The following two articles, by Kevin N. Giles and Millard J. Erickson, were presented as lectures at a plenary forum on the Trinity at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) on November 15, 2016, in San Antonio, Texas. Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem also spoke in the forum. Sam Storms presided.

Giles’s publications which relate to his lecture include The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate (InterVarsity, 2002), Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity (Zondervan, 2006), The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology (InterVarsity, 2012), and The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity (forthcoming from Cascade). Erickson has published God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity (Baker, 1995), Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions (Baker, 2000), and Who's Tampering with the Trinity?: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate (Kregel, 2009).

The lectures are published here in slightly revised form. As lectures, they are sometimes more technical than articles written for a broad audience. As presentations before an academic society, they are sometimes less formal than a typical academic article.

The Nicene and Reformed Doctrine of the Trinity

Kevin Giles

Thank you, Dr. Storms, for your welcome. It is a tremendous honor to be invited to give the introductory address at this ETS plenary forum on the Trinity.

In putting my case this afternoon, I am going to speak forthrightly and unambiguously, as I am sure Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware will do as well. Dr. Erickson, who stands with me in opposing Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware’s teaching on the Trinity, I am sure will be the clearest in what he says, and the most gracious. I speak bluntly because the issues we are discussing are of monumental importance for the evangelical community. I believe that what Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware teach on the Trinity, and now large numbers of evangelicals believe, contradicts what the Nicene Creed, the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant confessions, and the ETS doctrinal basis teach.

Three Introductory Clarifications

To begin my presentation, I make three matters perfectly clear. First, I have no distinctive doctrine of the Trinity. My exposition of the Trinity which follows is simply an outline of what I consider to be the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as articulated in the Nicene Creed. I know absolutely nothing about a so-called “evangelical egalitarian doctrine of the Trinity.”

What this means is that I have basically the same understanding of the Trinity as the many complementarian confessional Reformed theologians who have come out in opposition to Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware’s teaching on the Trinity. What this immediately reveals is that the divide on the Trinity is not between evangelical egalitarians and complementarians but between creedal and confessional evangelicals and non-creedal and confessional evangelicals.

Second, I want to state clearly and unambiguously that I think the doctrine of the Trinity has absolutely nothing to say about the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity, and neither does the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity, and neither does the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity, and neither does the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity, and neither does the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity, and neither does the relationship of the sexes.

The gender complementarian, Fred Sanders, who is giving a lecture on the Trinity after this forum, confirms what I say. On his blog and in a personal email to me he has said, “I have not been able to find one sentence where Kevin Giles works to secure his own [gender] egalitarian position by appeal to the Trinity.”

I do not appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity to support my gender egalitarianism because I believe the doctrine of the Trinity is our distinctive Christian doctrine of God, not our social agenda. Why and how the doctrine of the Trinity might inform our doctrine of the sexes, whatever that may be, completely escapes me. The Trinity is three divine persons, all analogically spoken of in male terms. How, we must ask, can a threefold analogically all “male” relationship inform a twofold male-female relationship on earth? No analogical correlation is possible. The argument simply does not make sense. The logic of this argument suggests that threefold marriages or male-male relationships are the ideal! None of us, I imagine, would affirm these deductions. The impossibility of correlation is made clear by Dr. Grudem in his Systematic Theology. On p. 257, in an attempt to make a connection, he likens the Trinity to dad, mum, and their one child. In doing so he feminizes the Son; the Son becomes an analogue of the woman. Moreover, this family picture of God has nothing to do with the revealed doctrine of the Trinity. It sounds more like Greek mythology.

This observation takes us right to the heart of what I believe is the fundamental and inherent error in Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware’s doctrine of the Trinity—depicting God in human terms, versus how God is revealed in scripture.

My consistent argument for nearly twenty years has been that, if we evangelicals want to get right our doctrine of the Trinity, the primary and foundational doctrine of the Christian faith, we must sharply and completely separate it from our doctrine of the sexes. They are in no way connected; when they are forced together, both doctrines are corrupted.

I have not the time to discuss 1 Cor 11:3 in any detail, but I am sure this one text does not justify fusing the doctrine of the Trinity with the doctrine of the sexes. This is not a Trinitarian text. The Spirit is not mentioned, and it would seem that the Greek word “head” (kephalē) almost certainly here carries the metaphorical meaning of “source.” Woman comes from man...
(that is, from Adam; 1 Cor 11:8, 12) and the Son comes “from” the Father.

Now my third point, still by way of introduction. In this presentation, I am arguing that what Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware teach on the Trinity is a sharp and clear breach with historic orthodoxy as articulated by the Nicene Creed.

There can be no denying that we have starkly opposing doctrines of the Trinity. Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware argue on the basis of creaturely analogies for a hierarchically ordered Trinity where the Father rules over the Son, claiming this is historical orthodoxy and what the church has believed since AD 325. I argue just the opposite. On the basis of scripture, I argue that the Father and the Son are coequally God; thus the Father does not rule over the Son. This is what the church has believed since AD 325. You could not have two more opposing positions. There is no middle ground.

When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, we are not discussing a theological question where one side can assert something, the other side assert the opposite, and resolution is possible. In this case, there is absolutely no uncertainty as to what constitutes Trinitarian orthodoxy. No other doctrine has been more clearly articulated by the great theologians of the church across the centuries and none more clearly and consistently articulated in the creeds and confessions of the church.

The Nicene Creed of AD 381

The Nicene Creed is the definitive account of the doctrine of the Trinity for more than two billion Christians. It is binding on all Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Reformed Christians. These two billion believers agree that anyone who denies what is taught in the Nicene Creed stands outside the historic Christian faith, and any community of Christians that rejects what the Nicene Creed teaches is by definition a sect of Christianity. On this basis, for example, we do not accept Jehovah’s Witnesses as orthodox Christians because they cannot confess this creed, even though, like us evangelicals, they uphold the inerrancy of scripture.

Be assured, I do not place this creed or any other creed or confession above scripture in authority or on an equal basis with scripture. For me, and for two billion Christians, this creed expresses what the church has agreed is the teaching of scripture. I believe every single statement in this creed reflects what the Bible articulates or implies. In my view, we have in this creed the most authoritative interpretation of what scripture teaches on the Father-Son relationship.

In this creed, the Son is communally confessed in these words. Note its use of “we,” meaning “we Christians.”

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only (monogenēs) Son of God, eternally begotten (gennaō) of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten (gennaō) not made, of one being (homoousios) with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and our salvation he came down from heaven, by the power of the Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

Let me now highlight seven things this creed says clearly and unambiguously about the Son of God.

First, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.” These words reflect exactly 1 Cor 8:6. In this verse, as you all know, Paul makes the Jewish Shema (Deut 6:4), which is a confession that God is one, a confession that the one God is God the Father and God the Son. Again, as you all know, “Lord” (kurios) translates the name of God in the Greek OT. In this confession, we are therefore saying we believe the “one Lord,” identified as Jesus Christ, is God without any caveats, yet not a second God. In other words, we are confessing Jesus Christ to be Yahweh, omnipotent God. In the NT, Jesus Christ is confessed as “Lord” over 600 times. The title Lord excludes the thought that Jesus Christ is eternally subordinate or submissive.

This first clause in the Nicene Creed immediately draws to our attention the logical impossibility of confessing Jesus as Lord and at the same time arguing he is set under God the Father and must obey him. If the Father and the Son are both rightly confessed as Lord, the supreme co-rulers over all, then they are not differentiated in authority. They are one in dominion, rule, power, and authority.

Let me illustrate the point I have just made. After hearing an Anglican complementarian theologian in Australia insist that the Son must obey the Father, I asked him how he could confess Jesus as Lord on Sundays in church and then during the week teach that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father and must obey him? He replied, “I see no contradiction, the Son is just a little bit less Lord than the Father.”

In arguing unambiguously and repeatedly that the Father and the Son are essentially and eternally differentiated in authority, Drs. Grudem and Ware contradict the first clause of the Christological confession in the Nicene Creed.

Second, the Nicene Creed says, “We [Christians] believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only (monogenēs) Son of God.…” Again, we all know that the word monogenēs means “only” in the sense of “unique,” “one of a kind.” The Greek church fathers, as Greek speakers, also knew it meant “only” in the sense of “unique,” “one of a kind.” None of them thought it meant “only begotten.” What is more, none of them appealed to this word or the texts in which it is found as the basis for their doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

John, the biblical author, uses the word monogenēs of Jesus Christ five times (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9). This designation of the Son was deliberately included in the creed because it explicitly excludes the disastrous error made by all the Arians of various brands, namely that human sonship defines divine sonship. All the Arians argued that, because Jesus Christ is called the Son of God, he is like a human son; he is subordinate to and must obey his father.

What this clause in the creed is saying is that Jesus’s sonship is not like human sonship. There is something about his sonship that is absolutely different from creaturely sonship.

In saying Jesus’s sonship is not like human sonship I am not saying anything novel. The best of theologians across the ages have with one voice insisted that human relationship and
human language cannot define God. Our creaturely language is adequate to speak of other creatures but inadequate to speak of the Creator. The fourth Lateran council (AD 1215) made this point starkly, “For between Creator and creature, no similarity can be expressed without implying greater dissimilarity.” What this means is that human language used of God is not to be taken literally or “univocally,” but analogically.

To argue that human language can define God is possibly the most serious theological error one can make. It leads to idolatry, making God in our own image. We evangelicals should not define divine fatherhood and divine sonship by appeal to human experience as liberal theologians are wont to do. We should define divine fathership and sonship in the light of scriptural revelation.

In the NT, Jesus Christ is called the Son and the Son of God to speak of his kingly status, not his subordination. The Reformed theologian and complementarian, John Frame, says, “There is a considerable overlap between the concepts of Lord and Son . . . Both [titles] indicate Jesus’ powers and prerogatives as God, especially over God’s people: in other words, [the title Son speaks of his] divine control, authority, and presence.”

I agree completely with Dr. Frame. I believe the NT calls Jesus Christ “the Son of God” to speak of his kingly status, NOT his subordinate status.

Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware, again in stark contrast to the Nicene Creed’s confession that Jesus is the Son in a unique way, constantly and consistently argue that Jesus Christ is to be understood like any human son and as such is subordinate and necessarily obedient to his father. Note carefully their theological methodology: they define God in creaturely terms, not by what is revealed in scripture.

In absolutely rejecting Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware’s theological methodology, I follow the gender complementarian Dr. Robert Letham. In his essay in One God in Three Persons, Letham roundly condemns Drs. Grudem and Ware for predicking their understanding of the Son of God on fallen human relationships. He says this is an Arian argument that must be categorically rejected:

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 the conclusion as heretical and opposed the premise as mistaken. Rather, [it taught], the Son is equal with the Father in status, power and glory.

Let me say it very clearly: to confess Jesus Christ as the monogenēs, the unique Son, is to say he is not like any human son. He is more dissimilar than similar to all human sons.

Third, the Nicene Creed says, We [Christians] believe . . . the unique Son of God, is “eternally begotten (gennao) of the Father.” Thus we come now to what is called “the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son,” what I and other orthodox theologians believe is the foundational element in the doctrine of the Trinity. You can see how important it was to the bishops who drew up this creed because they prompt us to confess twice the generation of the Son, once at the beginning and once at the end of the christological clause. This doctrine is like two book ends. Remove these words from the creed, and there remains nothing to support what stands in the middle.

The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is affirmed in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and by all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions of faith and by virtually every significant theologian over the last 1800 years.

The joint doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit seeks to explain threefold eternal self-differentiation in the life of the one God. It does this by noting that the Bible speaks of the “begetting” of the Son “from” the Father, and the “procession” of the Spirit “from” the Father. It is a doctrine arising out of scripture that explains much in scripture. It is an eloquent doctrine. It has solid biblical support. To argue that the greatest theologians across the centuries have taught a doctrine for which there is no biblical warrant is implausible. It is mind boggling.

For the authors of the Nicene Creed, and virtually all orthodox theologians, the primary basis for distinguishing and differentiating the Father and the Son is that the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father. This is the ONLY difference between the Father and the Son the Nicene Creed mentions and allows, and this difference is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Both Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware openly reject the doctrine of eternal generation. Dr. Grudem says it would be best if the words about the begetting of the Son were deleted from the Nicene Creed and from all “modern theological formulations” of the doctrine of the Trinity. Dr. Ware says this “doctrine is highly speculative and not grounded in biblical teaching.” On this point there is no ambiguity; both Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware undeniably say they reject the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son as it has been understood for 1800 years, and thus they deny what indelibly and eternally differentiates the Father and the Son.

Fourth, immediately after the confession of the eternal begetting of the Son, the Nicene Creed says the Son is, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.” These words assert that, on the basis of his eternal generation, the Son is everything the Father is—yet he is not the Father, but the Son. Derivation does not imply any diminution of the Son in any way, or any division or separation between the Father and the Son. These words are in the creed to say emphatically that, while the Son is “begotten of the Father” and “from” the Father, he is in no way less than, inferior to, eternally subordinated to, or submissive to the Father.

To argue that the Nicene Creed speaks of the eternal begetting of the Son in order to teach the eternal subordination of the Son, as Drs. Grudem and Ware do, is, to put it bluntly, perverse. For the bishops who promulgated this creed and
for orthodox theologians across the centuries, the eternal generation of the Son teaches that the Son is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God." The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, rather than teaching the eternal subordination of the Son, teaches the eternal co-equality of God the Father and God the Son.

Fifth, we come to the coup de grâce. We believe the Son is "one being (homoousios) with the Father." This is not a word the Bible uses of the Son. It is an implication drawn from the confession that the Son is "God from God." Allow me to explain the force of the Greek word homoousios.

All of us share the same nature as human beings, but we are not one in being. The Father and the Son uniquely are one in being. They are both God in all might, majesty, and glory without any caveat whatsoever.

That the Father and the Son are one in being means that they cannot have three wills. They cannot be separated in what they do; the one God cannot be divided into the Father who rules and the Son who obeys. Their glory is one. The word homoousios allows for no dividing or separating of the divine persons. It excludes absolutely any possibility that the Son can be eternally subordinated to the Father and thus other than the Father in might, majesty, dominion, authority, or glory.

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None of the various schools of Arian thought in the fourth century could endorse the word homoousios, because as fourth-century men living in a Greek culture they understood that to confess that the Father and the Son are one in being meant the Father and the Son cannot be divided or separated in any way. Modern day evangelicals who separate and divide the Father and the Son, setting the Father above the Son, accept the term homoousios.

Both Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware say that they affirm that the Father and the Son are one in being, but at the same time they sharply separate and divide the one God into the Father who rules and the Son who obeys, implying two wills in God. Thus, in reality, they deny that the Father and the Son are one in being.

Sixth, the Nicene Creed says of the Son that, "Through him all things were made." These words reflect exactly the words of scripture (1 Cor 8:6, John 1:3, Heb 1:2, cf. Col 1:16). For the Nicene fathers, the most fundamental division in the whole universe is between the creator and what he creates. These words are thus included in the creed to make the point emphatically that the Son is the omnipotent co-creator, yet as in all things, he and the Father contribute to this work distinctively as the Father and the Son. In this instance, the Father creates through or in the Son (Col 1:16).

In contrast, Dr. Grudem says the Son in creation is simply "the active agent in carrying out the plans and directions of the Father"—which is exactly what Arius taught. Dr. Ware says the Son "creates under the authority of the Father." I definitely see no support for these assertions in the Nicene Creed; indeed, the wording of the scriptures and the creed exclude the idea that the Son is the subordinate creator. Scripture speaks of him as the co-creator (e.g., 1 Cor 8:6, John 1:3, Heb 1:2).

Before moving on I must digress for a moment. Because orthodox theologians seek to take into account everything scripture says on the divine three persons, they affirm "order" in divine life and actions. They agree that nothing is random or arbitrary in God. Scripture speaks of the patterned ways God acts. One example is that he creates "through" or "in" the Son and not in any other way. More importantly, from scripture we learn that the Father begets the Son and sends him into the world. Such patterning differentiates the divine persons without subordinating any one of them. Orthodoxy accepts order in divine life and actions, but not hierarchical ordering. This conclusion is confirmed by noting that, in the roughly seventy times where the NT writers associate together the three divine persons, sometimes the Father is mentioned first (e.g., Matt 28:19), sometimes the Son (e.g., 2 Cor 13:13), and sometimes the Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor 12:4–6).

Seventh, the Nicene Creed says we Christians believe that, "For us and our salvation he [the Son] came down from heaven, by the power of the Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

The creed here reflects Phil 2:4–11. Jesus Christ, God the Son, had "equality with God [the Father]" (v. 6), yet he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (vv. 7–8 NRSV).

What Phil 2 teaches is the willing and self-chosen subordination and subjection of the Son for our salvation. On this basis, orthodox theologians with one voice insist that the subordination and obedience of the Son seen in the incarnation should not be read back into the eternal life of God. To do so is a grievous mistake.

In the incarnate Son we meet in the Gospels, we see the self-emptied God, the kenotic God (borrowing the word kēnō, "empty," from Phil 2:7), the Son of God who came down from heaven. To read back into the eternal life of God any of the human limitations of the kenotic Son, or his obedience to God the Father as the second Adam, is bad theology.

With Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, I believe that to interpret scripture rightly we must recognize that in scripture there is "a double account of the savior," one in "the form of God" and one "in the form of a servant." The two should not be confused. What these great theologians concluded is that the kenotic Son does not reveal fully the exalted Son. I agree.

The Arians of the fourth century read the Son's incarnational self-subordination, obedience to the Father as the second Adam, and his human limitations, back into the eternal life of God. Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware do the same and thus sharply break once
again with the Nicene faith and virtually every major theologian who has written on the Trinity since AD 325.

**Role Subordination of the Son**

I leave the Nicene Creed at this point. Before concluding, I need to comment specifically on Dr. Grudem's claim in his *Systematic Theology* (p. 251), that the eternal role subordination of the Son has been the church's doctrine at least since the council of Nicaea in 325. This is simply not true. "Role subordination" is definitely not found not in the 325 or 381 versions of the Nicene Creed. The word "role" does not appear, nor any synonym, nor the idea.

The first person in history to speak of the role subordination of the Son was George Knight III, in his 1977 seminal book, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. It was he who first introduced the concept of the Son's "role subordination" into evangelical theological circles. It was not known before that time. Many theologians across the centuries have spoken of the "subordination of the Son," but none spoke of the "role subordination of the Son or the Spirit" before Knight. To have done so before the late nineteenth century would be impossible because the French word "role" appeared first in English in 1875 to speak of the part an actor plays, and first in the sociological sense to refer to characteristic behavior in 1913.

The more general claim that the eternal subordination of the Son has been the teaching of the church since 325 is likewise objectively false. As we have just seen, the Nicene Creed seeks to exclude the external subordination of the Son in a number of ways: relationally the Father and the Son rule as the one Lord, temporarily the Son is eternally generated by the Father and as such is "true God from true God;" and ontologically the Son is one in being with the Father. The Athanasian Creed is even more explicit; it declares that the three divine persons are "co-equal" God.

Then we have all the Reformation and Post-Reformation confessions of faith that likewise seek to exclude the external subordination of the Son in a number of ways. With one voice, they affirm that the three divine persons are "eternal" and, importantly, "one in being and power." It is not only temporal and ontological subordination they reject, but also relational subordination; they teach that the Son is not less in power than the Father. The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, clause 3, on the Trinity, is the most specific, adding that the Son is neither "subordinate nor subservient."

The words "power" and "authority" often overlap in meaning in English, like the words "house" and "home;" but in both cases the words are not exact synonyms. However, when it comes to theological description of divine life, the words "power" and "authority," in English and in Greek, may be taken as synonyms. If the Son has all power then he has all authority, and if he has all authority he has all power. Both terms speak of divine attributes shared identically by the divine persons. What is more, Paul insists that the Son who reigns over all has "all authority (exousia, power (dunamis) and dominion (kuriotēs)" (cf. Eph 1:21).

"Equality" in being and power, we should also note, is affirmed by the Evangelical Theological Society doctrinal basis to which many evangelicals have subscribed. ETS members all confess the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to be "one in essence, equal in power and glory."

To confess that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in power of course means that one does not rule over the other in any way. The Father and the Son are God almighty, omnipotent God.

I also note that Dr. Ware stands in opposition to the ETS doctrinal statement in that he rejects "equality in glory." He says the Father has "the ultimate supremacy and highest glory." For him, the Son is less in glory and for this reason must give "ultimate and highest glory to his Father." In saying this he not only denies the ETS doctrinal basis but also the teaching of scripture where the Father and the Son are alike glorified (1 Cor 2:8, Gal 1:3–5, Eph 1:3–5, Heb 1:3, Rev 5:12–13, 7:9–12, etc.), and again the Nicene Creed which says the divine three persons "together" are to be "worshipped and glorified." To be faithful to the doctrinal statement we ETS members we must reject what Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware teach on the Trinity.

Some of you may be tempted to dismiss what I have argued, for one reason or another, but please note that in agreement with me now stand dozens of highly respected theologians, some gender complementarians, some gender egalitarians, some evangelicals, some not.

Kyle Claunch, from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, speaking specifically of Dr. Ware and Dr. Grudem's doctrine of the Trinity, agrees completely with me that what they teach is not historic orthodoxy. He says their doctrine of the Trinity entails a commitment "to three distinct wills in the immanent Trinity," an idea rejected by orthodox theologians. Moreover, he adds that their "way of understanding the immanent Trinity does run counter to the pro-Nicene tradition, as well as the medieval, Reformation, and Post-Reformation Reformed traditions that grew from it."

What could be clearer? Claunch says explicitly that what Dr. Grudem and Dr. Ware teach on the Trinity runs counter to the Nicene faith and the Reformation confessions. This is exactly what I have argued. He and I agree absolutely.

**Conclusion**

In the Nicene Creed, seven wonderful affirmations about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are made. I unequivocally endorse them all. I love them. These seven affirmations give content to my faith. I have written in the past and have spoken today and often to encourage us all to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in these words because this is the faith of the church, what the vast majority of Christians past and present believe is the teaching of scripture.

**Notes**

1. Such as Robert Letham, Carl Trueman, Fred Sanders, Liam Goligher, Aimee Bird, Keith E. Johnson, Stefan Linbad, Todd Pruitt, Michael Horton, and Rachel Miller.
3. "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 11:3 NRSV).
For the past two decades, evangelical theologians have debated over one specific aspect of the relationship between members of the Trinity. One group insists that the Father is eternally the supreme member of the Trinity, necessarily and always possessing authority over the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are thus subordinate to him. The other view contends that the Son eternally possesses equal authority with the Father, but that for the period of his earthly ministry, he voluntarily became subject to the Father’s will. Similarly differing views are held regarding the authority of the Holy Spirit, although the discussion has not dealt extensively with the status of the third person. Both parties agree that all three persons are fully deity, and thus equal in what they are. Biblical, historical, philosophical and theological arguments have been presented on both sides, without reaching agreement. Whether or not the subordination itself is eternal, some have begun to wonder whether the debate over it might be.

Perhaps what is needed to cut the Gordian knot is a different approach. In their book, That Used to Be Us, Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum argue that one of the skills that will be necessary in the global environment into which we are increasingly moving is critical thinking. Paradoxically, the wave of postmodernism makes critical thinking unpopular, but it has seldom been more needed. Although popular postmodernism is rampant on college campuses and in general culture, objective thinking is gaining influence not just in the natural sciences but also in the humanities. The aim in this article is to apply the methods of critical thinking to the view that the second person of the Trinity is eternally functionally subordinated to the Father. The intention here is not to be neutral, but to be as fair and objective as possible. I will focus primarily on the writings of Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem, and especially their most recent contributions to the debate.

A. A Rhetorical Issue

It is common practice in politics to attempt to gain an advantage in an argument by the way the issues are stated or the positions are

Language, Logic, and Trinity: A Critical Examination of the Eternal Subordinationist View of the Trinity

Millard J. Erickson