

Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles: Eternal Functional Authority and Submission among the Essentially Equal Divine Persons of the Godhead¹

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Introduction: Framework for the Doctrine of the Trinity

The Christian faith affirms that there is one and only one God, eternally existing and fully expressed in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is equally God, each is eternally God, and each is fully God—not three gods but three Persons of the one Godhead. Each Person is equal in essence as each possesses fully and simultaneously the identically same, eternal divine nature, yet each is also an eternal and distinct personal expression of that one and undivided divine nature.

The equality of essence among the members of the Trinity, then, is greater than the equality that exists among human beings or among any other finite reality. For example, my wife, Jodi, and I are equally human, in that each of us possesses a human nature. That is, her nature is of the same kind as my nature, viz., human nature, and so our equality surely is real as an equality of kind. But the equality of the three divine Persons is even more firmly grounded. Here, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each possesses not merely the same kind of nature, viz., divine nature; rather, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each possesses fully and

eternally the identically same nature. Their equality, then, is not merely an equality of kind but an equality of identity. There is no stronger grounding possible for the full equality of Persons of the Godhead than this. And so we affirm today what the church has affirmed as orthodox since the days of Nicea-Constantinople, that the oneness of God, and hence the full essential equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is constituted precisely in a oneness of divine nature possessed fully, simultaneously, and eternally by each of the divine Persons.

Therefore, since by nature or essence the Father, Son, and Spirit are identically the same, what distinguishes the Father from the Son and each of them from the Spirit cannot be their one and undivided divine essence. At the level of divine essence, each is equal as each possesses the identically same divine nature. Rather, what distinguishes the Father from the Son and each of them from the Spirit is instead the particular *roles* each has within the Trinity—both immanent and economic—and the respective *relationships* that each has with the other divine Persons.

In this article, then, we wish to examine particularly what it means that the Father is the eternal *Father* of the Son, and that the Son is the eternal

Son of the Father. I will defend the thesis that while Scripture clearly teaches, and the history of doctrine affirms, that the Father and Son are fully equal in their deity as each possesses fully the identically same divine nature, yet the eternal and inner-trinitarian Father-Son relationship is marked, among other things, by an authority and submission structure in which the Father is eternally in authority over the Son and the Son eternally in submission to his Father. There is, then, an eternal and immutable equality of essence between the Father and the Son, while there is also an eternal and immutable authority-submission structure that marks the relationship of the Father and the Son.

Some, of course, reject the notion that the submission of the Son to the Father is eternal and apart from simply his role as the incarnate Son of the Father.² For example, in his recent book, *Jesus and the Father*, Kevin Giles extends a plea to his “fellow evangelicals who in growing numbers in recent years have begun arguing for the eternal subordination in function and authority of the Son to the Father.” “Go back, you are going the wrong way,” he appeals to them. “To set God the Son eternally under God the Father is to construe the Trinity as a hierarchy and thereby undermine the coequality of the differentiated divine persons, the core truth of the doctrine of the Trinity.”³ Here I will argue that this position advanced by Giles and others in fact gets it exactly wrong. Scripture and the history of doctrine unite to declare that both an eternal equality of essence and an eternal functional authority-submission relationship characterize, respectively, the one and indivisible nature and the particular roles of the Father and the Son. Consider with me a portion of the case that can be made for the eternal functional authority-submission relation of the Father and the Son.

The Case for an Eternal Functional Authority-Submission Structure in the Trinity *Names of the “Father” and the “Son”*

From the beginning, the church has understood the names “Father” and “Son” for these respective Persons of the Trinity to be appellations of their eternal Personhood and relationship, respectively,

not conventions suitable for the incarnation merely. If the Father sends his Son into the world (John 3:17) and if the Father creates and reveals and redeems through his Son (Heb 1:1–3), then these names refer not to some *ad hoc* arrangement for the incarnation but to an eternal relationship in which the Father is the eternal Father of the Son, and the Son is the eternal Son of the Father. Now, what is in these names? Geoffrey Wainwright muses over the fact that “Father’ was the name that the second person in his human existence considered most appropriate as an address to the first person.” But why is this? To this question, Wainwright can only say that “*there must be . . . something* about human fatherhood that makes Father a suitable way for Jesus to designate the one who sent him. In trinitarian terms, the crucial point is that Father was the address Jesus characteristically used in this connection.”⁴ However, just what the “something” is, Wainwright does not tell us.

But is it not obvious? Jesus said often throughout his ministry that he came down from heaven to do the *will* of his Father (John 6:38), indeed the Father installed his Son as King on Mt. Zion to reign over the nations (Ps 2:6–9), and in the end it will be the Father who puts all things in subjection to his Son (1 Cor 15:27–28). Without question, a central part of the notion of “Father” is that of fatherly authority. Certainly this is not all there is to being a father, but while there is more, there certainly is not less or other. The masculine terminology used of God throughout Scripture conveys, within the patriarchal cultures of Israel and the early church, the obvious point that God, portrayed in masculine ways, had authority over his people. Father, King, and Lord communicate, by their masculine gender referencing, a rightful authority that was to be respected and followed. And the father-son relationship in particular evidences, among other things, the authority of the father over the son. Malachi 1:6, for example, indicates just this connection between “father” and authority: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty.” God as Father is rightfully deserving of

his children's honor, respect, and obedience. To fail to see this is to miss one of the primary reasons God chose such masculine terminology generally, and here the name "Father" particularly, to name himself. If the Father is the eternal Father of the Son, and if the Son is the eternal Son of the Father, this marks their relationship as one in which an inherent and eternal authority and submission structure exists. The Son *qua* eternal Son heeds the voice and command and will of his eternal Father.

One implication of the submission of the Son *qua* eternal Son to the Father *qua* eternal Father should be noted. Those who deny any eternal submission of the Son to the Father simply have no grounding for answering the question why it was the "Son" and not the "Father" or "Spirit" who was sent to become incarnate. And even more basic is the question why the eternal names for "Father" and "Son" would be exactly *these* names. John Thompson has indicated a trend in much modern trinitarian discussion to separate Christology from trinitarian formulations. He writes that "Christology and the Trinity were virtually divorced. It was both stated and assumed that any one of the three persons could become incarnate. . . . There was thus only an accidental relation between the economy of revelation and redemption and the eternal triune being of God."⁵ It appears that contemporary egalitarianism is vulnerable also to this criticism. Since, in their understanding, nothing *in God* grounds the Son being the Son of the Father, and since every aspect of the Son's earthly submission to the Father is divorced altogether from any *eternal relation* that exists between the Father and Son, there simply is no reason why the *Father* should send the *Son*. In Thompson's words, it appears that the egalitarian view would permit "any one of the three persons" to become incarnate. And yet we have scriptural revelation that clearly says that the Son came down out of heaven to do the will of his Father. This sending is not *ad hoc*. In eternity, the Father commissioned the Son who then willingly laid aside the glory he had with the Father to come and purchase our pardon and renewal. Such glory is diminished if there is no eternal Father-Son relation on the basis of which the Father wills to send,

the Son submits and comes, and the Spirit willingly empowers.

The Rightful Authority Specifically of the Father Over All Things

The Father is the grand architect, the wise designer of all that has occurred in the created order, and he, not the Son or the Spirit, is specifically said to have supreme authority over all. In his position and authority, the Father is supreme among the Persons of the Godhead as he is supreme over the whole created order. For example, Psalm 2 records the raging of the nations against "the LORD and against his Anointed" (Ps 2:3). The very reference to "his Anointed" indicates already the supreme position that this LORD has over the one he anoints for the work to be described. As we read on, far from trembling at the rebellious counsel of the kings of the earth, God rather laughs from his exalted place in the heavens (Ps 2:4). Of God it is said, "Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill'" (Ps 2:5–6). Notice that God asserts his rightful jurisdiction over the nations of the world, and he also affirms his authority over the very king whom he sets over the nations. The point, then, is clear. God's supremacy is both over the nations themselves and over this king whom he places over the nations.

And who is this king whom God sets over the kings of the nations? He is none other than his own Son. We read of God saying, "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel'" (Ps 2:7–9). The citation of Ps 2:7 in Acts and Hebrews make clear that the reference here clearly is to One who will become the incarnate Son of God, whom the Father places over the nations. God the Father subjects the nations to his rulership by sending his Anointed, God the Son, to come as the incarnate Son and King to reign over the world. And from Revelation 19 we learn that the incarnate but now crucified and risen Son, the

“Word of God” (Rev 19:13) and the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16) will indeed bring forth the wrath of God Almighty on the nations who stand against him. Although the fulfillment of this text, then, clearly is through the incarnate Son who will come to live, die, be raised, and, in the end, be exalted over all in fulfillment of the Father’s will, still Psalm 2 records, also clearly, the pre-incarnate will of this Father to anoint and install this particular One, his own Son, to be this king. Here, then, is evidence that the Father’s role is supreme over the Son as it is supreme over all things, for it is the Father who anoints the Son, who puts the Son in his place as king over the nations, and through his Son brings all things into subjection under his Son’s feet.

Consider a few other texts. In Matt 6:9–10, Jesus says to pray this way, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” As Jesus specifies that prayer is to be made to the Father, he does so in the very context in which he asserts that the Father is over all. It is (specifically) the *Father’s will* that is to be done, and the *Father’s kingdom* that is to come. Matthew 11:25–27 specifies that the Father has determined to hide his revelation from the wise and intelligent and to reveal it to infants. His authority, then, is supreme including over those who understand the very teaching of Christ, the Son. In John 6 it is only those whom the Father will give to the Son who will come to him (John 6:37) for no one can come to the Son unless the Father who sent the Son draws him (John 6:44). Ephesians 1:3 specifies that praise be directed to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for giving to his own people every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. As Rom 8:32 and Jas 1:17 confirm, it is (specifically) the Father who gives every good gift to his children, all of which comes to them through giving them his own Son. Ephesians 1:9–11 amplifies that it is the will of the Father to sum up all things in his Son as the culmination of his purpose (i.e., the Father’s purpose) to work all things—absolutely everything in heaven and earth—according to the counsel of his, the Father’s, will. This is so much the case that the

three-fold repetition of praise in Eph 1:6, 12, and 14 specifically is to the praise of his, i.e., the Father’s, glory. First Corinthians 15:28 instructs us that at the completion of history, when all things finally and fully are subjected to Jesus Christ the Son, then the Son himself will also be subjected to his own Father who is the very One who put all things in subjection under his Son, so that God the Father, who is not subjected to anyone—not even to his own Son—may be shown to be supreme and over all that is. Therefore, in this day when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, they will do so to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). The Father, then, is understood as supreme over all, and in particular, he is supreme within the Godhead as the highest in authority and the One deserving ultimate praise.

The Submission of the Son to the Father in the Incarnate Mission of the Son

The submission of the Son to the Father during the incarnation is both obvious and virtually undisputed.⁶ Even if people question whether the Son submits eternally to the Father, the evidence is overwhelming and absolutely clear that in the incarnate life and ministry of Jesus, he lived his life in submission to the Father. That is, Jesus sought in all he planned, said, and did to obey his Father, in full submission to the Father’s will. Consider just some of the evidence from the life of Jesus for his earthly constant and absolute submission to the Father.

The Gospel of John, in particular, makes much of Jesus’ constant desire to obey his Father. In a fascinating account, Jesus said to those religious leaders who were with him, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23). Here, Jesus established his pre-existence prior to the incarnation, and he implied by this not only that he came from above but that he was, in his very nature, uncreated and divine. Given this emphasis on his intrinsic deity (which he often makes, especially as indicated for us in John’s Gospel), other statements by Jesus that follow are quite astonishing. A few verses later, Jesus says, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that *I do not*

ing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:28–29, emphasis added).

Consider two observations from this account. First, the very same Jesus who claims implicitly to be God (8:23) then proceeds to describe himself as doing nothing by his own authority, speaking only what the Father teaches him, and only and always doing what pleases the Father (8:28–29). How amazing this is. Jesus is God, but Jesus obeys God. Jesus is not of this world, but in this world Jesus refuses to speak or act on his own initiative but rather chooses to do only what pleases his Father. Clearly, the only way to make sense of this is to see that the eternal Son of the Father is both "*God the Son*" and "*God the Son.*" That is, as eternally divine and not of this world, he is *God the Son*, but as under the authority of his Father, and as the eternal Son of the Father, he is *God the Son*. Both are true of Christ, and that both are true is a wonder indeed. One might think that if he is God, then he would not be under anyone's authority, or if he is a Son, then he could not be fully divine. But divine, he is, and a Son, he is. As *God the Son*, he submits, then, to God his Father.

Second, the level of his submission indicated here is nearly unbelievable. Hear again these words: "I do *nothing* on my own authority. . . . I *always* do the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:28–29, emphasis added). And of course, we know that these claims must be exactly correct, because Jesus went to the cross absolutely sinless, having done nothing other than the will of his Father (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15). The level of Jesus' submission to the Father, then, is complete, comprehensive, all-inclusive and absolute. There are no exceptions to his submission and obedience, for he never once sins at any point throughout all of his life.

Another glimpse of the pervasive and passionate submission of Jesus to the Father is seen in John 4. Recall the episode where Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman. His disciples had gone away to get food, and they came back and realized that Jesus had not eaten anything while they were away. They were sure he must be very hungry and ask

him if he wants something to eat. Jesus responds that he has food to eat that they do not know, and they puzzle over this (John 4:32–33). So, Jesus then says to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). That is, my food, my sustenance, what nourishes me, what fuels me, what drives me, declares Jesus, is doing the will of my Father.

And when one considers this idea that Jesus' food was doing the will of his Father, another episode from Jesus' life comes to the fore. In his temptation, when he had fasted from all foods for forty days, we read that the devil comes to him and challenges him, saying, "If you are the Son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matt 4:3). In keeping with his entire life's pattern of thought, behavior, and conviction, Jesus answers Satan saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). In other words, Jesus cared more about doing what the Father wanted him to do than anything else. Even after fasting forty days, he would not eat until his Father had indicated to him that the fast was over and that the time had come for him to eat. Jesus lived his life, then, in abject submission to his Father, and in this he was both fully free and fully man, and in this he also was fully God.

The Pre-Incarnate Submission of the Son to the Father in Eternity Past

It is not difficult to understand why some find the Son's eternal submission to the Father an objectionable concept. For if the Son eternally submits to the Father, this would indicate that authority and submission are eternal realities that inhere in the intrinsic relations of the Persons of the Godhead. But, if so, does it not stand to reason that when God creates the world that he would fashion the world in a way that pictures these eternal structures (e.g., his wisdom reflected in the wisdom of a *taxi* in the created order)? Does it not make sense, then, that the authority and submission structures in marriage and in church leadership are meant to be reflections of the authority and submission in the relations of the Persons of the Godhead? But

because some find the very notion of authority and submission objectionable within these two spheres of human relationships, they clearly resist seeing this relational dynamic as true of the eternal relations within the Godhead.⁷ But, is this what Scripture indicates? Does the Bible give any indication whether the Son's submission to the Father took place in eternity past and eternity future? Consider here support for the Son's submission to the Father in his pre-incarnate existence as the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

To begin, 1 Cor 11:3 offers a truth-claim about the relationship between the Father and Son that reflects an eternal verity.⁸ That God is the head of Christ is not suggested by the apostle Paul to be an *ad hoc* relationship for Christ's mission during the incarnation. It is, rather, stated as a standing truth regarding this relationship. God is the head of Christ, and placing this at the end of verse 3 indicates that the grounding for the other two instances of headship is found in this one. The Father has authority over the Son. There is a relationship of authority and submission in the very Godhead on the basis of which the other authority-submission relationships of Christ and man, and man and woman, depend. The *taxis* of God's headship over his Son accounts for the presence of *taxis* in man's relationship with Christ and the woman's relationship with man.

John's Gospel mentions forty times that Jesus was sent by the Father to accomplish his mission. Christopher Cowan demonstrates that the "sending" language in John indicates centrally, though not exclusively, the concept of Jesus as the agent of another (*viz.*, his Father) who carries out the will of the Sender in obedience as the Sent One.⁹ This being the case, it is noteworthy that a number of the instances of the Father's sending of the Son clearly indicate that the sending took place in regard to the pre-incarnate Son. John 3:16–17 reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." That the Father *sent* the Son *into the world* indicates the

sending took place prior to the incarnation itself. The Son of eternity past, then, obeyed the Father in coming into the world, since he was sent by the Father so to come. In John 6:38, Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." These words could not be clearer that the obedience to the will of the Father took place in eternity past as the pre-incarnate Son came from heaven at the will of the Father. Again, in John 8:42 Jesus said, "I have not even come on My own initiative but He [i.e., the Father] sent Me." By the Father's initiative and will, then, the Son came. How could it be clearer that the Son, then, obeyed the will of the Father and carried out his plan and purpose by coming into the world. Or again Jesus said, "Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" (John 10:36). Clearly, the Father both consecrated the Son for the very mission he planned for him, and then he sent the Son into the world to fulfill what he had designed. For this to be meaningful, we must understand both the consecration and sending of the Son as happening prior to the incarnation and, thus, in the design and purpose of God in eternity past.

The Synoptic Gospels likewise confirm, albeit with less detail, what we see regularly in John's Gospel, *viz.*, that the eternal Son is under the authority of his Father. Commenting particularly on the significance of the order of the divine names Matt 28:19, Simon Gathercole writes,

We have already seen how in Mark 13.32 Jesus stands between God and the angels in a heavenly hierarchy; in Matt. 28.19, however, we have a *divine* hierarchy of Father, Son, and Spirit: all three persons participate in the divine name invoked in baptism.

Already within the context of earliest Christianity, there is significance in the *order* of the names, however. Very common in the Synoptics is the implication of the Father's authority over the Son and the corresponding obedience of the Son to the Father. All things are given to the Son by his Father (Matt. 11.27 par. Luke

10.22; Matt. 28.18), and he continues to depend on the Father in prayer (e.g. Mark 1.35). Perhaps most clearly of all, the Son is frequently described as *sent* by the Father: once or twice in Mark, twice in Matthew, four times in Luke. Sending clearly presupposes an authority of the sender over the envoy.

In terms of the Son's authority over the Spirit, in John and Acts it is evident that the Son sends the Spirit (John 15.26; cf. 14.26; Acts 2.33). Jesus' sending of the Spirit at Pentecost would have been understood as the fulfillment of John the Baptist's promise (common to all four Gospels) that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This itself presupposes divine identity: as Jenson rightly notes, "No prophet as such can do this. To give the Spirit is to act from the position of God." But if the Son is the one who *sends* the Spirit, then this again would presuppose a relationship of hierarchy within a Jewish context. As a result, it can be concluded that the order Father-Son-Spirit in Matt. 28.19 is not incidental; rather, it is born out of the early Christian thinking that the Father has authority over the Son, who in turn has authority over the Spirit.¹⁰

Regarding the Father's sending of the Son, as found particularly in the Synoptics, Gathercole also comments on the significance of Luke 7:8, which provides a helpful illustration of the authority and submission inherent in such sending: "For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes."¹¹ Indeed, both the order of the divine names in Matt 28:19, and the language of the sending of the Son both in the Synoptics and in John, indicate the eternal *taxis* among the members of the Trinity.

Consider also Peter's claim: "For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet 1:20–

21). The key phrase, of course, is Peter's reference to Christ having been foreknown by the Father before the foundation of the world. Foreknowledge here does not mean merely knowing ahead of time what is going to happen. Of course God has foreknowledge in that sense. But more than that, to foreknow is to choose one for some certain purpose,¹² to know in the sense of favoring this particular One upon whom you choose to bestow some privileged service or calling. Thus, God had established his Son as the One who would bring everything into subjection under his feet, his Son as the One who would be raised above all of creation and given the name that is above every name. His Son would be given glory (1:21) through his suffering, death, and subsequent resurrection and exaltation. But when did the Father make this prior decision to choose his Son for this favored of all callings? "Before the foundation of the world" is the answer given by Peter. This requires, then, an authority-submission relationship in eternity past, one in which the Father chooses and sends, and one in which the Son submits and comes.

New Testament teachings on Christ as the Creator also confirm this same authority and submission structure between the Father and Son. Although Christ is featured as the Creator, nonetheless he creates under the authority of the Father. In Colossians Paul expresses thanks "to the Father," specifically in 1:12, who has "rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (1:13). With this stress on the Father's work, now he speaks of creation being done "in" Christ, indicating that the Son does what he does as the agent of the Father. First Corinthians 8:6 confirms this understanding, for here we read of "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." The Father creates by or through the agency of the Son. As such, Genesis 1 is echoed in John 1 insofar as the God who speaks and brings creation into existence (Gen 1) does so through his Word (John 1:3). So, by him, the eternal Word, all things are created. The Son as Creator of the universe does so as the instrument and agent of the Father's will and work.

Consider also Paul's teaching that the Father, before the foundation of the world, has chosen us in Christ (Eph 1:4) and predestined us to adoption through Christ (Eph 1:5). Since the Father is specified by Paul as the one who chose us in eternity past, we must take seriously that it is his choice in particular, and hence the authority by which we are placed in Christ rests with the Father. Surely this shows both the Father's supreme position of authority over all, but it also shows that the Son's work fulfills what the Father has willed. Echoes of "not My will but Yours be done" can be heard in the very electing will of the Father. It is his will that the Son accomplishes, and his will to which the Son submits. Furthermore, among the blessings for which we praise the Father is the blessing of providing his Son to redeem us from our sin (Eph 1:7). Indeed, the Father is praised for redeeming us through his Son (cf., Isa 53:10; John 1:29; Acts 2:23; Rom 8:32), and for this reason, the Father is deserving of all praise for the lavish display of his glorious grace (Eph 1:6–8, 12, 14). Both creation and redemption, works accomplished by the Son, are ultimately and rightly seen, then, as works of the Father that are done through the agency of his eternal Son according to the design and the will of the Father. This is by no means the full evidence of the authority of the Father over the Son in eternity past, but it is sufficient to demonstrate this clear teaching from Scripture.

The Submission of the Son to the Father in Eternity Future

What about eternity future? Do we have reason to think that the Son, having accomplished the mission that the Father sent him to do, will still be in submission to his Father in the ages to come? First, consider the repeated biblical theme of the risen and exalted Son who now sits at the "right hand" of his Father. At least fifteen references in the NT speak of Christ at the Father's right hand, and as Wayne Grudem points out, these have their background in Ps 110:1, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" On this text, Grudem comments,

This is not a promise that the Messiah would be equal to "the LORD" in authority, but that He would be second in authority, at the "right hand" of God. . . . Why is this important? Because it shows that someone can be subordinate in authority to someone else but still be equal in being.¹³

This is exactly the point. When "the LORD says to my Lord," both are viewed as divine in nature. Yet one Lord sits at the right hand of the other LORD. Therefore, the risen and exalted Son, while being fully God, sits in a position that represents his own acknowledgement of the Father's greater authority.

Along with his sitting at the Father's right hand, the Son also functions in the capacity of interceding for the saints (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). The Son himself taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matt 6:9), and in keeping with this trinitarian order of prayer, the Son acts on behalf of his own and brings their requests to the Father, the highest authority over all. The Son does not command the Father, nor does the Father do what the Son wills, but rather the Son intercedes to the Father that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

Consider Paul's teaching of Christ's future reign over all things, when everything in heaven and earth is put in subjection under his feet. He writes,

Then comes the end, when he [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:24–28).

As we observed previously, this passage indicates the position of preeminence that the Father has even over the Son. How so? The Son has his position over all of creation, bringing everything into subjection under his own feet, only because the Father has given all things to the Son. The Son, then, shows himself as the supreme victor and conqueror of all, including the conqueror of death itself, only because the Father has given him this highest of all callings and roles. In full acknowledgment of the Father's supremacy, the Son displays his submission to the Father by delivering up the now-conquered kingdom to the Father, and then, remarkably, by subjecting himself also to his Father. Though all of creation is subject to the Son, the Son himself is subject to his Father. There is no question, then, that this passage indicates the eternal future submission of the Son to the Father, in keeping with his submission to the Father both in the incarnation and in eternity past.

Consider also Philippians chapter 2. When Christ is exalted above all and presented before all of the created order, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11). This parallels exactly what we have seen in 1 Corinthians 15. While the Son is exalted over all of creation, the Father himself is seen as preeminent over the Son. Similarly, in the grand heavenly scene portrayed by John in the Apocalypse, notice that the Lamb who had been slain proceeds up to him who sits on the throne and takes the scroll to open its seals. And at the end of this account, we read, "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" (Rev 5:13). Once again, while the Lamb is worshipped with him who is on the throne, so that the Father and the Son are seen equally and fully as God, yet the Son (i.e., the Lamb) approaches the throne at the right hand of him who sits on it. In this scene picturing worship in the ages to come, the Son is shown to be under the authority of the Father—for the Father gives him the scroll to open, and the Son is located at the

right hand of the Father—while he is equal with the Father—for he is worshipped along with the One who sits on the throne.

Is it not clear, then, that Scripture teaches that Jesus' submission to the Father extends from eternity past to eternity future, and what we see in the incarnational mission of Christ over and over again is simply the manifestation, in time and history, of what is eternally true in the relationship between the Father and the Son? While the Son eternally is *God the Son*, he always has been, was during the incarnation, and always will be, God the *Son* of God the *Father*. Authority and submission reside eternally in this Father-Son relationship, as taught clearly in Scripture. As Colin Gunton has commented, reflecting on 1 Cor 15:28, this description of the Son's future subjection to the Father has "implications for what we may say about the being of God eternally, and would seem to suggest a subordination of *taxis*—of ordering within the divine life—but not one of deity or regard. It is as truly divine to be the obedient self-giving Son as it is to be the Father who sends and the Spirit who renews and perfects."¹⁴ We are enabled to see here something of what constitutes the beauty, the wisdom, and the goodness of the relations among the trinitarian Persons when we see the Son at work accomplishing the will of the Father. It is the nature of God both to exert authority and to obey in submission. And since this is the eternal nature of God, we may know that it is beautiful and it is good, and because of this, we are prompted to marvel a bit more at the glory that is our Triune God.

Historical Tradition Acknowledging Authority and Submission in the Trinity

While the early church clearly embraced, in time, the full essential equality of the three trinitarian Persons, nonetheless the church has affirmed likewise the priority of the Father over the Son and Spirit. Since this priority cannot rightly be understood in terms of a distinction of essence or nature among the Persons of the Godhead (lest one succumb to Arian subordinationism), it must exist in terms of relationship. Although this historical evidence has been provided by several elsewhere,¹⁵

consider just a few citations from church fathers and later theologians affirming both the equality of essence and functional authority-submission structure between the Father and the Son.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue* with Trypho, a Jew, he responds to a question about whether Old Testament saints will live in the resurrection. He writes,

Since those who did that which is universally, naturally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, they shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection equally with those righteous men who were before them, namely Noah, and Enoch, and Jacob, and whoever else there be, along with those who have known this Christ, Son of God, who was *before the morning star and the moon*, and *submitted to become incarnate*, and be born of this virgin of the family of David, in order that, by this dispensation, the serpent that sinned from the beginning, and the angels like him, may be destroyed, and that death may be condemned.¹⁶

That Christ is both the "Son of God, . . . before the morning star and the moon," and yet he "submitted to become incarnate" manifests Justin's view that Christ is both eternally God and yet he obeyed his Father in coming to be a man. In similar manner, Tertullian's *An Answer to the Jews* speaks in one place on the Psalms' predictions of the Son who would come, stating that the Son "was announced as about to come to earth *in obedience to God the Father's decree*."¹⁷ Tertullian, likewise, sees the priority of the Father's will in explaining the very coming to earth of the Son.

Novatian's *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* responds to arguments presented by modalists in which he replies that since the Son is sanctified by the Father and sent into the world, clearly the Son and the Father both exist while the Son, under the authority of the Father, is not the Father himself. He writes,

He is therefore the Son, not the Father: for He would have confessed that He was the Father had He considered Himself to

be the Father; and He declares that He was sanctified by His Father. *In receiving, then, sanctification from the Father, He is inferior to the Father*. Now, consequently, He who is inferior to the Father is not the Father, but the Son; for had He been the Father, He would have given, and not received, sanctification. Now, however, by declaring that He has *received sanctification from the Father*, by the very fact of proving Himself to be *less than the Father*, by *receiving from Him sanctification*, He has shown that He is the Son, and not the Father. Besides, He says that *He is sent*: so that *by that obedience wherewith the Lord Christ came, being sent*, He might be proved to be not the Father, but the Son, who assuredly would have sent had He been the Father; but being sent, He was not the Father, lest the Father should be proved, in being sent, to be *subjected* to another God.¹⁸

It is the Father's prerogative to sanctify and send the Son into the world, and by this he demonstrates that the Son is "inferior" to the Father. Clearly Novatian means only here that the Son follows the Father's command and submits to the Father's will. In refuting the modalists he affirms the deity of the Son but also insists on the functional submission of the Son to the Father.

One of the strongest statements among the church fathers comes from Hilary of Poitiers. In his *On the Councils*, he writes,

That the Son is not on a level with the Father and is not equal to Him is chiefly shewn in the fact that *He was subjected to Him to render obedience*, in that the Lord rained from the Lord and that the Father did not, as Photinus and Sabellius say, rain from Himself, as the Lord from the Lord; in that *He then sat down at the right hand of God* when it was told Him to seat Himself; in that *He is sent*, in that *He receives*, in that *He submits in all things to the will of Him who sent Him*. But the *subordination of filial love is not a diminution of essence, nor does pious duty cause a degeneration of nature*, since

in spite of the fact that both the *Unborn Father is God and the Only-begotten Son of God is God*, God is nevertheless One, and the *subjection and dignity of the Son are both taught in that by being called Son* He is made subject to that name which because it implies that God is His Father is yet a name which denotes His nature. Having a name which belongs to Him whose Son He is, *He is subject to the Father both in service and name*; yet in such a way that the subordination of His name bears witness to the *true character of His natural and exactly similar essence*.¹⁹

Finally, Augustine also affirmed that the distinction of persons is constituted precisely by the differing relations among them, in part manifest by the inherent authority of the Father and inherent submission of the Son. This is most clearly seen in the eternal Father-Son relationship in which the Father is eternally the Father of the Son, and the Son is eternally the Son of the Father. Hear how Augustine discusses both the essential equality of the Father and Son, and the mission of the Son who was sent, from eternity past, to obey and carry out the will of the Father:

If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the 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* and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father. *Not because one is greater and the other less*, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son. In the light of this we can now perceive that *the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh*, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that *it was not just the man who the Word became that was*

sent, but that the Word was sent to become man. For he was *not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father*, but in virtue of the *Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the Son*.²⁰

Notice two observations from Augustine's statement. First, Augustine sees no disparity between affirming, on the one hand, the full *equality* of the Son to the Father, and on the other hand, the Son's eternal position as *from* the Father, whose responsibility it is to carry out the will of the Father as the one *sent* from all eternity from the Father. Paul Jewett's claim, repeated by Bilezikian, Giles, and others,²¹ that functional subordination entails essential inferiority is here denied by Augustine. Second, notice that Augustine denies the false but repeated claim that all subordination of the Son to the Father rests fully in the Son's incarnate state. To the contrary, Augustine affirms that "the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh," and for emphasis he adds that "it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man." In other words, the sending of the Son occurred in eternity past in order that the eternal Word, sent from on high from the Father, might take on human flesh and then continue his role of carrying out the will of his Father.

In two places in his book, *Jesus and the Father*, Kevin Giles takes issue with my treatment of Augustine here. Both discussions by Giles refer to the same chapter, "Tampering with the Trinity," previously published in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by Wayne Grudem. The second discussion by Giles (pp. 229–30) repeats in shorter form nearly verbatim the identical objection he raised earlier (pp. 191–92) to my understanding of Augustine. Since the first of these is longer and more complete, allow me to quote it in full:

[Complementarians] want us to believe, unlike Augustine, that the language of sending indicates that the divine Father has

authority over the divine Son like husbands have over wives and men over women in the church. Professor Bruce Ware gives a classic example of such reasoning. Choosing Augustine of all people as proof of his thesis that historic orthodoxy teaches that the Son is eternally set under the Father's authority, he argues that this great Latin-speaking theologian "affirmed the distinction of persons is constituted precisely by the differing relations among them, in part manifested by the inherent authority of the Father and the inherent submission of the Son." ["Tampering," 246]. In support he quotes a paragraph from Hill's translation of *The Trinity* on the sending of the Son by the Father [4.27, p. 172]. The strange thing is that the passage he quotes denies the very thing he is asserting. In this paragraph Augustine says that when the Bible speaks of the Father sending and the Son as sent, "there is nothing [in these words] to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father and consubstantial and co-eternal One is not greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other Son: one is the begetter, the other the begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son." As I read this quote it seems to me it is emphatically denying what Bruce Ware is affirming. Augustine is insisting on the complete equality of the persons and on their irreversible distinctions. The Father and the Son are one in substance, inseparable in operations, indivisible in power and authority, but the Father is not the Son and never can be, and the Son is not the Father and never can be. For Augustine divine differentiation does not imply the Son or the Spirit's subordination in any way.²²

Two comments are in order. First, I emphatically affirm here what Augustine affirms, as quoted by Giles. That is, I affirm fully and unequivocally the complete essential equality of the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son each possesses the

identically same divine nature. Hence, I agree fully that any and every semblance of Arian subordinationism must be rejected as Augustine has done in his affirmation of the complete equality of nature of the divine Persons. Second, I also affirm what Augustine affirms in the portion from Augustine *not* quoted by Giles. Oddly, the readers of Giles's book, in both passages (pp. 191–92, 229–30) where he discusses my quotation and treatment of Augustine, have been sadly misinformed. For some inexplicable reason, in both discussions of my treatment of Augustine, Giles provides for the reader only the first portion of the longer quote from Augustine that I have provided in my previous published chapter (and even here he puts ellipses in the place of the phrase, "and yet that the Son is sent by the Father," where Augustine indicates he is making two points about the Father-Son relation, not just one). And of course, in that first portion, Augustine truly does affirm clearly and boldly that the Father and the Son are consubstantial and co-eternal. But in the same block quote reproduced in my chapter (see figure 1, next page),²³ immediately following where Giles has quit quoting, Augustine continues as follows:

In the light of this we can now perceive that *the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh*, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that *it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man*. For he was *not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father*, but in virtue of the *Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the Son*.

So, what I wrote earlier of Augustine's view in fact is born out by the longer and complete quotation that readers would have been able to see if Giles had simply continued the quotation of Augustine fully. Yes indeed, the Father and Son are fully and completely equal in essence (stressed by Augustine in the first part of his longer statement, the portion

Figure 1

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relationship.²⁶ As Augustine affirmed, the distinction of persons is constituted precisely by the differing relations among them, in part manifest by the inherent authority of the Father and the inherent submission of the Son. This is most clearly seen in the eternal Father-Son relationship, in which the Father is eternally the Father of the Son, and the Son is eternally the Son of the Father. But, some might wonder, does this convey an eternal authority of the Father and eternal submission of the Son? Hear how Augustine discusses both the essential equality of the Father and Son and the mission of the Son who was sent, in eternity past, to obey and carry out the will of the Father:

**Quoted
by Giles**

If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the 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* and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son; one is the begetter, the other begotten; the first is the one from whom the sent one is; the other is the one who is from the sender. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son.

In the light of this we can now perceive that *the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh*, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that *it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man*. For he was *not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father*, but in virtue of the Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the Son.²⁷

**Not
Quoted
by Giles**

²⁶For a discussion of evidence that early church theology upheld the simultaneous eternal equality of essence and the functional relationship of authority and obedience among the persons of the triune Godhead, see also Robert Letham, "The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990), 65-78; and Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *JETS* 42/3 (September 1999), 461-476. In limited space, Kovach and Schemm cite examples from Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and Augustine, with supporting commentary from John Calvin, Philip Schaff, Jaroslav Pelikan, J. N. D. Kelly, Charles Hodge, and W. G. T. Shedd, and they cite (471) the conclusion of Paul Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism," 4 (unpublished paper based on his dissertation, "Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6" [D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1987]), in which Rainbow concludes, "From the earliest form of the creed we can see that the Father and the Son are united in being, but ranked in function."

²⁷St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, Vol. 5, *The Works of St. Augustine* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), IV.27 (italics added).

quoted by Giles), while the Son as from the Father is under the authority of his Father, having come to earth to become incarnate precisely because he was sent from his Father to become a man (stressed by Augustine's double statement of this understanding in the second part of his longer statement, the portion omitted by Giles). I cannot say why Giles omitted the very portion of the quotation that supported my claim that Augustine affirms the pre-incarnate authority of the Father over the Son. But whatever the reason, the fact remains that Augustine affirms both the essential equality of the Father and the Son along with the pre-incarnate functional submission of the Son to the Father. Giles' own discussion, by its attenuated quotation of Augustine, turns out to be the treatment of Augustine that in fact denies what Augustine affirms.

Many more theologians throughout the history of the church could be added to this list. Grudem provides additional citations from Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Augustus Strong, Louis Berkhof, J. N. D. Kelly, Geoffrey Bromiley, Robert Letham, and others—all of whom display the same understanding of the trinitarian Persons, equal in essence but distinct in roles that display an authority and submission structure.²⁴ And to the consternation of many who follow much of his theology otherwise, Karl Barth also defended both the eternal functional submission of the Son to the Father and its implications for gender relationships.²⁵ Barth stressed that if the God who reveals himself is not God as he is, it follows that we have no true knowledge of God. The triune God of revelation is one in which the Son submits to the Father, and the Holy Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. So too, reasoned Barth, is the immanent Triune God apart from creation. One recent theologian who has observed the beauty of the Son's submission to the Father is the eminently-quotable P. T. Forsyth. He asserts that the Son's obedience to the Father demonstrates that "subordination is *not* inferiority, and it *is* God-like. The principle is imbedded in the very cohesion of the eternal trinity and it is inseparable from the unity, fraternity and true equality of men. It is not a mark of inferiority to be subordinate, to

have an authority, to obey. It is divine."²⁶ And in another place, Forsyth makes clear that the Son's obedience to the Father was indeed an eternal obedience, rendered by an eternal equal, constituting an eternal subordination of the Son to do the will of the Father. With this we conclude our historical overview. Forsyth writes,

Father and Son co-exist, co-equal in the Spirit of holiness, i.e., of perfection. But Father and Son is a relation inconceivable except the Son be obedient to the Father. The perfection of the Son and the perfecting of his holy work lay, not in his suffering but in his obedience. And, as he was eternal Son, it meant an eternal obedience. . . . But obedience is not conceivable without some form of subordination. Yet in his very obedience the Son was co-equal with the Father; the Son's yielding will was no less divine than the Father's exigent will. Therefore, in the very nature of God, subordination implies no inferiority.²⁷

Conclusion

We have examined what it means that the Father is the eternal *Father* of the Son, and that the Son is the eternal *Son* of the Father. We have defended the thesis that while Scripture clearly teaches, and the history of doctrine affirms, that the Father and Son are fully equal in their deity as each possesses fully the identically same divine nature, yet the eternal and inner-trinitarian Father-Son relationship is marked, among other things, by an authority and submission structure in which the Father is eternally in authority over the Son and the Son eternally in submission to his Father. There is, then, an eternal and immutable equality of essence between the Father and the Son, while there is also an eternal and immutable authority-submission structure that marks the relationship of the Father and the Son. Ultimately the credibility of this thesis depends on the teaching of God's word. Because in his inspired word, God has made known his own triune life, we must with renewed commitment seek to study, believe, and embrace the truth of God as made known here. Where we have been misled by

the history of this doctrine or contemporary voices, may Scripture lead to correction. But where contemporary revision departs from Scripture's clear teaching, may we have courage to stand with the truth and for the truth. For the sake of the glory of the only true and living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may we pledge to him alone our fidelity, obedience, love and devotion.²⁸

ENDNOTES

¹This article was originally presented at the 58th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Washington D.C., November 16, 2006. An expanded version of it (entitled, "Christ's Atonement: A Work of the Trinity") was published in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introduction to Christology* (ed. Fred Sanders & Klaus Issler; Nashville: B&H, 2007). It appears here with permission.

²See, e.g., Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (1997): 57–68; Stanley J. Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 4 (1998): 615–30; Royce G. Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordination: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); and Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

³Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 9.

⁴Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls," *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 120 (emphasis added).

⁵John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 22.

⁶Most egalitarians admit freely to the Son's submission to the Father during the incarnation. So many texts indicate such that it is impossible really to deny it while taking seriously the teaching of the Gospels. Nonetheless, some egalitarians (e.g., Grenz and Bilezikian) endeavor to support their idea of "mutual submission" of the Father and Son in the incarnation. For discussion of this view and response, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 430–37.

⁷Some egalitarians acknowledge the eternal inner-trinitarian Father-Son relation yet do not understand this as implying or entailing relations of authority and submission in the created order. See Craig Keener, "Is Subordination Within the Trinity Really Heresy? A Study of John 5:18 in Context," *Trinity Journal* 20 NS (1999): 39–51.

⁸For helpful discussion of the interpretation of *kephalē* ("head") and its bearing on this text, see Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 568–94.

⁹Christopher Cowan, "The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (2006): 115–35.

¹⁰Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006),

72–73. Gathercole's quotation of Jenson is from R.W. Jenson, *The Triune God* (vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*; Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 88.

¹¹Gathercole, *Pre-Existent Son*, 72. In a footnote, Gathercole expresses gratitude to Dr. Audrey Dawson for suggesting this example.

¹²See, e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 *Peter, Jude* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 87–88. Schreiner comments, "In the Greek text of v. 19 the word 'Christ' appears last, separated from the term 'blood' by five words. The text was likely written in this way so that it would be clear that the Christ was the subject of the participle commencing v. 20. The Christ 'was chosen before the creation of the world'" (87).

¹³Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 410–11.

¹⁴Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (2d ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 197.

¹⁵For a discussion of evidence that early church theology upheld the simultaneous eternal equality of essence yet functional relationship of authority and obedience among the persons of the triune Godhead, see also Robert Letham, "The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 65–78; and 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, no. 3 (1999): 461–76. In limited space, Kovach and Schemm cite examples from Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and Augustine, with supporting commentary from John Calvin, Philip Schaff, Jaroslav Pelikan, J. N. D. Kelly, Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd. Kovach and Schemm cite (p. 471) Paul Rainbow, "Orthodox Trinitarianism and Evangelical Feminism," 4 (unpublished paper, based on his dissertation, "Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6," [D. Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1987]), who concludes, "From the earliest form of the creed we can see that the Father and the Son are united in being, but ranked in function." See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 415–22.

¹⁶Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin: Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew* 45, in vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* [hereafter *ANF*] (ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1885–1897), 217 (emphasis added).

¹⁷Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 9 in vol. 3 of *ANF*, 163 (emphasis added).

¹⁸Novatian, *A Treatise of Novatian Concerning the Trinity* 27 in vol. 5 of *ANF*, 638 (emphasis added).

¹⁹Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils* 51, in vol. 9 of *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series* (ed. Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–57), 18-19 (emphasis added).

²⁰St. Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.27, in part 1, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (trans. Edmund Hill; ed. John E. Rotelle; New York: New City, 1991), 172 (emphasis added).

²¹See, e.g., Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study of Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), where he asks, "[H]ow can one defend a sexual hierarchy whereby men are over women . . . without supposing that the half of the human race which exercises authority is superior in some way to the half which submits?" (71). He continues by asking further whether anyone can "establish the mooted point—woman's subordination to the man—by underscoring the obvious point—woman's difference from the man—without the help of the

traditional point—woman's *inferiority to the man*? The answer, it appears to us, is no" (84). Cf. Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," 67, who says, e.g., that any talk about subordination "smacks of the Arian heresy;" and Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 9, "To set God the Son eternally under God the Father is to construe the Trinity as a hierarchy and thereby undermine the coequality of the differentiated divine persons, the core truth of the doctrine of the Trinity."

²²Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 191–92.

²³Bruce A. Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 246.

²⁴Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 415–29.

²⁵Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:157–210.

²⁶P. T. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father* (1897; repr., London: Independent Press, 1957), 42.

²⁷P. T. Forsyth, *Marriage, Its Ethic and Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 70–71.

²⁸I am grateful for the capable and helpful research for this article conducted by my teaching assistant, Mr. Oren Martin, along with thoughtful suggestions from several colleagues, especially Drs. Peter Gentry and Thomas Schreiner.