

June 14, 1988

Dear Beverly,

The ideas I mentioned to you on the phone the other day are essentially as follows:

Paul's comments about women veiling their faces when they pray seem to be largely a discussion of what was then Jewish traditional dress. However, there is implicit in his words the idea that the notion of a women veiling her face during prayer might go back to the same idea as the veil in the Tabernacle and temple.

From before the Tabernacle of Moses, to the temple of Solomon, and on into the time of early Christianity, veils were used to symbolize the holiness of that which they concealed. That was sometimes as true of the small veils worn by individuals as it was of the great veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the profane world.

The heavenly veil symbolized by the earthly ones is mentioned many places in the scriptures. A good example is the account of the Brother of Jared. The events of that story go through the following sequence: The Brother of Jared proves himself faithful by receiving instructions from the Lord and carefully following those instructions. He is then able to talk with God but not to see Him, for God is concealed in a cloud; when the faith of the Brother of Jared is sufficiently matured, he goes again to converse with the Lord; this time, however, the veil is parted and the Brother of Jared is able to enter into the Lord's presence.

That veil of light which concealed the Lord is alluded to elsewhere in the scriptures. Sometimes as a cloud, sometimes a mist, sometimes a fire; it may be what Isaiah calls a smoke, but its purpose is always the same: To prevent unsanctified eyes for seeing that which is holy.

As one might expect, the Tabernacle of Moses (which, like the later temple, was the place where man might go to be in the presence of God) incorporated within its symbolism the veil which separates man from God. This veil was located between Holy Place where the priests could be and the Holy of Holies where Moses would go to be in the presence of God. It was temporal evidence that God is inaccessible except on terms of absolute righteousness.

That same veil seems to have been symbolic of a second idea as well. The Holy of Holies was not an empty room. In it was kept the Ark of the Covenant, the oldest and most sacred symbol of Israel's worship. In somewhat the same way the veil was used to prevent the unworthy from entering the presence of God, it was used to identify, secure, and re-affirm the sacredness of the Ark. By placing the Ark behind the veil, Moses vividly identified it as being precious to the Lord.

When Solomon built the temple, it employed the symbolism of the veil just as had the Tabernacle. In the temple the veil separated the sacred from the profane and called attention to the divine nature of that which it concealed.

The most striking Old Testament example of an individual wearing a veil to conceal that which was sacred is found in the story of Moses. After Moses received the Ten Commandments from the Lord on Mount Sinai his face shone with such light that it frightened the people of Israel. To conceal that light, Moses covered his face when he spoke to them. But when he went into the Tabernacle, beyond its veil into the Holy of Holies, "before the Lord to speak with Him," Moses removed the veil from his face.

This same idea, using a veil to distinguish that which is sacred, is also found in the New Testament. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he recalls the light in Moses's face and the veil he wore, then compares that veil, which had hidden Moses's light from the eyes of the children of Israel, to the spiritual veil which obscured the gospel from the understanding of the Jews. Thus again calling attention to the fact that the veil is used to distinguish that which is sacred, not to obscure that which is not.

In First Corinthians Paul implies the same use for another veil. After expressing his praise to the Corinthians because they "keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you," and apparently in the context of their keeping those ordinances, he says, "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 then observes that a woman should veil her head when she prays, -- not because she must cover her inadequacy or unworthiness -- but because for her to fail to cover her head would evince that she did not honor herself. He says, "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head." One might ask if the head she dishonors is her husband. The answer to that seems to be, it is her own head, for Paul observes it is also covered with her long hair which "is a glory to her." The rest of Paul's explanation of the veil she wears is a reaffirmation of his earlier statement about its being evidence of her self worth. He uses the veil as symbolic of her relationship with her husband, with angels, and with her Father in Heaven. He explains, "For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels." Then without elaborating further about the angels or explaining precisely what he means, he adds, "Nevertheless, neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God." I do not know what those last five words mean in this context, but this is what I think they mean: In matters of priesthood there seems to be a vertical relationship between a wife, her patriarch husband, the Saviour and His Father. But in matters of her personal relationship with her Father in Heaven, her husband is not a part of the vertical structure. The veil which covers her face as she prays, like the veil of the temple itself, seems to symbolize the sacredness of that which it conceals. It seems to suggest that, notwithstanding the priesthood responsibilities and prerogatives of her patriarch husband, even he must stand without and reverence her prayers to God.

I hope those ideas will be useful to you. If they are, please handle them any way you wish. You mentioned quoting me in your book. That is not necessary and may not be wise -- there is nothing about my name which will enhance the credibility of the ideas. As to the words, they are the common property of whomever speaks the language. If you like the arrangements of some of these, you are welcome to use them, or if you like the ideas but wish to dress them in an arrangement of your own, please know I will find no offence in that. I believe your book will be very important, and am only grateful to be of some help.

Some scriptural references for those ideas are: Exodus 13: 20-21; Lev. 16:2; Isaiah ch. 6; Matthew 17:5; Cor. 11:1-13; II Cor. 3: 13-14; I Nephi 11:1, 17:7, 18:3; Ether ch. 2-3; JS Hist. 1:68; Moses 1: 1-2, 42.

Best of everything to you,

LeGrand Baker