

Concerning Women's Ordination: Women in Worship and "Headship"



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here are four central passages in the Pauline epistles appealed to by complementarians to argue against women's ordination or church leadership, based on an inherent subordination of women to male leadership and authority. The first is Ephesians 5:22-33, in which Paul exhorts women to "submit" to their husbands, drawing a parallel between Christ as the "head" of the church and husbands as the "heads" of their wives. I have already discussed this passage at length, arguing to the contrary that Paul is asking not for a specific subordination of wives to husbands, but a mutual subordination of all Christians to each other. Moreover, although Paul certainly affirmed that Christ exercised authority in relationship to the church, his use of the metaphor of "head" in relationship to Christ was not in the context of authority, but in the context of a kenotic self-emptying, of a voluntary taking on the role of a servant in relation to another, and in providing nourishment and support to another, what Michael Gorman refers to as "cruciformity," and what Alan Padgett refers to as "submission II."¹

Ephesians 5 is distinguished from the other three passages in that the subject matter of the passage concerns household relations, and so does not touch directly on the place of women in the context of church worship. To the contrary, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 focuses on problems concerning worship, and is one of three Pauline passages that are the linchpins of the complementarian argument excluding women from participation in church office. The other two are 1 Cor. 14:34-35, and 1 Timothy 2:9-15. While complementarians appeal to other passages of Scripture to argue for female subordination – the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, the role of women in the Old Testament, Jesus' relationship to the apostles and to women in the gospels, Ephesians 5² – it is only these three passages that provide specific references to the status of women in the context of worship in the churches of the New Testament. In what immediately follows, I will discuss 1 Corinthians 11; I discuss the other two passages in the next essay.³

Preliminaries

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is not only very difficult to interpret; it is also one of the most discussed in biblical literature. Anthony Thiselton's bibliography in his commentary on 1 Corinthians published in 2000 referred to 80 publications on this passage.⁴ More have appeared since. The following is a list of controversial issues in the passage:

(1) What is the issue of concern in the passage? Hairstyles (long or short hair? hair arrangements)? Head coverings of some sort (hats or scarves)? Veils?

(2) What is the meaning of κεφαλή (*kephalē*, the Greek word translated "head")?

(3) What does Paul mean by drawing a parallel between God as the head of Christ, Christ as the head of man, and man as the

head of woman?

(4) Do “man” and “woman” in the passage refer to men and women in general or to husbands and wives?

(5) What does Paul mean in saying that man is the glory of God, but woman is the glory of man?

(6) What does Paul mean when he writes that a woman is to have “authority” over her head?

(7) What is the meaning of the reference to angels? Are they “messengers” or supernatural beings?

(8) What does one make of Paul’s statement that “nature teaches” that men should not have long hair?

(9) When Paul states that “we have no such practice,” what practice is he referring to?

There is no single agreement on the answer to any one of these questions. Indeed, numerous suggestions have been proposed; despite a lack of clarity on so many questions, the passage has become key to the discussion about women’s “roles” in the church for complementarians.

In my previous essay on Ephesians 5, I noted five distinct hermeneutical approaches to the passage: hierarchical, radical feminist, “love patriarchy,” “revolutionary subordination,” and egalitarian.⁵ In my reading of commentators on this passage in 1 Corinthians, I have found the following general approaches:

(1) Hierarchical: This is the approach associated with complementarians. The primary concern in the passage is that, in worship, women have been engaging in practices in regard to head coverings or hair arrangement that “abandons the order that God has ordained.”⁶ Paul’s intention is to re-establish proper order by reminding women of their subordination to men.

The passage is understood hierarchically, with Paul's use of "head" language understood to mean that men exercise authority over women in the same way that God (as "head") exercises authority over Christ, Christ (as "head") exercises authority over the church, and man (as "head") exercises authority over woman. At the same time, this authority of men over women does not imply inequality. Headship is not "derogatory"; in the same way that Christ's "subordination" to God does not challenge his ontological equality with God, so women's subordination to men does not demean them or imply their inferiority, but merely indicates that men and women exercise different roles.

(2) Paradoxical: A second position argues that Paul is inconsistent. In the first half of the passage, he teaches that women are subordinate to men; however, in the second half, he backtracks and corrects himself, arguing that men and women are interdependent on one another.⁷

(3) Egalitarian: The egalitarian position argues that Paul is not talking about hierarchy, but order in worship, and maintaining proper gender distinctions between men and women. "Head" does not mean "authority over," but is usually understood to mean "source." Paul's entire argument is that men and women are distinct but mutually interdependent, just as God and Christ are. The passage is not about authority of men over women at all, or of men having prominence over women. Indeed, Paul's only reference to "authority" is to women having their own authority over their own heads.

(4) Revolutionary subordination/christological subversion: This position is similar to one I have already discussed in my essay on Ephesians. While conceding that *kephalē* might possibly mean "authority," or, more likely, "topmost" or "pre-eminent," the argument is that the "total perspective" of the passage undermines any notion of permanent hierarchy. Rather, "freedom" and "knowledge" are both challenged by love. Paul

insists on gender distinctions, but any competition about “authority” is challenged in light of a reciprocity and mutuality of relationships.⁸ Paul’s concerns about “head coverings” reflect his desire to promote appropriate public behavior within a specific culture, but the specific imperatives do not have transcultural permanence. Paul’s major concern is to prevent conflict and promote harmony within the church. As in Ephesians, where the context is that of “mutual submission,” so in 1 Corinthians, the focus is on “mutual dependence.”⁹ An advocate of this approach suggests that *kephalē* in reference to man be understood as “honorable” or “prominent” “in terms of the patriarchal structure of Paul’s day.” However, “Paul then redefines this ‘honored’ position not in terms of Christ’s *Lordship* over the church, but his *kephalē* that is manifest in his love and servant-self-giving and other-nurturing and promoting aspects of his relationship to the church.”¹⁰

(5) Modified egalitarian: A final position argues that the passage has been badly misinterpreted. Paul is not advocating a position in favor of head coverings, but is responding to a demand of the Corinthians in favor of head coverings. This position is held by Alan Padgett, and has received little support from other scholars, but is worth considering, if nothing else, because Padgett’s argument makes clear that there are genuine ambiguities in the original Greek text that lead to cautions about traditional readings.¹¹

Two pieces of background information help to shed light on the context of Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians. First has to do with the role of women in Paul’s ministry. The book of Acts makes clear that women exercised significant roles in the churches to which Paul ministered. A number of the respondents to Paul’s preaching were women (Acts 16:14, 17:4, 12, 34). Lydia was a leader in the church at Philippi, which met in her home (Acts 16:11-15). After Paul’s release from prison in

Philippi, Acts tells us that Paul visited Lydia, and also “the brothers” (Acts 16:40). Lydia’s significance in the church is indicated in that she is the only person named, and the male members are simply referred to as “the brothers.” Phoebe, the leader of the church at Cenchreae (a port of Corinth), is referred to in Romans 16:1 as a “deacon” (διάκονον, *diakonon* mas.) and a “patron/leader” (προστάτις, *prostatis*). (Many English translations translate these as “servant” or “deaconess” and “helper” without indication that these terms would be translated differently if referring to males.) While living in Corinth for two years, Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:1-4). Priscilla, along with her husband, is credited with teaching Apollos, mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:12 as a significant leader in the church. Also called “Prisca,” she is mentioned several times in Paul’s letters (Rom. 16:3, 1 Cor. 16:19, 2 Tim. 4:19), and is mentioned as being with Paul when he wrote the letter to the Corinthians. Significantly, in four of the six New Testament references to Priscilla, her name is mentioned before her husband. Clearly women exercised significant roles in Paul’s ministries, and the recipients of Paul’s letter would have recognized Priscilla and Aquila as the couple with whom Paul lived during the two years that he worked with their church.¹²

Second, the overall context of Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians is that of worship in the church. In order, he treats of problems of men and women leading worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16); problems concerning the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper (11:17-34), problems concerning charismatic gifts (12:1-30, 14:1-25); problems concerning women and men participating in (but not leading) worship. In the center of this discussion, he places his famous hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13).

Two aspects of this discussion are significant for the discussion in 11:2-16. First, women were involved in leading worship in the Corinthian church, including public speaking (“prophesying”) and were doing it on the same level as men.

Paul does not discourage this practice, but encourages it. Second, the “hymn to love” at the center of the discussion provides a helpful context to the entire series of issues that Paul addresses.¹³ Paul is correcting disorder in worship that is characterized by a lack of love and respect for fellow Christians. This provides an important clue as to the context of Paul’s concerns in his discussion about “head coverings.”

Head Coverings?

The first area of puzzlement in the passage has to do with the nature of the controversy that Paul was addressing. Scholars agree that Paul was addressing an issue of disorderly worship, but the specific cause for his concern remains unclear. The basic problem concerns the meaning of the Greek expressions *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* (*kata kephalēs echōn*, “down from the head”) (verse 4) and *ἀκατακαλύπτω τῆ κεφαλῆ* (*akatakalyptō tē kephalē*, “uncovered head”) (verse 5). The two basic options are that Paul is either talking about some sort of head covering or head gear (a shawl, hood, tunic or veil) or, alternatively, about hair styles (either long or unbound hair).¹⁴ Ultimately, the issue is undecidable. Both Paul and his hearers knew things we do not know. Regardless of the specific practice that set off the issue, the primary issue seems to be “that which distracts attention from God or Christ in public worship by generating a discordant, semiotic clothing code or hairstyle code which inevitably draws attention to the self in a way which makes the person’s head a source of shame for his or her own self-respect, the respect of congregation, and the honor of the Lord who in public worship should be the central focus of thought and attention.” Thiselton summarizes: “[I]t constitutes attention-seeking behavior which thereby dishonor[s] God and shames the self.”¹⁵

The overall context indicates that there were some within the Corinthian congregation who had concluded that Christian liberty entailed freedom from wearing in worship some

traditional gender-marker distinguishing women from men, associated with either some kind of head covering or with some manner of wearing the hair. This practice had led to public scandal of some kind, and this is the issue that Paul is addressing. As Kenneth Bailey notes, "From the outset, it is clear that the issue is gender *distinction*, not gender *subordination*."¹⁶

Headship

Key to the theological issue in Paul's discussion is the meaning of "head" (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) in verse 3: "But I wish you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (my translation). Paul here uses two analogies based on a comparison between a woman's literal head (part of her body) and her metaphorical head (her husband) and a comparison between an artificial "head covering" (whether an object of clothing or a hair style) and her natural head covering (her hair).¹⁷ Paul is using a word play on the notion of "head," which is not only a part of a woman's body, but also, metaphorically, her husband, and part of the woman's body whose covering or hair style is in dispute.

As in the English "head," the normal and most usual meaning of the Greek word *kephalē* refers to that physical part of the human body at its topmost extreme above the neck, and which contains eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and hair. The crucial question is, what does Paul mean by the metaphorical use of *kephalē* when he refers to the man as the woman's "head"? In modern English, "head" is used metaphorically to mean one who is an authority over, a master over subordinates, a "boss," someone who is "in charge." Was this how the metaphor of "head" would have been understood by native Greek speakers in the Mediterranean world in which Paul wrote 1 Corinthians? When Paul wrote that the man is "head" of the woman, are we to understand his point to be that the male of the human species

is supposed to have authority over and exercise a position of superiority to the female, who is always supposed to be subordinate to the male?

In recent years, numerous authors have questioned whether this would have been the natural understanding of the metaphor by Paul's readers, and there has been a lengthy discussion. Alan Johnson notes, "From at least the middle of the twentieth century there has been an ongoing, sometimes acrimonious debate over the meaning of the metaphor 'head' (Greek, *kephalē*) in Paul's letters, especially his use in male-female contexts . . ."¹⁸ Gordon Fee states, "Paul's metaphorical use of 'head' in verse 3 has set off an unfortunate, but massive, debate that has often produced as much heat as light."¹⁹ Similarly, Anthony Thiselton writes, "The history of claims about the meaning of κεφαλή is immense and daunting."²⁰ The literature suggests three possible meanings of the metaphor: (1) authority over; (2) source; (3) pre-eminent or foremost, metaphorically drawn from the physiological head as the foremost part of the body.²¹ Each one of the three possible meanings has been argued for respectively by what I have identified above as the (1) hierarchical, (3) egalitarian, and (4) "Revolutionary subordination/christological subversion" readings. In what follows, I will discuss the arguments for each reading of the metaphor.

Hierarchical

Complementarian Wayne Grudem is the single individual who has exerted the most effort to argue that "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3 means "authority over." Grudem has written several studies arguing for this view.²² Grudem's primary argument is based on citations from Greek lexicons²³ and comparisons with the use of *kephalē* in (primarily) non-biblical Greek examples. For example, Grudem complains that Thiselton "advances a

meaning for κεφαλή that is found in no Greek Lexicon at all.”²⁴ Grudem’s key claim is that in ancient Greek literature, *kephalē* normally means “authority over/ruler.” He claims that “no examples have ever been found where person A is called the ‘head’ of person B and person A is not in a position of authority over person B.”²⁵ His primary examples include military and political examples of authority from the LXX translation of the Old Testament (these will be discussed later), the handful of controversial passages from the New Testament, military and political examples from pagan and Jewish extra-biblical Greek literature, and, more recently, passages in patristic literature in which he argues that “authority over” or “rule” is the best interpretation of the metaphor for “head.”²⁶

The complementarian position has not essentially changed since its original presentation in George W. Knight’s, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women*. The basic argument is as follows. First, Paul establishes a “hierarchy of authority” based on the “role relationship” of men and women. Knight argued that Paul establishes “the role relationship of men and women by placing it in the hierarchy of headships (*kephalē*).” As Christ is the “authority of every man,” so there is a “chain of subordination” between man and woman. This notion of “authority over” or “headship” is the primary meaning of man being the “head” of woman.²⁷

Second, Paul establishes this hierarchy by describing a parallel between the “headship” of man over woman, and the “headship” of God over Christ. Thomas Schreiner claims: “Paul is saying that Christ is the authority over every man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ. Since Paul appeals to the relation between members of the Trinity, it is clear that he does not view the relations described here as merely cultural, or the result of the fall.” As Christ’s subordination to the authority of the Father does

not imply an inequality between God (the Father) and Christ (the Son), so the subordination of women to male authority does not imply an inequality between men and women.²⁸

Third, there is an appeal to the order of creation. Knight suggests that Paul's appeal in verses 8-10 to the order of creation in Genesis 2:18-25 – “For man was not made from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” – establishes the “determined role relationship.” Woman was created to be a “helper” for man. Man was not created to help woman. Schreiner also argues for a difference of “role relationships” on the basis of Paul's appeal to the creation narratives: “Paul obviously interpreted Genesis 2 as revealing a distinction in roles between men and women.”²⁹ This is, of course, a massive begging of the question. Schreiner has moved from a distinction between the sexes as male and female – which is in the texts, both Paul and Genesis – to a distinction of authority and subordination in roles, something mentioned nowhere in either text.

Finally, complementarians appeal to Paul's reference to “head covering” in verse 10, as evidence that Paul wants women to wear head coverings as a symbol of male authority over women: “A woman who does not wear a head covering both disgraces herself and brings dishonor on her authority, who is man.” Complementarian scholars assert that the word ἐξουσία (*exousia*, “authority”) in verse 10 refers to the woman's head covering as a sign of *male authority* over woman: “Paul wants women to wear a head covering in order to show that they are submissive to male headship.”³⁰

Does “head” mean authority?

Is it correct to understand Paul's use of the metaphor of *kephalē* (“head”) in this passage to mean “one who has authority over,” and the wearing of a head covering by a woman in worship as a symbol of male authority over her as

complementarians claim? Significant numbers (perhaps the majority?) of modern New Testament scholars disagree. The following arguments show that “head” in 1 Corinthians 11 almost certainly does not mean “authority over.”

First, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “head” (*rosh*) is used both literally and, when used metaphorically, it often does refer to one in authority. When the LXX translators of the Old Testament into Greek translated literal uses of *rosh* referring to the physical head, they naturally tended to use the Greek word *kephalē*. However, as numerous scholars point out, when the LXX translators translated *rosh* used as a metaphor meaning “ruler,” they almost never translated it simply as “head” (*kephalē*), but rather used a Greek word that literally meant “ruler,” such as ἀρχή (*archē*). This implies that the LXX translators did not consider the Greek word *kephalē* normally to have been understood to mean one in authority. Although Grudem’s main argument for “authority” is an appeal to those handful of verses in the LXX, as Gordon Fee points out, “The few instances (six in all) where they do not do this . . . are simply exceptions that prove the rule.”³¹

Philip Payne argues that the use of *kephalē* referring to someone in authority first appears in the LXX, and is best explained in terms of Hebrew influence.³² It is significant that in Grudem’s most recent list of fifty examples of “head” meaning authority in ancient literature, all of the examples are from the LXX until he lists Josephus, Philo, and Plutarch (all first or 2nd century). Apart from references to the New Testament, which are controverted, the rest of Grudem’s references are to the second century or later. This means that (apart from the LXX), Grudem does not provide a single example in ancient Greek literature prior to Paul in which “head” means authority.³³

This leads to what I have already referred to as the “battle

of the lexicons.” Contrary to Grudem, Payne argues that “authority” is *not* a common meaning in Greek lexicons. As mentioned above, Grudem listed six lexicons where “authority” appears as a meaning for *kephalē*. Payne lists 19 where it does not so appear.³⁴ Experts in the field can decide for themselves whose appeal to which lexicons carries more weight.

Finishing our summary of responses to Grudem’s appeals to ancient literature, it should be noted that, contrary to Grudem, it is not the case that when “head” is used metaphorically of persons in ancient literature, it always refers to those who exercise authority over others. Payne lists several examples where such a reading would be impossible, since the person referred to as “head” was long dead, and so could not exercise authority over those of whom he was listed as “head.” In these cases, at least, a better translation than authority would be “progenitor” or “ancestor.”³⁵

Second, Paul is unique in the ancient world in using *kephalē* as an example of a relationship between man and woman.³⁶ Accordingly, Grudem’s examples based on political or military uses of the metaphor of “headship” are beside the point. Moreover, the political examples on which Grudem draws are always examples of a one to many correspondence, of a single person who is “head” over many. Paul certainly does not understand the relationship between men and women to be like that between a single military commander and numerous soldiers or a single ruler and numerous followers. Both the use of the metaphor in a gender relationship and as a “one to one” correspondence thus mark significant differences between Paul’s usage and Grudem’s examples. Accordingly, modern exegetes argue that Paul is using what is called a “live metaphor.” Rather than simply appropriating a “dead metaphor” already in use (“leader” and “followers”), Paul is creating a new metaphor by his analogy. The meaning of the metaphor must

then be found in the context of Paul's own argument, not by looking to outside sources. Grudem's chief error (as well as that of some of his opponents) is to presume that the key to Paul's use of the metaphor "head" in this passage is to be found in how the metaphor is used in the LXX, and in pagan sources outside of Paul's own argument.³⁷ Since there are no examples outside of Paul to use "head" to describe the relationship between man and woman, it is only Paul's own context that can determine what he means.

Apart from the use of the metaphor "head" itself, there is absolutely nothing in the passage to indicate that Paul is concerned with issues of hierarchy. If Paul had meant to say that men are in authority over women, he had Greek terms he could have used: ἐξουσία (*exousia*, authority) or ἄρχων (*archōn*, ruler) or κύριος (*kurios*, lord). Paul uses *exousia* (authority) only once in the passage, and it is in reference to the woman's own authority, not to the authority of others over her (v.10). (This verse has been misleadingly translated to read that the woman should have a "symbol of authority over her head," but "symbol of" is supplied by English translators. The Greek simply states that the woman herself should have authority over her own head, the exact opposite of what some English translations misleadingly suggest. More on this below.) Accordingly, those who read the passage hierarchically as implying that it is about the authority of men over women are reading things into the passage that are simply not there.³⁸

If then the passage is not about the authority of men over women, what might be the point that Paul is arguing here? In what follows, I will summarize several readings of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11, beginning with the "egalitarian" argument that when Paul uses the metaphor of "head" in this passage, he means not "authority" but "source."

Egalitarian Readings

Egalitarian biblical scholars argue that there are numerous precedents for the metaphor “head” being used to mean “source” in ancient literature. In Hebrew, *Rosh Hashanah* means the “head of the year.” The first day of the year does not have authority over the rest of the year, but is the day from which the rest of the year follows. According to Psalm 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the *head* [*rosh*] of wisdom.” Modern English translations translate this as “The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom.”³⁹ Philip Payne states that “In contrast [to ‘authority’], ‘source’ is an established meaning for κεφαλή listed from the earliest Greek lexicons to the present.”⁴⁰ Payne lists several references to rivers as “sources,” but also a reference to Philo, where Esau is described as the progenitor or “head” of the clan; Philo identifies “the virtuous one” as the “head” of the human race from whom they draw their life. For Philo, the Ten Commandments are the “heads” (κεφάλαια), the “roots,” the “sources” (αρχαί) the perennial fountains of ordinances. The *Apocalypse of Moses* says that lust is the “head” of every sin. According to the *Ophric Fragment*, “Zeus is the head, the middle, and from Zeus all things exist.” Several manuscripts have *archē* (source) instead of *kephalē* (“head”) for this saying.⁴¹

The above does not prove that Paul understood *kephalē* to mean “source” in 1 Corinthians 11, but it demonstrates that this was at least a possible or likely meaning. Given that Paul’s own use of the metaphor in the passage is the most likely clue to discern his meaning, verses 8-9 and 12 would serve to collaborate “source” as a likely meaning. Verse 8 focuses on the creation account in which the woman was made from the man’s side, and the woman created as man’s partner or helper “fit for him” (cf. Gen. 2:20-21). Verse 12 continues with the theme of origins, noting that man is now born of woman, and “all things (or all persons) come from God.” Assuming that “source” or “origin of” is the correct understanding of “head”

in verse three, Paul's meaning would be: (1) The origin of every man is Christ, that is, Christ is the origin of creation; cf. 8:6: There is "one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." (2) The origin of woman is man. That is, woman ("issa") is taken out of man ("is") (Gen. 2:23). (3) The origin of Christ is God. God the Father is the agent of the incarnation. Payne notes that in each of the statements, the second member is highlighted with an article. Since in the other two cases, the article identifies a specific entity ("Christ, "God"), it would follow that "the man" is not a generic reference to "man in general" – the head (authority) of (every) woman is (every) man – but rather, the head (source/origin) of woman is "the man," that is, the first man, Adam, from whom the first woman was taken.⁴²

What is the point of Paul's listing of the figures in the specific order in which he lists them: head of man = Christ; head of woman = man; head of Christ = God? Grudem argues that the the order reflects a hierarchy of relationships: "Paul is here referring to a relationship of authority between God the Father and God the Son, and he is making a parallel between the relationship in the Trinity and the relationship between the husband and wife in marriage."⁴³ To the contrary, as Fee and Payne point out, the order simply reflects the chronology of salvation history: all things were created through Christ; the man is the "source" of the woman's being; God [the Father] is the source of Christ's incarnation.⁴⁴

What is the point of verse 7 – "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of God"? On a first reading, Paul seems to be at odds with the plain sense of Genesis 1:27 that the image of God consists in being created "male and female." Is Paul suggesting that only men (male human beings) are created in the image of God? Not even Grudem, despite his affirmation of female subordination, is willing to read Paul this way.⁴⁵

Schreiner argues that the point of the verse is twofold: (1) woman should honor man because he is her source; (2) the woman was created to help man in his tasks. No egalitarian would likely disagree with these two affirmations, but Schreiner goes on to conclude that Paul is interpreting Genesis 2 “as revealing a distinction in roles between men and women.” Schreiner claims that the purpose of this distinction of roles becomes clear when we remember that “Paul means ‘authority’ by the word *head* in verse 3.” Of course, this is the real issue of disagreement, and I have argued above that Paul does *not* mean “authority” in his use of the “head” metaphor in verse 3.

Everything depends here on whether Genesis 2 teaches subordination of woman to man in creation itself, and not as a consequence of the fall, and whether Paul himself interpreted Genesis 2 to teach such a subordination.⁴⁶ Fee suggests that Paul is reflecting the Genesis text in that the man by himself is not complete. The animals are not adequate and man needs a companion who is like him, but also different: “She is thus man’s glory because she ‘came from man’ and was created ‘for him.’ She is not thereby subordinate to him, but necessary for him. She exists to his honor as the one who having come from man is the one companion suitable for him, so that he might be complete and that together they might form humanity.”⁴⁷ Fee notes that there is no use of “glory” anywhere in the Bible to suggest that “glory” implies subordination. The context has to do not with authority and subordination, but with “shame” and “glory.” The woman who is intended to be the man’s glory is behaving in such a way as to bring “shame” on him.⁴⁸

Note that complementarians and egalitarians are not in disagreement about the basic meaning of the passage here. Both agree that Paul is teaching that woman came from man, that she is intended as man’s glory, and that she is man’s companion and helper. Disagreement arises about the implications of

this, and arguments to interpret the notion of “glory” in terms of authority and subordination or equality and companionship arise from prior assumptions about both the meaning of the Genesis accounts of creation and Paul’s own argument earlier in this passage.

Whose Authority?

In a text full of difficulties, certainly one of the most difficult sections has been verse 10. This is the only place in the text where the Greek word for authority (ἐξουσία, *exousia*) is actually used. A literal translation of the passage would be: “Therefore the woman ought to have authority (ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν, *exousian echein*) over her head because of the angels.” The straightforward sense of the text is that it is speaking of the woman’s own authority, not of someone else’s authority over her, but translators have been reluctant to translate the text this way. The KJV reads: “For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head because of the angels.” (Actually this is not a bad literal translation, but what does it mean for a woman to have “power” on her head?) The RSV reads: “That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels.” (But *exousia* simply does not mean “veil” or “head covering,” but “authority.”) The ESV (as well as the NASB and the NKJ), reflecting the complementarian assumptions of many of the translators, reads: “That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” (But the words “symbol of” are found nowhere in the Greek text, and make the text say the opposite of what it actually says, by implying that the “authority” in the text is not that of the woman herself, but of someone else over her.) *The New Living Translation*, admittedly a paraphrase, goes furthest in reading something into the text that is not there: “For this reason, and because the angels are watching, a woman should wear a covering on her head to show she is under authority.” The most recent version of the NIV, which is often understood to be somewhat of a paraphrase rather than a

literal translation, actually gets it right: “It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.”

Schreiner claims that the verse should be translated “symbol of authority” based on context: “[T]he issue is a woman’s proper role relationship to a man,” and, since Schreiner has already insisted that this role relationship is one of submission to male authority, the verse can only be interpreted in a way that confirms this authority.⁴⁹ But this is question-begging. To the contrary, Fee asserts: “This construction (subject, the verb *echein* [“has/have”] with *exousia* as the object followed by the preposition *epi*) would be read in the only way it is known to occur in the language: the subject has the authority ‘over’ the object of the preposition.”⁵⁰

Assuming then that the passage means what a straightforward reading suggests that it means – that a woman is to exercise authority over her own head, what might this mean in the context of Paul’s argument? And what does this authority have to do with “the angels?” Fee suggests that Paul is affirming that women do indeed have authority. Nevertheless, in light of what he has already written, they should exercise that authority in the correct way – by wearing a head covering.⁵¹ Bailey suggests that a clue can be found in the use of the Greek word *διά* (*dia*) throughout verses 8-11, sometimes translated “for” and sometimes translated “because of.” “For man was not created *for* [*dia*] woman, but woman *for* [*dia*] man. *Because of* [*dia*] this, the woman should have authority on the head *because of* [*dia*] the angels.” Bailey suggests that *dia* should be translated “because of” in all four instances. Verse 9 refers to the creation story. Woman is created as a “helper” (Hebrew *‘ezer*) to man not as someone who is weak and a servant, but rather as someone who comes to the man’s rescue because he is alone and insufficient in himself. The key focus

here is on mutuality and interdependence. The *this* in verse 10 (“because of this”) refers back to the creation story where the woman is created to be the companion and partner of man. The woman should therefore have a sign of authority on her head when she prophesies in the worshiping congregation: “The head covering [is] a visible symbol of [her own] authority to proclaim a prophetic word to the congregation.”⁵²

What about the angels? Payne points to biblical passages referring to the presence of angels in worship; Bailey suggests that “because of this” may refer to the presence of angels at creation. As the angels rejoiced at the new creation, so they are now rejoicing in the presence of Christian worship, and women should worship in such a manner that the focus is on God, not on themselves, so that the angels can again rejoice.⁵³ The reference is mysterious, but these at least are plausible suggestions.

Interdependence

Verses 11 and 12 mark the conclusion of Paul’s argument. (Verses 13 to 16 are arguably supplementary, but do not add anything substantial to the theological argument itself.) The word *πλὴν* (*plēn*) translated “nonetheless” in verse 11 indicates that Paul is introducing something new into the argument, while at the same time connecting what he is now writing to what has come before.⁵⁴ The passage is connected with what immediately precedes. The sequence “woman/man” – “Nonetheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man” – makes clear that the authority in the preceding verse 10 must refer to the woman’s own authority. If verse 10 were referring to the man’s authority over the woman, Paul would have written “Nonetheless, in the Lord man is not independent of woman.”⁵⁵

Crucial to the logic of Paul’s argument is the parallel that he draws between verses 8-9 and verses 11 to 12. The following outline, adapted from Fee, but drawing from other sources as

well, demonstrates the parallelism:

A Not is man from [ἐκ, *ek*] woman, **a**

but . . . woman from [ἐκ, *ek*] man (v. 8) cf. Gen. 21 **b**

B Not was created man for the sake/because of [διὰ, *dia*] the woman, **a**

but . . . woman for the sake of/because of [διὰ, *dia*] the man (v. 9) cf. Gen 2:18 **b**

(Because of [διὰ, *dia*] this, the woman should have authority over her head, because of [διὰ, *dia*] the angels (v. 10)

Nonetheless [πλὴν, *plēn*]

B' Neither woman without [χωρίς, *chōris*] man, **b**

nor . . . man without [χωρίς, *chōris*] woman, **a**

in the Lord; (v. 11)

A' *For* just as the woman from [ἐκ, *ek*] the man, **b**

so also the man through [διὰ, *dia*] the woman **a**

and all (people) [πάντα, *panta*] from [ἐκ, *ek*] God (v. 12)

cf. 1 Cor. 8:6

For us there is one God the Father, from [ἐκ, *ek*] whom are all (things) [πάντα, *panta*] and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through [δι', *di*] whom are all (things) [πάντα, *panta*] and we through [δι', *di*] him.

In this passage, "Paul is the first writer known to draw theological significance from the fact that every man is born through [*dia*] woman."⁵⁶ A comparison of 8-9 and 11-12 show that Paul deliberately uses parallel constructions and the same prepositions (*ek* and *dia*) in both passages.⁵⁷ A comparison with

1 Cor. 8:6 shows a parallel structure, and, once again, the same propositions as well as the same use of *panta* (all things or all people). Paul is reflecting on the the role of men and women through a reading of the Genesis creation texts, but also re-interpreting creation through a christocentric lens. "In the Lord," women are not without/separated from men, just as all men and all women have been created by God through Christ. This is parallel to verse 3. Christ is the "head" (creative source) of man, as man is the "head" (instrumental source) of woman, and the "head" (source) of Christ's incarnation is God the Father.

Note the parallels between verses nine and twelve. Man was not created because of [*dia*] the woman. However, man is born through [*dia*] the woman. Verses 11-12 repeat the terminology of 8-9 to show that the temporal priority of man in creation as the "source" of woman is balanced by the order of nature (natural birth) in which woman is the source of all men. Paul's juxtaposition here thus undermines any notion of subordination based on temporal order.⁵⁸

The context indicates that *panta* should likely be translated "all people."⁵⁹ Woman originally came from man in creation. Man now comes from woman through childbirth. All people come from God in creation. "In the Lord," men and women are not separate, but interdependent.

What is then is meaning of *chōris* ("separate from/without")? Paul's statement about woman having authority over her own head might have led women to assert their independence. Instead, Paul is affirming that in Christ, men and women are equal and interdependent. He further justifies this by noting their interdependence in origin.

To summarize, the normal meaning of χωρὶς [chōris] virtually demands that this statement be understood as an affirmation that in Christ there is no separation between woman and man.

*The introductory “however” shows that this is a new perspective, one that Paul regards as essential. “In the Lord” shows that it is something established in Christ, not something that was already established in society apart from Christ. . . . It does this [affirms the equality of man and woman in the Lord] by pointing out that every man’s source in woman balances woman’s source in Adam and by asserting that all this comes from God. Thus, the equal standing of woman and man in Christ is rooted in creation and biology and has its source in God. . . . Paul clearly does not want his specific instructions regarding the “head covering” issues raised by the Corinthian church to support any subordination of woman to man in Christ.*⁶⁰

Paul is thus defending here the equality of the sexes in Christ. Both men and women are called upon to lead and to speak (“prophecy”) in the worship assembly. While it is true that woman was created for man’s glory (v. 9), this does not imply that woman was created as man’s subordinate, but as his helper, one who is both different from and like him. God has arranged things “in the Lord” in such a manner that men and women are interdependent and need one another.⁶¹

The above summarizes both the hierarchical/complementarian and egalitarian readings of 1 Corinthians 11. In what immediately follows, I want to examine two more recent readings that do not part company with the egalitarian reading, but bring into account slightly different emphases or readings of the text.

Revolutionary Subordination/Christological Subversion

In my previous essay on Ephesians 6 and “mutual subordination,” I had identified a reading of Paul’s argument as “revolutionary subordination” or “christological subversion.” In recent years, a similar reading of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 11 has appeared. Judith M. Gundry-Volf wrote an article on “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor.

11:12-16" which explored a different interpretation from that of either the hierarchical/complementarian or egalitarian readings. This article influenced Anthony Thiselton's reading in his monumental commentary on *1 Corinthians*, and, more recently, Alan F. Johnson in his own commentary. In what follows, I will primarily be focusing on Johnson's own reading, as influenced by Gundry-Volf.⁶²

Gundry-Volf makes the argument that Paul's concern is to correct a worship practice that by bringing social shame on both men and women, was also bringing shame on the church. Both men and women were involved in the practice, which blurred gender distinctions between men and women. Paul's concern was that men and women were bringing shame on their respective "heads," but also that the practice hurt the church's witness to prospective outsiders. Paul was arguing for a worship practice in respect to hairstyles that symbolized mutual respect, while acknowledging clear gender identity distinctions. He refers to the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 to argue not only for gender differentiation, but also for a gender hierarchy concerning places of honor and respect. Thus, Paul affirms identical roles for men and women in worship, while also maintaining gender distinction, with some traces of patriarchal hierarchy.

At the same time, Paul provides a second reading of creation in light of redemption in Christ. In v. 11-12, Paul argues that there is an interdependence of man and woman based on equality in Christ. Both men and women are mutually the source of one another's existence, the man the source of the woman through creation, and the woman the source of the man through childbirth. Gender distinctions are thus upheld, but are relativized in Christ, "resulting in an egalitarian community patterned according to the redeemed creation, or new creation relationships, rather than according to fallen cultural norms."⁶³

Johnson acknowledges that, on this reading, there is a “clear tension” between vs. 2-10 and 11-16. Gundry-Volf suggests that Paul was simultaneously maintaining a practice in which women and men were equally allowed to engage in public worship by praying and prophesying, but at the same time, by respecting the patriarchal social patterns of sexual distinctions in the surrounding culture, the church’s mission to the world could be preserved.⁶⁴

Johnson largely follows Gundry-Volf’s reading, with some exceptions. He agrees that the context for Paul’s discussion is social shame, and neither the sexual temptation of men, the subordination of women to men, or homosexuality. Paul’s concern in the passage is mission to outsiders.⁶⁵

Johnson also agrees with Gundry-Volf (in a reading also followed by Thiselton) that the best understanding of Paul’s “head” (*kephalē*) metaphor is not “authority over” – “since there is no reference to submission (*hypotassō*) . . . and no strict hierarchy . . . beginning with God, then Christ, then man, then woman.” Instead, he suggests, there is an “honor order of pairs.” Man honors Christ; woman honors man, Christ honors God. In each case, “head” is the “honored member” or “archtype” of the other. Johnson suggests a combination of “preeminent” or “honored” with “source.” The “head” is the “honored source” of the pair – “[I]f there are any patriarchal tones in Paul’s honored person pairs, it is muted and does not figure significantly in the passage in any specific way.”⁶⁶

Johnson suggests that in 7-9, Paul is drawing on the creation narratives to echo motifs resonant in the “shame/honor” culture of the Mediterranean world: glory, honor, and shame. Paul follows rabbinic exegesis, focusing on the man as the “glory of God” to suggest that the man should bring “glory” to God rather than the “shame” of a non-masculine hairstyle. Conversely, the woman is the “glory” of man, and so should not wear her hair in a manner that brings shame on the man,

according to the cultural standards of the dominant culture. At the same time, the woman is the man's "glory" in that she is created from man, but is also his "helper" as a "partner," a companion who overcomes his loneliness. She should not then shame her partner by rejecting the cultural symbol of her womanhood.⁶⁷

At the same time, Johnson acknowledges that "authority over" (ἐξουσία ἐπί, *exousia epi*) (v. 10) refers to the woman's own authority over her head, not the man's authority over her. He considers two possibilities as equally likely – either that the woman has authority or control over her own head, or that she has the authority to lead in worship by prophesying. He acknowledges that there is no satisfactory interpretation for "because of the angels," but finds most likely that this is referring in some sense to the angels' presence during the church's worship. He concludes, "In any event it is clear that the text does not support the idea of male authority over the woman actually or symbolically."⁶⁸

Johnson suggests that the *plēn* ("however") of verse 11 suggests a contrast to what had gone before which is indicated by comparisons with 7-9. Instead of divergences – "man is not . . . but woman is" . . . – there are now similarities and parallels – "neither woman . . . nor man," "just as woman . . . so also man." The priority of the man is now replaced with interdependence – "neither man without woman," . . . "man is through the woman." Paul indicates a new rationale for this new interpretation of the relation between man and woman – "in the Lord."⁶⁹

In verses 11-12, Paul once again looks at origins. The woman's origin from man in creation is compared with man's origin from woman – every man is born through (*dia*) woman: "This seems to point in the direction of Paul's actually inverting the hierarchical relationship between the sexes and breaking out of the strictly patriarchal system for constructing gender

identity and roles.”⁷⁰

How should one assess this new interpretation of Paul? It reads not so much as a rejection of the egalitarian reading as a qualifying or tweaking of it. By focusing on the issue of “honor” and “shame,” the new reading pushes the passage more in the direction of what I have called “revolutionary subordination” or “christological subversion.” Rather than dwelling exclusively on the setting of Christian worship, this reading suggests that another audience must be kept in mind as well – that Paul is concerned at least as much about how the church will come across to outsiders as he is to the church’s own internal order. Interpreting the “head” metaphor in terms of “honor” fits in with this shift, but does not significantly depart from understanding “head” in terms of “source.” As Johnson reads *kephalē*, “honored source” is the best reading.

Where the reading might be problematic is in its assumption that there is a “tension” between what Paul writes in verses 2-9 and 11-12. Rather than reading these parts of Paul’s argument as parallel ways of saying the same thing (as in egalitarian readings), 11-12 is seen in some sense as in contrast to, or perhaps even as a corrective of the earlier verses. (This is similar to the view that Paul apparently contradicted himself – what I have called the “paradoxical” reading above.) Is it plausible that Paul would not have seen as in tension what so clearly seems to be a tension to the contemporary reader? Here is where I would suggest that the egalitarian reading is preferable. Paul is not correcting what he wrote in the earlier verses so much as preventing incorrect interpretations that some might draw from what he had written – that the woman is derived from the man in creation does not imply a subordination, but rather an equality of partnership, and verses 11-12 make this emphatically clear.

Modified Egalitarian: Reading “From the Bottom Up”

Perhaps the most provocative reading of 1 Corinthians 11 is

that of Alan Padgett.⁷¹ Padgett argues that, as in other cases, Paul's argument is best understood if read "from the bottom up." That is, the logic behind Paul's sometimes meandering argument is often best understood if one first reads his conclusion. Padgett suggests that the best clue as to the practice that Paul is addressing is found in verses 13-15, which, he argues, have been seriously misinterpreted. In verse 15, Paul writes: "For hair is given to her [by nature] instead of (ἀντί, *anti*) a covering." In verse 16, Paul appeals to the custom of the churches, and in verse 13 to 15, he provides an argument from nature. The controversial custom becomes clear in verse 13: "Judge for yourselves; is it proper for an uncovered woman to pray to God?" Given that there is no punctuation in the original Greek, Padgett suggests that this could as easily be read as a statement, "Judge for yourselves; it is proper for an uncovered woman to pray to God." He argues that verses 14-15 should only be properly read as a statement, not a question: "But nature itself has not taught you that if a man has long hair it is a shame while if a woman has long hair it is her glory; for hair is given to her instead of a covering." Modern translations and most interpreters treat 14-15 as a question – "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?" – and commentators treat Paul's use of the word "nature" as referring to "social custom."⁷² But Padgett argues that Paul is rather arguing against social custom, and instead is appealing behind custom to nature itself: there is no shame for a man to have long hair, and nature gives women long hair instead of the coverings that are placed on women's heads for social reasons. This is the natural reading of the passage, and Padgett notes that the Latin Vulgate correctly translates the verse as a statement, not a question. The custom that Paul was arguing *against* was the Corinthian social custom that it was shameful for men to have long hair, and for women to pray uncovered.⁷³ Thus, Padgett suggests that the position concerning women's

head coverings in verses 4-7 is not Paul's own, but a quotation from the Corinthians whom he is correcting. (Similarly, most scholars consider Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:1 – "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" – to be a quotation from his Corinthian audience, not his own views.) Padgett suggests that when Paul uses the phrase "I want you to know" (11:3) in 1 Corinthians, he is correcting a mistaken Corinthian view (cf. 10:1, 12:1).⁷⁴

Returning then to Padgett's "bottom up" reading, verses 11-12 provide a corrective to the Corinthian custom. "In the Lord," Paul argues, even though there is a temporal priority of man before woman in the creation story, men are now born of women. This balance between men and women is further emphasized in Paul's assertion that "all people come from God." The balance between men and women is based on the same christological principle that Paul used in Galatians to argue for the breaking down of the division between Jew and Gentile, and the overcoming of the cultural mark of circumcision. The implication of Paul's argument in verses 11-12 is along the same lines: "In the Lord, these differences of dress are of no importance. Social customs of dress, which distinguish male and female, should not inhibit a woman or man from praying or prophesying in the worship of the Lord."⁷⁵

This argument is further illustrated by verse 10 in which Paul writes that "a woman ought to have authority over her own head." Padgett points to the acknowledgment of New Testament scholars that the passage refers to a woman's own authority, but to their confusion about what this might mean. To the contrary, "What Paul says is simple enough: women ought to have freedom to wear their hair however they want to in church."⁷⁶

Padgett's conclusion then, is that, in this passage, Paul was actually arguing for the opposite of what many have assumed. Paul was arguing for more liberty for men and women in Christ.

He was only concerned with hairstyles or head coverings because of a Corinthian theology that was based on a false understanding of the relation between men and women. Paul was arguing against the notion that men alone were the glory of God by arguing that woman is the glory of man and thus should have freedom over her own head.⁷⁷

I find Padgett's reading to be intriguing, and it seems to solve a lot of the problems that arise from conventional readings of the passage. Padgett is convincing when he suggests that it would seem to be inconsistent with Paul's theology expressed elsewhere to insist that a social practice like wearing head coverings was indispensable. After all, in Paul's discussion of circumcision, he had argued vigorously against just such a social practice that was firmly entrenched in Jewish culture, and explicitly endorsed in the Old Testament. In addition, a reading of verse 14 as a statement rather than a question just makes sense. Nature does not teach that it is a disgrace for men to have long hair. Views about the propriety of hair length are social constructions, and, for that reason, New Testament scholars who interpret Paul's statement here as a question understand Paul to be referring to a social construction, although he speaks of "nature." Finally, the plain sense reading of verse 10 is that a woman should have authority over her own head. That is, it should be her own decision whether she wears a head covering or has a particular hairstyle.

As inviting as Padgett's reading might be, the main problem with it is in making the case that the position that Paul describes in the first half of the chapter is actually the Corinthian position that Paul is opposing rather than the position that Paul himself is endorsing. Payne suggests that Paul's "I want you to know . . ." is evidence that the Corinthians had not been opposing Paul, but simply needed new instruction. He writes that nothing in the passage indicates that what follows verse 3 is a quotation from Paul's

opponents.⁷⁸ Fee refers to Padgett's "improbable suggestion";⁷⁹ Thiselton notes that when Paul cites a slogan from the Corinthians elsewhere, his citation is succinct, unlike the supposed citation in the first part of chapter 11.⁸⁰ While Padgett's proposal is intriguing, it is not one that has been endorsed by a significant number of New Testament scholars.

Conclusion

The purpose of the above discussion has been to argue that there is nothing in Paul's discussion of worship in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 to suggest that he is advocating a subordination of women to men, or restricting the permission of women to lead worship and to speak publicly (prophecy) in the assembly. The complementarian reading that suggests that Paul is advocating a hierarchical "headship" of the authority of men over women or is postulating different "role relationships" is simply not in the passage. In order to make this argument, I have not only given reasons why I find the complementarian reading to be inadequate, but have also examined several alternative readings. Much about the passage is difficult to understand, and it should not be surprising that New Testament scholars have offered several different suggestions about what the problem was that Paul was addressing, and about the details of his solution. Nonetheless, despite disagreements about detail, I would suggest that the above readings point to a consensus about the main themes of Paul's argument. What then might be the conclusions drawn from the passage?

First, both men and women are to engage equally in the practice of leading in worship and speaking in the public assembly. Paul's concern in the passage is not to restrict the public role of one sex or another in worship, but to stipulate that worship should be conducted in a manner that does not create public scandal.⁸¹

Second, “in the Lord,” man and woman are not separate from or independent from another, but interdependent on one another. Paul’s use of “head” language has nothing to do with a hierarchy of men over women, or with “role relationships” of authority of men over women.

Third, if man is the source of woman in the Genesis creation narrative, he is only the instrumental source. Woman is the instrumental source of man through childbirth, and God is the ultimate source of both man and woman, who equalizes their standing in Christ.

Fourth, that woman is man’s glory does not mean that she was created for his purposes or utilitarian ends, but that men and women both need and are mutually dependent on one another.

Finally, even in the new age of redemption in Christ, sexual and gender distinctions are maintained; however, that does not mean that one sex is subordinate to the other, but that both are interdependent on and need one another.⁸²

Appendix: Subordination and the Trinity

The theme of God’s authority over Christ has become a central issue in this debate. In his earlier essay, Schreiner argued only for an “economic subordination” of the Son to the Father,⁸³ but Grudem has more recently insisted not only on an “economic subordination,” but on an eternal subordination within the immanent or ontological Trinity itself. Grudem states: “The differences in authority among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the only interpersonal differences that the Bible indicates exist eternally among the members of the Godhead. . . . [F]or all eternity there has been a difference in authority, whereby the Father has authority over the Son that the Son does not have over the Father . . . These differences, in which there is authority and submission to authority, seem to be the means by which Father, Son and Holy Spirit differ from one another and can be differentiated from

one another.” Grudem continues: “If we did not have such differences in authority in the relationships among the members of the Trinity, then we would not know of any differences at all, and it would be unclear whether there are any differences among the persons of the Trinity.”⁸⁴ Grudem rejects the “egalitarian claim,” which, as noted above, had earlier been affirmed by his fellow complementarian Schreiner, of a merely economic subordination of the Son to the Father: “[T]he egalitarian claim that the Son’s subordination to the Father was only for his time on earth is surely incorrect.”⁸⁵

Grudem draws on 1 Corinthians 11:3 as the key passage to support his argument:

*In this verse, “head” refers to one who is in a position of authority over the other, as this Greek word (kephalē) uniformly does whenever it is used in ancient literature to say that one person is “head of” another person or group. So Paul is here referring to a relationship of authority between God the Father and God the Son, and he is making a parallel between the relationship in the Trinity and the relationship between the husband and wife in marriage.*⁸⁶

(I have argued above that Grudem is mistaken both in his reading of 1 Corinthians as arguing such an authority-subordination relationship, but also in his claims that *kephalē* always means “authority” in ancient literature. Moreover, the context of Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 11 says nothing about husbands and wives. Paul is discussing men and women in the context of Christian worship, not husbands and wives in the context of marriage.)

Grudem goes on to claim a “role relationship” between man and woman parallel to an eternal authority relationship between the Father and the Son: “Just as the Father and Son are equal in deity and equal in all their attributes, but different in

role, so husband and wife are equal in personhood and value, but they are different in the roles God has given them. Just as God the Son is eternally subject to the authority of God the Father, so God has planned that wives be subject to the authority of their husbands.” Again, Grudem is emphatic that this authority relationship between Father and Son is eternal, inherent to the immanent Trinity:

*The Father has eternally had a leadership role, an authority to initiate and direct, that the Son does not have . . . Authority and submission between the Father and the Son, and between Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, is a fundamental difference (or probably the fundamental difference) between the persons of the Trinity.*⁸⁷

This argument concerning the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father has become increasingly controversial in recent Evangelical theology, with numerous Evangelical theologians arguing that Grudem’s notion of an “eternal subordination” and obedience of the Father to the Son is a departure from Nicene orthodoxy, and a reversion to a “subordinationist” theology rejected at Nicea.⁸⁸

I am not terribly interested in getting involved in this intramural debate, since I regard questions about the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic subordination of the Son to be peripheral to the question of the relationships between men and women. I think that Paul is making an analogy in 1 Corinthians 11:3 (which I have discussed above), not engaging in sophisticated metaphysical arguments about the eternal relations between the three members of the Trinity. At the same time, I will state that Grudem’s affirmation that the only basis for any eternal differentiation between the members of the Trinity would lie in differences of authority is bizarre, historically mistaken, and possibly heretical. The traditional understanding of the

Trinity is that the differentiations between persons in the immanent ontological Trinity arise from relations of origins. On the Eastern Cappadocian model, the Father is the *fons divinitatis* (fountain of deity); the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father. On the Western model, as formulated first by Augustine, and, I would argue, definitively by Thomas Aquinas, the Son is the *Logos* or Word whom the Father eternally begets, and the Holy Spirit is the mutual love who eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.⁸⁹ Far from the Trinitarian relations being relations of authority, they are relations of mutual love. Moreover, given the historically orthodox notion that God is three eternal divine persons with a single divine nature, and that will is assigned to nature, not persons, it likely makes no sense that the Father would eternally command the Son, and the Son would eternally obey, since the Triune God has a single undivided will. On the Thomist/Augustinian model, at least, the "faculty" to which the Son corresponds is intellect, with the Spirit corresponding to "will" or "love." Moreover, the doctrine of *perichoresis* or *circumcessio* implies that what the three persons will, they will as one. To say that one divine person eternally exercises authority over or commands another divine person and that the second divine person eternally obeys and submits likely implies some version of tritheism, not Trinitarian orthodoxy.

It is significant in this discussion that Grudem indicates that the only possible relationship that he can imagine between more than one person is one that is based on the authority of one over the other, rather than a relationship of genuine equality based on mutual love, which is the historical understanding of the Trinity. The logical implication of Grudem's claim that the only ground to distinguish between the persons of the Trinity would be in terms of authority and obedience would imply that authority and obedience is also the only ground to distinguish between any two human persons as well, that in any case in which two human persons come into

relationship to one another, that relationship must be fundamentally based on a hierarchy of obedience in which one of those persons has authority over the other, and the other obeys. It is certainly telling that when pressed for an analogy to account for differentiation between persons, the first analogy that comes to mind for Grudem is one of hierarchy and obedience, and it seems not to occur to him that mutuality and equality based on love would not only be just as adequate a manner of differentiating between persons, but a superior one. This would seem to indicate that there is a more fundamental difference between complementarians and egalitarians than basic disagreements about exegesis. At stake seems to be a fundamental difference of understanding of how persons relate to one another, a difference rooted in a very different understanding of the nature of the triune God, the incarnation, and human beings. In the end, the disagreement may well lie in different theologies of soteriology and grace.

1 See my "Concerning Women's Ordination: Mutual Submission," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-mutual-submission>; Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Alan Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

2 I have already dealt with these passages in previous essays. I will explicitly address the question of why Jesus chose only male apostles in a later essay. Description of church office in Acts and the epistles – apostle, presbyter, bishop, deacon – will also be discussed later.

3 "Concerning Women's Ordination: Speaking and Teaching," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-speaking-and-teaching>.

4 Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 800.

[5](#) “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Mutual Submission,”; <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-mutual-submission>.

[6](#) George W. Knight, III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1977, 1985), 20.

[7](#) J. Paul Sampley states that “at least at one level – namely, that in Christ there is no male or female – [Paul] has not fully carried through the social critique that he elsewhere sees implied so completely in his gospel. . . . Paul is himself at a bit of loggerheads as he tries to honor two very different convictions.” “The First Letter to the Corinthians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelves Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 928, 931. James D. G. Dunn refers to a “tension in Paul’s own thinking . . .” *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 589.

[8](#) Thiselton, 822-823; Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 177-201.

[9](#) Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, 2004), xiv, 34-36.

[10](#) Alan F. Johnson, “A Review of the Scholarly Debate on the Meaning of ‘Head’ (κεφαλή) in Paul’s Writings,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 2009: 35-57; 54.

[11](#) Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church*.

[12](#) Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 301; Karen M. Elliott, C.P.P.S. *Women in Ministry and the Writings of Paul* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2010), 54-57; See my essay, “Concerning Women’s

Ordination: Women's Ministry in the New Testament (Office)," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/womens-ordination-office>.

[13](#) Bailey, 409.

[14](#) If the former, then the concern could be modesty. A covered head would suggest that a woman is sexually unavailable. Public worship would not be a place for women to become "objects" of male attention. If the latter, then the emphasis would be on gender identity, that is, cultural markers between men and women. Thiselton argues for "head covering" (Thiselton, 823-833), as do Bailey (Bailey, 304 ff.) and Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 495 ff.; Alan Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, 189-190, and Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman: One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 199-207 believe that the passage is about whether or not hair was pinned up on top of the head.

[15](#) Thiselton, 828. Thiselton cites Richard Hays's comparison to wearing a baseball cap to a formal dinner as "rude and irreverent . . . a breach of etiquette." Richard Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation* (Louisville, Knox, 1997), 184.

[16](#) Bailey, 300.

[17](#) Keener, 32.

[18](#) Johnson, "Review," 35.

[19](#) Gordon Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assembled," *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., 148.

[20](#) Thiselton, 812. The most complete accounts of the discussion are probably Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 812-822 and Johnson, "Review," 38-57.

[21](#) Thiselton, 812-822.

[22](#) The most accessible essays are: “Appendix 1: Does *kephalē* (head) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,335 Examples,” in Knight, *Role Relationship*, 49-80; “Appendix 1: The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 425-468; “Appendix 3: Over Fifty Examples of *Kephalē* (‘Head’) Meaning ‘Authority Over/Ruler’ in Ancient Literature”; “Appendix 4: The Meaning of κεφαλή (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 544-599.

[23](#) Johnson refers to Grudem beginning what he calls “the battle of the lexicons.” “Review,” 41. Grudem appeals to six lexicons in *Evangelical Feminism*, 550-551.

[24](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 593.

[25](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 543.

[26](#) Grudem states: “Over fifty examples of *kephalē* meaning ‘ruler, authority over’ have been found . . . but no examples of the meaning of ‘source without authority.’” “[T]he general of an army is said to be the ‘like the head’ in Plutarch . . . the Roman Emperor is called the ‘head’ of the people . . . the King of Egypt is called ‘head’ of the nation in Philo . . .” *Evangelical Feminism*, 202, 205.

[27](#) Knight, 20-23.

[28](#) “The difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one. . . The Son has a different function of role from the Father, not an inferior being or essence. . . Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological difference, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home. Such

differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply his inferiority." Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecy and the Trinity," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 128

[29](#) Schreiner, 133.

[30](#) Schreiner, 132, 135.

[31](#) "The clearest evidence for the real differences between the Jewish and Greek metaphorical uses is to be found in the Septuagint (LXX). In the hundreds of places where the Hebrew *rosh* is used for the literal head on a body, the translators invariably used the word in Greek that means the same thing, *kephalē*. But in the approximately 180 times it appears as a metaphor for leader or chieftain, they almost always eliminate the metaphor altogether and translate it *archē* ('leader'), which is evidence that they were uncomfortable with (unfamiliar with?) the Jewish metaphor and simply translated it out. The few instances (six in all) where they do not do this . . . are simply exceptions that prove the rule." Gordon Fee, "Praying and Prophesying," note, 150; In his commentary, Fee notes "12 of 180 instances, and half of these . . . were required to preserve a head/tail contrast." Fee states: "Indeed, these statistics seem to make this a clear case where the exception proves the rule. Grudem's unfortunate failure to note these translational phenomena considerably mars his study . . ." Fee, *1 Corinthians*, note. 503. "[T]he Septuagint rarely translates *ros* (in the sense of leader) literally as 'head'; most often it uses other Greek words that mean 'leader.' It retains 'head' for leader less than one tenth of the time, despite the Hebrew usage. In other words, 'leader' is not a very common meaning for the Greek word for 'head.'" Keener, 32; "The Greek OT (LXX) shows that most of its translators did not regard 'head' (κεφαλή) as an appropriate word to convey 'leader.'" . . . The LXX translators overwhelmingly (in 226 of 239 instances) chose κεφαλή to translate literal instances of

'head.' Yet in only 6 of 171 instances where 'head' . . . must convey 'leader' did they translate it with the metaphor κεφαλή in a way that clearly means leader. In contrast, the NASB, reflecting the natural metaphorical use of 'head' to convey 'leader' in English, translates 115 of these 171 instances 'head.'" Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman: One in Christ: An Exegetical And Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 119. Payne notes that some of the instances that Grudem claims means "leader" actually mean "top," not leader. In Grudem's most recent essay on the topic, he lists a total of 14 passages from the LXX, but even if he is correct that in all of these passages, *kephalē* means "authority," the point remains. In over 200 passages where the Hebrew Old Testament uses "head" to mean "authority," the LXX translators chose not to translate "head" meaning "authority" with *kephalē*. Although mentioned regularly by New Testament scholars, I have not been able to find in any of Grudem's several articles on *kephalē* any acknowledgment that such a disparity exists between the Hebrew text and the Greek translation, let alone a recognition of its significance.

[32](#) Payne, 120.

[33](#) Grudem, "Appendix 3: Over Fifty Examples of *Kephalē*," *Evangelical Feminism*, 544-551. Gordon Fee complains that Grudem's "Survey of 2,336 examples" is "quite misleading." Of the 2,336 examples, only a small percentage are metaphorical. (The majority simply refer to the physical "head" of the body.) Of the 49 metaphorical uses that Grudem claims refer to "authority," twelve are from the New Testament. Since these are the passages at issue, to claim them as evidence is question-begging. Eighteen are from Greek translations of the Old Testament, but these "are the exceptions that prove the rule that this *is not* an ordinary reading for this Greek word . . ." Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 502.

[34](#) "'Authority' is not a well-established meaning of κεφαλή. .

. . . Apart from a few NT lexicons, the vast majority of Greek lexicons list no such meaning.” Payne, 121. Payne states, “Unfortunately, some advocates of male authority have misrepresented the lexical evidence . . .” Payne, 122.

[35](#) “Ashkelon [500 AD] hails Demosth[enes] as his master . . . κεφαλή . . . Demosthenes (384-322 BC) could not have had a position of authority over Zosimus since Demosthenes had died over 800 years earlier.” Payne, 122. Payne points to Philo referring to Esau as the “progenitor,” the head (κεφαλή) or founder of a clan. This cannot mean “ruler,” “since Esau is dead and has no authority over the clan that continues.” Philo refers to “the virtuous one” as the “head” (κεφαλή). “In both of these passages from Philo the person called ‘head’ is not in authority over the group identified but is their source of life.” Payne, 125.

[36](#) “There is no known instance where *kephalē* is used as a metaphor for the husband and wife relationship; this seems to be unique to Paul.” Fee, “Praying and Prophecy,” 150.

[37](#) “One of the problems with much of the debate regarding the metaphorical use of *kephalē* in Paul is the tacit assumption that the resolution lies in deciding once and for all what the metaphor means in Greek sources outside the New Testament.” Fee, “Praying and Prophecy,” 152

[38](#) “Despite repeated assertions to the contrary, nothing that is said following this verse hints at an authority-subordination relationship. . . . [T]he latter is to read something into the text that simply is not there . . .” Fee, “Praying and Prophecy,” 151. “Context is the key to determining how a particular term is being used in a given passage, and the context here indicates nothing about the husband’s ‘authority.’” Keener, 34

[39](#) Bailey, 302.

[40](#) Payne, 123.

[41](#) Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 6.21.4, *De locis affectis* 3.12; Philo, 4:488-89, *Rewards* 125, *Preliminary Studies* 120; *Apoc. Mos.* 19.3; *Orphic Fragment* 168. This is a selection among several others cited in Payne, 123-128. "All these examples show that 'source' is a well-established meaning of κεφαλή." Payne, 128.

[42](#) Payne, 130; Bailey, 302; "Paul's understanding of the metaphor, therefore, and almost certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped, is 'head' as 'source,' especially 'source of life.' This seems to be corroborated by vv. 8-9, the only place where one of these relationships is picked up farther in Paul's argument. There he explicitly states that man was the original source of the woman (cf. v. 12)." Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 503-504.

[43](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 46.

[44](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 504, "Praying and Prophesying," 152; Payne points out that when Paul refers to a hierarchical sequence, he lists members in a logical descending order (1 Cor. 12:28). To the contrary, in this list, the members are not listed in a descending order of authority, but chronologically. Payne, 129.

[45](#) "Paul is not denying that woman was created in the image of God, for that is clearly affirmed in Genesis 1:27 . . . He does not say in this passage that man is more in the image of God than woman is, nor should we derive any such idea from this passage." Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 26, note.

[46](#) See my essay "Concerning the Ordination of Women: Beginning with Genesis," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-beginning-with-genesis>.

[47](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 517.

[48](#) Fee, "Praying and Prophesying," 152.

[49](#) Schreiner, 135.

[50](#) Fee, "Praying and Prophecy," 156; "The word authority (*exousia*) is always, in Greek, the person's own authority, not someone else's. The phrase 'have authority over' always means having power, freedom, or authority over something. Despite the common translation in English of 'veil' or 'symbol of authority, *exousia* never means – and it simply cannot mean – having a symbol of someone else's authority on top of something." Padgett, 112.

[51](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 521. In the end, however, Fee admits that this passage is uncertain. "Paul seems to be affirming the 'freedom' of women over their own heads; but what that means in this context remains a mystery."

[52](#) Bailey, 309-311.

[53](#) Payne, 183-187; Bailey, 311-313.

[54](#) Payne, 189.

[55](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 522-523; Payne, 191.

[56](#) Payne, 195

[57](#) Payne, 196; Bailey, 307-309,

[58](#) "Paul immediately defends his affirmation of the equality of the sexes, . . . In order to make it clear that his point is not that man as the source of woman has priority over woman, Paul highlights that in giving birth, woman is man's source. Paul is intentionally counterbalancing his earlier statement that man is the source of woman. As Adam was the instrumental source of the first woman, so woman is the instrumental source in the order of nature of all subsequent men (including Jesus . . .)." Payne, 195

[59](#) Payne, 196; "Most translations have this final phrase as 'all things come from God,' but the debate is about where

people come from, so we should translate it as . . . ‘all people come from God.’” Pagett, 71.

[60](#) Payne, 193.

[61](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 523.

[62](#) Judith Gundry-Volf. “Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2-16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher*, ed. Jostein Åna, Scott J. Hafeman and Ottfried Hofius (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 151-171; Thiselton, 799-848; Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, 177-201.

[63](#) Johnson, 181-182; Thiselton, 811, 822. I am depending on Johnson and Thiselton, since I have not yet been able to obtain a copy of Gundry-Volf’s article.

[64](#) Johnson, 183.

[65](#) Johnson, 181-187.

[66](#) Johnson, 191.

[67](#) Johnson, 194-195,

[68](#) Johnson, 195-196.

[69](#) Johnson, 197

[70](#) Johnson, 198.

[71](#) Padgett’s position occurs in *As Christ Submits to the Church*, 103-124. An earlier version appeared as “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:12-16,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984): 69-86.

[72](#) Keener, 43; Bailey, 306; Payne, 201-202.

[73](#) Padgett, 108-109.

[74](#) Padgett, 122.

[75](#) Padgett, 110-111.

[76](#) Padgett, 112.

[77](#) Padgett 124.

[78](#) Payne, 114.

[79](#) Fee, *1 Corinthians* 501.

[80](#) Thiselton, 833.

[81](#) Note that Paul's critique of women who prophesy with their heads "uncovered" presumes that they are engaged in public speaking in church in the same manner as are men. He criticizes the manner in which this occurs, but not the practice itself.

[82](#) Largely drawn from Payne, 197. However, the same points are emphasized by Fee, Bailey, Keener, Johnson, Padgett, and others.

[83](#) "What the Nicene fathers rightly saw called a subordination of order is another way of saying that they saw a subordination in role, or a subordination in the economic Trinity. . . . It is clear that this subjection to the Father is *after* his earthly ministry, so how anyone can say that there is no hint of difference of order or role within the Trinity is difficult to see." Schreiner, 129.

[84](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 433.

[85](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 407.

[86](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 45-46.

[87](#) Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 46.

[88](#) Grudem's primary critic has been Kevin Giles, in a series

of books and articles. See Kevin Giles, "The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 334-354; *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002); *Jesus and the Father: Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012).

[89](#) See J. Warren Smith, "The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers"; Lewis Ayres, "Augustine on the Trinity"; Joseph Wawrykow, "Franciscan and Dominican Trinitarian Theology (Thirteenth Century) Bonaventure and Aquinas" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, Gilles Emery, O.P. and Matthew Leving, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108-137, 182-196; Gilles Emery, O.P. *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Gilles Emery, O.P., *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).