## IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART I

by Dennis Prutow

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In discussing the so called women's issue within the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, I have steadfastly affirmed the historic theological distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. The classic formulation is given by Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology. 1

By the ontological Trinity we mean God is one in essence or substance. The three Persons of the Trinity are the same in substance. This means they are equal in dignity, power, and glory.

By the economical Trinity we mean each person of the Godhead has a differing primary activity in the economy of redemption. The Father planned redemption. The work of the Son was to carry out the plan of the Father. The Holy Spirit now applies the results of the work of the Son to human beings. These are two different ways of looking at the blessed Trinity. The former views the Trinity from the perspective of God's being. The latter views the Trinity from the perspective of God's of administration redemption.

When we understand these views of the Trinity, misunderstandings dissolve. For example, that the one God reveals Himself as three persons is indeed a mystery. That God is at the same time One God and Three Persons seems contradictory. But this truth does not defy logic.

A basic principle of logic is the law of non-contradiction. This law may

be stated as follows: "A" cannot be "A" and "non-A" at the same time and in the same relationship. For example, a block of wood cannot be cubical and not cubical at the same time in the and same relationship. That seems simple enough. Putting it another way, if we look at a piece of wood from one angle we may see a square. But if we look at the same block of wood from another angle we may see a circle. We conclude the shape of this piece of wood is not cubical but cylindrical. There is no contradiction present. So far so good.

But the same thinking applies to our understanding of the Trinity. We may say is one and God is three. But we have not defined our position adequately. God is one in essence. God is also three persons. God is not one God and three Gods at the same time. God cannot be one God and three Gods at the same time. That would be a contradiction. Neither is God one person and three persons at the same time. God cannot be one person and three persons at the same time. This too would be a contradiction. With respect to his essence, God is one. With respect to personality, God is three. When we speak of God in relationship to the essence of His being, we say there is one God. When we speak of God in relationship to personality, we say there are three persons. The law of non-contradiction is  ${\tt satisfied.}^2$ 

What has just been said is integral to the discussion of biblical authority. The Christian family is to mirror the Trinity. On one hand, each member of the family is the same in essence. There is no inherent inequality between a husband and a wife. Nor is there inherent inequality between parents and their children. Each has essential and equal dignity. Nor can we say that one member of a family is more important than the family itself. A husband or a wife is not more important than Nor is marriage. individual child more important that the family or visa versa. There is equality in all these relationships.

On the other hand, within the first family, there were, by design, differing roles. Adam was the first person on earth, the first human being, the first man. Eve was created specifically to be a helper to Adam, complementary to him (Genesis 1:18). To this first pair God gave the task of working in creation and building a God glorifying culture (Genesis 1:26-27).

This cultural mandate was given to our first parents as a couple. We must not forget this. We dare not disparage the partnership. Nor do we dare disparage the roles given within the partnership. Eve was designed to be a "helper". She was to stand beside Adam and support him in the task of subduing the earth.

There is nothing inherently demeaning about this supportive role. Those placed in the supportive

Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), pp. 72-82

<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 87-89.

For a more complete treatment of this subject, see: R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, Classic Apologetics (Grand

role are not somehow by nature inferior. In fact, quite the opposite may be true. The word translated "helper" in Genesis 2:18 and 20 is used twenty times in the Old Testament. Job describes himself as one who "delivered the poor who cried for help, and the orphan who had no helper" (Job 29:12). In this case the wealthy Job was a "helper" to the financially poor orphan. God is seen in the same light. "Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me; O Lord, be Thou my helper" (Psalm 30:10). Obviously God is of greater honor, dignity, and glory, than any human being helped by Him.

What is the point as far as Adam and Eve are concerned? The implicit truth is that because Eve was given the role of helper, Adam was given the role as head of the first family. This is seen in the first acts of Adam in naming the animals and also naming Eve.

Is there a contradiction in taking this position? No there is not. It is obvious at the start that Adam and Eve are the same in nature and essence. As Adam says, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). At the same time, Eve is made the helper to Adam. In relationship to essence and nature, Adam and Eve are equal. In relationship to role, Adam and Eve are different. To understand the first human family in this way meets the requirements of the law of noncontradiction. For Adam to be head of the first family and Eve to be designated a helper to Adam does not contradict the equality which is present.

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## IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART II

by Dennis Prutow

Before moving to my next point, let me head off my detractors. In pointing out God is characterized in Scripture as a "helper", I am not at all intimating a man helped by God is somehow placed in a role over God. I simply made this point to display that the role of helper does not connote inferiority. This being the case, there is absolutely no contradiction between the notion of the equality of human beings with regard to nature and dignity and the notion that God placed the first man and women in different roles by making one the helper of the other.

As Adam and Eve faced life in the garden, Adam was the one helped and Eve was the helper. The word translated "helper" in Genesis 2:18 and 20 is used in this specific manner in Isaiah 31:3. Italics are added.

Now the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit; so the Lord will stretch out His hand, and he who helps will stumble and he who is helped will fall, and all of them will come to an end together.

It was common then as it is now for individuals to be in the role of the helped or in the role of the helper.

The New Testament comments on this distinction of role established in the garden.

For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

Woman was created to meet the need of the man. Adam could not accomplish the tasks given by God alone. A helper was needed. In this sense, woman was created for the sake of man.

Does this place Adam in the leadership role and Eve in the role of support? This is the traditional interpretation. But some suppress the aspect of role and insist the on the priority of oneness. At Wheaton College in August of 1993 before the National Conference of Christians for Biblical Equality, Gilbert Bilezikian said,

Male rulership began only after the fall as a result of the fall (Genesis 3:16). It was an element of the curse that would eventually be overturned in Christ's redemption with the reestablishment of the primacy of oneness.

The role of leader and head pejoratively characterized as rulership. This rulership is placed in opposition to the primacy of oneness. There are two errors here. The first is the unfortunate characterization which seems to indicate roles were introduced as a result of the fall. The second is placing oneness opposition to role and giving oneness the primacy.

First, was Adam the head of the first human family? The whole theological construct of the Bible indicates he was. Romans 5:12-21 makes this abundantly clear. The section begins with these words, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-" (Romans 5:12). The point should be clear. Adam was the responsible party in the covenant of works. Eve was also responsible. She too sinned. But Adam stood in a unique position. He represented all his posterity. He stood as the head of the race.

We insist on this because Adam and Christ are compared and contrasted in this passage.

So then as through one there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification to all men. For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

As Christ represented sinners, Adam represented all humankind. He sinned and humanity was plunged into darkness. He bore responsibility before God as the head of humanity. Adam failed in his responsibility before God. Eve also failed in responsibility to be an adequate helper to Adam. Rather than supporting him in the cultural mandate, she undermined the possibility of success by turning to Satan.

Bilezikian is correct in saying rulership began after the fall if he means dictatorial rulership began after the fall in distinction to headship. We are never privileged to lord it over the heritage of God, the primary manifestation of which is the family. But in the beginning, the role of head and the role of support were present.

Godly headship is restored by Christ. This is the picture given to us by Paul in Ephesians 5. We'll have opportunity to speak to this more in time. The point to grasp here is the role of head and the role of helper were instituted by God in the first human family. Bilezikian is incorrect if he is characterizing God ordained

headship as rulership in a deprecatory sense.

He is also incorrect when he insists Christ's redemption reestablishes the primacy of oneness. He misunderstands the historic doctrine of the Trinity at this point. As within the Godhead, so within the first human family, there was equality of essence and nature. At the same time there are differing roles. In the economy of redemption the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have different roles to play. In the administration of world affairs given to Adam and Eve, they too have different roles to play. Does the fact of their oneness supersede their job descriptions and obliterate the distinction in role. No! Oneness is neither primary nor secondary. In similar fashion the position of leader and the position of helper does not override and efface oneness. Oneness and role are equally ultimate. The former does not have primacy over the latter nor is the reverse true. This is a reflection of the Trinity where unity and diversity are equally ultimate and important and equally present.

Isn't this position a blatant contradiction? No! The law of non-contradiction is not violated. There is logical consistency. With respect to human nature Adam and Eve are one. With respect to role they are different.

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## IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART VI

The Church as a Covenantal Authority Structure

by Dennis Prutow

There are six other words translated *authority* in our English versions. The first word is used only two times in the New Testament: Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42. We looked at the parallel to these passages in Part IV of this series, Luke 22:25. As noted there, the problem is not with authority *per se*. The problem is in the sinful way in which the authority is exercised.

The next word we consider is also used only two times in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul exhorts, "First of all then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority." This is an obvious reference to civil authority. In the other reference. Paul uses the same word in relation to himself. "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come to you with superiority of speech or of wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:1). The word translated superiority here is rendered authority in 1 Timothy 2:2. Literally Paul is saying, "I did not come to you on the basis of the superiority of words." The superiority of speech to which Paul refers He also calls "persuasive words of wisdom" (verse 4) described as the "wisdom of men" (verse 5). What Paul is describing here in the Greek context finds its kinship in the "traditions of men" which were placed over the Word of God by the Pharisees (Matthew 15:1-9). In other words, to "come with superiority of speech" is to come in the authority of men. Whereas to come "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" is to come in the authority of God. With this, we are beginning to grapple with authority as it is to be exercised within the church.

The third word with which we are concerned is used in the New Testament seven times.<sup>3</sup> It means *command*, *order*, *authority*. It is translated *command* in the New American Standard Bible in four instances: Romans 16:26, 1 Corinthians

7:6, and 2 Corinthians 8:8. In two cases the word is translated *commandment*, referring to the commandment of God: 1 Timothy 1:1, and Titus 1:3. In these cases the word carries with it the connotation of authority. That is, commands or commandments may be published with or without authority. When the authority issuing the order is understood, the commandment is heeded.

The final place our word is used is in Titus 2:15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Here Paul directs Titus how to speak. He is to speak with authority. What is Titus to speak? "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Others are teaching the "commandments of men" (Titus 1:14). This is again reminiscent of the Pharisees teaching the traditions of men rather than the commandments of God. Titus is exhorted to teach the commandments of God. He may therefore and should speak with authority. The authority is not from men. But it is authority from God.

Paul then outlines what Titus is to teach. He is to give specific directions to the older men, the older women, the young men, and the slaves within the congregation (Titus 2:2-14). And Titus is to do this with *all authority*. Like Timothy, Titus no doubt received his commission and authority from the elders before he was left in Crete. Paul reminded Timothy,

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14). But this authority transmitted to Timothy and Titus was emphatically not the authority of men. It was the authority of God. The elders, acting under the authority of God, set aside Timothy and Titus for the gospel ministry. These men were therefore acting under authority of the gathered body of elders, the presbytery. Second, their authority was not something which was assumed by them. It was given. And as long as these men set forth the commandments of God rather than the traditions of men, they

properly exercised their authority. I include in the commandments of God the directions for the manner in which authority is to be exercised. Those who exercise authority are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and with love. In a similar fashion, the apostle Paul did not launch his mission to the Gentile world on his own authority. Paul and Barnabus were set aside by the church at Antioch with the laying on of hands. They were sent by the church. They too were under authority (Acts 13:1-3). Further, when Paul encountered difficulty on the mission field, he appealed to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to settle an important doctrinal matter (Acts 15:1-2).

One of the significant points to be grasped here is the nature of the church. The church of Jesus Christ is a covenantal authority structure. It is an authority structure in that there are those who are appointed to teach and preach. They act under the authority the body of elders. They are to speak the commands of God and represent God to the people of God. They are to speak with authority. This is an awesome task which is not to be taken lightly. It is a task which must not be assumed on the basis of self appointment. For a person to arrogate such authority to himself or herself is the greatest pretense.

That the church is a covenantal authority structure is evidenced in the practice of taking vows within the church. Those ordained to the gospel ministry take solemn vows before God. They are in covenant with Him concerning their work. By the same token, members also take vows. In the Reformed Presbyterian Church these vows are called the Covenant of Church Membership. In other communions they are simply known as membership vows. These vows reflects the biblical requirements for pastors to set forth the Word of God and the requirement of members, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account" (Hebrews 13:17). Pastors will give account as men under authority.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This word is the noun

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Copies may be made for study in church school classes.