

Incarnation, Trinity, and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

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In my earlier article¹ on 1 Timothy 2:12 and the ordination of women, I argued that Paul's *contextual* and *church-specific* reading and application of the creation texts indicates that the limitations on women's teaching roles in the church are circumstantial rather than universal prohibitions. Now, I wish to address arguments in a specifically Anglican² context that were not addressed in the first article, namely, arguments based on the incarnation and the Father/Son relationship within the Trinity that are thought to bar the ordination of women as priests and bishops. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two documents as sources for the main arguments to be considered in this Anglican context: the essay "Priestesses in the Church?" by C. S. Lewis,³ and "A Report of the Study Concerning the Ordination of Women Undertaken by the Anglican Mission in America," Rev. John H. Rodgers, chairman.⁴

It is not my purpose to discuss three other sets of arguments that are here considered secondary to the primary theological issues being addressed: the canonical irregularity or illegality of the first ordination of women to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) in 1974 and 1975,⁵ issues arising from the feminist movement and the "culture wars," or the argument against women priests from patristic authority and church tradition. With regard to "culture wars," cultural conservatives tend to see the ordination of women as symptomatic of a feminist movement that destabilizes the family and society generally;⁶ cultural progressives and egalitarians tend to see male-dominant readings of Scripture as increasing the dangers of domestic violence and abuse.⁷

With respect to patristic authority and church tradition, it is certainly the case that both support the traditional view of a male-only priesthood. Nevertheless, while patristic and ecclesiastical tradition has significant weight in an Anglican context, the tradition is not irrefrangible, and can be overcome by the Scriptures more rightly and adequately understood. During the Galileo controversy, the Vatican could rightly point to a patristic and later church tradition that was solidly on the side of a geocentric understanding of biblical texts such as Psalm 19, Joshua 10:13, and Psalm 93:1, and yet, as history shows, the church was later to correct its earlier understanding of these texts in the light of new evidence and better hermeneutical principles.⁸ Such may also be the case with regard to traditional understandings of the biblical texts regarding the ordination of women.

Incarnation: The male priest as "icon of Christ"

In his 1948 essay, "Priestesses in the Church?," Lewis recognized that any decision by the Church of England to ordain women as priests would likely be very divisive: dividing the Church of England from other historic churches and dividing the church internally against itself. In hindsight, Lewis proved to be correct on both counts. But in Lewis's own mind, the central problem was theological in nature, relating to the very nature of the incarnation itself. A priest is a double representative, representing the people to God and God to the people. He had no problem with a woman representing the people to God, but he did have a problem with a woman representing God to the people.⁹ But what is the problem here: "Since God is in fact not a biological being and

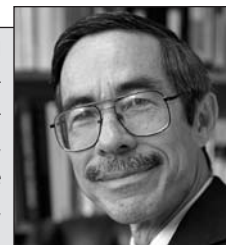
has no sex, what can it matter whether we say He or She, Father or Mother, Son or Daughter?"¹⁰

Lewis's answer is that "God himself has taught us how to speak of Him."¹¹ The masculine language of the Bible is not of merely human origin; it is neither arbitrary nor unessential: "A child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child."¹² "Equal" does not mean "interchangeable," and Lewis believed the gender language of the Bible was intended to "symbolize to us the hidden things of God."¹³ Jesus Christ was the true High Priest, and the incarnation took place in the form of a male, not a female: "Only one wearing the masculine uniform can (provisionally, and until the Parousia) represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him."¹⁴

How compelling is this argument from the incarnation and the male gender of Jesus? There is no question that Jesus was indeed the High Priest of the New Covenant, and that Jesus was of the male gender; however, there are a number of serious problems with this line of argument.

First of all, this line of argument overlooks the fact that the nature of priesthood has fundamentally changed in the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, it was the case that all priests were male; it is also true that Jesus Christ, the great High Priest (Heb. 9:11, 10:12–14) of the New Covenant, who completed and fulfilled the meaning of the Old Testament priesthood, was a male. The key change, however, is that, in the New Testament church, *all* believers are priests, offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Both male and female are "priests" in the New Testament usage of the term (cf. also Rev. 5:10, "You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to our God"). The word "priest" in the New Testament church is not limited to one male who stands before an earthly "altar"; the true altar is in heaven, where Christ, the High Priest, continues to represent us as his people before God (Heb. 8:2, 9:24, "to appear for us in God's presence"; 10:21, "We have a great priest over the house of God"). There is only *one* mediator between humanity (*anthropon*) and God, the human (*anthropos*) Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5); believers in the New Testament are no longer dependent on a single human mediator, but have immediate access to the Father, by faith, through Jesus Christ alone (Heb. 10:22: "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart *in full assurance of faith*").

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In the second place, the (male) priest as “icon of Christ” argument misunderstands and overspecifies the purpose of the incarnation. While it is certainly true that Jesus became incarnate as a male, the fundamental point is that God assumed a full and complete *human nature*—a human nature that represents both male and female. The prologue of John’s gospel states, “And the Word became *flesh (sarx)* and dwelt among us. . .” (John 1:14). It does not say, “And the Word became a *male (anēr)*.”

It should also be noticed that, in the incarnation, Jesus is not only a male by gender, but, more specifically, a *Jewish, unmarried, physically unblemished* male. (No one could be ordained to the Levitical priesthood who was blind, lame, deformed, crippled, or with eye defects: Lev. 21:17–21). Would anyone want to argue today, in the New Covenant, that a priest, to be an “icon of Christ,” representing God to the people, must necessarily be an unmarried Jewish male? Certainly not; it is thus apparent that such characteristics are *circumstantial* rather than *essential* characteristics of one who is to assume a full and complete *human* (not merely male) nature for the purpose of redeeming human nature, both men and women, and bringing them to God.

Both male and female are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27); both genders reflect the character of God. From the fact that God became incarnate as a *Jewish* man, it does not follow that Jews can be closer to God than Gentiles or that Jews are better “icons” of God than Gentiles. Nor does it follow from the fact that God became incarnate as a Jewish *man* that males are inherently better “icons” of God than women. Jesus was in fact a *free* man, but assumed the form of a *slave* (Phil. 2:5–11) in the incarnation; both slave and free man can in different ways serve as “icons” of God. The good news is that, in the New Covenant, these distinctions are overcome (Gal. 3:28: “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”); all have equal access to God and to God’s grace.

This having been said, it remains the case that Jesus, as male Priest/Son of God by fact of the incarnation, is reflective of and rooted in the Father/Son language of the Trinity. It is indeed the case that the language of God in Scripture is predominantly though not exclusively male; we can agree that the male language of God in the Bible is neither “arbitrary nor nonessential.” It is not to be construed simply as a culturally conditioned expression of the patriarchal Jewish culture of the biblical writers.

What then is the fundamental significance of the fact the God is revealed in Scripture as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” and not, say, as “Father, Mother, Child”? The question is, does the “Father/Son” language “valorize” the male imagery over the female? If so, is it really the case that God is more like a man than a woman? That men are intrinsically closer to the nature and essence of God than women? That male gender is intrinsically more fitting to reflect the nature of God than the female? These are crucial questions, and entire social orders have been built on the answers!

The position here argued, however, is a “no” to the above questions: that maleness is not, in fact, more similar to the divine essence than femaleness and that the male language of the Trinity is a *circumstantial* (though not arbitrary) and not *essential* characteristic of the Trinitarian revelation of Scripture.

First of all, following Aquinas and the mainstream of historic orthodox theology generally, it is to be recognized that all bibli-

cal and human language about God is *analogical* and not strictly *literal* in nature. As Aquinas stated, “things are said of God and creatures analogically and not in a purely equivocal nor in a purely univocal sense. . . . [T]hese names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, that is, according to proportion.”¹⁵ The word “Father” is predicated on a human father and on God as Father in an analogical sense, according to proportion. God is really like a human father in some respects, but being infinite and perfect, not *just* like or *only* like a human father, but infinitely greater than any human father.

God is a spirit by nature (John 4:24), and so is not literally a gendered being, though revealed (analogically) through gendered human language. If the nature of God was in fact “male” in some metaphysically ultimate sense, then one might have expected a revelation of the Triune name in *exclusively* male imagery such as “Father, Son, and Elder Brother,” or something of the like. The language of “Father, Son, Holy Spirit,” while seemingly predominantly (two-thirds?) male, is “neuter” on the Spirit (*pneuma*). And *ruach* (Spirit) in the Hebrew is feminine, while *ho paraklētōs* (“the Comforter”) is masculine in the Greek—which is an indication that the Holy Spirit transcends literal human gender categories. Since the Holy Spirit is a coequal, coeternal person of the Holy Trinity, possessing the same “power, substance, and glory,” the *lack* of a specific gender for the Spirit can be no less truly revelatory of the nature of God than the “male” gender language of Son and Father.

It can also be noted that God is also described in Scripture even in terms that are *impersonal*: God is a “Rock” (Isa. 17:1: “You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress”); “Fire” (Deut. 4:24: “the Lord your God is a consuming fire”); and “Light” (1 John 1:5, “God is Light, and in him there is no darkness at all”). These impersonal, analogical descriptors reflect the strength, solidity, holiness, moral purity, and truthfulness of God’s nature, while balancing overly *anthropomorphic* conceptions of God (as, for example, in the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon).

The fundamental core assertion of the Triune name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the *personal* nature of God: *ultimate reality is a communion of coequal, coeternal divine persons in holy, loving relationships*. The Triune community is the ontological basis of all human community and communion. It is here argued that the fundamental significance of the “male” language of the Trinity is an analogical revelation of the *strength and power of God to create and redeem*: God is the “Almighty” maker of heaven and earth, and the “Divine Warrior” (e.g., Exod. 15:3, “the Lord is a warrior”) who is strong to redeem his people from their enemies.¹⁶ The male language of God is *power* language that signifies that God is powerful to create and to save—that God is indeed the true God; there is no other.

At the same time, the feminine images of God in Scripture—less prominent, but not insignificant—“Mother” (Isa. 42:14), woman (Luke 15:8–10), hen (Matt. 23:37), and so forth—signify that God *nurtures and protects* as well as creates and redeems. Both the “power” language and the “nurturing” language speak truly of God; both are reflective of God’s character, just as male and female made in God’s image can both reflect the true character of God.

The revelation of the personal, Triune God as “Father, Son, Holy Spirit” and not as, say, “Father, Mother, Child” distinguishes the true God from the sexually active gods and goddesses of ancient Near Eastern polytheism, such as Baal and Asherah.¹⁷ *Yahweh has no consort*: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, later more fully revealed as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is no *fertility god* tied to the cycles of nature. In the Bible, “father gods” and “mother goddesses” do not sexually procreate “baby gods and goddesses.” The true God is the creator of human sexuality and genders, but is not literally a gendered being; rather, he is eternally an infinite, personal spirit. The Father/Son relationship of the Bible is a personal and covenantal, but not a *sexual* relationship.

At the same time, it is not the case that the biblical language of God as Father is arbitrary or only a reflection of cultural conditioning. The Father/Son language of the biblical and Trinitarian tradition is rooted in the prayer language of Jesus, who taught his disciples to address God as “Father.” Jesus took a designation of God that was relatively infrequent in the Old Testament and reflective of God’s fatherhood of the *nation* of Israel and made it *central* to the Christian understanding of God and intensely *personal*, foundational to the disciples’ personal relationship to God.

The Father/Son language of the Scriptures, and especially the nature of Jesus’ relation to the Father in the New Testament, is a revelation of a true Father/Son relationship and a model of how human fathers and sons should relate in the community of faith. The father/son relationship is a crucial human relationship in all cultures, and the biblical revelation of Father and Son teaches a healthy balance of strength and love, of authority and intimacy,¹⁸ that makes for healthy families, healthy churches, and a healthy social order generally.

Eternal subordination in the Trinity?

The second major type of argument against the ordination of women as priests (and bishops) is based on a claim that, in the life of the Trinity, the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, and that this, by way of analogy, provides justification for the subordination of women to men in the ordained ministry of the church. Examples of this type of argument may be found in the writings of two prominent evangelical scholars.¹⁹

According to one, “God’s ordering of the relations of male and female in the family ultimately reflects and rests upon God’s own triune nature. . . . An eternal headship and submission are lived out in the divine life of love. God the Father . . . is eternally the Father of the Son . . . loving headship and submission are eternal in the life of God.”²⁰ “The headship of the man reflects God’s Fatherhood in the life of the Trinity . . . the nuclear family is the ‘little church in the Church’ and the Church is the family of the families of God.”²¹ The submission by women to male authority in the church presumably is a reflection of the Son’s eternal submission to the Father in the Trinity.²²

The other scholar makes the striking claim that the “subjection of the Son to the Father for all eternity, a subjection that never began but always existed, and a subjection that will continue eternally in the future, does not nullify the deity of the Son.”²³ His concern

is to preserve the historic Nicene orthodoxy, which insists that, in the divine essence, the Son is fully equal to the Father (*homoousios*), but that in *role and status* the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. (As we shall see, this claim can not be sustained.)

He cites texts that speak of the Father “giving” and “sending” the Son to argue for a “unique headship, a unique authority for the Father *before* the Son came to earth,”²⁴ and appeals to texts such as Ephesians 1:4, John 1:3 (“all things were made *through* him”), and 1 Corinthians 15:28 to argue that the “Son is eternally submissive to the Father.”²⁵ He concludes that the alleged “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” shows how “equality in being and in value and in honor can exist together with differences in roles between husband and wife as well,”²⁶ and, by implication, in the subordination of women to men in the church.

These arguments show, unfortunately, how a particular social and cultural agenda—arguing for male “headship” over women—can lead to serious distortions in the reading of Scripture and of the historic doctrine of the Trinity. The thesis of the “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” is, as we shall see, a serious doctrinal deviation from the historic understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that this point of view appears to be gaining some ground in evangelical circles is to be viewed with alarm.²⁷ This way of arguing on (mistaken) Trinitarian grounds for the subordination of women to men in the ordained ministries of the church has serious logical, historical, and biblical/theological problems, as we shall see below.

In the first place, it is simply a *non sequitur* to conclude from the premise “The Son is eternally subordinate to the Father” that “Women are subordinate to men in the church.” [Let it be noted clearly: The truth of this first premise is *not* being granted in this article; it is in fact believed to be false.] The argument seems to be of the following structure: Suppose that it is the case that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father; this shows that subordination in role or function is compatible with equality of essence or nature; therefore, this supports our conclusion that women should be subordinate to men in the ordained offices of the church, since women can have equality with men by nature but be subordinate to men in roles and authority in the church.

This is an attempted argument by analogy, and arguments from analogy are only persuasive, and rarely demonstrative, since argument by analogy depends on the degrees of likeness or dissimilarity between the items being compared. In this case, the analogy is more *dissimilar* than similar. Consider the comparison in question: Father is to Son (in the eternal Trinity) as man should be to woman (in the ordained ministries of the church). The problem here is that the comparison is between, *eternal, infinite, divine, discarnate persons* in the eternal Trinity, of the “same gender,” and *temporal, finite, enfleshed human persons* of different genders in the historical church: The differences are much greater than the similarities. This stretches the analogy to the breaking point and evacuates the plausibility of the comparison. Furthermore, even if it could be argued that “subordination in role is consistent with equality of dignity or nature,” it does not follow that this *must* be the case in male/female role relationships in ministry; this must be argued on other (exegetical) grounds.

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This type of argument also seems to be guilty of the fallacy of reading a certain understanding of the human father/son relationship in time back into the eternal life of the Trinity. Human father/son relationships change over time. From birth through adolescence and until full adulthood is achieved, the son is dependent upon and subordinate to the father's authority. Over time, however, the relationship changes; the adult son can relate to his father as a friend, giving to the father continuing respect, but not owing unquestioning obedience. At the end of the life cycle, it can be the father who is "subordinate" to the son financially and otherwise, and dependent upon a younger and healthier son. The hierarchical argument in this matter seems to be guilty of selecting one aspect of a changing relationship (when son is dependent on the father) and importing *that* temporally conditioned aspect back into the eternal Father/Son relationship within the Trinity. When George W. Bush was president, he still owed his father, George H. W. Bush, respect, but while his son was in the White House, the older Bush was subordinate to the younger Bush in authority and prestige.

Historic Trinitarian orthodoxy: eternal equality of the Father and Son

The historic, orthodox understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that, in eternity, in the "immanent" Trinity (the *theologia*), the Son is in all things equal to the Father. In time, during his incarnate, earthly ministry (the *oikonomia*, or "economic" Trinity), the Son was *voluntarily* subordinate (in function, not essence) to the Father. The historic creeds and the church fathers were insistent that this distinction between the *theologia* and the *oikonomia* was crucial for right interpretations of the scriptural texts regarding Christ and for avoiding the various forms of subordinationism that had arisen in the church from the time of Origen to that of Arius. The basic error of the "New Evangelical Subordinationists"²⁸ is their failure to maintain this proper distinction between the *theologia* and the *oikonomia*.

The Constantinopolitan Creed, generally known as the Nicene Creed, has, since the time of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), been associated with the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) and was used in the liturgy of the Eucharist from the sixth century onward. Since the time of Chalcedon, it has become the most universally accepted of all the Christian creeds, acknowledged as a standard of orthodoxy by East and West alike.²⁹ Formulated to refute the Arian subordinationism of the Son to the Father, the creed emphatically asserts the essential equality of the Son and the Father:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through Whom all things came into being. . . .³⁰

An important commentary on this expression of Nicene orthodoxy is contained in a synodical letter of the bishops who had gathered in Constantinople, issued shortly afterward in A.D. 382. Some of these bishops had suffered violent persecution from the

Arians for defending the Nicene faith: "It was barely yesterday . . . that some [of the orthodox bishops] were freed from the bonds of exile and returned to their own churches through a thousand tribulations. . . . Even after their return from exile some experienced a ferment of hatred from the heretics. . . . Others were torn to shreds by various tortures and still carry around on their bodies the marks of Christ's wounds and bruises."³¹ For these orthodox bishops, the full deity and equality of the Son to the Father was no small matter, but a truth worth dying for!

The synodical letter makes it clear that the bishops affirmed the eternal equality of nature and dignity of the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed, stated the bishops,

tells us how to believe in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit: believing also, of course, that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a single Godhead and power and substance, *a dignity deserving the same honour and a co-eternal sovereignty* [emphasis added] in three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect Persons. . . . To sum up, we know that he was before the ages fully God the Word, and that in the last days he became fully man for the sake of our salvation.³²

The last sentence above reflects the distinction that was to become classic in orthodox Christology and Trinitarian doctrine, namely, that in eternity, in the *theologia*, the Son is in all things equal to the Father as to deity, while in the *oikonomia*, he became voluntarily subordinate to the Father with respect to his human nature.

The critical phrase in the synodical letter above is "a dignity deserving the same honour and a co-eternal sovereignty" (*homo-timou te axias kai synaidiou tēs basileias*).³³ Having just stated that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a "single Godhead (*theotētos*) and power and substance (*ousias*), the bishops make it clear that they believe that the Father and the Son have a "co-eternal sovereignty" (*basileias*). There is simply no way that "co-eternal sovereignty" can be squared with an eternal *subordination* of the Son to the Father. Equal sovereignty means equal *authority, power, and honor*—not less. The "New Evangelical Subordinationists"³⁴ have simply misread the tradition on this crucial point.

This reading of the Nicene Creed is further supported by the statements of Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian fathers, who was greatly influential in the formation of historic Trinitarian orthodoxy. In his *Fifth Theological Oration*, in a series of influential lectures given in the Church of the Anastasis in Constantinople prior to the Council of 381, Gregory ("the Theologian") clearly articulated his understanding of the eternal equality of the Father and the Son:

We believe in three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power. . . . When we look at the Godhead . . . at the Persons in whom the Godhead dwells, . . . *timelessly and with equal glory* [emphasis added] . . . there are three whom we worship. Each of these Persons possesses unity . . . by reason of the identity of essence and power. . . . I hope it may always be my position . . . to worship God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, three persons,

one Godhead, *undivided in honor and glory and substance and kingdom*. . . . [emphasis added]³⁵

For Gregory, the Father and the Son were eternally equal not only in *substance*, but also in *honor and glory and kingdom*. A coequal and coeternal “kingdom” implies coequal *authority* of the Son with the Father and flies in the face of the misunderstandings of the “New Evangelical Subordinationists.”

In a synod at Rome in 382, Pope Damasus issued the so-called “Tome of Pope Damasus,” clearly affirming the deity and equality of the Son and Spirit with the Father:

We anathematize those who do not wholly freely proclaim that he (the Holy Spirit) is one power and substance with the Father and the Son. . . . Anyone who does not say that the Son of God is true God, as the Father is true God, that he can do all things, and knows all things, and is equal to the Father, is heretical. . . . Anyone who does not say that there is only one godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one lordship, one kingdom, one will and one truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is heretical.³⁶

This declaration of 382 clearly asserts the equality of the Son to the Father not only in “substance” or essence, but also in *might, majesty, power, glory, lordship, kingdom, and will*. Denial of the equality of the Son with the Father in “might, majesty, power, glory, lordship, kingdom, and will” is considered heretical.

These latter statements leave no room for an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in “role” or “status” before the incarnation. This statement, representative of the Latin church, is consistent with the earlier statements noted above (the synodical letter of 382 of the bishops meeting in Constantinople and the Fifth Oration of Gregory Nazianzus) from the leaders of the Greek churches, and shows the East/West consensus of Trinitarian orthodoxy that was emerging at the close of the fourth century.

The so-called “Athanasian” Creed was likely written sometime between 381 and 428 and first appears in its currently accepted form toward the close of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century.³⁷ It has long been considered a standard of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the West. The Athanasian Creed is an able summary of the christological and Trinitarian doctrines of the first four ecumenical councils and emphatically and repeatedly asserts the equality of the Son with the Father, not any eternal *subordination* of the Son to the Father:

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the majesty coeternal (*aequalis Gloria, coaeterna majestas*). . . . So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty (*omnipotens*): and the Holy Ghost Almighty. . . . So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord (*dominus*): and the Holy Ghost Lord. . . . For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord (*Deum ac Dominum*). . . . And in this Trinity none is before, or after another: none is greater, or less than another (*nihil majus, aut minus*). . . . But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal (*coaequales*). . . . Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood (*minor Patre secundum humanitatem*).³⁸

It is abundantly evident that the explicit terminology of the Athanasian Creed excludes any notion of “eternal subordination” of the Son to the Father: “the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal . . . the Son Almighty . . . the Son Lord . . . every Person *by himself* [emphasis added] God and Lord . . . in this Trinity . . . none is greater, or less than another, . . . But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and *coequal* [emphasis added].” There is no eternal subordination of rank or status of the Son to the Father; the Son is only “inferior to the Father as touching his *Manhood*” [emphasis added], that is, after the incarnation, and with respect to the economy (*oikonomia*), not the eternal, pretemporal *theologia* or immanent Trinity. Phillip Schaff has correctly noted that, according to the Athanasian Creed, in the Trinity, “there is no priority or posteriority of time, no superiority or inferiority of rank, but the three persons are coeternal and coequal.”³⁹

In 675, a local council at Toledo formulated a creed expressing clear formulations regarding the Trinity and the incarnation:

In all things the Son is equal to God the Father, for his being born had no beginning and no end. . . . It must also be confessed and believed that each single Person is wholly God in himself and that all three Persons together are one God. They have one, or undivided, equal godhead, majesty or power, which is not diminished in the individuals nor augmented in the three.⁴⁰

This creed, reflecting the teachings of the Athanasian Creed and doctors of the church such as Augustine, should, in the estimation of the noted Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, “be numbered among the most important doctrinal declarations of the Church.”⁴¹ It clearly gives no support to ideas of an “eternal subordination” of the Son to the Father.

In 680, the sixth ecumenical council, meeting in Constantinople, issued a dogmatic decree against the Monothelites, who held that there was only one will in Christ. The council’s definition stated that Jesus Christ had two distinct but inseparable wills—a human will and a divine will—both acting in harmony, with the human will always acting in subordination to the divine will; “will” being regarded as an attribute of the nature rather than the person:⁴²

And we preach, according to the doctrine of the holy Fathers, *two natural wills* and two natural active principles inseparably, immovably, undividedly, and unconfusedly in him (Christ). And two natural wills, *not opposing each other*, as heretics assert, but his human will following without resistance or reluctance, but rather subject to his divine and omnipotent will . . . the human will had to be moved to submit to the divine will . . . as he (Christ) himself says: “Because I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me,” (John 6:38) calling his own will the will of the flesh. For the flesh, too, was his own.⁴³

In this important dogmatic definition regarding the person of Christ, there are significant implications for the present discussion of the nature of the Father/Son relationship in the Trinity. The orthodox teaching is that the “subordination” of the Son to the Father is the willing subordination of the *human* will of the incarnate Christ, in the *oikonomia*, to the *one* undivided *divine* will common to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are not three separate wills in the Trinity, but one undivided will common to all three, as stated earlier in the tradition. Recall the statement of Pope Damasus (382) noted earlier: “Anyone who does not say that there is only one godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one lordship, one kingdom, *one will* and one truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is heretical.”⁴⁴ The letter of Pope Agatho and the Roman synod of 125 bishops sent to instruct the legates sent to the Council of Constantinople in 680 states that, in the Holy Trinity, “one is the godhead, one the eternity, one the power, one the kingdom, one the glory, one the adoration, *one the essential will and operation* [emphasis added] of the same Holy and inseparable Trinity.”⁴⁵

If there were *three* wills in the godhead, it could make sense to posit an “eternal subordination” of the will of the Son to the will of the Father, but there is one will common to the three persons, not three. Historic orthodoxy teaches one nature and three persons, but not three wills in the Trinity. The “New Evangelical Subordinationists” seem to be guilty of projecting the economic subordination of the human will of the incarnate Son back into the eternal life of the Trinity, and so erase the historic Trinitarian distinction of the *theologia* and the *oikonomia*—the patristic hermeneutical principle for interpreting the New Testament christological texts and guarding against the heresies of Arianism and semi-Arianism.

The historic Reformation and post-Reformation creeds continue the earlier traditions of Trinitarian orthodoxy. The Belgic Confession of 1561 states that all three persons of the Trinity are “co-eternal and co-essential. *There is neither first nor last* [emphasis added]; for they are all three one, in truth, *in power*, in goodness, and mercy.”⁴⁶

Chapter three of the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 states that in the Trinity there are not “three gods, but three persons, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal. . . . We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach . . . that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity (*item creatum ac serviens aut alteri officiale in trinitate*) and that there is something unequal in it, a greater or a less (*inaequale, majus aut minus*) . . . something different with respect to character or will (*voluntate*) . . . as the Monarchians . . . and such like, have thought.”⁴⁷ If the Father and the Son do not differ according to *will*, there can be no eternal subordination of the will of the Son to the Father; the Father and the Son are indeed coeternal, coequal, nothing “unequal” or a “greater or a less.” The creed excludes all forms of subordinationism in very specific and explicit language.

Question nine of the Westminster Larger Catechism (1646) asks, “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” The answer is, “There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.”⁴⁸ This language of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being “equal in power and glory” reflects the historic Trinitarian orthodoxy of the Athanasian creed.

One of the contemporary evangelical hierarchists being examined appeals to biblical statements that the Son was “sent” by the Father (John 17:3, 18; 4:34; 5:24; 8:16; 9:4; 16:5; 20:21), that all things were made *through* [not “by”] him (John 1:3), and “The Son himself shall be subject to Him that put all things under

him” (1 Cor. 15:28) to argue for “eternal differences in relationship within the Trinity.”⁴⁹ These texts and the orthodox Trinitarian tradition, however, do not support such an interpretation.

In his reply to the Macedonians, who denied the full equality and deity of the Holy Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, Basil (“the Great”) of Caesarea, one of the Cappadocian fathers who laid the foundations of historic Trinitarian orthodoxy, defended the equality of rank and glory of the Son with the Father:

The Son, according to them [Macedonians] is not together with the Father, but after the Father . . . inasmuch as “with him” expresses equality of dignity, while “through him” denotes subordination. They further assert that the Spirit is not to be ranked along with the Father and the Son, but under the Son and the Father. . . . Let us first ask them this question: In what sense do they say that the Son is “after the Father,” later in time, or in *order*, or in *dignity*? [emphasis added]. . . . If they really conceive of a kind of degradation of the Son in relation to the Father, *as though he were in a lower place* [emphasis added], so that the Father sits above, and the Son is thrust off to the next seat below, let them confess what they mean. . . . [W]hat excuse can be found for their attack upon Scripture, shameless as their antagonism is, in the passages “Sit thou on my right hand,” and “Sat down on the right hand of the majesty of God”? The expression “right hand of God” does not, as they contend, indicate the lower place, but *equality of relation* [emphasis added]. . . . What just defence shall we have in the day of the awful universal judgment of all creation, if . . . we attempt to degrade him who shares the honor and the throne, from his condition of equality, to a lower state?⁵⁰

Basil clearly asserts the equality of dignity, honor, and rank of the Son with the Father, and would likely have seen the interpretations of the “New Evangelical Subordinationists” as having some significant similarities with the Macedonian heresies that he attempted to combat.

In his great treatise on the Trinity, a foundational text for orthodox Western Trinitarian theology, Augustine addresses the question of why it is said that the Son was “sent” by the Father:

But if the Son is said to be sent by the Father . . . this does not in any manner hinder us from believing the Son to be equal, and consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father. . . . Not because the one is greater, the other less; but because the one is Father, the other Son . . . the Son . . . is said to have been sent because the “Word was made flesh” . . . that he might perform through his bodily presence those things which were written. . . . He was not sent in respect to any inequality of power or substance, *or anything that in Him was not equal to the Father*. [emphasis added]⁵¹

For Augustine, the biblical language of the Father sending the Son implies not any eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, but rather the personal *distinction* between the Father and the Son, and the obedience of the incarnate Son in the *economy*.

One hierarchist appeals to 1 Corinthians 15:28, a text that was also a favorite text of the Arians in support of their subordinationist Christology. This text is understood by Aquinas in a way consistent with the historic orthodox tradition. In considering

the question of whether the Son is equal to the Father in greatness, Aquinas argues that such a text and others such as John 14:28 (“the Father is greater than I”) are to be understood “of Christ’s human nature, wherein He is less than the Father, and subject to him; but in his divine nature He is equal to the Father. This is expressed by Athanasius, ‘Equal to the Father in His Godhead; less than the Father in humanity.’”⁵² “The Son is necessarily equal to the Father in power. . . . The command of the Father [John 14:31, ‘As the Father gave me commandment so do I’] . . . may be referred to Christ in His human nature.”⁵³ Texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:28 may be properly understood to refer to Christ in the *economy*, with respect to his final act as the mediator and accomplisher of redemption in time, reporting “mission accomplished” to the Father, rather than to any eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.⁵⁴

This reading of 1 Corinthians 15:28 is confirmed by John’s heavenly vision in the Apocalypse, where he sees the exalted Lamb in the *center* of God’s throne (Rev. 5:6), not in some lower position, and the Lamb receiving *coequal honor and praise* from every creature in the universe: “To him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13). John’s vision of the heavenly throne pictures the Son’s coequal reign with the Father subsequent to his exaltation and the mediatorial actions presupposed in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

One hierarchist mistakenly argues that Jesus’ being exalted to God’s “right hand” (Psalm 110:1) can still imply that Jesus was “subject to the Father’s authority” and occupied a place of secondary authority.⁵⁵ As Richard Bauckham has correctly noted, while some rabbis read Psalm 110:1 to mean that the Messiah was only given a position of honor as a favored subject beside the throne, the early Christians read the text quite differently: Jesus is seated on the divine throne itself, “exercising God’s own rule over all things.”⁵⁶ The position of the exalted Messiah is not one of subordination, but one of equality and sovereign, universal lordship.

Since the central focus of the New Testament is the mighty acts of Jesus Christ in history for the redemption of his people, it is not surprising that most of the biblical revelation concerning Christ relates to the historical *economy* rather than to the pretemporal *theologia*. Nevertheless, there is substantial witness in the New Testament to the full equality of the Son with the Father from eternity. The classic text with which John opens his gospel, John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God*: kai theos en ho logos), clearly asserts the equality of the Son with the Father. As Murray J. Harris has noted, commenting on this text, “John seems intent to begin his work as he will end it (20:28), with an unqualified assertion of the supreme status of Jesus Christ, in both his preincarnate (1:1) and resurrection (20:28) states. . . . He equally with the Father, is the legitimate object of human worship.”⁵⁷ Harris suggests that part of John’s purpose in 1:1c (“was God”) may have been to avoid any erroneous inference that might have been drawn from 1:1b (“with God”), “that since the Word was said to be ‘with’ the Father—not the Father ‘with’ the Word—he was in some way inferior or subordinate to God.”⁵⁸

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called “our great God and savior” (*tou megalou theou kai sōtēros*, Titus 2:13; cf. 2 Pet. 1:1), not “our (lesser or subordinate) God and savior.” The writer of Hebrews ascribes deity to Christ: “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever’” (Heb. 1:8, Ps. 45:6). The Son sits on Yahweh’s throne, and there is no hint here whatsoever that the Son’s throne is of a second or subordinate rank. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, and the “exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3). There is no hint of subordination here.

Perhaps the most explicit witness in the New Testament to the Son’s eternal, pretemporal equality with the Father is found in the famous “kenosis” passage of Philippians 2:5–11:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God (*en morphē theou hyparkōn*), did not consider equality with God (*to einai isa theō*) something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in human appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross!

The crucial point to be seen here is that, prior to his incarnation, the Son existed in the very nature of God, and *equality* (*isa*) with God was his by right. “He had divine equality as his own prerogative,” as Ralph P. Martin has noted in his extensive commentary, “but gave it up when he exchanged the mode of existence in heaven for the mode of existence as Man upon earth.”⁵⁹ There is *equality* of the Son with the Father before the incarnation and voluntary subordination of the Son to the Father only at the point of the incarnation—not before. This passage clearly supports the historic distinction from the time of Athanasius⁶⁰ to the present between the *theologia* and the *economy*—that the Son is in all things equal to the Father as to his divinity and only subordinate to the Father as to his humanity.

This review of Scripture and of the history of orthodox Trinitarian theology has shown that the notion of the “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” is a serious misunderstanding of both Scripture and tradition. It seems that the “New Evangelical Subordinationists” have revived the subordinationist elements in christological and Trinitarian thought that were introduced into early Christian theology by Origen and that have lingered as a troublesome and confusing presence ever since.⁶¹ It also seems that, in an earlier generation, even conservative theological stalwarts such as Charles Hodge and A. H. Strong did not entirely escape from these subordinationist misunderstandings.⁶²

In the tradition of Eastern theology, there has been a significant tendency to ground the unity of the Trinity in the person of the Father as the “source” (*archē*) or “cause” (*aitia*) of the Son and the Spirit as to their modes of subsistence, but this Eastern view has always posed the danger of subordinationism, as noted above.⁶³ This subordinationist tendency, growing out of the notion of the Father as the “source” or “cause” of the Son, was itself rooted in the notion of the Father (eternally) “begetting” the Son and its anthropomorphic and causal connotations.⁶⁴ It is now rather widely recognized that the crucial word *monogenēs*

The position of the exalted Messiah is not one of subordination, but one of equality and sovereign, universal lordship.

(e.g., John 3:16) is properly translated as “unique” or “one and only,” rather than by “only begotten” as in the patristic and later tradition.⁶⁵ Jesus is the *unique* or *one and only* Son of the Father, rather than the only “begotten” Son of the Father, properly speaking. Since the language of “begetting” became embedded in the Nicene Creed (“begotten, not made”) and the later theological tradition, it can scarcely be removed, but such language should be read and understood as a way of affirming the *homoousios* or consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, rather than as implying the subordination of a son to a father who “begat” him. The Father is eternal, and the Son is eternal; no anthropomorphic notions of human “begetting” need to be read back into the eternal life of the Trinity.⁶⁶

This subordinationist danger was largely avoided in the Trinitarian teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus, for whom the divine “Monarchy” (*monarchia*) was not limited to one person, the Father, but was common to the three.⁶⁷ The unity of the three divine persons is found in their eternal *perichoretic* relations—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—being eternally and equally “in” one another, in an unending unity and communion of power, authority, glory, and mutual love.⁶⁸

In conclusion, then, it can be stated that the attempt to argue against the ordination of women to the priesthood on the basis of some supposed “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” must be judged to be a failed and misguided project. One wonders if the proponents of this point of view are willing to extend the logic of their arguments beyond time into eternity: If the subordination of the Son to the Father in *time* supposedly justifies the subordination of women to men in the earthly church, does the supposed subordination of the Son to the Father in eternity justify the *eternal subordination* of women to men in the heavenly church of the new creation? Are women to be *eternally* second-class citizens in the kingdom of God? Such specious arguments and misunderstandings of Scripture and tradition condemn women to positions of unending subordination and, worse still, *rob God the Son* of his coeternal and coequal glory, majesty, and lordship.

We can recall the words of Basil of Caesarea cited earlier (n. 50): “What just defence shall we have in the day of the awful universal judgment of all creation if . . . we attempt to degrade him who shares the honor and the throne, from his condition of equality, to a lower state?” This is surely too high a price to pay, and the “New Evangelical Subordinationists” would do well to reconsider their positions and look elsewhere for arguments to exclude women from the priesthood.

Notes

1. John Jefferson Davis, “First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul’s Use of Creation Narratives,” *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 5–10. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Division of Christian Thought at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for their comments and suggestions on this second paper.

2. Similar arguments could be made within Roman Catholic and Orthodox contexts as well.

3. C. S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 234–39. The essay originally appeared under the title “Notes on the Way” in *Time and Tide* 29 (Aug. 14, 1948), when the debate on women’s ordination was just getting underway in the Church of England.

4. This report (hereafter cited as Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*), was completed in 2003 and can be accessed online at www.theamia.org/assets/AMia-Womens-Ordination-Study-Aug-03.pdf.

5. For background on these ordinations, see Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 17–18. The canonically irregular nature of these ordinations notwithstanding, it may still be the case (as here argued) that such ordinations could have been done with proper biblical and theological justification. The actual effect of the ordinations, understandably, was to harden the opposition of conservative clergy within ECUSA to the ordination of women as priests, given the association of its first instances with liberal theology and violation of canon law.

6. See, for example, David Ayers, “The Inevitability of Failure: The Assumptions and Implementations of Modern Feminism,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 312–31.

7. See, for example, Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, eds., *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 16–27.

8. On the role of biblical interpretation during the Galileo controversy, see the excellent scholarly studies by Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), and Kenneth J. Howell, *God’s Two Books: Copernican Cosmology and Biblical Interpretation in Early Modern Science* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

9. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 236.

10. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 236.

11. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

12. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

13. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

14. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 239.

15. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pt.IQ.13 art 5, “Whether What Is Said of God and of Creatures Is Univocally Predicated of Them?”

16. Donald Bloesch also relates the masculine imagery of God in Scripture to the power, initiative, and mighty acts of God (*Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism* [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1982], 72), but also makes the questionable claim (p. 69) that “masculine images predominate for all three persons of the Trinity.” This latter claim seems rather dubious in light of the scriptural images of the Spirit: wind, fire, oil, water, dove—all of which are *impersonal* and not masculine.

17. On the development of the Yahwistic religion of Israel against the background of the gods and goddesses of Canaanite religion, see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

18. One evangelical pastor made the observation that, in his pastoral counseling experience, many men in the church were either *abusive* or, on the other hand, too *passive*: It was the exception rather than the rule in his experience to find a healthy balance of strength and love, of authority and intimacy in these Christian marriages.

19. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*, and Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Multnomah, 2006), 230–56. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 248–54, and *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Multnomah, 2004), 45–48.

20. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*, 23.

21. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*, 25.

22. Rodgers does not seem to consider the question, “If the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, does this mean that women should be *eternally* subordinate to men—even in heaven?”

23. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 244.

24. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 231.

25. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

26. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

27. See, for example, Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005), 76–102; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999), 160, 170. For earlier criticism of this trend, see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contempo-*

rary Gender Debate (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006). See also Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 479–96, for Letham's responses to the (egalitarian) positions of Gilbert Bilezikian and Kevin Giles. Letham correctly notes that the historic orthodox recognition of an order (*taxis*) within the Trinity—Father first, Son second, Spirit third—does not imply any subordination of rank, status, or hierarchy within the Trinity: “I repeatedly assert that this order is compatible with the full equality of the three persons in the undivided Trinity” (p. 481).

28. On this terminology, see note 34 below.

29. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, rev. ed. (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973), 31–32.

30. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 33.

31. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 25.

32. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 28.

33. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 28.

34. The “New Evangelical Subordinationists” (“NES”) are those who, like Grudem, Ware, and Köstenberger, are trying to argue for the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in the interests of arguing for the subordination of women to men in the family and in the ordained ministries of the church.

35. Gregory Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration*, 14, 28. On Gregory's Trinitarian thought, see Ben Fulford, “‘One Commixture of Light’: Rethinking some Modern Uses and Critiques of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Unity and Equality of the Divine Persons,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 2009): 172–89. Fulford points out that Gregory does speak of the Father as the “source” and “cause” of the Son, but these statements are to be read in the context of Gregory's equally clear statements about the equality of the Father and the Son.

36. Karl Rahner, ed., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church as Contained in her Documents* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1967), 90–91.

37. F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), “Athanasian Creed, The,” 98–99; Philip P. Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2 (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Bros., 1877), 31–36.

38. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 66–69.

39. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 38.

40. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 92, 95.

41. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 92.

42. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 72.

43. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 169.

44. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 90–91.

45. Henry Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees* (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 340.

46. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 390.

47. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 241.

48. *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Willow Grove, Pa.: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 160.

49. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

50. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, vi.13–15. The Macedonian heretics argued that biblical texts saying that the Spirit was “sent” by the Father and the Son implied that the Spirit was inferior to the Father and the Son; that the “Gifft” was not equal with the Giver: R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–81* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 768. The “New Evangelical Subordinationists” seem to apply something of a “Macedonian” hermeneutic and logic to their reading of biblical texts in the interest of finding an “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.” See also Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 235.

51. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV.20, 27.

52. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IQ.42, art. 4.

53. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IQ.42, art.6, “Whether the Son Is Equal to the Father in Power?”

54. In the same way, 1 Cor. 11:3, “the head of Christ is God” refers to Christ in his human nature, in the economy, not to the eternal state.

55. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 234–35.

56. Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 30. In Bauckham's groundbreaking new approach to New Testament Christology, focusing on a “Christology of Divine Identity” rather than on the older categories of “functional vs. ontological” Christologies, it can be recognized that “the unique sovereignty of God was not a mere ‘function’ which God could delegate to someone else. It was one of the key identifying characteristics of the unique divine identity. . . . When extended to include Jesus in the creative activity of God, and therefore in the eternal transcendence of God, it becomes unequivocally a matter of regarding Jesus as *intrinsic* to the unique identity of God. . . . [T]he Christology of the divine identity common to the whole of the New Testament is the highest Christology of all” (41–42).

57. Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 65. A text such as Eph. 1:4 (“chosen [by the Father] in him [Christ] before the foundation of the universe”) does not imply an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, since the eternal, pretemporal decree of election is not an act of the Father alone, but a decision of the one undivided will common to Father, Son, and Spirit—of all three persons acting in cooperation and mutual consultation, in *perichoresis*, so to speak (the Father “in” the Son, and the Son “in” the Father, eternally).

58. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 65.

59. Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 150. Cf. the translation of this passage by Silva: “Though he existed in the form of God, Christ took no advantage of his equality with God. Instead, he made himself nothing by his assuming the form of a servant, that is, by becoming incarnate.” Moises Silva, *Philippians: Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1988), 112.

60. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 1.4.41.

61. On the subordinationist elements in Origen, cf. *Comm. John* 2.20, the Father is the source of divinity; the Son is the source of reason; *Comm. John* 2.73, “the Holy Spirit too was made through the Word, since the Word is older than he.” See also John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), “Trinitariansim,” 207–09; and J. Nigel Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordinationism: A Study in Origen's Christology* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1987). J. N. D. Kelly notes that, in the East, the intellectual climate was “impregnated with Neo-Platonic ideas about the hierarchy of being,” ideas that were favorable to subordinationist understandings: *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1960), 136.

62. Hodge spoke of a “subordination” of the Son and the Spirit to the Father with respect to “mode of subsistence and operation,” *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1878), 462. A. H. Strong spoke of a subordination of the Son to the Father “of order, office, and operation”: *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1907), 342 (yet, on p. 343, Strong wrote that each of the three persons “is the proper and equal [emphasis added] object of Christian worship”). This language of “subordination” is an unfortunate confusion. The distinct modes of subsistence, for example—generation, procession—are the basis not of *subordination* of one person to another, but rather of the eternal *distinctions* of the persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The “order” (*taxis*) of the persons—Father first, Son second, Spirit third—in the New Testament texts reflects the historical order in which the three persons were revealed in the economy of redemption (God the Father as Creator, God the Son as Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier and Perfecter), and not any intrinsic and eternal subordination of one person to another. The “order” of the Father as “first” and of the Son as “second”—different “roles” within the Triune life—does not imply unequal *authority*, as the orthodox tradition's insistence on the coeternal, coequal “majesty, glory, *lordship*, and *kingdom*” makes clear. In their comments on the history of Trinitarian thought, both Hodge and Strong appear to be too dependent on secondary sources such as Pearson, Hooker, and Gieseler rather than upon the primary sources of the patristic tradition.

63. See Carey, "Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine," *Religious & Theological Studies Fellowship Bulletin* no. 9 (1995): 8, and also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 178.

64. On the notion of "eternal generation" of the Son in Origen and its background, see Maurice Wiles, "Eternal Generation," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 12, no. 2 (1961): 284–91.

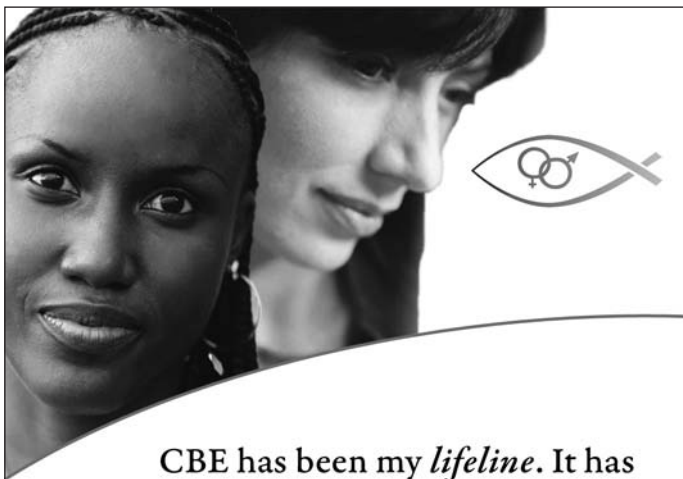
65. See the important article by Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 213–19, on the meaning and usage of *monogenēs*. Karl Barth in his Trinitarian theology continued to use the traditional concept of the Father as "origin," and argued, "In His mode of being as the Son He fulfills the divine subordination, just as the Father in His mode of being fulfills the divine superiority": *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 209; see the section "The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country," pp. 192–210. Barth properly wants to emphasize with this (problematic) language of an (eternal) subordination/obedience of the Son that the incarnate Jesus Christ was indeed a true and not apparent revelation of the true essence of God, but in so doing runs the risk, in the judgment of this writer, of blurring the distinctions between the *theologia* and the *economy*, between time and eternity, and between the *inherent* freedom of the Son of God (to become incarnate and obedient) and the *actualization* of that freedom in the history of redemption. Phil. 2:5–11 maintains this critical

distinction: In eternity, before the incarnation, the Son existed in equality with God; only as a result of the incarnation did he freely give up this equality and become *obedient* to the point of death on a cross.

66. Similarly, with all due respect to the Greek Fathers, the notion of "cause" within the eternal life of the Trinity, i.e., the Father "causing" the *hypostasis* or person of the Son and the Spirit, needs to be questioned, if not jettisoned entirely. The category of causation applies properly to God as Creator or First Cause of all that exists or occurs within creation, or to causes and effects *within* creation, but not with respect to one person of the Trinity "causing" another—for God *per se* is *uncaused* as First Cause; only things that *begin to exist* need causes, and all three persons are God *per se* and equally coeternal and uncaused. This notion of "causation" within the eternal Trinity has been a root of subordinationist tendencies that have plagued Trinitarian theology from the time of Origen to the present.

67. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, ii, "On the Son": "It is, however, a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person . . . but one which is made of an equality of nature and a union of mind, and an identity of motion, and a convergence of its elements to unity."

68. This "perichoretic" understanding of the basis of the inner-Trinitarian equality and unity is developed by Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 176–79; and by Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene, Ore: Wipf & Stock, 1998, 2005), 4–5, 70, 83, 140–47.



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