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What is it about women's heads?

Maureen Fiedler | Jul. 10, 2009 NCR Today

I have just clicked on photos of President Obama?s meeting with Pope Benedict XVI. In one, I noticed First Lady Michelle Obama joining them, and she was wearing a black lace veil.

Granted, such attire is extraneous to the meeting itself, and I know this is the usual attire of ?official? women when they meet personally with the Pope. But today, this veil distracted me ? at least briefly ? from the substantive reporting on the meeting. It conjured up images of the nuns in veils, Amish women in bonnets, Orthodox Jewish women in wigs, and Muslim women in ?hijabs? (head scarves). Or I think about the Catholic women wearing little lace ?doilies? in church in the 1950?s.

Why is it, I wondered, that so many religious groups seem determined to make women cover their heads? Do men find themselves out-of-control at the sight of women?s hair? (If so, that?s their problem ? not ours, of course). Is it a male desire to demonstrate control over women? Is it just tradition that dies slowly? Or maybe religious leaders are fearful of women?s minds, and their wisdom?

I?m not sure what it is (although if I were to vote, I?d say it was part of the desire to ?control?). In any event, males are rarely required to wear a head covering, at least in Western societies. It?s way past time for women to shed the headdresses too.

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