

To What End?

Revisiting the Gendered Space of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 from a Postcolonial Perspective

As a feminist scholar interested in postcolonial theories and their engagement with biblical texts, I find 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and the scholarship focusing upon it, remarkably fertile ground. Not only is this passage one of two or three that are consistently drawn upon for insight into roles for females within the church, thus making it an incredibly powerful text, but it is also one over which there is great contention in terms of what Paul actually thought or meant regarding the matters discussed within it. The scholarship on this brief passage is significant,¹ and the primary division among scholars² – whether Paul was in part quoting back to the Corinthians what he had heard they had said and then countering it,³ or that he was proclaiming all of the content as his own beliefs – has had the same division for at least a century with very little promise of being resolved.⁴ Indeed, many scholars have sought

¹ See Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, “Paul and the Rhetoric of Gender,” in *Her Master’s Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 287-310 or Preston Massey, “The meaning of katakalyptō and kata kephalēs echōn in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16,” *New Testament Studies* 53/4 (2007): 502-23 for more comprehensive lists of references addressing this passage.

² While there are scholars who find this distinction important to settle, I am deliberately not addressing the divide regarding whether “Paul” was discussing veiling or hairstyles. The final effect, as I understand it, is to have decency or order required of the woman in terms of her hair, whether it is covered or seen—and thus must be neatly kept. See Preston Massey, “The meaning of katakalyptō and kata kephalēs echōn in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16” in *New Testament Studies* 53/4 (2007): 502-23 and Yeo, Khiok-Khng Yeo, “Differentiation and Mutuality of Male-Female Relations in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Biblical Research* 43 (1998): 7-21 for strong arguments for veiling and hairdos, respectively.

³ Even within the scholars who hold to this method of reading the passage there has been debate as to whether Paul does this once or twice in this passage. The relatively few scholars that I have found who suggest a dialogical reading are David O’Dell Scott [*A Post-Patriarchal Christology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992)], Margaret Mitchell [*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991)], and Alan Padgett (“The Significance of anti in 1 Corinthians 11:15,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45/1 (1994): 181-187). Daniel Arichea somewhat dodges the issue by noting that Paul is acknowledging the subordination ideas, even found within scripture, but that they are to be renounced because of the newness in Christ (“The covering on the woman’s head: translation and theology in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16,” *Bible Translator* 55/4 (2004): 460-469).

⁴ The past decade has seen several creative nuances in terms of how to read this passage as entirely Paul’s thought and yet still maintain that Paul was essentially egalitarian. As it turns out, these are the chapters or articles of greatest interest for this piece. For instance, Francis Watson (“The Authority of the Voice: A Theological Reading of 1 Cor 11.2-16,” *New Testament Studies* 46.4 (2000): 520-36), seeking a coherent reading of this passage, suggests that Paul’s modification of the female head-covering practice turns it into a symbol of women’s freedom from an erotic basis for the relationship of male and female derived from creation. Ann Jervis (“The Story that Shaped Paul’s way with Women,” in *Loving God with our Minds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 265-79) suggests that “correctly identifying” the myth that informed Paul’s “way with women” as that of the crucified Christ “can allow us to see the way the conflicting pieces of his words and actions may, in fact, rest comfortably together” (268). See also Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Gender and creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: a study in Paul’s theological method,” in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher*

a reasonable way to handle the tension within this passage if taken as representing only Paul's thoughts or beliefs. It is worth noting, however, that when read as a dialogical exchange instead of entirely from Paul, much of the tension and difficulty with this passage disappears. Since I read the passage as a dialogue, I have very little to contribute to the realm of scholarship that seeks "the correct way to read/interpret" this passage. My reading of the passage is nothing new.⁵ What this chapter will address, then, are matters within the scholarship on this passage that are highlighted by feminist and postcolonial critical concerns. It seems appropriate, then, first to explain the interrogation process that I employ that leads me to the conclusions of this piece.⁶

Employing a hermeneutics of suspicion,⁷ I engage the voices within the scholarly material in order to see what they, knowingly or not, accomplish or prescribe for those who take their insights seriously. The first thing to note is when they use essentialist descriptions and assumptions about the females/wives. This is a fairly common occurrence, given that the texts biblical scholars draw upon are full of such essentializing rhetoric. Second, note if their conclusions or assumptions use gendered terms that establish and/or perpetuate hierarchies, which in itself is a means for justifying one group or person dominating another. Third, look to see if the representation of women's sexuality and/or bodies functions in such a way that the scholar participates in the methods of structural and relational control, in particular when

zum 65. Geburtstag (Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 151-71. Interestingly enough, Gundry-Volf does not actually resolve anything in her contribution. See discussion below.

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⁵ I am indebted to David O'Dell-Scott's work, *A Post-Patriarchal Christology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), for this insight as well as for his reading of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36. It does seem to be an approach worth considering given that the two most difficult passages to read as Pauline, for anyone who prefers to believe that Paul was more or less egalitarian, can be similarly handled and in this way make sense and leave Paul without contradicting himself. If he was as educated as I have been lead to believe he was, I prefer to think that he would have been aware of such blatant contradictions within his own thought and proclamations.

⁶ The following description of my approach is adapted to this particular passage and its scholarship from a more thoroughly discussed approach contained in chapter 2 of my book, *Abuse, Power and Fearful Obedience: Reconsidering 1 Peter's Commands to Wives* (New York: Continuum, forthcoming).

⁷ Refer to ESF's work, as well as the quote from *The Postmodern Bible* on what this means.

it benefits kyriarchal⁸ and imperial systems. In other words, are there essentialist assumptions being made about what role a female can fill that focus upon bodily capacities, which, if such roles are effectively prescribed, ultimately control and constrain the realm a female has access to and in which she can live, all of which benefits (maintains) the imperial voices and agendas. Finally, it is important to note the authority the scholar uses when addressing what females can or should be doing in light of the text at hand. This can be seen in the way a scholar speaks either on behalf of or to all females/wives – is it from a place of power over them or of desiring their empowerment? Similarly, we do well to note if the scholar uses malestream language,⁹ knowledge and power that, subsequently, mimics imperial methods of control and relational structures. In doing so, the scholar contributes to suppressing peripheral and non-normative voices, and simultaneously (re)invests with power those who resonate with androcentric kyriarchal views. Most significantly for this study, resonating with such views means that a person consents to and finds ways to justify the control of females/wives for the sake of orderliness or maintaining the status quo.

As one can see, these interrogations lead us back to the text itself. At that point it becomes a matter of not only to what extent does a scholar read “with the text” or “against the grain,” but also to what extent a scholar is influenced and affected by the “Pauline” rhetoric to the point that she mimics it in her writing. Elizabeth Castelli, Jorunn Økland, Margaret Mitchell, and Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner have all done important work dealing with the rhetorical effects of Paul’s writings.¹⁰ In doing so, they say to their readers that it is not enough to ask “what did Paul say” or “what did Paul mean,” not only

⁸ This neologism was coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in order to highlight the fact that oppression due to hierarchies and various forms of inequalities happens within any situation or society on more than one level at a time. The term is derived from the combination of the Greek words for “ruler”, *archē*, and “lord”, *kyrios*, which refers to a male who was in a master/slave relation, and most likely also the husband/wife and father/child relationships. Thus the term kyriarchy is intended to draw our attention to the inequalities within gendered, economic, political and familial relations, at the very least.

⁹ Another term coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, malestream is simply a play on the idea that what is usually referred to as “mainstream” is typically defined by and therefore most benefits certain males. Because the main-/malestream we are discussing is that of Western biblical scholarship, I must also point out that these males are typically white, heterosexual, and elite, and contribute positivistic interpretations of biblical passages. Thus, in this discussion, the point is that any scholar can employ malestream language. It is quite common to see someone who is harmed by such language, knowledge or power taking it up as her/his own, simply because that is what she/he has been socialized, and now theologically grounded, to do.

¹⁰ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space*, *JSNTSS* 269 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991); Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, “Paul and the Rhetoric of Gender,” in *Her Master’s Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 287-310 and “Unveiling Paul: Gendering *ēthos* in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” in *Rhetoric, Ethic and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference* (Thomas H. Olbricht and Anders Eriksson, eds.; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 214-37.

because meaning is only found when a person or group engages a text (as compared with the idea that it is contained in the words themselves), but also because leaving the discourse at this level—that of meaning—ignores and thus leaves unchallenged the implications of those meanings when put into practice. Make no mistake: the efforts to find “what Paul meant” are no doubt well intended. They are also often perpetuating oppressive or unjust systems and dynamics simply because such scholars do not consider the implications of such claims—in other words their materiality, how they become realized in people’s lives.

Thus in this chapter, I will engage 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and several scholarly contributions on it in order to indicate first that the power and authority granted to a Pauline passage is then transferred to the scholars and their contributions, and second that there is a direct connection between this passage’s potential to control and constrain females/wives and the fight for the “correct” interpretation of it that takes place within scholarship: the struggle over the passage is about control of meaning which “controls” lives. It is my intention to cause the reader to question more than to conclude. Primary among the things to question and think about is the matter of the power of texts to define, circumscribe and control the beliefs and behaviors of people. Due to limited space I will refer to articles in which the author assumes the entire content originated with Paul and keeps the study to an analysis of the content and not the rhetorical effects of it.¹¹

The same kind of tension within the passage at hand shows up within the scholarship on it. The tension in the Pauline passage primarily comes from reading 11:3, 7-9, juxtaposed with 11:11-12.

11: 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.... 7 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man. 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.... 11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent

¹¹ The article by Kathy Ehrensperger would also be worth including here, though there is not sufficient space to address it adequately, as that would require a full presentation of Elizabeth Castelli’s work as well (*Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, 1991). In her piece, “Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ: A Hidden Discourse of Power and Domination in Paul?” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38/4 (2003): 241-61, Ehrensperger directly challenges Castelli’s work and the conclusions therein regarding the detrimental effect of Paul’s rhetoric. Interestingly enough, her main argument hinges on *mimesis* terminology not implying “copying” or “sameness”. While I agree that Paul is not saying that they are to be exactly like him, it seems she is missing part of the point and powerful effect such commands to “imitate” him have on the recipient(s).

of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

I have yet to discover a scholar who denies that there is a contradiction between 11:3, 7-9 and 11:11-12. Why, then, does it seem appropriate to so many scholars to go on to find a way that these two ideas are actually of a coherent whole?¹² What is at stake for them or for Paul if someone were to claim that either some of this content is not from Paul or that Paul himself was not fully rational?

For those scholars who see some dissonance within this passage, the solution they offer that is intended to resolve the tension instead ends up with a similar dissonance as what we see in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In other words, the voice and authority claimed by Paul is transferred to or implicitly claimed by the scholar. The voice is simultaneously authoritative and ambivalent, in this case. Thus the scholars of this passage produce authoritative claims that maintain the tension or ambivalence of the biblical passage.

Judith Gundry-Volf, one of several scholars who attempt to “account for the tension in Paul’s thought” in this passage,¹³ does so in such a way that the tension yet remains. Her innovative approach suggests that Paul was working with three separate yet interdependent realms: culture, the eschatological life in Christ and the creation story(ies). “Paul adopts a patriarchal reading of creation in 11:7-9 that suits the goal of integrating the Corinthian pneumatics into their wider social context, in 11:11-12 he reads creation in a way that bursts out of a patriarchal framework and prefigures the gender equality that characterizes the cultic context of Corinthian worship.”¹⁴ While she claims that in 11:11-12 women “have the priority,” it is based upon a woman’s role in procreation.¹⁵ In other words, according to Gundry-Volf not only is the hierarchy flipped, thus maintaining inequality, but it is based purely upon a female body’s capacity to bear a child.

While this approach does account for the various mingled ideas in this passage, it does not resolve the tension that, now mingled, they have created. Gundry-Volf does not, in other words, offer any help for modern day readers in terms of how to make sense of the passage as an argument or as applied within their faith communities today. More importantly for this discussion, she suggests that from a cultural perspective for Paul to depart from traditional

¹² Watson, “Authority of the Voice,” 524, 528, 530; Judith Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.” Ann Jervis, “The Story that Shaped Paul’s way with women.”

¹³ Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Gender and creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: a study in Paul’s theological method,” in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag* (Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 151-71.

¹⁴ Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation,” 165.

¹⁵ Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation,” 171.

gender roles/expectations would be a source of shame for anyone within the community, as suggested by the ideas regarding the head in 11:3-4; thus the main idea of females wearing veils must be kept intact! As Gundry-Volf makes this claim, she fails to account for the freedom from the standards of this world that Paul discusses elsewhere as defining marks of the community that gathers in the name of Christ.¹⁶ Given the patriarchal nature of the world in which Paul lived, this pattern and paradigm of accommodating any of the conventional social scripts will consistently work against egalitarian visions.

In a similar vein, Andrew Perriman's word study on the term *kephalē*, surveying the works of Philo, Plutarch and the LXX, offers a fantastically positivistic interpretation of this metaphorical use of "head" in 11:3-4.¹⁷ His conclusion is that matters of "source" or "origin" may be a part of the argument but the main point Paul was trying to make has to do with women's behavior, judged by what they do with their bodies in worship, bringing honor to the men. He concludes, observing that, "We might almost say that 'man is the head of woman' and 'woman is the glory of man' are reciprocal statements."¹⁸ While the terms "head" and "glory" are not specifically gendered on their own, the application of them in this way makes it clear that the male leads and the female's purpose and identity is defined by her connection to the male. Additionally, the metaphor or image of God-Christ-male/husband-female/wife is a classic example of the top-down hierarchical relationship within the social and familial realms at that time such that to unquestioningly apply it to anything related to the "newness in Christ", or to read it alongside Galatians 3:28,¹⁹ is nothing short of laughable. Perriman does not offer any disclaimer, however, but seemingly agrees with this image and its application. Perriman condones the dominant place of male over female. In choosing to focus on the "headship" issue, which reflects a kyriarchal norm, he is able to speak from a position of power by drawing upon the authoritative status of Paul's words, and to justify the domination of females by males. Given that the idea is contained in the Christian canon, then, it is all theologically justified as well.

¹⁶ See also Cynthia Briggs Kittredge's discussion of Ephesians in *Community and Authority: The Rhetoric of Obedience in the Pauline Tradition* (Harvard Theological Studies 45; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1998), 176. "The conventional connotations of obedience language in the social contexts of the patriarchal family and in the political context of ruling and being ruled *are not transformed* within Paul's argument, despite the reversal of that system proclaimed in Phil 2:6-11" (176, emphasis added).

¹⁷ Andrew C. Perriman, "The Head of a Woman : The Meaning of in 1 Cor 11:3," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45/2 (1994): 602-622.

¹⁸ Perriman, "The Head of a Woman," 621-22.

¹⁹ I find it difficult to make strong claims based on proof-texting. I offer this comparison here because of its prevalence within the scholarship on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

In stark contrast to Perriman's contribution, Jouette Bassler does some interesting cherry-picking. While she thinks Paul is responsible for the entire passage, she also suggests that Paul's ambivalence is an indication of when reason fails, our emotions and deeply rooted traditions take over. Thus she is able to honor Paul's authority while simultaneously suggesting a critique of it. She takes the application of Genesis 1:27 in 11:7-9 to be a simple "misreading", since this Genesis passage shows male and female with no indication of one preceding or ruling over the other, whereas Paul's application makes the primacy of men clear. Again, Paul's voice is honored as authoritative, but his choice in this instance is declared unsound. She also takes the idea of woman being the glory of man to mean that she is the *reflection* of man.²⁰ Whether or not it is a game of semantics, Bassler manages to stay within the general framework established by this passage while offering a gentle critique of it.

"My investigation will explore the possibility that correctly identifying the myth that informed Paul's way with women can allow us to see the way the conflicting pieces of his words and actions may, in fact, rest comfortably together."²¹

"With God as the head of Christ, and Christ as the head of every husband, whatever else being head of a wife meant for Paul, it must have meant reflecting the self-sacrificial character of God and Christ. Likewise, Paul's words to the women to be silent in church and his direction that they should ask their husbands at home, occur in a context where he is teaching the Corinthians that the greatest spiritual gift is love, and that even in the moment of greatest spiritual ecstasy, considerate love should reign."²²

"...he strove to have [Jesus' story] enlighten his responses to women."²³ This claim is worth a thousand words of a response. Which part of Paul's ideas about Jesus is to shape the way one then speaks to or about women?

²⁰ Jouette M. Bassler, "1 Corinthians," in *Woman's Bible Commentary, with Apocrypha* (Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 411-19.

²¹ L Ann Jervis, "The story that shaped Paul's way with women," in *Loving God with Our Minds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 268.

²² L Ann Jervis, "The story that shaped Paul's way with women," in *Loving God with Our Minds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 278-79.

²³ L Ann Jervis, "The story that shaped Paul's way with women," in *Loving God with Our Minds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 279.

Arichea, Daniel C. "The covering on the woman's head: translation and theology in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16." *Bible Translator* 55/4 (2004): 460-469.

He reads the 'head' issue as Paul acknowledging the traditional ideas of subordination, even found within scripture, but that in Christ all such inequalities are removed. He suggests that Paul was taking the argument from a matter of creation to that of redemption (which does include a misreading of the myth in Gen 2, but the end result is the same) (460-62).

He presents the two primary interpretations of the covering – a veil or the hair itself – without taking a stand on it either way (462-64). But he does interpret it in light of 1 Cor 14, stressing the "Paul is quoting them" approach (465), but only for the matter of being allowed to speak and prophesy, not for the whole section of 1 Cor 11:2-16.

Finally, he gets into the modern day relevance of this text, noting, most importantly, that just because "fallen humanity" has certain "abnormalities which are considered deviations from God's norm" (468), that does not mean that we are to justify them theologically. Just because they are acknowledged within the scripture, as a result of 'fallen humanity', does not mean that they are to be incorporated within church structure and/or doctrine. Thus, wherever subordination is found within the scripture itself, we are to see this as a part of fallen humanity that should be countered by the "all are heirs of God's kingdom through Christ" belief. Women are to be allowed to fully participate in the worship services, according to their gifting (469).

Luise Schottroff's chapter in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire* focuses on purity and holiness within the letter of 1 Corinthians as a whole, and thus only peripherally addresses the passage in question. The reference she makes to 1 Cor 11:10, however, is quite telling. Schottroff suggests that it is a "complete parallel" with 11:29,

because he lines up the behavior of women refusing symbolic subordination to men with the behavior of the rich during Eucharist. He wants women to cover their heads 'because of the angels.' I really do not know the meaning of these words. I am not convinced that what Paul has in mind is the sexual desire of the angels. Perhaps he presupposes that the holiness of the angels requires women's subordination: otherwise their holiness and that of the communities could be endangered. The time of prayer, of prophecy, and of Eucharist is both a time for celebrating holiness and a time of vulnerability and danger. Holiness can be injured, and people can be damaged.²⁴

Suggesting that women submit to "symbolic" subordination, it seems, is supposed to be understandable or bearable for the females in the Corinthian communities in light of social codes and expectations. The question I have for Schottroff is whether she finds any power or

²⁴ Luise Schottroff, "Purity and Holiness of Women and Men in 1 Corinthians and the Consequences for Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire* (Holly E. Hearon, ed.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 90.

meaning in symbols. Not only are they used precisely because of their power, but they are also quite helpful in perpetuating an idea for generations beyond the one in which they were initially employed. If Schottroff would have us endorse the veiling in the first century for the sake of the purity of the communities, then she is condoning faith communities choosing cultural norms that resonate with kyriarchal and imperial methods of control.

Benjamin Merkle's article offers an interesting twist on honoring the authority of Paul in such a way as to support the scholar's specific view on women's roles.²⁵ While taking both 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as entirely Pauline, and thus authoritative for faith communities today, Merkle notes that the creation story is only indirectly relevant in the former but central to the argument of the latter. Since the argument from creation that "men and women are distinct cannot be culturally relegated," this biblical truth stands for all time. What is worthy of note is that Merkel considers it an *application* of this idea in 1 Corinthians 11 because it is being used as a jumping off point for a discussion about apparel. But within 1 Timothy 2 Paul is not applying an idea, according to Merkle, even though the creation story is then used to discuss the teaching capacity. Thus Merkle concludes that "it is not inconsistent to reject the need for women to wear head coverings while still affirming that women are not to teach or have authority over men."²⁶

Watson, Francis. "The Authority of the Voice: A Theological Reading of 1 Cor 11.2-16." *New Testament Studies* 46.4 (2000): 520-36.

In Paul's proposed modification to these practices, female head-covering – probably a veil – serves as a symbol of women's freedom from an erotic basis for the relationship of male and female derived from creation.

Will show the passage's "fundamental coherence" and that it is theologically much more significant than it is often assumed to be.

"In describing the uncovered female head as a source of shame, equivalent as such to hair cut short or shaved off altogether (vv. 5c-6), **the shame Paul has in mind is that of physical nakedness.**" (530) The shame comes as a result of 'exposing herself' to the male gaze (530). But this is all justified, for Watson, because he sees it as Paul's efforts for women's voices to be heard in the congregation.

²⁵ Benjamin L. Merkle, "Paul's arguments from creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49/3 (2006): 527-548.

²⁶ Benjamin L. Merkle, "Paul's arguments from creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49/3 (2006): 528.

“In the veil, eros faces its limit.” (535)

In his conclusion he jumps to the reference in 2 Cor 3 to Moses and the veil, suggesting that perhaps Paul’s advice was taken seriously, and they considered for themselves and came to a different conclusion regarding the veils, which his admission in 2 Cor 3 indicates. Their practice encouraged Paul to change his mind (536). “The veil signifies the distinction between eros and agape as the basis for the relationship of men and women within the Christian community.” (536)

At the end of the day, it is simply astounding to me that the gender roles and expectations from first century writings and world views are still, in the year 2009, allowed into the conversation regarding male and female roles within the church. Not only are they allowed in, they predominate over the session. In spite of various experts’ and layfolks’ denial of it, this passage with first century ideas about gender and sexuality continues to inform and define ours today.

If we return, ever so briefly, to the *possible* scenario that Paul was actually countering the gendered veiling requirements, we are then able to see that nearly 2000 years of church tradition, teaching, preaching and social convention based upon this passage has actually perpetuated what Paul sought to discredit.²⁷

It is not, ultimately, an issue of whether or not Paul himself believed that the second creation story was prescriptive instead of descriptive – which is itself highly unlikely – and therefore members of Christ’s church ought to be finding ways to make it fit within their theology and thus within ecclesial, social and familial roles. It is a matter of asking why Paul continues to hold such power and authority over us that we cannot challenge his claims and assertions. We ought to do the soul-searching to figure out why a church body would find some way to justify upholding the androcentric and kyriarchal world view contained in 1 Corinthians 11:3-4 because they think it is Paul’s belief, but then breathe a sigh of relief that they no longer have to when convinced that it is the very idea Paul was refuting.

- Feminist voices countering each other – emblematic of the confusion over Paul’s inherent authority and the text’s authority, both of which supersede that of personal experience; do we rehabilitate? – if so, why? For whose sake? What does it say about the texts and our relation to them?

²⁷ It is worth noting here something similar happened within the Christian movement once it was adopted as “the” religion of the Empire: the forces that Jesus was critiquing and most likely resisting are now the ones “taking up” his cause.

- This passage is one of contention; it is a gendered space/passage; it is given inordinate power and authority in terms of speaking to gender roles within the church.
- Why this passage?
- Regardless of whether Paul said it all or not, the concept of “head”, “source” or authority being held up at all is patriarchal. Period.
- Fascination with texts as authoritative; specific words/phrases/verses speaking truth and authority versus the overall thrust or message determining ‘truth’ in any given situation.
- Perhaps it is precisely because it is an issue of control and power, meaning it should not surprise us that what is being said within a reference to women is something that lays a hand of control on them, and that all the scholarship addressing these passages are indirectly dealing with who is “allowed” to control women.

While on one hand it seems fairly obvious that the ultimate filter that determines what a scholar sees in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is that of what she or he already believes, or wants to believe, about women’s roles in the various gatherings, at the same time there is an additional nuance, particularly within ‘feminist’ scholars to find a way to have it all make sense as coming from Paul.

A feminist and postcolonial reading of not just this passage but the scholarship on it includes asking questions about the authority of Paul and the power dynamics within the letter in general (reference to one or two of the other chapters in this book); it wonders about the role of texts in general, not to mention why such an ancient text continues to have such a stronghold on us and our perceptions of women; why and how such varied interpretations are possible, why do some readers have a need to redeem the text (preferring ancient, ‘original’ or ‘initial intentions’), why there is a need to let it speak one way or another at all. What are we doing when we take up one or two privileged passages and make so much of them? Why is it such a pressing matter to know what Paul meant or was trying to do in these 15 verses?

What becomes fascinatingly tricky is how to grasp what holds ultimate authority and thus gets to determine the meaning of this passage. What is it that determines if a scholar will embrace the “straightforward” reading of 1 Cor 11:2-16? Is it related to the side of the bed s/he woke up on? Does it have more to do with whether or not she/he has always secretly loved Paul’s writings thus she/he cannot denigrate them in public? Perhaps the clincher is that this passage is found in a letter assumed by all new testament scholars to have been penned by Paul, or at least by his amanuensis, thus dismissing it is ever-so-much harder to do? What I am working my way around to asking, here, is that our trust in Paul rivals that of our supposed “in God we trust”, making this seeming inconsistency more laden with implications for the church than any that we might find within the pseudo-Pauline corpus.