

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

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A Term Paper

Presented to Dr. Ken Neller

Harding University

Searcy, Arkansas

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As a Requirement in

Course 272

Intermediate Greek

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by

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April 2003

In the numerous discussions of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 throughout history, there has been a tendency to focus on some of the particular issues that plague the passage in order to draw conclusions about its meaning as a whole. This paper will examine many of these minor points. Yet, while the interpreter should not diminish the importance of these issues, it is more important to keep in mind the broader thread of argumentation that weaves together the entire letter. Therefore, it is most responsible to interpret the more ambiguous details in harmony with this interpretive thread, which now demands a brief explanation.

The key to understanding the dynamics present in the Corinthian church at the time Paul penned 1 Corinthians lies in unpacking the meaning of the term “over-realized eschatology.”<sup>1</sup> To put this in the simplest terms, the Corinthians had a tendency to “over-spiritualize” matters in their lives. Rooted in this is the Corinthians’ desire to be perceived as more (or most) spiritual, which accounts for a great number of the issues present in the letter. There were divisions about who was most spiritual according to one’s association (Paul, Apollos, etc.) (1:10-17; 3:21-23) or according to one’s “wisdom” (1:18-2:20). There was sin because the physical boundaries of

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<sup>1</sup>Jerome Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *CBQ* 42 (1980): 490. Murphy-O Connor refers readers to A.C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 (1977-78) 520-21. See also Mark Black, “1 Cor. 11:2-16--A Re-investigation,” In *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993), 215-216; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 497-498; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 183-184, 190-191; David K. Lowery, “The Head Covering and the Lord’s Supper in 11:2-34,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Ap-Je 1986): 155-156. Although Hays and Lowery do not use this terminology, the concept is present.

family and blood relationship were being ignored (5:1-13) and because the physical body was not considered to be affected by or to affect the “spiritual” (6:12-20). On an opposite extreme, marriage and sex were being avoided, as they were perceived to be unspiritual in nature (7:1-40), and abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols was, for some, a sign of “weak” spirituality (8:1-13; 10:14-11:1). More spiritual competition was present with regard to tongue speaking and prophecy (12:1-31; 14:1-40), and even the resurrection of the body had to be explained in order to demonstrate that the final, eschatological transformation had not yet occurred (15:1-58).

Paul’s unilateral response to all of these issues is the previously mentioned thread. At every opportunity and with every example, Paul is calling the Corinthians to the highest spiritual path, that of love (12:31b ff.). The apostle is not, however, touting some nebulous theology. The manifestation of this love is consistently seen in a willingness to set aside personal “rights” (ἐξουσία) and freedoms for the benefit of others. The Corinthians may be under the impression that, in their realized spirituality, all things are permissible, but Paul reminds them that not all things are beneficial (6:12; 10:23).

One must interpret 11:2-16 within this framework. It, no less than any other passage, reflects the Corinthians’ over-realized eschatology and demonstrates Paul’s instruction on the denial of personal rights and authority for the good of others. This in mind, we press on to examine the next most important context within which this discussion occurs--that of history.

### Historical Context

There are two primary difficulties for the historical analysis of this subject. First, it is difficult to discern what culture or cultures are under consideration. While the formation of Paul’s values is certainly most influenced by Jewish thought and custom (Phil 3:4-6; Acts 22:3),

he is also Hellenized and culturally sensitive in regard to relating the gospel (9:19-23). This brings into question the culture to which he is, in this particular case, being sensitive. That is to say, while Corinth had been historically Greek, it was at the time of the Corinthian letters a Roman colony, with the Jewish presence in the church further complicating the scenario. The second difficulty in the passage is an uncertainty as to exactly what customs are mentioned in the passage. A presentation of the possibilities relative to these customs will be part of the later discussion.

It would be thoughtless to assume that a metropolitan crossroads such as Corinth would be culturally homogeneous. However, it would at the same time be unprecedented if there were no dominant culture establishing norms and values for the society at large. Richard Oster has demonstrated decisively that Corinth was a Romanized city at this juncture in history.<sup>2</sup> It is on this basis that we proceed, although we by no means deny that there are other influencing factors to consider.

To begin most generally, the questions of social structure and gender relations must be addressed. Social inequality between men and women indisputably characterized the Roman culture. Women were not allowed a voice in any public affairs, and were more or less regarded as the property of their husband (or father) and relegated to the domestic setting.<sup>3</sup> While changes that occurred in Roman culture in regard to women were progressive compared to the attitudes of the Greeks,<sup>4</sup> David deSilva notes some opinions written by Plutarch in the second century A.D.,

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<sup>2</sup>Richard E. Oster, Jr., "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 488-493.

<sup>3</sup>Max Cary and T.J. Haarhoff, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World* (London: Methuen and Co., 1940), 142.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

which indicate attitudes still present well after the time of Paul: "...a woman should be seen when she is with her husband, but stay hidden at home when he is away" ("Advice on Marriage" 9).

"Both her body and her words should not be 'public property' but instead guarded from strangers. She should speak to her husband and through her husband" ("Advice on Marriage" 31-32).<sup>5</sup>

DeSilva goes on to say, "The reason for this relegation of women to private or nonmale areas is rooted in the ancient conception of a woman's place in the world. She is not seen as an independent entity or agent but as *embedded in the identity and honor of some male* (her father, if she is unmarried, her husband after she marries)."<sup>6</sup> For a woman to deviate from her place in the world was seen as liberal (in a negative sense) and undesirable.<sup>7</sup> James Jeffers, pointing to the unusual independence and freedom that women experience throughout the New Testament narrative, admits, "We do not know the level of leadership exerted by women in the Christian congregations. The absence of fixed, formal offices at the time makes it hard to determine the scope of the functions."<sup>8</sup> This uncertainty, however, only makes us cautious about quick conclusions. The narrative, 1 Corinthians included, does indicate the reality of the church's tension with social expectations regarding women. It is within this context that we must view the actions of the Corinthian Christians, actions that would likely have been seen by society at large as

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<sup>5</sup>David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 33

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 34.; emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup>James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 249.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 252.

“countercultural activity” to some degree.<sup>9</sup>

Another key consideration, which is relevant to Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures, is pointed out by John Pilch and Bruce Malina.<sup>10</sup> Honor and shame were crucial values for determining what the Corinthians ought to do, as is readily seen in the language of 11:2-16. It is significant that Pilch and Malina associate the honor and shame inherent in clothing with gender distinction. They refer back to Deut. 22:5 (regarding “cross-dressing”) and also note that hair styles in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 passage manifest the issue of gender distinction as well. As the Deuteronomy passage is obviously outside the realm of Roman culture, it is an indication that a more abiding principle may be present in 1 Corinthians: forsaking the culturally determined signs that indicate gender is not a sin because those signs are part of God’s law, but rather because men and women were made to be different. It is the confusing of maleness and femaleness that God finds displeasing. Thus, the distinction between genders appears to be the heart of these historical cultural issues.

### The Big Question and the Little Ones

If, after all of the heated debate about the various peculiarities in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, the meaning of Paul’s words can be discovered, then the big question that remains is: “Which parts of these fifteen verses are eternally binding and which parts are culturally relative?” Of course, the next question, wherever one lands, is: “Why?” Our exegesis will attempt to determine the author’s intent in each of the issues in dispute and answer the big question as well. The follow-

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Wendy Cotter, “Women’s Authority Roles in Paul’s Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?” *Novum Testamentum* 36 (O 1994): 370.

<sup>10</sup>John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993), 20-21.

ing is a list of the most pertinent questions.

1. Does παντὸς ἀνδρὸς mean “every husband” or “every man?”
2. What is the meaning of κεφαλῆ (head)?
3. What is referred to here: a head covering (i.e. a veil), a hair style, both, or neither?
4. What does ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς (to have authority on her head) mean?
5. What does διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους (because of the angels) mean?
6. What is the significance of πλὴν (nevertheless)?

There are other questions that could be and have been asked. Nonetheless, it seems that clarity on these few points could shed considerable light on the entire passage and perhaps rule out some of the remaining ambiguities. Even some of the above questions are weightier than others, but they will follow in the listed order.

#### Man or Husband?

In Anthony Thiselton’s seminal commentary on 1 Corinthians, he does well to refer the to man/husband question in v. 3 as a “residual issue.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is reasonable to find the answer to this question to be self-evident in the context of the passage. Still, it has been the subject of considerable discussion and so merits a brief look here.

Perhaps the heat of the man/husband debate is due to the NRSV’s translation of ἀνδρὸς as “husband.” George Butrick champions this position stating, “That the wife was subordinate to her husband was a teaching of the law (Gen 3:16) which Paul did not look upon as abrogated in

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<sup>11</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 822.

Christ.”<sup>12</sup> No doubt others who hold this position find the similarity of the language in Ephesians 5:24 to be convincing evidence. Indeed, while Richard Oster is thoroughly convinced that “man” is the preferable translation, he concedes that the Ephesian text “surely supplies some insight into the nature of a relationship defined in part by the term *kephale*.”<sup>13</sup> When considering Butrick’s reasoning, though, it is helpful to note F. W. Grosheide’s thoughts. He postulates that following *Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι* (And I want you to know), Paul is introducing something new, that is, in addition to what the law already taught or the *παραδόσεις* (traditions, v. 2) that he had handed down.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, to sweepingly state that Paul did not consider the law abrogated in Christ does not do justice to Paul’s supplementary or corrective intention in 11:2-16.

Jason BeDuhn offers another perspective when he asserts that in regard to the terms *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή*, Paul “makes full use of their semantic range.”<sup>15</sup> This seems to be based on his belief that regardless of whether one approaches the question from a theological or a socio-cultural slant, it remains true that “man is the head of woman” and “husband is the head of wife.” It is rather narrow to insist that *ἀνὴρ* should be translated the same way all three times on the grounds that it must mean the same thing or, with BeDuhn, both things (man and husband) throughout the passage. Either position denies Paul the ability to use a word in more than one

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<sup>12</sup>George Arthur Butrick, et al., eds., *1 Corinthians*, The Interpreter’s Bible (NY: Abingdon, 1953), 126.

<sup>13</sup>Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Culture or Binding Principle--A Study of Head Coverings, Hair-styles, Etc. (1 Corinthians 2:1-16),” *Harding University Lectures* (Searcy, AR: Harding Press, 1990): 434.

<sup>14</sup>F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 249.

<sup>15</sup>Jason David BeDuhn, “‘Because of the Angels’: Unveiling Paul’s Anthropology in 1 Corinthians 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (Sum 1999): 298-299.

way, which the Greek language did allow.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it is not unreasonable that Paul would start with more specific (and otherwise attested) teaching (regarding husbands) in v. 4 and make his way to a more general point (regarding men). Nonetheless, it is widely held that “man” is the most reasonable option.<sup>17</sup> The rest of the interpretation will show that difference between the genders is central to Paul’s teaching. Therefore, ἀνὴρ as the gender is the most likely interpretation.

### Headship

The issue of headship has been emphasized and debated above any other in 11:2-16. This is natural since the entire thrust of Paul’s argumentation proceeds out of his understanding of headship as it is presented here. The waters have been severely muddied, but as of late there has been a voice of reason amid the tumult of reactionary scholarship. Anthony Thiselton’s consummate synthesis of the various opinions held brings into focus the inadequacies of translating κεφαλὴ as either “authority” or “source,” the two most popularly held views.<sup>18</sup> He is standing on the shoulders of others, though, and it is necessary to review all sides of the argument.

Traditionally, κεφαλὴ has been translated as “head” and interpreted to signify authority, superiority, leadership, lordship and subordinate hierarchy (borrowing language from a multiplica-

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 185.

<sup>17</sup>See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 822; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plumber, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), 229; Mark Black, “1 Cor. 11:2-16--A Re-investigation,” 199-200.

<sup>18</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 803-823.

ity of commentators).<sup>19</sup> This is also often influenced by other theological conclusions molded by an understanding of passages such as Ephesians 5:24 or the belief that Paul's argument here is rooted in Gen. 3:16. It is not an unreasonable position, given the longstanding preference this interpretation holds. Because the rendering of κεφαλὴ as "one having authority over" is not as unusual as the opposing view, Mark Black states that it ought to have first consideration "unless the context strongly urges the other rendering."<sup>20</sup> As we will see, the context does indeed urge against the traditional translation.

A second position has reared its head in recent years, wherein κεφαλὴ is translated "source" or "origin."<sup>21</sup> Such a swing in thought has been dismissed by traditionalists as a by-product of women's liberation. This is ironic, for if society so bears upon one's rendering, then the traditional interpretation must certainly be somewhat influenced by the past nineteen hundred years' sexist repression of women; but that is rather tangential. The translation "source" has some merits of its own. Though not common, κεφαλὴ as "source" is legitimate, and admitted to be so even by Joseph Fitzmeyer in his article in favor of "authority."<sup>22</sup> "Source" is preferred by many for two reasons. First, v. 8 is obviously emphasizing the origination of woman from man.

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<sup>19</sup>See Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "Kephale in 1 Corinthians 11:3," *Interpretation* 47 (Ja 1993): 52-59; J.W. Roberts, *The Veils in 1 Cor. 11:2-16*, *Restoration Quarterly* 3 (4th Quarter 1959): 185-186; Jim McGuigan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, Looking Into the Bible Series (Lubbock, TX: Montex, 1984), 146; Grosheide, *First Epistle*, 250-251; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 184-185; Black, "1 Cor. 11:2-16 --A Re-investigation," 196-198.

<sup>20</sup>Black, "1 Cor. 11:2-16 --A Re-investigation," 198.

<sup>21</sup>See Murphy-O Connor, "Sex and Logic," 492-493; Jerome Murphy-O Connor, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (Ap 1988): 269-270; John P. Meier, "On the Veiling of Hermeneutics," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (Ap 1978): 217-218; F.F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), 103.

<sup>22</sup>Fitzmyer, "Kephale," 53-54.

This is understood to be a reaffirmation of Gen. 2:22, 23, which is their second reason for preference. The Genesis passage is taken as biblical substantiation for the “source” claim. The irony is plain, for both camps have gone to within one chapter of each other in Genesis to give their arguments viability.

There are some obvious difficulties with either of these renderings. First, the previously discussed historical context indicates that the subordination of women to men would certainly be the situation when this letter was read by the Corinthians. It is fair to think that women who were already experiencing freedom in Christ would be inclined to do away with old symbols associated with their subjection. Gender based discrimination may very well be the impetus for the church members’ actions that Paul is addressing. Richard Hays gives credit to the argument for “source” but also says:

. . . in view of the whole shape of the argument, the patriarchal implications of v. 3 are undeniable. Even if Paul is thinking here primarily of man as the source of woman rather than the authority over women, this still serves as the warrant for a claim about his ontological preeminence over her, as vv. 7-9 show.<sup>23</sup>

A.C. Perriman also looks toward “ontological grounding” as the basis for Paul’s headship statement in 11:3, but asserts that it has nothing to do with creational priority.<sup>24</sup> In this, Perriman takes the discussion to a new level. In his impressive work, he draws the conclusion that κεφαλή should be translated, “that which is most prominent, foremost, upper-most, pre-eminent.”<sup>25</sup> He states, “At issue between the man and the woman in this passage is neither

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<sup>23</sup>Hays, *First Corinthians*, 184.

<sup>24</sup>A.C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The Meaning of Kephale in 1 Cor. 11:3,” *Journal for Theological Studies*, n.s., vol. 45, pt. 2 (O 1994): 621.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 618.

authority nor origin, but the question of whether the woman's behaviour in worship brings glory or dishonour on the man."<sup>26</sup> This is in keeping with our historical analysis. If blurring gender distinctions (Deut 22:5) is the heart of the issue, and honor (or glory) and shame are the values being addressed, then the Corinthian women's actions would not only bring dishonor to themselves, but to the men as their head--that which is most prominent; thus Paul's reasoning in vv. 7-10. Considering all of this, Perriman's is the best interpretation of κεφαλῆ.

### The Custom in Question

To broach the subject of which custom is in question, we again turn to Thiselton. The battle on this front lies between two camps which are represented by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and Richard Oster.

We are forced to balance the Roman background forcefully urged by Oster against the ethical-cultural background proposed by Murphy O'Connor in which he perceives resonances of male sexuality or effeminacy, i.e. a homosexual semiotic of the male hair style of long, loose hair, or hair tied into a ponytail.<sup>27</sup>

Both scholars have some very persuasive points, but in their zeal, both leave unaddressed some significant problems with their respective positions.

Oster's main agenda is demonstrating that men wearing veils in 11:2-16 is not a hypothetical occurrence as many respected scholars have contended<sup>28</sup> but rather very normative of

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 621.

<sup>27</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 824.

<sup>28</sup>See Roberts, "The Veils," 186; John P. Meier, "On the Veiling of Hermeneutics," 218; Robertson and Plumber, *First Epistle*, 229; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 104; McGuiggan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, 147; Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle*, 253.

worship settings in Roman Corinth.<sup>29</sup> He conclusively shows that Roman men did wear head coverings at times of worship.<sup>30</sup> There are two primary difficulties, though, in labeling this the end of the discussion. The most pressing one is that if we follow this to its logical conclusion, then there are three possibilities: (1) as veiling is a Roman cultural practice, Paul is not the culturally sensitive fellow that we thought he was; (2) given a particular situation in Corinth, the Roman religious practice of men wearing head coverings dishonors the image and reflection of God; (3) men wearing head coverings is in conflict with an “eternally binding” practice or principle. Since we know that Paul is culturally accommodative to the gentiles when he can be (1 Cor. 9:19-23), and he was unwilling to accommodate Roman worship practices in this instance, then it must be (2) or (3).

To say it differently, when Paul states in v. 7 that man “ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God,” his reasoning is certainly not a reflection of the Corinthian mode of thought. If Paul is discussing head coverings (rather than hair styles), he finds the culture to be irrelevant. Yet, we can affirm, “Whatever else is in doubt, Paul was well acquainted with the fact that the high-priest wore a turban while ministering before the Lord in the tabernacle or temple (Exodus 28:4; 39:28).”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Paul’s reasoning in v. 7 cannot be *eternally* binding. It is certainly not the wearing of a head covering that God is displeased with, which

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<sup>29</sup>Oster, “When Men Wore Veils,” 481-505; Richard E. Oster, Jr., “Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 7,1-5; 8,10; 11,2-16; 12,14-26),” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 83, no. 1-2 (1992): 67-69.

<sup>30</sup>Oster, “Use, Misuse and Neglect,” 67-69; See also Cynthia L. Thompson, “Hair Styles, Head Coverings and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 (Je 1988): 99-115.

<sup>31</sup>McGuigan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, 144.

forces us to ask what about the *particular situation* occasioned such theological argumentation from the apostle.

Perhaps one would argue from the κεφαλῆ-as-authority position that head coverings were essential for signifying the woman's submission, and so men were forbidden. That, however, is also either a culturally relative maxim or a timelessly binding one. If it is a culturally relative one, then the logic still does not follow. Within the context of prayer and prophecy (v. 4-5), the culture did not take the head covering to be a signal of woman's submission to man. Oster himself labels the Roman laity's religious veiling practices as a gesture of piety in order not to offend the gods; *not* a gesture of female submission--hence men also wearing head coverings.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Paul's commands to veil or not to veil, if they were that, would not be in deference to any cultural shame regarding gender roles. There was no such shame attached to uncovering; only the lack of the piety to which Oster refers. Moreover, Cynthia Thompson points out that archaeological evidence indicates a freedom among women to veil or not to veil in worship. She points out that the unveiled women depicted in her findings would not have desired to be seen as dishonorable.<sup>33</sup> It then follows that shame was not the connotation attached to unveiling, and the shame at issue in the passage must have different basis than the religious use of head coverings. Oster's research is extremely clarifying, but it actually proves that Roman religious veiling practices cannot be what is really at issue.

As has already been demonstrated, shame was indeed associated with gender confusion. Murphy-O'Connor draws a meaning different from the traditional one from the phrase κατὰ

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<sup>32</sup>Oster, "When Men Wore Veils," 500-502.

<sup>33</sup>Thompson, "Hair Styles," 112.

κεφαλῆς ἔχων in v. 4.<sup>34</sup> Since “‘having something on the head’ is an unacceptable translation . . . we are forced to adopt the only grammatical alternative ‘having something hanging down from the head.’”<sup>35</sup> Thus the burden of proof lies on him to show that hair is in view throughout the entire passage.

He turns first to historical evidence, quoting extensively to show the association between long hair and effeminacy or homosexuality.<sup>36</sup> He also reasons that the antithesis in 11:2-16 is that the women are rebuked because their “hair was not neatly arranged in the fashion becoming a woman.”<sup>37</sup> Thiselton acknowledges the veracity of his citations but is still inclined to fall on the side of Oster, though “not decisively so.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, Murphy-O’Connor cogently demonstrates the viability of his interpretation and it seems to have lesser of the outstanding difficulties.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, as noted in the historical analysis, honor and shame embedded in gender distinction signaled by hair style would be of great importance to both author and recipient. Could it be that the Corinthians were blurring the sexual boundaries of personal decorum in or-

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<sup>34</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 484-485.

<sup>35</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” 268.

<sup>36</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 485-487.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 488. For the reader used to seeing ἀκατακάλυπτο translated “uncovered,” it is difficult to see how it could be rendered as Murphy-O Connor has it. However, he responsibly treats this question and disordered hair cannot be dismissed out of hand. It is a linguistically legitimate interpretation, not to mention the most likely given the context. Furthermore, Thompson substantiates the use of περιβολαίου as long hair fastened as a wrapping. Thompson, “Hair Styles,” 112.

<sup>38</sup>See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 824-825.

<sup>39</sup>See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, 187: “The covering of the woman with bound-up hair appropriately symbolizes her relation to the man within the order of creation; the unbinding of the hair effaces the created distinction between the sexes and somehow impugns the man’s role as bearer of the image of God.”

der to transcend the unspiritual confines of culture and society? This conclusion fits within the interpretive thread that we have proposed.

Jim McGuigan, while not in exactly the same place as Murphy-O'Connor, takes a similar approach and quotes even more first century evidence for the position that men's long hair was effeminate.<sup>40</sup> He notes that it is not inherently immoral for a man to have long hair, citing the Nasserite Vow, and points out (as would Murphy-O'Connor), "He wasn't speaking of simple length, he was speaking of being womanish."<sup>41</sup> But McGuigan also raises a much needed question: were the men at Corinth actually dressing like women?<sup>42</sup> He does not believe so. Paul does mention in chapter six that some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals, so the possibility remains. However, the historical context and the interpretive thread indicate that it is women, not men, who would likely be setting aside a custom that distinguished gender.

That the men in 11:2-16 are hypothetical is acceptable (even if disliked by some) but is admittedly one of two difficulties in Murphy-O'Connor's exegesis. The second is the aforementioned conclusion that somewhere in this discussion is the issue of female subordination and not simply homosexual tendencies. However this is already addressed if the impetus for the women to leave their gender symbols behind was to express their freedom in Christ. This is the conclusion that is most plausible. Therefore, the only real difficulty with Murphy-O'Connor's position is the practice of the men, which bears three possibilities: (1) they are altogether hypothetical; (2) they are homosexuals crossing gender lines; (3) they are expressing their support for gender equality in Christ by further blurring the gender lines. Whatever one opts for, the point that Paul

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<sup>40</sup>McGuigan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, 152.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 152.

is making stays the same. There should be gender distinction.

### Authority On Her Head

Naturally, one's interpretation of ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς will depend on previous decisions about headship and the custom in question. There are two ways to divide up the opinions about ἐξουσίαν. The first is based on whether it is (1) a metonymy for the physical (i.e., a veil or a hair style); (2) the exercise of authority; or (3) the exercise of authority by use of the physical. The second division is based on whether the authority is the woman's or the man's. Aside from these there are countless nuances to each commentator's argument, but it is not necessary to consider all of them here. It will do to simply review some of the high points and make a choice based upon the previous discussion.

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) is one of the earliest Christians to engage in the interpretation of 11:2-16. His agenda is quite different than ours, but in the course of his discussion he unveils a very ancient understanding of the issues involved. His conclusion bleeds into the discussion of διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, but it will suffice to say that he considered ἐξουσίαν to be a veil which served as a protective "power" for the women.<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Thompson points out, however, that Tertullian mentions the freedom that women had experienced in regard to veiling:<sup>44</sup>

Still, 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, as she might have chosen, just as, (she had equal liberty) to marrying,

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<sup>43</sup>Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. IV (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 31-32.

<sup>44</sup>Thompson, "Hair Styles," 112.

which itself withal is neither enforced nor prohibited.<sup>45</sup>

Thompson points to this passage to demonstrate that ἐξουσίαν must therefore have signified freedom of choice.<sup>46</sup> However, this overlooks the fact that married women and widows *did* feel obligated to veil (*in public*)<sup>47</sup> and that Tertullian's argument concerns only virgins (i.e., young women) who had not been previously required to veil. So, Thompson's option for freedom of choice is not valid, which is confirmed by Paul's emphatic conclusion to the matter in v. 16.

Boiling down a possibly drawn out discussion, we turn again to Thiselton. In keeping with the interpretive thread he asserts, "the issue here (as throughout 8:1-11 or even 8:1-14) remains that of assertive autonomy (ἐξουσίαν, 6:16, 10:23; cf. ἐξουσία, I have the right to . . .) *versus self control* or an ethic of moderation and restraint (ἐξουσία . . . ἔξεστιν)."<sup>48</sup> That the "authority" (11:10) is the woman's is widely held, though some claim that it is her authority to

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<sup>45</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 28. Tertullian provides us two additional insights. One, the interpretive thread which has seen us this far is present here also. Paul's teaching regarding marriage has held fast; celibacy is not enforced or considered more "spiritual." Two, at this historical juncture, veiling had been practiced among married women and widows, not virgins, suggesting an understanding of 1 Cor. 11 that related to the headship issue to marriage rather than simply to gender.

<sup>46</sup>Thompson, "Hair Styles," 112.

<sup>47</sup>This should not cause much confusion with respect to the previous conclusion that veiling is *not* that issue at hand. It is widely accepted that in the public realm the veil or hood of a woman was a designation of respectability (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 828-29). Tertullian (along with many others) is guilty of mixing the two spheres of activity. As Oster, our veiling expert, notes, one must use caution in trying to apply the doctrine of κεφαλή used here to contexts outside of worship (Oster, *Culture or Binding Principle*, 435). He refers to the gestures and body language of the human head of men and women *in the specific context of worship* (Ibid., 444).

<sup>48</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 839.

pray and prophecy,<sup>49</sup> while others, in keeping with Thiselton, prefer the connotation of self-control.<sup>50</sup> Those who purport the authority to be the man's are forced to do so in light of their understanding of κεφαλή but are unable to contend with the passage's more substantial claims for feminine authority.<sup>51</sup> The more likely interpretation is that of self-control (again emphasizing the unlikelihood that the men had need to exercise that same self-control).

### “Because of the Angels”

This phrase has been subject to some of the most fantastic interpretations of any passage in the Bible. Briefly, here are the interpretations worth considering: (1) the angels are simply present at the worship;<sup>52</sup> (2) the angels referred to are lusting after the Corinthian women;<sup>53</sup> (3) the angels are guardians of the created order;<sup>54</sup> (4) the angels report worship infractions to God;<sup>55</sup> (5) Paul is reminding them what happened to angels who rejected the natural order;<sup>56</sup> (6) τοὺς ἀγγέλους refers to human “messengers” from other congregations.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 497; Lowery, “The Head Covering,” 158; Meier, “On the Veiling of Hermeneutics,” 221; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 106.

<sup>50</sup>BeDuhn, ““Because of the Angels,”” 302-303; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 187-188.

<sup>51</sup>McGuiggan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, 149; Grosheide, *First Epistle*, 257; Black, “1 Cor. 11:2-16--A Re-investigation, 208-209.

<sup>52</sup>Lowery, “The Head Covering,” 158; Robertson and Plumber, *First Epistle*, 233; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 188.

<sup>53</sup>Tertullian in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 32; Meier, “On the Veiling of Hermeneutics,” 220.

<sup>54</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 106.

<sup>55</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 469-497.

<sup>56</sup>See McGuiggan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians*, 149; Grosheide, *First Epistle*, 257-258; Butrick et al., *Interpreter's Bible*, 128; Black “1 Cor. 11:2-16--A Re-investigation,” 210-212.

<sup>57</sup>Murphy-O Connor, *1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again*, 271-272.

If, as we have said, women are to exercise control over their head for the sake of maintaining gender distinction, then two possible understandings follow. First, angels may *represent* a natural ordering of things, and so Paul is pleading that some things are intended to be a certain way. This is not one of the above views, but rather a combination of ideas present there. Still, it is difficult to infer this meaning when the phrase is taken at face value. Another possibility is that human messengers are under consideration. Paul notes in v. 16 that none of the other churches have the practice of women praying or prophesying ἀκατακαλύπτω. So it stands to reason that in this discussion about what is beneficial for others, Paul is urging the Corinthians to be considerate of emissaries from other churches. They would certainly be taken aback by women in mannish attire. While this usage is not common to the Pauline writings, neither are many of the words in this passage. τοὺς ἀγγέλους as human messengers is the contextually sound interpretation, but again, regardless of what one chooses, the point is the same. Men should dress as men and women as women.

#### Nevertheless

As a final point, the significance of πλὴν in this text has, at times, been overlooked. Gordon Fee cuts right to the heart of the passage, noting the obvious chiasm in vv. 8-12.<sup>58</sup> For greater clarity, it can be depicted as follows:

**A** For man is not from woman but woman from man;

**B** For also man was not created because of woman but woman because of man.

Because of this the woman should have authority on the head; because of the angels.

Nevertheless, in the Lord,

**B'** neither is woman independent of man nor man independent of woman;

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<sup>58</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 523.

**A'** For just as the woman came from man, so also the man comes through the woman.  
And all things come from God.

Giving life to the argument, Fee says:

“While it is true that woman is man’s glory, having been created for his sake (v. 9), Paul now affirms that that does not mean that woman exists for man’s purposes, as though in some kind of subordinate position to his aims and will. To the contrary, God has so arranged things that “in the Lord” the one cannot exist without the other . . . .”<sup>59</sup>

Yet, Thiselton points out that Paul’s use of birth as evidence in v. 12 excludes the possibility that interdependence is a *new* principle “in the Lord.”<sup>60</sup> On this point, as much as any other, Murphy-O’Connor provides an insightful perspective. He asserts that *πλὴν* offers a “corrective”<sup>61</sup> for the traditional understanding of the male/female relationship and suggests that while man has always been born of woman, “the significance of this became apparent only in light of the mission of Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

All of this is woven together tightly by the interpretive thread. The Corinthians, motivated by their desire to demonstrate their freedom in Christ, were engaged in a number of inappropriate actions. Among these, the women were setting aside the symbols of their gender, and thus the symbols, in their cultural context, of inferiority and subjection. Therefore, Paul writes to address this issue with a number of arguments. Foremost among these is his appeal to love (chap. 13) manifested by a willingness to forego personal freedom or authority for the sake of others. Because man is created as the head of woman, he is prominent in the relationship (the representative). Therefore, if she adorns herself in a way that others will see as shameful, he too

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 842.

<sup>61</sup>Murphy-O Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 497.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 498.

is shamed by it. She may be his glory, but also his shame.

Furthermore, God's creation was intentional. Man was created as man and woman as woman. The Corinthians' eschatology is indeed *over-realized*--they have not left the boundaries of God's intentional creation. The resurrection is still to come (chap. 15). Nevertheless, Paul does not want them to think that his argument denies the "societal-leveling quality of baptism" (Gal 3:27-28).<sup>63</sup> In Christ, it is evident that man and woman are equal, that everything comes from God (v. 12). The Corinthian women were free to pray and prophesy, but they were not free to ignore the shame that culture, nature (Rom 1:26),<sup>64</sup> and revelation (Deut. 22:5) teaches when gender distinctions are obscured. In the end, gender distinctions must be maintained, just as in all the churches of God (v. 16). *That* is not relative to culture.

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<sup>63</sup>R. Scroggs as quoted in Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 814.

<sup>64</sup>Noel Weeks, "Of Silence and Head Covering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (Fall 1972): 22. For treatment of nature as society, see Luke Johnson's comments in Stuart L. Love, "Gender Status and Roles in the Church: Some Social Considerations," *Restoration Quarterly* 36 no 4 (1994): 265.

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## ADDENDUM

While there are a number of things about this paper that I would keep the same, three years of graduate studies have not left me unchanged. It was particularly interesting to reconsider my arguments here, because I ended up studying under Dr. Oster, who has been an employer, a teacher, and a friend. Moreover, Dr. Oster is one of the leading Paul scholars in the world--no small claim for a little Church of Christ seminary but true nonetheless. So it is with much trepidation that, despite increased respect for his understanding of the Roman context, I maintain that the head covering practices of Roman piety cannot be at issue in 1 Cor. 11, because, first and foremost, those practices had nothing to do with male headship or the denial thereof.

My second reason for opting against head coverings in the paper has only been reinforced as a deeper appreciation of the occasional nature of Paul's writings--largely due to Dr. Oster's instruction--and a subsequent missional hermeneutic have developed in my own thought. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine that Paul, who would fight so fiercely for gentile inclusion as to tell Jewish Christians that eating meat sacrificed to idols was a matter of conscience, would forbid a Roman practice such as male head covering. It is not impossible, as an occasion might have forced his hand, but the probability is decreased by virtue of the first problem. Is there an occasion that would prompt Paul to formulate a theological understanding of headship, associate it with a practice that had nothing to do with headship, and then forbid for men and require it for women? That is very far out of the realm of Paul's missionary practice as we know it. Add to

this difficulty the fact that such an occasion is purely hypothetical, and I am ready to go with another alternative.

My conversations with Dr. Oster revealed to me that our point of divergence is that I begin with an “occasion” of over-realized eschatology, and he does not. On one hand, I can appreciate the preference to correlate the text with archaeological evidence such as Roman head covering practices rather than reconstructed eschatological viewpoints. On the other hand, the religious and philosophical milieu of the Roman world is quite sufficient to account for the dynamics that--whatever one labels them--seem to have been present in Corinth as well as other churches. Particularly regarding the social location of women and the Christian impulse to recognize equality in Christ, there is plenty to suggest that some would have been disposed to “leave behind” the distinctions that resulted in social inequality. Whether or not they thought that an eschatological reality had invaded their present is a moot point.

Given that such dynamics make better sense of the text than the archaeological proof that Romans had a religious head covering practice, it is not necessary to correlate the Roman practice with 1 Corinthians 11. In light of a missional hermeneutic, I am even more impressed with the idea that Paul’s theology in 1 Corinthians 11 is rooted in the concern for the glory and honor of God and the way that plays out culturally in Corinth through gender roles. As in other passages on women, the Christian impulse toward equality is in tension with the culturally appropriate behaviors that can honor God before unbelievers, whereas disregard for those behaviors unnecessarily alienates Christians from the culture in which they witness. If I were to rework this paper, I would focus more on that point.