

Is the adorning of a woman's head when praying and prophesying primarily of theological or domestic significance in Paul's argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16?

Introduction

In this appendix¹ we want to bring together different strands from different parts of the book and analyse Paul's arguments² in 1 Cor 11:2-16 from a social, ecclesial and theological perspective. We want to uncover the ecclesial situation implied by this passage, and in particular the role (and supporting views) of those women who were praying and prophesying at Corinth. We want to set this situation in the broader context of Greco-Roman and Jewish socio-religious norms and determine the extent of such influence (if any) on the ecclesial situation. Finally, we want to examine if and how Paul uses domestic and theological arguments to establish an order in the ecclesia.

The teaching is of some importance to Paul. We can gather this from the fact that while Paul "commends"³ the Corinthians for following his "traditions" (*paradoseis* – 1 Cor 11:2, cf. 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6), they had yet to recognize and practice a proper order in meetings (1 Cor 11:34). It is significant that what Paul was advocating was already to be regarded as "tradition", and that such tradition had developed even at this early stage in the evolution of the movement. What Paul enjoins upon the Corinthians is not a teaching of *local* and *ad hoc* application, or one that is innovative to this letter, but one that had received widespread support in the "churches of God" (1 Cor 11:16, cf. 4:17), and about which the Corinthians would therefore have some knowledge from their normal intercourse with other ecclesias.⁴ It should also be noted that Paul expresses himself in strong language:

I want you to know...dishonours his head...dishonours her head...the same as if her head were shaved...shameful ...indeed ought not to cover his head...ought to have...authority on her head...Is it proper?...does not even nature itself teach you... 1 Cor 11:2-14 (New King James Version⁵)

This is strong language - the language of moral imperative (what they ought to have been doing).

The passage is undoubtedly significant for settling practical ecclesial differences over worship.⁶ Paul deploys arguments concerning honour and shame (vv. 4-5); he deploys an argument based on the account of creation in Genesis (vv. 7-9, 11-12); he has a cryptic reference to angels (v. 10); and finally, he appeals to what the Corinthians regard as "proper" (v. 13) and taught by "nature" (v. 14). Paul introduces his whole case with a principle of headship (v. 3).

The passage bristles with difficulty⁷ and it is no exaggeration to say that scholars have disputed almost every aspect. For example,

- The meaning of individual words and phrases such as κεφαλή ("head", v3), ἀκατακαλύπτω ("uncovered", vv. 5, 13), κατακαλύπτομαι ("covered", vv. 6 (twice),

¹ For a downloadable copy of the appendix see www.christadelphian-ejbi.org [cited July 2009].

² We will assume for the purposes of this essay that the passage is completely Pauline.

³ Paul is being ironic in his "praise" of the Corinthians and he means that they were *not* following his traditions of which one was about a proper order in meetings.

⁴ The evidence for the inter-connectedness of the Pauline ecclesias is detailed in Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1983), 107-110.

⁵ The New King James Version will be used in this essay, unless otherwise explicitly noted.

⁶ We know Paul is concerned with communal meetings of worship because his case is about prophesying (1 Cor 14:3, 22).

⁷ For example, E. Schüssler-Fiorenza observes that the passage is "very convoluted and far from being intelligible even today", *In Memory Of Her* (London: SCM Press, 2nd Ed., 1995), 219.

7), περιβολαίου (“covering”, v. 15), and κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (“having his head covered”, v. 4), have been the locus of disputes about whether Paul is addressing head coverings or hairstyles.

- The *logic* of Paul’s argument has presented several puzzles. How does the principle of headship in v. 3 relate to the body of arguments in vv. 4-16? How do arguments about shame and honour, Genesis typology, and what is proper and taught by nature, cohere together? Perhaps the main puzzle of logic has been why Paul mentions angels in v. 10 - διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.
- The social and cultural background has been disputed. One issue concerns the extent to which Jewish and/or Greco-Roman religious customs are informing the Corinthian practices, or underpinning what Paul is advocating. A second issue is whether Paul is advocating a household patriarchal code of behaviour as a model for ecclesial relationships.
- The meaning and significance of Paul’s use of the doctrine of creation has been disputed. Paul asserts that man is the “image and glory of God” whereas “woman is the glory of man”. Scholars have disagreed over whether this is a valid use of Genesis and whether Paul’s advocacy of such a created order is consistent with the baptismal principle that there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal 3:28).¹

We cannot avoid any of these areas of difficulty in addressing the question whether Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is primarily of theological or domestic significance.

The notion of “domestic significance” in our question could be construed in several ways. For example,

- Paul’s teaching has domestic significance if it is about how husbands and wives behave at ecclesial meetings, possibly those meetings that are held in their house.² Here Paul is understood to be reinforcing the common cultural household model of the day.
- Paul’s teaching has domestic significance if it is using (and/or adapting) first century socio-religious norms in respect of male-female relationships to govern the religious meetings of the new sect.
- Paul’s teaching has domestic significance if it is about relatively trivial local matters of fashion such as the way men and women have their hair or choose head-coverings.

¹ It is assumed here that Galatians dates from before the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) and about five years before 1 Corinthians (normally dated in the mid-fifties C.E.). The arguments for this position are summarised by D. Guthrie in *New Testament Introduction* (4th ed.; Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), 477-480.

² It was the practise of the early church to meet in houses (see W. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 75-77), and with the mixed social makeup in the ecclesia (cf. 1 Cor 1:26), it is likely that there would have been tensions arising from disagreements over the proper way to behave in meetings. For example, did the patriarch of a house have any authority over an ecclesia meeting in his house? How was a matriarch of a household to behave with regard to her husband (or any baptised servants) in the more egalitarian setting of an ecclesial meeting?

We shall consider each of these notions in our discussion of whether Paul's argument is primarily of theological or domestic significance.

The passage undoubtedly has domestic significance if only because Paul is at least putting forward views about the way men and women adorn their heads. However, in itself this claim is trivial; it doesn't account for Paul's strength of opinion. We need to fill out a more substantial domestic context. This could be done sociologically using either an integration or boundary model.

If Paul is ordering husband-wife relationships using a familiar household model, or using male and female norms from common socio-religious practises, then he can be understood to be *integrating* the Corinthians' sense of Christian identity with wider society. Alternatively, Paul could be distinguishing proper behaviour for meetings from other cults and by this setting some *boundaries*. Either model would be a kind of Pauline **domestic agenda** and define the domestic significance of the passage in a way that accounts for Paul's passion.

The passage has these two kinds of domestic significance, because throughout 1 Corinthians Paul is engaged in applying the Gospel to practical ecclesial circumstances. The state in which the ecclesia found itself had come about (speaking in the most general terms) as a result of men and women from mixed social backgrounds coming together into a new group. Inevitably, community meetings were evolving as the Corinthians applied the ideology of the Gospel in conjunction with their previously learned cultural norms. Paul is clearly attempting to bring order to this mix.¹

Does Paul apply theology to the Corinthians' situation? There are a number of questions to ask if we are to determine the theological significance of the passage:

Headship – is this a purely domestic notion to do with ecclesial or marital relationships, or is it grounded in a theology of creation or new creation in Christ?

Shame and Honour – are these social concepts or is Paul deploying a typology from the Old Testament?

Creation – is Paul using the doctrine of creation to enforce a social patriarchal order in male/female behaviour, or is he drawing an analogy between the creation of Adam and Eve and the ecclesia in order to enforce a theological distinction between male and female “in the Lord”?

Propriety and Nature – do Paul's closing arguments have any theological merit, or are they a hermeneutical key proving that Paul has been concerned all along with purely domestic matters?

We shall explore each of these avenues in our discussion of whether Paul's argument is primarily of theological or domestic significance.

Headship and Honour

Paul begins his discussion by stating that there is a series of “heads” that define certain relationships between God, Christ and men and women in the ecclesia.

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 Cor 11:3

¹ The emphasis on order (cf. 1 Cor 14:40) should also be seen against the backdrop of the Corinthians' tendency to schism (1 Cor 1:11-13).

Paul is interested in drawing out a corollary of the headship of the man in respect of woman, and a corollary of the headship of Christ in respect of every man. He doesn't develop any teaching from the principle that God is the head of Christ.

The metaphor of "headship" employed by Paul has been the subject of scholarly dispute. There have been two main proposals:

- a "head" is someone who has "authority over" other(s)
- a "head" is someone who is "the source of" other(s)

These two possibilities have different consequences for our discussion as to whether this passage is primarily of theological or domestic significance. If Paul is saying that the man has authority over woman, then this clearly has domestic significance; if Paul is saying that the man is the source of woman, then this appears to be a theological doctrine derived from the Genesis creation accounts.

The traditional approach is that a "head" is someone with authority over others. This is certainly the case in modern English culture, but was it the same in the first century? J. A. Fitzmyer¹ has argued that in Hellenistic Greek κεφαλή carried the metaphorical significance of "position of leadership or authority". Fitzmyer states his conclusion in these terms,

The upshot of this discussion is that a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11:3 be understood as 'head' in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else.^{2 3}

The basis of Fitzmyer's conclusion is a collection of passages from the LXX, Philo, Josephus and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. For example, one passage that Fitzmyer uses is from 2 Sam 22:44,

φυλάξεις με εἰς κεφαλὴν ἔθνων λαός ὃν οὐκ ἔγνων ἐδοῦλευσάν μοι

You have kept me as the head of the nations. A people I have not known shall serve me.
2 Sam 22:44

Fitzmyer makes the point that the last half of v. 44 makes it clear that κεφαλή is used with the connotation of "authority" or "supremacy".⁴ We do not need to list each of Fitzmyer's dozen or so examples as his point is the same in each case.

A. Perriman⁵ provides a convincing discussion of each of Fitzmyer's examples. He argues that Fitzmyer's analysis is not sufficiently nuanced in that the examples show more the notion of "prominence" rather than that of "authority". Taking the example of 2 Sam 22:44, Perriman concludes,

¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, "Another Look at ΚΕΦΑΛΗ in 1 Corinthians 11:3", *NTS* 35 (1989): 503-511.

² J. A. Fitzmyer, "Another Look", 510.

³ Paul does deploy the notion of "authority" in this passage (v. 10); however, his point is that the woman has authority on her head. Paul doesn't use the proposition that Christ has authority over every man or that the man has authority over woman in his argument.

⁴ J. A. Fitzmyer, "Another Look", 508.

⁵ A. Perriman, *Speaking of Women* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 19.

I would suggest, rather, that the pre-eminence of David as God’s anointed king...constitutes a more relevant set of associations for the interpretation of *kephalē* here.

Perriman’s argument is finely balanced. A person who has a position of prominence or pre-eminence may very well be a leader and have authority over others. However, this doesn’t mean that κεφαλή carries the metaphorical sense of “having authority” – it may just carry the metaphorical sense of “prominence”. A context in which the metaphor of headship occurs may very well also have notions of authority and leadership, but they may be carried by different language and complement the use of the “headship” rather than unpack that metaphor. Interestingly, Perriman shows that the notion of being a “representative” is closely associated with the metaphor of headship in some of Fitzmyer’s LXX examples (e.g. Jud 10:18, 11:8-9 {A}, and Jud 11:11 {A} {a}).

Although Fitzmyer and Perriman differ in their reading of certain (principally LXX) passages, they should be regarded as batting on the same side. An opposing interpretation of the metaphor of “headship” is put forward by G. D. Fee, who states his conclusion in these terms:

Paul’s understanding of the metaphor, therefore, and almost certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped, is ‘head’ as “source” and especially “source of life”...¹

The basis of Fee’s argument is twofold:

- the occurrence of the metaphor “headship” as “authority over” is rare in profane² Greek literature, and where it does occur, it should more properly be regarded as conveying the sense of “leadership” rather than “authority”.
- there are several examples of a metaphorical sense of “source” in profane Greek. Fee quotes examples from Philo, Artemidorus, and an Orphic fragment.

For example, Fee cites Philo from *De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis* 61,

And of all the members of the clan here described Esau is the progenitor, the κεφαλή as it were of the whole creature [meaning the source of the whole clan].³

We do not need to examine Fee’s other examples as the argument is the same in each case.

This example (and others) is discussed by Perriman, and once again, the analysis is more nuanced. His comment on the Philo text is that it is about the prominence and historical *priority* of the patriarch.⁴ His comments on Fee’s other texts have broadly the same outcome – the metaphor has more to do with precedence and priority rather than expressing the idea of “source”.⁵

Hence, C. D. Yonge translates the text,

¹ G. D. Fee, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 503; Fee cites other scholars in support.

² It should be noted that the “authority” interpretation of the metaphor does claim most of its support from *Septuagintal* usage.

³ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 503, n. 45.

⁴ Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, 26.

⁵ Paul does make a point about the *source* of the man and the woman - they are out of each other in different ways (vv. 8-9, 12); but this point makes *both* a source (the ‘source’ reading of v. 3 makes just the man the source of woman).

But as the head is the chief of all the aforementioned parts of the animal, so is Esau the chief of this race...¹

Yonge's translation goes beyond the idea of prominence and introduces the notion of leadership. Although Perriman and Yonge disagree, they are nevertheless in the same ballpark and opposing the proposal of Fee that the metaphor of headship that Philo uses is about physical descent.

In addition, Perriman makes two general observations: firstly, the interpretation of a metaphor is particularly sensitive to context; for example, in geomorphology, the head of a river may be its "source" – but this doesn't mean that in a social context the head of a person is the source of that person's life. Secondly, ancient writers may use 'head' in a specific way, but a specialized use of 'head' doesn't show that 'head' carried that particular metaphorical sense in general; for example, Artemidorus in *Oneirocriticum* 1.2 writes,

In real life, the father of this man, too, died; for just as the head is the source of life and light for the whole body, he was responsible for the dreamer's life and light.²

Perriman's comment on this text is that Artemidorus is making a specialized use of 'head' that fits the analogy he is drawing between parts of the body and members of the family – this doesn't mean that 'head' has the metaphorical sense of "source".

There is then a need to respect the context in which a metaphor occurs and a need to respect the distinction between *discourse usage* and a *lexical sense*.³

Perriman's conclusion and lexical proposal about the metaphor of headship is as follows:

I would suggest, therefore, that the common metaphorical application of *kephalē* embraces a coherent range of meanings that can be mapped as follows, and that it is within this area that we should expect to find the proper background to Paul's use of the word: (1) the physical top or extremity of an object, such as a mountain or river or pillar...; (2) more abstractly, that which is first, extreme, either in temporal or spatial terms; (3) that which is prominent or outstanding; and (4) that which is determinative or representative by virtue of its prominence.⁴

The notion of "headship" we adopt then is that a head is the one who is prominent in respect to another or group of others. Paul identifies this series of heads just so that he can go on and assert that two of these heads are dis-honoured by failure on the part of men and women in the ecclesia to adorn their heads appropriately. The concept of headship is critical to Paul's point in vv. 4-6 but not subsequently.

If the metaphor of headship is construed in the sense of "the one who has prominence", then it can be plausibly argued that Paul is applying a household model to ecclesial meetings – a household code of conduct in which normally the man is "the head of the household". Within this code certain behaviour by members of the household would bring dis-honour to the head of the household. This

¹ C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 309.

² This is cited in Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, 28.

³ The distinction between the "discourse usage" of an expression and the lexical sense of an expression is outlined by P. Cotterell and M. Turner in *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 139-145. Cotterell and Turner use the metaphor of "headship" as one of their worked examples to introduce the distinction.

⁴ Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, 32.

proposal clearly defines one way in which we might say that Paul's argument has *domestic significance*. Paul is applying a common domestic code in his appeal to the Corinthians.¹

Honour and Shame

Paul states that a “covered” head dis-honours (καταισχύνω) Christ on the part of the man (v. 4), and an “uncovered” head dishonours the man on the part of the woman (v. 5). Honour is a social construct; it can be *ascribed* to a person or it can be *acquired* by a person. The ascription of honour in Mediterranean society would derive from that person's social standing in a family, i.e. membership of a family (the basic unit of society was not the individual). In contrast, the honour that can be acquired by a person would derive from his having achieved certain things in his life, typically, this would be honour regarded as moral virtue.²

The membership of a family or household would convey a certain honour and this honour would pre-eminently be represented by the head of the household. Accordingly, as a member of the household, a person would dis-honour the head if they behaved inappropriately – in this way they represent the head of the household.

Paul is contending for a particular understanding of honour³ to be respected in the ecclesia and in so doing he is applying a significant social construct which would have had well understood cultural applications. However, Paul's coupling of the concepts of headship and honour/dis-honour is not a straightforward application of a patriarchal model to the ecclesia.

We can surmise some theological reasons underpinning this household model of headship and honour/dishonour. Christ has a “head” because he was the son of God (1 Cor 1:9); likewise, every man has a “head” because he is a “servant” owned by Christ and takes from Christ the example for his behaviour (1 Cor 3:11, 23, 7:22, 11:1).⁴ A man is a servant of Christ “in his household” because of Christ's work of redemption. However, while there may be a natural “fit” between theology and a cultural and ethical model in these two applications of headship, it is less clear how woman has the man as a “head” *in the ecclesia* in a theological sense.

Scholars often assume a marital context for Paul's point about the headship of the man and the honour or dis-honour that might arise from a woman's behaviour.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Cor 11:3 (RSV)

¹ A development of the concept of the headship of Christ can be seen in the household code of the Letter of Ephesians (Eph 5:22-25). On this, see D. G. Horrell, “The Development of Theological Ideology in Pauline Christianity” in *Modelling Early Christianity* (ed., Phillip. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 230-233.

² This twofold approach to “honour” in Mediterranean societies is outlined in H. Moxnes, “Honour and Shame” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed., R. Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996).

³ Paul has already contended for a new understanding of what is true honour in his praise of the “shame of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18-31). This is an argument for an *acquired* honour through the work of the cross, rather than honour that Christ had in virtue of his sonship. And again in 1 Cor 4:6-21, Paul tries to re-orientate the Corinthian's perceptions of honour and shame presenting himself as their *paterfamilias* (v. 15). On the theme of Paul as the *paterfamilias* of the Corinthians see, S. J. Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as ‘Paterfamilias’ of the Christian Household Group in Corinth” in *Modelling Early Christianity* (ed., Phillip. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 213-223.

⁴ There is possible a line of influence between Paul and the author of Hebrews at this point. The author of Hebrews makes the point that Jesus was a “son” over his own house (Heb 3:6).

The main reason for this “marital” reading lies in Paul’s use of Genesis and the account of the creation of Adam and Eve (1 Cor 11:7-10). However, there are difficulties with this interpretation. Firstly, the Greek for ‘woman’ - γυνή – has no indication of “possession” in this context; where γυνή means “wife” there is the presence of the simple genitive or an indication of possession (e.g. 1 Cor 7:2, 14:35). Secondly, the point Paul is making about the adorning of the head is clearly general, affecting not only every man (married or not), but every woman who prays and prophesies (married or not).¹ And lastly, it seems incongruous for Paul to mix a literal application of a household code with an analogical use of this code. In applying the household code to model the relationship of Christ to God and the relationship of Christ to every Christian man, Paul is applying a common social model by way of analogy. But if Paul affirms the headship of the husband in respect of his wife, Paul is simply transferring the code in a literal way to the state of Christian marriage.

For these reasons, we conclude that Paul is not concerned with married men and women. Instead, we propose that just as Paul is applying different aspects of the household model as an analogy for understanding the relationship between God and Christ (sonship in a house), and Christ and every Christian man (servants in a house), so too Paul is drawing the same analogy when he says that “the man” is head of “woman”. Paul is drawing the analogy a third time in order to convey a theological point. In some sense, women in an ecclesial meeting should manifest a behaviour that could reasonably be expected of a man and his wife in a household. In a household, the wife’s behaviour is representative of her husband and can bring dis-honour to her head – she represents “the man” – and can dis-honour him.

In effect Paul is setting up a typology between Christ and women in the ecclesia. When he says that “the head of woman is the man” he is not describing a relationship between men and women, as if to say that the head of *any* woman in the ecclesia is *any* man. Paul is talking about “woman” and “the man”, using the account of the creation of Eve in Genesis 2 (Gen 2:23f). He is deploying the singular definite description “the man” to refer to Christ as the second man and last Adam (1 Cor 15:45-47). This is an “Adamic” typology that Paul will further enlarge in vv. 7-9; in this typology the women of the ecclesia should consider themselves collectively as “the woman” (Eve) corresponding to “the man” of the new creation.² In this arrangement, they can dis-honour Christ if they do not adorn their head in an appropriate manner. Paul is using typology to model and order the behaviour of women in the ecclesia.

This reading removes the difficulties that have been put forward concerning this passage and the issue of male and female equality in Christ. It removes the men in the ecclesia from a direct relationship of authority over the women and places the Paul’s point into a typological framework. This approach underpins the social significance of Paul’s point about adorning the head with a theology centred on the prominence of Christ. As such it dovetails with the theme of Christ’s lordship which is central to Paul’s thought in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 11:1).

Paul will enlarge upon this typology in vv. 7-9, but before we examine Paul’s central argument in these verses, we must explore the social and cultural background to the issue of adorning of the head.

¹ The fact that Paul is concerned with every man and woman in the ecclesia indicates that he is not addressing just one socio-economic group within the ecclesia, although it may have been a single group (such as the women prophets) who were the catalyst for his remarks.

² W. J. Martin assumes a similar interpretation. However, he reads too much into Paul’s argument. His interpretation is that women in the ecclesia represent “the church” and men represent Christ. This is taking Paul too far and overlaying later theology (perhaps teaching from Ephesians) on top of 1 Corinthians 11. Instead, Paul’s point is more austere and not as developed. See W. J. Martin, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (eds., W. Ward Gasque and R. P. Martin; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1970), 231-241.

Social and Cultural Catalysts

There is clearly a social and cultural background to 1 Cor 11:2-16. Paul is addressing an issue of concern to him, but the behaviour of the Corinthian men and women was presumably based on competing social and/or religious norms. Paul is advocating a very specific social behaviour to do with adorning the head; he isn't counselling them about general moral behaviour. Accordingly, scholars have sought to explain the social and cultural context by reference to Greco-Roman and Jewish practises regarding the adorning of the head. Scholars have also sought to show that Paul is supporting one extant social and cultural practise over against another.

If Paul's teaching has domestic significance, then it is likely that this is because some or all of the Corinthians were using (and/or adapting) first century socio-religious norms in respect of male-female relationships to govern the meetings of the new sect.¹ An alternative (although not necessarily competing) approach argues that the Corinthians were advocating socio-religious practises on the basis of *Christian theology* rather than contemporary cultic norms. They were taking a fundamental principle of the Gospel and working out the implications in community life. It is possible that this principle was being particularly put forward by the woman prophets in Corinth.²

With their baptism into Christ, the Corinthian men and women had taken on an equal status and presumably able to carry out equal roles in the ecclesia. Paul explicitly teaches the principle of salvific equality in Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28

This is widely regarded as a baptismal liturgical formula in use around the ecclesias. As W. Meeks³ argues, this formula makes a factual claim about an objective change in reality that was achieved through the performative act of baptism. This rite of initiation fundamentally modified social roles. It broke down common social distinctions instead of integrating them into the working of the body of Christ. Paul alludes to the same principle in 1 Cor 12:13 to teach the unity of the body and in particular, the common participation by everyone in the spirit-gifts:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:13, cf. Col 3:10-11

This common participation in the Spirit is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul mentions men and women equally prophesying and praying in the spirit. This principle implies the breaking down of the distinctions between men and women in how they were meant to behave in religious settings. In the situation addressed by Paul, it is usually assumed that it was particularly the women who were asserting their *Christian* equality by not adorning their head as might have been the norm for non-

¹ J. D. G. Dunn, arguing from the likelihood that the whole Corinthian church met in the house of Gaius (Rom 16:23) and the typical entertaining facilities of well-to-do houses (accommodating around 40), observes that the social tensions and dynamics of opposition in the Corinth would have involved small numbers – J. D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1995), 18. Dunn's point is salutary - Paul is writing a letter and doing theology in a pastoral context, and the problem is small and local.

² See A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1995).

³ W. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity" *History of Religions*, 13/3, (1974): 165-208.

Christian religious women. Alternatively, it might be that they were intentionally copying a male custom common in other religious groups.

Meeks argues, in common with others, that Paul is modifying the baptismal principle of equality in 1 Corinthians 11. Meeks' view is that equality of status implied an equality of role but that did not mean for Paul that men and women were not to observe some *symbolic* differences between the sexes in the present age while waiting for the age to come.¹

Styles of Hair or Head-Coverings

A critical point of debate regarding the social context of Paul's remarks is whether Paul addresses a matter concerning the Corinthian women's hair styles or whether he is insisting on the wearing of an external head-covering. The traditional and older commentary view is that Paul is arguing for an external head-covering for women and the absence of such a covering for men. However, recent criticism has argued the case that Paul is concerned about hair.

The arguments depend on a distinctive translation of certain Greek phrases and identifying the correct social context in Corinth *and abroad*² amongst the Pauline ecclesias (1 Cor 11:16).

The disputed phrases are:

- The phrase *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* - rendered as "having his head covered" (v. 4)
- The adjective *ἀκατακαλύπτως* rendered as "uncovered" (vv. 5, 13)
- The verb *κατακαλύπτομαι* rendered variously as "covered" and "to cover" (vv. 6 (twice), 7)
- The noun *περιβολαίον* - rendered as "covering" (v. 15)

We will discuss these in turn and consider first the case that Paul is concerned about hair; after this, we will consider the case that Paul is concerned about head-coverings.

The Case for Hair

Two possible translations of *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* are the following:

"Every man praying or prophesying, having [his] head covered, dishonours his head"
1 Cor 11:4

"Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonours his head." 1 Cor 11:4
(N.I.V. footnote)³

¹ For example, another scholar following a similar line is R. Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman" *JAR*, 40, (1972): 283-306. The *historical* argument here is that in the development of the church, the baptismal formula is pre-Pauline and in 1 Corinthians 11 we have the beginnings of a reaction to this egalitarianism.

² Paul may well have used the same teaching elsewhere in establishing a custom among the ecclesias, and these would have had a different cultural bias (e.g. Galatian, Jewish, Greek). Taking this wider perspective, the domestic and social significance of Paul's argument's are broader in scope.

³ K. L. Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 90, observes that this footnote was included in the N.I.V. because reputable scholars think the passage is about hair, and that the interpretation was possible and of sufficient importance to be represented in a footnote.

Several scholars¹ argue for the “hair” interpretation although each scholar has a slightly different take on the passage. Each of them makes the point that Paul mentions hair in vv. 14-15 and they take Paul’s explicit mention of hair at the end of his argument to clarify the difficult expression *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*.

J. Murphy-O’Conner makes two points:²

- The verb ἔχων has a missing object and it is natural to suggest that the ‘object’ might be hair; otherwise it is difficult to imagine why Paul did not mention something like a veil if he was referring to an external head-covering.
- The preposition *kata* with genitive (of object i.e. ‘head’) should be taken to mean ‘down’ or ‘down from’ and this fits with the suggestion of hair (hanging down from the head).

Hence Murphy-O’Conner argues that Paul is saying that for a man to have long hair hanging down from the head would be a dis-honour.

This line is supported by A. Padgett³ who additionally observes that the normal Greek for ‘veil’ – *kalumma* – does not occur in the passage, and that the preposition *kata* does not generally mean ‘on’; were the verses concerned with head-coverings, it would have been more natural for a preposition like *epi* to have been used.

In coiffure, stylists will talk of having hair ‘up’ or ‘down’ in various associated styles. It’s not unreasonable to suppose that it was the same in Corinth. Such talk implies nothing about *length* of hair, but rather about whether a person has his or her hair ‘up’ or ‘down’.

If Paul is concerned with the length of men’s hair in v. 4 or whether his hair is hanging down from the head, then it would seem a false antithesis for Paul to talk of external head coverings for women in vv. 5-6. The key words in these verses are ἀκατακαλύπτως and κατακαλύπτομαι and one possible translation is,

And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair [ἀκατακαλύπτως] on her head dishonours her head - she is just like one of the “shorn women”. If a woman has no covering [κατακαλύπτομαι], let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again [κατακαλύπτομαι]. 1 Cor 11:5-6 (N.I.V. Footnote)

This rendering of ἀκατακαλύπτως as ‘no covering of hair’ and κατακαλύπτομαι as ‘no covering’ is assuming an object for the verb (hair) and this explains the rather free rendering of the second occurrence of κατακαλύπτομαι as ‘she should grow it again’. This assumption fits Paul’s comparison with the class of “shorn women”.

¹ For example, J. Murphy O’Conner, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” *CBQ* 42, (1980): 482-500.

² Murphy O’Conner, “Sex and Logic”, 484-485.

³ A. Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”, *JSNT* 20 (1984): 69-86 (70). It should be noted that while Padgett interprets the Greek phrases in the same way as Murphy O’Conner, he thinks that 1 Cor 11:3-7^b is a quotation of Corinthian arguments rather than Paul making his own case. A rebuttal of this approach is beyond the scope of this article.

Murphy O’Conner and Padgett argue that the word ἀκατακαλύπτos is better rendered ‘unbound’ – so that on this reading (for Murphy O’Conner) Paul is objecting to women having unbound hair or untidy, unkempt hair in meetings.¹ Each scholar cites the same comparative evidence from the Septuagint. The word ἀκατακαλύπτos occurs once in the LXX,² translating a Hebrew participle *parōga*:

The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose [*parōga*], and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, ‘Unclean, Unclean’... Lev 13:45 (RSV), cf. Num 5:18

They also support this approach by reference to 1 Cor 11:15 where Paul describes a woman’s hair as a “cloak” or “wrap” (περιβολαίου), and argue that hair is given “instead of” (ἀντὶ) an external covering.

Scholars supporting the view that Paul is concerned with hair offer a variety of social catalysts for Paul’s remarks:

(1) Murphy-O’Conner suggests that Paul’s opposition to men having hair hanging down from the head is based on an aversion to male homosexuality, and he cites evidence from Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides in support of the view that long dressed hair was a homosexual trait.³ On this reading, Paul is concerned to ensure that there is no gender confusion displayed by the ecclesia.

(2) Padgett argues that Greek women wore ornamental bands or combs, with their long hair bound up, plaited or wrapped around their heads. (Greek men wore their hair short). A woman with her hair not bound up on her head would be like one of the “shorn women”, i.e. like a woman of ill repute. He concludes therefore that the argument is about a social code to be imposed on the Corinthian women.⁴

(3) Schüssler-Fiorenza argues that the catalyst for Paul’s remarks was an unsightly copying of the ecstatic frenzy associated with prophetic behaviour in other cults such as that of Dionysos, Isis, and others; again, she cites archaeological evidence.⁵

If Paul is concerned with hair then it can be argued that Paul’s argument at least in vv. 4-6 is concerned only with social propriety and that it has no theological significance. On this view, Paul is seeking to impose common social norms to do with honour/shame and hairstyles (Murphy O’Conner), integrating the Corinthians’ cultural background with the requirements of a Christian life. He is also separating and distancing the Corinthians from the excesses of other cults (Schüssler-Fiorenza).

The Case for Head-Coverings

In Roman society, the characteristic form of worship was the sacrifice, and leftover parts of the sacrifice were sold in market places (cf. 1 Cor 10:25-31). The sacrifices were accompanied by prayers

¹ Murphy O’ Conner, “Sex and Logic”, 488-489; see also Padgett, “Paul on Women”, 70.

² There is textual variation for this word - Rahlfs’ critical edition of the LXX has ἀκατακαλύπτos, but Bagsters’ Vaticanus edition has ἀκαλύπτos.

³ Murphy O’ Conner, “Sex and Logic”, 485.

⁴ Padgett, “Paul on Women”, 70.

⁵ E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 227.

to the deity, which took the form of striking a bargain for the deity's favour.¹ Head-coverings were worn by men and women when performing sacrifice. Several stone reliefs depict altar scenes in which the one offering the sacrifice is the only one with a covered head, and Plutarch mentions the practise in *Roman Questions*.²

One scholar, B. Witherington III, argues on the basis of this evidence for a Roman cultural background to the issue of head coverings.³ Corinth was a Roman colony with a high proportion of Roman citizens; it might be argued therefore that the social significance of Paul's strictures lies in an endorsement or a contrast with Roman religious practises regarding the adorning of the head.

Since the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων could refer to hair or an external head-covering hanging down from the head, it could very well refer to a head-covering. Witherington also offers linguistic evidence and concludes,

The literary evidence also supports the contention that we are dealing with head-coverings rather than hair. Plutarch uses the same phrase that Paul does, *kata kephales*, to refer to something resting on the head, not hair, and much less long, flowing hair.⁴

Witherington's opinion is that Romans were more concerned with proper apparel in worship than Greeks, and therefore Paul's Roman background is to the fore in 1 Corinthians 11.

There is also LXX evidence supporting this interpretation of κατὰ κεφαλῆς. In Esther 6:12 we read that Haman hurried to his house, mourning and having his "head covered". The underlying Hebrew (*hāpāb*) means "to cover" as in "overlay" (cf. 2 Chron 3:5-9, Psa 68:13), and indicates an external covering. This expression is translated by the Greek κατὰ κεφαλῆς.

Head-coverings are also known in Greek customs. Witherington comments,

The inscriptional evidence suggests that it was possible for women to participate in the mystery processions and rites with a bare head. The specific evidence we have for Corinth, however, seems to indicate that this was not the usual practice in most religious contexts...C.M. Galt has collected a vast amount of evidence, both pictorial and inscriptional, to show that the predominant custom for adult women in Greece during the Hellenistic age and later in ritual contexts was to wear a head-covering. She has also shown that in Greek religious rites and dances adult women commonly wore a head-covering and that this custom is evident particularly at Corinth.⁵

There is also evidence for Jewish customs regarding head-coverings. It would seem that Jewish women wore veils in public places, but not in the synagogues, where they sat separately from the men.⁶ However, it is unlikely that Paul has in mind Jewish veils. He nowhere mentions veils in his

¹ See J. E. Stambaugh and D. L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 127-137.

² Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, (Loeb IV, 27, 1936), 266f, 267a.

³ B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 232-235.

⁴ Witherington, *op cit*.

⁵ B. Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1988), 81.

⁶ J. Lightfoot, *Commentary on the Talmud from the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), vol. 4, 229-241.

letters. A veil would cover the face, and the context in 1 Corinthians 11 is all about the *head*, so any external covering that Paul had in view would come down from the sides of the head.

There are then equally plausible social contexts relating to the wearing of head-coverings as there are if we regard Paul as being concerned with hair. On either approach, Paul might be regarded as either distancing Christians from other cultic activity or inculcating common social norms.

The crux of the scholarly dispute over “hair or head-coverings” revolves around the absence of an object for ἀκατακαλύπτος (vv. 5, 13) and κατακαλύπτομαι (vv. 6 (twice), 7), and whether the mention of hair in v. 14 should be taken as the clue to the identity of the object. The verb κατακαλύπτομαι means “to cover fully” and it is used in a wide variety of contexts in the LXX. Of itself, it does not settle whether Paul is concerned with hair or head-coverings.

We have noted that scholars in favour of “hair” appeal to the LXX usage of ἀκατακαλύπτος in Lev 13:45. This argument is by no means certain; putting aside the point that the LXX might be a mistaken rendering of the Hebrew participle *pārōga*, the correct understanding of the participle is a matter of interpretation. The basic sense conveys “loosening”, whether of the constraints of discipline, or of a head-covering, or of hair. Since the context of the passage is about bald heads and bald foreheads in which there is the sign of leprosy, i.e. hair is absent, the likelihood is that the participle is about head-coverings. Lepers may have covered their heads to disguise their leprosy.¹ Hence the Law required that their heads be unbound - i.e. not have a turban bound round the head.²

However, even if these points were conceded, it is argued that the mention of hair in v. 14 shows that Paul has been concerned with hair style in the early part of the argument.

Propriety and Nature

Paul invites the Corinthians to judge among themselves whether it was “proper” (πρέπον) for a woman to pray uncovered (v. 13). He could be appealing to their sense of cultural propriety or he may be inviting them to reflect on his traditions and see that they implied a need for proper adornment of the head (cf. later pastoral uses of πρέπον in 1 Tim 2:9-10, Tit 2:1).

He deploys an argument from “nature” - ‘doth *not even* nature herself teach you’ (v. 14) - as a supplement to his previous argumentation and as an appeal to the Corinthians’ own wisdom. (Paul thought that nature could teach things contained in the Law³ – Rom 2:14). Nature was meant to teach that stylised locks of hair (κόμη) for the man was a shame, but a glory for the woman.

Paul makes a connection between ‘covering’ and ‘glory’ in the argument from nature: the hair is given *for* (ἀντὶ) a covering. This can be construed equally as meaning “instead of” a covering, but it can also mean “corresponding to” – so that if⁴ stylised locks of hair are given to a woman, then she has a covering.

On this basis, it can be argued that Paul is supporting the need for head coverings with an argument from nature such that *if* women have been given stylised locks of hair, this shows women in general

¹ Alongside this rationale, we might ask: if hair is meant, what would be the *point* of the instruction that lepers have their (remaining scraps of) hair loosened?

² This interpretation is suggested by BDB, 828.

³ If Paul is thinking of the Law in connection with hair, then he may have in mind a typology based on the Nazirite vows relating to hair.

⁴ Commentators overlook the fact that Paul uses a conditional in his logic; he is not assuming that all women have hair of the quality that can be styled as locks.

need a head covering when praying and prophesying.¹ Paul describes the covering as a cloak or vesture (περιβολαίον, cf. Heb 1:12). He doesn't enlarge on why such a bodily feature might be considered to be a vesture. It is possible that Paul thinks of head-coverings as a ritual display of what it means to "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27), and that those women with beautiful hair are a display by nature of the need to have a "clothing" from God.²

Summary

The extent of the influence of social and cultural factors on Paul's argument has to remain a matter of speculation, however the possibilities are clear. If Paul is concerned with hair, then he may have been concerned to steer the Corinthian men away from the appearance of homosexuality or at least to enforce proper gender distinctions in behaviour; for the women, he may have been concerned to impress the need for "respectable" standards of hairstyle and the need to avoid the appearance of being like members of other cults. If Paul is concerned with external head-coverings, then likewise Paul may have been setting boundaries and building on common perceptions of religious practise. He may have wanted to make the women wear a head-covering and not the man to distinguish believers from Jewish synagogue practise. In advocating head-coverings for women, he can be seen to be integrating the Corinthian's growing perceptions of what it means to be a Christian with their cultural background knowledge of Roman and Greek cultic practise.

The determination of whether Paul is concerned with head-coverings or hair is not difficult; on balance, it seems that Paul is concerned with head-coverings.

The Creation Argument

Paul reinforces his argument about honour and shame with an argument based on the Genesis creation account.

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 the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the 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. 1 Cor 11:7-12

The argument isn't being deployed as a premise in support of Paul's points about honour and shame; these are *consequences* of either covering or not covering the head. Rather, Paul's argument here is a theological foundation for a practise relating to head-coverings. Although Paul has just appealed to Corinthian notions of honour and shame, he is nevertheless concerned to underpin a practise relating to head-coverings based on a doctrine about creation. The central position of this creation argument is evidence that Paul's thinking is primarily of theological rather than sociological significance. It makes the social reasoning of vv. 4-6 to be of less importance, in keeping with Paul's tirade against cultural wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 (cf. 1 Cor 2:5) and his remark about the passing nature of fashion (1 Cor 7:29-31).

The argument has not been without controversy. It is based on a harmonised reading of the two creation accounts in Genesis. In particular, Paul quotes from Gen 1:27 (LXX) and interprets τὸν

¹ This is the argument of Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 83.

² A discussion of the possible symbolic significance of clothing for Paul is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth noting that if this approach could be sustained, it would show that Paul's argument from propriety and nature was more theological than domestic in its significance.

ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ to refer to the *male* of the species in ἄνθρωπος εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα¹ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων rather than humanity.² In addition, he states that ἡ γυνή δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν, and he explains this in terms of the woman's origin, relying the creation account in Genesis 2.

This reading of Genesis 1:27 has been termed the “asymmetric reading”, and it separates in thought the parallel clauses, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him...”, and makes these refer to Adam - the man. The third clause of the verse, “...male and female he created them...” is joined in thought with Gen 1:28 as a lead in to the announcement that Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and multiply. In other words, the mention of the female is separated off from the declaration as to who has been made in the image of God.³

The thrust of Paul's argument has traditionally been taken to reinforce a hierarchical social order based on creation. Summarising this approach, the feminist scholar L. Fatum observes,

The consequence of being created in God's image is to Paul a mark of qualitative value, reflecting at once man's special distinction as a creature in relation to God and the distinction of the man, his gender role and status, in relation to the woman. Woman's status as a creature subordinated to man makes her subordinated and dependent on him in her relationship to God.⁴

The head-covering is then taken to be a reflection of this order.

Whether this interpretation of Paul's theology is correct has been questioned on two levels:

- We have already noted that the notion of headship in v. 3 is not hierarchical and authoritarian; it is unlikely therefore that Paul would then use the order of creation to make such a point.
- As pointed out by scholars such as Padgett, this interpretation is at odds with the baptismal principle of equality in Christ (Gal 3:28). This principle is fundamental to Paul's taking of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8); further, he reiterates the principle as the basis of the spirit-filled ministry a few sentences on in the letter (1 Cor 12:13).

Consequently, scholars have sought to mute what they have perceived as Paul's patriarchal views. For example, Schüssler-Fiorenza comments,

¹ The notion of glory is absent in Gen 1:27; Paul is picking it up from Ps 8:5 which is a commentary on Gen 1:26-28.

² The evidence for this approach in Jewish writings prior to the emergence of rabbinical Judaism in the second century C.E. is set out by A. Hultgard, “God and Image in Early Jewish Religion” in *The Image of God, Gender Models in Judeo-Christian Tradition*, (ed., K. E. Borresen; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1995), 29-49.

³ For two justifications of this reading, see M. G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), ch. 1 and P. A. Bird, “Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image” in *The Image of God, Gender Models in Judeo-Christian Tradition*, (ed., K. E. Borresen; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1995), 5-28. It is beyond the scope of this essay to defend or refute the asymmetric reading of Gen 1:27; however, given Paul's cultural upbringing and his inspired use of ἄνθρωπος in 1 Cor 11:7, it appears that it was *his* reading.

⁴ L. Fatum, “Image of God and Glory of Man: Women in the Pauline Congregations” in *The Image of God, Gender Models in Judeo-Christian Tradition*, (ed., K. E. Borresen; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1995), 50-133.

...perhaps sensing that his midrashic proof could be misunderstood, Paul insists that he does not want to deny the equality of women and men in the Lord (1 Cor 11:11)...¹

However, it is possible to avoid these difficulties by treating Paul's use of Genesis as typological. Instead of making a literal application of the created order to social relationships in the ecclesia, Paul is pitching his points at the level of type and anti-type. This approach diminishes the social significance of the argument (it removes the patriarchal overtone), and proposes instead that Paul is advocating that men and women in ecclesial meetings respect some *symbolic* differences.

A typology is suggested in Ephesians,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:25-27

The point here is that the ecclesia is a “woman” and the recipient of attention by Christ (“the man”) whose aim is to obtain a “glorious” ecclesia. It follows from this that the ecclesia has glory from her Lord and as such is *his* glory – the glory of *the man*. This is an Adamic typology whereby the ecclesia represents a new Eve who has her source of life in a Last Adam (cf. 1 Cor 11:8-9). The women of the ecclesia therefore represent the glory of a new creation. The symbology of the head-covering represents the fact that the woman is the glory of the man.² For a woman to discard a head-covering would dis-honour Christ: the head-covering represents her created status in Christ and she represents the ecclesia. The symbolic role of the men in the ecclesia complements this role on the part of women. They are representative of their head – Christ – the image and glory of God.

It may be that Paul was consciously developing his argument in 1 Corinthians 11 in Ephesians by making this typical identification between the ecclesia and “woman”. Paul does link the notion of “glory” with the new creation (Rom 8:18-21, 9:23, 2 Cor 1:20). He also applies the concept of the “image of God” to Christ (2 Cor 4:4) and he makes *this* image and glory the end-goal for believers (2 Cor 3:18).

On this reading there isn't a conflict between the baptismal principle of equality and Paul's use of the doctrine of creation because Paul is not subordinating women to men in the ecclesia. Instead he is ordering two social behaviours (one for men and one for women) so as to reflect a relationship of representation that each has to Christ. Paul is not supporting an old patriarchal order based on creation but using the order of the old creation to model the new creation.³

¹ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In memory of Her*, 229.

² An implication of this approach is that the notion of “the glory of man” does not carry a negative overtone; for example it is not a notion to do with sin or man's fallen state as in 1 Peter 1:24. This is shown by the fact that Paul is using material from the creation account in Genesis 2 *prior* to the Fall of Man. The notion of glory is something to do with *creation* not sin. This approach is the opposite of that proposed by M. Hooker in “Authority on her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor 11:10”, *NTS* 10 (1964): 410-416. Hooker argues that a woman is to wear a head-covering in order to *hide* the glory of man, whereas I have argued that the head-covering *displays* the glory of “the man” (Christ) – it symbolises His work with the ecclesia.

³ In case he is misunderstood by the Corinthians Paul balances his teaching about the distinctive symbology of “the man” and “the woman” in the ecclesia with a statement about their interdependence (vv. 11-12).

Angels

Paul concludes his theological argument with a statement involving angels; this has been a puzzle to commentators. The reason for difficulty is easier to state than providing any satisfactory solution.

For this cause ought the woman to have authority on [her] head because of the angels.
1 Cor 11:10

This verse refer backwards to previous argumentation, and the second clause picks up the leading idea with which Paul has been concerned - *angels*. A parallel example can be found in 1 Thessalonians:

For this cause, we were comforted, brethren, in all our affliction and distress, because of your faith. 1 Th 3:7

The cause of Paul's comfort has been the return of Timothy with the general news of Thessalonica - their faith, their charity, and their desire to see Paul; but Paul singles out the main reason for his comfort to be Timothy's report of their *faith*. In the same way, Paul singles out 'angels' as the leading idea of his previous argument.

The problem presented to commentators is that Paul hasn't previously said anything about angels.

The two main proposals¹ in the literature are,

- the angels are "evil angels" who lusted after women (Gen 6:1ff); and a woman needs a head-covering to hide her feminine allure.
- the angels are the "good angels" that govern creation. They are concerned with seeing that order is maintained, especially with the people of God. Hence, a woman should wear a head-covering to maintain a proper order in worship and obey the angelic order of things.

A variation of the second idea has been developed by Fitzmyer who cites Qumran material to support the proposal that good angels were present at sacred assemblies.² This is perhaps the best scholarly suggestion because Paul's treatment of head-coverings is sandwiched between two passages that deal with sacred assemblies (1 Cor 10:16-33, 1 Cor 11:17-34). The requirement for head-coverings is most readily seen as applicable in a context where Christians met to remember Christ in a memorial meal. Such a feast would have had symbolic significance in terms of expressing allegiance to Christ and recognizing what Christ had done for each believer. In this framework the ritual display of Christ's headship through dressing or not dressing the head could very well have been Paul's *paradoxeis*.

Conclusion

It is not an underestimate to say that 1 Cor 11:2-16 is a difficult text. Virtually every aspect has been the subject of dispute. It is unlikely that there will be any consensus in the foreseeable future. However, for our purposes the passage has proved fruitful as a primary source from which to gather information about the social realities of the early New Testament communities.

¹ These proposals and variations are discussed by in "A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of 1 Cor 11:10" in *The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (ed., J. A. Fitzmyer; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 187-204.

² Fitzmyer, "Qumran Angelology", 198-200.

In many ways this passage is a microcosm of 1 Corinthians as a whole: it addresses a practical situation and works out an ethic for that situation; it appeals to common social standards and theological principles rooted in the Gospel; and it seeks to inculcate a sense of unity and common purpose in the ecclesia.

The question as to whether the passage is primarily of theological or domestic significance encapsulates the exegetical problems of the text. It is no exaggeration to say that at every point in the text different scholars have proposed alternative sociological and theological interpretations. One scholar can claim that Paul's arguments are "based largely on contemporary social custom" (Hooker), while another scholar argues that Paul's arguments are "deeply grounded in his theological understanding of creation, redemption, their interrelation, and how they should be manifested in worship" (Witherington).¹

Our approach has been mixed. We have argued that the notions of headship, honour and shame are primarily social notions. However, we have argued that Paul is applying a social model (that of the household – father/son, master/servant, husband/wife) to model ecclesial relationships and introduce a theological typology that represents women in the ecclesia as the new "Eve". Insofar, as we have made a theological application of a social model, we cannot say that Paul's opening argument is either primarily of domestic or theological significance. Paul is integrating the Corinthians' understanding of social proprieties with a principle of headship rooted in Christ. He is giving these social proprieties a basis in a new order – the order of communal life under Christ.

We have argued that Paul's central argument centred on creation and it is primarily of theological significance. This underpins Paul's teaching about the headship of Christ in relation to the ecclesia. It presents an "Adam and Eve" typology in which the woman represents the work of Christ in saving a body of people. Both men and women have complimentary roles in representing the headship of Christ in the ecclesia.

Is the adorning of a woman's head when praying and prophesying primarily of theological or domestic significance in Paul's argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16? Perhaps the question is a moot one; Paul's argument has both kinds of significance. Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul is setting social boundaries and rules of behaviour; he is also dealing with issues using the social and ethical concepts of the day. Nevertheless, in all of this Paul is doing theology, a practical and pastoral theology. For this reason, we conclude that the adorning of a woman's head was primarily of theological significance for Paul.

¹ Hooker, "Authority on Her Head", 410; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 238.

This document archive has been made available
to you with the assistance of the publishers of:



inWORD

<http://inwordbible.com>