

1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?

Keith A. Burton
Oakwood College

The stated purpose of the recently released *Women in Ministry* is “to provide data to facilitate informed decision making [about the role of women in ministry].”¹ While the goal is applauded, upon perusal of the book one soon finds that the decisions are often made *for* and not *by* the reader. The majority of contributors to the exegetical chapters of this volume support an egalitarian *ministerium*, so they were compelled, in the absence of any clear biblical prescription, to produce a hermeneutical alternative for the reader, based primarily on the argument from silence.²

While this paper parallels a chapter on the same verses by Larry Richards, I have purposely decided not to critique his hypothesis. Instead, I intend to conduct as honest an exegesis as I can so the reader may use this chapter as a guide for decision making. As I mature, I am realizing more and more that confrontational tactics do not set the tone for meaningful dialogue.³

¹Nancy Vyhmeister, ed. *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1998), 2.

²Cf. Raoul Dederen, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *ibid*, 23; Jacques B. Doukhan, “Women Priests in Israel: A Case for Their Absence,” *ibid*, 38-39; Robert M. Johnston, “Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church,” *ibid*, 47; Keith Mattingly, “Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study,” *ibid*, 71-72; Jo Ann Davidson, “Women in Scripture: A Survey and Evaluation,” *ibid*, 178; Richard M. Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” *ibid*, 259-84; W. Larry Richards, “How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time? (1 Corinthians 11 and 14),” *ibid*, 322; Walter B. T. Douglas, “The Distance and the Difference: Reflections on Issues of Slavery and Women’s Ordination in Adventism,” *ibid*, 392-94.

³Indeed, Ellen White warns: “Brethren, we must sink the shaft deep in the mine of truth. You may question matters with yourselves and with one another, if you do it in the right spirit; but too often it is large, and as soon as investigation begins, an unchristian spirit is manifested. This is just

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Problems with Interpretation

I frequently have distraught students approach me asking for *the* right answer to an issue of controversy. Their confusion is often fueled by the varying opinions and theologies that circulate throughout our denomination. Since my answer could very well add to their confusion, my response is often delivered with a barrage of questions that forces the students to critically analyze the various positions they have encountered. I truly believe that people ought “to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other [people’s] thoughts.”⁴ We are called to be Bereans. I’m not sure exactly which principles the Bereans used to check the validity of Paul’s rendering of biblical theology, but I would like to point to three areas I often investigate to analyze the strength of a theological argument.

1. Philosophical Methodology. Although my area is New Testament, I enjoy the times when I am asked to teach Contemporary Theology. Reading the documents that portray the development of Christian doctrine allows me to see how much theology is akin to philosophy. The theologian utilizes diverse texts to systematize doctrines, and there are many times when the absence of one text will mean the collapse of an entire doctrine. The truth is, many theological conclusions are based on deductive argumentation. The problem with a deductive argument is that the conclusion is not always a clear fact. It must be deduced in the mind of the auditor.

Unfortunately, since there is absolutely no text that directly speaks to every issue with explicit terms, the method of deductive argumentation predominates in the discussion on women in ministry. For instance, try as we may, we find no clear “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not allow women to serve as bishops.” Consequently, both sides are forced to hide behind the “argument from silence.” However, even in the appearance of silence, there is often enough static to cause audible waves that are capable of reception by those who are willing to fine tune their exegetical receivers. While we may not be fully able to determine the uninhibited sound, the probability of the conclusion is heightened.

2. Audience Hypotheses. The prologue of *Women in Ministry* contains a statement by James White, who counseled: “All means which according to sound judgement, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations should be employed.”⁵ While this is good advice, it should not be seen as an invitation to throw caution to the wind. The guiding phrase in this statement is “sound judgement.” Many methods of interpretation are not forbidden by scripture, but are not useful in the quest to “advance the cause of truth.” If “truth” is indeed an accurate understanding of what God is saying

what Satan delights in, but we should come with a humble heart to know for ourselves what is truth.” (CWE, 41)

⁴Ellen G. White. *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1903), 17.

⁵James White, “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*, 26 (April 1860), 180. Cited in Vyhmeister, 5.

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through the text, one cannot dogmatically claim a position to be “true” if the methods used to arrive at it are hypothetical.

Many exegetical studies are governed by audience hypotheses.⁶ The audience hypothesis is often arrived at by looking for internal clues within the book itself and finding some external social phenomenon into which these clues can fit.⁷ The major problem with constructing doctrine from audience hypotheses lies in the very nature of the term “hypothesis.” A hypothesis is a working thesis that is based on inference and not fact. It is the sole task of the person working under the hypothesis to defend his or her position straw by straw.⁸ However, when one’s exegesis is governed by an hypothesis, the conclusion will have to be hypothetical.

3. Presuppositions. During an open discussion period in class one day, a student bemoaned the fact that many of the theological positions she had nurtured from childhood were now being challenged. As I probed her further, she explained that her studies in the development of theology have led her to see that she was often exercising simple faith in complex doctrine. Even the simple act of praying to Jesus demanded rethinking, since one can only claim such an act biblical if one deduces that Jesus is God. Many of our presuppositions are unconsciously formed by those who have significant influence over our lives. The heavy influence of presuppositions on one’s interpretation is seen in the lives of many professional theologians who reject the clear teaching of scripture to support the creeds of their denominations.⁹

Ellen White tries to guard against the negative results of presuppositional sanctity when she says,

We have many lessons to learn, and many, many, to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.¹⁰

⁶In this study the essays by Richards and Vyhmeister presuppose a gnostic influence and Doukhan argues for cultic prostitution.

⁷For example, with so much in the pauline epistles about *gnosis*, many have projected the full blown gnosticism of the second century into the first century letters. As much as one may hide behind the titles “incipient” or “proto”, the hermeneutic is governed by what we know of gnosticism in its full blown state. Further, even the so called “developed” gnosticism remains an enigma. See Bentley Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁸See for instance the conclusions of my *doktorvater*, Robert Jewett, in “The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979): 55-87.

⁹For example, see essays in D. A. Carson, ed. *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 37.

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If I truly want to hear the word of God, I must be willing to let go of cherished positions. I must not approach the text with the intention of defending my understanding of what the text should say. If I intend to decipher biblical truth, I must place secondary importance on the *dogmata* of all creeds and commentaries and depend on *sola scriptura*—the Bible alone.

Method Used In this Study

What is there for us to learn in Paul's statements about women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14? Let me say that my current understanding is that while the Bible supports the ordination of women (whatever "ordination" means), it does not support their occupation of the highest ecclesiastical office, which is the episcopate (senior pastor).¹¹ I am also working under the conviction that the current "*textus receptus*" as transmitted through Nestle-Aland 27 and UBS 4 with its variant readings conveys a reasonable account of the content of the original autographs. In my attempt to discern the will of God as revealed in His Word, I reserve hermeneutical caution for those points of textual differences. I do not subscribe to early interpolation theories, nor do I accept the growing consensus on a deutero-pauline corpus. Having faith in the word demands enough—I do not need to further complicate my religious experience by exercising faith in the conclusions of post-enlightenment European skepticism.

In addition to accepting the Bible as the revealed Word of God, I also acknowledge that it is a book that reflects various phases of history and culture. 1 Corinthians was written to a real church to address real problems. Paul did not write in a vacuum. He had helped to establish the church and was receiving frequent reports from and about the church, and he writes to address specific problems.¹² Members of the original audience did not have to scratch their heads and consult lexicons to discern Paul's admonitions. As we read the letter, we see that the original audience was affected by the cultural influence of the Judaism and paganism of the first century Greco-Roman world. The letter is set at a time when the Christian church is going through birth pangs as it is forced to separate from the umbilical chord of its Jewish parent. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, it is Paul's responsibility to aid the fledgling church as it first flexes its wings.

I also accept 1 Corinthians as a literary document that was written to be heard and not read. I must therefore take into account that the original audience did not have the luxury of analyzing each aspect of grammar and syntax to decipher the "real" intent of the letter. The rhetorical proximity between Paul and his

¹¹See Keith A. Burton, "A Practical Theology of Ordination," *Ministry* 69 (1996), 26-29; and the provocatively titled "At God's Table Women Sit Where They Are Told," *Spectrum* 25,3 (1996): 52-57. The original title was "The Place for Ordained Women Has Already Been Set," but the editors saw fit—to my chagrin—to "spice it up."

¹²See Margaret M. Mitchell, "Concerning *PERI DE* In 1 Corinthians," *Novum Testamentum* 31 (1989): 229-56.

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audience allowed for immediate understanding. In light of this, we must use extreme caution in our linguistic study, especially with regards to semantics. The important question that must be forefront in our mind as we analyze the passages is “How did the intended audience *hear* this?”

As I stated above, my purpose is to produce a document that will really be helpful in decision making. It is not my intent or desire to make a decision for the reader. If I am faithful in my treatment of the text, the text should speak for itself. In this chapter, I propose that many of the arguments that utilize these passages in the debate over women’s ordination are not focused on the right object. The major issue is not whether women can pray or prophesy with unveiled heads or whether they should be in “silence,” but it focuses on how Paul arrives at his conclusion. What is the basis of Paul’s plain teaching on the status of women in these passages? I submit that *while Paul often appeals to culture and tradition, the real validity of his arguments stems from the reality that he grounds each one in a principle from the authoritative Tanak.*

1 Corinthians 11

I would be the first to admit that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is a confusing text that demands deep reflection.¹³ It is obvious that Paul addresses a cultural issue and embraces cultural norms. Since the majority of the New Testament correspondence was written to be heard,¹⁴ I approach my interpretation through the lens of rhetoric. Rhetoric demands that one identifies the “issue” (*stasis*) of the rhetorical situation. What “issue” is Paul addressing here? It is obvious that the “issue” is one known both to Paul and his audience and concerns women covering their heads while praying or prophesying in church. The fact that it is an “issue” means that there were people in the congregation who had a different understanding than the one Paul presents.

Paul addresses the issue by formulating a rather extensive argument from deduction:

2 *Captatio benevolentiae*. Paul praises the Corinthians for honoring the traditions.

3 *Argumentative premise*. God is the head of Jesus, who is the head of man, who is the head of woman.

4-6 *An Argument from Embarrassment*. A man who prays or prophesies with his head covered shames Jesus, but a woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered shames the man.¹⁵

¹³See also admission by A. C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The meaning of *kephale* in 1 Cor. 13,” *JTS* 45 (1994), 619, who calls it a “notoriously difficult passage.”

¹⁴See George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984; and Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

¹⁵Verse six contains a syllogism. Major Premise: It is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven; Minor Premise: If a woman does not want to wear a veil she should cut or shave her hair; Conclusion: In order to avoid the appearance of shame, a women should wear a veil.

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7-12 *An Argument from Scripture*. A man should not cover his head since he is the image and glory of God, but a woman should cover her head since she is the glory of man.

13-15 *Argument from Nature*. A man's long hair is degrading, but a woman's long hair is attractive.

16 *Parenthesis*. An appeal to the Corinthians to honor this tradition in solidarity with the "churches of God."

Captatio benevolentiae (11:2). Paul uses a rhetorical device known as *captatio benevolentiae* to "capture the good will" of his audience. Before he addresses the problem area, he praises the audience for recognizing his authority and adhering to ecclesiastical tradition: "I commend you, because you remember all things from me, just as I gave them to you, you maintain the traditions." "Tradition" (*paradosis*) was not a bad word for Paul. He understood that every social group has rules that define it. In order to strengthen group identity, Christians everywhere had to have certain standards. The commendation is "tongue in cheek," or perhaps optimistically "lawyerly."¹⁶ Paul hopes that his flattery will ensure the positive reception of his argument.

Argumentative Premise (11:3). Before Paul introduces the tradition, he establishes a premise. Initially, this premise is not buttressed with biblical proof, but is basically conveyed in an authoritative fashion. The literal translation states, "But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ." It is immediately obvious that Paul uses "head" metaphorically. Until recently, it had generally been taken for granted that Paul uses "head" to demonstrate the relational hierarchy between God, Jesus, man, and woman. It was also conceded that while the exact nature of the "headship" is not stipulated, it appears that the sense of the text is that God is "over" Jesus, who is "over" every man, who is "over" a woman. However, in recent decades, a growing number of scholars have followed the lead of Stephen Bedale, who suggests that Paul understands *kephale* to mean "source" or "origin."¹⁷

¹⁶But see Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991), 443.

¹⁷Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954), 211-15. His supporters include Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, "Does Male Dominance Tarnish our Translations," *Christianity Today* 5 (October, 1979), 23-29; "The 'Head' of the Epistles," *Christianity Today* 20 (February, 1981), 20-33; Margaret Howe, *Women and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 60; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco: Word, 1974), 30-31, 100; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1971), 103; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1971), 248; Colin Brown, "Head," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:156-63; James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (London: InterVarsity, 1981), 164; Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972), 282-302.

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While Bedale has attracted an impressive list of disciples, Wayne Grudem warns that “authors who propose the sense ‘source’ are proposing a new meaning, one previously unrecognized by New Testament lexicons.”¹⁸ This is not to diminish the possibilities of new linguistic discoveries, but can one be so imperious as to presume the supremacy of an English meaning over the multiplicity of translations in lexicons of other languages? While Fee follows Bedale’s lead, he admits that the interpretation of this passage “has been further complicated by the resurgence in the 1960s (after being latent for nearly forty years) of the feminist movement both within and outside the church, so that many of the more recent studies on the text are specifically the result of that movement.”¹⁹ Consequently, it is necessary to question the political intent of the author.

Grudem’s research is based on a massive lexicographical study assisted by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database. Out of over 12,000 references to *kephale* in the TLG, Grudem randomly selects 2,336 and concludes that in not a single instance could *kephale* be translated “source.”²⁰ He thus summarizes his research:

[T]he meaning “ruler, authority over” has sufficient attestation to establish it clearly as a legitimate sense for *kephale* in Greek literature at the time of the New Testament. Indeed, it was a well established and recognizable meaning, and it is the meaning that best suits the New Testament text that speaks of the relationship between men and women by saying that the man is “head” of a woman and the husband is “head” of the wife.²¹

The possibility of “source” as a translation for *kephale* has been further investigated by Fitzmyer, who in his attempt to discover the semantic impact of *kephale* on the Hellenistic Jew highlights a number of occasions in the LXX in which the Hebrew *ros* is translated by *kephale*. None would deny that *ros* connotes “authority” or “supremacy”, hence it would only stand to reason that “a Hellenistic Jew could instinctively use *kephale* as a proper expression for authority.”²²

Given the natural connotation of *kephale* as metaphor, it seems evident to me that many who translate *kephale* as “source” do so on grounds other than

¹⁸Wayne Grudem, “Does *kephale* (“Head”) Mean “Source” or “Authority” in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985), 40.

¹⁹Fee, 492.

²⁰For an independent assessment of his research, see the chart on Grudem, 50-51.

²¹Grudem, 59.

²²J. A. Fitzmyer, “Another Look at *KEPHALE* in 1 Corinthians 11:3,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), 509. Fitzmyer lists Jeremiah 31:7 (LXX 38:7), 1 Kings 21:12 (LXX 20:12), 2 Samuel 22:24, Deuteronomy 28:13, 44, and Isaiah 9:13-14. More specifically, Fitzmyer, 510, proposes, “a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that *kephale* . . . be understood as ‘head’ in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else.” See also J. A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephale* in 1 Corinthians 3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59; and Perriman, 602-22, who argues that the meaning is neither “source” nor “authority.”

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exegesis. However, the meaning of a biblical term should not be determined by political exigency. Heuristics should not becloud hermeneutics. Richards states it well: "As attractive as the meaning of 'source' for the Greek word *kephale* is, we must, in the final analysis, rely on the passages written by Paul himself for a definition of *kephale*."²³ Paul uses *kephale* metaphorically in Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Colossians 1:18, 2:10 and 2:19. In each instance, there is no doubt that "authority" is the intended connotation for *kephale*.²⁴

Also important for the exegesis of verse 3 is the understanding of *aner*. While the Greek could be translated "man" or "husband", the context demands that it be understood "man." I am surprised that some leading translations have opted for "husband" in this verse.²⁵ This practice is so popular, that Richards does not even feel the need to justify his translating *aner* with "husband."²⁶ However, those who translate *aner* as "husband" have no real semantic or contextual grounds. Is Christ only the head of husbands? Are only husbands included in the remainder of the pericope? Of course not! Paul is not addressing marriages here, he is simply stating the levels in the human-divine order in which women are stratified under men.²⁷ The basis for his *theologoumenon* is not established until his second argument (11:7-12).

An Argument from Shame (11:4-6). Paul delves into the real issue here as he identifies the tradition. Apparently in the context of church, a man was not to pray or prophesy "having [something] against the head" since he would shame the head. On the other hand, when a woman prays with her head unveiled, she shames her head. Many commentators translate *kataschune* as "dishonor." However, the usual translation of the term is "shame."²⁸ It is not merely an infringement on social status, but the stirring up of a negative emotion in the offended one.

Another problem comes with the understanding of *kephale* in this context. Lexical semantics demands that a term be understood in the context of its most recent reference, unless there is an obvious change in context. The double use of *kephale* and the syntactical demands of the clause suggest that Paul is engaging in a word play with the actual and metaphorical meaning in these verses. In each instance, the first reference is actual and the second is metaphorical. By putting something against his actual head, the man shames Christ—his metaphorical head. The obvious hermeneutical question at this point is, "How is Christ

²³Richards, 318.

²⁴Fee's logic is definitely flawed when he argues against this understanding on the basis that the word *exousia* ("authority") is not used. (502)

²⁵E.g. New American Bible and New Revised Standard Version.

²⁶Richards' explanation for translating *aner* as "husband" is confined to an endnote that simply states: "the Greek word for 'man' (*aner*) means both 'man' and 'husband.'" (331, n.25).

²⁷See discussion in Conzelmann, 184. "Yet it is not questions of marriage that are being discussed here, but questions of community. It is a case of the *nature* of man and woman as such."

²⁸See R. Bultmann, "*aischuno*, ktl," *TDNT* 1, 189-91.

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shamed when a man has something against his head while praying or prophesying?" It seems to me that 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 helps to answer this dilemma. In this passage, Paul speaks of the "veil" that is lifted when one comes to Christ. Unlike Jewish men, who often covered their faces when approaching the divinity, the Christian man no longer has to approach God with a veil. The veil represents a barrier that has been demolished through the work of Christ. Is it possible that the covered head represents a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of Christ's mediatorial work? Is it possible that in prohibiting men from covering their heads, Paul discounts the Jewish custom of covering one's face when approaching the divinity?²⁹

Contrary to the man, when the woman prays, it is not Christ who she shames by not covering her literal head, but it is her metaphorical head—the man—who is shamed. In no uncertain terms, Paul makes it clear that the purpose of the woman's head covering is not for her benefit, but the man's. It is not immediately obvious why the man would be shamed by the woman's lack of head covering. However, upon reflection, when one thinks of the covering as a barrier, it appears that Paul is concerned about men being sexually attracted to women who ministered. Is it possible that women who were publicly prophesying and praying are being asked to suppress their sexual attractiveness that may distract a worshiping male?³⁰ Could this be a case similar to 1 Timothy 2:9-10, where women are asked to avoid the wearing of jewelry because of its potential to distract the eye from their inner beauty?

Paul goes on to say that a woman praying or prophesying with her hair uncovered is like one who does these things with a head that is shaven or shorn. Verse six is clear in its stipulation that a shorn or shaven head is disgraceful (*aischron*). No self-respecting woman in the first century would want to cut her hair. Short hair had negative connotations that reflected on the woman's character. If a woman entered the worship place with short hair, she would be immediately stigmatized. By comparing uncovered hair to shorn or shaven hair, Paul seems to be alluding to the fact that both would serve as a distraction. He is not inviting women who disagree with the tradition to change their hair styles. He simply presents an argument to support the tradition of head covering for those women who have a public role in worship.

²⁹For a similar line of reasoning see David E. Blattenberger, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11:2-26 through Archaeological and Moral-Rhetorical Analysis* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1997), 28f. See also W. C. Van Unnik, "With Unveiled Face", An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians iii 12-18," *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963): 153-69.

³⁰Bernadette Brooten, "Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, 63), feels that Paul is attacking homoeroticism between females, but this does not take into account that the counsel is to prevent the embarrassment of males.

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An Argument from Scripture (11:7-12). While the first argument is based on spiritual and moral *topoi*, the second argument is based on the Tanak—particularly the Genesis account of creation. What is important to our using the current passage as a key to decision making is Paul’s understanding of the authoritative nature of the Genesis account of creation. He understands the symbiotic relationship between Genesis 1 and 2. He has not been influenced by Julius Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis! He does not attempt to modify the straight teaching of the biblical cosmogony. He engages a strict reading of the text and interprets it at face value. The reason why a man does not cover his head is because he is in the “image and glory of God.” It appears that in addition to the Genesis account of creation, Paul utilizes the creation hymn of Psalm 8 to develop his midrash. While Genesis 1:27 refers to man (and woman) being made in the *eikon* of Elohim, Psalm 8 declares that he was crowned with glory (*doxa*) and honor. Although it can be reasoned that Genesis depicts both male and female as being created in God’s image, Paul reads Genesis 1 through the lens of Genesis 2. Since the man was created first, Paul reasons that he is the original image and glory of God. However, the woman is the “glory” of man. Notice that woman is not said to be the “image” of man. The fact that woman is not the “image” of man could be the very reason why the veil is needed. Again, this is not for the woman’s sake, but the man’s.

Verses eight and nine explain why the woman is the “glory” of man. First of all, woman was created *from* man. Secondly, woman was created *for* man. Again, Paul takes the text at face value. His argument has nothing to do with the status of humans after the fall. Paul sees an inherent hierarchy in the male-female marital relationship (Gen 2:26) from the original creation.

Having stated the premise for his argument, Paul draws the conclusion in the purpose clause of verse 10: “Therefore, the woman ought to have authority over the head, because of the angels.” This verse poses two major exegetical difficulties.³¹ The first problem is posed by the phrase “to have authority over her head” (*exousian echein epi tes kephales*). Many translations view *exousian* as a metonym for “veil” and interpret the phrase to mean “to have a veil on her head.” However, there is no obvious indicator for this reading. During his discussion, Paul has been appealing directly to women. He allows them to independently respond to his request. *Exousia* is something that is vested in the individual, and inherent in her status. In light of this, the whole idea of “authority over the head,” may relate to the woman’s right to do what she wants with her

³¹A concise synopsis of the exegetical alternatives is provided in W. Gerald Kendrick, “Authority, Women, and Angels. Translating 1 Corinthians 11:10,” *Bible Translator* 46 (1995): 336-343. On the difficulty in translating the verse, David R. Hall, “A Problem of Authority,” *Expository Times* 102 (1990), 39, comments: “This is one of many verses in Paul’s letters which are difficult to interpret because we do not know the background. Reading a Pauline letter is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. We can gather a gist of what is being said, but the details escape us because we cannot hear the voice at the other end of the line.”

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head. As we have already seen, the specific purpose of the head covering is not so much for the ministering woman as it is for the worshiping man. By covering her head, the woman provides a barrier to male lust. By exercising her *exousia* the woman helps to redirect the focus of the worshipers to God.

The final section of the clause is also confusing. Paul introduces a new entity into the discussion: “angels” (*angeloi*). The woman exercises authority over her head “because of the angels.” The Oxford NRSV depicts a recent trend in its suggestion that *angeloi* may refer to human messengers. However, this use of *angeloi* is extremely rare in the New Testament. It is much more likely that Paul here refers to spiritual *angeloi*. I personally am stumped by this verse. If Paul does indeed base his midrash on the LXX version of Psalm 8, then the reference to angels may allude to the psalmist declaration that man was “made a little lower than the angels.” Nevertheless, since the textual information is so scanty, I will refrain from offering an interpretive suggestion.

Having closed his argument, Paul makes a paranthetical statement indicated by *plen* (“nevertheless”). “Nevertheless, neither is woman independent from man, nor is man independent from woman in the Lord; for as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman, and all things are from God.” Paul is careful to end his argument on a soteriological note. In the spirit of Galatians 3:28, Paul stresses that in spite of the inherent differences between male and female, they are not independent creatures. They are both dependent on each other. Although woman was created for man, man also needs woman. And although woman was made from man, man is born through woman. However, ultimately both man and woman have their origin in God.

An Argument from Culture (11:13-15). Paul’s third argument to support the head covering tradition is derived from culture. He asks the question, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is dishonorable for him, but if a woman has long hair it is glory for her?” Paul talks here about what is proper. He appeals to the mores and values of the Greek world. Although many of us are influenced by the tendency of the Renaissance artists to depict biblical characters like the radicals of the flower power generation, a number of Greek sources inform us that Greek men did not grow their hair long.³² For a man to wear his hair long would be to dishonor (*atimia*) his position as a male in society.³³ In the Hellenized world that cherished order, men were supposed to look like men.

On the other hand, women were expected to wear their hair long. Paul states that long hair is a woman’s glory (*doxa*). *Doxa* is here contrasted with the *atimia*

³²*BAGD*, 442, cites Hdt. 1, 82, 7; Plut., Mor. 267b; Ps.Phoc. 212.

³³See discussion on the relationship of hair length to masculinity in Blattenberger, 46-61. Note especially the primary sources in his footnotes. But see comments by Cynthia L. Thompson, “Hair-styles, Head Coverings, and St. Paul. Portraits from Roman Corinth,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 (1988), 104, who although acknowledging the significance between male and female hair lists categories of people who sported long hair.

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(dishonor) that is associated with a man wearing long hair. Both dishonor and glory are concepts that must be acknowledged by another party. The RSV misses the entire point when it translates *doxa* with “pride.” The point is not how the woman feels about her own hair, but how others perceive it.³⁴ The essence of *doxa* is splendor and beauty.³⁵ *Doxa* is supposed to attract. This insight helps to strengthen the reason for the woman’s hair covering during worship. If the woman’s hair serves to attract, then it will definitely distract worshipping males.

Concluding Statement (11:16). Paul concludes the argument with an authoritative statement:³⁶ “If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no other custom, neither do the churches of God.” This verse serves as an inclusio to verse 2 where Paul praises the Corinthians for holding fast to the traditions (*paradoseis*). Here he makes it plain that the tradition he has just defended is a custom (*sunetheia*). All the churches of God agree that a woman should cover her head, and since the Corinthians are a part of the association, they are expected to show solidarity. Paul does not expect them to blindly accept the custom, but he has given them reasoned grounds to support its establishment. Also, notice that although he reasons from scripture, he does not make the issue of hair covering a divine mandate.

Helpful Conclusions from 1 Corinthians 11. As I end this section, I think it is safe to say that the dual purpose of the pericope is to explain and enforce the tradition of women covering their heads during public ministry in a co-ed worship setting. While the passage does not cover all aspects of women in ministry, there are certain relevant points that can be drawn from our exegesis:

1. When it is spiritually expedient, the church is authorized to make doctrines that have no explicit biblical mandate. While Paul could not point to a text that stipulated women should cover their heads in worship, he endorsed the practice because it allowed for all people to worship without distractions.

2. While Paul’s conclusions are contextually relevant, his arguments are biblically based. The Tanak had no scriptures that addressed the issue directly, so Paul had to extract a principle from the plain teaching of scripture. The fact that women were created “for” men and are the “glory” of men means that men need a barrier when worshipping to stop them from being distracted.

3. Women had a ministering role in the worship service. 1 Corinthians 14 makes it clear that the liturgy was open to include a hymn, a scripture reading, a revelation from two or three prophets, testimonies in another tongue from two or three people as long as there is an interpreter. The fact that 1 Corinthians 11

³⁴The same is true for the man with long hair who brings dishonor to himself.

³⁵See BAGD, 203f.

³⁶T. Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 679-89, would have us believe that Paul is not exercising authority here, but is making a gentle appeal since his teaching caused the confusion in the first place.

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speaks of women praying and prophesying means that women were allowed to minister in certain capacities. This does not appear to be an issue for Paul.³⁷

4. Paul accepted the plain biblical cosmogony that supports a hierarchical relationship between women and men. Although men have inherent authority over women, this hierarchy does not provide them with any soteriological advantage and is strictly applicable to the realm of the social.

5. Paul has no problem with adapting to societal mores. Other societies may not have had such a negative view of men with long hair.³⁸

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

If the fifteen verses of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 have posed an exegetical challenge, then the two and a half verses of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 present an even bigger one. Our task would have been a lot easier if Paul had not been so silent about what exactly he means by women being silent. By referring to “all the churches of the saints,” Paul makes it clear that he is once more appealing to current ecclesiastical custom or tradition. The content of this specific tradition involves the silence of wives (*gunaiques*) in the worship setting. Paul’s words are very clear: “As in all the churches of the saints, let the wives be silent; for it is not permitted for them to speak in church, but they are to be in subjection, just as the law says. But if they wish to learn, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a wife to speak in church.”

Since 1 Corinthians 11 portrayed the Corinthian women as prophesying and praying, it would appear that Paul is here contradicting himself. Hence Richards question, “How can a woman prophesy and keep silence at the same time?” Some have tried to satisfy the enigma by posing different settings for the two passages,³⁹ or proposing that this passage is as an interpolation.⁴⁰ However, the setting of both passages is clearly the church assembled for worship, and, in spite of the highly hypothetical arguments in support of interpolation, I have to side with Schüssler Fiorenza, who states: “Since these verses cannot be excluded on textual-critical grounds but are usually declared inauthentic on theological

³⁷In fact, other female prophets are mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 21:9; Rev 2:19-23). See comments by Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shephard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 215.

³⁸This also helps us understand that although Paul does not openly attack the societal institution of slavery, he never provides biblical support for its practice. Douglas fails to see this in his critique of Bacchiocchi, Holmes, and Pipim (392-94).

³⁹For instance, H. R. Homyard, “Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (1997):461-72, suggests that chapter 11 relates to non-church activities, and chapter 14 to church worship.

⁴⁰See Fee, 699-707. See also Philip B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995):240-62, who cites variant readings in Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus; J. H. Petzer, “Reconsidering the silent women of Corinth—a note on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” *Theologia Evangelica* 26 (1993): 132-38; and MacDonald, 216.

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grounds, it is exegetically more sound to accept them as original Pauline statements and then explain them within the present context.”⁴¹

What is the present context? These verses are couched close to the conclusion of Paul’s counsel on proper decorum in the worship service—a discussion that starts in 11:2. More specifically, Paul is providing suggestions for church liturgy, particularly with regards to prophesying and speaking in tongues. In 14:23 he expresses his concern about how an outsider would perceive disorderly conduct in worship. Consequently, as an aid to establishing order he proposes a suggested order of service in verses 26-30. So concerned is he about order in the worship service, that twice in these verses he recommends that tongue speakers and prophets should keep silent if their contribution does not add anything to the worship service (14:28, 30).⁴²

Indeed, as Richards recognizes, it is in this context that we are to understand the Pauline admonition for wives to be silent.⁴³ Some may be asking why I have been using “wives” to translate *gunaikes* when I rejected the dual translation of *aner* in 11:3. The answer lies in v. 35, where Paul makes it plain that the women in question had “husbands”—which would naturally make them “wives.”⁴⁴ This universal rule was applicable to wives “in [all] the churches,” to ensure order in the worship service. One may ask, “If Paul has a problem with wives speaking in church, why didn’t he address the issue in chapter eleven when he spoke of women in general?” However, in light of v. 35, the issue is not merely “speaking,” but speaking for the sake of learning.⁴⁵ Unlike the female prophets who were making spiritual revelations, these wives were asking questions that demanded answers. Imagine the commotion in a small gathering if husbands and wives were carrying on conversations while designated people were trying to preach, pray, or prophesy.⁴⁶

Paul well recognizes that his admonition is culturally and contextually grounded. He knows that there is no explicit text in the Tanak prohibiting wives from asking questions in church. However, he feels that in order for the command to be spiritually relevant, it must have a biblical principle. Paul does not

⁴¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 230. See also the excellent text critical discussion about the variant readings by Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997):242-255.

⁴²See also Richards, 323.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴See discussion in Fiorenza, 231, who concludes: “the injunction does not pertain to all women but solely to the wives of Christians.”

⁴⁵See M. Hasitschka, “‘Die Frauen in den Gemeinden sollen schweigen.’ 1 Kor 14,33b-36 - Anweisung des Paulus des rechten Ordnung im Gottesdienst,” *SNTU* 22 (1997):47-56.

⁴⁶But see L. Ann Jervis, “1 Corinthians 14.34-35: A Reconsideration of Paul’s Limitation of the Free Speech of Some Corinthian Women,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 (1995):51-74, who proposes that the women were interrupting the prophets and thus bringing confusion to the service.

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pretend to have “papal” authority as he delivers his admonition. For this particular ruling, he appeals to a section of the “law” (*nomos*) that calls for the subordination of wives. While it has been suggested that *nomos* could refer to Rabbinic law⁴⁷ or early Christian ecclesiastical law, the original audience would have taken for granted that Paul makes a reference to the “Torah” section of the Tanak.⁴⁸

It appears that Paul derives the principle for this tradition from Genesis 3:16b: “and your desire [shall be] towards (*pros*) your husband, and he shall rule (*kurieusei*) over you.” While the English term “desire” has romantic connotations, the LXX’s use of *apostrophe* denotes “a desire to control.”⁴⁹ As a result of the fall, the woman “desires” to control the husband. Indeed, in Genesis 3:17, Adam is chastised for allowing his wife to lead him into sin. This feminine desire to control stimulates competition for “headship.” Consequently, in a bid to maintain the original order, Yahweh prophesies that the husband will now “rule over” his wife.⁵⁰ However, since it is the wife’s desire to control, she must now make a conscious effort to “submit” to the lordship of her husband.⁵¹ Hence Paul’s deduction that “the law says” (*ho nomos legei*) wives are to be subordinate (*hupotassesthosan*).

So how does all of this relate to the command for wives to be silent? It seems to me that the real issue is not one of whether or not a wife could speak in church, but how she should submit to the person who is telling her not to speak. Is it possible that Paul could have been assisting husbands who did not want their wives to disturb the service by asking them to explain things that were hard to understand?

Paul ends his admonition by stating, “It is shameful for a wife to speak in church.” Now that we have an idea about the background, we know that this statement is not to be understood absolutely. Only those wives who are insubordinate are being chastised here. It is interesting to note that Paul utilizes the same word for “shameful” (*aischron*) as he did in 11:6 to refer to a woman with shorn or shaven hair. If I am right in my thesis that short hair is objectionable because it distracts worshipers, then it is safe to assume that the type of talking that was taking place was also distracting. Indeed, when placed in the larger context of chapter 14, it is clear that Paul’s concern is with “decency”

⁴⁷See Fiorenza, 231; and S. Aalen, “A Rabbinic Formula in 1 Cor 14,34,” *Studia Evangelica* 2 (1964): 513-25.

⁴⁸See, for instance, Romans 3:21, where Paul speaks of the Tanak with the term “law and prophets” (*nomos kai prophetai*).

⁴⁹The same term is used in Genesis 4:6 when it speaks of sin “desiring” Cain. See U. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959), 165–166.

⁵⁰The husband’s implicit position as *kurios* can be contrasted to Cain’s implicit designation as *archon* (4:7). *Kurios* denotes inherent status whereas *archon* denotes function.

⁵¹See Ephesians 5:22-33, where Paul ends his discussion about marital relationships with an appeal for the wife to “respect” her husband.

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(*euschemonos*) and “order” (*taxin*) in worship (11:40). In light of this, it may be well to adapt one of the interpretive translations offered by Daniel C. Archiea:

When you come together to worship, the wives should refrain from talking. In fact, they should not talk at all, since as the law says, they are subordinate to their husbands. If they want to find out about anything, they should wait until they get home and then ask their husbands. It is shameful for wives to be talking during the church meeting.⁵²

Helpful Conclusions from 1 Corinthians 14. While this passage was not as “meaty” as the first, there are certain points of learning that can apply to our discussion on women in ministry:

1. As in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul acknowledges the authority of the church to establish spiritually expedient rules that are not clearly stated in Scripture.
2. Whenever Paul refers to ecclesiastical law, he anchors it in a theological principle.
3. Paul sees the subjection of wives to husbands as a divine command that although stipulated after the fall remained relevant for the Christian community. In alluding to Genesis 3:16b, Paul establishes the fact that current human character—particularly the wives desire to control—needs to be subject to Divine wisdom.
4. Worship should be theocentric and not anthropocentric. The human element in worship needs to be subjected to the order of the Spirit. Worshipers should focus on God and not on each other.

General Conclusion

As we assess the two passages in light of women in ministry, I do not believe I will be amiss to conclude that both are directly relevant to the ongoing discussion. 1 Corinthians 11 makes it clear that women publicly ministered in the early church through prayer and prophecy. It is also clear that their spiritual giftedness does not obliterate the hierarchical distinction between the genders that was established at creation. In addition to supporting the male-female hierarchical distinctiveness, an understanding of 1 Corinthians 14 is also helpful in letting us know that Paul does not place a general indictment against women speaking in the community of the saints. So the answer to the question, “How does a woman prophesy and keep silence at the same time?” is simple. She doesn’t! In each pericope, Paul addresses two distinct categories of women. The only thread that holds these two passages together is the distraction caused by their actions in the worship service. In both passages, Paul’s chief concern is the uncovered female heads, talkative wives, uninterpreted glossalalia, and the many other phenomena that distracts the worshiper from the true object of worship.

⁵²Daniel C. Archiea, “The Silence of Women in the Church: Theology and Translation in 1 Corinthians 14.33b-36,” *Bible Translator* 46 (1995), 111.

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So how can this study assist in the decision making process of those who desire to arrive at a biblical decision on the role of women in ministry? Rather than provide an answer, I would like to close with a few questions:

1. Are there any aspects of *this* study that appear to be governed by philosophical methodology?
2. Does it appear that I arrive at my conclusions through adherence to an audience hypothesis? If so, how close is the hypothesis to the plain reading of the text?
3. Did you get the impression that my conclusions were governed by my presuppositions, or did you detect a sense of objectivity?
4. In light of Paul's acceptance of ecclesiastical authority, does an individual member of the church have the right to reject the church's current stance on women in ministry?
5. At what point should the church's authority to devise spiritually expedient doctrines be challenged?
6. How does Paul use scripture to address the issue of women in the church?
7. On what basis would you accept or reject Paul's use of scripture in his admonition?
8. Did the Corinthian woman have to be ordained in order to prophesy?
9. Did Paul uphold the hierarchical distinction between male and female?
10. Does the biblical teaching on male "headship" apply to church organization?

I trust that your honest and prayerful answers to these questions will help to clarify the issues.

Keith Augustus Burton is Associate Professor of New Testament at Oakwood College and the Pastor for Administration at the Madison Mission Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also serves as President-elect for the Adventist Society of Religious Studies. Burton completed his Ph.D. in New Testament Interpretation and Classical Literature at Northwestern University in 1994. He has presented several scholarly papers and authored numerous articles. His most recent book, Law, Rhetoric, and the Mystery of Salvation, is soon to be published by the Edwin Mellen Press. burton@oakwood.edu