

GRECO-ROMAN COSTUME AND PAUL'S FRAUGHT ARGUMENT  
IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11.2-16

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Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 is notoriously difficult. Indeed, in addition to several problematic points in Paul's argument,<sup>1</sup> scholars cannot even agree what precisely is at stake for Paul in this passage. Is it hair length and style or head-coverings? The argument in favor of the former rests primarily on three pillars: interpreting κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων to mean 'having [hair] coming down from the head', reading ἀκατακάλυπτος as a reference to unbound hair, and emphasizing Paul's analogy to hair length in vv. 14-15. However, all three pillars are without solid foundation.<sup>2</sup>

Through the history of the head-covering/hairstyle debate, the meaning of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων and its implications for the passage have often been discussed. However, it is a phrase that bears revisiting, particularly since the majority of discussions do not attempt to survey its typical use in Greek literature, nor do they interact with the increasingly compendious works on Greek and Roman costume. In fact, once clarity is gained regarding the issue addressed in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 within its cultural milieu, Paul's argument as a whole is likewise clarified. To tip my hand, let me say that I will first marshal contextual evidence that Paul is concerned with head covering rather than hair length or style,

1. E.g. the appeal to creation, which appears deliberately to ignore the fact that Gen. 1.26-27 and 5.1-2 identify the image of God as comprising male *and* female, the appeal to 'natural' hair-length, which did not even hold true across the Roman Empire (see Elizabeth Bartman, 'Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment', *AJA* 105.1 [2001], pp. 1-25), and his difficult reference to the angels in 1 Cor. 11.10.

2. For instance, Preston Massey has demonstrated that κατακαλύπτω (and thus also ἀκατακάλυπτος) can only be understood with reference to 'textile coverings' and not unbound hair (Preston T. Massey, 'The Meaning of Κατακαλύπτω and Κατὰ Κεφαλῆς ἔχων in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16', *NTS* 53 [2007], pp. 502-23).

focusing particularly on the meaning of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων. Secondly, drawing on the social implications of Greco-Roman costume, I will attempt to demonstrate that Paul's argument is focused on *female* head covering and not head covering for both genders. I then briefly address Paul's curious appeal to no custom in v. 16, before examining the possible Pauline origins of the aberrant Corinthian practice and the reasons for his difficult argument.

### *Hair Length or Head Covering?*

Although the majority of scholars argue that Paul is referring to the wearing of head-coverings in 1 Cor. 11.2-16, a steady minority of scholars, with Jerome Murphy-O'Connor as one of the most vocal advocates,<sup>3</sup> has argued forcefully that what is really at stake is hair length and style. Proponents of the hair interpretation are indeed correct in noting the social tone of Paul's argument in vv. 4-10, which emphasizes shame and decorum (vv. 4-6, 13-15). Murphy-O'Connor argues that long hair on a man, and a concern for styling, was a typical indicator of homosexuality within first-century Roman, Greek and Jewish culture. For Paul, among others even beyond the Jewish tradition, such effeminate behavior was shameful.<sup>4</sup> According to Murphy-O'Connor, a first-century Jew would not, indeed could not, view it as shameful for a man to pray with a covered head since the Torah itself prescribes a turban for the high priest (Exod. 28.4, 37-38; cf. Ezek. 44.18; *m. Yom.* 7.5). Further, he argues that it is 'difficult to imagine' why Paul didn't specify the 'nature of the head-covering' if that is indeed the problem.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the first place, shame is not limited to issues of homosexuality and hairstyle. Further, it is not difficult to imagine why Paul omitted the specific head-covering. Paul, in this *ad hoc* letter written in

3. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16', *CBQ* 42 (1980), pp. 482-500; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, '1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again', *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 265-74.

4. He cites in support: Pseudo-Phocylides 210-214; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.36-38; Juvenal, *Sat.* 2.96; Horace, *Epod.* 11.28; Musonius Rufus 21 (in O. Hense, *Reliquiae* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1905]); and Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.1. See also the discussion in Bartman, 'Hair', pp. 2-3.

5. Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', pp. 483-84. MacGregor declares this 'inexplicable' (Kirk R. MacGregor, 'Is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 a Prohibition of Homosexuality?', *BSac* 166 [2009], pp. 201-16 [206]).

response to issues *already present* in Corinth, does not need to specify what coverings are in view since he is writing to those who are currently using them. The Corinthians know very well what Paul has in mind, even if it might be hard for us to pinpoint. Murphy-O'Connor's appeal to vv. 14-15 to prove that hair length and style are at stake is likewise unconvincing; there is no reason that Paul cannot appeal to customary hair length *by way of analogy* to the matter of head-coverings.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if it is hard to imagine a first-century Jewish man who thought that praying with a head-covering, *per se*, was shameful, it would be just as hard to find one who thought that praying with long hair, *per se*, was shameful. If one interprets 'having something on his head' in v. 4 as the shame of long hair in v. 14, that stands in clear contrast to the Jewish Nazarite vow that required a male to grow his hair, a vow that, according to Acts 18.18, Paul himself took.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, something much more specific must be in view. On the more common view that vv. 14-15 is an analogy, Paul's argument is that women ought to cover their hair, since 'nature' itself already works towards this end. Or, as Bengel explained well over a century ago, the appeal to long hair shows that women's heads ought to be covered 'as much as possible' (*quam maxime*).<sup>8</sup>

There are, however, more serious objections to the hairstyle interpretation. The prepositional phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς in v. 4 most likely does not refer to hair, based on the use of this same descriptor in Greek literature outside of Paul. Murphy-O'Connor is correct that κατὰ plus the genitive is typically adversative in Paul's writings.<sup>9</sup> However his corollary argument is less convincing, namely that it cannot be adversative here due to the lack of a verb of motion and so it must refer to movement away from a source. In fact, even Murphy-O'Connor's preferred sense of

6. Pace Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther II* (EKKNT, 7; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991–2001), pp. 506-507, and also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1995), p. 227, whose decision in favor of hairstyles is apparently based only on v. 15 that states ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ].

7. This has been recognized as far back as Epiphanius (*Pan.* 80.7), which he resolves by arguing that long hair is fine on a man so long as it is for such a purpose and is cut when the purpose is completed; cf. also Johan A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti II* (ed. Ernst Bengel and Johann Christian F. Steudel; Tübingen: Ludov. Frid. Fues, 3rd edn, 1835), p. 144.

8. Bengel, *Gnomon*, p. 145.

9. Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', p. 484.

movement away from a source occurs principally with verbs of motion.<sup>10</sup> Although κατὰ κεφαλῆν, which is nearly synonymous with ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς in v. 10, would be more common to denote static position of an object on the head, κατὰ κεφαλῆς is also used in this sense.

The phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς is used regularly in Greek, from pre-classical times onwards, to refer to objects *other than hair* being on the head. Very often, especially in medical contexts, it refers to pouring water or other ‘medical’ treatments onto the head.<sup>11</sup> This specific use is complemented by more general references to ‘anointings’ for other reasons, from watering plants (Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 6.18.10) to pouring pickled relish on the head of irritating philosophers (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.20).<sup>12</sup> It is also regularly used in reference to beating someone on the head, often with lethal results (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 5.252).<sup>13</sup> More to the point in relation to Murphy-O’Connor’s arguments are the references to drawing up, placing on, or walking around with a head-covering κατὰ κεφαλῆς. In *Vita Aesopi W* (112.7), an Egyptian priest places a horned and bejeweled crown κατὰ κεφαλῆς. Further, as Murphy-O’Connor himself admits,<sup>14</sup> Posidonius describes Scipio the Younger as walking around ‘while having his cloak upon his head’ (ἐβάδιζε κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχων τὸ ἱμάτιον).<sup>15</sup> Finally, with a phrase remarkably close to 1 Cor. 11.4, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (3.71.5) describes a statue of a Roman augur as ‘having a covering on its head’ (τὴν περιβολὴν ἔχουσα κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς).<sup>16</sup>

10. E.g. Homer, *Il.* 22.187; 16.1667; *Od.* 14.399; Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 355; Theocritus 7.82; Plato, *Phaed.* 229c; *Leg.* 944a, etc; cf. LSJ s.v. κατὰ I.

11. [Hippocrates], *Epid.* 1.3.17; 2.5.22; 2.6.6; 7.1.67; *Aph.* 7.42.2; *Liq.* 1.11; *Morb.* 2.14.15; *Nat. mul.* 48.3; *Mul. i-iii* 75.15; 123.5; 224.15. This is also common in Galen.

12. Cf. also Plato, *Resp.* 398A; Aristotle, *Fragmenta varia* 6.33.236 (according to Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 44.28 in G. Kaibel [ed.], *Dipnosophistarum* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1887]); Theophrastus, *Char.* 16.13; Porphyry, *Christ.* 61.4 (in reference to the anointing of Jesus).

13. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.87.4 and, slightly differently, Hippocrates, *Nat. mul.* 5.14.

14. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Sex and Logic’, p. 484 n. 11.

15. Posidonius, *Frag.* 125b (W. Theiler [ed.], *Posidonius: Die Fragmente* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982]) according to [Plutarch], *Reg. imp. apophth.* 200E.

16. Cf. also 12.16.4 (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἴλκυσε τὸ ἱμάτιον); 15.9.7 (τὴν τε περιβολὴν κατὰ κεφαλῆς εἴλκυσε); Plutarch, *Quaest. rom.* 267C (ἐφέλκυσσάμενην ἰδῶν κατὰ κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον).

Importantly, there is not a single use of the prepositional phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς that describes hair coming down from the head as Murphy-O'Connor *et al.* would interpret it. Even John Chrysostom, to whom he appeals, interprets the phrase *in the first instance* as a reference to a head-covering and treats this as the most obvious interpretation that he applies to the case of both women and men; indeed, Chrysostom makes an effort to *add* hair to the list of things that the phrase would most naturally indicate.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Murphy-O'Connor argues that περιβόλαιον could be an adequate description of female hair styles that were 'wrapped around' the head<sup>18</sup> but he fails to adduce any examples of such a use.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, women's hairstyles in Greco-Roman antiquity are not all accurately described in those terms<sup>20</sup> and it would strain credulity to argue that Paul was promoting one hairstyle above others that were equally socially acceptable. Furthermore, the term περιβόλαιον most commonly means a textile covering, even a head-covering as we saw in the passage from Dionysius of Halicarnassus mentioned above; neither Murphy-O'Connor nor subsequent supporters of the hair length/style position adduce a single example of it in reference to hairstyles.<sup>21</sup> Nor do they supply examples where the term 'uncovered' refers to disordered hair. Murphy-O'Connor's initial appeal to the LXX for the notion of unbound hair

17. See Chrysostom, *Hom. 1 Cor.* 26.4 (PG 61.216-217); on Chrysostom's interpretation of 1 Cor. 11.3-16, cf. Maria-Fotini Polidoulis Kapsalis, 'St. John Chrysostom's Interpretation of Kephale in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 49 (2004), pp. 321-56.

18. Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', p. 489.

19. Even Schrage, *Korinther*, pp. 522-23, who follows the hair-length interpretation, finds Murphy-O'Connor's argument lacking here.

20. Cf. the discussion in Ovid, *Ars* 3.133-148, and see Bartman, 'Hair', p. 8; Elaine Fantham, 'Covering the Head at Rome: Ritual and Gender', in J.C. Edmondson and Alison Keith (eds.), *Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture* (Phoenix Sup, 46; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 158-71; Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-presentation and Society* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 25-41; Judith L. Sebesta, 'Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman', in Judith L. Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (eds.), *The World of Roman Costume* (Wisconsin Studies in Classics; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), pp. 46-53.

21. The idiosyncratic interpretation of Troy W. Martin, 'Paul's Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15: A Testicle instead of a Head Covering', *JBL* 123 (2004), pp. 75-84, that περιβόλαιον is a testicle, has been effectively rebutted by Mark Goodacre, 'Does Περιβόλαιον Mean "Testicle" in 1 Corinthians 11:15?', *JBL* 130 (2011), pp. 391-96.



actually undermines the argument, since he admits that an ‘uncovered’ head refers to the lack of a turban or head-covering: ‘In none of these or related texts is there any direct mention of hair, despite current English, French, and German versions’.<sup>22</sup> Understandably, he dropped this aspect of his argument in subsequent publications, resting his interpretation of ἀκατακάλυπτος entirely on his questionable reading of περιβόλαιον in v. 14.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Kirk MacGregor has recently argued that because pottery and sculpture in Corinth portray men and women without head-coverings, there was no practice of head covering for men or women in Corinth.<sup>24</sup> However, he fails to account for the fact that this discrepancy between written and visual sources pertains across the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world and that interpretation of visual sources is no less fraught with interpretive difficulty than that of written sources.<sup>25</sup> That is, a bust of an unveiled woman is not a photograph. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that in many cases the veil was implied by the hairstyle, which was styled high in the front but flat at the back where the head-covering would rest.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, recent scholarship on both Greek and Roman costume has concluded that women *did* wear veils, even if it was not a custom entirely without exception.<sup>27</sup>

22. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Sex and Logic’, p. 488. This controverts the argument of Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, p. 228, who appeals to Num. 5.18 as a reference to hair. More recently, Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 154, cites the same LXX passages (Lev. 13.45 and Num. 5.18) while adding Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.60. However, since Philo is referring to the biblical passages, which all speak *only* of ‘uncovering the head’ in the HB and LXX versions, there is no reason that Philo’s phrase ἀκατακάλυπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ refers to anything but the removal of head-covering, as Murphy-O’Connor rightly points out; cf. the arguments of Massey, ‘Meaning’.

23. See Murphy-O’Connor, ‘1 Corinthians 11:2-16’, p. 269 and n. 12, where he notes that criticism of his previous recourse to the Hebrew verb underlying the LXX ‘is valid’.

24. MacGregor, ‘Prohibition’, p. 205, cf. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, p. 154.

25. Cf. Bartman, ‘Hair’, p. 22; Olson, *Dress*, p. 114.

26. Olson, *Dress*, p. 34. A good example of the high-front hairstyle with a *palla* across the back is seen in a marble tombstone of Claudius Agathemerus and his wife Myrtale (AN.Michaelis.155) at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

27. On this, see esp. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite’s Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003), *passim*, esp. p. 315; Olson, *Dress*, *passim*, esp. pp. 113-14; some relevant evidence is discussed below.

Therefore, without any other modifying noun, the phrases κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων and ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ most naturally refer to some object that covers the head, *other than hair*.

*Male and Female Head Covering, or Just Female?*

The question then arises, is Paul speaking about male *and* female head covering or primarily female head covering? Several scholars argue for the former, noting that men and women are in view in every verse except vv. 13 and 16 (cf. vv. 3-12, 14-15).<sup>28</sup> However, the rhetorical question in v. 13 should not be underestimated. When Paul asks the Corinthians to pass a verdict on an issue, the question is gender specific: ‘is it fitting for *women* to pray to God with their heads uncovered?’

Further, Paul presents his position on men and head covering with little argument; he simply states that men are the image and glory of God and that they ought not to cover their heads. In contrast, Paul’s position on women receives defense at every point. He notes that praying uncovered is the same as shaving one’s head for a woman, an action Paul clearly presents as shameful (vv. 5b-6). Later, while Paul simply states man’s position in relation to God, he defends his position on women by three verses appealing to creation and, less clearly, to the role of angels (vv. 8-10). Again, when Paul simply states that long hair is shameful to a man, he feels the need to justify his next statement that it is a glory to a woman, since it is already given as a covering (vv. 14-15).

Scholars have long tripped over Paul’s comprehensive statements regarding male shame and head-coverings (or, for some scholars, hair length) by noting that there are inevitable exceptions to ‘every man’ who has a head-covering, as I noted earlier. However, the over-simplification of male practice allows it to serve more effectively as a foil for female practice.<sup>29</sup> Paul focuses on differentiation rather than making a two-sided argument aimed at men and women. In this rhetorical differentiation between men and women, Paul employs a common Greco-Roman rhetorical *topos*, in which prescriptions for female head covering often

28. David W.J. Gill, ‘The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16’, *TynBul* 41 (1990), pp. 245-60; Mark Finney, ‘Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in its Social Context’, *JSNT* 33 (2010), pp. 31-58; Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Sex and Logic’; MacGregor, ‘Prohibition’.

29. Cf. similarly Schrage, *Korinther*, p. 504 with n. 94.

featured.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, as I suggested above, the practice of a woman covering her head in public is widely attested in Greco-Roman and Jewish antiquity.<sup>31</sup> While the young freeborn Roman girl tended to wear her hair in simple braids, those who were married and widowed wore the *palla* (ἰμάτιον) or *ricinium*, which was pushed up over the hair—or part of the hair for those with more elaborate hairstyles—when in public or around men other than one’s husband.<sup>32</sup> This fact answers Murphy-O’Connor’s objection that the term ‘veil’ (κάλυμμα) is lacking from 1 Cor. 11,<sup>33</sup> it was the *palla* or ἰμάτιον at stake, not a κάλυμμα. Ulpian’s Digest preserves a ruling by a certain M. Antistius Labeo, who died between 10 and 22 CE, that allowed those who violated a virgin or matron to claim extenuating circumstances if the woman was dressed like a servant or prostitute.<sup>34</sup> In Roman

30. Note the arguments of Olson, *Dress*, p. 113, that such pictures and prescriptions were ideal rather than actual.

31. Cf., e.g., Léon Heuzey, *Histoire du costume antique* (Paris: Librairie ancienne honoré Champion, 1922), pp. 168-74, 191-96; Georges Losfeld, *Essai sur le costume grec* (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1991), pp. 275-78; Lucille A. Roussin, ‘Costume in Roman Palestine: Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah’, in Sebesta and Bonfante (eds.), *World of Roman Costume*, pp. 182-90; Ursula Scharf, *Straßenkleidung der römischen Frau* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3.585; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 96-103; Sebesta, ‘Symbolism’, pp. 48-50; Fantham, ‘Covering’; Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite’s Tortoise*.

32. The best discussion of this to date is in Olson, *Dress*, who also helpfully points out the tension between the literary record that consistently prescribes the veiling or mantling of women in Rome and the visual evidence that portrays a large number of women without head-coverings; cf. earlier Heuzey, *Histoire*, p. 143, who notes the difficulty of correlating the material and written evidence: ‘Dans l’étude du costume grec...la principale difficulté est de concilier avec les monuments figurés les multiples notions que l’on récolte chez les écrivains, poètes, prosateurs, grammairiens, lexicographes’. On the common practice of head-coverings in Greece from the pre-classical era to the Roman period, see the thorough study of Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite’s Tortoise*; cf. Losfeld, *Essai*, pp. 273-80.

33. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Sex and Logic’, p. 484.

34. *Digest* bk 47 10.15.15: *Si quis virgines appellasset, si tamen ancillari veste vestitas, minus peccare videtur: multo minus, si meretricia veste feminae, non matrum familiarum vestitae fuissentiarum si igitur non matronali habitu femina fuerit et quis eam appellavit vel ei comitem abduxit, iniuriarum tenetur.* (If someone solicits virgins, if nevertheless they were clothed like slaves, he appears to do less wrong: much less is he guilty of injury if the woman is clothed like a harlot, not being clothed as a matron, [or] if the woman was not in dress befitting a matron when someone solicits them or abducts them as a companion for himself). See the discussion in



antiquity there were a number of differentiating elements, including the color of the clothing, but also including the traditional veiling use of the *palla*.<sup>35</sup> Such disparate sources as Tertullian, the Mishnah, the Cave of Letters and the Dura Europos synagogue attest that the same expectation was true among the Jews.<sup>36</sup> Valerius Maximus (6.3.10-11) preserves an account of a man who divorced his wife simply for going out without her head covered because she allowed other men to see what was for his eyes only.<sup>37</sup> In this light, for a woman to remove her head-covering in the *public sphere* of communal worship would have been seen as shameful *to her husband*, whose wife's conduct suggested loose morals.<sup>38</sup>

A further religious influence may have been in play in Corinth as well. Women, *as women*, were largely excluded from Greco-Roman religious practice. Those women who did participate, such as the Vestal Virgins in Rome, only served to emphasize the fact that normal women, who participated in the feminine sphere of everyday life, were not permitted to take part in mainstream religion.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, religious practices in which women fully participated were consistently held in suspicion by

Robert C. Knapp, *Invisible Romans: Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women...the Romans that History Forgot* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 260; Olson, *Dress*, p. 51.

35. See, among others, Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, pp. 256-61.

36. Cf. *m. Ket.* 5.8; 7.6; *m. Kel.* 24.16; Tertullian, *Car.* 4; and Roussin, 'Costume in Roman Palestine', who discusses the material evidence from the Cave of Letters and Dura Europos. She argues that veiling was common among Jewish women in continuity with the majority of Greco-Roman women; cf. also Aline Rousselle, 'Body Politics in Ancient Rome', in Pauline Schmitt Pantel (ed.), *A History of Women in the West. I. From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1992), pp. 313-16.

37. The famous praise of Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 4.19) that his wife *si quando recito, in proximo discreta velo sedet* may also be a reference to veiling, though the sense is not clear. The phrase *quando recito* may refer to a reading or declamation to an audience in his home or simply a reference to Pliny's own habit of study. Further, *discreta velo* could be taken as 'being separated by a curtain' or 'being separated, with a head-covering'.

38. Angelika Starbatty, *Aussehen ist Ansichtssache: Kleidung in der Kommunikation der römischen Antike* (Münchner Studien zur alten Welt, 7; Munich: Utz, 2010), p. 94: 'Eine Frau war immer auch Aushängschild ihres Mannes'; cf. also Dale D.B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 243.

39. Cf. John Scheid, 'The Religious Roles of Roman Women', in Pantel (ed.), *A History of Women in the West*, I, pp. 377-408.

men and so were relegated to the margins and suburbs. Livy's account of the Roman Bacchanalia in 186 BCE (Livy 39.13), like Euripides' *Bacchae* before it, exemplifies the anxiety that Greek and Roman men felt about women who divested themselves of social indicators such as head-coverings and were imbued with a divine spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, for several reasons, an unveiled woman who was praying and prophesying likely would have been unsettling to many male witnesses. This problem may have been exacerbated in the case of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, since it seems that those present at gatherings were not necessarily limited to believers (1 Cor. 14.23). Paul, then, is concerned on at least two fronts. First, he is concerned about the unity of the church and that all things be done with the goal of 'building up', as he emphasizes variously throughout the letter.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, Paul wants to protect the Corinthian believers from charges of impropriety, both for the sake of the way in which they are viewed by others, and also for the sake of their ability to 'flee sexual immorality', as he enjoins in 6.18.

*'We have no such custom...'*

If, as I have argued, female head-coverings were the norm in Greek and Roman society, in what sense did Paul and the other early Christians 'have no such custom'? The majority of scholars interpret this to mean 'we recognize no other practice',<sup>42</sup> though this is not what the statement says. In fact, it is the logical opposite. Rather than 'we have no other

40. Cf. Louise L.B. Zaidman, 'Pandora's Daughters and Rituals in Grecian Cities', in Pantel (ed.), *A History of Women in the West*, I, pp. 338-76 (376).

41. See esp. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 99-111.

42. So John C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965), p. 90; cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 530; David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 175; Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I, II* (HNT, 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1931), p. 55; Andreas Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (HNT, 9.1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 239; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 847-48; Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 129.

practice’, Paul states ‘we do *not* have *that* practice’. I noted above that the custom of women covering their heads in public was a widespread ideal in the first-century Roman Empire. Therefore, very likely they did in fact have a common practice of women praying and prophesying with covered heads. Paul’s question in v. 13, however, is more specific, ‘Is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered?’ Thus, Paul claims in v. 16 that the churches have no custom of women *unveiling* during prayer and prophecy. It is here that the distinction between *συνήθεια* in v. 16 and *παράδοσις* in v. 2 needs to be emphasized. While the early churches may have had a typical practice of veiled prayer, it remained at the level of ‘custom’.<sup>43</sup> They had no *tradition* regarding the matter one way or the other. And why would they? It is precisely the newly arisen issue among the Corinthians that impels Paul to formulate this new justification for a practice that was previously taken for granted. This means that any claim that v. 16 is an argument from authority<sup>44</sup> could only stand if ‘authority’ is understood as the force of collective habit rather than any positively constructed maxim. New developments in Corinth have brought this culturally expected, thus implicit and largely unconscious, behavior to the level of conscious discourse. Again, Bengel was prescient in his suggestion that ‘this rule... is not older than Paul’.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Origins of the Problem*

Given that being unveiled had so many negative connotations for women, why then were some women embracing the practice in Corinth? In the first place, it may reflect a variety in Roman practice of female head-coverings; it has been suggested that women of lower economic profiles

43. Fee, *Corinthians*, p. 529, correctly notes that v. 16 highlights ‘custom’ as opposed to ‘tradition’, though he fails to acknowledge that Paul is appealing to a lack of custom.

44. Such as Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 32; London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 421, and see above note. This interpretation stretches at least as far back as Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–457 CE) who states, ‘this argument [*viz.* v. 16] is sufficient to reprimand those overly schismatic for he shows that these things are thought not only by him but also by all the Churches of God’ (ἱκανὸς οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐντρέψαι καὶ τοὺς λίαν ἐριστικούς. ἔδειξε γὰρ οὐκ αὐτῷ μόνῳ ταῦτα δοκοῦντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσαις ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλησίαις) (*Interpretatio* in PG 82, p. 313).

45. Bengel, *Gnomon*, II, p. 142, *regula non est antiquior Paulo*.

did not commonly wear head-coverings.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Roman literary sources are unanimous in their expectation that women be covered in public and Greek practice of female head covering was remarkably static from pre-classical antiquity through the Roman period.<sup>47</sup> In this light, there is a strong possibility that Paul himself unintentionally set the Corinthian believers on this trajectory and any variety in the practice of female head-covering current in Corinth would only have increased the speed with which the issue arose.

As Paul notes in 1 Cor. 11.11, *in the Lord* (i.e. Christ) there is no woman χωρίς man nor man χωρίς woman. The meaning of the preposition is not straightforward. The subsequent explanation (v. 12) seems to indicate the verse should be understood in terms of interdependence; the creational order already adduced in v. 8 is mirrored by the generation of man by woman.<sup>48</sup> Further, the statement that ‘and everything is from God’ emphasizes the contingency of male creational priority in v. 8, relativizing it and placing male and female on a common level.<sup>49</sup> This is similar to Gal. 3.28 ‘in Christ there is neither male nor female’, but 1 Cor. 11.11 allows for a more subtle discussion of mutuality in the face of Corinthian malpractice than did the absolute statement of Galatians.

However, that argument would be entirely sufficient on its own without invoking the notion of being ‘in the Lord’. That is, the facts of creation and birth adduced in v. 12 also take place among those who are not ‘in Christ’.<sup>50</sup> This observation, along with Paul’s general focus on

46. Cf. Propertius 2.23.13; Olson, *Dress*, pp. 45-46. However, the connection between uncovered hair and sexual promiscuity of the lower classes remains at the forefront of Propertius’s characterization of women from lower social classes. Note also that Plutarch (*Quaest. rom.* 267A) states that it is ‘more usual’ (συνηθέστερον) for women to have their heads covered.

47. On Greek practice, see esp. Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite’s Tortoise*.

48. In a similar vein, *Gen. R.* 8.9 (R. Simlai) and 22.2 (R. Ishmael in the name of Akiba) claims that ‘[There is] neither man without [בְּלִילָהּ] woman nor woman without [בְּלִילָהּ] man, and [there is] no Shekinah without [בְּלִילָהּ] Shekinah’, indicating that the man and woman together share in the שְׁכִינָה of God since ‘henceforth it shall be “In our image, after our likeness”’; cf. Madeleine Boucher, ‘Some Unexplored Parallels to 1 Cor. 11,11-12 and Gal. 3,28: The NT on the Role of Women’, *CBQ* 31 (1969), pp. 50-58.

49. The contrast with vv. 3-10 is noted correctly by Josef Kürzinger, ‘Frau und Mann nach 1 Kor 11:11f’, *BZ* 22 (1978), pp. 270-75.

50. Cf. Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, p. 123, who emphasizes that ἐν κυρίῳ means ‘within the community’.

differentiation in this passage, has led some to argue that χωρίς signifies differentiation here rather than separation.<sup>51</sup> This position, then, would *match* Paul's statement in Gal. 3.28, which he also hints at in 1 Cor. 12.13, though without the male/female pair. The difficulty with this interpretation is that χωρίς as 'different from' is a comparatively rare use and v. 12 could be read to take the explanation in a different direction. Nevertheless, it does take seriously the location of the mutuality ἐν κυρίῳ.

In either case, the πλήν that begins v. 11 signifies a strong contrast with the preceding material in the form of a concession.<sup>52</sup> In fact, both interpretive possibilities for χωρίς imply a much greater mutuality than is suggested by vv. 3-10; man generates woman, and woman generates man, but both are entirely contingent on God who generates all things. Why would Paul make such a concession that undermines his previous argument? The most likely answer, in my view, is that 'neither male nor female' is a point that the Corinthians have already taken to heart and with which Paul in fact agrees.<sup>53</sup> In the case of χωρίς as 'apart from', however, he restates the concept in such a way to allow for his argument for differentiation.<sup>54</sup>

It seems likely, then, that Paul taught the Corinthians that 'in Christ there is neither male nor female', even if not with that precise formula, and allowed the believing Corinthian women to participate in communal worship with prayer and prophecy. Nevertheless, Paul never taught that

51. So Kürzinger, 'Frau und Mann', followed by Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, p. 229; Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians* (SP, 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 412. Note that Gen. 26.1 uses χωρίς to denote a *different* famine, as Kürzinger correctly argues.

52. So rightly Kürzinger, 'Frau und Mann', p. 274, and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, '1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 679-89; however, I disagree with the latter's argument that the 'custom' in v. 16 refers to contentiousness rather than head-coverings.

53. That Paul originally taught the Corinthians that 'there is neither male nor female in Christ' has also been argued by, e.g., Wire, *Women Prophets*, pp. 122-28; Horrell, *Social Ethos*, pp. 84-86; cf. also Bruce Hansen, *All of You Are One: The Social Vision of Galatians 3.28, 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11* (LNTS, 409; London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), pp. 148 n. 129, with further bibliography. However, Hansen does not discuss 1 Cor. 11.11 *specifically* as an echo of this formula.

54. Cf. L.A. Jervis, "But I Want You to Know...": Paul's Midrashic Intertextual Response to the Corinthian Worshipers (1 Cor. 11:2-16)', *JBL* 112 (1993), pp. 231-46, and stated more negatively, Wire, *Women Prophets*, p. 128.



women should uncover their heads to do so and it seems that the head-covering was naturally adopted by the Corinthian women.<sup>55</sup> At some point after Paul left, some community members, not necessarily only women (τις, v. 16), began to question the cultural commonplace of women having their heads covered because *in Christ* they had the same status as men. Thus, Paul's efforts throughout vv. 3-15 are to differentiate the conduct of men and women, on creational and customary grounds, in order to demonstrate that women are held to a different standard of conduct than men. They are not permitted simply to imitate the practice of the men who pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered. While their status 'in Christ' may well be equal, Paul argues, that does not change the social conventions that were currently in effect. He argues that to do so shames their husbands (or perhaps fathers in the case of unmarried adult women). For that reason, Paul claims that women ought to remain covered in prayer and prophecy, regardless of the fact that men are uncovered.

### *Conclusion*

What does all this mean, then, for Paul's argument? It is striking that an argument in service of such a common practice is so notoriously fraught with controversy. This is due to the fact that the difficulties of his rhetorical situation are manifest in his argument. In short, Paul's argument is difficult because he is trying to persuade the Corinthians to adopt a certain behavior, without controverting his initial teaching that could be applied in the way the Corinthians had done, and without any definite 'tradition' regarding the matter. Further, he knows that his authority among the Corinthians is not without its problems and so he places the Corinthians in the judgment seat in vv. 2, 13 to decide on the matter, though Paul clearly wants them to agree with him.

Paul's argument has some elements in common with what Cicero referred to as *insinuatio*, a means of arguing by which one 'secretly enters the mind of the listener through dissimulation and an indirect manner', used when one, or one's case, is out of favor with the court (*Inv.* 1.20-21). In particular, Paul's generic treatment of male head-coverings diffuses tension regarding the true matter by beginning each topic with a rhetorical foil (vv. 4, 7, 14). Of course, Paul need not have read Cicero to

55. Incidentally, there is evidence that Roman women covered their heads in religious settings as did Roman men; cf. Fantham, 'Covering'.

understand a touchy situation when he saw it. It may come as something of a surprise, but Paul's tight-rope walk<sup>56</sup> between affirming his original teaching and persuading the Corinthians not to apply it to head-coverings appears to have worked, at least according to Tertullian. 'The Corinthians themselves understood [Paul] in this way [that unmarried women ought to be veiled along with married women]; and even to today the Corinthians veil their virgins: what the apostles taught, those who learned approve' (*Virg.* 8.8).<sup>57</sup>

56. I have borrowed the analogy of the tight-rope from Angelika Reichert's work on Romans (Angelika Reichert, *Der Römerbrief als Gratwanderung: Eine Untersuchung zur Abfassungsproblematik* [FRLANT, 194; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001]).

57. *Sic et ipsi Corinthii intellexerunt; hodie denique virgines suas Corinthii velant: quid docuerint apostoli, qui didicerunt approbant.*