

Cat.1 # 5 God, hierarchy and justice

By Pieter Bos

Note by Helene Bos, 2018: During the last half century there has been a rejection of the concept of hierarchy, due to the movement of new-liberalism. All hierarchy and authority is mocked and rejected by the advocates of that (rebellious) movement. Therefore it is important to reflect on this subject that Pieter wrote about.

The concept of hierarchy is suspect. The statement "The man is the head of the woman" triggers negative reactions. How can hierarchy and justice relate positively?

At a reflective point in his argument Paul "wants us to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1Cor 11:3). In other words: there is a hierarchical order God / Christ / husband / wife, and that for the sake of justice!

Research shows that in Paul's day "head" is NOT understood to mean "centre of control" but "source of life" (see note). In other words: God is the source of life –quite obvious-; Christ receives life from God and passes it on to husband; husband receives it from Christ and passes it on to his wife.

In this understanding man's primary responsibility, in general: also government's primary responsibility, is not ruling, but passing on the life received from above! This is the beauty of hierarchy for the sake of justice. In a true hierarchical structure life flows from the Head to the body, flows DOWN from the Source of Life, and every "head" in between is responsible for the life to be passed on down the ladder!

What happens when a man, a government, does not recognize God? If life is not received from above it is sucked up from below: a father, a teacher, a church, a government, enriching and empowering himself/itself at the expense of the "subjects": broken hierarchy corrupts justice.

That's why God, as the source of life, is throughout scripture emphatically concerned about the "widow and orphan", and "the least of my brothers" as they are at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. The quality of life of the weak is a signal for the quality of functioning of hierarchy.

Jesus offers to go to a centurion to heal his servant (Matt 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). The –pagan- centurion identifies himself as a man both "under authority" and with authority (Matt 8:9). The centurion understands that it is only through obedience to his superiors that he has the authority to rule others. That's why he cares for his sick servant (Matt 8:5-6), values his servant highly (Luke 7:2), loves the nation where he is sent (Galilee, of all places) and builds the local synagogue (Luke 7:4). That's why he reasons: "That Jewish rabbi would never be able to care for the sick so powerfully, if he was not himself obedient to the one who commissioned him; from him one word should be sufficient."

"When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him: I tell you the truth, I have not found in Israel anyone with such great faith" (Matt 8:10). Jesus makes an instant sermon on the topic of hierarchy. He makes a very strong declaration by saying that "subjects of the kingdom will be thrown out," whereas many coming from outside will enter into the kingdom (Matt 8:11-12). In other words: those who do not practice true hierarchy, who rule down without caring down, will be expelled; those who may not be legitimate subjects but who act according to true hierarchy, will come in and take their places!

This short sermon of Jesus establishes true hierarchy and justice: with respect and trust "up" and loving care "down", hierarchy functions for the sake of justice for the weak. In short: hierarchy is not lick up and kick down, but honour up and care down.

- Note: Mickelsen, Berkeley & Alvera. 'What does Kaphale mean in the New Testament?' in Alvera Mickelsen (ed.), Women, Authority & the Bible, Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986.