ETERNAL SUBORDINATION OF JESUS? A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

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Introduction

An idea that has been attracting a great deal of attention among Evangelical and some Seventh-day Adventist scholars is the notion that Jesus' subjection to the authority of God the Father during the time of His life on earth was not only a *temporary submission* to the authority of the Father. In the divine works of creation, revelation, redemption, and judgment, the New Testament is clear that Jesus always acted in submission[1] to the Father (1 Cor 8:6: John 8:28; 1 John 4:14; 5:22, 30). In the current debate, however, it is argued that "God the Father has eternally had a role of leadership, initiation, and primary authority among the members of the Trinity, and that the Son has eternally been subject to the Father's authority."[2] Because

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[1] The use of the terms "submission" and "subordination" in the context of the present Trinitarian debate needs clarification. The point that proponents of the new view try to make—that Jesus' earthly submission was not only a temporal submission—has been characterized in two main ways: as "eternal relations of authority-submission" (ERAS) or "eternal functional subordination" (EFS). Since these characterizations relate to the same point, it seems that they use the words "subordination" and "submission" interchangeably when it comes to describing the eternal relations between members of the Trinity. Thus, whereas Bruce Ware prefers the term "submission" (e.g., Bruce Ware, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005], 21, 71–87), Wayne Grudem favors "subordination" (e.g., Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994], 251). Millard Erickson suggests that Ware's preference for the term "submission" seems to be an attempt to avoid giving an impression of the Son's inferiority implied in the term "subordination." On Ware's hesitation to use the word "inferior," Millard Erickson, *Who's Tampering With the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 211, writes, "Ware's similar hesitation can be seen in his constant use of the term submission, rather than subordination, and his avoidance of the words inferior or inferiority." And with Grudem even as he defends his use of the term "subordination," he resorts to the language of authority and submission. Thus he writes, "If the Father-Son relationship revealed in Scripture looks like authority and submission, and acts like authority and submission, then it is authority and submission" (Wayne Grudem, "Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012], 226). In this study, I prefer the use of "subordination" not only because it covers the idea of "submission," but also because it fittingly describes the concept of ERAS (in the work of such scholars as Ware) where the "submission" of the Son is considered ontological and immutable and goes beyond voluntary submission.

[2] Wayne Grudem, "Biblical Evidence," 224. The book edited by Jowers and House represents sixteen diverse chapters on the subject as to whether the Son is subordinate or equal to the Father. A sample of books and articles devoted to the subject includes: Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006); Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?*; Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological*

the debate has been linked to issues of gender roles and church polity, such as ordination,[3] it has highlighted the foundational role of the doctrine of God in framing other theological doctrines and Christian practice.

What is meant by the idea of the eternal functional subordination of the Son? What are the critical issues in this idea? How should it be assessed? Defenders of eternal functional subordination insist strongly that the ancient church unambiguously endorsed the idea of the eternal subordination of the Son.[4] Whether this is so remains to be seen. Nevertheless, in some ways, eternal functional subordination cannot be understood outside the context of the classical Trinitarian discussions in the early church. For this reason, this study will begin by first considering eternal functional subordination as a Trinitarian issue by providing a summary of the early church's Trinitarian discussions as its backdrop. Next, we shall examine what form the doctrine of the Trinity takes when eternal functional subordination is embraced, and how it connects with themes in the classical doctrine. Following these expositions, we shall embark on a two-step assessment. First, since eternal functional subordination claims to be faithful to the classical Trinitarian doctrine, that assertion will be tested. Second, eternal functional subordination will be evaluated from a Seventh-day Adventist point of view, and that appraisal will involve, among other things, a brief presentation of a few of the key biblical texts advanced in support of eternal functional subordination. Finally, we will outline a few theological and practical implications of eternal functional subordination.

Society 40, no. 1 (1997): 58; Chung-Hyun Baik, *The Holy Trinity—God for God and God for Us: Seven Positions on the Immanent-Economic Trinity Relation in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); Gilles O. P. Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kevin Giles, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordinationism," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28, no. 3 (2004): 270–284; Giles, "The Evangelical Theological Society and The Doctrine Of The Trinity," Evangelical Quarterly 80, no. 4 (2008): 323–338; Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); and Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower, *Trinity Without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019). For some perspectives on Seventh-day Adventist involvement in the discussions, see Matthew L. Tinkham Jr., "Neo-Subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 55, no. 2 (2017): 237–290.

[3] For a brief account of this dimension of the debate, see Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 240–245.

[4] Bruce Ware, "Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 29–38.

Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son: A *Trinitarian* Issue

In asserting that the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father is a Trinitarian issue, it should be emphasized that the focus of this debate is on the divine being of Jesus *within the inner life* of the Godhead. Discussions about the being of Jesus may either focus on who He was in His *humanity* or they may address who He is as a *divine* person. Theologically, deliberations about the divine being of Jesus are considered Trinitarian, whereas those about the nature of His humanity are described as Christological in nature. In this study, our attention will be devoted to the Trinitarian aspects of the debate.[5]

The issue about Jesus' divine nature was one of the first to be hammered out in the history of Christian thought, especially during the fourth century. Although the word "trinity" is not explicitly found in either the Old or New Testament, yet, from the beginning of the Christian church, Christian thinkers felt compelled to express their view of the God of the Bible in Trinitarian terms. The early Christians called upon the name of Jesus Christ as Lord, and by praying in His name, they knew they worshipped Him as God. The New Testament contains some basic early facts of what Christians believed about Jesus. At Caesarea Philippi Peter confesses Jesus' divine connection (Matt 16:13–17; John 6:68–69). In Acts 2 he portrays Jesus as the one who had sent the Holy Spirit from His exalted position on the right hand of God (Acts 2:33). Peter also presents Jesus to the crowd as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Both these titles have divine undertones. Especially by calling Jesus *Lord*, Peter here bestows on Jesus the name of the God of Israel. Indeed, Jesus' divine preexistence is declared to predate His human existence (Phil 2:5–6). These considerations explain the early Christian (mainly Jewish monotheist) practice of worshiping Jesus. But "the more emphatic the church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ related to God."[6] For this reason, early Christian thought developed Trinitarian explanations—at the heart of which is the affirmation that, though different from the Father, Jesus Christ

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[5] On the issue of the Trinity, see Kwabena Donkor, *God in 3 Persons—In Theology*, Biblical Research Institute Release 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Daniel Bediako, *God in 3 Persons—In the Old Testament*, Biblical Research Institute Release 10 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); and Paul Petersen, *God in 3 Persons—In the New Testament*, Biblical Research Institute Release 11 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015).

[6] Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 61.

is just as truly God as God the Father—while still maintaining that there is only one God. Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 298–373), bishop of Alexandria, was at the forefront in this debate, battling the ideas of Arius (ca. AD 310), a presbyter in the church of Alexandria. It took the adoption of a creed by the Ecumenical Council of Nicea, held in AD 325, for Arius' ideas to be condemned.[7] The creed (the document that formed the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity) basically answered the question about how Jesus Christ is just as truly God as God the Father, while still maintaining that there is only one God. The creed did this by saying that the *being* of the Father and the Son are one: "The only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."[8]

The point was not uniformly accepted. There continued to be ongoing deliberations during the fourth century. Christian thinkers, especially those who have come to be known as the Cappadocian fathers, continued Athanasius' work: Basil the Great (d. AD 379), Gregory of Nyssa (d. AD 394), and Gregory of Nazianzus (d. AD 390). Their work prepared the way for what is generally taken to be the final word for the church on the question of the Trinity at the Council of Constantinople, AD 381. One scholar argues forcefully that the history briefly outlined above,

> famously complex as it is, is the only available definition we have of what it is to be trinitarian. This does not mean, of course, that everyone who wishes to claim to be trinitarian must become an expert in fourth century doctrinal history; it does mean that when a question arises about what is

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[7] Those like Arius (ca. AD 310), a presbyter in the church of Alexandria, were reported to argue that Jesus Christ was somewhat inferior to the Father. Arius takes the extreme position that "God was not always a Father, but there was a time when God was not a Father. The Word of God was not always, but originated from things that were not; for God that is, has made him that was not, of that which was not; wherefore there was a time when He was not; for the Son is a creature and a work. Neither is He like in essence to the Father; neither is He the true and natural Word of the Father; neither is He His true Wisdom; but He is one of the things made and created, and is called the Word and Wisdom by an abuse of terms, since He Himself originated by the proper Word of God, and by the Wisdom that is in God, by which God has made not only all other things but Him also" *(Deposition of Arius, in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980], 4:70).

[8] "The Nicene Creed," www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm (accessed November 18, 2019). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confession in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 156–159.

acceptably trinitarian, then the only proper court of appeal is to a careful statement and consideration of this history.[9]

To the extent that those who espouse the "eternal functional subordination" of Christ subscribe to the near-consensus, fourth-century orthodox formulations regarding the divine being of Jesus, we may say that *fundamentally* they are Trinitarian. So, one scholar who favors the notion of the eternal functional subordination of Jesus writes,

> The church stands united against all aberrations of the Trinity: those that would divide the essence of the Trinitarian God into tritheism, those that make the *essence* of the Father and Son different—ranging from the semi-Arians of Nicaea, or to full blown Arianism, or those who would re-duce the Godhead to the unipersonal God of Modalism.[10]

Similarly, one scholar who supports the idea of eternal subordination communicates his basic agreement with the *fundamental* fourth-century view on the divine being of Jesus in the following:

> 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.[11]

The foregoing affirmations of the fundamental fourth-century Trinitarian orthodoxy by two leading proponents of the notion of eternal functional subordination means that the contemporary evangelical debate over this issue requires closer analysis. We begin by examining especially the *form/shape* the doctrine of the Trinity takes when the view of eternal functional subordination is embraced.

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[9] Stephen R. Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 35, no. 1 (2017): 95.

[10] H. Wayne House, "The Eternal Relational Subordination of the Son to the Father in Patristic Thought," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 133. Emphasis supplied.

[11] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 13.

The Shape of the Trinity with Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son

What happens to the nature of the Trinity when the Son is said to be eternally and functionally subordinated to the Father? Here we come to the crux of the matter in the debate between the opposing camps on the question of the Trinity. For this purpose, it is of the utmost importance to clarify what the contrasting parties hold in common regarding the fourth century's classical position on the divine being of Jesus. A closer look at the statements by the scholars quoted above shows that the focus of their agreement with fourth-century Trinitarian orthodoxy is on the essence of Jesus' divine being. Here, they all agree that the being of Jesus as divine Son is the same as that of the Father. But, both during the fourth century and today, affirming the sameness of the being of the members of the Godhead is only the beginning of Trinitarian difficulties. The essential challenge was, and continues to be, even in the current debate, as follows: if it is affirmed that the members of the Godhead have the *same* being and are *one* God, how is one supposed to account for their different identities? It is the response of the proponents of eternal functional subordination to this question that the opposing camp deems unfaithful to the Bible and the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Before looking at their response, however, it may be helpful to provide a summary of the fourth-century deliberations on the same question as a needed context for the current debate.

The fourth-century orthodox response to the previously raised question brings into focus the work of the Cappadocian fathers, who seemed to have worked against the critiques of a certain individual by the name of Eunomius.[12] Contrary to the Cappadocian fathers, Eunomius seemed to argue that Jesus, the Son, could not possibly have the same being or essence with the Father.[13] In response, the

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[12] What the author presents here as the Cappadocian fathers' response to the perplexing question raised above draws directly on his previous essay, Donkor, *God in Three Persons— in Theology.*

[13] See Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 97–101 for a discussion on Eunomius' theology. Eunomius argues rationally, and on the basis of his understanding of how language works. First, and rationally, he affirms that God, by nature, is "Ingenerate or Unbegotten." Given his background in Eastern Neo-Platonic philosophical thought on God, this ingenerate nature of God (*ousia*) has to be "simple," which in Greek thought means "indivisible." Second, and based on his understanding of the nature of language, Eunomius argues that "names, properly used, correspond on a one-one mapping to entities." Therefore, if God is named as ingenerate, the language, really, says everything that can be said about His nature. It follows, then, that the Son *must* be "generate/begotten," *not*

Cappadocians argued for the sameness of Jesus' being with the Father by adopting the Greek concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Their goal was to clarify what characterizes the divine nature (*ousia*) and the three Persons (*hypostasis*) respectively. By these distinctions, they meant to teach that the Christian idea of God entails one *ousia* ("nature," "essence") and three *hypostases* ("persons"). In the West, the church father Tertullian had earlier given a similar picture of God, using the Latin phrase one substance (*substantia*) and three distinct persons (*persona*). In the East, the Cappadocians used *ousia* ("essence," "substance") as that which is common to the three persons,[14] while *hypostasis* marked the special *form* of existence that distinguishes each of them—hence, the commonly known Trinitarian formula "One essence, three Persons."

But when Athanasius, the Council of Nicea, and the Cappadocian fathers say that the three divine persons share the same *ousia* but are distinguished by their *hypostases*, how can this be and what exactly does it mean? They found their answer in the doctrine of *eternal begetting* or *generation,* initially proposed by Athanasius. The fourth-century Trinitarian defenders granted that if the Father begets, then He may be thought of as the *arche* ("origin," "source") of the Son. At the same time they would argue, as one scholar summarizes nicely, that "this is not a creative act in time that produces something other than God, but a divine generative act within the life of God that results in a divine Father and Son who are one in being and power."[15]

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of God's essence or *ousia*, but of His will and action. It is, therefore, categorically impossible for the Father to establish a Son of similar *ousia*.

[14] It was Tertullian (born ca. AD 150 in Carthage) who introduced the Latin term *persona* into Trinitarian discussions. As he uses it, however, the term does not "have the connotations of emotional individuality or unique consciousness that clearly belong to the term in contemporary usage" (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985], 226). In his day, the term *persona* had the legal connotation of an objective individual who was capable of having property. Thus, he uses the terms *persona* and *substantia* to identify an objective threeness and an objective oneness respectively in God.

[15] Kevin Giles, "The Father as the Mia Arche, the One Originating Source of the Son and the Spirit, and the Trinity as the Monarchia, the One Undivided Sovereign Ruler," *Colloquium* 46, no. 2 (2014): 180. Obviously, such an explanation makes a qualitative difference between time as we know it and time (more accurately, timelessness) within God's life. This distinction between time and timelessness was the commonly assumed metaphysical framework within which the debate was conducted. For Athanasius' discussion of the eternal begetting of the Son, see *Discourses* 2.21–23, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 4:379–397. On the concept of divine timelessness and its impact on Christian theology, see Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

Yet, to say that the Father is the *arche* ("origin," "source") raises a second question that the early Christian Trinitarians had to face. If the Father is the origin of the Son, shouldn't the Father be greater since, as Arius argues, there must be a time of origination? After all, *arche* must imply *aitia* ("cause"). It is important here to understand the basic philosophical framework within which the debate was conducted. All sides to the debate presupposed existing Greek philosophy and, based on philosophical concepts that were employed at the time, the origination of the Son, as conceived by the Trinitarians, was an *eternal, timeless* act. For this reason, one could *not* say of the Son, as Arius does, that "there was a time when he was not." While it may seem hard to grasp the idea, according to classical Greek philosophy, a timeless act, technically, means precisely that there is no time component involved in the act. It is for this reason that Gregory of Nazianzus can argue that "origination does not imply temporal separation, any more than the fact that the sun is not prior to its light. Thus, the Son and the Spirit are *from* the Father, but not *after* the Father."[16]

But if, as orthodox Trinitarianism maintains, the Father and Son have the same nature, and one could not locate a point in time when the Son *became*, a third question arises. In what sense can we legitimately say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons? This question bears directly on how the three may be distinguished. The Cappadocians' answer is that "the Godhead is simple and exists thrice-over, in *hypostases* distinguished by *relations of origin*, and not otherwise."[17] The three are distinguished based on how they are related one to the other with regards to origin, whereby only the Father is *unbegotten*, only the Son is *begotten* of the Father, and only the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. In other words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be distinguished respectively by the *relational* ideas of "unbegottenness," "begottenness," and "procession."

And, if the three can be distinguished, why are they not three gods? The orthodox Trinitarian answer is that they are not three gods because the one God of three persons is in an absolute unity of being, consciousness, and will. Eunomius argues regarding the Son that "He is subject to him [the Father] both in essence (*ousia*) and will."[18] Gregory of Nazianzus answers, "To us there is one God, for the Godhead is one, and all that proceeds from him is referred to one, although we believe in three persons. For one is not more and

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[16] See discussion in Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity*.
[17] Ibid., 116. Emphasis supplied.
[18] Giles, "The Father as the Mia Arche," 180.

another less God; nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power."[19] Kevin Giles agrees with Richard Cross that "Gregory in Oration 31.14 is specifically countering the Eunomian doctrine of God that separates and divides the divine persons in being, power and will."[20] Separation of the divine persons in terms of being, power, and will—as Eunomius did—would mean tritheism—namely, that there are three gods.

Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son Interprets Cappadocian Divine Relations in Authority-Submission Terms

The previous point about relations of origins as that which distinguishes the members of the Trinity is critical to what needs to be said now. It was important to fourth-century Trinitarian orthodoxy to be able to distinguish the members of the Trinity in order to avoid the heresy of modalism.[21] And for the Cappadocian fathers, the principle for making those distinctions within the persons of the Trinity was how they are related with regards to their origins. By insisting that the Father *only* is unbegotten, and that the Son *only* is begotten, fourth-century Trinitarian orthodoxy set up an asymmetrical relational order[22] as a distinguishing principle within the inner life of the Deity.

Eternal functional subordination supporters, based on the orthodox distinctions noted above, are keen to point out that the orthodox Trinitarians recognized order (*taxis*) in the inner (*in se*) divine life, while maintaining the equality of the divine essence. The following are just a couple examples from church history that representatives of eternal functional subordination use to illustrate this Trinitarian distinction of order.

> [Macedonius asks] What then is lacking to the Spirit to be the Son, for if nothing was lacking to him, he would be the Son? We say [Gregory answers] that nothing is lacking to him, for nothing is lacking to God; but it is the difference in manifestations, if I may say so, or in the relationship between them (*tes pros allele scheseos daiphoron*) which makes also

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[19] *Oration* 31.14, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 7:322. Emphasis supplied. See also *Oration* 29.2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 7:301.

[20] Giles, "The Father as the Mia Arche," 186.

[21] The basic idea in modalism is that the three persons of the Godhead are simply modes or manifestations of the one divine being.

[22] The asymmetrical relational order means that the relations of the persons in the Trinity are such that, for example, only the Father is Father, and only the Son is Son, and this relation cannot be reversed.

the difference in what they are called (Discourse 31, 9, *Sources chretiennes* No. 250, pp. 290–92).[23]

One scholar also quotes Gregory of Nyssa to defend the point that the orthodox church recognized *order* in the Trinity but only excluded distinctions in the divine nature that would make any of the divine persons unequal in the *divine essence*.

> But in a Divine nature, as such, when once we have believed in it, we can recognize no distinctions suggested either by the Scripture or by our own common sense; distinctions, that is, that would divide that Divine and transcendent nature within itself by any degrees of intensity and remission, so as to be altered from itself by being more or less. Because we firmly believe that it is simple, uniform, incomposite, because we see in it no complicity or composition of dissimilars, therefore it is that, when once our minds have grasped the idea of Deity, we accept by the implications of that very name the perfections in it of every conceivable thing that befits the Deity.[24]

The scholar observes after this quote that "if someone believes the fathers or councils disallowed intra-personal distinctions that do not deny the divine essence, the burden of proof rests on them to provide clear examples, something no one has done so far to my knowledge."[25]

At this point we may conclude that both orthodox Trinitarianism and eternal functional subordination supporters agree that there is order within the inner life of the Deity. But do they come to the same conclusion on the shape of the Trinity based on this order? As noted earlier, for fourth-century orthodox Trinitarianism, order is simply an asymmetrical relational order—meaning, for example, that the Son is second to the Father in order, and so is *sub-ordered*.[26]

However, eternal functional subordination defenders take the orthodox distinctions implicit in the divine asymmetric order a step further, insisting that in the "relationship of begetting and being

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[23] *Oration* 31.9 [*Sources christenes* 250:290-92], quoted in House, "Eternal Relational Subordination," 160.

[24] *De Spiritu Sancto*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 5:315, quoted in House, "Eternal Relational Subordination," 157.

[25] House, "Eternal Relational Subordination," 157.

[26] Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 101.

begotten there is either a functional subordination, or a relationship of authority and submission."[27] Remarkably, eternal functional subordination advocates, while affirming that the Father and Son are fully equal in their deity as each possesses fully the identically same divine nature, maintain that the eternal and inner-Trinitarian Father-Son relationship is marked by an authority and submission structure.[28] How does one defend such a position? It seems that there are only two possible lines of argument open to eternal functional subordination to support this position and still remain Trinitarian in the orthodox sense.[29] Both lines are pursued by them. This study will first briefly outline both arguments, and then assess them. The first line of argument is based on the asymmetric order in the Godhead.

Arguments from Asymmetry and Order in the Trinity

We begin the eternal functional subordination argumentation with the common view, which H. Wayne House expresses, that understanding names as designations, without intrinsic characteristics that adhere to them, is meaningless.[30] Here the relevant names are Father and Son. House depends in his reasoning, among others, on Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa*, after making the point that the divine persons should be distinguished chiefly and firstly by relations rather than origins, Aquinas explains that

> this name *Father* signifies not only a property, but also the hypostasis; whereas this term *Begetter* or *Begetting* signifies property only; forasmuch as this name *Father* signifies the relation which is distinctive and constitutive of the hypostasis; and this term *Begetter* or *Begotten* signifies the origin which is not distinctive and constitutive of the hypostasis.[31]

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[27] Holmes, 100. Holmes relies on Thomas Aquinas to recognize the limitations of what can be said about the eternal Father-Son relationship and gives the reason why: "The answer is fairly simple. All that is said of the eternal life of God is said of the single *ousia* save only that which refers to the relations of origin. Thomas Aquinas, who understood this well, suggests that there are five things only we can know about the persons of the Trinity: that the Father is unbegotten, that the Father begets the Son, that the Son is begotten of the Father, that the father and the Son together spirate the Spirit, and that the Spirit proceeds from the father and the Son".

[28] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 14.

[29] For a brief analysis of the two possible lines of arguments, see Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 101–102.

[30] House, "Eternal Relational Subordination," 139.

[31] *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 40, a. 2 corp.

House builds on Aquinas:

> For the relations of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit to properly distinguish them, some intrinsic qualities must exist in their unique persons. The other persons do not share this uniqueness, even as these persons share the entirety of the divine being. Thus, the Father is Father only of the Son, something that is founded on both by His intrinsic subsistence as Father and by His act as a father of begetting the person of the Son and communicating the essence of the deity eternally to the eternal Son.[32]

When House expresses these views about the persons of the Trinity by the use of phrases such as "intrinsic qualities" and "intrinsic subsistence," it is not entirely clear whether he is referring to essential qualities of the members of the Trinity. But there are those who come close to using ontological language in expressing the *taxis* (order) in the Godhead. Bruce Ware, for example, observes that "there is . . . 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."[33] Here, Ware proposes an ontological, immutable authority-submission structure that goes beyond any voluntary submission. He does not explicitly provide any ontology as the basis for the eternal and immutable authority-submission structure. He simply states that

> an authority-submission structure marks *the very nature of the eternal Being* of the one who is three. In this authority-submission structure, the three Persons understand the rightful place each has . . . the Son submits to the Father just as the Father . . . exercises authority over the Son. . . . This hierarchical structure of authority exists in the eternal Godhead.[34]

Thus Ware remarks,

> Why is the first person of the Trinity the eternal "Father" and the second person the eternal "Son"? Must this not be the language God has chosen to indicate the type of eternal

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[32] House, "Eternal Relational Subordination," 140–141.
[33] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 14.
[34] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 21. Emphasis supplied.

relationship that exist between the first and second persons? . . . Does it not stand to reason that God wishes by this language to indicate something of the authority and submission that exists within the relationships of members of the immanent Trinity?[35]

This raises some important questions to which we now turn. In his critique of eternal functional subordination as undermining the *homoousios* of the Father and the Son, Millard Erickson addresses a legitimate concern about an ontological subordinationism when the authority-submission structure is expressed using ontological language.[36] In other words, if the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, then technically the Son has the property of subordination *essentially* while the Father does not. In that case, such a difference must imply that the Father and Son are different in essence.[37] Erickson's significant criticism has triggered a response by Ware, that is summarized well by Benedict Bird who states that who

responds by differentiating between an "essential property" and a "property of the essence." Sonship is an essential property of the Son. But it is not a property of the divine essence (*ousia*) because it is not a shared attribute of Father and Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit have different ontological properties in their different *hypostases,* but this is not a denial that they are of one common *ousia*.[38]

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[35] Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 96.

[36] Millard Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 172, argues that "if authority over the Son is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Father, and subordination to the Father is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Son, then something significant follows. Authority is part of the Father's essence and subordination is part of Son's essence, and each attribute is not part of the essence of the other person. That means that the essence of the Son is different from the essence of the Father. . . . That is equivalent to saying that they are not homoousios with one another."

[37] D. Glenn Butner Jr., "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 132, though taking some objection to this argumentation, which he calls the most prevalent philosophical and theological argument against eternal functional subordination, remarks that "though the conclusion that EFS entails a rejection of homoousianism ultimately holds true, I do not find the standard argument against EFS compelling. This is because if one cannot apply a unique word to each hypostasis—at the very least the terms 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Spirit'—then there is no way to distinguish the persons. The problem with EFS is not Arianism, but the fact that it entails tri-theism. Advocates of EFS are correctly using classical trinitarian metaphysics but incorrectly replacing terms like "unbegotten" and "begotten" with the ideas "authority" and 'submission.'"

[38] Benedict Bird, "John Owen and the Question of the Eternal Submission of the Son

Ware presents another line of argument that we need to look at in order to draw an appropriate conclusion on his understanding of the divine *taxis*:

> There is an ordering in the Godhead, a "built-in" structure of authority and submission that marks a significant respect in which the Persons of the Godhead are distinguished from one another. Surely, they are not distinct in essence, for each shares fully the identically same divine nature. Their distinction, rather, is constituted, in part, by *taxis*— the ordering of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Godhead. . . . For all eternity, the order establishes that God is the head of Christ. . . . Intrinsic to God's own nature is a fundamental *taxis*, and he has so designed creation to reflect his own being, in his own internal and external relationships.[39]

Ware clearly interprets the nature of Trinitarian ordering (*taxis*) to mean more than numerical ordering. Numerical ordering, implied in the divine asymmetry, simply means that by virtue of the relations of origins, the Father is the first person in the Godhead, the Son the *second*, and the Holy Spirit the *third*. But for Ware, the different *hypostases* in the Godhead (that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which reflects the *taxis*, is constituted by the different ontological properties in their different *hypostases*. Thus, there is an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father that is part of the eternal divine nature. The question remains open, however, whether Ware's seeming ontological authority-submission structure as an "essential property" of the *hypostases* squares with fourth-century Trinitarian orthodoxy. To this we shall return later.

Arguments from the Father-Son Analogy

The second line of argument that might be used to support eternal functional subordination relates to the father-son analogy. One scholar notes, "It is trinitarian or filial subordination, that is, subordination in respect to order and relationship. As a relation, son-ship is subordinate to fatherhood. In the order, a father whether divine or human is the first, and a son is the second."[40] This comment relates to the asymmetric order in the inner life of the Trinity, but it also pertains to the second line of argumentation that eternal

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within the Ontological Trinity," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 80 (2018): 309.

[39] Ware, *Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit*, 72.

[40] William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan Gomes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 250.

functional subordination takes—namely, using the analogy that the human father and son relationship involves authority, submission, and subordination.

Wayne Grudem is one evangelical scholar who makes the most of the argument from the father-son analogy. He sets as his goal "to examine the meaning of the names 'Father' and 'Son' as well as 31 passages of Scripture that give evidence that God the Father has eternally had a role of leadership, initiation, and primary authority among the members of the Trinity."[41] Grudem conducts this exercise by fully affirming the full deity of the Son, "who is equal in all attributes to the Father and to the Holy Spirit."[42] So, while Grudem knows that the names "Father" and "Son" are not univocal (their meaning for human beings is not the same as for God), he is of the view that the names "Father" and "Son" "must be analogous to some human experience of being father and being a son when they are applied to the Father and Son in the Trinity."[43] In answering his own question of what the names "Father" and "Son" signify, Grudem first denies Millard Erickson's position that the primary meaning of the biblical term "Son" is likeness[44] and Kevin Giles' view that it signifies intimacy and identical authority.[45] Grudem then attempts to rebut two key critiques from the above-mentioned authors on the issues—namely, that the names "Father" and "Son" apply to the Father and Son eternally, and that the names also indicate authority and submission. With regards to the latter, Grudem notes that

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[41] Grudem, "Biblical Evidence," 224.

[42] Ibid., 227.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 116, writes that "an assumption seems to underlie the subordinationists' position, namely, that the term *Son* indicates a role subordinate to the Father. While this is often an implicit or unstated assumption, there are points at which it becomes part of the argument, especially as we saw in Grudem's work, and the insistence that these names are the eternal names of the Father and the Son runs parallel to the argument that the authority structure is eternal. There is considerable biblical evidence, however, that the primary meaning of the biblical term Son as applied to Jesus is likeness, rather than subordinate authority. So, for example, the Jews saw Jesus' self-designation as the Son of God as a claim to deity or equality with God (e.g., John 5:18)."

[45] Giles, *Jesus and the Father,* 127, expresses the view that "the titles *Father* and *Son* are not used in the New Testament to suggest that the divine father always has authority over the *Son*. They speak rather of an eternal correlated relationship marked by intimacy, unity, equality, and identical authority." Giles observes further that "in his detailed study on the force of the title *Son* in the Bible, John Frame concludes that the title *Son* when used of Jesus speaks of his authority and lordship and of his unique relationship with his Father. He says, 'There is considerable overlap between the concepts Lord and Son. . . . But each encompasses the emphasis of the other. Lordship presupposes sonship, and sonship implies lordship'" (Giles, *Jesus and the Father,* 127, citing John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002], 661).

in the biblical world, there were no commendable examples of a son not being subject to his father or not deferring to the leadership role that still belonged to the father, even when the son had grown to adulthood. Therefore, what is everywhere true of a father-son relationship in the biblical world, and is not contradicted by any other passages of Scripture, surely should be applied to the relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinity. The names "Father" and "Son" represent an eternal difference in the roles of the Father and the Son. The Father has a leadership and authority role that the Son does not have, and the Son submits to the Father's leadership in a way that the Father does not submit to the Son. The eternal names "Father" and "Son" therefore give a significant indication of eternal authority and submission among the members of the Trinity.[46]

For his part, Ware contends that the church has always under-stood the names "Father" and "Son" in the Trinity not merely as conventions suitable for the incarnation, but "appellations of their eternal personhood and relationship."[47] He argues that

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.[48]

Ware follows after Geoffrey Wainwright's musing that there must be *something* about human fatherhood that makes "Father" a suitable way for Jesus to designate the one who sent Him. Although Wainwright himself does not specify what that something might be, for Ware, it is obvious that it has to be in regard to the Father's authority.

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

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[46] Grudem, "Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission," 231–232.
[47] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 15.
[48] Ibid.

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.[49]

In Ware's view, failure to see this argument is to miss the primary reason for which God chose masculine terminology generally, and the name "Father" particularly for Himself. For Ware, the conclusion follows, then, that "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."[50]

The Son *qua* eternal Son, heeding the voice, command, and will of His eternal Father, is taken as a clear indication of distinctive roles for Father and Son. John Frame connects the notion of Father, primacy, authority, and role: "That the father has some sort of primacy is implicit in the name father, and of course the doctrines of eternal generation and procession suggest that the Father has some sort of unique 'originative' role."[51] Norman Geisler is even stronger when he observes that

all the members of the Trinity are equal in essence, but they do not have the same *roles*. It is a heresy (called subordinationism) to affirm that there is an *ontological subordination* of one member of the Trinity to another, since they are identical in essence. . . . nonetheless, it is clear that there is a *functional subordination*; that is, not only does each member

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[49] Ware, 16.

[50] Ibid., 16.

[51] Frame, *The Doctrine of God,* 720. It is significant to note Hodge's view on explaining what the terms Father and Son mean in the divine eternal relations. "It is no doubt a Scriptural fact that the relation between the First and Second persons of the Trinity is expressed by the relative terms Father and Son. It is also said that the Son is begotten of the father; He is declared to be the only begotten Son of God. The relation, therefore, of the Second Person to the First is that of filiation or sonship. But what is meant by the term, neither the Bible nor the ancient creeds explain," see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), I: 468.

have a different function or role, but some functions are also subordinated to others.[52]

For Grudem, the subordination in role of the Son is essential to a proper definition and meaningfulness of the doctrine of the Trinity:

> If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally "Father" and the Son is not eternally "Son." This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally *existed*. This is why the idea of eternal equality in being but subordination in role has been essential to the church's doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene Creed, which said that the Son was "begotten of the Father before all ages" and that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son."[53]

So, by making economic subordination an accompanying principle of differentiation in the divine relations, Grudem ties subordination in role of the Son to an eternal subordination of the Son in the divine life.

The issue is disputed, however, as to whether eternal subordination in role in the divine relations has been essential to the church's doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene Creed. Millard Erickson, for example, disputes Grudem's claim that eternal subordination in role in the divine relation has been essential to the history of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In attempting to trace the origins of the doctrine of eternal subordination, Erickson acknowledges that in America during the period from 1870–1970, theologians such as Charles Hodge, Augustus Strong, and Louis Berkhof had written about subordination in the Godhead principally from the point of view of the modes of existence of the persons within the Trinity. With the publication of the book *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* by the Evangelical scholar George W. Knight III, Erickson detects the introduction of a new "concept that has become crucial both

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[52] Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 2:290.
[53] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251.

to the discussion of the relationship of men and women and that regarding the relationship of the Father and the Son."[54] Although referring specifically to the relationship between man and woman, the following remark of Knight equally captures his understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son: "I have chosen to speak of this relationship as a *role relationship* where the question of authority, headship, or leadership is in view."[55] In other words, whereas Hodge, Strong, and Berkhof write about subordination in the Godhead principally from the point of view of the modes of existence[56] of the persons within the Trinity, Knight turns the notion of modes of existence into a role relationship. In other words, each person of the Godhead's way or mode of being God is made "role-specific." And, within the context of Trinitarian relationship, Knight understands the *role* relationship as eternal and permanent:

> The apostle Paul in his appeal to the relation of God the Father to God the Son does not regard Christ's Sonship and resultant incarnation as implying His inferiority to the Father. Although Christ the Son's submission is expressed in the areas of action and of incarnation (the areas of service and of the accomplishment of salvation; cf. also I Cor. 15:24–28), it is also an expression of the ontological relationship of preincarnate, submissive Sonship (cf., e.g., John 5:18–23, 30). The ontological relationship analogous

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[54] Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 34.

[55] George W. Knight III, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1977), 9. Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 242, notes that "most of the gender debate between egalitarians and complementarians prior to and during the early 1970s had focused on identifying proper hermeneutical principles that should be utilized in biblical interpretation, evaluating the roles and authority of important female biblical characters (e.g., Deborah, the five daughters of Zelophehad, Philip's five daughters, Pheobe, Junia, etc.), and doing exegesis on key scriptural passages that seemed to address the dynamics of male-female relations (e.g., Gen 1–3; Luke 8:1–4; 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:34–36; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:18–33; 1 Tim 2:8–15). However, an alien argumentation was introduced into the debate in the 1970s by some complementarian theologians, causing the discussion to take a surprising turn. Alan G. Padgett refers to this novel argumentation as the 'turn to the Trinity.'"

[56] The phrase "mode of existence" is used as a means of speaking about the personal distinctions within the Godhead. Thus, "in God there are no three individuals alongside of and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one. Consequently many preferred to speak of three hypostases in God, three different modes, not of manifestation, as Sabellius taught, *but of existence or subsistence*" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 2:87).

to that between man and woman, writes Paul, is that between Father and Son (I Cor. 11:3). That Christ submits as Son and as incarnate, i.e., because of certain ontological aspects, does not mean therefore that He is inferior to the Father, nor does it cast doubt into His deity.[57]

When Knight says here that the Son's submission is also an expression of the ontological relationship of preincarnate, submissive Sonship, he introduces a certain fixity to the person of the Son that is foreign to classical Trinitarian doctrine. Such a position stands in conflict with the classical doctrine of *perichoresis*, which guarantees "the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity in the divine essence and in each other."[58] It is generally recognized that the novelty in Knight's approach is using the relationship between the Father and the Son as an analogy for male-female relations.[59] Philip Cary mentions that Grudem's *Systematic Theology* makes role subordination in the Trinity a centerpiece of his work, and observes,

> Both Knight and Grudem make quite clear what contemporary reality lies behind this historic error: for them, affirming subordination in the Trinity is essential to holding the line against egalitarianism in the church and the world. The new evangelical subordinationism, in other words, belongs to an overarching strategy to keep women subordinate to men that can no longer use the old weapons of thoughtless prejudice.[60]

Therefore, in the view of scholars such as Erickson and Cary, role subordination, far from being considered essential to the church's doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene Creed, is a recent phenomenon.[61]

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[57] Knight, *The New Testament Teaching*, 55–56

[58] Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Term*, 67.

[59] See Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 242. Knight, *The New Testament Teaching*, 26, writes, "The apostles do not argue just for some authority in marriage, but explicitly and particularly for man's authority and headship over woman and woman's submission to man (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; I Peter 3:1-7). For the basis of man's headship over woman and woman's submission to man, the apostle Paul appeals to the analogy of God the Father's headship over Jesus Christ, His incarnate Son (1 Cor. 11:3) . . .With full authority and with absolute and permanent reasons, Paul argues for the form of this relationship between man and women."

[60] Philip Cary, "The New Evangelical Subordinationism: Reading Inequality into the Trinity," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 7.

[61] See Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 240–259 for a helpful and concise overview of

Assessing Eternal Functional Subordination

Having offered the foregoing outline of the shape of the doctrine of the Trinity when eternal functional subordination is accepted, the need now arises to evaluate the two key lines of arguments that are employed in its favor: namely, that 1) the order of asymmetry in the Trinity, as such, entails an authority-submission structure; and 2) that the divine Father-Son relation also implies an authority-submission structure.

Evaluation from an Orthodox Trinitarian Perspective

In order to evaluate eternal functional subordination, a methodological issue needs to be addressed. How should the evaluation be approached? Since both sides of the debate affirm the classical Trinitarian doctrine in its entirety, the author of the present study agrees with Stephen R. Holmes that the evaluation must necessarily be historical. Holmes argues that

> the word "Trinitarian" has typically been used to judge the adequacy of various proposed readings of Scripture. Arians, Socinians, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals, and various others all read Scripture wrongly because they fail to read it in a trinitarian way. That sentence only makes sense if we accept that "trinitarian" means something more definite than merely "whatever I think the Bible teaches."[62]

Thus, he argues that when a question arises about what is acceptably Trinitarian, the only proper court of appeal is to a careful statement and consideration of the history of the fourth-century debate and resolutions, especially the Cappadocian statement.[63]

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the history of neo-subordinationism in the gender debate among Evangelicals and Seventh-day Adventists.

[62] Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 92. Consequently, Holmes notes, "The first thing we must insist is that biblical exegesis has no purchase on this question. This is not a surrender of biblical authority, but a consequence of what I have so far argued about the term 'trinitarian' being only definable historically. Suppose I came to be convinced both that the Scriptures teach EFS (or ERAS [Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission]), and that the position was nonetheless incompatible with those positions developed in the fourth century: the proper claim then would not be that EFS was compatible with trinitarian orthodoxy, but that (so-called) trinitarian orthodoxy was unbiblical. I would have arrived in the position of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Oneness Pentecostals, of rejecting trinitarianism out of faithfulness to (what I perceived to be) the Biblical revelation" (ibid., 95).

[63] Ibid., 92.

So, although the present study will evaluate eternal functional subordination from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, the initial evaluation will be based on considerations of the fourth-century orthodox Trinitarian debates.

Our first line of evaluation is eternal functional subordination's alleged authority-submission structure in the divine *taxis*. But before we take a closer look at how eternal functional subordination interprets the supposed subordination entailed in the divine order (*taxis*), it would be helpful to outline the orthodox Trinitarians' concept of "eternal generation" as a representation of the biblical concept of "begetting." Hodge puts the origins of the doctrine of eternal generation in helpful perspective:

> The Nicene fathers, instead of leaving the matter where the Scriptures leave it, undertake to explain what is meant by sonship, and teach that it means derivation of essence. The First Person of the Trinity is Father, because He communicates the essence of the Godhead to the Second Person; and the Second Person is Son, because He derives that essence from the First Person. This is what they mean by Eternal Generation.[64]

Regarding the details of the doctrine of eternal generation of the Son, it was taught[65] 1) that it was the person, not the essence of the Son, that was generated (that is, the Son is generated or becomes a person by the communication to Him of the divine essence); 2) that it is eternal—that is, an eternal movement in the divine essence; 3) that it is by necessity of nature, and not by the will of the Father; 4) that no separation or division was involved—that is, the whole and complete essence of the Father was communicated from the Father to the Son; and 5) that it is without change.

Holmes brings some significance and clarity to the doctrine by referencing Origen:

> Origen offered the standard defense of eternal generation, a doctrine that of course is enshrined in the Creed. God does not change, and so the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and yet the Son has His origin in being begotten from the Father; how do we square these three necessary biblical

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[64] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I:468.

[65] Ibid., 468–469, adds helpfully that "the principal grounds urged in support of this representation are the nature of sonship among men, and the passage in John v. 26, where it is said, 'As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in Himself.'"

truths? By, Origen suggests, asserting that the generation of the Son is not the beginning of a new relationship, but the eternal way of being of the Father and the Son. The Father is eternally begetting the Son; the Son is eternally being begotten of the Father. . . . To press forward a bit from Origen, this is the best description—the only description—of the pure act that the life of God is, a single, simple event of ecstatic, perfect, and loving self-donation.[66]

The reason it is important to preface eternal functional subordination's interpretation of the supposed subordination entailed in the Trinitarian order (*taxis*) with an overview of the doctrine of eternal generation is because the latter doctrine sets the conditions or provides the parameters within which eternal functional subordination's interpretation of the nature of the Father-Son relation can proceed. This has to be the case since the *order* that is claimed to involve subordination is a consequence of the eternal generation (in this case of the Father and Son). Regarding this role that the doctrine of eternal generation plays in defining what could possibly be the nature of the Father-Son relationship, Holmes remarks,

Assuming then that the doctrine of eternal generation is accepted, if we are going to find an account of EFS/ERAS that is adequately Trinitarian, we are going to have to find it within our confession of eternal generation, as there is nothing else we can say about the Father-Son relationship. This 'nothing else' imposes a strict condition on our derivation: it is not just that our putative account of EFS or ERAS has to be coherent with eternal generation; it has to be shown to derive from that doctrine, because there is nothing other than eternal generation that we can say of the Father-Son relation.[67]

It should be pointed out that the doctrine of eternal generation that was so foundational to fourth-century Trinitarianism was built on the doctrine of divine simplicity. Divine simplicity demands "the singularity of divine will, divine energy, divine action, and every other aspect of the divine life save only the eternal relations of origin."[68] Therefore, when eternal functional subordination ties functionality to the order in the divine life, it becomes extremely

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[66] Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 100.
[67] Ibid., 101.
[68] Ibid., 103.

difficult to square it with the notion of divine simplicity on which the doctrine of eternal generation is founded. Holmes' assessment is accurate.

> Diversity of function requires diversity of act: this seems clear enough. Therefore, to hold to any form of functional differentiation, whether subordinationist or some other kind, within a single divine act is surely impossible; it would require an account of how two (or, in fact, three) different functions can exist within the same single and simple act. There is an eternal analogue of the order of divine acts in the world, but it is in the order of relations of origin, and not otherwise. There is no space here for an account of EFS/ERAS, or for anything similar. To assert relations of authority and submission within a single divine will is similarly impossible: authority and submission require a diversity of volitional faculties. Where there is one simple single will, there can necessarily be no authority or submission.[69]

Similarly, the issue of one will is considered so critical to fourth-century Trinitarianism by one scholar that in his view, it is "what puts modern evangelical subordinationism outside the pale of Trinitarian orthodoxy."[70]

Alan Myatt also sees the philosophical and logical difficulties in affirming divine simplicity on the one hand and, on the other hand, directly extending the functionality of the economic Trinity

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[69] Ibid., 103-104. Cf. Dennis Jowers, "The Inconceivability of Subordination Within a Simple God," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 384–385: "The doctrine of divine simplicity thus seems to dictate that the divine will and the divine power are one, not many; and this implies that the divine persons act not through wills and powers distinctive to themselves, but through the one will and the one power that are identical with the divine essence. . .The implications of this teaching for the question of whether the Son eternally submits to the Father are unmistakable. If the Father and the Son possess only one will, the same will, then the Father cannot issue commands to the Son *qua* divine, and the Son *qua* divine cannot submit to them."

[70] Cary, "The New Evangelical Subordinationism," 5. Cary explains further that "Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not just three persons who decide to cooperate, like Peter, Paul, and Mary agreeing to do something together. Their agreement is essential and necessary part of their being, or else they would actually be three Gods just as Peter, Paul and Mary are three humans. Hence the difference in roles in the Trinity cannot mean anything like a relationship of command and obedience, where one person's will is subjected to another's. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always necessarily of one will, because there is only one God *and therefore only one divine will*" (ibid., 6).

into the divine life. Thus, referring to Ware's insistence that the roles in the economic Trinity are not *ad hoc*, Myatt remarks,

> The Son's submission is not for the purpose of carrying out the process of redemption. Rather it is a fundamental expression of his "sonship." The Son is not the Son unless he is eternally submissive to the Father and this relationship is grounded in God himself. It is difficult to see what this groundedness could be if it is not an aspect of God's being. Therefore, it follows that something in the being of the Son suits him for a subordinate role while the being of the Father suits him for supremacy.[71]

Myatt extends his discussion to Wayne Grudem, who also agrees that headship and submission are eternal realities rooted in the nature of God the Trinity.[72] To this Myatt responds,

> The problem here is to understand what it could mean for each to be suited for one role or another, by virtue of what they are as Father and Son, if it is the case that their natures are identical, which they must be if they share the one unique divine nature. How can it be that they do not differ in attributes and competencies, if their roles are necessarily related to who they are? If this fitness for authority entails the supremacy of one party, then it necessarily entails the inferiority of the other party. How, then, is this not due to a difference in nature? Their roles are necessarily linked to the being of each. If the roles are unrelated to any distinction in attributes, as Grudem affirms, then why exactly is the authority-submission relationship both necessary and one-way? To say that the Father is in authority because he is the Father, and that it is his authority that makes him the Father is circular. It does not explain why or how, much less prove, that this is the case.[73]

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[71] Alan Myatt, "On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinction," http://www.myatts.net/papers/myatt_on_hierarchy.pdf (accessed March 7, 2022). The paper was first presented as a lecture at the 61st annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, November 20, 2009.

[72] Myatt, "Compatibility of Ontological Equality," 28. See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 47.

[73] Myatt, "Compatibility of Ontological Equality," 24.

It seems clear enough that the fourth-century orthodox Trinitarians used the idea of eternal generation to set up the asymmetry in the divine life in a way that excluded functional/economic subordination in the divine life itself. On this point, it needs to be made clear that it is impossible for proponents of eternal functional subordination and eternal relations of authority-submission to subscribe to the classical doctrine of the Trinity, with the concept of eternal generation at its core, and still make a claim for eternal functional subordination. As noted in Myatt's previous quote, the latter claim necessarily entails the inferiority of the other party. Indeed, it would seem that they have a double problem: they are not in harmony with the Nicene creed and they are also out of harmony with the biblical view that all three persons of the Godhead are divine—and thus equal.

The second line of evaluation from fourth-century orthodox Trinitarianism relates to arguments from the Father-Son relation. If it is indeed the case that authority and submission require a diversity of volitional faculties, then the implication is clear that where there is one simple, single will, there can necessarily be no authority or submission. This would mean that the path to an authority-submission structure in the divine life through an appeal to the language of "Father" and "Son" seems blocked. The concept of divine simplicity makes human paternal-filial relationships incapable of functioning as an analogue of anything real in the divine life. Divine simplicity forces the conclusion that in the divine life, the language of "Father" and "Son" points to an asymmetrical relationship of origin and nothing more.[74] Indeed, D. Glenn Butner takes the discussion on the divine will further, arguing that when the dyothelite Christology,[75] which eternal functional subordination promoters subscribe to, is applied to the Trinitarianism they espouse, "EFS is more in the line of what might be called polytheistic homoiousianism, whereby the Father and the Son have distinct natures, but each is still eternally divine."[76]

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[74] See Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 104.

[75] Dyothelitism, also spelled "dythelitism," is a particular Christological doctrine developed around the seventh century AD that espouses the existence and operation of two wills (divine and human) in the person of Jesus Christ.

[76] D. Glenn Butner Jr., "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will," *The Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 132, interacts with eternal functional subordination promoters on the ramifications of the concept of "submission" in the debate: "The word 'submission' does not just suggest that the Father and Son have distinct wills according to the word's definition, but also according to its specific usage among advocates of EFS. The longest discussion of the meaning of 'submission' that I have found written by Wayne Grudem describes submission as a 'disposition to yield.' In husband-wife relationships this is not 'an absolute surrender of her will' because the wife

Butner argues that "to posit such terms as 'obedience' and 'submission' that imply a distinction of wills between the Father and the Son while affirming dyothelite Christology entails a distinction of natures between the Father and Son (and spirit) resulting in tritheism."[77]

Evaluation from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective

In his brief review of the history of neo-subordinationism in Seventh-day Adventism, Matthew Tinkham draws the conclusion that Grudem's popularization of Knight's neo-subordinationism has penetrated the theology of many Evangelical denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[78] Tinkham has noted that "since the late 1800s and early 1900s, Seventh-day Adventists have affirmed the equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,"[79] and that some Adventist "writers began to use new-subordinationist arguments borrowed from Grudem in the 1970s and 1980s to support a complementarian perspective."[80]

The evaluation of eternal functional subordination/eternal relations of authority-submission from the traditional Adventist point of view may be approached from two lines of inquiry: an exegetical appraisal of the biblical texts used to support their conclusions, as well as an assessment of the theological-philosophical commitments on which their position is based. The biblical evidence adduced by both sides in the current debate is extensive, often with the same texts being interpreted to support each side against the other.[81] Our presentation will necessarily be brief because of space limitations.

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may have to take a stand against the husband's 'sinful will.' Though not "absolute," Grudem certainly considers submission a *qualified* yielding of one will to another. Similarly, eternal functional subordination advocate Tom Smail describes the eternal subordination of the Son as a "*willing* responsiveness" which is the "*proprium*, the defining hypostatic characteristic" of the Son. Robert Latham's definition is equally clear: submission is a "free action *chosen willingly* by the one who submits." Time and again, advocates of EFS use the word "submission" according to its proper lexical meaning to indicate a yielding disposition of the Son's will toward the Father's will, clearly implying two wills" (ibid., 136–137).

[77] Butner, "Problem of the Divine Will," 132. Butner clarifies, "To suggest that the Father and the Son are distinguished by eternal submission and obedience is to suggest that the Father and the Son have different wills. If the advocates of EFS continue to maintain the dyothelite position and the resulting consequence that a will is a property of nature, then this means that the Father and Son have different natures. The result is tritheism" (ibid., 142).

[78] Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 258.

[79] Ibid., 245, 245 n. 35.

[80] Ibid., 246.

[81] Essays on the use of biblical texts for and against eternal subordination of the Son have been conveniently brought together in Jowers and House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism*. For a concise but exhaustive discussion on the use of biblical texts against eternal functional subordination of the Son, see Giles, Jesus and the Father, 93–128.

On the use of Scripture by proponents of eternal functional subordination/eternal relations of authority-submission, Bruce Ware is representative. Ware defends the thesis that while Scripture clearly teaches, and history of doctrine affirms, that the Father and Son are fully equal in their deity as each possesses fully the identical 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 the Father."[82] Ware pursues several lines of argument based on his interpretation of biblical passages. The first line of argument concerns the names of "Father" and "Son." Referring to John 6:38, Psalm 2:6–9, and 1 Corinthians 15:27–28, he concludes that "a central part of the notion of 'Father' is that of fatherly authority." The second relates to "the rightful authority specifically of the Father over all things." The texts relied upon in making the point include Psalm 2:3–9, Revelation 19:13–16, Matthew 6:9–10 and 11:25–27, John 6:37–44, Ephesians 1:3 and 1:9–11, Romans 8:32, James 1:17, and 1 Corinthians 15:28. Third, Ware comments on "the submission of the Son to the Father in the incarnate mission of the Son." This submission is not controverted, but in Ware's fourth line of argumentation he discusses "the pre-incarnate submission of the Son to the Father in eternity past." He interprets 1 Corinthians 11:3, John 3:16–17, and John 8:42 and remarks,

> Clearly, the Father both consecrated the Son for the very mission he had 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.[83]

Fifth, Ware considers "the submission of the Son to the Father in Eternity future." Prominent biblical passages discussed include Psalm 110:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. He summarizes, "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

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Perhaps one of the more thorough but succinct exploration of texts used in favor of eternal subordination can be found in Grudem, "Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission," 223–261. For a brief rebuttal of texts used in support of eternal functional subordination, see Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 259–274.

[82] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 14.

[83] Ibid., 23.

manifestation, in time and history, of what is eternally true in the relationship between the Father and the Son."[84]

Exegetes do not uniformly agree on the interpretation given by Ware to the various lines of biblical texts adduced in support of his positions. His first line of biblical argumentation, for example, is frequently rebutted by the point that it fails to take into account the literary context of those passages. Tinkham notes that "Johannine passages that speak of the Son's subordination to the Father should be read contextually, as referring to the Son's unique experience in humanity during the time of his incarnation and should not be read as referring to eternity."[85] Similarly, Paul B. Petersen concludes his discussion of John 17:3 and 14:28, recognizing that Jesus speaks these words "from the perspective of His humanity."[86] Furthermore, it has been argued that the biblical term "Son" as applied to Jesus primarily means likeness rather than subordinate authority. This is illustrated by the fact that in John 5:18, when Jesus designated Himself as the Son of God, the Jews understood it as a claim to deity or equality with God.[87]

Of all the texts presented by Ware in his second line of textual argumentation as indicative of the "the rightful authority specifically of the Father over all things," 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 is acknowledged as the strongest passage in support of eternal subordination. The other texts are easily disposed of as relating to the temporary subordination of the Son for the purpose of fulfilling the unique function of humanity's salvation. 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, however, seems to suggest that in the end the Son will turn all authority over to the Father, and then will Himself become subject to the Father.[88] In his exegesis of this passage, however, Ángel Rodríguez, comes to a different conclusion. He outlines the sequence of events in the text in its context: 1) "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Cor 15:20). 2) Since Christ's resurrection assured the resurrection of believers, the next event is the resurrection of "those who belong

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[84] Ware, 28.

[85] Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 262–263.

[86] See Petersen, *God in 3 Persons,* 7–8, 17.

[87] Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity,* 116.

[88] This is mentioned briefly by both Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Divine Order of Headship and Church Order: A Study of the Implications of the Principle of Male Headship for the Ordination of Women as Elders and/or Pastors," paper presented at the Meeting of the Commission on the Role of Women, Washington, DC, 24–27 March 1988, 14 (also 48), available at https://www.adventistarchives.org/divine-order-of-headship-and-church-order.pdf), 14 and Edwin Reynolds, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship in First Corinthians," 22, available at https://www.adventistarchives. org/biblical-hermeneutics-and-headship-in-first-corinthians.pdf (accessed August 12, 2019), 22.

to him" (1 Cor 15:23). 3) That resurrection is followed by the "end," the consummation of God's plan, when Christ's victory over evil will be consummated. This end, at which time Christ will put all enemies under His feet, includes the millennial reign of Christ (Messianic kingdom) followed by the total extermination of the wicked and of death itself (1 Cor 15:25–26; Rev 20). 4) At the close of the cosmic conflict everything will be brought into subjection to the Son of God, the goal of the plan of salvation will be achieved, and the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father. Given the context of the passage, Rodríguez concludes,

> The kingdom of the Son, so to speak, merges into the cosmic kingdom of God. This subordination of the Son refers to a functional submission and not a description of inner-Trinitarian relationships (cf. John 1:14; 17:5). As God-incarnate the Son voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father (cf. Matt 26:39), He was enthroned in the heavenly temple as Savior and King, and He is mediating for us in the heavenly sanctuary (1 Tim 2:5). At the end of the cosmic conflict the exalted Lord will place Himself under the Father. God will be the sovereign Lord of the universe. Notice that the passage does not say, "that the *Father* may be all in all," but "that *God* may be all in all." As part of the Godhead Christ participates in the absolute sovereignty of God, but as the incarnate God He continues to voluntarily submit to the Father. This means that throughout eternity Jesus will remain human. Redeemed humanity voluntarily submitted to God, and now Jesus, who belongs to that humanity, will do the same. That submission is part of His eternal sacrifice on our behalf.[89]

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[89] Ángel Rodríguez, "1 Corinthians 15:28," Biblical Research Institute, https://adventist-biblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-nt-texts/1-corinthians-1528 (accessed November 5, 2019). Linda L. Belleville, "Son Christology in the New Testament," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 69, comes to a similar conclusion. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 135–137, provides evidence that shows that both John Calvin and Charles Hodge interpreted this passage in a way that would corroborate Rodríguez's conclusion. Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 270–271, also concludes, "Now, what is the nature of this subordination of the Son and his kingdom to the Father at the end of time? This should not be understood as an ontological subordination. Rather, in context of the whole chapter, the Son subordinates himself as the second Adam, the representative and mediator of the kingdom of redeemed humanity. At the eschaton, he submits this redemptive *role* with its *functions* to the Father. Nevertheless, this submission does not bring an end to the Son's kingdom, which is eternal (Ps 45:6; Dan 7:14, 27; Luke 1:33; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:11). Rather, at that time, it will be shared in the Godhead forever (cf. Dan 2:44; Rev 1:6; 11:15)."

As noted earlier, Ware's third line of biblical argumentation regarding "the submission of the Son to the Father in the incarnate mission of the Son" is not controverted. It is the fourth, where he discusses "the pre-incarnate submission of the Son to the Father in eternity past," that is disputed. The most important biblical text he uses in support of this argument is 1 Corinthians 11:3. It appears that the one thing that is certain about this text is the view that "1 Corinthians 11:3 is a very difficult passage to interpret (especially due to the metaphorical use[s] of the controversial word κεφαλή) as evidenced by the diversity of interpretations and applications in scholarship and the lack of unanimity."[90] As noted earlier, Ware uses this passage to support Christ's subordination in eternity. He suggests that the passage is meaningful only if, in God's plan, the sending happened prior to the incarnation. This interpretation requires that the word *kephale* be interpreted as "head" in the sense of "authority." Thus in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul would be arguing that God is the "head" of Christ, and similarly, the man is the "head" of the woman. Others disagree. Philip Payne, for example, claims that "the items listed in verse 3 are not listed in a descending or ascending order of authority, but they are listed chronologically: Christ, the creative source of man; the man, the source from which God took woman; God, the source of Christ in the incarnation."[91] Kevin Giles, after taking the view that Paul plays on the multiple meanings of *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3–10 and that no one meaning can be dictated, observes that

> in 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul does not allude to a fourfold hierarchy, God-Christ-man-woman, but to three paired relationships in which in each case one party is the *kephale* of the other. They are not ordered hierarchically. Paul speaks first of Christ and man, then man and woman, and last of God and Christ. Rather than subordinating the persons in a descending "chain of command," or "hierarchy of headship" Paul is differentiating the persons paired to introduce the main point he wants to make in the whole

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[90] Tinkham, "Neo-Subordinationism," 262. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 240-41, recalls an event where "several years ago at an evening-long debate at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, he [Grudem] and Gilbert Bilezikian examined thirty instances of the word *kephale* in classical Greek writings. Each contended that all thirty instances supported his view!"

[91] Philip B. Payne, "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," *Priscilla Papers:* Academic Journal of CBE International (July 2006), available at https://www.cbe-international.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/wild-hair-and-gender-equality-1-corinthians-112 (accessed March 71, 2022).

passage, namely that men and women are differentiated by God. This sexual differentiation is to be demonstrated by what they have or do not have on their head when leading in public worship.[92]

A non-hierarchical reading of 1 Corinthians 11:3 may be carried through consistently to verses 7–12 to provide a plausible and satisfactory meaning to this difficult passage. With particular reference to verses 7–9, Anthony Thiselton observes that it represents a theme drawing its force from a combination of the role of Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:18, 22 and the force of the terms εἰκών, "image" (Heb צלם, *tselem*) in Genesis 1:26–27 (LXX) and the special semantic range of δόξα, "glory."[93] From that point of view, Thiselton remarks that it becomes clear the emphasis falls less on hierarchy as such than on relationality.[94] It is a relationality, not hierarchy, in which both male and female in their creational distinctiveness have an obligation to bring glory to each other.[95] Judith Gundry-Volf draws the strands together:

> Paul's main point is that man and woman are both the *glory of another* and therefore both have an obligation not to cause shame to their 'heads' . . . since they are the glory of different persons—man is the glory of God, and woman is the glory of man—they must use different means to avoid shaming their 'heads.' But Paul appeals to creation to show their obligation to bring glory—each to the particular one whose glory they are by creation—which they do through distinctive masculine and feminine hairstyles [or head coverings.]"[96]

We will not devote any more time to Ware's fifth line of biblical argumentation since we have dealt with it in relation to his second point, when we considered 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. What can be fairly concluded is that exegetically, Ware's use of key biblical texts

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[92] Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 112.

[93] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 833.

[94] Ibid.

[95] See ibid., 834–837 for an extended discussion on "Image of God, Glory, and Gender Differentiation" in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9.

[96] Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16: A Study of Paul's Method," in *Evangelium–Schriftauslegung–Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jostein Adna et al (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 157.

in support of eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father is far from conclusive. Furthermore, a theological-philosophical reflection on the issues involved in the eternal subordination debate may serve to reduce the plausibility of those texts supporting eternal functional subordination.

Although Adventists who subscribe to the eternal submission of the Son do not embrace the philosophical and theological concepts such as divine simplicity, timelessness, and eternal generation, EFS is inseparably linked to these concepts that shape the debate within the larger Evangelical circle. For example, in the context of Trinitarian deliberations, a position that the Father and the Son are ontologically equal, yet Christ submits to His Father, or that the role relationships between Christ and His Father extend from eternity past to eternity future, cannot be successfully argued without the concept of eternal generation. Also, the idea that the Bible teaches that headship and submission are principles of heaven belonging to the Godhead cannot be defended easily through the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:3,[97] as we have shown, without the foundational concept of eternal generation.[98] From the perspective of orthodox Trinitarianism, it is the extremely

[97] Cf. Bacchiocchi, "Divine Order of Headship and Church Order," 14, 48; Reynolds, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship," 1–46.

[98] The ability of Bruce Ware, "Knowing the Self-Revealed God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," Biblical Reasoning, July 4, 2016, https://secundumscripturas.com/2016/07/04/knowing-the-self-revealed-god-who-is-father-son-and-holy-spirit (accessed January 14, 2020), to shake off the doctrine is revealing in this regard: "Have the proponents of ERAS [Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission] denied the Nicene doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son? Response: The answer emphatically, and for all proponents of our view whom I know, is no. We have never denied this doctrine, and indeed we affirm it as declaring very important truths about the eternal relation between the Father and the Son, the eternal deity and unity of both the Father and the Son, and the eternal Fatherhood of the Father and eternal Sonship of the Son. . . . For my 30+ years of teaching, I have believed and taught with great conviction that the Father is the eternal Father of the Son, the Son the eternal Son of the Father, and that the Son, in possessing the identically same and eternal divine nature as the Father possesses, is *homoousios* with the Father. Where I have always hesitated is with biblical support put forth by others for the twin doctrines of eternal generation (Son) and eternal procession (Spirit), sometimes called the doctrine of the eternal modes of subsistence. Because of this, though I have never denied this doctrine, I have been reluctant to embrace it. I have craved biblical support and yet have not been convinced by what has been offered. John 5:26, for example, perhaps the most-frequently cited text in support of eternal generation, does not, in my judgment, teach this doctrine. . . . But then, if you ask the question, 'just how is the One who is called "Father" in fact *eternal* Father? And just how is the One who is called "Son" in fact *eternal* Son?' it is here that the doctrine of the eternal modes of subsistence offers the only real accounting or grounding available. While the Father is eternal Father, and the Son the eternal Son, the best way to account for these truths is by affirming what the church has taught, viz., that the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. So, while I remain unconvinced at present that specific texts in Scripture teach this doctrine,

philosophical concept of eternal generation that creates the space, on account of the *taxis* entailed in it, for considering any notion of ordering (hierarchical or otherwise).[99] And in Trinitarian discussions it is this divine ordering that grounds the alleged functional differentiation, even in the Godhead. The idea that the role relationships between Christ and His Father extend from eternity past to eternity future fits well in this scheme.

Two key questions, therefore, remain to be addressed in this evaluation. First, how should Adventists relate to the philosophical concept of eternal generation that grounds not only the relations of origin in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, but also the alleged subordination of the Son to the Father in the divine life itself? Second, how should Adventists approach or define what seems to be an apparent subordination of the Son to the Father in the Bible?

Adventists and Eternal Generation

Strong mentions that the principal grounds urged in support of the concept of eternal generation are the nature of sonship among men and the passage in John 5:26, where it says, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself." He points out that while the relation of the Second Person to the First in Scripture is that of filiation or sonship, the Bible does not explain the term. It is the Nicene fathers who explain what is meant by sonship and teach that it meant derivation of essence. Basically, the essential idea of paternity is taken to mean that it is a father who imparts essence—an idea that Hodge opposes: "It is a gratuitous assumption that, so far as the soul is concerned, there is even among men any communication of essence of the parent to the child. Traducianism has never been the general doctrine of the Christian Church . . . it is unreasonable to assume that such communication is essential to the relation of Father and Son in the

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I accept and embrace it as the 'church's doctrine' and the only genuine explanation that grounds the Father as eternal Father, and the Son as eternal Son."

[99] So Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 101, on the criticality of the doctrine of eternal generation to orthodox Trinitarianism, remarks that "to deny eternal generation is certainly to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, and, given that 'eternally begotten of the Father' is a confession of the Nicene Creed, is in grave danger of departing from what can meaningfully be called Christianity." Regarding certain eternal functional subordination defenders' view on eternal generation, Holmes mentions his awareness that some defenders of eternal functional subordination have denied eternal generation and adds, "I should note that there have been several verbal reports that two leading figures who have advanced this position in print, Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem, indicated in public at the 2016 ETS conference that they now accepted the doctrine of eternal generation. I cannot yet find any published statement to this effect, although I sincerely hope it is true, as all heaven rejoices when a sinner repents" (ibid., 101, n. 25).

Trinity."[100] The concept has its roots in the Platonic doctrine of the generation and nature of the logos.

Adventists have traditionally refrained from basing or defending doctrines on the basis of philosophical concepts. The Adventist doctrine of the Trinity is, therefore, somewhat unique in that regard. As one scholar points out, "what many have not realized is that the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity differs from the Seventh-day Adventist biblical doctrine of the Trinity. This includes *eternal generation* of the Son and divine impassability, which are influenced by Greek philosophy."[101] Whereas the concept of eternal generation is the orthodox Trinitarian attempt to theorize about the inner-Trinitarian relationship, Adventists' denial of the concept testifies to the fact they are only willing to state the eternity of the Trinity without elaboration. This is what is evident in Fundamental Beliefs 3, 4, and 5, where the Father, Son, and Spirit are addressed specifically, each of the persons simply introduced with the phrase "God the eternal. . ." without further elaboration. Similarly,

> The fourth Fundamental Belief, which deals directly with the Trinity has only this to say about the being of God: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons." The statement seems to deliberately attempt to state only the basic facts about God's nature—one eternal God who has been revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It does not elaborate on the nature of God's eternity; neither does it address how the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nor the nature of the unity amongst them.[102]

While Seventh-day Adventists do not support the idea of eternal generation, when they buy into the idea that in the relationship of begetting and being begotten there is either a functional subordination or a relationship of authority and submission, they indirectly adopt the Platonic philosophy entailed in the concept of eternal generation of the Son and, by implication, go beyond classical fourth-century orthodox Trinitarianism. As shown above, the fourth-century orthodox Trinitarians employed the concept of eternal generation *only* as a way of distinguishing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as First, Second, and Third Persons of the Godhead

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[100] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I: 469.
[101] Merlin Burt, "The Trinity in Seventh-day Adventist History," *Reflections 22* (April 2008): 3. Emphasis supplied.
[102] Donkor, *God in Three Persons,* 18.

respectively. They found the concept helpful because it enabled them to be able to say that the three are absolutely equal and yet distinguishable and *nothing more*.[103]

But the introduction of functional subordination or an in-built authority-submission structure into the immanent divine life not only departs from fourth-century orthodox Cappadocian Trinitarianism, but it brings into it a significant measure of inconsistency. Myatt observes that

> there is both a logical and psychological tendency for worldviews to reach as much consistency as possible. A stable worldview must have equilibrium and consistency between its ontology and its ethics. Action that is eternal and necessary to a thing is logically grounded in its nature. It does what it does because of what it is, and what it is, is a function of its being. The notion of the eternal subordination of the Son introduces an artificial disjunction between the ontology and ethic of the hierarchicalist worldview that is inherently unstable. This element of irrationalism will press for resolution, either by denying eternal subordination or denying ontological equality in the Trinity.[104]

Adventists and the Apparent Subordination of the Son to the Father in the Bible

It is generally agreed upon that during Jesus' incarnation He was subordinate to the Father. Disagreement appears when biblical texts are brought up to advance the argument that the Son's submission extends backward and forward into what is described as "eternity past" and "eternity future" respectively.[105] Ware, for example, refers to 1 Corinthians 15:28 and comments,

> There is no question that this passage indicates the eternal future submission of the Son to the Father, in keeping with

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[103] Cf. Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 103, who states, "To say that the relational distinctions that define the divine simplicity have a proper order to them—we most properly name God as the dominical baptismal formula does, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and so there is a taxis, an order, in the eternal divine life. This, I take it, is the eternal analogue to the order we found in the inseparable divine acts, but there is no hint here yet of subordination, authority, or submission."

[104] Myatt, "Compatibility of Ontological Equality," 25.

[105] It is interesting to note that because of an apparent commitment to the notion of divine simplicity and a timeless view of God, B. Bird, "John Owen and the Question," 312 n. 57, remarks, "Suffice it to say that there can be no 'past' or 'future' aspect to eternity."

his submission to the Father both in the incarnation and in eternity past. Clearly, then, 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, here and now, of what is eternally true in the relationship between the Father and the Son.[106]

Contrary to Ware's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:28 in terms of eternal subordination, classical Trinitarian orthodoxy takes a different route. It maintains divine simplicity and the absolute equality of the Father and Son by adopting what almost becomes an exegetical rule that whenever a text speaks of any sort of subordination of the Son to the Father, the text is to be read as speaking of the economy, of the relation of the Father to the incarnate Son.[107]

Theologically, a brief reflection on the contrary positions of orthodox Trinitarianism versus eternal functional subordination will reveal a difference in broader hermeneutical commitments that help situate an Adventist approach to a passage such as 1 Corinthians 15:28. On the one hand, orthodox Trinitarianism needs the Greek philosophical doctrine of divine simplicity so that when eternal generation is introduced as a way to distinguish the members of the Godhead, it can coherently stave off the charge of any subordination. Given the philosophical presupposition of divine simplicity on the part of classical Trinitarianism, 1 Corinthians 15:28 cannot be interpreted from the point of view of eternal subordination in any way. On the other hand, eternal functional subordination needs the philosophical, hermeneutical notion of hierarchy for theological purposes. And, if that notion can be held coherently without the suggestion of diminution in the Godhead, then a passage such as 1 Corinthians 15:28 can be interpreted from the point of view of eternal subordination, even when it involves submission—hence the idea of "ontological equality but functional differentiation." But eternal functional subordination faces the challenge that a hierarchy in the divine being that embodies an authority-submission structure has ontological implications that undermine the integrity of the Godhead in terms of equality.

If an Adventist interprets 1 Corinthians 15:28 to mean eternal subordination of the Son that involves submission, it would be

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[106] Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 84.
[107] Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism," 99.

difficult to see how it can be based solely on the exegesis (micro-hermeneutics) of the text. Every exegesis (micro-hermeneutics) is influenced by some broader hermeneutical principles (meso- and macro-hermeneutics). Theological coherence requires that this text, or any other such text, be exegeted in a manner that is consistent with the general Adventist understanding of the doctrine of God. For Adventists, the general understanding of the being of God held among us ought to provide the needed broader hermeneutical grounding for interpreting particular passages. In their understanding of the nature of God, Adventists do not see any biblical evidence for the idea of generation within the divine life. Biblical expressions of God the Son as "first-born" (*prōtotokos*, Col 1:15; Rom 8:29; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5) and "only begotten" (*monogenēs*, John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9 [KJV]), may seem to suggest generation.

> However, *prōtotokos* is also used in a metaphorical sense (LXX of Exod 4:22; Ps 89:27) and when applied to Christ expresses superiority and preeminence. In a similar vein, *monogenēs* does not contain the idea of begetting but rather of uniqueness and, when applied to Christ, emphasizes His unique relationship with the Father. On the other hand, Hebrews 1:5 gives no idea of physical or spiritual generation. There is, therefore, no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father.[108]

Thus, Ellen G. White's well-known statement that "in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived"[109] reflects Adventists' biblical understanding of the being of God, and provides a macro-hermeneutical ground for the being of the Son that should inform the exegesis of particular passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:28. An interpretation of the text that suggests eternal, submissive functional subordination of the Son to the Father will require a corresponding hermeneutical principle of ontological subordination. Classical orthodox Trinitarians and eternal functional subordination promoters may find refuge for such an ontological principle in the Platonic philosophical doctrine of eternal generation, but Adventists' understanding of the being of God clearly contradicts that philosophical doctrine. Recall Strong's words: "The Nicene

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[108] Fernando Canale, "Doctrine of God," in Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 125–126.

[109] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 530.

fathers, instead of leaving the mater where the Scriptures leave it, undertake to explain what is meant by sonship, and teach that it *means derivation* of essence."[110]

Therefore, it seems correct to locate the subordination of the Son, as Rodríguez does in exegeting 1 Corinthians 15:28, within the temporal economy of salvation that the incarnation represents—and not in the *in se* divine life. Furthermore, such placing of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:28 as subordination in the economy of salvation in relation to the incarnation, and *not* as a reflection of functional subordination within the Godhead, is consistent with Ellen G. White's account of "the counsel of peace" (Zech 6:13) for the fallen sons of men.[111] In this case, the Son's subordination in the counsel of peace is a deliberative event in the history of redemption.[112] As White explains, "The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order fully to carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin."[113]

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[110] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I:468. Emphasis supplied.

[111] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 63, writes, "Before the Father He [Christ] pleaded in the sinner's behalf, while the host of heaven awaited the result with an intensity of interest that words cannot express. Long continued was that mysterious communing—'the counsel of peace' (Zechariah 6:13) for the fallen sons of men. The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.'" White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 7, *1891–1892*, MS 43B, 1891, para. 4, says, "When the world was created by Jesus Christ through the power of God, Satan tempted Eve and she sinned, and she tempted Adam and he sinned. Then was the divine council from the beginning of the world hid in God. Ephesians 3:9–11. And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

[112] Compare Ellen G. White's notion of the "counsel of peace" with the idea of *pactum salutis*, such as espoused by John Owen. See, e.g., B. Bird, "John Owen and the Question," 315, who writes, "For Owen, the Son's submission to the Father begins in eternity, 'before the world was, and is manifested in the incarnation. He submitted in eternity to being sent by the Father . . . According to Owen, he submitted to this mission in the divine, that is, the 'eternal counsel for the setting apart of his Son incarnate' for the office of mediator, which was 'an act eternally established in the mind and will of God.'" Furthermore, Bird remarks, "Although settled upon in eternity, the subordination of the Son is inseparable from Christ's mission in time: 'God takes this counsel with him . . . only with respect unto his future incarnation.' In other words the subordination is intrinsic to the *office* that the Son bound himself in eternity to undertake, and then did undertake throughout his earthly ministry" (ibid., 317).

[113] Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 222.

Some Implications of Eternal Functional Subordination

Due to space limitations, our intent here is not to enter into a detailed study of the implications of the theology of eternal functional subordination, but simply to outline a few possible theological and practical implications of that theology.[114] The fundamental underlying challenge evident in our discussion and assessment of eternal functional subordination is the implication that when the Son is made to be eternally functionally subordinated to the Father, the Son appears as inferior to the Father. There are a few instances where this seems to come across more directly. So Ware, for example, sees in Philippians 2:11 and 1 Corinthians 15 that "while the Son is exalted over all creation, the Father himself is seen as *preeminent* over the Son."[115] Also, in his extensive discussion of the use of *kephale* in Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3, Grudem observes that "in all of these cases the person who is 'head' is also 'prominent' in some sense. That is because some sense of prominence accompanies the existence of leadership or authority."[116] It appears that eternal functional subordination proponents would rather talk about the Father's "preeminence," "prominence," or even "superiority," and not the Son's "inferiority."[117] Yet the impression remains.

Theological Implications

Theologically, the sense of the Son's inferiority would affect the significance of the doctrine of the incarnation. If the Son in some sense occupies a lower status in the divine life itself, then it would follow that though His incarnation may have entailed a greater degree of humiliation (because He became human), categorically, the incarnation simply continued what He has always been in eternity in relation to the Father. In that case, obedience and subordination would not have been a new experience in His incarnate state. Such

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[114] For a fuller discussion, see Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 195–246.

[115] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 27. Emphasis supplied.

[116] Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of Κεφαλη ('Head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 199.

[117] See Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity*, 210–212. Similarly, P. T. Forsyth, God the Holy Father (1897; repr., London: Independent Press, 1957), 42, observes, "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." See also Grudem, *Manhood and Womanhood*, 247.

an understanding would seem to be contrary to what is expressed in Philippians 2:7, where "like the movement from riches to poverty in 2 Corinthians 8:9, this text follows the movement from the exercise of lordship to the obedience of the servant. The hymn teaches that Jesus added servanthood to lordship as he added humanity to deity."[118]

Another doctrine that would be negatively impacted by eternal functional subordination is the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Based on such biblical passages as 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Romans 5:8, and 2 Corinthians 5:14, Adventists teach, along with other Christians, that "upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart."[119] In recent years, there have been some Christian writers who find the doctrine of substitutionary atonement immoral, arguing,

> The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse— a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement "God is love." If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.[120]

It is evident that the case of immorality is built on the fact that the Father as judge requires the sentence to be meted out on His Son as an innocent party. This charge loses its appeal, however, when it is understood, in the context of the classical Trinitarian doctrine, that the actions of any member of the Trinity involves the other members as well. It seems, however, that the charge of immorality receives some degree of credibility when, with eternal functional subordination, the Father is made out to be the preeminent one who "consecrated the Son for the very mission he planned for him, and then sent the Son

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[118] R. R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon,* New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 32.
[119] White, *The Desire of Ages*, 753.
[120] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 182–183.

into the world to fulfil what he had designed."[121]

Practical Implications

It is significant to note, as Myatt does, that as a consequence of the teaching of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, "Dr. Bruce Ware has encouraged us not to pray directly to Jesus, but rather to pray only to the Father, through Jesus, in the Spirit."[122] Although Ware mentions the example of the Lord's Prayer to say that Jesus taught Christians to pray that way, he also says that "the Christian's life of *prayer* must rightly acknowledge the roles of the Father, Son and Spirit as we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit."[123] One problem with Ware's view is that there are some instances in the Bible where prayer is addressed to the Son (Acts 7:59–60; 2 Cor 12:8–9). But even more significant is the theological implication that underlies the suggestion to not pray directly to Jesus. Prayer is a form of worship, and worship is only due to God, who is Triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Is the suggestion that we should not pray directly to Jesus supposed to carry the implication that Jesus is not fully God? The same question could be extended to the Holy Spirit, although He is not usually addressed in the debate on eternal subordination. Thus, while there is no explicit reference in the Bible about praying to the Holy Spirit, there is no biblical/theological justification for not praying to the Holy Spirit since He is equally God (Acts 5:1–5). Ware's suggestion about not praying directly to Jesus, then, ultimately represents a theological threat to the integrity of the Trinity.

Closely related to the issue of prayer is the refocusing of the ultimate "object" of worship and praise from the Son to the Father. Ware explores Philippians 2 not only to establish the preeminence of the Father, but he also remarks on the way the passage ends to indicate that the Father is the one who receives ultimate praise.

> This glorious statement of the exaltation of Christ does not end with every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus is Lord. Rather, this action is penultimate while the ultimate glory is extended to God the Father (v. 11b). God the Father receives the ultimate and supreme glory for the Father sent the Son to accomplish redemption in his humiliation, and the Father exalted the Son over all creation; in all these things, the Father stands supreme over

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[121] Ware, "Equal in Essence," 23.
[122] Myatt, "Compatibility of Ontological Equality," 23.
[123] Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 18.

all—including supreme over His very Son. All the praise of the Son ultimately and rightly redounds to the Father. It is the Father, then, who is supreme in the Godhead—in the triune relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and supreme over all the very creation over which the Son rules as its Lord.[124]

In this quote Ware makes it clear that the reason the Father receives ultimate praise and glory is because He is the source of the Son's actions. What Ware fails to account for is the reciprocal relationship between the works of the Father and Son. As Giles notes, "John never envisages a disjunction in will or work between the Father and the Son. He consistently teaches that the Son does the works of the Father (5:17, 19; 10:32, 37; 14:10–11). What Jesus does the Father does and vice versa."[125]

The application of the issues involved in eternal functional subordination to matters relating to the role of women in the church, home, and state is readily acknowledged: "Many evangelicals . . . view the issue of subordination within the Trinity as pivotal to contemporary disputes about the role of women in church, home, and state."[126] Much of this study has already been devoted to the theology of eternal functional subordination, which underlies these issues. The validity of this application depends on one's evaluation of eternal functional subordination. In the assessment of the author of the present study, eternal functional subordination is not only inconsistent with the classical Trinitarian doctrine, but its use of key biblical texts examined briefly in this study are in some cases misinterpretations, and in others inconclusive at best. Consequently, it would be misguided, for example, to settle the issue about the role of women in the church on the basis of the notion of hierarchy or subordination within the Godhead.

Conclusion

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[124] Ware, 50-51.

[125] Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 122.

[126] Jowers and House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism*, xi. In an obvious reference to these same matters, Ware, writes, "Because the structure of authority and obedience is not only established by God but is, even more, possessed in God's own inner trinitarian life, as the Father establishes His will and the Son joyfully obeys, therefore we should not despise but should embrace proper lines of authority and obedience. In the home, believing community, and society, rightful lines of authority are good, wise, and beautiful reflections of the reality that is God Himself" (Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father?" in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, 251).

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity was a bold attempt by Christians to defend the deity of Jesus Christ during the early centuries of the church's existence. It is a formulation that tried to make some rational and conceptual sense of a reality the formulators knew to be true on the basis of Scripture—namely, that Jesus Christ is just as truly God as God the Father—while still maintaining that there is only one God. It is a fact of history that in attempting to conceptualize this reality, the formulators resorted to the tools readily available to them—that is, Greek philosophy. As it turned out, the form of the doctrine "God in three Persons" was true to the biblical evidence, but the accompanying explanations embodied some Greek philosophical concepts that were not addressed in Scripture and that sometimes are altogether inconsistent with the biblical worldview. Among these are concepts such as divine simplicity, eternal generation, and the timelessness of God.

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity has been the subject of much ongoing discussion among Evangelicals in recent years because of ideas advanced by eternal functional subordination defenders to the effect that although Jesus Christ is fully God, He has eternally occupied a functionally subordinate position within the Godhead. While opponents of eternal functional subordination argue that it is a manipulation of the doctrine of the Trinity to bolster their complementarian views on gender relations, eternal functional subordination defenders counterargue that their views have always been in the mainstream of historic Christian thought. Our review shows that eternal functional subordination promoters play on the classical Trinitarian concept of taxis in the Trinity and go beyond orthodox Trinitarianism by introducing the notion of an authority-submission structure into the divine life, and thus are outside of the orthodox (traditional) understanding of the Trinity. After exploring what we consider to be the two main arguments employed by eternal functional subordination supporters (arguments from taxis and the Father-Son relation), our view is that the new development seems to run counter to classical fourth-century Trinitarian conclusions.

The model of the Trinity presented by eternal functional subordination cannot be unequivocally defended from the Bible. This study has shown how key biblical passages used by Ware, for example, may be interpreted differently. To the extent that eternal functional subordination thrives on the classical concept of divine taxis (ordering) derived from the Platonic doctrine of eternal generation, the latter doctrine is read into the biblical text. Thus an

Adventist embracing eternal functional subordination faces two difficult theological challenges: first is the challenge of providing interpretation to biblical texts different than, and beyond, what eternal functional subordination offers; and second, the problem of being consistent with Ellen G. White's view that "in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, *underived*."[127] This is primarily because the concept of eternal generation entails the idea of derivation. Moreover, Adventists have traditionally refrained from advancing theological ideas on the basis of philosophy. This is already evident in the formulation of the church's doctrine of God in its Fundamental Beliefs, and there does not seem to be any reasonable justification for pursuing a different course.

Finally, the few theological and practical implications of eternal functional subordination that we mentioned may be used hermeneutically to assess its correctness. It is often the case that a theory's truthfulness may be judged by the viability of its results. Questions that eternal functional subordination raises concerning the spiritual dimension of the Christian experience, with particular reference to prayer and worship, demonstrate that the issues at stake in the eternal functional subordination debate are not mere abstract and theological quibbling about the Trinity. A number of biblical teachings and practices are potentially impacted, underlying the truth that the doctrine of God is the cornerstone doctrine for all Christian doctrines and practices. A mistake here infects all. For now, the implications of eternal functional subordination for prayer and worship raise such significant concerns that they may be the best adjudicators of its acceptability.

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[127] White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530. There are other statements by Ellen G. White which point in the same direction. She states: "Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory" (Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973], 46). She similarly states: "Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven" (ibid.). She also affirmed that "He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent" (ibid.; see also White, *Evangelism* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946], 615).

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