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"PRISCILLA AND AQUIILA INSTRUCTED APOLLOS MORE PERFECTLY IN THE WAY OF THE LORD" (ACTS 18)
This issue of *Priscilla Papers* begins the journal’s thirtieth year! The first issue, winter of 1987, opened with an article by Kari Torjesen Malcolm. Additional authors included Alvera Mickelsen and Catherine Clark Kroeger, CBE’s founding president. Other early leaders of CBE included James Alsdurf, James Beck, Gilbert Bilezikian, Diane Chynoweth, Betty Elliott, W. Ward Gasque, Stan Gundry, Ruth Hall, Gretchen Gaebelini Hull, Richard Kroeger, Deborah Olsoe Lunde, Jo Anne Lyon, Faith Martin, Alice Mathews, Susan McCoubrie, Dorothy Meyer, Berkeley Mickelsen, Roger Nicole, Nancy Graf Peters, and Betty Shunk. Disturbed by the shallow biblical premise used to exclude the gifts of women, such leaders determined that a national organization was needed to promote biblical equality. Thus CBE was established on January 2, 1988, about a year after *Priscilla Papers* first went to press.

The founding editor of *Priscilla Papers* was Elizabeth “Betty” Kroeger Elliott, daughter of Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Kroeger. Gretchen Gaebelini Hull then served as editor from 1989–2000, and under her leadership the journal found traction in the evangelical world. An expanded issue, containing twenty-one articles from the first decade, celebrated the journal’s tenth anniversary in the winter of 1998. During a four-issue transitional period (spring 1999 – winter 2000), Tina Ostrander joined Gretchen as co-editor. Carol R. Theissen became editor in the spring of 2000. Under her leadership, *Priscilla Papers* received a visual makeover and recruited a group of consulting theologians to ensure the journal’s academic excellence. To grow our capacities as theological publishers, Carol enrolled CBE’s journals in the Evangelical Press Association (EPA) for critique and learning—a move that has earned *Priscilla Papers* a total of seventeen EPA awards. Carol, whose editing work with *Priscilla Papers* came after a career with *Christianity Today*, passed to the presence of the Lord in May 2003. Victoria Peterson-Hilleque became acting editor for five issues in 2003–2004.

In the autumn of 2004, William Spencer began his decade of service as editor of *Priscilla Papers*. Forgive my understatement when I say that the journal flourished under the leadership of Bill and Aída Besançon Spencer. In the autumn of 2006, Chelsea DeArmond and Kevin Giles stepped in as guest editors for an expanded twentieth anniversary issue, the opening pages of which featured an editorial much like this one and also showed the evolution of the six cover formats to date.

In the fall of 2014, editorship passed from Bill Spencer to me, Jeff Miller. At the same time, Theresa Garbe replaced the ever capable Deb Beatty Mel as associate editor and graphic designer. Small changes were made to the cover format (did you notice?), and we began occasionally publishing sermons as a service to the church and its worship. In 2015, a Peer Review Team of scholars began assisting the journal, and the several indexing services which include *Priscilla Papers* expanded to include the American Theological Library Association Religion Database.

This issue of *Priscilla Papers* is largely about marriage; looking ahead, the spring 2016 issue will address certain aspects of Paul’s letters.

*Soli Deo Gloria*! May God continue to bless CBE and its academic journal, *Priscilla Papers*.

... greet you in the Lord.
The Negative Consequences of Dowry Payment on Women and Society

REV. DR. EMILY ONYANGO

In May 2015, CBE president and Priscilla Papers publisher Mimi Haddad traveled to Kenya to work beside one of CBE’s closest partners—Ekklesia Foundation for Gender Education (EFOGE). One of her reasons for going was to participate in a public lecture on dowry, offered by EFOGE in partnership with The Anglican Diocese of Bondo and Bishop Okullu College of Theology. Two of the several lectures given at that event have been adapted for this issue of Priscilla Papers and appear below.

Dowry, or bride-wealth payment, is a widespread practice in many African societies. In traditional African societies, bride-wealth had some positive aspects but mostly negative consequences, for it stands at the foundation of patriarchy. In traditional African societies, bride-wealth was related to goods and services that a bridegroom and his kinsmen transferred to the family of the bride. Traditionally, this transfer involved the delivery of livestock by a suitor to the father or family of his prospective bride.

The negative consequence of bride-wealth is clearly seen in the debate on terminology. The term “bride-price” has the connotation of a purchase or financial transaction. Though it is always claimed that what we actually have is bride-wealth, in present day society it is more like a financial transaction. Bride-wealth has been highly commercialized, leading to many negative consequences such as women treated as property, the idea of daughters as investment, come-we-stay marriages, forced marriages, enslavement, family conflict, inferiority and dehumanization, and gender-based violence. Each of these several categories will be described briefly below.

Women as Property

Commercialization of bride-wealth started with the introduction of the cash economy. Bride-wealth is paid to individuals in cash, as opposed to livestock. Cash is a symbol of sale, so women are seen as articles of sale. This leads women to be seen as property and chattel. Parents put a price on their daughters; in many communities the standard payment apart from cash is a grade cow, water tanks, or other unofficial payments. The payment becomes even higher if the bride is educated. When women are treated as property, they have no dignity. Such treatment as property is clearly seen in the way the transaction meeting is held, with haggling and bargaining, but without the input of the women.

Daughters as Investment

Parents see their daughters as a means of getting rich. Most of the people groups, for example the Nandi, value their cows more than their wives and daughters. They only value the daughters because they will eventually get cows from their suitors. John Mbuthia argues that Africans view their daughters as an investment whose dividends can be gleaned periodically. A daughter is like a bank account, and it seems only right to many that her father should be able to draw from her from time to time. The craving for bride-wealth money by parents, especially in Kenya’s Central Province, leads women to form groups through which they pay their bride-wealth if the men cannot pay. This group even includes single women who have children, and their main argument is that if they have to receive bride-wealth for their children, they have to ensure their own bride-wealth is paid.

Come-We-Stay Marriages

Commercialization of bride-wealth leads to eloping or what are referred to as come-we-stay marriages. Many young people cannot afford the hefty bride-wealth, so they neither inform their parents nor have their marriages blessed in churches. Many marriages also begin on a shaky financial foundation because the couple might be forced to take a loan to pay bride-wealth to parents. Thus, even as they begin their married lives they are servicing the loan. In many instances, the girls have to help the men by contributing to funds for the bride-wealth, and hence the practice has lost its original meaning. In some instances, the men borrow the money but expect the women to pay when they become married.

Forced Marriages

Many parents are more interested in bride-wealth than in the welfare of their daughters. They are happy to marry their children off to rich men, even if the children are under age or have not completed school. This is especially common among pastoralist communities such as the Maasai. Other communities, however, also practice forced marriage. For example, in instances where a family has boys who need to go to school, they may marry off their daughters to gain money to pay bride-wealth. This means that parents will not give the girls education, but marry them off instead. Orphans are almost always forced into marriage by their uncles or other relatives so that money can be found to educate boys. In most African communities, marriage cannot be nullified even if the woman is undergoing problems, for if a marriage has to be nullified the bride-wealth has to be paid back. Women therefore stay in abusive marriages because the parents cannot pay back the bride-wealth. The idea of bride-wealth is based on traditional practices such as those among the Luo tribe, taking bride-wealth in advance from your friend with the promise that you will give them your daughter.

There was also the practice of bride-pawning among the Kambas, Nandi, and Kisii. This means that when the
community was experiencing starvation, they could give their daughters to the neighboring community in exchange for grain, with the view that, if the situation improved, the girls would be redeemed. However, this redemption never happened, and in some communities, such as the Kisii, the head of the family into which the girl was pawned could even have a sexual relationship with her!

Enslavement of Women

In Africa, bride-wealth has always been paid in exchange for a woman's productive and reproductive labor. The woman is seen as a source of labor for the family and also a machine for giving birth. As a result, if the woman does not give birth, the man can demand his bride-wealth to be repaid or mistreat her. By paying bride-wealth, men have legal rights over the ownership of children. As Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek says, an African woman is a slave or a beast of burden. The woman is expected to work hard and pay back the bride-wealth.

Family Conflict

Most dowry marriages are founded on bitterness and suspicion, which leads to conflict. This is mainly due to the unreasonable demands of parents before the marriage. These demands lead to loss of respect and, in some instances, the couple pays the money requested and then breaks any relationship with the bride's family. Men who do not pay bride-wealth do not have legal rights over their children and their wives. A recent case in point is when a man was denied the right to bury his wife and the children were taken away from him. The man had struggled with the wife who was suffering from breast cancer. He had been drained both financially and emotionally, and when the wife died, the family then wanted to discuss bride-wealth.

Inferiority and Dehumanization

Since men pay bride-wealth, there is a notion that the girl has been bought. This gives women an inferior position; they cannot be equal with the buyer. This is dehumanizing because whatever little the men pay is not equal to the value of a human being. The whole of the man's family has a notion that they are participants in the purchase. The man's sisters have a notion that the bride-wealth was used to purchase the brother's wife, hence they have a stake in controlling her. In fact, in Luo culture the wife always refers to her husband's sister as a partner in her late husband's community. In most instances, these marriages are dehumanizing, and the widow is exploited.

Gender-Based Violence

As objects and possessions, women are abused both physically and psychologically. The language used by most men is that they are disciplining their wives. Wife beating or battering is rampant, and most people accept this as normal. Even professional women are beaten by their spouses. Bride-wealth is also seen as paying for the productive and reproductive labor of women. This implies that, when the woman becomes married, she has to add several hours of work to her day, hence as p'Bitek says in his epic poem, Song of Lawino, an African woman becomes a beast of burden. Secondly, through bride-wealth a man is seen as having paid for the reproductive labor, hence her sexuality itself is bought. In many instances a woman is viewed as a sex object. First, a woman's major role is to give birth to and take care of babies, especially boys. If a woman does not give birth to boys, she is beaten and insulted. Secondly, the man controls her sexuality and demands sexual satisfaction, whatever the situation. A woman does not have control over her sexuality. As an example, people claim that there is no such thing as rape in marriage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the payment of bride-wealth in Africa, which leads to the inferiority and mistreatment of women, is not in line with biblical teaching on equality between men and women. Secondly, it is against the Christian view of marriage as partnership and a bond of love between two people. In the Bible, marriage is compared to the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ comes to challenge negative aspects of culture which enslave people; hence Christians in the modern world should rethink the practice of bride-wealth.

Notes

2. Local Native Councils Meeting, 1927.
This article is a philosophical reflection on dowry and how it bears on burial disputes among the Luo people of East Africa. Part one offers preliminary remarks to convey my position on dowry. Part two describes the implications of dowry on the burial dispute of a Luo woman named Veronica, as a way of illustrating the far-reaching effects of the dowry system. I have utilized Bernard Lonergan’s Transcendental Method in my thought process about dowry.¹ This method is derived from Lonergan’s cognitonal theory—experiencing, understanding my experience, judging the understanding of my experience, willingness to act informed by the judgment of the understanding of my experience, and finally leading to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. In our efforts to raise consciousness about dowry, we can transpose the method into an invitation to engage in the following five imperatives: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be willing, and be loving in our discourse on dowry and its long term implications.²

Preliminary Remarks

The word “dowry” is derived from cognate Greek (dosis noun, didōmi verb) and Latin (dōnum noun, dō verb) terms from the semantic domain of giving. Dowry is therefore a gift that is given. It is a symbolic gesture of simultaneous gratitude and benefaction to another.

In Western and some Asian societies dowry is a portion of wealth given to the bride by her family at the start of her marriage. It can take the form of real estate, money, gold, diamonds, or other precious metals or gemstones.³ In a different context, dowry can also refer to the sum of money, gold, silver, etc., required of postulants by some religious communities of cloistered nuns before a candidate enters the convent.

In contrast, in most African societies dowry takes the form of benefaction to the bride’s father by the groom. It is a goodwill gesture, a generous gift without strings attached, and if the father is deceased the dowry is received by her brothers or older male relatives. Among the Luo tribe of western Kenya the customary dowry is a negotiated amount in the form of live cows. A minimum of two is the norm; in some instances, even if additional cash has been given, the symbolic two cows are non-negotiable.

For purposes of this study, let us make a distinction between bride-wealth and dowry. The former refers to resources brought into a marriage by the bride, while restricting the term dowry to the gift the groom gives to the family of the bride, also referred to as bride-price.

What, therefore, is the significance of dowry? In marriages arranged or agreed to by parents it is of major significance; indeed, it is what legitimizes an African marriage.⁴ Once a family has received dowry from the groom they cannot give the girl to another man, even if the other potential suitor is richer and offers a higher amount of dowry; nevertheless, the groom will likely receive pressure to give more in such a situation. Among the consequences of dowry payment are that the girl cannot return to her father’s home in the event of a failed marriage and, in the event of death, her family of birth cannot claim her remains.

Luo society is patriarchal. It is the male members who give and receive dowry; they are therefore the ones who marry and, in contrast, females are married.⁵ Because of dowry, the bride is the one who leaves her family, renounces her maiden name, and takes on the groom’s family name. Because of dowry, a traditional Luo marriage does not begin on equal footing. Within this context, the Genesis claim that “a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife” is unattainable (Gen 2:24 NIV), and the NT ideal of marital equality remains both a challenge and, in most instances, a value yet to be realized.

In some instances, if the negotiated dowry is more than the proverbial two cows, the balance is provided after the woman has given birth, preferably to a male offspring. In the event that a woman is barren, a portion of the dowry is demanded back or a younger sister of the barren woman is given in marriage to the man who paid dowry.

Dowry has been commercialized. Evidence for this is in our vocabulary; most of the terms we use in connection with dowry have more to do with payment in the sense of a monetary economy and less to do with benefaction or gift. The consequence has been a gradual dehumanization of our mothers, sisters, and daughters. They are considered the property of their fathers, brothers, and other male relatives. They are married off in exchange for quantifiable goods. Evidence of this commercialization is the fact that, the higher the education level of a girl, the more the dowry.

Consider another example of the commercialization of dowry: If dowry has not been given, yet a woman cohabits with a man at his behest, she is not considered married but one who has eloped. A female child born from such a relationship will belong to the man, and hence be considered acquired property, once he has paid dowry. In the event that a woman who has eloped dies, the man will have to pay dowry in order to bury her. Furthermore, if a woman cohabiting with a man dies, leaving behind female children, the man will make every effort to pay dowry before the burial takes place lest he forfeit dowry later owed to him for his daughters.⁶

Commercialization of dowry dehumanizes women, reducing them to the level of merchandise to be bartered in exchange for a pair of animals. As a further example, in the same way that animals are beasts of burden, analogically a rural married woman is at times treated like a glorified slave: she does all the housekeeping, tills the fields, fetches water, gathers firewood, forages for food, etc. She also must satisfy the sexual desires of
her husband. Failure to do any of these will earn her a thorough beating, for she is expected to endure various forms of violence visited on her person.

The good Luo woman is blindly obedient. Like animals, women are mute; they are to be seen and not heard. She is resilient and acquiesces to the demands of her husband—hence a true Luo, for the literal meaning of the term “Luo” is “one who follows norms, traditions, customs, rituals, etc.”

The misleading claim has been made that there is no divorce in Luo society. Among traditional Luos, a woman cannot initiate a divorce. For divorce to take place, a portion of the dowry must be returned, and in some instances it is required that the very same cows which were given as dowry be returned! This unrealistic expectation makes it doubly difficult for a woman to be freed from a toxic marriage.

In Christian marriages, where the ideal basis is love, a marriage is valid if there is free consent between two free adults in the presence of witnesses, pending procreation. Even though dowry has been enculturated in the pre-nuptial phase of marriage preparation, Christian theologians ought to re-examine the understanding of dowry in light of the abuses that have crept in and follow the spirit of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Kenya 2010, and the Marriage Act of 2014, which make no explicit requirement for dowry for a marriage to be valid. Should one persist in a desire to give dowry, it should be clearly considered a gift to and not a payment for the bride.

Veronica’s Story

On September 10, 2009, there was an accident along the Katito-Sondu Road in western Kenya. One of the victims, Veronica, was pronounced dead on arrival at the Aga-Khan Hospital in Kisumu. Even before her body had grown cold, a heated burial dispute emerged right outside the mortuary, between Veronica’s estranged in-laws from Kamagambo-Rongo and her brothers from nearby Gem.

Veronica had risen through the ranks and had become a District Commissioner for Rachuonyo North. Veronica, a Roman Catholic, and her husband Denis, an Adventist, had wedded in the Catholic Church. Six years into the marriage, Denis had been involved in an automobile accident which left him a paraplegic. Their two children, Fred and Sam, were both afflicted with Canavan’s disease, which manifested as a combination of cerebral palsy and polio. The children’s limbs were deformed, and they did not live beyond age twelve. According to court records and findings, Veronica was blamed and demonized by her father-in-law for having given birth to children with special needs; he often insinuated that Veronica was jinxed and was the root-cause of the family’s misfortune. The father-in-law separated the two by abducting Denis from Veronica’s duty house in Kakamega and taking him south to their matrimonial home in Kamagambo. He further ostracized Veronica, making it clear that she was no longer welcome in the Kamagambo home. By the time Veronica died, she had been living alone, separated from her husband, for twelve years.

Veronica decided to start a new life. She bought a piece of land in Kakamega, on which she constructed her new home. She made it known to her brothers and her friends that, in the event of death, she should be buried at the said piece of land rather than at her matrimonial home—contrary to Luo burial custom.

After Veronica’s death, the two families engaged in mediation talks on two occasions, yet could not come to an agreement. The intervention of Riaga Omollo, head of the Luo Council of Elders, and of the council itself, was sought, but their wisdom on Luo culture and Omollo’s high status could not sway the brothers of Veronica in their defense of her wish and will to be buried in Kakamega rather than Kamagambo.

The two parties then subjected themselves to an arbitration process organized by Nyanza Provincial Commissioner Francis Mutie and presided over by three respected lawyers. After listening to both parties, they ruled in favor of Kamagambo. In their ruling they asserted that, whenever there is a conflict between common law and customary law, the latter takes precedence. Thus the customary Luo law, that a married woman whose dowry had been paid belongs to her husband’s people, was upheld—and this includes her body as well.7

Because the arbiters failed to take into account the several injustices done to Veronica by her in-laws, one of her brothers moved the matter to the High Court.8 Eight months later, on April 9, 2010, the High Court sitting in Kisumu made a landmark ruling in favor of Veronica’s wish and will and ordered that her remains be interred on her land in Kakamega, where she had established her new home, as per her wishes.9 Veronica’s burial took place the following week, but a few weeks later the Kamagambo party filed a petition for judicial review with the Court of Appeal, seeking that Veronica’s remains be exhumed from Kakamega and be re-interred in Kamagambo. On June 18, 2015, five and a half years since Veronica was buried, the Court of Appeal made a ruling upholding the High Court decision, thus definitively setting precedence in Kenyan law with regard to burial disputes involving a woman’s oral will.

What has Veronica’s Story to Do with Dowry?

In every instance, Veronica’s in-laws emphasized that she was their wife. At the first mediation talks, mzee A made the claim that her wish is a right derived from the dowry we gave in the form of cows.” Both before and after the arbitration process, the Kamagambo spokesman made it clear to the brothers of dowry had been paid belongs to her husband’s people, was upheld—and this includes her body as well.

Let us be reasonable and responsible by not turning a blind eye to the ramifications and abusive claims associated with dowry which, in some instances, have led to the enslavement of our sisters.
Veronica that un uyalo wish wanto wayalo culture ... nyakanene wish ne pok oloyoga culture. (“You are championing wish and will, but we are defending [the Luo] culture; wish and will has never triumphed over culture.”)

Throughout the arbitration process, the Kamagambo party aimed to prove that Veronica was married according to Luo customary law; thus, according to the transcript of the arbitration proceeding, each of the four elders, though they contradicted each other, narrated the part they played during the dowry payment. One could not recall the number of cows given but insisted that they had been transported by a lorry (truck) to Nairobi and given to the girl’s mother. Questioned separately, like the proverbial story of Susanna and Daniel, another alleged that they took two cows to Veronica’s home in Gem but could not recall to whom they gave them. The father-in-law produced two receipts as evidence for the purchase of the cows that were given as dowry for Veronica. When the case moved to the High Court, the Kamagambo party clung to the claim that they had paid dowry, and produced the two receipts as exhibits. They could not explain, however, why they were still in possession of the receipts. (When dowry is paid, the suitor’s party hands over receipts to the one receiving dowry as proof that the cows were not stolen.)

In all four sets of proceedings, the Kamagambo party refused to acknowledge the various forms of domestic violence, verbal abuse, public humiliation, witch-hunting, and demonizing visited upon Veronica by her father-in-law and mother-in-law, precipitating the separation. The claim of the brothers was simple: because of the subhuman conduct of the in-laws towards the deceased, they were undeserving of being given her body for burial; doing so would have been a final act of spite.

The brother's position was informed by a dynamic notion of culture, while the in-laws' position was a classical notion of culture. If culture is perceived classically, then there is but one culture, to whose norms all must conform; it is static and cannot change: The way things were done by our ancestors is the way they are to be done in the present and forevermore. But if culture is perceived dynamically, then it admits the possibility of growth, development, and transformation. A dynamic notion of culture is a way of thinking historically, learning to retrieve what has been deemed significant, and looking for new authentic modes of expression in keeping with the times. A dynamic notion of culture recognizes that a certain cultural norm, which by a classical notion of culture is defended as permanent, was itself new at one point.

Even if the in-laws of Veronica had paid dowry and thus had a “rightful” claim on Veronica as their wife, according to the brothers it would not justify the inhuman treatment she had endured at the hands of her father-in-law, the chief claimant in this case.

Essentially, if Veronica’s brothers had not put up a stiff fight for her wish and will to be respected, they would have acquiesced to a repugnant cultural norm that condones violence visited on married women whose voices are muzzled, all in the name of dowry. There are many Veronicas in Luo society, and because of the cost and time that litigation involves, many shy away from championing the cause.

This burial dispute is an instance of how gender based violence continues to be visited upon women even after death. Thank God the High Court ruling of April 9, 2010, which was upheld by the Court of Appeal decision of June 18, 2015, set a new precedent in Kenyan law regarding the wish and will of a married woman; until overturned, regardless of dowry, a woman’s last wishes, if realistic, will be accorded by the laws of Kenya.

Let us be attentive by recalling and engaging our individual and collective experience of dowry. Let us be intelligent by applying our understanding to the meaning and significance of dowry. Let us be reasonable and responsible by not turning a blind eye to the ramifications and abusive claims associated with dowry which, in some instances, have led to the enslavement of our sisters. We will be loving if we make a genuine effort to retrieve the symbolism of dowry as both benefaction and gift and not a barter trade that inadvertently sells the female members of our households into a form of indentured slavery.

Notes

9. Ruling on Oduke v. Onindo, Civil Suit No. 143 of 2009 (High Court of Kenya, Apr 9, 2010).
A Year’s Work: New Resources

CBE's bookstore developed ten new resources, including:

A five-lecture series, entitled

*Is Gender Equality a Biblical Ideal?*

*Still Side by Side* translations
(PDF versions are available for free)

Also:

- *Biblical Gender Equality: A Summary*
- *The Word Embodied* (young adult curriculum) forthcoming
- *God, Sex, and You* (high school curriculum) forthcoming
- We added three new translations—Tanzanian Swahili, Burmese, and Tamil—of CBE’s founding document, “Men, Women and Biblical Equality” to our website.

Free CBE Resources

To make CBE resources available to Christians everywhere, CBE has added 30 full length conference lectures to YouTube. Hear Dr. Mimi Haddad speak about Christian identity or listen to Pastor Eugene Cho discuss “Misogyny and the Church.” You can help by sharing these videos with friends and family.

[cbe.today/videos](http://cbe.today/videos)

All translations of Still Side by Side are available in PDF format for free!

[cbe.today/ssbs](http://cbe.today/ssbs)
Dismayed and confused by constant concerns about safety for girls and exclusion of women from church leadership, Faith Martin began a journey searching for theological developments regarding such demeaning views of women. Other studies of women in the church, such as Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld’s Daughters of the Church, reveal a consistent disparagement of women since the third century. Interpretations of NT household codes favoring male authority have often been cited to support such practices. These interpretations bear two kinds of illusions. One implies that church membership is predominantly male. The more serious concern is that presumptions of superiority and inferiority contradict the gospel message of love and grace, the good news of setting the oppressed free. Therefore, a proper theological hermeneutic of the NT household codes demands the inclusion of cultural dimensions.

Scholarship over the last few decades has offered abundant insights into the Greco-Roman world. Research has revealed that male-dominated household management had its origins in Greek philosophy, was adapted by the Romans, and influenced the household codes in a few NT epistles. Archaeological studies piece together an image of ancient social life further illuminating the cultural context of the Christian church in its germination. For understanding the NT household codes, these findings offer social, in addition to theological, perspectives.

David Balch offers convincing evidence that the rules regarding household management can be traced to Aristotle’s Politics over 300 years before the church. The rule of household management stems from Aristotle’s concept regarding harmony in the city-state. Harmony in the family, the basic unit of the city-state, sustains harmony for the city-state. Harmony among the members of a family is crucial for the stability of the city-state. But for Aristotle, this harmony is achieved at the cost of slavery and female subjugation. Following Jesus’s ministry of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and letting the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18–19), it is plausible that the first Christian communities consisted of the oppressed, surely including many women and slaves. Alan Kreider’s research affirms that women indeed greatly outnumbered men in the church of the first two centuries. If the NT household codes had simply mimicked Greco-Roman subjugation, the epistles would have met resistance from church communities full of the poor and the oppressed!

Balch properly describes the church communities in Asia Minor addressed by 1 Peter as under sharp criticism by outsiders. He keenly points out that the cultural milieu of honor and shame informs the household codes in 1 Peter. Joel Green, on the other hand, highlights the subversive message regarding honor as imbedded in the whole epistle—“honor everyone,” “honor Christ,” “if you suffer as a Christian do not be ashamed.” The household codes in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter all bear some tension against the pervasive Roman household rules. The consistent appearance of admonishment to women and slaves in each set of household codes signifies the importance of their behavior for church communities. A larger portion of the codes addresses women than slaves.

The NT household codes’ treatment of women is one of the key elements conveying the love and grace of the gospel, contrasting with the patriarchal hierarchy dominating the first-century Greco-Roman world. As Christian women bore witness in their daily lives, transformation began throughout the social structure.

An initial investigation of the philosophy behind household management in Greek writings and this formal philosophy’s impact on the Roman world reveals the debatable assertion of male superiority based on rationality. There was an intricate relationship between women’s role and the cultural values of honor and harmony. Analysis of household codes in 1 Peter and Ephesians follows the initial philosophical investigation. The analysis shows that NT household codes are the Christian gospel in cultural forms. Instead of wiping away a culture due to its defects, the gospel corrects and heals the wounds caused by cultures while assuming the cultural forms. Women’s role in NT household codes indeed testifies to this transforming power.

Household Management in Greek Classics

Although the majority of Plato’s Republic concerns the construction of an ideal state, Paul Shorey notes that the theme of the book is justice. The logic behind The Republic is that human needs—food, housing, clothing, and the like—drive people to form a city since no one person can meet all needs (II.369B, D). Two virtues are indispensable for a city: sobriety and justice (IV.430D). Justice is “having and doing one’s own and what belongs to oneself” (IV.433E). Sobriety is manifested in the control of the worse by the naturally better part of the soul (IV.431A). This ability to control comes from the rational side of the soul in contrast to “the irrational and appetitive” (IV.439D).

Extending sobriety from individual to city, sobriety of a city is for the superior to rule over the inferior, as the rational part of the soul should rule over the irrational part. Without any explanation, Plato asserts that children, women, and slaves belong to “the mob of motley appetites and pleasures and pains” (IV.431C) and are ranked with those to be ruled.

Plato’s theme on the constitution in The Laws remained the same thirty years after finishing The Republic. The purpose of the constitution is “effecting the happiness of those who enjoy them” (Laws I.631). The desired happiness of the city and of the individual continued to be “peace and mutual good will” (I.628). The dualistic division of material and spiritual with the
The patriarchal hierarchical nature of Roman society is evidenced in Plato’s two categories of the good things: “merely human” (those pertaining to physical and material wellbeing in the order of health, comeliness, bodily strength, and wealth), and “divine” (in the order of wisdom, sobriety of spirit, righteousness, and valor). His counsel for the institution of law reveals the central role of family as *The Laws* attends to various aspects of family life (IV.721).

Two observations surface before moving on to Aristotle. First, if justice means that people can live out their gifts and potential, the ruler and the ruled should receive equal treatment for they all strive to perform their duties properly even though they are endowed with different levels of authority. Second, it is questionable that rationality is the better part of the soul. The Apostle Paul also describes the inner battle of the soul (Rom 7:18–24), but the triumph does not come from power of will or “calculations of reason” (Rep. IV.439C). Plato’s elevation of rationality leads to Descartes’s statement, *Cogito ergo sum*. This is in tension with biblical teaching that human beings bear the image of God, who is the “I am” (Exod 3:14). Thus, for Christians, it should be “I am, therefore I think.” This will be further discussed later. For now, we consider the supporting logic for Plato’s elevation of reason and his demeaning of women and slaves.

In *Ethics*, Aristotle analyzed the human soul to affirm the superiority of the rational part of the soul “possessing reason absolutely and in itself,” and laid down the theoretical foundation for his *Politics* by defining justice in light of virtue (*Ethics* I.8; V.5). He further distinguished domestic justice from political justice. The former dealt with slaves and children as if they were properties while the latter was justice for equal partnership “between citizen and citizen.” Although the relationship between husband and wife was not in the same rank as that between master and slave, the hierarchy between husband and wife made this husband-wife dyad fall into the domestic category (*Ethics* V.10). Aristotle agreed with Plato, his teacher, that human basic needs drive people to form a city (Rep. II.369D). Aristotle also elaborated that “every state is a sort of partnership” beginning with the partnership between female and male, and that every state is composed of households (Pol. 1252a 1–8, 25–29; 1253b 1–14). Just as a slave is a slave by nature, Aristotle justified the subordination of women and children in light of their capacity of soul: “the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it, but without full authority, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form” (1254a 8–24; 1255b 25–35). Aristotle’s reasoning indeed reflects Plato’s concept of justice of everyone doing according to one’s ability, and the hierarchical authority according to one’s capacity of rationality. This classical Greek philosophical foundation for household management carried over into the Roman Empire.

**Household Management in the First-Century Greco-Roman World**

The patriarchal hierarchical nature of Roman society is evidenced in its familial structure. Since the archaic period, the *paterfamilias* enjoyed unlimited power in his household, not only over family possessions but also over all household members. He represented the family to the larger society. He acted as a priest over the cult of the ancestors. His role and responsibilities in the family are like that of the aristocracy, “composed of the most important heads of families, in the political life of the state.”

When Augustus brought an end to the civil war between the camps of Caesar and Pompey, he left the economic policy largely untouched. Géza Alföldy further notes that social relations and social structure of the Roman world of the first two centuries of the Empire also showed little change. Social stratification continued to be a prominent feature of Roman society. Years of warfare during the expansion of the Roman Empire resulted in an influx of wealth that created a group of “new men” who moved from lower to upper strata, even to the rank of senator. Part of the cost for this *Pax Romana* was the lives of many soldiers who left behind widows. A group of “new women” also emerged, who seemed to deviate from the traditional moral value of modesty. Augustus, in his attempt to regulate wealth and the elite class, issued several edicts related to domestic matters in the name of moral reform.

Within two years, Augustus issued two laws known as the *lex Julia: lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* (c. 18 BC) and *lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis* (c. 17 BC). The former intended to restrain marriage within social class boundaries and to encourage procreation. It penalized the unmarried and childless particularly through restricting their inheritance rights. The latter aimed to boost morality by exposing adultery to the public sphere through a trial with judge and jury. Although the trial might have raised the cost for this law. In addition, the dress codes for women were specified to distinguish the modest wife from the adulteress and the prostitute. Bruce W. Winter succinctly articulates Augustus’s purpose of elevating the senatorial class profile through conforming their wives’ lifestyle to an expected standard. In this way, a man’s honor became intricately intertwined with his domestic life.

The societal responses to the *lex Julia* revealed the futility of Augustus’s effort to regulate morality and wealth of the elite. Despite the ineffective result of the written laws, these laws reveal a few facts related to women’s social status. First, women continued to be ruled by men. Second, within the patriarchal hierarchy, wealth facilitated upward mobility for women. Third, a man’s honor became closely knitted with his wife’s lifestyle. Fourth, a man could initiate public trial in suspicion of his unfaithful wife or daughter to defend his honor, but he could no longer execute “honors” killing. Indeed, domestic life could no longer be totally private, for the law set women free from the absolute power of *paterfamilias*. If the written laws for regulating household management of the upper strata bore little success, most likely there existed unwritten agreements regarding domestic matters.

James Crouch’s presentation of the evolution of Stoicism provides valuable insights to the shape of popular philosophies in the Greco-Roman world around the first centuries BC and AD. By the time Augustus inaugurated his campaign for
moral reform, Greek philosophy had already established a stronghold in the Greco-Roman world. Texts from philosophers of various traditions reveal Platonic-Aristotelian influence. The association of household management with stability of state, the importance of subordination of the lower parties of the dyads for the prosperity of household, and the moral values of modesty of women all indicate the far-reaching power of the unwritten laws. The submissiveness of the inferior parties of the dyads was assumed. As the early Christian church emerged, they must have been familiar with written and unwritten laws regarding household management.

Gospel in Cultural Forms

Examining the apologetic function of the household code through the lens of social context, Balch asserts that the author of 1 Peter exhorts the churches in Asia Minor to live up to the expectation of the larger society. Churches should abide by society’s demands on the subordinate parties, as indicated in the emphasis on the submission of wives and slaves. Applying Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s social theory regarding institutionalization and the routinization of charisma, Margaret MacDonald presents the changing functions of the household codes for the Christian communities in different developmental stages in the Pauline letters. Both external social context and internal group dynamics contributed to this change as the Christian communities witnessed rapid growth. She also notes the subtle protest in these epistles against the prevalent ethics of their contemporary culture. Altogether, these scholarly works provide a dynamic picture of the early church that facilitates understanding of how the household code functioned in the Christian communities, and how the early church lived out the gospel message.

These scholars rightly point out that NT household codes are an adaptation of the widespread contemporary household management schema. Since the church members came from some kind of household, they would have known the written and unwritten laws pertaining to their roles in their households. While some scholars consider Christianity a movement mimicking the trend of greater social freedom for women in the Greco-Roman world, the following analyses of NT household codes reveal a more encompassing purpose: expressing the gospel message of love and mercy through household relationships. The epistle’s purpose goes beyond the superficial admonishment of subordination. In light of the good news, the codes set free not only women but also slaves and other household members from oppressive cultural elements. NT household codes bear the power of the gospel in cultural forms.

1 Peter: Women’s Role Exemplifies a Lifestyle for All Christians

Balch is right that Christian communities in Asia Minor were among the minority religious groups who needed to defend their legitimacy and come to terms with Roman household ethics. The prominence of the Isis cult must have roused official and social suspicion concerning Christian communities. Slender and threats of suffering indicated in 2:12; 4:4. 12 affirm that these Christian communities were under the scrutiny of the larger society. As such, it is plausible that the church may have been encouraged to conform to the outsiders’ belief that women and slaves were subservient classes. Balch’s argument for the apologetic function of the household codes in 1 Peter thus seems reasonable. However, situated within the overall theme that the church is God’s chosen race, the NT household codes actually bear witness to the gospel in subtle ways. Instead of strictly conforming to the dominant Roman cultural values, Joel Green rightly contends that the household codes in 1 Peter exemplify how NT authors adapted the codes according to “the demands of their faith commitments.” Facing the changing status of women in their time, church members—with women in the majority—were exhorted to live out their faith in Christ in their daily lives as witness to love and honor in Christ. Peter did not ask the church members to withdraw at the threat of social scrutiny, but to engage the society with a new identity, a new perspective of honor, and a new attitude toward subordination.

In 1 Peter, the first redemption of the Roman patriarchal culture is the renewal of identity in Christ. The beginning two verses of 1 Peter can be easily skipped over as merely salutation, but they actually set the tone for the rest of the letter. Peter identified the recipients to be eklektos (“chosen”) and parepidemos (“strangers”). This identity comes from “the foreknowledge of God the Father,” “in the sanctification of the Spirit,” and is made possible through Jesus Christ’s “obedience and sprinkling of his blood.” Thus, from the beginning of the letter a special honor of “being elected” is attributed to the Christians in Asia Minor. This resonates with Roman honor. On the other hand, being “diaspora” connotes shame with trauma, refugees, and exile.

The first aspect of their “being elected” is elaborated starting with 1:3, “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” and culminates in 2:9, that everyone in Christ belongs to a community as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” As resurrection would refer to “the divine inauguration of a new world order,” Peter assured “the chosen ones” of an eschatological inheritance (1:4) and encouraged them to pursue “praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). This new identity of chosenness, with its eschatological hope of honor in Christ, provided a solid foundation for Christians to endure societal scrutiny and to bear witness to their faith as they lived as aliens in this world.

The Jewish converts understood what “strangers” meant. They had been in virtual exile for a few centuries. How could Gentile converts who grew up in their homeland understand the
alienation resulting from exile? In 1:14–17 Peter explains that such alien status occurred not because of their physical location but because of their different lifestyle. Kreider understands paroikous in 2:11 as "resident aliens" and interprets this to mean "at home everywhere; fully at home nowhere."27 Due to their distinctive way of living, the early Christians did not conform to the dominant values of their time. Thus in their practice of Jesus's teaching, they would share the same rejection as Jesus did. But the suffering would not outweigh the joy and honor of becoming a member of God's household and the hope of eschatological inheritance. This new identity in Christ subtly challenges the hierarchical belief of Greco-Roman household management based on the portion of rationality a person possesses. The foundation of personhood shifts from rationality to God's love through Christ's suffering that makes everyone truly equal. The purpose of life is not the pursuit of personal happiness or state happiness, but to glorify God, with joy as a side effect.

The new identity in Christ leads to new perspectives on relationships between husband and wife. As mentioned above, the paterfamilias acted as the priest of the household gods. One of the signs of household harmony or peace is the religious uniformity of wife and slaves. Balch notes that Jewish and Christian slaves were the first group to reject the worship of their master's gods for the sake of exclusive worship of their own God.28 Likewise, when a married woman converted to follow Jesus, she would disturb the religious harmony in the household. Because women apparently were the majority in the first Christian communities, their allegiance to Christ deviated from their husbands' religious practice. This must have caused negative reactions from society. First Peter tackles the issue after addressing slaves.

The imperative hypotēgēte ("be subordinate") in 2:13 indicates "finding and occupying responsibly one's place in society, not resignation." It is qualified by "because of the Lord" (2:13), "as persons having freedom" and "as God's slaves" (2:16), and differs from the unconditional obedience (hypakōē) to God and to the gospel (1:2, 14, 22).29 For a married woman whose husband was not converted yet, her obedience first belonged to God for she had assumed a new identity in Christ. She was first God's slave. Thus, there would be no compromise in her allegiance to God. Other than that, she continued to be her husband's wife and under his authority in the household. Her proper roles and responsibilities as a household wife in the Roman society would not differ from her neighbors. Thus the instruction should not be taken as a theological principle but as an exhortation for a Christian wife in a non-Christian family to minimize conflict due to religious practices.30 In light of the overall instruction of "honor all" (2:17), her behavior not only meets the requirements of the Roman cultural mandate (except one), but also bears testimony to her faith.

Unlike the Platonic and Aristotelian advice of dominance regarding a husband's relationship with his wife, 1 Peter contains instruction for Christian husbands in 3:7. It begins with the phrase, "in the same way"—the same way as described for Christian wives to honor all in the household. How did husbands honor their wives in Roman society? They did not! But 1 Peter gives the instruction for the man to "live knowledgeably" with the women (including their wives) in his household. Drawing from a near-equivalent term in 1:18 and 5:9 regarding redemption, and the analogous adverbial phrases in 1:17, 2:19, and 3:2, Green explains "to live knowledgeably" as "informed by the character of Christ who redeemed you and the overarching purpose of God."31 Without contradicting the cultural belief that women were weaker, 1 Peter exhorts that the weaker ones also receive honor instead of being marginalized. Harmony would no longer be displayed by the proper ruling order in the household; rather, it is lived out in mutual honor between household members. In addition to noting the differences of Peter's household code from the Aristotelian ones, Green observes similarities between the instructions to wives in 3:1–6 and those to all Christians in 3:14–16. Thus, household relations still model relations for the larger society. Green observes the chiastic structure of 2:13–3:12, which wraps the household codes around the example of Christ:

2:13–17: instruction for everyone
2:18–20: instruction for slaves
2:21–25: the example of Christ
3:1–7: instruction for wives (and husbands)
3:8–12: instruction for everyone

As such, slaves and wives were encouraged to model after Christ, and they exemplified a lifestyle for all Christians. The status of slaves and wives reflected the status of Christians in Roman society who were without power and privilege and were under social scrutiny.32 The purpose of Peter's household code is "not so much to take a position relative to secular society, as it is to present examples of the way Christians are to live vis-à-vis their world."33 Thus, women's role in Peter's household code is indeed one of the key elements of expressing the love and mercy of the gospel. The code not only defined the internal relationship among the members of God's household, but also exhorted the members to live out the gospel message through their marginalized roles.

Ephesians: Juxtaposition of Husband-Wife and Christ-Church

The Christian communities in Ephesus, located in Asia Minor, would face a similar social scrutiny as those addressed by 1 Peter. MacDonald, however, positions the epistle in the context of uncertainty regarding the Apostle Paul's personal presence. The issue of leadership succession may have loomed large in this context, for these Christian communities may not have had direct interaction with Paul. Unlike Balch's theory of apologetic function for the household codes, MacDonald views the codes as a pathway toward institutionalization. As the growing number of Christians would require better structure for sustainability, hierarchy and order might be reinforced in the process. Adopting the term "love-patriarchalism," MacDonald points out that, in the process of institutionalization, love still undergirds the structure.34

Indeed, the teaching did not seek to overturn the existing patriarchal structure. However, the epistles revolutionized
women's status and women's role, inside and outside church, by defining their new identity in Christ, proposing mutual submission, and paralleling the husband-wife and Christ-church relationships. These practices undermined the popular mentality of the inferiority of women of the time. Through household relationships, the transformation of the cultural values began with the smallest step in the daily interaction within the household and rippled through society.

Similar to 1 Peter, the first redemption presented in Ephesians is the renewal of Christians' identity in Christ. The recipients of Ephesians were called "saints" with the quality of being "faithful in Christ" (Eph 1:1). Paul's custom of referring to them as "saints" bears the idea of being "set apart from everyday usage, dedicated to God."35 The second qualification keenly reveals Paul's intention of identifying their new status as followers of Jesus Christ and being "brought into a living fellowship."36 The prominence of en Christō ("in Christ") and equivalent expressions indicates the centrality of Christ.37 As such, Paul repeated the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians before he presented his household code. This new identity in Christ entitled Christians to their inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:14) and ensured their eschatological hope of glory and honor.38 The slave Christians in the communities must have extra joy because they would have no share of any inheritance under Roman law. By claiming that Christians have honor and inheritance in Christ, Paul indeed subtly altered the social code of honor and shame, and the treatment of the marginalized.

How does one obtain this new identity in Christ? Being reconciled into one body, they stopped being foreigners and aliens and moved into the household of God. They become God's residence through the Spirit (Eph 2:11–22). The concept of household is essential here. More important is that their new identity in Christ liberates them from the old hierarchy based on their presumed portion of rationality. Unity occurs when they align themselves with the head, Christ, in the Spirit. New humanity in Ephesians is not judged by rationality, but by God's criterion—love. All enter into the household of God, the kingdom of God, and thus are all under the rule of the only paterfamilias, God.

The theme of "church" is so prominent that some scholars consider it the primary subject of Ephesians. Peter Thomas O'Brien nevertheless identifies "cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ" as the central message.39 Either way, ecclesiological emphasis is present. What would be the purpose of the Ephesian household code in light of this theme? O'Brien contends that even though the verb for "subordinate" is in the middle voice (hypotassomenoi), thus intensifying the reciprocal pronoun "to each other" (allēlois). The flow of argument "is not speaking of mutual submission in the sense of a reciprocal subordination, but submission to those who are in authority over them."40 However, in light of the themes of unity and equality presented in Eph 2, of new identity in Christ and the exhortation of love throughout the epistle, O'Brien's interpretation does not fit well. His choice may be partly due to his understanding of unity as solely dependent on the Spirit.41 O'Brien's view represents those who insist on male-dominance. However, Eph 4:11–16 describes a visible and growing unity when all the members of the body align properly to the head, Christ. The addition of allēlois actually gives more weight to the mutuality. As Andrew Lincoln notes, the mutuality comes because of the Christians' new identity in Christ. This new identity inspires a new attitude toward Christ's "overwhelming love and at his power," an attitude "in light of his sovereign claim and righteous judgment."42 Likewise, John Paul Heil recognizes the "submission" in 5:21 in light of believers submitting to Christ like all things being brought to Christ's feet (1:22).43 To be consistent with Green's interpretation of "submissive" as applying the active engagement aspect of subordination, the mutual submission would encourage each member to function responsibly. The result is their growing into the likeness of Christ. This surely is a more cohesive picture of unity.

O'Brien asks the right question, "Why [has] Paul placed such a heavy emphasis on the marriage relationship here in the Ephesians household table?" But O'Brien presents only half of the answer: "the harmony of the Christian family is an essential element of this oneness," in light of God's universal vision to sum up all things in Christ.44 The mutuality in the household codes subtly challenged the pervasive cultural values, especially those regarding women's social status. The codes not only affirmed women's new identity in the household of God, but also defined a new love relationship for church members as a way to testify to the gospel message. The juxtaposition of husband-wife and Christ-church not only elevates women to a glorious position in the context of the church, it also reminds all church members of their marginalized position in society.

Conclusion

MacDonald applies "love-patriarchalism" to Pauline household codes arguing that the codes retained the patriarchal hierarchy in the process of institutionalization. However, retaining the social strata does not mean Paul intended to keep the structure. As with 1 Peter, authors of NT household codes did not aim to demolish the social structure but to define for the first Christian communities the proper relationships among the members of the communities. The first purpose was to live out the gospel message and convey the message to the larger society. On the surface the Christians seemed to adapt to the existing patriarchal hierarchy, but as indicated above, the subtle alteration of the codes in light of the new identity in Christ asserted the transformational power of the gospel in daily life. Following the Roman emphasis on family order as the foundation of social and state harmony, the transformation in family life certainly would ripple across the whole social structure.

Fear of unbridled desires, especially sexual desires, seems to be the basis for Plato and Aristotle appealing to reason as a safeguard against irrational desires. On the other hand, both philosophers recognized the desire for immortality through procreation, which necessitated the union of male and female and regulations related to this union. Neither Plato nor Aristotle denied the natural tendencies of desire, but the motivation of
regulation was to rule over these desires. They tried to win the battle by reason. Through subjugating women externally, they thought they could contain such desires internally. This desire to rule invites power and, possibly, abuse of power. Justice quickly turns into legalism that demands each person accept the status quo.

Admitting that human beings are creatures—creatures bearing God’s image—challenges this status quo. The new perspective will bring out the gifts God has given each person, female and male, young and old, slave and free. Reason and relationship are only two dimensions of who a person is. Abuse of power can be reduced because right authority and hierarchy are built upon the foundation of love. NT household codes might have accepted some forms of the household management dyads, but in subtle ways the authors of these codes altered the social honor/shame code, as well as women’s status. These codes conveyed the love and mercy of the gospel in daily mundane life, instead of a grand “constitution” like The Laws or Politics. Through the Roman Empire’s emphasis on harmony within households, NT household codes initiated the transformation not by removing patriarchal hierarchy, but by changed interaction in daily life that rippled through the Empire.

The theological admonishment for the early church should have elevated women’s status within the church communities. However, the process of institutionalization must have put more weight on male leadership as shown in the Pastoral.43 This implies a reversal of the tide. By the third century, gifts from patrons were channeled through the bishop’s office, suggesting minimization of women patrons’ role in church.46 This might be a sign of reducing their leadership as well. Historically, the church exhibited gradual conformation to patriarchal hierarchy. MacDonald is correct that, in institutionalization, leadership authority—male leadership authority—overshadowed the ideals in the epistles.47 When the church emerged out of marginality into the mainstream, the dynamics between the church and the society also changed. Martin’s comment properly reflects this trend: “The founders of the Roman church were Roman men with the Roman gift of government and organization. Roman law became the basis of canon law, and the patriarchal mentality was absorbed into the veins of the church.”48 Thus it is important to recover proper understanding of the purposes of NT household codes in light of their social context and the NT authors’ motives.

The study of NT household codes illuminates the grace and mercy of the gospel and demonstrates hope for the oppressed and marginalized. Anachronous application of the codes would only eclipse that power.

Notes

1. Faith McBurney Martin, Call Me Blessed: The Emerging Christian Woman (2d ed.; Pittsburgh: Spring Valley, 1998), 20–26, 58–60. Martin notices that Jesus treats women as equals. However, Christian fathers such as Tertullian blamed Eve for opening the door to the Devil and destroying the image of God. Augustine classified women in the lower, material realm while men occupied the higher, spiritual realm. Subsequent church leadership in Europe viewed women as lesser human beings. This view persisted in medieval theologies despite the cult of the Virgin that venerated Mary. Reinforced by the Reformers, Protestantism presented a “less perfect” spirituality of women compared to men. The trend continued into the twentieth century.

2. Origen commented that Phoebe’s diaconate role was a special case needing the Apostle Paul’s validation. Hippolytos decreed ordination for clergy and not for widows, whose lot was prayer. Such evidence indicates the shrinking roles in church ministry for women in the third century. Ruth Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present (Grand Rapids: Academice, 1987), 107–8.


5. Joel B. Green, 1 Peter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).


13. Bruce W. Winter, Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 44. Bauman, Women and Politics in Ancient Rome, 12, reveals another aspect of the accusation of adultery for elite women attempting politics. First of all, “patriarchal Roman society did not like women’s involvement in politics.” Since the usual tactic of charging a political opponent with treason was not applicable for women, accusation of adultery opened the door for dismissing female political discord. The most famous case is Augustus’s indictment of his own daughter, Julia, in 2 BC. See Bauman, Women and Politics in Ancient Rome, 108–9; Winter, Roman Wives, Roman Widows, 51–52.

14. The equestrian revolt was a resistance against the law’s effect on inheritance, seen as an intrusion into domestic matters over which there had been much more liberty regardless of the opposition. Augustus legislated an amendment, lex Papia Poppaea (AD 9), to push his agenda forward. See Winter, Roman Wives, Roman Widows, 47–49, 54–56.

15. When Panaetius set free Stoicism from pure philosophical debates of the nature of the universe to embrace moral duties especially in terms of serving the state, he enabled Middle Stoicism to engage the practical Roman mind. The Stoic theme shifted from logic to human relationships, “particularly those of family and kinship.” Greek philosophy not only slipped into the upper strata through philosophical education, but gained popularity among the masses. See James E. Crouch, The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 56–57.

16. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive, 52–58, aptly notes the Platonist-Aristotelian influence in the household management writings of eclectic
Stoics such as Seneca (first century AD), Hellenistic Jews including Philo and Josephus (first century AD), and Neopythagoreans such as Bryson of Heraclea and Callicratidas (first centuries BC and AD). Winter’s survey of the philosophical responses to “new women” reveals similar imprints of Greek philosophies (Roman Wives, Roman Widows, 59–74).

21. The Isis cult brought much suspicion from Roman society. A frieze recovered from ancient Rome depicts veiled men (not women) in procession honoring Isis. See Tucker and Liefeld, Daughters of the Church, 81. Its feminist tone sharply contrasts with the androcentric Roman tradition. This became Octavian’s thrust “to maintain the renown of [their] forefathers” against Antony. Despite the official effort to eliminate the Isis cult, the cult persisted and finally was tolerated. See Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive, 71; Tucker and Liefeld, Daughters of the Church, 58.
22. Green, 1 Peter, 71.
23. Scholarly consensus regarding authorship of 1 Peter is elusive. Although pseudonymity in the NT world is a recognizable practice, in light of certainty being unattainable, I follow Achtemeier and Epp, who honor the tradition associating the letter with Peter for “its intent to be apostolic”; see Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, 1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 43. Likewise, aligning with the canonical perspective for “its ‘authorization’ of the letter and the letter’s message,” Green attributes authorship to Peter; see Green, 1 Peter, 10.
25. Green, 1 Peter, 13.
26. Green, 1 Peter, 28.
27. Kreider, Worship and Evangelism, 12.
29. Green, 1 Peter, 73.
30. Achtemeier and Epp, 1 Peter, 209.
31. Green, 1 Peter, 100.
32. Green, 1 Peter, 72.
33. Achtemeier and Epp, 1 Peter, 55.
34. MacDonald, Pauline Churches, 43. The term comes from Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 2 vols. (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 69–89. According to Gerd Theissen’s definition, love-patriarchalism “takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger. From the weaker are required subordination, fidelity, and esteem. Whatever the intellectual sources feeding into this ethos, with it the great part of Hellenistic primitive Christianity mastered the task of shaping social relations within a community which, on the one hand, demanded of its members a high degree of solidarity and brotherliness and, on the other, encompassed various social strata.” See Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth (trans. and ed. John H. Schütz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 107.
37. Eph 1:3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32.
41. O’Brien, Letter to the Ephesians, 64.
42. Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 367.
45. MacDonald, Pauline Churches, 207–14.
46. Osiek et al., A Woman’s Place, 11.
47. MacDonald, Pauline Churches, 136.

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**CBE,Today/Intern**

“I feared I would be answering phones or doing some other mindless busy work. But my internship with CBE was much better than I expected. I really felt like part of the CBE team... I was able to do real writing work.”

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**Priscilla Papers** • Vol. 30, No. 1 • Winter 2016
The perception in evangelical church culture persists that one of our primary goals as a church is to create good, healthy, safe, Christian families. Sure, we might have singles’ ministries in our churches, but even those are usually designed to help singles meet each other! It is no small secret that the ultimate goal of some singles’ ministries leaders is to work themselves out of a job. Consider this note that I received from a friend after discussing this topic with him:

This is a very interesting topic for me as many of my closest friends are single. My best friend and I talk about this a lot because he desires to find a life partner and wonders why he has not found anybody yet. He also feels at the age that he is that a majority of people look at him as if he is “less responsible” or “more selfish” because of his singleness. As you know, the current church culture promotes marriage, which makes it extremely difficult to be single as a Christian (unless you have extremely thick skin and are okay with comments people are making about you at times). My question is: how does the church counter this view of marriage and make singles know that they are important, gifted, and even needed in the body of Christ? Personally, what can I do to help my friend and others know and feel like they have abilities and responsibilities that married couples don’t have or can’t do, and help singleness be seen as not a temporary thing but a very valuable and fulfilling thing?

To address these questions, I want to look at the NT to see what it has to say to this matter. Happily, we find that it is not silent on this topic. And, moreover, much of the NT instructions on this topic come from single people! Below I offer three NT insights on marriage and singleness in the church.

Paul offers these instructions about marriage and singleness in 1 Cor 7:

Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. … I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. …

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Cor 7:1–3, 6–9)

We might be aghast as we read Paul’s instructions here. Is he really saying that the purpose of getting married might be to curb our own sexual immorality? Where is the romance, Paul? Aren’t you the one who penned the “love passage” just six chapters later in 1 Cor 13—one of the most famous wedding texts there is? I doubt many of us have heard 1 Cor 7 read at a wedding ceremony! But here it is as plain as day—Paul instructing us to stay single unless doing so would cause us to be sexually immoral. A little later in this passage, Paul gives us further rationale for his recommendation:

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor 7:32–35)

In other words, Paul’s instructions about marriage and singleness do not stem from a restrictive, prudish, anti-sex attitude. Rather, his view of marriage and singleness is fundamentally Christ-focused. He instructs us to adopt whatever life vocation will offer us the best opportunities to serve Christ.

We often think of our vocation in terms of career, but that simply highlights our tendency to compartmentalize our lives. For Paul, vocation includes not only career but our relational status. Paul says that we each have our own gift from God, some to singleness and others to marriage; some to education, others to tent-making. No one vocation is to be idealized or expected of all Christians; rather, we are to be fully devoted to Christ in whatever vocation we have been called. For some, we may be called to the vocation of singleness, to others the vocation of marriage. For still others, we might be called to the vocation of singleness for a period of our lives and marriage at a later period.

The first principle we glean from the NT regarding singleness and marriage is this: The ideal Christian existence is not a fulfilling marriage but is fully committed discipleship to Christ.

Jesus makes this abundantly clear in his call to discipleship. In Luke 14 Jesus states: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26–27). Jesus is teaching that discipleship to...
him requires a radical reorientation of perspective regarding your family relations. If you are not willing to suffer and to allow your family to suffer for the sake of Christ, then you are not his disciple.

Earlier in that same chapter Jesus instructs his disciples:

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14:12–14)

In other words, even our social priorities must be restructured when we commit to Christ. Instead of showing favoritism toward our families, we favor those who will never have the opportunity to repay us.

When we begin to view discipleship to Christ, rather than happy families, as the chief aim of the Christian life, other insights regarding singleness and marriage emerge. To draw out these points, I want us to turn to a passage of scripture that you have probably never heard anyone preach from before: Paul's final greetings to the church in Rome found in Rom 16. But listen carefully to the way Paul describes the men and women whom he greets.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she many need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Greet the man Adronicus and the woman Junia, both of whom he calls “outstanding among the apostles.” Were they a married couple? We cannot know for sure. Because Paul does not say whether they are married, we can infer that their marital status is not the salient point in his commendation of them.

Greet Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all presumably single women who Paul states have “worked hard in the Lord.” He even greets the mother of Rufus, presumably a widow, since Paul does not also greet her husband as well. In short, along with the households and married couples, Paul greets a number of single women and men as his fellow co-workers in the Lord.

A professor friend of mine recently recounted to me a conversation she had with one of her female students. This student explained that she felt a strong call from the Lord to serve Christ as a nurse in Africa. But she knew that she could not act on that call unless and until her future husband received the same calling. The only problem was that this student was not even dating anyone at the time of this conversation! But she had been taught that good Christian girls find good Christian husbands, and good Christian wives submit their own calling to Christ. This does not also greet her husband as well. In short, along with the households and married couples, Paul greets a number of single women and men as his fellow co-workers in the Lord.

In contrast, Rom 16 offers us a second and quite radical principle about singleness and marriage, namely this: Discipleship to Christ is more fundamental than marital status or even gender identity.

This is not to say that we erase or blur all gender distinctions, but it is to say that we must check all of our gender stereotypes against Christ's own view of men and women. This point is important for both single men and women, but I think it may be particularly important for single women to hear, so I want to spend a moment addressing women specifically.

In the familiar story of Mary and Martha, we are given a glimpse of Jesus’s view of gender stereotypes. In Luke 10 we read:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

Greet Asyrcritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. (Rom 16:1–16)

Often, when we come to this passage, we are tempted to skip straight over it, or maybe to at best stop long enough to speculate what Paul means by a "holy kiss." (Was that on the lips or what?) But this passage is actually extremely instructive regarding the biblical perspective of marriage and singleness. For in this passage Paul not only greets married couples and entire households who serve the Lord together, but he more often greets individual men and women who are serving the Lord alongside him. He commends the woman Phoebe, as a deacon and benefactor. He greets the man Adronicus and the woman Junia, both of whom he calls “outstanding among the apostles.” Were they a married couple? We cannot know for sure. Because Paul does not say whether they are married, we can infer that their marital status is not the salient point in his commendation of them. He greets Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all presumably single women who Paul states have “worked hard in the Lord.” He even greets the mother of Rufus, presumably a widow, since Paul does not also greet her husband as well. In short, along with the households and married couples, Paul greets a number of single women and men as his fellow co-workers in the Lord.

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As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her
home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself. Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42)

NT scholar, N. T. Wright, explains this passage as follows:

Most of us grew up with the line that Martha was the active type and Mary the passive or contemplative type, and that Jesus is simply affirming the importance of both and even the priority of devotion to him. That devotion is undoubtedly part of the importance of the story, but far more obvious to any first-century reader, and to many readers in Turkey, the Middle East, and many other parts of the world to this day, would be the fact that Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet within the male part of the house rather than being kept in the back rooms with the other women. This was probably what really bothered Martha; no doubt she was cross at being left to do all the work, but the real problem behind that was that Mary had cut clean across one of the most basic social conventions. And Jesus declares that she is right to do so. She is “sitting at his feet”; a phrase that doesn’t mean what it would mean today, the adoring student gazing up in admiration and love at the wonderful teacher.

As is clear from the use of the phrase elsewhere in the New Testament . . . to sit at the teacher’s feet is a way of saying you are being a student, picking up the teacher’s wisdom and learning; and in that very practical world you wouldn’t do this just for the sake of informing your own mind and heart, but in order to be a teacher, a rabbi, yourself.2

In fact, when we look at Jesus’s ministry, we see that he was constantly surrounded by women disciples. Sure, they were not numbered among The Twelve, but that does not diminish their importance to his ministry. In Luke 8:3, for example, we read that a number of women “were helping to support [Jesus and the disciples] out of their own means.” These wealthy women were not derided by Jesus for not staying in the home. Instead, Jesus allowed them to contribute their gifts to his ministry.

So, women, whether you are single, dating, married, a mother, divorced, or widowed, let me make this biblical principle clear: Your worth and value to the body of Christ is not limited to your ability to find a husband, have a happy marriage, to have children, or to keep up a house. You are valuable as the individual God made you to be, and your individual gifts are vital to the life of the church, whatever those gifts may be. Women often have unique gifts and insights that men often lack. Without your gifts, leadership, and service, our church will implode.

Now that I have addressed the women, let me also say a word to the men: whether you are single, dating, married, a father, divorced, or a widower, let me make this biblical principle clear: Your worth and value to the body of Christ is not limited to your ability to find a wife, have a happy marriage, to make babies, or to provide for a family. You are valuable as the individual God made you to be, and your individual gifts are vital to the life of the church, whatever those gifts may be. Men often have unique gifts and insights that women often lack. Without your gifts, leadership, and service, our church would implode.

To restate our second principle: Discipleship to Christ is more fundamental than marital status or even gender identity. Discipleship is our identity as Christians. Paul sums this up well with his statement in Gal 3:26–29:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is their male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This passage in Galatians not only speaks to the fact that our fundamental identity is in Christ rather than our gender, nationality, or social standing, but by calling those in Christ children of God and fellow heirs, it also points to our third NT principle regarding singleness and marriage, namely, that the most fundamental social unit for Christians is not the family but the church—the family of God.

In Paul’s greetings in Rom 16, Paul says of Rufus’s mother that she “has been a mother to me, too.” And he often refers to the recipients of his letters as brothers and sisters. Such language is not mere window dressing for his letters, but actually points to a foundational theological point: the church family is more fundamental than the biological family. This may sound extremely unusual to our modern ears, as we go about “church shopping” until we find the right kind of church—“seeker sensitive,” “missional,” “emergent”—church that will “meet the needs of our families.” But Jesus confirms this view in his own ministry. When his family comes to visit him and Jesus is told that his “mother and brothers” are there, Jesus responds: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice” (Luke 8:21).

This new family identity is poignantly illustrated by Jesus on the cross, when he addresses his mother, Mary, and his beloved disciple, John, saying to Mary, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to John, “Here is your mother” (John 19:26–27). Jesus was not merely looking out for the well-being of his widowed mother, but he was declaring a truth about the fundamental identity of the church. The church is not an institution that requires family ties for membership and care. In fact, the church does not require families to maintain its existence. Entrance into the church is
not by birth after all, but by conversion—a spiritual rebirth. The only healthy family that the church is called to maintain is the family of God.

In Acts, this vision of the church as a new family structure becomes a lived reality. Acts describes how in the early church, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:44–45). These are the kinds of sacrifices that people only make for their families, which, of course, is precisely the point. And because of these sacrifices, Acts states that “there were no needy persons among them” (4:34). Indeed, the church even went to great lengths to take care of the many widows who were among them, as recorded in Acts 6. As Paul states in 1 Tim 5:1-2: “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

At my church growing up we had a Sunday night service that was often referred to as “family night.” It was a smaller, more intimate setting than the Sunday morning service, and oftentimes we even had a meal together after the service. But interestingly, at “family night” we rarely sat together as families. The youth would sit in the middle section of the sanctuary together, while our parents would sit in the outer sections. And even at the family style potlucks afterward, people would sit with their church friends rather than in family units. I’ve since come to realize that family night at church was about the church being a family together, not about the church recognizing our individual family units. This image of the church as a family was firmly etched into my brain by an old, campy, corny song that we often sang on Sunday nights. In fact, I often ended up requesting that we sing this song, especially once our church became too hip to sing it anymore. And so I conclude with the lyrics for this old song, “The Family of God”:

I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God
I’ve been washed in the fountain
Cleansed by his blood
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod
For I’m part of the family
The family of God.

Notes
1. All biblical quotations are from the NIV.
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And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.
John 8:32

Antoinette Erasmus  Mimi Haddad  Marianne Lousw  Ps Ray McCauley  Emily Onyango
Wayne Grudem says that for twenty-five years he has believed that how the Trinity is understood “may well turn out to be the most decisive factor in finally deciding” the bitter debate between evangelicals about the status and ministry of women.1 This is encouraging to hear, because Grudem and many of his fellow complementarians have got the doctrine of the Trinity completely wrong. On the status and ministry of women they can quote verses in support of their position, and egalitarians can quote verses in support of their position, and so we end up in a text jam without an external adjudicator to say who is right or wrong. But with the Trinity it is different. The doctrine of the Trinity is exactly and unambiguously defined by the ecumenical creeds and the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, enunciated in detail by the great Trinitarian theologians of the past such as Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, and spelled out carefully today in the numerous scholarly books on the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.2 Thus what each side is claiming to be the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity can be evaluated against evidence; the facts of the matter can be checked. Both sides cannot be right. After debating with my complementarian friends on the Trinity for more than fifteen years in numerous publications, I am more than ever convinced that the complementarians are the ones who have it wrong—dead wrong. The creeds, the confessions, and virtually all the great theologians of the past and present reject completely any hierarchical ordering in divine life.

Before turning to the essays in the book One God in Three Persons, I want to say that the reason given by the editors for publishing the book is fallacious. It is written, we are told, to encourage to hear, because Grudem and Bruce Ware, and is now an intrinsic part of the complementarian position.7

Neither side in the debate about the status and ministry of women should appeal to the Trinity.

Because egalitarian evangelicals generally do not appeal to the Trinity for male-female equality, since they do not think it is relevant to this issue, they do not have anything novel to say on this doctrine. Millard Erickson,6 Tom McCall,9 Keith E. Johnson,10 Robert Letham,11 and myself,12 as well as other informed evangelicals (gender complementarians and egalitarians alike), who have written in opposition to the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of the Trinity, simply want evangelicals to remain faithful to what the church universal has agreed is what the Bible teaches on this centrally important doctrine. In all my writings on the Trinity my one aim has been to articulate the Nicene faith as it is expressed by Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and Augustine, summed up in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, and reaffirmed by Calvin and in the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, thus showing that what most complementarians are teaching on the Trinity is not historic orthodoxy.

I am strongly of the opinion that neither side in the debate about the status and ministry of women should appeal to the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is our distinctive Christian doctrine of God, the primary and most important doctrine; it does not set a social agenda of any kind. To argue that the Trinity supports gender equality or women’s subordination is simply bad theology and bad thinking. How a three-fold divine relationship, or specifically Grudem and Ware’s “male-male” divine Father-Son relationship, might prescribe a two-fold, male-female relationship on earth cannot be explained. Correlation is not possible.

Ware and Starke’s book is not easy to review because most of the eleven chapters show virtually no understanding of the key elements of the creedal and confessional doctrine of the Trinity. The same errors are endorsed time and time again, and often what is asserted makes little sense. Then we have the problem that two essays outline orthodoxy in opposition to all the other authors, but the editors do not acknowledge this, and a third chapter on the beliefs of particular Baptists in eighteenth century England has no connection with what this book is about. Letham’s entirely orthodox chapter on the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, a doctrine confessed in the Nicene Creed, endorsed by all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, and taught by almost every significant theologian across history, is, we should carefully note, written in opposition to those who reject this doctrine, most importantly Grudem and Ware. Finally, I point out that the editors and most of the
contributors seem to believe that all those on the egalitarian side are for a co-equal Trinity of persons and all those on the complementarian side are for a hierarchically ordered Trinity, but this is simply not true as this book’s selection of contributors illustrates. Letham and Oliphant, who have chapters in this book, and Keith E. Johnson, who is sharply criticized in it for opposing the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of the Trinity, are complementarians on the gender issue. These men believe in the permanent subordination of women but not in the eternal subordination of the Son.

Chapter 1

Wayne Grudem has the first say. He accuses evangelical egalitarians of “denying the Trinity” and of “important doctrinal deviations” from orthodoxy. He says “evangelical feminists” “deny eternal distinctions between the Father and the Son,” deny “that God the Son was eternally God the Son,” claim “that any act of any [divine] person is actually the act of all three persons,” reject “the authority of Scripture,” and affirm “things about Scripture that are not true.” A certain Kevin Giles and the dozen of evangelical systematic theology, Millard Erickson, get the most criticism. The charges are either ones that could be levelled against Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, or virtually any of the great theologians of the past, or they are without substance. I have a full chapter in my book Jesus and the Father on how orthodoxy ensures the eternal distinctions between the Father and the Son.13 I argue that the personal identity of each member of the Trinity is first grounded in their unique names—Father, Son, Spirit—which cannot be altered, and in differing origination: the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds, which immutably differentiates them relationally. The Father is the Father of the Son and cannot be otherwise, the Son is the Son of the Father and cannot be otherwise, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or from the Father through the Son. What I and all orthodox theologians past and present reject absolutely is that the three omnipotent divine persons are differentiated in power or authority. You will not find any of the great theologians of the past, or any of the creeds or confessions, teaching divine differentiation on the basis of differing authority. This is an Arian error.14 Following exactly in the steps of the Nicene fathers, I endorse the idea that all the works of God are works of all three divine persons. This is called the doctrine of “inseparable operations,” and it is well grounded in scripture. Letham agrees. He says, “all three persons work inseparably in all God’s works,” and then he adds, as all orthodox theologians do, nevertheless,

Each work is attributed [in scripture] peculiarly to one trinitarian person; only the Son died on the cross, although he offered himself by the Spirit (Heb. 9:4). This inseparable action should keep us from conceiving of only one person being at work in this or that; talk of “roles” that each of the divine persons undertake is potentially misleading.15

The claim that Erickson and I deny that the Son is eternally the Son and the Father eternally the Father leaves me speechless. Grudem even claims that I could speak of God the Father as “my friend in heaven” or my “brother in heaven.”16 This is a serious accusation with no justification whatsoever. I could not speak of the Father in these terms and I never have, and I believe unequivocally that the Son is eternally the Son and the Father eternally the Father. And I am sure professor Erickson does likewise. I agree with Grudem that “to deny that the Son was (sic, it should be ‘is’) eternally the Son would be to deny both the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds.”17

To assert that Erickson, Linda Belleville, and I “reject the authority of scripture” simply because we point out that the title “the Son” is not the only title given to Jesus Christ, and that some other titles are more commonly used, is absurd.18 To accuse Erickson of rejecting the authority of scripture is also absurd. Erickson has been a defender of biblical inerrancy all his professional life. Finally, Grudem accuses evangelical egalitarians who have written on the Trinity of “ignoring verses that contradict” their position.19 This again is simply not true. I am willing to consider any verse in the Bible that might inform me better on divine triune life. Most of the verses Grudem lists, that he says Erickson and I ignore, speak of “divine order”—how the three persons work cooperatively in an unchanging and irreversible pattern. We do not discuss them because we have no problem with them. They do not speak of a hierarchical order. And contra Grudem’s claim, the Father is not always mentioned first in Trinitarian texts in scripture, as Letham points out in explaining scriptural teaching on order in divine life and action.20

In this section I get another broadside for arguing that isolated verses that seem to stand in tension with what is dominant and theologically deepest in scripture should not be absolutized, and that “simply opening our Bibles cannot settle what should be believed about the Trinity.”21 I stand by both assertions. As a confessional Christian I come to scripture assuming that the creeds and my own church’s confessions of faith will guide me to a right understanding of the many diverse comments I find in scripture on most if not all of the great doctrines. Without their guidance I could easily read my own views into scripture and fall into heresy.

Throughout this chapter Grudem shows a breathtaking ignorance of the historic doctrine of the Trinity, as do most of the other contributors to this book. The Nicene Fathers were totally opposed to the subordination of the Son in being, power, or work. For them the eternal generation of the Son does not imply the Son’s subordination—just the opposite. It speaks of him as God in the same sense as the Father, omnipotent God. No Nicene father ever suggests that creaturely words such as “father” and “son” can define the triune creator; indeed they explicitly oppose this idea. The Son is confessed as “the Son” because through his eternal generation by the Father he is other than the Father and yet one in being with the Father. Lewis Ayres, arguably the most informed patristic scholar on the Trinity at this time, says, “It is fundamental to all pro-Nicene theologies that God is one power, glory, majesty and rule, Godhead essence and nature.”22 If the divine persons are one in power, they are each omnipotent and thus one does not rule over another. Ayres also says that “one of the
most important principles shared by pro-Nicenes is that whenever one of the divine persons acts, all are present, acting inseparably." The confessors of the Evangelical Theological Society say the same. The terms "power" and "authority" are both divine attributes shared equally by the divine persons, and thus the terms are virtual synonyms. If the three divine persons have the same power then they have the same authority. The Reformed Belgic Confession of 1651 explicitly excludes hierarchical ordering in the same words as the Athanasian Creed and adds that the Son is "neither subordinate nor subservient" to the Father.

Confessional evangelicals do not give to the creeds and confessions the same authority as scripture, let alone set these documents over scripture. Rather, they believe the creeds and confessions express what the best theologians of the past have concluded the scriptures teach holistically on doctrines that have been in dispute. They see them as both summaries of what the church universal should believe the scriptures teach, and the best guides we have for the right interpretation of the scriptures on the doctrines they articulate. In this book, One God in Three Persons, there is no interaction with these weighty theological documents that enunciate what the universal church believes about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Their teaching is ignored. What this means is that most of the essays in the book reflect nothing more than the idiosyncratic opinions of individual men whose main agenda is maintaining the subordination of women.

We of course do need to check if John's Gospel teaches the eternal subordination of the Son in authority and thus hierarchical ordering in divine life, as Cowan argues, but for the moment we need to accept that hierarchical ordering in divine life is rejected by the creeds and confessions and endorsed by no orthodox theologian from the past. Indeed, for most patristic scholars it is seen as the essence of the various forms of fourth century Arianism. Letham, for example, says, "Arians of all shapes froze the triad into a hierarchy." No one denies that in John's Gospel, and occasionally elsewhere in the NT, we find texts that speak of the subordination of the Son, but for all orthodox theologians these speak of the Son "in the form of a servant" during his earthly ministry.

Central to Cowan's case is that frequently in John's Gospel the Son is said to be "sent" by the Father. For him, and for most of the other writers in this book, this indicates that the Son must do as the Father commands; he is set under the Father's authority and must obey him. This is an old argument; the Arians never tired of using it. Augustine says "they turn to the axiom: "The one who sends is greater than the one sent." In a reply to such Arian reasoning Augustine argues that sending does not imply, let alone indicate, subservience: only that the one sent comes from the sender. He thus concludes that, just as the terms "unbegotten" and "begotten" differentiate the Father and the Son, while not suggesting any subordination or inequality, so too do the terms "send" and "sent." What Augustine clearly recognized is that creaturely words such as...
“begetting,” “sending,” “son,” and “father” cannot be applied to God univocally. God is not defined by human terms used of creaturely existence. When it comes to John’s understanding of the sending language, I argue that what is reflected here is the Jewish Shalich principle, namely that the one sent has the same authority as the one who sends.32 Cowan will not concede this point. In answer to him I raise three points. First, no exegete should assume that creaturely words such as “father” and “son” and “sent,” when used in the Bible, should be understood univocally and literally. God cannot be defined in creaturely terms. Second, in John’s Gospel Jesus does see himself representing perfectly the Father because he has been “sent” by him (3:34; 5:23; 7:36; 28–29; 8:16; 18; 12:44–45; 49; 13:20; 14:24). And third, in John’s Gospel, while it is true that Jesus is sent by the Father and does his will perfectly, he is pre-existent God (1:1), who does the works of the Father (5:19; 9:4; 10:37), including those works that only Yahweh can do such as raising the dead (5:21; 6:40) and exercising judgment (5:22; 27–29; 8:16). What is more he identifies himself with Yahweh in the “I am sayings” (8:59; 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, etc.), and after his resurrection he is unambiguously confessed as “The Lord” (20:18, 28, 21:7), Yahweh in all might, majesty, and authority.

Elsewhere in the NT the title “Son” speaks pre-eminently of Jesus Christ’s kingly status. In the book of Revelation he is identified as the Son of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who rules on the one throne with his Father (Rev 7:10–12, 11:15). Here complementarians need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is not only named the Son of God but also “the Lord.” In this confession he is identified with Yahweh, the Lord God omnipotent. The Reformed theologian and complementarian, John Frame, says, “scripture calls Jesus the Son of God in a unique sense,”33 and he adds,

There is a considerable overlap between the concepts of Lord and Son. Both indicate Jesus’ rule over his covenant people (as Son, he is the covenant King of Ps 2:27). Both [titles] indicate Jesus’ powers and prerogatives as God, especially over God’s people: in other words divine control, authority, and presence.34

These observations remind us that we should never give content to titles used of Jesus Christ by appeal to fallen human life and relations. It is scripture that should give the content. When the NT writers call Jesus Christ “the Son of God,” his lofty status, not his subordination, is implied.

Chapter 3

Clyde Claunch in his essay, “God is the Head of Christ: Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Ground Gender Complementarity [italics added] in the Immanent Trinity?” discusses another key text in this intramural debate among evangelicals on the Trinity. As someone who believes strongly in the complementarity of the sexes35 I need to point out that, in fact, Claunch is arguing that 1 Cor 11:3 grounds woman’s subordination, not the complementarity of the sexes, in the immanent Trinity. For him the term “complementarity” is a code word for female subordination.36 He begins by saying that his argument does not imply a “social model of the Trinity,”37 but then later endorses the idea that the three divine persons each have their own will, which is the essence of a social doctrine of the Trinity!38 Claunch agrees that the Greek word kephalē that literally refers to the top part of the body may have the metaphorical meaning of either “source” or “authority over,” but he says it must mean the latter in 1 Cor 11:3 because Paul in this passage is securing the subordination of women in the subordination of the Son to the Father.39 I am not convinced. The metaphorical meaning of a word, I agree, is best determined by context, and in this case context well-nigh rules out the meaning “authority over.” Why would Paul first say in v. 3 that man is head over woman and then immediately say in v. 5 that men and women can both lead in church by praying and prophesying, “the two principal exercises in public worship of the Early Christians”?40 And second, why would Paul say in v. 11 that women have “authority” on their heads if he thought authority was reserved to men? Positively, given the priority of context in determining the meaning of metaphors, the meaning “source” is to be preferred. In 1 Cor 11:9 and 12, the apostle has man/Adam as the source or origin of woman (Gen 2). This being so, then the clause, “God is the kephalē of Christ,” probably refers to the Father as the origin or “source” of Jesus Christ in the incarnation, or possibly to the Son’s eternal generation from the Father.

Assuming that kephalē means “head-over” in this context, Claunch argues that 1 Cor 11:3 “does indeed ground gender complementarity in the immanent Trinity, albeit indirectly.”41 For him, this text first of all speaks of the Son as subordinated to the Father in the economy, but he argues that this is then to be read back into the immanent Trinity. What this means is that what he gives with one hand he takes back with the other. The Son is not only subordinate in the economy; he is subordinated eternally.

On taxis/order, Claunch is simply factually wrong.42 The biblical “order” is not always Father, Son, and Spirit, as 2 Cor 13:13 and many other Trinitarian verses demonstrate.43 Frequently the Father is not mentioned first. On Augustine he is also wrong. The great Latin-speaking theologian does not allow that the eternal generation of the Son implies a “Trinitarian taxis” of authority and submission in the eternal life of God.44 For Augustine, the eternal generation of the Son, which anticipates the sending of the Son into the world, speaks of the “absolute equality” of the Father and the Son.45 On this basis they are one in being and attributes—and authority is a divine attribute.46 I quote Augustine, “The Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Spirit is almighty; yet there are not three almighties but one
almighty.” What Claunch fails to recognize is that Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity excludes on principle the idea that the Son is eternally set under the Father and must obey him. The Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God, equal in all things.

Finally, I commend Claunch for his honesty and openness. He admits that the understanding he and his fellow complementarians hold “of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son,” in which the Son must eternally submit his will to the will of the Father “runs counter to the pro-Nicene tradition, as well as the medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation Reformed traditions that grew from it.”

Chapter 4

In his essay, “That God May Be All in All: The Trinity in 1 Corinthians 15,” James Hamilton accuses Erickson and me of not adequately dealing with 1 Cor 15:24–28. This text speaks of the Son on the last day handing over the kingdom of God to the Father. He says we err in not considering these words in the light of the whole argument Paul is making in this chapter. I like his conclusion: this whole chapter is an argument “that the resurrection of Jesus is a necessary component of the Gospel, and to deny the general resurrection, as some Christians do, undermines the Gospel.” But how this conclusion aids in the interpretation of vv. 24–28, he does not explain.

Before considering his specific criticism of our handling of vv. 24–28, it is to be noted that Hamilton believes, as do most of the contributors to this book, that orthodoxy teaches the ontological equality of the divine persons and the eternal role subordination of the Son. Yet, with one voice the Nicene fathers teach, in modern terms, the ontological equality of the three divine persons and their equal authority. Thus all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions and the confession of faith of the Evangelical Theological Society, as we have already noted, speak of oneness in being and power in divine life. For the Nicene theologians, the Father and the Son work or function as one, not in a command structure. Hamilton is correct: the Arians, “would not have affirmed ontological equality,” but he fails to note that it was they, not the Nicene fathers, who taught the eternal functional subordination of the Son—his subordination in authority. The Nicene fathers held that, if the Son was not one in being with the Father, then he was not one in power with the Father, and vice versa. They never spoke of the “role” subordination of the Son, as Hamilton claims they did. They spoke rather of the “works” or “operations” of the divine persons, arguing that they worked “inseparably.” The term “role” and the idea of assumed “roles” is not found in the Nicene fathers, and the word “role” is not found in any of the most-used English translations of the Bible. I agree with Letham that in the cause of truth the word “role” should not be used in any discussion on divine life and action. And, I would add, it should not be used to interpret the Bible on the male-female relationship. We do not simply play the “role” of being a man or woman. We are a man or a woman.

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The pro-Nicene fathers, as well as Erickson and I, believe that ontological equality excludes absolutely any necessary and eternal (functional) subordination/submission. To suggest otherwise is “nonsensical.” If the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father and cannot be otherwise, then his subordinate status speaks not only of his function or “role” but of his person—who he is. What is more, Arians in the middle of the fourth century explicitly confessed the Son to be truly God, even if neither they nor the Nicene fathers ever spoke explicitly of “the ontological equality” of the Father and the Son. For example, the Second Sirmium Creed of 357, which none deny is an Arian Creed, first confesses the Son “to be begotten of the Father . . . before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, by whom all things were made” before speaking of his eternal subordination. What this means is that Arians in the middle of the fourth century, like most complementarians today, confessed the Son to be truly God without any caveats, yet eternally subordinate to the Father as well.

When it comes to the exegesis of 1 Cor 15:24–28, Hamilton dismisses Pannenberg’s evocative interpretation (which I do not endorse). He says little about my account of what Calvin and the majority of Reformed theologians have said on these verses. They agree that this text is not speaking of the end of the Son’s rule but the end of his rule as the God-man mediator. In support, Erickson and I, together with many Reformed theologians, point out that numerous scriptures speak of the Son ruling for ever and ever (2 Sam 7:12, Isa 9:7, Luke 1:33, 2 Pet 1:11, Rev 7:10–12, etc.). These texts count against Hamilton’s interpretation of 1 Cor 15:24–28, namely that the Son in eternity “will be subject to the Father.” I thus with confidence, along with millions and millions of other Christians who confess the Nicene Creed, believe that the Son’s rule “will have no end.”

Chapter 5

This chapter by Robert Letham on the eternal generation of the Son is the most unexpected and important chapter in the book. He writes in opposition to evangelicals, including Ware and Grudem, who reject this doctrine, a doctrine fundamental to Trinitarian orthodoxy. I applaud Letham’s endorsement not only of the Nicene doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and of “inseparable operations,” but also his rejection of the use of the term “role” to differentiate the Father and the Son, his opposition to reading back into divine life the creaturely content of the terms “father” and “son,” his emphatic affirmation that the “Father and the Son are one in being, equal in power and glory, possessing all God’s attributes,” and his allowing only that “in terms of personal relations there is a distinction. The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten—never the reverse.” This he believes reflects “order” or “a general pattern” in divine life and operations that is irreversible and unchanging. It does not speak of hierarchical ordering in divine life.

What is so important in this essay is that Letham brands as Arian the primary argument used in this book and elsewhere
by complementarians for the eternal subordination of the Son in authority, namely that the divine names, “Father” and “Son” should be understood as they are in human relationships. He says,

The Arian argument that human sons are subordinate to their fathers led to their contention that the son is subordinate to the Father. The church rejected this conclusion as heretical and opposed the premise as mistaken. Rather, the Son is equal with the Father in status, power and glory. He is identical in being from eternity. In short, to take the creaturely reality as definitive of the life of God is a serious error, leading to dire results.61

Compared to what I say in this critique of One God in Three Persons, what Letham says is far more telling. It inflicts a mortal blow to the complementarian hierarchically ordered doctrine of the Trinity. He gives a profound and informed rejection of virtually every assertion that the other contributors make and of the primary thesis of this book, namely that the creaturely terms “father” and “son” define the triune relationships of the Creator. He brands this argument for the Son’s eternal subordination “Arian,” “heretical” and a “serious error.” We can only wonder whether the editors understood what Letham was saying.

Chapter 6

“True Sonship—Where Dignity and Submission Meet: A Fourth Century Discussion” is the title of Michael Ovey’s chapter.62 He is the principal of Oak Hill, a prestigious evangelical Anglican theological college in England. You would imagine someone holding this position would appeal first to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and then to the Thirty-Nine Articles, binding on all Anglicans, in seeking to outline the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, Ovey appeals to a number of contentious creeds from the middle of the fourth century, a quotation from the Arian bishop Basil of Ancyra, and a selected quotation from Hilary of Poitiers, which all reflect either the confused theological thinking in this period or explicitly Arian teaching. He also appeals to the fact that Athanasius speaks of a divine Father-Son relationship.

Commendably, he outlines his thesis succinctly and clearly.

The creedal and confessional material we will examine shows that overall, Arian, Nicene, and non-Nicene sources alike commonly held to the submission of the Son outside the incarnation. However the material also shows that the Son’s submission may be grounded differently, with Arian versions of submission being associated with the Son as a creature, while the others stress the Son’s submission arises from his sonship and not from him being a creature.63

Ovey is unambiguous; the Arian and pro-Nicene fathers both “held to the submission of the Son outside the incarnation.” They only differed on what is the basis for this “submission” or “subordination” of the Son (he uses both terms interchangeably). For all those called “Arians,” the Son is subordinate because he is a creature, not truly God. In contrast, for all the pro-Nicenes, the Son is God yet eternally subordinate because he is “the Son” and like all sons he is set under his father’s authority.

Ovey is completely wrong in both his primary assertions. The Arians in the middle of the fourth century did not subordinate the Son because he is a creature and the pro-Nicene fathers did not subordinate the Son because he is like a human son. The creeds to which he appeals, as proof that the Arians subordinated the Son because they did not believe he was fully God and the co-creator, all contradict his thesis. Let me outline the facts, quoting from the creeds to which Ovey appeals. He and I agree that each of these creeds speaks unambiguously of the eternal subordination of the Son. Thus for Athanasius they are Arian creeds.64 But in direct contradiction to Ovey’s assertion, they all confess in the strongest terms that the Son is fully God and the co-creator. “The Dedication Creed” confesses the Son to be “begotten of the Father, before all ages, God from God, whole God from whole God, sole from sole, perfect from perfect, King from King, Lord from Lord, by whom all things were made.”65 Similarly the Macroстиch Creed of 345 and the First Creed of Sirmium of 351 speak of the Son as generated “before the ages” and as “God from God, Light from Light” “through whom all things were made.”66 The Second Sirmium Creed of 357, called “the Blasphemia” by Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers because of its stark teaching on the eternal subordination of the Son, is equally explicit. The Son is “begotten of the Father … before all ages . . . God from God, Light from Light, by whom all things were made.”67 If the non-biblical word homoousios is not to be used, I can think of no stronger wording to affirm that the Son is God in the same way as the Father.68

Yes, these creeds and Athanasius, to whom Ovey also appeals, affirm that the Father is the Father and the Son is the Son. We would expect this because they all oppose Sabellianism, which denied eternal differentiation in divine life. However, to argue, as Ovey and several other contributors to this volume do, that this indicates the belief that the divine Son is eternally subordinated to the divine Father because he is a son and all sons must obey their father is completely mistaken. The Nicene fathers opposed the idea that creaturely words and creaturely relationships can define divine life, which is what the Arians believed, as Letham so eloquently points out. He calls this argument “heretical” and a “serious error.”

Paradoxically, what Ovey has proven is that the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity he and most other contributors to this book espouse reflects Arian theology in the middle of the fourth century: The Son is truly God but he is eternally subordinate or submissive to the Father.

Chapter 7

In the next essay, “Augustine and His Interpreters,” John Starke, in opposition to every patristic scholar I have read, argues that Augustine teaches an “order of authority and submission” in which the Father rules over the Son. In contrast, the erudite
patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly says that, for Augustine, “the unity of the Trinity is squarely in the foreground, subordinationism of every kind is excluded.” Similarly, Letham says that for Augustine, “The inseparability of the persons in both being and action, in turn, is a reflection of their complete equality. All elements of subordination are pruned away.” Starke is of the opposite opinion. He argues that by speaking of the Son as eternally begotten of the Father and as “sent” by the Father into the world, Augustine shows that he believed that there is an “an order of initiating authority and receptive submission between the Father and the Son.” This is absurd. If this book were not a scholarly publication his conclusion would not deserve comment. For Augustine “the Son is equal to the Father in every respect,” only subordinate by his own choice in that he took the “form of a servant” for our salvation. Augustine comes back to the issue of the sending of the Son many times, and in every instance he rejects the Arian argument that this implies the Son’s subordination. He says,

If the reason why the Son is said to be sent by the Father is simply that one is the Father and the other the Son, then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father . . . one is not greater and the other less.

In regard to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, Augustine believed that this guarantees both the full equality of the two divine persons and their indelible differentiation. Augustine says orthodox theologians agree that the scriptures teach that

The Father, Son and Spirit exist in an inseparable equality of the substance present in divine unity; and therefore there are not three Gods but one, although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten of the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself co-equal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the three fold unity.

The names Father and Son definitely distinguish the divine persons for Augustine, like all the Nicene fathers, but he rules out of court the possibility of moving from human relations to divine relations. This, he says, is what men “misguided by the love of reason” do. For him, we cannot “transfer” what we observe about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they [the men who love reason] would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence.

Augustine never wavers. For him the scriptures clearly teach that the Son is eternally “equal to the Father” in “the form of God” and “less than” or “inferior to,” or as we would say today, “subordinate to” the Father temporally in “the form of servant” in his earthly ministry.

Chapter 8
I will not comment on Michael Hakin’s essay on the doctrine of the Trinity espoused by eighteenth century Particular Baptists, for I cannot see how it bears on the topic addressed in the book or in this review.

Chapters 9 and 11
Ch. 9 is Philip Gons and Andrew Naselli’s essay, “An Examination of Three Recent Philosophical Arguments Against Hierarchy in the Immanent Trinity,” which I pair with the concluding essay by Bruce Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of Homoousios?” for they cover much the same ground. They alike reject the argument presented by the well-informed philosophical theologians Tom McCall, Keith Yandell, and Millard Erickson, that to insist that the Son is necessarily and eternally subordinated to the Father in authority implies his ontological subordination, and as such is a denial that the Father and the Son are one in being (Greek homoousios). Gons and Naselli’s ignorance of historical theology is immediately disclosed in that they assume that “hierarchical ordering” in the immanent Trinity is orthodoxy. Virtually all informed theologians see hierarchical ordering in divine life as the essence of the Arian error and the heresy called “subordinationism.” They and Ware also show that they have not grasped historic orthodoxy in that they separate and distinguish between what is true of the one divine essence/being and what is true of the divine persons. The three persons are the one divine being; there is no divine being or essence apart from the persons. What the divine persons are in unity, they are as Father, Son, and Spirit.

I will make no attempt at a reply to their attempts to ward off the philosophical objections to their doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son in authority, first because I am, like Gons and Ware, not a philosophical theologian, and second, because it has been done superbly by Thomas McCall, an especially competent philosophical theologian. I warmly commend McCall’s work. I will focus rather on the theological argument that Gons, Naselli, and Ware make in reply. They point out that orthodoxy eternally differentiates the Father and the Son on the basis of differing origination—the Father begets, and the Son is begotten—which is true, and I have made the point many times. They believe this indicates that each divine person has a unique “property,” so to differentiate the persons by differing origination, or as complementarians do, by differing authority, does not imply ontological subordination or the denial of homoousios. Again what they say reveals a failure to understand Nicene orthodoxy. The Nicene fathers insisted that differing origination was the one safe way indelibly to differentiate the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) because this alone did not call into question divine oneness and equality or allow the subordination of the Son in the eternal life of God in any way. It is because the Son is eternally begotten of the Father that he is, as the Nicene Creed says, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God . . . one in being with the Father.” Differentiating the Father and the Son on
the basis of differing authority, all the pro-Nicene fathers clearly saw, entailed the sub-ordering of the Son, the essence of the Arian error.

Chapter 10

Finally, I briefly comment on K. Scott Oliphant’s essay, “Simplicity, Triunity and the Incomprehensibility of God,” which is a competent account of the somewhat abstract philosophical yet theologically orthodox idea that God is “simple.” The argument is that the triune God of revelation is philosophical yet theologically orthodox idea that God is “simple.” The argument is that the triune God of revelation is ultimately the one God, divided in no way, or to quote Oliphant, “whatever essential attributes, qualities, or properties [that] inhere in God, they are identical with him, in the sense that they are not something other than God himself.”

What this means is that, if our triune God is “simple” in this sense, then he is not and cannot be divided into a God who commands and a God who obeys. Highlighting his orthodoxy Oliphant also argues first that we cannot define God in creaturely terms; we must “rather submit our thinking to scripture.” This comment excludes defining the divine Father-Son relationship by appeal to the force of the human words “father” and “son.” And second, he argues that a distinction must be made, a distinction rooted in scripture, “between God (including the Son of God) as he is essentially and God in relation to creation.” This distinction rules out of court reading the subordination of the Son seen in creation back into the life of God. What is missing from this essay is any engagement with the strongly argued essay by the evangelical theologian, Dennis Jowers, on divine simplicity that makes the divided Trinity of the complementarians a logical impossibility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I must admit that I can find little to commend in this book with the exception of Letham and Oliphant’s essays which accurately reflect orthodoxly, but what they say is drowned out by the other ill-informed essays that reflect an Arian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine rejected by the Nicene fathers and excluded by the creeds and confessions. Should any reader want to discover what in fact orthodoxy teaches, the best place to begin would be the Athanasian Creed which sums up the catholic, or universal Christian, faith on the Trinity and on the person of Christ. Then they should move to the books on the Trinity written by competent patristic scholars who in most cases know nothing at all of the distinctive post-1977 complementarian doctrine of a hierarchically ordered Trinity. I list the best of these in endnote 2 below.

Finally, I return to where I began. Grudem is convinced that “the most decisive factor in finally deciding” the bitter debate between evangelicals about the status and ministry of women is what is believed about the Trinity. I disagree because I am convinced that the Trinity in no way defines the male-female relationship on earth, and appeal to the Trinity is therefore irrelevant and bad theology. If, however, Grudem’s view is accepted—as do most of the writers in One God and, I suspect, most complementarians—then these evangelicals are left with only two starkly opposed options. They can endorse the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of a hierarchically ordered Trinity, following the Arians. Or, they can endorse the Nicene doctrine of a co-equal Trinity enunciated clearly and unambiguously by Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine, codified in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, reaffirmed by the Reformers, and now spelled out in the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions. To opt for the second choice is, of course, difficult for complementarians because, given Grudem’s argument, it would involve abandoning belief in the permanent subordination of women. I of course strongly recommend this path because I do not believe the Bible makes the subordination of women the creation ideal; to argue that women are permanently subordinated to men demeans them, and to do so in our age makes as much sense as believing that the world is flat.

Notes


4. The only examples I can think of are S. Grenz and D. Kjesbo, Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 151–56, and W. Spencer, “An Evangelical Statement on the Trinity,” Priscilla Papers 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 16. In both cases the connection is incidental to what else they say. I am sure other egalitarians have appealed to divine life in support of gender equality; my point is simply that it is not an argument in any of the better known and most informed books by evangelical egalitarians.


7. I fully document this fact in Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 20–32.

8. M. J. Erickson, Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009)


11. One of the clearest and most telling essays in opposition to the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity is given by Letham in ch. 5 of
One God. See my discussion of his chapter below. Early in our debate with each other I said a few things I would now word more carefully, and I suspect Letham would say the same about what he has written. On the basis of such comments by Letham, some of the writers in this book quote him in support of their erroneous ideas. See One God, 11 n. 1, 157, 162, 166, 170, 195 n. 2, 197 n. 7. Some of the appeals to what Letham says on “order” in divine life are wrongly understood. For him order in divine life does not imply hierarchical order.


28. I note that Grudem does refer to the creed of Nicæa and the later Nicene Creed (One God, 28), but only in passing, and the conclusion he draws is false: The eternal begetting of the Son is not mentioned in these creeds to prove that Jesus was always the Son of God and thus, like a true son, subordinate. The eternal begetting of the Son is in fact confessed because it makes the Son God, God in the same sense as the Father—omnipotent God.


30. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 2.2.7 (p. 101).


32. See my argument in Jesus and the Father, 119–21, and my appeal to scholarly opinion in support.


34. Frame, Doctrine of God, 661.

35. Who could possibly deny that the two sexes together complete what it means to be human and that procreation is not possible without the complementary contribution by both sexes?


37. Clyde Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ: Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Ground Gender Complementarity in the Immanent Trinity?” in One God, 67.

38. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 88–89.

39. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 76–78.

40. So C. Hodge, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 208. We should also note that Paul says in 1 Cor 12:28 that prophecy is “second,” teaching “third.”

41. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 67.

42. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 90–91.

43. See further, Giles, Jesus and the Father, 109–10.

44. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 90.

45. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 1.1 (p. 65).


47. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 5.9 (p. 195).

48. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in One God, 88.

49. After I wrote this review, late in the editing stage I read Wesley Hill’s superb book, Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). For a convincing theological interpretation of 1 Cor 15:24–28 in conformity with the Nicene faith, I could not recommend his work too highly.


52. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in One God, 106.


54. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in One God, 123, 125.

55. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in One God, 95.


57. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in One God, 123.

58. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in One God, 123, 125.


60. Letham, The Holy Trinity, 179 and n. 29, 259, 383.


68. Here we need to note that in the middle of the fourth century most bishops were wary of the term homoousios. They feared it opened the door to Sabellianism (modalism) and they noted the word was not found in the Bible.


70. Letham, The Holy Trinity, 199.

71. John Starke, “Augustine and His Interpreters,” in One God, 171.

72. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 6.1.6 (p. 209).

73. See my detailed account of Augustine on the sending of the Son with many quotations from his writings in, Jesus and the Father, 191–92 and The Eternal Generation of the Son, 152–62.
74. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 4.5.27 (p. 172). See also 4.5.29 (p. 174).
75. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 1.2.7 (p. 69).
76. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 1.1.1 (p. 65).
77. Saint Augustine: The Trinity, 1.3.14 (p. 74), 1.3.15 (p. 75), 1.4.22 (p. 82), 1.4.24 (p. 83), 2.1.3 (pp. 98–99), etc.
78. Philip R. Gons and Andrew David Naselli, “An Examination of Three Recent Philosophical Arguments against Hierarchy in the Immanent Trinity,” in One God, 205; Bruce A. Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of Homoousios?: A Response to Millard Erickson and Tom McCall,” in One God, 243, 245, 247.
82. Oliphint, “Simplicity,” in One God, 233. See also, for the same point in other language, p. 234.

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- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons in equal power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.
- God’s design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women’s gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

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- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ’s redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.

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