

**The Law of the Veil of  
1 Corinthians 11**

**Thesis by Christopher Vigil**

**Submitted to Dr. Stephen Hildebrand**

**August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

**Edited and resubmitted**

**September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

## I. Introduction

During the 1960's the Roman Catholic Church held as Canon Law the tradition that women would wear a veil when entering a Church. This teaching comes from St. Paul who reminds the Church at length of the proper relationship that women have toward men, the relationship that men and women have to God, and why women and men should and should not wear a veil, respectively, in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16.

2 I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you. 3 But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife, and God the head of Christ. 4 Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered brings shame upon his head. 5 But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled brings shame upon her head, for it is one and the same thing as if she had had her head shaved. 6 For if a woman does not have her head veiled, she may as well have her hair cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should wear a veil. 7 A man, on the other hand, should not cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 nor was man created for woman, but woman for man; 10 for this reason a woman should have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 Woman is not independent of man or man of woman in the Lord. 12 For just as woman came from man, so man is born of woman; but all things are from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears his hair long it is a disgrace to him, 15 whereas if a woman has long hair it is her glory, because long hair has been given (her) for a covering? 16 But if anyone is inclined to be argumentative, we do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God.(NAB)

After the middle of the twentieth century, following the Second Vatican Council, the veil went into disuse, in spite of the teachings of Canon Law, at that time, which dictated, that women were to be veiled while in Church.<sup>1</sup>

1917 Code of Canon Law 1262 § 2

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward N. Peters, *1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* (New York: PJ Kennedy & Sons, 1918).

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 approach the table of the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the veil of 1 Corinthians 11, which was held as a standard practice until the middle of the twentieth century, as a tradition of the Church, decipher whether or not it still is or is not a legally binding obligation for women, and the purpose and ramifications in still upholding this tradition.

In order to demonstrate how to apply this tradition today, the presentation will begin with text analysis. The pertinent words, styles and other various exegetical<sup>4\*</sup> arguments related to this discussion will be identified. In order to limit length and communicate to the average reader, it will not fully digest the text in an exegetical fashion. After a clear understanding of what St. Paul intended is established, the traditional and historical usage of the veil through the Patristic writings and early commentary will be presented. In order to apply this scripture and Canon law, the twentieth century arguments will be put forth. Lastly, the current thoughts on the matter and the rationale for the modern increased interest will be discussed.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Code of Canon Law 1262§ 2. 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. (Roma: The IntraText Digital Library, 2007) Èulogos SpA  
[http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0813/\\_P42.HTM](http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0813/_P42.HTM)

<sup>4</sup> exegesis - an explanation or critical interpretation of a text - Merriam-Webster Online (www.Merriam-Webster.com) copyright 2005 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated.  
<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/exegesis>

## Scripture and the Veil of 1 Corinthians 11

St. Paul's First letter to the Corinthians is a lengthy reproach to the Church in Corinth "to settle divers matters of ecclesiastical discipline."<sup>5</sup> Typically scholars break up 1 Corinthians into five sections: Prologue and Address: 1:1-9, Corrections and Address to problems: 1:10-6:20, Answers to Corinthians Questions: 7:1-14:40, Resurrection of Christ and the Church: 15:1-58, and the Epilogue: 16:1-24.<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is found in the middle of the Answers to the Questions, the largest section and the primary rationale for why St. Paul is writing to the Corinthians.

There are a few important aspects of St. Paul's address regarding veils that should be critically approached. First and foremost, it is important to note the structure of the response. There is a chiasmic<sup>7\*</sup> structure of verses 2-16, although some assert the structure differently (1-17, 1-16, 2-17). Many scholars agree in placing verse 10 in the absolute middle of the structure.<sup>8</sup> This lends to a particular interest in verse 10: "for this reason a woman should have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels." Verse 10 can easily be divided such that it is, itself, a chiasm with the Greek *dia* dividing the verse and likely paralleling "authority on her head" and "angels".<sup>9</sup> There is much

---

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Fr. Geo. Leo. Haydock, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a Comprehensive Catholic Commentary* (Monrovia: Catholic Treasures, 1991), 1500.

<sup>6</sup> Norman E. Anderson, "The Angels of 1 Corinthians 11:10: A Survey of Interpretative Options" <http://home.comcast.net/~walkswithastick>, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> "chi-as-mus : an inverted relationship between the syntactic elements of parallel phrases" Merriam-Webster Online ([www.Merriam-Webster.com](http://www.Merriam-Webster.com)) copyright 2005 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/chiasmus>

<sup>8</sup> Anderson.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:10: διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου. The Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. United Bible Societies, London

inconclusive information regarding what St. Paul means when he says “on account of the angels.” A few simple suggestions are that this is a reference to authority, symbols of guardians of liturgy, guardians of modesty, an indication of hierarchy, or a symbolic representation of order.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of the understanding of the angels, a central point in St. Paul’s response is identified, St. “Paul’s basic point is clear: men and women have distinct appearances appropriate to them in the setting of religious practice.”<sup>11</sup> Although there is some confusion on how to interpret how St. Paul wants this tradition of veiling to be carried out there are only two truly legitimate interpretations, St. “Paul either wants habitually unveiled women to follow different decorum in the Christian assembly[women who do not veil should veil when in a worship setting], or else he does not agree with a cultic practice that undermines the established social norm of veiling[women who remove their veil when engaging in acts of worship]”<sup>12</sup> From this understanding and other uses of veil through scripture we can also conclude that this veiling is a sign of ritual purity.<sup>13</sup> Succinctly, the commentaries all demonstrate the primary point St. Paul intends to teach is that women “should wear a veil”(1 Corin. 11:6).

Although St. Paul has authority over various communities, one must ask what authority does St. Paul have over the whole Church? In 1 Corinthians 7:17b, St. Paul

---

1975.; Anderson; Jason David BeDuhn, "'Because of the angels': Unveiling Paul's anthropology in 1 Corinthians 11." *Journal of Biblical Literature*,(118.2,1999), 295-320.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Hahn, *The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: Commentary, Notes and Study Questions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 33.; Anderson.; Ed. by Wayne A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul: A Norton Critical Edition: Annotated Text Criticism*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1972).

<sup>11</sup> BeDuhn.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

demonstrates that how widespread his authority is when he says “I give this order in all the churches.” Further commentary clarifies how he asserts authority in 1 Corinthians 4:21 when he says “Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a gentle spirit?” In the introduction to 1 Corinthians in the New American Bible it states that “He writes with confidence in the authority of his apostolic mission, and he presumes that the Corinthians, despite their deficiencies, will recognize and accept it.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *New American Bible*, “1 Corinthians Introduction.”  
(<http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/intro.htm>)

## II. The Tradition of the Veil of 1 Corinthians 11<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to important matters of the faith, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church are on the forefront of the mind. What did the Church Fathers say on the veil? St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St John Chrysostom and others discussed the topic. It is not surprising to see the veil in 1 Corinthians 11 discussed by the Fathers in their various commentaries in the early centuries, but it is surprising to see it discussed in their homilies and letters. The following is a demonstration of various authors, and time period; when applicable, a discussion of the authority of the material is established.

### **Pope Linus in the Liber Pontificalis, unknown**

In the *Liber Pontificalis*, or the *Book of Popes*, under the heading of our second pontiff, Pope Linus, we read: “He establishes from the command(or rule) of blessed Peter that a woman should enter into the Church with her head covered.”<sup>16</sup> Composed at the earliest in the 9th century, the comments on the early popes are considered, by and large, to be apocryphal. On this specific statement the Catholic Encyclopedia says that “without doubt this decree is apocryphal, and copied by the author of the ‘Liber Pontificalis’ from the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (11:5) and arbitrarily attributed to the first successor of the Apostle in Rome.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, “The statement made in the same source, that Linus suffered martyrdom, cannot be proved and is

---

<sup>15</sup> Robert Sungenis provides a list of authors and their sources that have made statements on the veil, some of those sources are considered here.

<sup>16</sup> “Hic ex praecepto beati Petri constituit ut mulier in ecclesia uelato capite introiret.” *Liber Pontificalis*, public domain, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/liberpontificalis1.html>; Translation provided by Arthur Joseph Dhanagom.

<sup>17</sup> J.P. Kirsch, “Pope Linus,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Volume IX, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 2007). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09224a.htm>

improbable.”<sup>18</sup> This source must be dismissed as non-authoritative on this point, but is a representation of how this the veil is an important issue to the Church in the first millennium.

### **St. Hippolytus of Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century**

St. Hippolytus of Rome in *The Apostolic Tradition* (c. 215) articulates the theology of the veil. While speaking of various instructions of women catechumens in the assembly, he hallmarks “Moreover let all the women have their heads veiled with a scarf but not with a veil of linen only, for that is not a sufficient covering.”<sup>19</sup> In this text St. Hippolytus instructs about many various customs specific to the time, but the veil might not be a teaching for all time because it reoccurs in other Patristic texts.

Regardless, during his lifetime, he upholds the teaching that women should be covering the head, entirely, and not with a small piece of linen. The commentary on this text interrelates the similar aforementioned directive by Tertullian on the matter of veiling the entire head.<sup>20</sup>

### **Tertullian, Early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century**

Tertullian has an entire letter dedicated to the topic *On the Veiling of Virgins* in which he remarks that “until very recently, among us, either custom was, with comparative indifference, admitted to communion. The matter had been left to choice, for each virgin to veil herself or expose herself,” giving us insight into first part of third

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, Translated by Alistar Stewart-Sykes (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, 2001), section 18, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

century.<sup>21</sup> The purpose for his defense is to exhibit that it “behooves our virgins to be veiled” not because of customs which are often “maintained in opposition to truth” but that it is “exacted by truth” to do so.<sup>22</sup> He vehemently defends this practice: “O sacrilegious hands, which have had the hardihood to drag off a dress dedicated to God!”<sup>23</sup> Tertullian asserts that the greek word for woman, γυνή, found in 1 Corinthians 11:10, often refers to married women but that St. Paul is referring to all women inclusive of virgins and all “other names... of the successive stages of life.”<sup>24</sup> He claims, “In fact, at this day the Corinthians do veil their virgins.”<sup>25</sup> Tertullian’s whole argument is that a veil is required to be worn by all women in churches, and that this requirement is not just a discipline, but the law of nature and the “will of the espoused” Christ.<sup>26</sup>

### **Clement of Alexandria, Turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century**

Clement of Alexandria writes in the *Instructor*, Book III, Chapter XI: "For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled. They say that the wife of Æneas, through excess of propriety, did not, even in her terror at the capture of Troy, uncover herself; but, though fleeing from the conflagration, remained veiled."<sup>27</sup> In other places of Chapter XI, subtitled A Compendious View Of the Christian Life, he also says that men should “use simple clothing, and of a white colour” and that “the Word prohibits

---

<sup>21</sup> John Chapman, “Tertullian”. Transcribed Tobin, Lucy. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Volume XIV, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 2007). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14520c.htm>; Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Translated by S. Thelwall., Ch. 3. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0403.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor(Pædagogus)*, Book III, Ch. XI. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iii.iii.xi.html>

us from doing violence to nature by boring the lobes of the ears.”<sup>28</sup> Clement of Alexandria continues to comment on various norms, “Let the head of men be shaven, unless it has curly hair”, and that the “moustache... is to be cut round, not by the razor, for that were not well-bred, but by a pair of cropping scissors. But the hair on the chin is not to be disturbed, as it gives no trouble, and lends to the face dignity and paternal terror.”<sup>29</sup> Forbidding makeup, he says “it is monstrous for those who are made in "the image and likeness of God," to dishonour the archetype by assuming a foreign ornament, preferring the mischievous contrivance of man to the divine creation.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, it is important to point out that in this passage prior to his statements about the veil, he speaks about modesty in this fashion: “she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.”<sup>31</sup> Clement of Alexandria speaks profoundly of different practical rules on “Earrings,” “Painting the Face,” and other matters, but on these points he is making statements encouraging the pupil who he writes to to live an austere life.<sup>32</sup> Although Commentary does provide some insight into how St. Paul may have intended for women to cover their entire head, Clement of Alexandria may or may not speak of the veil as St. Paul does, but during the life of Clement of Alexandria, who died in 215, it was the practice of Christian women to pray veiled.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> BeDuhn.

### **St. Jerome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century**

The father, St. Jerome, in *Letter CXLVII to Sabinianus*, speaks of the tradition of the veil in religious communities during the fourth century.

It is usual in the monasteries of Egypt and Syria for virgins and widows who have vowed themselves to God and have renounced the world and have trodden under foot its pleasures, to ask the mothers of their communities to cut their hair; not that afterwards they go about with heads uncovered in defiance of the apostle's command, for they wear a close-fitting cap and a veil.<sup>34</sup>

### **Ambrosiaster, c.4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> Century**

The *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, by Ambrosiaster, or pseudo-Ambrosius, is quoted by St. Augustine and others throughout the history of the Church. Probably written in the fourth or fifth century, the commentary is predominately regarded as orthodox with few exceptions. Ambrosiaster says that "the veil signifies power, and the angels are bishops"<sup>35</sup> and also that "this was the church's tradition, but since the Corinthians were ignoring it, St. Paul made his appeal to nature."<sup>36</sup> The author does not speak as to how the tradition is to be applied to his time. Also the author is unknown thus no magisterial authority can be attributed to him, but these comments are an indication of biblical scholarship upholding the teaching put in place by St. Paul.

### **St. Augustine, Turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century**

We ought not therefore so to understand that man is made in the image of the supreme Trinity, that is, in the image of God, as that the same image should be understood to be in three human beings; especially when the apostle says that the man is the image of God, and on that account removes the covering from his

---

<sup>34</sup> St. Jerome, *Letter CXLVII: To Sabinianus*, 5.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.CXLVII.html>

<sup>35</sup> Ambrosiaster, "Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas," Edited by Henricus Iosephus Vogels, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 81, (Vindobonae: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1966-69), 122.

<sup>36</sup> Ambrosiaster, 124.

head, which he warns the woman to use, speaking thus: "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man." What then shall we say to this? If the woman fills up the image of the trinity after the measure of her own person, why is the man still called that image after she has been taken out of his side? Or if even one person of a human being out of three can be called the image of God, as each person also is God in the supreme Trinity itself, why is the woman also not the image of God? For she is instructed for this very reason to cover her head, which he is forbidden to do because he is the image of God.<sup>37</sup>

This text from *On the Trinity* by the well-known patristic writer St. Augustine, teaches that women were instructed to be veiled in the later part of the fourth century and into the middle of the fifth.

### **St. John Chrysostom, Turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century**

In his *Homily XXVI on First Corinthians*, St. John Chrysostom, intensely encounters chapter 11, where he predominately speaks of the complimentary aspects of man and woman and the corresponding inter-correlation to the hierarchy of authority and creation. Although he truly intends to focus on the aforementioned subject, St. John does spend a great deal of time on the discipline of the veil, "It follows that being covered[veiled] is a mark of subjection and authority. For it induces her[women] to look down and be ashamed and preserve entire her proper virtue. For the virtue and honor of the governed is to abide in his obedience."<sup>38</sup> Specifically regarding verse 10 he says that St. Paul intended that women "ought to be covered" "not at the time of prayer only but also continually."<sup>39</sup> Regarding verse 6, he says "for he[St. Paul] said not merely covered,

---

<sup>37</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*, Book XII, Chapter 7.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>

<sup>38</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily XXVI on First Corinthians*, Section 5.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220126.htm>

<sup>39</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Section 4.

but "covered over," meaning that she[women] be carefully wrapped up on every side.<sup>40</sup> Finally, when speaking of verse 16, St. Chrysostom says "It is then contentiousness to oppose these things, and not any exercise of reason" and that "the whole world has both received and kept this law" indicating that this was a universal practice of the Church at the time which St. Paul wrote his letter.<sup>41</sup> Further articulating this point he makes use of an analogy that "no ruler without military girdle and cloak, would venture to appear before him that has the diadem: so neither do thou without the symbols of your rule, (one of which is women unveiled)."<sup>42</sup> St. John Chrysostom also speaks of many other aspects of how to apply the usage of angels in verse 10 and he encounters an intense theological understanding of how authority relates to the angelic hierarchy. Although his critical analysis of a few verses does bring attention to what St. Paul may have specifically intended through attention to the words, this analysis of scripture is not overall a biblical commentary, but a theologizing of the tradition of the usage of the veil. It has been demonstrated that the tradition of women being veiled in Church was maintained during the life of St. John Chrysostom in the second half of the fourth century and into the beginning of the fifth century.

### **St. Thomas Aquinas, 13<sup>th</sup> Century**

In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas adds a point about the veil while handling the issue of "Modesty in the Outward Apparel."<sup>43</sup> He quotes St. Augustine who says "that it is unbecoming for women though married to uncover their hair, since the

---

<sup>40</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Section 5.

<sup>41</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Section 5.

<sup>42</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Section 4. (Parenthesis in original text)

<sup>43</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, Q. 169.

Apostle commands them to cover the head."<sup>44</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas then adds "In this case[the usage of the veil]<sup>45</sup>, however, they may be excused from sin, if they do not do it [wear the veil] from a certain vanity, but because of some contrary custom. Such a custom, however, is not praiseworthy."<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that St. Thomas Aquinas draws attention to other customs of not wearing the veil, but these customs, although not necessarily sinful, are in contradiction to the universal custom established and maintained up until the present time. In his *Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul*, St. Thomas also asserts that when St. Paul speaks about the veil in 1 Corinthians 11:1-17, he is speaking not about a custom or discipline, but a moral obligation derived from nature.<sup>47</sup> This is a distinct teaching which indicates that regardless of other practices, this custom is established by nature and thus required to be upheld by ordered nature. It can be concluded that the tradition of the veil was in full force as law during the life of the great

---

<sup>44</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, Art. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Refers to "Augustine says (Ep. ccxlv ad Possid.): "I do not wish you to be hasty in forbidding the wearing of gold or costly attire except in the case of those who being neither married nor wishful to marry, should think how they may please God: whereas the others think on the things of the world, either husbands how they may please their wives, or wives how they may please their husbands, except that it is unbecoming for women though married to uncover their hair, since the Apostle commands them to cover the head."

<sup>46</sup> "In quo tamen casu possent aliquae a peccato excusari, quando hoc non fieret ex aliqua vanitate, sed propter contrariam consuetudinem; quamvis talis consuetudo non sit laudabilis." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, Q. 169, Art. 2. Translated Donald P. Goodman III, July 19, 2005, (Los Angeles: Tradition In Action, Inc., 2005).

<sup>47</sup> "Glossa enim exponit hoc de lege: dicit quod est ignominia secundum legem quod quis nutriat comam, sed non habetur expressum quod in lege quod praecipiat alicui tonderi caput nisi de Nazarenis quorum coma debebat offerri domino. Sed nec est etiam secundum sententiam apostoli, quod (quia) hic non arguitur ex lege, sed a natura."; (Assistance with translation "hic non arguitur ex lege, sed a natura" provided by Arthur Joseph Dhanagam) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Corinthians*, 11:14  
<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/c1r.html>

theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, and that he was in complete accord with St. Augustine on the subject, confirming the tradition of the veil in the thirteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

We can see that the practice of women being veiled in Church was an issue of much dissention, but was maintained by Patristics and Doctors of the Church: authoritative magisterium, and upheld as a discipline for many centuries.

---

<sup>48</sup> Donald P. Goodman III, "Because of the Angels: A Study of the Veil in the Christian Tradition." July 19, 2005 (Los Angeles: Tradition In Action, Inc., 2005).

### III. The Relationship Between Canon Law and Twentieth Century Immodesty

On January 25<sup>th</sup> 1959, Pope Blessed John XXIII announced the decision that the 1917 Code of Canon Law should be revised. On that same day, the Supreme Pontiff also announced that he would convoke an ecumenical council. In 1983, on the same day and month, Pope John Paul II promulgated the revised Code of Canon Law. During the period between when the Second Vatican Council convened in 1962 and when the revised Code was published twenty one years later, there was much confusion on how to apply the prior Code. Canon 1262§2, undoubtedly in full force, is disregarded by Pope Paul VI when, in 1976, during his *Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, he speaks of the veil:

Another objection[for why women can not be admitted to the ministry of priesthood] 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 the head (1 Cor 11:2-6); such requirements no longer have a normative value.<sup>49</sup>

Did Pope Paul VI intend, by this statement, to revoke Canon 1262.2 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law? There are a few important points to consider when viewing the words of Pope Paul VI. The letter is addressed as a Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood. It is written to put an end to a movement in the Church pushing for female clergy and is not intended teach about the veil; thus, it is not vigorously producing a conclusive statement on the usage of veils. It can be succinctly

---

<sup>49</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter insigniores*, 1976, 4.  
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfinsig.htm>

determined that the Supreme Pontiff was using this as an example to demonstrate how, in modern day biblical scholarship, some particular disciplinary laws mandated by St. Paul are considered to be customs of that period. The text must be examined more closely to see that the phrase “one claims” demonstrates that the issue of interpreting various aspects of St. Paul’s writings is a modern issue of biblical scholarship. This is not an authoritative statement on the veil made by Pope Paul VI because of the phrase “probably inspired by the customs of the period.” It is not necessarily even a statement of biblical commentary, much less an authoritative statement on how to interpret 1 Corinthians 11:16. He is only making a personal interpretation on the subject of the veil.

Most importantly it should be noted that Popes do make mistakes and are only infallible on matters of faith and morals; in this case Pope Paul VI makes the erroneous statement that the usage of the veil and other practices “no longer have a normative value.” As mentioned before, the Code of Canon Law of 1917: 1262§2 was in full force until 1983 and thus, one cannot assume that Pope Paul VI is making this statement in order to change this tradition.

Through Pope Paul VI’s statement on the veil, it is certain that in this period between the council and the revision of the Code of Canon Law, the veil fell into to disuse. When and exactly this happened is unclear. Many sources on the topic of the veil claim that during the years of the Second Vatican Council a reporter misrepresented that that veil was not an issue of discussion for the Council. Some sources reference a follow up article correcting the information. Regarding these two news sources the authors reference the year 1969, another 1973, one traces a reference to The Atlanta Journal of June 21, 1969 and points to a the headline “Women Required to Cover Head, Vatican

Insists.”<sup>50</sup> It should be noted however, that although many proponents make note of a particular event, some reference an erroneous source and others contain a quote but do not reference a source.<sup>51\*\*</sup> Regardless of the exact date, the wide-spread practice of wearing the veil was no longer and the Church did not work to correct this.

It is important to note that no recorded authoritative statements had been made on the disuse of the veil prior to the publication of the 1983 Revision of the Code of Canon Law. There have been numerous reports by parishioners that clerics informed their congregations that, amongst many other practices, it was no longer necessary to wear a veil. Regardless of when and what various non authorized individuals might have said on the matter, it was at least a disobedient act to be an unveiled woman in a Church until the new Code was promulgated. Disobedience to the code can be considered as sin because “everyone subject to the legislator is bound in conscience to observe the law.”<sup>52</sup>

Beginning in 1917 the Canon law was codified dictating specific laws which govern the Latin Rite Catholic Church. When the 1917 Code of Canon law encountered the issue of the veil, it was in unison with the current practices, the tradition and the clear scriptural teaching of 1 Corinthians 11. There is also a direct correlation between modesty and the veil. Following the promulgation of the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon

---

<sup>50</sup> Robert A. Sungenis, “Should Women Wear Veils?” April 22, 2004 (State Line: Catholic Apologetics International, 2005). ; Rita Davidson, *Immodesty: Satan’s Virtue* (Lanark, Ont.: Little Flowers Family Apostolate, 2003), 66.

<http://catholicintl.com/epologetics/articles/pastoral/head-covering1.htm>

<sup>51</sup> Davidson.; Sungenis.

\*\* Authors Note - I went to the Atlanta Journal Archives and viewed the Saturday June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1969, the Atlanta Constitution of the same day and the following Sunday Atlanta Journal Constitution. There is no headline or article pertaining to the Catholic faith outside of a school having a different religious sister as a principal.

<sup>52</sup> A. Boudinhon, “Canon Law,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Volume IX, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09056a.htm>

Law(1917), there began some changes in fashion. As noted by St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine and other writers previously mentioned, there is a direct correlation between modesty and the Canon on the veil. This is evident through the 1930 addition of a footnote in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, Appendix XVII, an “Instruction Concerning Immodest Dress of Women” given by Pope Pius XI on January 12, 1930. Although St. Paul was chiefly talking about the usage of a head covering, the tradition of the Church has consistently demonstrated a correlation between the necessity for women to dress modestly and the veil. Both St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom instruct that the phrase “because of the angels” in 1 Corinthians 11:10 corresponds to the need for women to guard themselves from tempting men to lust which is a bi-product of immodesty.<sup>53</sup>

### **Immodesty, the Mind of the Twentieth Century**

Although immodesty in the twentieth century is a topic which requires a treatise on its own, it needs to be treated here correlating how the historical disuse of the veil parallels the Church’s encounter with the modern fashion movement, climaxing at the so-called “Cultural Revolution” of the 1960’s, in order to deduce the rationale for the lack of teaching on the veil in the present day.<sup>54</sup>

Any mild historical research indicates an obvious movement of immodesty beginning in the late nineteenth century developing up until the present day. At the turn of the 1900’s women slowly began wearing shorter length dresses and skirts. The 1920’s demonstrate this movement with the introduction of the flapper style dresses, but more

---

<sup>53</sup> Goodman.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Hart, *Those Who Serve God Should Not Follow the Fashions*, (Lanark, Can.: Little Flowers Family Apostolate, 2004), 2.

notably this can be seen through the development of the female bathing suit.<sup>55</sup> Prior to the beginning of the twentieth century people did not publicly attend beaches with the opposite sex present. Even when women did bath the bathing suit was a full length outfit, then, in the 1920's it began to be tight fitted becoming smaller every year. Men and women began attending beaches together. The Church forbade mixed bathing, but society took on it's own form and the vast majority of Catholics have followed.<sup>56</sup> In 1946 the bikini was introduced such that a woman is barely covered.<sup>57</sup> The fashions of the bathing suit slowly began to infiltrate the streets into the 1960's. It follows that the organization *National Organization of Women*(NOW) was founded in 1967, which, in 1968, promoted a "national unveiling" in which all veils would be burned in public.<sup>58</sup> Today, it is not entirely uncommon to see women in public scarcely wearing more clothing than what is used for a bikini at a beach.

### **Prophecies of Immodesty**

This de-evolution of modesty could have been brought about for many reasons. Modern day immodesty could simply have as it's source the changing times, but dynamic sources such as apparitions of Mary and "End Times" prophecies are discussed elsewhere related to this discussion.

The so-called *Prophecy of St. Nilus* reported to be of the fifth century is ominous and thus investigated. He is reported to have said that, "After the year 1900, toward the

---

<sup>55</sup> Colleen Hammond, *Dressing with Dignity* (Rockford: Tan Books and Publishing Inc., 2005), 43-48.

<sup>56</sup> Authors Note - Davidson. P. 101-102 References Enrique Cardinal Pla y Daniel, Archbishop of Spain quoting him saying "mixed bathing between men and women... must be avoided", but the author makes no notation of the source for this quote.

<sup>57</sup> Hammond, 46.

<sup>58</sup> George Gil, *The Veil*, (Franklin: Christian Family Outreach, 2005), 12-13.

middle of the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable ...People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair."<sup>59</sup> There are reported to be as many as twenty individuals with the same name in the early Greek Church, but no text has been produced which references the translation or translator.<sup>60</sup> The author is unknown and the text is most likely of a later century, because the phraseology, word usage and different versions create a great deal of difficulty in attributing St. Nilus the Elder as the author. Critics of this so-called Prophecy of St. Nilus believe that this source was created as an apocryphal text likely developed in the twentieth century as a mass email hoax.<sup>61</sup>

Another interesting mystical source is found between 1919 and 1920. Our Lady of Fatima tells Jacinta that "Certain fashions will be introduced that will offend Our Lord very much." Other reports of Marian apparitions also claim that she speaks against immodesty, but the Church handles apparitions and interlocutions with skepticism and thus no authority more than devotion are applied to the reported words of Mary the Mother of God.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Church's Response to Immodesty in the Twentieth Century**

The Church has made serious efforts to dissuade these developing fashions. In 1921, Pope Benedict XV stated, in the encyclical *Sacra Propedimum* that

... one cannot sufficiently deplore the blindness of so many women of every age and condition; made foolish by desire to please, they do not see to what a degree

---

<sup>59</sup> Davidson, Rita. *Immodesty: Satan's Virtue* Little Flowers Family Apostolate

<sup>60</sup> Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (Dallas: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).; *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXXIX Nilus of Sinai

<sup>61</sup> Robert Sungenis, "Q&A on the Prophecy of St. Nilus," (State Line: Catholic Apologetics International, 2005)

<sup>62</sup> Davidson, 10-33.

the in decency of their clothing shocks every honest man, and offends God. Most of them would formerly have blushed for those toilettes as for a grave fault against Christian modesty; now it does not suffice for them to exhibit them on the public thoroughfares; they do not fear to cross the threshold of the churches, to assist at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass, and even to bear the seducing food of shameful passions to the Eucharistic Table where one receives the heavenly Author of purity. And We speak not of those exotic and barbarous dances recently imported into fashionable circles, one more shocking than the other; one cannot imagine anything more suitable for banishing all the remains of modesty.<sup>63</sup>

On August 23, 1928, in the *Letter to the Congregation for Religious*, G. Cardinal Laurenti, Prefect of the *Sacred Congregation for Religious* remarks that Pope Pius XI, began a “Crusade Against Immodest Fashions, Especially in schools Directed by Religious.”<sup>64</sup> Because of this, the Cardinal Vicar of Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Pomili, issued “Standards of Dress” on September 24, 1928 dictating that “a dress cannot be called decent which is cut deeper than two fingers breadth under the pit of the throat; which does not cover the arms at least to the elbows; and scarcely reaches a bit beyond the knees. Furthermore, dresses of transparent materials are improper.”<sup>65</sup> In 1930, the previously mentioned *Instruction Concerning the Immodest Dress of Women* was decreed by Pope Pius XI. Various crusades against immodesty formed following this Acta Apostolicae. On May 19, 1931 the Philippine Bishops decreed a pastoral letter restating the standards of modesty. By 1935, a “League of Modesty” was formed in Chicago,

---

<sup>63</sup> Pope Benedict XV, *Sacra Propediem*, January 6, 1921, 19.  
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben15/b15sapro.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Davidson.

<sup>65</sup> “Rome’s Decrees on Modesty in Dress: Still Victims of ‘Conspiracy of Silence,’” *Marylike Crusader*, Nov-Dec 1963, (Chicago: MaryLike Crusade, 1963).  
<http://www.national-coalition.org/modesty/moddecre.html>;  
“Rufino J. Cardinal Santos, Archbishop of Manila, quotes these standards as “The Church’s stand concerning modesty in dress” in his Pastoral of December 6, 1959. He attributes them to Pope Pius XI Himself, and gives the exact date of issuance, September 24, 1928.”

Illinois and upheld the “standards” set by Pope Pius XI. In December of 1944, the Marylike Crusade of Illionis began disseminating these early twentieth century teachings of the Church. On August 15, 1954, Pope Pius XII in a letter to his Bishops through the Sacred Congregation of the Council, he exhorts them to “take action against the most serious plague of immodest fashions.”<sup>66</sup> On November 8, 1957 Pope Pius XII in an address to a newly formed fashion organization refers to the standards of dress saying, “there is always an absolute norm to be kept.”<sup>67</sup> Even after the announcement of the revision of the new Code of Canon Law and the calling for an ecumenical council on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1959, we continue to see how the Church was working hard to fight off immodesty. On December 6, 1959, the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Rufino Santos, reiterates the directives of Pope Pius XI. After the Second Vatican Council convened, the crusade from Archbishops and the Popes seemingly halted. Fashion was no longer a discussion and generally most all dress was found acceptable in Churches. The link which the Fathers made between the veil and modesty takes form when it is noted that women stopped wearing the veil sometime in the 1960’s, around the time of the Council. Soon thereafter, in 1976, Pope Paul VI makes an erroneous statement about the usage of the veil and in 1983 the Revised Code of Canon Law is promulgated with no mention of this teaching.

---

<sup>66</sup> Robert Hart, *Those Who Serve God Should Not Follow the Fashions*, (Ontario: Little Flowers Family Apostolate, 2004), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Pope Pius XII, “Moral Problems in Fashion Design: An Address of Pope Pius XII to a Congress of the Latin Union of High Fashion,” *Osservatore Romano*, November 9, 1957, (Italy: N.C.W.C. News Service, 1957?).

#### IV. Twentieth Century Discussion on the Veil of 1 Corinthians 11

Although there was much said about modesty in the twentieth century, there have been very few statements made on the usage of the veil. Even modern biblical scholarship has predominately ignored how the custom has gone into disuse in the Catholic Church today. The exegetical dissection has been demoted to a discussion of the feminist perspectives and these commentators predominately focus on what authority St. Paul speaks with. Upon intense research, the only pertinent inter-weaving of biblical scholarship and the tumultuous loss of the veil in the twentieth century is a footnote reference in a commentary: “Inter insigniores, 1976, 4”, the aforementioned address of Pope Paul VI on the issue of the woman priesthood, which wearily has weight in the argument for disuse of the veil.

In 1951, the well-respected, Servant of God Bishop Fulton J. Sheen says “it is very likely that the Divine prohibition against women appearing in church with their heads uncovered is related to this idea. As the Church can have no Divine Head other than Christ, so the woman should have no head except her husband; therefore, her natural head should be covered.”<sup>68</sup> Into the twenty-first century, Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand speaks of the need for women to be veiled pointing to their nature she says that a “woman’s “organs are "veiled," indicating their mystery and sacredness”<sup>69</sup> She also adds that women should remain veiled for “anything precious, mysterious or sacred is veiled.”<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, *Three To Get Married* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 117.

<sup>69</sup> Alice Von Hildebrand, “Alice Von Hildebrand on Feminism and Femininity” November 26, 2003, *Zenit* (New Rochelle: Zenit, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> Alice Von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ann Arbor: Sapientia Press, 2002), 83.

## **Arguments on Canon Law and the Veil of 1 Corinthians 11**

Although there is a correlation between the disuse of the veil and the lack of mention in the Revised Code of Canon Law, it cannot be said that thus it is no longer a tradition of the Church. From this point of view, the Code of Canon Law needs to be examined to understand why this law is omitted and whether the 1917 Code 1262§2 still has the force of law. There are three arguments from Canon Law for and against the veil: liturgical law, abrogation, and simply a tradition or immemorial custom.

### **Arguments for the Veil from Liturgical Law**

At the forefront of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Canon 2 explains, “for the most part the Code does not determine the rites to be observed in the celebration of liturgical actions. Accordingly, liturgical laws which have been in effect hitherto retain their force, except those which may be contrary to the canons of the Code.”<sup>71</sup> Even commentary on Canon 1262 of the 1917 Code notes “popular customs may modify this provision as the text indicates.”<sup>72</sup> If the law can be changed then it is a matter of discipline. This commentator would certainly see the 1262.2 law as a liturgical discipline. This is highlighted by the usage of the words “ecclesiam” and “maxime cum ad mensam Dominicam accedunt” (especially while going up to the table of the Lord). Arguments against this proposition is that, even though the 1917 Code makes mention of Canon 1262§2 in a liturgical way, it is not composed as a liturgical law. But this is debunked by the recognition that other canons on Liturgical matters in the 1917 Code are certainly derogated by later documents and not by the Code itself. Regardless of whether the

---

<sup>71</sup> The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation* (The Canon Law Society Trust: 1983).

<sup>72</sup> Fr. T. Lincoln Bouscaren, *1957 Commentary on the 1917 Code of Canon Law*, 691.

mandate by St. Paul on the veil is natural law as St. Thomas Aquinas or St. Augustine suggest or merely an antiquated tradition as society puts forth, Canon 1262 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law is certainly liturgical law.

### **Abrogation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law**

The second argument is related to the term abrogation. In Church law, abrogation is the complete abolishing of previous law. Critics posit that regardless of whether it is or is not a liturgical law, it was abrogated by Can. 6: “When this Code comes into force, the following are abrogated: 1° the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917.”<sup>73</sup> One commentary says “there was no need for the legislator expressly to abrogate the 1917 Code in 6 §1, 1° of the 1983 code, because this would have been accomplished in virtue of the 1917 code's complete reordering by the 1983 code. However, this may have left uncertainty regarding the status of those parts of the 1917 code that were not treated anew in the 1983 code, so express abrogation probably was necessary.”<sup>74</sup> This commentary does not take into consideration the force of Canon 2 in relation to Canon 6, because Canons 1-6 appear under the heading of “General Norms” and thus clarify one another. Commentary also suggests that this is applicable only to “Liturgical Laws” contrary to the *Revised Code of Canon Law*. The previously mentioned commentator also says that, “from a purely technical viewpoint, canon 2 is unnecessary because the general rules of canon 6, §1, 2° and 4° are applicable also to the

---

<sup>73</sup> The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation* (Mahway: The Canon Law Society Trust: 1983).

<sup>74</sup> John P. Beal, Coriden, Green. *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (Mahway: The Canon Law Society of America, Paulist Press, 2000), 81.

liturgical norms.”<sup>75</sup> It cannot be concluded that this is certainly the case, because if Canon 2 were to be somewhat unnecessary then it would have been relegated to a sub-point of Canon 6. Again, the “General Norms” are interpreted using one another to distinguish which prior laws are still applicable and not that all prior laws are abrogated. It should be also be noted that following the Second Vatican Council, Liturgical laws were published separately and maintained by a new congregation of the Church; this is why the new Code does not encounter “Liturgical Law”. A solid dissection of the various interpretations of these Canons can place the prescribed laws on the veil either in the realm of liturgical matters, indicating that the Revised Code of Canon Law does not affect it, or considers that each specific law within the *Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* were completely revoked.<sup>76</sup>

### **Immemorial Customs**

For this argument three terms need to be defined. *Custom* is derived from a consistent, thirty year, authoritatively approved practice introduced by a competent community. The term *centenary custom* is a custom that has been in place for over one hundred years and an *immemorial custom* is one that is “without remembrance,” lasting longer than time can accurately record when the custom was put in place. In the General Norms, Can. 5 §2 says that “Customs apart from the law, whether universal or particular, which have been in effect hitherto, are retained.” Canon 5 in §1 also says that “other contrary customs are also to be considered suppressed... unless they are centennial or immemorial: these latter may be tolerated if the Ordinary [Bishops, Superiors and the

---

<sup>75</sup> Beal, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Beal, 80.

like] judges that... they cannot be removed. This canon implies that only centenary or immemorial customs have a force greater than the Canonical Law, because even if they are contradictory to the Canonical law they still have the force of law.<sup>77</sup> Clearly Canon 1262 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law is not in contradiction to any later Canons. It can be stated then that the custom of wearing the veil had been in place for at least a hundred years and thus was a custom, approved by the competent authority of the *Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, not contradictory to the law, and accepted by a competent community. It then can also be said that it is also an immemorial custom, approved by the legislator, St. Paul, and clearly rearticulated throughout the centuries. Taking into consideration the previously discussed canon law arguments, the critics could posit that Canon 1262 of the 1917 Code was revoked and thus it was not reaffirmed, but it is not the intention of the council to remove from the mind of the Church a “custom”, which, as Canon 27 says, “is the best interpreter of laws.”

---

<sup>77</sup> *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation*, Can. 26.

## **V. Conclusion and Rationale**

Immodesty is rampant in our Churches. Women are scantily clad when approaching the sanctuary to receive Holy Communion. Today the Church does not, in anyway, commend them for this behavior, but by and large, they are permitted to persist. St. Paul demonstrates that the veil is a holy practice for women and the Fathers of our Church correlate modesty and this holy custom. This custom became an issue in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in 1930 the Church added to the instruction on the veil an appendix on modesty, demonstrating that the practice of wearing a veil while receiving Holy Communion is the apex of modesty.

There will be a wide range of reactions within the person when reading this treatment of the veil, both positive and negative. Critics will focus on certain issues over others. Some may contend that it is a superfluous and vain act and is too opposed to the modern norms; St. Thomas Aquinas also had this concern, but he demonstrates that properly understood the veil is a beautiful devotion and can lead a woman into greater intimacy with the creator. A few critics may bring attention to the feminist views of Paul's writings. Some critics will bring attention to the absence of the matter in the 1983 Code of Canon law. Most critics will claim that there are more important issues and this matter should be dismissed. All these arguments have some importance, but this does not change the great holiness of the veil, or the pleasure of knowing that wearing the veil pleases the Angels. These arguments all fail in understanding that following God means a complete abandonment to Christ: in his Church and in his tradition of Sacred Scripture. Wearing the veil allows women to be obedient to the instruction of the Saints, it allows women to be a distinctly veiled tabernacle when receiving the "bread of angels", it

protects and guards the eyes of their husbands from immodesty, and contributes to restoring the Divine order in modesty.

In 1 Corinthians 11, St. Paul exhorted the Church of Corinth to follow the practice of the rest of the Universal Church: women should be veiled when in Church. He had the proper authority to do this and the Church upheld his authority on this subject firmly and without doubt until the middle of the twentieth century. No new biblical commentary on the subject will ever overturn the greatness of this devotion, which is a distinct symbol of modesty for women. When considering this custom in our Churches today, one cannot help but note the astonishing parallel between the removal of the veil and the increase in the sin of immodesty. Whether it is a canonical law or not can be debated, but Canon Law dictates that it is an immemorial custom which has the force of law.

Lately, when visiting the campuses of faithful Catholic universities in the United States, or upon entering packed daily chapels, it is likely that there will be a woman or two wearing a veil upon their heads. This tradition is increasing in devotion daily. In the past decade there have been several books and pamphlets published which address the subject of the veil. Some families have formed companies recently in order to start producing veils for the public. One can deduce that there is a correlation between the usage of the veil and a desire to be oriented towards God's proper order. Slowly, this practice is becoming a part of the mainstream Catholic culture of today.

When seeing a women wearing a veil today we can all unite in our love for God with St. Paul and encourage Catholic women to wear a veil because of their love for Christ and his Church, all "because of the angels."