

The New Evangelical Subordinationism?

*Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son | Edited by
Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House | Reviewed by William David Spencer*

This new book on the Trinity is not to be missed. It may well prove to be the definitive contemporary reader on the debate over whether the Trinity is stratified according to rank or not—God being equal in substance and equal in rank, authority, and glory or eternally differentiated in these aspects, a difference that may or may not reflect in human relations.

Editors Dennis Jowers and H. Wayne House have assembled an impressive list of scholars with egalitarian and hierarchical stances on the Trinity (which may not duplicate each one's views of human gender relationships) and have worked tirelessly to ensure the accuracy of the words expressed, taking the authors through a number of careful revisions and constant checking and double-checking of sources, citations, and ideas. Difficult to express is the debt readers owe the editors for the painstaking efforts they expended to ensure the volume expressed exactly what each author intended to say.

The book opens with a valuable preface by the editors that outlines the heart of each chapter, creating a brief primer which is particularly helpful for new readers just entering the debate to grasp the key issues and understand the various viewpoints in contention before venturing into the position arguments proffered by a number of prominent figures.

Particularly of interest to CBE readers is Phillip Cary's "The New Evangelical Subordinationism: Reading Inequality into the Trinity," which first appeared in *Priscilla Papers* (vol. 20, no. 4 [Autumn 2006]) and won a 2006 Evangelical Press Association first-place award for excellence. Other chapters from an evangelical egalitarian perspective include Linda Belleville's "Son' Christology in the New Testament," Keith E. Johnson's linking of St. Augustine's defense of equality within the Trinity with his equal insistence on the eternal generation of the Son from the Father (please note the book review that follows this one), and the newest version of "An Evangelical Statement of the Trinity," which was composed by the present writer in consultation with a number of outstanding evangelical scholars from a variety of fields. This chapter, too, appeared in an earlier version in *Priscilla Papers* (vol. 25, no. 4 [Autumn 2011]), but worth noting is that *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* is not simply a rehash of articles and chapters already in print elsewhere. As with "An Evangelical Statement on the Trinity" and its theological explanation, opportunity has been given to update each of these pieces, and so the book incorporates the latest versions of previously printed chapters, thereby replacing earlier ones. (The Trinity Statement, in this latest form, by the way, is now also available in several languages on its own Web site, www.trinitystatement.com, along with a biblical commentary, as well, and a place where readers who want to join us in support can add their names).

The New Evangelical Subordinationism? also includes a chapter by Kevin Giles, reflecting on the Trinity without levels of authority (or “tiers” as he calls them), and an explanation by Mary Veeneman of noted Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner’s reasons for rejection of eternal subordination in the Godhead.

Editor Dennis Jowers concludes the book with a thoughtful reflection, positing that the entire discussion of whether the Son can ever be submissive to the Father is inappropriate, since the concept that orders can be issued in the Trinity appears to be antithetical to the revelation of the Godhead’s perfect simplicity and communion.

On the hierarchical side are chapters by prominent proponents of the idea that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, including Bruce Ware, Denny Burk, coeditor H. Wayne House, Yudha Thianto, Wayne Grudem, Michael Bird and Robert Shillaker, and J. Scott Horrell, as well as the self-identified egalitarian in human relationships, Craig Keener, who differs with many other egalitarians by affirming the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.

Also interesting to note is a chapter by Jack and Judith Balswick, which they intend to be useful to both sides of the gender debate, relating relationships in the Trinity to marriage.

What makes this book so valuable is that, under one cover, CBE readers can find the latest evangelical thinking on equality in the Trinity, but at the same time will have the opportunity to hear exactly what hierarchists are saying. Similarly, those who ascribe to the hierarchical view can hear fair presentations of the egalitarian view. This is not to say that either side is incapable of fairly representing the views of the other in their own books and articles, but it is saying that nothing surpasses actual primary source statements from proponents on both sides to eliminate ignorance and dispel misunderstanding. While readers will miss hearing Millard Erickson’s perspective on equality and Andreas Köstenberger’s on subordination, there is still adequate material to sample a number of approaches to the issue, so that those who want to explore this topic owe it to themselves to acquire this book and read it carefully and prayerfully—it is a responsible and helpful production. All of us who love the triune God of the Bible and seek to understand better the biblical revelation God has graciously granted us will find this interaction of perspectives intriguing.

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Originally published in [Priscilla Papers, Volume 26, Number 4 Autumn 2012, pp. 26-27.](#)

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