

The Authority of the Voice: A Theological Reading of 1 Cor 11.2–16

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The polarity between 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' perspectives on the relationship of male and female is not the best way to approach this passage (1 Cor 11.2–16), which interprets this relationship as one of *interdependence*. This interdependence is expressed in the shared practices of prophecy and prayer, in which the dialogue between God and the congregation is articulated. In Paul's proposed modification to these practices, female head-covering – probably a veil – serves as a symbol of women's freedom from an erotic basis for the relationship of male and female derived from creation.

Pauline texts relating to matters of gender have been intensively discussed in recent years, and underlying much of this discussion is a single, simple polarity between 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' understandings of the relationship of male and female. A given text, it is held, will assume or assert *either* a hierarchical view of the male/female relation *or* an egalitarian one. In the one case, the text is held to be implicated in the development and legitimation of Christian 'patriarchy'; in the other, it is used to validate the contemporary conviction of the equality of male and female as authentically Christian. Some texts lean towards 'oppression' – male dominance and normativity. Others tend towards a 'liberation' in which women, subject for so long, are at last able to discover their own authentic vocations alongside men. Exegetes may diverge over the respective weight they accord to these positive and negative poles; one scholar may prefer the role of apologist for the apostle, another may choose the role of the critic. Underlying the divergence, however, is the shared interpretative paradigm constituted by the polarity of hierarchical and egalitarian views on gender.¹

This interpretative paradigm does shed light on some of the phenomena of the Pauline and deutero-Pauline texts. It is not simply mistaken. But its scope is

1 This polarity dominates E. Schüssler Fiorenza's influential *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983), which tells the story of the 'patriarchalization' of an original 'discipleship of equals'.

limited. Pauline statements on gender are more diverse than it can allow; their particular nuances may be lost if 'equality' is always the fundamental concern. In Gal 3.28, for example, the three distinctions (Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female) do not straightforwardly represent a series of hierarchical relationships.² The distinction between Jew and Greek does not constitute a hierarchical relationship, since *each* party regards itself as superior to the other. From a Greek perspective, the distinction is related to the broader differentiation between 'Greeks and barbarians' (Rom 1.14); from a Jewish perspective it arises from the distinction between those who are 'Jews by birth (φύσει)' and 'Gentile sinners' (Gal 2.15). As for the second distinction, the terms 'slave' and 'free' refer less clearly to a hierarchical relationship than if Paul had written 'slave or master'. 'Male and female (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ)' is an allusion to Gen 1.27, as the substitution of καὶ for οὐδέ indicates, and there is no suggestion in the Genesis text that this relationship is understood hierarchically. If the distinctions of Gal 3.28a do not refer to 'hierarchical' relationships, then the 'oneness in Christ Jesus', in the face of which the distinctions are declared to be irrelevant, is not to be understood as an 'egalitarian' oneness. In baptism, Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female receive a new identity as they 'put on Christ' (3.27): the emphasis lies not on their 'equality' but on their *belonging together* as they participate in the new identity and the new practices and modes of interaction that this will entail. Paul *could* have assumed that the three distinctions he mentions were hierarchical ones, and that in Christ these are replaced by an egalitarian oneness, but there is nothing in the wording of his statement (or in the hypothetical baptismal formula supposed to underlie it) to suggest that he actually did so. The polarity of hierarchy and equality is an exceedingly blunt instrument for interpreting this text.³

In 1 Cor 11.2–16, on the other hand, the presence of both hierarchical and egali-

2 On the more usual view, Gal 3.28 is 'the clearest statement of women's equality to be found in the Christian scriptures', proclaiming as it does 'the abolition of three sets of hierarchical relations' (S. Briggs, 'Galatians', in E. Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, 2: A Feminist Commentary* [New York: Crossroad, 1994] 218–36, 218, 219).

3 As J. L. Martyn argues, 'Religious, social, and sexual pairs of opposites are not replaced by equality, but rather by a newly created unity' (*Galatians* [AB: New York: Doubleday] 377). I have reservations, however, about Martyn's assertion that Gal.3.28 proclaims 'the erasure of the distinction of male from female', on the basis of a 'new creation in which the building blocks of the old creation are declared to be nonexistent' (381); compare D. Boyarin's claim that 'in the process of baptism in the spirit the marks of ethnos, gender, and class are all erased in the ascension to a univocity and universality of human essence which is beyond and outside of the body' (*A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* [Berkeley: University of California, 1994] 24). Martyn rightly stresses the eschatological radicalism of Pauline thought; but even the claim that 'I (ἐγώ) no longer live, but Christ lives in me' is qualified by the acknowledgement that 'I' continue to live 'in flesh' (ἐν σαρκί), and so in a degree of continuity with the pre-Christian life that has 'died' (Gal 2.19–20). When Jewish and Gentile Christians eat together at Antioch, the difference between them is not 'erased' but

tarian conceptuality might seem to be obvious. It is said that Christ is the head of man and man of woman; that woman was created from and for man (vv. 3, 8–9); and, apparently in flat contradiction to this, it is said that woman and man are reciprocally dependent on each other (vv. 11–12). This is, surely, a classic instance of Paul's ability to use both hierarchical and egalitarian models of the male/female relationship, apparently unaware that these are mutually exclusive.⁴

In this paper, I shall argue that the polarity of hierarchy and equality does not do justice to the scope of Paul's thought in this passage.⁵ In the reading presented here, its theological content is visualized as a set of four concentric circles; our movement through the passage will proceed from the outermost circle towards the centre, from the general to the particular. In the outermost circle, we identify the single general principle that determines Paul's understanding of the male/female relationship. In the second circle, the shared practices that Paul wishes to modify are understood as a concrete application of this principle, both in their original and in their modified forms. In the third circle, we shall attempt to clarify the rationale for the modification itself. Finally, in the inner circle, the precise form of this modification will be considered. The general principle underlying Paul's understanding of the male/female relationship is that of *interdependence*. This principle finds a concrete application in the communal practices of prayer and prophecy in which women and men both participate. Fearing that women who fulfil these prominent roles expose themselves to male erotic fantasy, Paul seeks to modify these shared practices by requiring women to cover their heads; the head-covering is a sign that an understanding of the male/female relationship in terms of a male-oriented eros is definitively superseded in Christ. Although the traditional identification of the head-covering as a veil has been questioned in recent scholarship, this remains much the most plausible interpretation of Paul's language.

For all its flaws, obscurities and illogicalities, this passage from 1 Cor 11 remains

subsumed into an encompassing unity in Christ (cf. 2.12–16). The denials of Gal 3.28 should be understood as still stronger forms of the parallel statements found in 5.6 and 6.15, that circumcision and uncircumcision are now irrelevant (οὔτε . . . τι ἰσχυέει, 5.6; οὔτε . . . τί ἐστίν, 6.15).

4 According to J. Gundry-Volf, this passage (and specifically vv. 7–9, 12) indicates that creation 'can be construed in a patriarchal sense . . . but also in an egalitarian sense'; the latter reading stems from specifically Christian insights, the former from the perspective of patriarchal culture ('Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method', in O. Hofius *et al.*, eds, *Evangelium – Schriftauslegung – Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997] 151–71, 170).

5 There is a more wide-ranging discussion of this passage in ch. 2 of my *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000). Although the exegetical results of the present paper are similar, they are presented from a different perspective and a number of new arguments are added.

the single most significant discussion of the male/female relation in the Pauline corpus. This reading seeks to bring out its fundamental coherence, and to suggest that its theological concerns are more substantial than is usually recognized.

1. The principle of interdependence

In 1 Cor 11.11–12, Paul writes: ‘Nevertheless, neither is woman apart from man nor man from woman, in the Lord. For as woman is from man, so also man is through woman; and all things are from God.’ This passage assumes the irreducible *difference* between man and woman.⁶ Yet this passage is above all an assertion of male/female *interdependence*. There is, it claims, no such thing as man-in-himself or woman-in-herself, each in abstraction from the other. As Paul will later note, ‘The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”, nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you” ’ (1 Cor 12.21). Neither man nor woman can say to the other, ‘I have no need of you’, since each is constituted as man or as woman only in relation to the other. Man and woman are presented here as ‘equal’ in the sense that the being of each is equally dependent on the being of the other.

In v. 11, man and woman are said to belong together ‘in the Lord’ – in the sphere in which the salvation achieved in Jesus’ death and resurrection is acknowledged and actualized. In v. 12, Paul finds a parable of this relationship ‘in the Lord’ in the sphere of created human existence, as seen through the lens of Jewish scripture. Woman is not woman apart from man, and the narrative of woman’s creation in Gen 2 is understood as an illustration or parable of this fact: ‘Woman is from man (ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός)’ (v. 12a). Man is not man apart from woman, and this is illustrated by the realities of child-bearing: ‘Man is through woman (διὰ τῆς γυναικός)’ (v. 12b). Despite Gen 2, it cannot be said that woman is non-reciprocally dependent on man as her origin, for ‘man is through woman’. Despite the realities of child-bearing and child-rearing, it cannot be said that man is non-reciprocally dependent on woman as his origin; for, in Gen 2, ‘woman is from man’. In any case, man or woman can only be said to be the origin of the other in a relative sense: for, as Paul notes, ‘All things are from God’ (v. 12c).

Thus, the principle that man and woman have their being from and with each other holds true both in the sphere of the Christian community (‘in the Lord’, v. 11) and, by analogy, in the sphere of creation as a whole (‘all things’, v. 12). This principle of interdependence is open to an unlimited range of concrete applications. Paul himself applies it elsewhere to sexual conduct within marriage, where it provides him with an argument against unilateral sexual abstinence:

6 According to some recent feminist theory, the problem with the concept of equality is that it threatens to eradicate gender difference. See L. Irigaray, ‘Equal to Whom?’, *differences* 1 (1988) 59–76 – a critique of E. Schüssler Fiorenza’s *In Memory of Her*.

Let the man render what he owes to the woman, likewise the woman to the man. The woman does not exercise authority over her own body but the man, and likewise the man does not exercise authority over his own body but the woman. (1 Cor 7.3–4)

These statements are a concrete application of the general principle enunciated in 1 Cor 11.11–12, that woman is not apart from man nor man from woman; and this is underlined by common formal features. In 7.4, the chiasmic structure (woman, man; man, woman) is identical to that of 11.11, 12;⁷ and in both passages the chiasmic symmetry is twice underlined by the use of adverbs of comparison or by a negative equivalent (ὁμοίως in 7.3, 4; οὔτε . . . οὔτε in 11.11; ὅσπερ . . . οὕτως in 11.12). The principle of male/female interdependence enunciated in the later passage is, however, open to quite different applications. As the rest of 1 Cor 7 shows, it does not imply the normativity of marriage: it is no less true of the unmarried than of the married that they are not themselves apart from the other represented by the opposite sex. Since they are open to a range of applications, the dogmatic assertions of 1 Cor 11.11–12 are more fundamental to Pauline reflection on gender than Gal 3.28, despite the much greater prominence of the latter text in recent scholarship.⁸

The significance of these assertions may have been underestimated because of their problematic context. That context includes a further repeated chiasmic statement that appears flatly to contradict v. 12: 'For man is not from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman but woman for the sake of man' (vv. 8–9). How is this compatible with the denial of a one-way relation of origin in v. 12? The passage as a whole appears to use a hierarchical conceptuality according to which Christ is the head of man and man of woman (v. 3), and man is the glory of God and woman the glory of man (v. 7). This apparently

⁷ In 1 Cor 7.3, the logic is again chiasmic although the Greek word-order is not.

⁸ The 'principle of interdependence' also appears to underlie Paul's objections to same-sex relationships in Rom 1.26–7. In these relationships, Paul may have believed, woman attempts to be 'apart from man' and man attempts to be 'apart from woman'. Thus, the result of οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας is ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι. The principle of interdependence suggests a more fruitful approach to the passage in Rom 1 than one that finds here another instance of 'hierarchical' thought: so B. J. Brooten, for whom Paul's problem with homosexuality is that a male has to fulfil the subordinate role that nature intends for the female ('Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Eroticism', in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* [ed. C. W. Atkinson *et al.*; Boston: Beacon, 1985] 61–87). In relation to the ethical issue, a single brief clarification must here suffice. Granted that homosexual relationships *may* constitute a gesture of exclusion and hostility directed towards the opposite sex (as, arguably, in Plato), the question is whether this exclusion of the other is a *necessary* or a *contingent* feature of such relationships. The absence of heterosexual intercourse does not in itself contravene the principle of interdependence, since this principle is supposed to underlie the male/female relationship in its totality, outside marriage as well as within it.

hierarchical conceptuality is linked – although obscurely – with the demand that Corinthian women should cover their heads as they pray or prophesy, thereby differentiating themselves from their male counterparts. In this context, the dogmatic assertions of vv. 11–12 might seem to be a foreign body, introduced perhaps as a concession.

This, then, is the question to be addressed: can the practices to which Paul refers, together with his proposed modification of them, plausibly be understood as concrete applications of the general principle of interdependence?

2. Practices of dialogue

It is the practices of prayer and prophecy that Paul is concerned with, and that he seeks to modify. An injunction addressed to ‘every man who prays or prophesies . . .’ is complemented in the following verse by an injunction to ‘every woman who prays or prophesies . . .’ (vv. 4, 5, cf. v. 13). At this point in the passage, the concept of equality is indeed important if one takes it to refer not to an abstract equivalence of worth but to common roles within the life of the congregation. The roles of the pray-er and the prophet are open to both men and women, equally, and these are clearly *public* roles in the context of the congregation’s gatherings for worship. As Paul later explains, the one who prophesies ‘speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation’ (14.3), doing so as the representative of God to the congregation. In conjunction with prophecy, ‘prayer’ must presumably refer here to the equally public function of leading the congregation in communal prayer, thus representing the congregation to God. Paul alludes to this (with specific reference to the prayer of thanksgiving) when he writes: ‘If you give thanks with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?’ (14.16). The congregational response, ‘Amen’, indicates the representative nature of the prayer in question. In prophecy one articulates the word of God to the congregation, in prayer one articulates the word of the congregation to God; and in the conjunction of these activities there occurs the divine–human dialogue that lies at the heart of the Christian community’s life and worship. These complementary roles, which make the community what it is, are exercised by both men and women. The Pauline injunctions about the covering or otherwise of the head are an attempt to *modify* these shared practices, by introducing into them a mark of difference, but there is no suggestion that it is inappropriate or problematic for women to participate in them. *The proposed modification to the shared practices presupposes that these practices will continue.* If women cease to pray or prophesy (silenced perhaps by the later gloss in 14.34–35), then the entire passage loses its point. The head-covering enjoined on woman is, precisely, her *authority* (ἐξουσία, v. 10) to fulfil these ministries for the upbuilding of the congregation.

There is no suggestion that the head-covering is intended to remedy some abuse current in the Corinthian church. Nothing is said here of an 'over-realized eschatology' which 'involved some breakdown in the distinction between the sexes', as women at Corinth argued for the right to pray and prophesy 'without the customary "head-covering" or "hairstyle"':⁹ On the contrary, Paul opens this section of his letter by praising the Corinthians for their loyalty to the traditions he had taught them: 'I commend you because you remember everything I told you and maintain the traditions just as I delivered them to you' (11.2). When Paul seeks to remedy an abuse in the Corinthian church, he speaks in quite different tones: 'In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you assemble it is not for the better but for the worse' (11.17). The contrast between οὐκ ἐπαινωῶ here and ἐπαινωῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς in 11.2 is clearly deliberate. The Corinthians are at fault in their practice of the Eucharist, but Paul does not suggest that any comparable distortions of his original teaching occur in the shared ministry of prophecy and prayer. The women prophets have not 'abandoned' their traditional head-covering, influenced perhaps by some enthusiastic belief about the abolition of gender differences in Christ, for at Corinth the head-covering is not traditional but an innovation that Paul only now seeks to impose. He does not seek here to correct an abuse but to modify an existing practice that he regards as essentially good and praiseworthy.¹⁰

At issue in this passage, then, is not the covering of the female head as an end in itself, but the appropriate exercise of the shared practices of prayer and prophecy. Here too, Paul's concern is that 'all things should be done decently and in order' (14.40) – not because decency and order are ends in themselves but as means to the true end of worship, which is to hear 'the word of God' (14.36) and to articulate the responsive human word that ensures that divine–human communication is dialogue rather than monologue. Paul's view of what constitutes decency and order may have been as questionable to the Corinthians as it is to us, and, because he anticipates dissent, it is this issue that fills the foreground of the passage in ch. 11. Yet it would not do so were it not for Paul's conviction that the divine–human dialogue must be articulated in the voices of women as well as of men.

At one point in the passage, this underlying conviction suddenly comes to the surface. Aware that in attempting to modify the shared practices he may appear to

9 G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987) 498.

10 Speculations about the situation at Corinth to which Paul here responds are therefore beside the point. For a particularly vivid account of that situation, see J. Murphy O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2–16', *CBQ* 42 (1980) 482–500: Corinthian men were flaunting their long hair (conventionally associated with homosexuality), while Corinthian women were experimenting with masculine hairstyles. 'Scandal was the symbol of their new spiritual freedom; the more people they shocked, the more right they felt themselves to be' (490).

be undermining them, Paul emphatically denies that this is his intention. The dissent he expects from the Corinthians (cf. 11.16: 'If anyone is inclined to be argumentative ...') might take various forms, but prominent among them would surely be the suggestion that Paul is now *opposed to* women's participation in the divine-human dialogue at the heart of worship. He requires, a Corinthian critic might suggest, that the woman who prays or prophesies should in some measure conceal herself as she does so. Will she next be required to make herself inaudible as well as invisible? In other words, will she be deprived of her ministry of the word, and will this ministry now be exercised by men only? Paul's claim that it is 'shameful (αἰσχρόν)' for a woman to pray or prophesy with head uncovered (11.6) might seem to lead all too inevitably to the claim that it is 'shameful' for a woman to speak in church (14.35: αἰσχρόν again). In that case, there would no longer be an analogy to the divine-human dialogue in the ongoing dialogue of men and women. Where one party is silenced, communication is reduced to monologue: talking-at rather than speaking-with.

It is this suggestion – that the head-covering is just the beginning of a process that will ultimately silence women altogether and leave speaking in church to men – to which Paul responds by way of the general dogmatic assertion that woman is not woman apart from man and man is not man apart from woman (11.11). The assertion opens with an adversative, πλὴν ('Nevertheless ...'), suggesting that the denials that follow rebut a conclusion that might be drawn from what Paul himself has just said. Women who pray and prophesy are now to cover their heads, thereby differentiating themselves from men who perform the same functions – *nevertheless*, this is not a first step towards a separation of women from men within the congregation's meetings for worship. It does not imply that, in the ministry of the word of prayer and prophecy, the men who speak and the men who listen can speak and listen in a self-sufficient, all-male sphere in which women are silent and, as such, absent. On the contrary, in the Lord woman and man belong inseparably together, and it is this belonging together that is articulated in the shared practices of prayer and prophecy. In the church, men and women must hear the word of the Lord as articulated both by men and by women.

Paul's principle of interdependence also implies a further negation. It is not the case that women who speak do so primarily for the benefit of women listeners, on the basis of one set of shared experiences or concerns, and that men who speak do so primarily for the benefit of men, on the basis of another. That would be a further infringement of the principle that, in the Lord, woman is not apart from man nor man from woman. If this principle is correct, men need to hear the word of the Lord in the words of women as well as of men, and women need to hear the word of the Lord in the words of men as well as of women. Where this does not occur, the underlying theological error is serious and damaging: for men

and women have failed to realize that their humanity, as constituted or reconstituted 'in the Lord', is such that each cannot be fully human without the other. Where men enclose themselves in an all-male world, or where women enclose themselves in an all-female world, they deny their own humanity; that is, they deny the humanity redeemed and recreated in Christ, and reassert the distorted, unredeemed humanity that exists apart from Christ.¹¹

We have seen that what is at issue in this passage is women's covering of the head not as an end in itself but as a modification to the practice of a shared ministry of prayer and prophecy. This shared practice is a concrete application of the general principle that man and woman are what they are only in relation to the other, and this remains the case even in the modified form of the practice. Interdependence rather than equality is the concept that lies at the heart of Paul's concerns here. But a new suspicion arises at this point. Interdependence might exist within a hierarchical relationship between a superior and a subordinate partner. Master and slave may be said to be dependent on one another, but the relationship between the two remains an unequal one. Interdependence is fully compatible with inequality. In 1 Cor 11, Paul on two occasions appears to assert a hierarchical understanding of the male/female relationship:

I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (v. 3)

Man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman but woman from man; and man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. (vv. 7-9)

These last statements appear blatantly to contradict the interpretation of Gen 2 presented in v. 12. But the still more fundamental problem is that the modification Paul proposes appears to be closely connected to an understanding of the male/female relationship in which one is superior and the other subordinate, one first and the other second. Is this what 'interdependence' amounts to? This conceptuality, it might seem, cannot fail to undermine women's right or calling to participate in the ministry of the word on an equal footing with men.

The next step is to show that, in spite of Paul's misleading language, the concept of hierarchy is marginal to this passage. The rationale for the proposal that women who pray or prophesy should cover their heads lies elsewhere.

¹¹ The possibility of a separation along gender lines is acknowledged by Paul precisely as he denies its validity: in v. 11 the principle of interdependence is asserted in negative form, by way of a rejection of an opposing principle of separation. My reading assumes that Paul is also here tacitly responding to an anticipated accusation that he himself advocates a principle of separation.

3. The old and the new

The insertion of a mark of difference into the shared practices of prayer and prophecy is ostensibly derived from a series of identifications in which the ‘head’ of man is identified as Christ whereas the ‘head’ of woman is man (v. 3). The presence here of hierarchical conceptuality is unmistakable, and if the connotations of superiority and subordination were to be pressed, the outcome might be that, in church, men would speak and women would listen – as in 1 Cor 14.34–5.¹² The hierarchical conceptuality here has the potential to undermine the very practice that Paul wishes to preserve in modified form. Yet its role in the passage as a whole is remarkably limited, despite the emphatic terms in which it is introduced (θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι, 11.3); Paul’s metaphorical play with the term κεφαλή contributes virtually nothing to his argument. Having asserted that ‘the head of every man is Christ’ (v. 3), he proceeds to claim that ‘every man praying or prophesying with head covered dishonours his head’.¹³ This may be a reference to the literal head dishonouring the figurative head, that is, Christ, although Paul hardly makes this clear. When he adds, ‘Every woman praying or prophesying with head uncovered dishonours her head’, the reference to a figurative head – that is, to man – is still less clear. The equations of v. 3 – Christ the head of man, man the head of woman – lead one to expect a further reference to man as woman’s head in v. 5, but the ‘head’ that is dishonoured when she prays or prophesies uncovered appears to be her own head. In failing to cover her head, she brings dishonour upon her head, that is, upon *herself*. This is, says Paul, equivalent to her having her hair cut short (κείρασθαι) or shaved off altogether (ξυρᾶσθαι), something that is ‘shameful for a woman’ (αἰσχρὸν τῇ γυναικί). Her uncovered head is clearly *her own* shame: there is no reference at all to a *man*, woman’s figurative head, who is put to shame by her conduct. The hierarchical conceptuality of v. 3 proves to be virtually redundant in Paul’s proposed modification to the shared practices of prayer and prophecy. The claim that the male head is appropriately left uncovered, but that this would be improper for a woman, stands on its own; the linkage with the dogmatic assertions about headship in v. 3 is tenuous.¹⁴

This is confirmed by Paul’s later appeal to his readers to judge for themselves

¹² The arguments for regarding this passage as a gloss are well set out by Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 699–708.

¹³ The meaning of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (‘having down the head’) is established by Est 6.12, where Haman returns to his home grieving κατὰ κεφαλῆς; this renders the Hebrew *h²pūy r’ōš*, ‘head covered’. A later LXX editor therefore rightly paraphrases the cryptic Greek phrase as κατακεκαλύμμενος κεφαλῆν.

¹⁴ Fee acknowledges this as a possible interpretation of v. 5, but argues that the primary reference of ‘her head’ must be metaphorical; otherwise v. 3 would be redundant (*1 Corinthians*, 508n). Can we assume, on principle, that there can be no loose ends or false starts in Pauline argumentation?

whether it is really fitting (πρέπον) for a woman to pray to God with uncovered head (v. 13). Paul's belief, here traced back to 'nature' (vv. 14–15), is that the uncovered female head just *is* a source of shame, irrespective of any relation to a figurative male head. In v. 15, Paul will similarly claim that woman's long hair is 'glory to her [αὐτῆς]', not to her husband – if she has one. Like most assertions about propriety and decorum in matters of dress, Paul's claims are open to question in their own cultural context and are virtually meaningless elsewhere. But the crucial point here is that he does not in practice relate his opinions about propriety to the hierarchical conceptuality he introduces in v. 3 but develops no further.

Seemingly hierarchical language returns, however, in vv. 7–9. Here, the mark of difference – women should cover their heads, men should not – is justified by an appeal to the creation narratives of Gen 1–2. Man is the image and glory of God, whereas woman is the glory of man; woman was created from man and for the sake of man. Man is first, woman is second: the required head-covering is in some way related to this asymmetry. Yet – to anticipate the argument that follows – Paul's concern that current practice be modified expresses a commitment not to male primacy but, on the contrary, to its overthrow. His anxiety is that the woman who prays or prophesies with uncovered head may become the object of the male erotic gaze: the problem to which female head-covering is the proposed solution is that of a male-oriented eros. As a woman articulates the word of God to the congregation or the word of the congregation to God, her appearance may obstruct the reception of her word; or so Paul fears. In describing the uncovered female head as a source of shame, equivalent as such to hair cut short or shaved off altogether (vv. 5c–6), the shame Paul has in mind is that of physical nakedness. This shame is the consequence of self-exposure to the male gaze. How can there be proper attention to the content of what is said where there is an improper attention to the person of the speaker? Paul is aware that his readers, male and female, are likely to find his argument here alarmist and insulting (cf. v. 16); we shall return to this issue later to ask whether anything of theological substance can be retrieved here. For the present, it is worth emphasizing again that the reason for Paul's embarrassing contortions is his concern that *women's* voices be heard – truly heard – as representing both the congregation and God in the ongoing divine–human dialogue.¹⁵

¹⁵ It is crucial to this interpretation that the 'shame' referred to in vv. 5–6 (καταισχύνει, αἰσχρόν) is that of physical nakedness, which, for Paul, is associated with the uncovered female head. Thus, the reason why it is shameful for a woman to have her hair shaved off is that she thereby loses the garment (περιβολαῖον) bestowed on her by nature to conceal her nakedness – that is, her long hair (v. 15, where shame language [ἀτιμία] is again used). Two OT passages illustrate this link between the uncovered female head and the shame of physical nakedness. (1) In Isa 47.2–3, the 'virgin daughter of Babylon' is commanded: 'Take the millstones and grind meal, put off your veil (ἀποκάλυψαι τὸ κατακάλυμμά σου), strip off

Man is said to be ‘the image and glory of God’, and it would therefore be improper for him to cover his head (v. 7). The term δόξα is intended to gloss the scriptural εἰκόν, understood here as manifestation or revelation. If man is the manifestation of God, then man is not to conceal what God has revealed. Yet woman should cover her head, for she is the glory not of God but of man. But in what sense is she the glory of man, and what has that to do with her covering her head? If man is the image and glory of God in the sense that he is the revelation of God, is woman the glory of man as the revelation of man? That seems unlikely: for, unlike God, man is not hidden and does not need a manifestation external to himself. Even if he did, why would it need to be concealed by a head-covering?

It seems that there is a semantic slippage between the two occurrences of δόξα in v. 7. Man is the glory of God as the manifestation of God which should not be concealed, but woman is the glory of man in a rather different sense. In v. 15 Paul will describe long hair as woman’s ‘glory’, and in this context δόξα is used to refer to the object of one’s pride and joy. A similar usage is found elsewhere in Paul. The Thessalonians are described as ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά (1 Thess 2.20). In Phil 3.19 it is said of certain persons that ‘their glory is in their shame (ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν)’. In one case the object of glory is an appropriate one, in the other it is inappropriate; but in both cases δόξα is the object of a person’s joy, love and devotion. This sense of δόξα makes 1 Cor 11.7 comprehensible: man as the manifestation of God should not cover his head, but woman as the object of man’s erotic joy, love and devotion should cover her head. Paul assumes a construal of erotic attraction as an asymmetrical phenomenon of male initiative and female response, and he also assumes that this phenomenon is a potential hindrance to participation in the divine–human dialogue articulated by the woman who prays or prophesies. She is to cover her head so as to deflect the look that would otherwise undermine her ministry.¹⁶

(ἀνακάλυψαι) your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. Your shame shall be uncovered (ἀνακαλυφθήσεται ἡ αἰσχύνη σου), and your reproaches (ὀνειδισμοί) shall be seen . . .’ (2) At her trial on a false charge of adultery, Susanna – a woman ‘of great delicacy and beautiful in appearance (καλῆ τῶ εἶδει)’ (Sus 31) – appears before her accusers, the two elders who had attempted to seduce her. ‘And the wicked men commanded her to be unveiled (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι) – for she was veiled (ἦν γὰρ κατακεκαλυμμένη) – so that they might be satisfied with her beauty (ὅπως ἐμπλησθῶσιν τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς). But her family (οἱ παρ’ αὐτῆς) and all who saw her wept’ (vv. 32–3, Theodotion). The elders’ ‘desire’ (ἐπιθυμία, v. 21) is fulfilled in the uncovering of Susanna’s face. When Corinthian women pray or prophesy, they occupy an equally public position in which (according to Paul) they expose themselves to the male erotic look. They must therefore follow Susanna’s example and cover their heads (with a veil, as she did; on this point see below).

¹⁶ Attempts at a univocal understanding of the two occurrences of δόξα in v. 7 run into insuperable difficulties. Thus, R. Hays suggests that, for Paul, man reflects the glory of God and woman the glory of man: ‘Given Paul’s assumption that woman is the glory of the *man*, her

Paul finds support for this asymmetrical construal of eros in the creation narrative of Gen 2. Woman is the glory of man, *for* woman was created from and for the sake of man (1 Cor 11.7–9). Woman originates in the divine decree that ‘it is not good that the man should be alone’ (Gen 2.18). When she arrives on the scene, she is greeted with an ecstatic look of recognition – ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ (2.23): the look that intends and initiates the movement of reunion in which man becomes one flesh with his wife (2.24). Woman is from and for man, she is regarded as an object of erotic attraction: and yet, for Paul, this construal of woman (together with the corresponding construal of man) has no place within the communal life of the Christian congregation. In the Lord, women and men are interdependent, and this is the interdependence of agape and not of eros. It comes to expression in the shared practices of prayer and prophecy, and female head-covering is intended to ensure that this interdependence is preserved and is not distorted into covert eroticism. The head-covering is therefore woman’s ‘authority’ (ἐξουσία, v. 10) to put definitively behind her an origin which binds her to male erotic desire, in order to discover her true humanity within the divine–human dialogue that she helps to articulate.¹⁷

The role of the subordinationist language of 1 Cor 11.7–9 is therefore to outline a problem to which the head-covering is the solution. The claim that ‘man was not created from woman but woman from man’ (v. 8) is not contradicted by the later claims that woman and man belong together and that neither is the ultimate origin of the other (vv. 11–12); for these later claims serve to define the male/female relationship as it now stands ‘in the Lord’ (v. 11), and in creation only as viewed from that perspective (v. 12), whereas the preceding passage defines a form of that relationship derived from creation but now definitively surpassed and superseded. The head-covering marks the limits of the old, asymmetrical, erotic construal of the male/female relationship, and the turn to new, reciprocal modes of interaction ‘in the Lord’ that express the reality of agape. It is, as it were, an eschatological symbol or sacrament. The realities of the original creation are seen from

uncovered head would then inappropriately reflect the man’s glory in the worship setting, deflecting attention from God’s glory’ (*First Corinthians* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997] 186). Can Paul have believed that a man sees in woman not an other but his own transfigured reflection?

¹⁷ The equation of the head-covering and authority is rightly noted by M. Hooker: ‘Far from being a symbol of the woman’s subjection to man, . . . her head-covering is what Paul calls it – authority: in prayer and prophecy she, like the man, is under the authority of God’ (‘Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Corinthians 11.10’ [1964], reprinted in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990] 113–20, 120).

the perspective of a 'new creation' in which they no longer hold sway: 'The old has passed away, behold, the new has come!' (2 Cor 5.17).¹⁸

4. The limit of the veil

It is now clear why Paul wishes to modify the shared practices of prayer and prophecy so that they express more appropriately the new reality of the male/female relationship as it exists 'in the Lord'. The head-covering he seeks to impose marks the turning-point between the old order of eros and the new order of agape. What is not yet clear is just what this 'head-covering' is that is intended to avert the male gaze from the appearance of the woman who prays and prophesies, for the sake of a proper attention to what she says. Is it a hairstyle, or some kind of garment such as a veil or headscarf?

In 1 Cor 11.2–16, Paul finds analogies for the uncovered and covered female head in short and long hair respectively. In vv. 5c–6, he asserts that the uncovered female head is analogous to hair cut short or shaved off altogether: the one is said to be as shameful as the other. It is clear that it is an *analogy* that Paul intends: 'Every woman who prays or prophesies with head uncovered (ἀκατακαλύπτῳ τῆ κεφαλῆ) dishonours her head; it is one and the same thing as her having her hair shaved off (ἐν γάρ ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῆ ἐξυρημένη)' (v. 5; the following verse again asserts the equivalence of the two states). In vv. 13–15, on the other hand, it is long hair that provides Paul with the analogy he wants:

Judge for yourselves: is it appropriate for a woman to pray to God uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is his dishonour (ἀτιμία αὐτῷ), whereas if a woman has long hair it is her glory (δόξα αὐτῆ)? For her hair is given to her as a covering (ἀντὶ περιβολαίου).

If the lack of the required head-covering is *analogous* to a woman's having her hair cut off, it is likely that in this later passage too Paul intends an analogy. Nature provides a covering for woman, in the form of her long hair, and this natural 'covering' is said to confirm the appropriateness of the head-covering that Paul seeks to impose. Thus, the uncovered female head is equivalent to hair cut off, in that both conditions are a source of shame (vv. 5c–6). The covered female head is equivalent to long hair, the garment that nature itself has provided for women (v. 15). If an analogy between head-covering (or its lack) and hair-length is intended in the one case, it is presumably also intended in the other.

¹⁸ This interpretation may help to make sense of the notoriously difficult διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους in v. 10. If the angels are τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου to whom God has entrusted the administration of the world until the fulness of time (cf. Gal 4.3), then the head-covering is a sign of freedom and authority in relation to these 'weak and impoverished' entities (cf. Gal 4.9). It anticipates a day when 'we shall judge angels' (1 Cor 6.3).

The effect of this interpretation is to rule out certain attempts to specify the nature of the head-covering that Paul here envisages. If the head-covering is *analogous to* long hair and its absence to short hair, then the head-covering in question cannot be *identified with* long hair or its absence with short hair. Paul is not instructing the Corinthian women prophets to cover their heads by allowing their hair to grow long.¹⁹ Nor, on the other hand, is he requiring them to cover their heads by binding up hair that they allow to hang down loose. If his problem were with loosed hair, one would not expect him to speak so positively about long hair (v. 15). And to identify unbound and bound hair with the uncovered and the covered head respectively is awkward and improbable.²⁰ The head-covering Paul envisages is therefore some kind of garment – perhaps a headscarf or a veil. A headscarf would partially conceal the hair, a veil would conceal the face. But Paul believes that long hair is already a ‘garment (περιβολαίον)’ provided by nature for the female head (v. 15), and it is hard to see why this natural garment should itself be concealed underneath an artificial one.²¹ The reference is therefore most prob-

19 The view that Paul is criticizing the Corinthian women for their short hair is advocated by W. J. Martin, ‘I Corinthians 11:2–16: An Interpretation’, in W. Ward Gasque and R. P. Martin, eds, *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970) 231–41.

20 W. Schrage’s arguments in favour of the ‘unbound hair’ view represent a broad consensus in recent scholarship (*Der Erste Brief an die Korinther (1 Kor 6,12–11,16)* [EKK VII/2; Solothurn and Düsseldorf: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995] 491–4). (1) Paul does not mention the veil in this passage, but he does mention the topic of hair-length (vv.4, 6, 14–15). (2) There is extensive evidence that women took part in Graeco-Roman religious rites with unbound hair. (3) The term ἀκατακάλυπτος is found in the LXX only in Lev 13.45, where it refers to unbound hair. It is remarkable how Lev 13.45 is so often cited without any reference to LXX usage of κατακαλύπτειν, which Paul uses three times in 1 Cor 11.6–7. This term is used in connection with the veiling of the face in Gen 38.15; Isa 6.2; Sus 32; Isa 47.2–3 is also relevant here. As for the first point, the celebration of woman’s long hair as her ‘glory’ (v. 15) is hardly an effective argument *against* unbound hair. The references to hair-length must be understood as supporting arguments for the imposition of the veil. If the ‘unbound hair’ interpretation is preferred, however, the interpretation of the passage in terms of the erotic attraction of man to woman is still viable. In one of the parabolic visions of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, there appear ‘twelve women, very beautiful to look at, clothed in black, girded, and their shoulders bare and their hair loose (τὰς τρίχας λελυμέναι). And these women looked to me to be cruel’ (Sim.9.9.5). Later, certain of the ‘servants of God’ are ‘deceived by the beauty of these women’ with their ‘loose hair’ (9.13.7–9). Hermas and his readers obviously recognize unbound hair as a symbol of illicit sexual attraction.

21 The view that the head-covering does not include the face is represented by C. Wolff: ‘Bei der Kopfdeckung, auf die korinthische Frauen verzichteten, handelt es sich nicht um einen das Antlitz verhüllenden Schleier; denn Paulus spricht nicht von einer Verhüllung des Gesichtes, sondern vom Bedecken des Kopfes’ (*Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* [THKNT 7/II; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982] 67). Wolff appeals to evidence from the synagogue at Dura Europos for a form of head-covering that leaves the face free. A. Jaubert shows that later Jewish texts require the covering of the hair on the grounds that ‘les cheveux sont un

ably to the *veil* – an interpretation of this passage that dates back at least to the latter half of the second century.²²

The only outstanding problem for this view is that Paul refers to the covering of the ‘head’ (vv. 4–5, 7, 10; contrast vv. 6, 13), rather than the ‘face’. The passage itself suggests a possible explanation for this: the choice of ‘head’ rather than ‘face’ may stem from Paul’s analogies from hair-length. Nature itself decrees that long hair is appropriate for a woman whereas short hair is disgraceful; nature instructs us as to the proper and improper state of a woman’s head. In imposing an additional, artificial head-covering, in the form of a veil, Paul is claiming to complete and perfect what nature has initiated. This argument, unpersuasive though it still is, requires a focus on the head rather than the face if it is to work at all. This focus on the head rather than the face also makes possible the metaphorical play with the term ‘head’ in v. 3, although we have seen that this plays virtually no part in the argument of the passage.²³

It is, therefore, the veil that serves to ward off the erotically charged male look from the face of the woman who prays or prophesies, in order that nothing might detract from the authority of her voice. In the veil, eros encounters its limit.

Conclusion

If the head-covering Paul requires is a veil, then one might – tentatively and speculatively – connect this passage with the symbolic interpretation of Moses’ veil in 2 Cor 3. In the later passage, the veil represents the old order, glorious yet death-dealing and destined to be eclipsed by the new order of the Spirit rather than the letter. More precisely, it represents the fact that the true nature of this old order is concealed from its adherents, a concealment of the real meaning of ‘Moses’ (as text) that is prefigured by the veil worn by Moses (as a person). The veil that once concealed Moses’ face now covers the face of the text, and indeed the

ornement pour la femme mais un danger pour l’homme, parce qu’ils sont pour lui un attrait’ (‘Le Voile des Femmes [I Cor XI.2–16]’, *NTS* 18 [1971–2] 419–30, 425–6). Although my own interpretation of the passage assumes that the head-covering includes a covering of the *face*, the crucial point is the basis of the head-covering in the erotic attraction of the male for the female.

22 Evidence for this may be seen in the substitution of κάλυμμα for ἐξουσία attested already in the Valentinian Gnostic writer Ptolemaeus (Irenaeus, *Adv.Haer.* 1.8.2).

23 In support of the ‘loosed hair’ view, Hays writes: ‘It was not the normal custom for women in Greek and Roman cultures to be veiled; thus, it is hard to see how their being unveiled in worship could be regarded as controversial or shameful. For women to have loose hair in public, however, was conventionally seen as shameful . . .’ (*First Corinthians*, 185). But the shame to which Paul refers is bound up with cultural assumptions that he himself shares but which may not have been accepted at Corinth; hence his anticipation of dissent (v. 16). The Jewish and Oriental provenance of the veil is emphasized by A. Oepke, in *TDNT* 3:561–3.

hearts of those who hear it read. But 'we' are different: we all behold 'with unveiled face (ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ) the glory of the Lord . . .' (2 Cor 3.18). The letter to which this passage belongs follows the disastrous breakdown of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians that occasioned the 'painful letter' that may be partially preserved in 2 Cor 10–13.²⁴ Was the tone and content of 1 Corinthians a factor that helped to precipitate the breakdown? Did the attempt to impose the veil upon Corinthian women prophets cause particular offence, as Paul himself anticipated (cf. 1 Cor 11.16)? If so, we might suppose that the assigning of the veil to the old, superseded order, and the claim that 'we all' – women and men alike – behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, may be a tacit admission that the veil is, after all, an inappropriate symbol of the new creation. The later passage would then indicate that the earlier instructions about head-covering have now been withdrawn, in response no doubt to Corinthian protests.

Whether this reconstruction of events is fact or fantasy, history or pious imagining, it is pleasing to suppose that Paul's first readers did what he asked of them – which was to 'judge for yourselves' (1 Cor 11.13) – and reached a conclusion different from his, eventually persuading the apostle himself of the justice of their point of view. Paul's first readers would then anticipate and confirm our own judgement that his concern about the erotic potential of the uncovered female face was unnecessary and demeaning to both women and men. Yet the original symbolism of the veil retains its theological value. The Pauline veil speaks of the possibility of a male/female relationship based no longer on eros and a corresponding male-oriented asymmetry, but on an agape expressed and enacted in a divine-human dialogue mediated by human voices – the voices of both men and women. The veil signifies the distinction between eros and agape as the basis for the relationship of men and women within the Christian community.

²⁴ I have advocated this view of the origins of 2 Corinthians in '2 Cor X–XIII and Paul's Painful Letter to the Corinthians', *JTS* 35 (1984) 324–46. A general orientation towards the 'final' or 'canonical' form of a text does not mean that hypotheses of this kind must be renounced altogether.