

# 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*.<sup>1</sup>

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 administration of 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 and in the 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 God 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 satisfied.<sup>2</sup>

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 the marriage. Nor is an individual child more important than 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

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

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete treatment of this subject, see: R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, *Classic Apologetics* (Grand

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

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 non-contradiction. 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.

## 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 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 is 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 in 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 her 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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