

κεφαλή AND ITS MULTIPLE MEANINGS

1. Authority, Supremacy, Leadership

This is the traditional rendering from the medieval period onward. Robertson and Plummer write, “By κεφαλή is meant supremacy.... Christ is the head of man; man is the head of woman ... [3:23](#); [Eph 1:22](#); [4:15](#); [5:23](#).... God is supreme.... This was a favorite Arian text; it is in harmony with [15:24–28](#).”⁴⁵ J. A. Fitzmyer has strongly contended that this view should be reinstated in contrast to the attempts of S. Bedale (1954), Robin Scroggs (1972), and J. Murphy-O’Connor (1980, 1988) to argue for the meaning *source* (see below).⁴⁶ Fitzmyer notes that in the LXX κεφαλή translates Heb. **רֹאשׁ** (*ro’sh*) *head*, some 281 times, of which the subcategory meaning *leader* occurs in at least 3 places in Exodus and at least 11 times in Judges (e.g., [Judg 10:18](#); [11:8](#), [9](#), [11](#)). [2 Sam 22:44](#) is a key text for this meaning, as Murphy-O’Connor concedes.⁴⁷ However, if we understand κεφαλή—**רֹאשׁ** to include *head* in the sense of English *top*, the numerical ratio is increased.⁴⁸ Fitzmyer shows that a wider range of passages than those cited by Murphy-O’Connor bear the meaning *chief, leader, leadership* especially in conjunction with the sense of *preeminent* or *top*. We shall explore these further in the light of the data from Brown-Driver-Briggs (1980 ed.) when we return to our own translation. Fitzmyer concludes: “The upshot ... is that a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that κεφαλή in [1 Cor 11:3](#) be understood as ‘head’ in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else.”⁴⁹

Fitzmyer’s work largely vindicates the “traditional” interpretation of Weiss, Robertson and Plummer, Wendland, Allo, Lietzmann and Kümmel, Grosheide, and Héring, whose arguments Murphy-O’Connor and Fee tend to underrate. Héring argues that even in the case of Christ “the term clearly indicates the Son’s subordination to the Father.”⁵⁰ Conzelmann also notes the role of “subordination” but only (rightly) within a broader and more complex frame: “ ‘Head’ does not [in the OT] denote the sovereignty of one person over another but over a community.... Subordination [in Christology] is also expressed in

⁴⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle*, [229](#).

⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, “Another Look at κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11:3,” 503–11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 506; Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2–16,” 492; cf. 482–500.

⁴⁸ Fitzmyer, “Another Look at κεφαλή,” 506–9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 510; cf. BDB (1980 ed.), [910–11](#). Fitzmyer cites passages from Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Judges, 2 Samuel, and elsewhere, which BDB also support.

⁵⁰ Héring, *First Epistle*, 103.

terms of a totally different complex of ideas.”⁵¹ Wolff, however, underlines the Pauline emphasis on the creation “order” as against Corinthian cries for “freedom.”⁵²

Wayne Grudem provides a survey of 2,336 instances of κεφαλή in the writings of thirty-six Greek authors (based on *Thesaurae Linguae Graecae* from the eighth century BC to the fourth century AD).⁵³ Of these, over 2,000 denote the “actual physical head of a man or animal,” while of the remaining 302 metaphorical uses, 49 apply to a “person of superior authority or rank, or ‘ruler’, ‘ruling part.’” No instances were discovered in which κεφαλή had the meaning ‘source’, ‘origin.’”⁵⁴ R. S. Cervin offered different conclusions, and hence in 1990 Grudem produced “a Response” to Cervin and to other recent studies which attempt to reinstate “source” or the meaning of “preeminent” or “foremost” without the explicit entailment of “authority over.”⁵⁵ Here he repeats his conclusions of 1985 and subjects Cervin’s methods and conclusions to criticism. Grudem’s critique of the proposals about “source” seems convincing, but his attempt to insist that the sense of “head” used by Paul necessarily carries with it notions of authority rather than prominence, eminence, representation, or preeminence is less conclusive, especially when he concedes that some 2,000 of 2,336 occurrences presuppose the semantic contrast between physical head and physical body.

2. Source, Origin, Temporal Priority

As early as 1954, S. Bedale proposed that κεφαλή could mean *source*.⁵⁶ However, he does not deny, as Murphy-O’Connor was to do, that the Greek word “carries with it the sense of ‘authority,’” including its use in [1 Cor 11:3](#).⁵⁷ By contrast, Murphy-O’Connor in 1989 argued that the word “never denotes authority or superiority,” while by 1997 he had softened this to “the instances where ‘head’ implies superiority are very rare.”⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce holds a position between Bedale and Murphy-O’Connor on the same spectrum: “we are probably to understand not ... ‘chief’ or ‘ruler’ but rather ‘source’ or ‘origin’—a

⁵¹ Conzelmann, *1 Cor*, [183](#), n. 21 and n. 26.

⁵² Wolff, *Der erste Brief*, 248–49.

⁵³ Grudem, “Does κεφαλή (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” [38–59](#).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49 and 52.

⁵⁵ Grudem, “[The Meaning of κεφαλή \(‘Head’\): A Response to Recent Studies](#),” *TrinJ* 11 (1990): 3–72.

⁵⁶ S. Bedale, “[The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles](#),” *JTS* n.s. 5 (1954): 211–15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁸ Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Cor*, 121; cf. his comment ad loc. in R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy (eds.), [New Jerome Biblical Commentary](#) (London: Chapman 1989), sects. 49, 53.

sense well attested for Gk. *kephalē*.”⁵⁹ Bruce bases his argument largely on the assumption that “source” fits the logic of later verses in this passage, and the role of Christ as “source” of human existence. Christ “derives his eternal being” from God ([3:23](#); [8:6](#)).⁶⁰ Barrett is perhaps on firmer ground when he argues that since κεφαλή can denote the part standing for the whole (e.g., head of cattle, see below), this may extend as a metaphor for the source or origin of the person or object in question. Barrett then expresses the view which he shares with Bruce, that this sense “is strongly suggested by verses [8f](#). Paul does not say that man is the lord (κύριος) of the woman; he says he is the origin of her being.”⁶¹ He argues further, with Bruce, that the relation between Christ and God “can be understood in a similar way. The Father is *fons divinitatis*; the Son is what he is in relation to the Father.”⁶² R. Scroggs (1972 and 1974) presses the case further. [Gal 3:27–28](#) had already established “the societal levelling quality of baptism,” and the use of κεφαλή in [1 Cor 11:3](#) carries no hint of female subordination. Everything hinges on mutual dependence throughout the passage.⁶³ “In normal Greek κεφαλή does not mean lordship.”⁶⁴

John P. Meier also argues that “we have here a later Hellenistic use of *kephalē* with metaphysical overtones. The idea is ‘source’ or ‘origin,’ especially the origin of something’s existence. A chain of sources or emanations is being set up. God is the source of the Messiah ... the Son is God’s instrument in creation ... ([1 Cor 8:6](#)). Christ is the source and perhaps also the Platonic archetype of the male... [Genesis 2](#) states that woman was made from the rib of man. The chain of being, the order of creation, necessarily involves subordination, with set places and roles.”⁶⁵ Fee also argues for “source,” but is closer to Scroggs and Murphy-O’Connor in rejecting the subordinationist aspect. Fee writes: “Paul’s understanding of the metaphor, therefore, and almost certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped is ‘head’ as ‘source,’ especially ‘source of life.’ This seems corroborated by vv. [8–9](#).”⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Bruce, *1 and 2 Cor*, 103.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Barrett, *First Epistle*, [248](#).

⁶² Ibid., [249](#).

⁶³ R. Scroggs, “[Paul and the Eschatological Woman](#),” *JAAR* 40 (1972): 283–303, and “Paul and the Eschatological Woman Revisited,” *JAAR* 42 (1974): 532–37.

⁶⁴ Scroggs, “Paul” (1972): 298.

⁶⁵ Meier, “On the Veiling of Hermeneutics (1 Cor 11:2–16),” 217–18; cf. 212–26.

⁶⁶ Fee, *First Epistle*, [503](#). Fee also appeals to P. B. Payne, “[Response](#),” in A. Mickelsen (ed.), *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 113–32; and Kroeger, “The Classical Concept of ‘Head’ as ‘Source,’ ” in Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve* (American title *Serving Together* [New York, 1987]).

Witherington (1988), Radcliffe (1990), and with more caution Schrage (1995) favor “source.”⁶⁷ Schrage follows Schlier and Conzelmann in rejecting the notion that κεφαλή can normally denote authority over an individual (although he readily concedes that Heb. רֹשׁ (ro’sh) can denote leadership over a group), and rightly insists that the preponderance of uses in this passage denote the physiological head in contrast to body (cf. vv. [4a](#), [5a](#), [7](#), [10](#)). He also points out, with J. D. G. Dunn, that since in [11:10](#) the woman who uses prophetic speech is said to have “authority” (ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ...) it is unlikely that the opening propositions serve to establish man’s authority over woman.⁶⁸ Finally, Horsley (1998) advocates source on the basis of Philo’s use of κεφαλή as progenitor for Abraham (Philo, [De Congressu Quaerendae 61](#)).⁶⁹

This argument comes up against three problems among others. (a) Is it convincing to ignore the weight of evidence adduced by Fitzmyer about the Hebrew and LXX and by Grudem about uses of κεφαλή in Greek literature? At times the debate degenerates into a confrontation over which meaning is allegedly “rare.”⁷⁰ Certainly the LXX usage cannot be ignored. Scroggs presents a one-sided and incautious view, while arguably even the ever judicious Murphy-O’Connor may perhaps tend to overstate his case. (b) Granted that (as cannot be denied) the physiological use of κεφαλή hugely preponderates, can a metaphorical extension of the physical head readily mean source? We have to envisage a two-stage process in which a direct or level-one metaphor (**preeminence**, *foremost*, *top*) becomes a second-level metaphor for that preeminence from which other existence flows. However, this does not entail the total eclipse of the **preeminence**, *top-stone* dimension. (c) Much depends on drawing inferences about the christological relation to God in other Pauline passages. Here, although it is true that God is regarded as source (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) in contrast to mediate ground of existence (δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ, [8:6](#)), it remains the case for Paul that Christ’s work is “for” God as preeminent ([3:23](#); [15:24–28](#)). The *valid* point in all of the arguments for “source” is not that κεφαλή necessarily means source but that (*pace* Grudem) it does *not* seem to denote a relation of “subordination” or “authority over.”

⁶⁷ Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 2:501–4; Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 84–85; and Radcliffe, “Paul and Sexual Identity: 1 Cor 11:2–16,” in Soskice (ed.), *After Eve*, 66.

⁶⁸ Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 2:504; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 589–90; on [11:10](#) see below; also Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation,” 159–60.

⁶⁹ Horsley, *1 Cor*, 153.

⁷⁰ Puzzlingly, Witherington, e.g., cites H. Schlier, [TDNT, 3:674–76](#), to support source as “well known in the extrabiblical literature” (*Women in the Earliest Churches*, 84 and 255, n. 37). But when we consult Schlier directly, this is hardly confirmed. Schlier identifies: (1) “first, supreme ‘top’ or [last in the list and only instantiated two or three times] also ‘point’, ‘point of departure’ ... ‘the mouth of a river ... or also its source’ ” ([Herodotus 4.91](#)), also perhaps in Philo; (2) “ ‘prominent’, ‘outstanding’, ‘determinative’ ”; (3) synecdoche for “the whole man.” The Herodotus reference is clear but dates from the fifth century BC; the allusion in Philo is more ambivalent.

3. Synecdoche and Preeminence, Foremost, Topmost Serving Interactively as a Metaphor Drawn from the Physiological Head

Whether we scrutinize the use of κεφαλή in Greek literature (including the LXX and Jewish texts) or the Heb ראש (*ro'sh*), we find (a) the overwhelming majority of references to physiological head in contrast to body; and (b) a substantial number of occurrences of synecdoche, where *heads* denotes persons or animals (for which the part denotes the whole, as in “head of cattle,” or “counting heads”). In theological terms this hints at a representative use: Christ stands for man or humankind in the new order, just as Adam is “head” of the race without the gospel ([1 Cor 15:21–24](#); cf. [Rom 5:12–21](#)). This is further corroborated by the language about shame, image, and glory common to [11:4–6](#) and esp. [11:7](#) (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα) and [15:49](#) (τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου). This suggests only one nuance of the word, however.

Gregory Dawes devotes eighty pages of his study of this subject to theories of metaphor, including those of M. Beardsley, D. Davidson, Max Black, Janet Martin Soskice, and Paul Ricoeur. He concludes: “If this word is a living metaphor, it can (and should) be translated as ‘head.’ ... To *translate* the word as ‘source’ is to pre-judge an important issue: it is to imply that in this context the word is functioning as a dead metaphor” (his italics).⁷¹ Dawes himself argues that it is a living metaphor that carries neither the sense of “overload” (i.e., the approach under [i] is not fully satisfactory), “nor does it mean ‘source’ [view (ii)].”⁷² He cannot accept Grudem’s conclusions on the ground that a word count overlooks the issues concerning metaphorical extension which lie at the heart of Dawes’s argument.⁷³ Rightly, in my view, he asks the question over which I have agonized: in what sense would Paul and his readers use and understand this metaphor which not only elsewhere but specifically in [1 Cor 11:2–16](#) and in [Eph 5:21–33](#) rests upon the head-body distinction of physiology?

From the side of the hellenistic linguistic background, it is possible to reconstruct a broad medical understanding of κεφαλή in the period from Hippocrates (460–380 BC) to Galen (AD 130–200). Contrary to what is often implied in older modern biblical studies, the ancient world was aware that the brain (ὁ ἐγκέφαλος) constituted a “source.” “From the brain and from the brain only arise our pleasures, joys, laughter and jests, as well as our sorrows, pains, griefs ...,” but the brain also served as a “control”: “It makes us mad or delirious, inspires us with dread ... brings sleeplessness ... and acts that are contrary to habit.... All come from the brain” (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου).⁷⁴ Dawes cites sources in Pythagorean philosophy which apparently ascribed a “ruling” function to the brain.

⁷¹ Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 126.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 128–33.

⁷⁴ Hippocrates, [De morbo sacro in Hippocrates](#), LCL (London: Heinemann, 1952), 2:174 and 175.

Galen opposed the widespread claim that the heart is the source of nervous experience: “the source of all the nerves (τῶν νεύρων) is the brain (ὑπάρχειν τὸν ἐγκέφαλον).”⁷⁵ Galen perceives that motion and sensation owe their function to the brain: the themes of “source” and of “controlling function” both play a part in medical vocabulary and thought.⁷⁶ Within two or three years of the date of our epistle, Seneca writes to Nero that the head is a source of health or well-being: *a capite bona valetudo*.⁷⁷ However, Sevenster emphasizes the metaphor of headship and control in these passages, where Dawes focuses more closely on source. As Sevenster notes, the issue in *de clementia* is to plead that as Emperor Nero will, like the head of a body, radiate kindness which will permeate the empire to bring it health, the people will do the same; Dawes cites the parallel in the *Moral Epistles* of Nero as a source of well-being to the “body” of the empire.⁷⁸

From the side of the LXX and Hebrew background, W. J. Martin very well maps a wide semantic field within which *topmost*, synecdoche for *totality*, responsible *eminence*, and *cornerstone* play major roles.⁷⁹ Similarly, Dawes concludes that the precise force of the metaphor must be contextually determined: in [Eph 5:22–24](#) it can have no other meaning than “authority over,” but this depends on context rather than on lexicography. The problem about translating κεφαλή as *head* in [1 Cor 11:3](#) remains that, as R. Cervin notes, in English-speaking contexts “the head” almost always implies leadership and authority, as in headmaster, Head of School, Head of Department, head steward.⁸⁰ As we noted earlier, Perriman convincingly urges that the equivalent assumption in first-century hellenistic contexts would be to construe the metaphorical force of *head* not as authoritative leader in charge, but as one who is “**prominent, foremost, uppermost, preeminent.**”⁸¹ Senft, Horrell, and in effect Hasler share this view, although Hasler argues that in the context of Paul’s deliberative rhetoric a dialectic embraces both the arrangement or “placing” of creation and the new liturgical dignity and equality of the woman who uses prophetic speech within the frame of “glory” received from God.⁸² BDB (for Heb.), LSJ (classical Gk.), BAGD, Grimm-Thayer, MM, and Louw-Nida point in this direction (see below).

⁷⁵ Galen, [On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato](#), in *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum V:4:1, 2* (Berlin: Berlin Academy, 1981), 1.7.55.

⁷⁶ Galen, *De Usu Partium* 12.4.

⁷⁷ Seneca, *De Clementia* 2.2.1; cf. *Epistles* 95.52; and *De Ira* 2.31.7.

⁷⁸ Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, 171–72; Dawes, *The Body in Question*, 132–33.

⁷⁹ Martin, “1 Cor 11:2–16: An Interpretation,” in W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, 232–33; cf. 231–41.

⁸⁰ Cervin, “Does κεφαλή Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’?” [87](#).

⁸¹ Perriman, “The Head of a Woman,” cf. 602–22.

⁸² Horrell, *Social Ethos*, [171–72](#) (cf. [168–76](#)); Senft, *La première Épitre*, 141, “le sommet”; Hasler, “Die Gleichstellung der Gattin. Situationskritische Reflexionen zu 1 Kor 11:2–16,” 189–200.

The multivalency of the term ראש (*ro'sh*) for Jewish converts who know the LXX translations should not be forgotten, as Fitzmyer rightly insists (against Scroggs). Of five Hebrew words which κεφαλή translates this is by far the most common.⁸³ Brown-Driver-Briggs (1980) divide uses into eight categories with subdivisions as follows: (1) *head*, (a) of humans; (b) of animals; (2) *top* (e.g., of rocks, towers, pillars, ladders); (3) *chief*, (a) chief man (see Fitzmyer, above); (b) chief city; (c) chief nation; (d) chief priest; (e) head of family; (4) *front place*, e.g., taken by the leader but *also* used of priority *in time*; (5) *best*; (6) of an *army* company; (7) *sum* or total; (8) residual nuances.⁸⁴ Liddell-Scott-Jones offer a survey of classical Greek uses which is remarkably similar, beginning with (1) *head* of man or beast; (2) *synecdoche* for the whole person; (3) *head* of a vegetable; (4) the *capital* or chief place; (5) the *crown* or completion of something; (6) *chief* (and the idiom κατὰ κεφαλῆς, over the head, e.g., from [Homer, Iliad 18.24](#), onward; cf. [11:4](#)).⁸⁵

For the period of NT Greek, BAGD does not differ significantly. The most frequent and prominent, once again, are (1) heads of persons or animals in the physiological sense, e.g., the hairs of the head ([Matt 10:30](#); [Luke 7:38](#); Philo, [De Legatione ad Gaium 223](#)); and after this (2) synecdoche (e.g., [Rom 12:20](#), “coals of fire on his head,” perhaps from a curse formula); (3) head “metaphorically” in contrast to the church as body ([Col 1:18](#); cf. [2:19](#)); (4) “figuratively” to denote superior rank; (5) also to denote uppermost part, end, point, keystone ([Acts 4:12](#); [1 Pet 2:7](#)) and either capital or frontier city ([Acts 16:12](#)). With Grudem, neither BAGD nor Lattke in *EDNT* nor Grimm-Thayer appear to propose *source*,

BDB Brown, Driver, and Briggs, [Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament](#)

LSJ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, [A Greek-English Lexicon](#)

BAGD Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#)

Grimm-Thayer Grimm and Thayer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament](#)

MM Moulton and Milligan, [The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from Papyri and Other Nonliterary Sources](#)

Louw-Nida Louw and Nida, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains](#)

⁸³ Hatch-Redpath, *Concordance to the Septuagint*, 2:760–62.

⁸⁴ BDB (1980 ed.), [910–11](#).

⁸⁵ LSJ, [801](#) (with minor changes to numbering).

BAGD Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#)

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even under either “metaphor” (BAGD, 16) or “figurative” use (BAGD’s 2a, b).⁸⁶ It appears that Louw and Nida also focus on *physiological head, superior, or cornerstone*, but not *source*.⁸⁷ Moulton-Milligan stress the occurrence of (1) physiological head; (2) synecdoche, and (3) extremity or topmost in the papyri, also without apparent mention of *source*.⁸⁸ H. Schlier, as we earlier noted, identifies “first,” “prominent,” and synecdoche, with only a couple of isolated instances in Herodotus (484–425 BC!). And perhaps in Philo.⁸⁹ He does not appear to propose this meaning for [1 Cor 11:3](#).

It is significant that in Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon* virtually the only occasion on which the meaning of κεφαλή is compared with ἀρχή as “equivalent” is with reference to [1 Cor 11:3](#), on the basis of the application of ἀρχή to God in relation to Christ, and Christ in relation to the world (but with the important proviso that ἀρχή is also multivalent as beginning or source, or as first principle, or as ruler, authority).⁹⁰ In the patristic era the emphasis begins to shift from physiological head to the metaphorical use in the ecclesial order as religious superior or bishop (e.g., Athanasius, *Apology* 89), head of the house, or to Christ as head of creation, or as head of the church (Origen, [John 1:13](#)). Nevertheless, whether we consult the standard lexicons or the *TLG* (with Grudem), this kind of data is insufficiently nuanced contextually to give us a complete picture.

Here it becomes significant to return to Chrysostom, whom we had in mind when we initially queried Fee’s generalization about eras of study and their related conclusion. Chrysostom is highly sensitive to the multivalency of κεφαλή in [1 Cor 11:3](#). Chrysostom is aware that a parallel between

EDNT Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament

Grimm-Thayer Grimm and Thayer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament](#)

BAGD Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#)

BAGD’s Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#)

⁸⁶ BAGD, [430](#). Cf. further Grimm-Thayer, [345](#). M. Lattke, *EDNT*, [2:284–86](#), goes further: he excludes the proposal about *emanation* on the ground of the NT and biblical theme of *creatio ex nihilo* ([285](#)).

⁸⁷ Louw-Nida, 1:[95–96](#), [739](#); and 2:[141](#).

⁸⁸ MM, [342](#). ἀνεγκέφαλος is used metaphorically to mean “brainless.”

⁸⁹ Schlier, [TDNT](#), [3:674](#); cf. [673–82](#) (in spite of Witherington’s appeal noted above).

Lampe’s Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*

⁹⁰ Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 749; on ἀρχή see BAGD, [111–12](#).

TLG Thesaurus Linguae Graecae

men/women and God/Christ should not give “the heretics” grounds for a subordinationist Christology. In certain respects *head* denotes a kind of primacy, but both God and Christ on one side and men and women on the other are of the same mode of being. “For had Paul meant to speak of rule and subjection ... he would not have brought forward the instance of a woman (or wife), but rather of a slave and a master.... It is a wife (or woman) as free, as equal in honour; and the Son also, though He did become obedient to the Father, it was as the Son of God; it was as God.”⁹¹ While we must avoid reading back patristic doctrines of the Trinity into Pauline texts, Chrysostom (a) reflects Paul’s notion that in the context of love between God and Christ, or between man and woman, obedience or response is *chosen, not imposed*; and (b) reflects the endeavor to do justice to *the duality or wholeness* of difference and “order” on one side and reciprocity and mutual dignity and respect on the other.

Chrysostom’s one major deviation from Paul’s explicit argument in this chapter arises when he distinguishes between woman in creation and woman after the fall. Initially, he comments, woman is “bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh” ([Gen 2:23](#)). In creation, he argues, “there is no subjection,” but when freedom was misused this status was revised ([Gen 3:16](#)). Chrysostom is influenced, it seems, by [1 Tim 2:14](#) at this point. On the other hand, this observation may be deemed a digression from his main point: “Even to the simple *the difference* is evident” between applications of the word *head* to Christ, to man, and to God (my italics). In the case of the man-woman relationship the physiological head shares “like passions with the body,” just as God and Christ share the same nature and being. By contrast the first proportion entails a sharper difference: Christ as *head* of man does share man’s order of being.⁹² Chrysostom appreciates the sensitivity of the various nuances that may be conveyed.

Tertullian similarly recognizes the interactive force of the metaphor of *head*: “This, to be sure, is an astonishing thing, that the Father can be taken to be the face of the Son ([2 Cor 4:6](#)) when he is his head; for ‘the head of Christ is God’ ” ([1 Cor 11:3](#)).⁹³ In effect he anticipates Ian Ramsey’s principle that where models conflict or complement each other, unwanted meanings fall away, and the models are thereby qualified.⁹⁴ On the other hand, Tertullian goes further. In his specific discussion of the meaning of veils upon the head, he argues that here *head* is used as a synecdoche for the woman herself: “the whole head constitutes the woman.”⁹⁵ Clearly Augustine is wary of conceiving of *caput* either as head in an authoritarian sense or still more any notion of “source,” since he cites [11:3](#) in his treatise on the Trinity precisely to underline the eternal sonship of Christ and the aseity, equality, and “immortality” of the Trinity: “some things were made by the Father, and some by the Son.... The Son is equal with the Father,

⁹¹ Chrysostom, [1 Cor. Hom., 26:2](#).

⁹² *Ibid.*, [26:3](#).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, [26:3](#).

⁹⁴ Tertullian, [Against Praxeas, 14](#).

⁹⁵ I. Ramsey, [Religious Language](#) (London: SCM, 1957).

and the working of the Father and the Son is indivisible.... 'Being in the form of God ...' [[Phil 2:6](#)] ... 'the head of Christ is God' [[1 Cor 11:3](#)]."⁹⁶

Fee's general statement may perhaps more readily apply to such patristic writers as Origen and Jerome. Origen is more at ease with a quasi-subordinationist Christology, qualifying [Col 1:16](#), [17](#), with reference to [1 Cor 11:3](#), "alone having as head God the Father, for it is written 'The head of Christ is God' " ([1 Cor 11:3](#)).⁹⁷ Jerome comments on [11:3](#): "*Vir nulli subjectus est nisi Christo, ... Mulier vero et Christo et viro debet esse subjecta.*"⁹⁸ However, this misses the subtlety of Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, and several other patristic writers. Patristic writers, as well as modern lexicographical research, encourage the conclusion of Collins: "Paul's rhetorical argument is constructed on the basis of a pun. He plays on the multiple meanings of 'head'."⁹⁹

4. Summary and Conclusions

(a) Head

The value of this translation and interpretation is that it addresses the issues raised by Fitzmyer and the lexicographical survey of *TLG* undertaken by Grudem. If our network of reader expectations in the modern West matched those of first-century Corinth and hellenistic Judaism, this would offer the most open-ended translation to carry the several nuances associated with the metaphorical extension and application of the term, and especially a wordplay with subsequent uses of the physiological head seems to be entailed in the following verses. Nevertheless, today's chain of literal and metaphorical associations is so exclusively bound up with institutional authority (witness the use of the term "headship" in late twentieth-century debates) that this translation and interpretation suggest a narrower focus than Paul probably has in mind. It is possible that it is drawn from its use in Corinthian discussion, but we cannot be sufficiently certain to place part of the verse in quotation marks (see below on Schrage's critique of Padgett). If we use the term "head," its multiple meanings from context to context as serving a polymorphous concept must always be kept in view.

(b) Source

This has eminent advocates, including three leading commentators, namely, Barrett, Fee, and Schrage. Yet in spite of claims to the contrary, the paucity of lexicographical evidence remains a major obstacle to

⁹⁶ Tertullian, [On the Veiling of Women, 17:2](#) (on [1 Cor 11:6](#)).

⁹⁷ Augustine, [On the Trinity, 1:6:12](#). Elsewhere Augustine concedes that [11:3](#) combines the notions of mediator with Christ's being "of the very being of God" ([On the Trinity, 6:10](#)).

⁹⁸ Origen, [De Principiis, 2:6:1](#).

⁹⁹ Jerome, *Comm. in Ep. 1 ad Cor.*, in Migne, *PL*, 30:749.

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this translation. Such contexts of head of the river are so self-evident as a transferred metaphor that they should be held aside from those contexts where no such clear signal is generated by the immediate context. Arguments from the relation between Christ and God as a parallel “control” in actuality would support all three (or four) translations or interpretations. Oddly, although we ourselves are hesitant to adopt source, advocates of this view might have strengthened their case by pointing out more strongly that ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός (of source) and διὰ τῆς γυναικός (of “mediate” creation) in [11:12](#) offers precisely the terminology of [8:6](#) about God and Christ. This weighs more seriously than broader discussions, and we have to judge whether it is sufficient to make it plausible that Paul expected this meaning to be understood by his readers in v. [3](#), ahead of his argument in v. [12](#).

(c) Preeminent, Foremost, and Synecdoche for a Representative Role

This proposal has the merit of most clearly drawing interactively on the metaphorical conjunction between physiological head (which is far and away the most frequent, “normal” meaning) and the notion of prominence, i.e., the most conspicuous or topmost manifestation of that for which the term also functions as synecdoche for the whole. The public face is linked with responsibility and representation in the public domain, since head is both the part of a person which is most conspicuous and that by which they are most readily distinguished or recognized. These aspects feature more frequently and prominently in first-century Greek texts than either the notions of ruler or source, although we agree with Fitzmyer and Grudem that a survey of Hatch-Redpath does not corroborate claims that when רֹאשׁ (ro’sh) means rule, LXX almost always uses a different Greek word.

More striking than links between *source* and the use of [Genesis 2](#) in the immediate context is the total perspective of [1 Cor 8:1–14:40](#) that Paul corroborates the *theoretical right of the “strong” or “prominent” to exercise their “knowledge” and “freedom,”* but dramatically places *boundaries and qualifications around freedom and knowledge by insisting on the priority of love (as in [13:1–13](#)), most especially love which will respect the self-awareness (conscience??) and self-esteem of the “weak,”* who must not be permitted to stumble. If Paul asserts a theoretical hierarchy, which does indeed correspond with “knowledge” of the creation order, the *foremost* within this order must protect the status and self-respect of “the weak” *for whom they must take responsibility (synecdoche).* The more anyone stresses “prominence,” the more that person must ensure that “the other” does *not* experience the self-humiliation expressed in [12:15](#). “If the *foot* (*sic, πούς*), should say, ‘because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ just because of this does it not belong to the body?” Hence women use prophetic speech alongside men. However, at Corinth women as well as men tended to place “knowledge” and “freedom” before love in the Christian sense. Paul does not permit their “freedom” as part of the gospel new creation to destroy their proper self-respect and respect in the eyes of others by taking part in worship dressed like an “available” woman. That is not love, for it brings “shame” on themselves, their menfolk, and on God.

One writer goes a considerable part of the way toward making this point, but exempts gender for the wrong reason. Dale Martin rightly agrees that the appropriate head covering provides a sign of “nonavailability” for respectable women who appear in public, most especially when thoughts are to be

focused on God in corporate worship. This “was understood in ancient culture to protect vulnerable women from the penetrating gaze and from dangerous invasion.”¹⁰⁰ Throughout this epistle, Martin rightly urges, there is a sense in which Paul “attempts to make the weak strong and the strong weak.”¹⁰¹ Although Martin does not invoke the principle here, this is part of the “reversal” which stems from the role of the cross as “ground and criterion” (Schrage) of Christian life and thought. However, Martin argues that “when it comes to the male-female hierarchy, Paul abruptly renounces any status-questioning stance.... This ... has to do with physiology. The ‘stuff’ of female nature is differently constituted from that of male nature.”¹⁰²

This is less than convincing, however, in the light of J. Gundry-Volf’s more careful arguments about the dialectic between creation, culture, or society and eschatology. *Paul insists on gender distinctiveness*. That goes for the *men* (vv. [4](#), [7](#) with Murphy-O’Connor) no less than for the *women* (vv. [5](#), [6](#), [7b](#)). However, if love takes priority over freedom, any competitiveness about “authority” becomes obsolete in the new order, even if a reciprocity of relationship allows different inputs to the relation of mutuality; rather, the entailments of protection of, and respect for, “the other” hold greater prominence than issues of “authority” within the wholeness of Paul’s dialectic. Here *lexicography, theories of metaphor, exegesis, and the continuity of [8:1–14:14](#) cohere well together*. Neither “headship,” nor “order,” nor “equality” alone conveys the complexity and wholeness of Paul’s theology. Again, *multiple meaning holds the key*.

Some residual issues in v. [3](#) deserve brief attention. NRSV translates ὁ ἀνὴρ in the middle clause as *husband* (against **man** in REB, NIV, NJB), although it has **man** in the first and third propositions. A few commentators defend *husband*, but the overwhelming majority of writers convincingly argue that the issue concerns gender relations as a whole, not simply those within the more restricted family circle.¹⁰³ θέλω δέ should be rendered as an adversative (with NRSV, NJB, REB, Fee, and others; as against NIV, *now ...*). This also renders still more problematic A. Padgett’s argument that the θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι wording suggests that Paul is introducing a Corinthian formula in v. [3](#), a thesis which Fee and Schrage both reject.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, as Murphy-O’Connor argues, Paul commends the readers for maintaining the tradition that women can be active in prophetic speech, but (δέ) attacks men and women equally for

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *First Cor*, 396; cf. 405–6.

¹⁰¹ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 242; cf. 233–41.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 248–49.

¹⁰⁴ Orr and Walther, *1 Cor* [259](#), argue that *husband* is perhaps more likely; cf. also C. S. Keener, [Paul, Women, Wives](#) (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 32–36.

generating signals which blur gender distinctiveness in unacceptable ways by each appearing with inappropriate headgear.¹⁰⁵

4 The Greek phrase *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* is translated by **with his head covered** in NJB and NIV (also *who keeps his head covered*, REB; or *with something on his head*, NRSV; but NIV mg. note, or ... *with long hair ...*, signals a well-known difficulty). This is all the more important since, as Murphy-O'Connor insists, Paul's first warning against departure from church tradition concerns the clothing or head style of *men*, not women.¹⁰⁶ As we noted at the end of our introduction to [11:2–16](#), Richard Oster vehemently attacks the suggestions of Weiss, Bruce, and Fee (and Meyer and others could be added) that the notion of men wearing head coverings in the course of preparing or uttering prophetic speech is “hypothetical,” together with Fee's conclusion that reconstructions of the situation cannot be more than “speculative.”¹⁰⁷ Oster argues that Paul's concern that the church should not retreat into the defensive stance of a sectarian ghetto (cf. [1 Cor 5:10](#)) ensures that the perceptions of society in Roman Corinth mattered to him, and that the church itself would readily have carried with it many cultural norms from Roman society of the first century. Archaeological evidence from coins, statues, and architectural monuments provide an important source for seeking to understand what is at issue here.

¹⁰⁵ Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Cor 11:2–16,” 78–79; (cf. 69–86); criticized by Fee, *First Epistle*, [501](#), n. 37, and by Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 2:500, n. 63.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 483.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* (above).