

Christology - Subordination

Here are the thirteen additional quotations, followed by the original five:

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (1973). (Packer is probably the best-known living evangelical theologian, and is sometimes called "the gate-keeper of evangelicalism.")

"Part of the revealed mystery of the Godhead is that the three persons stand in a fixed relation to each other....It is the nature of the second person of the Trinity to acknowledge the authority and submit to the good pleasure of the first. That is why He declares Himself to be the Son, and the first person to be His Father. Though co-equal with the Father in eternity, power, and glory, it is natural to Him to play the Son's part, and find all His joy in doing His Father's will, just as it is natural to the first person of the Trinity to plan and initiate the works of the Godhead and natural to the third person to proceed from the Father and the Son to do their joint bidding. Thus the obedience of the God-man to the Father while He was on earth was not a new relationship occasioned by the incarnation, but the continuation in time of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father in heaven." *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 54-55.

2. Carl F. H. Henry (1982). (Henry taught at numerous evangelical seminaries and was often referred to as "the dean of evangelical theologians" in the last half of the 20th century.)

"The creeds speak of the subordination, distinction and union of the three persons without implying an inferiority of any; since all three persons have a common divine essence they affirm the Son's subordination to the Father, and the Spirit's subordination to the Father and the Son. This subordination pertains to mode of subsistence and to mode of operations" (*God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1982), vol. 5, p. 205.)

"Christians must . . . avoid claiming supernatural authority for one or another interpretation that seems to resolve the problem of persons and essence in the Trinity" (p. 210).

3. Jonathan Edwards (1740). (Edwards (1703-1758) is commonly recognized as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, theologian in the history of America.)

"1. That there is a subordination of the persons of the Trinity, in their actings with respect to the creature; that one acts from another, and under another, and with a dependence on another, in their actings, and particularly in what they act in the affair of man's redemption. So that the Father in that affair acts as Head of the Trinity, and Son under him, and the Holy Spirit under them both.

2. 'Tis very manifest that the persons of the Trinity are not inferior one to another in glory and excellency of nature...

4. Though a subordination of the persons of the Trinity in their actings be not from any proper natural subjection one to another, and so must be conceived of as in some respect established by mutual free agreement...yet this agreement establishing this economy is not to be looked upon as merely arbitrary...But there is a natural decency or fitness in that order and economy that is established. 'Tis fit that the order of the acting of the persons of the Trinity should be agreeable to the order of their subsisting: that as the Father is first in the order of subsisting, so he should be first in the order of acting...therefore the persons of the Trinity all consent to this order, and establish it by agreement, as they all naturally delight in what is in itself fit, suitable and beautiful. Therefore,

5. This order [or] economy of the persons of the Trinity with respect to their actions ad extra² is to be conceived of as prior to the covenant of redemption...

6. That the economy of the persons of the Trinity, establishing that order of their acting that is agreeable to the order of their subsisting, is entirely diverse from the covenant of redemption, and prior to it, not only appears from the nature of things, but appears evidently from the Scripture..."

1062. "Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption," from Jonathan Edwards [1740], *The "Miscellanies,"* 833-1152 (WJE Online Vol. 20), Ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw.

4. Geerhardus Vos (1896). (Vos was professor of biblical theology at Princeton from 1892-1932, and his *Biblical Theology* was required reading in my classes at Westminster Seminary.)

"Although these three persons possess one and the same divine substance, Scripture nevertheless teaches that,

concerning their personal existence, the Father is the first, the Son the second, and the Holy Spirit the third There is, therefore, subordination as to personal manner of existence and manner of working, but no subordination regarding possession of the one divine substance." *Reformed Dogmatics*, translated and edited by Richard B Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2012-2014, from hand-written lectures in 1896), vol. 1, p. 43.

5. Robert L. Reymond (1998). (Former professor of theology at Knox Theological Seminary in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis Missouri.)

"We know also that his Sonship implies an order of relational (not essential) subordination to the Father which is doubtless what dictated the divisions of labor in the eternal Covenant of Redemption in that it is unthinkable that the Son would have sent the Father to do his will." *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 336.

6. Robert Letham (2004). (Letham is professor of theology at Union School of Theology, Oxford, UK (formerly Wales Evangelical School of Theology) and adjunct professor at Westminster Theological Seminary.)

"The Son's submission to the Father is compatible with his full and unabbreviated deity. Therefore, we may rightly say that the Son submits in eternity to the Father, without in any way breaking his indissoluble oneness with the Father or the Holy Spirit, and without in any way jeopardizing his equality. Being God, he serves the Father. Being God, the Father loves the Son and shares his glory with him (John 17:1-4, 22-24). *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 402.

7. Bruce Ware (2005). (Ware is professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. Though he is a participant in the current discussion, I did not quote him in my earlier brief list, so I include him here.)

"...the Son is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and hence, the Son stands in a relationship of eternal submission under the authority of his Father" *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Crossway 2005), p. 71.

8. Norman Geisler (2003). (Geisler is a well-known professor of theology and apologetics who has taught at several evangelical seminaries and now teaches at Southern Evangelical Seminary.)

"One final word about the nature and duration of this functional subordination in the Godhead. It is not just temporal and economical; it is essential and eternal. For example, the Son is an eternal Son (see Prov. 30:4; Heb. 1:3). He did not become God's Son; He always was related to God the Father as a Son and always will be. His submission to the Father was not just for time but will be for all eternity." *Systematic Theology vol. 2* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 291.

9. Charles Ryrie (1986). (Ryrie was for many years professor of theology at Dallas Seminary.)

"The phrase 'eternal generation' is simply an attempt to describe the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity and, by using the word 'eternal,' protect it from any idea of inequality or temporality...Priority without inferiority as seen in the Trinity is the basis for proper relationships between men and women (1 Cor. 11:3)." *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 54, 59.

10-11. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (1987). (Lewis and Demarest taught theology for many years at Denver Seminary.)

"Alongside the essential equality of persons there exists an economic ordering or functional subordination. Paul implies that, within the administration of the Godhead, the Father has the primacy over the Son...and over the Spirit...And the Son has priority over the Spirit....the ordering relation is eternal and not limited to Christ's state of humiliation." *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 266-267.

12. Malcolm B. Yarnell III (2016). (Yarnell is professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas.)

"John [in Revelation] has splendidly portrayed Christological monotheism in its eternal and historical dimensions...He has brought together the titles, the functioning, and the worship that indicate Jesus's equality with, yet subordination to, the

Father in the one place where we can view them simultaneously, the eternal throne of God...

"There is an eternal subordination in John's portrayal of the three. God receives upon his throne the victorious Lamb through whom he sent to be a sacrifice. And the Spirit is sent from the throne into all of creation through the Lamb in order to reveal God and the Lamb. There is no hint here that the subordination of the Lamb and the Spirit is merely historical or merely functional. This is an eternal setting....There is eternal equality in John's portrayal of the three, too." God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 211, 217.

13. Mike Ovey (2016). (Ovey teaches theology and serves as principal at Oak Hill Theological College in London. Although I have only quoted published books for the first twelve authors listed here, I am adding a quotation from Mike Ovey's blog post on June 10, because his new book *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* has not yet reached me.)

After quoting Athanasius and Hillary of Poitiers in support, Ovey writes:

"I have to conclude against Liam that:

1. There is historical precedent for asserting the eternal subordination of the Son.
2. The texts of scripture require us to recognise at the level of the persons distinguishable wills of Father and Son.
3. The Son tells us in scripture that he reveals his eternal love for his Father by his obedience on earth, and this love at the level of persons includes on the Son's part eternal obedience.
4. The eternal subordination of the Son does not divide the will of God at the level of nature, because the issue here is one of relations between the persons.
5. The eternal subordination of the Son does not entail Arianism, because the Son's obedience arises from his relation as son and not because he is a creature." (Cited from http://oakhill2.ablette.net/blog/entry/should_i_resign/)

Finally, for the sake of completeness, here are the evangelical theologians that I cited in my earlier article, plus the statements on the Nicene doctrine from Philip Schaff and Geoffrey Bromley:

14. John Frame (2002). (Professor of theology and philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary-Orlando):

"There is no subordination within the divine nature that is shared among the persons: the three are equally God. However, there is a subordination of role among the persons, which constitutes part of the distinctiveness of each. But how can one person be subordinate to another in his eternal role while being equal to the other in his divine nature? Or, to put it differently, how can subordination of role be compatible with divinity? Does not the very idea of divinity exclude this sort of subordination? The biblical answer, I think, is no." (The Doctrine of God (2002), 720; see also his Systematic Theology (2013), 500-502).

15. Louis Berkhof (1938). (Professor at Calvin Seminary 1906-1944; his Systematic Theology was perhaps the most widely-used text for Reformed theology through much of the 20th century):

"The only subordination of which we can speak, is a subordination in respect to order and relationship....Generation and procession take place within the Divine Being, and imply a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but not subordination as far as the possession of the divine essence is concerned. This ontological Trinity and its inherent order is the metaphysical basis of the economical Trinity." (Systematic Theology, 88-89).

16. A. H. Strong (1907). (President of Rochester Theological Seminary; his Systematic Theology was for many decades perhaps the most widely-used text for evangelical Baptists):

"...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while equal in essence and dignity, stand to each other in an order of personality, office, and operation...The subordination of the person of the Son to the person of the Father to be officially first, the Son second, and the Spirit third, is perfectly consistent with equality. Priority is not necessarily superiority. The possibility of an order,

which yet involves no inequality, may be illustrated by the relation between man and woman. In office man is first and woman is second, but woman's soul is worth as much as man's; see 1 Cor 11:3." (Systematic Theology, 342).

17. Charles Hodge (1871-1873). (the great Princeton theologian whose Systematic Theology, 100 years after its publication, was still the required text for at least one of my theology classes as a student at Westminster Seminary):

"The Nicene doctrine includes...the principle of the subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. But this subordination does not imply inferiority....The subordination intended is only that which concerns the mode of subsistence and operationThe creeds are nothing more than a well-ordered arrangement of the facts of Scripture which concern the doctrine of the Trinity. They assert the distinct personality of the Father, Son, and Spirit...and their consequent perfect equality; and the subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, as to the mode of subsistence and operation. These are scriptural facts, to which the creeds in question add nothing; and it is in this sense they have been accepted by the Church universal." (Systematic Theology, 460-462).

[Additional statement on 1 Cor. 15:28:] "We know that the verbally inconsistent propositions, the Son is subject to the Father, and, the Son is equal with the Father, are both true. In one sense he is subject, in another sense he is equal. The son of a king may be the equal of his father in every attribute of his nature, though officially inferior. So the eternal Son of God may be coequal with the Father, though officially subordinate. What difficulty is there in this? What shade does it cast over the full Godhead of our adorable Redeemer? . . . The subjection itself is official and therefore perfectly consistent with equality of nature" (Hodge, 1 and 2 Corinthians (Wilmington, Del.: Sovereign Grace, 1972 reprint of 1857 edition), 185- 186.

18. John Calvin (1559):

Regarding Calvin, church historian Richard A. Muller, in his massive Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics writes that "Calvin certainly allowed some subordination in the order of the persons . . . But he adamantly denied any subordination of divinity or essence" (Vol. 4, p. 80).

Here are Calvin's own words:

"It is not fitting to suppress the distinction that we observe to be expressed in Scripture. It is this: to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity....The observance of an order is not meaningless or superfluous, when the Father is thought of first, then from him the Son, and finally from both the Spirit." (John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 1:13.18, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:142-43.)

[Commentary on John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me":] "Faith is a work of God, by which he shows that we are his people, and appoints his Son to be the protector of our salvation. Now the Son has no other design than to fulfill the commands of his Father." (John Calvin, Commentary on the Gospel According to John, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 252.

Interpretations of the Nicene Fathers (4th century AD):

Historian Philip Schaff (1819-1893), author of the eight-volume History of the Christian Church (1910), editor of the standard reference work Creeds of Christendom (3 vols., 1931), and also editor of the 23-volume series Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. wrote this about the Nicene fathers:

"The Nicene fathers still teach, like their predecessors, a certain subordinationism, which seems to conflict with the doctrine of consubstantiality. But we must distinguish between a subordinationism of essence (ousia) and a subordinationism of hypostasis, of order and dignity. The former was denied, the latter affirmed." (History of the Christian Church, 3:680).

Philip Schaff is not alone in his assessment of historic Christian orthodoxy and the Nicene Creed. Historian Geoffrey W. Bromiley, author of the textbook Historical Theology (1978), editor of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, translator of Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, and translator of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics,

wrote:

"Eternal generation....is the phrase used to denote the inter-Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son as is taught by the Bible. "Generation" makes it plain that there is a divine sonship prior to the incarnation (cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:9), that there is thus a distinction of persons within the one Godhead (John 5:26), and that between these persons there is a superiority and subordination of order (cf. John 5:19; 8:28). "Eternal" reinforces the fact that the generation is not merely economic (i.e. for the purpose of human salvation as in the incarnation, cf. Luke 1:35), but essential, and that as such it cannot be construed in the categories of natural or human generation. Thus it does not imply a time when the Son was not, as Arianism arguedNor does his subordination imply inferiority....the phrase....corresponds to what God has shown us of himself in his own eternal being....It finds creedal expression in the phrases 'begotten of his Father before all worlds'" (Nicene) and "begotten before the worlds" (Athanasian). Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Eternal Generation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 368).

In addition, Harold O. J. Brown (former professor of theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), in his massive study of the history of Christian heresy and orthodoxy, concluded this about the language of "eternally begotten of the Father" in the Nicene Creed:

"Nicaea clearly affirmed that the distinction between the Father and the Son is not ontological or substantial, inasmuch as both are God. It did not clearly specify wherein that distinctiveness does lie. Inasmuch as it is not ontological, it must be relational, as the language of the Bible continues to assert even when we have stripped "begetting" of its ontological implications. At this point, in order to distinguish the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from one another, the language was allowed to carry its economic implications; that is to say, the Persons of the Trinity were seen to differ in the relationship of commissioner and commissioned, the one sending and the one sent (John 3:16, 14:16). Here, finally, the distinction was allowed to rest; the Son, under (sub) the orders of the Father is clearly subordinate in the relationship, although not by nature; the same holds true for the Holy Spirit." (Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: the Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present*(Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), 133.

Website Reference:

<http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2016/06/another-thirteen-evangelical-t.php>