

# The Practice Of Headcoverings In Public Worship

Issued by the Reformed Presbytery In North America

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## Introduction

It is our sincere desire to lead the people of God under our care in the ways of Christ that has led Presbytery to issue this report concerning headcoverings. We have carefully and prayerfully studied the issue from both Scripture and history. We now urge you, dear brothers and sisters, who are under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery In North America to read this position paper with a dispassionate and objective spirit, seeking to understand as clearly as possible, the reasons given for Presbytery's conclusions. This report is not intended to offer an exhaustive amount of information on the subject of headcoverings in public worship, but rather is intended to give a summary of the major principles which have guided Presbytery to its present position.

## Preliminary Considerations

It may be asked, "Why is a report on headcoverings in public worship needed at the present time?"

First, there may be issues concerning which the Presbytery has not, as yet, officially adopted a position, but sees it as necessary to do so for the good of the church. This is true with regard to the headcovering in public worship. Prior to the formation of the Reformed Presbytery In North America (in August 2000), the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton had for a number of years practiced and taught the unalterable moral use of the headcovering for women in public worship. Approximately three years ago, the Session moved away from the position that headcoverings were an unalterable moral practice to a position of uncertainty while yet practicing the use of the headcovering in public worship. With the formation of the Presbytery, the distinctive teachings and practices of the Session as an inferior court necessarily came under the judicial review of the whole Presbytery. Such a review was initiated concerning headcoverings, and this report constitutes the judicial conclusions of Presbytery.

The second reason why this report on the headcovering in public worship is deemed necessary by Presbytery is due to increased information that has come to its attention which addresses the issue before us. When greater light on a subject becomes available, our duty before the Lord is to reform. Not to do so would be a grievous sin. Thus, Presbytery considers itself bound by duty to Christ and to His church to submit this report for the clearing of its conscience.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Philippians 3:15-16).

Thirdly, Presbytery's decision to issue this report involves the significant issue of ecclesiastical authority. God alone has absolute authority. All authority received by man (whether in the familial, ecclesiastical, or civil sphere) is delegated by God and limited by God's Word. Since Jesus Christ is the only head of the Church, the officers of the Church must be careful that they do not

exceed the lawful boundaries of their limited authority in their use of the keys of the kingdom by imposing ordinances or practices upon the people of God in public worship which are not clearly warranted by Scripture. To do so is tyranny. For Christ's authority can never be used against the truth, but only in defense of the truth.

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth (2 Corinthians 13:8).

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also (*The Westminster Confession Of Faith*, 20:2).

## **The Plan And Scope Of This Report**

First, the Presbytery, as a covenanted judicatory in moral continuity with earlier faithful courts, will examine the position stated and upheld by these covenanted judicatories as declared in our subordinate documents, along with the private writings of faithful covenanted ministers. Second, we will reference the determinations and declarations made by other non-covenanted, yet faithful reformed judicatories and ministers. Third, having considered the practice and interpretation of Scripture by faithful courts and ministers as it relates to the headcovering, we consider their position in the light of our own study of Scripture.

## **1. The Subordinate Standards**

When approaching a passage of Scripture, it is particularly important to interpret that passage with a clear understanding of the context in which it appears, as well as to interpret that passage in consistency with the rest of God's revelation in Scripture. In our judgment, the heart of the controversy concerning headcoverings in public worship turns upon whether the statements of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 were based upon cultural considerations or upon some other more permanent, moral principle.

In examining our subordinate standards, the critical question in our minds was this: Did our covenanted judicatories understand 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to teach that the headcovering was a moral sacred significant sign commanded by God to be used in all generations and countries; or did they affirm the contrary, and believe this passage to be teaching that the headcovering was cultural, a mere circumstance of worship which was common to human actions and societies and, therefore, alterable?

We believe it is certain that our covenanted church courts interpreted 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 with a cultural presupposition and that they believed the headcovering to be cultural and, therefore, alterable according to the prevailing national custom of that time. Our proof for this conclusion immediately follows.

### **A. The Approved Practice Of The Headcovering In Scotland (1560-1638)**

First, we will demonstrate that men (at least, and most likely the women as well) ordinarily covered their heads during the time when a sermon was being preached and that these

same men" ordinarily" uncovered their heads when the Lord's Supper was being served. Demonstrating this to be the ordinary practice within the Church of Scotland will serve to prove that our covenanted General Assemblies and all inferior courts did not understand Paul to be teaching that men were always to remain uncovered in a public worship service. It, therefore, follows that if our covenanted judicatories ordinarily allowed men to be covered for sermons and uncovered for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, then they interpreted the covering and the uncovering of the head in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as a cultural custom within Corinth at the time in which Paul wrote.

Speaking upon the subject of different signs to be distinguished (namely, natural, customable, and voluntary), George Gillespie, minister of the Church of Scotland states the following concerning one example of a customable sign:

Customable Signs; and **so the uncovering of the head, which of old was a sign of preeminence, has, through custom, become a sign of subjection** (*Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, Naphtali Press, p. 247, emphases added).

Secondly, customary signs have likewise place in divine service; for so a man coming into one of our churches in time of public worship, **if he sees the hearers covered, he knows by this customary sign that sermon has begun** (*Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, Naphtali Press, p. 248, emphases added).

From the above we learn that the Scottish Church "customarily" (i.e. according to their cultural custom) did not cover their heads until the preaching began. We also note that the sign of uncovering the head, according to Gillespie, had radically changed its meaning over time in Scotland. Of old in Paul's time, it was a sign of preeminence, and now in Gillespie's time "custom" had altered its significance to mean just the opposite (i.e. subjection). This alone is proof that Scotland's ministers did not deem the headcovering to be an unalterable sign (for if it were unalterable, then why did they accept the changed meaning of the sign?), and that they necessarily understood Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 within a cultural context.

Furthermore, we learn from that which is cited below that the Scottish Church purposely removed their headcoverings when it was time to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Samuel Rutherford proves that the Church of Scotland ordinarily removed the headcovering when receiving the Lord's Supper when he states:

**Though therefore we receive the supper of the Lord uncovered**, no man can conclude from thence Adoration of the Elements, as we do from kneeling conclude the same, as we shall here for all bodily worship or expression of our affection to means of graces (though these means be but creatures) is not Adoration properly either of God, or of these means, it is Lawful to tremble at the word, and for Josiah to weep before the book of the Law read (*The Divine Right of Church Government*, Still Waters Revival Books, pp. 89, 90, emphases added).

In his *Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, George Gillespie answers an objection raised by an Anglican bishop. Though the objection is primarily directed to the question of reverence and adoration of the sacraments, we use the following citation as a second witness to prove that the Church of Scotland ordinarily practiced the removal of headcoverings at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Gillespie states:

Those who speak more plainly than Bishop Lindsey, do here object to us, that reverence is due to the sacrament, and that we ourselves do reverence it **when we**

**sit uncovered at the receiving of it** (*Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, Naphtali Press, p. 217, emphases added).

In his answer, Gillespie does not deny that they uncovered their heads at the receiving of the sacrament. To the contrary, he explains why it was done, and how it, in no way was intended to be an adoration of the elements of bread and wine, but instead merely a reverencing of them. For all those who might be interested to read his extended explanation, please note pages 218 and 219 in Gillespie's *Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*.

We do not presently wish to enter into the merits or demerits of uncovering the head at the receiving of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as that is a separate question from that which we intend to analyze by this Scottish practice. What we do wish to point out is the manner in which this covenanted church approached the whole matter of the headcovering in light of what is taught in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In Scotland during her best and purest times, it is historically certain that men (at least, and most likely women as well) customarily wore a headcovering during the time that sermons were preached and that it was a practice accepted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It is in no way arguable that this practice was contrary to the will of the General Assembly, as we have records of all the Acts of General Assembly from that time, and no censure or controversy is mentioned in regard to this practice. The same is true for the practice of removing the headcovering when receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These conclusions being certain, we must ask the following question: Since Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:4 states that, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head," and again in verse 7 states, "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head"—Which contextual presupposition and understanding would the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland apply to the text of 1 Corinthians 11 in order to allow men to wear headcoverings during the sermon, and then to remove them as an act of reverence during the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper? A universal, unalterable interpretation of the headcovering in 1 Corinthians 11 or a cultural, alterable interpretation? Seeing that both the sermon and the sacrament are acts of worship administered at the time of assembled public worship, is it conceivable that the covenanted judicatory of the Church of Scotland understood headcovering as a sacred significant sign that was unalterable? Rather, is it not certain that they deemed the headcovering to be a cultural custom which could be altered?

We conclude that it is incontestable as demonstrated by their own practice that the General Assembly understood and interpreted 1 Corinthians 11:4, 7 with the presupposition that Paul was speaking from a cultural perspective.

Carefully note that Rutherford interprets the headcovering to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 11 as a national or cultural sign rather than as a universal or moral sign.

**Uncovering the head, seemeth to be little older then Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians.** The learned Salmasius thinketh it but **a National sign of honour, no ways universally received**: but certainly is not Adoration: **Though therefore we receive the supper of the Lord uncovered**, no man can conclude from thence Adoration of the Elements, as we shall here for all bodily worship or expression of our affection to means of graces (though these means be but creatures) is not Adoration properly either of God, or of these means, it is Lawful to tremble at the word, and for Josiah to weep before the book of the Law read, and for the Martyrs to kiss the stake as the Instrument by which they glorified God, in dying for the truth: all these things being Objectam quo, and means by which they

conveyed their worship to the true God, and natural and Lawful expressions of their affection to God: For uncovering the head, it is a sort of veneration or reverence, not adoration; and Paul insinuateth so much when he saith, 1 Cor 11:4. "Every man praying and prophesying having his head covered, dishonoreth his head": But it is not his meaning that he dishonoreth God. **The Jews to this day, as of old, used not uncovering the head as a sign of honour: But by the contrary, covering was a sign of honour. If therefore the Jews, being made a visible Church, shall receive the Lords Supper, and Pray and Prophecy with covered heads, men would judge it no dishonoring of their head, or not of disrespect of the ordinances of God: Though Paul having regard to National custom in Corinth, did so esteem it** (*The Divine Right of Church Government*, Still Waters Revival Books, pp. 89, 90, emphases added).

Rutherford is publicly teaching that Paul had regard to the national custom of Corinth. He states that "national custom" is the reason why Paul did esteem a man's head being covered as that which dishonored his head. This covenanted minister was not disciplined nor deposed for teaching this truth to the church at large, but rather was deemed one of the Second Reformation's brightest lights. If this was false doctrine (as some suppose), then why was Rutherford neither disciplined nor corrected for his public error? Surely some members of the General Assembly read these public statements. In our judgment, Rutherford was not disciplined because the Church of Scotland agreed with him. They too, understood that Paul (in 1 Corinthians 11) was speaking from a cultural context.

This is also consistent with *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6) which states:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; **and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed** (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:6, emphases added).

One of the proof texts used for this section of the Confession is:

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him (1 Corinthians 11:13, 14)?

By the use of this proof text, it is certain that not only did the Westminster Assembly place the headcovering within the realm of that which is circumstantial to worship (and thus alterable) as opposed to that which is an unalterable sacred significant action, but also that the Church of Scotland (who judicially ratified and covenanted to uphold this Confession) viewed the headcovering as a circumstance of worship.

In addition to this, the fact that *The Directory For The Publick Worship Of God* does not even mention headcoverings in public worship should not escape our attention. The Directory's primary concern is to set out what God requires in worship. If the framers and upholders of this Directory deemed the headcovering in public worship to be a mandatory

and unalterable sacred significant sign, then their omission of it from the Directory is a very serious error. Issues of far less relative significance are included in this carefully written Directory. We, therefore, conclude that the omission of any direction concerning headcoverings may reasonably be offered as proof that the Assembly did not authoritatively require headcoverings in all circumstances of public worship nor in all nations at all times.

Finally, after perusing all the Acts of General Assembly from 1560 to 1649 inclusive, all records of the Commission to the General Assembly which we have in our possession, and all Presbyterian and Session records available to us, we have not found one instance where a man was censured for covering his head in worship, nor a case where a woman was disciplined for uncovering her head in worship (although we know that men covered their heads and women uncovered their heads at certain points in public worship). Though this is an argument from silence, we deem this fact noteworthy and unexplainable, if, indeed, men must at all times be uncovered in worship and women must at all times be covered in worship.

This leaves no doubt in our minds that these covenanted church courts within Scotland consistently interpreted the uncovering of men and the covering of women in 1 Corinthians 11 with the contextual presupposition that Paul was addressing the cultural practice within Corinth. In order for us, as a Presbytery, to censure the practice and interpretation of the covenanted General Assembly, and to accuse them of serious error, we must necessarily produce conclusive proof that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not to be interpreted culturally. We do not believe that the Church of Scotland was in error on this point. To the contrary, we believe that they correctly ascertained the meaning of this passage of Scripture and ruled headcoverings to be circumstantial and alterable according to the custom and culture of various nations.

## **B. Examination Of The Practice Of A Covenanted Session**

In particular, *The Register of the Minister[,] Elders and Deacons of the Christian Congregation of St. Andrews, Comprising the Proceedings of the Kirk Session, and of the Court of the Superintendent of Fife, Fothrik, and Strathhearn, 1559-1600.*

Only a couple of instances from a number of like cases will be presented from these covenanted judicatories in order to confirm that these judicatories necessarily must have interpreted the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 from a cultural perspective. The first example from the Session of St. Andrews now follows.

March 1581

The which day, Thomas Reif younger, confessed to having committed adultery with Margaret Cluny, is discerned to compear [appear—RPNA] upon Sunday next [and—RPNA] to come with the said Margaret, clothed in sackcloth, **bare headed** and bare footed, and stand at the Kirk door from the second to the third bell to sermon before noon, and thereafter to compear upon the adulterers place of the penitent stool within the Kirk, **and sit therein until the sermon be ended**, and so forth to continue each Sunday until the Kirk be satisfied (*The Register of the Minister[,] Elders and Deacons of the Christian Congregation of St. Andrews, Comprising the Proceedings of the Kirk Session, and of the Court of the Superintendent of Fife, Fothrik, and Strathhearn, 1559-1600*, pp. 475, 476,

emphases added).

Note here that the Session has commanded both a man and a woman to sit bare headed upon the penitent stool (which was a stool placed within clear view of the congregation during worship). This is significant on two accounts. What punishment was it for the man to sit bare headed, if indeed the Session believed that 1 Corinthians 11:4 taught that a man ought always to have his head uncovered during public worship? Also, if the Session believed that according to 1 Corinthians 11: 5, 6, 10, a woman must necessarily cover her head during public worship, or be judged immodest and in violation of the Seventh Commandment, then why, in punishing her adultery, would they order her to show herself immodest before God and man (and the angels) during a public worship service? This would be to punish her immodest adultery by commanding her to be immodest! Clearly, this covenanted Session understood Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 to be speaking within a cultural context. To say otherwise is to condemn this action and to implicitly condemn all subsequent assemblies for failing to censure this action by the Session.

Just in case someone should raise the objection that, in the above example, the woman was not commanded to be bareheaded during prayer, but only during the sermon (as if that would clear them of the obvious difficulty), we will provide yet a more detailed example.

January 1584

The which day, compears [appears—RPNA] Jhone Paterson, merchant and citiner in St. Andrews, who grants and confesses that he has had carnal dealings with Issobell Gray in adultery, he being married to Jonet Trymlay his spouse (he then admits his guilt but denies part of Issobell's statement). The Session, in respect of his confession, with one voice ordains the said Jhone Paterson, and also the said Issobell in respect of her confession, to begin, upon the Sunday next to come, their humiliation for the said offense; to wit that both together to compear clothed in sackcloth, **bare headed**, and bare footed at the Kirk of the said city, at the second bell to sermon before noon, and to stand there until the third bell to sermon be ceased; and thereafter to compear together on the highest degree of the penitent stool, **and sit as said until the sermon and prayers be ended**, and so forth to continue each Sunday until the Kirk be satisfied (*The Register of the Minister[,] Elders and Deacons of the Christian Congregation of St. Andrews, Comprising the Proceedings of the Kirk Session, and of the Court of the Superintendent of Fife, Fothrik, and Strathhearn, 1559-1600*, p. 551, emphases added).

Similar rulings and examples can also be found in the same Register upon pages 441, 572, 705, 731, 767, 785, 793, 866, 877, 886, and 921. Note here, that in the above cited ruling by this covenanted Session in Scotland, we find that a man and a woman are commanded to sit on the penitent stool with a bare head "until the sermon and prayers are ended." Again, if a woman is not to be in public worship with her head uncovered during prayer without being chargeable with immodesty, then why did the Session command her to remain on the penitent stool until the prayers were ended? Can we possibly impute to this covenanted Session the contradiction of having a woman repent of adultery by committing acts of sinful immodesty?

Our explanation is this : we understand that the covenanted Session of St. Andrews understood 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to be cultural in context, and, thus, their censure of these two people did not contradict this text. According to the cultural norms in Scotland at that time, women did wear headcoverings in public and at worship. Thus, for the woman

to come bareheaded was culturally shameful to her. The men, also customarily wore hats during the times of sermon. Thus, for the man to be bareheaded was likewise a public humiliation. The bareheadedness of both the man and the woman was not construed as a sin against the light of nature, for that would involve the Session in commanding people to sin as an act of repentance. The bareheadedness of the man and the woman was a cultural humiliation, and, thus, a significant act of discipline for their sin. This explanation clears the Session of commanding this adulterous couple to sin against the light of nature and exemplifies the point that the headcovering to them was a cultural issue.

## 2. European Reformed Testimony

### A. The Church Of Geneva In The Time Of Calvin

We now turn to the teaching and practice of faithful continental reformed churches. In this section we examine the presuppositions and practices of covenanted Geneva, according to the words of John Calvin, the Notes of the Geneva Bible, and Francis Turretin.

We do not deny that the cultural practice of Geneva was generally for women to wear a headcovering in society and in public worship. This, however, is not at the heart of what we are seeking to ascertain. The question we are asking is whether the covenanted divines of Geneva understood the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 to be teaching that the headcovering is a permanent moral sacred significant sign, or alternately, a culturally alterable circumstance.

Speaking of decorous arrangements which take away confusion in the church, Calvin says on page 1207 of *Institutes Of The Christian Religion* (Westminster Press edition):

There are examples of the first sort in Paul: that profane drinking bouts should not be mingled with the sacred supper of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:21-22), and that women should not go out in public with uncovered heads (1 Cor. 11:5).

After addressing matters related to proper order and decorum as mentioned above, Calvin goes on to say:

But because he [God—RPNA] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies what we ought to do **(because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages)**, here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity if the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these (*Institutes Of The Christian Religion*, Westminster Press, p. 1208, emphases added).

What is Calvin's conclusion?

Lastly, because he [God—RPNA] has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, **and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones** (*Institutes Of The Christian Religion*, Westminster Press, p. 1208, emphases added).



If Calvin believed that the headcovering was an unalterable law of God, in all times and circumstances, then why did he say it "ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age...." and that ".... it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones?" This is inexplicable except upon the presupposition that he understood 1 Corinthians 11 to be speaking from a cultural perspective. If the headcovering is an unalterable law of modesty, then what do the "customs of each nation and age" have to do with the headcovering?

There are some who would try to evade this conclusion by stating that Calvin was speaking here only of extraordinary times and situations when a woman may not be covered. We trust that all who read Calvin in context will easily ascertain that when he says the headcovering "ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age" he did not mean in extraordinary situations only. The customs of each nation and age are hardly extraordinary. In fact, it is because they are customs that we would class them as ordinary.

## **B. The Geneva Bible Notes**

The notes of the Geneva Bible make the same point as Calvin has made above. Commenting upon 1 Corinthians 11:4 ("Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head",) the notes (which were written later by Beza, Calvin's successor) state:

{3} By this he [Paul—RPNA] gathers that if men do either pray or preach in public assemblies having their heads covered (**which was then a sign of subjection**), they robbed themselves of their dignity, against God's ordinance.

{b} It appears, that this was **a political law serving only for the circumstance of the time that Paul lived in, by this reason, because in these our days for a man to speak bareheaded in an assembly is a sign of subjection** (emphases added).

The Geneva Bible was used in the Protestant kingdoms for a very long time, only to be eventually supplanted by the King James Version in English speaking nations. Its popularity makes it certain that this note was read by many persons within Geneva and elsewhere. This note from the Geneva Bible could not make the cultural argument in 1 Corinthians 11 any clearer. If the divines of Geneva truly believed that 1 Corinthians 11 was "not" to be interpreted with a cultural presupposition, then why is this note never questioned, condemned, or corrected by subsequent Genevan Divines and Assemblies; and why are these comments even included within the most widely used Bible of the reformed people within Geneva? Why was there no uproar in Geneva over such a blatant cultural interpretation of Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11?

In our judgment, it was because there was general agreement in Geneva upon the way that 1 Corinthians 11 ought to be understood and applied. Though they themselves in Geneva adopted the headcovering in both society and public worship, they did not understand this passage of Scripture to necessitate its use in all times, nations, and circumstances. Thus, the Geneva Notes by Beza and the words of Calvin are written from the same cultural perspective.

Note also that like the comment made by Beza in the Geneva Notes regarding the changed meaning of the sign of the headcovering, George Gillespie's comment quoted previously likewise corroborates the words of Calvin and Beza: "in these our days for a man to speak bareheaded in an assembly is a sign of subjection" (rather than a sign of authority as in 1 Corinthians 11:4).

Thus both Scotland and Geneva had the same customary practices (for men at least). Both were the opposite of the practice instituted by Paul in Corinth. In Corinth, male covering was dishonourable and intimated subjection. In Geneva and Scotland, it was honourable signifying authority. Did Genevan divines understand 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 to be speaking from a cultural context? Based upon the evidence above, we do not see how it could reasonably be questioned.

### C. Francis Turretin (1623-1687)

Turretin was the renowned teacher of the Academy in Geneva and successor to Calvin, Beza, and Diodati. Turretin not only observes that the cultural decorum of being covered or uncovered in public worship was only for a time, but also concludes that since the reason for the practice has ceased so should the practice itself.

**Although certain ordinations of the Apostles (which referred to the rites and circumstances of divine worship) were variable and instituted only for a time** (as the sanction of not eating blood and of things strangled [Acts 15:20]; **concerning the woman's head being covered and the man's being uncovered when they prophesy [1 Cor. 11:4, 5]) because there was a special cause and reason for them and (this ceasing) the institution itself ought to cease also**; still there were others invariable and of perpetual observance in the church, none of which were founded upon any special occasion to last only for a time by which they might be rendered temporary (such as the imposition of hands in the setting apart of ministers and the distinction between the offices of deacon and pastor). Since the institution of the Lord's day was of this kind, from this we infer that the intention of the founders was that the observance of this day should be of perpetual and immutable right. (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 95, emphases added).

Was Turretin teaching a new headcovering doctrine or was this essentially the same doctrine which Calvin and Beza's Genevan Notes promoted? It seems to us that if Turretin was radically changing Geneva's doctrine of the headcovering, there would have been some contention and argument from his fellow pastors and congregations. In fact, to the best of our understanding, there is no mention of this at all in the historical record.

What then was the uniform position of Geneva regarding the headcovering? Calvin says the headcovering is alterable, the notes to the Geneva Bible say it is alterable (at least for men), and Turretin says its variable for men and women and in his day it ought to cease entirely. In each of these cases, it is clear that these divines interpreted the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 within a cultural context.

## D. The Reformed Churches Outside Of Scotland and Geneva

### (1) The Augsburg Confession (1530)

This early Confession of the Reformation declares that the matter of the headcovering in public worship is neither a matter with which to bind men's consciences nor a necessary service which if violated makes one guilty of sin.

What is, then, to be thought of the Lord's day, and of like rites of temples? Hereunto they [ours] answer, that it is lawful for Bishops or Pastors to make ordinances, whereby things may be done in order in the Church; not that by them we may merit grace, or satisfy for sins, **or that men's consciences should be bound to esteem them as necessary services, and think that they sin when they violate them, without the offense of others. So Paul ordained, 'that women should cover their heads in the congregation' (1 Cor. xi. 6); 'that the interpreters of Scripture should be heard in order in the Church' (1 Cor. xiv. 27), etc.**

Such ordinances it behooveth the churches to keep for charity and quietness' sake, that one offend not another, that all things may be done in order, and without tumult in the churches (1 Cor. xiv. 40 and Phil. ii. 14), **but so that consciences be not burdened, so as to account them as things necessary to salvation, and think they sin when they violate them, without offense of others; as no one would say that a woman sins if she went into public with her head uncovered, provided it were without the offense of men** (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 6th ed. [1931], Baker Books, 3:68-69, emphases added).

This Confession was widely subscribed early in the First Reformation. In fact, a subsequent version of this Confession (revised by Phillip Melancthon, but not revised on this point) was subscribed by John Calvin in Ratisbon in 1545. If, as this Confession states ("no one would say that a woman sins if she went into public with her head uncovered, provided it were without the offense of men"), then again we ask: What contextual understanding did these brothers and sisters have regarding 1 Corinthians 11? Clearly, in a culture where men were not ordinarily offended by a woman going outside with her head uncovered, such as our own culture, this Confession of Faith says there is no sin.

### (2) The Reformed Churches Of France (1579)

In its National Synod, the Reformed Churches Of France specifically address the issue of the headcovering in public worship. However, they do not require women to be covered and men to be uncovered (as taught in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5), but rather at the time of prayer, they require all (without exception) to be uncovered. Such a practice does not demonstrate some unalterable, universal rule in regard to the headcovering. To the contrary, the practice of the Reformed Churches Of France indicates an ecclesiastical custom that was not permanent in itself.

XXX. Whereas divers Persons during Publick and Family Prayers, **do neither uncover their Heads**, nor bow their Knees, expressing thereby the great Pride of their Hearts, and scandalizing such as fear the Lord, that this their

Irreverence may be amended and reformed, all Pastors, Elders, and Governours of Families are advised and required to see carefully unto it, that during the time of Prayer, **every one in their Churches and Families without exception, be they high or low, noble or base, do testifie the humbleness of their Heart, by those fore-mentioned outward marks of humility**, unless they be hindered by unavoidable necessity or malady, in which cases we leave them to the direction of their particular and respective Consciences (*Synodicon in Gallia Reformata*, ed. John Quick, The Synod of Figeac. Synod X. Of the Tenth National Synod of the Reformed Churches of France, held at Figeac the Second Day of August, and ended the Eighth Day of the same Month, in the Year of Grace 1579, being the Sixth Year of the Reign of Henry the Third, King of France and Poland, emphases added).

Likewise, the Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France states:

**That great irreverence, which is found in diverse persons, who at public and private prayers do neither uncover the heads**, nor bow their knees, shall be reformed, which is a matter repugnant to piety, and giveth suspicion to pride, and does scandalize them that fear God. **Wherefore all Pastors shall be advised, as also Elders and heads of families, carefully to oversee that in time of prayer all persons without exception or acceptation, do evidence by those exterior signs the inward humiliation of their hearts**, and of that homage yielded by them unto God, unless anyone be hindered from doing so by sickness or otherwise; the judgment which shall be remitted to the testimony of their own particular consciences (*Synodicon in Gallia Reformata*, ed. John Quick, The Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France, Chapter 10, Canon 1, p. xliii, emphases added).

How then did the Reformed Churches of France understand the headcovering? They required all persons without exception, and everyone in their churches and families without exception to pray publicly and privately with their heads uncovered. This means men, women and children were to pray in public and private with uncovered heads so as to signify inward reverence and humility toward God. This is hardly what one would expect to find if they had interpreted 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in a universal, moral sense. Please keep in mind that these citations are the agreed upon position of the entire French Reformed Church as stated in their Book of Discipline (over a very long period of time) and not merely the opinion of one or two ministers.

### **(3) The Dutch Annotations Upon The Whole Bible, Or, All The Holy Canonical Scriptures Of The Old and New Testament (1637)**

The Synod of Dordt (in 1618) commissioned a work of Annotations covering all of the books of the Old and New Testaments to be made available for heads of households (and students of the Scripture) in their study of God's Word. It was completed in 1637 and was published by the authority of the Synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

The following comments are made upon 1 Corinthians 11:4:

**[N]amely, forasmuch as the uncovering of the head was then a sign**

**of power and dominion, as on the contrary now at this day those that have power over others, will keep their heads covered, and they that are under others will uncover their heads before them.** But in all these things, we must always have the respect to the use of **divers times and countries**, and what is honorable and edifying therein, 1 Cor. 14:40, Philippians 4:8 (*The Dutch Annotations Upon The Whole Bible* [1637], trans. Theodore Haak [1657], 1 Corinthians 11:4, emphases added).

Again, this is not the opinion of one or two ministers in Holland, but rather the agreed upon position of the entire synod. Here again, consistent with the ministers of Scotland, Geneva, Germany and France, these renowned Dutch ministers in the Netherlands' best and purest time of Reformation, indicate that the sign of the headcovering in their time and land was different than that of Corinth at the time in which Paul penned 1 Corinthians 11. All those in Holland who were under subjection were to signify their submission by uncovering their heads, and all those in authority were to cover their heads. Obviously, these ministers agreed that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 was to be interpreted within a cultural context.

By now it should be clear that those divines living at the time of the First and Second Reformations did not view the headcovering (whether covering oneself or uncovering oneself) as an unalterable practice, but rather as a custom changeable in both meaning and practice.

The noted historian, David Hay Fleming, further illustrates the constantly changing practice of the headcovering among the Reformed churches from that of Paul's practice in 1 Corinthians 11.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century many Scottish Presbyterians uncovered their heads during sermon. [A footnote cites the following source: An Examination of Three Prelatical Pamphlets, 1703, p. 18] The custom survived in the Scottish Church at Rotterdam until at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At one time the ministers of Scotland may have kept their hats on while preaching, as French and Dutch Protestant preachers did (*The Reformation in Scotland* [1910], Still Waters Revival Books, pp. 301, 302).

As Presbytery has sought to understand the cultural context of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, it has become increasingly clear that this is an interpretive key that ought not to be omitted from a proper understanding of this passage. We have clearly demonstrated that the Covenanted Church of Scotland practiced (and approved) a cultural use of the headcovering within worship. We have demonstrated that this is consistent with our subordinate documents, in particular with *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6), which classifies the headcovering as a circumstance of worship which is alterable. We have found no evidence to suggest that the headcovering was required in Scotland as a mandatory and unalterable practice based upon the law of nature. Consequently, we have not found one case wherein a man was disciplined for covering his head or a woman censured for uncovering her head, nor do we find it mentioned, let alone required, in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*. Furthermore, we have provided irrefutable evidence to demonstrate that the reformed churches in Geneva, Germany, France, and Holland, during their purest times of reformation, all understood the covering and uncovering of the head in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as cultural. This demonstrates the judgment of the best divines in the purest times of the reformed church.

How then should we, as a Presbytery, contextually approach 1 Corinthians 11:2-16? Should we adopt the same cultural approach as this immense and learned cloud of witnesses, and understand as they clearly understood that this text was based upon cultural customs within Corinth, or should we use a contradictory approach, and thus accuse them of serious error and face the necessity of altering our covenanted testimonies of faith and practice? Presbytery is persuaded that the first of these two options is the most sound and wise perspective in which to view 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

### **3. The Scriptural Observations Of The Reformed Presbytery In North America Upon 1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

The Presbytery prayerfully issues the following observations as those, which in our judgment, are most consistent with the text we are discussing.

#### **A. The Context Of 1 Corinthians 10-14**

We would draw your attention to the contextual flow of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians concerning meat offered to idols, headcoverings and the Lord's Supper.

##### **(1) Meat Offered To Idols**

In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul states:

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

He then goes on to teach the Corinthians, and the church at large, that the lawfulness of eating meat offered to idols depended upon the circumstances of the case. Eating such meat in a pagan temple where it had religious significance was an act of idolatry. However, when this same meat lost its religious significance and became simply a commodity of trade and consumption in the social realm, it was permissible to buy or eat it (unless it scandalized another, causing them to stumble). Thus, Paul is giving principles to the church in order that they may judge for themselves what was most expedient and orderly in various circumstances.

##### **(2) The Lord's Supper**

Skipping over 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 for a moment, we next consider the context and instruction of the Apostle Paul in his direction regarding the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). It is clear from the context of Paul's rebuke that the Corinthians were guilty of disorderly conduct during the administration of the Lord's Supper. Some were getting drunk, others were not waiting for the whole congregation to be assembled before beginning, and generally, as one might expect by such selfish behavior, these activities were causing confusion and offense in the church. Paul instructs them regarding how to restore godly order to the celebration of this ordinance.

Paul gives the following words of instruction:

Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

Again, similar to Paul's concern for godly order, decorum, and the eschewing of offense in 1 Corinthians 10 (in regard to meat offered to idols), Paul instructs the Corinthians how they should order the circumstances that surround the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He teaches them that it is offensive and divisive to fail to wait for one another, and that if the reason one cannot wait is hunger, then it would be expedient to eat something at home before coming. Although, we may never see this particular offense arise in our circumstances, nevertheless the principle of unoffensive behavior in a public setting is applicable to many circumstances.

### **(3) Spiritual Gifts**

As the Apostle continues into Chapters 12, 13 and 14, his emphasis is upon unity and edification within the Church of Christ, and the importance of not using spiritual gifts in a disorderly and offensive manner which, in effect, fails to edify the body by causing strife and division.

Our point here is this: From 1 Corinthians 10-14, Paul is giving general principles of good order, that the Corinthian Church may behave in an edifying and unoffensive manner. The flow and general theme of the context of this section of Scripture is clear. Paul is using specific circumstances and issues, which the Corinthians faced in their day and age, to teach them how to apply the godly principles which would minimize offense and would promote love, edification and unity. Meat sacrificed to idols is certainly specific to that age and culture, as is the error of getting drunk at the Lord's Table, as is much of the instruction in how to properly order prophetic gifts. While we, in our culture may not ordinarily face the case of meat sacrificed to idols, or people getting drunk at the Lord's Supper, or people abusing true prophetic gifts, we however, greatly benefit from applying these godly principles of good order to the situations of our time.

### **(4) The Headcovering**

In keeping with this context, we believe that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 was continuing in the same general line of argument. He addresses the headcovering practice which was culturally acceptable to the Corinthians, and seeks to teach them that they are not to be offensive, divisive or contentious by altering the customs of the land, when they come to worship. He is laying down the same principle as that taught both before and after the headcovering passage. In effect he is saying, do not alter the established order of this circumstance when you see that it will be offensive and destructive to the unity of the church. Do not be contentious about this issue. Rather, do that which edifies and that which promotes unity within your current cultural context. Thus, the moral nature of covering or uncovering one's head in worship is not (in and of itself) the issue which Paul is addressing. To the contrary, he is addressing the detrimental effect that such

activity would have upon the unity and peace of the church within the cultural context of Corinth.

We have already demonstrated that this cultural perspective in approaching 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not uniquely the view of the Reformed Presbytery In North America, but also the view that guided the best and purest churches of the First and Second Reformations. We concur with their scriptural judgment.

## **B. Other Cultural Issues In The New Testament**

We offer the following supportive argument to demonstrate that in Scripture, cultural distinctions must be carefully considered when judging Scriptural commands. Consider the following two obligations in Scripture which clearly hinge upon the cultural context in which they were given— namely, foot washing and the holy kiss.

### **(1) The Obligation To Wash The Feet Of Others**

On the night in which the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he gave His disciples an object lesson in serving one another: He, their Master, humbled himself and washed their feet.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you (John 13:14-15).

Is this an obligation that rests upon all Christians in all ages to perform one to another? Or are there cultural considerations at that time in history which help us to understand this obligation given by Christ to the disciples? In fact it was the role of a servant to wash in cool water the dusty, weary feet of the master, mistress, or guests. Although the Lord authorized his disciples to wash the feet of others, as an appropriate act in their cultural context, we do not believe that in our society we are presently under an obligation to practice that specific cultural custom. We recognize there is a moral principle (of selfless service) that stands behind that cultural practice which we must continue to exemplify in our lives as Christ's ministers and disciples. The Lord here illustrates the moral duty incumbent upon all who rule in His Church to be the greatest servants of all in caring for others. The actual practice of foot washing had cultural significance to those living in the ancient world, but it has no real significance to those living in the Western world of the twenty-first century. Perhaps our closest cultural equivalent to foot washing presently is offering refreshments and hospitality to guests who visit in our homes.

It is interesting to note as well that this is not the only time that foot washing is mentioned in the New Testament. Foot washing was such a significant act within the apostolic Church that it formed one of the "good works" to which the Church was to look in setting aside those elderly women who were qualified to be financially supported by the Church.

Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she



have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

There are a few anabaptistic churches that have made foot washing an ordinance to be observed at the time of the Lord's Supper. However, the vast majority of the Christian Church has correctly understood the actual practice of foot washing to be a cultural custom. We acknowledge that foot washing was authorized by Christ (in John 13:14-15) and commended by the apostle Paul (in 1 Timothy 5:9-10), and that it signifies the moral principle of selfless service. But we also acknowledge that we are not universally bound to the alterable, cultural custom of foot washing, but rather to the unalterable, moral principle of service. So likewise, we acknowledge that men and women are not universally bound to the alterable, cultural custom of uncovering and covering their heads, but rather to the unalterable, moral principle of lawful male headship under Christ and respectful female submission in the Lord within the assemblies of the Church.

## **(2) The Obligation To Greet One Another With A Holy Kiss**

There are three places in the New Testament where we find imperatives to greet one another with a holy kiss.

Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you (Romans 16:16).

All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20).

Greet one another with an holy kiss (2 Corinthians 13:12).

In one other passage, the imperative of the holy kiss is extended to include "all the brethren."

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss (1 Thessalonians 5:26).

The same questions may be asked about the obligation of the holy kiss as were asked about foot washing. Is this an obligation that rests upon all Christians in all ages to perform one to another? Or are there cultural considerations at that time in history which help us to understand this obligation given by the apostle Paul to the churches at Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica?

Again, it is generally recognized that the practice of the holy kiss was not the exclusive practice of those within the Church, but rather was a cultural expression of friendship in society at large. This being the case, we must not artificially cling to their cultural practice as being necessary among all believers in the modern Western world of the twenty-first century. The predominant cultural equivalent of the holy kiss among those in our Western society would likely be a holy handshake or perhaps a holy embrace. Is such a departure from the actual cultural expression of the holy kiss as commanded by Paul a violation of God's Word? Again, we do not understand that we are bound by this specific cultural custom, although we would understand that the moral principle (of Christian love) that lies behind that practice does in fact continue as an obligation. So likewise, we acknowledge that men and women are not universally bound to the alterable, cultural custom of uncovering and covering their heads, but rather to the unalterable, moral principle of lawful

authority and submission within the Church.

### **(3) The context of 1 Corinthians 11**

As we consider briefly the passage itself in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, it should be apparent how significant the cultural context is in correctly understanding the text. For if the headcovering ought to be viewed in a similar way to that of foot washing and the holy kiss, as also the good order concerning sacrificed meat and the Lord's Supper, then Paul is instructing the Corinthians concerning the abiding moral principle of proper order and decorum between male authority and female submission in public worship within the appropriate cultural expression familiar to Corinthian society.

Thus, when Paul appeals to the order of headship in 1 Corinthians 11:3 ("But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."), he begins by laying down the unalterable, moral principle of male headship and female submission. This, in reality, was the truth that was being denied when the men covered their heads and the women uncovered their heads contrary to the accepted cultural custom in Corinth. The uncovering of the man and the covering of the woman were merely the outward cultural expressions of this revealed order of headship (similar to the outward cultural sign of the holy kiss signifying the revealed truth of brotherly love).

Paul also makes clear to the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5) that when men cover their heads and women uncover their heads in public worship, they bring shame upon themselves by inverting the conventional customs appropriate to men and women within Corinth.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

Similarly, if the Corinthian believers had refused to greet one another with a holy kiss, it would have been tantamount to denying the unalterable principle of brotherly love and would have brought great shame upon their own heads for refusing to do that which even the heathens did one to another as a cultural expression of their love.

The same moral principle (of male authority and female submission) is taught from the order of creation in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. We believe that if our present culture did customarily use male/female signs which express the gender order, it would be necessary to follow these. If, however, the headcovering is not cultural, but is rather (as some claim) a divine regulation required in public worship for all time, based upon the law of nature and the order of creation, we would expect to find evidence of this in the Old Testament. We would expect to find the headcovering instituted in the Garden of Eden as a creation ordinance. The evidence, however, is to the contrary. For Genesis 2:25 teaches that Eve did not wear a headcovering, but was rather naked.

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Nor do we find the Corinthian headcovering regulation taught as an ordinance in the public worship of God in the Old Testament. Indeed for certain men in ecclesiastical office we find the exact opposite required. High priests were required to cover their heads in Leviticus 8:9 in contrast to Paul's instruction that men uncover their heads in public worship:

And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the LORD commanded Moses.

Similarly, the priests also were required to cover their heads in Ezekiel 44:18 contrary to the regulations of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:4.

They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causeth sweat.

We consider that this evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that the headcovering practice of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 cannot be an unalterable moral requirement based upon the creation order, the law of nature, or worship regulations of the Old Testament.

Paul uses every argument at his disposal to demonstrate the disorderly and unbecoming conduct of women who (within that cultural context) uncovered their heads in public worship. Even the angels, who approve of all good order rather than confusion within worship, become a reason for these women to cover their heads in accordance with the prevailing custom of women in Corinth.

For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

If Paul can address the disorderly conduct of the Corinthians in the use of spiritual gifts by drawing their attention to the fact that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"; then he can also address the disorderly conduct of the women who have removed the cultural sign of their submission by reminding them of the outward order and submission in which the angels delight.

Paul raises a rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 11:13:

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?

We ask: If Paul was commanding the Corinthians and the church of all ages to obey an unalterable law of God, irrespective of time and culture, then what was he calling the people to judge in themselves? Was he encouraging the people to judge in themselves whether God's unalterable commands are right? No, that could not be the case, for we are not to judge the commands of God, but rather to adore and obey them. If one should answer, "Paul was calling the people to judge according to the law of God written in their hearts, and according to the light of nature"; we then ask: Does the light of nature in fallen man teach principles of gender comeliness in prayer? Specifically, do all heathen nations intuitively understand that it is sinful for a woman to pray to God uncovered, and a man covered? If so, then where is the evidence of that fact? To the contrary, we have previously demonstrated that

among even the most reformed nations, men were at times covered for prayers and at other times uncovered. Likewise, women as well as men and children were (as in the French Reformed Churches) ordered to be uncovered during public and private prayers. We have demonstrated that even in enlightened and reformed nations the meaning of the sign of the headcovering had changed radically. In one age a covered head meant submission, and in another age it meant the exact opposite—namely, authority. The light of nature in regard to women praying uncovered is not even close to uniform among the reforming Protestant nations. So how then do we assert that Paul was calling on the Corinthians to judge according to a uniform light of nature within a heathen land?

What then was he asking the people to judge? They were to judge in themselves, whether, under the current cultural circumstances, it was comely for a woman to pray in public uncovered. This is something that could be easily judged and is a very relevant question for the Corinthians to answer. All they had to do was to look at what was considered comely in their culture and to respond accordingly.

One of the strongest objections against the cultural interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is claimed to be found in 1 Corinthians 11:14:

Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

What kind of nature does Paul have in mind? The unalterable light of nature written in our hearts?

John Calvin has rightly rendered the sense of the passage. Commenting upon 1 Corinthians 11:14 Calvin states:

He [Paul—RPNA] again sets forth nature as the mistress of decorum, and what was at that time in common use by universal consent and custom—even among the Greeks—he speaks of as being natural, for it was not always reckoned a disgrace for men to have long hair. Historical records bear, that in all countries in ancient times, that is, in the first ages, men wore long hair. Hence also the poets in speaking of the ancients, are accustomed to apply to them the common epithet of unshorn. It was not until a late period that barbers began to be employed at Rome—about the time of Africanus the elder. And at the time when Paul wrote these things, the practice of having the hair shorn had not yet come into use in the provinces of Gaul or Germany. Nay more, it would have been reckoned an unseemly thing for men, no less than for women, to be shorn or shaven; but as in Greece [Corinth—RPNA] it was reckoned an unbecoming thing for a man to allow his hair to grow long, so that those who did were remarked as effeminate, **he [Paul—RPNA] reckons as nature a custom that had come to be confirmed** (emphases added).

If, as Calvin taught, nature is custom that has come to be confirmed within a society, then Paul is asking this question: "Doth not even a custom which has come to be confirmed in your culture, itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" This follows very well with the scope of Paul's argument and is indeed something that the Corinthians could easily judge. If we say that God explicitly commanded the use of the headcovering in this passage irrespective of the culture of the Corinthians, then there was really nothing for the Corinthians to

judge in themselves, and this makes Paul's question irrelevant. We are not prepared to assert this.

### **Conclusion Of The Reformed Presbytery In North America**

We have come to the conclusion, based upon scriptural argument, and in accord with the best divines in the purest times of the church that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 should be interpreted within a cultural context. We believe that Paul is not enjoining all churches, at all times, to follow the specific headcovering practice which he prescribed for the Corinthian Church. We do assert, however, that the principles which are taught in this passage afford us great light as to how to conduct ourselves in decency and order within various cultural contexts. We further assert, like Paul, that in a land where the headcovering is a cultural sign of either authority or submission that the orderly way to proceed is to follow the custom of the land, provided that such a custom does not oppose the general rules of the Word of God. In a land or time when the headcovering is neither a sign of submission or authority (as is true within North America in the twenty-first century), we maintain that one ought not to wear a headcovering as a sign of authority or submission, and thus cause confusion or offense within the church. If a man or a woman within our culture attaches no significant meaning of authority or submission to the headcovering, and simply wishes to wear a hat to church, we believe they are at liberty to do so. In this way, we, as Christians, may use our liberty to promote unity and peace within the body of Christ and to drive away unnecessary contention from the Church.

The Presbytery heartily and without reservation testifies its full agreement with and approval of our covenanted subordinate standards and the rulings of our covenanted and faithful judicatories as being agreeable to and founded upon the Word of God. As with all our subordinate standards, we make no claims that this report is infallible. We confess that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the alone infallible rule of faith and practice (cf. Term #1 of our Six Terms of Communion) and that the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself (cf. *The Westminster Confession Of Faith*, 1:9). In the words of *The Westminster Confession Of Faith* (31:4), we further believe that

All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.

Indeed, if it is ever conclusively proved that any of our subordinate documents have erred from the infallible rule of Scripture, our duty is to reform. The primary purpose of all subordinate standards is to state what we believe the Scriptures to teach.

### **Directive Of The Reformed Presbytery In North America**

The Presbytery, based upon all the considerations mentioned in this report, directs the practice of all members under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery In North America to be brought into full accord with our Covenanted Standards and the rulings of our covenanted and faithful judicatories. This change in public practice will be effective immediately.

## **Correspondence To The Reformed Presbytery In North America**

Finally, we understand that this alteration concerning headcoverings will inevitably lead to many questions. We request that you direct your correspondence regarding this report to Mr. Greg Barrow, Clerk of Presbytery (gkbarrow@home.com) who will in turn make your comments available to the whole Presbytery. We pray that each of you will carefully consider the reasons why we have made this change and that you might be blessed in the liberty purchased for us in Christ.

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Romans 14:17, 19).