But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. In fear of You I will worship toward Your temple” (**Psalm 5:7**)
- ✠ “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (**Isaiah 56:7, Luke 19:46, Matthew 21:13**)

Knowing all of this should command all of those who attend church wedding, whether the bride and the groom or their guests to dress modestly and decently, meaning our clothing must provide sufficient covering for the body so that others are not embarrassed or tempted.

This principle is especially relevant today when modern dress fashions reject modesty and decency as the basis for constructive human relationships. The concern of the modern fashion

industry is to sell clothes, jewelry, and cosmetics by exploiting sensuality of the human body, even if it means marketing immodest products that only feed pride and lustful looks.

The Bible explicitly condemns the lustful look:

✠ “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (**Matthew 5:28**)

The revealing clothes promoted by the modern fashion industry awaken lustful passions in the heart of the beholder and contribute immeasurably to the depravity of our time. By dressing modestly, the Christian woman plays a key role in maintaining public morality.

God calls us to dress modestly and decently, not only to prevent sin, but also to preserve intimacy. People who want to sin will sin no matter how modestly dressed the people they see are. The purpose of modesty is not only to prevent lustful desires, but also to preserve something which is very fragile and yet fundamental to the survival of a marital relationship: the ability to maintain a deep, intimate relationship with one's spouse. If marriage is going to last a lifetime, as God intended it to, then husband and wife must work together to preserve, protect, and nurture the intimacy. When all is said and done, modesty will preserve the joy of intimacy long after the ringing of the wedding bells.

The apostolic admonition to dress modestly and decently summons us to reject the seductive dictates of fashion, choosing instead to reflect in our outward appearance the natural beauty of simplicity and of elevated purity. Please read carefully this Scripture:

✠ “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (**Romans 12:1, 2**).

If Satan still tries harder to deceive you and tell you that it is not any body's business of how you dress and that it is men's fault, sin and weakness to look at you, remind yourself with God's teaching that you could be causing them to lust your flesh:

✠ “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (**1 John 2:15-17**)

Also remember the holiness of the church; as Jacob saw it in his dream. Look at what happened when he saw the ladder and the angels were ascending and descending on it:

✠ “He was afraid and said: How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (**Genesis 28: 17**)

Finally, I want to mention the words of the golden mouth, St. John Chrysostom, who strongly criticized worldly celebrations (Public sermons, *Marriage and Family Life*, Page 81-88, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. N.Y.), saying:

1. "Why do you celebrate weddings in a silly and immodest manner"?"
2. "What is the meaning of these drunken parties with their lewd and disgraceful behavior"?"
3. "Is marriage a comedy? It is a mystery, an image for something far greater".
4. "If you have no respect for marriage, at least respect what it symbolizes. It means Christ and the church. It is an image of the church and of Christ, and will you celebrate it in a profane manner"?"
5. "In marriage, the two have become one. How can you celebrate it with a noisy uproar, which dishonors and bewilders the soul"?"

If you want to examine the abovementioned mistakes and to know that they are against the word of God and His commandments, you need to read, understand and meditate on the following Biblical Verses:

- ✠ "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (**Romans 12:1, 2**).
- ✠ "As obedient children, not conforming yourself to the former lusts, in your ignorance; but as He who called you is Holy, you also be holy in all your conduct because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy' ... Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear" (**1 Peter 1:14-17**).
- ✠ "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (**Psalms 1:1-3**).
- ✠ "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (**Ephesians 5:15-16**).
- ✠ "For you, brethren have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh... Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish... If we live in the Spirit, let also walk in the Spirit" (**Galatians 5:13-25**).
- ✠ "Therefore, I urge you, imitate me" (**1 Corinthians 4:16**).
- ✠ "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (**1 Corinthians 11:1**).
- ✠ "Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children" (**Ephesians 5:1**).
- ✠ "Brethren, Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (**Philippians 3:17**).
- ✠ "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (**3 John 1:11**).
- ✠ "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (**1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22**).

- ✠ “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord., for whom I have suffered the Loss of all things, and count them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ” (**Philippians 3:7, 8**).
- ✠ “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (**Matthew 5:29**).
- ✠ “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness” (**Matthew 6:23**).
- ✠ “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (**1 Corinthians 6:12**).
- ✠ “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify” (**1 Corinthians 10:23**).
- ✠ “For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols. And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother parish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brethren stumble” (**1 Corinthians 8: 10-13**).
- ✠ “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (**Matthew 18:6**).
- ✠ “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (**Philippians 4:8**).

Also, please read our article “Just A Little Wine” posted on our church website <http://saintbishoy.ca/>.

Head Covering for Women and Long Hair for Men

Some people strongly oppose covering their heads in the church claiming that this is an old tradition coming from overseas or old fashion styles that doesn't apply to today's modern and civilized women. This is not true at all.

Covering the head for women and forbidding long hair for men are Biblical teachings. This is clearly stated in the following Scriptures:

- ✠ “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. 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. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman

from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him. But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11: 1-16)

Similarly, some men let their hair grow to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ and claim that this is a holy thing. They argue that there is nothing wrong with long hair and there is no Biblical teaching against long hair. This is not true either. They completely forget that The Lord was a Nazirite, a first born, as the Bible says:

- ✠ “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine” (Exodus 13: 2)
- ✠ “For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb” (Judges 13: 5)

After the incarnation of The Lord Jesus Christ, that requirement stopped, except for people who offer themselves as Nazirite to God. If this is not true, how could St. Paul say:

- ✠ “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” (1 Corinthians 11: 14)

Now, since Fr. Tadros Malaty wrote in his commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians an extensive interpretation to these verses, I will just quote them here for you to read; explained verse by verse:

- ✠ “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” (1 Corinthians 11: 3)

In this chapter, the Corinthians wrote to St. Paul seeking his counsel concerning the role of women in the public church meetings, and particularly in worshipping. In case a woman enjoys a kind of proclamation or inspiration, will she take up a leading role in worshipping; take off her veil, and teach the congregation? The apostle did not provide them with a direct answer, but he rather seeks from them to look into the situation, and to recognize some facts, that would help them to reach decisions; with the intention to confirm that the church system is not set upon solid and dry laws that should be obeyed without discussion, but they should recognize the spiritual and theological concepts behind every law or system, saying: “*I want you to know*”. Here he presents three different kinds of heads:

(1) The head of every man is Christ:

The Word condescended, became man, and occupied the rear row of humanity; consented to become a slave sold for thirty pieces of silver; and to be betrayed by His disciple; so that, by humility and giving love, he would become a Head, a Bishop, and a Leader of man. He could have issued His commands from heaven to be committed to follow; but our Christ **presents a**

new concept of leadership; that of commitment and self deliverance for the sake of His beloved subjects. By saying “*the head of every man*”, he means (of every believer), namely, He presented His life for all mankind, to embrace every man in the whole world.

- He who keeps Christ in him, Keeps his Head for his own protection - **(St. Augustine)**
- As long as Christ is the Head of every man, and logically (of every believer – as it would not be possible for Christ to be the head of a non-believer); that is why he who forsakes faith, the giver of salvation, would become headless like ‘Goliath’ (**1 Samuel 23**), who lost his head by his own sword. Our job is not to sever the head, but to demonstrate to them that it is severed - **(St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa)**
- I wonder what kind of a crown did Christ submit His head for the sake of the salvation of humanity? What kind of crown is for Him, He, who is the head of man, the glory of woman, and the Groom of the church? ... It is a crown of thorns and thistles - **(The scholar Tertullian)**
- The Head suffered at the location of “Golgotha” (the skull)! What a great prophetic name! A name that reminds you to think of the crucified, not a mere man ... He is the Head with power! - **(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

(2) The head of woman is man:

Some men often use this part of the phrase to commit woman to submission. But the apostle started by presenting Christ as the Head of man as an example. So that, if man intends to practice his leadership, he should imitate His Christ, by bringing his love down to his wife’s heart, by honoring her, and by delivering himself for her sake. That would make her, on her part, covet to seek his protection, when she sees him worthy and capable of practicing his role. **Man’s leadership, is actually a right sought by his wife, wishing to see in him the giving and humble leader; and not a right sought by the husband for the sake of authority and submission without wisdom or love!**

- ✠ This is a warning, that none of them should depend on the other. She, who was created as a helper, is in need of the protection of her stronger husband; giving significance to the expression “*The head of woman is man*”. And he who needs the help of his wife has fallen because of her. So you should not submit your life in the hand of another, unless you are sure of their virtue. And you should not claim to take the role of protecting those whom you think are weaker than you, while they are committed to share their grace with you, in particular the ones in a position of a greater power, and are supposed to take the role of a protector - **(St. Ambrose)**

(3) The Head of Christ is God the Father:

God, the Word, took the role of the Intercessor on behalf of humanity before God, the Father. Through His own free will He became Man and, in perfect obedience, He submitted to His Father’s will, though He is One with Him in essence, to consummate every ordinance of salvation. And as said by the apostle:

✠ “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”
(**Hebrew 5: 8**)

In His role for salvation, He took the role of the Son submitted to the will of His Father, to take away from us the nature of disobedience, and to let us share with Him the feature of obedience.

- “*The Head of Christ is God the Father*”, having begotten Him; the head of man is Christ, having created him; and the head of woman is man, having been created from his side (**Genesis 2: 21-22**). It is therefore one expression with several meanings according to the diversity of persons and the relationships between them- (**Ambrosiaster**)
- The term “head” is used with diverse meanings, or else the result would be erroneous. There is a huge difference in the level and nature of relationship between Christ and God the Father, on the one hand, who are equal in essence; and that between man and woman on the other hand - (**St. John Chrysostom**)
- He says “*The head of Christ is God the Father*”. And I say as well, As we are all one body, And so are Christ and God the Father, they are One; By this, God the Father is our Head - (**St. John Chrysostom**)

✠ “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head” (**1 Corinthians 11: 4**)

By the term “**prophesying**” here, he means (**teaching**) publicly in the public meetings, to proclaim the will of God; namely talking to people for the sake of edification, giving them guidance and spiritual comfort (**1 Corinthians 3: 14**). Therefore by saying “**praying or prophesying**” he means carrying out a role of leadership among the congregation in the church.

It is not befitting for man to give a sermon, with his head covered by any means; as uncovering the head is a sign of submission, since he talks in the presence of God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Representing the Person of the Lord Christ who obeyed and honored the Father, the spiritual leader uncovers his head, once he starts his worship ministry. Up to this day, some European men, when greeting somebody, take off their hat as a sign of respect.

“**Dishonors his head**”, namely, dishonors his Christ. All over the world, man uncovers his head in the presence of someone of greater rank than him (as it happens in the military, or before a king, or a ruler).

In this respect, someone may wonder **why then would the Bishop, the Priest, or the deacon put a crown on his head during the ministry of the Divine Liturgy?** According to the Coptic rite, the priest uncovers his head while praying the Divine Liturgy as though to celebrate the wedding of the heavenly King of kings to His church, the heavenly Queen. The ministers of the altar, feeling that, by standing in his presence they are crowned as spiritual king, they cherish the spiritual honor they get through the sacrifice of the cross.

As to wearing the black turban on his head during his other services to the congregation, It is a reminder of the decree that was issued by a certain Sultan to commit the Christian subjects to wear a black turban, and the Jews to wear a blue one, as a kind of ridicule and humiliation; Hence it is still worn by the priest as a sign of his acceptance of the shame with pleasure for the sake of Christ.

- The Corinthian women used to pray or to prophesy with uncovered heads; while men who for so long have been preoccupied with philosophy, used to cover their head with long hair, as was the custom of the Greeks, when they pray. Having already counseled them concerning those issues, some obeyed, while others did not, that is where he praises those who obeyed, before attempting to correct the position of the others - **(St. John Chrysostom)**
- ✠ “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” **(1 Corinthians 11: 5)**
- Saying “every woman” implies of all ages, all ranks, and in all situation - **(The scholar Tertullian)**
- Several prophetesses were mentioned in the Holy Scripture, like ‘Miriam’ (**Exodus 15: 20**), ‘Deborah’ (**Judges 4: 4**), ‘Huldah’ (**2 Kings 22: 14**), ‘Noadiah’ (**Nehemiah 6: 14**), and ‘Anna’ (**Luke 2: 36**). In the early church, in the time of the apostles, there were as well, prophetesses to whom God has revealed His will, and they used to pray for the others; like the virgin daughters of Philip the evangelist (**Acts 21: 9**), as well as others before and after them, about whom the prophet prophesied in the old, saying : “*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*” (**Joel 2: 28; Acts 2: 17**) - **(St. John Chrysostom)**

Having had its special circumstances, it so seems that some women in the church of Corinth were so filled with pride, that they used to force themselves on the front rows of the church, and to lead meetings, and to give sermons with their heads uncovered. And, imitating the pagan priestesses, they used to take off their veils, uncover their heads, and display their hair in a disorderly way, as a sign of having inspiration. Yet those priestesses they imitate were also known for their ethical corruption and sexual looseness.

It was the custom of some women at that time to keep their heads uncovered in an attempt to **draw the attention of men**; and as a sign of non-submission and disrespect for authority, in particular of the husband, the father, or men in general in the public meetings. The apostle, intending for the Christian women to be respectful, reserved, and humble, particularly during the collective worship, forbade them to uncover their heads while praying or prophesying.

That trend to uncover their head was counted by **the apostle as a dishonor to a woman**, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. The hair being a sign of beauty for women, shaving it was an attempt to look as equal to man, and to reveal that she does not cherish her race as a woman. The honor of each race is in cherishing his or her race. Neither of them should feel haughty or envious of the other race as being superior.

Here it is noticed that women and virgins of the early church, used to have a role of leadership, leading prayers and giving sermons (prophesying), yet with their heads covered. And as it was the custom among the Greeks and the Jews, that women would not appear publicly with uncovered head. It was the custom, on the other hand, among prostitutes to appear with uncovered heads.

Immoral and unruly women were punished by having their heads shaved, as a sign that they dishonored their men (if they are married), who are their heads; namely that they are unworthy of having husbands as their honored heads. And ‘Tacitus’ tells us that, despite the huge census, it was very rare to find immoral among the Germans; and in case one is found, she would be punished by having her head shaved, displayed before her folks, and would be expelled from her home by her husband.

According to the Mosaic Law, in case a wife was accused of sexual immorality, she was to be brought before the priest, and to have her head shaven (**Numbers 5: 18**). And according to Achilles Tacitus Clitophon; writing about Leucippe; before putting her on sale in the slave market, her head was shaven, and her head adornments were removed.

Among the Greeks, women used to have their heads shaven as a sign of intense grief. And among the Hindus, a woman cuts her hair off when her husband dies, as a sign that she is widowed.

A married woman, on the other hand, counts her hair as her beauty. The way a woman wearing improper attire, would be counted as dishonoring her husband, and her conduct would be a subject of doubt. Appearing in public with her head uncovered is counted the same way.

- As it is a great honor for a woman to keep her rank; it is disgraceful for her to rebel. I am sorry to say that some women in the congregation uncover the heads of their maidservants and pull them by their hair! Why should your face get red when hearing that; I am only addressing those who do such a disgraceful behavior? Do you uncover her head, contrary to the words of the apostle Paul? Are you not aware that by so doing you dishonor yourself? - (**St. John Chrysostom**)

✠ “For if the 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” (**1 Corinthians 11: 6**)

The apostle gives the woman the choice to cover her hair or to have it shaved. And if, according to nature or custom, it is disgraceful to shave the head, uncovering the head would be on the same level.

Yet, it is a different case, as far as a nun is concerned. Rejecting her natural beauty, and not caring for how the other people would look at her, she has her hair shorn so as not to be preoccupied with it, and dedicate herself completely to worship or ministry.

- By uncovering her head to imitate men a woman would not have the honor of men, as much as losing her own honor - (**St. John Chrysostom**)

✠ “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Corinthians 11: 7)

During collective worship, man ought not to cover his head, a sign of cherishing the authority given to him by God who created him in His Image, to have dominion on the creation on earth, and not to be in bondage or humiliation.

The woman, being bone of man’s bones and flesh of man’s flesh, she is his glory and splendor, since she is created as well in the image of God and according to His likeness (**Genesis 1: 26-27**). Yet, having come after man in the order of creation, she is committed to practice submission as a sign of not being independent of her man. As both of them are one body. The submission of woman is not humiliation, being the glory of her husband, and without her he is as though has lost his glory.

Man therefore cherishes dominion, not for the sake of pride, but for commitment to responsibility and to the practical giving love for his family. The woman in her turn is committed to submission, not with a feeling of humiliation, but with the spirit of unity and cooperation, for her man to be proud of her as his glory and splendor.

The apostle underscores the role of man as a steward of God, to appear in the collective worship with an uncovered head, as a testimony to the glory of God. And as the man cares to testify to God by being of authority; so is the woman, being the glory of man, practices authority among her household and children, bringing pleasure to the heart of her man. A woman is either the glory of her man or his disgrace. If she cares for raising her children in the fear and the love of God, she will glorify her man before God and men. And if she does not raise them in a godly way, she would fail him before heaven and on earth.

- As an officer cannot appear before the king without his military uniform and the signs of his rank, the same way, man who dares to approach the throne of God is committed to carry the sign of his rank, represented by having his head uncovered; otherwise he would dishonor himself and do wrong to Him who honored him - (**St. John Chrysostom**)

✠ “For man is not from woman, but woman from man” (1 Corinthians 11: 8)

Woman is created from the side of man (**Genesis 2: 18, 22-23**); yet not the product of his hands, but created by God. And as man is the veil between God and the woman, woman is therefore committed to that veil (or cover); Man, on the other hand, being created directly by God, he should not have a veil or a cover on his head.

✠ “Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11: 9)

Man is not created for the woman, but woman is created to be his helper or partner (**Genesis 2: 18, 21-22**) ... She is his bride, the way the church is the bride of Christ ... She is not created to be his maidservant, but to be his helper ... Not to satisfy his lust and pleasures, but to be his partner and support in life ... Not to become of a nature lower than his, but of the same nature, a

friend to share with him his pleasures and grief ... Being a helper to support him in the truth, would not lessen her honor; ... Being in need of her, both would walk together on the same path.

✠ “For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (**1 Corinthians 11: 10**)

The apostle’s argument concerning the submission of woman is not meant to lessen her honor, but to exhort her to behave with a spirit of submission, shyness, and acceptance of the commitments of nature and customs to have her head covered, something that give her honor and glory. He connects between the two terms: cover (veil) and submission; being almost similar in Hebrew: ‘radad’ and ‘radid’.

“a symbol of authority on her head”: Many scholars believe that the word **“authority”** here, means ‘veil’. Some believe it to be a head cover adorned with pearls, like the one which was worn by the queens of Persia, as a sign of splendor and a symbol of submission to the king.

Called ‘tiara’ or ‘kerchief bandalette’. It was also worn by married women, who had authority on the unmarried girls who used to wear little hats instead. In several countries women used to wear a head cover that reached down to their eyes.

Wearing a head cover, a woman carries a symbol of authority, of power, or of glory, as a believer submitted to her man in the Lord.

Now, who are the angels for whose sake women should have their head covered?

He probably means the **congregation of worshippers**; for according to **St. John Chrysostom**: “You are standing together with the angels, praising and singing”.

While others believe angels to be **the evil angels** or the demons who infiltrate into the church meetings to provoke people to rebel, and to enjoy looking at the women with uncovered heads. Others believe them to refer to the ministers and workers of the church.

While still others believe that they are **angels in the literal sense**, who are present in the church to share with us the worship of God, and find pleasure in us as the children of God (**Ecclesiastes 5: 6; 1 Timothy 5: 21**); Who, exulting and rejoicing to see the spirit of piety, submission, and shyness, appearing on the worshipping women, present this spirit as practical prayers before the divine throne.

Some believe that the Nazirite would never let a razor touch his hair (**Numbers 6: 5-7**), as a sign of his submission to God, and dedicating his life to Him. The same way, a woman who has her head covered, proclaims the dedication of her life to her household, and her submission to her man to the account of her family.

- The veil refers to power; and the angels to the bishops - (**Ambrosiaster**)
- It is as though he says to woman: If you do not care for your man, do it to honor the angels. Being a sign of submission and a symbol of authority, he exhorts her to look

downward, and in shyness to keep the befitting virtue; since the virtue and honor of him who submit are in his obedience - (St. John Chrysostom)

✠ “Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11: 11)

If it is for the sake of the proper ordinance of affairs of the family, that the woman submits to her man in the Lord, and carries the authority in her household to proclaim the honor of her man; yet the apostle confirms their equality in the Lord, and the mutual respect between both of them.

Being in need of one another, neither of them should belittle the other or look at him as inferior to himself. In Jesus Christ, each of them should respect the other and cooperate with him, to realize the one goal. Both hide “**in the Lord**”, becoming members of one body, working together through the Head – Jesus Christ – for the sake of the edification of all.

✠ “For as the woman was from the man, even so the man also is through the woman; but all things are from God” (1 Corinthians 11: 12)

As the woman was created from the man, Man is born from the woman; both of them are the creation of God (**Romans 11: 18**). Each of them depends on the other, and both depend upon their Creator. By such an outlook, man and woman should reconsider their view about authority and submission; as authority is a commitment, work, and love; and submission is cooperation, and keeping the spirit of unity.

The first woman was created from the side of Adam; and men, the children of Adam are created in the womb of woman; but all are the creation of God; and the whole humanity owe their existence to the Creator.

- Talking about the glory of man, the apostle Paul sets the following balance: Man should not boast beyond what is befitting; nor apply pressure on the woman; since, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man is independent of woman. Each of them is the cause of the other; or rather, none of them is of the other, but God is the cause of all - (St. John Chrysostom)
- As any exaltation of the man, completely refers to God; we are committed to obey Him and stop complaining - (St. John Chrysostom)
- Paul adds that all things are from God; lest the woman would be offended because of her dependence on man, or man would boast because of his position of responsibility - (Ambrosiaster)
- Concerning the two genders: males and females, while ‘Mani’ (**the son of perdition**) says that they are not from God but from the devil; Paul (the chosen vessel) says: “*As woman was from man, even so man also is through the woman; but all things are from God*”. The devil through the mouths of the followers of ‘Mani’ say that the body is an evil material created, not by God but by the devil - (St. Augustine)

✠ “Judge among yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (**1 Corinthians 11: 13**)

He asks them with a spirit of delicateness and wisdom, to go back to nature itself to meditate and judge, what would be befitting of her.

As by nature, the Greek women used to appear in public with their head covered, the apostle wonders if it would not be honorable for them to refrain from imitating the evil priestesses of the idols, in the collective worship meetings, or while giving speeches or sermons to the congregation.

But this text should not be understood as though women have taken the role of leadership in prayers or preaching; except in case where there are women of special gifts like Anna the prophetess and Priscilla (**Acts 2: 18**); but the general rule was for the women to keep silent in the church (**1 Corinthians 14: 34-35; 1 Timothy 2: 11-12**).

- That is the church tradition; which when disregarded by the Corinthians, Paul resorted to Nature - (**Ambrosiaster**)

✠ “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” (**1 Corinthians 11: 14**)

Men of Achaia to which Corinth is affiliated were so known for their long hair, that they were called by Homer “**the Greeks with long hair**” or “**the Achaeans**”. As to the Jews, only the Nazirites among them used to leave their hair without shearing or shaving with a razor, as a sign of complete dedication to God (**Numbers 6: 5; Judges 13: 5; 16: 17; 2 Samuel 14: 26**), of humility, and of being not preoccupied with outer appearance. First born were considered Nazirites, among whom were the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even St. Paul when he had taken a vow, he let his hair grow and when the vow is done, he cut it off:

✠ “So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow” (**Acts 18:18**)

- It is not befitting of man to imitate women - (**St. Ambrose**)

✠ “But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering” (**1 Corinthians 11: 15**)

A woman should harmonize with nature that gave her the long hair, by covering this hair to keep her beauty.

Women in the East, according to ‘Harmer’ used to let their hair long as a sign of their glory. According to ‘M. W. Montague’, their hair used to trail beautifully behind them, adorned with plenty of jewels. And according to ‘Chardin’, some women had their hair so long to reach down to their heels.

When Ptolemy Eurgetes, king of Egypt left to war against Seleucus Callinicus, his wife the queen vowed to present the most precious sacrifice, to cut off her long hair and to present it as an offering to the gods, if the king comes back safe.

On the contrary, men in the East, used to cut it short, lest they would be accused of being feminine, which is counted as great shame.

✠ “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the churches of God” (**1 Corinthians 11: 16**)

The apostle Paul believes that many, in dealing with some issues like the head cover for man and woman, are fond of debate and contention. Yet, because what should preoccupy the heart of a true believer is his attachment to the Lord, and his care to have fellowship with Him, his time is too precious to get into such foolish debates that cause divisions and dissensions. But, in love he acts with what brings peace to souls, and edification to the church of God.

By saying “***We have no such custom, nor the churches of God***”, he refers to the absence of such practices of women appearing in the church assemblies with their heads uncovered.

- Resistance to this teaching is an unreasonable rebellion. If the Corinthians persist on being contentious, they would be standing against what is followed by the entire catholic church - (**St. John Chrysostom**)

In conclusion, I pray that our saintly congregation of all men and women abide by the teaching of the Coptic Orthodox Church of God for we are not contentious, but loving members of the same one body of the Lord Jesus Christ and we do not imitate the outside world, as the Bible teaches us:

✠ “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (**Romans 12: 2**)