

Launch contribution – Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (IVP, 2002)

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Kevin Giles has written perhaps the most significant book of the past decade or more for the faith and life of English-speaking Protestant churches. This is a big claim, but when an author points us to corruptions in the Christian doctrine of God, we need to sit up and take notice, because corrupt theology corrupts everyday Christian life.

I want to express my appreciation for Kevin's work at two particular points. But first, a little biography. In 1973 I was a theological tutor at Moore College, and came to know Dr Broughton Knox as a friend, despite a generation difference in our ages and experience. Gender issues were beginning to be in the air, and I remember (with some embarrassment) being quite keen on Larry Christensen's book, *The Christian Family* (which holds that all women are under male authority, as Kevin reminds us). What began to bother me about Moore was not so much issues about women and men, but Knox's emphasis on revelation being exclusively propositional, and the over-use of logic in theology. These bred a rationalistic spirit, felt in such things as holy communion being but once a term (in contrast to Ridley's weekly warm-hearted celebration) and the absence of any gardens (quite a contrast to Leon Morris' roses at Ridley).

In 1975 I returned to Ridley, and taught ministry and sacraments for the first time, giving one hour to the ordination of women. In the following year my wife, Peta, wrote a 10,000 word essay on 'Being a Woman' for the Associate of Ridley College: this changed our lives. Theologically, I found myself drawn beyond the New Testament texts, to the doctrine of God, as I became increasingly bothered by Dr Knox's emphasis on 'headship'. In 1977 I published what I still regard as my most original piece of writing, 'On God and Gender' (*Interchange* 22), making the sort of points which Kevin does so much more fully in his first Part. For myself, it was reflection on the classical doctrine of God as Trinity which led to me to give full support to the opening of all ministries to women and men. But I have not followed through on contemporary evangelical discussions of these matters – my mind has been more on their ecumenical dimensions.

Kevin Giles, to his great credit, and at some personal cost, has persisted in seeking to engage with Moore's position on women's ministry. This new book from his pen shows much hard work done in both documenting the increasingly hierarchical tendency in Protestant circles associated with Moore, and in working through the development of the Christian doctrine of God for himself. The desperately sad challenge which he makes is of crucial importance, not so much for women as for the Christian Church. Whatever our doctrinal understanding, the primary way we experience the doctrine of the Trinity is through prayer, especially its corporate expression in liturgy. This is a weak point in much Protestant evangelicalism, and the recent loss of liturgy in Sydney is both a sign and warning of what may be taking place in our understanding of God. If Kevin is right, that the current Moore / Grudem line corrupts the Christian doctrine of God – and I am convinced that he is – then Australian Anglicans are facing a looming crisis of far, far greater significance than has been previously realised.

First, then, I want to thank Kevin for his patient, careful work on the doctrine of God.

Secondly, I want to thank him for his work on orders, roles and gender difference, in Part 2. His occasional writings on these areas has helped me understand contextual issues, and I am delighted that he has now been able to set them down more fully: these matters are of much wider significance than the relations between women and men, but touch deeply the ways by which we understand how the scriptures speak to us as social beings.

Thirdly, however, a little criticism. Kevin time and again appeals to 'many evangelical theologians', or 'traditional theologians' (especially Athanasius and Augustine) in the formation of theology. Clearly theologians are important – but theology is done in the first place in and for the Church. The Creeds were not constructed by theologians, but emerged (with expert theological input, sometimes well-meant, sometime manipulative and even violent) from the prayer, faith and life of the churches. Personal reflection on the scriptures by each Christian is a vital aspect of Christian living, but the interpretation of the scriptures is in the first place an *ecclesial* matter, not a matter of counting theologians' heads! Similarly, Kevin shows in great detail how important are our presuppositions when it comes to reading and interpreting the scriptures – his chapter on slavery opened my eyes to positions that I had too easily accepted as 'obviously' impossible. In his discussion – throughout the book, not just in one or two places – he rightly points to the importance of taking tradition seriously.

What surprised me, however, in regard to the issues both of interpretation and tradition, was this book's complete lack of reference to the profound discussion in ecumenical reflection – the 1963 Montreal agreement on scripture and T/tradition(s), the more recent work *Treasures in Earthen Vessels* on interpretation, and especially ARCIC's 1998 Agreement, *The Gift of Authority*, in which I was myself involved. Such approaches are not only found in ecumenical circles, of course: a popular article by G.C. Berkouwer gets one mention in Kevin's book, for example, but his magnificent work, *Holy Scripture*, which would help the discussion greatly, is not mentioned.

But these criticisms must be muted. Kevin has worked out for himself, in the heat of debate, and in an impressively short time, while carrying a full ministry load in both parish and diocese, approaches and insights which many others have taken years to discern. My hope is that Kevin's work will not only assist evangelical Christians, but will further yet more fruitful engagement across the Christian world about these issues. They touch one key aspect of our life as humans, how we relate to one another as women and men in Christ. Yet the ripples and whirlpools from the matters which Kevin raises are wider and deeper. They are of crucial importance to our living as Church in the communion of the Triune God, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, and living it out, according to the scriptures.