

Because of the Angels; As Saith the Law: Veiling and Silence of Women in 1 Corinthians 11 and  
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In 1966, a grassroots group of women angered at perceived inequalities in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act formed a group in a hotel room at a conference. This group, made up of 28 women, was the National Organization for Women (NOW), the first grassroots organization of second wave feminism.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to a member named Elizabeth Farians, NOW engaged in religious activism. In 1968, Farians turned her attention to the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular its canonical requirement that women cover their heads during the Mass, especially when approaching the Altar rail.<sup>2</sup> Farians despised the fact that the Roman Catholic Church required this of women, and so in 1968, the NOW task force, under her guidance, called for a, “National Unveiling.”<sup>3</sup> This came to a head in the so called, “Easter Bonnet Rebellion,” on the following Easter. Fifteen women with preposterously huge easter hats approached the Communion rail, removed their hats, and received Communion. Farians referred to this as the, “first church demonstration for women’s rights.”<sup>4</sup>

Two years later in 1970, the *Novus Ordo Missae* was published, a new Catholic Missal or Mass book, in which women were allowed for the first time to serve as lectors. Farians was still unhappy with all the restrictions put on women when serving as lectors, so she ceremoniously cremated a copy of the missal, wrapped the ashes in a pink ribbon, and sent the package to a nearby Cardinal.<sup>5</sup> Two traditional Christian positions

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<sup>1</sup> [A Brief History of Women’s Liberation Movements in America < Literary Hub \(lithub.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Canon Law from 1917 until 1983 required this.

<sup>3</sup> [Elizabeth Farians: Catholic Feminist Pioneer | Feminist Studies in Religion \(fsrinc.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Elizabeth Farians: Catholic Feminist Pioneer | Feminist Studies in Religion \(fsrinc.org\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Elizabeth Farians: Catholic Feminist Pioneer | Feminist Studies in Religion \(fsrinc.org\)](#)

were very closely linked in Farians's mind as offensive and detrimental to the feminist project, namely female head covering and the silence of women in Christian worship.

These two Christian positions are drawn from passages in St. Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34-35. For the sake of this study, particular attention will be given to 1 Corinthians 11:13 which says, "**Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?**" This paper will also focus on Paul's injunction to silence in 1 Corinthians 14:34, "**Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are to be submissive, as the law also says.***"

Many conservative Christian theologians argue that the prescriptions about head covering in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:2-16 are limited to the first century. However, they affirm that prescriptions about female teaching in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34-35 are still applicable. In fact, this interpretation of the relationship between the two passages is older than second wave feminism. As early as 1938, JT Mueller took the same position in a paper entitled, "St. Paul and Women's Status."<sup>6</sup> Mueller's position is that the principle of headship remains, while the custom of head covering does not.<sup>7</sup> This is substantially the same position as the 1985 CTCR document entitled, "Women in the Church."<sup>8</sup> In past debates of the Missouri Synod, and further back, these two sections of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians have been linked together to suggest that if one falls, so does the other, and if one stands, then so should the other.

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<sup>6</sup> Mueller, St. Paul and Women's Status, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> CTCR, Women in the Church, 1985, pages 27-28.

In a 1969 MDiv dissertation entitled, “The History of Women’s Rights in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” one graduate of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Robert Fitzpatrick, noted that at his own time, the question of women’s ordination became alive when at the Denver Convention of 1969, women’ suffrage became acceptable in the Missouri Synod.<sup>9</sup> He also asks an important question about how female silence in the church, a position defended in the history of the Missouri Synod up until the present was affected by an interpretation of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:2-16. Responding to JT Mueller and quoting him, Fitzpatrick writes, “If the, ‘harm done by unveiling is done where the veiling of women is a symbol of her subordinate position,’ cannot the same be said about women’s speaking?”<sup>10</sup> In other words, if Paul urges women to cover their heads during worship in one chapter, but we say that this is culturally limited to the Corinthians, how do we on the other hand say that women’s silence during worship is not culturally limited to the Corinthians?

This paper will argue that both sections of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians still apply for the holy Christian church, and that neither are totally and completely limited to the Corinthian context. It will be argued that there is a distinction, and while it was sinful for the Corinthians to transgress Paul’s injunctions on female head covering, not veiling is not a *sin per se* for women. However, the injunction still stands and applies. Female head covering in the church pertains to *decorum* and good order rather than a question of moral guilt. The paper will provide witnesses from church history, including Abraham Calov, who took this position. In explaining the way this injunction uniquely applies to

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<sup>9</sup> Fitzpatrick, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Fitzpatrick, 19.

the church in Corinth, namely the first century gift of prophecy which confirmed the ministry of the Apostles, we will follow Abraham Calov's answer to the supposed contradiction of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Finally, the paper will commend the godly and laudable custom of women covering their head in church as one of many godly *mores* which can aid the church's catechesis concerning the orders of creation, an answer to the confusion that plagues our contemporary world and would seek to flatten everything and everyone.

## **Testimonies from Church History**

Regarding the church's historic position on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34-35, it is easiest to proceed chronologically. In a very concise study, Phillip Brown demonstrates that the church fathers nearly universally agree that St. Paul's words about head coverings still applied.<sup>11</sup> The earliest extant reference to 1 Corinthians 11 comes from Irenaeus (130-202), who only speaks about it briefly. In talking about how the Valentinians use 1 Corinthians 11 as a proof-text, he writes in *Against Heresies*, Book One, "In the same Epistle, ... [Paul] says, 'A woman ought to have a veil upon her head, because of the angels.'"<sup>12</sup> While Irenaeus here is talking about how the Valentinians use the passage, he does not dispute that in this epistle St. Paul says that a woman ought to have a veil on her head. There is a much stronger statement from Clement of Alexandria (153-217) who writes the following,

"Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Brown, *Survey of the History of Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Survey of the History of Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, page 1-2.

modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.”<sup>13</sup>

While Clement’s application of 1 Corinthians 11 arguably focuses more on modesty than on headship, nevertheless it cannot be argued that Clement believes women ought to wear a material veil on their head at the time of prayer.

From 300 to 400 AD, Brown notes that attention shifted to the masculine portion of 1 Corinthians 11 due to monastics growing out their hair to emphasize their holiness. Citing Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Basil, and Augustine, Brown makes an important point about how hair length factors into the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11. Yet Augustine, writing at this time, also argues that women should veil at the time of prayer. He writes in *On the Holy Trinity*,

“The man is the image of God, and on that account removes the covering from his head, which he warns the woman to use ... She is instructed for this very reason to cover her head, which he is forbidden to do because he is the image of God”<sup>14</sup>

Brown concludes his study of the early church fathers with these words, “All commentators understood it to be universally authoritative and normative.”<sup>15</sup>

While it would be laborious to discuss every place where the Reformers discuss female head covering, several important passages must be mentioned. First, the passage is discussed in the Lutheran Confessions. The 28<sup>th</sup> Article of the Augsburg Confession says this in paragraphs 53-57,

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *Survey of the History of Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Survey of the History of Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

“What, then, are we to think of the Sunday and like rites in the house of God? To this we answer that it is lawful for bishops or pastors to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the Church, not that thereby we should merit grace or make satisfaction for sins, or that consciences be bound to judge them necessary services, and to think that it is a sin to break them without offense to others. So Paul ordains, 1 Cor. 11:5, that women should cover their heads in the congregation, 1 Cor. 14:30, that interpreters be heard in order in the church, etc. It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquillity, so far that one do not offend another, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion, 1 Cor. 14:40; comp. Phil. 2:14 . But so that consciences be not burdened to think that they are necessary to salvation, or to judge that they sin when they break them without offense to others; as no one will say that a woman sins who goes out in public with her head uncovered provided only that no offense be given. Of this kind is the observance of the Lord’s Day, Easter, Pentecost, and like holy-days and rites.

Several things that are mentioned here will be maintained by Lutheran Theologians from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Firstly, there is a connection between 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14, whether the theologian focuses on the aspect of good order in 1 Corinthians 14:30, or the relationship between women prophesying in chapter 11:5 and 14:34-35. Secondly, Lutherans will affirm, following paragraph 56, that women who do not cover their heads are not *per se* sinning, while clearly maintaining that Paul is speaking here of a material veil.<sup>16</sup> The result is that many Lutherans have historically argued that women veiling in church is a good custom, based on an apostolic command, which is in itself more appropriate than not veiling, but that it is not *per se* sinful to go unveiled.

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<sup>16</sup> German/Latin text of paragraph 56- *ihr Haupt sollen decken/ velent capita*. The English of the Triglotta follows the Latin text (*mulieres*) and so says, “women,” while the German word Weib could mean woman, but many times means wife.

What does Martin Luther, the blessed Reformer say about this? In an interesting book titled *Martin Luther on Women*, there are three quotations where Dr. Luther speaks to this issue. Luther writes the following,

“Women, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife” [[Eph 5:22-23](#)]. Again to the Colossians in the third chapter [3:18]. Because of this, the wife has not been created out of the head, so that she shall not rule over her husband, but be subject and obedient to him. For that reason the wife wears a headdress, that is, the veil on her head, as St. Paul writes in 1. Corinthians in the eleventh chapter, that she is not free but under obedience to her husband.<sup>17</sup>

And,

Otherwise and aside from that, the wife should put on a veil, just as a pious wife is duty-bound to help bear her husband’s accident, illness, and misfortune on account of the evil flesh.<sup>18</sup>

Finally,

“Fur and head coverings are women’s most attractive and honorable and most genuine and most necessary adornment...”<sup>19</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it does not seem that women restricted this understanding of head covering to church, but to public life in general. For this reason, it is very difficult to find any artistic rendering of Katie Luther that shows her with uncovered hair. Others have noted that the same is the case for Emilie Walther.

Next, we must turn our attention to the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, Philip Melancthon. His words about head coverings are extreme to the modern ear, but

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<sup>17</sup> A sermon on marriage, 15 January 1525 WA XVII/I – Quoted from Susan C. Karant-Nunn & Merry E. Wiesner – *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) page 95

<sup>18</sup> Weimar edition of Luther’s works – Table Talk 6 (No 6567 p67) – Quoted from Susan C. Karant-Nunn & Merry E. Wiesner – *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) page 31

<sup>19</sup> WA TR IV, no 4090, page 129 – Quoted from Susan C. Karant-Nunn & Merry E. Wiesner – *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) page 30



anyone who wants to treat this topic as the reformers thought of it cannot omit his opinions and expressions given in his two commentaries on 1 Corinthians. Philip Melancthon briefly touches on female head covering in his *Annotations on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*. He writes, ““But this is the point of the argument: a woman is a servant, therefore she should cover her head, but a man has no need to since he is free.”<sup>20</sup>

Melancthon’s other commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians (*Argumentum et brevis explicatio prioris epistolae ad Corinthios*), contains more about this topic. Melancthon takes the position that nature adds long hair as a covering to the woman to signify that she should be covered more, because she ought to appear less often in the sight of people.<sup>21</sup> Melancthon concludes, “Therefore a woman should be veiled,” (*ergo mulier sit velata*).<sup>22</sup> Melancthon seems to firmly take the position that women ought to be veiled in public spaces, whether church assemblies or not. He continues, “the woman does not teach in the public assembly, neither is she a political governess nor a woman soldier, and so in a public meeting she ought to be veiled.”<sup>23</sup> However, he does refer to her activities in the church, and there, as argued above, he brings the conversation back to good order. After speaking about how men who carry out public life with covered heads

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<sup>20</sup> 7 Philipp Melancthon, *Annotations on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), p. 117.

<sup>21</sup> “*Nam natura comam prolixam mulieri addidit, et significant magis eam tegendam esse, quia minus debet venire in conspectu populi.*” *Argumentum et brevis explicatio prioris epistolae ad Corinthios*, in *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1848), vol. 15, page 1118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> “*Mulier non docet in publico congressu, nec est gubernatrix politica nec praeliatrix: ideo in publico conventu sit velata.*” *Ibid.* page 1119.

do not serve good order, he writes, “On the contrary, woman deforms her head, if she is not veiled, because she also does not preserve order.”<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, Lutherans only subscribe unconditionally to three writings of Melanchthon. These are the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. Nevertheless, these comments from Melanchthon on head covering help to explain the background for why he specifically says in the Augsburg Confession that it is not a sin to go about in public with an uncovered head (*In publicum non velato/ mit bloßem Haupt der Leute ausgeht*). Melanchthon only in a peripheral way connects the silence of women in 1 Corinthians 14 with the veiling of 1 Corinthians 11 by saying that it would be ridiculous for men, who are dedicated to public oratory, to cover their heads while doing so. He writes, “So in the action of oration, if he should speak veiled, it would be ridiculous. For the action is dominated by the face and in the eyes. Rightly therefore is it written: He deforms his head, even Christ.”<sup>25</sup> This should reinforce that for Melanchthon, women prophesying with heads covered was an exception and unique, as normally public speaking with a veil would be counterproductive and ridiculous. For Paul and the Corinthians it was meant to acknowledge that even in the midst of their limited prophesying, the order of creation was never undermined.

I would argue that Philip goes beyond what 1 Corinthians 11 actually says, namely that women should have their heads covered, “when praying or prophesying.” However,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. page 1119.

<sup>25</sup> “*Sic orationis actio, si diceret velatus, ridicula esset. Actio enim dominatur in vultu et in oculis. Recte igitur scriptum est: Deformat caput, se et Christum.*” Ibid. page 1119.

his words should impress upon us how feminism and egalitarianism have so colored our exegesis that his words sound monstrous. This is the case even though the mature Melancthon has the reputation among Conservative Lutherans of capitulating to political pressure and watering down Christian doctrine. Perhaps the time has come not to simply bully Melanchthon's cowardice but to look in the mirror and ask if we haven't done the same on the topic of women and the church. When it comes to male headship and female submission, are we spiritual Philippists, or *Gnesio*, that is, genuine Lutherans?

The next orthodox Lutheran to be examined is Abraham Calov. As the description for our conference said, he was recognized as a fiercely orthodox theologian, whose written works include a commentary on the Bible called the *Biblia Illustrata*. Calov, like Luther and Melanchthon, acknowledges that the church continued this custom and grounded it in the prescription of Paul. Calov writes, commenting on 1 Corinthians 11:6 "Let the head be covered: Namely in the church, whose custom has been retained from the prescription of Paul."<sup>26</sup> Calov was not afraid to acknowledge that the precise character of the covering would change due to time and culture, and that there was a unique impetus for this in the Greco-Roman context. He writes, "However, the Apostle does not prescribe a fixed and unchangeable rite (*certum et immutabilem ritum*) to all the churches, but rather, he teaches something that was especially fitting for the Corinthians and which in itself seems more decorous."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>" Operto sit capite: in Ecclesia scilicet, qui mos ex praescripto Pauli retentus." Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata Tomus II*, 352.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata Tomus II*, 353.

Calov also teaches Christian freedom in this area, acknowledging that he permitted women to be in church with uncovered heads.<sup>28</sup> This is spoken of by way of permission, not command. He maintains, “If women are willing to be veiled elsewhere, then certainly in the church such should be veiled, where things worn with all modesty (*summa cum verecundia*) are fitting.”<sup>29</sup> Calov sees a connection between 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. Namely, that women are as a rule, forbidden to teach publicly in the church, except for the provisional, immediate, particular mandates given to specific women in salvation history. He writes, “Therefore, the fact that Paul forbids women to perform the duties of teaching in 14:28ff is to be understood with this exception, except they should have a particular mandate of God.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, Deborah, Annah, or even Mary Magdalene are obvious exceptions to the general prohibition on women speaking, because they were given a specific message to bring, they were called by God immediately, and their public speaking was limited to this particular message. Calov’s explanation of what Paul means by, “because of the Angels,” bears mentioning. Rather than seeing this as a reference to Bishops, or to the Nephilim of Genesis 6, Calov suggests that this continues Paul’s argument from the Order of Creation. Women ought to consider that Angels are prior to men and women in the order of creation, and that they are not ashamed to veil their faces before God. Therefore, women ought not be ashamed to cover their heads in recognition of the fact that men precede them in the order of creation. If they will not do this, they should do so because of the angels, who

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<sup>28</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata Tomus II*, 355.

<sup>29</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata Tomus II*, 353.

<sup>30</sup> *Quare quod Paulus vetat foeminas docendi munere fungi infra XIV 28 Id intellegendum cum exceptione, nisi speciale Dei mandatum habeant.* Above cited work, 352.

precede both men and women.<sup>31</sup> Calov dispels another modern myth surrounding 1 Corinthians 11. Namely, the clause, “we have no such custom,” of verse 16. Calov insists that this custom (*consuetudine*) is not veiling, but rather contentiousness. As will be discussed later, veiling falls better under the category of *mores*, as Calov uses it.

Lucas Osiander (1534-1604) was an important orthodox Lutheran interpreter of Scripture, not to be confused with Andreas Osiander (his father), the chief opponent condemned in FC III. His simple commentary on the entire Bible was very influential. He writes, “A Woman should not dwell in the public congregation of the church with an unveiled head (*capite non velato*): lest she should seem to exercise dominion and authority (*dominium et imperium*) over her husband.”<sup>32</sup> Osiander claims that in addition to headship, Paul adds another reason, namely, “public and civic honesty,” which Osiander claims is the thing that, “nature itself prescribes.”<sup>33</sup> He states that women prophesied in the early church because for a little while there remained those unique gifts of the Holy Spirit (*singularia dona Spiritus Sancti*) which also took effect of some pious women (*piis quibusdam mulieribus*).<sup>34</sup> Regarding the silence enjoined on women in 1 Corinthians 14, Osiander says this about verse 34, “Let your women keep silence in the churches. They should not presume to teach publicly, nor to discuss the

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<sup>31</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata Tomus II*, 353-354.

<sup>32</sup> Lucas Osiander, *Epistolae S. Pauli Apostoli Omnes quotquot extant iuxta veterem seu vulgatam translationem*. 1583, 293.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

business of religion,” (*de negotio religionis conferre*).<sup>35</sup> He claims that exceptions in Holy Writ, such as Deborah, Anna, etc. do not take away the general rule.<sup>36</sup>

Two final related points must be raised from Osiander. Regarding 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11, Osiander writes,

“It is not in itself a sin (*per se peccatum*) for a woman to be veiled or to not be veiled (*velatam esse mulierem, vel non velatam*): but it is a sin, to do those things in the church of God which are indecorous, and which fight against good order, give offense to the neighbor, and which offer an opportunity of slander to the adversaries,” (*adversariis calumniandi ansam praebent*).<sup>37</sup>

He makes a related, important point about 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14. He writes, “Therefore in the church it is necessary to observe not only what is *per se* licit or not licit: but also what is appropriate or not appropriate, so that we may avoid this (the inappropriate) and seek after that (the appropriate).”<sup>38</sup> Osiander’s words here should be repeated every time we have a discussion about women’s service in the church. In the church, we do not only consider what is *per se* licit, but also what is fitting, what is appropriate. Hence the Apostle’s words, “Judge for yourselves, is it fitting/appropriate/comely (*πρέπον*) for a women to pray uncovered to God?,” (1 Corinthians 11:13). Osiander affirms Christian freedom and nowhere says that a woman must cover her head in order to be saved. However, we don’t only concern ourselves with this chief doctrine of the Christian faith. In the church, we also consider what’s appropriate, what is fitting. A woman ought to keep silence in the church and not teach

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>38</sup> “*Quare in Ecclesia non tantum quid per se licitum sit, nec ne: sed etiam quid decorum vel indecorum sit, videre oportet; ut hoc vitimus, illud vero sequamur.*” Ibid. 333.

or have authority. Is it in itself, *per se* sinful for women to vote in the Christian congregation? What about teach confirmation? What about giving children's messages? Often, we run immediately to what is licit or not licit, and this allows us to step right up to the line of false doctrine or unbiblical practice.

We ought to consider not only what is *per se* licit, but also what is most fitting and best undergirds the teaching of Holy Scripture. In many Lutheran churches in the United States and throughout the world, the road to Women's ordination is built with a series of seemingly innocuous new things that women can do in teaching capacities or new carve outs where the order of creation does not apply. We also should recognize that common objections to seemingly absolute statements in the Scripture have been dealt with by our fathers. Regarding the question of women singing in church considering 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, we can look to the Weimar Bibelwerk, an important 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran study bible. The Bibelwerk says this, "they certainly may join in singing, but not preach," (*sie mögen wohl mit singen, aber nicht predigen*).<sup>39</sup>

At this point, it would be valuable to move to resources that are closer to our own day that address these topics. These books are all in English and are probably available in your church's library or your pastor's study. First is George Stoeckhardt's *Exegetical Lectures on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Stoeckhardt was one of the finest interpreters of Holy Scripture in the early Missouri Synod. Stoeckhardt has this to say regarding verse 6,

"If a women refuses to cover her head, she would indicate thereby that she claims emancipation from the authority of her husband. However, any such claim would not only imply a breach of commonly received rules of

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<sup>39</sup> Weimar Bibelwerk, 1720, 745.

etiquette, but also definitely an infraction of the Lord's Natural Order. Obviously, the case here is assumed that such a woman also prays or prophesies in the public assembly of the congregation. To make a rule of such practice he later forbids as a moral offense. Here he merely would forbid a woman's appearance with an uncovered head in public worship as a social impropriety, while in those days, it was even understood as a moral wrong. If a woman insists on appearing in a public meeting without head covering, she puts herself into a class with those women who have their head shorn or shaven. These were in those days harlots. Surely, a decent woman would not want to be classified with loose women and harlots. Therefore, godly women will always want to appear properly with a veiled head."<sup>40</sup>

Stoeckhardt maintains that uncovering the head is not in itself a sin, but that to cover the head is in itself, *per se*, more appropriate for women. This seems to be a similar argument that Osiander makes. He acknowledges that there were specific circumstances for the Corinthians, yet he maintains that the passage is still in force for us today as an injunction of propriety. Christian liberty must always be maintained and the practice should not be forced on anyone. In conclusion, he writes, "we must not elevate good custom to the level of divine precept."<sup>41</sup>

Worship resources published by Concordia Publishing House in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century confirm this interpretation. In *Liturgy and Agenda* (1916), a Liturgical resource created initially for the English Synod and then district with the help of W.H.T. Dau, we find such an interpretation. The foreword states, "Evangelical freedom from old ceremonialism does not mean license and extreme individualism. There may be, especially in the joint public worship of Christians,

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<sup>40</sup> Georg Stoeckhardt, *Exegetical Lectures on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 68.



things that are unbecoming. (See 1 Cor. 11:14; Col. 2:16ff).”<sup>42</sup> Which particular verse is Liturgy and Agenda making reference to? Interestingly, one that does not have to do with women. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:14 says, “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” Although it cites a passage relating to men from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11, it would hardly do interpretive violence to suggest that if one aspect of Paul’s injunctions concerning head coverings were still in effect they would all need to be. Although to be fair, in practice, that is exactly what the modern Christian congregation does. It acts as though the prescriptions for men are still in effect, insisting that men remove their hats, but ignoring the prescriptions for women. According to Liturgy and Agenda, 1 Corinthians 11’s statements about what is fitting and appropriate for public worship remain in effect for the New Testament church.

The Lutheran Liturgy (1955), altar book for the Lutheran Hymnal (1941) includes this statement in its general rubrics, under the heading, “Headgear for Women.” It says, “It is a laudable custom, based upon a Scriptural injunction (1 Corinthians 11:3-15) for women to wear an appropriate head covering in church, especially at the time of divine service.”<sup>43</sup> This statement is quoted favorably in Paul HD Lang’s book published in 1964, “What an Altar Guild Should Know.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps a minor point, but worthy to note here, is that up until the present day, many Lutheran commentaries dispute that the covering which Paul speaks of is

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<sup>42</sup> Liturgy and Agenda, III

<sup>43</sup> TLL, 427.

<sup>44</sup> What An Altar Guild Should Know, 17.

the woman's hair. RCH Lenski calls this argument, "Specious."<sup>45</sup> Gregory Lockwood in the Concordia Commentary of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians likewise dismisses a similar argument from Richard Hayes in footnote 25 of his 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11 section. He writes, "However, this interpretation in terms of bringing one's wayward head under control seems unlikely and trite by comparison with the traditional interpretation in terms of a shawl as a symbol of authority."<sup>46</sup>

Kretzmann writes in his Popular Commentary,

"So important does the apostle consider the maintenance and observance of the relation between the sexes as fixed by God that he wants also the external sign of the woman's auxiliary position retained: For this reason the woman is obliged to have "power on her head"; she should wear the token, or emblem of her status, the veil, as denoting the power which she derives from the man, and that on account of the angels."<sup>47</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Citations have been marshalled, quite obnoxiously perhaps, in order to establish that the recent resurgence of female head covering during the Divine Service in our churches is not cultish behavior. It is not a despising of women, but rather a recognition that we are people of unclean lips and we live amidst a people of unclean lips. So infected are we with the false teachings of feminism and egalitarianism, that now our culture faces their unavoidable metastasis, transgenderism. We need bodily preparation which is indeed a fine outward training. We need exactly what Calov and others have classified female head covering as, *mores*.

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<sup>45</sup> Lenski, 1 Corinthians, 449.

<sup>46</sup> Lockwood, 374.

<sup>47</sup> Kretzmann, NT II, 140.

Although the term *mores* is etymologically connected to the English term, “moral,” I am using *mores* in a softer sense that allows for some variation and freedom, while still upholding civic righteousness, good order, and propriety. Masculine and feminine *mores* help guide us through tumultuous times in which everything is up for grabs, not totally unlike the late 1960s in which so many of these *mores* were overturned. How did those sexual revolutionaries express their dissent? Men grew out their hair. Women participated in a national unveiling in 1968. At this same time in American Lutheranism, it seemed as though long-standing convictions were being reexamined. Women were granted the franchise in the Missouri Synod in 1969. The first female pastor in the ALC was ordained in 1970. This is not a case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, as if setting aside female head coverings led to women pastors. And yet as we’ve seen, Lutheran theologians throughout the centuries consistently linked Paul’s admonitions to women to cover their heads in chapter 11 to his refusal of women to teach in chapter 14. If *mores* were purposefully transgressed in order to fight against God’s created order, then a return to the *mores* of our fathers, and more importantly of the Bible, could help impart some of their wisdom.

So is this a simple appeal to nostalgia? Will next year’s paper argue that we must return to separating men and women in the congregation? Or that worship in German inherently prevents Transgenderism? Probably not. These are *mores* that were not only grounded in history but also based on scriptural injunctions. If the word of God is useful (2 Timothy 3:16), then any *mores* we would have cannot go wrong by following the text of Scripture. Especially if the contemporary application of those texts for the church were only broadly disregarded following a cultural movement such as 2<sup>nd</sup> wave

feminism, which obviously had ulterior motives. This paper is simply a plea to re-examine two unchangeable principles in Holy Scripture, and their attending but often neglected customs (*mores*), and to observe them as fully as we can in congregational life, staying clear of both license and legalism. For example, St. Paul says that women ought to ask their husbands questions at home about the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 14:35). I suspect that this scriptural injunction is not sincerely inculcated in the people of God, but that most people view themselves as isolated individuals who interact with the teaching of their Pastor in a direct and personal way. This is not inherently wrong, or *per se* sinful, as if we should kick a woman out who asks questions in Bible class. However, have we fully understood this passage if our exegesis of, “let them ask their husbands at home,” is limited to, “women can’t be pastors,” ?

What about 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:2-16? Is there any aspect of this teaching which St. Paul says is built into nature that we should emphasize? Why is it that men to this day don’t wear hats in church if these passages are totally culturally conditioned? Even if we granted that head coverings occupied a more common role in 1<sup>st</sup> century Corinth, that would only strengthen their role as a theological, “symbol of authority,” for us today. A Christian woman who covers her head in worship in 2024 is not riding any cultural inertia to do so. She is not keeping some fad or trend. Rather, a conviction about the Word of God and her place in the order of creation has led her to this decision. A woman’s decision to quietly learn God’s word and ask her husband questions at home is born out of a desire to not only hear the word of God but also keep it. She follows the example of St. Mary and stores these things in her heart (Luke 2:19). In a world that tells

us men can be women and women can be men, we ought to look back to God's word and see who it tells us to be and what that means practically in our lives.

To be sure, we can make a distinction between women preaching or teaching in the church and women veiling or not veiling. St. Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach,(1 Timothy 2:12)" and appeals to the Law (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). JT Mueller is correct to note that there is no corresponding, "I do not permit a women to pray with uncovered head."<sup>48</sup> This is because veiling or not veiling is not *per se* sinful. And yet, Paul does appeal to angels and nature. It can become sinful due to secondary considerations, as happened with the Corinthians because of the added issue of prophesying. Yet, in 11:13, Paul is clear to omit prophecy when he speaks of what nature teaches. He writes, "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" This is the custom, or *more*, that remains for the church today. Veiling as a custom is retained by the church from the injunction of Paul, yet violation of it is a violation of good order, propriety, not a sin in itself. Paul's very question, "is it proper?" reflects this. Due to secondary circumstances, at Corinth, a woman's refusal to cover her head could mean that she is dishonoring her head, her husband, but it doesn't mean that in the action itself. Both principle and custom should be upheld and encouraged. We need not separate doctrine and practice. The consistent voice of the Lutheran church has been that women ought not be teachers in the church and that female Christian head covering is a laudable practice, based on a Scriptural injunction. Its revival among us should be celebrated as a clear confession of God's created order, that He has created us male and female and that we are different. To those who oppose

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<sup>48</sup> Mueller, 19.

it, the following question must be seriously pondered. Does animosity toward this practice arise, not because it doesn't mean anything to modern western man? Or, are people even within the church opposed to this practice because it actually does mean something, and it's something that chaffs against the spirit of our age?