



## “TRADITIONAL” HEAD-COVERINGS & LONG HAIR

“Judge for yourselves (έν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε); is it proper (πρέπον ἐστίν, is it becoming) for a woman to pray to God uncovered (ἀκατακάλυπτον)? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is a dishonor (ἀτιμία) to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory (δόξα αὐτῆ ἐστίν)? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other custom (συνήθειαν), nor do the churches of God.” (1 Cor 11: 13-16)

This happens to be part of our Church’s reading for today, so let me reflect on it. Here St. Paul argues for propriety/decency in two areas of “custom,” concerning our external appearance, as men and women: 1. Women should be not be “uncovered” at prayer, and 2. Men should not wear long hair.

Today, however, in my Church, the Russian-Orthodox one, “men” do often wear their hair long, particularly our priests and monks, while “women” are often urged to cover their heads at prayer, in church (not with long hair, but headscarves). So – how do we reconcile this present-day reality with what St. Paul says?

We don’t. We ignore what he says about the “men,” because we “recognize” a different “custom” today, not exactly “customary” outside our Church, but “customary” according to our church-cultural norms and ideas about propriety/decency in the Church. These norms and ideas, not dogmatic ones, but church-cultural ones, have obviously changed since the time of St. Paul. Independently of St. Paul, we choose to have “men,” our priests and monks, wear long hair, while we choose to have our women “covered” in church. And this is A-OK, because we are not fundamentalists when it comes to Scripture, and we do recognize that its culturally-conditioned aspects are not dogmatic statements.

I have nothing against this state of affairs, either against priests having long hair, or against women wearing headscarves. But let me note that neither of these “customs” or “habits” of ours (συνήθεια), in our today, are ours "because St. Paul said so." So please don't tell me that women must cover their heads in church for that specific reason, "because St. Paul said so." We have our customs, which are changeable, according to our church-culture, which we choose and "judge for ourselves."

<http://www.coffeewithsistervassa.com/>

July 27, 2017