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Ecclesial Hierarchy and Subordination Between Regenerate Men and Women in Public Worship: A Renewed Look at 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36

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Abstract

The role of regenerate men and women in the church remains an ongoing, intensely-debated subject within evangelical faith communities. The preceding also includes the narrower issue of church services involving the dynamic relational tension between the genders centred around ecclesial hierarchy and subordination. Pivotal to the preceding disputation is Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 regarding male and female believers in congregational gatherings. My disquisition takes a renewed look at these two passages to discern what they do and do not teach on the topic mentioned above. A key premise is that when these texts are examined within the context of their first-century AD, Greco-Roman setting, Paul taught Christians to observe common cultural conventions of the time regarding the practice of wearing head coverings and maintaining decorum within public worship. A corresponding premise is that the apostle was not mandating a corporate practice that is directly applicable to 21st-century believers, regardless of whether they reside in the global north or the majority world.

Keywords
Corinth; head coverings; public worship; gender identity; hierarchy; subordination; Greco-Roman culture.

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1. Introduction

Among researchers well-versed on Paul's theology concerning men and women, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 remain an ongoing source of controversy. The following essay, being aware of the dissonant and competing perspectives on these two disputed passages, seeks to contribute to the dialogue from the perspective of a confessional Lutheran who lives in the global north.[2] This includes affirming that God created all people to be equal in dignity and worth, yet distinct as male and female in his sacred presence.

My paper deals with various contextual and exegetical insights on the roles of regenerate husbands and wives (and more generally saved males and females) within the first-century AD church at Corinth. The disquisition takes a renewed look at 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, along with 14:33b–36, to discern what both do and do not teach on the topic mentioned above. A key premise is that when these texts are examined within the context of their first-century AD, Greco-Roman setting, Paul taught Christians to observe common cultural conventions of the time regarding the practice of wearing head coverings and maintaining decorum within public worship. A corresponding premise is that the apostle was not mandating a corporate practice that is directly applicable to 21st-century believers, regardless of whether they reside in the global north or the majority world.

2. Paul's Affirmation for Holding to Settled Apostolic Tradition (1 Cor 11:2)[3]

Comfort (2008) observes that 1 Corinthians 11:2 begins a new section of Paul's letter (signalled by the Greek particle, *de*).[4] Ellingworth and Hatton (1995) advance the discussion by noting that the apostle's usage of 'traditions' (or, oral 'teachings'; v. 2; Greek, *paradosis*) and 'practice' (v. 16; Greek, *synētheia*) form an inclusio that brackets off the passage. They also point out the strong 'contrast' between Paul's affirmation in verse 2, 'I praise you', with his censure verse 17, 'I have no praise for you'; yet, as the authors explain, there are relevant 'points of contact', both with the preceding 'section' and 'earlier' sections of the 'epistle'.

2 Cf. Peppiatt (2015) for an exploration of Paul's use of 'diatribal argumentation' as a 'rhetorical strategy' in 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36. The author postulates that the regenerate males at Corinth were forcing their saved female counterparts to 'veil themselves when praying or prophesying' (10). Furthermore, the author maintains that Paul 'cites his opponents' views' (4) in an 'extended fashion in order to refute them'. While the author's approach is innovative, this essay does not share the author's key supposition that Paul constructed 'powerful … arguments against the Corinthian practices of head coverings for women' (5). Also, contrary to the author, I think a major flaw in the author's central thesis is that 'there is no signal in the text itself indicating' (12) that Paul 'might be referring to a Corinthian idea'. In short, the author resorts to an argumentum ex silentio (i.e. an argument from silence), in which a litany of assumptions, claims, and conclusions are made within an information vacuum.

3 It is beyond the scope of this essay to undertake a detailed structural analysis of 1 Cor 11:2–16. This essay follows the divisional breakdown appearing in Fee (1987:493–4) and Waltke (1978:47–8). For two different interpretations of the potential chiastic pattern (inverted parallelism) in this passage, cf. Garland (2003:511) and Hoelke (2014:62–3), along with the explanations offered in each work, respectively.

4 Cf. Robertson and Plummer (1911).

After completing the part of his letter regarding meat offered to idols (8:1–11:1), Paul next addressed the manner in which the Corinthian church conducted public worship (11:2–14:40).[5] Keener (1992:21) remarks that the apostle's 'arguments' were 'meant to persuade his readers in terms of the logic of their own culture'. The first topic in this new section of the letter (11:2–16) includes Paul's observations concerning married female believers (and less specifically those who were single) who discontinued covering their heads in corporate Christian gatherings.[6] As the discourse in the following section indicates, the precise meaning of what Paul intended to convey is disputed among specialists.

At the outset, it is important to recognize that the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures of the first century AD were patriarchal. As Phiri (2017:119) ascertains, it was the norm in antiquity for men to be the primary leaders and decision-makers of society, while women were mainly relegated to subordinate roles. Likewise, this 'social-cultural' (135) arrangement was mirrored in the 'hierarchy and values of the church'.

Both Testaments of Scripture faithfully reflect the preceding historical backdrop; yet, it would be incorrect to conclude from this observation that patriarchy is the *de facto* biblical norm either for societies (in general) or ecclesial communities (in particular).[7] Indeed, it stands to reason that churches today can remain faithful to Scripture and operate along the lines of shared leadership among regenerate men and women (sometimes referred to as *amphiarchy*, which means 'government of both kinds').[8]

Returning now to the Greco-Roman culture of the first century AD,[9] men perceived the hair of women as a potential source of lust. So, to minimize this possibility, it was customary for women to cover their hair in public settings and community gatherings.[10] Johnson (2004) labels these and other referents that follow as 'sexual identity markers' that were 'customary' in Paul's day.

5 Holmyard (1997) claims that Paul, in 1 Cor 11:2–16, neither addresses the 'corporate worship of the church' (461) nor deals with 'congregational settings'; instead, the author thinks the passage 'pertains to nonchurch settings'. Despite the novelty of the author's supposition and arguments, this treatise holds to the 'traditional view' espoused by the majority of specialists, namely, that throughout 11:2–14:40, the apostle discussed the way the believers at Corinth engaged in public worship. In this regard, Lowery (1986:157) points out that Paul, in appealing to 'church practice elsewhere as a feature of his argument' (cf. 11:16), indicates that he had in mind congregational 'meetings'.

6 In this essay, no distinction is made between what Ellingworth and Hatton (1995) refer to as larger 'church meetings' and smaller domestic gatherings in 'private homes' (cf. Acts 18:7; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15). Despite the potential notional distinctions between the preceding two referents, my discussion intentionally regards them as being generally synonymous and conveying closely related ideas. On a correspondent note, Fee (1987:492) remarks that with respect to 'early Christian worship', specialists 'know next to nothing' about the following four areas: (1) the 'time / frequency of gatherings'; (2) the 'place(s) of gatherings'; (3) the 'kind(s) of gatherings'; and, (4) the 'role of leadership'.

7 Concerning ecclesial communities, Johnson (2004) refers to the 'traditional male-authority viewpoint with its restrictive subordinate roles for women in the church'.

8 For example, cf. Gupta (2019).

9 The discourse that follows is in essential agreement with the observation made by Thiselton (2000:801) that greater emphasis should be given to 'Roman cultural and social norms for mid-first-century Corinth, rather than those of Greece' that 'precede 44 BC'. Expressed another way, the 'main social norms to which Corinthian culture aspired were those of Rome, rather than Greece'.

10 Cf. the discussion in the following representative publications: Allo (1956:258, 262); Ciampa and Rosner (2010); Garland (2003:509–10); Gill (2002); Grosheide (1984:253–4); Hays (1997); Horsley (1998:154); Keener (1992:28–9); Morris (1985); Prior (1985); Thiselton (2000:801–2); Verbrugge (2008:354); Westfall (2016:85–6).

One possibility is that the upper-class women in the congregation at Corinth wanted to dislodge their husbands' authority over them, and so removed their head coverings as a sign of their freedom. Another possibility is that some female believers thought they had reached a spiritual state in which the male / female distinction no longer existed, and so were trying to blur the variance between the genders with their dress.[11]

In either case, the apostle began this portion of his letter by commending his readers for consistently maintaining the instruction and practices he orally handed down to them (v. 2). Paul, who had spent some time with Jesus's earliest disciples,[12] verbally passed on what he had learned to the church at Corinth, as well as to other congregations the apostle founded. As an emissary for the Messiah, Paul undertook the responsibility to teach—through both his preaching and letters—the key doctrines and practices of the Christian faith. He urged the Corinthians to follow these 'traditions' (v. 2) as closely as possible.[13] In many ways, the apostle's readers had not let him down, even though his letter contained much criticism.

3 Paul's Argument Based on Christ and Culture (1 Cor 11:3-6)

To form the basis for the teaching that would follow, Paul stated a principle that had its beginnings at the creation of the world, including God's bringing Adam and Eve into existence (Gen 2:21–22). The Father was the 'head' (1 Cor 11:3) of the Son, the Son was the 'head' of every 'man', and the 'man' was the 'head' of the 'woman' (specifically within the faith community).

The underlying Greek nouns, as determined by their usage in 1 Corinthians 11:3, could also be rendered as 'husband' (*anēr*) and 'wife' (*gynē*), respectively. Some specialists favour the view that Paul was generally referring to men and women within an ecclesial context, while other specialists side with the narrower view that the apostle was addressing married couples within a faith community.[14] Admittedly, the weight of evidence could go in either direction. Even so, when taking into account 14:33b–36[15], I tend to side with those

11 At various points, differing interpretive options are presented; however, it is beyond the scope of this essay to sort out and advocate strongly for any intensely-debated hermeneutical view. This is especially so when the overall thrust of my discourse and the conclusions I reach are not materially impacted by the fact that the weight of the biblical evidence for various sides of an issue could equally go in either one direction or another. Informative in this regard is the acknowledgment made by Johnson (2004), 'This passage has generated a mountain of contemporary literature addressing in detail almost every possible nuance of these verses'; yet, despite the abundance of scholarship dealing with 1 Cor 11:2–16, Holke (2014:4) voices the following candid assessment: 'Commentators and scholars alike have struggled to find consensus not only in regard to issues such as structure, language, and cultural context, but also in regard to the broader focus and argument of the passage itself'. For detailed presentations of the pros and cons of arguments connected with the panoply of positions broached herein, cf. the representative list of exegetical and theological works formally cited in this treatise and listed in the Bibliography.

12 Cf. Acts 9:26–28; Gal 1:18–20; 2:1–10.

13 Cf. 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; Rom 6:17; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6.

14 Cf. the discussion in the following representative publications: Ciampa and Rosner (2010); Barrett (1968:248); Ellingworth and Hatton (1995); Fitzmyer (2008:413); Grosheide (1984:250); Morris (1985); Pratt (2000); Sampley (2002:928); Taylor (2014); Thiselton (2000:822); Verbrugge (2008:351).

15 Cf. the excursus in section 8, which deals with 1 Cor 14:33b–36.

exegetes who think Paul, to a considerable extent, primarily had in mind regenerate husbands and wives.[16] Of course, the apostle's teachings could apply more generally to all saved men and women within a corporate worship setting.

There are at least four primary ways in which the Greek noun, *kephalē*, which is translated as 'head', has been interpreted by specialists.[17] First, some think the term means 'ruler' and was used to denote someone who had authority over another. If this was Paul's intent, then he was saying that the Father is in authority over the Son, the Son is in authority over the man, and man is in authority over the woman. Second (and related to the above), others maintain that the term 'head' denotes prominence and supremacy. If this was Paul's intent, then he was saying that the Father is preeminent over the Son, the Son is preeminent over the man, and the man is preeminent over the woman.

Third, still others hold the view that Paul followed the order of Creation in stating one entity as being the 'head' of another. If this was the apostle's intent, then, first, the Father sent the Son to be his agent of Creation. Second, the Son made the man, Adam. Third, the woman, Eve, was formed from one of Adam's ribs. Fourth (and related to the above), some argue that the term 'head' means 'origin' or 'source' and was used to refer to someone who was responsible for another's existence. If this was Paul's intent, then he was saying that the Father is the source of the Son's existence, the Son is the source of the man's existence, and man is the source of the woman's existence.

In stepping back from the above four views, it is important to recognize that Paul's comment dealt with the relational dynamics between believers within a specific congregational and cultural setting. For instance, as stated earlier, because Greco-Roman and Jewish societies were patriarchal (male-controlled), men were regarded as the authority figures within the household. This being the case, as Stern (1996) notes, it is groundless to allege that what the apostle taught fostered 'male chauvinism' (or prejudice against and 'dominance' of women).[18] Thiselton (2000:831) seems close to the mark in proposing that while the missionary-evangelist affirmed a 'difference' among the genders, he did so 'without any necessary inference of gender hierarchy'.

Furthermore, Paul was addressing then-prevalent issues involving regenerate husbands and wives (and more generally saved men and women) during church meetings at Corinth. Garland (2003:514) observes that the apostle's 'purpose' was 'not to write a theology

16 Cf. Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:11–12; 1 Pet 3:1–7.

17 Cf. the discussion of the lexical and literary evidence in the following representative publications: Baker (2009); Cervin (1989); Fitzmyer (1993; 2008:409–11); Grudem (2001); Hoelke (2014); Hjort (2001); Johnson (2009); Payne (2006); Perriman (1994); Taylor (2014); Thiselton (2000:812–22).

18 Cf. a comparable observation made by Witherington (1995:231).

of gender'; instead, it was to 'correct an unbefitting practice in worship', which threatened to 'tarnish the church's reputation'. Given this objective, it is imprudent to make overly generalized and dogmatic assertions that universally apply today to all male and female believers throughout any society, anywhere around the globe, regardless any particular historical and cultural context.

Paul, having established a theological foundation for his criticism, admonished his readers for not following the traditional instruction concerning head coverings (v. 4). Unlike today, in the Greco-Roman culture of the apostle's day, men generally did not wear head coverings (Latin, *capite velato*; 'with veiled head') in public.[19] One exception to the above practice involved men of elite social status.[20] Their prominent standing in Roman society permitted them to preside as priests at heathen religious gatherings. When they did so, as Oster (1988:496) explains, it was customary for them to drape their long togas (Greek, *himation*) or tunics 'over the back of the head and then forward until it approached or covered the ears'. This action enabled them to pray, offer sacrifices, and pour libations to pagan deities in a semi-private and intimate way, without being distracted by unimportant sights and sounds.[21]

I surmise that, against the preceding liturgical backdrop, during a Christian worship service, if a male believer 'covered' his physical 'head' while praying or prophesying,[22] he signalled (whether intentionally or unintentionally) his devotion to heathen gods and goddesses. In this way, he dishonoured, disgraced, or disesteemed

19 Concededly, some specialists have interpreted 1 Cor 11:2–16 through the lens of first-century AD Jewish liturgical customs (especially the use of the yarmulke, kippah, or skullcap); yet, as Hjort (2001:59) stresses, the 'majority of the Corinthian church were pagan Christians, for whom the adoption of Jewish gender roles was not immediately apparent'. So, it seems unlikely that Paul would overtly 'allude to such Jewish traditions' as he addressed the 'shameful element' of his readers' 'behaviour' within their predominately Greco-Roman cultural context. In this regard, the observations made by Oster (1988:487) are especially trenchant: 'Paul's specific injunction about the liturgical veil for men cannot be traced to practices in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, the Dead Seas Scrolls, the Gospels, the corpora of Philo and Josephus, or the Mishna'.

20 Oster (1988) is an early influential study regarding the practice of elite males within Greco-Roman society donning head coverings within pagan religious settings. Later confirming studies include the following: Finney (2010); Gill (1990; 2002); Massey (2018); Oster (1992); Thompson (1988); Witherington (1995). In keeping with what I noted in fn 11, given there is no scholarly consensus regarding the precise nature of the cultural background and social customs Paul addressed in 1 Cor 11:2–16, what appears in this essay is my attempt to reason through and explain the overall logic of the apostle's directives to his original readers within its first-century AD, Greco-Roman context.

21 Phiri (2017:130) delineates that a 'family's ancestral deities' were called 'lares' (Latin for 'household gods'). These were placed on a 'lararium' (plural, laraia), which 'functioned as the shrine for the lares'. A 'lararium' typically 'consisted of a niche in the wall', which was often located either 'in the 'kitchen' (especially near the hearth) or on an 'altar in the atrium' (the front reception room, near the main entrance to the home).

22 Herein the gift of prophecy is defined as the ability to spontaneously proclaim fully inspired and authoritative revelations from God, whether the foretelling of future events, the heralding of apostolic truths, or the denouncing of social injustices; cf. 1 Cor 12:10, 28–29; 13:2, 8–9; 14:1–40; Ciampa and Rosner (2010); Fee (1987:595–6); Fitzmyer (2008:412, 467); Garland (2003:582–3); Thiselton (2000:826, 963–5). Noteworthy is the sermon Peter delivered on the day of Pentecost. The apostle quoted from Joel 2:28–32 (Acts 2:16–21) to declare that the outpouring of the Spirit on Jesus's followers (being evidenced by speaking in foreign languages) was a partial fulfilment of what would occur at the second advent of the Messiah. In contrast to the former days of the old covenant, the latter days of the new covenant would be characterized by unique manifestations of the Spirit among all God's people. There is no restriction, either, on regenerate men and women prophesying. The Spirit would enable both saved males and females to proclaim divine oracles to their fellow human beings. What occurred at Pentecost would find its ultimate fulfilment in the end-time kingdom of the Son.

his metaphysical 'head', namely, the Messiah.[23] Hjort (2001:60–2) lends weight to the plausibility of the preceding supposition, the disparate conjectures offered by other specialists notwithstanding. The passage under consideration is located after a 'treatment on idolatry' in 8:1–11:1 and the 'abuse of the Lord's Supper' in 11:17–34. I concur with Hjort that the 'positioning' of 11:2–16 signifies 'one of the most important hermeneutical keys to reading the text'. Specifically, the 'heuristic function of the context' highlights the 'religious' nature of the problem Paul was addressing, namely, 'idol worship'. This particularly involved the tendency of some within the Corinthian faith community to be 'polytheistic' and 'syncretistic'.[24]

Paul's comments in 10:18–22 are of particular interest. The apostle revealed that, like the Lord's Supper and the sacrifices offered by Jews at the Jerusalem temple, there were also deep spiritual realities underlying the sacrifices made to idols. While the sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem were offered to the one, true, and living God, sacrifices at pagan shrines were offered, in effect, to demons (v. 20).[25] Demons beguiled people into venerating idols to hinder them from worshipping the Creator. Because of the relationship of demons to the idol feasts, Paul implored his readers to have no part in such lavish meals.

Some of the believers in Corinth were participating in both the Lord's Supper and idol feasts. Both practices brought them into fellowship with spiritual beings—in the first case with the Saviour, in the second case with Satan's fiendish associates. Paul viscerally believed this contradictory set of practices was abhorrent. So, if the Corinthians wanted to enjoy the sacrament of holy communion with the Messiah, then they had to break off their fellowship with demons. This meant they had to stop going to idol feasts (v. 21). If Paul's readers persisted in attending heathen banquets, they would risk the Lord's anger. Because he is a zealous Lord,[26] he would not share his holiness, honour, and worship with demons. Moreover, no human being could withstand his wrath when it occurred (v. 22).

Returning once more to the discussion concerning 11:3–6, Hays (1997) indicates that the 'immediate concern of the passage is for the Corinthians to avoid bringing shame on the community'. Furthermore, Baker (2009) explains that both 'in Corinth', as well as throughout the rest of the 'Mediterranean world', 'honour and shame' were a 'powerful force', especially involving 'what others in

23 Cf. a comparable emphasis made by the following specialists: Garland (2003:517); Pratt (2000); Thompson (1988:104); Wire (2003:131–2).

24 Cf. 1 Cor 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19–22; 12:2. Oster (1988:504) points to the need of 'evaluating possible Christian adaptation of non-Christian rites', along with 'analysing the processes of acculturation and syncretism in Roman Corinth'. The view taken in this essay contrasts with that of Schemm and Köstenberger (2019:250), who assert that the 'gospel itself is the interpretive key'. While the good news of salvation is pertinent, it is an exaggeration to claim that it furnishes the 'integrative glue for Paul's argument'.

25 Cf. Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37.

26 Cf. Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9; 32:15–21; Ps 78:58.

society' thought 'about someone'.[27] Along the same lines, Johnson (2004) remarks that in the passage under consideration, Paul made use of an 'ancient honour-shame motif' to promulgate his argument. This included detailing the 'correct social honouring and avoidance of shame behaviour between males and females'. In fact, an 'elaborate honour-shame code' governed the 'public and private behaviour of men and women'. [28]

Worthy of consideration is the circumstance for married women, which operated differently than for married men.[29] According to the custom of the day, wives emphasized their purity, rectitude, and submission to their husbands by wearing a head covering in public. For married female believers, this practice carried over to their participation in corporate Christian gatherings. Specialists debate the exact reference of the Greek phrase translated 'head covered'. Some think it refers to a veil or shawl placed over one's head, while others maintain the reference is to the length of a person's hair (and possibly including the way the hair is styled). Perhaps both options are equally viable, rather than being mutually exclusive.[30]

Paul drew attention to an unsaved woman having her hair 'shaved'. As indicated above, in the first century AD, devotees of pagan deities would meet in private homes to venerate heathen gods and goddesses.[31] In these gatherings, female participants would fulfil their religious vows and signal their worship of pagan deities by offering the hair from their sheared or shaved head at the altar of an idol.[32]

27 For a concise overview of the concepts of honour and shame in the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural contexts, cf. Domeris (1993). The author advocates for a conflict model, rather than the method prevalent in structural functionalism, for exploring honour and shame in the New Testament, including the Pauline corpus. The author regards the 'conflict model' (290) as being 'more dynamic than the rigid structural functionist approach', the 'limitations of any model' (293) notwithstanding. Furthermore, the author notes that the 'society' (294) of the first century AD was 'radically divided by status, wealth, power, and gender'. He also observes that both Jesus and Paul, in their distinctive ways, promoted a 'society with upside-down estimations of honour and shame' (295). For this reason, the author thinks it is valid to recognize 'early Christianity as a counter-culture movement'.

28 There is a plethora of studies in the academic literature dealing with the issue of honour and shame in the New Testament, including 1 Cor 11:2–16 (cf. deSilva 2000:23–93). While my own discourse in this treatise draws upon the insights arising from such scholarship, I have intentionally avoided making the honour-shame dialectic a central and extended focus of my disquisition (which would otherwise result in duplicating what others have already stated in a fulsome manner). More seminal to this essay is the issue of idol worship and the way in which it potentially serves as a complementary hermeneutical lens through which to better understand the nature of Paul's comments in the passage being deliberated.

29 Cf. the detailed discussion in the following representative publications: Finney (2010); Hoelke (2014); Massey (2018).

30 Cf. the discussion in the following representative publications: Baker (2009); Barrett (1968:249–50); Ciampa and Rosner (2010); Grosheide (1984:253); Hoelke (2014); Horsley (1998:153–4); Hurley (1973); Johnson (2004); Massey (2018); Sampley (2002:928); Verbrugge (2008:351).

31 Regarding the customary practices of female social elites within Greco-Roman society, cf. the substantive analysis offered by Finney (2010); Gill (1990); Massey (2018); Thompson (1988).

32 Cf. Keener (1992:35); Thompson (1988:113); Witherington (1995:234, 236, 238).

Once again, I surmise that, against the preceding backdrop, during a church service, any married, Christian 'woman' (v. 5) who did not cover her physical 'head' while praying or prophesying signalled (whether intentionally or unintentionally) her devotion to heathen gods and goddesses.[33] In this way, she dishonoured, disgraced, or shamed her spiritual 'head,' namely, her husband. The implications for the proclamation of the gospel cannot be overstated. Gundry-Volf (1997:154–5) avers that the faith 'community's social acceptability' was 'diminished and its missionary task hindered'. Oppositely, as Hoelke (2014:iii) asserts, 'By covering their heads, the women [would] avoid self-promotion, acknowledge the value of their male human counterpart, and honour God'.

33 Cf. a comparable emphasis made by Bruce (1971:105).

Next, Paul used a line of reasoning called an *appeal to extremes*. The apostle sought to highlight the affirmation of a premise that logically resulted in an objectionable conclusion. Paul said that if the saved female spouses in the Corinthian congregation refused to wear head coverings during corporate worship, they might as well shear their heads (v. 6). However, if cutting or shaving their hair seemed offensive, demeaning, and degrading, they should 'cover' their 'head' (or have long hair).

4. Paul's Argument Based on the Creation Account (1 Cor 11:7-12)

As an elaboration on the point Paul communicated in verse 4, he stated that men, beginning with Adam, were made in the 'image' (v. 7) of the Creator and reflected his 'glory'. So, if a saved male believer at Corinth covered his head during corporate worship, he was in some way veiling God's 'image' and depreciating his 'glory'. Then, the apostle stated that the 'woman' reflected the man's 'glory'.[34]

34 Cf. Prov 11:16 (LXX); 1 Esd 4:13–28; along with the observations in fn 48.

Payne (2009:200) elucidates that Paul, in articulating an 'exalting affirmation' of 'woman' as the 'glory of man', did not 'imply or suggest that woman' is somehow 'less' than 'man' in bearing the 'image' and displaying the 'glory' of the Creator. Indeed, 'woman' is the 'human splendour that catches man's eye'. For this reason, 'woman' is the 'pride and joy of man'.

Admittedly, as Johnson (2004) indicates, Paul articulated a 'patriarchal reading of the creation narratives'. Gundry-Volf (1999:285) likewise states that the apostle used 'first-century Mediterranean shame-honour culture with deeply ingrained patriarchy as a lens through which to read creation'; yet, it would

be incorrect to conclude from these observations that he denied the truth revealed in Genesis 1:27, namely, that women (along with men) bore God's 'image'. Indeed, Gundry-Volf (1997:156) cautions that interpreters should 'keep in mind' the missionary-evangelist's 'purpose' so that they 'avoid' making 'false inferences from his argument'.

Paul's line of reasoning continues in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9, where he reiterated what Moses stated in Genesis 2:18 and 21–23. Specifically, Adam was the first human being whom God created in his image, and he subsequently formed Eve from Adam's rib.[35] The Hebrew noun rendered 'helper' (v. 18; *'ē'zĕr*) can also be translated as 'companion' or 'partner'. 'Suitable' renders a noun (nĕ'ḡĕḏ) that conveys the idea of close correspondence. In this case, Adam needed a mate who would complement him.[36]

While it is true that Eve was created to be Adam's 'helper', there is nothing in the language to suggest that this made the woman in some way either ontologically or functionally inferior to Adam.[37] On the contrary, the same word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to the kind of help God provides.[38] Consequently, even though Eve physiologically differed from Adam, Eve was not less than Adam as a human being made in God's image. Eve was Adam's feminine counterpart, colleague, and co-labourer. The emphasis, then, is more in the direction of an egalitarian, rather than a complementarian, view of the genders, whether in society or the church.

Accordingly, Gundry-Volf (1999:283) surmises that 'both man and woman are the source of the other's existence' and so 'interdependent as equals from the perspective of creation'. Johnson (2004), in agreement, observes that Paul gave a 'fully egalitarian, redemptive reading of creation where male and female are mutually and equally dependent on one another'. Hays (1997) goes further with this cautionary remark: 'Anyone who appeals to this passage to silence women or to deny them leadership roles in the church is flagrantly misusing the text'.

In 1 Corinthians 11:10, Paul referred to saved women in the Corinthian church services literally having 'authority' (or 'control'; Greek, *exousia*) over their 'head'. Metzger (1994) surmises that the ambiguity of the apostle's reference led to the 'explanatory gloss,' *kalumma*, or 'a veil' in 'several versional and patristic witnesses' as a replacement for *exousia*. In this case, the head covering (whether the presence of long hair or wearing a veil) was an outward symbol of the regenerate wives' conscious decision to honour their husbands in a visible, culturally appropriate way. [39]

35 Henry (1994) offers the following salient thought in connection with Gen 2:21, 'The woman was … not made out of [Adam's] head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved'.

36 Cf. Kidner (1967); Pratt (2000); Reyburn and Fry (1998); Speiser (1964); Wenham (1987).

37 Cf. a similar point made by the following: Hays (1997); Westfall (2016:69, 86).

38 Cf. Pss 30:10; 121:2.

39 Numerous modern translations reflect the interpretive view stressed here for 1 Cor 11:10 by adopting one of two renderings, either 'sign of authority' (NIV; NJB) or 'symbol of authority' (CSB; CSV; Lexham; NASB; NET; NKJV).

Paul explained that adhering to the above custom was important due to the presence of 'angels'; yet, specialists remain unsure what precisely the apostle meant. What follows are three noteworthy interpretive possibilities put forward by specialists.[40] One option draws attention to the throne room scene of Isaiah 6:1–2, which reveals that a cohort of seraphim covered themselves as they ministered in the Creator's sacred presence. Proponents maintain that in imitation of these mighty angels, women likewise should veil themselves.

A second option is that Paul had in mind angels observing the Corinthian Christians during their worship services.[41] As stated earlier, according to the cultural norms of first-century AD Greco-Roman society, the long hair worn by women exemplified their sexuality. Also, when women wore some sort of head scarf, they signalled their marital status and commitment to their husbands. To do otherwise would suggest the women were available and promiscuous. So, according to this line of reasoning, onlooking angels would be enticed to sin, perhaps in the same manner alluded to elsewhere in Scripture.[42]

A third option is that the reference might have to do with Christians eventually judging angels.[43] In this case, the idea is that God's heavenly emissaries would balk at the sight of believers—whom the angels served[44]—doing anything within a church service that violated the hierarchal order of creation that God originally established.

In keeping with the assertions put forward above, it would be incorrect to surmise that women—whether single or married—are ontologically and functionally inferior to men. After all, as Ciampa and Rosner (2010) observe, Paul's inclusion of the Greek phrase rendered, 'in the Lord' (*en kyriō*; 1 Cor 11:11), is a 'reference to the new creation context established by the gospel'. [45] Allo (1956:261) draws attention to Galatians 3:28, which reveals that distinctions based on ethnicity and religion (e.g. 'Jew' and 'Gentile'), socio-economic status (e.g. 'slave' and 'free'), and gender (e.g. 'male' and 'female') become subordinate to the baptismal union believers have in the Saviour.[46] As a result of the cross-resurrection event, saved men and women are spiritually equal and mutually interdependent.[47]

Although Paul had partly been basing his argument on Adam's creation before Eve, the apostle now balanced that by pointing out that men are born from women. So, in one sense, man is prior to woman; yet, in another sense, woman is prior to man (1 Cor 11:12).[48] Robertson and Plummer (1911) capture the essence of thought by opining, 'if [the man] is [the woman's] initial cause (*ek*), she is his

40 Cf. the discussion in the following representative publications: Barrett (1968:253–5); Bruce (1971:106); Conzelmann (1975); Fitzmyer (2008:417–9); Garland (2003:526–9); Grosheide (1984:256–8); Hurley (1973); Morris (1985); Prior (1985); Robertson and Plummer (1911); Sampley (2002:929); Taylor (2014); Verbrugge (2008:355); Westfall (2016:86); Wire (2003:121–2).

41 Cf. Eph 3:10.

42 Cf. Gen 6:1–4; 2 Pet 2:4–7; Jude 1:6–7.

43 Cf. 1 Cor 6:3.

44 Cf. Heb 1:14.

45 Cf. Rom 16:12–13, 22; 1 Cor 4:17; 7:22, 39; 9:1–2; 15:58; 16:19; Phil 4:2.

46 Cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11.

47 On the one hand, as Payne (2009:87) conveys, 'the gospel transforms all aspects of human life'; yet, on the other hand, Fitzmyer (2008:416) adds the cautionary note that 'because the promise' in Gal 3:28 is 'eschatological, Christians do not yet have full possession of it'.

48 Cf. Gen Rab 8:9; 1 Esd 4:14–17; 4:33–41. For an extended treatment of possible allusions Paul made in 1 Cor 11:7–12 to 1 Esd, cf. Newberry (2019); Westfall (2016:66–8, 72–3, 103). Newberry (2019:48) surmises that the 'repeated and sometimes distinctive echoes of 1 Esdras 4 increase the probability of a direct and not inadvertent connection between these passages'.

instrumental cause (*dia*)'. Thiselton (2000:842) draws attention to the essence of 'human relationality' as encompassing a mutual 'respect' for each gender's 'otherness'. Johnson (2004) sharpens the focus by deducing that Paul inverted the 'hierarchal relationship between the sexes' and broke 'out of the strictly patriarchal system for constructing gender identity and roles'.

Furthermore, Paul argued, the Creator is the one who brought all life into existence. Indeed, He is eternally prior to both men and women. So, everything that was done in corporate worship needed to be consistent with this truth. According to Witherington (1995:238), the salient implication of the apostle's statement for regenerate husbands and wives, along with all saved males and females, is that 'men and women share a horizontal dependence on each other and a vertical dependence on God'.

5. Excursus: The Image of God in Biblical Perspective[49]

49 What appears in this section is adapted from material appearing in Lioy (2016:26–8), along with the secondary sources cited therein.

The broader context of Genesis 1:26–27 indicates that the Hebrew noun, '*adam*, which is translated 'mankind', refers to the male and female genders of the human race. Additionally, only human beings are created in the divine image. For that reason, they are distinguished from the rest of the creatures God brought into existence. Accordingly, all members of the human race bear the 'image' (v. 26; Hebrew, *tselem*) and 'likeness' (Hebrew, *demuth*) of God. *Tselem* is typically used in reference to such replicas as models, statues, and images; and *demuth* is derived from a primitive root (Hebrew, *damah*) that means 'to be like' or 'to resemble'. In verse 26, the two terms seem virtually synonymous in meaning.

The Creator-King gave humans the capacity and authority to govern creation as his ruling representatives. Their jurisdiction as his theophanic deputies extended to the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and animals on the land. The mandate for people to govern the world as benevolent vice-regents of the true and living God is a reflection of his image in them. By ruling over the rest of creation in a responsible fashion, people bear witness to the divine likeness placed within humanity. Also, as they mediate God's presence, they make his will a reality on earth.

The preceding statements should not be taken as permission for people to exploit and ravage either the environment or its inhabitants, including other humans. After all, people are not the owners of creation, but rather stewards who are accountable to their divine Owner. So, while people have jurisdiction over animals and

plants, in the present era of redemptive history, they exercise no authority over cosmic entities and forces. Moreover, because all people bear the image of God, they have sanctity and innate worth. Correspondingly, they are to be treated with dignity and respect.

6. Paul's Argument Based on the Created Realm (1 Cor 11:13–15)

Paul invited the Corinthians to evaluate the facts for themselves. The apostle did so by asking two rhetorical questions. First, Paul wanted his readers to recognize that during times of public prayer, while saved men should not wear head coverings, their regenerate female peers should do so (v. 13).[50] Barker (2009) comments that 'in terms of contemporary application, wearing a hat or not is not really the point'. Similarly, Pratt (2000) remarks that 'modern Christians cannot simply put veils on their wives and believe they have fulfilled the intention of Paul's teaching'.

Second, Paul appealed to the cultural attitudes of his day. Keener (1992:42) clarifies that the apostle's 'appeal to nature was a standard Greco-Roman argument' among 'Stoics', 'Epicureans', and 'other philosophers'. The apostle did so by pointing out that, according to the general way God designed the created realm ('nature', which translates the Greek noun, *physis*; v. 14), along with what Greeks and Romans in that day innately perceived to be appropriate behaviour (as defined by their societal norms), men typically kept their hair short.[51] To do otherwise was considered shameful or disgraceful. Meanwhile, women behaved honourably by wearing their hair long (typically either braided or knotted; v. 15). As suggested by the NLT, the Greek noun translated 'glory' indicates that a woman's 'long hair' was not just intended to be a 'covering' for her head, but also a beautiful source of 'pride and joy' for her.

7. Paul's Appeal to Hold to Established Church Practice (1 Cor 11:16)

Paul anticipated that some of his readers might not readily accept what he said. To those individuals, he pointed out that all the other churches he established followed the same 'practice' (v. 16) he taught. Keener (1992:45) elucidates that 'Paul's appeal to custom' was a 'standard way for an ancient lawyer or speech writer to argue a case'.[52] In the case of the apostle, he expected the believers at

50 Verbrugge (2008:352, 355) draws attention to the fact that it is only in 1 Cor 11:13 that Paul spotlighted, without any corresponding 'parallel for men', what was 'proper for a woman' to do. The implication is that, for the apostle, a woman praying to 'God with her head uncovered' was the 'core problem' that was 'uppermost in his mind' and needed to be remediated.

51 Thiselton (2000:844) delineates 'four distinct views' for making sense of Paul's use of physis ('nature') in 1 Cor 11:14, as follows: (1) an 'intuitive or inborn sense of what is fitting, right, or seemly'; (2) the 'way humans are created', namely, their 'constitution as men and women'; (3) the 'physical reality of how the world is ordered'; and, (4) the 'customs of a given society'. The interpretation offered in this treatise has given particular emphasis to options 3 and 4.

52 e.g. Isocrates, Theon, and so forth.

Corinth to adhere to his ecclesial authority by falling in line with other likeminded congregations (referred to as the 'churches of God') regarding this custom.

As the preceding discourse indicates, the proper interpretation of many parts of the above passage remain open to debate. Also, different faith communities—whether Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Weslyan, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, or otherwise—glean different principles from it. For example, a less favourable option is that Christian women ought to find culturally appropriate ways to show submission to their husbands. A more likely option is that, while regenerate men and women are spiritually equal in Christ, distinctions between the genders ought to be reflected in ways that mirror current societal norms, whether in the global north or the majority world.

8. Excursus: Paul's Comments in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

One's understanding of 11:2–16 influences the way in which 14:33b–36 is interpreted.[53] Concededly, there is some disagreement among interpreters over whether the second half of verse 33 goes with what comes before or what comes after. Was it the need for 'peace' that was in all the Christian congregations or the rule about married 'wives' (or 'women'; v. 34) there remaining 'silent'?

The literary analysis put forward by Garland (2003:510) suggests that verse 33b belongs with what follows. He surmises that these two passages 'form a bookend', as seen by the following parallels: (1) the 'churches of God' (11:16) and the 'churches of the saints' (14:33b); (2) an 'allusion to Genesis 2' (11:7–12) and an appeal to the Mosaic Law (14:34); and, (3) the repeated emphasis on what is 'shameful for a woman' (11:6 and 14:35, respectively).[54]

On the surface, 14:33b–36 seems to be an outright prohibition of wives (or women) speaking in the congregational meetings at Corinth. Paul added that the accepted protocol was for the female attendees to remain silent and submissive, as the Mosaic Law taught.[55] However,

53 Cf. the detailed discussion in the following representative publications: Barrett (1968); Bruce (1971); Ciampa and Rosner (2010); Fee (1987); Fitzmyer (2008); Garland (2003); Grosheide (1984); Kistemaker (1993); Sampley (2002); Thiselton (2000); Verbrugge (2008).

54 For the counter argument that 1 Cor 14:33b is more closely linked with v. 33a, cf. Ciampa and Rosner (2010).

55 Perhaps Paul's moderately ambiguous statement in 1 Cor 14:34 is a reference to Gen 2:18–24 and 3:16, along with the broader teaching and Jewish interpretive tradition (both oral and written) connected with the Pentateuch.

the apostle noted that it was culturally permissible for wives (or women)[56] to ask questions of their husbands at home.[57]

As with 11:2–16, when considering 14:33b–36, it is important to situate Paul's remarks within their first-century AD, patriarchal context. Phiri (2017:102) explains that the Corinthian congregants 'belonged to a larger community' in which the prevalent 'cultural values, lifestyle, and rhetoric' influenced their thinking and actions. Westfall (2016:190) clarifies that the apostle's readers convened 'in small, intimate house churches organized around fellowship meals'.[58] According to the cultural conventions of the day, 'women were busy with food preparation, serving food, and cleaning up'. This created an 'environment where women naturally' tended to be 'noisy and talk among themselves to facilitate their work and enjoy each other' as they completed their tasks.

Keener (1992:70) deduces that, in all likelihood, Paul was 'addressing relatively uneducated women who were disrupting the service with irrelevant questions'. Furthermore, Keener (83) indicates that in Paul's day, 'women' (whether 'Jewish' or 'Greek') were 'less likely to be educated than men'. Keener (80) additionally notes that Paul opposed the female congregants 'learning too loudly in public'. Keener argues that this was an 'issue related to an ancient culture', one which 'no longer relates to women as a group'.

The preceding analysis strongly suggests that the wives (or women) were getting involved in loud, acrimonious, and disruptive quarrels about the theological accuracy of what was being prophesied and proclaimed in worship services. So, rather than arguing and demanding an immediate explanation, the female congregants were directed to wait until after the service to receive further clarification. Keener (1992:84) maintains that Paul's 'point' was 'not to belittle women's ability to learn'; rather, the apostle was 'advocating the most progressive view of his day'.

In the above case, then, Paul did not issue an absolute, all-out, and permanent ban of female congregants (whether married or single) ever uttering any comments within a corporate worship service; rather, the apostle was advocating for the preservation of decorum and public order. Keener (1992:72) elucidates that the 'way' the agitators were 'trying to learn, rather than the learning itself', was 'problematic'. In a similar vein, Garland (2003:669) regards the nature of the 'problem' as the way 'wives comport themselves in the public sphere', especially within the 'context of examining prophecies'. For this reason, Paul's injunction has 'nothing to do with the public ministry of women'.

56 According to Keener (1992:82), 'nearly all Greek women in Paul's day were married'.

57 Some later manuscripts place 1 Cor 14:34–35 after verse 40. Omanson (2006) details one conjecture that vv. 34–35 are an interpolation, namely, a passage that Paul did not originally pen; instead, it is claimed that 'copyists' added these verses sometime later, possibly 'under the influence' of 1 Tim 2:9–15 (for a lengthy defence of this view, cf. Payne 2009:251–82); yet, as both Comfort (2008) and Metzger (1994) attest, this postulation lacks sufficient textual support in the earliest and best Greek manuscripts (cf. Nestle-Aland; United Bible Society; Westcott-Hort; Textus Receptus). Niccum (1997:243), based on his thoroughgoing analysis of the 'external evidence', deduces that it 'unanimously supports the inclusion' of 1 Cor 14:34–35 and that the interpolation view is 'untenable'. Kistemaker (1993) advises that the best way to 'resolve difficulties with this text' is not to resort to the notion of it being a 'marginal gloss'; instead, it is to 'consider the structure, the larger context, and preeminently the themes or principles Paul has explicated'.

58 Cf. the remarks made in fn 5.

The believers at Corinth had been going their own way when it came to conduct of their worship services, and so they had become disorderly. For this reason, Paul reminded them that God's Word did not 'originate' (v. 36) with them, nor were they the only ones to hear it. With respect to congregational decorum, the missionary-theologian's readers needed to come in line with apostolic teaching, as had other the churches he founded.

9. Conclusion

This essay has sought to take a renewed look at 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, along with 14:33b–36, to discern what both these texts do and do not teach concerning the roles of regenerate males and females within the first-century AD church at Corinth. In 11:2, the apostle affirmed his readers for holding to settled apostolic tradition. His remarks in the verses that follow dealt with female believers (especially those who were married) who discontinued covering their heads in corporate Christian gatherings.

The disquisition in the essay identified verses 3–6 as Paul's argument based on Christ and culture. Verses 7–12 were understood to be the apostle's argument based on the creation account. Verses 13–15 were seen as Paul's argument based on the created realm. Finally, verse 16 was said to be Paul's appeal for his readers to hold to established church practice when it came to the issue of head coverings.

Early on, it was recognized that there is no consensus among specialists about various interpretive issues examined in this paper. It was also determined that making an effort to sort out the contested matters and advocating vigorously for one option over the others was beyond the scope of the essay. Instead, it was decided to objectively and concisely set forth dissimilar views that did not materially affect the discourse and conclusions presented in the treatise. The points of debate included the following three items: (1) how the Greek noun, *kephalē* ('head'; v. 3) should be understood; (2) what is the exact reference of the phrase translated 'head covered' (v. 4); and, (3) what is the precise nature of Paul's reference to the presence of 'angels' (v. 10) when believers gathered for worship.

The preceding comments notwithstanding, there were other disputed issues broached in the treatise in which specific interpretive options were favoured. For instance, it was observed that a greater number of Paul's readers were predominately Gentiles who came from pagan backgrounds. For this reason, it was argued that the missionary-theologian alluded to Greco-Roman, rather than Jewish, liturgical

practices as he addressed the troublesome conduct of the Corinthians. It was also noted that 11:2–16 is thematically connected with Paul's comments about idolatry in 8:1–11:1. Specifically, the issue of head coverings was linked to the problem of idol worship among the apostle's readers.

Moreover, it was acknowledged that Paul lived within a patriarchal culture and that both 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 reflect this backdrop. It was also stated that this historical detail is more incidental than prescriptive. Expressed differently, the predominance of patriarchy during the first century AD does not support the conclusion that male superiority / dominance is the transcultural biblical norm for societies (in general) and ecclesial communities (in particular). Just as important for churches today—whether in the global north or the majority world—is the necessity of congregations remaining faithful to Paul's teaching on men and women and operating along the lines of shared leadership among regenerate males and females.

Two key premises, which were broached in section 1, are reaffirmed here. First, when the 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 are examined within the context of their first-century AD, Greco-Roman setting, Paul taught Christians to observe common cultural conventions of the time regarding the practice of wearing head coverings and maintaining decorum within public worship. Second, the apostle was not mandating a corporate practice that is directly applicable to 21st-century believers, regardless of where they reside.

The preceding two premises have direct pertinence to the issue of how regenerate men and women relate and function within the broader mission of God. To reiterate what was said earlier in the treatise, Paul's emphases, even with respect to the Genesis creation account, are more in the direction of an egalitarian, rather than a complementarian, view of the genders, whether in society or the church. One outtake, as noted above, is that the alleged ontological and functional inferiority of women—whether single or married—to men signifies a deeply flawed inference. A second outtake is that saved men and women, in baptismal union with the Messiah, are spiritually equal and mutually interdependent. A third outtake is that both genders enjoy shared, unrestricted access to any and all vocal and executive leadership roles within their faith community.

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