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Setting the Scene—I

- an Introduction to the Book's Interpretive Approach



Portrait of a Woman by Robert Campin. (1375/1379–1444), The woman is wearing a wimple which features four layers of cloth. The pins holding it in place are clearly visible.

In this chapter, I wish to describe briefly some of the background to 1 Cor. 11:2-16 as it is understood in the present book. This is followed by a brief description of the “structural” approach taken in analysing the passage and, again briefly, the results obtained by the analysis. Finally, I discuss the “background assumptions” that have been made for the analysis.

The Situation at Corinth

The occasion for Paul’s teaching regarding women’s headcovering in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is widely discussed. It is frequently pointed out that Paul teaches regarding both men and women in this passage, and it is sometimes claimed that the problem that Paul is addressing is wrong hair and/

or headcovering behaviours by both men and women in the church at Corinth.

Furthermore, the extent of the claimed wrong behaviour on the part of the Corinthians sometimes, it seems to me, to go beyond what is likely, or even feasible. Occasionally, one encounters proposed reconstructions of the situation at Corinth which, at least to my conservative tendencies, border on the fantastical, such as the image conjured up of raving, dishevelled women with heads thrown back mimicking the *maenads* of the Dionysian cult as they prophesy in the Corinthian church and of effeminate men adding to this picture of degeneracy.

My current view on this is that Paul is replying to a question on the topic of the veiling of women in church which was included in the earlier letter written to him by the Corinthians (or perhaps was (?also) based in information from “Chloe’s people” (1 Cor. 1:11)) and that it perhaps only concerned the *theoretical* possibility that women in the church did not need to, or indeed perhaps *should* not, cover or veil their heads when publicly communicating directly with God—either in prayer to God or receiving prophecies from God. I don’t think one can infer from Paul’s teaching that the wrong behaviour was actually occurring at the time the Corinthians wrote to him— and perhaps rather the reverse. For example, in verse 2, the verse which introduces the topic of headcoverings, Paul is fulsome in his praise. I suggest that Paul is unlikely to have spoken in this way if the Corinthians had been actively following a wrong course of action in this area. Furthermore, in v. 16, Paul only expresses the *possibility* that someone might oppose his headcovering teaching. Having said this, it is possible that some wrong headcovering behaviour was actually occurring, but Paul perhaps would not feel it appropriate to criticise this error of judgement on the part of the Corinthians if he, Paul, had given no prior instruction on the topic (i.e. teaching on headcovering was not included in the “all things” or “the traditions” of v.2.) The commentaries offer, as already noted, a wide range of views on the extent to which wrong headcovering behaviour might have already been occurring at Corinth.

We do not know what the question, if it existed, actually was. It is sometimes framed in terms of a desire by the Corinthians (both men and women!?) for women to abandon headcoverings when praying or prophesying in order to be like, or to be equal to the men who did not have the symbolic barrier of a headcovering between themselves and God when praying or prophesying. This is possible, but it is only an inference. (Such an interpretation however fits well with the radical nature of Paul’s teach-

ing e.g. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)). We could equally imagine that the letter questioned whether it was appropriate for a woman to have this symbolic “barrier” of a headcovering interposed between herself and God when she is praying directly to God or receiving a prophecy from God as a valid and important theological question in its own right, albeit perhaps occasioned by noting that the men did not have such a “barrier”, but without it necessarily involving “proto-feminist” status comparisons!

Furthermore, although Paul teaches regarding both men and women, most of the teaching concerns women: every statement about men is balanced by a corresponding statement about women, but not vice versa. This observation is consistent with the view that the teaching about men has been given primarily because of the question regarding women, and that the teaching about men is introduced where necessary to give a fuller picture, by way of contrast. Nevertheless, the teaching regarding men is vital to the overall picture which Paul has so brilliantly painted for all of us.

The conclusions reached in the present book regarding Paul’s teaching on the topic of headcoverings, however, do not depend on the correctness or otherwise of the “minimalist” reconstruction proposed above of the situation in Corinth. Thus I think the conclusions “hold” whether or not there was actual wrong behaviour in this area by the Corinthians and whether or not men as well as women were involved.

As a final note about the situation in Corinth, from a historical perspective, it is almost certain that some of the women in the Corinthian church would have been slaves or servants in non-Christian households (at least one third of the urban Corinthian population in the 1st Century A.D. is estimated to have been slaves) and may not have had the choice about their hair length—it may well have been kept short, or at least shorter, as a marker of their servile status. (Please see, for example the article at www.coriniummuseum.org/2016/07/roman-haircare/). I mention this now because of the recent “theological” argument, (already briefly mentioned) which is that, contrary to nearly two thousand years of custom and Christian teaching in the Western World, Paul is teaching that the appropriate covering is the woman’s long hair, and that the churches of God have no other custom. Now Paul will go on in chapter 11 to berate the wealthy Corinthians for shaming the poor at the communion meal—and yet, if the “long hair as veil” argument is correct, Paul would appear to be fine with wealthy women having their glorious “koma” hair on display

whilst praying to God (and/or prophesying) and meanwhile their poorer sisters who are slaves would have to endure the shame of their shorter hair and of being “unfitting” (v. 13) if they venture themselves to pray to God. This point is basically the same as that made by Peter Leithart in discussing this topic in which he points out that a headcovering would “level out” these status differences during meetings of the church.

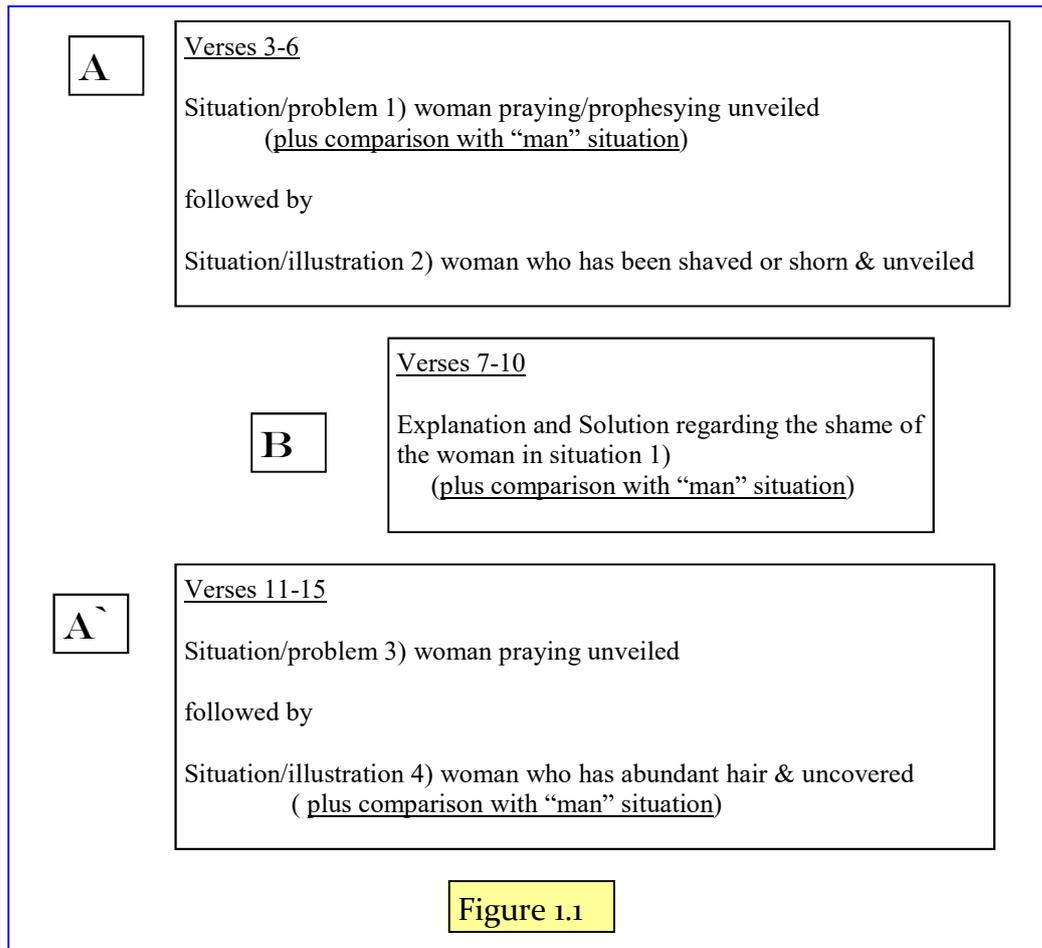
The Structural Analysis Approach to 1 Cor. 11:2-16

In this passage Paul teaches about hair- and head-covering with regard to both men and women when praying and prophesying. As stated in the preface, my primary aim in writing this book is to see whether the structural analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, whilst extremely interesting and helpful in its own right, can help to clarify the arguments that Paul puts forward in these verses, and whether this can, in turn, help us to understand the extent to which, and the manner in which, Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians applies or might apply to Christians today. This approach, emphasising structural aspects, is somewhat in contrast to some, indeed many, of the treatments of the subject that I have encountered which do not seem (to me anyway!) to give sufficient weight to the potential role of structure for the exegesis of these verses.

The analysis presented in this book points towards a particular (largely traditional) interpretation, and therefore, by exclusion, points away from some other interpretations. Rightly or wrongly then, such a structural analysis is seen, at least by me, as a tool for providing clarity and definiteness in the sea of different interpretations with which we are confronted today.

A Very Brief Look at the Structural Pattern in 1 Cor 11:2-16

On the next page is a diagram (Figure 1.1) which (with particular reference to women praying/prophesying in church rather than men praying/prophesying) shows the basic structural pattern that Paul uses in this passage. It has a chiastic A-B-A’ structure (with verses 2 and 16 acting as “bookends”). The two A’s look at two different ways in which a woman praying/prophesying whilst unveiled is unsuitable. The first A, (verses 3-6) gives a comparison with a woman who has had her hair removed, and the second A, i. e. A’, (verses 11-15) gives a comparison with a woman who has an abundance of hair (*kome* hair!) The B section (verses 7-10) actually amplifies and explains the A section and offers no new “situations” for consideration. (Please also note that the “comparison with the “man” situations” are chiastically located in Figure 1.1 too!)



Thus there are four “situations” to consider.

1) In “A”, a woman is praying/prophesying unveiled (against the “background” of male “headship”), and this is compared with

2) the situation of a woman who has been shaved or shorn but the context in which the woman is “located” is not explicitly given: the woman in question appears to be one of the women described in situation no. 1— though in the (ironical and hopefully hypothetical!) event of her actually being shorn or shaved, her shame would extend to “everyday life” too. Perhaps instead, we should see that Paul’s words “for it is one and the same thing with being shaved” as setting up a parallel “everyday life” situation, so that the (hopefully hypothetical!) woman in situation 2) is for illustration purposes only!

3) In “A`”, the woman is praying unveiled (against the background of male and female mutual interdependence, not male headship), and this is

compared with (note the word “or” at the beginning of v. 11—in the Textus Receptus; unfortunately it is missing in NA27) situation no. 4 (described below).

4) This is the situation of a woman with long (abundant) hair - but the context in which the woman is “located” is not explicitly given. (However, the fact that the “covering garment” given to her is a *peribolaion* rather than a veil perhaps suggests “everyday life”/outdoors rather than “church”/indoors.) Also the woman is not necessarily the same as the woman in situation 3, since the woman in situation 4 has long hair, and the woman in situation 3 has unspecified hair, but if it is not already long, it cannot instantly be made “long” - that would take some time! This contrasts with the woman in situation 1 who could—at least theoretically—cut off her hair very quickly and so appear as the woman in situation 2!

Later in this chapter I will be considering the relationship of the “hair” situations (2 and 4) to the “praying and prophesying” situations, (1 and 3) in particular suggesting that the primary purpose of the “hair” situations is to provide a “teaching occasion” for the praying/prophesying situations.

In this book it is assumed that the context of the praying/prophesying discussed is primarily the public meeting of the church rather than private, informal or family gatherings. It is interesting that the context is not specifically given for the hair situations (as already noted). This will be discussed further later in the book, but for now we note that since hair grows slowly, the condition of a woman’s hair will be “carried with her” both in church and in everyday life, so it is not really necessary to specify a context. However, the shame and glory of the two “hair” situations/illustrations respectively relate to the circumstances of how the woman is seen in the eyes of others both in everyday life and in the church, but that they do not *require* a church or “religious” context unlike the praying/prophesying situations. For simplicity of discussion, I will be treating these “hair” situations/illustrations as “everyday life” situations, whilst mentally noting that they also apply in church.

From a more “conceptual” perspective, the structure of the passage consists of two “arguments”, a longer one followed by a shorter one. This is illustrated in Figure 1.2 on the next page.

The analysis shows that, rather than a single argument, Paul actually puts forward two separate but complementary arguments in this passage - the “upper” argument (verses 3-10) is based on the hierarchical structure of the relationship between men and women, and the “lower” argument (verses

Paul's Two Arguments in Favour of Women's Headcoverings in 1 Cor. 11:3-15

1) The "Hierarchical" ("headship") Argument in verses 3-10

- a) First Component of the Hierarchical Argument (verses 3– 6)
 - key theme = shame
- b) Second Component of the Hierarchical Argument (verses 7-10)
 - key theme = glory

2) The "Interdependent" Argument in verses 11-15

- key themes = "fittingness" and glory

Figure 1.2

11-15) is based on their mutual interdependence. These arguments should not simply be conflated, although they are similar insofar as they both point to the need for God, not men/women, to be glorified at times of worship and they are also similar in that, in both cases, the relationship between men and women is seen as part of a higher theological reality involving God and Christ (vs. 3 and 11). We are to do *all things* to the glory of God, as 1 Cor. 10:31 tells us, but in our passage, it is public worship that is "in the spotlight".

It is to be noted, that contrary to the view expressed in many sermons, other talks and articles on this passage, it is not here seen to be the case that the "hierarchical" view presented in verse 3 provides "the key" to the *entire* passage. Rather, it is seen here to be the key to verses 3-10, but also to provide part of the background to verses 11-15!

The upper argument is undergirded by an asymmetrical, hierarchical view of the relationship between men and women, and expresses the need for the woman to cover her head when praying to God or prophesying. This need is related to i) the man as the head of the woman and ii) the woman as the glory of the man. This argument (at least as I understand it) will be described more fully later in the book. I will be suggesting that Paul presses home his argument by a sort of little parable in which the shame-driven veiling behaviour when praying and prophesying is parallel to the shame-driven veiling behaviour when a woman has been shaved (or sheared!) In giving this parable or illustration (in vs. 5b-6), Paul has not yet explained how the shame originally arose when the

woman is praying or prophesying. This explanation is given (rather cryptically!) in vs. 7-10—please see below). The “shaved head situation” thus functions as a sort of “type” or as a “mini-parable” for the uncovered head when praying/prophesying, and at this point we wonder whether Paul is indicating that if his hearers/readers were better “attuned” to spiritual realities, they (both women and men (man in his role as the head of the woman)) really would experience an equivalent shame, or even greater shame, before God when a woman prays/prophesies uncovered as the woman would experience “in public” if shaved or shorn. The argument then, as with parables generally, is an *argumentum a minore ad maius* in which the “lesser” situation (from a theological perspective) (i. e. the woman’s “hair” status when unveiled) points to the “greater” situation (i. e. the woman’s praying/prophesying status when unveiled.)

That Paul is arguing in this parabolic way is not really recognised in the commentaries, so this is a very bold suggestion! (As noted, I call the little parable, “For prayer, think hair!”)

At any rate, the second component of the first argument (labelled b in Figure 1.2) follows on from, and expands the first component by showing that the woman’s covered head means that God alone, and not man, will be glorified at this time. How does this second component “work”? Well, the woman’s head represents the man (as 1 Cor. 11:3 teaches) and the woman is the glory of the man (v.7), and so the glory of the man could be seen as sort of “concentrated” in or on the head of the woman. Therefore covering her head with a veil prevents the shameful situation that would occur when man is being glorified through the action of the woman praying or prophesying— a time when God should be glorified. The authority of the woman to pray or prophesy directly to God, (thus temporarily bypassing the man who is “next up” in the hierarchical structure) is the fact that the veil is covering her head (i. e. it is covering the man’s glory) at this time.

The angels, representatives of heaven and present at times of public worship, are concerned for God’s glory, (c.f. the Seraphim in Is.6:3 who, it is to be noted, cover themselves in God’s presence) and are, it may be supposed, reassured by the presence of the veil that God alone is being glorified by the prayer or prophecy. The angels are perhaps particularly concerned that the approach to God by humans should be conducted properly since the angels are or were themselves involved in mediation—e.g. the Law, which was the “charter document” of the Old Covenant between God and Israel was mediated through angels, and there were cherubim stationed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden guarding the Tree of Life. There is plenty of glory in the situation described in 1 Cor 11:2-16!! How could there not be

when men and women are in the presence of, and communicating directly with, God—so it is vital that the glory on display should be God’s alone!

The argument that Paul uses here may nevertheless seem to us like an “odd” argument (assuming that this, or something like it, is what Paul is actually teaching in these verses!) but we modern exegetes tend to be rather “wooden” and “theologically unimaginative” when it comes to biblical exegesis!

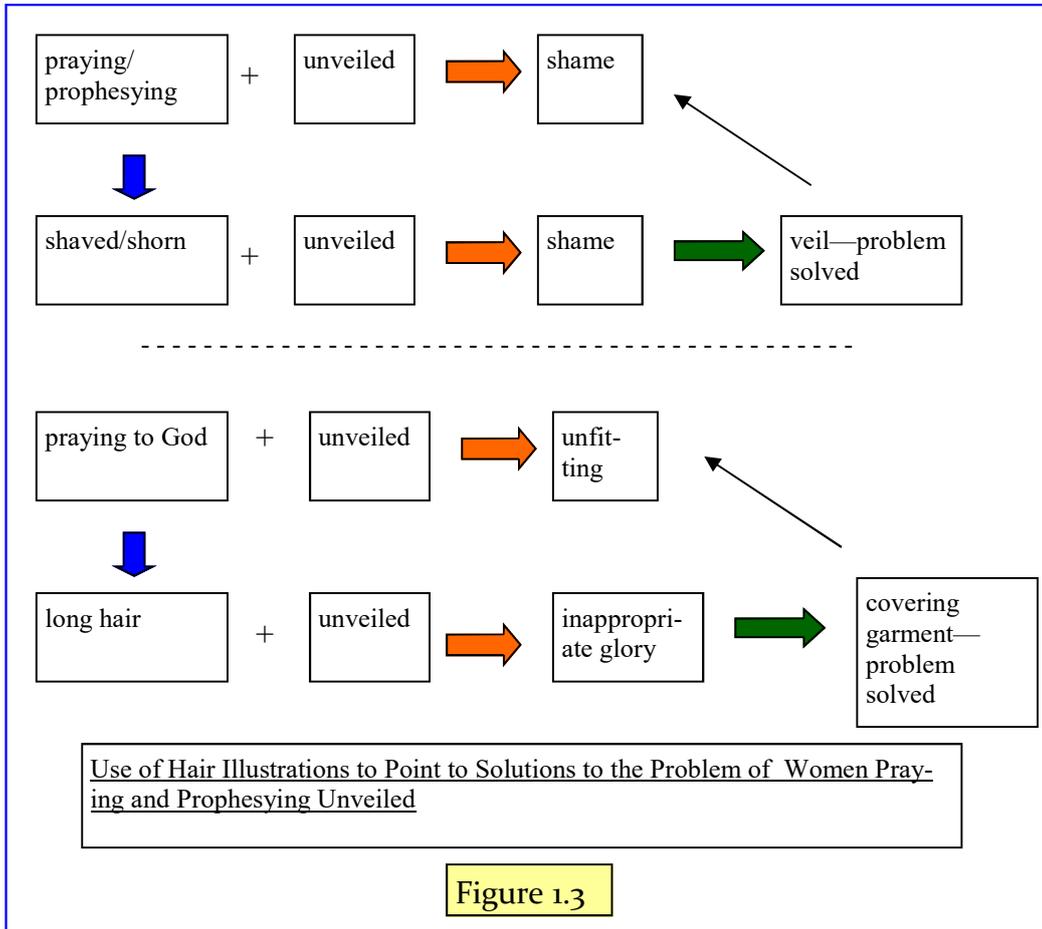
The lower argument is prefaced by a complementary underlying view—that of the interdependence of men and women. This lower argument is shorter and simpler than the upper argument, since, in the lower argument, the “complicating factor” of the man (who, in the “upper argument” is interposed via headship between the woman and God) is not present.

The lower argument presents the view that a woman should be veiled when praying to God in order to avoid an inappropriate glorifying of herself at this time a result of having this exalted role. Using a second aspect of the “For prayer, think hair!” parable, Paul likens this privileged role of prayer to the glory of a woman’s *long or beautified hair*, which, to avoid an inappropriate glorifying of herself when in public is characteristically covered up. This understanding of the significance of a woman’s long or beautified hair is here attributed to the teaching by nature to the effect that the long hair (and/or her beautified hair - depending on the precise meaning of the Greek noun *kome* and verb *komaō*) is her glory and ii) that the long hair, is brought into some kind of relation (the Greek connecting word here is *anti*) with a covering garment, a *peribolaion*. It will be necessary to investigate later in the book what this relationship actually is, since *anti* has several meanings, but for now I suggest that one possibility for Paul’s meaning might be that, in everyday life, a covering garment is worn adjacent to and covering the glorious long hair (presumably for reasons of modesty and propriety.) If this is so, then Paul’s argument about the need for a headcovering when a woman who has beautiful long hair is in public points to the need for a veil when the woman is praying to God. Again, the argument is an *argumentum a minore ad maius*.

A covering veil or equivalent accomplishes the requirements of both the upper and lower arguments since it covers the shame resulting from the inappropriate promotion of man’s glory through the woman’s praying/prophesying in the upper argument and also the “unfittingness” resulting from an inappropriate exultation of the woman whilst praying in the

lower argument. God alone is the One who should be exulted and glorified.

Figure 1.3 below illustrates how the “hair illustrations” point to the solutions to the problems of shame and “being unfitting” when a woman prays/prophesies unveiled.



Such, as it see it, *in nuce*, is Paul’s argument. It certainly seems a “strange” argument – rather different from our ways of reasoning, but Paul is working from a thoroughly biblical, typological world view—a wonderful view, characteristic of much pre-modern exegesis, which has in many vital areas been lost to us by the recent neglect, even denial, of such typological and figurative readings of Scripture, but which is now, fortunately again starting to be appreciated. Arguments from the nature of God, from creation and from New Covenant principles taken from Scripture are of course incontrovertible, but Paul’s criteria for a decisive argument - such as the respective glories of God, men and women or the *fundamental* (rather than purely linguistic) relationship between heads and their anti-typical (to use the language of typology) counterparts - are, it has to be admitted, proba-

bly not those for which we would instinctively reach in our theological reasoning regarding a topic as apparently “mundane” as headcoverings. Nevertheless, Paul’s arguments, especially when, as is frequently the case, they are interwoven with drama, humour, and even at times deliberate exaggeration and irony are, I suggest both brilliant and compelling and point the way to the “typological” mode in which we too should try to think and reason as we seek to fit our lives into the narrative of Scripture. If we find Paul hard to understand, it is we, who need to learn and adapt—not Paul!!

Background Assumptions for the Analysis

Below are presented (in no specific order!) some of the background assumptions made regarding the present analysis, together with a brief indication of how those assumptions “operate” and affect the direction of the analysis.

1) *“For prayer, think Hair!”*

As already noted, I believe that Paul’s two illustrations are comparing, not hair with veiling, but (in a perhaps somewhat counter-intuitive way), hair with prayer and prophesy! Thus, the way in which the woman’s hair is worn in public illustrates the way in which a woman should pray or prophesy in church! What are the “criteria” of these comparisons? There are two criteria. The first is the corresponding position on the honour-shame axis, (please see later!) and the second is the role of veiling which, in every case, solves the problem. Much of the rest of the book will be spent in clarifying and expanding this explanation.

2) *Primary Emphasis on Women’s Headcoverings*

Perhaps I should say right at the outset that I think that this passage is primarily about women’s headcoverings when praying or prophesying in church. (It is sometimes held, largely on a particular interpretation of Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 14, that women must only pray and prophesy outside of formal church settings. I do not think this is the case, and on the contrary hold that Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 11 specifically relates to public praying and prophesying in church.) The teaching about men in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is of course important and useful but it does seem to me (and to many commentators, e.g. Charles Hodge) to function largely as something of a “foil” in those places where Paul felt such teaching necessary in order provide a more complete explanation regarding the women. I hope to justify this viewpoint during the course of the book, but I suggest that, then as

now, it is primarily women's headcovering behaviour in church, rather than men's, which is/was the more pressing topic needing to be addressed! Nevertheless, the conclusions reached in this book regarding women's headcoverings do not require adherence to this "women-oriented" view of the passage!

3) Emphasis on Praying and Prophesying

I should also emphasise that Paul is addressing the specific situation of a woman *praying or prophesying* in church. This expression "praying or prophesying" is sometimes taken to refer to all activities when the church meets (the official terms for this use of language are that it is a particular type of *synecdoche* called a *merism*). Since Paul excludes women from the public teaching role in church, it is unlikely that he intends praying or prophesying to stand for all the activities in meetings of the church. I think that it is more likely that these two activities have been singled out by Paul (or were the focus of the question previously put to Paul by the Corinthians) because they are two situations when, at least in public worship in church, i) a woman is sort of "in the spotlight" and ii) because she is speaking publicly and directly to God or delivering a message directly from God and that this context is important in understanding Paul's arguments about headcoverings. I draw attention to this because I think that caution should be exercised regarding the many (albeit worthy) attempts to extrapolate Paul's teaching about head or hair coverings beyond this immediate context.

4) An Assumption about Veiling/Covering and Glory

One of the assumptions that I am making in this book is that it is the nature of glory to involve the manifestation, or "shining forth" - literally or metaphorically—of a person or thing or of some good quality of that person or thing. (E. g., Moses' shining face represented the glory of the Old Covenant—2 Cor. 3:7-18). As such, glory and veiling/covering are opposite, antithetical concepts. (Moses shining face is covered up by a face veil.) As I understand these matters then, something that is covered up cannot at the same time manifest glory without a radical "transvaluation" - amounting to an inversion- of the meaning of glory.

The reason I'm saying this at this point is that all the "standard" translations of 1 Cor. 11:15 say something to the effect that ". . . if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her because the hair has been given to her as a covering". Furthermore, one of the arguments one often encounters—the "long hair as a covering" argument (as opposed to the "long hair is the veil!" ar-

gument!) - is that the long hair's function as a covering points to the appropriateness of the woman wearing a veil in addition when praying or prophesying (i.e. the woman "takes the hint" from nature's covering, and supplies a veil).

I think both the translation and the argument are fundamentally wrong. First, long hair on a woman is certainly a glory to/for her, but it can hardly be because it is a covering, (like a cloak or some other garment that covers her up) that it is a glory to her! Quite the reverse, it is a glory because it shows her off to best effect! The long hair is like a "glory-cloud" surrounding the woman and drawing attention to her and presenting her in a very positive light; cloaks or similar just do not function in that way. Secondly, the claimed "covering" effect of hair in this translation could indeed point to the need for an additional cover in the form of a veil—the structure of the text supports making a connection between the "hair" and the "veiling when praying" situations—but the fact that the hair is a glory indicates that putting on a veil would be an entirely inappropriate addition, since it would snuff out any possibility of glory!

More plausible translations of 1 Cor. 11:15b will be extensively discussed later in the book.

5) *An Assumption about Veiling and Male Headship*

This has already been mentioned, but is discussed in more detail here.

It is often claimed that the woman's headcovering represents or symbolises the woman's submission to male authority (or at least that it is an outward symbol of the man's headship over the woman). I'm being very bold here, but I think that this view, stated in this very direct way, is largely false, and not actually found in 1 Cor. 11:2-16. However, I suggest it is not *entirely* false, and I would suggest that the true part of it needs to be re-stated rather carefully as follows: I think that, as described in b) above, (i.e. in Paul's "upper" argument (vs. 3-10) in Figure 1.2), the woman's headcovering whilst she is praying or prophesying shows that she is *not* directly representing her designated head—i.e. the man—at these times, but rather she is speaking to or hearing directly from God: in terms of the symbolic representation, the man (i.e. the woman's head) is being veiled at this time so that it is made clear that he is not being glorified as a result the woman's (good) actions in praying/prophesying. So far so good. But the fact that the woman's head needs to be covered at these special times is an acknowledgement that the man is the head of the woman! It is only that the man's *glory* is not what is to be on "display"

when the woman is praying or prophesying. (Or to put it the other way round, if the man were *not* the head of the woman, *this* aspect of headcovering by the woman would not be necessary (and Paul could have omitted verses 3-10!) This argument is essentially the view of C. K. Barrett (basically following Morna Hooker) in his 1 Corinthians commentary. This view has been stated in a brief, summarising way above, but it will be more fully described later in the present book. (Perhaps I could also suggest that, regardless of whether the argument about male headship is presented in a direct way, or in the extremely nuanced way presented here, neither argument justifies the view that male headship is to be understood primarily as the duty of submission to male authority by the woman (rather than for example as her right to be cared for, protected and provided for by the man).

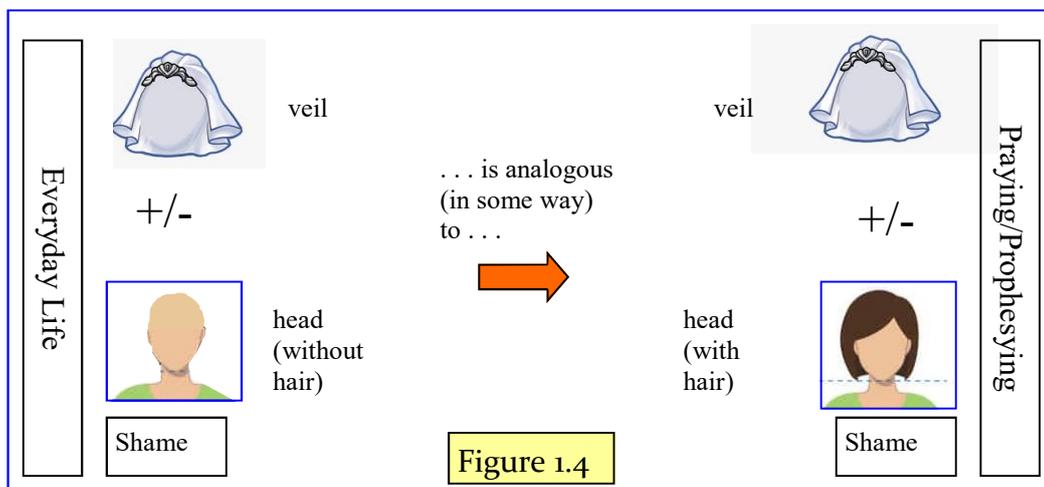
This particular function of the headcovering (i.e. that of veiling the glory of man) is in operation at this particular time in public worship before God. I don't think that we can at all infer from 1 Cor. 11:2-16 that the woman's headcovering if worn necessarily has this particular significance at all other times, (and indeed this "veiling of man's glory" during the particular times of public worship appears to be, as already suggested, part of the significance of the reference to the representatives of God, the angels, in v. 10). On *all* public occasions however, a woman's headcovering can be an actual enacting of female modesty, whatever its additional symbolic referential significance in various specific contexts.

The conclusions reached are, in *broad* outline (with the exception of some of the previous two paragraphs) consistent with the traditional and universally agreed upon teachings and practice of the church in the West for almost 2000 years—right up until modern times. During this entire time, women traditionally wore headcoverings in church. (Indeed women wore them most of the time, though that's not what is primarily discussed in 1 Corinthians Ch. 11 which is actually mainly restricted to discussing women's headcoverings whilst praying or prophesying (presumably in a church context)).

6) An Assumption about the Meaning of "Kephale" - i.e. "Head"

I mention here an assumption that I think will be helpful later. It's this. The Greek word, *kephale*, like our English equivalent "head", is used both physically and "metaphorically" in this passage—as is universally recognised in the commentaries and elsewhere. However, with regard to the physical meaning there is a slight ambiguity: it is not clear whether the hair is included as part of the head! The word head or *kephale* refers to a

person's head both before and after the hair of his or her head has been shaved off! The person doesn't cease to have a "genuine" head after shaving off his or her hair! Rather the hair is an "optional" part of a person's head and I therefore assume that there are two closely related meanings to the word: i) a head to which hair is attached and ii) a head from which the hair has been removed. This may seem very pedantic, but I mention it now anyway as Paul develops an analogy in verses 5 and 6 between a woman who prays and prophesies without a veil on her head and an unveiled woman who does not have hair on her head. Although Paul (? deliberately) never specifically uses the word *kephale* when speaking of the shaved or shorn head in these verses, I think it is implied, and that Paul still regards it as a head!! This analogy is illustrated in Figure 1.4 below:



(Against this “analogy” understanding, it may be argued that, on the contrary, when Paul uses the words “one and the same thing” in v. 5 regarding the connection between the unveiled shaved head and the head that is unveiled during prayer and prophecy that he is requiring a much closer connection than that suggested by the word “analogy” - for example some people argue that the veil is “the presence of a “proper” hairstyle”, and departures from this are “unveiled”!) However, I note that in this section of our passage, Paul says, for example, that the head of the woman is the man, and proceeds to treat the woman's physical head as representing the man. If Paul feels free to use the “identity” “is” for such a symbolic representation, then I suggest he can use the expression “one and the same” for an analogy! (Elsewhere, Paul says, “the Rock was Christ—1 Cor. 10:4—a typological relationship rather than an exact identity). In any case, we know that being unveiled whilst also being shaved or shorn is not literally “one and the same thing” with praying/prophesying with unveiled head since they are describing two different situations. Some sort of typo-

logical or analogous relationship must presumably therefore be meant, and we are encouraged to ask, “In what particular respect(s) or aspects(s) are they “one and the same thing”?)

7) *Women’s Hair Lengths Are a Parable/Analogy/Illustration in this Passage: Long Hair is not Specifically Prescribed for Women!*

It is widely understood that, with regard to women, although the main topic of the passage is the need for veiling when a woman is praying or prophesying, Paul is also teaching, indeed prescribing, equally about certain hair lengths or hairstyles—specifically that a Christian woman should i) avoid extremely short hairstyles and ii) preferably have long hair when praying/prophesying, and also, in “everyday life” as well. This “prescribing” has sometimes (more frequently in the past than today) also been understood to include iii) the wearing of a headcovering when the woman is in public). Leaving aside, for the moment, the important question of whether such behaviours are required of Christian women today, I do not think this is a quite accurate way of reading the passage, and in this section of the present work, I wish to attempt, (and it is a most inadequate attempt!) to discuss why I think Paul’s main topic, the prescriptive teaching about the need for veiling in church, is in a different “ontological category” from the teaching about hair and hair lengths in everyday life, (but which, of necessity, includes “church life”, since hair grows slowly, and, unlike a veil, cannot be put on and taken off at will!). I will be suggesting in this book that Paul, rather than directly teaching/prescribing about hair lengths and coverings, is assuming already fully agreed and accepted values in these areas in the Corinthian church, (with the possible exception of a small number of “dissidents”!) - values that were basically held in the “best practice” of the wider society too - regarding these two “extreme” hair situations, namely i) the absence of, and ii) the abundance of, women’s hair and consequent appropriate head covering behaviours (including, but not restricted to, the wearing of a *katakallumma*, a veil covering the head) in these specific situations in “everyday life”.

If this is a correct view, it is reasonable to ask why Paul introduces these two (rather specific) instances of agreed behaviour in everyday life in his argument about veiling when a woman is praying or prophesying. My current view, and the argument in this book, is that Paul is using these agreed values to act as a teaching aid—a sort of parable, analogy or illustration, but also a “stepping stone” - to the correct head covering behaviour when a woman is praying or prophesying: as a good teacher, he is starting from what is already known and agreed! To be sure, Paul is implicitly upholding these two particular hair and headcovering values and practices, whether

in the church or in the wider society, and so, in an indirect way, teaches them (as discussed further below!) but I currently think that they are assumed rather than specifically taught in the passage, and that they form part of the starting presuppositions for, rather than conclusions to be drawn from, Paul's reasoning in this passage. On this view of the passage, Paul has no need explicitly to teach these things since they are already understood. Indeed, their very truth makes them a good foundation on which to build!

(Perhaps if Paul were teaching, not the Corinthians who have already learned the basics, but us, (once he had recovered from the shock of our acquiescence in modern cultural values!) he would have initially to "spoon feed" us with what we really ought already to know about women's hair and headcoverings in the context of shame and glory in everyday life!)

There are many bible teaching situations where it is not always clear whether a teaching is simply "culturally circumscribed", or whether it is indeed culturally circumscribed but nevertheless from which can be inferred "relevant principles of application" for today, or whether the teaching is of universal application, and not dependent on culture at all (i.e. normative, to use the standard terminology). Thus, I think the "headcovering when praying/prophesying" teaching in 1 Cor. 11, based as it is on creation principles and on eternal theological truths which relate to the Christian believer as he or she stands in Christ and before God, is therefore totally universal, "supracultural" and normative. But the hair length and headcovering behaviours which Paul assumes the Corinthians will hold in "everyday life" are not, in our passage, linked to creational and theological truths about God in this way, and so will have a different "ontological status".

To give one example, Paul expects his readers/hearers to agree that nature teaches that ". . . if a woman has long (or beautified) hair it is a glory to her". Now I can, (and do!) agree that nature does indeed teach this, but, whilst it is nice—indeed, it is a glory! - for a woman if she wears long or beautified hair in this way, that does not, in itself, mean that it is a biblical requirement for her to do so!

The arguments about hair length and headcoverings for Christian women in everyday life in our passage are however, I suggest, nevertheless a bit more complicated than that! To continue the above example, with the translation of v. 15b that I currently hold, (different from the "standard" translations) I think that Paul expects the Corinthian Christians to be taught by nature (v. 14) that, if glorious long hair is worn by a woman,

then nature is also teaching that it should be covered when she is in public. Whether or not this is a correct understanding of v. 15b, Paul's teaching raises the question, "What is nature?" in this passage, and how binding on Christians should be their Christian understanding of nature and nature's lessons. I think Christians are eminently qualified to interpret nature, since they will, (or at least should!) do so from a Christian, indeed Christological and typological perspective, and to learn and apply the lessons from "nature properly understood". This requires Christian judgement—in contrast to simply being given commands.) I suggest therefore that "learning from nature" is in a different "ontological category" from straightforward commands or injunctions in the bible, but that it is something we should nevertheless do, and from which important lessons should be learnt!

However, things are, in the special case of a woman's long hair, even more complicated than that!! In this specific case of "hair and headcovering" behaviour, we are **told**, (in Scripture!!), **what** we are expected to be taught by nature (vs. 14-15) So, are we being taught this by Scripture, or by nature or by both?!! This particular instance of teaching, ostensibly by nature, has, paradoxically, a "foot in both camps"!! I would judge that with regard to long hair and associated head coverings, we are indeed, like the Corinthians, expected to see the propriety of a woman covering her glorious long hair, if worn, when in public, and this is in line with the modesty taught in other biblical passages, but I can see that others will judge the matter differently. "Let each one be fully persuaded in his or her own mind!"

Before leaving this topic, perhaps I could just comment briefly on Paul's assumption that a woman who has been shorn or shaved will experience shame in public, and that this shame can be removed by veiling. Although Paul does not specifically say so, this is probably also something that he understands nature to "teach". (However, it is only towards the end of the passage, after he has given the necessary information and principles, that Paul "relinquishes control" and "hands over" to nature and the judgement of the Corinthians - and even then, he exerts a very strong guiding hand, as previously noted!!) At any rate, the shame and its removal by veiling is something that Paul can count on to be the understanding of the Corinthian church. When, in verse 6, Paul says, "But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved . . .", I think the little word translated as "if" should really be translated as "since", and in fact, a number of translations adopt this translation, and many commentators agree. If "since" is the correct translation, then the divinely inspired Paul is stating a truth—it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaved! If a woman (e.g. some mod-

ern women perhaps) say they do not feel this shame, then, one could say that it is, nevertheless, according to Scripture, shameful, and one could, on that Scriptural basis, suggest that such women could consider “re-setting” the calibration of their “shame-o-meter” in this area.

The more conventional view also sees Paul as using “hair” behaviours as illustrations regarding headcovering behaviours when praying and prophesying, but holds that he is also using the opportunity equally to teach about, and argue for, correct “hair” behaviours both when the woman is praying and prophesying and also in everyday life, and that there is no distinction between the basis for this teaching and the teaching about veiling when praying/prophesying in church.

The proposed distinction (between main teaching and illustration) in the above interpretation of Paul’s teaching will be described (and defended) much more fully later in the book, but I thought it would be helpful to mention this now since this (perhaps somewhat pedantic?) distinction that I have tried to draw (i.e. between the ontological status of the main teaching and that of the illustrations that undergird this teaching) is a specific feature of how the passage is interpreted in this book.

(Later in the book, I will also be discussing (and arguing for) the appropriateness of Paul’s teaching regarding headcoverings when a woman is praying or prophesying in church today - even for individual Christians or churches which do not hold to the view regarding “nature” that I have proposed here, and who, in contrast, hold that the “illustrations” that Paul uses about hair length and hair covering to undergird his main argument are local and culturally circumscribed, and that “nature” should be understood in a wider sense—in particular as incorporating within itself such local, cultural practices.)

8) *How Do the Hair Illustrations “Work”—Why are They Appropriate?*

I think that there are two main reasons why Paul has chosen to use “hair behaviour” to illustrate his teaching on the need for veiling when women are praying/prophesying. The first is that veils and hair both go on top of the head—so the illustration is apt! The second is that in everyday life, there are two particular “problem” circumstances relating to a woman’s hair (or lack thereof!) in which the problem is averted by veiling. These relate to shame and (inappropriate) glory respectively and Paul has used the parallelism between these two circumstances and two corresponding, “matching” aspects of the praying/prophesying in church situation, in

which potential problems are also averted by veiling, to serve as teaching aids or parables to “get across” his main teaching point (dramatically and amusingly!) about veiling when praying/prophesying. Thus, the “familiar and accepted”, as well as by turns the amusing and/or shocking, (“What, cut off all my hair? - is praying or prophesying unveiled really as bad as all that?”! “Well, no—actually it’s worse –the hair was just an illustration!”) are used to point to the somewhat more conceptually challenging message about veiling during prayer and prophecy that Paul wants to get across.

Is there more to these illustrations than a coincidental parallelism? There is surely more to it than that! I think that Paul is “tapping into” typological truths about hair, prayer and prophesy, veils and honour/shame etc. that in the Providence of God are real and genuine rather than “happenstance”, and it is our great privilege to investigate such truths as we grapple with the teaching of this passage. To give just one example from the OT, hair is sometimes used symbolically to represent the actions that take place, or the life led, during the time that the hair is growing—for example the dedication of the hair at the end of a Nazirite vow or the shaving of the head of a captive woman taken as a wife. Whether or not these particular instances are relevant to our passage, there appears to be, at any rate, a *conceptual* basis for paralleling the condition of the hair with one’s actions—in our case, the actions of praying and prophesying in church! (A NT example of this would perhaps be Jesus’ words about the hairs of the head being numbered, and Jesus’ relating this to God’s care regarding the circumstances of our lives and the need for us to fear Him.)

9) A Note on “Available” Hair Lengths

In reading books, articles and commentaries which discuss 1 Cor. 11:2-16, one of the things that I have noticed is that there is frequently a sort of implicit understanding that women’s hair has either to be very, very short, or long. Thus, for example, in his book, *Head Covering: A Forgotten Christian Practice for Modern Times*, Jeremy Gardiner, in the course of showing that long hair is not the intended veil or covering says (p.72), “If long hair was the same as being covered according to Paul, what would uncovered mean? It would mean having short hair, right?” Jeremy is here attempting to show, as many others have done, that 1 Cor. 11:6 does not make sense when long hair is the covering about which Paul is speaking. On this understanding, verse 6 would be saying something to the effect that, “If a woman does not have long hair, she should be sheared”. The argument then runs that v. 6 makes no sense because if she does not have long hair, then she will already have extremely short hair, equivalent to being sheared, so cannot be sheared at that point. It’s an argument that has con-

vinced many. However, even though I believe the “long hair as veil” interpretation to be wrong, I think that this argument against that interpretation is false since “uncovered” should not specifically mean, “having been sheared or shorn”, but rather, should validly refer to any hair length for the woman which fails to qualify as an equivalent to a veil, not just the exceedingly short hair length described by the term “sheared”.

The weakness (as I see it) of this argument then is a result of an erroneous classification, namely the “conceptual bifurcation” of women’s hair lengths into either “long” or “shamefully short”. I would suggest that there are many “intermediate” hair lengths which whilst falling short (literally!) of being long enough to mimic the action of a veil are nevertheless certainly not capable of being described as “being sheared” (like a sheep!)

So, I will, in this book be assuming (?more realistically!) that there are basically, not two, but three “available” hair lengths—sheared/shaved, intermediate and long (i. e. “veil-length”) hair - where “intermediate” clearly covers a wide range of hair lengths!

10) A Note About Honour and Shame and About Glory and Shame

The word shame occurs three times in the passage, glory three times, dishonour once and “fitting” (i.e. appropriate) once. These words all refer to one’s standing, or the evaluation of one’s behaviour, in the eyes of others in the famous “honour-shame” cultural system which (rightly) exists everywhere, (and if it doesn’t, then it should!) but which was a particularly important feature of the First Century Mediterranean world. Not all aspects of the honour-shame system were good in the Ancient world, e. g. the excessive love of honour could drive some to very wrong behaviours, but Christians were expected to align (re-align where necessary) the honour-shame axis according to good and genuinely honourable Christian values).

Honour and shame are “dialectical opposites”, and so are glory and shame - honour and glory being closely related concepts.

On this latter point of honour and glory being closely related concepts, I would like to offer this quotation from pp. 110-111 of Bruce Malina’s book, *The New Testament World—Insights from Cultural Anthropology* which clarifies the relationship, as well as emphasising the point made earlier in this chapter that veiling (which conceals) and glory (which must be manifested) are opposite concepts. Here is the quotation:

“The Bible translators’ words for behaviours that demonstrate honor include *to glorify, to acquire glory, and glory*. *Glory* refers to the external items people have that reveal their status, their honor. To glorify is to trot out, parade and show by some external act what sort of person one is and what sort of group one belongs to . . . [several biblical examples of glory follow] . . . These are many instances of glory, of the external and visible showing the nonvisible social standing of the persons involved.”

Just as with the earlier discussion of hair length, it is a mistake to pigeon-hole all people/behaviours into either honourable or shameful! Most actions and states of existence are “neutral”, and “neutral” is good and perfectly acceptable. Shame is to be avoided at all costs, and aiming for honour or glory is a risky strategy: if it works, fine, but an inappropriate claim to honour, or a claim to honour that back-fires, quickly results in shame! (For example, Jesus’ advice to take the lowest place at a banquet!)

Honour and shame are not exact opposites however. There is such a thing as positive shame, and people who lack this are shameless. Women in particular are “repositories” of good shame in all cultures (or should be) and are (or should be) particularly averse to actions, such as inordinate drawing attention to themselves in a shameless way which would result in shaming.

The word “fitting” in v. 13 refers, I suggest, neither to shame nor glory/honour, but to that neutral point in the middle where one’s behaviour is appropriate and unostentatious, and risks neither shame nor glory! To achieve this is surely as much as most of us can or should hope for most of the time!!

In Paul’s first argument, the facts that the woman is the glory of the man and the man is the “head” of the woman are the reasons why praying/prophesying unveiled is shameful for a woman: glorifying man in the presence of God is a very inappropriate claim to glory and therefore results in shame. This will be discussed in more detail later in the book.

Similarly, following one of the understandings of v. 15b that will be advocated in the present book, nature teaches that if a woman “*kome*”s her hair (i.e. she grows it long) it is a glory to her because, or so that, (depending on the translation of *hoti* at the start of v. 15b) there is a need for it to be covered with a *peribolaion*—a cloak—when the woman is in public. How does this “work”? Well, honourable women avoid drawing attention to themselves in public—even for “positive” things like glorious hair. (This

behaviour is highly regarded in Scripture which speaks of modesty and discreteness in very positive terms for a woman.) So the glory of long hair needs to be concealed at these particular times. Note, the uncovered display of glorious long hair is not described as shameful—rather it is, I would suggest, “inappropriate” (which covers a range of levels of “severity” in the direction of shame on the honour-shame axis) - and so nature, through the mechanisms of culture and good judgement, quietly, tactfully, kindly and unassumingly arranges for any potential such lapse in best judgement on the part of the woman to be averted by covering — at least nature rightly understood by Christians, and the “best practice” of many cultures too, is seen to operate that way!

In Paul’s two main arguments about the shame and “unfittingness” of a woman praying/prophesying unveiled in church and in the two corresponding “hair” illustrations—the shame of being sheared and the inappropriate glory of long hair - the solution to all four situations is veiling. Veiling returns the woman, either from shame or from inappropriate glory, to a state of neutrality on the honour-shame “axis” - the ideal condition in everyday life, and also when praying/prophesying since God does not want us to be shamed, but God alone is the one who should be glorified (1 Cor. 10:31).

It is interesting that when in the first case, a woman prays/prophesies unveiled, and it is the glory of the man that is inappropriately on display, the result is shame, but when in the second case the woman (representing herself) prays to God unveiled it is only described as “unfitting”, not as shame. This allows for the likelihood, as discussed above, that the latter behaviour producing “unfittingness” is seen as a less serious a breach than the former behaviour which produces shame. Why is this? This is an important and interesting topic which will be reserved for later!

11) *A Note About The Theological “Universe of Discourse” in 1 Cor. 11:2-16*

The vocabulary that Paul uses is noteworthy for its theological distinctiveness. Nowhere in the passage does Paul speak of sin, righteousness, evil, grace, law, wrath, judgement, punishment, love, condemnation, justification, life, death, salvation etc. Rather, words like honour, shame, glory, disgrace, “nature”, “fitting” (i.e. appropriate) occur. However, in noting this, we should not minimise the importance of antitheses such as honour-shame and glory-shame within Paul’s argument—and indeed within most societies—including those of the 1st Century Mediterranean world. It is an unfortunate feature of modern Western societies that we

have, to a large extent, lost, misunderstood or downplayed these values (for example, in shameless clothing habits, and in the acceptance of “being economical with the truth”, and even outright lying, in Western political life), and, in order better to appreciate good and noble values such as honour and shame, we may need to “re-orient” ourselves. A very helpful book in this regard is Bruce Malina’s book mentioned earlier. The purpose of such a “re-orientation” is not to support all the specific manifestations of honour, shame etc. found in the 1st Century world—these societies did misuse these component categories of human social life with, for example, competitive striving for honour amongst men (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:8). Thus, as Christians, we recognise that a correct biblical understanding of these important values for human flourishing is not an uncritical acceptance of their 1st Century cultural realisation, but rather an acknowledgement of necessary, supra-cultural, biblical truths: the bible teaches us the value of, and proper way to manifest, honour, shame etc.

It is a feature of honour that, when inappropriately claimed, it becomes shame and likewise glory, when inappropriately manifested, also becomes shame, or at least it becomes “unfitting”. I will be suggesting that these ideas, although not explicitly stated, underlie Paul’s arguments in our passage. (That glory can be or become shame is shown by Phil. 3:19, and that claimed honour can become shame is shown in Jesus’ parable about the guest who claimed a high place at table and was shamefully “demoted” (Luke 14:7-11)).

I think that the “theological distinctiveness” noted above is an important feature of Paul’s argument, and whatever conclusions we reach regarding the meaning of the passage and its implications for Christians today, I suggest that these implications should exist and function within approximately the same “universe of theological discourse” as Paul’s original arguments!

