

INTRODUCTION

Christians are deeply divided over the issue of ordaining women to the Ministry of the Church.¹ For one group of Christians in the Church the trend to welcome women into the Ministry is received with great joy, while in another it is looked upon as a breakdown in God's good order.² While the first group look forward to having their first woman Archbishop, or Moderator of the General Assembly, the second group see it as the clearest indication that the Church is desperately sick. When the Bible is used to justify positions which are polar opposites one suspects that something has gone seriously awry.

The position adopted in this work is that men and women are both to have dominion over His creation (Gen 1:28) and each was created by a wise God with a different but complementary purpose in mind. The difference in purpose is based on gender: "male and female created he them." Man, as "the glory of God," is to fulfil the purpose God meticulously planned for him; and woman, as "the glory of man," is to fulfil a different purpose that God has meticulously planned for her as seen in her different constitution—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

If we safeguard the equality of men and women as created in the moral image of God, we also safeguard their humanity. The perfect model of a human being is the Lord Jesus. He is the Adam who did not fall. In him we see what it is like to be a "normal human being." He alone teaches us how to be fully human. Anything less than his standard is debased humanity. We shall see below what is required of every person if s/he is to be truly human. It is important for what follows to safeguard the full humanity of Jesus, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). He was a man, not a woman; he is "the glory of God," not "the glory of man." Both male and female can be fulfilled human beings provided they fulfil their ordained roles. If either departs from their set roles then they cease to be "normal" in God's eyes and bring shame on themselves. They become rogue elements in His world, creating havoc and disorder until they return to the complementary roles He has planned for them.

Man did not choose to be head of woman. He was put in this position by his Creator. Woman did not choose her station in life. She was created to be man's helper. Man has nothing to boast about because what he has is a gift or privilege from God. In any case with headship³ comes the awesome responsibility to render to his Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ the honour and worship that is due to them.

Woman has nothing to regret because her responsibility is to be a helper suitable for man. She is answerable to God, through Jesus Christ, for the way she fulfils her creation calling toward Man/Mankind. Man probably has the more daunting responsibility, but both must face up maturely to the challenge that their different stations in God's creative order demands of them. Rather than talk about woman being in subjection to man we should view man and woman having their own special agenda to fulfil, and these, when cemented in a loving relationship, are truly complementary and beautiful in their outcome. Without love, binding man and woman into one flesh, the relationship breaks down and force, or physical coercion, is resorted to by man in order to achieve his goals which may not relate to his duty toward his Maker.

¹ This work arose out of a discussion paper which I presented to the Kirk Session in my own church (Alexandra Presbyterian Church, Belfast) on the question of ordaining women to the Ministry, or Teaching Elder, in March, 1973.

² For the view of the Reformed Churches see *Acts and Reports of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Amsterdam, 1968* (p. 35), and *Acts and Reports of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Australia, 1972* (pp. 52-59). Writers who adopt the historic view of the Christian Church are Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1971); G. W. Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); and Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1958). This work contains some fine exegesis and is a textbook on the subject. It also has an excellent European bibliography.

³ The term 'headship', like 'trinity' and dozens of other theological terms, does not occur in the Bible, but it is necessary to sum up what Scripture teaches on the subject of the relation of Christ to God, man to Christ, and woman to man. Thus the concept of 'headship' is as much present in the text of Gen 2-3 and 1 Tim 2 as it is in 1 Cor 11.

Both Adam and Eve sinned, so it is wrong to suggest that Genesis 3:15 teaches that as a direct punishment for her sin Eve was subordinated to Man, that is, that Woman was made subject to Man as a *penalty* for her sin, as though an initial equality with Adam was replaced by inequality, which would be a reduction in her original status.⁴ The harsh “rule” of man over woman came about as a *consequence* of sin, just as weeds and birth-pains did, because the pre-Fall headship and the pre-Fall moral image of God both underwent a fundamental change when sin entered the souls of Adam and Eve.

The action of God in bringing Eve to Adam *before* she sinned was a beautiful action, and encapsulated the union of two complementary natures whose distinctive genders ensured a life-long relationship to keep them together. The giving of themselves to each other was the first act of mutual love by both of them.⁵ It is to this pre-Fall scene that Jesus directs the mind of his disciples when considering his view of marriage.

So voluntary, loving submission, *per se*, is not the problem. It is Man’s inability to love the Woman after the pattern of the Lord’s love for the Church that is his problem. And it is the refusal of Woman to accept her preordained station alongside Man which is her problem. But Paul links the covering of the Woman’s head with her pre-Fall calling to fulfil her mission to be Man’s finest helper, and not to her post-Fall condition. He links Man’s uncovering with his pre-Fall calling to be the image and glory of God,⁶ which he can now become fully (potentially) in Christ.

In Paul’s view the coming of the Messiah marked a new age for mankind (a *tabula rasa*) in which man and woman appear once more capable of fulfilling their assigned responsibilities, as on the day they were created, through the help of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of Christ within their bodies. It is in recognition of this new opportunity and new beginning with all its possibilities to fulfil their original set goals that Paul’s doctrine of covering and uncovering of the head relates to, as we shall see in the following sections.

Man and Woman can achieve equal dignity by fulfilling their respective roles under Christ and not by taking over the other’s role. The sign of their distinctive roles is symbolised in the covering of the head (for women) and the uncovering of the head (for men). For a woman to come before God with an uncovered head is a clear signal to Him that she has thrown off her original (pre-Fall) assigned role, and seeks to emulate the role that He has assigned to man. The same can be said of man *mutatis mutandis*.

From the commencement of the New Testament Church men and women were full members of it through a common baptism (Acts 1:14; 12:12), and this is confirmed by the many women that Paul included in his greetings to the churches (Rom 16:1,3; 1 Cor 9:5, etc.). The fact that women were to accept the love-headship of their husbands in the created order is no diminution of her dignity any more than Christ’s dignity is diminished in relation to God.

The gender and other differences between men and women arising from the creation, and the unity and equality of the sexes *in Christ* as a result of redemption are two different things, and on different levels, as we shall see. Rather, their distinct God-created genders complement their God-given roles, and make them attractive to one another in a loving relationship.

The equality of the sexes, being “all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), does not imply a theological equality, but refers to the status of being children of God, which men and women equally inherit through baptism. The priority established in the order of creation is a fact that remains unchanged. 1 Cor 14:34 cannot therefore be simply an example of a temporally conditioned judgement about the position of women in the liturgy, but must be a conscious decision of fundamental significance.⁷

⁴ This view was advocated by P. Jewett, *Man As Male And Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 22, 114.

⁵ Paul was aware of this in his advice to married couples in 1 Cor 7:3. This perfect, pre-Fall headship is still operative in all Christian marriages.

⁶ For the significance of this phrase see L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, “Man, Woman and the Angels in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” in *The Creation of Man and Woman*, edited by Gerard P. Luttikhuisen (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 76-92, esp. pp.83-85.

⁷ Article “Woman,” in *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Theology*, ed. J.B. Bauer. 3 vols (London: Sheed & Ward, 1970), III, 985-991, esp. p. 990. See 4.2. below for a fuller treatment of Galatians 3:28.

The conclusion of this work is that God has given different dress-codes to men and women when they appear in worship before Him, either in the formal public worship, or in family worship, or in private devotions.

The dress-codes are different because He has given to man and woman different powers and responsibilities. To Man He has given the authority to lead⁸ his own family.

Because He made man and woman with different purposes in mind He has made Man head of the Woman. As head He has given man the prime responsibility and duty to worship Him in His appointed manner. In fulfilling this headship role the woman is to be a silent, supporting participator.

In Part 1 the theological reasons are set out. Central to this section is the need to show that the terms “head,” “submission” and related terms should be given the meaning they have in the Greek of the New Testament. This is followed by four factors that help to clarify what is meant by the Headship of Man. Part 2 is taken up with eight popular arguments which undermine the theological case set out in Part 1, followed by two minor sections on, the case for a distinctive Christian culture, and compromises made by some evangelicals to the position adopted in this work. It was intended that each objection and its reply should stand alone, consequently there is some unavoidable repetition in the replies. Part 3 sets out the practice of the Early Church until about AD 400 which supports the theological reasons set out in Part 1. Part 4 sets out some recommendations or practical conclusions in the light of the entire presentation.

Following these four parts come three Excursuses and nine Appendices, seven of which examine particular key words in some depth. A special section contains 21 charts illustrative of the theology of the present work. These should be consulted before reading the text.

All females, married or unmarried, have one dress-code. All males, married or unmarried, have one dress-code. The practices relate to the positive authority that God had invested men and women with. They differ in authority and it is *this difference* that the practices speak of, and witness to. This difference is located at the spirit level—the spirit in a male body. Headship is located in the “breath” that was breathed into his body. All males have it by birth. No one is born genderless, but all are born cultureless. The former is determined by God; the latter by man. The former passes imperceptively from gene to gene; the latter passes perceptively from mouth to mouth.

The positive interpretation that Paul gives to the two theological dress-codes (and an uncovered head is as much a conscious act as covering the head) means that a covering on a woman’s head should never be interpreted as a sign that she is under her husband’s authority. This is not how Paul saw it. If Christ voluntarily submits himself to the Father, and man voluntarily submits himself to Christ, then woman should voluntarily submit herself to man. But man’s uncovered head is not a symbol of his submission to Christ. Scripture says his head is to be uncovered because “he is the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7). Likewise woman’s covered head is not a symbol of her submission to man. Scripture says her head is to be covered because she is “the glory of man.”

She is to submit herself to man’s love-headship after the manner of Christ’s submission to the Father’s will, because of the position that has been granted to Man, through his headship, *but the theological practice of covering her head stands for her own positive authority*. It has as much a *positive* significance as the man’s uncovering has. When she puts the covering of her own God-given authority on her head she is acknowledging her station and position in God’s authority structures. The covering must not be re-interpreted solely to remind her that she is under the headship of man. That could give the covering a negative significance in the eyes of some, whereas Paul gives it a positive significance. He calls it “authority.” The different theological dress-codes remind men and women of their place in God’s order, and the duties and privileges that go with that position. The two distinct theological practices speak of a God-ward, not a Man-ward,

⁸ The word ἐπιμελήσεται ‘to take care of’ occurs only three times in the NT, Lk 10:34, 35; 1 Tim 3:5. Paul avoided using the normal terms for rule such as, προϊσθῆναι ‘to rule/maintain’ (8x); βραβεύω ‘to rule’ (1x); ἡγεύομαι ‘have the rule over’ (3x); ἄρχω ‘rule over’ (2x). The idea of *taking care of* brings out the twin ideas of love and control being used for the good of the whole family.

relationship; a vertical, not a horizontal, orientation. Nevertheless, there will be implications for the way men and women fulfil their distinctive roles in God's world.⁹

END OF SECTION

⁹ For a summary statement of this Introduction see the first part of Excursus 1: Critique of John Stott's position.