

Paul: Female hair too sexy to go unveiled: Considered sexual equivalent of male testicles

by [John Dart](#) in the [May 4, 2004](#) issue

The apostle Paul wanted women to cover their tresses while praying because he—like the rest of Hellenistic culture then—believed that the long hair of adult females was the sexual equivalent of male testicles, according to a newly published study.

Citing writings from Aristotle, Euripedes and the disciples of Hippocrates, the “father of medicine,” Troy W. Martin of St. Xavier University in Chicago said that Paul reflected the physiology of his time in believing that the hair of adult women “is part of female genitalia.” Martin’s article appears in the spring issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

Modern commentators on the First Letter to the Corinthians have often confessed their confusion over exactly what Paul was telling the Greek church to do. Martin contends that is partly because Paul used a sexual euphemism in 1 Corinthians 11:15 for a word translated as “covering.” The word means “testicle” in works by Euripedes and a second-century AD Greek novelist, he said.

Ancient medical views of where semen comes from and where it goes help to explain Paul’s convoluted argument in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Martin wrote. “Hippocratic authors hold that hair is hollow and grows primarily from either male or female reproductive fluid or semen flowing into it and congealing,” he said. The brain is the place where this fluid is produced or at least stored, they thought. “Since hollow body parts create a vacuum and attract fluid, hair attracts semen,” Martin said.

Martin, a professor of religious studies at the Catholic university, is collaborating on a multivolume work aimed at using ancient medical texts to illuminate passages and concepts in the New Testament.

When Paul tells the church in Corinth that “nature teaches” that it is “degrading” for men to wear their hair long, the apostle to the gentiles is alluding to once-common beliefs about the role of hair in sexual intercourse, he said. Men with long locks would divert too much semen from their scrotum where their pubic hair and testicles have become larger at puberty. Luxurious hair on women serves them well, however, because those long, hollow hairs add to the suction in her body.

“Long feminine hairs assist the uterus in drawing semen upward and inward; masculine testicles, which are connected to the brain by two channels, facilitate the drawing of semen downward and outward,” wrote Martin. The favorite Hippocratic test for fertility in women was linked to the belief about the strong suction power of their head of hair. “A doctor places a scented suppository in a woman’s uterus and examines her mouth the next day to see if he can smell the scent of the suppository,” said Martin. If he can, she is declared fertile; if not, she is termed sterile because channels to her head are blocked. “The male seed is therefore discharged rather than retained, and the woman cannot conceive,” he wrote.

“Informed by the Jewish tradition, which strictly forbids display of genitalia when engaged in God’s service, Paul’s argument from nature cogently supports a woman covering her head when praying or prophesying.”

Six-winged seraphim in Isaiah who take part in divine liturgy have two that reverently cover their face and two that cover the feet for modesty. “The term ‘feet’ euphemistically refers to the genitals of the seraphim,” the scholar said. Hebrew priests approaching the altar are to wear linen breeches to cover their naked flesh, according to Exodus, but Martin said that “flesh” in that context means their genitals.

A woman’s hair is her “glory,” says Paul, but he added that for the sake of decency her hair should be veiled during public worship. Inasmuch as conceptions of the body have changed, Martin added, “no physiological reason remains for continuing the practice of covering women’s heads in public worship, and many Christian communities reasonably abandon this practice.”