

“Orthodox presbyter replies to “heretic” bishop.”

I was delighted to read Bishop Robert Forsyth’s review of my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, IVP, 2002 in the December edition of *Southern Cross*. I hope that my book claiming Sydney theologians have fallen into heresy on the doctrine of the Trinity in their zeal to uphold the permanent subordination of women will be widely read and a serious and detailed response will be made by the Sydney Doctrine Commission.

Robert tries to side step my case by arguing that the Sydney position is orthodoxy as the Creeds define it. However the Nicene Creed affirms that the Father and the Son are “one in being” (Greek *homoousios*). In direct contradiction the Sydney Doctrinal Commission speaks of “differences of being” in the Godhead (para 25). Basic to the Sydney doctrine Commission report is the idea that the Son is less in authority than the Father, like women are less in authority than men in the home and the church. In direct contradiction the Athanasian Creed affirms that all three divine persons are not only “coequal” but also equal in authority (all three are “almighty”).

I smiled when Archbishop Carnley of Perth and primate of the Australian Anglican Church, was quoted in support of a hierarchically ordered Trinity. Sydney evangelicals usually depict him as a dangerous liberal.. Appeals to the Trinity to support the subordination of one group or another are legion but this does not say they are orthodoxy as defined by the Creeds and Confessions. I have answered the Primate’s defective reasoning elsewhere (*Common Theology*, 1-2, 2002, 13-15). On the back of my book four of the foremost evangelical theologians in America endorse in detail or in principle my argument. Their opinion I would have thought was of more weight.

As my book is basically a study in hermeneutics, how to interpret the Bible rightly, I deliberately do not spend time debating specific problematic texts. Yes Robert, 1 Cor. 15:28 is a difficult text but I am more than happy with the interpretation that Calvin gave, which I quote at length, or better still Professor Pannenberg’s interpretation. He argues that this text refers to the voluntary handing back of the rule of all things to the Father by the Son at the end of world history, which is the counterpart of the voluntary bestowal of rule to the Son by the Father after the resurrection. In other words the text speaks of “role change,” not “fixed roles”.

My argument that the *eternal* role subordination of the Son, or *eternal* subordination in act or work, implies necessarily inferiority in being is not a novel or absurd thesis as Robert suggests. If someone is permanently incapable of leadership then by necessity they lack something the superior possesses. Dr Broughton Knox from the late 70’s onwards as he developed his theology against the ordination of women often spoke of “superiority-inferiority” in the Father-Son and the man-woman relationship (e.g. *The Ministry of Women*, 1977, 30-31). In contrast orthodoxy uniformly asserts that the divine three always act as one. They are one in being and work/function. I could not have more

thoroughly documented this point, yet Robert dismisses my case as if it were a personal quirk of mine.

In all honesty, as much as I like the bishop, I think he needs to do better than this. If I am not substantially refuted then the charge remains, Sydney theologians have fallen into heresy on the primary doctrine, the doctrine of God, in their quest to keep women subordinate.

On the matter of slavery Robert raises no substantial objections to my case that the wrong-headed and immoral 19th century evangelical “biblical argument” for slavery was far stronger than the 20th century evangelical case for the permanent subordination of women. Before quoting 1 Tim 1:10 to raise doubts on what I claim Robert should have consulted a commentary. What seems to be condemned is stealing a slave from a slave owner. Slavery as such is not condemned in this verse or any other in the Bible. In the ancient world slavery and the subordination of women were both taken-for-granted realities.

To conclude by suggesting I have undermined the authority of the Bible by saying, some things in Scripture cannot be applied in our age and should not be, is a bit over the top. Does the Bishop insist that in his part of the diocese footwashing be practiced and women cover their heads when taking part in church services as scripture commands?

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