

Trinitarian Perspectives on Gender Roles¹

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The purpose of this article is to offer a critique of evangelical feminism. What follows is mainly a theological discussion that concerns the doctrine of the Trinity and the gender role debate. In what way might the triune relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit help one to understand how men and women are related? Are there theological foundations for gender relations? The article evaluates the proposals of Gilbert Bilezikian and Stanley J. Grenz.

The Trinity: A Model for Gender Roles

One of the benefits of the twentieth century revival of trinitarian doctrine is that both egalitarians and complementarians have been able to tap into a larger discussion, asking the question, "What, if anything, can be said about the relations within the Godhead that might also explain how men and women relate to each other?" Those familiar with some of the more recent monographs on the Trinity know that the gender role question consistently finds its way to the surface.² Millard Erickson explains why a person with a feminist bent might see the doctrine of the Trinity as problematic:

Because the Trinity is composed of three persons, at least two of whom are identified as masculine in nature, women have no one to identify with. The spiritual qualities set up as ideals are those of the masculine gender. Furthermore, the Trinity has frequently been used to justify patriarchalism

and hierarchicalism. Women have been made to feel that they are inherently less than men. So for many feminists, both women and men, the Trinity seems incompatible with their fundamental experience.³

Consequently, there have been several feminist revisions (some more radical than others) of the doctrine of God in recent years. Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God Talk* (1983), Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's *The Divine Feminine* (1983), Sally McFague's *Models of God* (1987), and Denise Carmody's *Christian Feminist Theology* (1995) all come to mind. But, this essay is not concerned with the broader picture of feminism, rather, its focus is evangelical feminism.

Gilbert Bilezikian

Gilbert Bilezikian's article, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,"⁴ was originally a paper he delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 18, 1994. Bilezikian describes what he thinks the problem is:

From within our own ranks a potentially destructive redefinition of the doctrine of the Trinity is being developed that threatens its integrity at what has historically proven to be its most vulnerable point: the definition of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The promoters of this approach are not heretics bent on

subverting the faithful. They are well meaning but overzealous guides who venture into the dangerous waters of Christological speculation only obliquely, while attempting to press other issues.⁵

Bilezikian goes on to say that “some proponents of a hierarchical order between male and female attempt to use, as a divine model for their proposal at the human level, an alleged relationship of authority/subordination between Father and Son.”⁶ In other words, according to Bilezikian, the relationship between the Father and Son is wrongly used to legitimize the order between men and women.

The central question, insofar as the Trinity is concerned, is whether there is any type of order or ranking at all in the Godhead. Bilezikian claims that “nowhere in the Bible is there a reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such ‘subordinationist’ theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical.”⁷ He says that his position has been the view of the Western Church since the Arian controversy and its settlement at the councils. “There was no order of subordination within the Trinity prior to the Second Person’s incarnation, (and) there will remain no such thing after its completion.”⁸ Calling on church history again to prove his point, Bilezikian argues that “through the councils, the Church cut across all speculations to affirm the coeternality, the interdependency and the oneness in substance of the three persons of the Trinity, *thus excluding any form of hierarchy, order or ranking among them that would pertain to their eternal state.*”⁹

Summarizing, the flow of Bilezikian’s argument looks like this:

1. Ever since the Arian controversy the Western Church has affirmed an understanding of the Trinity that excludes “any form of hierarchy, order or ranking among them that would pertain to their eternal state.”¹⁰
2. Complementarians, however, read into the Trinity a hierarchy, order, or ranking so that, by way of analogy, they may have support for their position.
3. This lands complementarians in the camp of subordinationism.
4. Subordinationism is a heresy that has been consistently rejected throughout church history.
5. Therefore, complementarians who claim that there is an order or ranking in the Godhead are heretics.

There is, however, at least one glaring problem with Bilezikian’s proposal. He has clearly oversimplified and misrepresented church history on the understanding of the Trinity. He has taken the heretical concept of subordinationism and wrongly identified it with *any* type of eternal order, ranking, or hierarchy in the Godhead. Commenting on the

Nicene Fathers and the idea of subordination in the Godhead, Philip Schaff says:

[T]he Nicene fathers still teach, like their predecessors, a certain *subordinationism*, which seems to conflict with the doctrine of consubstantiality. But we must distinguish between a subordinationism of essence (*ousia*) and a subordinationism of hypostasis, of order and dignity. The former was denied, the latter affirmed. . . . Father, Son, and Spirit all have the same divine essence, yet not in a co-ordinate way, but in an order of subordination.¹¹

That Bilezikian has made a flagrant error can also be seen by surveying some of the classical exegetes of the Patristic period. Hilary (*The Trinity*), Athanasius (*Orations against the Arians*), Gregory of Nazianzus (*The Five Theological Orations*), and Augustine (*The Trinity*) all affirm some sort of eternal order or ranking in the Godhead.¹² One important example will suffice. Augustine, representing the Western Church, does indeed teach that there is an order that pertains to the eternal state of the Godhead. This eternal order can be seen in at least two ways.¹³

First, Augustine sees the eternal distinction of roles as related to the external operation of the Godhead. That is, “each of the Persons possesses the divine nature in a particular manner. . . . the role which is appropriate to him in virtue of his origin.”¹⁴ In other words, even in the unity of essence (for which Augustine is famous), there is an appropriate reflection of the eternally distinct order of the persons in the Godhead. Second, Augustine’s explanation of the mutual relations affirms an eternal order. One of Augustine’s signal contributions is that he attempted to solve the problem of subordinationism by positing the category of relations.¹⁵ In this approach, the Father is different from the Son relationally, and yet the same ontologically. The point is that Augustine was rejecting Arian subordinationism while at the same time holding to an eternal order among the Persons of the Godhead. Assuming that Augustine is widely accepted as representative of the Western Church, Professor Bilezikian’s appraisal is completely unacceptable. Although it is not the purpose of this essay to articulate, in a constructive manner, just *how* the human order of gender roles reflects the divine order of the Trinity, at least the possibility still remains (cf. 1 Cor 11:3).¹⁶

Paul Rainbow, in an unpublished paper titled, “Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism,”¹⁷ evaluates Bilezikian’s denial of a hierarchy, order, or ranking in the Godhead in Bilezikian’s transcribed lecture on “Subordination in the Godhead, A Re-emerging Heresy.”¹⁸ Rainbow confirms that Bilezikian has misrepresented the historically orthodox position on an eternal order in the Godhead. Rainbow avers,

Not a single one of Dr. Bilezikian's charges can stand. The trinitarian doctrine he impugns as heretical, is in fact that of historic orthodoxy ... That only a few individual theologians subscribe to it, is patently false. His own rationalistic premise that unity of essence necessarily implies parity of station and function runs contrary to scripture as understood in all the major theological traditions.¹⁹

Rainbow concludes by asking Bilezikian to demonstrate his argument from the Church Fathers. He says, "let him bring forth from their writings...explicit and emphatic denials of an order among the Persons of the Godhead, considered as to their Personhood, as distinct from their being."²⁰ In Rainbow's words Bilezikian's view of the Trinity has indeed been shaped by the "feminist egalitarianism of which Dr. Bilezikian is a well known champion."²¹

Stanley J. Grenz

A more recent article published on the Trinity and gender roles is "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships" by Stanley Grenz.²² While Bilezikian's work is basically a polemical approach that discounts the idea of subordination, Grenz's article is a more constructive approach that attempts to build a model for male-female relations based on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Grenz wants to correct the emphasis on the oneness of the transcendent God that has dominated Christian theology for much of church history. God has been characterized wrongly "by the supposedly male traits surrounding designations such as Lord and King."²³ This has led to a conception of gender roles that gives prominence to men and fosters hierarchicalism. Grenz welcomes the twentieth century renewal of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity because it points to a better understanding of human relations. He says:

Simply stated, the doctrine declares that the eternal God is not an undifferentiated reality. Although one, God is nevertheless a unity in diversity. The one God is the social Trinity, the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Consequently, God is fundamentally relational. Hence it comes as no surprise that when God fashions the pinnacle of creation, a unity in diversity—humankind as male and female—emerges.²⁴

Grenz's thesis is that the foundation for godly male-female relationships is the mutuality modeled within the Trinity.²⁵ His reasoning is simple. Since God is fundamentally relational, "we can look to the dynamic among the Trinitarian

persons for the clue to understanding what characterizes godly human relationships."²⁶ Grenz describes this fundamental dynamic within God with one key word, mutuality. He says that the best way to look into this concept of mutuality is through the window of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Grenz goes on to support his proposal on a theological basis. He claims that at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity is an eternal dynamic, a two-way movement that is mutually reciprocating.²⁷ Grenz explains that the Church Father Origen spoke of it as the eternal generation of the Son. From all eternity the Father begets the Son in one eternal act. Consequently, Grenz argues that some theologians have wrongly constructed a linear model of the Trinity in which authority flows from the top down. Thus as authority flows from the Father to the Son, so also men have authority over women. According to Grenz, however, the problem with this model is that it fails to see that the eternal generation of the Son moves "in two directions."²⁸ Calling on another Patristic divine, Grenz says,

As the Church father Athanasius realized, this dynamic not only generates the Son but also constitutes the Father. In that the Son is none other than the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the Son is not the Son without the Father. But in the same way the Father—being the eternal Father of the eternal Son—is not the Father without the Son ... The idea of generation within the Triune God means that we must balance the subordination of the Son to the Father with the dependence of the Father on the Son. In short, the eternal generation of the Son indicates that the first and second persons of the Trinity enjoy a mutuality of relationship.²⁹

Grenz's proposal, however, is problematic for several reasons.

Overemphasis on Relationality

The first concern deals with Grenz's overemphasis on relationality in the doctrine of God. Grenz claims that although He is one, "God is nevertheless a unity in diversity. The one God is the social Trinity...God is fundamentally relational."³⁰ For the sake of clarity, what Grenz is not saying is worth pointing out. He is not saying that the only way to describe or understand God is captured in the concept of relationality.³¹ Nor is he saying that all other ways of describing God are insignificant. What Grenz has done, however, is to take the fact that God is relational and interpret the entire doctrine of God through this concept. In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, Grenz explains:

Many theologians appeal to the concept of divine attributes in an attempt to pierce through the veil of mystery to the one, eternal divine essence.

However, because God is triune—the Father, Son, and Spirit in eternal relationship—our quest to speak of the being and attributes of God actually constitutes an attempt to characterize the relational nature of God—God in relationship.³²

While Grenz is to be commended for beginning his doctrine of God with the trinity of God,³³ his effort to correct the classical emphasis on the transcendence of God seems to have swung the pendulum too far in the direction of relationality. A balanced view of the doctrine of God requires more than the fact that God is fundamentally relational. Thomas Oden's caution fits well:

Classic Christian teachers warned against emphasizing one attribute at the expense of another... The history of theism is plagued by errors caused by overemphasizing a single one or set of attributes while neglecting others. Aristotle stressed God's absolute essence, aseity, self-contemplation, transcendence, and immutability, yet failed to grasp God's relationality, closeness, and covenant love toward humanity... A healthy equilibrium in the Christian teaching of God grows as one becomes firmly grounded in the interpenetrating qualities of the divine attributes so as to not overemphasize one to the neglect of others.³⁴

While it may be unnecessary to return to the classic Thomistic division in the doctrine of God, *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*,³⁵ where one focuses first on the divine essence, only later to reflect on the relations, still it is best to maintain a distinction between the two. It is important to recognize that each of the personal distinctions of the Godhead “belong not to the divine essence as such universally, but only to the particular person of the Trinity who bears its name.”³⁶ Therefore, in an effort to maintain the significance of the distinctions among the Persons of the Godhead, it is said that the attributes of God only belong to the divine essence universally.³⁷ Thus an overemphasis on relationality—that which removes the distinction between God's essence and His person—may lead to a weakened view of God's trinity.

Regarding male-female relations, then, there may be some other fundamental aspects of God, or communicable attributes, to consider with regard to humanity in general, and to male-female relations in particular. For example, is it not significant that God is spirit (John 4:24) and truth (John 1:14; 1 John 5:20)? A substantive view of the *imago Dei* would indicate such.³⁸ The idea that humanity, as both male and female, bear the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and thus can reason and understand truth is based on a very important attribute of God.

Moreover, God is holy (Lev. 11:44) and good (Exod. 33:19). These two attributes of God, no matter how they are

classified, speak of something beyond the concept of relationality. In fact, it is God's morality that is the fundamental foundation for ethical human behavior. Both male and female stand accountable before God to live under His divine instruction. While this instruction includes how men and women are to relate to one another, it is not limited to that concept. Thus, John Dahms argues that, “*The doctrine of the generation of the Son is an essential component of the theological basis for biblical ethics.*”³⁹ He says,

Fundamental to Biblical ethics is the teaching that we are to be like God ... What is right for us is analogous to what is true of him. But the Scriptures teach that Christians are to recognize the authority of those who are over them in the state, the Church, the home ... Because the Son is begotten (and the Spirit spirated) this recognition of human authorities has a theological basis. On the other hand, without the generation doctrine ... the social ethics urged in the Scriptures is not compatible with ultimate truth.⁴⁰

While Dahms' example of the subordination of the Son to the Father is a relational example, nevertheless, the point is that what is right for us is what is true of Him. Indeed, our relationships with others are based on what is morally right and ultimately true for God.

There are, then, other fundamental aspects of God to consider with regard to humanity in general, and to male-female relations in particular. In short, many of the concepts Grenz uses (relationality, mutuality, and community), along with the conspicuous absence of other ideas (such as authority, order, submission, and obedience), are cause for concern. It is not that his terms lack biblical support. They are indeed biblical concepts. Alone, however, they lead to an unnecessary overemphasis on relationality.

Origen and Eternal Generation

The second concern builds on the first. Grenz has distorted the teaching of the eternal generation of the Son. In an effort to correct the asymmetrical model of human relationships, Grenz claims that the generation of the Son is actually a two-way movement which, properly understood, provides a symmetrical model for male-female relationships. However, the classical teaching of the eternal generation of the Son is a one-way movement. It does not move, as Grenz says, in “two directions.”⁴¹ At least Origen does not speak of it in this manner. Neither does he imply it.

In fact, Origen rightly teaches that it is one-way. The Father, who stands at the apex of Origen's system, “is the source and goal of all existence.”⁴² The Son is the eternally generated Word (or Wisdom). He comes from the Father who

alone is “unbegotten.”⁴³ In more than one instance, Origen uses the analogy of light from the sun to explain eternal generation (an analogy that illustrates, among other things, the one-way direction of the generation).⁴⁴ When properly understood, “it (the analogy) clearly shows that the existence of the Son is derived from the Father, but not in time, nor from any other beginning, except, as we have said, from God Himself.”⁴⁵

The Eleventh Council of Toledo puts the one-way direction of eternal generation in clear terms:

The Son was born, but not made, from the substance of the Father, without beginning, before all ages, for at no time did the Father exist without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. *Yet the Father is not from the Son, as the Son is from the Father, because the Father was not generated by the Son but the Son by the Father. The Son, therefore, is God from the Father, and the Father is God, but not from the Son.*⁴⁶

To speak of the eternal generation of the Son as a two-way dynamic, as Grenz does, is without historical precedent and of questionable logical consistency. If generation is a two-way movement, then in what way can we meaningfully speak of the Father as ingenerate (Gk. *agennetos*)?

Harold O.J. Brown explains the significance of the language of “eternal generation” or “eternal begetting” when he says:

It permits us to ascribe the following traditional properties to each of the three Persons: to the Father, ingenerateness; to the Son, begottenness; and to the Holy Spirit, procession. (This language)...suggests to us part of the meaning of being a person, namely, that one is an individual and not interchangeable with another person: the begetter and the begotten one cannot reverse their roles.⁴⁷

Summarizing the second concern, Origen did not teach, nor has classical Christian teaching expounded, that the eternal generation of the Son is a two-way movement.⁴⁸ This is not to say that the Father could be the Father without the Son. It is clear that the Father is the Father because of the generation of the Son. But, the fact that Sonship constitutes Fatherhood does not require eternal generation to be viewed as a two-way movement.

Athanasius and Sonship

The third problem with Grenz’s proposal is that, apparently, he also reads his two-way idea into Athanasius’ argument found in *Orations against the Arians*.⁴⁹ The work of

Athanasius to which Grenz refers teaches nothing more than that Sonship and Fatherhood only make sense when thought of together. Athanasius says, “When we call God Father, at once with the Father we signify the Son’s existence.”⁵⁰ Grenz is right to point out that Fatherhood and Sonship are essentially related and that the Father never existed apart from the Son. But, eternal generation is still unidirectional and Athanasius does not seem to indicate otherwise.⁵¹

Interestingly, the significance of the ontological distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead is rightly affirmed by Grenz. He puts it this way: “Were the threeness of the one God not ontological, the Son and the Spirit would ultimately be lacking in full deity. As Athanasius rightly declared, in that case we could not participate in salvation.”⁵² Yet, only a proper understanding of the eternal generation of the Son—that is, one-way generation—provides an ontological basis with soteriological significance. After all, it is the Son who submits to the Father for the purpose of redemption, not the Father to the Son. Athanasius argues that indeed this is the reason for the incarnation of the Word.⁵³

In short, Athanasius does not appear to teach what Grenz asserts. As previously noted, Grenz suggests that “the idea of generation within the Triune God means that we must balance the subordination of the Son to the Father with the dependence of the Father on the Son.”⁵⁴ If it is not altogether clear what Grenz means by the “dependence of the Father on the Son,” perhaps a rather startling statement from another one of Grenz’s recent works will help clarify it. In *Women in the Church*, Grenz calls on yet another Patristic divine, Irenaeus, and makes this interesting claim:

In sending his Son into the world, the Father entrusted his own reign—indeed his own deity—to the Son. Likewise, the Father is dependent on the Son for his title as the Father. As Irenaeus pointed out in the second century, without the Son the Father is not the Father of the Son. *Hence the subordination of the Son to the Father must be balanced by the subordination of the Father to the Son.*⁵⁵

What justification is there for moving from the Father’s “dependence” on the Son to the Father’s “subordination” to the Son? Wolfhart Pannenberg, the one whom Grenz appears to be following on this idea,⁵⁶ is more careful in his proposal. Pannenberg explains Athanasius’ effort to protect the priority of the Father and yet not lapse into Arian subordinationism with these words,

Athanasius, however, argued forcibly against the Arians that the Father would not be the Father without the Son. Does that not mean that in some way the deity of the Father has to be dependent

on the relation to the Son, although not in the same way as that of the Son is on the relation to the Father? The Father is not begotten of the Son or sent by him. These relations are irreversible. But in another way the relativity of fatherhood that finds expression in the designation “Father” might well involve a dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true reciprocity in the trinitarian relations.⁵⁷

Following Athanasius, Pannenberg’s proposal for “true reciprocity” between the Father and the Son is a helpful trinitarian construct. The relativity of fatherhood and sonship is undeniable. However, trinitarian interdependency in no way requires Grenz’s distortion of one-way generation or the addition of the concept of two-way subordination between the Father and the Son.

In historical, orthodox trinitarian discussion, this type of language has no precedence. Neither does Scripture indicate such an idea. Grenz’s proposal seems to be more informed by evangelical feminism than biblical theology. It may be that his egalitarian presuppositions have contributed to his view of the Trinity, causing him to misrepresent the Church Fathers and the classical expression of the doctrine.

The Egalitarian Presupposition

The last problem is that Grenz seems to presuppose that for a mutually reciprocating love relationship to be meaningful there must not be an order or ranking in that relationship.⁵⁸ This presupposition, of course, is the touchstone of evangelical feminism. Any type of subordination, or ordered relationship, automatically implies the inferiority of that one who subordinates himself (or herself), whether willingly or not. Grenz’s presupposition, however, has a few flaws.

First, it is at odds with the relationship between the Father and the Son during the incarnation. Certainly there was a sense of loving reciprocity between them during that time (see John 6:38; 7:16; 8:28-29; 14:10; 15:10; 17:4; 1 Cor 15:24-28). If nothing else, the incarnation proves that it is possible, and in the case of the atonement, even necessary, to have an ordered relationship (wherein one submits willingly to another) and still have a mutually reciprocating love relationship.

Second, Grenz’s presupposition is problematic in light of the doctrine of “eternal generation” already explained above. As Geoffrey Bromiley explains:

“Generation” makes it plain that there is a divine sonship prior to the incarnation (cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:9), that there is thus a distinction of persons within the one Godhead (John 5:26), and that between these persons there is a superiority

and subordination of order (cf. John 5:19; 8:28). “Eternal” reinforces the fact that the generation is not merely economic, but essential, and that as such it cannot be construed in the categories of natural or human generation. Thus it does not imply a time when the Son was not, as Arianism argued...Nor does the fact that the Son is a distinct person mean that he is separate in essence. Nor does his subordination imply inferiority.⁵⁹

Assuming that the Father and the Son (along with the Holy Spirit; or through the Holy Spirit as Augustine and Grenz both like to think of it)⁶⁰ share their love for and with each other eternally, then “eternal generation,” rightly understood, also stands against Grenz’s apparent presupposition.

Finally, Grenz’s egalitarian presupposition also breaks down in the illustration of his own son.⁶¹ Attempting to clarify the mutually dependent relationship of the heavenly Father and Son, Grenz explains that he was not an earthly father until his firstborn son was generated. Thus, “there is a reciprocal relationship inherent in human generation.”⁶² Although he understands that this human analogy “has an obvious shortcoming and therefore ought not to be pushed too far,”⁶³ Grenz still misses the bigger question. Is there not an order in the mutually reciprocating relationship of the father (Stanley Grenz) and his son (Joel Grenz)? Does Grenz really want to take the next step and say that the parent-child relationship is equal in both essence *and* function?

Conclusion

Both Gilbert Bilezikian and Stanley Grenz have made daring claims in their recent attempts to discuss the possible connection between the Godhead and male-female relations. Bilezikian’s approach must be rejected because he has oversimplified and misrepresented church history on the doctrine of the Trinity. The Church Fathers affirmed that, according to Scripture, there is an eternal order in the Godhead, an order of subordination that has historically been understood in such a way so as not to be confused with the heresy of subordinationism.

Grenz is to be commended for proposing a model of how male-female relations might reflect the relations within the triune Godhead. Indeed, it is no small matter to suggest, in human terms, how humanity might mirror the internal relations of Almighty God. His concern for reciprocating loving relations within both the human and divine frameworks is certainly a valid, if not, indispensable point. However, in proposing such a model, it is unnecessary to overemphasize relationality in the doctrine of God, redefine the doctrine of eternal generation, apparently misrepresent Athanasius, and

work from the assumption that loving (and reciprocating) relationships, must of necessity, be absent of all order or ranking.

A better approach is that there is an eternal order in the Godhead, an order in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share and reciprocate love, and yet still maintain their eternally distinct roles. With this model, the order in the Godhead may be seen, however dimly, in the order between male and female. The reciprocity among the members of the Trinity (as well as on the human level) is not lost. Rather, it is made more meaningful by the personal distinctions of each member in the divine order. While there is still much work to be done in developing a constructive model for exactly *how* male-female relations might reflect the relations within the Trinity, nevertheless, the complementarian view of gender roles seems to make more sense theologically. ■

¹ A version of this article appeared earlier and has been reproduced with permission from: Stephen Prescott, N. Allan Moseley, and David Alan Black, eds., *Here I Stand: Essays in Honor of Dr. Paige Patterson* (Yorba Linda, CA: Davidson Press, 2000.)

² See Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995) 271-89; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991) 266-78; Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 46-55; John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 114-17; Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Wheaton: Bridge Point, 1996) 22, 24.

³ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 271.

⁴ Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/1 (March 1997) 57-68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷ Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 241.

⁸ Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping," 60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923) 681.

¹² I briefly survey these classical exegetes in light of this question in Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/3 (September 1999) 461-76.

¹³ See my unpublished paper, "Augustine, the Trinity, and the

Modern Gender Role Debate," delivered March 19, 1999 at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society Meeting, Wake Forest, NC.

¹⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978) 273-74. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1991) 2:9; 103.

¹⁵ Mary T. Clark, *Augustine* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ I believe that the human order of gender roles *does* reflect, in some fashion, the divine order of the Godhead. On this much, Stanley Grenz (whose proposal follows) and I agree.

¹⁷ Paul Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism." This is an unpublished paper used by permission. Rainbow's argument against Bilezikian, and for an order and ranking in the Godhead, is based in part on his Oxford dissertation, "Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6" (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1987). According to Rainbow, 1 Cor 8:6 explains that while God the Father is the originator of all things, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great agent through whom all things came into being. The Corinthian passage is especially relevant to the trinitarian discussion because, as can be clearly seen in comparison, it supplied vocabulary for the Nicene Creed in several places. This leads Rainbow to conclude: "Hence the Father is the ultimate author and goal of creation and redemption, while the Lord Jesus is the mediator of both, taking a penultimate role with respect to his Father, a role which obtains for all his activity in the world, from the remotest beginning to the eschaton, and not just during the Incarnation. From this earliest form of the creed we can see that the Father and the Son are united in being, but ranked in function." Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism," 4.

¹⁸ Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism," 1. Apparently, this transcribed lecture was an early draft of "Hermeneutical Bungee Jumping," since the claims Rainbow refutes are repeated verbatim in the latter article.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Stanley J. Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41/4 (December 1998) 615-30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 616.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 617.

²⁵ Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) 47-51.

²⁶ Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 617.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 618. It is important to note that I affirm the idea of *circumincessio* or *perichoresis* among the members of the Godhead. The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is distinct from, but not mutually exclusive of, the teaching of the coinherence of the Three.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 617.

- ³¹ For clarity, it is well to note that I do not understand Grenz to be denying the unity of the one essence of the Godhead. See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 65-75, 88-97.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³³ See Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 212-13. Like Grenz, I also see the value of beginning the doctrine of God with the concept of God's triunity since we first meet God in divine revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Two of the most important modern discussions on the significance of beginning the doctrine of God this way are Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part One*, 2d ed., trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975); and Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).
- ³⁴ Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998) 38-39.
- ³⁵ See Rahner, *The Trinity*, 16-21.
- ³⁶ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907) 246.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 245-46.
- ³⁸ See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 499.
- ³⁹ John V. Dahms, "The Generation of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32/4 (December 1989) 498.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 618. My concern is not that Grenz has misrepresented Origen on the concept of eternal generation, but rather, that he has distorted the proper understanding of eternal generation as a one-way movement from the Father to the Son.
- ⁴² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 128.
- ⁴³ Origen, *First Principles*, 1.2.3.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.2.4; 1.2.11.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.2.11.
- ⁴⁶ The Eleventh Council of Toledo, quoted from Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998) 111. Emphasis mine.
- ⁴⁷ Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) 133.
- ⁴⁸ Geoffrey Bromiley explains "eternal generation" this way: "'Generation' makes it plain that there is a divine sonship prior to the incarnation (cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:9), that there is thus a distinction of persons within the one Godhead (John 5:26), and that between these persons there is a superiority and subordination of order (cf. John 5:19; 8:28). 'Eternal' reinforces the fact that the generation is not merely economic, but essential, and that as such it cannot be construed in the categories of natural or human generation. Thus it does not imply a time when the Son was not, as Arianism argued... Nor does the fact that the Son is a distinct person mean that he is separate in essence. Nor does his subordination imply inferiority. In virtue and not in spite of the eternal generation, the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30) ... It ('eternal generation') finds creedal expression in the phrases 'begotten of his Father before all worlds' (Nicene) and 'begotten before the worlds' (Athanasian)." Geoffrey Bromiley, "Eternal Generation," Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 368.
- ⁴⁹ In footnote 4 of "Theological Foundations," Grenz points the reader to "*Apologia Contra Arian* 3.6." This appears to be an inaccurate reference. Perhaps he intends *Orationes contra Arianos*, since there 3.6 matches his discussion (PG 26:332c). Cf. Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 68.
- ⁵⁰ Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, 3.6.
- ⁵¹ Grenz uses Athanasius to argue against an "assymetrical model of God." In fact, this seems to be a questionable understanding of Athanasius. Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 619. See Alwyn Petterson for a clearer understanding of the assymetrical relationship between the Father and the Son. Alwyn Petterson, *Athanasius* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1995) 167-69.
- ⁵² Grenz, *Theology for the Community*, 66.
- ⁵³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*. As John Dahms puts it, "*The generation doctrine provides an ontological basis for the subordination of the Son of the Father*, which the NT emphasizes (e.g. John 5:19-30)." John Dahms, "The Generation of the Son," 497.
- ⁵⁴ Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 618.
- ⁵⁵ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995) 153-54. Emphasis mine. Grenz appears to be following Wolfhart Pannenberg regarding the Father's dependence on the Son. Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 619. Pannenberg, however, is more careful in his argument and does not speak of the "subordination" of the Father to the Son as Grenz does. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 273, 279, 312-13.
- ⁵⁶ Grenz says, "Pannenberg is an important contemporary proponent of this idea." Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 619. Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 50.
- ⁵⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 312.
- ⁵⁸ Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 619.
- ⁵⁹ Bromiley, "Eternal Generation," 368.
- ⁶⁰ Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 622.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 618.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*