

**A submission by Kevin Giles to the Sydney Doctrinal Commission working on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2004.** This can be found on

<http://www.ajmd.com.au/trinity/> the doc itself is at

<http://www.ajmd.com.au/trinity/DoctrineCommisResponse.pdf>

**With an appendix by the primate of the Australian Anglican Church, the Most Rev Peter Carnley.**

I hear the doctrine commission is seeking submissions to help it clarify what exactly is the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. As I have made a thorough study of this issue and continue to research the matter, I would like to be of assistance. Much of what I say will be a critique of the 1999 doctrine commission report.

**Preliminaries**

It is my view that the new doctrine commission needs first of all to clarify a number of key questions left unanswered or confused in the 1999 report.

**Question 1.** Is the methodology of the commission to be one of deduction or induction? Is the commission charged with finding in the Bible, the creeds and various writers anything at all that might support an eternally, hierarchically ordered Trinity with the sole intent of justifying the permanent subordination of women? Or is it first charged with seeking to articulate from the Bible, the creeds and Reformation confessions the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and only secondly with asking, how such teaching bears on the man-woman relationship?

As I very much hope the second approach will be taken this time, I would encourage the members of the new commission to spend at least three months or more in an independent study of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine and Calvin to determine what they actually teach on the Trinity before seeking to relate this to the man-woman relationship. There is no better guide to the teaching of Athanasius and the Cappadocians than T F Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*. I believe this is the best treatment on the Trinity from a biblical and historical perspective. He is also excellent on Calvin (see his *Trinitarian Perspectives*). Another excellent introduction to all these thinkers is Gerald Bray's, *The Doctrine of God*. I would not want to differ from either of these authors, and where I do please let me know. Another very important introductory text for evangelicals in particular is B B Warfield's, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity." in *Biblical*

*Foundations*. In my days at Moore College Broughton Knox got all his students to read it. G L Prestige's, *God in Patristic Thought* is still foundational reading. If Robert Doyle had read this book he would not have mistakenly claimed in the April 2004 edition of *Briefings* that Athanasius taught the *Monarchia* of the Father.

As much as these key theologians need to be studied I personally would be content if the new doctrine commission concentrated only on the Athanasian creed. The 1999 doctrine commission members called this document "a standard authority for Anglicans" (para 9), and I would agree but also add that I think it gives authoritative guidance to all Christians who claim to be orthodox, and members of the one catholic/universal church. I think this creed settles every issue in contention. It makes belief in a "co-equal" Trinity in which none is before or after (no hierarchical ordering) and none is lesser or greater (no eternal subordination) the foundation of the Christian faith. This creed clearly rules on the key issues in debate.

- Modalism and tritheism are excluded absolutely. There is one God and three persons. "We worship one God ... neither confounding the persons: nor dividing the substance." "So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods but one"
- The Father is given no priority. "Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit." This is the first of many statements seeking to exclude subordinationism in any form – the perennial heresy.
- No derivative subordination is allowed. The Father is not the source of the being of the Son or the Spirit. This creed does not make the Father the *monarche* of the Son.
- No subordination in the *being* of the Son or the Spirit is allowed. The substance/being of God is one.
- No subordination in authority whatsoever is allowed. All three persons are said to be equally "almighty" and "Lord"
- The persons are differentiated by only one thing besides their personal identities: the Father is "unbegotten," the Son is "begotten," and the Spirit is "proceeding." Neither in this creed or anywhere in the tradition does differentiation imply subordination. (Warfield, *op cit*, p 109), has

a brief note explaining why origination does not suggest derivation.)

- The Son is “only inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” (I suspect this means, while he was in the “form of man,” as Augustine teaches.). “As touching his “Godhead” (which is eternal) he is “equal to the Father.”

**Question 2.** Can analogical appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity “prove” either the “co-equality” of the sexes or the permanent subordination of women?

There are major problems here. The Trinity is three “persons,” man and woman as husband and wife are two persons; the Father and Son are a father-son relationship, not a husband-wife relationship. Perhaps the Trinity only suggests loving, mutually self-giving relationships and no more. I do not think 1 Cor 11:3 settles anything. Does whatever it means to be “the head” of the Son mean the same as what it means to be “the head” of woman? Despite Grudem’s valiant attempts to make *kephale* mean, “head over” the latest scholarly commentaries on this epistle by Thiselton and Garland reject his claims. It is hard to think Paul would say that the man has headship/authority over the woman and then say but in church woman has authority to lead in prayer and prophecy. Is one text in any case sufficient justification for this huge theological claim?

Miroslav Wolf in his important book, *After Our Own Image*, discusses just this issue in relation to the doctrine of the church. He argues that whenever the Trinity is appealed to simply support another doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity gets distorted.

**Question 3.** While reading the Bible and the trinitarian tradition will the new commission seek to understand and use key terms as they are understood by those who used them, and as they are defined in any dictionary, or will they give them the ideological meaning that they have been given since the 1970’s by conservative evangelical seeking to make a case for the permanent subordination of women?

Since the 1970’s evangelicals preoccupied with upholding male hegemony have given non-dictionary meanings to a range of terms to further their political agenda. These redefined words are now used by this same group to enunciate their doctrine of the Trinity. This does not facilitate

sound scholarship or open up channels of communication with those in debate with them. Let me give some examples.

In every day speech the words “different/difference” mean “other than,” or “not the same.” In subordinationist speak these cognate words mean “subordinate.” If any one denies women are permanently subordinated they are accused of denying male-female difference. Arguments to the contrary are summarily dismissed. In 1999 doctrine report those who deny subordination in the Trinity are accused of modalism because they are said to deny difference. The problem this raises is that in the historic trinitarian tradition, differentiating the divine persons never implies subordination. If every time a subordinationist sees the persons being differentiated in the Bible or the tradition he thinks, “Ah here we have subordination,” then we have a major communication problem.

In everyday speech the word “order” has a range of meanings, the relevant ones for this discussion being, sequence, orderly, regulate, set out according to plan, prescribe etc. According to subordinationists speak, “order” always means “hierarchical order,” never horizontal order. In regard to the Trinity when a subordinationist sees “order” in the Godhead mentioned he again says, “Ah subordination.” (I will return to this matter.)

In everyday speech the word “role” refers to actions people perform. One’s role does not define one’s persons. Roles can change. In evangelical subordinationist literature the word “role” (and its synonym “function”) is given an entirely new meaning. It is a personally defining category that can never change. It is permanently ascribed by God (or so we are told). A woman’s role, which is entirely related to her subordination, defines who she is. She is the subordinated sex. Her role or function defines her *being*: it can never change. When this special and novel meaning of the words role and function are applied to the Son of God we have major problems. If the divine Son is *eternally* subordinated in role or function, he is a subordinated divine person. He is subordinated in *being*.

In everyday speech the words “inferior” and “subordinate” mean much the same thing. A

subordinate is an inferior. In subordinationist speak we are repeatedly told that the word “subordination” does not mean “inferior” in any way. Now it is true that someone holding an inferior or subordinate position is not personally (ontologically) inferior in everyday usage because they can change their position but in this usage the subordinate status is permanent. It defines the person. If the Son is *eternally* subordinated to the Father, he is less than the Father in some ways. He is an inferior. (Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century virtually every Christian theologian spoke of women as “inferior” and of men as “superior.” Now socially conservative evangelicals claim women are “equal” with men only subordinated in role. The commission needs to ask, has a higher status been given to women by evangelicals in the post 1970’s, or is it the same status only the wording has been changed?)

“Egalitarian” is another word given a special meaning. For most of us this is an entirely positive word. We value democracy predicated on this principle, and most Christians think the Bible demands that we view everyone as of equal worth and dignity and grant them equality of opportunity. In hierarchalist literature an egalitarian is someone to be condemned for denying the “differences” between the sexes. When those who advocate an egalitarian model of the Trinity are ridiculed as “modalists” one can only smile. Does not the New Testament twice speak of the Father and the Son as “equal” (Jn 5:18, Phil 2:6)? And does not the Athanasian creed commend just this idea when it speaks of a “co-equal” Trinity where none is before or after another, where none is greater or less than another?

Perhaps the word “biblical” is the most loaded of the terms given special meaning. In subordinationist writings such as the 1999 doctrine report, “biblical” means what “sound” teachers such as Moore College staff teach, and “unbiblical” is what people like Kevin Giles teach. Very sadly, in the 1999 doctrine report things that the Bible does not teach or rejects are called “biblical” (i.e. the eternal, compulsory subordination of the Son) and complex, developed doctrines that are objective developments on scripture are at times also said to be “biblical.”

Other key words given special meaning are “complementary” and “asymmetrical” which both are given the meaning “hierarchically ordered” and, “freedom” which seems to mean “incapable of doing

otherwise” (para 18)!!!

We cannot debate the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in any scholarly and objective way unless we can agree on the meanings and historic usages of the key terms and ideas.

**Question 4.** Is the new commission seeking to articulate a doctrine of the Son of God’s eternal functional subordination predicated on his ontological subordination, or simply of his *eternal* subordination in function or role?

On this matter the old report was thoroughly confused. Both claims are made but functional subordination predicated on ontological subordination seems to prevail. In Robert Doyle’s attack on my views in the April 2004 *Briefing* I understand him to still be asserting the functional subordination of the Son *on an ontological basis*. If functional *alone* were to be endorsed the question arises then, can you have anything “eternal” that is not ontological? If the subordination demanded is essential to the persons subordinated is that not ontological subordination?

**Question 5.** Does the new commission want its readers to believe that the developed doctrine of the Trinity given in the creeds springs immediately from the Bible, or that all doctrines are the product of hundreds of years of theological reflection in which certain parts of scripture are given precedence over others and objective advances on anything actually said in scripture are made on the basis of sound reasoning?

Every book I have read on the Trinity, including those by conservative evangelicals, admits that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is an objective development on what is said in scripture. In the old report the constant claim is made that everything “we” are teaching about the Trinity is “biblical.” In the following pages where I comment paragraph by paragraph on the 1999 doctrine report I repeatedly note how this distorts the truth. As the old commission made so many claims for biblical support for their views, I would encourage the new commission to make a careful study Phil 2:4-11, a pivotal passage in the debate about what the Bible says of the Son. The best exposition I know is by Peter O’Brien in his NIGTC commentary on this book. I note that he repeatedly speaks of the Son's temporary subordination in the incarnation as "voluntary," and the relationship between the Father and the Son as "reciprocal." He gives strong exegetical support for

these two conclusions. How he could sit on the 1999 doctrine commission and allow these exegetical findings be denied surprises me. In regard to John's Gospel where the subordination debate has raged most I think Davey's book quoted in the 1999 report is very inadequate and outdated. I would recommend M M Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, and Larry Hurtado's, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp349-402. I think A E Harvey's article, "Christ as Agent" in *The Glory of Christ*," eds Hurst and Wright, is very good on the sending motif.

**Question 6.** Does the new commission affirm the authority and importance of "tradition," defined precisely as how the scriptures have been understood by the best of theologians of the past and codified in creeds and confessions?

The old report says nothing substantial about the importance of tradition in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. The author's clear intent is to give the impression that what they teach is "biblical," and what others teach is not. Hopefully the new commissioners will openly acknowledge that without tradition we could not settle this issue. They will concede that without it we would be back with Athanasius and Augustine seeking to out-proof-text one another. It is true that the New Testament is trinitarian to the core but what needs to be openly and honestly acknowledged is that the Bible alone does not answer complex questions on the Trinity raised by Christians of a later age such as, How are the persons related? How should they be designated? How do they order themselves? Is there any subordination whatsoever in the eternal Trinity? etc. All these questions took centuries to work out. Today we look back at the long and painful debates on these issues that took place, and we thank God for the clear answers given that seem to catch the trajectory of the primary thrust of the revealed scriptures. To give this importance to tradition is not to set it above scripture, the primary authority, but to acknowledge its importance in helping us to understand and interpret scripture. When tradition is codified in creeds and confessions it cannot not be lightly set aside. Only with the strongest support from scripture and overwhelming support from the best of theologians may weighty tradition be overturned. Creation in seven days six thousand years ago, slavery and the inferiority of women are traditions that have been rejected because teaching in scripture counts against them and the traditions were weak. They simply perfectly mirrored prevailing cultural ideas.

In my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, I decided not to go directly to scripture as virtually all evangelicals and Reformed scholars agreed that scripture alone can not resolve the issues I was addressing. Instead I followed the path taken by virtually all students of the doctrine of the Trinity, the historical path. All the key texts are considered, but always in relation to how Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine and Calvin understood them. This methodology does not imply a low view of scripture but a high one. It makes it a principle that scripture will not be used to give putative answers where it does not speak clearly or with one voice.

*I suspect most members of the past and present doctrine commissions are consistent evangelical and Reformed Christians who accept that theology draws on the Bible and tradition. What I am asking is that the 2004 doctrine commission members openly confess this. They publicly renounce the Sydney rhetoric, "Everything we believe comes directly from the Bible." I am currently in email dialogue with Mark Baddeley, the Moore College faculty member, who does believe all theology springs immediately from the Bible. He has asked me to "repent" of my appeal to tradition as the best guide to understanding scripture in regard to the Trinity. He thinks it is a denial of "scripture alone." Your correction of him on this matter would be reassuring. The "Bible alone" rhetoric is sectarian and reflects classic old fundamentalism. When it appears "reason" also goes out the door.*

**Question 7.** If the 2004 doctrine commission members unequivocally embrace the orthodox doctrine of a "co-equal" Trinity where each divine persons has the same authority, none is before or after, none greater or lesser than another, can the permanent subordination of women still be maintained?

Here the problem is not only that the 1999 doctrine commission grounded the subordination of women on a hierarchically ordered Trinity but also the tendentious arguments and terminology taken from the post 70's women debate were used to construe the doctrine of the Trinity. The Son's subordination was explained as an eternal functional or role subordination and it was implied that differentiation implied subordination. If the 2004 doctrine commission concede that permanency of role implies inferiority, and that difference does not imply subordination the case against women is lost. I suspect that the women question and the Trinity question cannot be separated. This is not my conclusion alone, it is the conclusion of the 1999 doctrine commission! It

will be interesting to see what the 2004 doctrine commission says on this matter

**Now to detail of the 1999 doctrine commission report.** (The full text of the 1999 Doctrine Commission Report is printed in my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, pp 122-137, and can be found on [www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/doc/trinity.html](http://www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/doc/trinity.html))

"One can possess a different function and still be equal in essence or worth. Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home. Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply His inferiority." ( Schreiner in Piper and Grudem, 128).

Para 3. This is the key question. Can you have a *compulsory, permanent* subordination of one race, sex, or member of the Godhead that does not imply inferiority? I think not and I would like one example where this can be so. If the roles can be changed that's fine but if they are compulsory and fixed one party is not a true equal in any real sense. The assertion of equality is just words without content.

4. Both the so-called "egalitarian" and the so-called "subordinationist" accept the equality of the sexes. The egalitarian believes that an individual may voluntarily choose to give a temporary submission in certain circumstances, without compromising equality. The "subordinationist" regards submission in some roles within ministry and marriage as arising from the nature of gender differences, without compromising equality. Both regard their views as being supported by our knowledge of the Trinity.

Para 4 The logic here is not clear. In this para we are told the role ascribed is chosen and "temporary." What is to be believed? Does the Son freely choose to subordinate himself temporally or is it commanded by the Father and eternal? This should be made absolutely clear.

5. All parties in the present discussion regard both the unity and equality of the three Persons of the Godhead as an absolute fundamental of the Christian faith. There are not three Gods; they are not three "people"; they are not three "parts" of God. Each partakes fully of the divine essence; each rightly receives all praise, honour, glory and worship. Christ Jesus did not exploit his equality with God the Father in order to use it to his own advantage and especially to avoid his incarnation, but retained it while "being made in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7). We are not saved through the work of an angel, or a secondary god. We are saved by the work of God himself: the salvation initiated by God the Father and won by God the Son on the cross, is applied to us by God the Holy Spirit.

Para 5 Perfect orthodoxy. I agree fully

6. In order to help emphasise this equality and unity, some theologians speak of the "coinherence" (or "perichoresis") of the Trinity, that is that each Person "indwells" the other in mutual delight and union. For the same

reason, they also say that "the external operations of the Trinity are indivisible". This means that there is one God, who in all three Persons of his being is involved in all the works of God in creation and redemption. It safeguards us against any idea that there may be three different wills working in opposition. "The one God ("He") is also and equally "they" and "they are always together and always co-operating. . . ." (Packer, 42). On the other hand, according to the doctrine of "Appropriation" it is permissible to refer elements of God's work pre-eminently to one or other of the Persons. Creation is "from the Father, through the Son" (1 Cor 8:6), for example.

Para 6 Wonderful. Spot on orthodoxy.

7. However, there has been substantial criticism of the position taken by those who like Dr Schreiner believe that along with the equality there is an element of subordination in the Godhead, and that it has direct significance in the debate about male and female relationships in the Church and the home. The three lines of criticism are as follows –

Para 7. I agree, the “substantial criticisms” of the claim that the Son of God is *eternally* subordinated to the Father are overwhelming.

8. It is a heresy. "Subordinationism" is certainly the name given by historians of theology to a major heresy, that of suggesting that in substance or in being, ("ontologically") the Son is inferior to the Father. The classic form of Subordinationism is Arianism, the doctrine which taught that the Son was a secondary god, unlike and not of the same substance or essence as the Father. But a more moderate form, in which the Son is of like substance to the Father, was also judged inadequate. The Church doctrine states that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are of the same substance, or essence, equal in power, dignity, worship and praise. The question discussed below is whether the subordinationism asserted in the current debate is the heretical form or not (see items 13-16 below). Gilbert Bilezikian claims that it is: "God and Christ are both persons within the one being of the Trinity. Nowhere in the Bible is there a reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such "subordinationist" theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical" (Bilezikian, 279).

Para 8. The next few paragraphs deal with the term “subordinationism.” I will take up the meaning of this word at this point.

- Some theologians define “subordinationism” as the error of teaching a subordination of *being* in the Godhead and this is OK. All claims that the Son is *eternally* subordinated to the Father, however worded, even using the words function or role, imply ontological subordination. If the subordination is *eternal* the person is subordinated in nature, being, essence.
- However some dictionaries and theologians define subordinationism as any teaching that suggests that the Son and/or the Spirit are *eternally* subordinated in being *and* function/work. Warfield implies this understanding of the term. He will not allow the subordinate functions of the Son in the work of redemption to be read back into the eternal Trinity. Here it should be

noted that the Bible and all the church fathers, and amongst moderns, Barth and Torrance insist that the being *and* the works (functions) of God and Christ are one. (Of course they affirm that each divine person has works that are distinctly theirs but they hold that one does not do anything apart from the other two. The divine persons have one will and always work as one).

- Others define subordinationism as the error of a reading back into the immanent or eternal Trinity the temporal subordination of the incarnate Son. The conservative Reformed scholar Cornelius Van Till adopts this position (*The Defence of the Faith*, p 25). He claims that, “All heresies with respect to the Trinity can be reduced to one great heresy of mixing the eternal and the temporal.” (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p 234).
- I personally define subordinationism much more carefully and explicitly, namely as follows. It is to deny that in the eternal Trinity all three divine persons are fully “co-equal.” Or more generally it is to deny in any detail what the Athanasian creed teaches on the Trinity in regard to the equality of the divine persons. It is to deny that the three persons are all of one substance/being and glory. It is to deny that all three persons are almighty and Lord. It is to deny that none is before or after, none is above or below. It is to deny the three persons are “co-equal.” It is to deny that the Son is equal to the Father in “his Godhead,” and is only subject to the Father in his “manhood.”
- Subordinationism may also be defined as a form of tritheism. All subordinationists want to stress the differences between the Father and the Son, and sometimes the Spirit. In doing so they *divide the persons* and tear apart the one Godhead. Orthodoxy in contrast always stresses the unity and equality of the persons. Proof of this point is seen in the Athanasian creed where fourteen clauses one after the other speak of the unity and equality of the three divine persons. Only after this litany of affirmations on unity and equality does a single clause of three lines then differentiate the persons by origination. The creed then returns to its stress on unity and “co-equality” for another four clauses. I would hold that the later half clause that says the Son is “inferior to the Father as touching his manhood” also differentiates the persons. Calvin seeks to exclude all forms of subordinationism when he says he will allow only a “distinction, not a division” between the divine three (*Institutes*, 1.13.17, p 142).
- Barth in his extended repudiation of “every form of subordinationism” (*C/D*, 1.1, pp 381-2)

finds two inherent errors in subordinationism of any kind. It divides “the one single and equal God,” and it makes “the one who reveals himself the kind of subject we ourselves are.” (Some think Barth teaches subordinationism but this section indicates otherwise. Barth does talk about a subordination and obedience “in God.” as he ponders the mystery of the subordinate and obedient Christ. The majority interpretation of these comments is that here Barth recognises that what is revealed in Christ even in his incarnational subordination and obedience tells us something about Godself. Our God is a God who stoops to save no matter what the cost. Barth’s critics more commonly accuse him of modalism because of his insistence that it is the one God who comes to us. Where modalism or even a tendency to modalism is present subordinationism of one or two members of the Trinity is absolutely excluded. The one God cannot be other than himself.)

If the doctrine commission wants to argue that there is an orthodox *eternal* subordinationism they must define what this is. To simply assert there is such a thing proves nothing.

9. It applies only to the redemptive work of Christ. The second criticism accepts that there is a legitimate form of subordinationism, but insists (as in the quote given in item 2 above) that it is applied only to Christ in his redemptive work. As the Athanasian Creed (a standard authority for Anglicans) says, "And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are coeternal together: and co-equal." In dealing with the Son it says: "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is God and Man", and continues later, "Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood". Thus hierarchy and subordination are features of the relationship between the man Jesus and his heavenly Father, but (it is claimed) not of the relationship between the Father and the Son before the incarnation. Another version of this criticism widens the scope by saying that the subordination is specifically to do with redemption, not the permanent inner life of the Godhead -

"... the subordination of the Son to the Father is not an ontological subordination in the eternal Godhead, but a voluntary act of self-humiliation on the part of the Son in the economy of redemption. As God, the Son is equal with his Father, though as Messiah he has assumed a servant role and become subordinate to his Father. The basis of the comparison between Man's being, as an "I"/"thou" fellowship of male and female, and God's being, as an "I"/"thou" fellowship of persons in the Godhead, is the doctrine of the Trinity, not the doctrine of Incarnation". (Jewett, 133, fn105)

Para 9. This paragraph basically reflects orthodoxy. It is correct that the Athanasian creed restricts the subordination of the Son to his ministry as the incarnate Son. An eternal “hierarchy and subordination” of the Son are excluded. But why do the compilers of this report not unquestionably

embrace what this creed says and speak of a “co-equal” Trinity? I also agree with the quote from Jewett. He is spot on. Wonderful

10. This is a matter to which direct appeal must be made to the Scriptures to see whether they throw light on the subject (see items 17 to 28 below).

Para 10. We are now told the answer will be given by “direct appeal “ to scripture This para seems to suggest that with the Bible in hand and no knowledge of historical theology or the creeds the Christian will be able to work out the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Most Reformed theologians do not think the *doctrine* of the Trinity is spelt out in scripture. The Dutch Reformed theologian A Kuyper pours scorn on such claims. He says claims that developed doctrines are simply summations of biblical teaching are a “theological illusion.” (*Principles of Sacred theology*, 574-5). We will see as the document continues whether or not the scriptures do indeed settle all the issues without any reference to the tradition, as defined earlier.

11. The analogy with human relationships does not hold. There is a third problem urged from the egalitarian point of view. Even if a form of subordinationism is acceptable, and even if it applies to the eternal relations between the Persons of the Godhead, is it relevant to the subject of the relationships between men and women? Thus, since the divine persons are not Persons in the human sense (they are not "three people", for example), the analogy between God and human relations is a false one. "The subordination of individual persons within the one Trinity is quite different from a social order that encodes the subordination of one group (women/wives) to another group (men/husbands) apart from considerations of the abilities, giftedness or mission of the individuals involved" (Grenz and Kjesbo, 117) (see items 29 to 41 below).

Para 11. Here the author(s) of the 1999 report see the problem of analogical correlation that I have raised in my introductory questions put to the 2004 commissioners. Unfortunately this problem is left unresolved. How does the relationships of the three divine persons inform the twofold relationship of man and woman? If you choose to believe the Son is subordinated *eternally* to the Father you may claim that women are permanently subordinated to men, but if you follow the Athanasian creed and argue the Father and Son are “co-equal” you may see man and women as co-equal – and of course like the Father and the Son differentiated. When the doctrine of the Trinity is construed to prove something else the answer wanted can usually be found. This doctrine must be studied in its own right. (This is where Volf is so good.)

13. As noted already, "Subordinationism" is certainly the name given to one

of the most deadly heresies ever faced by the Church. If Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is of a different and inferior essence to his Father, he cannot be the mediator between God and man, and the true revelation of God. We do not see the Father in the Son (John 14:9), and our salvation is not secure. The unity of the Father and the Son is essential for the work that Christ came to do.

Para 13 I agree subordinationism is a “deadly heresy” and I agree with all else in this paragraph.

14. But, despite the danger of Subordinationism, the word "subordination" is still used by orthodox theologians to describe the relation they perceived in Scripture between the Father and the Son. Thus, in the words of H.E.W Turner, "There is an orthodox subordination in the sense that the Trinity must begin with the Father or lead up to the Father, but this is concerned with the order of thought and unity in derivation and does not affect the ontological status of the three persons." (Alan Richardson, 329).

Para 14. If H E W Turner spoke of an *order* in the Trinity “in the sense that the Trinity must begin with the Father ... .” I would be happy to accept this. All orthodox Christians believe in *order* in the Godhead so long as it is not a hierarchical order. To suggest this order is a sub-ordering is unhelpful to say the least. Here it is to be remembered that confusion on the doctrine of the Trinity was widespread before the renaissance of interest in this doctrine in the post 1970’s.

15. T. C. Hammond states - "In short, the full Christian doctrine demands all three of the following -

1. The unity of the Godhead
2. The full deity of the Son (who was "begotten") and the Spirit (who "proceeds" from the Father and the Son).
3. The subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father." (T. C. Hammond, 57).

Para 15 says nothing. Did Hammond believe in the eternal subordination of the Son, or simply a temporal and voluntary subordination? In the context of his whole discussion in, *In Understanding Be Men*, I think the latter. That was Dr Knox’s opinion when I was his student.

16. Such teaching could be cited many times over. It would not be true to say, therefore, that every version of subordinationism is a heresy. There is a subordinationist element in the usual statement of the Church position.<sup>2</sup> It is always put alongside statements of the ontological equality of the divine persons. It maintains ontological equality and functional subordination. It usually applies to the eternal relations between the Persons and not just the order of redemption or only the manhood of Jesus. But is this type of subordinationism biblical, and in any case what does it imply?

Para 16. Can you give me examples of such teaching in Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Calvin, Torrance, Bray, Van Till etc? The truth is that these theologians unanimously reject that the Son is *eternally* subordinate *in any way*. *Temporal functional subordination* in the Son’s work

of redemption is no problem. What is a problem is *eternal* functional subordination, which the 1999 doctrine commission embraces enthusiastically, sometimes as in this paragraph grounding it on ontology. This is implied in the last three lines of this paragraph and stated explicitly elsewhere. If this subordination “applies to the *eternal relations* between the persons and not just to the order of redemption, or only the manhood of Jesus,” is this not a difference in ontology? Do not the eternal relations of Father, Son and Spirit constitute who they are, not just how they function?

**A note on the term “functional.”** *Warfield seems to have introduced the term “functional” subordination into evangelical thinking on the Trinity when he made it a synonym for subordination in “modes of operation,” a subordination he limits exclusively to “the redemptive process.” (“Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” p 110). For him this subordination is not to be read back into the eternal “modes of subsistence” – the personal being – of the Son. To do so he says would “impair the [Son’s] complete identity with the Father in being and the complete equality with the Father in power” (p 112). I can gladly accept a temporal functional subordination entirely limited to the work of redemption, but the use of the word “function” not found in the tradition before his time, may confuse things. Even in his incarnation Jesus functions as God, raising the dead, forgiving sins, bestowing salvation, etc. I prefer to think of all three persons acting or functioning as one with the Son subordinated only in his incarnate work for our redemption. In the tradition the three divine persons are always understood to be one in being and work, one in person and function, though never confused.*

17. Its biblical roots. Pivotal to the whole revelation of the Trinity is the status of the Son of God. What we make of him determines our understanding of the nature of God. His true manhood is the explicit teaching of Scripture (1 Tim 2:5). So, too, is his deity (John 1:1). Correspondingly we read that he claimed unity and equality with God (John 10:30-33), but that he also said "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). In speaking of his relation with the Father, the Gospel of John refers to the way in which the world was made through him (1:3), and also the way in which he had been "sent" into the world for its salvation (eg 3:16-17). The Scriptures thus themselves bear witness to a subordination which belongs to the eternal relationship between the persons of the Trinity, and not only to the humanity of Jesus in the incarnation, or even in the broader work of redemption. This applies to the Spirit as well as the Son (Jn 14:26). As far as revelation permits us to see in any temporal direction - from before creation (Eph 1:4), to creation (1 Cor 8:6) and to redemption (Jn 3:16-17; 12:49,50), to the gift of the Spirit (Gal 4:6), and forward to consummation (Jn 5:25-26) and beyond (1Cor 15:28) - unity, equality and subordination characterise the life of the Trinity.

Para 17. Now we get to the Bible again. I agree with the first 4 lines but I think the treatment of the classic problem text of Jn 14:28 is a bit glib. We must remember that this is also the favourite text of JW's. Orthodoxy has always argued that this one text, or perhaps two problematic texts (I think also of 1 Cor 15:24-28) must not be read to contradict so much else in scripture. The majority opinion in the early church was that Jesus' words in Jn 14:28 allude only to the time of his earthly ministry. So also J Calvin and L Morris and D Carson. At a more contextual and exegetical level both Hurtado's, *Lord Jesus Christ* and Thompson's, *The God of the Gospel of John*, give good treatments of this text. The sending texts in John were also repeatedly quoted by the Arians. I love Augustine's treatment. Basically he argues we should not read the word "sent" in human terms. He insists this language *differentiates* the persons not subordinates the persons, and I agree. (Robert Doyle in his article in the April edition of *Briefing* shows he has either not read or not understood Augustine on this matter.) On an exegetical basis I personally think the sending language reflects the Jewish *shaliach* principle, the one sent is as the sender. If so then this terminology speaks of the equal authority of the Father and the Son, not the subordination of the Son in authority to the Father.

I simply disagree that the Bible bears witness to an *eternal* subordination of the Son and the Spirit. The text quoted in the last three lines simply do not point to an *eternal* subordination in the Trinity. Here we see the Bible being quoted to "prove" what it does not teach! (On 1 Cor 15:28 see below). Interestingly, Cornelius Van Till who also claims that all that he teaches about the Trinity comes directly from the Bible makes exactly the opposite claim. He says, "a consistent biblical doctrine of the Trinity would imply the complete rejection of all subordinationism." (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 104). Who is right? I would suggest only appeal to the creeds and confessions can settle this matter.

18. The Son's obedience to the Father arises from the very nature of his being as Son. His freedom consists in doing what is natural to him, which is to submit to his Father. He is incapable of doing other than his Father's will. The Son does not ask the Father to submit to him, for example, and cannot do so if he is to have the liberty to be true to his filial nature. The suggestion that, "Subordination is a matter of freedom of the will, not of some imposed order: it is voluntary and mutual. . ." (see item 2 above), misunderstands the meaning of freedom. The will is not free from the order imposed by the inner reality of personhood. For example, true freedom is

enjoyed when a perfectly good person delights in doing good; in this case, when the Son delights to please the Father. Alternative accounts of freedom tend towards individualism and an emphasis on arbitrary choice as the essence of that freedom.

Para 18. Now we have again explicit ontological language. "The Son's obedience to the Father arises from the *very nature* of his *being as Son*." He *is* a subordinated divine person. And this obedience is compulsory. I see nothing like this wording in Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine or Calvin. I think these words are a stark breach with orthodoxy and with the Bible. Peter O'Brien in his excellent treatment of Philippians 2:4ff says this text teaches that the Son's humiliation and obedience is "voluntary" and temporal. To add that the Son does not ask the Father to submit to him is both a truism and a bit of debating flourish. Divine relations and work cannot be reversed and no one suggests that they can. The Father is always the Father of the Son, and the Son is always the Son of the Father. The Father sends and the Son goes, the Son is incarnate not the Father, the Son is the redeemer not the Father etc, but orthodoxy has never taught that difference implies eternal subordination. To suggest so is simply to be confused.

The comments about divine and human freedom are unhelpful and I think an insult to intelligence. Sorry. Is "freedom" being defined as "incapable of doing otherwise?"

19. J. Ernest Davey sums up the evidence from John's Gospel in these words - "The human traits in John's picture of Jesus, weariness, thirst, tears, etc., imply a creaturely dependence during the life of Christ in the flesh; but even John's picture of the eternal Son in himself retains the same subordinationist note - cf. John 14:28 . . . and cf. the Johannine Rev. 3:12, 21 and the like, where the risen Christ in Heaven not only receives gifts and dignity from the Father, but also speaks of Him as His God (four times in the one verse, and note even in our Gospel of John 20:17 after His Resurrection), ie. even the risen and exalted Son has a God, a worship or religion in His relation to the ultimate God, the Father eternal and invisible. Indeed there is no doubt that for John the dependence of Christ upon the Father is not confined to his life upon earth; it reaches back into his pre-existence (17:24) and forward to His exalted life as the Risen One (14:16), and is in line with the thought of Paul in such passages as 1 Cor. 15:24,28." (J. Ernest Davey, 78-79)

20. Davey has given his answer as to whether the subordination of Son to Father applies only to the incarnation - he sees it as a matter of the eternal relations. Gordon Fee bears witness to the same phenomenon in his treatment of 1 Corinthians. In order to guard the unity and equality of the persons, he speaks at several points of the "functional subordination" of Son (and Spirit) to Father. In some cases, he specifically links this to the incarnation (on 11:3) and the work of redemption (on 15:28, though notice that this passage is speaking of the Son's submission in the eschatological triumph). But on 8:4-6, which speaks of creation, he refers to what he calls, "the functional subordination of the Son to the Father." He then explains, "God the Father is both the ultimate source and ultimate destiny

of all things, including ourselves; the Lord Christ is the divine mediator, through whom God created all things and redeemed us" (Fee, 374). Just as clear is his reference to the "functionally subordinate" activities of both Son and Spirit (who of course has never been incarnate) in his comment on 12:6: "the unity of God dominates his thinking in such a way that the Son and the Spirit are subsumed under that unity, and their own activities are seen as "functionally subordinate" (eg. God gives gifts "through the Spirit," vv. 8-9). On the other hand, there can be little question that he thinks of Christ and the Spirit in terms of their full deity" (Fee, 588).

Para 19 and 20. Appeal to Davey is self-serving and unscholarly. The work is badly outdated and inadequate. I have referred to Thompson and Hurtado's work as much more exegetically grounded. However neither of these authors can be quoted to prove John held to the eternal or simply the temporal subordination of the Son. They are exegetes not systematic theologians seeking to answer the questions of a much later time. We must be quite honest: some texts in John suggest one answer, others suggest the opposite. One of the tasks of the systematic theologian is always to work out what is primary and secondary at a theological level in the rich diversity of scriptural teaching on any matter. If all texts on any question said exactly the same thing and spoke directly to every question raised in another age we would not need systematic theologians. The church fathers and the creeds eventually agreed that texts like Jn 14:28 did not speak of the eternal subordination of the Son in being or work. I think they made the right decision. John's overall emphasis is on the oneness of the Father and the Son; on their mutual indwelling, and most importantly on their oneness of will and work. These primary and emphasised insights exclude the thought that the Son is *eternally* and *involuntarily* subordinated in being or function. In John, Jesus *is* God (1:1) (the language of ontology) and he *functions as God* with all authority raising the dead, forgiving sins, offering salvation, sitting in judgement, giving life. So his opponents concluded that in doing these things he was "making himself equal with God." (Jn 5:18) They were right. From this we conclude: *In John's Gospel we do not find ontological or functional subordination but rather ontological and functional equality between the Father and the Son!* Cullmann argues that the whole New Testament presupposes the *functional equality* of the Father and the Son after Easter. (*Christology*, 3-4, 325-326). If Cullmann and I are right then claims that the Son of God is *eternally functionally* subordinated to the Father are contrary to biblical revelation.

21. A distinction is rightly made between what is revealed to us about God in salvation (the "economic Trinity") and what we know of his own inner life (the "essential" Trinity). We may ask whether subordination is true of the inner, eternal relations of the essential Trinity, or only in the outworking

of salvation. If we are to avoid agnosticism about God, however, we must assert that the economic Trinity reveals the truth, but not all that is true, about the essential Trinity. That is, when we deal with the God revealed in Scripture we deal with the real God as he is in himself and not a God whose revelation is a distortion of his reality. According to Scripture, the submission of Christ does not express a temporary and arbitrary arrangement, but the very nature of God in himself. The danger otherwise is the heresy of modalism, in which the Persons as revealed in Scripture are only the temporary manifestations of the one God. In fact, it was not the Father but the Son who was the incarnate Mediator, and it could not have been other. We never read, for example, that the Father obeys the Son or that the Son sends the Father, or that the Spirit creates through the Father.

Para 21. I agree with lines 1 to 6. The Son does reveal the Father. The comment, “According to scripture, the submission of Christ does not express a temporary and arbitrary arrangement but *the very nature* of God himself” is perplexing and demands comment. Of course no one thinks anything in God is “arbitrary.” But what does the “very nature of God” refer to? To the Godhead or Christ? If these words mean the submission seen in Christ’s incarnate ministry tells us something of the very nature of the Godhead I agree. This sounds like Barth. Even in his subordination the Son reveals the Father. There is no disjunction in the one God at any time, or in any way. If this is what is meant I do not see a parallel in the rest of the document. However if the eternal (i.e. non “temporary”) submission “in the very nature of God himself” alludes only to the Son then this statement would seem to contradict the teaching of Phil 2:4ff, and indeed the whole NT that makes the subordination of Christ in the incarnation temporary and voluntary? O’Brien certainly thinks so when he speaks as an exegete. The ontological language is again to be noted. This subordination is in “*the very nature of God himself.*”

I have yet to find a modern trinitarian theologian who endorses the “co-equality” of the persons who even hints at modalism. The emphasis among contemporary theologians is more towards a “social Trinity” where the distinct persons come to the fore. (On this matter Barth and Rahner who have a modalistic tendency have been left behind). This charge is simply sword rattling for the audience. Thus the following comments about persons and works of individual members of the Godhead being changed is irrelevant and silly. No one is suggesting this. God the Father is always God the Father, the one who sends, and God the Son is always God the Son who is sent and the Spirit is always God the Spirit who sanctifies and empowers. God the Father did not die on the cross and God the Father is not the Redeemer. These things *eternally and irrevocably differentiate* the persons: they do not subordinate any person. Neither I nor any one I have read on the Trinity

gets this confused. The imagined heretic is a straw man.

- **A note on confusing the persons.** *In my ongoing discussions with Sydney theologians on the Trinity the constant charge is that if I stress the equality and oneness of the divine three I must be a modalist. How anyone with Bible in hand could be a modalist escapes me. The Bible gives clear definition to each “person,” and I for one clearly recognise and affirm this. However, in the tradition equality and unity are always stressed because subordinationism is the perennial heresy not modalism. This emphasis cannot be missed in the Athanasian creed (as I have already pointed out) or in Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas and Barth, and it is evident in Calvin and not ignored even by the Cappadocians. The fault actually lies with my accusers. All subordinationists border on tritheism because they make a clear division between the Father and the Son. The two are set in opposition and their perfect unity torn asunder.*

22. The Church Doctrine of the Trinity. What distinguished the orthodox from the heretical was determination of the orthodox to do justice to the whole teaching of Scripture. The Arians over-emphasised the subordinationist elements of the NT presentation. The orthodox needed to insist on the unity and equality of Father, Son and Spirit. If the revelation in Christ was to be true, they had to say with Christ, "The Father and I are one; if you have seen me you have seen the Father". But they did not ignore or neglect the other evidence of Scripture for a relational subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. With varying degrees of success they allowed room for this too.

Para 22. Now there is the claim that the position being put forward represents “the whole teaching of scripture.” I am not at all convinced. I do not think the 1999 doctrine commission has done justice to all the teaching of scripture on the Father-Son relationship. Indeed it gives little evidence in any observable or tangible way of a deep concern with the teaching of scripture. The members selectively quote a few verses and nowhere give any exegesis of key texts such as Phil 2:4ff. They do not discuss what it might mean to confess “Jesus is Lord.” How does this confession match up with thinking of the Son of God as eternally subservient to the Father? It seems to me at the very least that this confession recognises that the Son *functions* as the ruler of the universe. Nowhere in the 1999 doctrine commission report is it mentioned that in the New Testament the “equality” of the Father and the Son is explicitly taught (Jn 5:18, Phil 2:6). And, at times they even contradict scripture such as when they make the subordination of the Son compulsory and eternal, something explicitly excluded by Phil 2:4ff. In allowing the given agenda, the permanent subordination of

women, to determine how scripture is read it seems to me biblical authority is undermined. The Bible is simply appealed to prove what is already believed.

I am flabbergasted by the claim that Arius only “overemphasised the subordinationist elements in the NT.” Certainly the church fathers never thought this. They thought his subordinationist teaching undermined the faith completely. Arianism was the most dangerous heresy that had arisen. I wonder if the new doctrine commission will be happy to reiterate this claim?

23. In the course of Christian history there have been many attempts to state the doctrine of the Trinity. All attempts which have produced orthodox answers have followed the soteriological flow of the New Testament. In the Eastern tradition, it has been more usual to begin the process of thinking and talking about the Trinity from the Persons, and thus the priority of the Father. It is as if the Father is the source of the deity enjoyed by Son and Spirit. The danger of heresy is met by the insistence that the Son and Spirit are of one being with the Father, but the position of the Father ensures a hierarchical mode of conceiving God.

Para 23. This is a fairly inadequate summary of the “Eastern” position which in reality is quite diverse but I see no huge problem here until the last couple of lines. The Eastern position does not teach hierarchical ordering. This is an Arian error and Eastern theologians who are well informed don’t fall into that error. The Cappadocians were dead against hierarchical ordering as was Athanasius. In my book *The Trinity and Subordinationism* I give the classic quote from Athanasius explicitly rejecting hierarchical ordering (p 40). Quotes from the Cappadocians include the following:

Basil writes,

“Those who teach subordinationism, and talk about First, Second and Third, ought to recognise they are introducing erroneous Greek polytheism into pure Christian theology ... subordination cannot be used to describe persons who share the same nature.” (*NPNF*, 8, 47, p 30)

Gregory of Nyssa adds,

“We do not know of any difference by way of superiority and inferiority in attributes which express our conceptions of the divine nature.” (*NPNF*, 5, p 327)

Gregory of Nazianzus is even more emphatic. In reply to Arius he says,

“For he did not honour the Father by dishonouring his Offspring with his unequal degrees of Godhead. But we recognise one glory of the Father, the equality of the Only-begotten; and one

glory of the Son and the Spirit. And we hold that to subordinate any of the three, is to destroy the whole.” (NPNF, 7, 30, p 405). And,

“The one Godhead and power found in the three in unity, and comprising the three separately, not unequal in substance or natures, neither increased or diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same.” (NPNF, 7, 40.41, p 375)

It should be noted that the Cappadocians motive for insisting on the *monarchie* of the Father was to safeguard the unity of the divine three, not to subordinate the second and third persons in any way.

24. The Western tradition, exemplified in Augustine, has as its starting point the Triune life itself in its oneness. The emphasis falls from the beginning on the single essence and hence the unity and equality of the Persons. Even so, however, the order of the Godhead is acknowledged. This is most clearly expressed in the Catholic Creeds which assert both the equality and difference in the relations between the persons of the Godhead. The church did not conceive of the Father, Son and Spirit as just existing together. Rather they were understood as eternally related to each other in distinctive relationships of derivation and being. So the differences between the co-equal persons of the Trinity are not only voluntary or temporary, but go to each's very mode of being.

Para 24 I agree entirely with the first five lines. Every orthodox theologian affirms the unity and the difference of the divine three. In Augustine the priority of the Father is very muted. Only twice as far as I can see in the whole of *De Trinitate* does he speak of the *principium* of the Father, and in one of these passages he associates this with the Son. Basically he thinks, as the doctrinal commission wording helpfully says, of “the triune life itself in its oneness.” We have again ontological language in the last two lines. The persons are differentiated “in distinctive relationships of derivation and *being*,”... that go to “each’s *very mode of being*.” In Augustine the persons are differentiated primarily by their differing relations of origin. They share “indivisibly” the one substance, and they work or function as one.

25. In the Creeds, the Son and the Spirit are asserted to be equal with the Father, but it is a derived equality. With the second and third persons, the mode of derivation and the relationship of being is distinct. The Athanasian Creed, while strongly affirming the equality of the persons, makes these differences of being most clear - "The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made or created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is from the Father and the Son, not made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. . . And in this Trinity there is none afore or after the other; none is greater or less than the other."

Para 25 Now we come to *derivation of being* that has been mentioned several times as a justification for the subordination of the Son. I do not think the Nicene creed teaches this and the Athanasian creed certainly does not teach derivation of divine being. In the Athanasian creed the Father is not depicted as the *monarche* (sole source) of the being of the Son. The idea is never suggested. True, this creed differentiates the Father and the Son by speaking of them as “begotten” and “unbegotten,” but in the orthodox tradition differing origination does not imply derivation of being, let alone subordination in being or work. There has been debate about the Nicene creed but in historical context the words “God from God, light from light, true God from true God” were included to absolutely exclude Arianism that taught that the Son was not fully God. Even if they could be taken to imply derivation they absolutely exclude subordinationism. The Son is God as much as is the Father. They have the one being (*homoousios*). Here we need to note that Calvin spent more time in his discussion on the Trinity in opposing derivative subordinationism than any other matter. He denounced as heretics those who spoke of the Father as the “essence giver,” as if the Son received his divinity or being from the Father (*Institutes*, p 149). For Calvin the Son is *autotheos* – God in his own right. (This is noted in para 26 of the doctrine commission report). Warfield also rejects derivation of being.

What we are told in para 25 is that the Son and the Spirit’s equality is a “derived equality.” What this means is then explained. It means that “with the second and third persons, the mode of derivation and relationships of *being* are distinct.” This comment does not simply differentiate the persons, it divides them. The Father is *other than* the Son and the Spirit, their being is *distinct*. In an absolutely breathtaking claim we are told that the Athanasian creed makes “these *differences of being* most clear.” This comment is an explicit denial of the Nicene and Athanasian creed’s central affirmation. The three divine persons are one in substance/being (*homoousios*). Here we have the most explicit and daring claim that the Son is eternally ontologically subordinated – in his *being*. And we are told this is what the Athanasian creed teaches!!!! Wow! Then to confuse matters further the Athanasian creed’s one extended clause that *differentiates* the divine three is quoted as proof of *derivation and division in being*. And then the words speaking of the co-equality of the persons are added. In this one section opposing ideas are patched together. Explicit heresy (contradicting the creed) and orthodoxy (a quote from the creed) stand side by side and both are

endorsed.

26. A doughty advocate of the ontological equality of the Persons was John Calvin, who insisted on the single essence of God and the self-sustaining deity ("Autotheos") of both Son and Spirit, in order to secure the point that in dealing with Son and Spirit we are dealing with God himself and not some lesser being. Even so, however, Calvin and the Calvinists (Edwards, Berkhof, Hodge, Dabney, Packer, Knox) - not to mention the neo-orthodox (Barth, Brunner) have recognised order, and "a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but no subordination as far as possession of the divine essence is concerned" (Berkhof, 88-89). As Calvin says of the Father, "even though we admit that in respect to order and degree the beginning of divinity is in the Father, yet we say that it is a detestable invention that essence is proper to the Father alone, as if he were the deifier of the Son"; and elsewhere, summarising Tertullian, "there are thus three, not in status, but in degree" (Calvin, 152,157).

Para 26. Of course all Calvinists recognise order in the Trinity. God is perfection. *What Calvin and all orthodox theologians reject is hierarchical order in the eternal Trinity.* Speaking of the Father-Son relationship Calvin says in "eternity there is no before or after" (1.13:18, p 143) Warfield and Torrance in their important studies on Calvin's teaching on the Trinity think Calvin absolutely excludes subordinationism of all kinds. Calvin should not be quoted in support of any form of subordinationism or hierarchical ordering in the Trinity.

Hodge was definitely a subordinationist. He repeatedly speaks of the subordination in "subsistence and operations" (being and work) of the Son and the Spirit in the eternal Trinity. I cannot find this in Dabney or Edwards but I may have missed something. I am not sure about Packer but I very, very much doubt if he would give support to what the 1999 report says. Why not send him a copy for his comments? L Berkhof does speak carelessly a couple of times but overall he consistently and clearly opposes subordinationism. He commends Augustine for eliminating the last elements of subordinationism (*Systematic Theology*, p 83) and Barth for not allowing for "any subordination" (p 84). I will leave it to commission members to judge on Dr Knox. In the mid sixties when I studied under him, before the woman question arose, he liked Warfield on the Trinity and warned against Hodge. Warfield rejects eternal subordination in "subsistence and operations" – being and function. The truth is most Calvinists oppose any subordination in the eternal Trinity. So Warfield, Bavinck, Hoeksema and most strongly Van Till, so also Bray, Nicole, Volf and Erickson.

**A note on divine order.** Robert Doyle's claims that "order means hierarchy" (*RTR*, 52, 21), and the 1999 doctrine commission report consistently implies this understanding of divine order, but the fact of the matter is the term "order" does not necessarily carry this meaning, as reference to any dictionary will show. I point out in preliminary question 3 at the beginning of this paper that the word "order" has many meanings other than hierarchy. Nevertheless, orthodoxy agrees that there is an economic order, or revelational order, or historical order (the terms do not matter) that places the Father first, the Son second and the Spirit third, and the Apostles and Nicene creed are structured on this basis. At times the Cappadocians suggest an order in origination, and others have followed them, but this idea is very difficult as orthodoxy insists that all three divine persons are eternal. At times the Cappadocians also speak against this as the quotes above indicate. Basil (*On the Holy Spirit*) has several sections rejecting all forms of what he calls "enumeration." What must be recognised is that orthodox theologians from the time of Athanasius have rejected hierarchical order seeing it as the essence of Arianism. Thomas Aquinas sums up the matter well. "In the divine persons there exists indeed a natural order but no hierarchical order" (*Summa* 1.108.1).

If the order in the immanent Trinity were Father-Son-Holy Spirit we would expect this order to be given consistently in scripture. This is not the case. In the more than twenty triadic comments in the New Testament, every order possible is found several times. In approximately eleven passages Jesus/Christ/Son/ Lord is named first (Rom 8:1-3, 15:16, 15:30, 1 Cor 2:2-5, 6:11, 2 Cor 3:3, 13:14, Gal 3:1-5, Eph 2:20-22, 4:1-6, 1 Peter 4:14); six put the God/Father first (Matt 28:19, 2 Cor 1:21-22, 2 Thess 2:13-14, Eph 3:14-16, Col 1:3-8, 1 Peter 1:2), and five the Spirit (Rom 8:15-17, 14:17-18, Eph 2:18-20, Phil 3:3, Jude 19-21). After noting this scriptural variation Warfield asks, if the Father-Son-Spirit order embodies "the very essence of the doctrine of the Trinity" should we not anticipate consistency in scripture? (*Biblical Doctrine*, 108).

27. Given the issues at stake in debates about the nature of human relationships, there has been a move amongst some scholars to propose a version of the doctrine of the Trinity which is "egalitarian". It has been alleged that traditional teaching undergirds political, ecclesiastical and social injustice. Mutual submission of the Persons of the Trinity takes the place of subordination in relations. One such learned work is that of Miroslav Volf (*After Our Likeness*, 1998), who shows through a consideration of two leading representatives of Orthodox (Zizoulas) and Roman Catholic

(Ratzinger) theology that the mainstream of thought is "subordinationist". His own proposal, based especially on the doctrine of co-inherence, is egalitarian.

Para 27 This paragraph implies that the historic doctrine of the Trinity affirms hierarchical ordering and the eternal subordination of the Son in particular but this is incorrect. Nothing could be more mistaken. See the Athanasian creed for proof. There are many modern expositions of the Trinity, most of which simply want to affirm the best of patristic Eastern and Western thinking on the Trinity. Yes, LaCugna, Boff and some other contemporary theologians do make the historic doctrine of three "co-equal" persons a model for equal consideration in society, but the members of the Sydney doctrine commission should respect them for this because they too want to make their hierarchically ordered Trinity a model for social relationships. Both use the doctrine of the Trinity for political ends – one for emancipation, one to permanently subordinate half the human race. Erickson and Grenz and to some degree Pannenberg speak of the persons in the Trinity as "mutually subordinate" but as I continue to read the Bible and the tradition I would be cautious of speaking this way because I think it could mute the divine distinctions so clearly taught in scripture and so clearly emphasised in the tradition. Perhaps O'Brien's conclusion that in Phil 2:4ff Paul is depicting the Father and the Son in "reciprocal" terms offers a better way to speak of the Father-Son relationship. This word he says is demanded by what the text says. The Son freely and voluntarily subordinates himself for the salvation of men and women and the Father freely and graciously exalts the Son giving him his own name and making him Lord over all creation.

I think the reading of Volf is distorted and tendentious. True, Volf finds one reference (and then in only one translation) of the word "hierarchical" in Zizioulas and if I remember he only infers subordinationism in Ratzinger, but this is a very minor point in his book. I very much doubt if either man would accept this estimation of their trinitarian thought. Volf's main agenda in this part of his book is awakening his readers to the danger of reading back into the Trinity one's own prior beliefs and doctrinal commitments. It is also not noted or mentioned that Volf clearly stands in the evangelical and Reformed fold. His depiction of a co-equal Trinity is characteristically Reformed.

28. Nonetheless, on the basis of the considerations already given above, the Commission regards such a move as a very significant departure from Scripture and the established Church doctrine. We are troubled that a debate about the nature of humanity and human relations should have led to a move to change our established understanding of God. If this is the meaning of

the paper referred to in item 2, it must be regarded as having failed to make good its contention that "There is no order of subordination in this understanding of headship."

Para 28. This is a key question. Are those who follow the wording of the Athanasian creed and speak of a "co-equal" Trinity faithfully following the tradition, or are those who speak of the *eternal* subordination of the Son and hierarchical ordering following the tradition? It is my charge that evangelicals who speak of the *eternal* subordination of the Son are the ones who have re-read the Bible and the tradition to prove what they already believe: women are permanently subordinated to men. Their novel meanings of key terms used to reinterpret the trinitarian tradition, the rejection of clear biblical teaching and creedal affirmations suggest this.

29. If we assume that subordination in the Godhead is part of orthodox Christian teaching and that it expresses the truth of Scripture, the question still remains as to its relevance to human relationships. In arguing that there is a relevance, those who hold to both equality and subordination in human and divine relationships make two uses of the doctrine. Both are significant, if justifiable, but the second is the stronger.

Para 29 *Eternal* subordination in the Godhead should not be assumed. If it "expresses the truth of scripture" where is the scriptural evidence? I see no exegesis to support this claim, despite the assertion this is what the Bible teaches. I think Phil 2:4ff teaches otherwise and the Athanasian creed explicitly excludes such teaching. These repeated appeals to scripture when scripture does not speak on the issue, or if it does it says the opposite of what is claimed, are a very serious matter. It suggests a reluctance to let scripture speak for itself, a denial in practice of biblical authority.

30. Equal and Different? In the first place, there are those who appeal to this doctrine to support the assertion that in personal life equality and subordination can co-exist. This is the view expressed by Dr Thomas Schreiner (cited in item 3 above). They argue that in the case of God a strong illustration may be found for their contention that differences in roles, even differences involving subordination, do not necessarily imply inequality of essence. In Schreiner's words, "there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church or home". Thus, although in the ordering of family and church life, men are to take the lead, and women are to submit to their husbands and refrain from exercising eldership authority in the church, this in no way implies ontological inferiority, or distorts the basic truth that in Christ there is no male or female (Galatians 3:28). For this point many other cases may be found in everyday life - companies, ships, schools - wherever there is leadership, obedience, and persons who though equal in essence as human beings are subordinate in role. The fact that the inner life of God himself contains the same discernible principle is evidence that it cannot be wrong to enter such relations, and it must be possible to order life in that way with justice.

Para 30 Of course equality and subordination can coexist. In all of life we see this. If there were not order of some kind human beings could not live together. The question is, can substantive equality and *permanent* subordination be reconciled? Can it be held that if one race or sex or member of the Godhead is *permanently* subordinated he/she is a true equal with his “superior”? In orthodox trinitarian theology it is consistently asserted that the being and works of God are one. The Son is fully God because he does what only God does – raise the dead, save, judge, etc. To *permanently* subordinate the Son in work/function and authority suggests he is less in being than the Father. The authors of the report seem completely ignorant of the constant stress in the tradition that the being and works, the person and functions, of the divine three are one. Both Barth and Torrance constantly stress that the being and acts of the Father and the Son are one. They recognise that to *eternally* subordinate the Son in his works, functions or authority to the Father implies his ontological subordination.

In regard to human relations I have been saying for 30 years that it is deliberately obfuscating to appeal to role subordination in “companies, ships, schools” to prove that *permanent* role subordination does not imply inferiority. To go on using this spurious argument when it has been exposed is inexcusable. To have a subordinate position in everyday life does not imply inferiority because one’s subordinate status is not intrinsically connected to one’s being. It is not a permanent unchangeable status determining who one is. The ship’s crewmember can become a captain, the student a teacher, the nurse a doctor, even a child and adult. In sociological usage, roles are changeable and so do not imply personal inferiority. If, however, women and the Son are *permanently* subordinated because of, and for no other reason, than who they *are*, then they are subordinated persons, and consequently inferiors. One’s role determines one’s being. Let me say it again. Everyone agrees role allocation as such does not imply the inferiority in the one with the lesser role. The superior and lesser role invariably has some basis (seniority, competence, training, ownership or not, etc) and the role can be changed. The worker can become a manager etc. But once you introduce the note of *permanency* connecting the subordinate role with the person themselves, with their very being, it does imply inferiority. Simply pouring scorn on this reality does not change anything. If the 2004 doctrine commission want to continue to speak of permanent role subordination intrinsically connected with divine or human persons they need to address this issue

31. This line of thought is not troubled by the understanding of subordination as applying only to the order of redemption (as in Jewett, item 9 above). That God has functioned in the incarnation like this without compromising his equality, is sufficient to establish the case.

Para 31 This is a give-away paragraph. Another point I have been making for 30 years is that to base the *permanent* subordination of women on a supposed *social order* given in creation logically and theologically demands that *all women be subordinated to all men in all situations* – the whole created world. This is what virtually all Christians believed up to modern times on the basis of the belief that God made women *inferior* to men. The old position was consistent but the post 1970's creation-given hierarchical social order only applying in the home and the church is not. It is self contradictory. This argument to substantiate the *permanent* subordination of women *only* in the church and the home is as convincing as the appeal to a supposed hierarchically ordered Trinity.

32. Dr Schreiner's position is true as far as it goes. As is shown in item 11 above, however, it may be challenged at a deeper level. While personal submission may be a pattern for instances such as individuals in work situations, it serves as an inadequate model, for "a social order that encodes the subordination of one group. . . to another group. . . apart from considerations of the abilities, giftedness or mission of the individuals involved" (see item 11 above). Subordination (with basic equality) is a common human experience. But the individual who submits does so on the basis of such matters as age, training or willingness to take responsibility. The arguments used by those who see subordination as a feature of church and home appeal to the ineradicable gender difference. They may be thought to be concluding that "all women should submit to all men". The Doctrine Commission does not accept this conclusion, but recognises that it is a key reason why the "egalitarian" contends that in the Godhead the obedience of the Son to the Father is voluntary, temporary and personal, rather than reflecting the essence of the eternal relationship between them. These deeper issues lead us to ask what bearing if any does the doctrine of the Trinity have on the relationship of men and women as such, rather than individuals from either sex?

Para 32. "Dr Schreiner's position is only true as far as it goes." Now the authors of the report again introduce ontology. Permanent functional subordination on its own is inadequate to justify the permanent subordinate status of women and the Son. Instead we are told that we must believe that the obedience of the Son reflects "*the essence* of the eternal relationship between them." "Essence" in the Western trinitarian tradition is an equivalent of the terms "being" or "substance." Schreiner wants only to endorse permanent role subordination but this paragraph the Sydney theologians say this is not enough. If women and the Son are permanently subordinated it must be grounded in their very being, ontologically

What is surprising in this paragraph is to see some insight into what I have just been arguing about permanency in role. Now the authors speak of “social order that *encodes* the subordination of one group to another group. Apart from abilities, giftedness or mission of the individuals involved.” The solution offered is to ground this subordination on “ineradicable gender difference” i.e. in the *very being* of women! Ontology again!

33. God's life as a pattern for us. In the face of this challenge, a second and more profound exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity in its biblical context is required. Enough has been said to indicate that the idea that the obedience of the Son can be summed up as "voluntary, temporary and personal" is both inadequate and untrue. It relies on a view of freedom whose tendency is toward the arbitrary and the individualistic (see items 18, 20 and 24 above). The equality and subordination which "subordinationists" see in the Trinity belongs to the very Persons themselves in their eternal nature, and this has a profound bearing on human relationships. Thus Dr D. B. Knox wrote in his addendum to the General Synod Doctrine Report of 1977, "The principle of order, of headship and subordination, is clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 where Christ is head over all things and yet himself is subordinate to the Father. Since Christ is both head of every man and himself subordinate to the Father he is the example (in perfect relationship) both of the exercise of headship, ie. gratitude ("I thank thee Father") and obedience ("I do always the things that are pleasing to him")." (Knox, 31). Indeed, P. K. Jewett is also arguing a version of that case in the extract given in item 9 above.

Para 33 Now we return to the obedience of the Son which is always the primary issue because the woman question is always in mind. How the man-woman relationship is understood determines how the Father-Son relationship is understood. The Son must be compulsorily under the authority of the Father like women to men in the home and in the church if the doctrine of the Trinity is to justify male hegemony. In contrast to such teaching the Bible and the tradition consistently relate the obedience of the Son to his soteriological work completed on the cross and therefore depict it as voluntary and temporal. In this paragraph we again have an ontological claim, “the subordination which ‘subordinationists’ (i.e. the authors) see in the Trinity belongs *to the very Persons themselves in their eternal nature.*” Then follows a quote from Knox in which he claims God the Father is eternally “head over” the Son like men are “head over” women, and the text quoted in support is 1 Cor 15:23-28. So we have two key issues, Does the Bible and tradition set the Son eternally under the authority of the Father? And does 1 Cor 15:23-28 teach just this?

I am at present researching for a larger book solely on the doctrine of the Trinity. From this work I give a more detailed response to the central idea among contemporary subordinationists that the

Bible and the tradition eternally subordinate in obedience the Son to the Father. I will also give my initial exegetical work on 1 Cor 14:24-28.

### Excursus 1. On the obedience of the Son

#### The Bible

The fact that Christians confess “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Acts 2:21, Rom 10:9, Phil 2:11 etc) would seem to exclude on principle the thought that the *resurrected* Son is in obedient submission to the Father. The title Lord (Gk *kurios*) in every day usage in the first century designated someone in authority. It is paired with either servant or slave.

In John the Son does the Father’s will (4:34, 5:30, 6:38-39 etc) but what John stresses is that the will of the Son is always to do the will of the Father. Jesus is never depicted as under compulsion to do as the Father commands. The word “obedience” is never used in connection with the Father-Son relationship in John. For John the works (functions) Jesus performs – healing, raising the dead, judging, forgiving sins, giving life, saving - indicate that he is “equal with God” (Jn 5:18). John teaches the *functional equality* of the Father and Son, not the Son’s *functional subordination of the Son*. To suggest the opposite is to contradict scripture.

In Rom 5:12ff Paul speaks explicitly of the obedience of Christ depicting him as the second Adam. “The first Adam” through his act of disobedience brought condemnation, Christ, the second Adam, through his perfect obedience brought justification. So Paul writes, “For just as one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (5:19 cf. 1 Cor 15:22). In speaking of Christ as the second Adam Paul underlines his true humanity that made it possible for him to die on the cross. In his death his work as the second Adam was completed.

In Phil 2:8 the obedience of Christ is again related to his death. Peter O’Brien in his exposition of Phil 2:4ff repeatedly and on solid exegetical evidence sees the Son’s obedience as voluntary and temporal. It ends with his death on the cross

### The tradition

As far as I can see the significance of biblical comments about the obedience of Christ do not come into debate until the outbreak of the Arian heresy in the fourth century. Arius and all his followers were agreed on one matter. God the Father was an unoriginated Monad and for this reason the Son and the Spirit were radically different and unlike him. They could be spoken of as “God” but not in the same sense as the Father who was unique. On this basis the Arians taught that the Father and the Son (in the early stage of the debate it was these two divine persons who were always in focus) were of different being and power. Everyone has heard that Arius ontologically subordinated the Son to the Father. What is less well known and recognised is that he and all the Arians also eternally subordinated the Son in power and authority. R P C Hanson in his monumental study of Arianism says the Arians consistently taught that the Son “does the Father’s will and exhibits obedience and subordination to the Father, and adores and praises the Father, *not only in his earthly ministry but in Heaven*”(p 1030). The Arians argued that, because the Son was manifest in the flesh as less in power and authority than the Father, he must be *eternally* less in authority and power than the Father. Their error was to read back the Son’s subordination in authority seen in his incarnate ministry back into the eternal Trinity

In reply, Athanasius attacked the central tenet of Arianism by clearly articulating for the first time the Christian doctrine of God. God is not a Monad. He is from all eternity a triad of inseparable and equal divine persons. He wrote, “The faith of Christians acknowledges the blessed Triad as unalterable and perfect and ever what it was.” However, what he never tires of stressing is that the Father and the Son are one and ever have been. “We may neither say that God [the Father] was ever without his Word, nor that the Son was ever non-existent.”

Because the Son and Father are inseparably one God, Athanasius asks the Arians, “Must not he who is perfect be equal to God?” He of course believes only an affirmative answer is possible. Athanasius’ tenacious belief that the Father and the Son cannot be divided in any way, being differentiated only by differing origination, leads him to repeatedly lay down what might be called the Athanasian rule, “The same things are said of the Son which are said of the Father, except for calling him Father.”

From this it follows that Athanasius could not allow that the Son was eternally set under the Father in authority. Whatever his personal failings may have been as a man, as a theologian the logic and consistency of his reasoning is without fault. At no point at any time does he waiver from his belief that the Father and the Son are inseparably one in being, work and authority. All his efforts are put to refuting the Arian arguments that seek to radically differentiate the Father and the Son by depicting the Son as less in deity and authority. As we have already noted the Arians appealed to the human weaknesses, ignorance and obedience of the Son to prove he was a lesser god. What they saw in the Son in the form of a servant they ascribed to the divine Son in his eternal relationship with the Father. Athanasius rules such reasoning out of court. He makes a clear distinction between the Son as man with the limitations this involved and the Son as God without human limitations. Thus he will not allow that “properties of the flesh ... such as to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to weary and the like,” may be ascribed to the divine Word.

Although Athanasius does not discuss as a separate issue the obedience of Christ, one of the texts he frequently quotes and discusses is Phil 2:4-11, which he notes emphasises the humble status of the Son in the incarnation. For Athanasius the Son’s self-emptying in order to become man did not involve any diminution of his divinity or power but it did involve him in becoming a servant and in being “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” He writes, “For though the word existing in the form of God took a servants form, yet the assumption of the flesh did not make a servant of the Word, who was by nature Lord.”

However, Athansius is in no doubt that the power and authority of the Father and the Son is the same. Speaking of the Son he says,

“He is Lord and King everlasting.”

“For he ever was and is Lord and sovereign of all, being like in all things to the Father.”

“He is Lord of all because he is one with the Father’s Lordship.”

Likewise the attributes of the Father and the Son are the same.

“The Father is eternal, immortal, powerful, light, king, sovereign, God, Lord, creator, and maker. These attributes must be in the image ... the Son. ... . If the Son be not all this... he is

not a true image of the Father.”

“He is himself the Father’s power and wisdom.”

“The attributes of the Father (are) spoken of the Son.”

The obedience of Christ is a major theme in the voluminous writings of the Cappadocians. It is clear why this is so. Eunomius, the Cappadocian’s arch Arian opponent, subordinated the Son in being, derivation, *and authority* to the Father. In his *Confession of Faith* that he sent to the emperor Theodosius in 383 Eunomius professes,

“We believe in the one and only true God..., he has no sharer of his Godhead nor participator of his glory *nor joint possessor of his authority* nor consort of the throne of his kingdom, for he is one and sole God almighty. ...

And we believe in the Son of God ...

He is *obedient* in creating and giving being to things that exist, *obedient* in all his administration, not having received his being Son or God because of his *obedience*, but from his being Son and being generated as only-begotten God, being *obedient* in words, *obedient* in acts ...

Like the earlier Arians whom Athanasius opposed, Eunomius emphasised the human traits of Christ seen in the incarnation. These he believed indicated the eternal subordinate status of the Son. Gregory of Nazianzus more than once lists the “expressions” of his humanity quoted *ad nauseam* by Eunomius. They are given as allusions to the passages or teaching Eunomius quoted in evidence.

“My God and your God, or greater or created, or made or sanctified; add if you like *servant* and *obedient*, and gave and learnt and *was commanded and sent*, can do nothing of himself, either say or judge, or give or will. And further to these - his ignorance, *subjection*, prayer, asking, increase being made perfect ...”

In their reply to Eunomius’ teaching the Cappadocians, like Athanasius, make a clear distinction between Christ as man and Christ as God. They argue that the limitations he embraced in becoming incarnate in no way impinged on his divine status as equal with God. Gregory of Nyssa writes, “We recognise two things in Christ, one divine, the other human (the divine by nature, but the human in the incarnation, we accordingly claim for the Godhead that which is eternal, and that which is created we ascribe to his human nature).” In his “Against Eunomius” he adds, “By his partaking of creation he also partook of servitude. And him who is in servitude you will surely invest with the servants form.”

The Cappadocian's think of the incarnate Son as representative man who wins our salvation by going to the cross in obedience. Gregory of Nyssa in answering Eunomius points out that "the mighty Paul" says "he became obedient" (Phil 2:8) "to accomplish the mystery of redemption by the cross, who had emptied himself by assuming the likeness and fashion of a man ... healing the disobedience of men by his own obedience." In reply to the claim that Jesus is forever the servant of God the Father Gregory Nazianzus writes, "In truth he was in servitude to flesh and to birth and to the condition of our life with a view to our liberation." Then countering appeal to the words from the epistle to the Hebrews, "he learnt obedience," which Eunomius' "profundity" took to mean, the Son's "obedience is part of his nature (and it is) impossible for him not to be obedient," he insists that the Son "became obedient ... by becoming for our sakes flesh, a servant and a curse, and sin." He did so according to "his free will." Then noting that Christ goes voluntarily by his own choice to the cross (Jn 10:18) he adds, "Even in the time of his passion he is not separated from his authority; where can heresy possibly discern the subordination to authority of the King of Glory?" To this we can add the words of Gregory of Nazianzus. "In his character as the Word he is neither obedient nor disobedient. For such expressions belong to servants, and inferiors ... . In character of the form of a servant, he condescends to his fellow servants, nay to his servants ... bearing all me and mine in himself."

Like Athanasius and Augustine before him, Calvin held that Phil 2:4-11 prescribed how scripture was to be read correctly in relation to the person of Christ. Time and time again he returns to this text. Here he sees the scriptures teaching that in becoming man the Son willingly and freely chose to subordinate himself for the salvation of men and women. He took "the form of a slave ... and became obedient to the point of death." On this basis Calvin insists, along with Athanasius, the Cappadocians and Augustine, that all texts that speak of the frailty, subordination, or obedience of the Son refer solely to his incarnate existence. As the divine the Son he is equal in divinity, majesty, and authority with the Father and the Spirit.

He notes that in Phil 2:8 Paul quite specifically speaks of the Son's "obedience" as one of the human traits that his "voluntary" emptying of himself involved. He writes,

“Laying aside the splendor of majesty, he showed himself obedient to his Father (cf. Phil 2:8). Having completed his subjection, he was at last crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:9) and exalted to the highest Lordship that before him every knee should bow ... (Phil 2:10).”

Then in the next sub-section of the *Institutes* while speaking of the salvific work of the Son he returns to the matter of his obedience. Here he points out that the Son had to be obedient if he were to be the second Adam. To make his point he asks,

“How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly towards us? To this we in general reply that he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by Paul’s testimony: ‘As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience we are made righteous’ (Rom 5:19).”

He then adds, “his willing obedience is the important thing because a sacrifice not offered voluntarily would not have furthered righteousness.”

Then finally we should note that the Athanasian creed codifies this teaching affirming all three divine persons are “almighty” and “Lord”, while the Second Helvetic confession condemns those who speak of the “subordination” or “subservience” of the Son. The scriptures and the tradition it seems to me are unanimous. The obedience of the Son to the Father is limited to the incarnation and is related primarily to his work on the cross after which he is raised to rule as Lord. If this is so then the eternal subordination in authority of the Son is not endorsed by the Bible or tradition. To claim otherwise is mistaken.

### **Excursus 2. 1 Cor 14:20-28.**

In 1 Cor 15: 20-28 Paul’s gaze moves to the end of all things. What he is pointing to is possibly the most perplexing question raised by any text in the New Testament. What this text says has no parallel in the Bible. No answer solves all our questions. Some change in how the universe is governed does seem to be implied, but to take this to mean the Son’s lordship over creation will be taken from him by the Father is extremely difficult. If the apostle in v 28 is saying that at the consummation of all things the Father will assert his authority over the Son by ending his rule then what he says here contradicts many other texts that speak of the Son’s reign as “forever” (2 Sam

7:2-4, Is 9:7, Lk 1:33, 2 Peter 1:11, Rev 7:10-12, 11:15, cf. Eph 1:20). Such an interpretation would also stand in conflict with Paul's dominant Christocentric focus when speaking of the end. Elsewhere in Paul the end signifies the coming of the Lord Jesus who will sit in judgement (2 Cor 5:10)). Then believers "will be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17), be "with him forever" (1 Thess 4:17) and "reign with him" (Rom 5:17). Ridderbos' solution is to argue that Paul's eschatology, at least in its terminology, does not form a closed system. "He gives expression to the same matter in various ways, even though this sometimes involves the appearance of mutual contradiction."

Perhaps, however, an exegetical solution is possible. The Greek verb translated "subjected" can be read in the middle voice "Christ subjects himself" or in the passive voice, "Christ is subjected by God the Father." I believe the former is to be preferred because this means what happens at the end parallels what took place in the incarnation when the Son voluntarily subordinated himself for our salvation. If this is the case then what Paul is teaching is that at the resurrection God the Father freely makes God the Son ruler over all, and at the end, Christ the Son freely gives back this rule to God the Father. Rather than speaking of fixed roles, or of the eventual eternal subordination of the Son in authority, this text indicates a changing of roles in different epochs by two omnipotent divine persons.

34. The same connection is made in the Theological Statement by the (English) House of Bishops, entitled *Eucharistic Presidency*. (1997). The Bishops see the ordering of the Church as reflective of the ordering of the Trinity. They therefore insist upon the equality of persons before God while regarding such equality as consistent with an asymmetrical subordination which flows from the nature of the Persons themselves -

"It is generally accepted that although there is no subordination of being, there is nevertheless differentiation of function and relationship within the Trinity. For example, it is the Son who lives in obedience to the Father and not vice versa; the Father relates to both Son and Spirit, but in different ways. So, too, there can and should be a diversity of responsibilities and relationships within the Church - a theme classically expounded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12." (p22)

Para 34. If the English house of bishops spoke of the ontological subordination or its equivalent the eternal subordination of the Son, then they got it wrong. I have not bothered to check on this as it is an irrelevancy. However, I very much doubt if this is what they said. If they did so what? I have found dozens of appeals to subordination in the Trinity to justify hierarchical ordering of some form in human relationships. Those holding authority always seek to justify their status. In 2003 I took Archbishop Carnley to task in the journal, *Common Theology*, for doing just this with the

primate-bishops-clergy relationship. I note that in the second paragraph of para 34 the writers of the 1999 Sydney report seem to say it is only differentiation in the Trinity to which the house of Bishop's appeal – and this is orthodoxy.

35. On the other hand, the word "subordination" on its own hardly does justice to the full range of the relationship of Father and Son as revealed in the Scriptures. In particular, it must be understood in the light of the mutual love and delight that each Person has in the other as is reflected in the words of Dr Knox cited above. The English Bishops speak of, "a certain 'priority' of the Father in both the acts and being of God" (22), but they are careful to describe the relation between Father and Son in these terms: "relationships within the Trinity are fully mutual and reciprocal: they are constituted by mutual interaction, giving and receiving. The obedience of Jesus to the Father is a freely given commitment, not resigned submission or servility to a greater power. . . Likewise, within the Church, while there can be no difference of worth of persons in the sight of God, relationships of obedience and accountability between members may properly exist; and, provided that they are practised within free relationships of mutual giving and receiving, they are able to promote the fulfilment of the Church's calling." (23).

Para 35 . I like Dr Knox's quote. The next two quotes from the house of bishops seem to me to be in tension. The Father has a certain "priority" yet trinitarian relations are "fully mutual and reciprocal." The authors of the 1999 doctrine report certainly endorse the "priority" of the Father but do they endorse the second part of this quote which would seem to be close to what the Bible suggests? If not why quote what is opposed? This report is shot through with inconsistencies and directly contradictory comments often in the same paragraph. (If it were an undergraduate essay I would fail it!)

36. Nonetheless, the question remains whether the analogy presupposes that the Persons are people, and whether the revealed nature of the one God may in fact be used to illustrate or demonstrate the true relations between human beings. The life of God is very far removed from the life of humans, and the relation between three Persons dwelling perichoretically is unlike any human experience. Does the Bible itself draw any connection between the relations of the Godhead and the ordering of human life? In particular does it speak in this way to the issue of the relation between men and women?

Par 36 An excellent question. We return to where we began. Does the divine Father-Son-Spirit relationship in any *specific* way inform the man-woman/husband-wife relationship? The movement from God to humankind is properly conceived but how does a three-fold relationship, or the Father-Son relationship, inform a man-woman relationship? I suspect only tangentially, not in prescriptive detail. Then we have the problem of how the doctrine of the Trinity is formulated. If the Father-Son-Spirit relationship is construed as a hierarchy in being or authority, and the doctrine

of the Trinity is thought to specifically inform the man-woman relationship, one answer will follow. If on the other hand, the Father-Son-Spirit relationship is construed as a “co-equal” one where all have the same authority, none is before or after, none greater or lesser than another, then a contrasting view of the man-woman relationship will be embraced. The question put in para 36 is an important reminder that the doctrine of the Trinity must be formulated independently of attempts to prove something already believed. It is my opinion that in writing the 1999 doctrine commission report the authors went the other way, despite what is said in this paragraph. They began with the permanent subordination of women, the most important thing for them to uphold, and then tried to construe the Trinity so that it confirmed to what they already believed. Am I wrong on this?

37. It is true that the Bible carefully safeguards the distinction between God and his human creatures: "For I am God and not man - the Holy One among you" (Hos 11:9). This is fundamental. On the other hand, there is biblical material which likens man to God: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Furthermore, the new self is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col 3:11; cf. Eph 4:24) and it is in this new self in particular that human divisions are, in part, laid aside and "Christ is all, and is in all". Likewise, Paul speaks of "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name" (Eph 3:15). Such texts demonstrate that God's pattern of creation makes it possible to draw conclusions about the nature of human life and relationships from God. To avoid mere speculation, however, we must be led by the Scriptures in our thinking. What are the implications of the relations of the Godhead?

Par 37 Yes, all human language used of God is analogical, and we should not move from human relations to divine relations. The movement must be in the other direction, from God to humankind, which I think this para is saying. Human relationships should correspond with divine relations. The key question, however, is, Have the authors of this document followed this path? The evidence suggests they have not. It would seem that they have depicted the Father-Son relationship in terms of fallen human relations between men and women. Not only does the language used to construe their doctrine suggest this but also the fact that what they teach on the Trinity contradicts the Athanasian creed which speaks of divine persons with equal authority and no hierarchical ordering.

38. In a remarkable statement, the Apostle Paul says: "Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man (NIV; the RSV gives, "the head of a woman is her husband"), and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3) 4. The resulting discussion depends upon this set of relations, including those between God and Christ. The passage (11:2-16) is especially germane, because the subject under review by Paul is the relationship of men and women (or husbands and wives) in the exercise of

the ministry of prophecy and prayer. Women have the authority to engage in this ministry (11:10), but both men and women must do so in a way which does not blur the distinct ordering of the sexes, which is founded on God's order in creation (11:3-9).

39. Paul is particularly concerned about the symbolism of head coverings. The point at issue for him is that the head coverings in question have a symbolic purpose in distinguishing priority and reflecting relationships between the sexes (or between husband and wife): "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" (11:7). The "head" plays both a literal and a metaphoric role in the passage. The covering or uncovering of the literal head is dishonouring to the metaphoric head: if a man is covered, he dishonours Christ who is his head; if a woman is uncovered, she dishonours the man, who is her head (11:3-5). Paul is also at pains to point out that though man is the "head" of the woman, man and woman are interdependent: "For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman" (11:12).

40. There are a number of exegetical questions raised about this passage - does "head" imply "source" or "authority"? Is it about men and women, or husbands and wives? Is it about the church meeting or private prophecy? Nonetheless, and this is the point at issue in the current discussion, it is clear that an aspect of the relation between God and Christ (whether "head" implies "source" or "authority") is used as the ground of the order between man and woman (whether it means husband and wife or not) in the particular situation of ministry. This is not a matter of differentiation between individuals on the grounds of abilities, giftedness or mission (see item 11 above). It is based ultimately on the sexual differentiation, but may primarily belong to the differentiation between husband and wife made clear in Genesis 2. Furthermore, that relation is characterised by both order and interdependence, priority and equality. The point is, of course, all the clearer if, as seems most likely, the word "head" implies authority. In short, here is a key passage in the Scriptures where the ordering of the Trinity is said to have a bearing on the ordering of the sexes. It thus provides justification for those who make the claim that the subordination of the Son provides a model for that interdependence, with subordination, which is expressed in various ways in family (Eph 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7) and church (1 Tim 2:11-15).

Paras 38, 39 and 40 Now the critical text, 1 Cor 11:3, is introduced in support of the divine Father-Son, human man-woman parallel. The complexity of working out what Paul is saying in this passage as a whole is recognised by the members of the doctrine commission but no exegetical effort is expended on this text, or on the passage as a whole. Basically what is said in paras 38 and 39 and much of 40 I can endorse. I definitely agree the main issue is the differentiation of the sexes, not the subordination of women to men. Exegetically the following points need to be made.

Some evangelicals today think that in 1 Cor 11:3 Paul speaks of a four-fold hierarchy, God-Christ-man-woman. This is not the case. Paul in fact speaks of a three fold pairing; in each case one person is the metaphorical "head" of another, and not in a hierarchical order. First he

mentions Christ and man and last, God and Christ. What Paul seems to be doing in this verse and throughout this passage is seeking to differentiate men and women, not subordinate Christ or women. Grudem wants us to believe that the Greek word *kephale* (translated into English as “head”) always means a “person in authority over.” His premise is that words have one fixed meaning and the context does not matter. Virtually all linguists are of another opinion. Any given word has a range of meanings and the context is the most important indicator of that meaning. The erudite Anthony Thiselton carefully considers Grudem’s thesis and dismisses it. He holds that Paul is playing on the “multiple meanings” of *kephale* in 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and in v. 3 it does not “denote a relation of subordination or authority over.” The context rules out of court Grudem’s understanding of *kephale* in v. 3 because Paul immediately goes on to speak of men and women leading (i.e. having authority) in the congregation by praying and prophesying, the two most important ministries in the Corinthian church. All he asks is that the sexes be differentiated by what they have or do not have on their literal head. when leading the congregation. To reply that prophecy does not signify authority to speak on behalf of God, whereas teaching does, is special pleading. Paul makes prophecy the second most important ministry ahead of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28)

In the immediate context, as just noted, and in the larger context of the Pauline epistles, the idea that Paul is teaching in 1 Cor 11:3 that the Father eternally rules over the Son simply does not make sense. In Eph. 1:22, Col. 2:10 Paul speaks of the risen Son as “head over all things.” How do these words relate to what is said in 1 Cor 11:3? Does one text teach that the Father eternally rules over the Son and the others that he rules over the world, equal with God the Father? I have been waiting for an answer to this question for a long time from subordinationists.

Another key question to ask of the text is, does Paul address men/women or husbands/wives? Throughout this passage it seems certain that Paul has, at least in the first instance, men and women in mind, not husbands and wives. The evidence is as follows: 1. he is here ruling on how men and women as such should dress when taking a public role in church, marriage never comes into view; 2. he speaks of “every man” and “every woman” in vv 3,4,5; 3. in vv 11-12 men as such are born of women not husbands of wives; 4. there were unmarried women in the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 7:8,25), and we know from Acts that some women prophets were unmarried (Acts 21:9). If the exegesis of this passage demands that we accept Paul is addressing men and women as such, and we

want to believe the passage subordinates women, then this text, like the appeals to the Trinity and the supposed creation social order, prove too much. It makes all women subordinate to all men. (Simply to dismiss this compelling logic as is done in para 32 does not solve anything.)

41. It is important to note, however, the biblical controls of the procedure. That there is an relation between the sexes which somehow reflects the divine life itself is clear (cf. Gen 1:27). Likewise we may conclude that it has a bearing on the proper conduct of marriage and ministry. But the ordering of the sexes appropriate to home and church is not applied to business, political or professional life. While it may be argued that gender is relevant in relationships between men and women in general (cf. 1 Tim 5:1-2), the vocabulary of "subordination" is applied to the particular context of the concrete relationships entered into in home and church. Such is the difference between God and us that we ought to apply trinitarian relations to human relations with caution. It may be best not to move beyond the applications that Scripture itself gives. In fact, the NT more often regulates relations between men and women (husbands and wives) by appeal to the present work of Jesus Christ.

Para 41. This is a bit of special pleading. As I have just noted, if the *permanent* subordination of women is based on a supposed hierarchical social order given in creation, then it applies to all women in creation in all contexts, not just to women in the home and the church. If women's subordination is based on the Father-Son relationship then it also applies to all women in all contexts. Here we need to note a sharp break with tradition by those who today advocate the *permanent* subordination of women only in the church and the home. Unlike the members of the doctrine commission, Christians in past ages with virtual unanimity have argued that all women are subordinated to men because God made women "inferior" to men. In theological writings right up to recent times this idea is taken for granted. Modern day advocates of women's permanent subordination take a novel path in seeking to restrict women's subordination to the home and the church, but the putative evidence they use counts against their own case. It proves too much.

42. The present discussion has been initiated by conflicting statements such as those referred to in items 2 and 3 above: "Headship within the Trinity cannot mean 'subordinate to' or 'under the authority of'"; and, in contrast, "Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply his inferiority".

Para 42 Yes.

43. It is not at all surprising that debate about the respective roles of men and women in home and church should reach the lofty heights of the doctrine of God. There may only be a few texts which deal directly with the issue of whether women may be presbyters as such, but the texts themselves are part of a whole network of material in the Bible about men and women, and about Creation, Redemption, the authority of Scripture and about the nature of God. Furthermore, basic ideas about the meaning of human freedom are at stake. That is why these debates engender such passion and such

interest in the church and in the community, and that is why various attempts have been made to "feminise" God and re-order the Trinity in the last decades.

Para 43 In this para the topic is said to be the “respective *roles* of men and women.” The question is, What content is being given to the word “role? Does the word “role” refer to who washes up or who cuts the lawn, or *who holds power*? If it is the latter, as it certainly is, then the word “role” is misused. What is in mind is *gender relations* not *gender roles*. Men are set over women, not that they may have differing roles as society changes To use the word “role” in a way not given in any dictionary and contrary to sociological usage is to deliberately obfuscate what is being said.

Now it is implied that anyone who does not endorse the eternal subordination of the Son has “feminised” God and re-ordered the Trinity! Come on.

44. It is inevitable, therefore, that the present dispute should raise the question of what sort of God it is who reveals himself to us. The "egalitarian" case, although not every egalitarian person, logically leads to a claim for undifferentiated equality in the relation of the three Persons. The "subordinationist" case will just as logically appeal both to elements of equality and to elements of order that are seen in the relation of the Persons.

Para 44 The egalitarian case “logically leads to a claim for undifferentiated equality in relation of the three persons.” What is this egalitarian model of the Trinity. Is it the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity? The model spelt out in the Athanasian creed where all three divine persons are said to be “co-equal”? I definitely do not endorse a hierarchically ordered Trinity or the eternal subordination of the Son but I find no problem in differentiating the persons. This comment about modalism is absurd and not worthy of a group of evangelical theologians. I make the point again. *To deny the eternal subordination of the Son is not in any way to deny or question differentiation.*

Para 44 Nothing in this paper has shown that the Bible supports the *eternal* subordination of the Son, or for that matter the permanent subordination of women simply in the home and the church Nevertheless the document once more claims that what has been taught is “securely based on the revelation of the scriptures.” I note, however, that in this last paragraph the permanent “functional subordination” of the Son and women in convoluted wording seems to be separated from a subordination in “essence.” Many other comments given earlier base this subordination in the essence, or being, or very nature of the Son and women. What did the members of the 1999 doctrine

commission believe?

**Appendices.** (Since sending my response to the new doctrine commission members I have edited and expanded what follows)

*The May articles by Mark Baddeley in Southern Cross and the Reformed Theological Review and the April one by Robert Doyle in The Briefing (and his reply to me in the June edition) I am sorry to say I do not consider to be serious scholarship. They are simply attempts to shoot the messenger because the message is not liked. In both cases the impression is given that I am the person who is teaching something erroneous and novel. They imply or argue that I have read the creeds, the Reformation confessions, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Calvin, Barth and Rahner wrongly and mischievously. The problem with this is that the position I take is that of virtually every mainline Catholic and Protestant scholar who discusses these issues. This complete rejection of what I say on the Trinity suggests that the conservative evangelical Professors, Roger Nicole, Millard Erickson and Donald Bloesch who read the manuscript for IVP were also mistaken (see their comments on the back of my book). In Australia Professor Anne Hunt, a Catholic theologian, who has written three books on the Trinity and is an expert on Rahner also read my book and endorsed its contents. These attempts by Mark and Robert to dismiss my case suggests that only Moore College theologians really know what words mean on a given page and they alone have the right understanding of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.*

*The editors of the Reformed Theological Review, and the editor of the Southern Cross, would not grant me right of reply to what I believe is a gross distortion of my views and a perpetuation of the errors seen in the 1999 doctrine commission report. I did however have two short letters in reply printed in the Southern Cross. The editor of The Briefing allowed me 800 words to reply to Robert Doyle's approximately 8,000 words but it was understood that Robert would be given my reply to refute and I would not be allowed an answer. To put a bit of balance in all this I make a brief reply to Mark and reprint my reply to Robert.*

**A brief reply to Mark Baddeley, lecturer in Church History, Moore Theological College, Sydney.**

Writing in the April edition of *Southern Cross* and in the April 2004 edition of *the Reformed Theological Review* Mark disputes my claim that orthodoxy does not allow any subordination in being or function in the eternal Trinity. He makes many wild and untrue assertions about my view of scripture and by implication homosexuality but in this brief comment I want to simply respond to his criticisms of my references in my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, to Rahner and Barth. For some perverse reason Baddeley thinks these two writers are central to my argument. This is simply untrue as a quick glance of the book will show. Rahner is only introduced to speak of his "rule." His views besides this one issue play no part in my book. Barth is introduced because of his importance but again he is not central to my discussion like Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine and Calvin. I do not endorse unquestionably any of the modern trinitarian scholars I mention except T F Torrance.

To suggest that Rahner clearly teaches the eternal subordination of the Son in any form is simply

silly. He is one of the leading Catholic scholars of this century and to claim that he directly and intentionally breaks with the whole Catholic dogmatic tradition that excludes all forms of subordinationism is too hard to believe. That a comment here or there could lead to subordinationism I can accept. Some think he raises this danger by adopting the Eastern view that the Father is God in the absolute sense. However, Rahner is usually criticised for bordering on modalism, and as modalism implies that there is only one God, it completely excludes subordinationism. The challenge I put to Mark is to come forward with one sentence from Rahner's writing that shows he teaches the eternal subordination of the Son *in any way*. Comments on divine differentiation or of the Father as the *monarche* of the Son and the Spirit are not evidence of this. Until Mark comes forward with this evidence his view that Rahner supports contemporary evangelical subordinationism should be held with the greatest suspicion. I have reread Rahner and I cannot find anything that suggest what Mark claims. I think he is totally mistaken.

Since I wrote *Subordinationism and the Trinity*, Paul Molner's important book, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*, 2000 has been published. I would now be much more cautious of affirming "Rahner's rule" without qualifications. Molnar makes the point that "Rahner's rule" is both true and false. In Jesus we do see the Father but the Christian doctrine of God cannot simply be formulated by reference to the incarnation.

Baddeley's accusations about my exposition of Barth on "obedience in God" are equally problematic. Again I am not convinced for one moment that Barth breaks completely with the tradition and confessions and teaches the *eternal* subordination of the Son. He in fact has a whole section denouncing "every form of subordinationism" as a terrible heresy (*C/D*, 1.1, p 382). What needs to be recognised is that Barth is a dialectical theologian. Often what he affirms in one long and wordy paragraph he will deny or say the opposite in the next. Often it is very hard to know exactly what he is arguing. When he comes to speak of the mystery of the subordination of the Son culminating in his death on the cross he seems to think of this as revealing something about the Godhead, not just about the Son. He consistently speaks of a "subordination in God." My interpretation is an interpretation but well supported by other students of Barth. Again it is to be remembered that the most common criticism of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is that it verges on modalism. We see why this claim is made by reference to the passage in Barth we have just discussed where he speaks of "a subordination in God," not in Christ, as well as by Barth's profound stress on the unity and simplicity of God. Barth definitely has a modalistic tendency but most do not think he is a modalist. But because of this tendency, caution should be shown in arguing that he is a subordinationist. Where modalism is even hinted at, subordinationism is excluded. A God who is essentially one cannot have revelations of himself opposed to what he is in himself. I have been interested to find in Molnar that Barth is actually ambivalent towards what "Rahner's rule" represents. At times Barth says the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity are one, and at other times he denies this. Molnar argues that Barth wants to make sure the immanent Trinity is not compromised by historical revelation. The Son in his humanity, Barth argues, both reveals and conceals the Father.

Mark's argument is predicated on the idea that if one or two details in my book can be shown to be

incorrect then my basic thesis that to permanently subordinate the divine Son and Women is demeaning of them and contrary to scripture can be summarily dismissed. If only things were so simply. What Mark needed to do to show himself as a scholar was examine what the 1999 doctrine commission actually taught and then compare this with the teaching of the best of theologians past and present and the creeds and confessions. Instead his only aim is to down me by any argument that would appeal to his Sydney audience.

**A brief reply to Robert Doyle, senior lecturer in Systematic Theology, Moore Theological College, Sydney.**

After reading carefully Robert Doyle's long essay in the April 2004 edition of *Briefings*, mainly attacking what I have written on the Trinity, I am convinced that he does not reflect historic trinitarian orthodoxy. I will, however, confess to two "sins." First, I believe as a convinced evangelical that our understanding of scripture on what the Bible teaches about the Trinity should be guided by the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and the Reformation confessions because they are the fruit of deep and prolonged study of this issue by the best theologians of the past. Secondly, I believe that how scripture is understood can change over the centuries, and has done so in regard to slavery and women. My criticism of the 1999 Sydney Doctrine Commission Report is that in seeking to ground the permanent subordination of women on the eternal subordination of the Son the authors explicitly contradicted the creeds and confessions that define orthodoxy. In my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, I print the Report in full and list the serious theological errors it makes. Robert Doyle addresses none of these. In regard to the Bible I think Genesis chapter 1 proves my point. Interpretations can change in the course of history and have done so. In my brief reply to Robert I want to concentrate on the Trinity, the foundational doctrine for Christianity. The Trinity is nothing less than the Christian doctrine of God. Get this wrong and much else in ones theology is sure to be wrong, not least ones understanding of man and woman in Christ.

In claiming that Athanasius depicts the Father as ruling over the Son, Robert is factually wrong. I challenge him to find one text in Athanasius where this is suggested. Athanasius thought this idea was an Arian heresy. The Apologists and Tertullian begin with the idea that God is a monad who shares his monarchy (sole rule) with the Son and the Spirit who he brings forth without compromising his unity. This did not produce a doctrine of a "co-equal" Trinity. The great step forward by Athanasius was to conceive of God not as a monad but as a Triad – a Trinity from all eternity. Whenever Athanasius speaks of the Father he speaks of the Son. Even in the quote Robert uses the Father has his Word and Wisdom with him. The other charges Robert makes against my interpretation of Athanasius are simply silly. I do not think he, or Augustine, or Calvin, or the Bible, confuse the persons or allow them to be interchanged. Such comments are simply debating ploys to make me sound unorthodox.

Robert is also mistaken in his reading of Augustine. In seeking to explain how scripture can speak both of the absolute equality of the Father and the Son, and of the subordination of the Son Augustine develops several rules of interpretation. The first is that all comments about the Son's

subordination refer to his ministry in the “form of a servant” while all that speak of his equality with the Father refer to him in the “form of God.” The Son is *temporally* subordinated in the incarnation, *eternally* one in being and work with the Father and the Spirit. Then he considers the comments about the Father sending the Son which the Arians quoted to prove that the Son and the Spirit are subject to the Father’s directions, just as Robert does. Augustine says, “in error” they presume, “the one who sends is greater than the one sent”(Hill, *De Trinitate*, 2 7, p 101). In a reply to such reasoning then and now Augustine argues that sending does not necessarily entail subservience: only that the one sent comes “from” the sender. He thus concludes that just as the terms begetting and begotten *differentiate the Father and the Son* while not suggesting any eternal subordination, so too do the terms sending and being sent (*ibid*, 4.29, p 174). On the basis of this reasoning Augustine formulates a second rule of interpretation. Texts that speak of the Son’s sending by the Father do *not* teach that “the Son is less than the Father, but that he is from the Father. This does not imply any dearth of equality, but only his birth in eternity” (*ibid*, 2.3, p 99).

In the 1999 Sydney Doctrine Report we are also told that Calvin endorsed the *eternal* subordination of the Son and Doyle claims I misread Calvin by rejecting this assertion. However on my side is the great Reformed scholar B B Warfield. In his definitive study of Calvin’s view of the Trinity he concludes Calvin wrote, “to eliminate the last remnants of subordinationism.” T F Torrance in his study of Calvin’s doctrine of the Trinity comes to the same opinion.

Now to Roberts many comments on divine order. I want to affirm along with all orthodox theologians divine order. The divine persons always act according to their given natures in an orderly way. What I deny is any *hierarchical ordering* in the Trinity - what Robert and the doctrine report endorse. Hierarchical ordering is the essence of the Arian heresy. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers repeatedly reject this, as does the Athanasian Creed. It says, “In this Trinity none is before or after, none is greater or less than another ... all are *co-equal*.” If I wanted a statement rejecting Robert’s and the Doctrinal Commission Report’s view I could not say it better.

K Rahner is mentioned very briefly by me mainly in relation to his “rule” and K Barth in a little more detail for his provocative ideas. Robert, I endorse neither theologian’s teaching in totality. To suggest that what I say on Rahner indicates I think the incarnation only leads to a “generic truth about all of God” just leaves me speechless. I smiled when I saw Miroslav Wolf quoted against me. This learned evangelical and Reformed scholar rejects both the permanent subordination of women and the eternal subordination of the Son, seeing both as serious theological errors.

.....

As expected Robert took the opportunity the editor of *The Briefing* gave him to refute anything I said. (See the June edition of *The Briefing* p 31.) His comments are fascinating reading. What they show is that it is absolutely impossible to communicate when ideology rules, in this case the ideology of male hegemony. Everything I say is wrong by definition. Robert even accuses me of “inverting” what the historical sources say! When I point out that great scholars like Warfield and Torrance read Calvin as I do I am still wrong. I am so perversely minded that I am constitutionally unable to read Robert’s seemingly unambiguous comments or any historical text and get the true

meaning. It seems only he and other lecturers at Moore College can read (i.e. interpret) texts correctly. They alone determine right interpretation and truth, like the Pope. In a slip of logic for his case he repeats what he says in his long April essay and notes that significant conservative evangelical scholars in America and England think my reading of the historical sources is correct. I find what he says in reply to me so disingenuous that I refuse to lower myself to interact with it. On just one matter he is helpful. He tells his readers not to trust my readings of the historic texts but to read them themselves. On this I could not agree more strongly. One interpretation of what the great theologians of the past and the creeds teach is basically wrong and one basically right. He and I are taking opposing positions on a set body of literature. In turning to the historic texts readers should begin with the Athanasian creed, the most definitive and most clear definition of trinitarian orthodoxy to come from the early church.

Kevin Giles, The Vicar St Michael's Church, North Carlton, 3054, 15-6-04

## **Appendix 2**

### **SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS OF THE MOST REVEREND DR PETER CARNLEY AO ON 'THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AND ITS BEARING ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF MEN AND WOMEN'**

#### **A Report of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission of the Diocese of Sydney, 1999.**

I think it is clear that the Sydney Doctrine Commission paper 'The Doctrine of the Trinity and its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women' (1999) intends to uphold orthodox Christian belief in the divinity and equality of the three Persons of the Trinity. Belief in the 'unity and equality of the three Persons of the Godhead' is regarded as 'an absolute fundamental of the Christian faith' (para 5). On the other hand, Arianism is identified as the classic form of 'Subordinationism' and as a 'major heresy'. This is repudiated (para. 8).

However, following almost immediately upon these nods of obeisance in the direction of Christian orthodoxy, a form of subordinationism is nevertheless openly espoused. The 'functional subordinationism' of the Son to the Father, not just during the course of Jesus' incarnate human life, but in their eternal relationship, is affirmed (para 16). It seems to be thought that the original stated intention to adhere to orthodox belief in the unity and equality of the divine persons of the Trinity can be sustained by affirming only a 'functional subordination' by contrast with an 'ontological subordination'. An ontological subordination of the Son to the Father is not to be affirmed but to be avoided. In other words, it is held that the Son and the Father are equal in terms of their being, for they both share the same divine substance, but in a behavioral or

functional or relational way the Son is subordinate to the Father.

Whether a functional subordinationism can be held apart from an ontological subordinationism may be problematic, however, for almost immediately the Report itself begins to talk of the subordination of the Son to the Father in ontological terms. The subordination of the Son to the Father is handled as a matter of 'status', 'a subordination which belongs to the eternal relationship between the persons of the Trinity' (para 17). It is hard to see that such a relationship of subordination can just be a matter of behaviour or function. Indeed, it is actually argued that the functional subordination of the Son to the Father ensues from an ontological subordination insofar as the Son's obedience to the Father is held to arise 'from the very nature of his being as Son.' 'His freedom consists in doing what is natural to him, which is to submit to his Father.' In other words, it is contended that the very nature of his being as Son gives rise to his functional obedience to the Father: ontological reality gives rise to functional reality.

Furthermore, these statements seem to imply that 'the very nature of his being as Son' (from which submission to the Father ensues) is in some way different from the very nature of the being of the Father (which requires submission). Instead of affirming the unity of the one divine nature, we thus end with talk of the nature of the Son and the nature of the Father as essentially different - even as polar opposites, one nature requiring obedience and the other nature giving rise to obeying. In this case, within the Godhead, the Father and the Son are not 'One in Being', but essentially different in being. Indeed, in para 21, far from confining statements relating to the subordination of the Son to the Father to functional or behavioral statements, it is suggested that 'subordination is true of the inner, eternal relations of the essential Trinity'; 'the submission of Christ' belongs to 'the very nature of God in himself'. Thus, the Report concludes that 'The equality and subordination which 'subordinationists' see in the Trinity belongs to the very Persons themselves in their eternal nature...' (para 33). All these are ontological statements, statements about the being of God.

### **Some Methodological problems**

1: The Sydney Doctrine Commission Report clearly seeks to work with a dichotomy between

the idea of functional subordination and that of ontological subordination. Quoting Dr Thomas R Schreiner, it is held that though the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, 'there is no ontological distinction'. It is contended that functional subordination 'in no way implies ontological inferiority'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, despite the statements cited above, it seems to be contended that a purely functional or behavioral subordination is possible without suggesting a subordination in terms of essential nature or being, just as 'persons who though equal as human beings are subordinate in role' (para 30).

In this way the Report seeks to uphold 'the ontological equality of the divine persons' while arguing for a functional subordination of the Son to the Father. Thus, this view 'maintains ontological equality and functional subordination' (para. 16). This seems to mean that the Son functions or behaves towards the Father as an inferior to a superior but is not an inferior.

The crucial question raised by this line of argument is: can such a dichotomy between ontological and functional subordination really be sustained? Apart from the difficulty the Report itself has in trying to sustain a functional subordinationism while at the same time seeking to avoid an ontological subordinationism, there are some logical difficulties which suggest that such a dichotomy is really unsustainable. There is clearly a linguistic difference between ontological statements and functional statements. In other words, there are statements that are about the being of a person and statements of an operational or functional kind about what he or she does or might do. In this is possible to distinguish being from act. But the crucial question is: what is the logical connection between these two kinds of statement and can ontological and functional statements really be held entirely apart? Can one make a functional assertion without logically implying a related ontological assertion? For example, it might be said that a person is (ontologically speaking) a gardener and thus may naturally and regularly (or even occasionally) be found functioning as a gardener. But for how long would it be possible to sustain the contention (functionally speaking) that a person who gardens is not also (in ontological terms) a gardener?

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<sup>1</sup> See J Piper and W. Grudem (eds), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood - a response to Evangelical Feminism*, Crossway: Wheaton, 1991, p. 128,

Likewise a person caught in the act of robbing somebody is usually and legitimately described as a robber. It would be a strange use of language to say that a person caught robbing somebody is not a robber.

It is true that one might say that an actor playing the part of a medical practitioner in a stageplay is not really (ontologically speaking) a medical practitioner, but only a professional actor. But is it likewise possible to say that the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, but not really the Father's subordinate? In other words, the methodological commitment of the Sydney Doctrine Commission Report to a distinction between being and act may not be sustainable. There are logical reasons why talk of a functional subordination of the Son to the Father will slide, inevitably, into statements affirming an ontological subordination. Just as those who wish to speak consistently are obliged to say that those who are said to be doing the gardening, will also be said to be gardeners; so a person who is said to be functioning in a role subordinate to another will also be said to be the subordinate of the other. Functional statements imply ontological statements and vice versa.

If one is committed to speaking consistently it is not possible to say that those who are gardening are not also gardeners, unless the point is to assert that they are really something else in disguise, or pretending to be other than they are. In this case, those who are gardening might be admitted not to be gardeners, but only people pretending to be gardeners. They might be undercover men lurking in the bushes while they spy on somebody, for example. But I do not think we would be comfortable in saying that the Son's alleged functional or behavioral subordination to the Father is likewise only an appearance or a pretence, and that really (or ontologically) he is not a subordinate. This would fracture the unity of God. For the Son and the Father are one both in being and act. The idea of holding being and act entirely apart is particularly difficult, if not impossible.

2. On the other hand, it seems to be presupposed by the Sydney Doctrine Commission Report that an underlying or foundational divinity, conceived in terms of monist or static categories of divine 'substance' or 'essence', which is shared by the persons of the Trinity, is somehow separable from the more dynamic reality of the intra-personal relations of the Persons of the Trinity. In this way the alleged functional subordination of the Son to the Father is held not to

affect the underlying ontological nature and status of the Persons as of equal divinity (or 'of the same substance'). Thus, it is held that the Son can be said to be both functionally subordinate to the Father but 'equal in divinity'.

There has in the past been some tension in the trinitarian theology respectively of West and East over the preferred use of 'substance' and '*koinonia*'. However, this is not how it was in the patristic theology of the Trinity of Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. Indeed, much contemporary theology of the Trinity insists that a post-Augustinian tendency to contrast a western reliance on the category of substance and the eastern reliance on the category of communion was historically a false polarization. The notion of the *koinonia* of the Persons of the Trinity is in no sense to be thought of as a qualification of a more foundational category of substance or divine being. Rather, the intra-personal relatedness of the Persons in the divine communion is the primordial reality of God, the divine reality in which we live and move and have our being. The relation of Father to Son is not somehow to be added to a static understanding of the Father and the Son as separate divine individuals, sharing the same foundational divine substance, but in independence of their inter-personal relationality. Rather, the intra-personal relations of the Trinity is what is ontologically foundational.

In other words, being and act cannot be held apart for an actualistic ontology of God holds that the *koinonia* of the divine persons is the essence or substance of divinity. In this way communion becomes a primordial ontological concept in patristic thought. God is love: The intra-personal divine communion is what God is. This is of the essence or substance of divinity. As John Zizoulas says: 'The substance of God, "God", has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.'<sup>2</sup> This means that the discussion of the unity and diversity of the Persons of the Trinity must work at the integration of the concepts of *koinonia* and essence or being. This is usually achieved through an appeal to the essential coinherence of the persons in the unity of God's being, or perichoresis, or circumincessio. In other words, the intra-personal relatedness is not an 'add on' but itself constitutive of God and thus foundational to God's being from all eternity. This

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<sup>2</sup> John Zizoulas, *Being as Communion*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985, p. 17. See also pp. 40-41.

makes it impossible to say that the Son is relationally subordinate to the Father but not ontologically subordinate to the Father.

3. There is a confusion in the Sydney Doctrine Commission Report between the idea of the eternal origin and causality of the Father (*arche*) with respect to the Son and the Spirit and the idea of the 'subordination' of the Son and Spirit to the Father. In the received theology of Christian orthodoxy the Son is said to have *been begotten* of the Father and the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father. In this way the Son and the Spirit eternally derive their divinity from the Father, though in distinguishable ways. This is why the equal sharing in divinity is essentially a matter of relationality. As set out in the paragraph above, divinity does not somehow pre-exist the relatedness of the Persons, as humanity or human nature pre-exists particular human persons. Rather, the Father is the unifying source of the divinity both of the Son and the Spirit within the one Unity of Being of the Godhead. The divine nature of God the Father is thus shared with the other two persons of the Trinity in a way that establishes the unity of the Godhead. A somewhat unfortunate quotation of H. E. W. Turner<sup>3</sup> in the Sydney Doctrine Commission Report suggests that this is a kind of subordinationism. Certainly, the Father enjoys a kind of logical (though not temporal) priority in relation to the eternally begotten Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. The Father is always the First Person of the Trinity, in this causal or originative and unifying sense. If this is a kind of subordination it is ontological rather than merely functional. Father, Son, and Spirit are not temporally but eternally related and this, not some pre-existing substance, is the primordial ontological reality of God. But the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father is what establishes the equality of the divine nature and status of the Persons of the Trinity. It in no way suggests a moral relationship of superiority to inferiority, or that the relationship is a one-way relationship of duty and obedience to a superior of a kind that excludes the mutuality of communion between equal persons. Rather, just the opposite, the repetition of God (as Barth would speak of the three Persons or 'ways of being' of God or

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<sup>3</sup> In Alan Richardson, *Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 329.

Seinsweisen) signaled by the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father and the eternal procession of the Spirit means that the Son and Spirit are of equal status and divinity in the one communion of the divine. There is no reference to so-called functional or behavioral subordinationism in the H. E. W. Turner quotation. It is simply a muddle to confuse talk of the originative divinity of the Father with talk of the moral duty of submissiveness of the Son to the Father, conceived on analogy with the moral duty of some earthly persons to others while sharing the same humanity as suggested in para 30.