

Rethinking the Veil: Another Approach to I Corinthians 11:2-16

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Every generation of Christians has its own opinion about what outward acts of piety define holiness—or at least what outward acts violate that generation's perceived definition of holiness. Perhaps nowhere have the unfortunate consequences of this problem been more forcefully illustrated than has been the case with the problem of the veiling of women in church. The Apostle Paul addresses the problem of abuse of Christian freedoms in a remarkable section of *I Corinthians 11:2-16*. Let's study the topic together...

The question of veiling as discussed by Paul in I Corinthians 11:2-16 remains one of the most perplexing discussions in the New Testament, despite the more than nineteen hundred years of church history which have come and gone since the inspired apostle penned this enigmatic passage. This special communication presents a proposed solution that calls for a retranslation of the passage in question to reflect a revised understanding of the author's intention with respect to an application of the Gospel to Corinthian society.

THE PROBLEM PASSAGE: I CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for carefully following the traditions, just as I passed them on to you.

³Now I want you to realize that Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of

Christ. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head, ⁵and every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, which is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶So if a woman does not cover her head, she should cut off her hair. If it is a disgrace for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her own head.

⁷A man should not cover his own head, because he exists as God's image and glory. But the woman is man's glory. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹and man was not created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰This is why a woman should have authority over her own head: because of the angels.

¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man of woman. ¹²For as

woman came from man, so man comes through woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³Decide for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

¹⁴Nature itself teaches you neither that it is disgraceful for a man to have long hair ¹⁵nor that hair is a woman's glory, for hair is given as a substitute for coverings. ¹⁶But if anyone wants to argue about this, we do not have any custom like this, nor do any of God's churches.

There seems to be little consensus among scholars as to what Paul was attempting to communicate when he laid down the precepts which can be found in the paragraph in question. Few early church fathers commented rationally on the veiling of men and women, and the last twenty years have seen the range of conclusions reached by different treatments vary from one theological extreme to the other.

Part of the problem inherent within the veiling issue no doubt stems from the paucity of exegetical discussions on the subject. New Testament Abstracts lists only twelve English and six foreign language papers relating to veiling published since the late 1950's.

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That total comes from thousands of articles released by dozens of journals over a thirty year period. Journal articles^{2,3} yield a

² Some of the significant scholarly papers published in English since 1957 include: Madeleine Bloucher, "Some Unexplained Parallels to I Corinthians 11:11-12 and Galatians 3:28: The New Testament on the Role of Women," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (January, 1969) pp. 50-58; Henry Cadbury, "A Qumran Parallel to Paul," *Harvard Theological Review* 51 (January, 1958) pp. 1-2; L. Copy, "I Cor. 11:2-16: One Step Further," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978) pp. 435-36; J. A. Fitzmyer, "A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of I Corinthians XI.10," *New Testament Studies IV (1957-58)* pp. 48-58; J. Greig, "Women's Hats—I Corinthians 11:1-16," *Expository Times* 69 (May, 1958) pp. 156-57; M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor. XI.10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964) pp. 410-16; James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Cor. 11:2-15 and I Cor. 14:33b-36," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, pp. 190-220; Neil R. Lightfoot, "The Role of Women in Religious Services," *Restoration Quarterly* 19/3 (1976) pp. 129-36; Linda Leung, *Paul's View of a Woman's Place in the Church: A Study of I Corinthians 11:2-16* (Deerfield, Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1973) Unpublished Master's Thesis; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Non-Pauline Character of I Corinthians 11:2-16?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95/4 (1976) pp. 615-21; William O. Walker, "I Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) pp. 94-110; Bruce Waltke, "I Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (March, 1978) pp. 46-57; N. Weeks, "Of Silence and Head Coverings," *Western Theological Journal* 35 (January, 1972) pp. 21-27.

³ Some relevant English publications prior to 1957 include: Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* V (1954) pp. 211-15; Joseph Beet, "Because of the Angels: I Corinthians XI.10," *The Expositor, First Series*, XI (1880) pp. 20-33; Samuel Krauss, "The Jewish Rite of Covering the Head," *Hebrew Union College Annual XIX (1945-46)* pp. 121-68; Samuel Lowrie, "I Corinthians XI and the Ordination of Women as Ruling Elders," *Princeton Theological Review* XIX (1921) pp. 113-30;

legion of differing views. Cadbury and Fitzmyer see the passage as non-Pauline due to Essene influences from IQSaii,3-11 (*The Qumran Rule of the Congregation*) and from IQvii,4-6 (which deals with pre-requisites for service within Qumran religious assemblies and with requirements for attendant worshipers).^{4,5} Walker⁶ "solves" the philosophical problem of how an inspired and therefore inerrant apostle could have been held responsible for the difficult commands in the passage by declaring verses 2-16 to be redactions by three later interpolators.⁷ Hooker bluntly calls Paul's logical processes in the passage "non sequitur"⁸

The passage is difficult not only to interpret exegetically but also to apply practically. On the opposite extreme of the hermeneutical spectrum stands Waltke, who must be credited for recognizing the logical implications of what Paul seems to be saying. If, as nearly two thousand years of ecclesiastical tradition has asserted, Paul really does affirm the veiling of women in the local church assembly, then Waltke is correct that "it would be well for Christian women to wear head coverings at church meetings as a symbol of an abiding theological truth".⁹

Othoneil Motta, "The Question of Unveiled Women (I Corinthians 11:2-16)," *Expository Times* XLVI (1934-35) pp. 186-88; and A. Roberts, "Power on Her Head: I Corinthians 11:10," *The Expositor, Fourth Series*, X (1894) pp. 139-40.

⁴ Cadbury, p. 412.

⁵ Fitzmyer, p. 57.

⁶ Walker, pp. 94-110.

⁷ A position masterfully refuted by Murphy-O'Connor. See the 1976 JBL article. Of course, Walker's viewpoint leaves unanswered the question of how early church fathers ever could have approved such a redaction, since no Ante-nicene writer ever questioned Pauline autography of the disputed passage.

⁸ Hooker, p. 413.

⁹ Waltke, p. 57.

The traditional interpretation of I Corinthians 11:2-16 places Paul in a logical contradiction. We evangelicals cannot escape the dilemma imposed upon us by virtue of Pauline apostolic authority. We must avoid the academic Scylla of liberal scholarship which begs the question by "discovering" that Paul never wrote the problematic passage after all,¹⁰ but we must also avoid Waltke's eisegetical Charybdis which requires twentieth century cultural equivalents of veils for women.

The former course has obvious dangers, and the latter violates Paul's own regulation in verse sixteen that neither original apostolic decree nor subsequent ecclesiastical custom should ever require them.¹¹

We propose another solution to the problem. The solution we present is essentially a rethinking of the suggestions originally presented by Dr. Katherine Bushnell in her classic work, *God's Word to Women*.¹² Bushnell's thesis generally follows that proposed by John Lightfoot,¹³ and asserts that Paul wrote I Corinthians 11:2-16 not so much to decree veils for women but to forbid them for men. Historically problematic interpretations of verses 13-16 as being interrogatives in the Greek text have served to confuse

¹⁰ There is absolutely no manuscript evidence for such a supposition that the pericope in question was ever added to or deleted from any ancient MSS by any later redactor.

¹¹ Some scholars see the reference to the custom (Greek: *sunhqelian*) as referring to the issue of long hair on men and women. More on this later.

¹² Katherine C. Bushnell, *God's Word to Women: One Hundred Bible Studies*, Fourth Edition, (Oakland, CA: By the author, 1930). Despite a few areas of aberrant anthropology early in her work (such as a theory that Adam was androgynous in anatomy and nature), Bushnell's solution to the veiling question as presented in paragraphs 216-70 (Lessons 29-35) of her work has never been satisfactorily refuted from a Greek grammatical or exegetical standpoint.

¹³ As she contends. See paragraph 240.

the real issues for centuries. (In fact, the context of the passage may more logically call for the verses in question to be rendered as simple declaratives.) We propose that Paul—far from requiring head coverings¹⁴ for women—permitted Christian women to go about akatakaluptos¹⁵ within the immediate context of contemporary Corinthian culture. We suspect Paul's permissive stance took its origin from a psychological equation by Corinthian Jews of “unveiled” (i.e., akatakaluptos) women with an admission of adultery. Such an admission could well dishonor the husband of the wife who went about so akatakaluptos.

Our clue to understanding Paul's intention in I Corinthians 2:11-16 is found in verse thirteen. The interrogative sense of the question “Is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered?” should instead be rendered as the declarative “It is proper for a woman to pray to God with loosened hair.” An examination of five key exegetical areas will help to establish the reasoning behind such a rendering. These areas are:

- First, the logical fallacies inherent within the traditional hermeneutic which have Paul requiring head coverings for women;
- Second, the significance of veiling within the Corinthian context—namely, the real meaning of akatakaluptos

¹⁴ For so should the Greek word *kalumma* be translated, since the Jewish tallith is obviously being referred to in its application to Christian men in the Corinthian congregation. Our modern conception of a woman's head covering being similar to Muslim veils is anachronistic by more than seven centuries.

¹⁵ The Greek word *akatakaluptos* is commonly translated “unveiled”. We translate *akatakaluptos* with the rendering “with hair loosened” for reasons set forth below.

as “loosened hair” rather than as “with unveiled face” (verses 4-9);

- Third, the meaning of the phrase *exousia epi ths kefalhs* (“authority over her head”, verse 10a);
- Fourth, the implications of *diatous aggelous* (“because of the angels”, verse 10b); and,
- Fifth, Paul's intention in his reference to “long hair”¹⁶ in verses 14 and 15.

When seen in their proper light, clarifying these five problem areas should help us understand that the passage states almost exactly the opposite of what the traditional viewpoint has been.

We have very little information available to us about veiling customs in the early church.

We submit that, when read and understood in its proper context, I Corinthians 11:2-16 establishes the following objectives from the standpoint of the original author's intention:

First, Paul forbids use of a head covering in the worship service by men because the theological symbolism intended by wearing a head covering dishonors Christ.

Second, Paul advises Corinthian women not to allow themselves to be made subject to any heathen cultural expectations except when disobedience to those expectations might jeopardize Christian testimony or bring shame on her family honor. In such cases submission to cultural standards is permitted.

Third, the Apostle affirms that it is the woman alone—and no one else—who has authority to decide

¹⁶ The word “long” in these verses does not appear in the Greek. The implications of that omission bear heavily on application of the passage to 21st century congregations. More on this later.

whether she may or may not go about akatakaluptos.

Fourth, Paul states that God has given hair in general—both to men and to women—as a “substitute for” (Greek: *anti*) man-made coverings. Thus he establishes the irrelevance of continued discussion of the matter.

Fifth, Paul concludes the argument by noting that the entire area should be kept beyond the authority and jurisdiction of apostolic legislation or of ecclesiastical order in subsequent generations.

We reject Waltke's suggestion calling for female worshipers to wear head coverings of any kind as symbols of “an abiding theological truth”.

I. PROBLEMATIC AREAS WITHIN TRADITIONAL VIEWS

The traditional interpretation of I Corinthians 11:2-16 places Paul in a logical contradiction. This contradiction occurs relative to the application of verses 10-16 within the larger context of the theological principles found in verses 2-9. Hooker illustrates the problem smugly by reducing I Corinthians 11:3-16 to a logical syllogism:

Man is the glory of God:
Therefore his head must be bare.

Woman is the glory of Man:
Therefore her head must be covered.¹⁷

Hooker then questions the validity of his own logic by concluding that such a “non sequitur should at least cause us to question whether we have understood Paul correctly.”¹⁸ Waltke never satisfactorily answers the misgivings he raises about the traditional interpretation which has Paul requiring women to veil while forbidding them for men:

¹⁷ Hooker, p. 413

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

So then, if they [men and women] are equal both in the old and new creation, why maintain a hypocritical symbol that masks the theological reality [i.e., of sexual equality as seen for example, in Galatians 3:28]?¹⁹

Bushnell rather humorously points out the incongruity of the traditional interpretation of the veils and angels referred to in verse ten by picturing the events described in the passage in a non-Christian culture:

Imagine yourself in a far country, unacquainted with its religious customs. You go with your guide to a place of heathen worship, from which women are not (as is usual) excluded. You see the women all veiled, at least they draw their veils over the face and mumble behind them when they speak or pray. You ask, "Why do not these women lift their veils when speaking; then we could hear what they say?" Your guide replies, "Our great prophet says they must veil when praying or speaking in public." You ask, "But does he bid them veil at other times?" "No, only at worship, when if they will not veil, he orders them to be punished by having their heads shaved." "Why is this?" you ask, to receive the astonishing reply, "In some way, I cannot explain just how, they seem to tempt the good angels in heaven to fall into sin with them, and therefore must veil when in public worship,—some claim it is to show that women must not obey angels lest the angels command them to sin; others than angels must not see their faces lest they be seduced to sin." You take out your notebook, probably, and prepare the skeleton of a letter to your church paper at home: "These heathen...their inane and

insane jealousy of their wives "leading them to view good angels with suspicions of the basest sort...stupid superstition as to the sin of angels and the danger of it...unclean imaginations...strange to say they fear holy angels...more than demons or men," etc.²⁰

If competent Biblical scholars such as Hooker, Bushnell, and Walcke are forced to question traditional exegesis of the passage, it would surely seem an analysis of the problem is called for.

Most of our knowledge of ancient Greek veiling comes from only two sources.

As previously pointed out by Hooker,²¹ the logic of verses 3-4 should lead us to prohibit veiling for women. Notice the peculiar lack of the definite article in verse three:

...pantos andros h kefal h o cristos estin, ...of every man Christ is the head,

...kefal h de gunaikos o anhr, ...and of a woman the man is a head,...

Paul is establishing a principle of authority by means of the metaphor of headship. For the purposes of the example, Paul cites the following order of delegated authority in the relationships mentioned:

Christ is **the** head of a male. The man is **a** head (i.e., one of two or more heads) of a woman. The woman's other head is, of course, Christ. Logic should tell us that Paul is directing the Corinthians that veiling for women should follow the same prohibitions that it does for men.

II. THE HEAD COVERING AND ITS SYMBOLISM

Of crucial importance to understanding I Corinthians 11:2-16 is the issue of the head coverings. Unfortunately, there is less data to

work with here than many scholars suppose. Lightfoot comments:

We do not know the customs of the time and of the ancient world as well as we would like. On the matter of veils, for example, commentary after commentary asserts that, among the ancients, women wore veils in public. But there is a paucity of firm historical information on this point, particularly as it applies to various cultures and ages of the past.²²

Hurley bluntly confesses: "We have very little information available to us about veiling customs in the early church."²³ As Fitzmyer is quick to observe,²⁴ most of our knowledge of ancient Greek veiling comes from only two sources.²⁵ In writing of these heathen veiling practices, Fitzmyer is forced to admit that

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 that Paul was trying to handle.²⁶

Biblical inferences with respect to head coverings of any kind seem to offer only limited help in coming to grips with the issue. Exodus 39:27-29—far from prohibiting headgear in the religious assembly—actually proscribes it, though only for Aaron and his sons and not for the common worshiper.²⁷ Ezekiel 44:18 futuristically prescribes "linen turbans" for millennial priests. The thirteenth chapter of Ezekiel gives us the only clear OT reference to women wearing veils within the context of religious activity. It occurs

²² Lightfoot, p. 129.

²³ Hurley, p. 193.

²⁴ Fitzmyer, p. 48.

²⁵ The *Andania Mysteries Inscription* and the *Lycaoniae Lex Sacra*.

²⁶ Fitzmyer, p. 48.

²⁷ A gold diadem with the words "Holy to the Lord" engraved on it was fastened to this headgear, "as the Lord commanded".

¹⁹ Walcke, p. 47.

²⁰ Bushnell, Paragraph 270.

²¹ Hooker, p. 413.

during a discourse by God recording divine condemnation for false prophecy going on in Israel both by men (as condemned in Ezekiel 13:1-16) and also by women (as condemned in Ezekiel 13:17-23). It is the latter half of chapter thirteen which bears examination for our discussion. Verses 17-21 read (NIV):

¹⁷Now, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imaginations. Prophesy against them ¹⁸and say, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own?'..."

²⁰Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says... ²¹"I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power; then you will know that I am the Lord."

All of these verses seem to leave us in a dilemma if we rely on the OT witness alone, because if they tell us anything at all about head coverings, it is that they are approved for men and disapproved for women!

A partial answer to the conundrum lies, as Hurley contends,²⁸ with the meaning of the Greek word *akatakaluptos* as used in I Corinthians 11:5. A more befitting translation of the word would be "loosened" or perhaps "uncovered" hair.²⁹ Hurley further observes that prohibition against the wearing of gold braid found elsewhere in the NT would have little relevance if the braids were

covered over by a veil! At any rate, the most convincing evidence that *akatakaluptos* does not mean "unveiled" or "uncovered" is seen in Paul's non-use in I Corinthians 11:2-16 of the one Greek word which in fact does mean "unveiled". That word is the passive participle *anakekalummenos*. It is derived from the root *anakaluptw*, and is employed in II Corinthians 3:18 where the context of the Apostle Paul's reference to unveiling occurs as a conclusion to an argument comparing Christian freedom to Mosaic legislation. With faces *anakekalummenos*, the Corinthians are to be transformed into Christ's glory. This word *anakekalummenos* unquestionably means "unveiled", as an examination of the context clearly demonstrates.

We submit that since Paul employed the legitimate Greek word for "unveiled" in his second canonical letter to Corinth, he could have used in I Corinthians 11:2-16 if he had so desired. The fact that he chose not to employ *anakekalummenos* speaks strongly against an intention by Paul to make the word *akatakaluptos* synonymous with *anakekalummenos*.

The Greek word is used in the LXX of Numbers 5:18 within the larger context of the test for an unfaithful wife (5:5-31). The loosened hair (LXX: *akatakaluptos*) is a symbol of possible, though as yet unproven, adultery.³⁰ The

³⁰ An Israelite husband who wrongfully forced his innocent wife to undergo the test for an unfaithful wife was heavily fined "because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name" (Deuteronomy 22:19a). Besides having to pay one hundred shekels to his father-in-law as a potential divorce settlement in the event his marriage to the man's daughter were to fail in the future as a consequence of the wife having endured this public humiliation, such a man was forbidden to divorce his exonerated wife at any time in the future for any reason for as long as he lives (Deuteronomy 22:19b). The

Corinthian Jews would think back to OT precepts concerning the test for suspected adultery when they read Paul's reference in I Corinthians 11:2-16 to their women appearing *akatakaluptos* in public.

Regardless of whether we say that Paul's use of *akatakaluptos* in I Corinthians 11:2-16 refers to faces being veiled, hair being covered, or hair being loosened from a restricted cosmetic arrangement, the key to the relevance of the whole problem lies in how Jewish believers at Corinth would identify with seeing their wives going around *akatakaluptos* in their services.

It is this psychological identification by Jewish Christians at Corinth which explains the dishonoring which would come to a woman's "head"—i.e., her husband. The prostitutes and adulteresses were known to go about *akatakaluptos* in their culture. For a Christian woman to come before the Lord in such a way would be in their society a cultural admission of immorality in dress if not in action. The Jews had long since abandoned the OT standard of capital punishment for adultery. This abandonment came about mainly due to the Roman system's abrogation of Jewish penal sovereignty in administering the death penalty. The convicted woman would instead be shorn or shaven.³¹ Hence Hurley's contention:

We can now understand why Paul considers that such a woman is in fact one with her who is shorn or shaven. If a woman places upon herself the accusation of adultery, it is

initiative, presumably, would remain with the humiliated wife. Included in the list of inadequate reasons for a future divorce being initiated by the husband is any future marital unfaithfulness prompted by this shameful episode of public mistrust showed toward her by her mistrustful husband.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-203.

²⁸ Hurley, pp. 198-203.

²⁹ *Ibid.* See the Hurley article in full for the LXX and MT documentation of this usage of *akatakaluptos* as synonymous with the Hebrew פָּרַח.

equivalent to a confession. Among Jews of Paul's day, a woman convicted of adultery was to be shorn or shaven; that marked her publicly declared guilt. The woman who publicly accuses herself is with equal certainty a violator of the marriage relation and is therefore one with her who is shorn or shaven.³²

How a woman's metaphorical head—viz., her husband—would be dishonored now becomes obvious, for an accusation of adultery would provide public shame for the entire family of which the husband is the *kefal h*.

Ideally, Paul would veil no one. It is known that the tallith commonly worn by men when reading on the *Almemar* or when praying before the ark is a symbol of condemnation for sin.³³ Therefore for Paul, wearing the tallith must be forbidden because it dishonors the One Who atoned for all sin by virtue of His completed work. Likewise, going about *akatakaluptos* must be forbidden for women because Christ, too, is the ultimate Head of woman. But Paul graciously bows to the weaknesses of man's imperfect culture, even as he did earlier in I Corinthians 8:13 when he volunteered to forgo eating meat “while the world stands” if doing so would stumble another person. He allows those women who feel that going about *akatakaluptos* would dishonor their testimony to Christ to adapt themselves lovingly to the needs of weaker individuals.

III. THE MEANING OF “AUTHORITY ON HER HEAD”

Having established that Paul is calling for freedom in I Corinthians 11:5 relative to a ban on head coverings for men during worship,

we must now ask who is to have the final say in the family regarding the issue of a woman going about *akatakaluptos*. Is it to be the husband, who might fear that disobedience by his wife to this cultural mandate might result in dishonor to his family? Or is the last word on the subject to come from the wife? I Corinthians 11:10 gives us the answer. It is imperative that the text be read in the original Greek in order to fully comprehend the implications of Paul's thoughts in the passage. The Greek text reads *dia touto ofeilei h gunh exousian ekein epi ths kefalhs dia tous aggelous*.³⁴ (Because of this the woman ought to have authority over her head: because of the angels.)³⁵

We suspect Paul's deliberate use of the verb *ofelw* here underscores the importance of Christian consideration for the spiritual welfare of others. He is saying that a

³⁴ This is the reading attested to by such manuscript uncials as p46 (second century); *Sinaiticus* (fourth century); *Vaticanus* (B, fourth century); *Ephraemi Rescriptus* (C, fifth century); *Claramontanus* (D, sixth); *Euthaliannus* (H, sixth); and *Boernerianus* (G, ninth century). It is attested to by minuscules dating from these respective centuries: ninth (33, 81, 104); tenth (1739); eleventh (181, 436, 451, 1962); twelfth (88, 326, 330, 1241, 2127); thirteenth (614, 2492); fourteenth (629, 630, 1877, 1881, 1984, 2495); and sixteenth (1985). The following Byzantine lectionaries also attest this reading: Old Latin *Ardmahanus*, *Claramontanus*, *Divionensis*, *Sangermanensis*, *Augiensis*, *Boernerianus*, *Bodleianus*, and *Harleianus Londiniensis*. It is further attested by the Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Coptic (*Sabidiv* and *Bobairic*).

³⁵ The Greek word *kal umma* is attested to by no relevant MS occurrences. See the textual apparatus of the UBS Greek New Testament. A variant reading which exchanges the word *kal umma* for *exousia* is mentioned in the textual apparatus, but its chief attestation springs from a Coptic language difficulty. See our comment in footnote 44. The primary reading *exousia* (“authority”) is given an “A” probability value by the UBS editors over this unlikely usage of *kal umma* (“veil”).

woman ought to have authority over her own head, but that the integrity of an overall Christian witness takes priority over the rights of any believer.

The main problem in verse ten is the Greek phrase which we translate as “to have authority over her own head”.³⁶ Waltke assumes that the word “head” (Greek: *kefal h*) is a double entendre with anatomical and social significance,³⁷ but that is a problematic assumption since the passage would then be requiring veils (in his interpretation as *exousia* referring to veils) for the husband as well as for the wife! Some scholars see the *exousia* of this verse to be a figurative symbol of the power to which the woman is subject.³⁸ Waltke seems to favor this view when he theorizes:

Although Paul does not say so explicitly, it seems probable to suppose that some of the individualistic Corinthians were proposing that their women throw off their veils which symbolized their subordination to the men.³⁹ Exegetically, however, there is no biblical proof at all that the veil ever symbolized subjection, and the only way to make the Greek construction of I Corinthians 11:10 say this is to render the word “authority” (Greek: *exousia*) with passive force instead of the more usual active force. Ramsey has little patience for such grammatical manipulation. He calls that type of eisegesis “a preposterous idea which a Greek scholar would laugh at anywhere except in the New Testament, where (as they seem to think) Greek words may mean anything that commentators choose.”⁴⁰

³⁶ We render the definite article with possessive force here for contextual reasons.

³⁷ Waltke, p. 51.

³⁸ Fitzmyer, pp. 50-53.

³⁹ Waltke, p. 46.

⁴⁰ William Ramsey, *The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influences on His Life and Thought*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³³ Bushnell, Paragraph 240.

Other scholars have theorized that *exousia* here refers to a symbol of the dignity of a woman⁴¹ or to protection against evil spirits.⁴² Kittel's ingenious solution sees the *Talmud Sabbath VI.8b* commentary on Isaiah 3:18 giving an Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *shys* in terms of *slwmyb*—the root of which (*slh*) does in fact mean “to have authority over”.⁴³ Unfortunately, all of these solutions assume that the word *exousia* (“authority”) is a euphemism or word picture which really means “veil” or “head covering”).

These “solutions” overlook Bushnell's brilliant observation that this equation of “authority” with “head covering” more probably originates from a Coptic language MS problem rather than from Pauline typology.⁴⁴ We should therefore turn to other sources for a solution to the meaning of the phrase *exousia epi ths kefalhs*.

A study of NT usages of the term “to have authority over” gives the solution to Paul's intention in I Corinthians 11:10. In every other NT occurrence of the term “to have

authority over”, it refers to the absolute fiat exercised by the one having the authority over the object modified by the preposition:

- In Luke 9:1 the disciples are given authority *epi panta ta daimonia*—and the context makes it obvious that Christ is giving them divine authority to cast them out at will.
- Revelation 2:26 sees Christ giving to those who overcome authority *epi tw n ethnwn* to rule them with a rod of iron.
- The destroying angel of Revelation 6:8 has authority to kill one fourth of the earth according to his own will.
- The two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:6 will have special *exousia epi tw n udatwn* to turn those waters into blood whenever they desire. They will not have to pray or otherwise seek prior permission from God to do so.
- The Antichrist will be given authority *epi pasan fulhn kai laon kai glwssan* to do with them as he wills, says Revelation 13:7.
- God Himself is declared in Revelation 16:9 to be the One Who has authority *epi tas plhgas* of the tribulation.
- The saints referred to in Revelation 22:14 are seen to have the absolute right *epi to xul on ths zohs* (i.e., to access to the tree whenever they so desire with no restrictions of any kind).

The basic thrust of these passages is that when the term “to have authority over” is used, it indicates absolute freedom of the person yielding authority to deal with the object of that authority in any manner chosen by that

individual. One of the most graphic examples of the truth of this use of *exousia epi* is seen in Revelation 20:6, where the Second Death is said to have no authority over the saints to harm them.

The implication of these NT examples to our discussion concerning I Corinthians 11:10 is this: if all other NT usages of the term *exousia epi* connote freedom by an individual to exercise control over the object of the preposition *epi*, and if such usages always connote an active volitional choice on the part of the person referred to, then it follows logically that the occurrence of *exousia epi ths kefalhs* in I Corinthians 11:10a means that a woman ought “to have authority over her own head”—viz., to wear her hair as she sees fit in the circumstances.

The passages does not mean she should wear a veil or head covering. It means that she does have authority to go about *akatakaluptos* or not *akatakaluptos* at her sole discretion. It connotes the exact opposite intention by the Apostle. The passage places the decision concerning the matter with the wife and not with the husband.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF “BECAUSE OF HER ANGELS”⁴⁵

The sometimes fanciful suggestions and conjectures of a few scholars notwithstanding, we suggest that the phrase *dia tous aggelous* in verse ten gives added support to the grammatical illustrations cited above which indicate that the woman should have the final say in deciding to wear her hair in any way she sees fit. Fitzmyer shows how some have theorized a word corruption by later copyists

(London: Hodler and Stoughton, 1907), p. 203.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, pp. 50-53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, because of Paul's use of the phrase *dia tou aggelou*. More on this in the next section.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Bushnell, Paragraph 257. She observes that the equation of *exousia* (“authority”) and <F128M>kalumma<F255D> (“veil”) first appeared in Coptic MSS translated from the Greek NT. According to Bushnell, the Coptic word for “power” (*ouershishi*) could easily have been mistaken for the Coptic word for “veil” (*ouershoun*) in dirty or defective MSS by copyists due to the astonishing similarity in visual appearance within the Coptic alphabet between the combination of letters forming the syllables *oun* and *ishi*. See our earlier footnote 35. Is it a mere coincidence that the variant reading which adds the word “veil” to I Corinthians 11:10 stems mainly from Coptic MSS families?

⁴⁵ The definite article is rendered with possessive force in keeping with the context discussed in the previous section. See our previous footnote number 36.

which “explains” the present form of *aggelous* in the Greek.⁴⁶ He also documents previous “solutions” to the angel problem such as assertions that they are figurative of human messengers.⁴⁷ Hooker rejects for two reasons the contention that Paul is warning believing women to veil because of possible attacks by lustful demons:

First, nowhere else in the NT are angels thought of as evil; second, ...the idea is totally irrelevant to the context of the passage.⁴⁸

So also states Fitzmyer.⁴⁹ Waltke fears that the “uncovered and therefore insubordinate women would offend the angels because they are custodians of the created order.”⁵⁰ Fitzmyer refutes this superstitious and in some ways Cabalistic view.⁵¹ By far the most fanciful explanation for the presence of the angels in this passage is that of Cadbury⁵² and Fitzmyer,⁵³ who quote the Qumran Rule of the

Community (*IQSaii*, 3-11) as the reason for excluding unveiled women. Fitzmyer contends that “the unveiled head of a woman is like a bodily defect which should be excluded from such an assembly 'because holy angels are present in the congregation'.”⁵⁴ All of these solutions cited assume that the words *exousian ecein epi ths kefalhs* mean “to have a veil on her head”.

The woman should have the final say in deciding to wear her hair in any way she sees fit.

The simplest solution to the reference to angels is to take the definite article with possessive force and translate the passage as: “The woman ought to have authority over her own head because of her angels.”

By the reference to “her angels”, Paul would be referring to an individual's so-called “guardian angels”, of whom Christ Himself alluded in His discourse on children (Matthew 18:10 and parallels). While we are told very little in Scripture about these “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation,”⁵⁵ we do know that some classes of angels veil themselves in the presence of God.⁵⁶

The group of angels to which Christ referred, however, do not so veil. They always see the face of the Father in heaven. Paul therefore is giving just another reason⁵⁷ in a whole series of arguments why the woman should have final say in determining whether or not to go about *akatakalo*uptos.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Hebrews 1:14

⁵⁶ Witness the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2.

⁵⁷ Hence Paul's introductory use of *dia touto* in the sentence. We would loosely translate the verse by this paraphrase: “Here's another reason why a woman should have authority over her own hair: her angels have no worship restrictions, so why should she?”

He is asserting that if a woman's guardian angels have access to the presence of God without restrictions of any kind, there is no reasons why she should be restricted, either.

V. HAIR AS (?) A COVERING

I Corinthians 11:13b-15 gives yet more evidence that Paul is permitting women the freedom to go about *akatakalo*uptos. If we translate these two sentences as declaratives, more light is shed on the problem of “veiling” than if we render them as mere interrogatives. The Greek grammar of the passage, including its word order, seems to fit a declarative better than does an interrogative. We would translate the verses as follows:

^{13b}It is proper for a woman to pray to God without head coverings.⁵⁸ ¹⁴Nature in no way teaches on the one hand⁵⁹ that if a man has hair⁶⁰ it puts him to shame ¹⁵nor does it teach on the other⁶¹ that a woman's hair is her glory. All of this is true⁶² because hair⁶³ is given as a substitute for

⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, p. 50. As stated earlier herein, there is no ancient MSS evidence for textual corruptions within the I Corinthians 11:2-16 passage, except for the Coptic language problem which may have mistaken the Coptic word “veil” for “authority”. The possibilities for a solution to the problem of angels in this passage if we assume an unintentional redaction are limited only by the imagination of the scholar and the length of the doctoral dissertation desired! Some representative “solutions” taken from Fitzmyer's observations follow: Women should veil “...on account of the gospel” (*to euaggelion*); “...on account of the crowds” (*tas agelas*); “...on account of the men who crowd in”; “...on account of the vulgar men” (*tous andras*); “...on account of the mocking unbelievers” (*tous eggelastas*); “...on account of the mobs” (*tous oclous*); or perhaps merely “throughout the whole of her divine message” (*ths agelias*).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

⁴⁸ Hooker, p. 412.

⁴⁹ Fitzmyer, pp. 53-55.

⁵⁰ Waltke, p. 54.

⁵¹ Fitzmyer, pp. 53-55.

⁵² Cadbury, p. 1.

⁵³ Fitzmyer, p. 57.

⁵⁸ For the sake of argument, we adopt the traditional translation of *akatakalo*uptos as “head coverings”. See our argument earlier in this paper suggesting that the word should be translated as “unloosened”. Also, see our previous footnote number 57.

⁵⁹ This term “on the one hand” is called for by the presence at this point in the passage of the Greek linking participle *men*.

⁶⁰ The adjective “long” commonly inserted into English translations of this phrase is in fact absent from the Greek text. Our reason for not including it here (i.e., for the sake of argument) will become obvious shortly.

⁶¹ The phrase “nor does it teach on the other” is called for by the presence at this point in the passage of the linking particle *de*, which creates a “*men...de*” logical thought train in Paul's argument.

⁶² The phrase “all of this is true” is called for because of the causal particle *oti*.

⁶³ The validity of the presence of the possessive pronoun *auth* is doubtful because of the paucity of MS evidence. See the textual apparatus of the UBS text.

man-made⁶⁴ coverings. ¹⁶But if anyone seems to be disturbed by all of this, neither we nor the churches of God have any such custom.

The rendering above smoothly fits the context of Paul's argument. The key words in the passage occur in verse 15b: *oti h komh anti peribolaïou dedotai*.

The real thrust of I Corinthians 11:2-16 is that Paul is directing the Corinthians not to become entangled with the cultural mandates of their secularized society. The primary meaning of the Greek preposition *anti* as that of substitution has been so well established that no scholarly documentation is needed to so demonstrate. But Waltke goes against the plain meaning of the text when he comments that Paul

cannot mean “in place of” a covering, but rather “asking for” a covering. Although the Greek preposition frequently implies substitution, that is not its sense here, for such a meaning would render the rest of the argument, especially that in verses 5-6, nonsensical.⁶⁵

In fact, the preposition *anti* does not imply substitution as Waltke says. It *means* substitution. The only meaning which would be rendered “nonsensical” by translating *anti* the way it ought to be translated is Waltke's. To paraphrase Hooker's quote previously mentioned,⁶⁶ such a non sequitur should at least cause Waltke to question whether he has understood Paul correctly!

We submit that verses 13b-15 give the final death blow to Corinthian scruples which required

veiling. “You who have received divine revelation should look to nature,” says Paul as a last resort. “Nature does not tell you that hair on a man is a shame to him so that it ought to be covered in worship.” The Apostle then claims nature does not exalt hair on a woman, either! To sum up, the message of nature is absolutely neutral—it neither encourages nor discourages such regulation. But it does give the Corinthians one very important piece of information: nature tells them that hair is given by God as a substitute for “coverings” men might provide. The sense of the verses seems to be that that which God provided should not be superseded by man's regulations.^{67,68}

⁶⁷ Even if the alternate rendering of the preposition *anti* were to be admitted with the resultant translation of “hair is given as a covering,” we see no problem with applying the principle to the Corinthian situation. If hair is God's head covering given to men and to women, we can be sure that no substitute provided by men for the worship services are needed!

⁶⁸ A brief comment on the adjective “long” in reference to hair is also called for. The word “long” is absent from the Greek text of I Corinthians 11:14-15. If the OT economy taught anything at all about short or long hair, it taught that long hair on men or women could be a sign of deep spiritual meaning and dedication to God. That hardly could be considered a “shame”! We refer, of course, to the Nazarite vow, which Numbers 6:2 tells us was open to both men and women. Bushnell puts forth a convincing argument in Paragraph 230 of her book which indicates that Paul either would have been in the midst of the period of his life referred to in Acts 18:18 when he had taken a Nazarite vow, or else he would have recently completed the time of it. Whether or not Paul had completed his Nazarite vow described in Acts 18:18 by the time he wrote I Corinthians 11:2-16, the Nazarite implications to I Corinthians 11:14-15 would have been on Paul's mind as he wrote these verses. Surely the very existence of the Nazarite vow would not have served as an indication to Paul that long hair was a shame to a man or that it should be covered over in the case of a woman! It would more

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS: APPLYING “THE VEIL” TO CHRISTIAN CULTURE

The real thrust of I Corinthians 11:2-16 is that Paul is directing the Corinthians not to become entangled with the cultural mandates of their secularized society. The Corinthian women had become psychological prisoners to the social expectations of their unbelieving culture. The result of that imprisonment was an erroneous conclusion by the Corinthians that their women must avoid being *akatakaloptos* in their religious assembly. Only women of loose morals—adulterers and prostitutes—went about that way, and these Christian women mistakenly believed they must bow to Corinthian social dress customs if they wished to avoid bringing shame on the family to which they belonged. Otherwise, false rumors of sexually immoral behavior on their part might result.

If the Christian women at Corinth were in a bad state because of their psychological imprisonment to the cultural expectations of their day, the men were infinitely worse off! At least the women feared only societal slander! The men had become enslaved to the spiritual expectations of Judaizing believers within their assembly. These false teachers sought to have all males wear the tallith upon their heads whenever they came into God's presence. Thus the fear felt by the men would transcend the comparatively harmless concerns of the women about their moral

probably imply just the opposite. At any rate, the Corinthians, as inordinately proud descendants of that race of people referred to in Homer's *Iliad* as the “long haired Achaeans”, would not have seen long hair as an issue to the culture of their day. In no case would the Corinthians have considered “long” hair to be a “shame” to a man.

⁶⁴ The word “man-made” is supplied for emphasis. Any “covering” not supplied by God is “man-made”.

⁶⁵ Waltke, p. 55.

⁶⁶ Hooker, p. 413.

reputations because the men dishonored Christ by failing to see themselves ransomed by a finished and perfect atonement at Calvary: they veiled out of condemnation for sin.

Far more insidious and dangerous was the spiritual problem of the men than was the psychological fixation of the women. The fear felt by the women could have a legitimate basis when one considers the value placed within Scripture on moral integrity relative to a picture of Christ being presented to the world. Corinthian unbelievers had the right to expect believers to avoid even the appearance of evil.

Therefore Paul acknowledges the freedom which should be allowed women so that they might not stumble potential converts. “A woman ought to have authority over her own head” to go about *akatakalyptos* or not, says Paul, but there are evangelistically based considerations which can overrule that right.

But the men had no excuse! For them to wear the tallith in the Corinthian assembly—and remember, they would wear it only in the assembly—would in effect be an admission of the insufficiency of Christ's work. Therefore Paul bluntly condemns the heretical implications of their symbolic action of wearing the tallith as a Jewish symbol of condemnation for sin by forbidding men to wear the tallith. No exceptions to this prohibition of any kind are allowed by Paul.

The traditional view, of course, forbids the wearing of a tallith for men and requires a “head covering” of some sort for women. We submit that this interpretation fails to fit the context of the book as a whole, while our proposal can easily be integrated into the context of Paul's attempt to counteract the Corinthian tendency to be infected by their

secular environment. This tendency by the Corinthians to be seduced by their society is the very center of the Apostle's concern in writing the Corinthian correspondence in the first place! Even the most casual perusal of I Corinthians will illustrate that the Corinthians had been infected by worldly philosophies: they had divisions in the assembly (1:11ff), factions (3:3-4), misunderstanding of the function and place of the minister within the congregation (3:5-23), and ignorance of the apostolic role within the context of the local church (4:1-21). Among their members they had tolerated incest and adultery (5:1-6), lawsuits between believers (6:1-11), and prostitution (6:12-20).

They were ignorant of and insensitive to the unique problems of unmarried believers (7:1-40) and were blind to the possibilities of stumbling weaker brethren (8:1-9:27). They misused their Christian freedoms (10:1-33) and heathen religious practices had infiltrated their conceptions of the function of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), spiritual gifts (12:1-31), love in action (13:1-13), and glossalalia (14:1-40). Greek philosophy had also corrupted their understanding of the latter day resurrection of the body (15:1-58). And the foregoing list of problems is just a summary of the topics dealt with by Paul in First Corinthians!

Since the Corinthian believers had been so influenced by the secular cultural influences of their day in every other imaginable area, we suspect there is no reason to suppose that they had escaped infection in the area of their dress as well.

We propose that this is the very topic dealt with by Paul in I Corinthians 11:2-16. The Apostle decrees that women by be permitted to worship in any dress they choose—i.e., with their hair *akata-*

kaluptos or not at their option. The men are forbidden to copy the Judaistic world by wearing the tallith during worship. We submit that—far from being an apostolic mandate for the women to copy a heathen secular society in dress (a position the traditional interpretation of the “head covering” issue must logically lead us to take)—the real intention of this problematic passage is to forbid such a blind secularization.

If the thrust of I Corinthians is along iconoclastic ideals, so also is Paul's counsel concerning the veiling of men and women. The only mitigating circumstances which might affect the application of apostolic command to the Corinthian “veiling” situation is that of consideration for the effectiveness of Christian evangelism.

Even in this consideration, however, Paul must allow the image of Christ to be kept pure as He is presented to an unsaved world. If that was the Apostle's overriding concern in his own Christian life, testimony, and ministry, should it not evermore be ours as well until the Son of Man comes?

William Welty

