

An Extended Review of *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*

Edited by Bruce Ware and John Starke (Crossway, 2015)

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Wayne Grudem says that for twenty-five years he has believed that how the Trinity is understood “may well turn out to be the most decisive factor in finally deciding” the bitter debate between evangelicals about the status and ministry of women.¹ This is encouraging to hear, because Grudem and many of his fellow complementarians have got the doctrine of the Trinity completely wrong. On the status and ministry of women they can quote verses in support of their position, and egalitarians can quote verses in support of their position, and so we end up in a text jam without an external adjudicator to say who is right or wrong. But with the Trinity it is different. The doctrine of the Trinity is exactly and unambiguously defined by the ecumenical creeds and the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, enunciated in detail by the great Trinitarian theologians of the past such as Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, and spelled out carefully today in the numerous scholarly books on the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.² Thus what each side is claiming to be the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity can be evaluated against evidence; the facts of the matter can be checked. Both sides cannot be right. After debating with my complementarian friends on the Trinity for more than fifteen years in numerous publications, I am more than ever convinced that the complementarians are the ones who have it wrong—dead wrong. The creeds, the confessions, and virtually all the great theologians of the past and present reject completely any hierarchical ordering in divine life.

Before turning to the essays in the book *One God in Three Persons*, I want to say that the reason given by the editors for publishing the book is fallacious. It is written, we are told, to challenge those who “view the Trinity as a model for evangelical egalitarianism.”³ The fact is, however, appeal to the Trinity by evangelical egalitarianism is rare.⁴ Virtually every evangelical egalitarian book on the status and ministry of women primarily appeals to scripture, saying nothing at all about the Trinity. In the definitive summary of the evangelical egalitarian position given by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) the Trinity is not mentioned.⁵ Similarly the definitive book of essays outlining the evangelical egalitarian case, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, makes no appeal to the Trinity.⁶ My chapter on the Trinity in this book is simply a strong warning to complementarians that their hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity breaches historic orthodoxy. I have never argued for gender equality by appeal to the Trinity. The argument that the Trinity is a hierarchy of three divine persons and as such prescriptive of the male-female relationship on earth was invented by George Knight III, popularized by Wayne

Grudem and Bruce Ware, and is now an intrinsic part of the complementarian position.⁷

Because egalitarian evangelicals generally do not appeal to the Trinity for male-female equality, since they do not think it is relevant to this issue, they do not have anything novel to say on this doctrine. Millard Erickson,⁸ Tom McCall,⁹ Keith E. Johnson,¹⁰ Robert Letham,¹¹ and myself,¹² as well as other informed evangelicals (gender complementarians and egalitarians alike), who have written in opposition to the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of the Trinity, simply want evangelicals to remain faithful to what the church universal has agreed is what the Bible teaches on this centrally important doctrine. In all my writings on the Trinity my one aim has been to articulate the Nicene faith as it is expressed by Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and Augustine, summed up in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, and reaffirmed by Calvin and in the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, thus showing that what most complementarians are teaching on the Trinity is not historic orthodoxy.

I am strongly of the opinion that neither side in the debate about the status and ministry of women should appeal to the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is our distinctive Christian doctrine of God, the primary and most important doctrine; it does not set a social agenda of any kind. To argue that the Trinity supports gender equality or women’s subordination is simply bad theology and bad thinking. How a three-fold divine relationship, or specifically Grudem and Ware’s “male-male” divine Father-Son relationship, might prescribe a two-fold, male-female relationship on earth cannot be explained. Correlation is not possible.

Ware and Starke’s book is not easy to review because most of the eleven chapters show virtually no understanding of the key elements of the creedal and confessional doctrine of the Trinity. The same errors are endorsed time and time again, and often what is asserted makes little sense. Then we have the problem that two essays outline orthodoxy in opposition to all the other authors, but the editors do not acknowledge this, and a third chapter on the beliefs of particular Baptists in eighteenth century England has no connection with what this book is about. Letham’s entirely orthodox chapter on the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, a doctrine confessed in the Nicene Creed, endorsed by all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions, and taught by almost every significant theologian across history, is, we should carefully note, written in opposition to those who reject this doctrine, most importantly Grudem and Ware. Finally, I point out that the editors and most of the

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contributors seem to believe that all those on the egalitarian side are for a co-equal Trinity of persons and all those on the complementarian side are for a hierarchically ordered Trinity, but this is simply not true as this book's selection of contributors illustrates. Letham and Oliphint, who have chapters in this book, and Keith E. Johnson, who is sharply criticized in it for opposing the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of the Trinity, are complementarians on the gender issue. These men believe in the permanent subordination of women but not in the eternal subordination of the Son.

Chapter 1

Wayne Grudem has the first say. He accuses evangelical egalitarians of “denying the Trinity” and of “important doctrinal deviations” from orthodoxy. He says “evangelical feminists” “deny eternal distinctions between the Father and the Son,” deny “that God the Son was eternally God the Son,” claim “that any act of any [divine] person is actually the act of all three persons,” reject “the authority of Scripture,” and affirm “things about Scripture that are not true.” A certain Kevin Giles and the doyen of evangelical systematic theology, Millard Erickson, get the most criticism. The charges are either ones that could be levelled against Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, or virtually any of the great theologians of the past, or they are without substance. I have a full chapter in my book *Jesus and the Father* on how orthodoxy ensures the eternal distinctions between the Father and the Son.¹³ I argue that the personal identity of each member of the Trinity is first grounded in their unique names—Father, Son, Spirit—which cannot be altered, and in differing origination: the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds, which immutably differentiates them relationally. The Father is the Father of the Son and cannot be otherwise, the Son is the Son of the Father and cannot be otherwise, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or from the Father through the Son. What I and all orthodox theologians past and present reject absolutely is that the three omnipotent divine persons are differentiated in power or authority. You will not find any of the great theologians of the past, or any of the creeds or confessions, teaching divine differentiation on the basis of differing authority. This is an Arian error.¹⁴ Following exactly in the steps of the Nicene fathers, I endorse the idea that all the works of God are works of all three divine persons. This is called the doctrine of “inseparable operations,” and it is well grounded in scripture. Letham agrees. He says, “all three persons work inseparably in all God's works,” and then he adds, as all orthodox theologians do, nevertheless,

Each work is attributed [in scripture] peculiarly to one trinitarian person; only the Son died on the cross, although he offered himself by the Spirit (Heb. 9:4). This inseparable action should keep us from conceiving of only one person being at work in this or that; talk of “roles” that each of the divine persons undertake is potentially misleading.¹⁵

The claim that Erickson and I deny that the Son is eternally the Son and the Father eternally the Father leaves me speechless.

Grudem even claims that I could speak of God the Father as “my friend in heaven” or my “brother in heaven.”¹⁶ This is a serious accusation with no justification whatsoever. I could not speak of the Father in these terms and I never have, and I believe unequivocally that the Son is eternally the Son and the Father eternally the Father. And I am sure professor Erickson does likewise. I agree with Grudem that “to deny that the Son was (*sic*, it should be “is”) eternally the Son would be to deny both the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds.”¹⁷

To assert that Erickson, Linda Belleville, and I “reject the authority of scripture” simply because we point out that the title “the Son” is not the only title given to Jesus Christ, and that some other titles are more commonly used, is absurd.¹⁸ To accuse Erickson of rejecting the authority of scripture is also absurd. Erickson has been a defender of biblical inerrancy all his professional life. Finally, Grudem accuses evangelical egalitarians who have written on the Trinity of “ignoring verses that contradict” their position.¹⁹ This again is simply not true. I am willing to consider any verse in the Bible that might inform me better on divine triune life. Most of the verses Grudem lists, that he says Erickson and I ignore, speak of “divine order”—how the three persons work cooperatively in an unchanging and irreversible pattern. We do not discuss them because we have no problem with them. They do not speak of a hierarchical order. And *contra* Grudem's claim, the Father is not always mentioned first in Trinitarian texts in scripture, as Letham points out in explaining scriptural teaching on order in divine life and action.²⁰ In this section I get another broadside for arguing that isolated verses that seem to stand in tension with what is dominant and theologically deepest in scripture should not be absolutized, and that “simply opening our Bibles cannot settle what should be believed about the Trinity.”²¹ I stand by both assertions. As a confessional Christian I come to scripture assuming that the creeds and my own church's confessions of faith will guide me to a right understanding of the many diverse comments I find in scripture on most if not all of the great doctrines. Without their guidance I could easily read my own views into scripture and fall into heresy.

Throughout this chapter Grudem shows a breathtaking ignorance of the historic doctrine of the Trinity, as do most of the other contributors to this book. The Nicene Fathers were totally opposed to the subordination of the Son in being, power, or work. For them the eternal generation of the Son does not imply the Son's subordination—just the opposite. It speaks of him as God in the same sense as the Father, omnipotent God. No Nicene father ever suggests that creaturely words such as “father” and “son” can define the triune creator; indeed they explicitly oppose this idea. The Son is confessed as “the Son” because through his eternal generation by the Father he is other than the Father and yet *one in being* with the Father. Lewis Ayres, arguably the most informed patristic scholar on the Trinity at this time, says, “It is fundamental to all pro-Nicene theologies that God is one power, glory, majesty and rule, Godhead essence and nature.”²² If the divine persons are one in power, they are each omnipotent and thus one does not rule over another. Ayres also says that “one of the

most important principles shared by pro-Nicenes is that whenever one of the divine persons acts, all are present, acting inseparably.”²³ Again it follows, if the divine persons always work inseparably, one does not command and another obey; they work in perfect harmony as one. Complementarians cannot expect to be taken as serious scholars if they ignore or reject what Ayres and other well informed patristic scholars conclude.

Why the editors positioned this ill-informed and wildly polemical chapter first raises many questions.

Chapter 2

Christopher Cowan next explores how the Father and the Son are portrayed in John’s Gospel. He begins by speaking of “John’s ubiquitous depiction of a hierarchical relationship between the two”²⁴ and then repeatedly describes the Father-Son relationship as hierarchically ordered.²⁵ The endorsement of hierarchical ordering in divine life is found throughout this book. Most of the writers seem unaware that historic orthodoxy views hierarchical ordering in divine life as the essence of the error specifically called Arianism or, more generally, subordinationism.²⁶

Before considering in more detail what Cowan says in his chapter, I digress to give greater specificity to why I reject most of what he says and most of what most others say in this book. I strongly oppose their hierarchical ordering of the divine persons and particularly their subordination of the Son to the Father because this teaching contradicts the ecumenical creeds and the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions. For this reason it cannot be taken as an expression of orthodoxy.

The Nicene Creed that defines the faith for all Western and Eastern churches confesses the Son to be,

Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. Through whom all things were made. For our salvation, he came down from heaven . . .

What this clause asserts is that, on the basis of his eternal begetting by the Father, the Son is God in exactly the same way as the Father. He is one with the Father in being and thus one in majesty, glory, wisdom, power, and authority. If I wanted to rule out of court any sub-ordering of the Son I could not say it better.

The Athanasian Creed, the most definitive statement of Trinitarian orthodoxy from the early church, is more explicit. It says,

In this Trinity, none is before or after, none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. All three are “almighty” and “Lord.”

Then we have the Reformation and Post-Reformation Confessions, binding on millions of Christians who belong to mainline Protestant churches.²⁷ These with one voice decree that the

Bible teaches that the divine three persons are one in being/ essence *and* power. The confession of the Evangelical Theological Society says the same. The terms “power” and “authority” are both divine attributes shared equally by the divine persons, and thus the terms are virtual synonyms. If the three divine persons have the same power then they have the same authority. The Reformed Belgic Confession of 1651 explicitly excludes hierarchical ordering in the same words as the Athanasian Creed and adds that the Son is “neither subordinate nor subservient” to the Father.

Confessional evangelicals do not give to the creeds and confessions the same authority as scripture, let alone set these documents over scripture. Rather, they believe the creeds and confessions express what the best theologians from the past have concluded the scriptures teach holistically on doctrines that have been in dispute. They see them as both summaries of what the church universal should believe the scriptures teach, and the best guides we have for the right interpretation of the scriptures on the doctrines they articulate. In this book, *One God in Three Persons*, there is no interaction with these weighty theological documents that enunciate what the universal church believes about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Their teaching is ignored.²⁸ What this means is that most of the essays in the book reflect nothing more than the idiosyncratic opinions of individual men whose main agenda is maintaining the subordination of women.

We of course do need to check if John’s Gospel teaches the *eternal* subordination of the Son in authority and thus hierarchical ordering in divine life, as Cowan argues, but for the moment we need to accept that hierarchical ordering in divine life is rejected by the creeds and confessions and endorsed by no orthodox theologian from the past. Indeed, for most patristic scholars it is seen as the essence of the various forms of fourth century Arianism. Letham, for example, says, “Arians of all shapes froze the triad into a hierarchy.”²⁹ No one denies that in John’s Gospel, and occasionally elsewhere in the NT, we find texts that speak of the subordination of the Son, but for all orthodox theologians these speak of the Son “in the form of a servant” during his earthly ministry.

Central to Cowan’s case is that frequently in John’s Gospel the Son is said to be “sent” by the Father. For him, and for most of the other writers in this book, this indicates that the Son must do as the Father commands; he is set under the Father’s authority and must obey him. This is an old argument; the Arians never tired of using it. Augustine says “they turn to the axiom: ‘The one who sends is greater than the one sent.’”³⁰ In a reply to such Arian reasoning Augustine argues that sending does not imply, let alone indicate, subservience: only that the one sent comes from the sender. He thus concludes that, just as the terms “unbegotten” and “begotten” differentiate the Father and the Son, while not suggesting any subordination or inequality, so too do the terms “send” and “sent.”³¹ What Augustine clearly recognized is that creaturely words such as

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“begetting,” “sending,” “son,” and “father” cannot be applied to God univocally. God is not defined by human terms used of creaturely existence. When it comes to John’s understanding of the sending language, I argue that what is reflected here is the Jewish *Shaliach* principle, namely that the one sent has the same authority as the one who sends.³² Cowan will not concede this point. In answer to him I raise three points. First, no exegete should assume that creaturely words such as “father” and “son” and “sent,” when used in the Bible, should be understood univocally and literally. God cannot be defined in creaturely terms. Second, in John’s Gospel Jesus does see himself representing perfectly the Father because he has been “sent” by him (3:34, 5:23, 7:16, 28–29, 8:16, 18, 12:44–45, 49, 13:20, 14:24). And third, in John’s Gospel, while it is true that Jesus is sent by the Father and does his will perfectly, he is pre-existent God (1:1), who does the works of the Father (5:19, 9:4, 10:37), including those works that only Yahweh can do such as raising the dead (5:21, 6:40) and exercising judgment (5:22, 27–29, 8:16). What is more he identifies himself with Yahweh in the “I am sayings” (8:59, 6:35, 8:12, 10:7, etc.), and after his resurrection he is unambiguously confessed as “The Lord” (20:18, 28, 21:7), Yahweh in all might, majesty, and authority.

Elsewhere in the NT the title “Son” speaks pre-eminently of Jesus Christ’s kingly status. In the book of Revelation he is identified as the Son of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who rules on the one throne with his Father (Rev 7:10–12, 11:15). Here complementarians need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is not only named the Son of God but also “the Lord.” In this confession he is identified with Yahweh, the Lord God omnipotent. The Reformed theologian and complementarian, John Frame, says, “scripture calls Jesus the Son of God in a *unique sense*,”³³ and he adds,

There is a considerable overlap between the concepts of Lord and Son. Both indicate Jesus’ rule over his covenant people (as Son, he is the covenant King of Ps 2:27). Both [titles] indicate Jesus’ powers and prerogatives as God, especially over God’s people: in other words divine control, authority, and presence.³⁴

These observations remind us that we should never give content to titles used of Jesus Christ by appeal to fallen human life and relations. It is scripture that should give the content. When the NT writers call Jesus Christ “the Son of God,” his lofty status, not his subordination, is implied.

Chapter 3

Clyde Claunch in his essay, “God is the Head of Christ: Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Ground Gender *Complementarity* [italics added] in the Immanent Trinity?” discusses another key text in this intramural debate among evangelicals on the Trinity. As someone who believes strongly in the complementarity of the sexes³⁵ I need to point out that, in fact, Claunch is

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arguing that 1 Cor 11:3 grounds *woman’s subordination*, not the complementarity of the sexes, in the immanent Trinity. For him the term “complementarity” is a code word for female subordination.³⁶ He begins by saying that his argument does not imply a “social model of the Trinity,”³⁷ but then later endorses the idea that the three divine persons each have their own will, which is the essence of a social doctrine of the Trinity!³⁸ Claunch agrees that the Greek word *kephalē* that literally refers

to the top part of the body may have the metaphorical meaning of either “source” or “authority over,” but he says it must mean the latter in 1 Cor 11:3 because Paul in this passage is securing the subordination of women in the subordination of the Son to the Father.³⁹ I am not convinced. The metaphorical meaning of a word, I agree, is best determined by context, and in this case context well-nigh rules out

the meaning “authority over.” Why would Paul first say in v. 3 that man is *head over* woman and then immediately say in v. 5 that men and women can both lead in church by praying and prophesying, “the two principal exercises in public worship of the Early Christians”?⁴⁰ And second, why would Paul say in v. 11 that women have “authority” on their heads if he thought authority was reserved to men? Positively, given the priority of context in determining the meaning of metaphors, the meaning “source” is to be preferred. In 1 Cor 11:9 and 12, the apostle has man/Adam as the source or origin of woman (Gen 2). This being so, then the clause, “God is the *kephalē* of Christ,” probably refers to the Father as the origin or “source” of Jesus Christ in the incarnation, or possibly to the Son’s eternal generation *from* the Father.

Assuming that *kephalē* means “head-over” in this context, Claunch argues that 1 Cor 11:3 “does indeed ground gender complementarity in the immanent Trinity, albeit indirectly.”⁴¹ For him, this text first of all speaks of the Son as subordinated to the Father in the economy, but he argues that this is then to be read back into the immanent Trinity. What this means is that what he gives with one hand he takes back with the other. The Son is not only subordinate in the economy; he is subordinated eternally.

On *taxis/order*, Claunch is simply factually wrong.⁴² The biblical “order” is not always Father, Son, and Spirit, as 2 Cor 13:13 and many other Trinitarian verses demonstrate.⁴³ Frequently the Father is not mentioned first. On Augustine he is also wrong. The great Latin-speaking theologian does not allow that the eternal generation of the Son implies a “Trinitarian *taxis*” of authority and submission in the eternal life of God.⁴⁴ For Augustine, the eternal generation of the Son, which anticipates the sending of the Son into the world, speaks of the “absolute equality” of the Father and the Son.⁴⁵ On this basis they are one in being and attributes—and authority is a divine attribute.⁴⁶ I quote Augustine, “The Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Spirit is almighty; yet there are not three almighties but one

almighty.”⁴⁷ What Claunch fails to recognize is that Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity excludes on principle the idea that the Son is eternally set under the Father and must obey him. The Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God, equal in all things.

Finally, I commend Claunch for his honesty and openness. He admits that the understanding he and his fellow complementarians hold “of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son,” in which the Son must eternally submit his will to the will of the Father “runs counter to the pro-Nicene tradition, as well as the medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation Reformed traditions that grew from it.”⁴⁸

Chapter 4

In his essay, “That God May Be All in All: The Trinity in 1 Corinthians 15,” James Hamilton accuses Erickson and me of not adequately dealing with 1 Cor 15:24–28.⁴⁹ This text speaks of the Son on the last day handing over the kingdom of God to the Father. He says we err in not considering these words in the light of the whole argument Paul is making in this chapter. I like his conclusion: this whole chapter is an argument “that the resurrection of Jesus is a necessary component of the Gospel, and to deny the general resurrection, as some Christians do, undermines the Gospel.”⁵⁰ But how this conclusion aids in the interpretation of vv. 24–28, he does not explain.

Before considering his specific criticism of our handling of vv. 24–28, it is to be noted that Hamilton believes, as do most of the contributors to this book, that orthodoxy teaches the ontological equality of the divine persons and the eternal role subordination of the Son.⁵¹ Yet, with one voice the Nicene fathers teach, in modern terms, the ontological equality of the three divine persons and their equal authority. Thus all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions and the confession of faith of the Evangelical Theological Society, as we have already noted, speak of oneness in being and power in divine life. For the Nicene theologians, the Father and the Son work or function as one, not in a command structure. Hamilton is correct: the Arians, “would not have affirmed ontological equality,”⁵² but he fails to note that it was they, not the Nicene fathers, who taught the eternal functional subordination of the Son—his subordination in authority. The Nicene fathers held that, if the Son was not one in being with the Father, then he was not one in power with the Father, and vice versa. They never spoke of the “role” subordination of the Son, as Hamilton claims they did. They spoke rather of the “works” or “operations” of the divine persons, arguing that they worked “inseparably.” The term “role” and the idea of assumed “roles” is not found in the Nicene fathers, and the word “role” is not found in any of the most-used English translations of the Bible.⁵³ I agree with Letham that in the cause of truth the word “role” should not be used in any discussion on divine life and action.⁵⁴ And, I would add, it should not be used to interpret the Bible on the male-female relationship. We do not simply play the “role” of being a man or woman. We *are* a man or a woman.

We do not simply play the “role” of being a man or woman. We are a man or a woman.

The pro-Nicene fathers, as well as Erickson and I, believe that ontological equality excludes absolutely any necessary and eternal (functional) subordination/submission. To suggest otherwise is “nonsensical.”⁵⁵ If the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father and cannot be otherwise, then his subordinate status speaks not only of his function or “role” but of his person—who he *is*. What is more, Arians in the middle of the fourth century explicitly confessed the Son to be truly God, even if neither they nor the Nicene fathers ever spoke explicitly of “the ontological equality” of the Father and the Son. For example, the Second Sirmium Creed of 357, which none deny is an Arian Creed, first confesses the Son “to be begotten of the Father . . . before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, by whom all things were made” before speaking of his eternal subordination. What this means is that Arians in the middle of the fourth century, like most complementarians today, confessed the Son to be truly God without any caveats, yet eternally subordinate to the Father as well.

When it comes to the exegesis of 1 Cor 15:24–28, Hamilton dismisses Pannenberg’s evocative interpretation (which I do not endorse). He says little about my account of what Calvin and the majority of Reformed theologians have said on these verses. They agree that this text is not speaking of the end of the Son’s rule but the end of his rule as the God-man mediator. In support, Erickson and I, together with many Reformed theologians, point out that numerous scriptures speak of the Son ruling for ever and ever (2 Sam 7:12, Isa 9:7, Luke 1:33, 2 Pet 1:11, Rev 7:10–12, etc.). These texts count against Hamilton’s interpretation of 1 Cor 15:24–28, namely that the Son in eternity “will be subject to the Father.”⁵⁶ I thus with confidence, along with millions and millions of other Christians who confess the Nicene Creed, believe that the Son’s rule “will have no end.”

Chapter 5

This chapter by Robert Letham on the eternal generation of the Son is the most unexpected and important chapter in the book. He writes in opposition to evangelicals, including Ware and Grudem, who reject this doctrine, a doctrine fundamental to Trinitarian orthodoxy. I applaud Letham’s endorsement not only of the Nicene doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and of “inseparable operations,”⁵⁷ but also his rejection of the use of the term “role” to differentiate the Father and the Son,⁵⁸ his opposition to reading back into divine life the creaturely content of the terms “father” and “son,” his emphatic affirmation that the “Father and the Son are one in being, equal in power and glory, possessing all God’s attributes,” and his allowing only that “in terms of personal relations there is a distinction. The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten—never the reverse.”⁵⁹ This he believes reflects “order” or “a general pattern” in divine life and operations that is irreversible and unchanging. It does not speak of hierarchical ordering in divine life.⁶⁰

What is so important in this essay is that Letham brands as Arian the primary argument used in this book and elsewhere

by complementarians for the eternal subordination of the Son in authority, namely that the divine names, “Father” and “Son” should be understood as they are in human relationships. He says,

The Arian argument that human sons are subordinate to their fathers led to their contention that the son is subordinate to the Father. The church rejected this conclusion as heretical and opposed the premise as mistaken. Rather, the Son is equal with the Father in status, power and glory. He is identical in being from eternity. In short, to take the creaturely reality as definitive of the life of God is a serious error, leading to dire results.⁶¹

Compared to what I say in this critique of *One God in Three Persons*, what Letham says is far more telling. It inflicts a mortal blow to the complementarian hierarchically ordered doctrine of the Trinity. He gives a profound and informed rejection of virtually every assertion that the other contributors make and of the primary thesis of this book, namely that the creaturely terms “father” and “son” define the triune relationships of the Creator. He brands this argument for the Son’s eternal subordination “Arian,” “heretical” and a “serious error.” We can only wonder whether the editors understood what Letham was saying.

Chapter 6

“True Sonship—Where Dignity and Submission Meet: A Fourth Century Discussion” is the title of Michael Ovey’s chapter.⁶² He is the principal of Oak Hill, a prestigious evangelical Anglican theological college in England. You would imagine someone holding this position would appeal first to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and then to the Thirty-Nine Articles, binding on all Anglicans, in seeking to outline the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, Ovey appeals to a number of contentious creeds from the middle of the fourth century, a quotation from the Arian bishop Basil of Ancyra, and a selected quotation from Hilary of Poitiers, which all reflect either the confused theological thinking in this period or explicitly Arian teaching. He also appeals to the fact that Athanasius speaks of a divine Father-Son relationship.

Commendably, he outlines his thesis succinctly and clearly.

The credal and confessional material we will examine shows that overall, Arian, Nicene, and non-Nicene sources alike commonly held to the submission of the Son outside the incarnation. However the material also shows that the Son’s submission may be grounded differently, with Arian versions of submission being associated with the Son as a creature, while the others stress the Son’s submission arises from his sonship and not from him being a creature.⁶³

Ovey is unambiguous; the Arian and pro-Nicene fathers both “held to the submission of the Son outside the incarnation.” They only differed on what is the basis for this “submission” or “subordination” of the Son (he uses both terms interchangeably).

For all those called “Arians,” the Son is subordinate because he is a creature, not truly God. In contrast, for all the pro-Nicenes, the Son is God yet eternally subordinate because he is “the Son” and like all sons he is set under his father’s authority.

Ovey is completely wrong in both his primary assertions. The Arians in the middle of the fourth century did not subordinate the Son because he is a creature and the pro-Nicene fathers did not subordinate the Son because he is like a human son. The creeds to which he appeals, as proof that the Arians subordinated the Son because they did not believe he was fully God and the co-creator, all contradict his thesis. Let me outline the facts, quoting from the creeds to which Ovey appeals. He and I agree that each of these creeds speaks unambiguously of the eternal subordination of the Son. Thus for Athanasius they are Arian creeds.⁶⁴ But in direct contradiction to Ovey’s assertion, they all confess in the strongest terms that the Son is fully God and the co-creator. “The Dedication Creed” confesses the Son to be “begotten of the Father, before all ages, God from God, whole God from whole God, sole from sole, perfect from perfect, King from King, Lord from Lord, by whom all things were made.”⁶⁵ Similarly the Macrostich Creed of 345 and the First Creed of Sirmium of 351 speak of the Son as generated “before the ages” and as “God from God, Light from Light” “through whom all things were made.”⁶⁶ The Second Sirmium Creed of 357, called “the Blasphemia” by Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers because of its stark teaching on the eternal subordination of the Son, is equally explicit. The Son is “begotten of the Father . . . before all ages . . . God from God, Light from Light, by whom all things were made.”⁶⁷ If the non-biblical word *homoousios* is not to be used, I can think of no stronger wording to affirm that the Son is God in the same way as the Father.⁶⁸

Yes, these creeds and Athanasius, to whom Ovey also appeals, affirm that the Father is the Father and the Son is the Son. We would expect this because they all oppose Sabellianism, which denied eternal differentiation in divine life. However, to argue, as Ovey and several other contributors to this volume do, that this indicates the belief that the divine Son is eternally subordinated to the divine Father because he is a son and all sons must obey their father is completely mistaken. The Nicene fathers opposed the idea that creaturely words and creaturely relationships can define divine life, which is what the Arians believed, as Letham so eloquently points out. He calls this argument “heretical” and a “serious error.”

Paradoxically, what Ovey has proven is that the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity he and most other contributors to this book espouse reflects Arian theology in the middle of the fourth century: *The Son is truly God but he is eternally subordinate or submissive to the Father.*

Chapter 7

In the next essay, “Augustine and His Interpreters,” John Starke, in opposition to every patristic scholar I have read, argues that Augustine teaches an “order of authority and submission” in which the Father rules over the Son. In contrast, the erudite

patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly says that, for Augustine, “the unity of the Trinity is squarely in the foreground, subordinationism of every kind is excluded.”⁶⁹ Similarly, Letham says that for Augustine, “The inseparability of the persons in both being and action, in turn, is a reflection of their complete equality. All elements of subordination are pruned away.”⁷⁰ Starke is of the opposite opinion. He argues that by speaking of the Son as eternally begotten of the Father and as “sent” by the Father into the world, Augustine shows that he believed that there is an “an order of initiating authority and receptive submission between the Father and the Son.”⁷¹ This is absurd. If this book were not a scholarly publication his conclusion would not deserve comment. For Augustine “the Son is equal to the Father in every respect,”⁷² only subordinate by his own choice in that he took the “form of a servant” for our salvation.

Augustine comes back to the issue of the sending of the Son many times, and in every instance he rejects the Arian argument that this implies the Son’s subordination.⁷³ He says,

If the reason why the Son is said to be sent by the Father is simply that one is the Father and the other the Son, then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father . . . one is not greater and the other less.⁷⁴

In regard to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, Augustine believed that this guarantees both the full equality of the two divine persons and their indelible differentiation. Augustine says orthodox theologians agree that the scriptures teach that

The Father, Son and Spirit exist in an inseparable equality of the substance present in divine unity; and therefore there are not three Gods but one, although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten of the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father or the Son, but the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself co-equal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the three fold unity.⁷⁵

The names Father and Son definitely distinguish the divine persons for Augustine, like all the Nicene fathers, but he rules out of court the possibility of moving from human relations to divine relations. This, he says, is what men “misguided by the love of reason” do. For him, we cannot “transfer” what we observe

about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they [the men who love reason] would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence.⁷⁶

Augustine never wavers. For him the scriptures clearly teach that the Son is eternally “equal to the Father” in “the form of God” and “less than” or “inferior to,” or as we would say today, “subordinate to” the Father temporarily in “the form of servant” in his earthly ministry.⁷⁷

Chapter 8

I will not comment on Michael Hakin’s essay on the doctrine of the Trinity espoused by eighteenth century Particular Baptists, for I cannot see how it bears on the topic addressed in the book or in this review.

Chapters 9 and 11

Ch. 9 is Philip Gons and Andrew Naselli’s essay, “An Examination of Three Recent Philosophical Arguments Against Hierarchy in the Immanent Trinity,” which I pair with the concluding essay by Bruce Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of *Homoousios*,” for they cover much the same ground. They alike reject the argument presented by the well-informed philosophical theologians Tom McCall, Keith Yandell, and Millard Erickson, that to insist that the Son is necessarily and eternally subordinated to the Father in authority implies his ontological subordination, and as such is a denial that the Father and the Son are *one in being* (Greek *homoousios*). Gons and Naselli’s ignorance of historical theology is immediately disclosed in that they assume that “hierarchical ordering” in the immanent Trinity is orthodoxy. Virtually all informed theologians see hierarchical ordering in divine life as the essence of the Arian error and the heresy called “subordinationism.” They and Ware also show that they have not grasped historic orthodoxy in that they separate and distinguish between what is true of the one divine essence/being and what is true of the divine persons.⁷⁸ The three persons are the one divine being; there is no divine being or essence apart from the persons. What the divine persons are in unity, they are as Father, Son, and Spirit.

I will make no attempt at a reply to their attempts to ward off the philosophical objections to their doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son in authority, first because I am, like Gons and Ware, not a philosophical theologian, and second, because it has been done superbly by Thomas McCall, an especially competent philosophical theologian. I warmly commend McCall’s work.⁷⁹ I will focus rather on the theological argument that Gons, Naselli, and Ware make in reply. They point out that orthodoxy eternally differentiates the Father and the Son on the basis of differing origination—the Father begets, and the Son is begotten—which is true, and I have made the point many times. They believe this indicates that each divine person has a unique “property,” so to differentiate the persons by differing origination, or as complementarians do, by differing authority, does not imply ontological subordination or the denial of *homoousios*. Again what they say reveals a failure to understand Nicene orthodoxy. The Nicene fathers insisted that differing origination was *the one safe way* indelibly to differentiate the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) because this alone did not call into question divine oneness and equality or allow the subordination of the Son in the eternal life of God in any way. It is because the Son is eternally begotten of the Father that he is, as the Nicene Creed says, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God . . . one in being with the Father.” Differentiating the Father and the Son on

the basis of differing authority, all the pro-Nicene fathers clearly saw, entailed the sub-ordering of the Son, the essence of the Arian error.

Chapter 10

Finally, I briefly comment on K. Scott Oliphint's essay, "Simplicity, Triunity and the Incomprehensibility of God," which is a competent account of the somewhat abstract philosophical yet theologically orthodox idea that God is "simple." The argument is that the triune God of revelation is ultimately the one God, divided in no way, or to quote Oliphint, "whatever essential attributes, qualities, or properties [that] inhere in God, they are identical with him, in the sense that they are not something other than God himself."⁸⁰ What this means is that, if our triune God is "simple" in this sense, then he is not and cannot be divided into a God who commands and a God who obeys. Highlighting his orthodoxy Oliphint also argues first that we cannot define God in creaturely terms; we must "rather submit our thinking to scripture."⁸¹ This comment excludes defining the divine Father-Son relationship by appeal to the force of the human words "father" and "son." And second, he argues that a distinction must be made, a distinction rooted in scripture, "between God (including the Son of God) as he is essentially and God in relation to creation."⁸² This distinction rules out of court reading the subordination of the Son seen in creation back into the life of God. What is missing from this essay is any engagement with the strongly argued essay by the evangelical theologian, Dennis Jowers, on divine simplicity that makes the divided Trinity of the complementarians a logical impossibility.⁸³

Conclusion

In conclusion, I must admit that I can find little to commend in this book with the exception of Letham and Oliphint's essays which accurately reflect orthodoxy, but what they say is drowned out by the other ill-informed essays that reflect an Arian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine rejected by the Nicene fathers and excluded by the creeds and confessions. Should any reader want to discover what in fact orthodoxy teaches, the best place to begin would be the Athanasian Creed which sums up the catholic, or universal Christian, faith on the Trinity and on the person of Christ. Then they should move to the books on the Trinity written by competent patristic scholars who in most cases know nothing at all of the distinctive post-1977 complementarian doctrine of a hierarchically ordered Trinity. I list the best of these in endnote 2 below.

Finally, I return to where I began. Grudem is convinced that "the most decisive factor in finally deciding" the bitter debate between evangelicals about the status and ministry of women is what is believed about the Trinity. I disagree because I am convinced that the Trinity in no way defines the male-female relationship on earth, and appeal to the Trinity is therefore irrelevant and bad theology. If, however, Grudem's view is accepted—as do most of the writers in *One God* and, I suspect,

most complementarians—then these evangelicals are left with only two starkly opposed options. They can endorse the Knight-Grudem-Ware doctrine of a hierarchically ordered Trinity, following the Arians. Or, they can endorse the Nicene doctrine of a co-equal Trinity enunciated clearly and unambiguously by Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine, codified in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, reaffirmed by the Reformers, and now spelled out in the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions. To opt for the second choice is, of course, difficult for complementarians because, given Grudem's argument, it would involve abandoning belief in the permanent subordination of women. I of course strongly recommend this path because I do not believe the Bible makes the subordination of women the creation ideal; to argue that women are permanently subordinated to men demeans them, and to do so in our age makes as much sense as believing that the world is flat.

Notes

1. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004), 411 n. 12.
2. See for example, L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy; An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1988); E. Fortman, *The Triune God; A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982); J. Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2 vols. (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary, 2004–2006); T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1996); S. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012).
3. Bruce Ware and John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), back cover.
4. The only examples I can think of are S. Grenz and D. Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 151–56, and W. Spencer, "An Evangelical Statement on the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 16. In both cases the connection is incidental to what else they say. I am sure other egalitarians have appealed to divine life in support of gender equality; my point is simply that it is not an argument in any of the better known and most informed books by evangelical egalitarians.
5. <http://www.cbeinternational.org/content/statement-men-women-and-biblical-equality>.
6. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005).
7. I fully document this fact in *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 20–32.
8. M. J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009)
9. T. H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 175–88.
10. K. E. Johnson, "Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Subordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective," *Them* 36 (2011): 22–24.
11. One of the clearest and most telling essays in opposition to the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity is given by Letham in ch. 5 of

One God. See my discussion of his chapter below. Early in our debate with each other I said a few things I would now word more carefully, and I suspect Letham would say the same about what he has written. On the basis of such comments by Letham, some of the writers in this book quote him in support of their erroneous ideas. See *One God*, 11 n. 1, 157, 162, 166, 170, 195 n. 2, 197 n. 7. Some of the appeals to what Letham says on “order” in divine life are wrongly understood. For him order in divine life does not imply hierarchical order.

12. Kevin N. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

13. Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 205–41.

14. Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 172–99.

15. Robert Letham, “Eternal Generation in the Church Fathers,” in *One God* 123.

16. Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations in Evangelical-Feminist Arguments about the Trinity,” in *One God*, 19.

17. Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations,” in *One God*, 29.

18. Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations,” in *One God*, 32–37.

19. Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations,” in *One God*, 37.

20. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in *One God*, 121. For more detail see Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 109–10.

21. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity* (trans. E. Hill; New York: New York City Press, 1991), 1.3.14 (p. 74), 1.4.22 (p. 82), 2.1.2 (pp. 98–99), etc.

22. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 279.

23. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 280.

24. Christopher W. Cowan, “‘I Always Do What Pleases Him’: The Father and Son in the Gospel of John,” in *One God*, 48.

25. Cowan, “The Father and Son in the Gospel of John,” in *One God*, 48, 51, 53 (twice), 59, 61, 64.

26. See further, K. N. Giles, “Defining Subordinationism,” *EQ* 72, no. 3 (2015): 207–24.

27. See further on this K. N. Giles, “The Evangelical Theological Society and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *EQ* 80, no. 4 (2008): 323–38.

28. I note that Grudem does refer to the creed of Nicaea and the later Nicene Creed (*One God*, 28), but only in passing, and the conclusion he draws is false: The eternal begetting of the Son is not mentioned in these creeds to prove that Jesus was always the Son of God and thus, like a true son, subordinate. The eternal begetting of the Son is in fact confessed because it makes the Son God, God in the same sense as the Father—omnipotent God.

29. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), 147. See also pp. 383, 400, 484, 489, 491–93.

30. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 2.2.7 (p. 101).

31. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 4.29 (p. 174).

32. See my argument in *Jesus and the Father*, 119–21, and my appeal to scholarly opinion in support.

33. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 658. Italics added.

34. Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 661.

35. Who could possibly deny that the two sexes together *complete* what it means to be human and that procreation is not possible without the complementary contribution by both sexes?

36. See Kevin Giles, “The Genesis of Confusion: How ‘Complementarians’ Have Corrupted Communication,” *Priscilla Papers* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 27–28.

37. Clyde Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ: Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Ground Gender Complementarity in the Immanent Trinity?” in *One God*, 67.

38. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 88–89.

39. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 76–78.

40. So C. Hodge, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 208. We should also note that Paul says in 1 Cor 12:28 that prophecy is “second,” teaching “third.”

41. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 67.

42. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 90–91.

43. See further, Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 109–10.

44. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 90.

45. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 1.1 (p. 65).

46. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 3.12 (p. 197). For extensive documentation from Augustine’s writings on these matters see Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 152–56, 190–94, 227–30 and K. N. Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 151–63.

47. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 5.9 (p. 195).

48. Claunch, “God is the Head of Christ,” in *One God*, 88.

49. After I wrote this review, late in the editing stage I read Wesley Hill’s superb book, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). For a convincing theological interpretation of 1 Cor 15:24–28 in conformity with the Nicene faith, I could not recommend his work too highly.

50. James Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All: The Trinity in 1 Corinthians 15,” in *One God*, 102.

51. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in *One God*, 95–96, 105, 106, 108.

52. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in *One God*, 106.

53. See Giles, “The Genesis of Confusion,” 23–24.

54. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in *One God*, 123, 125.

55. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in *One God*, 95.

56. Hamilton, “That God May Be All in All,” in *One God*, 108.

57. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in *One God*, 123.

58. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in *One God*, 123, 125.

59. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” in *One God*, 123–24.

60. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 179 and n. 29, 259, 383.

61. Letham, “Eternal Generation,” *One God*, 122.

62. For an extended critical review of Ovey’s chapter see <http://www.psephizo.com/gender-2/complement-arianism/>.

63. Michael J. Ovey, “True Sonship—Where Dignity and Submission Meet: A Fourth-Century Discussion,” in *One God*, 130–31. He restates his thesis on p. 50.

64. Ovey, “True Sonship,” in *One God*, 129. For the full text of these creeds see Hanson, *The Search*, and Athanasius, “On the Councils,” *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), henceforth quoted as *NPNF*.

65. Hanson, *The Search*, 286; *NPNF* 4, “On the Councils,” 23 (p. 461).

66. Hanson, *The Search*, 309–10.

67. Hanson, *The Search*, 326–29; *NPNF* 4, “On the Councils,” 27 (p. 464).

68. Here we need to note that in the middle of the fourth century most bishops were wary of the term *homoousios*. They feared it opened the door to Sabellianism (modalism) and they noted the word was not found in the Bible.

69. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 273.

70. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 199.

71. John Starke, “Augustine and His Interpreters,” in *One God*, 171.

72. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 6.1.6 (p. 209).

73. See my detailed account of Augustine on the sending of the Son with many quotations from his writings in, *Jesus and the Father*, 191–92 and *The Eternal Generation of the Son*, 152–62.

74. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 4.5.27 (p. 172). See also 4.5.29 (p. 174).
75. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 1.2.7 (p. 69).
76. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 1.1.1 (p. 65).
77. *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, 1.3.14 (p. 74), 1.3.15 (p. 75), 1.4.22 (p. 82), 1.4.24 (p. 83), 2.1.3 (pp. 98–99), etc.

78. Philip R. Gons and Andrew David Naselli, “An Examination of Three Recent Philosophical Arguments against Hierarchy in the Immanent Trinity,” in *One God*, 205; Bruce A. Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of Homousios?: A Response to Millard Erickson and Tom McCall,” in *One God*, 243, 245, 247.

79. Thomas McCall, “Gender and the Trinity Once More: A Review of *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life*” (ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke; Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), *TJ* (Fall 2015): forthcoming.

80. K. Scott Oliphint, “Simplicity, Triunity, and the Incomprehensibility of God,” in *One God*, 223.

81. Oliphint, “Simplicity,” in *One God*, 229.

82. Oliphint, “Simplicity,” in *One God*, 233. See also, for the same point in other language, p. 234.

83. Dennis Jowers, “The Inconceivability of Subordination within a Simple God,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (ed. Dennis Jowers, W. Jowers, and H. Wayne House; Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 375–410.

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Instead, we worship three persons who hold in common the same power, the same intelligence, and so on. Many biblical passages teach the Trinitarian existence of God.Â Such a text shows us that within God Himself there is both a unity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (one name) and a distinction (three subjects or persons). We do not have a logical contradiction here because God is both one and three at the same time, but He is not one and three in the same sense. The three divine persons are distinct in terms of their personal relationships to one another, but not in their essence. All of them are the being of God. They do not have an independent existenceâ€”you could not take away any of the three persons and still have God. How do the three persons of the Trinity relate to each other? Evangelicals continue to wrestle with this complex issue and its implications for our understanding of men's and women's roles in both the home and the church. Challenging feminist theologies that view the Trinity as a model for evangelical egalitarianism, *One God in Three Persons* turns to the Bible, church history, philosophy, and systematic theology to argue for the eternal submission. Read Full Overview.

2. The Essence of God is not constituted by parts, and there is no sort of multiplicity and plurality in the Divine Essence. Types of Compositeness.Â While regarding themselves as monotheists, Trinitarian Christians believe in three Persons (or Essences) which are as follows: 1. The Person of the Essence (God the Father); 2. The Person of the Word (God the Son); and. 3. The Person of Life (God the Holy Spirit). According to them, each of these Persons completely possesses the truth of Godhood and all of these Persons are the same in the truth of Godhood. Thus, the truth of Godhood is one thing and for this reason, while God is One, He has three Persons. Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life. Edited by Bruce Ware and John Starke (Crossway, 2015) Kevin Giles. Wayne Grudem says that for twenty-five years he has believed that how the Trinity is understood â€œmay well turn out to be the most decisive factor in finally decidingâ€ the bitter debate between evangelicals about the status and ministry of women.¹ This is encouraging to hear, because Grudem and many of his fellow complementarians have got the doctrine of the Trinity completely wrong. On the status and ministry of women they can quote verses in support of their p