

# Rejoinder to Robert Letham

*Kevin Giles*

Dr Robert Letham is a formidable critic. He is a first rate conservative Reformed theologian who has mastered the primary and secondary sources on the Trinity. Where he commends my work I am encouraged, and where he criticises me I take notice. I am thus pleased that on a number of key matters in my article rejecting the thesis that the Son is eternally subordinated or submissive he concludes I have it basically right. Where he criticises me, I think he has not read me carefully enough. In the space available I can only take up a few key issues.

I in fact emphatically endorse unchanging divine order. In my *Jesus and the Father* I discuss what all my witnesses to the Trinity tradition say on this matter (109-10, 134, 164-5, 219, see also 48-50, 225-6) and I make divine order one of my seven fundamentals for an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (311). I agree that the Father sends and the Son is sent, and with Augustine I argue that this speaks of immutable divine differences not the subordination of the Son. In the same way I also insist that the Son is 'begotten'.

I do not think by quoting with approval one Greek Orthodox theologian who embraces a mild form of subordinationism that this makes it right. In his book on the Trinity Dr Letham warns against the tendency to subordinationism in Orthodox theology.

As for his comments that I unfairly criticise LMETS and Dr Wayne Grudem in particular, arguing that they are Arians, I must also respond. My thesis is that LMETS and many other evangelicals, including Dr Letham himself, in their quest to ground the permanent subordination of women in the immanent Trinity have embraced some key elements basic to Arianism, not that that they are Arians. I openly acknowledge and often point out in my book that all these people say they endorse the full divinity of Christ and that they claim that their teaching faithfully reflects the Creeds and Confessions and the great patristic theologians. Their counter claim is that I am the one in error. My response to this counter charge is to ask people to consider the evidence that is unambiguous and extensive. We cannot both be right. In regard to Dr Grudem I do not deny for a moment that he makes many orthodox comments on the Trinity. My claim is that often nearby he will say something that is contradictory. For example, yes he does say the Son is omnipotent, but his primary thesis is that the Son must obey the Father. Does not this imply that the Son is a little bit less omnipotent than the Father?

Dr Letham suggests that to question what some of the most significant and influential leaders of the conservative evangelical movement are teaching may threaten their jobs. I think not. The fact is that many stand in fear of their displeasure. I am only a knave crying out, 'The emperor has no clothes on.' Should I keep silent if this is true?

I agree that a differing role does not imply the subordination in being of one party, but if the supposed role is permanent or eternal, reflecting an unchanging

power relationship I hold that it does. Dr Letham does not say anything on this matter that I make central to this debate.

I endorse unreservedly the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ. I simply argue, following Calvin among others, that the human does not bring the divine down. The ascended Christ, fully man and fully God, is one in power with the Father and the Son. He now reigns as Lord.

What I ask my readers to do is simply look at the evidence I outline, and if they have other questions in mind about my views read my book for the facts.

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## **Surrejoinder to Kevin Giles**

***Robert Letham***

Kevin Giles and I have had a number of written exchanges over the last few years, and I am currently on holiday in the USA and away from sources of information. Rather than reply in detail to him, let me simply offer a minor correction to his comment about my reference to 'one Greek Orthodox theologian'. The citation was of John Meyendorff, born in France to a family from the Russian nobility, a leading Russian Orthodox theologian and before his death Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary. It was not made on his own account, as a proposal of his own, but was a description of Byzantine theology as a whole. In this we should recognise a significant difference from that to which we in the west are accustomed. Eastern theology considers originality to be located in the sources, 'the originals', rather than in any ingenuity by the individual theologian, and so prizes what it maintains is the unchanging nature of its faith. Moreover, Orthodoxy is a seamless web, a living stream comprising the Bible, the creeds, the writings of those it regards as Fathers, and above all the liturgy, which dates back to the fourth century. A citation from an individual Orthodox theologian, when compared with its counterpart from a Barth, a Moltmann or a Torrance, has to be seen in the context of this constant vital tradition in a much more heightened way.