

**Paul and Women Veiling in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: Assessing the Interpretation and Translation of *evxousi,an e;cein evpi. th/j kefalh/j dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (1 Cor 11: 10) in the Light of its Socio-Cultural Context**

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***Abstract***

*Some scholars hold that 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 forbids women from prophesying or praying with unveiled heads. But this text is difficult due to the phrase *evxousi,an e;cein evpi. th/j kefalh/j dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (to have authority on the head because of the angels). The problem occurs when *ka,lumma* (veil) substitutes *evxousi,an e;cein* (to have authority). Other problems are on the phrases *dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (because of the angels) and *evpi. th/j kefalh/j* (on the head), which allegedly denote male superiority and female inferiority. Veiling in the socio-cultural context of the text defined the status of women as inferior compared to that of men. Yet the text never authenticated superiority and authority of men over women. Rather, it inspired women to wisely exercise their right to veil their heads so as to avert dissuading people from worship and to avoid defying the Roman law.*

***Keywords: Paul, Translation, Interpretation, Women Veiling, Male Superiority, Women Subordination, Socio-Cultural Contents***

## **Introduction**

The meaning of *evxousi,an e;cein evpi. th/j kefalh/j dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (*to have authority because of the angels*), which is central to, and the climax of 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16, is contentious and confusing (Oropeza, 2017, pp. 140-141, 147; Pierce, 2011, p. 85; Fee, 2005, p. 155). This results to varied and indecisive versions as to the text's application (Peppiatt, 2018, p. 3; Taylor, 2015, pp. 58-59; Peppiatt, 2015, pp. 1, 59). Some scholars have used it to not only exclude women from certain aspects of ecclesiastical and societal life, but also to validate their inferiority and subordination (Osei-Bonsu & Gokah, 2013, p. 8; Padgett, 2011, p. 32; Kasomo, 2010, p. 132). This paper analyses the text's socio-cultural context and its interpretation and translation in order to ascertain the relationship between *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*), *dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (*because of the angels*) and Women's veiling. It also evaluates the meaning of *evpi. th/j kefalh/j* (*on the head*) vis-à-vis the supposed superiority of men and inferiority of women. The aim is to verify whether the text sanctions the superiority and authority of men and inferiority and subordination of women or not.

## **The socio-cultural context of 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16**

The Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures, which emphasized on gender differentiation as well as women inferiority and men superiority, endowed the text its socio-cultural context (wa Gatumu, 2013, pp. 45-53; Barton, 2003, p. 1337). As such, the text's litigious issues could have emerged from the social life in the contextual situation of the Corinthian church. Treblico notes that Christians and non-Christians interacted with each other and each knew the deeds of the other (Treblico, 2017, p. 166).

Furthermore, power struggle among the elite in Corinthian church had flourished from power politics in secular meetings. Corinth, which was a political and economic power, an epitome of colonies overseas and an icon of Roman imperial thinking, was established through brutal power politics (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.1.2; Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar* 57.8; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 43.50.3; Spawforth, 2012, pp. 47-48; Sander, 2005, p. 15). So, it was totally filled with power politics centred on personality. However, the combative conduct of such politics, which was totally cruel but well-organized, had been copied into the church (Winter, 2001, pp. 139-141; Welborn, 1997, pp. 67-70; Clarke, 1993, pp. 59-108).

The difficult issues were on the hairstyle, which indicated status and gender affiliation and head-covering in public, which implied men's authority (Lovén, 2015, p. 271; Sebaste, 1994, pp. 46-64; Bonifante, 1994, pp. 3-10). Within Jewish culture and religion, head-covering implied a wife's fidelity to the husband and respect to the law. The law allowed a Jewish man to divorce his wife for walking in the streets without covering her head (*Mishna Ketubot* 7:6). Philo (*The Special Laws*, 3.X.52-60) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.11.6.270) note that head-covering was a sign of modesty, but which according to Numbers 5: 12-31, could only be removed if a wife was suspected and/or accused of adultery. Within Graeco-Roman culture, veiling the bride was actually the marriage ceremony because the veil was a symbolic feature of the bride's dress (See Plutarch, *Advice on Marriage*, 2; *The Satires of Juvenile*, 2.117; Tacitus, *The Annals*, 1728-31, p. 425). A veiled head signified modesty and chastity, which were obligatory for married women. Female statutes in the early Roman Empire, which are evidence to the symbolic value of a veil, denoted the modest married woman wearing a veil and a long dress.

Conversely, the immodest women were unveiled and dressed in alien non-Roman attire, meaning that they were loose and had left Roman way of life, character and values. This, typifying the relativism of alien lifestyle, had brought ruin to the Roman Empire in public and in private.

Undeniably, modesty was a critical Roman virtue for a married woman and the veil meant firmness and fidelity due to its ritual link with the faithful wife of Jupiter's priest (Karaman, 2018, p. 132, Cleland & Llewellyn-Jones, 2007, p. 205; Winter, 2003, pp. 80-96; La Follette, 1994, pp. 55-56). A married woman who left the house unveiled was deemed to have withdrawn herself from marriage hence inviting divorce (Sebaste, 1994, p. 48). Valerius Maximus (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 6.3.10) explains how Sulpicius Gaius, a consul in 166 BCE, justified divorcing his wife for having left the house unveiled.

To have your good looks approved, the law limits you to my eyes only. For them assemble tools of beauty, for them look your best, trust to their closest familiarity. Any further sight of you, summoned by needless incitement, has to be mired in suspicion and crimination

So, modesty, shame and duty were firmly demanded in Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures.

The view of 1 Corinthians 11: 5 is that an unveiled woman was similar to a shaved one. The cultural norm in the Graeco-Roman world was for women to have long hair and men to have short hair (Thomas, 2015, p. 92; Beall, 2013, p. 111). Dio Chrysostom (*Discourse* 64.3) avers that "a woman guilty of adultery" the law commanded her to "have her hair cut off" and "play the prostitute".

Shaving was a sign of shaming adulterous women. Perhaps Paul was therefore admonishing Christian women to avoid mistaken identity, though, as it will be explained in more details below, it was normal for women to worship with unveiled head or with loose hair in some mystery cults (Fiorenza 1983, p. 227). This may have inspired Christian women and/or wives to consciously remove the head-covering while praying and prophesying (Ferguson 2003, pp. 77-79). Nevertheless, a woman who appeared in public and/or in worship places without a head-covering was defiant to Roman legal standards typifying marriage. Menander (*Perikeiromene* 2. 311–12) underlined that a woman had to veil herself so as to avoid shame. So, a woman who worshipped without a veil was inexcusably indifferent to the standards of the first century CE. This meant resisting the Roman law, which held that a woman was what she wore or what she removed from her head. So, unveiled women were deemed to have ridiculed the much priceless virtue of modesty typifying a married woman (Winter, 2003, p. 96).

The socio-cultural context of the text was also informed by the patriarchal culture of the time. According to Llewellyn-Jones, veiling was a male ideology that forced women to be silent and invisible, “like mute tortoises contained and hidden within their shells” (Llewellyn-Jones, 2003, p. 1). Women, especially those of class and status, entered into arranged marriages that were politically correct to their family. They were not only married at a young age but also remained under the authority of their fathers if not that of their husbands. The Roman ideal was for women to pass from the control of the father to that of the husband. The debate on repealing the Oppian Law, which was created to inhibit female luxury and their liberty during the war, makes this clear. According to the law, “no woman should possess more than half ounce of gold, or wear a garment of various colours, or ride in a carriage drawn by a horse, in a city, or in any town, or any place nearer thereto one mile; except on occasion of some public religious solemnity.”

Marcus Porcius Cato supported the law noting that their ancestors thought it appropriate for women not to do any, even private business, without a male director and that they must be controlled by parents, brothers or husbands. He argued that their ancestors curbed the unjustified freedom of women by subjecting them to their husbands. He repudiated its repealing claiming that if women were given equality with men, they would become men's superiors.

Lucius Varerius opposed Cato, but he upheld women's subjection under men; now not by the law but by men's regulation. He argued that it was in the best interest of men if they held women in control and guardianship not in bondage but by preferring the title of father or husband to that of master. However, women's weak nature demand they submit to whatever men said, yet men must use their greater power prudently when exercising their authority over women. But women fought against the law by coming out in large numbers and not relenting until it was clear that majority would vote against it (Livy, *The History of Rome*, 34.1-8).

It is clear therefore that for a woman to live in such a patriarchal society, a male authority figures over her was obligatory. Besides, women were frequently reminded about the extemporary model of feminine behavior and their duty to always stay loyal to their husbands even in widowhood (Stambaugh & Balch, 1986, p. 111). According to Plutarch (*Advice on Marriage*, 1971, pp. 23, 26), the husband was to rule, and the wife was to be subordinate. The Roman State feared that foreign religions may meddle with the status quo and never hesitated to hound religions that knowingly or unknowingly interfered with the same (Winter, 2001, pp. 137-138). This fortified the patriarchal culture of the Roman household (Stambaugh & Balch, 1986, p. 124).

### **Interpretative difficulties on women's veiling**

1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 has some interpretative difficulties on women's veiling that cannot be ignored. As Schreiner (<http://bible.org>) notes, the difficulties with this text could lead one to say that it should not be used to establish any doctrine or teaching on the role relationship of men and women. Indeed, one might claim that only clear passages should be used to form a doctrine, and this passage is too obscure. No one, or at least few people, would argue that women should be adorned with veils today, leading some to say that this passage is culturally bound and no longer viable in the twentieth century.

Fiorenza (1983, pp. 227-228) argues that it is difficult to decide clearly the kind of behavior Paul criticized or what customs he meant to introduce in I Corinthians 11: 2-16. She opposes the interpretation that Paul instructed pneumatic women leaders to wear the veil according to Jewish custom. She notes that verse 15 works against such readings in asserting that women's long hair replaces the head covering. Several other scholars contend that Paul's argument is inexplicably difficult, his directives on praying or prophesying are vague and his view on woman's hairstyle is vague. His instructions and argument are flawed and explicitly difficult; especially his argument from nature in verses 13-15. The basis for the natural shame of a man with long hair in verses 14-15a and the idea that a woman's long hair is given to her instead of a covering in v. 15b are vague. So, it is difficult for the modern reader to completely comprehend the argument on the veiling of women (Martin, 2004, p. 76; Soards, 1999, pp. 221, 224; Furnish, 1999, p. 77). Perhaps the difficulties of interpreting 1 Corinthians 11: 2-6 occur when its social cultural context is not seriously taken into consideration. A basic theory in hermeneutics is that the cultural setting of a text must be understood before its application can be made.

Grant R. Osborne highlights the need to determine the degree to which instructions in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 (and other texts) are tied to the cultural practices of the first century CE (discussed above). He notes that Hellenistic backgrounds are very helpful in understanding epistles addressed to Gentile churches. He cites the Graeco-Roman attitudes towards women and the first century customs regarding hairstyle (discussed above) as helpful in understanding and applying 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 (Osborne, 2010, pp. 172-173, 423).

It is overwhelmingly probable therefore that the issues described in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 depicted what was happening in Corinth. Women, having had comprehended their liberty as an indicator of their equality with men, sought to worship with bare head like men (Bickel & Jantz, 2004, p. 86; Richards, 2002, p. 86; Winter, 2001, p. 121). This, as noted above, was common in the ecstatic worship performed in the mystery cults, which were now making their way into church worship. Women initiated into the mysterious cults were unveiled during the time when religious rites were being executed, albeit the priestess of Demeter was customarily veiled because she identified herself with the goddess (Llewellyn-Jones, 2003, pp. 169, 185). Nevertheless, unveiled women could have caused uneasiness in a context where women's presence and participation in public affairs except religious meeting was shameful and a threat to men's authority (Livy, *History of Rome*, 34.2-4). However, Paul not only sought to guard women's actual authority in church worship, but he also wanted to inspire orderly worship. His fear could have been that Christian gatherings were copying mystery cults; whose major centre was at Corinth.



He thus sought to buttress orthodox symbols of gender distinction, which were being eroded in mystery cults (Rooijakkers, 2018, pp. 26-42), so as to inspire good order during worship. It is clear therefore that the complexity of interpreting and translating 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 rotates around women's head-covering, especially when it is interpreted as fortifying the traditional status of women (Dunn, 2003, p. 70).

### **The interpretation and translation of 1 Corinthians 11: 10**

This section analyses the phrase *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*), *dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (*because of angels*) and *evpi. th/j kefalh/j* (*on the head*) in that order. It seeks to show that although *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*) has been interpreted and translated as a symbol of authority indicated by women's veiling, and which imply women's inferiority, lacks textual support (Shipley, 2010, pp. 7-11, 224). It also aims to show that the readings of *dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (*because of angels*) have not offered its clear meaning and that *evpi. th/j kefalh/j* (*on the head*) does not imply superiority of men and inferiority of women and/or control or supremacy of husbands to their wives (Roetze, 2015, p. 187; Montague, 2011, p. 187; Boring & Craddock, 2009, p. 532; Turner, 2009, p. 194; Lambrecht, 2003, p. 192).

### **vExousi,an e;cein and women's veiling**

*vExousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*) is central to 1 Corinthians 11: 10 but its translation and interpretation has been a major problem (Taylor, 2014, p. 253; Hurshman & Smith, 2003, p. 16). It has been regarded as a way of exercising power hence interpreted and translated as veil (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, pp. 277-279; Metzger, 1993, p. 495; Fee, 2014, p. 567).

Appeal is made to Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*, 1.47.1-5) who described a stone figure among the three he cited as having three symbols of royal power on its head. For that reason, some scholars believe *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*) means a woman should “have a symbol of authority” and not “have authority” (Tidball & Tidball, 2012, p. 218; Ciampa & Rosner, 2010, p. 532). But the Diodorus text does not support such a reading. The inscriptions on the head of the king’s statue prove that the king’s authority was on himself. This inscription read, “King of Kings am I, Osymandyas. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works.” The symbols on the statue that induce reading *evxousi,a* (*authority*) as *ka,lumma* (*veil*) were not on the head of the king and never symbolized the king’s authority. They were on the head of the statue of the king’s mother “signifying that she was both daughter and wife and mother of a king.” Therefore, the view that *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*) means symbol of authority is a mistranslation, which makes verse 11 to conform to its context’s expectations (Payne, 2015, p. 182; Hurshman & Smith, 2003, p. 16). But the meanings of *evxousi,a* (*authority*) that Bauer et al provide do not allow such conformity.

Firstly, *evxousi,a* (*authority*) means freedom to choose, right to act, to decide or dispose property. As such, *evxousi,an e;cein* (*to have authority*) means “to have the right” to do something. This usage is found in 2 Thessalonians 3: 9; John 10: 18, 1 Corinthians 9: 4-6 and Hebrews 13: 10 and Tobit 2: 13 (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, p. 278). Secondly, it refers to ability, might or power to accomplish a task, a usage found in Matthew 9: 8; Mark 3: 15; Luke 10: 19; 12: 5; John 1: 12; 7: 1; Acts 8: 19 and Revelation 9: 10, 19; 11: 6; 13: 12 (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, p. 278). Thirdly, it refers to authority, absolute power or warrant hence referring to those with authority and warrant to do what they do as it is used in Acts 26: 12 and Matthew 21: 23-24, 27.

It also refers to people with authority, to putting someone in charge, to apostolic authority and to Jesus' total authority. This usage is found in Diodorous Siculus, *Library of History* 13, 36, 2; 14, 81, 6; Vi; Aesopi I c. II; Josephus *Antiquities* 2, 90; 20, 193; Revelation 12: 10; Mark 13: 34; 2 Corinthians 10: 8; 13: 10 and Matthew 28: 18. It also refers to power exercised by rulers and those in prominent position by virtue of their office thus referring to ruling power or official power (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, p. 278). It also refers to an area where power is exercised and also to the possessor of authority, either human or rulers of the spirit world. This is found in Colossians 1: 13; 16; 2: 10, 15; Ephesians 2: 2; Luke 12: 11 and Rom. 13: 1-3. Its usage in these texts can be compared to *The Testament of Levi* 3: 8 and *The Testament of Solomon*, 20: 15 (Cullmann, 2018, pp. 66-67).

So, if the above meanings were linked to 1 Corinthians 11: 10, then *evxousi*, an *e;cein* (*to have authority*) should mean that women have the liberty to cover their head or to have long hair during worship. It may also mean that they have authority and ability to participate in church worship in their own right. It may also mean that they have apostolic authority and commission to not only worship but also to be actively involved in keeping orderly worship. However, while Vine accepts that *evxousi*, a (*authority*) denotes authority, he denies it has same meaning in 1 Corinthians 11: 10. According to him, it refers to the veil with which a woman must cover herself in church as a symbol of the Lord's authority over the church (Vine, 2015, p. 235). But to translate or identify *evxousi*, a (*authority*) as "veil" is a weak reading arising from a latter attempt to harmonize the assertion of verses 5-6, which ostensibly compel women to veil (Stuckenbruck, 2017, p. 265; Schreiner, 2011, p. 43) .

But still, the context of the text contains some evidence that seems to imply that those with authority were often known through symbols of authority placed on their heads. Statutes and other images of men and women having “authority on their head” existed. Also, words “symbol of authority on her head” were overt on many coins, statutes and other images in the Graeco-Roman culture (See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 3.61; Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.15. 98-100). But it is notable that such statutes and images showed authority on their head but not on the heads of others. According to Gench, there is no evidence to show that *evxousi,a* (*authority*) was ever used as a sign or symbol of someone else’s authority other than to the one authority is given (Gench, 2015, p. 48; Hurshman & Smith., 2003, p. 21).

Dunn asserts that the answer to the issue of a woman having authority over her head is clear-cut. This is because if woman is the glory of man (11: 7), her head covering hides man’s glory in the presence of God and his angels. Far from being a symbol of woman’s subjection to man, her head-covering is what Paul calls authority, which functions as her right to pray and prophesy (Dunn, 2003, p. 71). Likewise, Padgett avers that women ought to have freedom to wear their hair as they see fit in the worship service. After all nature has given them long hair instead of a covering so they do not need any other (Padgett, 2003, p. 19).

### **Dia. tou.j avgge,louj (because of the angels) and women’s veiling**

The meaning of *dia. tou.j avgge,louj* (*because of the angels*), which according to Fee is veiled with opacity (Fee, 2005, p. 155), has mainly been linked to the idea that women must be veiled during prayer to protect themselves from the so-called romantic glance of some angels.

Tou.j avgge,louj (*the angels*) have been explained as the sons of God who lusted after women and fell (Gen 6: 1-4) or the Watchers described in the book of *I Enoch* 16–19 as seducing women (Stockton, 2017, p. 97). Women therefore should cover themselves so as to either imitate or avoid tempting the angels (Zilm, 2012; Wassen, 2011, pp. 735-754; Evans, 2010, p. 243; pp. 437-454; Stuckenbruck, 2017, pp. 279). The problem with this interpretation is the inference that women can only be protected from tou.j avgge,louj (*the angels*) when praying or prophesying if angels are mediators. The other view is that tou.j avgge,louj (*the angels*) refer to fallen evil angels from which women must cover themselves for protection. The view is fortified by the idea that evxousi,a (*authority*) points to the power women have to protect themselves from angels (Thiselton, 2000, p. 838). Another view is that tou.j avgge,louj (*the angels*) refer to angels ruling the nations but who will be subordinate to believers including women (Keener, 1993, p. 476).

The above explanations point to a Jewish and early Christian tradition that angels were present during worship and they directed the spiritual exercises of the saints, which is clear in the Dead Sea Scrolls (CD 15: 17; 1 QM 7: 6; 1 QSa 2: 8-9). Any breach of modesty would incite displeasure to the angelic helpers and conceivably cause them to depart. It was also held that the good deed that angels witnessed made them bring more kindness to worshipers. In Tobit 12:12-15, angel Raphael unveils his role to Tobit with regard to the prayers of the saints.

And so, when you and your daughter-in-law Sarah prayed, I brought a reminder of your prayer before the Holy One; and when you buried the dead, I was likewise present with you. When you did not hesitate to rise and leave your dinner in order to go and lay out the dead, your good deed was not hidden from me, and I was with you. So now God sent me to heal you and your daughter-in-law Sarah. I am

Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.

The same angelic mediation is indicated in Revelation 8:2-4.

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

However, it is unclear as to whether *avgge,louj* (*the angels*) in 1 Corinthians 11: 10 served as mediators in praying and prophesying or as women seducers. Boring argues that Paul never referred to angels as vehicles of prophetic revelation (Boring, 1991, p. 181).

Another theory is based on the office of the controller of women affairs otherwise known as *gunaikonomos* whose role was to police dress codes during public events (See Plutarch *Life of Solon* 21.4-5; Nagle, 2006, p. 257). According to Epicurus (*Discourses* I.24.3-30), *avgge,louj* not only denoted angels but also scouts sent to spy and report back. Diogenes the Cynic was a divine messenger and a scout sent by God to spy on men. So, if married women were wrongly dressed during a religious activity, messengers sent to spy on them would report on their dressings to dress code supervisors. Women praying and prophesying with unveiled heads or short hair would have sent a signal that they were identifying themselves with women who behaved loosely at banquets that were often held in private homes (Alikin, 2010, p. 183; Yamaguchi, 2006, p. 24; Winter, 2003, pp. 90-91; Cheung, 1999, p. 37).

However, the importance to which Paul attached to *toú j avggelou j (the angels)* as to the authority of women is unclear (Padgett, 2003, pp. 20-21; BeDuhn, 1999, pp. 305-308).

### **vEpi. th/j kefalh/j (on the head) vis-à-vis the alleged men superiority and women inferiority**

The meaning of *evpi. th/j kefalh/j (on the head)* concerning the superiority of men and the inferiority of women is contentious. Oropeza maintained that Paul used *kefalh/j (head)* metaphorically, noting that there are three possible interpretations as to what it refers. These include “authority over” or “source/origin” or “that which is most prominent, fore-most, upper-most, pre-eminent”.

He notes that the first usage can work well with the idea of women submission but which he disparages because the text is not on submission but gender distinction.

He also rejects source/origin usage, which, albeit promoting gender equality, lacks lexical support. He favours the third option since the head in ancient body metaphors often denoted the “topmost” leadership of the body. This is based on the view that the head also relates to God and Christ hence the idea of topmost or pre-eminence cannot easily be split from the idea of leadership. Equally, leadership cannot be easily isolated from the sense of authority (Oropeza, 2017, pp. 141-142). But while *kefalh/j (head)* was used figuratively for the authority figure in ancient households, the head that needs or does not need covering is literal and does not symbolize superiority in rank. The relation visualized is not that of subordination to the man as “leader” (Fee, 2005, p. 151, Keener, 1993, p. 476).

But some Bible versions (Such as New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New International Version's, New Living Translation, and Today's English Version), by adding "symbol of" or "sign of", which are absent from the Greek text, mistranslate the verse to suggest man's authority over woman (Payne, 2015, p. 182).

Grammatically, *evpi* (on) followed by a genitive (*evpi. th/j kefalh/j – on the head*) underlines contact (this is the sense with which *evpi. (on)* is used in Lk 12: 42; Acts 6: 3; Rom 9: 5, and Rev 5: 10; 17: 18). This implies that a woman has authority on her head.

The usage is compatible with the Greek *evxousi,a* (*authority*), which also means power or right. So, the verse should be translated, *for this reason the woman has authority on her head because of the angels*. Dropping "symbol of" or "sign of" reverses cultural models of the day, which as noted above dilute women's authority due to patriarchal ideas about male honor (Johnson, 2006, p. 28). Plausibly, the first century CE patriarchal mind-set influenced the interpretation and translation of 1 Corinthians 11: 10 (Taylor, 2014, p. 253).

The veil, which as noted above does not appear in the Greek text, has elicited the view that the text is about the authority a man or husband has over a woman or wife and so it is about the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. This is because the man is "the head of the woman." Hillyer (1970, pp. 1065-1066) sums it up that "a woman should have authority on her head ... i.e., wear a veil in public, to symbolize submission to her husband, and to protect her honour and dignity before other men". Williams (1960, p. 960) asserts that Paul intend to emphasize on women's inferiority in using the word head vis-à-vis God to Christ, Christ to man and man to women. This however raises a profound theological question as to whether Christ is inferior to God.



The inferiority of women is based on the observation that “the head of a woman is her husband” through the analogy of “the head of every man is Christ” and “the head of Christ is God”. The inferiority of women is based on head-covering, but which is exchanged with the Greek word for authority and so the veil is seen as a symbol of authority. But Paul used *evxousi,a* (*authority*) and there is no single example of *ka,lumma* (*veil*) as a symbol of authority in the New Testament. It is only through the assumed affinity between *evxousi,a* (*authority*) and *ka,lumma* (*veil*), but which lacks manuscript support, that the inferiority of women and superiority of men is enforced. But Paul was clear that men and women were dependent on one another (1 Cor: 11:11-12).

This excludes the option that women are under the authority of men while praying or prophesying.

However, there is a tendency to read 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 in the light of Genesis 2: 18 the woman is referred to as a man’s helper. The ‘helper’ is seen as lesser to the helped and so the word is taken to imply an inferior position. This is the insinuation arising from its definition in various English dictionaries where “helper” specifically refers to an unskilled worker supporting a skilled worker. It also refers to one being directed by one in authority, who oversees the actions of the helper so as to conclude the desired task in a wisely supervised way. But the Hebrew word *rz<[Eß* (*helper*) does not mean an inferior status (Padget, 2003, p. 21). In the seventeen times it is used in the Old Testament, it refers to God and not to Eve, meaning that God helps people without the idea of God being inferior (Trible, 1988, p. 90).

But it has been argued that since Eve was made from, and after Adam, male is superior to female (Pellew, 2011, p. 10; McKeown, 2008, p. 336; Martos & Hégy, 1998, p. 10). If this is true, it would lead to the logical conclusion that the earth from which Adam was made as well as cows and fish that were created before Adam were superior to him.

Accordingly, the label of woman as helper does not point to inferiority but rather to strength and self-determination (Merrill, 1991, pp. 19-20). So, Paul is not speaking about head coverings to indicate the inferiority of women. He was dealing with men and women who ‘prays and prophesies’ and not elevating men over and above women because both were on the same moral and ecclesial level.

As Stephen C Barton (2003, p. 1337) observes, “The mutual interdependence of women and men is a basic building block of the unity of the church members as whole ... Paul’s clear assumption is that peace and good order in the *ekklesiā* depends not just on peace between wives and husbands (chapter 7) but on peace between female and male members in general.” The idea is that male and female prophets had been divinely endowed as prophesy is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12: 28; 14: 1-5). Paul was not stating that women cannot prophesy since they were prophesying already. He was affirming that women have the authority to prophesy but the issue was on how they exhibited and used that authority. He meant that it was unwise if women used their authority to distort gender differentiation in a context it was upheld. This is distinctive in the image of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Rom 12), which underlines unity in diversity. Barton accurately notes that true Christian unity is not about eliminating distinctions but acknowledging them and providing space for them so as to boost the entire church. Paul was therefore resisting the personification of spiritual authority without respecting the known ways of denoting the difference between men and women (Barton 2003, p. 1387).

He was neither asking for the subordination of women nor their equality. He was underlining the right of men and women to express their identity and authority but not ratifying women’s inferiority or suppression.

He recognized mutual dependence between men and women (1 Cor 11: 11-12) as well as gender difference, which was to be respected and given space in worship.

### **Conclusion**

Paul obviously wanted women to have the right to decide whether to cover their heads. However, they were to be cautious not to divert people from worship and to avoid behaving like women who shamed themselves by failing to honor symbols of gender distinction. So, despite the socio-cultural milieu of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and its patriarchal nuances relegating women to a downward spiral, it is noticeable that the text does not validate superiority and authority of men and inferiority and subordination of women. The text also does not exclude women from praying or prophesying with unveiled head and performing other ecclesiastical duties such as leadership.

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