

Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10)

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In 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul negotiates between theological ideals (11:11-12) and his assumptions about the sexuality of men, women, and angels. Paul's instructions derive from what he assumes is proper to the ordering of the cosmos. It is therefore less important to decide whether in 11:10 Paul is concerned with "good" or "bad" angels.

The interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 remains one of the more baffling problems of exegesis for contemporary scholars, clergy, and laity. Not least problematic has been the view of some that this passage seems to represent a contradiction within Paul's thought. Whereas this passage presupposes that there are women in Corinth who pray and prophesy aloud during worship (11:5),¹ Paul admonishes in the same letter at 14:34 that "women should be silent in the churches." This possible contradiction is exacerbated by the fact that in both passages Paul appeals beyond his own views to common practice among the churches: On the one hand, concerning the suggestion that women should not cover their heads, he states, "we have no such custom, and neither do the churches of God" (11:16) while, on the other hand, concerning the silence of women, he emphasises that "as in all the churches of God, let women be silent in the churches" (14:34).²

1. The text: "And every woman who prays or prophesies with the head uncovered shames her head."

2. It should be noted that the practices referred to in both passages are different. The appeal to common practice in 1 Corinthians 14 is more directly concerned with silencing women from speaking in "the churches," whereas in 1 Corinthians 11 the reference to custom among congregations has to do with whether or not women wear veils or head coverings. This recognition of different

Thus, whatever one makes of 1 Cor 11:2-16, problems of how Paul's statements fit into the literary context of the letter as a whole cannot be ignored. This is also true of smaller bits of the passage. Although different points are raised which seek to convince readers about the merits of women wearing head coverings in worship, it is not always clear how these are interrelated or to what extent they comprise an overarching coherent argument. This is nowhere more true than in 11:10. While the dictum of interpreting within the literary context may seem rather axiomatic, it is a point that bears mention here: in relation to 11:2-16, the reference to angels does not, at first glance, seem to add very much to Paul's reasons about women having long hair or wearing head coverings. Indeed, were the phrase *διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους* (*dia tous angelous*, "because of the angels") in 11:10b to be omitted, the argument would proceed smoothly from 11:10a to 11:11-12 without anything being missed. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that "angels" are given as one reason among others within a passage replete with problems for interpretation, it is initially appropriate to consider two aspects of 11:2-16: first, this study will look at several interpretive difficulties in order to draw some preliminary decisions that provide a profile for an exegetical approach; second, this study will contextualise 11:10 by drawing brief attention to other reasons assembled by Paul in support of his insistence that women, while they pray or prophesy, adjust their appearance as it relates to the head.

PROBLEM AREAS FOR INTERPRETATION

Inconsistency

This logical tension between 1 Cor 11:2/3-16 and 14:33b-36 is resolved by a number of exegetes who argue that one or the other passage is an interpolation.³ With respect to 11:2/3-16 in particular, such

contexts of argument might initially seem to be a plausible way of resolving the contradiction. However, the prophesying of women, which is taken for granted in 11:5, is excluded in 14:34. Thus, unless one adopts a text- or source-critical solution, one should not be too quick in attempting to resolve the material incongruity between the texts.

3. More than in the case of 11:2-16, a number of scholars treat 14:33b-36 as a post-Pauline gloss, despite the absence of text-critical evidence to the contrary; so esp. Johannes Leipholdt, *Die Frau in der antiken Welt und im Urchristentum* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962) 125-126; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968)

a later insertion is supposed to have been by either Paul himself (Earle Ellis⁴) or by a pseudo-Pauline disciple (See A. Loisy,⁵ William O. Walker,⁶ L. Cope,⁷ and G.W. Trompf⁸). It is true that 11:17 (“In instructing you in this, I do not praise you” [In the following directives, I have no praise for you.]) can be read as if following immediately upon 11:2 (“I praise you because you remember me in every way and [because] you hold fast to the traditions just as I transmitted [them] to you.”). This solution, however, does not have any external (that is, text- or source-critical) evidence to support it.⁹ Moreover, it is possible in my

330-333; Robin Scroggs, *The Text and the Times. New Testament Essays for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 71; Gerhard Dautzenberg, *Urchristliche Prophetie: Ihre Erforschung, ihre Voraussetzung im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975) 257-273, and “Zur Stellung der Frauen in den paulinischen Gemeinden,” in *Die Frau im Urchristentum*, eds. G. Dautzenberg, Helmut Merklein and Karlheinz Müller (Quaestiones disputatae, 25; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1983) 182-224. In addition to the contradiction between this passage and 11:2-16, further considerations have been identified: (a) 14:33b-36 intrudes into the context of 1 Corinthians 14 which is concerned with regulating prophetic activity; (b) the appeal in 11:34 to the law as the authoritarian basis for behaviour is difficult to reconcile with Paul; and (c) its content is congruent with that of the deutero-Pauline 1 Tim 2:11-12 (“Let a woman learn in quiet [and] in all submission; that is [δε] I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in quiet.”).

4. Earle Ellis, “Traditions in 1 Corinthians: For Martin Hengel on His Sixtieth Birthday,” *NTS* 32 (1986) 492-494: Paul himself or through instructions has inserted an “oral or written” tradition (i.e. 1 Cor. 11:2-16) “into an initial secretarial draft or into the completed roll or codex before the letter was sent to Corinth.”

5. A. Loisy, *Remarques sur la littérature épistolaire du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Nourry, 1935) 60-62: 1 Cor 11:3-16 interrupts the flow of Paul’s argument between 11:2 and 11:17 and, therefore, must have been added by another hand.

6. Walker posits an insertion of 11:3-16, which was a combination of three post-Pauline sources; see “1 Corinthians 11.2-16 and Paul’s Views Regarding Women,” *JBL* 94 (1975) 94-110; “The ‘Theology of Woman’s Place’ and the ‘Paulinist’ Tradition,” *Sem* 28 (1983) 101-112; “The Vocabulary of 1 Corinthians 11.3-16: Pauline or Non-Pauline?” *JSNT* 35 (1989) 75-88 and esp. pp. 83-84, n.3.

7. L. Cope, “1 Cor 11.2-16: One Step Further,” *JBL* 97 (1978) 435-436. Unlike Walker, Cope attributes 11:2 to Paul.

8. G.W. Trompf, “On Attitudes toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Cor 11:3-16 and Its Context,” *CBQ* 42 (1980) 196-215.

9. See the convincing arguments against the hypothesis by Walker in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The Non-Pauline Character of 1 Cor 11.2-16?” *JBL* 95 (1976) 615-621, and “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *CBQ* 42 (1980) 482-500.

opinion seriously to explore ways in which 11:2-16 presupposes or reflects content in the remainder of the epistle, a possibility which is not so easy in the case of 14:33b-36.¹⁰

Incomplete Knowledge about the Corinthian Situation

The passage 11:2-16 raises another, more general, exegetical difficulty: If one takes for granted that it stems from the apostle, what is the relationship between what Paul states and what was actually going on in the church at Corinth? This issue raises further questions: What can be said about the particular situation with which Paul is concerned? What did Paul know about what was happening in Corinth and how did he find out? Can one assume that what was reported to Paul, whether orally or through a letter from Corinth, accurately reflected the situation there? Finally, how much of the passage reflects practices in Corinth, so that every statement of Paul may be mirror-read into similar or opposite opinions at Corinth,¹¹ and how much of it represents a persuasive sort of rhetoric which seeks to undermine views not yet held among

10. The consideration of 14:33b-36 as a marginal note added by Paul between the initial draft and the sending of the letter has been suggested by Earle E. Ellis, "The Silenced Wives of Corinth (1 Cor 14,34-5)," in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, eds. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 213-220, followed by Stephen Barton, in "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth," *NTS* 32 (1986) 225-246. In support of the Pauline origin of the passage, Barton appeals to a coherence between 14:33b-36 and other parts of 1 Corinthians in the following areas: (a) the appeal to what the law says (14:34; see 9:8-9 and 14:21) and (b) the appeal to a distinction between private (οἶκος, *oikos*, "house") and public (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*, "assembly") in correcting behaviour (14:35; see 11:17-34). However, Barton goes on to explain the incongruity of the "shame" of a woman speaking in the ἐκκλησία with 11:2-16 by stating that, unlike the former, the latter passage is concerned with "divinely inspired" speech (p. 231). The excellence of Barton's discussion aside, his explanation is unsatisfactory for the reason that, in a context in which Paul is concerned with prophecy, the writer of the text shows no attempt to qualify the categorical silence enjoined upon women. Likewise unsatisfactory is the attempt to reconcile 14:34-35 with the rest of 1 Corinthians by Elisabeth Schüsser-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983) 228-229, who argues that 14:34-36 refers specifically to wives, while 11:2-16 is concerned with the activities of "pneumatic" women who can be devoted to the affairs of the Lord (see 7:32-35). Again, the text in 14:34-36 itself presupposes no such distinction.

11. For readings that tend to reflect this approach, see those of Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

those being addressed?¹² While hardly anyone today disputes that a situation at Corinth lies behind the multilayered arguments concerning the need for women to wear head coverings or to have long hair, one still may wish to consider just *which* of Paul's statements on this matter reflects the Corinthian context to which Paul was responding.¹³

Background in Contemporary Social Customs

A further obstacle to understanding the passage has received considerable attention, namely, the extent to which Paul's position and the position he seeks to correct (even in relation to angels) reflect contemporary social practices and tradition-historical sources from Jewish and classical antiquity as they relate to conventions among males and females with regard to the cutting of hair, hair styles, and head coverings. Can

1990) 116-134; and L. Ann Jervis, "But I Want You to Know . . .": Paul's Midrashic Intertextual Response to the Corinthian Worshipers (1 Cor 11:2-16)," *JBL* 112 (1993) 231-246.

12. Unlike other sections of the epistle, 11:2-16 is not introduced by the phrase *περὶ δέ* (*perī de*, "therefore") as in 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; although this phrase, on the basis of 7:1, has been taken as an indicator that Paul is responding to problems he has learned about through written correspondence, the absence thereof does not, conversely, mean that Paul has therefore gleaned his information about the situation orally. See esp. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, HUT 28 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991) 261 and n. 214; and Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 231.

13. This matter is in part exemplified by Paul's statements about men. A number of interpreters have argued that Paul's reference in 11:4 to men who pray or prophesy with their heads covered is merely a hypothetical problem, meaning that it is a rhetorical construct marshalled in support of Paul's criticism of women who pray or prophesy without head coverings; so esp. Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, KEK, 5, 9th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 271; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914) 229; F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Butler and Tanner, 1971) 104; and Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 507-508. For a contrasting view, see esp. Richard F. Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4," *NTS* 34 (1988) 481-505, esp. pp. 483-484, 505, and "Use, Misuse, and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence," *ZNW* 72 (1990) 52-73, esp. pp. 67-69. With respect to women, most scholars have assumed that Paul is dealing with a real problem in the Corinthian congregation; however, see Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 106: "The possibility that 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 was not intended to correct an actual wrong must be noted."

any satisfactory “fit” be found between what Paul commends to the Corinthians and sources which describe practices among various groups in the Mediterranean world? Moreover, is there any straightforward correspondence with biblical tradition, contemporary Jewish interpretation of scripture, and early Jewish writings?

With respect to the Graeco-Roman context, attempts to provide some illumination have proved helpful, though perhaps invariably they have run into difficulties. Both the literary and archaeological evidence from Mediterranean antiquity—even when it relates to first-century Corinth—does not produce the sort of “perfect match” that fully clarifies either the statements of Paul or the problem he is purportedly addressing.¹⁴

EXCURSUS

Cynthia L. Thompson’s thoroughgoing investigation of excavated marble statues, small clay statuettes and numismatic materials from Corinth, which were produced by different social strata from the 1st century BC until the mid-2nd century AD is difficult to relate to Paul’s statements insofar as they pertain to head coverings. If anything, this evidence provides some background to the coiffure of women, namely, Paul’s assumption that women should have long hair (11:6) and that such hair, when it is styled on the head, may be appropriately described with the Greek term περιβόλαιον (*peribolaion*, “wrapping,” 11:15).¹⁵ For the notion of head coverings, concerning which the archaeological remains of Corinth provide almost no evidence, we have to turn to

14. Despite the optimism of Oster, “Veils,” 481-505, the earlier remark by Joseph A. Fitzmyer in “A Feature of Qumran Angelology and 1 Cor. 11:10,” in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, ed., SBS, 5 (Missoula, MT: SBL and Scholars Press, 1974) 188, n. 1, still holds: “Though many details about the wearing of the veil in antiquity, both by Jewish and Greek women, have been preserved for us, none of them bears directly on the problem of the church in Corinth. We do not know the exact nature nor the origin of the abuse Paul was trying to handle.”

15. Thompson, “Hairstyles, Head coverings, and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth,” *BA* 51 (1988) 99-115, here p. 112. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 227, is surely correct that Paul’s reference to hair as a wrapping suggests that he is not concerned in Corinth with a Jewish custom.

literary sources. Pausanias (*Descriptions of Greece*, Elis I.20.2-3) notes that priestesses, in the context of singing in the temple of Eileithyia in worship of Sosipolis, had to cover their heads and faces in a white veil” (2nd cent. AD). According to Apuleius (*Metamorphoses* 11.10), women participating in the cult of Isis near Corinth “had their hair anointed and their heads covered with bright linen, but the men had their crowns shaven and shining bright” (2nd cent. AD). It is also known more generally that women, according to Roman custom, were known to have veiled their heads when offering sacrifices (so Varro, *de Lingua Latina* 5.29.130¹⁶; see Juvenal, *Saturnalia* 6.390-392), though one should observe that, in contrast to Paul, these practices were not regarded as ways of distinguishing women from men.¹⁷ Thompson herself concludes that Apuleius’s description of the Isis cult must have referred to a special circumstance rather than to general practice in Roman society, while Plutarch’s statements on Roman women going about in public with their hair covered while the men do not (*Roman Questions* 14)¹⁸ are more speculative than derived from strict observation. The correspondence to Paul’s view, especially in the case of the Isis cult, is noteworthy, while the literary witnesses to the disheveled hair of the maenads in the cults of Dionysos, Cybele, the Delphian Pythia, and the Sibyl¹⁹ correspond, by contrast, more to the behaviour Paul is criticising. At least two points can be learned from this evidence. First, the use of head coverings in a cultic context does not refer to a general, but rather to a function-specific, practice. Thus we are not to imagine that Paul was requiring women to cover their heads in contexts other than when they

16. Varro’s note on the Roman *ritus* avails despite his strained etymological derivation for the term *rita* (“veil”). See further M. Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980) 12-27, esp. pp. 16 and 21.

17. See Oster, “Veils.”

18. The passage is in Plutarch’s *Moralia* 267 A-B. This custom is not in itself the focus of Plutarch’s comments as such. His description of practice, instead, occurs while he inquires into why, during funerals, sons cover their heads while daughters do not, reasoning that such a custom is intended to contrast from what is usually done in public.

19. On the conventions associated with these cults, see R.C. and C.C. Kroeger, “An Inquiry into Evidence of Maenadism in the Corinthian Congregation,” *SBL Seminar Papers* 14 (1978) 2.331-346. See esp. Juvenal, *Saturnalia* 6.314-316.

were praying or prophesying. Second, the custom of abandoning any head coverings in worship as a mark of true prophecy among some contemporary cults may clarify why such a practice could have been adopted among the Corinthians, while the practice described by Apuleius in relation to the Isis cult shows that there could have been a similar precedent for the practice enjoined by Paul. Therefore, just because Paul is addressing a specifically Christian context of worship does not mean he would necessarily have wished to distinguish practices of the Christian community from those known in other religious cults. He is concerned, in the end, with customary practice here. More significant (and problematic), on the one hand, is the distinctive theological reasoning which Paul used to support his view and, on the other hand, the fact that he wished to use this as a mark of gender distinction. For the latter, and of course in relation to the role of “angels” in Paul’s discussion, it becomes necessary to explore the backgrounds in biblical and contemporary Jewish traditions.

Problematic Terms

If we focus on the translation and interpretation of particular words and phrases, several difficulties arise. First, there is the difficulty of translating the term κεφαλή (*kephalē*, “head”) in 11:3-5:

the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies while not having (a covering) on the head shames [with his head covered dishonors] his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies without covering her head shames [with her head uncovered dishonors] her head.

The word is intended as a metaphor, but in what sense? Does it mean “origin” or “source”?²⁰ Or does it mean “lordship” or “superiority”? Whichever meaning one chooses, two points should be mentioned at this stage: (1) Paul is using the term to draw a distinction in some sense

20. So, early on, S. Bedale, “The Meaning of *Kephale* in the Pauline Epistles,” *JTS* 5 (1954) 211-215; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 103; Barrett, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 248; Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Women,” 89 and n. 41; Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 491-492. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 229, also adopts this interpretation, while allowing the term to denote a descending hierarchy, though in the sense that “each preceding member . . . establishes the other’s being.”

between God, Christ, male, and female (in *which* sense remains to be seen); and (2) that the behaviour inferred by Paul on the basis of this term is closely bound up with “glory” (11:8-9,15; see 15:40-41), on the one hand, and with “shame” or “dishonor” (11:4-5,14), on the other. The question, for our purposes, will be to ask against which framework the distinctions of order and of behaviour are to be understood.

That Paul is using a pun with respect to κεφαλή is reflected in his literal use of the term in the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (*kata kephalēs echōn*, “having on the head”): to have on the head means for Paul to honour one’s head. Concerning the meaning of “having on the head,” however, interpretations are divided. Does the phrase, as used in 11:4, refer to a man who “has *something* [a head covering] on his head,” as conventionally understood, or, as Murphy-O’Connor has argued, does the expression merely refer to a man who has long hair? By extension, does the term “to be covered” (κατακαλύπτω, *katakalyptō*) allude to a piece of clothing or, again with Murphy-O’Connor, does it denote long hair?²¹ The likelihood that Paul’s language refers to something on the head, rather than to hair itself, is strengthened by Plutarch’s use of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς in a similar way.²² I think that Paul’s reference to hair “as a wrapper” (ἀντὶ περιβολοῖου, *anti peribolaion*) in 11:15 is not a straightforward identification of what he is *ultimately* advocating, but should rather be understood *as a comparison*. Since in 11:5-6 Paul can associate bareheadedness with being without covering (ἀκατακαλύπτω), he leaves it to his readers to infer that having long hair must naturally be accompanied by head covering. Finally, an emphasis on clothing seems apparent, since the context of “praying or prophesying” in wor-

21. See Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1988) 268-269. Murphy-O’Connor thus translates the phrase ἀντὶ περιβολοῖου in 11:15 to mean “as a wrapper” instead of “in place/instead of a wrapper.” Moreover, on the basis of 11:6 Murphy-O’Connor regards “being covered” as Paul’s way in the passage to denote a woman’s long (uncut) hair.

22. So Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 233, who appeals to Plutarch’s *Regum* 200F; *Roman Questions* 267C; *Pyrrhus* 399B; *Pompey* 640C; *Caesar* 739D; *Lives of Ten Orators* 842B. However, one should note that these examples include the verb “to have” with an object, usually τὸ ἱμάτιον (*to himation*, “garment” or “piece of clothing”). Hence the importance of the cumulative weight added by the other reasons given here. For a further argument that Paul is concerned with veiling and not hairstyle, see Annie Jaubert, “La voile des femmes (1 Cor. xi.2-16),” *NTS* 18 (1972) 419-430.

ship is specified. Paul is not concerned here with how men and women generally carry themselves; thus a hairstyle (that is, styling the hair on the head as a wrapping) for the sake of a public mode of participation in worship would have been less practicable than the use of veils, which would have more clearly signalled the difference of context.

Finally, and perhaps most disputed of all, is the question of how to understand the term ἐξουσία (*exousia*, “authority”). Since this term occurs in 11:10a, that is, just prior to mention of the “the angels,” it merits some comment. When the text says that “a woman ought to have ἐξουσία on/over the head,” interpretations have been varied; analogous to “having on the κεφαλή,” the translation of the phrase with ἐξουσία is not straightforward. I have to admit that it is difficult to decide among the primary interpretations (both new and traditional); they include the following: (1) The phrase is made to refer to a woman’s having “power,” “control,” or “authority” over her own activity when she prophesies or prays. Paul would thus be admitting that woman has the authority to “prophesy or pray” in the context of worship.²³ Along similar lines, (2) the phrase is related to the woman’s “freedom” or “right” to choose to do what she wishes with her head.²⁴ This interpretation attempts to place what Paul says here with other parts of 1 Corinthians where Paul, using ἐξουσία to refer to one’s “freedom” or “right,” mentions that, theoretically, a man is not under constraint to marry (7:37), one may eat meat sacrificed to idols (8:9), and an apostle ought to be supported (9:17-18). Problematic for this explanation is that “having ἐξουσία over the head” in 11:10 is not a construction that takes this form²⁵ in the other instances. If either of the two options just mentioned avails here, it remains doubtful that it is the *only* meaning in play. It has to be

23. In this connection two articles are most often referred to: Morna D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI.10,” *NTS* 10 (1963–1964) 410–416; and W. Foerster, “ἐξουσία,” in *TDNT* 2:562–574. See further Barrett, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 255; Jaubert, “La voile des femmes,” 428–430; Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 82.

24. See A. Padget, “Paul on Women in Church: The Contradiction of Coiffure in 1 Cor 11,2–16,” *JSNT* 20 (1984) 69–86, esp. 78; and Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 520.

25. The closest analogy is in 1 Cor 7:37. The phrase refers to a man’s freedom *not* to touch his virgin, and not to the freedom to do so. In 11:10, however, ἐξουσία is related to an obligation.

remembered that Paul regards this ἐξουσία as an “obligation” (he uses the verb ὀφείλει, *opheilei*, “ought”), that is, as a constraint rather than simply as a “right.”

(3) A very different sort of explanation has been proposed *inter alia* by Fitzmyer: the use of ἐξουσία may itself mean “head covering” or “veil.” Following the lead of Kittel, Fitzmyer appeals to the Aramaic word שְׁלִטְנִיָּה (*šlṭwnyā*) which in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* carries the meaning “head ornament” or “veil.”²⁶ Since the root of this word, שִׁלַּף (*šlṭ*), commonly means “to have power/dominion over,” the Greek ἐξουσία may be understood as an equivalent. And so, Paul’s vocabulary either derives from a simple mistranslation or reflects a “popular etymology” that no longer betrays knowledge of the Aramaic word.²⁷ It is, of course, possible that the apostle himself knew such an etymology; however, the translation or identification of ἐξουσία as “veil” seems unnecessarily specific. Furthermore, I doubt whether the Corinthian recipients of his letter may be expected to have understood the term as an equivalent for “veil”!

(4) The term ἐξουσία has in the past been frequently understood as a “magical power” possessed by the veiled woman, there to protect her against the invasion of evil spirits or angels. This view would imply that, at least for Paul, women belong to “the weaker sex” and, unlike men, need a head covering to protect them, especially during times when they are vulnerable, such as when they pray or prophesy in ecstasy. Fitzmyer, among others, has rejected this view because he has found no evidence from antiquity which attests that such a protective function was accorded to a woman’s veil. However, as will become clear below, such a conclusion is too dismissive.

Summary and the Nature of Gender Equality in Paul

The foregoing discussion brings us to the point of addressing the

26. Fitzmyer, “A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of 1 Cor 11:10,” 193-194; see further Foerster, “ἐξουσία,” 574.

27. Along these lines, it is thought that the textual variant κάλυμμα (*kalymma*, “veil”), *velamen* in some Lat. mss., in place of ἐξουσία and Origen’s explanatory addition of κάλυμμα καὶ before the word when discussing the text (in a Lat. translation: *velamen et*) demonstrate a straightforward equivalence between “veil” and ἐξουσία.

problem of the phrase “on account of the angels.” In doing so, it is important for us not to forget the perspectives reached thus far. For the sake of clarity, the views I adopt as a basis for the discussion may be summarized as follows: (1) 1 Cor 11:2-16 is Pauline. (2) The statements of Paul in the passage cannot be confined to the question of hairstyles; references to covering are best related to “apparel” or “clothing.” (3) Although in 11:4,7, Paul refers to men who do not wear head coverings, the thrust of the argument as a whole is directed towards the behaviour of women. (4) The various interpretations of a woman’s having ἐξουσία on the head are not all mutually exclusive. In fact, the text itself seems to reflect the ambiguous status of the woman: on the one hand, she may possess “authority” over what she does; on the other hand, women are being asked to participate in exercising constraint over their own activity “on account of the angels,” the notion of protection, if not subjugation, is not far away.

It is true that in 11:11-12, in some ways the climax of the argument, Paul underlines the mutuality and interdependence between women and men. Does this, however, mean “equality” in practice? Although the language of Paul acknowledges equality between the sexes “in the Lord” and although elsewhere Paul cites baptismal tradition that there is “neither male nor female” (so Gal 3:28), what this means in reality is another matter (even in Gal 3:28 the masculine form is used to denote male and female oneness). We know, for instance, from the *Gospel of Thomas* (logion 114)²⁸ and *Joseph and Aseneth* (14:15-15:2)²⁹ that “androgyny” did not have to denote equality which respects the woman’s dignity *as a woman* but rather accepts equality on grounds that she be virtually regarded as a male. Paul, of course, refuses in 11:2-16 to blend the distinctions between women and men. Nevertheless, we learn, especially from *Gospel of Thomas*, that one ought not assume that

28. This often cited text may be translated from the Coptic as follows: “Simon Peter said to him, ‘Let Mary depart from us, because women are unworthy of this life.’ Jesus said, ‘Behold, I shall lead her, in order that I may make her a male, so that she may also become a living spirit, being like you males. For every woman who makes herself a male shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.’”

29. The virgin Aseneth’s full preparedness for conversion to Judaism is signified by the removal of her head covering (at the angel’s behest) which renders the appearance of her head “as that of a young man” (15:1).

notions of gender unification are going to mean equality in practical terms. In other words, Paul might not have understood equality or even mutuality in a straightforward manner.³⁰

Paul's Arguments for Head Coverings

As observed above, the expression κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων looks like a throwaway, enigmatic comment which is unnecessary to the flow of the argument. Paul does not bother to explain it or to connect it to the immediate context with any transparency. In this sense, the phrase stands out in contrast with at least five other reasons given by Paul, reasons which more readily reinforce one another through notions of order, scriptural exegesis, "nature," and common practice among the Christian congregations. The fact that Paul produces not one, but a number of arguments in order to convince women to cover their heads, signals the special importance he attached to this practice in relation to the worshiping assembly. Herewith, we briefly consider these other arguments, which are found in 11:3-9 and 11:13-16.

First, Paul appeals to the status of women in the hierarchical order of the cosmos (11:3-5a,7). It is hard to escape the conclusion that the term κεφαλή, regardless of whether or not it is to be translated as "origin" or "source," denotes a pecking order of relationships within the cosmic order: God (the head of), Christ (the head of), man (the head of), woman. This hierarchy is reinforced in 11:7, where "Christ" is left out of the equation: the terms εἰκόν (εἰκόν, "image") and δόξα (δόξα, "glory") are both directly applied to the man in relation to God, while

30. See especially Wayne Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1974) 165-208; and Dennis R. MacDonald, "Corinthian Veils and Gnostic Androgynes," in *Images of the Feminine Gnosticism*, Karen L. King, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 276-292, who demonstrates how widespread male hierarchy within androgyny was among the gnostic sources (e.g., the *Apocryphon of John*); see further the excellent overview of the notion of "unequal androgyny" by Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 230-232. Against Schüssler-Fiorenza (*In Memory of Her*, 211-113), who attempts to rescue the *Gospel of Thomas* (and thus Paul) from gender-related notions of inequality, it seems rather that the notion of practical inequity in Paul (as may have been assumed by Paul in Gal 3:28) ought not be dismissed too quickly, that is, merely on the grounds that gnostic beliefs cannot be shown to have influenced the behaviour of the Corinthian women. The issue is more one of latent male attitudes than of tradition- and religio-historical influences.

the woman's δόξα is merely conceived in relation to the man.³¹ For Paul this essential difference between man and woman is to manifest itself in the matter of head covering, with the man being without any at all and the woman having to cover herself. If this cosmological classification is disturbed by the woman, she brings shame upon her head (11:5), that is, upon her superior (the man), just as a man who crosses the boundaries of propriety by covering his head brings shame upon his head (11:4—presumably this is Christ). Given the introduction of κεφαλή in 11:3 to denote superiority, 11:4-5 cannot be read as activity which brings shame upon one's self. The language—that is, to “shame his/her head”—means instead that one dishonours the one who is next up or immediately above in the cosmic scale. The notion of shame characterizes activity which is in breach of the cosmic order. The metaphorical use of κεφαλή as “leader” or “ruler (Hebrew שׂר),³² in combination with the literal meaning “head,” results in a semantic wordplay: the appropriate treatment of one's head in terms of covering or not covering shows respect towards one's head, that is, towards one's distinct place in the divine order. This wordplay implies that the order imposed upon the world involves boundaries of distinction that should not be violated.

Second, as we have discussed, for the sake of the argument, Paul equates a woman's uncovered head with her having no hair at all. Strictly speaking, this argument makes no sense, because it is not based on observation; it builds, rather, on a sense of shame which Paul assumes his readers in Corinth would share towards the notion of female bareheadedness (11:6a).³³ The identification of an uncovered

31. This argument assumes the “image” language of Gen 1:27 which is being interpreted through the point of view of Genesis 2. See Gen 5:1-3, in which both male and female are described as created, though unlike Gen 1:27, the term “image” is reserved for “Adam,” which is the name given to both of them.

32. For the Heb. term in the generic sense of “ruler,” see Deut 1:13 and Isa 29:10; in the context of Israel, as “leaders,” see Exod 6:14,25; 18:25; Num 1:4,16; 7:2; 8:12; 10:4; 13:3; 17:3; 25:4,15; 30:1; Deut 1:15; 5:23; 28:13,44; 33:5,21; Josh 11:10; 14:1; 19:51; 21:1; 22:21; 23:2; 24:1; Judg 7:25; 10:18; 11:8,9,11; 1 Sam 15:17; 1 Kgs 8:1; 1 Chr 5:24; 7:2,4,7,9,11,40; 8:6,10,13,28; 9:13; 12:32; 29:11; 2 Chr 5:2; 28:12; and Ps 18:43. Among the Dead Sea materials, see esp. 1QSa (*Rule of the Congregation*) col. i, 16.23.25.

33. See the *Test. of Job* 23:8-10 and esp. 24:9-10, in which Job's wife shows her shame by having her hair cut.

with a shorn head enables Paul to transfer the shame associated with being without hair to the practice of not covering the head.

Third, Paul's argument appeals to the chronological order of creation: woman was created from man, not vice-versa (11:8-9). This is clearly based, not on Gen 1:26, according to which "male and female" were created together, but on the creation story in Genesis 2,³⁴ in which a discernible sequence of time elapsed between Adam and the formation of the woman.

Fourth, Paul appeals to "nature" (φύσις, *physis*, 11:14). Perhaps this argument is in some way related to the social shame Paul associates with bareheadedness in 11:6. Paul presumes that the Corinthians will agree with him that it is inappropriate, on grounds of nature itself, for a man to have long hair and that it is appropriate for a woman to have long hair. Granted that this view is shared by the Corinthians, Paul assumes further that they will conclude that long hair is to be accompanied by a head covering. Long hair is to be covered and short hair is not.³⁵ The logic of the argument also works in the other direction: since men should not wear a head covering in worship, they should not have long hair; if women should be covered (as Paul thinks should be the case), they should have long hair.

Fifth, in 11:16 Paul cuts his own argument short by referring to the problem as a contentious matter; anyone who would disagree with his instruction contravenes uniform practice "in the churches of God." Paul thus appeals to "custom," that is, he claims that "we" have no other practice either. Is Paul referring to congregations which are under his own apostolic influence ("we") and then to all the remaining congregations? It is not clear. Nevertheless, Paul's rhetoric is constructed in such a way as to emphasise that any among the Corinthians who would

34. A similar adaptation of Genesis 2 seems to be operative in the fragmentary text of 4Q415 (=4QInstruction) fr. 2, col. ii, lines 1-9; see J. Strugnell and D.J. Harrington, eds., *Qumran Cave 4 XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XXXIV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 47-48 (text and translation).

35. See *Jos. and Asen.* 15:1: The angelic humanlike figure tells Aseneth to remove her veil because her head "is like that of a young man," that is, because she has short hair, a veil is not deemed necessary.

resist his instruction regarding head coverings risks isolating himself from the remainder of the Christian movement.

WHY, THEN, “ON ACCOUNT OF THE ANGELS”?

As we have observed, the angels are not as such integrated into the flow of the argument in 11:2-16. Therefore, the possible explanations are, by necessity, drawn from inferences based on the immediate context (in particular, 11:2-9), the epistle as a whole, traditions about angelic beings in early Jewish documents and, more broadly, Graeco-Roman antiquity. In terms of a debate concerning which of specific background throws light on what Paul consciously thought when he mentioned the angels, little has been said which may be called “decisive.” Thus, in addition, we may need to consider the worldview—that is, the realm of what Paul may have assumed—against which an interpretation can be most satisfactorily pieced together. We need to be open to the possibility, therefore, that not all the conventional alternative interpretations proposed are mutually exclusive; perhaps, moreover, the questions for which the alternative proposals provide an answer need to be rethought.

The four main interpretations of “the angels,” whether offered in the distant or recent past, are as follows:

First, a number of interpreters have and continue to maintain that Paul was simply referring to *human* ἄγγελοι.³⁶ Murphy-O’Connor, in support of this view, appeals to 1 Cor 10:32 and 14:23. In 10:32, just prior to this passage, Paul exhorts the Corinthians in general to “be without trouble to Jews, Gentiles, and to the church of God,” while in 14:23, in addressing disorderly conduct in worship fomented by speaking in tongues, he warns that “ordinary people or unbelievers” would regard them as crazy. From these texts Murphy-O’Connor argues that “Paul would be concerned that practices in Corinth should not shock envoys from other churches.”³⁷

36. So, J.B. Lightfoot, in *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859) 4:238; and, more recently, A. Padgett, “Paul on Women in Church” 81; and Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” 271-272.

37. *Ibid.*

This approach to the angels in 11:10 is very weak. Although the term ἄγγελοι can refer to a noncelestial human being several times in the writings of the New Testament (so Matt 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; Jas 2:25; and, as some argue, the “angels” of the seven churches in Rev 2–3), it nowhere clearly refers to such in the Pauline or deutero-Pauline corpus.³⁸ Furthermore, although 10:32 does refer to contact between the Corinthian Christians and others, it does not specify a context of worship. Finally, in 14:23 those whom Paul envisions as observers of the Corinthians’ worship are not Murphy-O’Connor’s “envoys from other churches,” but rather ἰδιώται (*idiōtai*, “untrained”) and ἄπιστοι (*apistoi*, “unbelievers”)! Thus, while not entirely impossible, the notion that women are to wear head coverings on account of visiting humans as ἄγγελοι is highly unlikely.

Second, an interpretation which often regards “the angels” in 11:10 as unequivocally “good” or at least “obedient”; they are *guardians of the created order*. Within the immediate context, as we have seen, Paul draws on the biblical tradition from Genesis 2 to assert the chronological priority of man over woman (11:8-9; see 11:3). If the creation story is in view, it could be argued that a mention of “angels” in 11:10 would not be out of place. Indeed, according to some exegetical traditions, angels were considered to have been active participants with God in the creation of humanity. According to Philo, in Genesis (1:26) God is speaking to the angels when God says, “let us make man” (*de Opificio Mundi* 72-76; see *de Confusione Linguarum* 171-182; *de Fuga et Inventione* 65-70; *de Mutatione nominum* 27-34).³⁹ The tradition in

38. Gal 4:14 does, admittedly, come close. However, Paul uses the expression ἄγγελον θεου there as a hypothetical (not real) description of himself to emphasise the exemplary hospitality of the Galatians towards him (“you welcomed me as [though I were] an angel of God, as Christ Jesus”). The thrust of the statement, which extends the comparison to include Christ, suggests that Paul is thinking of a strictly nonhuman, divine messenger.

39. Philo’s purpose for involving angels (identified as “heavenly bodies” created on the fourth day) in the creation of humanity is to account for the duality of voluntary and involuntary dimensions of human nature. Whereas heavenly bodies possess a mind (but only unto themselves) and plants and animals are without mind and reason, only humans have the capacity to participate willingly in evil. The role of angels in creation of humanity, therefore, serves to distance the utter goodness and transcendence of God from responsibility for being the originator of evil.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen 1:26 is thus probably dependent on an older tradition when it specifies that “let us” refers to “the angels who minister before him and who were created on the second day of the creation of the world.” Such participation of angels in creation is presupposed among the recently available *4QInstruction* (also known as *4QSapiential Work A*) manuscripts, in which two types of humanity are distinguished (4Q417 1 i, lines 15-18): on the one hand, there is “Enosh” (עֲנוֹשׁ, *ʿenōš*), a spiritual people (עַם רִוּחַ, *ʿam ruah*, 1.16) whose created form corresponds to “the pattern of the holy ones” (כְּתַבְנִית קְדוֹשִׁים, *k²tabnīt q²dōšīm*, 1.17); on the other hand, there are the “children of Seth” (1.15) who presumably do not have the capacity to discern between good and evil (1.18).⁴⁰ Unquestionably, Paul is concerned with maintaining distinctions within divine order, both in 11:2-16 and in 1 Corinthians as a whole (see Paul’s reference to the distinct δόξα of “heavenly” as opposed to “earthly” bodies and, more specifically, among the heavenly bodies themselves in 15:40-41). Angels guard this order—here the distinction between man and woman—and, presumably, would take offence at a practice which violates this order as set forth in verses 3 and 8-9.⁴¹ A difficulty with this interpretation is that, surprisingly, there is hardly an

40. On the analysis of this passage, I am indebted to Benjamin Wold, whose thesis is exploring scriptural exegesis among the more recently available sapiential texts from the Dead Sea documents.

41. Those adopting this view include James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1947) 152; Fitzmyer, “Qumran Angelology and 1 Cor 11:10,” p. 197 no(s). 36-37; and Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 69. This view has provided an attractive option for those who interpret Paul’s emphasis on man’s chronological priority over woman in creation as a concession to the old order (i.e. of the law) of which angels are guardians.

A different way of relating the function of angelic beings to creation has been maintained by those who regard them as guardians of the “old” order, presumably as they are often regarded as having acted as mediators in the giving of the law (Gal 3:19; see Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2; *Jub.* 1:27,29; 2:1 *passim*; *Apoc.Mos.* introduction; and Josephus, *Ant.* 15.136). Paul is negotiating between the eschatological (see 11:11-12) and the old order (11:8-9) and instructs women to wear head coverings either (a) as a concession to the old (or even pagan) order itself or (b) in order to show that they have the authority (see 11:10a) to transcend the old order to which she was once subjected. For the position of (a), see G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 15-22; and T.W. Manson, *On Paul and John*, 19-20; in relation to (b), see Hooker, “Authority on Her Head,” 412-413; Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Women,” 91, n. 46.

instance in early or rabbinic Jewish tradition in which angelic beings are specifically assigned such a role,⁴² to say nothing about what such guardian angels would have had to do with the coiffure of women. This is not to deny that the mention of angels in 11:10 in some way relates to cosmic order; indeed, the reverse seems to be the case. However, in what sense?

Third, we are brought a step further by the proposal of Fitzmyer, who has drawn attention to a number of texts from the Dead Sea documents concerned with the notion of *the angels' presence in the congregation of the community*.⁴³ In his initial publication, Fitzmyer was only able to refer to four texts, according to which purity in the community is demanded because of the presence of the angels (*IQWar Rule* vii, line 6; *IQSa=Rule of the Congregation* ii, lines 8-9; *4QFlorilegium* fr. 1 i, lines 3-4; see CD=*Damascus Document* xv, lines 15-17); since then, further materials overlapping with the previously known documents have come to light which echo this motif (*4Q491=4QWar Rule*^a fr.'s 1-3, line 10; *4QD=Damascus Document*^a fr. 8 i, lines 6-9).⁴⁴ In terms of form, these texts provide a list, inspired by Leviticus 21:18-23, of categories of *men*⁴⁵ who are not allowed to participate in the community, whether it be in the eschatological war (as in the *War Rule*) or the worshiping, eschatological assembly (as in the *Rule of the Congregation*, *Damascus Document*, and *Florilegium*). Of particular interest, notes Fitzmyer, is the explanatory formula "for the angels of holiness shall be with" (כִּי מַלְאָכֵי קִדְוֶשׁ עִמָּם, *kī mal'ākē qōdeš 'im*) of which the construction διὰ plus the accusative τοὺς ἀγγέλους in 1 Cor 11:10 is reminiscent.⁴⁶ Taken together, the texts strengthen the view that the presence

42. I am in agreement with Jaubert, "La voile des femmes," 427, who emphasises that there are no sources from antiquity which support this interpretation.

43. Fitzmyer, "A Feature of Qumran Angelology in 1 Cor 11:10."

44. For convenient access to the Hebrew texts of these Dead Sea documents and to corresponding English translations, see Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, lightly reworked edition from the 1997-1998 publication).

45. Only in *IQM* vii, 3-4 does the category of women occur: "no young male or woman (נְשִׂאִים) shall enter into their camps when they go out from Jerusalem to go to war until their return."

46. *Ibid.*

of angels was considered to have significant ramifications for the observance of purity regulations in the Qumran community.⁴⁷

One could develop Fitzmyer's ideas further. These Qumran texts, in turn, reflect the belief, more widely attested among the Dead Sea documents, that the community (and, possibly other communities as well) related its self-understanding to the presence of angels in their midst.⁴⁸ For instance, in *11QBerkhot* the presence of God and of God's holy angels in the community is given as the reason (ii, line 14) for the community's enjoyment of favourable weather, good harvest, and protection from a variety of mortal and unclean dangers (ii, lines 7-14); for this function the angels present in the community can even be "blessed" alongside God (ii, lines 4-6).⁴⁹ Among the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, extant mostly through the Cave 4 manuscripts from Qumran (4Q400-

47. Those who have shared or followed Fitzmyer's interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:10 include the following: H.J. Cadbury, "A Qumran Parallel to Paul," *HTR* 51 (1958) 1-2; and Jervis, "But I Want You to Know . . ." 231-246, esp. 244, n. 53.

48. See esp. 1QS xi, 8; 1QSB iii, 6; iv, 26; 1QH iii, 21-23; vi, 13; xi, 11-14; fr. 2, ll. 10, 14; fr. 5, l. 3; fr. 7, l. 11; fr. 10, ll. 6-7; 1QM i, 14-15; xii, 1-2, 4-5, 7-9; xiii, 10; xvii, 6; 1Q36; 4Q181 fr. 1, ll. 3-4; 4Q400 ii. 5-7; 4Q491 fr. 24, l. 4; 4Q511 fr. 2, l. 8; fr. 8, l. 9; 11Q14 ii, 13-14. On the significance of these texts, see the studies by B. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community*, SNTSMS, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Gott und Beial*, SUNT, 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 222-232; H.-W. Kuhn, *Enderwartung und Gegenwärtiges Heil*, SUNT, 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 66-73; Hermann Lichtenberger, *Studien zum Menschenbild in Texten der Qumrangemeinde*, SUNT, 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980) esp. 224-227; and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, WUNT, II/70 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995) 150-163. As composition of the sapiential document *Instruction* extant among materials from Caves 1 and 4 cannot be assigned to the Qumran community itself, the following texts which coordinate the life of the faithful community with angelic beings are of special interest: 4Q417 ii, 15-18//4Q418 fr. 43, ll. 11-14; fr. 55, ll. 8-12; fr. 69, ll. 10-14; fr. 81, ll. 4-5.

49. Column ii in *11QBerkhot* overlaps in content with 4Q285 fr. 1, ll. 1-10 and, therefore, Martin Abegg has argued that it preserves a portion of the *War Scroll*; see "Messianic Hope and 4Q285: A Reassessment," *JBL* 113 (1994) 81-91; and, further, P. Alexander and G. Vermes, "4QSefer ha-Milhamah," in *Qumran Cave 4 XXVI: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part 1*, Emanuel Tov, ed., in consultation with James VanderKam and Monica Brady, DJD, XXXVI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 231-232, 241-243. The blessing formula of this text, in which the blessing of God precedes the blessing of the angels, shows that the Book of Tobit, at 11:14-15 (where the same occurs), draws on a traditional formula (both recensions; Cod. Sinaiticus preserves a more elaborate form); see further 4Q418 fr. 81, ll. 1-5.

407; see 11Q17 and the Masada manuscript), the community describes the heavenly worship of the angels; the members of this community are said to stand in awe of the privilege they have to participate in this angelic cultus (4Q400 ii, lines 5-7). Angelic worship is thus described as exemplary, and this inspires the human community to declare about the angelic *elim*: “they are honoured among all the camps of the *elohim* and revered by human councils.” Clearly, the presence of angels in the community was related, not only to its members’ general sense of well-being but also represented a form of cultic worship that to which the community aspired. We may infer, therefore, that the inclusion of angels into the reason for drawing clear boundaries between the clean and unclean takes for granted that they convey the holiness of God in the community.

When we return to 1 Corinthians 11, we may consider how the Dead Sea materials could be thought to provide a background. Of course, one glaring difference that comparison reveals is the presence of women in the Christian worshiping community. The Dead Sea documents do not envisage women as full participants in the present, heavenly, or even eschatological cultus. To the extent that Christian men and women, especially those of Jewish descent, fell heir to such traditions, they would have been aware of the new status given to the woman in the postresurrection era, when circumcision—from which women had been excluded by definition—no longer functioned as a requirement for full admission into the participation in worship. One does not have to argue much further to show how this new perspective would have led to a reconfiguration of male-female relationships; thus Paul could write in 11:11: “neither is woman without man nor man without woman in the Lord.” Paul would have instructed the women of the congregation to cover themselves, in accordance with the woman’s secondary appearance in the order of creation and because her $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ is different from that given to men. Fitzmyer explains, in analogy to the Dead Sea texts, that the unveiled woman would have been perceived by the angels as a “bodily defect” to be excluded from the assembly.⁵⁰ The covering would, then, be a way for compensating for this deficiency, especially so in the

50. Fitzmyer, “A Feature of Qumran Angelology in 1 Cor 11:10,” 56-57.

presence of holy angels, with whom are associated an exemplary, heavenly, and pure worship of God. Presumably the Corinthians, not least the women who prayed and prophesied in the assembly, would have been familiar with such an ideal: they would have understood themselves to be worshipers of God alongside the angels (13:1,⁵¹ in which Paul may be subordinating such a perception to an *ἀγάπη*-ethic). Thus, in 11:10 Paul would be seen to advocate head coverings for women out of respect for the angels with whom the congregations' members understand themselves to be worshipping God.

This picture is coherent, even inspiring. It even attempts to situate Paul's reference to the angels within the context of 1 Corinthians as a letter and, to some extent, the situation in Corinth. It is compatible with the notion of angelic guardians of the created order.⁵² Fitzmyer is convincing, furthermore, in showing that Paul is concerned with maintaining "holiness" and "purity" in the worshiping community and that "the angels" in 11:10 have something to do with this. However, there are several problems with this approach, if it is adopted to the exclusion of other possibilities. First, it presupposes that Paul would have imagined that physical defects are sufficient reason for exclusion from the Christian community, since women are, on argument, being instructed to cover their heads on account of their association with other defects which, according to Lev 21:18-23 and the Dead Sea materials, are inadmissible to the cult.⁵³ Secondly, and more of a difficulty, the tradition-historical background invoked by Fitzmyer does not directly bear on the presence or activity of *women* in the religious community. One could, of course, argue that Paul is simply applying a tradition to a situation which, by its very nature, is essentially different (where the inclusion of women in the worshiping community is more or less being taken for

51. See e.g., Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 228; and Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views," in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry*, Richard N. Longenecker, ed.. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 184-212, esp. 205, where 13:1 is taken to suggest that the angels of 11:10 are those who were understood to mediate "gifts of inspiration."

52. See the reference to Fitzmyer in n. 26 above.

53. Similarly, see the criticism by Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16," 497 and n. 57.

granted); this argument, however, carries weight to the extent that there are no other traditions which more directly relate women to angelic beings. Thirdly, Fitzmyer—as indeed many interpreters of this passage⁵⁴—feels constrained to decide whether the angels are “good” or “bad”; for reasons I wish yet to specify, this seems to be a false dichotomy; the question should not be what kind of angels Paul is referring to, but rather what kind of worldview, whether conscious or not to Paul and his readers, would have made it possible to regard the covering of the female head in a highly charged religious context such a necessity. Our asking this question reveals the greatest difficulty of all in Fitzmyer’s thesis: it relies wholly on analogy and does not help to account for the head covering (and by women!) in and of itself. Rather than taking “angels” as a logical point of departure, discussions should actually begin with the question about veiling and head covering in antiquity.

This brings us to a fourth explanation, which I regard as tenable despite the fact that variations of it have been so categorically dismissed by a number of scholars: the head coverings were intended to be prophylactic. While this reason may seem to assume that “the angels” to which Paul refers must therefore be “bad,” the more important question is what social functions could be attributed to the veiling of woman in classical antiquity. How, moreover, do any of these functions bear upon the importance Paul attaches to women covering themselves while they are prophesying? In asking these questions, we are not necessarily looking for a theological intentionality on the part of Paul, but rather we wish to consider predominant assumptions which accompanied the veiling of woman.⁵⁵

54. So, Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. by A.W. Hethcote and P.J. Allcock (London: Epworth, 1962) 106-108; Hooker, “Authority on Her Head,” 412; Barrett, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 253-254; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 228; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 521; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 69; J. Winandy, “Un curieux *casus pendens*: 1 Corinthiens 11.10 et son interprétation,” *NTS* 38 (1992) 621-629, esp. 627-628; see also the publications cited in n. 56 below.

55. Here the recent studies, which are sensitive to cultural anthropology, are especially important. The observations on the significance of veiling in Graeco-Roman antiquity depend to some degree on the following publications: Helen King, “Producing Woman: Hippocratic Gynaecology,” in *Women in Ancient Societies*, eds. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria

Although the wearing of head coverings among men in antiquity was not uncommon, the practice among women carried with it strong sexual connotations. Apparel was, of course, one way of marking the differences—or, better, boundaries—between the sexes, that is, to keep gender categories distinct. Of course, we are not in a position to generalise about Graeco-Roman antiquity, as practices must have varied according to time period, place, and social context.⁵⁶ When, however, women did cover their heads or veiled themselves—whether in public,⁵⁷ in relation to marriage rituals,⁵⁸ while mourning,⁵⁹ or participating in a

Wyke (Houdsmills/Basingstoke/London: MacMillan, 1994) 102-114; Gail Paterson Corrington, “The ‘Headless Woman’: Paul and the Language of the Body in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991) 223-231; Anne Carson, “Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire,” in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 135-169, esp. pp. 153-164; and Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 229-249 and 294-300.

56. So, e.g., the differences between Romans and Greeks with respect to head coverings in *Moralia, Roman Questions* 14.

57. See Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 33.48-49, who refers to a persisting custom in Tarsus concerning the “the attire of women,” meaning that they dress in such a way “that nobody can see any part of them, neither of the face nor of the remainder of the body, and that they might not see anything from the road”). Dio’s explanation of this practice focuses on control of the woman rather than the man, for he goes on to describe the function of the face covering as a way of keeping out “wantonness” (of the woman!), whereas an uncovered face is as vulnerable as “an uncovered soul.” On the propriety of head coverings for women in public in the early Jewish and rabbinic Jewish, see Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, CRINT III/1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 133. See Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.56, in an interpretation of Numbers 5, according to which the removal of the suspected woman’s head covering symbolises her loss of innocence.

58. See Carson, “Putting Her in Her Place,” 160-164. Carson refers to a number of sources, from which the following, in terms of exercising social control over (or “civilising”) the bride, seem to be the most significant: the myth which explains cosmology as Zeus’ gaining control over the goddess of the underworld by a veiling through which she is transformed into a beautiful and fertile wife Ge. See Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951) 48; Plutarch’s reference to the customary Boeotian wedding ceremony, in which “after veiling the bride they put on her head a crown of asparagus, for this plant yields the sweetest fruit from the roughest thorns” so that her “initial unpleasantness” will give way to “a docile and sweet life together” (*Moralia, Coniug. praec.* 138D). With respect to the protection of the bride’s virginity see Lucian, *The Carousal, or the Lapiths* 8: the bride on the couch, surrounded by women on both sides “is strictly veiled”; in Homer’s *Odyssey* 1.334, Penelope, accompanied by two maidservants on each side, is covered by “a veil across her

religious cult⁶⁰—assumptions concerning the nature of female physiology and, thus, sexuality were being brought to expression. Such would have been especially true in contexts which scholars in the social sciences have termed “strong group.”⁶¹ These assumptions reflected, in turn, the male *Angst* in the face of female sexuality. The association of a woman’s nature with wetness and porousness was thought to make her especially vulnerable to disease, sexual appetite, irrationality, and pollution. These values in antiquity are even assumed among those who devoted themselves to the science of studying the female anatomy, for example, as in the detailed works of the Hippocratic school (beginning in the 4th–5th centuries BC, esp. *Diseases of Women*) and Aristotle (4th century BC; esp. *History of Animals*, *Parts of Animals*, and *Generation of Animals*).⁶² The significance of these sources is not so much their tradition-historical relevance for ideas consciously taken up by Paul or his Corinthian readers during the first century AD, but rather it consists in the fact that observations being made among the “sciences” were conditioned by male assumptions about female inferiority. *Socially*, the wearing of something on the head, especially when enjoined on women, would have reflected the wish to exert control over the woman whose

cheeks” as a symbol of her unavailability to would-be suitors. In addition, there are numerous references among classical sources to the moment of unveiling in a wedding ceremony, at which the protective boundaries around the bride are removed to expose her to the penetrative gaze of her husband. See *ibid.*, 163 and n. 55, and esp. Cynthia B. Patterson, “Marriage and the Married Woman in Athenian Law,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, Sarah B. Pomeroy, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991) 48-72.

59. See Plutarch, *Moralia*, *Roman Questions* 14.

60. So Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.10; Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 5.29.130; Juvenal, *Saturnalia* 6.390-392. See the Excursus above.

61. On this expression as a cultural anthropological category, see Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 54-64, and its adaptation for New Testament study by Bruce Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986) 14-15. The Corinthian situation, we may suppose, fits best the “strong group, low grid” model, according to which the strong concern for purity in a community is combined with the experience of that community being under the threat of pollution from within.

62. See the excellent study of these sources by Lesley Dean-Jones, “The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, 111-137 (bibl. in n. 58).

very physiology represents a danger to the (male) ordering of society.⁶³ Within a group for which special importance is attached to defining strict boundaries of “purity” between its members and outside influences (as Paul tries to do for the Corinthians; see 1 Cor 5:1-2,9-13; 6:1,15-20; 8:7,11; 10:20-21), it should not be surprising that the woman can be regarded as one focal point for the attempt to assert control over the danger of “pollution.”⁶⁴

The notion in Graeco-Roman antiquity of female vulnerability and inferiority, assumed in many Jewish sources,⁶⁵ and the attendant practice of prophylactic head covering fit well with the early Jewish mythological interpretations of Gen 6:1-4. With regard to this, NT scholars have customarily focused on the essentially evil character of the angels who “fell” because they were attracted by the beauty of the “human daughters.” This would be much in line with the *Book of Watchers* of *1 Enoch* (see chapters 7-8) and the *Book of Giants*: here the more neutral “sons of God” in Gen 6:1 are interpreted as the angels who have introduced evil into the world by instructing women in reprehensible matters and siring through them a race of oppressive giants. These gigantic offspring are seen as a *mala mixta*, the result of an illegitimate violation of boundaries in the cosmic order (*1 En.* 15:8-16). With this background in view, some scholars, even recently, have interpreted “the angels” in 1 Cor 11:10 as categorically “bad” angels.⁶⁶ The women wear head coverings as protection against precisely *these* angels because, being invariably cast as male beings, they pose a sexual threat to the women.

63. Thus the sexual dimension of head coverings may presuppose a construal of female physiology which correlates the head and genitalia (that is, goes well beyond regarding such a connection as metaphorical); on this, see Dean-Jones, “The Cultural Construct of the Female Body,” 124-125 and 136, who is followed by Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 237-239.

64. It would simply be wrong, therefore, to conclude with Fitzmyer, “A Feature of Qumran Angelology and 1 Cor 11:10,” 193, with respect to protection, that there is a “lack of evidence showing that a woman’s veil was ever thought of as having such a function in antiquity”; in this I concur with Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 299, n. 66.

65. Josephus, *c. Apionem* 2.201 (“a woman is in all things inferior to a man”); Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.169-180 (a woman is inferior and oriented towards the senses); and *passim*.

66. See John Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965) 182-185 (esp. 184 n. 4, with bibl.); Walker, “The Vocabulary of 1 Corinthians 11.3-16,” 82; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, AGAJU, 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 139.

However, given our emphasis on the sexual significance of head coverings in antiquity, I would like to suggest that the problem lies less in the sort of angels being referred to than in the assumption of sexual vulnerability of women to pollution. For Paul it is not a matter of offering an explicit argument in chapter 11 about female weakness in this respect; rather, his reasons for commending head coverings are unable to break away from the deep-seated assumption that women constitute the locus where boundaries between different parts of the cosmos are most likely to be violated. This view breaks through to the surface of the argument, despite all the mutuality between male and female emphasised by Paul (11:11-12).

If the point of departure for female head coverings is located in notions of sexuality and hierarchy in antiquity, then it is unnecessary to consider whether “the angels” are good or bad. In relation to the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, it is important to realise that the “fallen angels” were usually considered “good” to start with. It is only after they have departed from their proper place in creation when the trouble begins. In *Jub.* 5:1-11, the “fall” of the angels is delayed; it does not occur in heaven, but happens on earth, while the angels were on a mission to instruct humans “and perform judgment and uprightness upon the earth” (5:6 and 4:15). The status of angels is, in other words, not static. Whatever their position or nature, angels have the capacity to violate the cosmic order. Despite distinctiveness between human and angelic spheres of existence, Paul and his Corinthian readers shared the worldview that both nevertheless *share social space* (see 1 Cor 4:9,15; 6:3; 13:1). Because the understanding of angels was commonly expressed in terms of male sexuality and because women were assumed to be especially “open” to invasion (from whatever source), Paul’s reference to the angels betrays a subtle warning that more than just social relationships between men and women are at stake; ultimately, wearing veils is a matter of maintaining the cosmic order. The head coverings are prophylactic in the sense that they protect this order by helping to draw boundaries between distinct, yet sometimes socially overlapping, spheres more clearly.

These boundaries, which have structured the universe since creation, are to be respected. For Paul, head coverings function to keep men and women distinct from one another; in this regard, the notion

of distinctiveness plays into a hierarchical arrangement that reflects the status quo. The head coverings also function to keep women distinct from the angels who, for the sake of this argument, are considered an essentially different order of creation. After all, in analogy to human men, the apocalyptic angels were prone to be cast as beings with a potentially active male sexuality. The veil is protective on two fronts⁶⁷: on the one hand, it protects the woman against inadmissible invasions from the outside and, on the other hand, protects those on the outside (so, from the male point of view!) against the vulnerability to evil that the woman represents.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing analysis, I have not proceeded on the assumption that something “normative” is at stake in inquiring into *what* Paul instructs that women in Corinth should do and *why* they should do it. Instead, this study has delved into worldviews and tradition-historical backgrounds in order to bring to light the matrix within which Paul’s

67. This double function is reflected in the account of Dio Chrysostom cited in n. 57 above. In addition, see Tertullian, in *On the Apparel of Women* and *On the Veiling of Virgins*: the veil protects from the outside (e.g., *Veiling of Virgins* 3: “Every public exposure of an honourable virgin is . . . a suffering of rape”) at the same time as protecting the angels (e.g., *Veiling of Virgins* 7: “So perilous a face, then, ought to be shaded, which has cast stumbling-stones even so far as heaven: that, when standing in the presence of God, at whose bar it stands accused of the driving of the angels from their [native] confines, it may blush before the other angels as well; and may repress that former evil liberty of its head,—[a liberty] now to be exhibited not even before human eyes.”). Tertullian draws on the watchers myth from the Enochic tradition as the background for 1 Cor 11:10. However, unlike the Enochic tradition and other Jewish apocalyptic documents, he limits the interest of the evil angels to virgins. There is no indication in 1 Corinthians 11 that Paul is particularly concerned with unmarried women.

68. Worth noting is that the Jewish interpretations not only considered the “watchers” as having posed a sexual threat to women during the antediluvian period (*1 En.* 7-8; 19:1; *Jub.* 4:21-22; *1 En.* 69:1-15; 86:1-5) but also blamed adorned women themselves for this fall (so *Test. Reuben* ch. 5). Covering the head would have, of course, covered a prominent area of the woman’s body which, when adorned, was frequently associated in Mediterranean antiquity, especially Roman culture, with sexual vices reflecting, from the traditionally-minded Roman male, foreign influences (e.g., from the East—India, China, Arabia—from which many such goods were imported); see Maria Wyke, “Woman in the Mirror: The Rhetoric of Adornment in the Roman World,” in *Women in Ancient Societies*, 134-151.

enigmatic statement concerning “the angels” in 1 Cor 11:10 might make sense.

The context of 1 Corinthians suggests that Paul and the congregation in Corinth were both familiar with and even understood their worship as participation in the worship of angels. This belief would have reinforced what is at stake in maintaining order (circumscribed by ‘holiness’) in the community, though Paul himself could relativise the ideal (13:1) if some members of the community were placing it in service of a spirituality that overlooked the dignity and place of others in the community. While the import of angels for the community could be explicitly articulated within the framework of 1 Corinthians, it is unlikely that the mention of angels in 11:10 can be fully explained on this account. Any act of communication—and surely that of Paul is no exception—represents a blend of ideas being consciously articulated and perhaps even unexamined assumptions that underpin these ideas; what is deliberately written and what is left unsaid may correspond to one another or, at times, may conflict. I have presented matters in such a way that, in the case of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul’s statements (for instance, those in 11:8-9 and 11-12, respectively) should not be harmonized too quickly, as the apostle fell heir to a worldview in which veiling could not be dissociated from sexual connotations widespread in antiquity. The mention of “angels,” therefore, is a reflex of such connotations: whatever ideologies of worship may be coordinated with the exemplary worship of angels, the potential remains that these angels are sexually vulnerable as well.

In any case, we should recognise that almost since the beginning 1 Cor 11:2-16 has exercised an enormous influence on behaviour within churches. As Christian churches almost unanimously agree that Paul’s letters belong to a canon of authoritative writings, it is not improper from within the Christian tradition to ask in what way the results of our considerations might be construed as meaningful. The answer, I think lies in the nature of what Paul is doing: here we find him negotiating between a principle of “neither male nor female,” which for him counts as ultimate, eschatological reality “in the Lord” (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11-12), and socially-conditioned views and assumptions which have mitigated his vision of what such a principle of equality may imply for social relationships between women, men, and even angels. It is hard to escape

the notion that Paul's instruction in 1 Cor 11:2-16 implies that a woman, even when she prays or prophesies, is the social inferior of the man. We are thus left with an irresolvable tension in Paul. Of theological interest is, therefore, less *what* he concludes on the matter, but *that* he was struggling at all to come to terms with Christian identity within a complex matrix of sexually-conditioned mores and social practices of the Mediterranean world.⁵⁰



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