

The Deception

of Eve

and the

Ontology of Women



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Editor's Reflections



2010 marks about forty years of my wife's and my affiliation with the Evangelical Theological Society. The reason I am not exactly certain when we affiliated is because I remember, while I was still a college student at Rutgers and Aída at Douglass, sometime in the 1960s, enlisting in the Theological Students Fellowship, which was something

like an IVCF/ETS farm club aimed at nurturing college students and seminarians in a high and scholarly view of the Bible.

Seminary followed and, after our graduation, the ETS records us both joining in 1973. By 1971, Aída had already begun work on what was to become "Eve at Ephesus," which she was then invited to present at the ETS's eastern regional/Westminster Seminary conference on the question of women in ministry in 1974, her seminal article of the same name being published in JETS in its Fall, 1974 (vol. 17, no. 4) issue. This was, if I remember correctly, the first of her series of presentations for the ETS and other scholarly organizations which a decade later would flower into her well-received 1985 book *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry*, which appeared first in the academic series R.K. Harrison edited for Thomas Nelson, afterwards became available for many years from Hendrickson, and is now with Baker. One might say that her work on women's ordination was nurtured in the ETS.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, we were in Kentucky, where Aída was working on her Ph.D. in New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and chairing the southeast regional section of the ETS (1981-82), the first woman to do so, if I remember correctly. By the mid-1980s, we were teaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Here we brought back to life the ETS's northeastern region, which had died out over a decade before. Aída served for two years as the reorganizing chairperson and I chaired this section for the next two years. Thus, from our earliest scholarly years, we have been active, loyal, and enthusiastic members of the ETS. As staunch biblical inerrantists, we embraced the ETS as our scholarly community and, over four decades later, that commitment has not changed.

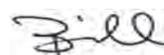
Back in those early days for us, at the Westminster conference, the chairperson announced to the gathering what I think today captures the essence of the ETS. He explained that at Westminster the tried and true questions are explored but, since the ETS was also involved, that exploration would be done in a refreshing and innovative way. What a perfect explanation of the ETS: staunchly committed to inerrancy but bringing it as a hermeneutic to an expanded range of biblical, theological, philosophical, archaeological, practical topics, both traditional and cutting edge. As I reflect on the published articles I myself have authored for JETS and the presentations I have made to the ETS's regional and national meetings, I can see he was right. I have had the opportunity to present on a variety of topics, ranging, for example, from Paul's listing of his sufferings as a teaching tool; Jesus' sacrifice as a global hermeneutic; various stylistic

analyses of Jesus' own prayers in comparison with his model prayer and also with the Greek demotic prayers; several presentations on Rastafarian views of Jesus; an examination of literacy education as a tool for ministry; a few papers on Athanasius' perspective on the Trinity; a discussion of the models of Christian marriage; artificial intelligence, robots and the imago Dei; and on and on to this year's topic of the metaverse and cyber-adultery. Where else could I bring such a range of interests and find colleagues with a similar high view of Scripture to mine exploring equally fascinating and informative traditional and cutting edge issues? The ETS is unique. I think it is appropriate to say, given all the investment my wife and I have made in this organization over these many years, that we love the ETS, as we love our own church, our school, and our friends in the faith. The ETS is our thought community.

Christians for Biblical Equality, which we have supported since its inception, commands our love with an equal fervor. Like the ETS, it is committed to a high view of Scripture. In fact, its membership counts among itself many of the same people who have led the ETS over the years. Its vision is similar to the ETS's: To empower the church across the world to serve the Lord, honor the Bible, and bring in the rule of God. CBE explicitly focuses on empowering 100% of the church—both women and men—to serve God, and has expanded that vision to empowering a multi-cultural, multi-national church. The ETS and CBE are not in competition—far from it. They are supplementary organizations working together to serve Jesus Christ and galvanize Christians to spread the good news of what Jesus alone has done for us—died in our place to reconcile us with God.

This autumn marks the end of the 6th year and beginning of the 7th year of my service as editor of CBE's academic voice and journal, *Priscilla Papers*. With over 100 denominations in our global membership, CBE is an international organization with a diversity in unity that mirrors the ETS's, both of our organizations imaging the unity and diversity in the Trinity. My vision for my role in CBE is similar to my vision for my contribution to the ETS: to help educate, edify, and energize into mission the full church called out, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As I always point out to my students at GCTS's Boston campus and my parishioners at the church I helped plant and continue to pastor, the gates of hell are stationary. One Christian charging them can do some damage, but ultimately bounces off, given our limits of life-span, influence, and energy. But the church united is an irresistible battering ram that shatters those gates and sets its prisoners free. When organizations like CBE and the ETS work together, hell's gates tremble, for they cannot stand.

Blessings,



William David Spencer

First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul’s Use of Creation Narratives

JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS

First Timothy 2:11–15, and especially verse 12, has long been a focal point in modern discussions of the ordination of women. Traditional reservations about the ordination of women as pastors and elders have generally made two assumptions in the interpretation of this passage: (1) that the meaning of *authentēin* in verse 12 is clearly known and should be translated simply as “have authority,” and (2) that the appeal to the creation narrative naming Adam and Eve in verses 13 and 14 implies a universal, “transcultural” principle that prohibits the exercise of ecclesiastical authority by women over men in all (or some) circumstances.

The purpose of this article is to argue that both of these assumptions are faulty, and that 1 Timothy 2:11–15, rightly understood lexically and contextually, does not teach any universal prohibition of the ordination of women as pastors or elders. The primary focus of this discussion will be the second assumption, regarding the appeal to the Genesis creation account of Adam and Eve.¹ It will be argued that Paul’s *contextual* and *church-specific* appeal to creation texts makes it not only possible, but preferable to see the limitation on women’s teaching roles in 1 Timothy 2 as a *circumstantial* and not universal prohibition. Before proceeding with this analysis, however, a few observations will be made regarding the meaning of *authentēin* in verse 12.

Authentēin: “have authority” or “domineer”?

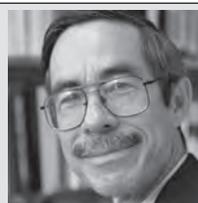
It is well known that *authentēin* in verse 12, a *hapax legomenon*² in the New Testament, has been the focus of considerable attention among lexicographers and biblical scholars in recent decades. Those who favor “traditional” understandings of male ecclesiastical leadership have tended to translate this word in the neutral sense of “have authority” or “exercise authority,” as, for example, George Knight in a widely cited article of 1984.³ In 1988, Leland Wilshire, examining 329 occurrences of this word and its cognate *authentēs*, showed that, prior to and contemporary with the first century, *authentēin* often had negative overtones such as “domineer” or even “murder” or “perpetrate a crime”; only during the later patristic period did the meaning “to exercise authority” come to predominate.⁴

In a 2004 study, Linda Belleville⁵ carefully examined the five occurrences of *authentēin* prior to or contemporary with Paul and rendered these texts as follows: (1) the *Scholia* (fifth to first century B.C.) to Aeschylus’s tragedy *Eumenides*: “commit acts of violence”; (2) Aristonicus (first century B.C.), “the *author*” (of a message); (3) a letter of Tryphon (first century B.C.), “I *had my way* with him” (*contra* Knight); (4) Philodemus (first century B.C.), “*powerful lords*”; (5) the poet Dorotheus (first and second centuries A.D.) in an astrological

text, “Saturn . . . *dominates* Mercury.” It is clear, especially in instances 1, 3, 4, and 5 above, that a neutral meaning such as “have authority” is not in view.

Belleville also notes, significantly, that a variety of *pre-modern* versions of the Bible⁶ translate this word not simply as “have authority” or “exercise authority,” but with some negative sense, e.g., the Old Latin (second to fourth centuries A.D.): “I permit not a woman to teach, neither to *dominate* (*dominari*) a man”; the Vulgate (fourth to fifth centuries A.D.), “neither to *domineer* over a man”; the Geneva Bible (1560 ed.), “neither to *usurpe* authority over a man”; the Bishops Bible (1589), “neither to *usurpe* authority over a man”; and the King James Bible (1611), “nor *usurp* authority over a man.” In none of these cases can the translators be suspected of having a modern, “feminist” bias in translating *authentēin* with a negative sense of “domineer” or “usurp authority.” These instances show that the “traditional” translation of *authentēin* as “exercise authority” is neither uniform nor self-evident in the history of interpretation; if anything, it could be argued that the burden of proof is on the (now) “traditional” view to justify its translation choice.

It should also be observed that Paul, had he the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical leadership and authority in mind, had at his disposal a number of words that could have served this sense, notably *proistēmi*. This word, occurring eight times in the New Testament and used six times by Paul in reference to church leaders (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12; Rom. 12:8), can have the senses of “manage, conduct, rule, direct, be concerned about,” and connotes the “normal” and “expected” type of leadership that should be exhibited by those selected to lead. The fact that a highly unusual and ambiguous word is chosen in 2:12 would be consistent with an unusual set of circumstances in the context to which the text is addressed. It will be argued below that these circumstances, as indicated by clear references in the Pastoral Epistles themselves, involve women



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who are being deceived by false teachers and, as such, are not suitable for the exercise of teaching or ruling authority in Ephesus.

Paul's use of the creation narratives

The major focus of this article is an examination of Paul's appeal to the Genesis creation narratives, with a view to showing that, in this (1 Tim. 2:11–15) and other passages, the apostle refers to these texts with the local circumstances and the problems of specific churches in view. It is here argued that previous discussions of this passage have not given adequate recognition to the *context-specific* way in which Paul applies the creation texts.

When writing to the church in Ephesus, the apostle states that women are not to teach or have (NIV)/usurp (KJV) authority over men because "Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (vv. 13–14). Paul appeals to the Genesis narratives, describing the human situation both prior to the fall and immediately subsequent to it (Gen. 2:18–25, 3:1–7). It has been argued that, since verse 13, referring to the chronological priority of Adam over Eve in creation, is both a *creation* narrative and *before the fall*, the conclusions drawn from it by the apostle are not simply reflective of cultural circumstances or the sinful human condition, but are normative for all times and places and, consequently, bar the ordination of women to certain offices in all circumstances. Paul's reasoning appeals to a basic order of creation and not merely to a limited cultural context or to the practices of particular churches. For those who accept the authority of canonical Scripture and who take Adam and Eve to be historical individuals, such considerations would appear to be weighty and even insuperable objections to the ordination of women as senior pastors or elders. Even if Adam and Eve were considered not to be historical individuals, but rather archetypal representatives of the first human beings, it could still be argued that the implications that Paul draws from these accounts are of transcultural validity precisely because they are drawn from *prelapsarian creation* texts.

The foregoing argument, however, fails to take into account the way in which the apostle Paul draws implications from creation texts in ways that are specifically related to his pastoral and theological concerns for specific churches and congregations. It should be observed that, in other church contexts, the apostle derives different applications from these same creation texts. For example, in writing to the church in Rome, Adam, not Eve, is singled out as the representative figure who brought guilt and death upon the entire human race (Rom. 5:12–21); Eve is not so much as mentioned. Adam is singled out as the representative head of the fallen human race, just as Christ is presented as the second Adam, the "one who was to come" (v. 14). The focus on Adam is consistent with Paul's purpose in setting forth his gospel as a gospel for the entire human race, for Jew and Gentile alike. As he had previously

stated in 3:9, "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin"; the righteous standards of the law hold "the whole world accountable to God" (3:19, emphasis added). Hence, there is a universal need for the gospel. Later, in the epistle to the Romans, he deals with matters such as eating meat and observing special days (14:5–23) that are of internal concern to a congregation of both Jewish and Gentile converts, but, in the opening chapters (1–3), he is especially concerned with the "global" and universal relevance of the gospel, and consequently reads Genesis 3 in terms of Adam's disobedience that led to condemnation for *all* people (5:18).

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul makes different applications of the creation narratives that are specifically related to the problems of this local assembly. In giving directives about the proper conduct of women in public worship (1 Cor. 11:2–16), Paul, while pointing to the creational grounding (v. 8, "woman [came] from man"; cf. Gen. 2:21–23), qualifies this in the direction of the mutual dependence of men and women (vv. 11–12). Evidently, the apostle expects that the women in Corinth will continue to pray and prophesy in the assembly (11:5), but should do so in an orderly and respectful way that honors the priority of creation—however the latter is to be understood.⁷

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle addresses the danger of being deceived by false teachers. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, he writes that "I am afraid that just as *Eve* was deceived by the serpent's cunning [Gen. 3:1–6], your minds might be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" by the "super apostles" who are preaching a "different Jesus" (vv. 4–5, emphasis added). The point to be noticed is that Paul draws a parallel here between the deception of Eve and the danger of the entire *Corinthian congregation* (or its [male] leaders) being deceived by false teachers. In this text, the figure of Eve is clearly taken to apply to the entire congregation and not specifically to the women within it, as though they, merely by virtue of their gender, were uniquely susceptible to such deception. This is to be contrasted with the reference to the deception of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:12, when Paul is writing to a church in Ephesus in which he is concerned that some of the younger widows have already "turned away to follow Satan" (1 Tim. 5:15), and is aware of "weak-willed women" in Ephesus who are burdened by sins and have not learned the truth, their homes being infiltrated by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6–7).

This comparison of 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:12 shows that Paul does not have a "one size fits all" hermeneutic when reading and applying the Genesis narratives of creation and fall: "Eve" can be seen as a figure of *women* in Ephesus or as a figure for *an entire church* in Corinth—because the local circumstances differ, though false teaching is a danger in both settings. Applications are drawn from Genesis in a church-specific and contextually sensitive way.

Another example of Paul's contextually sensitive application of creation texts may be seen in the different ways controversies concerning

The fact that a highly unusual and ambiguous word is chosen in 2:12 would be consistent with an unusual set of circumstances in the context to which the text is addressed.

food are addressed when writing to the congregations in Ephesus and Rome. In 1 Timothy 4:1–5, written to Ephesus, Paul’s response to false teachers who are forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from certain foods is that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (v. 4). The principle being invoked is clearly reflective of the teaching found in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The institution of marriage and all types of food—“kosher” or “non-kosher,” meat or vegetables, sacrificed to a pagan idol or not—are, intrinsically in and of themselves “clean,” reflecting the goodness of God’s creation itself. Paul strongly asserts this principle as over against the false teachers.

In writing to the Roman congregation, however, on similar issues of permissible foods and observance of special days (Rom. 14), Paul takes a somewhat different pastoral approach because of different circumstances. As with the Ephesian congregation, the apostle alludes to the creational principle of the goodness of all food (14:4, “nothing is unclean in itself;” cf. Gen. 1:31), but in the Roman church there are other dynamics to be considered: the practices and scruples of Jewish and Gentile converts whose different religious and cultural backgrounds are creating problems of conscience and troubling the unity of the church. While in principle the Gentile believers in Rome could insist on their “creational right” to eat meat, Paul urges them to forbear in Christian love out of regard for the consciences of their Jewish brethren. In this circumstance, Paul urges that a central redemptive concern for the unity of the church and respect for Christian conscience in secondary matters take precedence over any individual’s “creation right” to eat meat. While Paul is not denying the validity of the creational goodness of meat—as previously noted, in Romans 14:4 he had already stated that “no food is unclean in itself”—this principle is not applied to the life of the churches without regard to the particular circumstances of the congregation in question. In Ephesus, Paul can be more insistent on the “creational right” to eat all foods because the denial of this right is coming from false teachers who are in danger of abandoning the faith and following deceiving spirits (1 Tim. 4:1). Here, the issue of food is implicated with the preservation of the faith itself. In Rome, on the other hand, there is no indication in Romans 14 that either party—Jew or Gentile—is in danger of abandoning the faith, being deceived by demons, or drifting in the direction of heretical doctrine.

Further, the foregoing discussion of food controversies in two churches addressed by Paul suggests that, just as in one circumstance a creational right to eat (1 Tim. 4) does not lead to an unqualified permission to eat in another instance (Rom. 14), so it could also be the case that a creationally endorsed prohibition (1 Tim. 2:12–13) of women exercising ecclesiastical authority does not imply prohibition under different circumstances. In both cases, it is here being argued, Paul applies creation texts in a contextually sensitive manner and in a way that is concerned to preserve the apostle’s core values: sound doctrine and the preservation of the apostolic deposit of faith, the unity of the churches, and harmony and good order in the Christian family.

On this reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Paul is indeed prohibiting women in Ephesus from exercising ecclesiastical authority and would not support their “ordination,” the reason being that false teachers pose a grave threat in Ephesus and women are being misled by false teachers and straying after Satan. Paul sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis 3 and the deception of women in Ephesus, just as he sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis and the deception of the *congregation* in Corinth. In different circumstances, where women are sound in the faith and their lives consistent with the apostolic core values of congregational unity and the harmony and good order of the family, the way would be open for their exercise of ecclesiastical leadership. The general, “transcultural” lesson that should be drawn, then, from the Genesis texts, in light of their contextually differentiated uses in 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11, would be that *whenever* and *wherever* either *women or men* are being misled by false teachers, they should not be ordained as church leaders; soundness in the faith is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for service as an elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1–13).

The question of homosexual practices

At this point, it seems appropriate to consider a possible objection to the foregoing line of argument. Those holding a “traditional” understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 raise the concern that the same logic that would argue that creationally grounded prohibitions concerning women in the church do not necessarily apply in all contexts could be extended to argue that biblical prohibitions against homosexual practices grounded in creation are not necessarily forbidden in all circumstances either. In short, do arguments for women’s ordination inevitably lead to justifications for homosexuality? The question is a serious one and deserves a careful answer, for trends in some mainline American churches give plausibility to such concerns.

The response to this concern, however, is to observe that, in the course of redemptive history and in the breadth of the biblical canon, there is *uniformity* in the biblical rejection of homosexual practices while there is *diversity* in the types of public leadership roles played by women in the Old and New Covenant communities.⁸ In the case of homosexual practices, there is one consistent position reflected throughout the Scriptures in both testaments; the biblical assessment of homosexuality is uniformly negative.⁹ There are no historical or cultural contexts mentioned in Scripture in which homosexuality is portrayed in a positive light. The creational distinctions between male and female (Gen. 1:27) which are foundational for the prohibitions against homosexuality have the same implications for all cultural contexts.

In the case of women’s leadership roles, however, there is significant diversity within the canon itself. In 1 Timothy 2, women’s roles are restricted, it is here argued, in light of the local problems of women being misled by false teachers and, plausibly, teaching men in a *domineering* fashion.¹⁰ Elsewhere, one can recall the prominent leadership roles exercised by Deborah the prophet (Judg. 4), Huldah the prophet (2 Kgs. 22), Miriam the sister of Moses (Exod. 15:20–21), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), the four

daughters of Philip who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) to be reminded of the ways that women have been used by God at different times in biblical history; there is no hint in the canonical texts that the activities of these women were viewed in a negative light. This diversity—the fact that women’s authoritative leadership is sometimes prohibited (1 Tim. 2) and sometimes permitted (Deborah, Judg. 4)—indicates that *circumstantial* factors are in play, not merely “transcultural, creational” norms that are applied without regard to local problems.

Deborah’s leadership

The case of Deborah is especially relevant to this discussion of Paul’s use of creation texts in relation to leadership roles for women in the covenant community. The biblical text states that Deborah was

judging Israel at that time (Judg. 4:4). She “held court” under “the palm of Deborah” in the hill country of Ephraim and the Israelites “came to her to have their disputes decided” (Judg. 4:5); the biblical author clearly understands her to be exercising judicial authority.¹¹ The verb used to indicate Deborah’s activity (*shaphat*) is the same verb used to describe the judicial activity of Moses (Exod. 18:13) and Samuel (1 Sam. 17:6). The judges who were to be appointed in the various tribes and towns according to the law of Moses (Deut. 16:18–20) were to administer justice impartially and were to be respected as serving the “Lord your God” (Deut. 17:12) and representing his authority. As Robin Davis has pointed out in a recent study, the parallels between Moses and Deborah are numerous and striking: both Moses and Deborah functioned as judges (Exod. 18:13, Judg. 4:4); both sat for judgment, and the people came to them (Exod. 18:13, Judg. 4:5); both proclaimed the word of the Lord (Exod. 7:16, Judg. 4:6); both were prophets (Deut. 18:15, Judg. 4:4); both pronounced blessings (Exod. 39:43, Judg. 5:24); both pronounced curses in the name of the Lord (Deut. 27:15, Judg. 5:23); both had military generals (Joshua, Barak); both gave instructions to the people as to how the Lord would defeat the enemies (Exod. 14:14, Judg. 4:6); in both cases, the Lord caused the enemy in chariots to panic and flee (Exod. 14:24, Judg. 4:15); God’s victory is told first in prose (Exod. 14, Judg. 4), then in poetry (Exod. 15, Judg. 5); Moses (and Miriam, Exod. 15:1) and Deborah (and Barak, Judg. 5:1) led the people in worshipping God after their great deliverance.¹² In Judges, Deborah appears as a “second Moses” figure whose authority derives from the God of Sinai.

The case of Deborah poses a special dilemma for the “traditional” reading of 1 Timothy 2:12: If it is true that Paul’s use of creation texts is intended to prohibit all women in all circumstances from exercising authority over men in the covenant community, then the apostle is *forbidding* what God has in this instance *permitted*—and this would amount to a contradiction within the canon itself.

Various ways of evading this problem are not convincing. Was Deborah usurping authority rather than exercising it legitimately? There is no indication in the book of Judges, the Old Testament as a whole, or the New Testament that God disapproved of Deborah’s activities; on the contrary, Deborah is to be understood in light of

the programmatic statement in Judges 2:16 that God, in his mercy, “raised up judges who saved them”; her leadership is a notable example of exactly such divinely empowered activity.

Was Deborah not really “ruling” or “judging” Israel at this time, but merely dealing with people privately when they came to her, as one scholar has suggested?¹³ This argument is unconvincing for three reasons: (1) it overlooks the usage of the verb *shaphat*, which is also used to describe the activities of Moses (Exod. 18) and Samuel (1 Sam. 17:6),

both of whom engaged in *public* and *authoritative* judging; (2) it overlooks the plain reference to Deborah’s place of judgment,¹⁴ the *palm tree of Deborah*, a public location, not a private one, such as a home; and (3) it overlooks the plain statement of the text that Deborah was judging *Israel*, a reference to the nation

as a whole, not just to various individuals. Deborah’s leadership, like that of the other judges, was widely recognized and transcended tribal boundaries.

Was Deborah only God’s “second best” because the men of Israel would not lead?¹⁵ This view overlooks the explicit texts such as Judges 5:2 (“When the princes in Israel *take the lead* . . . Praise the Lord!”) and 5:9 (“My heart is with Israel’s princes, with the *willing* volunteers among the people”) where the leaders of Israel are commended, not rebuked, for answering God’s call through Deborah.

Nor is it the case that the Deborah texts can be discounted by suggesting that she exercised only “civil” and not “spiritual” authority. This notion of the separation of civil and religious authority makes no sense in the theocratic life of Israel at this time. Such a reading imports into the text modern notions of “separation of church and state” that are foreign to it. Deborah issues commands to Barak in the name of the Lord (Judg. 4:6, “The Lord, the God of Israel commands you”); the kings of Israel were to rule on the basis of the law of Moses (cf. Deut. 17:18, “he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law [law of Moses]”), not according to some secular or merely “civil” law.¹⁶

The implication of the foregoing observations is that Deborah should be seen as a positive and not negative example of a woman exercising authority in the covenant community. Deborah may be unusual and somewhat exceptional in biblical history, but she is a positive example notwithstanding. Since God himself raised up Deborah as a judge, and that which God chooses to do can not be *intrinsically wrong*, it cannot be intrinsically wrong for a woman to exercise authority over a man in ecclesiastical contexts.

The case of Deborah, seen as a positive example, is then consistent with a recognition of the *circumstantial* nature of the prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:12; not all women are prohibited by God from exercising authority over men at all times in the church. The reading here presented then removes the appearance of a “contradiction within the canon” and provides hermeneutical space for the recognition of other “Deborahs” who may be called by God to lead from time to time.¹⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, the following translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is proposed: “I do not permit a woman to teach in a way that domineers over men.” This rendering of the verse is consistent with the following considerations: (1) the unusual—in fact, singular—usage of *authentēin* in the New Testament, suggestive of unusual circumstances, rather than Paul’s more usual word *proistēmi* for church leadership; (2) the negative connotations for *authentēin* found in four of the five uses of the word in texts prior to or contemporary with Paul; (3) the translations of “domineer” or “usurp authority” found in earlier versions of the Bible, such as the Old Latin, Vulgate, Geneva, Bishops, and King James; (4) the grammatical and syntactical observation that, in the New Testament, pairs of nouns or noun substitutes (e.g., infinitives) connected by a “neither . . . nor” (*de . . . oude*) construction can define a progression of related ideas or define a related purpose or goal;¹⁸ (5) the church-specific way in which Paul cites and applies creation texts, as seen in the comparisons of 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11:3 in matters of deception by false teachers, and 1 Timothy 4:4 and Romans 14 in the matter of permissible foods; and (6) the positive example of Deborah (Judg. 4, 5) in canonical history as a woman raised up by God to exercise leadership and authority—not just over a local assembly, but over the covenant *nation*.

It is also argued that the proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 is consistent with and supportive of what might be termed Paul’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” in the Pastoral Epistles and his ministry generally: (1) the preservation of sound doctrine and the apostolic faith, (2) the unity and good order of the churches, and (3) the solidarity and harmony of Christian families. It is evident that, in the Pastorals, the apostle is concerned with problems that are arising on all three fronts. The problem of false teaching is frequently mentioned (1 Tim. 1:4–7; 4:1–3, 7; 5:15; 6:3–5; 2 Tim. 2:16–18, 25–26; 3:8–9; 4:3–4; Tit. 1:10–11; 3:9–11). Insubordinate men and empty talkers are disturbing the church (Tit. 1:10). In terms of family life, there are problems with women being deceived by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6); some of the younger widows have already strayed after Satan (1 Tim. 5:15); and some false teachers are even upsetting whole families (Tit. 1:11).

In the face of these problems in the community at Ephesus, Paul stresses the importance of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3, 10; 4:6, 16; 2 Tim. 1:14; 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1), good order in the church (1 Tim. 3:15; cf. 1 Cor. 14:40, “decently and in order”), and good order in the family (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12; 5:14; Tit. 1:6). As Paul contemplates the end of his own life’s work and the transition to the second generation of Christian leadership, he is naturally concerned to “tighten up the ship” in its faith and order in order that the churches might weather the storms that are to come in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1; cf. 4:3–4).

In light of these local problems, where women are being misled by false teachers and where some women may be teaching in a domineering, abrasive, or alienating fashion that creates conflict and division in the assembly and in marriages, the apostle does not

permit such women to be placed in positions of leadership in the church. On the other hand, in other circumstances, where gifted women are sound in the faith and have a way of teaching that is not dividing the assembly or marriage relationships in the church—where the apostle’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” are satisfied—then the way would be clear to recognize the calling of such gifted women and set them apart for leadership in the church.

Arguably, Deborah during the period of the judges could be viewed as an example of such a gifted and called woman whose ministry was consistent with the “fundamental concerns for faith and order”: raised up by the Spirit of God; administering the law of Moses with justice, impartiality, and discernment; recognized and accepted by the community, and with no indications in the biblical text that her ministry created domestic difficulties with her husband, Lappidoth. Churches today would be well advised to reconsider the “traditional” readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 that bar women from certain leadership roles in the church. Traditional readings of the text may be in danger, however unintentionally, of quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), of stifling the service of gifted women, and of depriving the churches of able leadership at a time in redemptive history (Acts 2:17) when the people of God should be expecting more, not fewer, “Deborahs.”

Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, Paul’s authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is assumed.
2. A word occurring only once.
3. George Knight III, “Authenteo in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 145.
4. Leland Wilshire, “The TLG Computer and Further References to Authenteo in 1 Tim. 2:12,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1988): 120–34. The scholarly literature on this passage is comprehensively surveyed in the article by Craig L. Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchalist nor Egalitarian,” in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Paul and His Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 312–24. See also the lexical analysis of Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: Authenteo in 1 Tim. 2:12,” in Kostenberger, Schreiner, and Baldwin, eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 79–80. The favoring of a neutral meaning, such as “have authority,” by Greek church fathers in the fourth and later centuries could be seen as reflective of the church’s changed cultural context subsequent to the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313, permitting Christian worship to move from the private, house-church setting to more public spaces—public spaces in which, in Greek culture, public leadership roles for women were not generally favored. Byzantine social customs favored the veiling and semi-cloistering of women and a narrowing of social roles; men and women in general led segregated lives. Vern L. Bullough, *The Subordinate Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 123, 126; Julia O’Faolin and Lauro Martines, eds., *Not in God’s Image* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), 74.
5. Linda Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 205–23, at 214–17.
6. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 209–10.
7. For an extensive review of the recent scholarly literature discussing this difficult passage (1 Cor. 11:2–16), see Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchalist nor Egalitarian,” 295–302.
8. See the insightful discussions of William J. Webb, *Slaves,*

Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), esp. 135–84 on the interplay between creation, new creation, and cultural elements as they relate to the biblical statements on women and homosexual practices. Webb’s nuanced approach is consistent with the argument of this article, but he does not appear to develop my “context-specific use of creation texts” approach in a focused way.

9. For a comprehensive examination of the biblical texts on homosexuality and issues of interpretation, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001).

10. Traditional interpreters of 1 Tim. 2:13 (“Adam was formed first, then Eve”) see in this an appeal to the order of creation and the principle of primogeniture, or the firstborn being worthy of greater honor. But it should be noted that Paul can also apply the primogeniture principle in context-specific ways. For example, in Rom. 3:1–2 and 9:4–5, he reminds his Gentile readers of the spiritual privileges (law, covenants, temple worship, etc.) of Israel; Israel is God’s “firstborn” in the order of redemptive history. Gentiles should not boast over the branches because “you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (11:18), and yet the thrust of the book of Romans as a whole is to argue for the spiritual equality of both Gentiles and Jews before God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:28–30, cf. Gal. 3:28). The “Adam was formed first” reference in 1 Tim. 2:13 can plausibly be understood as a context-specific response and corrective to a situation in which women were not acting respectfully toward men in the Ephesus congregation and are being rebuked for their (domineering) behavior.

11. Robert Boling comments on this text: “*Judging*. That is, functioning with reference to a recognized office. . . . *Deborah’s Palm*. That she had a tree named after her suggests a setting in which she was responsible for Yahwist oracular inquiry . . . the judgment. Heb. *ham-mishpat*; here it stands for her decision in response to a particular inquiry.” *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 95.

12. Robin E. Davis, “Historical and Literary Parallels Between the Moses and Deborah Narratives,” unpublished paper, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Jan. 2006, 1–7. Davis cites other parallels in addition to those mentioned above.

13. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Press, 2004), 133.

14. Barnabas Lindars comments, “Deborah had her seat below this

tree in the sense that she exercised her function as judge here.” *Judges 1–5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 183; J. Alberto Soggins, *Judges: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1981), 64: “‘Used to sit’: where she exercised her office as a judge . . . in the forensic sense of this term.”

15. Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 134.

16. With reference to Deborah, Thomas Schreiner (“The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006], 211) recognizes her prominent leadership role, but then points, correctly, to the distinction in the New Testament between the roles of prophets (as in Corinth) and elders: The prophets ostensibly did not have the same type of authority by way of continuing office as did the elders in matters of teaching. This distinction, even if correct, misses the main point with respect to Deborah: She had both “charismatic” authority as a prophet and a recognized office as a judge. The two aspects were combined in her case, demonstrating that God can approve the exercise of authority under both aspects by a duly called and gifted woman.

17. Acts 2:17, “In the last days . . . your sons and daughters shall prophesy,” indicates that, in the New Testament age, the age of the outpouring of the Spirit, the church should be expecting more Deborahs, not fewer! What may have been exceptional in the Old Covenant can become usual in the New, fulfilling Moses’ hope that, at some time in the future, “all the Lord’s people” would be prophets (Num. 11:29).

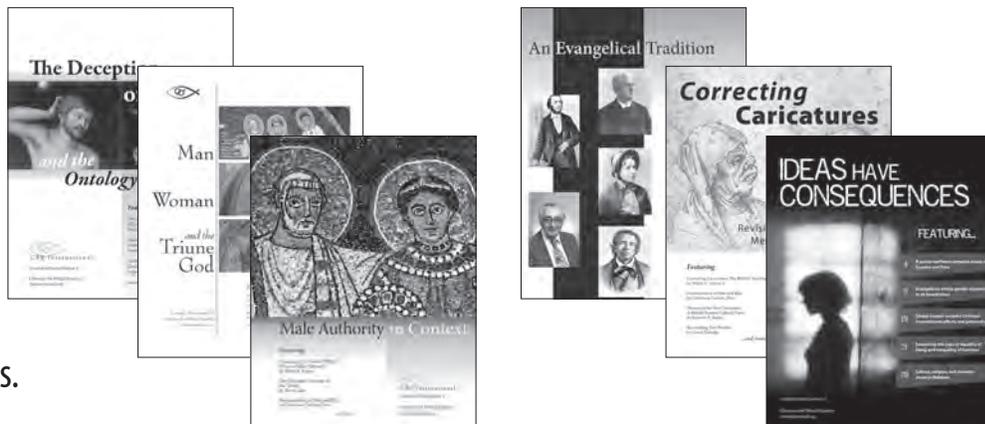
18. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 218, gives as examples Matt. 6:20, “where thieves neither break in nor steal” (i.e., break in with a view to steal); Acts 17:24, God “neither dwells in temples made with human hands nor is served by human hands” (i.e., dwells in human temples with a view to being served by human hands). The translation proposed here is similar to Belleville’s renderings: “I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man,” or, “I do not permit a woman to teach a man in a dominating way,” 219.

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Incarnation, Trinity, and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS

In my earlier article¹ on 1 Timothy 2:12 and the ordination of women, I argued that Paul's *contextual* and *church-specific* reading and application of the creation texts indicates that the limitations on women's teaching roles in the church are circumstantial rather than universal prohibitions. Now, I wish to address arguments in a specifically Anglican² context that were not addressed in the first article, namely, arguments based on the incarnation and the Father/Son relationship within the Trinity that are thought to bar the ordination of women as priests and bishops. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two documents as sources for the main arguments to be considered in this Anglican context: the essay "Priestesses in the Church?" by C. S. Lewis,³ and "A Report of the Study Concerning the Ordination of Women Undertaken by the Anglican Mission in America," Rev. John H. Rodgers, chairman.⁴

It is not my purpose to discuss three other sets of arguments that are here considered secondary to the primary theological issues being addressed: the canonical irregularity or illegality of the first ordination of women to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) in 1974 and 1975,⁵ issues arising from the feminist movement and the "culture wars," or the argument against women priests from patristic authority and church tradition. With regard to "culture wars," cultural conservatives tend to see the ordination of women as symptomatic of a feminist movement that destabilizes the family and society generally;⁶ cultural progressives and egalitarians tend to see male-dominant readings of Scripture as increasing the dangers of domestic violence and abuse.⁷

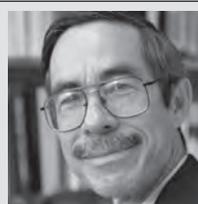
With respect to patristic authority and church tradition, it is certainly the case that both support the traditional view of a male-only priesthood. Nevertheless, while patristic and ecclesiastical tradition has significant weight in an Anglican context, the tradition is not irreformable, and can be overcome by the Scriptures more rightly and adequately understood. During the Galileo controversy, the Vatican could rightly point to a patristic and later church tradition that was solidly on the side of a geocentric understanding of biblical texts such as Psalm 19, Joshua 10:13, and Psalm 93:1, and yet, as history shows, the church was later to correct its earlier understanding of these texts in the light of new evidence and better hermeneutical principles.⁸ Such may also be the case with regard to traditional understandings of the biblical texts regarding the ordination of women.

Incarnation: The male priest as "icon of Christ"

In his 1948 essay, "Priestesses in the Church?," Lewis recognized that any decision by the Church of England to ordain women as priests would likely be very divisive: dividing the Church of England from other historic churches and dividing the church internally against itself. In hindsight, Lewis proved to be correct on both counts. But in Lewis's own mind, the central problem was theological in nature, relating to the very nature of the incarnation itself. A priest is a double representative, representing the people to God and God to the people. He had no problem with a woman representing the people to God, but he did have a problem with a woman representing God to the people.⁹ But what is the problem here: "Since God is in fact not a biological being and has no sex, what can it matter whether we say He or She, Father or Mother, Son or Daughter?"¹⁰

Lewis's answer is that "God himself has taught us how to speak of Him."¹¹ The masculine language of the Bible is not of merely human origin; it is neither arbitrary nor unessential: "A child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child."¹² "Equal" does not mean "interchangeable," and Lewis believed the gender language of the Bible was intended to "symbolize to us the hidden things of God."¹³ Jesus Christ was the true High Priest, and the incarnation took place in the form of a male, not a female: "Only one wearing the masculine uniform can (provisionally, and until the Parousia) represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him."¹⁴

How compelling is this argument from the incarnation and the male gender of Jesus? There is no question that Jesus was indeed the High Priest of the New Covenant,



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and that Jesus was of the male gender; however, there are a number of serious problems with this line of argument.

First of all, this line of argument overlooks the fact that the nature of priesthood has fundamentally changed in the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, it was the case that all priests were male; it is also true that Jesus Christ, the great High Priest (Heb. 9:11, 10:12–14) of the New Covenant, who completed and fulfilled the meaning of the Old Testament priesthood, was a male. The key change, however, is that, in the New Testament church, *all* believers are priests, offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Both male and female are “priests” in the New Testament usage of the term (cf. also Rev. 5:10, “You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to our God”). The word “priest” in the New Testament church is not limited to one male who stands before an earthly “altar”; the true altar is in heaven, where Christ, the High Priest, continues to represent us as his people before God (Heb. 8:2, 9:24, “to appear for us in God’s presence”; 10:21, “We have a great priest over the house of God”). There is only *one* mediator between humanity (*anthropon*) and God, the human (*anthropos*) Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5); believers in the New Testament are no longer dependent on a single human mediator, but have immediate access to the Father, by faith, through Jesus Christ alone (Heb. 10:22: “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart *in full assurance* of faith”).

In the second place, the (male) priest as “icon of Christ” argument misunderstands and overspecifies the purpose of the incarnation. While it is certainly true that Jesus became incarnate as a male, the fundamental point is that God assumed a full and complete *human nature*—a human nature that represents both male and female. The prologue of John’s gospel states, “And the Word became *flesh* (*sarx*) and dwelt among us. . .” (John 1:14). It does not say, “And the Word became a *male* (*anēr*).

It should also be noticed that, in the incarnation, Jesus is not only a male by gender, but, more specifically, a *Jewish, unmarried, physically unblemished* male. (No one could be ordained to the Levitical priesthood who was blind, lame, deformed, crippled, or with eye defects: Lev. 21:17–21). Would anyone want to argue today, in the New Covenant, that a priest, to be an “icon of Christ,” representing God to the people, must necessarily be an unmarried Jewish male? Certainly not; it is thus apparent that such characteristics are *circumstantial* rather than *essential* characteristics of one who is to assume a full and complete *human* (not merely male) nature for the purpose of redeeming human nature, both men and women, and bringing them to God.

Both male and female are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27); both genders reflect the character of God. From the fact that God became incarnate as a *Jewish* man, it does not follow that Jews can be closer to God than Gentiles or that Jews are better “icons” of God than Gentiles. Nor does it follow from the fact that God became incarnate as a *Jewish man* that males are inherently better “icons” of God than women. Jesus was in fact

a free man, but assumed the form of a *slave* (Phil. 2:5–11) in the incarnation; both slave and free man can in different ways serve as “icons” of God. The good news is that, in the New Covenant, these distinctions are overcome (Gal. 3:28: “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”); all have equal access to God and to God’s grace.

This having been said, it remains the case that Jesus, as male Priest/Son of God by fact of the incarnation, is reflective of and rooted in the Father/Son language of the Trinity. It is indeed the case that the language of God in Scripture is predominantly though not exclusively male; we can agree that the male language of God in the Bible is neither “arbitrary nor nonessential.” It is not to be construed simply as a culturally conditioned expression of the patriarchal Jewish culture of the biblical writers.

What then is the fundamental significance of the fact the God is revealed in Scripture as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” and not, say, as “Father, Mother, Child”? The question is, does the “Father/Son” language “valorize” the male imagery over the female? If so, is it really the case that God is more like a man than a woman? That men are intrinsically closer to the nature and essence of God than women? That male gender is intrinsically more fitting to reflect the nature of God than the female? These are crucial questions, and entire social orders have been built on the answers!

The position here argued, however, is a “no” to the above questions: that maleness is not, in fact, more similar to the divine essence than femaleness and that the male language of the Trinity is a *circumstantial* (though not arbitrary) and not *essential* characteristic of the Trinitarian revelation of Scripture.

First of all, following Aquinas and the mainstream of historic orthodox theology generally, it is to be recognized that all biblical and human language about God is *analogical* and not strictly *literal* in nature. As Aquinas stated, “things are said of God and creatures analogically and not in a purely equivocal nor in a purely univocal sense. . . . [T]hese names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, that is, according to proportion.”¹⁵ The word “Father” is predicated on a human father and on God as Father in an analogical sense, according to proportion. God is really like a human father in some respects, but being infinite and perfect, not *just* like or *only* like a human father, but infinitely greater than any human father.

God is a spirit by nature (John 4:24), and so is not literally a gendered being, though revealed (analogically) through gendered human language. If the nature of God was in fact “male” in some metaphysically ultimate sense, then one might have expected a revelation of the Triune name in *exclusively* male imagery such as “Father, Son, and Elder Brother,” or something of the like. The language of “Father, Son, Holy Spirit,” while seemingly predominantly (two-thirds?) male, is “neuter” on the Spirit (*pneuma*). And *ruach* (Spirit) in the Hebrew is feminine, while *ho paraklētos* (“the Comforter”) is masculine in the Greek—which is

an indication that the Holy Spirit transcends literal human gender categories. Since the Holy Spirit is a coequal, coeternal person of the Holy Trinity, possessing the same “power, substance, and glory,” the *lack* of a specific gender for the Spirit can be no less truly revelatory of the nature of God than the “male” gender language of Son and Father.

It can also be noted that God is also described in Scripture even in terms that are *impersonal*: God is a “Rock” (Isa. 17:1: “You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress); “Fire” (Deut. 4:24: “the Lord your God is a consuming fire”); and “Light” (1 John 1:5, “God is Light, and in him there is no darkness at all”). These impersonal, analogical descriptors reflect the strength, solidity, holiness, moral purity, and truthfulness of God’s nature, while balancing overly *anthropomorphic* conceptions of God (as, for example, in the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon).

The fundamental core assertion of the Triune name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the *personal* nature of God: *ultimate reality is a communion of coequal, coeternal divine persons in holy, loving relationships*. The Triune community is the ontological basis of all human community and communion. It is here argued that the fundamental significance of the “male” language of the Trinity is an analogical revelation of the *strength and power of God*

to create and redeem: God is the “Almighty” maker of heaven and earth, and the “Divine Warrior” (e.g., Exod. 15:3, “the Lord is a warrior”) who is strong to redeem his people from their enemies.¹⁶ The male language of God is *power* language that signifies that God is powerful to create and to save—that God is indeed the true God; there is no other.

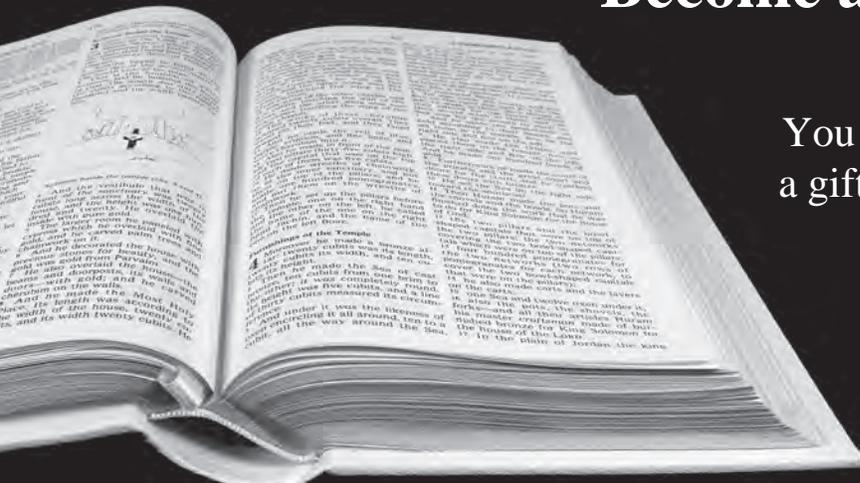
At the same time, the feminine images of God in Scripture—less prominent, but not insignificant—“Mother” (Isa. 42:14), woman (Luke 15:8–10), hen (Matt. 23:37), and so forth—signify that God *nurtures and protects* as well as creates and redeems. Both the “power” language and the “nurturing” language speak truly of God; both are reflective of God’s character, just as male and female made in God’s image can both reflect the true character of God.

The revelation of the personal, Triune God as “Father, Son, Holy Spirit” and not as, say, “Father, Mother, Child” distinguishes the true God from the sexually active gods and goddesses of ancient Near Eastern polytheism, such as Baal and Asherah.¹⁷ *Yahweh has no consort*: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, later more revealed as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is no *fertility god* tied to the cycles of nature. In the Bible, “father gods” and “mother goddesses” do not sexually procreate “baby gods and goddesses.” The true God is the creator of human sexuality and genders, but is not literally a gendered being; rather, he is eternally an infinite, personal

The thesis of the “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” is, as we shall see, a serious doctrinal deviation from the historic understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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spirit. The Father/Son relationship of the Bible is a personal and covenantal, but not a *sexual* relationship.

At the same time, it is not the case that the biblical language of God as Father is arbitrary or only a reflection of cultural conditioning. The Father/Son language of the biblical and Trinitarian tradition is rooted in the prayer language of Jesus, who taught his disciples to address God as “Father.” Jesus took a designation of God that was relatively infrequent in the Old Testament and reflective of God’s fatherhood of the *nation* of Israel and made it *central* to the Christian understanding of God and intensely *personal*, foundational to the disciples’ personal relationship to God.

The Father/Son language of the Scriptures, and especially the nature of Jesus’ relation to the Father in the New Testament, is a revelation of a true Father/Son relationship and a model of how human fathers and sons should relate in the community of faith. The father/son relationship is a crucial human relationship in all cultures, and the biblical revelation of Father and Son teaches a healthy balance of strength and love, of authority and intimacy,¹⁸ that makes for healthy families, healthy churches, and a healthy social order generally.

Eternal subordination in the Trinity?

The second major type of argument against the ordination of women as priests (and bishops) is based on a claim that, in the life of the Trinity, the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, and that this, by way of analogy, provides justification for the subordination of women to men in the ordained ministry of the church. Examples of this type of argument may be found in the writings of two prominent evangelical scholars.¹⁹

According to one, “God’s ordering of the relations of male and female in the family ultimately reflects and rests upon God’s own triune nature. . . . An eternal headship and submission are lived out in the divine life of love. God the Father . . . is eternally the Father of the Son . . . loving headship and submission are eternal in the life of God.”²⁰ “The headship of the man reflects God’s Fatherhood in the life of the Trinity . . . the nuclear family is the ‘little church in the Church’ and the Church is the family of the families of God.”²¹ The submission by women to male authority in the church presumably is a reflection of the Son’s eternal submission to the Father in the Trinity.²²

The other scholar makes the striking claim that the “subjection of the Son to the Father for all eternity, a subjection that never began but always existed, and a subjection that will continue eternally in the future, does not nullify the deity of the Son.”²³ His concern is to preserve the historic Nicene orthodoxy, which insists that, in the divine essence, the Son is fully equal to the Father (*homoousios*), but that in *role and status* the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. (As we shall see, this claim can not be sustained.) He cites texts that speak of the Father “giving” and “sending” the Son to argue for a “unique headship, a unique authority for the Father *before* the Son came to earth,”²⁴

and appeals to texts such as Ephesians 1:4, John 1:3 (“all things were made *through* him”), and 1 Corinthians 15:28 to argue that the “Son is eternally submissive to the Father.”²⁵ He concludes that the alleged “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” shows how “equality in being and in value and in honor can exist together with differences in roles between husband and wife as well,”²⁶ and, by implication, in the subordination of women to men in the church.

These arguments show, unfortunately, how a particular social and cultural agenda—arguing for male “headship” over women—can lead to serious distortions in the reading of Scripture and of the historic doctrine of the Trinity. The thesis of the “eternal subordination of the Son to the Father” is, as we shall see, a serious doctrinal deviation from the historic understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that this point of view appears to be gaining some ground in evangelical circles is to be viewed with alarm.²⁷ This way of arguing on (mistaken) Trinitarian grounds for the subordination of women to men in the ordained ministries of the church has serious logical, historical, and biblical/theological problems, as we shall see below.

In the first place, it is simply a *non sequitur* to conclude from the premise “The Son is eternally subordinate to the Father” that “Women are subordinate to men in the church.” [Let it be noted clearly: The truth of this first premise is *not* being granted in this article; it is in fact believed to be false.] The argument seems to be of the following structure: Suppose that it is the case that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father; this shows that subordination in role or function is compatible with equality of essence or nature; therefore, this supports our conclusion that women should be subordinate to men in the ordained offices of the church, since women can have equality with men by nature but be subordinate to men in roles and authority in the church.

This is an attempted argument by analogy, and arguments from analogy are only persuasive, and rarely demonstrative, since argument by analogy depends on the degrees of likeness or dissimilarity between the items being compared. In this case, the analogy is more *dissimilar* than similar. Consider the comparison in question: Father is to Son (in the eternal Trinity) as man should be to woman (in the ordained ministries of the church). The problem here is that the comparison is between, *eternal, infinite, divine, discarnate persons* in the eternal Trinity, of the “same gender,” and *temporal, finite, enfleshed human persons* of different genders in the historical church: The differences are much greater than the similarities. This stretches the analogy to the breaking point and evacuates the plausibility of the comparison. Furthermore, even if it could be argued that “subordination in role is consistent with equality of dignity or nature,” it does not follow that this *must* be the case in male/female role relationships in ministry; this must be argued on other (exegetical) grounds.

This type of argument also seems to be guilty of the fallacy of reading a certain understanding of the human father/son relationship in time back into the eternal life of the Trinity. Human father/son relationships change over time. From birth through adolescence and until full adulthood is achieved, the son is dependent upon and subordinate to the father's authority. Over time, however, the relationship changes; the adult son can relate to his father as a friend, giving to the father continuing respect, but not owing unquestioning obedience. At the end of the life cycle, it can be the father who is "subordinate" to the son financially and otherwise, and dependent upon a younger and healthier son. The hierarchical argument in this matter seems to be guilty of selecting one aspect of a changing relationship (when son is dependent on the father) and importing *that* temporally conditioned aspect back into the eternal Father/Son relationship within the Trinity. When George W. Bush was president, he still owed his father, George H. W. Bush, respect, but while his son was in the White House, the older Bush was subordinate to the younger Bush in authority and prestige.

Historic Trinitarian orthodoxy: eternal equality of the Father and Son

The historic, orthodox understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that, in eternity, in the "immanent" Trinity (the *theologia*), the Son is in all things equal to the Father. In time, during his incarnate, earthly ministry (the *oikonomia*, or "economic" Trinity), the Son was *voluntarily* subordinate (in function, not essence) to the Father. The historic creeds and the church fathers were insistent that this distinction between the *theologia* and the *oikonomia* was crucial for right interpretations of the scriptural texts regarding Christ and for avoiding the various forms of subordinationism that had arisen in the church from the time of Origen to that of Arius. The basic error of the "New Evangelical Subordinationists"²⁸ is their failure to maintain this proper distinction between the *theologia* and the *oikonomia*.

The Constantinopolitan Creed, generally known as the Nicene Creed, has, since the time of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), been associated with the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) and was used in the liturgy of the Eucharist from the sixth century onward. Since the time of Chalcedon, it has become the most universally accepted of all the Christian creeds, acknowledged as a standard of orthodoxy by East and West alike.²⁹ Formulated to refute the Arian subordinationism of the Son to the Father, the creed emphatically asserts the essential equality of the Son and the Father:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through Whom all things came into being. . . .³⁰

An important commentary on this expression of Nicene orthodoxy is contained in a synodical letter of the bishops who had gathered in Constantinople, issued shortly afterward in A.D. 382. Some of these bishops had suffered violent persecution from the Arians for defending the Nicene faith: "It was barely yesterday . . . that some [of the orthodox bishops] were freed from the bonds of exile and returned to their own churches through a thousand tribulations. . . . Even after their return from exile some experienced a ferment of hatred from the heretics. . . . Others were torn to shreds by various tortures and still carry around on their bodies the marks of Christ's wounds and bruises."³¹ For these orthodox bishops, the full deity and equality of the Son to the Father was no small matter, but a truth worth dying for!

The synodical letter makes it clear that the bishops affirmed the eternal equality of nature and dignity of the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed, stated the bishops,

tells us how to believe in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit: believing also, of course, that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a single Godhead and power and substance, *a dignity deserving the same honour and a co-eternal sovereignty* [emphasis added] in three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect Persons. . . . To sum up, we know that he was before the ages fully God the Word, and that in the last days he became fully man for the sake of our salvation.³²

The last sentence above reflects the distinction that was to become classic in orthodox Christology and Trinitarian doctrine, namely, that in eternity, in the *theologia*, the Son is in all things equal to the Father as to deity, while in the *oikonomia*, he became voluntarily subordinate to the Father with respect to his human nature.

The critical phrase in the synodical letter above is "a dignity deserving the same honour and a co-eternal sovereignty" (*homotimou te axias kai synaidiou tēs basileias*).³³ Having just stated that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a "single Godhead (*theoteitos*) and power and substance (*ousias*), the bishops make it clear that they believe that the Father and the Son have a "co-eternal sovereignty" (*basileias*). There is simply no way that "co-eternal sovereignty" can be squared with an eternal *subordination* of the Son to the Father. Equal sovereignty means equal *authority, power, and honor*—not less. The "New Evangelical Subordinationists"³⁴ have simply misread the tradition on this crucial point.

This reading of the Nicene Creed is further supported by the statements of Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian fathers, who was greatly influential in the formation of historic Trinitarian orthodoxy. In his *Fifth Theological Oration*, in a series of influential lectures given in the Church of the Anastasis in Constantinople prior to the Council of 381, Gregory ("the Theologian") clearly articulated his understanding of the eternal equality of the Father and the Son:

We believe in three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power. . . . When we look at the Godhead . . . at the Persons in whom the Godhead dwells, . . . *timelessly and with equal glory* [emphasis added] . . . there are three whom we worship. Each of these Persons possesses unity . . . by reason of the identity of essence and power. . . . I hope it may always be my position . . . to worship God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, three persons, one Godhead, *undivided in honor and glory and substance and kingdom*. . . . [emphasis added]³⁵

For Gregory, the Father and the Son were eternally equal not only in *substance*, but also in *honor and glory and kingdom*. A coequal and coeternal “kingdom” implies coequal *authority* of the Son with the Father and flies in the face of the misunderstandings of the “New Evangelical Subordinationists.”

In a synod at Rome in 382, Pope Damasus issued the so-called “Tome of Pope Damasus,” clearly affirming the deity and equality of the Son and Spirit with the Father:

We anathematize those who do not wholly freely proclaim that he (the Holy Spirit) is one power and substance with the Father and the Son. . . . Anyone who does not say that the Son of God is true God, as the Father is true God, that he can do all things, and knows all things, and is equal to the Father, is heretical. . . . Anyone who does not say that there is only one godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one lordship, one kingdom, one will and one truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is heretical.³⁶

This declaration of 382 clearly asserts the equality of the Son to the Father not only in “substance” or essence, but also in *might, majesty, power, glory, lordship, kingdom, and will*. Denial of the equality of the Son with the Father in “might, majesty, power, glory, lordship, kingdom, and will” is considered heretical.

These latter statements leave no room for an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in “role” or “status” before the incarnation. This statement, representative of the Latin church, is consistent with the earlier statements noted above (the synodical letter of 382 of the bishops meeting in Constantinople and the Fifth Oration of Gregory Nazianzus) from the leaders of the Greek churches, and shows the East/West consensus of Trinitarian orthodoxy that was emerging at the close of the fourth century.

The so-called “Athanasian” Creed was likely written sometime between 381 and 428 and first appears in its currently accepted form toward the close of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century.³⁷ It has long been considered a standard of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the West. The Athanasian Creed is an able summary of the christological and Trinitarian doctrines of the

first four ecumenical councils and emphatically and repeatedly asserts the equality of the Son with the Father, not any eternal *subordination* of the Son to the Father:

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the majesty coeternal (*aequalis Gloria, coaeterna majestas*). . . . So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty (*omnipotens*): and the Holy Ghost Almighty. . . . So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord (*dominus*): and the Holy Ghost Lord. . . . For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord (*Deum ac Dominum*). . . . And in this Trinity none is before, or after another: none is greater, or less than another (*nihil majus, aut minus*). . . . But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal (*coaequales*). . . . Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood (*minor Patre secundum humanitem*).³⁸

It is abundantly evident that the explicit terminology of the Athanasian Creed excludes any notion of “eternal subordination” of the Son to the Father: “the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal . . . the Son Almighty . . . the Son Lord . . . every Person *by himself* [emphasis added] God and Lord . . . in this Trinity . . . none is greater, or less than another, . . . But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and *coequal* [emphasis added].” There is no eternal subordination of rank or status of the Son to the Father; the Son is only “inferior to the Father as touching his *Manhood*” [emphasis added], that is, after the incarnation, and with respect to the economy (*oikonomia*), not the eternal, pretemporal *theologia* or immanent Trinity. Phillip Schaff has correctly noted that, according to the Athanasian Creed, in the Trinity, “there is no priority or posteriority of time, no superiority or inferiority of rank, but the three persons are coeternal and coequal.”³⁹

In 675, a local council at Toledo formulated a creed expressing clear formulations regarding the Trinity and the incarnation:

In all things the Son is equal to God the Father, for his being born had no beginning and no end. . . . It must also be confessed and believed that each single Person is wholly God in himself and that all three Persons together are one God. They have one, or undivided, equal godhead, majesty or power, which is not diminished in the individuals nor augmented in the three.⁴⁰

This creed, reflecting the teachings of the Athanasian Creed and doctors of the church such as Augustine, should, in the estimation of the noted Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, “be numbered among the most important doctrinal declarations of the Church.”⁴¹ It clearly gives no support to ideas of an “eternal subordination” of the Son to the Father.

In 680, the sixth ecumenical council, meeting in Constantinople, issued a dogmatic decree against the Monothelites, who

held that there was only one will in Christ. The council's definition stated that Jesus Christ had two distinct but inseparable wills—a human will and a divine will—both acting in harmony, with the human will always acting in subordination to the divine will; “will” being regarded as an attribute of the nature rather than the person:⁴²

And we preach, according to the doctrine of the holy Fathers, *two natural wills* and two natural active principles inseparably, immovably, undividedly, and unconfusedly in him (Christ). And two natural wills, *not opposing each other*, as heretics assert, but his human will following without resistance or reluctance, but rather subject to his divine and omnipotent will . . . the human will had to be moved to submit to the divine will . . . as he (Christ) himself says: “Because I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me,” (John 6:38) calling his own will the will of the flesh. For the flesh, too, was his own.⁴³

In this important dogmatic definition regarding the person of Christ, there are significant implications for the present discussion of the nature of the Father/Son relationship in the Trinity. The orthodox teaching is that the “subordination” of the Son to the Father is the willing subordination of the *human* will of the incarnate Christ, in the *oikonomia*, to the *one* undivided *divine* will common to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are not three separate wills in the Trinity, but one undivided will common to all three, as stated earlier in the tradition. Recall the statement of Pope Damasus (382) noted earlier: “Anyone who does not say that there is only one godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one lordship, one kingdom, one will and one truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is heretical.”⁴⁴ The letter of Pope Agatho and the Roman synod of 125 bishops sent to instruct the legates sent to the Council of Constantinople in 680 states that, in the Holy Trinity, “one is the godhead, one the eternity, one the power, one the kingdom, one the glory, one the adoration, *one the essential will and operation* [emphasis added] of the same Holy and inseparable Trinity.”⁴⁵

If there were *three* wills in the godhead, it could make sense to posit an “eternal subordination” of the will of the Son to the will of the Father, but there is one will common to the three persons, not three. Historic orthodoxy teaches one nature and three persons, but not three wills in the Trinity. The “New Evangelical Subordinationists” seem to be guilty of projecting the economic subordination of the human will of the incarnate Son back into the eternal life of the Trinity, and so erase the historic Trinitarian distinction of the *theologia* and the *oikonomia*—the patristic hermeneutical principle for interpreting the New Testament christological texts and guarding against the heresies of Arianism and semi-Arianism.

The historic Reformation and post-Reformation creeds continue the earlier traditions of Trinitarian orthodoxy. The Belgic Confession of 1561 states that all three persons of the Trinity are “co-eternal and co-essential. *There is neither first nor last* [emphasis added]; for they are all three one, in truth, *in power, in goodness, and mercy.*”⁴⁶

Chapter three of the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 states that in the Trinity there are not “three gods, but three persons, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal. . . . We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach . . . that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity (*item creatum ac serviens aut alteri officiale in trinitate*) and that there is something unequal in it, a greater or a less (*inaequale, majus aut minus*) . . . something different with respect to character or will (*voluntate*) . . . as the Monarchians . . . and such like, have thought.”⁴⁷ If the Father and the Son do not differ according to will, there can be no eternal subordination of the will of the Son to the Father; the Father and the Son are indeed coeternal, coequal, nothing “unequal” or a “greater or a less.” The creed excludes all forms of subordinationism in very specific and explicit language.

Question nine of the Westminster Larger Catechism (1646) asks, “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” The answer is, “There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.”⁴⁸ This language of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being “equal in power and glory” reflects the historic Trinitarian orthodoxy of the Athanasian creed.

One of the contemporary evangelical hierarchists being examined appeals to biblical statements that the Son was “sent” by the Father (John 17:3, 18; 4:34; 5:24; 8:16; 9:4; 16:5; 20:21), that all things were made *through* [not “by”] him (John 1:3), and “The Son himself shall be subject to Him that put all things under him” (1 Cor. 15:28) to argue for “eternal differences in relationship within the Trinity.”⁴⁹ These texts and the orthodox Trinitarian tradition, however, do not support such an interpretation.

In his reply to the Macedonians, who denied the full equality and deity of the Holy Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, Basil (“the Great”) of Caesarea, one of the Cappadocian fathers who laid the foundations of historic Trinitarian orthodoxy, defended the equality of rank and glory of the Son with the Father:

The Son, according to them [Macedonians] is not together with the Father, but after the Father . . . inasmuch as “with him” expresses equality of dignity, while “through him” denotes subordination. They further assert that the Spirit is not to be ranked along with the Father and the Son, but under the Son and the Father. . . . Let us first ask them this

question: In what sense do they say that the Son is “after the Father;” later in time, or in *order, or in dignity?* [emphasis added]. . . . If they really conceive of a kind of degradation of the Son in relation to the Father, *as though he were in a lower place* [emphasis added], so that the Father sits above, and the Son is thrust off to the next seat below, let them confess what they mean. . . . [W]hat excuse can be found for their attack upon Scripture, shameless as their antagonism is, in the passages “Sit thou on my right hand,” and “Sat down on the right hand of the majesty of God”? The expression “right hand of God” does not, as they contend, indicate the lower place, but *equality of relation* [emphasis added]. . . . What just defence shall we have in the day of the awful universal judgment of all creation, if . . . we attempt to degrade him who shares the honor and the throne, from his condition of equality, to a lower state?⁵⁰

The position of the exalted Messiah is not one of subordination, but one of equality and sovereign, universal lordship.

Basil clearly asserts the equality of dignity, honor, and rank of the Son with the Father, and would likely have seen the interpretations of the “New Evangelical Subordinationists” as having some significant similarities with the Macedonian heresies that he attempted to combat.

In his great treatise on the Trinity, a foundational text for orthodox Western Trinitarian theology, Augustine addresses the question of why it is said that the Son was “sent” by the Father:

But if the Son is said to be sent by the Father . . . this does not in any manner hinder us from believing the Son to be equal, and consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father. . . . Not because the one is greater, the other less; but because the one is Father, the other Son . . . the Son . . . is said to have been sent because the “Word was made flesh” . . . that he might perform through his bodily presence those things which were written. . . . He was not sent in respect to any inequality of power or substance, *or anything that in Him was not equal to the Father.* [emphasis added]⁵¹

For Augustine, the biblical language of the Father sending the Son implies not any eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, but rather the personal *distinction* between the Father and the Son, and the obedience of the incarnate Son in the *economy*.

One hierarchist appeals to 1 Corinthians 15:28, a text that was also a favorite text of the Arians in support of their subordinationist Christology. This text is understood by Aquinas in a way consistent with the historic orthodox tradition. In considering the question of whether the Son is equal to the Father in greatness, Aquinas argues that such a text and others such as John 14:28 (“the Father is greater than I”) are to be understood

“of Christ’s human nature, wherein He is less than the Father, and subject to him; but in his divine nature He is equal to the Father. This is expressed by Athanasius, ‘Equal to the Father in His Godhead; less than the Father in humanity.’”⁵² “The Son is necessarily equal to the Father in power. . . . The command

of the Father [John 14:31, ‘As the Father gave me commandment so do I’] . . . may be referred to Christ in His human nature.”⁵³ Texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:28 may be properly understood to refer to Christ in the *economy*, with respect to his final act as the

mediator and accomplisher of redemption in time, reporting “mission accomplished” to the Father, rather than to any eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.⁵⁴

This reading of 1 Corinthians 15:28 is confirmed by John’s heavenly vision in the Apocalypse, where he sees the exalted Lamb in the *center* of God’s throne (Rev. 5:6), not in some lower position, and the Lamb receiving *coequal honor and praise* from every creature in the universe: “To him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb be praise and honor *and* glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13). John’s vision of the heavenly throne pictures the Son’s *coequal* reign with the Father subsequent to his exaltation and the mediatorial actions presupposed in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

One hierarchist mistakenly argues that Jesus’ being exalted to God’s “right hand” (Psalm 110:1) can still imply that Jesus was “subject to the Father’s authority” and occupied a place of secondary authority.⁵⁵ As Richard Bauckham has correctly noted, while some rabbis read Psalm 110:1 to mean that the Messiah was only given a position of honor as a favored subject beside the throne, the early Christians read the text quite differently: Jesus is seated on the divine throne itself, “exercising God’s own rule over all things.”⁵⁶ The position of the exalted Messiah is not one of subordination, but one of equality and sovereign, universal lordship.

Since the central focus of the New Testament is the mighty acts of Jesus Christ in history for the redemption of his people, it is not surprising that most of the biblical revelation concerning Christ relates to the historical *economy* rather than to the pre-temporal *theologia*. Nevertheless, there is substantial witness in the New Testament to the full equality of the Son with the Father from eternity. The classic text with which John opens his gospel, John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: *kai theos ēn ho logos*”), clearly asserts the equality of the Son with the Father. As Murray J. Harris has noted, commenting on this text, “John seems intent to begin his work as he will end it (20:28), with an unqualified assertion of the supreme status of Jesus Christ, in both his preincarnate (1:1) and resurrection (20:28) states. . . . He equally with the Father, is the legitimate object of human worship.”⁵⁷

Harris suggests that part of John's purpose in 1:1c ("was God") may have been to avoid any erroneous inference that might have been drawn from 1:1b ("with God"), "that since the Word was said to be 'with' the Father—not the Father 'with' the Word—he was in some way inferior or subordinate to God."⁵⁸

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called "our great God and savior" (*tou megalou theou kai sōtēros*, Titus 2:13; cf. 2 Pet. 1:1), not "our (lesser or subordinate) God and savior." The writer of Hebrews ascribes deity to Christ: "But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever' (Heb. 1:8, Ps. 45:6). The Son sits on Yahweh's throne, and there is no hint here whatsoever that the Son's throne is of a second or subordinate rank. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the "exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). There is no hint of subordination here.

Perhaps the most explicit witness in the New Testament to the Son's eternal, pretemporal equality with the Father is found in the famous "kenosis" passage of Philippians 2:5–11:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God (*en morphē theou hyparkōn*), did not consider equality with God (*to einai isa theō*) something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in human appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross!

The crucial point to be seen here is that, prior to his incarnation, the Son existed in the very nature of God, and *equality* (*isa*) with God was his by right. "He had divine equality as his own prerogative," as Ralph P. Martin has noted in his extensive commentary, "but gave it up when he exchanged the mode of existence in heaven for the mode of existence as Man upon earth."⁵⁹ There is *equality* of the Son with the Father before the incarnation and voluntary subordination of the Son to the Father only at the point of the incarnation—not before. This passage clearly supports the historic distinction from the time of Athanasius⁶⁰ to the present between the *theologia* and the *economy*—that the Son is in all things equal to the Father as to his divinity and only subordinate to the Father as to his humanity.

This review of Scripture and of the history of orthodox Trinitarian theology has shown that the notion of the "eternal subordination of the Son to the Father" is a serious misunderstanding of both Scripture and tradition. It seems that the "New Evangelical Subordinationists" have revived the subordinationist elements in christological and Trinitarian thought that were introduced into early Christian theology by Origen and that have lingered as a troublesome and confusing presence ever since.⁶¹ It also seems that, in an earlier generation, even conservative theological stalwarts such as Charles Hodge and A. H. Strong did not entirely escape from these subordinationist misunderstandings.⁶²

In the tradition of Eastern theology, there has been a significant tendency to ground the unity of the Trinity in the person of the Father as the "source" (*archē*) or "cause" (*aitia*) of the Son and the Spirit as to their modes of subsistence, but this Eastern view has always posed the danger of subordinationism, as noted above.⁶³ This subordinationist tendency, growing out of the notion of the Father as the "source" or "cause" of the Son, was itself rooted in the notion of the Father (eternally) "begetting" the Son and its anthropomorphic and causal connotations.⁶⁴ It is now rather widely recognized that the crucial word *monogenēs* (e.g., John 3:16) is properly translated as "unique" or "one and only," rather than by "only begotten" as in the patristic and later tradition.⁶⁵ Jesus is the *unique or one and only* Son of the Father, rather than the only "begotten" Son of the Father, properly speaking. Since the language of "begetting" became embedded in the Nicene Creed ("begotten, not made") and the later theological tradition, it can scarcely be removed, but such language should be read and understood as a way of affirming the *homoousios* or consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, rather than as implying the subordination of a son to a father who "begat" him. The Father is eternal, and the Son is eternal; no anthropomorphic notions of human "begetting" need to be read back into the eternal life of the Trinity.⁶⁶

This subordinationist danger was largely avoided in the Trinitarian teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus, for whom the divine "Monarchy" (*monarchia*) was not limited to one person, the Father, but was common to the three.⁶⁷ The unity of the three divine persons is found in their eternal *perichoretic* relations—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—being eternally and equally "in" one another, in an unending unity and communion of power, authority, glory, and mutual love.⁶⁸

In conclusion, then, it can be stated that the attempt to argue against the ordination of women to the priesthood on the basis of some supposed "eternal subordination of the Son to the Father" must be judged to be a failed and misguided project. One wonders if the proponents of this point of view are willing to extend the logic of their arguments beyond time into eternity: If the subordination of the Son to the Father in *time* supposedly justifies the subordination of women to men in the earthly church, does the supposed subordination of the Son to the Father in eternity justify the *eternal subordination* of women to men in the heavenly church of the new creation? Are women to be *eternally* second-class citizens in the kingdom of God? Such specious arguments and misunderstandings of Scripture and tradition condemn women to positions of unending subordination and, worse still, *rob God the Son* of his coeternal and coequal glory, majesty, and lordship.

We can recall the words of Basil of Caesarea cited earlier (n.50): "What just defence shall we have in the day of the awful universal judgment of all creation if . . . we attempt to degrade him who shares the honor and the throne, from his condition of equality, to a lower state?" This is surely too high a price to pay,

and the “New Evangelical Subordinationists” would do well to reconsider their positions and look elsewhere for arguments to exclude women from the priesthood.

Notes

1. John Jefferson Davis, “First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul’s Use of Creation Narratives,” *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 5–10. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Division of Christian Thought at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for their comments and suggestions on this second paper.

2. Similar arguments could be made within Roman Catholic and Orthodox contexts as well.

3. C. S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 234–39. The essay originally appeared under the title “Notes on the Way” in *Time and Tide* 29 (Aug. 14, 1948), when the debate on women’s ordination was just getting underway in the Church of England.

4. This report (hereafter cited as Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*), was completed in 2003 and can be accessed online at www.theamia.org/assets/AMia-Womens-Ordination-Study-Aug-03.pdf.

5. For background on these ordinations, see Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 17–18. The canonically irregular nature of these ordinations notwithstanding, it may still be the case (as here argued) that such ordinations could have been done with proper biblical and theological justification. The actual effect of the ordinations, understandably, was to harden the opposition of conservative clergy within ECUSA to the ordination of women as priests, given the association of its first instances with liberal theology and violation of canon law.

6. See, for example, David Ayers, “The Inevitability of Failure: The Assumptions and Implementations of Modern Feminism,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 312–31.

7. See, for example, Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, eds., *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 16–27.

8. On the role of biblical interpretation during the Galileo controversy, see the excellent scholarly studies by Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), and Kenneth J. Howell, *God’s Two Books: Copernican Cosmology and Biblical Interpretation in Early Modern Science* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

9. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 236.

10. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 236.

11. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

12. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

13. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 237.

14. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?,” 239.

15. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pt.IQ.13 art 5, “Whether What Is Said of God and of Creatures Is Univocally Predicated of Them?”

16. Donald Bloesch also relates the masculine imagery of God in Scripture to the power, initiative, and mighty acts of God (*Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism* [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1982], 72), but also makes the questionable claim (p. 69) that “masculine images predominate for all three persons of the Trinity.” This latter claim seems rather dubious in light of the scriptural images of the Spirit: wind, fire, oil, water, dove—all of which are *impersonal* and not masculine.

17. On the development of the Yahwistic religion of Israel against the background of the gods and goddesses of Canaanite religion, see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

18. One evangelical pastor made the observation that, in his pastoral counseling experience, many men in the church were either *abusive* or, on the other hand, too *passive*: It was the exception rather than the rule in his experience to find a healthy balance of strength and love, of authority and intimacy in these Christian marriages.

19. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women, and Wayne Grudem, Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Multnomah, 2006), 230–56. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 248–54, and *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Multnomah, 2004), 45–48.

20. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*, 23.

21. Rodgers, *Ordination of Women*, 25.

22. Rodgers does not seem to consider the question, “If the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, does this mean that women should be *eternally* subordinate to men—even in heaven?”

23. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 244.

24. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 231.

25. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

26. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

27. See, for example, Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005), 76–102; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1999), 160, 170. For earlier criticism of this trend, see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006). See also Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 479–96, for Letham’s responses to the (egalitarian) positions of Gilbert Bilezikian and Kevin Giles. Letham correctly notes that the historic orthodox recognition of an order (*taxis*) within the Trinity—Father first, Son second, Spirit third—does not imply any subordination of rank, status, or hierarchy within the Trinity: “I repeatedly assert that this order is compatible with the full equality of the three persons in the undivided Trinity” (p. 481).

28. On this terminology, see note 34 below.

29. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches*, rev. ed. (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973), 31–32.

30. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches*, 33.

31. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 25.

32. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 28.

33. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 28.

34. The “New Evangelical Subordinationists” (“NES”) are those who, like Grudem, Ware, and Köstenberger, are trying to argue for the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in the interests of arguing for the subordination of women to men in the family and in the ordained ministries of the church.

35. Gregory Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration*, 14, 28. On Gregory’s Trinitarian thought, see Ben Fulford, “‘One Commixture of Light’: Rethinking some Modern Uses and Critiques of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Unity and Equality of the Divine Persons,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 2009): 172–89. Fulford points out that Gregory does speak of the Father as the “source” and “cause” of the Son, but these statements are to be read

in the context of Gregory's equally clear statements about the equality of the Father and the Son.

36. Karl Rahner, ed., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church as Contained in her Documents* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1967), 90–91.

37. F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), "Athanasian Creed, The," 98–99; Philp P. Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2 (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Bros., 1877), 31–36.

38. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 66–69.

39. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 38.

40. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 92, 95.

41. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 92.

42. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 72.

43. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 169.

44. Rahner, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 90–91.

45. Henry Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees* (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 340.

46. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 390.

47. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 241.

48. *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Willow Grove, Pa.: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 160.

49. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 246.

50. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, vi.13–15. The Macedonian heretics argued that biblical texts saying that the Spirit was "sent" by the Father and the Son implied that the Spirit was inferior to the Father and the Son; that the "Gift" was not equal with the Giver: R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy*, 318–81 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 768. The "New Evangelical Subordinationists" seem to apply something of a "Macedonian" hermeneutic and logic to their reading of biblical texts in the interest of finding an "eternal subordination of the Son to the Father." See also Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 235.

51. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV.20, 27.

52. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IQ.42, art. 4.

53. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IQ.42, art.6, "Whether the Son Is Equal to the Father in Power?"

54. In the same way, 1 Cor. 11:3, "the head of Christ is God" refers to Christ in his human nature, in the economy, not to the eternal state.

55. Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 234–35.

56. Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 30. In Bauckham's groundbreaking new approach to New Testament Christology, focusing on a "Christology of Divine Identity" rather than on the older categories of "functional vs. ontological" Christologies, it can be recognized that "the unique sovereignty of God was not a mere 'function' which God could delegate to someone else. It was one of the key identifying characteristics of the unique divine identity. . . . When extended to include Jesus in the creative activity of God, and therefore in the eternal transcendence of God, it becomes unequivocally a matter of regarding Jesus as *intrinsic* to the unique identity of God. . . . [T]he Christology of the divine identity common to the whole of the New Testament is the highest Christology of all" (41–42).

57. Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 65. A text

such as Eph. 1:4 ("chosen [by the Father] in him [Christ] before the foundation of the universe") does not imply an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, since the eternal, pretemporal decree of election is not an act of the Father alone, but a decision of the one undivided will common to Father, Son, and Spirit—of all three persons acting in cooperation and mutual consultation, in *perichoresis*, so to speak (the Father "in" the Son, and the Son "in" the Father, eternally).

58. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 65.

59. Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 150. Cf. the translation of this passage by Silva: "Though he existed in the form of God, Christ took no advantage of his equality with God. Instead, he made himself nothing by his assuming the form of a servant, that is, by becoming incarnate." Moises Silva, *Philippians: Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1988), 112.

60. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 1.4.41.

61. On the subordinationist elements in Origen, cf. *Comm. John* 2.20, the Father is the source of divinity; the Son is the source of reason; *Comm. John* 2.73, "the Holy Spirit too was made through the Word, since the Word is older than he." See also John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), "Trinitarianism," 207–09; and J. Nigel Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordinationism: A Study in Origen's Christology* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1987). J. N. D. Kelly notes that, in the East, the intellectual climate was "impregnated with Neo-Platonic ideas about the hierarchy of being," ideas that were favorable to subordinationist understandings: *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1960), 136.

62. Hodge spoke of a "subordination" of the Son and the Spirit to the Father with respect to "mode of subsistence and operation," *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1878), 462. A. H. Strong spoke of a subordination of the Son to the Father "of order, office, and operation": *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1907), 342 (yet, on p. 343, Strong wrote that each of the three persons "is the proper and equal [emphasis added] object of Christian worship"). This language of "subordination" is an unfortunate confusion. The distinct modes of subsistence, for example—generation, procession—are the basis not of *subordination* of one person to another, but rather of the eternal *distinctions* of the persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The "order" (*taxis*) of the persons—Father first, Son second, Spirit third—in the New Testament texts reflects the historical order in which the three persons were revealed in the economy of redemption (God the Father as Creator, God the Son as Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier and Perfecter), and not any intrinsic and eternal subordination of one person to another. The "order" of the Father as "first" and of the Son as "second"—different "roles" within the Triune life—does not imply unequal *authority*, as the orthodox tradition's insistence on the coeternal, coequal "majesty, glory, *lordship*, and *kingdom*" makes clear. In their comments on the history of Trinitarian thought, both Hodge and Strong appear to be too dependent on secondary sources such as Pearson, Hooker, and Gieseler rather than upon the primary sources of the patristic tradition.

63. See Carey, "Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine," *Religious & Theological Studies Fellowship Bulletin* no. 9 (1995): 8, and also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 178.

64. On the notion of "eternal generation" of the Son in Origen and its background, see Maurice Wiles, "Eternal Generation," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 12, no. 2 (1961): 284–91.

65. See the important article by Dale Moody, “God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 213–19, on the meaning and usage of *monogenēs*. Karl Barth in his Trinitarian theology continued to use the traditional concept of the Father as “origin,” and argued, “In His mode of being as the Son He fulfills the divine subordination, just as the Father in His mode of being fulfills the divine superiority”: *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 209; see the section “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country,” pp. 192–210. Barth properly wants to emphasize with this (problematic) language of an (eternal) subordination/obedience of the Son that the incarnate Jesus Christ was indeed a true and not apparent revelation of the true essence of God, but in so doing runs the risk, in the judgment of this writer, of blurring the distinctions between the *theologia* and the *economy*, between time and eternity, and between the *inherent* freedom of the Son of God (to become incarnate and obedient) and the *actualization* of that freedom in the history of redemption. Phil. 2:5–11 maintains this critical distinction: In eternity, before the incarnation, the Son existed in equality with God; only as a result of the incarnation did he freely give up this equality and become *obedient* to the point of death on a cross.

66. Similarly, with all due respect to the Greek Fathers, the notion of “cause” within the eternal life of the Trinity, i.e., the Father “causing” the *hypostasis* or person of the Son and the Spirit, needs

to be questioned, if not jettisoned entirely. The category of causation applies properly to God as Creator or First Cause of all that exists or occurs within creation, or to causes and effects *within* creation, but not with respect to one person of the Trinity “causing” another—for God per se is *uncaused* as First Cause; only things that *begin to exist* need causes, and all three persons are God per se and equally coeternal and uncaused. This notion of “causation” within the eternal Trinity has been a root of subordinationist tendencies that have plagued Trinitarian theology from the time of Origen to the present.

67. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, ii, “On the Son”: “It is, however, a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person . . . but one which is made of an equality of nature and a union of mind, and an identity of motion, and a convergence of its elements to unity.”

68. This “perichoretic” understanding of the basis of the inner-Trinitarian equality and unity is developed by Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 176–79; and by Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene, Ore: Wipf & Stock, 1998, 2005), 4–5, 70, 83, 140–47.

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On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinctions

ALAN MYATT

It has become evident in the recent debate over the nature of the Son's subordination to the Father in the Trinity that important issues are involved. Most recently the claim has been made that this doctrine has implications for how Christians may pray. 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.¹ If he is correct, then many of us will need to change how we approach God in the most intimate areas of our devotional life. This is not an arcane discussion of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. It goes to the core doctrines of our faith. It defines the nature of the God we serve. Significant practical issues of prayer and worship are involved.

My purpose in this article is to examine the notion of hierarchy, ontological equality, and functional subordination from the standpoint of worldview. By this I mean to do three things; first, to raise the question as to how this issue may or may not be coherent from the perspective of developing a consistent worldview; second, to evaluate the presuppositions and worldview issues that seem to underlie notions of hierarchy; and finally, to ask whether or not these points are consistent with a biblical view of God and creation.

Hierarchy and worldview

All worldviews either include or imply the answers to questions in four distinct areas of discourse; knowledge (epistemology), being (ontology or metaphysics), value (ethics) and purpose (teleology). The question of functional subordination arising out of ontological equality touches especially the areas of ontology and ethics, the theories of being and action. But exactly how are these to be related to one another?

The organic unity of worldviews

A worldview is like a mobile. It hangs from a support, its foundational presuppositions, connecting its parts in a delicate balance. Unless we adhere to some type of irrationalism, it is difficult to deny the interdependence of the parts as they balance each against the others to maintain a cognitive and emotional equilibrium. Like any system, when we jiggle one section, the others move as well. If we remove a weight on one side, the system attempts to adjust in order to maintain the balance of consistency. This is a psychological as well as an intellectual truism.

Psychologists speak of the notion of *cognitive dissonance*; that all things being equal, people will tend to alleviate

feelings of discomfort caused as a result of holding mutually exclusive ideas through such strategies as modifying one of them, adding additional ideas that appear to reconcile the two, changing relevant behaviors and so forth.² David K. Clark has pointed out that the internal arguments which people tend to generate to achieve cognitive consistency are the ones they find the most powerful.³ While such arguments may actually lead toward more consistency, it is clear that this does not *necessarily* eliminate contradictions within one's beliefs. It does imply either becoming more consistent or devising a means of convincing oneself that no inconsistency exists.

This inherent drive toward at least perceived, if not true, consistency in worldview is instinctive. It is reasonable to assume that since consistency is itself a virtue reflecting the rational character of the mind of God, then God has created this drive as an essential part of our noetic structure. The doctrine of creation indicates that there is a correspondence between our minds and the structure of the created order. If one looks at an elephant one sees an elephant, not a giraffe or a banana. It is plausible, therefore, to conclude that the unity of the worldview categories of ontology, epistemology, ethics and teleology is not merely a human construction. Rather, this unity reflects the necessary coherence of the created order itself.

The necessary unity of ontology and ethics is a well-known and useful tool in our apologetics. We refuse to allow our atheist neighbors the fantasy of imagining that a rational ethic can be derived from the cosmology of Richard Dawkins or Bertrand Russell. Atheists can certainly *be* decent, law-abiding folks. They just have no intellectually defensible reason for being so. All they have, in the end, is mere personal preference. We insist on pressing this point because we are convinced of the unity of worldview; that there is no disjunction between ontology and ethics. Decisions made in each of the four worldview areas determine the structure and content of the others. There is a



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necessary logical and psychological connection that pursues this type of unity, just as a mobile maintains its balance by adjusting itself back to equilibrium when one side is poked or modified.

Is it rational to separate ontology from teleology and ethics? Can there be a disjunction between ontology, the essence of an entity, and its ethical relationships with other entities? No, the theory of action and value is necessarily linked to ontology. Therefore, a necessary hierarchy in one area logically implies a necessary hierarchy in the other. A hierarchy of function necessarily points to a hierarchy of being. Given the coherence of worldviews, an eternally necessary functional hierarchy would be incompatible with ontological equality between the members of the hierarchy.⁴

The coherence of ontology and function in the Trinity

This brings us to the case of the claims being currently made in favor of just such an eternal hierarchy in the ordering of the Persons of the Trinity. Is it possible to make sense of such a notion? Is it coherent, either in its logic or practice? Or does it involve an inner dissonance that causes it to be permanently out of balance, in spite of the best efforts of its proponents?

Bruce Ware offers two reasons why there is no conflict between ontological equality and functional subordination in male and female relationships. The first is the analogy of that between parents and children. “But is it not also clear that parental authority does not make parents superior to their children or children inferior to their parents? Both parents and children are fully human, fully made in the image of God, and fully deserving of the dignity and rights accorded to all human beings.”⁵

The second reason offered by Ware is simply a restatement of the assertion that “authority and subordination do not compromise the complete equality of the Triune Persons of the Godhead.”⁶ Therefore, the same must be true in human relations as well. Since he thinks his view is taught in Scripture, the question of its coherence is assumed but never demonstrated.

Rebecca Groothuis has responded to this type of discourse in her discussions of how complementarians ground gender role distinctions in the nature of masculinity and femininity.⁷ Reviewing complementarian sources, she shows that the logic of the hierarchical view requires that the difference be in the *nature* or *being* of each as male and female.⁸ This is the case since the woman’s subordination is both necessary and permanent. She then asks whether the relationship between being and role as defended by complementarians is logically possible. Though the doctrine of the Trinity is not the focus of her discussion, the logical problem she highlights is the same. If one’s eternal and necessary unequal role entails one’s unequal being, then this would obtain in the case of the Father and Son as in any other relationship.

Indeed this seems to be the case. The English suffix “-ness” denotes the condition or state of being of a thing.⁹ If the basic “-ness” of a thing, i.e. its “femaleness” or its “sonship” (or “sonness”) is the sufficient condition of its subordination, then this subordination is unavoidably a function of its being. It is grounded in its nature as female or son. If this were not the case, then there simply would be no *reason* why any such a distinction should be both necessary and permanent.

That such an understanding applies to recent arguments of some complementarians concerning the Trinity is to be confirmed by Ware’s insistence that the roles in the economic Trinity are not *ad hoc*. 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.¹⁰

Wayne Grudem agrees. Headship and submission are eternal realities rooted in the nature of God the Trinity. However, it is not based on any distinction in competencies between the three Persons. “It is just there,” he writes.¹¹ The Father has authority just because he *is* the Father and this is most likely *the* fundamental difference between the Persons of the Trinity. However, he states that, “They don’t differ in any attributes, but only in how they relate to each other.”¹²

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.

Millard Erickson has noted that if authority and submission are essential and not accidental attributes of the Father and Son, then the essence of the Father and the essence of the Son are different. This “is equivalent to saying that they are not *homoousious* with one another” and so he concludes that there seems to be an internal contradiction in their formulation of this doctrine.¹³

It is important to note that Grudem admits that authority is related to the being of God. "Within the being of God, you have both equality and authority," he says. Since this is the case, he believes that egalitarians should just agree that such relations are possible.¹⁴ But why should egalitarians admit to any such thing? His use of the term "being" to describe the locus of both equality and subordination in God is a sign of the very incoherence that egalitarians are complaining about. This becomes even clearer as we look at Ware's analogies offered in defense of this view.

Parents and children are equal in dignity, Ware writes. Yet parents properly have authority over their children. However, he fails to note that, in fact, children are inferior to their parents in respect to the characteristics that make their submission necessary. Children lack the wisdom, experience and physical capability that parents possess to make their own decisions and survive. This is why the law recognizes that children do not share fully in the rights of adult humans until they reach the age of majority. They do not have the right to decide not to go to school, to live on their own, to enter into contracts and to do many other things that adults do. It is for their protection and well-being that children must submit to their parents because they lack, by virtue of their being, the competence to fully care for themselves. In this respect they are *not* equal to their parents, although it is certainly the case that they are equally in God's image and thus of equal value and dignity. Once they become adults, and are thus judged responsible for themselves, then it is not necessary they submit to their parents. The crucial point here is that if there were no difference in attributes and being regarding the ability to care for one's self, there would be no reason for the submission. The analogy appears to actually support the incoherence of the hierarchical view.

In the case of children, subordination is clearly not related to any defect in their humanness, but rather the changing state of their maturity. However, as Groothuis contends, "When subordination follows *necessarily and justifiably* from the subordinate person's unalterable nature, the subordinate *is* inferior in at least some aspect of her being; in this case, the scope and duration of the person's subordination will reflect the extent and significance of the inferiority."¹⁵ More specifically, she argues that if the subordination is "permanent, comprehensive and ontologically grounded," then the subordinate person is inferior.¹⁶

In a recent article, Steven B. Cowan attempts to refute Groothuis and establish the coherency of the complementarian position. Can he save ontological equality and functional hierarchy from its apparent inherent irrationalism? I do not believe so. Space does not allow a full scale discussion, but a few remarks, are in order.

Cowan frames the issue between the two sides as a dispute over "whether the property of *being equal in value and dignity to X* can be had by an individual who also has the property *having a subordinate role to X*."¹⁷ However, the point at issue is not necessarily a question of value, per se, though egalitarians tend to believe that this is implied. Rather it is a question of ontological inferiority in respect to the qualities that make one fit for authority or leadership. The only coherent reason for one to have necessary authority, leadership, teaching and decision-making primacy

is that one is better fitted for such tasks by one's nature. The subordinate may be equally valued as properly fulfilling a necessary role, but this is not the same thing as being ontologically equal. Ontological inferiority persists regardless of complementarian efforts to make it go away.¹⁸

The result is that the subordinate party is viewed as inferior in the sense of being less suited for carrying out the functions and responsibilities of authority. Cowan uses an unusual illustration that actually reinforces this point. He speaks of a hypothetical alien creature with two independent faculties enabling it to live both in water and on land. Its fitness for each environment is related to ontological factors appropriate to each. He supposes that women could likewise have qualities that suit them for subordination in the present that would not be expressed in the future new heavens and earth.¹⁹ These would be qualities of their being. Now if we apply this reasoning to the Trinity it would seem that the Son is subordinate to the Father because in his nature, he is less fit for supreme authority. The clear implication is that the Son has a different nature, inferior in at least some respects to that of the Father.

It appears that in spite of statements to the contrary, there is a drift in hierarchicalist interpretations of the Trinity toward moving beyond a merely functional subordination to ground the obedience of the Son in the nature, or ontology, of the Persons of the Trinity. This is to be expected if the notion of ontological equality and permanent functional subordination is incoherent, as I believe it to be.

As I argued at the outset, 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.

A stable worldview must have equilibrium and consistency between its ontology and its ethics.

The Great Chain of Being: the ontological basis of hierarchy

Throughout the bulk of Christian history, the hierarchical stratification of human relations extended beyond male-female relationships in the church and home to persons at all levels of society. Scholars have documented the caste system of medieval Christendom and linked it to an underlying worldview known as the Great Chain of Being. The assumptions of the Chain of Being have their roots in the West in Aristotelian and Platonic thought, in which the natural division of society into superiors and subordinates was taken for granted. This perspective was developed into an all-encompassing philosophy and worldview in neo-Platonist thought. As Greek philosophical notions were appropriated by early Christian apologists in their defense of the faith, it eventually became entwined with the theology of the church and set the agenda for its theory of society.²⁰

The influence of Greek hierarchicalism on the doctrine of God is evident in Origen's theory that the Father imparts to the Son his existence and therefore the Son is less than the Father.²¹ This is very similar to the kind of emanation theories emerging from neo-platonic thought. For Plotinus, all of the diversity in the universe originates in a series of emanations from the being of the One, who is beyond being itself. The resulting Chain of Being forms a hierarchy from the higher spiritual realms to the lower creatures.²²

Neo-Platonic notions of hierarchy continued to find their way into the church's theology through such writings as those of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. This vision of society became basic to Western thought.²³

In the Middle Ages, this concept translated into the division of society into "Three Estates," each stratified according to the Chain of Being. The first estate consisted of church officials beginning with the pope, archbishops, bishops, and priests. The second estate included the ruling classes of kings, nobility and knights, while the peasants and merchants made up the lower estate. Any violation of the established authority within each estate was seen as a threat to the creation order and subversive to the state and to the stability of Christian culture. Any attempt to leave one's place in the chain was therefore an act of rebellion. It is critical to note that in the family there was a hierarchical ordering of husband, wife, children and servants.²⁴ Each was subordinate to the previous due to their immutable places on the Chain of Being.

It is important to understand that the philosophy of the Great Chain of Being is a non-Christian solution to a philosophical problem that arises out of the denial of a biblical worldview. The question as to whether or not reality is ultimately one or many is derived from the assumption that the universe is ultimate, and is thus founded on a denial of the Creator-creature distinction. From a biblical standpoint, only the Triune God is ultimate, and in him both unity and diversity

are equally ultimate. The unity of his nature is not prior to the diversity of Persons and neither is the diversity of Persons prior to the unity of his nature. There is an absolute ontological equality, except for their personal consciousness, between the three Persons.²⁵ Since he is the Creator, God's sovereign plan accounts for both the unity and diversity of the creation. There is no need to posit a hierarchy or Chain of Being to hold everything together. The diversity and unity of the universe finds its resolution in the will and creatorial acts of the One-and-Many Trinity.²⁶

The notion of the Chain of Being is, hence, the fruit of an essentially pagan worldview. Yet it is this view that became definitive for defining hierarchical relationships in Western Christendom. Relations of political, ecclesiastical and gender authority were explicitly based on this type of thinking. Its influence on biblical interpretation can even be seen in the commentaries of Calvin, who argued that the woman

by nature (that is, by the ordinary law of God) is formed to obey; for ... (the government of women) has always been regarded by all wise persons as a monstrous thing; and, therefore, so to speak, it will be a mingling of heaven and earth, if women usurp the right to teach. Accordingly, he bids them be "quiet," that is, keep within their own rank.²⁷

Elsewhere he argues

He (Paul) establishes by *two* arguments the pre-eminence, which he had assigned to men above women. The *first* is, that as the woman derives her origin from the man, she is therefore inferior in rank. The *second* is, that as the woman was created for the sake of the man, she is therefore subject to him, as the work ultimately produced is to its cause. That the man is the beginning of the woman and the end for which she was made, is evident from the law.²⁸

Notice the language. The woman is inferior in rank. She is formed to obey. This is Chain of Being language, subtly imposed on the biblical text.

The influence of the Chain of Being continued to play a leading role in attempts of 19th century Christians to use the Bible to justify the continuation of slavery. Theories of the lower rank of Africans on the Chain of Being abounded and were used to argue that there was nothing immoral in the arrangements of antebellum slavery in the southern United States.²⁹ After all, according to the Chain of Being doctrine, each person's role is indispensable to the functioning of society. In a sense, all are of equal value, though, to quote George Orwell, "some are more equal than others."³⁰ The subordination of some to others appears to be an evil, they admitted, but once it is understood as a necessity of the order of creation (the Great Chain of Being), it is argued that subordination is not an evil at all.³¹

The similarities in the chain of authority in the Trinity and in male-female relations to the non-Christian theory of the Great Chain of Being are no coincidence. Such notions were derived from the infusion of the Chain of Being philosophy into Christian thought, forming the presuppositional lens through which medieval and early modern Christians read their Bibles. The ontology of hierarchy is derived from this presupposition, a metaphysic at odds with the Christian doctrine of creation and the notion of the self-contained Triune God as presented in Scripture. It places the value and limits the function of things according to their position in the hierarchy of Being. Current attempts to define the Trinity as an eternal hierarchy of authority and submission may be understood, then, as examples of reading the Great Chain of Being back into the biblical text. The motive for this seems to be the preservation of an understanding of male-authority in the home and church.³²

It should be noted that this hierarchical understanding of these relations, indeed of the universe itself, is virtually ubiquitous in non-Christian, pagan thought throughout the world, both ancient and modern. Ancient mystery religions of the Near East, as well as Hindu pantheism among others, show this tendency to structure the universe in a hierarchy of Being, with rigid social structures. In its more pure forms, unimpeded by any biblical influence, the tendency is for some type of cosmic evolution through which humans eventually become divine. Common factors are a hierarchy of divinities and a hierarchy of male over female. Patriarchy has been so universal in human society that it could be said to be the default mode of human existence.³³

While complementarians persist in accusing egalitarians of yielding to the pressure of non-Christian culture in their handling of Scripture, it appears that just the opposite is true.³⁴ It is the complementarian position that grows out of non-Christian presuppositions. This has important implications. Traditional hierarchical biblical interpretation has been filtered through the lens of a cultural vision of human relations compromised by a pagan worldview grounded in the Great Chain of Being. This effectively blinded it to the egalitarian implications of the biblical text.

Contrary to being a capitulation to culture, the egalitarian impulse is a historical development running against the tide of these assumptions. It surfaced in Britain and America as the implications of Reformation theology began to saturate the culture in the wake of the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁵ It came into full bloom among evangelicals in the abolition and suffrage movements of the nineteenth century. Under pressure from egalitarian readings of Scripture, the hierarchical vision has been in a steady retreat

ever since. The Bible's teachings of the ontological equality of all persons has done away with the rule of kings in favor of democracy, the enslavement of Africans in favor of equal civil rights for all races, and the political and social subordination of women in favor of suffrage and the rights to education and careers.

One place where the Chain of Being still seems to hold power is in the church.³⁶ It should be a matter of concern that

its influence remains entrenched. At the outset of this article, it was noted that at least one prominent proponent of the eternal submission of the Son to the Father has encouraged us to cease praying directly to Jesus. This is because the Father is seen

to be supreme.³⁷ A recent booklet that I received expresses a quite similar sentiment:

Jesus taught his followers to pray to "our Father in the heavens." (Matthew 6:9). Our prayers, then, must be directed only to Jehovah God. However, Jehovah requires that we acknowledge the position of his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ ... He is appointed High Priest and Judge. (John 5:22; Hebrews 6:20) Hence, the Scriptures direct us to offer our prayers through Jesus. For our prayers to be heard we must pray only to *Jehovah* through his Son.

That this quote, which obviously comes from the Jehovah's Witnesses, sounds so similar is a cause for concern. I am not suggesting that the author mentioned shares their Arianism. This would be an unfair accusation. Nevertheless, it seems that when we are exhorted to pray only to the Father and not to the Son as well, some sort of Rubicon has been crossed. One wonders what the impact of this will be on worship as its implications are worked out. Could it be described as Jesus' lesser glory? The fact is that Jesus taught us to pray to himself as well as to the Father (John 14:14). This is completely appropriate. The perichoretic unity of the Trinity simply does not allow for any type of essential supremacy or subordination amongst the three Persons. They must share one identical divine nature as the Scriptures teach.

Millard Erickson has warned that the hierarchicalist interpretation of the Trinity is a detour in the wrong direction. He contends that this position is unstable. I must agree. If my argument at the beginning of this paper is correct, then this instability will attempt to resolve itself, returning to equilibrium just as a hanging mobile does when it is bumped. The dissonance between equality and subordination will lead to one or the other being given up. In this case, that may very well mean that some will eventually follow the logic of hierarchy toward Arianism. I would like to join Dr. Erickson in a plea for the hierarchicalists to rethink their position and turn back.

Notes

1. Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 18.
2. R. L. Timpe, "Cognitive Dissonance," in *The Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling*, 2nd ed., ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 220.
3. See David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person Centered Approach to Christian Defense*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 160-162. Thanks also to Dr. Maria Boccia of Gordon-Conwell, whose insights helped illuminate this point.
4. I am not arguing that all worldviews are necessarily consistent. That is clearly not the case. One of the primary reasons for rejecting false worldviews is the fact that they do contain logical contradictions that are irreconcilable within the framework of their own presuppositions. However, it does appear that both logic and human psychology tend to push in the direction of consistency. Decisions made in the area of teleology will both be shaped by and shape interpretations of ontology and ethics. The reductionistic empiricism of the new atheists leads inexorably to relativism in ethics. That not all atheists are willing to admit this or embrace it is only evidence of the inherent irrationalism in the worldview itself. The more consistent they are, the more relativistic they become.
5. Ware, 138.
6. *Ibid.*, 139.
7. See Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 41ff.
8. "But notice that in evangelical patriarchy a woman's subordination still follows—necessarily and permanently—from what she necessarily and permanently *is* by nature (namely, female). Her personal being decides and determines her subordinate status ... The essence of masculinity is a sense of leadership, and the essence of femininity is a disposition to submit to male leadership." Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, "Equal in Being, Unequal in Role," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 302.
9. "-ness," in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).
10. Ware is consistent and forthright in asserting the Father's supremacy over the Son and Holy Spirit in the Godhead. Ware, 46ff.
11. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers), 47.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Millard Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2009), 172.
14. Grudem, 48.
15. Groothuis, "Equal in Being, Unequal in Role," 316.
16. *Ibid.*, 317.
17. Steven B. Cowan, "The Metaphysics of Subordination: A Response to Rebecca Merrill Groothuis," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 14:1 (Spring, 2009), 43.
18. Cowan contends that since female subordination is not permanent in the next life, Groothuis's argument fails (46). However, there is a drift toward eternal female subordination in complementarian thinking, as evidenced by Mark David Walton's defense of such in his article, "Relationships and Role in the New Creation," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 11:1 (Spring 2006). Indeed, the entire push for eternal hierarchy in the Trinity evidences the irresistible logic of this.
19. Cowan, 47.
20. Perhaps the most important book tracing the history of the concept is Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). See also E. M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 25ff; Letha Scanzoni, "The Great Chain of Being and the Chain of Command," *The Reformed Journal*, 26:8 (October 1976) 14-18; and Robert K. McGregor Wright, "Hierarchicalism Unbiblical," *Journal of Biblical Equality*, 3 (June 1991), 57-66.
21. This is especially evident in this quote, "The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father); the Holy Spirit is still less, and dwells within the saints alone. So that in this way the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit, and in turn the power of the Holy Spirit exceeds that of every other holy being." *Origen on First Principles: Being Koetschau's Text of the De Principiis Translated into English*, tr G. W. Butterworth, (Peter Smith Publishers, 1966), 33-34 (Fragment 9), cited in Edward Moore, "Origen of Alexandria," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/o/origen.htm> (accessed Nov. 16, 2009).
22. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Volume I Greece & Rome Part II* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1962), 210ff.
23. Cf. Tillyard, 26-27.
24. Dr. Bruce Magee has a helpful diagram of these relationships in his internet course notes, English Department, Louisiana Tech University, http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/201/intro2_medieval/estates&chain_of_being_notes.htm (accessed Oct. 12, 2010).
25. Wayne Grudem's suggestion that unless there is a hierarchy of roles of authority and submission in the Trinity then there is no distinction between the Persons, resulting in modalism, is nonsensical. The distinction between the Persons is perfectly capable of existing without any hint of roles or authority and submission. All that is required is that each Person has his own individual and unique consciousness, distinct from the others. There is no necessary reason why this would require that one be eternally under the authority of the other. The real distinction is that there are three "egos", three distinct individual consciousnesses in an I-thou relation with the others. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 251.
26. A very helpful discussion of this may be found in Rousas John Rushdoony, "The One and Many Problem—The Contribution of Van Til" in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E. R. Gehaan, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 339-348.
27. *Commentary on 1 Timothy*, 2:12.
28. *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*. 11:8
29. An example of one such text is Josiah Priest, *Bible Defence (sic) of Slavery; and Origins Fortunes, and History of the Negro Race*, 5th ed, (Glasgow, KY: W. S. Brown, 1852), 166ff. More extensive documentation can be found in Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 482ff.
30. George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, (Everyman's Library, 1993), 88.
31. This is the argument of Soame Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*. 4th ed. (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), 71-72.
32. Dr Bruce Ware denies that his view of the eternal subordination of the Son was influenced by a desire to bolster complementarian claims concerning male-female relations. I am

willing to take his claims at face value, however, it should be noted that it was complementarians who first brought the Trinity into the discussion to support their views. See Bruce Ware, "A Defense of the Ontological Equality and Functional Authority-Submission Relations among the Three Trinitarian Persons," unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 20, 2009.

33. Attempts to prove the existence of a primordial matriarchy from which the ancient world fell into patriarchy have not been successful. See Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 263-270.

34. "Bruce Ware: First, and most fundamental, the issue at root is this: will Christian individuals, churches, and organizations follow the clear teaching of Scripture on the equality and distinction that mark the nature and roles of men and women, or will they yield to the pressure and values of our culture and so re-cast biblical teaching after the mold of our own age? I'm quite aware that evangelical egalitarians would deny that they are guilty of this charge, but I stand by the charge. What drives contemporary egalitarian biblical interpretation is not the force of the biblical text itself but the culture that presses to modify what that text says." "JBMW Forum," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 12:2 (Fall 2007), 42.

35. The impact of the Great Awakenings on the formation of American and British concepts of liberty, morality and equality are documented in John Wesley Bready, *England Before and After Wesley*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938). Of course, egalitarianism is not entirely novel in history. There is evidence that the early church enjoyed a time of egalitarian practice before the Chain of Being philosophy became dominant. See also Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women*, published by Christians for Biblical Equality.

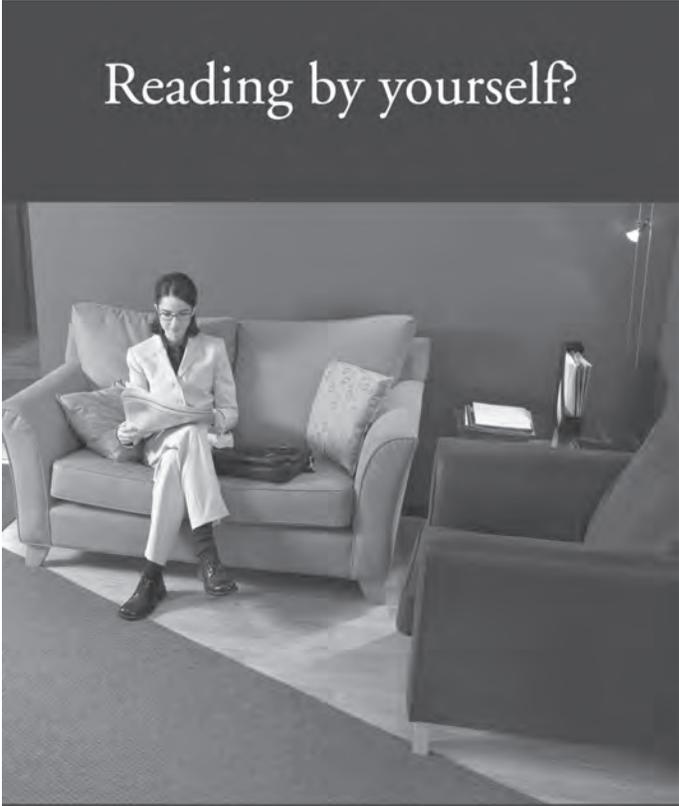
36. It also continues to hold sway as the organizing principle of neo-Darwinian theories of evolution, but that is a subject for another study.

37. Ware, 153.

38. *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2005), 167-168.

39. Erickson, 258.

"On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinctions" was first presented as a lecture at the 61st annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, November 20, 2009.



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Fully Human : A Pastor and Counselor Responds to Pornography

GERALD FORD

Someone¹ has said that one of the biggest problems with pornography is not that it shows too much of a woman, but that it doesn't show enough. It doesn't show that she is an individual with a soul, who has a right to be valued as such. It doesn't show that she has the right to privacy and honor and respect. It doesn't show that she is a person of worth, created in the image of God, *fully human*.

It is clear that pornography is a serious problem for both the church and the broader society. As a pastor and counselor, I am interested in the problems lurking beneath the problem. What is it about our culture that makes pornography normal, even acceptable? What is it about men that makes them think they have permission to look at women as objects? What is it about women that keeps them from believing they deserve better? In this article I propose that we will deal effectively with pornography only once we truly understand our sexuality, our value, and our relationships.

The repression of our spirit: understanding sexuality

While thinkers like Sigmund Freud have entertained the question of how repression of physical sexuality harms the individual, few people have dealt with the question of how repression of the human spirit has harmed our personality. We have been created to be in relationship with God, with one another, and with our own selves (all necessary if we are to live in full community), in a way that recognizes our spiritual, mental, and physical nature. God has expressed himself in all three of these ways, and bearing God's image we also have the capability of these expressions.² Denying that a person's body is sacred, deserving to be respected and not exploited, is but a step away from assaulting the spirit and the mind in the same way. The mind and the body are never far apart. The spirit and the body are never far apart. The mind and the spirit are never far apart. What affects one will affect the others, and when one is in pain, it may well be sending a message to the others.

Freud was also wrong about repression when he failed to recognize self-control as a healthy way to value sexuality. Self-control, or we may call it self-discipline, is a healthy and necessary way to develop who we are, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 2:18), to press toward the mark of the high call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14), and to be good stewards of who we are in mind, body, and spirit.

In the image of God: understanding our value

What does show the whole truth about a woman, or a man? Not all pictures are worth a thousand words. Let's take a closer look

at who we are as God's children, created in his image, male and female (Gen. 1:27).

As a pastor and as a marriage counselor, I hear of many good books, support groups, and therapy approaches to help wrest a person away from the addictive

snare of pornography. These efforts produce varying results, but still something is lacking if we are only trying to change people's minds about the nature of pornography. Nothing works as well as a genuine change of mind about the nature of women, the startling recognition that every woman is a person for whom Christ died. To let the gospel speak to us about each other is to become amazed at the infinite value that God has given to us. When we truly understand our value, we are able to look at each other and say "Here is someone who should not be made the victim of either shame or arrogance." Internalizing this truth changes the way we "view" women, both figuratively and literally. The world of pornography is a world where respect is abandoned and lost, and it is a world where people become shallow viewers of shallow expressions, in which neither the viewer nor the person in the picture is respecting or experiencing full humanity.

To see our value as Christ does requires us to deal with another fact: pornography not only fails to show all that is true of women, but it also fails to show all that is true of men. The tired and worn-out clichés depicting men as animalistic cravers of yet another sexual adventure, as well as the assumption

Love is not the fuzziness of a romance novel or the desperate fleeing of loneliness at all costs; true love is the "energy of our will that drives us toward the healing of what is broken about us."



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that men just aren't as sensitive as women when it comes to sexuality, have come not from the Bible, but rather from a fallen and shallow world.

Love and respect for women and men: understanding relationships

Recently, an old theory has resurged in the world of Christian counseling. I often hear people say that their well-meaning pastor or therapist has taught them that men want respect more than they want love and that women want love more than they want respect. The theory suggests that men will forsake love if they have to do so in order to get respect, and that women will forsake respect if they have to do so in order to gain love. On the face of it, this theory may seem valid but it is filled with problems and falsehoods. The truth about love is that true love is also respectful. The truth about respect is that it can and should be loving. If it is not connected to love, it is probably not respect.

Furthermore, what many men view as respect is really something else. It may be nothing more than pride. If not pride, this "respect" may only be an attempt to avoid the openness and sharing that love requires. Or, sadly and strangely, it may be a cover-up of shame. Pride, avoidance, and shame do not recognize or value our humanity.

True love is stronger than most of us believe. It is not the fuzziness of a romance novel or the desperate fleeing of loneliness at all costs; true love is the "energy of our will that drives us toward the healing of what is broken about us."³ Love builds relationships. Love sacrifices. Love values the personhood of others.

Respect happens when we see something we value. Respect will do well to preserve and nurture its object. Respect will seek to love.

In the counseling room, when I hear men talking about respect, the requests are often more about a demand for power without accountability. They don't want questions about where they are, what they do, whom they are with, or how they spend money and time. They want blind faith, and they don't want to share decision-making. It gives respect a bad name.

This love/respect issue is unhelpful. Statistically, there are some people who live this way, though certainly not all men and not all women do so. (And remember, statistics may only be a count of people's mistakes rather than a count of their true human characteristics.) If we accept the ideas behind the theory that some men may value respect to the abandonment of love and some women value love to the abandonment of respect, we must also ask some hard questions. Why would men fail to see that they need love? Why would women fail to see that they need respect? Why would we devalue either one of these great graces? Do we believe that we can't have both love and respect? Do we believe that either of these can

really survive without the other? Love and respect are equally to be credited for influencing the way we act toward each other, the way we speak to each other, and the purposes of our relationships.

Pornography strikes out in both of these concepts; it is neither respectful nor loving. God intends for us to give respect and love and to receive both in return, but the world of pornography is the world of selfishness and isolation. It is a world of manipulation. It is the world of a double life.

Fully human

In *Being Human ... Becoming Human*, noted theologian Helmut Thielicke writes of humanity in this way: it is our calling to be fully human, a quest that means that as we grow toward Christ, we become more human as well. This process continues throughout the believer's life and never ends until we see Christ face to face. In heaven we will not be gods: we will finally be the complete humans God intended us to be. "The human self receives infinite reality from its awareness of existing for God, of being a human self for which God is the standard," Thielicke writes. He points out that if we see ourselves only in relation to our jobs, or our possessions, or our parents' standards, or our governmental construct, or our behaviors, then we will be a "lowly self." Without a better standard than what we ourselves create, we have only our work to measure ourselves by. But, "... what an infinite emphasis it puts on the self to receive God as the standard."

The human self with God as the standard will see and treat other humans in a new and different way. It is only by grace that we grow toward the likeness of Christ, just as it is only by grace that we become the child of God by faith. We are God's by creation, and we are his by redemption. By his grace, he who came among us as fully God and fully human seeks to perform the miracle of making us fully human as well.

Notes

1. John Paul II, from the lectures "Theology of the Body," as discussed by Christopher West.
2. While this article cannot develop a full theological study of what it means to be created in the image of God, I have come to a comfortable belief that at least part of this expression refers to the mental, physical, and spiritual persons of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which God has created in us, as mind, body, and spirit. Respectfully and thankfully stated, we too are "trinity."
3. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1954.

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Authentic Masculinity; Authentic Relationships Reflections for Couples

JENNIFER AND LUKE REYNOLDS

The Breaking Point: Jennifer's Story

Luke had just returned from a conference in California. Our only contact over the past week had been a brief fifteen-minute phone conversation. The conference was going well, and he couldn't wait to return and share the details. He was eager to see me again. The feeling was mutual. Even though at that time we were traveling through a difficult period in our relationship, I missed our daily conversations and his presence, his embrace.

The series of events that followed his homecoming are now somewhat of a blur. I remember the inevitable discussion about the conference. We were in my car, parked. Luke was in the driver's seat. "I have to read you a letter I wrote while at the conference. Please let me finish. After I'm done, I want you to be completely honest with me about anything that goes through your mind." An indescribable sense came over me; my body clenched a bit, my heart started pounding just a tad faster, and my stomach squirmed. Something didn't feel right and I had no idea what he was about to read.

As I sat there in the passenger seat, I listened as my fiancé confessed to using pornography on multiple occasions throughout our relationship as well as to acting in other ways that I will refer to as violations of trust. I literally felt as though someone had punched me in the stomach. I could not create sound; I could not speak. My world, which had been recently rocking, felt like it was collapsing. The attempt to fight off tears lasted until he finished reading, and then I could no longer hold back the pain of my fresh wounds. The next two weeks were filled with grieving. Several times I broke down and bawled until I couldn't breathe, until I gagged. I didn't know what to think, what to do, or where to go.

Was I overreacting? According to culture, pornography is an acceptable component of a healthy sexual drive. And yet, the brokenness and pain we were both experiencing did not seem normal or healthy. Society's acceptance of pornography, wrapped up in its definition of masculinity, is horribly skewed, and unfortunately the church has not been immune to such lies. But as Christians we need to find our standard for authentic masculinity in the Bible alone.

Defining Authentic Masculinity

There is an amazing passage in the gospel of John in which Jesus' behavior toward a hurting woman is contrasted with that of the Pharisees. These religious leaders and lawmakers often missed the point: they focused on *objects* rather than on *people*. In this way, they were as destructive and dehumanizing to those around them as those who use pornography today. They

focused only on what built themselves up—what *they* needed—and therefore had no understanding or relationship with *love*. Enter Jesus (John 8:2-9):

At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

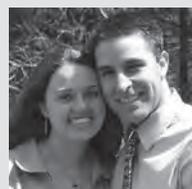
But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman standing there.

Jesus is focused not on what the woman is accused of, but on the attitudes of the Pharisees. The scene reveals a desire for dominance and power. These Pharisees acted in a way to make themselves feel stronger, which resulted in the shaming and abusing of the accused woman. Today, this cycle is replicated all too often. Men assert their "masculinity" as selfishness and dominance, and women are objectified and belittled. Pornography is not the only way this process occurs, but it is one of the most tragic.

Culture tells us that pornography is normal—that sexual urges are needs, and that acting on those sexual urges is what real men do. Normal? The level of aggression and intensity displayed in pornography is unmatched to intimate intercourse within a healthy marriage. Porn celebrates sex outside of committed



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relationships. In a tragically increasing manner, it also delights in abusing and denigrating women. Two prominent researchers, Gail Dines and Robert Jensen, found that if pornographic films that contained offensive language against women were to be removed from the market, the entire industry would collapse. Men are aroused as women are verbally abused. But this isn't the worst of it: in many porn films, and especially on internet sites, the increasing physical abuse is horrific.

The big picture is this: men who watch women being *abused* are told by culture that they can *easily* switch back to the role of loving women with sensitivity and strength. This is a lie.

Authentic masculinity arises from a place of egalitarian compassion, when respect and love replace domination and control. Yet, the Pharisees in this John 8 passage reveal their tired and accustomed trends: they exert what they consider strength by lording it over a woman who stands powerless before them. *Their* voices are all that matter, not hers.

A Woman's Voice

A woman *must* understand that she *cannot* make her husband, boyfriend, or loved one stop using pornography. She can encourage growth, repentance, and transformation, but he must be the one who makes the choice.

The only person we can change is ourselves. For many women this is a hard concept. Often culture portrays women as loving nurturers who desire to help those who are struggling. We need to change this perception. We are not saying that women need to stop nurturing or caring about those they love. However, the way this is often perverted into glorifying women's desire to "fix" others, particularly men, is an unhealthy error that we must confront. We challenge women to center inwardly and work on strengthening themselves, to work on seeing themselves as Jesus does.

If someone you love is struggling with pornography, it is important not to lose yourself in the process. Prayerfully consider your role, whether it is giving tough ultimatums or more gentle support. Each situation is different to a degree, but the commonality is that pornography is universally destructive. Do not settle for a relationship where you are one of many women. Do not settle for a relationship where you cannot trust the man you love. Choose a relationship where you will be treated the way Jesus wants you to be treated.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the norms of male domination—expressed through pornography—are the opposite of authentic masculinity. Pornography imprisons women in the grasp of insecure and dominant men. Each time men domineer over women, they throw the first stone. But Jesus does what is *most* powerful: he stands up *for* the woman with all the power he has. He frees her.

Though John 8 doesn't describe the woman's face after her encounter with Jesus, we like to imagine it this way: *After hearing*

Jesus' words her head slowly rises. Instead of looking at the dirt she looks up for the first time. She sees the face of the one who loves her, recognizes her humanity. Her eyes tighten just a bit, and she stifles a tear or two. Her line of vision is clarified; gratitude is written on her face, a new strength is being written on her soul.

"Authentic Masculinity; Authentic Relationships: Reflections for Couples" was originally published in *Mutuality*, Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 2009.

Is Your Porn Use Destroying Your Relationship?

Confront your addiction with these four biblical principles.

HONESTY

(1 John 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:2; Prov. 24:26)

Wholeheartedly admit your problem to God and to your loved ones. Take full responsibility for your actions. Be prepared for and welcome your spouse's honest reactions.

COMMITMENT

(Col. 3:5; Phil. 4:8-9)

Commit to stopping your harmful behavior. Commit to pray and daily depend on God. Commit to professional counseling. Commit to demonstrating to your spouse that she means more to you than your addiction. And commit to receiving the grace our Savior readily gives.

ACCOUNTABILITY

(Rom. 12:1-2; James 5:16)

Follow through on your commitments. Seek accountability from trusted friends.

SACRIFICE

(Phil. 2:3-8; Eph. 5:21; Rom. 12:9-10; Gal. 5:13-14)

Prove your love for your spouse through both words and actions. Allow healing to occur on her terms. Work daily to empathize with your spouse's situation. Understand that forgiveness may not always include reconciliation, but seek after it anyway.

The View From the Pulpit

Honest Advice from Women in Ministry

Women in ministry leadership face unique challenges as they seek to follow their calling in a world that often discourages and discriminates because of their gender. Here ten women leaders share experiences, wisdom, and hope as they respond to these common obstacles.

My male colleagues exclude me from discussions and do not listen to my ideas. I feel like a “fish out of water.”

About thirty years ago, when I began teaching as the first (and, for ten years, as the only) female at my school, I noticed I went through several transitions with some of my male colleagues. First, on a local scholarly trip, I found that throughout the evening they talked to each other as if I was not there. I felt they regarded me as a child who can be seen but not heard. Although they invited me to join them on other trips, I never went again. Second, when in our academic meetings I forced myself to contribute, my comments were often met in laughter. (The child should never have spoken!) Third, when they realized I had gained a certain amount of influence, some of them planned methods to undercut my suggestions. (The child had become unruly.) So, I went through three stages; ignored because I was of no significance, laughed at because I was different, undercut because I was threatening. What made a difference? As a faculty we took an educational trip abroad and, for once, we all got to know each other as mature individuals outside of academic concerns. Then, when we returned, I was treated with more respect. The situation also improved when other male colleagues began making a point of announcing that I had my hand up during meetings, encouraging my participation.

When you are facing exclusion from your colleagues, be affirmed by the Word of God. The Apostle Paul said that God chose the ones “that are not” in order to nullify the ones who “are” (1 Cor 1:28) and Mary praised the Lord, prophesying the Lord has “lifted up the humble,” while bringing down “rulers from their thrones” (Luke 1:52). We cannot allow the negative opinions of others to become our own opinion of ourselves because in God’s sight we are significant. The best technique of all is to ask for prayer from supporters for important forthcoming meetings and to engage key colleagues individually ahead of time to discuss those issues you believe to be important. And, remember to advocate for others as others once advocated for you.

For other practical advice, look for William David Spencer’s article “From Locker Room to Meeting Room: Restructuring Groups for Both Women and Men” in the forthcoming *Some Men Are Our Heroes*, eds. Jewel Hyun and Cindy Lathrop, as well as *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Serving Together in the Church*, eds. A. Besançon Spencer, W. D. Spencer, and Mimi Haddad.

Rev. Dr. Aída Besançon Spencer, Ph.D., is professor of New Testament and Director of the Office of Presbyterian Ministries at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and a founding pastor of Pilgrim Church in Beverly, Massachusetts.

My seminary professor has publicly made it clear he believes women should not be in church leadership.

None of my MDiv professors were supportive of women’s leadership in the church. In one course, the subject came up in *every* class session, as my professor was spurred on by male students, and I, the only woman in the class, was never called on. What advice do I have for other women living such a story?

- Remember that God is your authority, not any college or seminary professor. At the conclusion of seminary, I left a denominational missions meeting where I refused to sign a statement discriminating against women pastors only to find a message on my answering machine inviting me to preach elsewhere. God truly has the final word, so give him your emotional energy. School ends. He doesn’t.
- Concentrate on the people who do support you. For me, there were specific female pastors who listened to me for hours as I went through seminary. Find those people and spend as much time with them as possible.
- Remember that you can shake people’s worldviews just by loving Jesus. Love those professors, too, and find things to genuinely affirm in them. Ask them questions based on your thorough research. Seek to influence—rather than to defeat—those who may oppose you. A male classmate told me once, “I thought all women leaders were heretics who didn’t respect God’s Word. But then I heard you thought it was okay for women to preach, so I knew that my assumption couldn’t be true.” Your life will preach to those around you as much as your professor’s lectures do.

Laura M. Rector (M.Div, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is currently pursuing her Ph.D. at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Some of my parishioners think my leadership style is too “feminine” while others think it is too “masculine.” I just can’t win!

An elderly male congregant once wrote me an irate email claiming that the problem with a woman pastor like me is that I am not feminine enough to be a maternal figure, but I am not forceful enough to “get the job done” like men do—a description of a true “lose-lose” proposition!

I have found the book *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders* helpful for understanding this nuanced challenge. Authors and psychology professors Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli propose the metaphor of a labyrinth to

replace the old “glass ceiling” metaphor in the business world. They write:

In everyday behavior on the job, women encounter more obstacles to their leadership and authority than men do. Women who are too assertive, competitive, or even competent can at times threaten others, who then resist female influence and leadership. This resistance to their leadership can lower evaluations of women’s personalities and skills, obscure women’s contributions to group tasks, undermine their performance, and even subject them to sexual harassment. At the same time, women can be criticized for being too nice. *Men, unlike women, do not bear the burden of having to be especially likable to be influential or to be accepted as leaders, nor do they have to establish themselves as clearly superior in ability* (p. 117, emphasis mine).

Navigating a labyrinth is an apt metaphor for being a woman leader in the church—I don’t feel like I am crashing through a glass ceiling so much as making my way through the complex twists and unexpected turns of leading as a woman. According to my disgruntled congregant, as I tiptoed my way through this labyrinth, I veered too far away from the feminine and at the same time steered away from the assertive side. That’s a tough—and very treacherous—road to walk.

We must remember that we are called to be more concerned with being Christ’s disciple and less about fitting cultural expectations. In order to navigate the labyrinth as a disciple of Jesus Christ, we must follow only Jesus, listening for his voice, discerning his way, avoiding culture’s strident calls to be aggressive and self-aggrandizing, yet seeking his courage to keep from being too passive or agreeable when we need to stand up for what is right and just.

Rev. Alison Moore John is pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Brookline, Massachusetts.

I feel like I’m going to fail and that when I do, everyone will use it to confirm their beliefs that women shouldn’t be in ministry.

Growing up in a very traditional denomination, I was taught that according to Scripture, God calls solely males into the ministry and that women must be submissive to men and be silent in the church. I will be forever grateful for Christians for Biblical Equality for introducing me to writings by highly respected evangelical scholars that interpreted difficult biblical passages differently than my denominational leaders did.

During the week of my seminary graduation, in May of 2003, I received an unexpected call to serve First Christian Church in Beaumont, Texas as their interim pastor and, a year later, as their senior pastor. Occasionally when a struggle arises in the congregation, a little tape from my past plays in my head that says, “If a man were pastor here, he would be able to handle this situation quickly and efficiently.” There is another tape that echoes in my head at times: “Maybe the church would be better off with a young

man with two cute young children and then the church would grow and lots of young families would join.”

When doubts arise and those old tapes start trying to play once again, I remember that:

- The Spirit of God, who called me as a shepherd serving under the Great Good Shepherd, is equipping me to feed the flock.
- My community of faith, friends, and family are upholding me in prayer.
- I see God’s miraculous hand in circumstances in spite of my human frailty.
- I am surrounded by the communion of saints that includes myriads of named and unnamed women throughout the ages who have answered the call and have been empowered, commissioned, and ordained by the Spirit to do the work of ministry.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13).

Rev. Brenda Griffin Warren is senior pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Beaumont, Texas.

I wonder whether I’m being compensated differently from my male colleagues.

Max Weber, founder of the academic discipline of sociology of religion a hundred years ago, astutely observed that whatever we designate as “sacred” becomes “uniquely inalterable.” Whether cast in the harsh rhetoric of John R. Rice in 1941 (*Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers*) or in the candy-coated language of “complementarity” by John Piper and Wayne Grudem in 1991 (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*), the result is the same: When God’s name is attached to any form of misogyny, for sincere Christians, that teaching becomes unalterable. It stands firm and it guides both attitudes and actions.

That reality has helped me understand (and forgive) the many times over the last six decades that I’ve been ignored, my voice has been silenced, and my contributions have been discounted. In particular this has been true in two areas. Often I felt excluded from discussions among male colleagues, or the ideas I’ve put on the table have been ignored. A second area has been the pain of knowing that a male colleague has received a larger salary for essentially the same level of responsibility and performance. Dealing with these realities is always a balancing act between speaking up when simple justice has been compromised or knowing when to smile and let go of the desire for respect or equity.

While I have not always coped well with those “facts of life” in this fallen world, two truths have made a difference for me. First, most colleagues don’t intentionally hurt me; they simply act out of training from infancy about gender (see Weber’s *The Sociology of Religion*). That helps when I need to challenge them. Second, in the end it is God’s smile that matters. That helps when I need to let go.

Dr. Alice Mathews is the former academic dean at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where she continues to teach as the Lois W. Bennett Distinguished Professor Emerita in the areas of women’s studies and educational ministries. She is known for her participation in the daily radio program, *Discover the Word*.

I'm tired of constantly having to defend my call. I just want us to move past the "women in ministry" question and serve Jesus!

The biblical account of Esther has long been a favorite of mine. Even as a child it captivated my imagination, most especially because God used a woman to save his people. I remember wondering if I would have the same courage should I ever find myself in a similar situation. Do you remember the part of the story when Esther walked into the throne room (Esther 5:2)? She couldn't be sure the king would allow her in until he extended the gold scepter. He did, and she entered confidently to make her request.

Oddly, I have often come to see myself in the same place as Queen Esther when I consider the "women in ministry" question. It's not that I have been called to "save my people," but rather, that I have a sense of needing permission to enter. When I find myself in uncertain ministry settings, I realize I involuntarily brace myself for an adverse reaction when it's discovered I'm a pastor. I sense the focus turn toward me and the tension mount as I wait to be invited in or ridiculed for daring to ask.

Our encouragement in the face of this tension is the truth that the Lord God has invited us all into the throne room through faith in Jesus Christ. We are called and must serve our God based on gifting, not gender. This knowledge stops my involuntary response and elicits a confidence that keeps me entering in to tell the story of God's grace. No one said to Esther that a woman could not carry the message to save her people. They were grateful she was willing to accept the assignment. I long for the day when there will be no question about "women in ministry" and we can all just serve the Lord Jesus as he calls. Only then will the church truly be "... brought into complete unity" (John 17:23).

Nancy Parkhurst Leafblad (M.Div, Bethel University) is a pastor, speaker and writer.

My congregation closely scrutinizes my clothes and appearance. Some are afraid that I am distracting men from worshipping when I preach.

This is a commonly expressed frustration of women in positions of ministry leadership. You may find yourself at the close of a sermon, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit and the incredible, humbling satisfaction that God has used you, only to be confronted by brothers and sisters who comment on your haircut or object to the length of your skirt. While many men in ministry also experience criticism of their clothes and appearance, this is simply a more prevalent problem for women.

The tension is that women in the church are expected to be "put together" but not vain; to be beautiful and captivating but not sexual. The point where these tensions meet varies from person to person, and from culture to culture. The bottom line here is the question of responsibility. You are *not* responsible for your congregation's decisions to lust or be distracted; your body and the clothes you cover it with do not *cause* another person to sin.

You are, however, responsible for your own actions and motives. Ask yourself questions like: "Why am I wearing what I'm wearing?" "Am I trying to find my worth or acceptance in my appearance?" and "Deep down, do I want to draw attention to myself or to God?" Ask the Lord regularly to help you examine your motives. And then put something on and forget about it! Trust God to give you a healthy perspective on your clothing, and find relief in the truth that we simply cannot please everyone (nor are we called to).

Consider also the root of this problem and what your church can do to address it. Is your congregation working to prevent the objectification of women both within your church walls and beyond? Is your youth group dissecting cultural messages about the value of outward appearance? Are you providing a place for congregants to heal from pornography addictions? Consider too how to address commonly-held gender stereotypes that can be used to justify sexual sin, such as the belief that men are more "visual" and therefore unable to keep themselves from viewing women in an exclusively sexual way.

Megan Greulich is the editor of *Mutuality* magazine.

My family does not support me in my call. I'm tired, discouraged, and wondering if I am mistaken in believing that I am called to ministry.

In my thirty-plus years of ministry, I have encountered hundreds of young women who are caught between their families, churches, and personal convictions that God has called them to serve him in professional ministry. Just recently a young woman shared that her father felt that she would be sinning against God if she pursued a career in ministry. Yet she felt that she would be sinning against God if she wasn't obedient by pursuing her calling. How could she make sense of it all? It is extremely easy in this type of situation to doubt one's self, call, and faith.

Two principles have helped me as I have faced this challenge. My own call to ministry was a source of tension in my family, as my father had a very traditional view of women in ministry. Over the years, I found that if I moved my conversations with him toward what we both shared, which was a love for God and a desire to serve him, then we could at least have conversations that weren't contentious, even if we didn't agree. He grew to respect my decision, even requesting that I preach at his funeral, which I did.

Secondly, when the doubts and discouragement come, we need to get back to the core of what we know. Doubts seldom come when we are doing ministry. It is during those times when we are preaching, teaching, or serving in many other ways that we most often have a sense of "this is what I was made to do." Conversely, it is in conversations with others who question the appropriateness of our ministry or in the alone times when the doubts arise. We have to trust in that sense of confidence and calmness at the core of who we are, and trust that this confidence is from God.

Pamela Erwin (D.Min) is professor of youth ministry and practical theology and chair of the Biblical and Theological Studies Department at Bethel University (Saint Paul, Minnesota) with over twenty-five years of experience in the field of youth ministry as an educator, author, and practitioner.

My church congregation questions if I can be both a good mother and an effective minister.

One of my single male colleagues once called into question my commitment to ministry because I had been unable to attend all of our staff meetings. At the time I was a wife, a mother to five children, and an almost full-time student. I felt that his statement was unreasonable, and yet I found myself feeling guilty because I knew that there would be other times that circumstances would prevent me from being present. Children get sick, cars break down, the dog throws up just as I am walking out the door, and other family members' activities conflict with my schedule. But does the fact that I am a mother make me ineffective and necessitate that I step down from ministry? Interestingly, my colleague didn't question whether or not I had been gifted by God to serve in the church, but instead seemed to imply that my inability to function exactly as other staff disqualified me from participating.

Many churches run on a business model that requires leaders to keep certain hours and show up for every activity, which can prove challenging for women with children. These expectations are not bad in and of themselves; routines and discipline are necessary for any entity to run smoothly. But, perhaps churches could benefit from a bit more flexibility. I wonder how many people (female or male) resist answering a call from God because they can't perfectly meet the "requirements" of their church.

Motherhood has taught me the freeing truths that it is impossible for me to have all my "ducks in a row" and that God doesn't require this of me. Instead, being a mother has trained me to endeavor to walk in the Spirit at all times—mothers must learn to prioritize and solve problems, be sensitive to the Spirit's leading, and lean more on God rather than our own understanding. Are these not all crucial skills for church leaders? Perhaps it is time for churches to re-examine their structures and make room for the many members who are gifted and anointed for ministry but may not be able to fit perfectly into the present church configuration.

Liz Beyer is bookstore coordinator for Christians for Biblical Equality. She is a wife, mother of five, and a worship leader at her church.

I'm weary of being the first woman in my position.

There are many challenges women face as "pioneers." Some challenges mirror those faced by women influencers in general, but they are exaggerated—intensified, if you will—when a woman is a "first" in any field. Other obstacles seem peculiar to "firsts." Whichever the case, there are some common difficulties cited by women who set precedents:

- A schizophrenic juxtaposition of high and low expectations (i.e., "she's going to have to do the job twice as well" coupled with "she's going to blow it")
- A confusing constellation of reactions from other females—anything from admiration, jealousy, fear, and competition to outright rejection and opposition

- Intensified tokenism, whether implicit or explicit (i.e., she's the lone female face on the conference docket; the solo woman on the dust jacket endorsements; the logical choice for the "softer" perspective in a collaborative project; the only soprano voice on the panel)

While these problems are real, I believe the opportunities for female "firsts" are exponentially greater than the difficulties. Please understand that I'm no Pollyanna. The barriers, discrimination, invalidation, and outright abuse women still face within the body of Christ anger me on a regular basis. People who know me will tell you I have little tolerance for gender-biased behavior and will call both individuals and institutions out when they treat women as lesser beings in the kingdom of God.

However, I've also come to realize that the old adage rings true: what we focus on gets bigger. When I talk to women in ministry, I always take time to hear their stories of marginalization, disempowerment, and hurt. But these stories are not the conclusion. They are a crucial introduction—but only an introduction. The greater story is the unfolding of possibility that happens when women reconnect with their potential; re-commit to the hard work of personal and professional development; re-kindle their God-breathed curiosity and passion for life; and embark on new adventures of learning, creativity, and excellence.

In the end, our gift to the world is who God created us to be. As with the risen Christ, our wounds are indelible imprints on our stories. They propel us toward solutions, toward justice, toward life. But, unlike Christ, we have a tendency to get stuck in our circumstances and pain, cocooning in our scarcity narratives—the accounts of what we haven't been allowed to do—instead of allowing God to transfigure us through new narratives—the accounts of abundance and the stories yet to be written of what we can and are doing.

Women who pioneer understand this difference. They don't deny the past or numb themselves to the challenges. But they are continually called forward by possibilities. They believe in something so strongly—see something in their mind's eye so clearly—they must make it a reality. It is this single-minded focus on what can be, not on what is, that fuels the illogical, life-giving hope that defines all greatness. Not a desire to be first, but a desire to co-create a brand new reality.

Sally Morgenthaler has been a pioneer in ministry for well over a decade. She is an author, an educator, and a speaker.

"The View From the Pulpit: Honest Advice from Women in Ministry" was originally published in *Mutuality*, Volume 16, Issue 4, Winter 2009.

Is Women's Leadership in the Church a "Primary Issue"?



If you are concerned about the question of gender and Christian faith you have probably heard someone say, "Yes, the woman's question is important, but it is not a 'primary issue.'" What is at the heart of this comment? Primary issues are understood to be those that focus on the gospel, evangelism, and the leading of the lost to Christ. As the following email illustrates, one's biblical position on gender clearly advances or diminishes the good news of the gospel. Emily, a woman who recently contacted CBE, writes:

I had heard the word of God, and I felt moved by much of it ... However, I was held back from this because I was told ... Eve [was] really responsible for all sin in the world, and not Adam, even though she didn't force him to eat the forbidden fruit... I was to be silent in church, and women could not hold a position of responsibility ... it was as if God had already decided that because I am female there was nothing He cared to hear me say. And worst of all was what was to happen if I were to marry. I would become a slave to my husband, obeying his word as if it were the word of God ... I left church behind and my faith in the Lord with it. I couldn't reconcile being part of a religion that had labeled me as inferior from birth.

Emily, like all humans, understands when faith is presented in a way that is illogical or unjust. It is because of people like Emily that many Christians are not only reexamining Scripture's teaching on gender. They are also discovering that the differences between egalitarians and complementarians—those who support a male model of authority—run deeper than a difference in interpretation or personal preference. Egalitarians and complementarians present differing worldviews, and this is why so many of us challenge gender-hierarchy as God's ideal. Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) is devoted to show individuals like Emily—who have left the church, or who refuse to marry, or who have joined other religions—that Scripture does not extend authority to men just because they are male. Rather, leadership and service is the product of God's gifting, one's intimacy with God and one's moral choices.

In many ways our work as egalitarians resembles that of evangelicals in history, who also challenged a defective worldview—one that viewed Africans as destined by God to permanent servitude. Such a mistaken perspective distorts the key elements that shape one's worldview. These include:

- *Knowledge*: How we understand truth
- *Ontology*: The nature and value of being
- *Justice or Ethics*: Moral choices based on knowledge and ontology
- *Purpose*: Our ultimate purpose and destiny

As Alan Myatt observed in, "On the Compatibility of Ontological Equality, Hierarchy and Functional Distinctions" (p. 23), a corruption in one area of worldview distorts the others. As slavery proponents insisted that the divine destiny of Africans was servitude (purpose); they also advanced a biblical basis for slavery (knowledge). Individuals of African descent were therefore said to possess an inferior nature (ontology), which is why they must be ruled by others (ethics). To redress this flawed worldview, abolitionists had to "put right" all four elements. That is why some early evangelicals challenged slavery with a robust biblicalism (knowledge) that showed how each person is made new in Christ (ontology), and through God's Spirit, all believers are gifted for service regardless of ethnicity (purpose). This view, in turn, leveled a serious theological challenge to the institution of slavery (ethics). As a more biblical worldview prevailed, slaves were freed and some flooded to the mission field, where their calling and giftedness were evident. Ultimately it became clear that slavery was not a matter of preference or difference in biblical interpretation, it was a worldview with eternal consequences.

In a similar manner, Christian women are often told that their divine destiny is permanent submission to male authority (purpose), a view that, some say, is promoted throughout Scripture (knowledge) and one that is rooted in the Trinity itself; established not because of a woman's character, giftedness or intimacy with Christ, but based solely on gender (ontology). Therefore, women are to obey men, and men are to hold ultimate authority over females in the church and home (ethics). Thankfully, like abolitionists, egalitarians have made their case biblically (knowledge), that women are created as strong partners for men (Gen. 2:20) (ontology), and as such are to exercise a shared dominion

with men (Gen. 1:28) (purpose). As women shared leadership and authority on mission fields around the world, it led to one of the largest expanses in all of Christian history—the Golden Era of Missions. As women are given equal authority to make decisions in marriages, this not only leads to happier marriages but also to a lower incidence of abuse (ethics), according to the research of Life Innovations, Inc. As believers embrace a more biblical worldview on gender, we offer a clear image of God to those who have left the church because of prejudice against females that cannot be sustained biblically.

Does the shared leadership and authority of women and men advance a more biblical worldview? Katharine Bushnell observed in 1919 that a consistent interpretation of Scripture requires that we assess women’s capacity for service in the same way we assess men’s—not based on the fall—but through our atonement in Christ. To do otherwise does violence to the gospel, to which all of Scripture and history point.

We thank the Evangelical Theological Society for an opportunity to provide ETS members with a publication from Christians for Biblical Equality. We also thank the authors who

contributed to this journal, especially Jack Davis. His article, “First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul’s Use of Creation Narratives,” received a first place award, in Biblical Exposition at the recent Evangelical Press Association convention. I hope the articles and information herein will enrich your own service for Christ. We look forward to meeting you at future ETS conferences. Stop by CBE’s booth or join our annual ETS community meals on Wednesday evenings. We cherish an opportunity to become better acquainted.

In Christ,

Mimi Haddad
President of CBE

MEN AND WOMEN IN CHRIST: IDENTITY AND MINISTRY



Journey with CBE to **Medellín, Colombia** on **July 7-9, 2014** for our first conference in South America!



We are partnering with the Biblical Seminary of Colombia to host this international conference that will explore Christian gender identity and its implications for ministry. Come and join us in Medellín as we learn, fellowship, and praise God together.

Join us on July 24-26, 2015 for a conference in Los Angeles, California.



Christians for Biblical Equality in partnership with La Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia



Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality is an organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of believers of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scripture as reflected in Galatians 3:28.

Mission Statement

CBE affirms and promotes the biblical truth that all believers — without regard to gender, ethnicity or class — must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home and world.

Core Values

We believe the Bible teaches...

- Believers are called to mutual submission, love and service.
- God distributes spiritual gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class.
- Believers must develop and exercise their God-given gifts in church, home and world.
- Believers have equal authority and equal responsibility to exercise their gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class and without the limits of culturally-defined roles.
- Restricting believers from exercising their gifts — on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or class — resists the work of the Spirit of God and is unjust.
- Believers must promote righteousness and oppose injustice in all its forms.

Opposing Injustice

CBE recognizes that injustice is an abuse of power, taking from others what God has given them: their dignity, their freedom, their resources, and even their very lives. CBE also recognizes that prohibiting individuals from exercising their God-given gifts to further his kingdom constitutes injustice in a form that impoverishes the body of Christ and its ministry in the world at large. CBE accepts the call to be part of God's mission in opposing injustice as required in Scriptures such as Micah 6:8.

Envisioned Future

Christians for Biblical Equality envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God's glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

Statement of Faith

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.

We believe in the unity and trinity of God, eternally existing as three equal persons.

We believe in the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.

We believe in the sinfulness of all persons. One result of sin is shattered relationships with God, others, and self.

We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.

We believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

We believe in the equality and essential dignity of men and women of all ethnicities, ages, and classes. We recognize that all persons are made in the image of God and are to reflect that image in the community of believers, in the home, and in society.

We believe that men and women are to diligently develop and use their God-given gifts for the good of the home, church, and society.

We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God's design.

We believe that, as mandated by the Bible, men and women are to oppose injustice.

CBE Membership

CBE membership is available to those who support CBE's Statement of Faith. Members receive CBE's quarterly publications, *Mutuality* magazine and *Priscilla Papers* journal, as well as discounts to CBE Bookstore and CBE conferences. Learn more by following the "Membership" link on our homepage.



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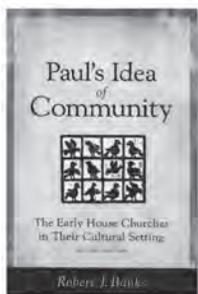
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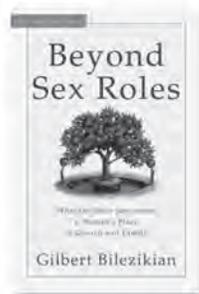
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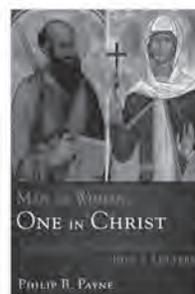
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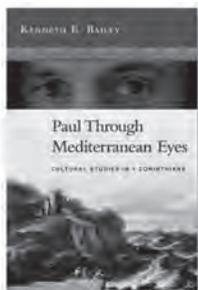
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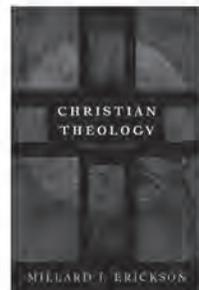
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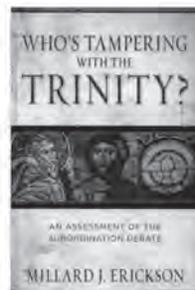
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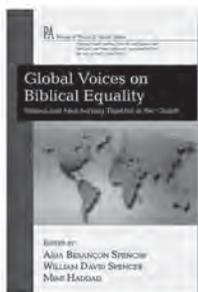
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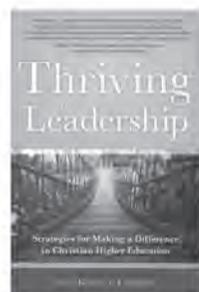
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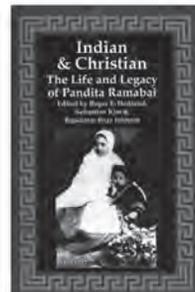
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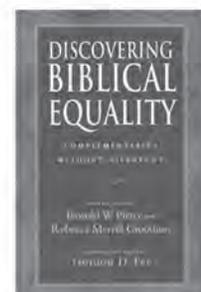
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