

IS THERE A UNILATERAL HIERARCHY IN THE TRINITY?
A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CASE AGAINST THE
ETERNAL, FUNCTIONAL SUBMISSION OF
THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Purpose and Methodology	7
Biblical Problems of EFS/ERAS.....	7
1 Corinthians 11:3 and the Trinity.....	8
Johannine Literature and Intra-Trinitarian Relationships.....	12
The Incarnation and Karl Rahner’s Rule.....	14
Sending Language in the New Testament.....	20
Prayer and the Trinity.....	23
Unilateral Hierarchical or Mutual Reciprocal Intra-Trinitarian Relationships	26
No Consistent Ordering.....	27
Shared Economic Activities	31
Intra-Trinitarian Reciprocity and Mutuality	37
The Relationship of the Father and the Son	37
The Relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit.....	41
Scripture’s Description of the Eternal Intra-relations of the Trinity	46
Theological Problems of EFS/ERAS	50
Consequences for the Doctrine of God’s Triunity	50
Consequences for Soteriology and Theodicy	67
Consequences for Christian Ethics.....	73

EFS/ERAS as Possible Perpetuator of Victimization of the Vulnerable	73
Ethical Trajectories of the Father-Son and Male-Female Connection	74
Summary.....	80
Conclusion and Recommendations for Moving Forward	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

Introduction¹

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the Trinity has been a central topic of debate among evangelical and Reformed theologians in all disciplines due to the popularization of a newer conception of intra-Trinitarian relations—most popularly referred to as “eternal, functional subordination” (EFS) or alternatively by some as “eternal relations of authority and submission” (ERAS).² Supporters of EFS/ERAS affirm that “[a]ll members of the Trinity are equal in *essence*,”³ that is ontologically⁴ equal in the immanent Trinity or in God’s nature in and

¹Some sections of this paper are significantly revised, updated, and expanded parts of Matthew L. Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism: The Alien Argumentation in the Gender Debate,” *AUSS* 55.2 (2017): 237–290. I am grateful to the editors of *AUSS*, John W. Reeve and Martin F. Hanna, for permitting me to adapt those parts into this present form.

²For ERAS, see Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock, *The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2016), 93; Bruce A. Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of *Homoousios*? A Response to Millard Erickson and Tom McCall, in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction in Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 238–239. Millard J. Erickson calls this view the “gradationist” view in *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 13–25. Thomas H. McCall labels this view “hard EFS” in *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 176–177. Elsewhere McCall and Keith E. Yandell call it necessary role subordination (NRS), which they define in the following way: “The Son is permanently and necessarily subordinate to the Father, and the Father is permanently and necessarily authoritative over the Son, with the Holy Spirit being permanently and necessarily subordinate to both the Father and the Son.” See “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 341. Elsewhere, I have used the term “neo-subordinationism” to refer to this view of intra-Trinitarian relations. For an explanation of this term, see Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism,” 238n1.

³Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: In One Volume* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 548; emphasis original.

⁴Ontology refers to the metaphysical study of the nature of being. Discussions concerning divine ontology in this article refer to the very substance/essence/nature or being of God and the relationship of his three persons, or who God is in and of himself eternally and necessarily (i.e., the immanent Trinity [the Trinity *ad intra*]). See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 302; Kwabena Donkor, *God in 3 Persons—In Theology*, Biblical Research Institute Release 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 17n49.

of himself (*ad intra*).⁵ For example, Wayne A. Grudem writes that “each member of the Trinity is fully God, and ... each person fully shares in all the attributes of God.”⁶

However, those who maintain EFS/ERAS seek to clarify the distinctions of the three equal persons that compose the one God by way of their eternal intra-Trinitarian relations and their temporal relationship to creation.⁷ Here advocates of EFS/ERAS deny equality, especially in terms of authority.⁸ In its place, they assert that there is an eternal, unilateral-hierarchical ordering pattern of the divine persons that is essential to the triune God in which the Son exclusively submits in function and authority to the Father, and the Spirit exclusively submits in

⁵For a detailed historical account of the rise of EFS/ERAS among evangelical and Reformed Christians, see Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism,” 240–259; Kevin N. Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 1–34.

⁶Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 248. See also *ibid.*, 252–255. Bruce A. Ware, says the same in more words, “There is one and only one God, eternally existing and fully expressed in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is equally God, each is eternally God, and each is fully God—not three gods but three Persons of the one Godhead. Each Person is equal in essence as each possesses fully the identically same, eternal divine nature, yet each is also an eternal and distinct personal expression of the one undivided divine nature” (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005], 103).

⁷Grudem asserts, “*The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to the creation.* In those relationships they carry out roles that are appropriate to each person” (*Systematic Theology*, 250; emphasis original).

⁸Functionality refers to how a person or thing operates or acts. Thus, when divine functionality is discussed in this article, it refers to how God through his three persons acts in the world with respect to creation, redemption, and consummation (i.e., the economic Trinity [the Trinity *ad extra*], which comes from the Greek word, οἰκονομικός [*oikonomikós*], referring to the arrangement of activities in a household [the English word, “economics comes from this word]; for examples of the use of οἰκονομικός, see Aristotle, [*Oec.*]; Xenophon, *Oec.*). See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 302; Donkor, *God in 3 Persons*, 17n49.

function and authority to the Father and the Son (for those who accept the *filioque*⁹ clause).¹⁰ This unilateral Trinitarian hierarchy is said to be recognizable in the economic Trinity—or the way in which God, through his three persons, carries out his plan of creation, redemption, and consummation (*ad extra*)—and analogically descriptive of the immanent Trinity.¹¹ Thus, the submission in the Trinity on this view is “not just temporal and economical; it is essential and eternal”¹²; it is “essential to the very nature of God himself, and ... could not be otherwise.”¹³ In expressing the necessity of EFS/ERAS in the Trinity, Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock go so far as to say that “[t]here is no Holy Trinity without the order of authority and submission.”¹⁴ Grudem, one of its primary advocates, summarizes the position of EFS/ERAS in the following

⁹The *filioque* debate (a Latin term, meaning “and from the Son”), in brief, was an argument between the Western and Eastern churches over whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from only the Father (Eastern position) or from both the Father and the Son (Western position). The *filioque* addition to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE) by the Western church” at the Third Council of Toledo (589 CE) “was a major theological reason for the Great Schism that took place between Eastern and Western Christianity in 1054. For more information concerning the *filioque* debate, see Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 76–78; Norman R. Gulley, *God as Trinity*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 135–138; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology, Basic Guides to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 30; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 521; F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth, *The Holy Spirit*, Guides to Theology, ed. Sally Bruyneel, Alan G. Padgett, David A. S. Fergusson, and Iain R. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 30–37.

¹⁰See Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 549; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249–250; idem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2004; repr. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47.

¹¹See Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 119–120. Unfortunately, those who subscribe to EFS/ERAS do not sufficiently define the limits of the analogy between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity.

¹²Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 549. See also John V. Dahms, “The Subordination of the Son,” *JETS* 37.3 (1994): 351; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249–251.

¹³Ibid., 250. In this way, EFS/ERAS comes dangerously close to ancient subordinationism. See the later discussion on ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*) below.

¹⁴Strachan and Peacock, *The Grand Design*, 93.

way: the persons of the Trinity are “equal in being but subordinate in role.”¹⁵

Intriguingly, EFS/ERAS has been used by some complementarians, but not all,¹⁶ to bolster their sociological perspective in the debate over the role relationship of women and men in the home, church, and society.¹⁷ This is accomplished by engineering a one-to-one analogy between the Father-Son relationship and the male-female relationship, arguing that as the Son is *ontologically* equal, but *functionally* submits throughout *eternity* in role and authority to the Father, so too women are *ontologically* equal but *functionally* submit to men *permanently* in role and authority. This novel argumentation has shifted the gender debate from a discussion on anthropology and ecclesiology to one on theology proper, a shift that has been called the “turn to the Trinity.”¹⁸

Although EFS/ERAS has continued to grow in popularity in some circles,¹⁹ there are many evangelical and Reformed theologians who have heavily criticized this new conception of

¹⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251. McCall gives an analytic philosophical explanation of EFS/ERAS as follows: “the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father [and the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son] in all time segments in all possible worlds; there are no time segments in any possible worlds in which the Son is not subordinate to the Father [and the Holy Spirit is not subordinate to the Father and Son]” (*Which Trinity?*, 178).

¹⁶For examples, see Paul C. Maxwell, “Is There an Authority Analogy Between the Trinity and Marriage? Untangling Arguments of Subordination and Ontology in Egalitarian-Complementarian Discourse,” *JETS* 59.3 [2016]: 541–570; Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 120.

¹⁷In fact, the gender debate seems to be the context and impetus for its existence. Perhaps, EFS/ERAS would not have come into existence if there had never been a gender debate. See Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism,” 240–259; Giles, *Rise and Fall*, 1–34.

¹⁸Alan G. Padgett, “The Bible and Gender Troubles: American Evangelicals Debate Scripture and Submission,” *Di* 47.1 (2008): 24.

¹⁹Giles argues that, in June 2016, EFS/ERAS began to face major criticism in the blogosphere that caused a majority of evangelical and Reformed theologians to reject the doctrine (*Rise and Fall*, 35–66). While he may be right about theologians, it seems that EFS/ERAS remains quite popular among seminary students, especially those who had Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* as their textbook, as well as lay church members. See discussion in Tinkham Jr., Review of *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*, by Kevin Giles, *AUSS* 56.1 (2018): 181–185. For a bibliography of the online debate articles from 3 June–11 July, 2016, see John T. Jeffery, “The 2016 Trinity Debate: A Bibliography,” *Books at a Glance*, 12 July 2016, <http://www.booksataglance.com/blog/2016-trinity-debate-bibliography-okay-teach-complementarianism-based-eternal-subordination/>.

the Trinity, declaring it to be a significant departure from Scripture and traditional Christian orthodoxy.²⁰ While these scholars join proponents of EFS/ERAS in upholding the full ontological equality of the divine persons of the Trinity, they adamantly disagree with an eternal, unilateral hierarchy in the Trinity regarding the persons' respective roles, functions, and authority. They alternatively assert what has been called temporary, functional subordination (TFS), which means that "there has been a functional subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Holy Spirit to both Father and Son, but [contend] that this was only temporary, for the purpose of accomplishing the special tasks that the Son took on during his earthly ministry, and that the Spirit fulfills in relationship to salvation."²¹ This submission, for advocates of TFS, is nonessential and does not pertain to the nature of the triune God nor to intra-Trinitarian relationships outside of the Trinitarian economy. To advance this view, they observe many overlapping and equal functions among the three persons and, thus, argue the traditional adage that "the external works of the Trinity are indivisible" (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), which means, according to Millard J. Erickson, an advocate of TFS, "the actions of any one of the persons of the Trinity are actually actions in which all three persons participate."²² Thus,

²⁰For some notable examples, see Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *JETS* 40.1 (1997): 57–68; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 306–309; idem, *Tampering with the Trinity*; Kevin Giles, "CBE and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 25.4 (2011): 20–21; idem, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); idem, *Rise and Fall*; idem, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordinationism," *ERT* 28.3 (2004): 270–284; idem, "The Evangelical Theological Society and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *EvQ* 80.4 (2008): 323–338; idem, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 139–158; Nancy Hedberg, *Women, Men, and the Trinity: What Does It Mean to be Equal?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010). See also the book that provides a venue for the debate between the two sides, namely Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

²¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 307. See also the discussion in Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 142–157. Erickson refers to theologians that maintain this view as "equivalentists" in *Tampering with the Trinity*, 13–25.

²²Idem, *Christian Theology*, 308. See also idem, *Tampering with the Trinity*, 123–138, 248. McCall summarizes this position in analytic philosophical terms: "in this possible world it is everlastingly [or timelessly] true that at times $t - tn$ the Son is incarnate and thus functionally and temporally subordinate" (*Which Trinity?*, 176).

proponents of TFS argue that “Father, Son, and Spirit are one in divinity, work/function, and authority.”²³

Furthermore, contrary to the practice of some complementarians who support EFS/ERAS, some egalitarians who are also exponents of TFS have oppositely employed relations of equality in the Trinity to strengthen their sociological perspective regarding the roles of men and women in the home, church, and society.²⁴ Other egalitarian and complementarian advocates of TFS, as well as some who support EFS/ERAS, have strongly cautioned against making an analogy between the Trinity and human gender because of the lack of such an analogy in Scripture and its dangerous implications for both the doctrines of the Trinity and of human sexuality and ethics.²⁵

See also *ibid.*, 176n4.

²³Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 127.

²⁴Interestingly, some egalitarians embrace EFS/ERAS instead of TFS. For an example, see Craig S. Keener, “Is Subordination within the Trinity Really Heresy? A Study of John 5:18 in Context,” *TJ* 20 (1999): 39–51; *idem*, “Subordination with the Trinity: John 5:18 and 1 Cor 15:28,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 39–58.

²⁵Some advocates of EFS/ERAS have given those who oppose it the label “evangelical feminists.” For examples, see Wayne A. Grudem, “Doctrinal Deviations in Evangelical-Feminist Arguments about the Trinity,” in *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction in Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 17–45; Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 66. As D. Glenn Butner, Jr. says, this labelling “is a rhetorical strategy meant to predispose readers against their perspectives, but it is neither accurate or just. ... Labelling opponents of [EFS/ERAS] ‘evangelical feminists’ ... associates them with certain [theological] moves that run contrary the heart of evangelical identity and theology. This is despite the fact that the egalitarians (an increasingly also complementarians) who oppose [EFS/ERAS] never affirm these troubling moves and generally reject the label ‘evangelical feminist’ as an accurate representation of their perspectives. Calling opponents of [EFS/ERAS] ‘evangelical feminists’ is an inaccurate title that serves to predispose lay evangelicals to reject any claims made against eternal submission. ... [I]ntentionally crafting a category that is inaccurately associated with a widely rejected position or person is an unethical and manipulative rhetorical strategy. Opponents of [EFS/ERAS] are not evangelical feminists and should not be silenced by labelling them as feminists” (*The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case Against the Eternal Submission of the Son* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018], 156–158).

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is twofold. (1) First, it seeks to demonstrate that, while it is true that theology proper should inform all areas of systematics (since it is the foundation upon which the edifice of systematic theology is built), reading perceived differences of gender roles into the immanent Trinity is not biblically warranted and is theologically dangerous, having severely destructive consequences for Christianity. In order to avoid these consequences, the equality of the Trinity should be preserved by egalitarians and complementarians by excluding the doctrine of the Trinity, especially its EFS/ERAS conception, from the contemporary discussion on gender roles. (2) Second, it seeks to demonstrate the detrimental nature of the claim of EFS/ERAS that the persons of the Trinity relate to one another in an eternal, unilateral hierarchy of authority and submission in role and function, suggesting TFS as a much more tenable view of the Trinity. This twofold purpose is accomplished at various points in the paper by highlighting (1) the failure of EFS/ERAS to adequately account for all of the canonical data in Scripture and utilize sound hermeneutical principles and (2) its negative theological ramifications for the doctrine of God, soteriology, theodicy, and Christian ethics. Finally, the article concludes with some recommendations for how to proceed in the gender debate without injuring intra-Trinitarian ontology.

Biblical Problems of EFS/ERAS

Exponents of EFS/ERAS utilize and interpret a handful of biblical passages in a certain way to substantiate their supposed, eternal, functional submission of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son, and some of them connect this intra-Trinitarian submission to the complementarian view of male-female relations in a one-to-one analogy. Though its advocates posture that it is “*the plain reading*” of the biblical text (i.e., the most

natural, literal, and clearest interpretation of Scripture), when one looks more carefully at the biblical texts that they employ, it is apparent that questionable hermeneutics are in use. Gilbert Bilezikian has amusingly referred to their interpretative maneuverings as “hermeneutical bungee-jumping.”²⁶ Whereas the most notable examples are addressed below, due to the constraints of this paper, a discussion entertaining every instance in which Scripture is used to argue for EFS/ERAS cannot be provided.²⁷ However, the key passages and major lines of scriptural argumentation frequently used in EFS/ERAS literature will be explored to demonstrate some of the hermeneutical problems therein.

1 Corinthians 11:3 and the Trinity

The keynote passage that advocates of EFS/ERAS and some complementarians use to suggest hierarchal order in the Trinity and in male-female relations respectively is 1 Cor 11:3, which says, “But I want you to know that the head of every man/husband [παντὸς ἀνδρὸς] is Christ, [the] head of a woman/wife [γυναικὸς] is the man/husband [ὁ ἀνὴρ], and [the] head of Christ is God.”²⁸ There are some problems with the EFS/ERAS interpretation of this text. First, 1 Cor 11:3 does not seem to be ordered *hierarchically* from highest to lowest levels of perceived authority that moves downward in a unilateral fashion: God-Christ relationship, Christ-man

²⁶ Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping,” 57–68.

²⁷ Genesis 1:26–28 is of utmost importance in this debate on the Trinity and gender roles, but it will not be addressed here, since proper treatment of the passage would necessitate a more extensive discussion than what can be given here. Thus, this section of the article will focus on the New Testament. Some helpful discussion on this passage and its implications for other passages in the Old and New Testaments can be found in Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 15–80, 633–658; Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 29–72.

²⁸ Translation supplied. Depending on their context, ἀνὴρ (*anēr*) can be translated as either “man” or “husband,” and γυνή (*gunē*) can be translated as either “woman” or “wife.” Translating ἀνὴρ as “husband” and γυνή as “wife” in 1 Cor 11:1–16 seems to fit the context best.

relationship, and man-woman/husband-wife relationship (see **fig. 1**).²⁹

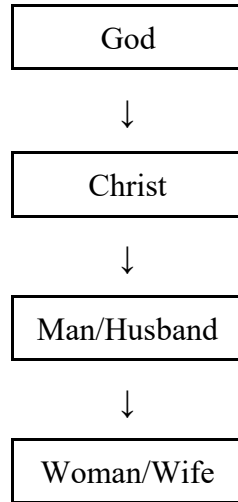


Figure 1. The Hierarchical Reading of 1 Corinthians 11:3

Philip B. Payne explains that when “Paul wanted to make a hierarchical series elsewhere, he did so in a logical sequence.”³⁰ A notable example of this is found one chapter later in 1 Cor 12:28. There, Paul plainly ranked and ordered the spiritual gifts that God appointed in the church from first to last, using the ordinal terms *πρῶτον* (*proton*; “first”), *δεύτερον* (*deuteron*; “second”), *τρίτον* (*triton*; “third”), and *ἔπειτα* (*epeita*; “then” or “next”).³¹ Paul makes his preference for prophecy (listed second) over speaking in tongues (listed last) even more explicit in 1 Cor 14:1,

²⁹ “[T]he order of the three parts of the headship statement [in 1 Cor 11:3] ... is not conducive to creating a sense of a chain of command” (Stephen Bauer, “1 Corinthians 11 and Headship,” *Reflections on Scripture*, April 2014, 7, <http://webpages.charter.net/stephenbauer/4-1%20Cor%2011%20and%20Headship.pdf>). It is interesting, however, to note that in order to make an argument for EFS/ERAS that women should refrain from ministering in the office of pastor/elder, Gregg R. Allison completely changes the order of the text into his preferred hierarchical order: “The apostle draws an analogy between (1) the subordination of Jesus Christ, the Son, to God the Father, who is his head, or authority; (2) the subordination of every man to Christ, the Lord, who is their head, or authority; and (3) the subordination of a wife to her husband, who is her head, or authority” (*Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 228). This rearrangement, of course, affects the intended meaning as it is given in the text.

³⁰ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 129. See also Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 105–106.

³¹ The adverb *ἔπειτα* is used to enumerate items in a list beyond the ordinal number “third” (e.g., “fourth,” “fifth,” etc.). See the second definition in “*ἔπειτα*,” BDAG 361.

5, 39. Another example is found two chapters later in 1 Cor 13:13 where Paul listed “faith, hope, and love” (in that order), but then proceeded to clarify that love, though listed last, is actually “the greatest of these.” No such ordering language or clarifying statements are found in 1 Cor 11:3 or its surrounding context.

Rather, on closer look, it appears that Paul arranged the relations *chronologically* as represented in **figure 2**: Christ-man relationship (Gen 1:26–27; 2:7), man-woman relationship (Gen 2:21–23), and God-Christ relationship (John 1:1–3, 14).

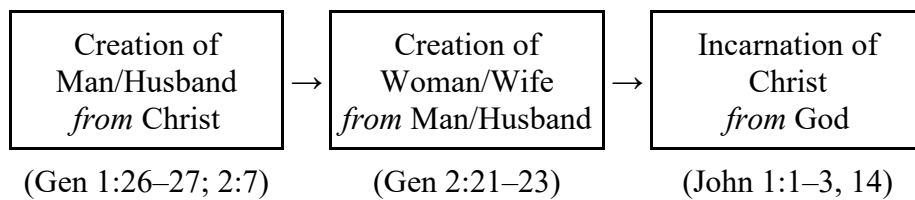


Figure 2. The Chronological Reading of 1 Corinthians 11:3

The chronological ordering of this text points toward interpreting κεφαλή (*kephalē*) or “head” as meaning “source” (e.g., Eph 4:15–16) instead of “authority” in the following way: “man came from Christ’s creative work, woman came from ‘the man,’ Christ came from God in the incarnation.”³² This is further supported by Paul’s use of ἐκ or “from/out of” in 1 Cor 8:6 and 11:8, 12, where the source of woman being man and the source of man being Christ/God are predicated.³³

³²Payne, *Man and Woman*, 129. See also Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 106.

³³New Testament scholar Teresa Reeve points out that κεφαλή has three primary clusters of metaphorical meanings—authority, source, and prominence/representation—and that each of these meanings is employed by Paul in various places throughout his epistles (“First Corinthians 11:2–16 and the Ordination of Women to Pastoral Ministry,” in *Women and Ordination: Biblical and Historical Studies*, ed. John W. Reeve [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015], 243–262). She identifies the uses of κεφαλή in Eph 4:15–16 and Col 2:18–19 as having the meaning of “source” (ibid., 248–249). Thus, this metaphorical meaning was not foreign to Paul. Concerning the debated usage of κεφαλή particularly and all word usages generally, Reeve makes this very important exegetical and hermeneutical point that is often violated by those who demand that κεφαλή always—or at least in most cases—means “authority”: “it is essential to allow the context to point to the meaning of words in a specific usage, rather than insisting on interpreting every word in a rigidly unvarying way” (ibid., 250). Thorough discussions of the word κεφαλή and the debate over its meaning can be found in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary*

However, even if Paul intended κεφαλή to mean “authority” rather than “source” (as the occurrence of ἐξουσίαν [*exousian*] or “authority” in 1 Cor 11:10 may suggest), one should not interpret 1 Cor 11:3 as support for EFS/ERAS, because the God-Christ relationship is a reference to Jesus’s incarnate life and ministry on earth.³⁴ Bilezikian argues, “[T]he passage nor its context contains any indication that this headship [of God to Christ] describes an eternal state. In this text, Paul is referring to the relationship that prevails between God and Christ in the context of Christ’s ministry to men and women within human history.”³⁵ Undoubtedly, this passage exclusively addresses the context of the incarnation and cannot be understood in any eternal sense.

Furthermore, as a chronology, 1 Cor 11:3 is not establishing a one-to-one hierarchical analogy between the Father-Son relation and the male-female relation. Michael F. Bird, who affirms EFS/ERAS, observes that 1 Cor 11:3 nowhere grounds the man-woman relationship in the Trinity. He writes, “1 Cor 11:3 ... does indicate that men and women should both respect their respective heads, but it does not imply that man is the head of women *because* God is the head of Christ.”³⁶ Similarly, Jason S. Sexton concludes that “there is no one-to-one correspondence between the parallel relationships designated in the text.”³⁷

on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 812–823; Alan F. Johnson, “A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of ‘Head’ (*Kephalē*) in Paul’s Writings,” *Priscilla Papers* 20.4 (2006): 21–29.

³⁴Butner, Jr. agrees, “Even if we grant that *kephalē* mean authority, there is simply nothing in the text that entails eternal submission or obedience” (*Son Who Learned Obedience*, 187).

³⁵Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping,” 61.

³⁶Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 120n66; emphasis original. Furthermore, he writes, “I do not think that the Trinity should be used to establish the proper relations between men and women, simply for the fact that the Trinity is unique and does not translate well as a model for relations between two persons of separate genders” (*ibid.*, 120). See also Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion,” *TrinJ* 29 (2008): 278.

³⁷Jason S. Sexton, “The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence,” *JETS* 54.4 (2011): 798.

Finally, the reader must realize that 1 Cor 11:3 is a very difficult passage to interpret (especially due to the metaphorical use[s] of the controversial word κεφαλή) as evidenced by the diversity of interpretations and applications in scholarship and the lack of unanimity. Consequently, it is not fitting that asserters of EFS/ERAS should make this text the foundation of their major argument. Therefore, the usage of this text to support EFS/ERAS is unwarranted.³⁸

Johannine Literature and Intra-Trinitarian Relationships

In addition to 1 Cor 11:3, proponents of EFS/ERAS have interpreted several of Jesus's statements in the Gospel of John, such as John 14:28, "... for the Father is greater than I,"³⁹ John 5:30, "I can do nothing on my own;" and others (e.g., John 3:34; 4:34; 5:19ff, 6:38; 7:18, 8:26, 28–29; 12:49; 14:24, 31, etc.), as indicating that Jesus eternally submits to the Father's authority.⁴⁰ The key hermeneutical problem therein is that a "proof-texting" methodology has been employed that has caused them to overlook the obvious context in which Jesus made these statements—namely, during the period of his incarnate ministry, "in the days of his flesh" (Heb 5:7). Hence, it cannot be inferred that these statements have an eternal quality, especially one that concerns God's inner life. To suggest otherwise is to deny the literary and historical context of these passages.⁴¹ Without this critical contextual insight, one can easily read these Johannine

³⁸For more helpful discussion on this passage, see Bauer, "1 Corinthians 11 and Headship" 1–9; Gordon D. Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 142–160; Payne, *Man and Woman*, 113–140; Reeve, "First Corinthians 11:2–16," 243–262. These sources provide useful footnote references to both complementarian and egalitarian literature on this passage.

³⁹All English Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), unless noted otherwise.

⁴⁰See Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 408. See also the discussion in Keener, "Subordination within the Trinity," 39–51; Bird and Shillaker, "Subordination in the Trinity," 276–277; Christopher Cowan, "The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited," *JETS* 49.1 (2006): 115–135.

⁴¹Contextual analysis of the literary unit under study is a crucial step of the historical-grammatical method

passages as asserting ontological inequality between the Father and the Son, which, of course, most, if not all, supporters of EFS/ERAS and those of TFS would be quick to deny. Additional clarity concerning these passages comes to light when they are balanced with other texts (e.g., John 5:18, 8:58, 10:30, 14:9, 17:5, and others), which emphasize Jesus's oneness and equality of divinity and glory with the Father prior to, during, and after the incarnation. In this regard, Stephen R. Holmes notes a helpful "exegetical rule" that was employed in the early fourth century debates on the Trinity that continues to prove useful:

Much of the worthwhile work in the fourth-century debates depended on clarifying the different ways in which Scripture refers to the Father-Son relation. The basic clarification ... is between the eternal relation and the relation of the Father to the incarnate Son. "I and the Father are one" refers to the eternal relation; "the Father is greater than I" to the incarnated relation. ... This distinction is basic to the development of fourth-century trinitarianism, and stands as a way of continuing to affirm the co-equal glory of the Father and the Son without ignoring or explaining away Biblical texts that speak of an unequal relationship. It becomes effectively an exegetical rule: whenever a text speaks of any sort of subordination of the Son to the Father, the text is to be read as speaking of the economy, of the relation of the Father to the incarnate Son. Thus the basic doctrinal requirement of absolute equality ... is maintained.⁴²

Therefore, Johannine passages that speak of the Son's submission to the Father should be read *contextually*, as referring to the Son's unique experience in the flesh during the time of his incarnation (i.e., the divine economy) and should not be read as referring to eternity (i.e., the divine ontology).⁴³

in the process of discovering the intended meaning in a text. Leaving out this step, can lead to theologically dangerous interpretations, such as the one being deconstructed in this article.

⁴²Stephen R. Holmes, "Classical Trinitarianism and Eternal Functional Subordination: Some Historical and Dogmatic Reflections," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 35.1 (2017): 99.

⁴³See Augustine, *Trin.* 1.7.14 (NPNF¹ 3:324); T. H. Jemison, *Christian Beliefs: Fundamental Biblical Teachings for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1959), 87–88. Fernando L. Canale says, "The biblical idea of the subordination of God the Son to God the Father belongs, not to the inner structure of divine reality, but rather to the sphere of the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. ... Thus, statements that imply the subordination of God the Son to God the Father are to be understood as a result of His incarnation, the expression of His obedience to the Father" ("Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Reference Series 12 [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2001], 126). For a New Testament perspective, see also Paul B. Petersen's

The Incarnation and Karl Rahner's Rule

Thirdly, exponents of EFS/ERAS claim that the incarnation of Christ serves as a biblical example of his submission and obedience to the Father's commands in eternity. Bird writes, "Because the New Testament speaks about Jesus' submission to his Father during the incarnation ... and even postascension as God's vice-regent ... , we have to propose that the Son's submission demonstrates something of the eternal relationships within the Godhead."⁴⁴ Elsewhere he writes, "[I]f Jesus appears subordinate in his incarnation, then we must suppose that there is something corresponding to subordination within the immanent Trinity as well."⁴⁵ As can be seen, the unique experiences and actions of submission in the Trinitarian economy—especially those connected to Christ's submission to the Father in his incarnate ministry—are read univocally into the eternal life and being of the triune God and his immanent intra-Trinitarian relations (though this is done selectively and seemingly arbitrarily⁴⁶).

This raises the hermeneutical issue of Karl Rahner's Rule, which states, "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."⁴⁷ Most

discussions on John 17:3 and 14:28, in which he recognizes that Jesus speaks these words "from the perspective of His humanity" (*God in 3 Persons—In the New Testament*, Biblical Research Institute Release 11 [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015], 7–8, 17). Robert K. McIver also has a helpful article on Christology in the Gospel of John ("Some Aspects of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel Relevant to Contemporary Christological Controversy," in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. Paul B. Petersen and Robert K. McIver [Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2014], 3–27).

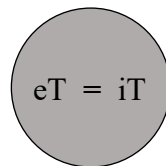
⁴⁴Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 119–120. See also idem and Shillaker, "Subordination in the Trinity," 271–272. Why does one "have to propose" this? Can the Son's incarnate submission simply be a new role he took upon himself in response to sin in order to redeem fallen humanity?

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁶For example, Ware recognizes the submission of the Son to the Holy Spirit during his incarnate ministry, but chooses not to read this into the immanent life of God seemingly because to do so would contradict his thesis. See Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 88–94. See also Tinkham Jr., Review, 185.

⁴⁷Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 22; original emphasis removed.

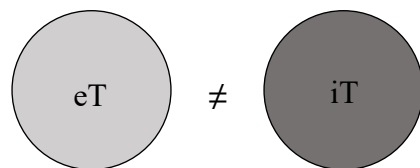
theologians agree that Rahner’s Rule should not be taken in a strict univocal sense⁴⁸ that makes the economic Trinity completely identical with the immanent Trinity (see **fig. 3**) because of the detrimental biblical and theological problems such a reading can create (e.g., reading the Son’s temporary incarnate suffering into God’s eternal experience⁴⁹).



The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa.

Figure 3. Univocity

Likewise, most theologians agree that the opposite kind of reading—an equivocal reading (see **fig. 4**)⁵⁰—is just as dangerous (if not more so) because it completely empties God’s self-revelation in Scripture of any meaning at all. Nothing can be said about God outside of the economy. Anything said about the Trinity in the economy is meaningless in regard to the Trinity *ad intra*.



The economic Trinity *is not* the immanent Trinity and vice versa.

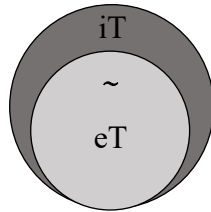
Figure 4. Equivocality

⁴⁸Univocity is the use of a descriptor in the same sense when applied to two objects (i.e., similarity or likeness).

⁴⁹For a problematic example, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 159–161.

⁵⁰Equivocality is a logical fallacy in which there is a complete change in meaning of a descriptor from its application to one object to its application to another (i.e., dissimilarity or unlikeness).

Therefore, most theologians, including most exponents of EFS/ERAS, understand Rahner’s Rule analogically,⁵¹ meaning that, though the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity and the two are completely compatible, the revelation of God in Scripture is highly contextualized (see **fig. 5**). In other words, not everything that God is and does in the economy of redemption can be read into the immanent Trinity as eternally true of God.



The economic Trinity *reveals*
the immanent Trinity.

Figure 5. Analogy

This is precisely because of creation and the subsequent fall of humanity into sin. Most of what is biblically revealed addresses the context of the economy, God’s relationship with his creation and his plan and actions to save fallen humanity that necessitated a divine experience *ad extra* which is not eternally true of his experience *ad intra*. Much of what pertains to God *ad intra* must be carefully extrapolated from his economic self-revelation via clear textual indicators (e.g., John 17:5, 24).

While most, if not all, proponents of EFS/ERAS wish to apply Rahner’s Rule analogically, they often do not carefully define the analogy between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity and its contextual limitations.⁵² This usually results in the univocal

⁵¹Analogy occurs when a descriptor changes some of its meaning, but maintains some as well when applied to two objects. In other words, there is similarity and dissimilarity (i.e., likeness and unlikeness), but there is quite a large spectrum of how much of it is univocal (similar) or equivocal (dissimilar). Only through analogical language can understand talk about God properly. Whatever scriptural revelation says about God will be similar to him (to a degree) and dissimilar to him (to a degree).

⁵²Erickson states that “it would be helpful if Ware and Grudem were to articulate their theory of religious language. They have spoken of the analogical nature of the terms Father and Son. To invoke the concept of

radicalization of Rahner’s Rule, forcing a strict identification of the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity in a way that reads the economy of the incarnation—particularly the elements of submission and obedience—directly into the Son’s (and the Holy Spirit’s) eternal existence. This too falls short of the scriptural evidence.

The New Testament portrays the incarnation as a serious change in the life of the Trinity for how it was in eternity. Philippians 2:6–11 is a helpful example. There, Paul first made it clear that Jesus was fully equal to God, without any qualification (though those who maintain EFS/ERAS restrict it to ontological equality only, excluding functional equality⁵³), prior to (and following [Phil 2:9–11]) the incarnation.⁵⁴ Second, it does describe an *incarnate* experience of the Son that includes obedience, but two things should be kept in mind. First, the Son’s obedience is *subsequent* to his incarnation and thus offered *qua* human. Second, the New Testament never describes the period of the Son’s incarnation in terms of eternal, essential submission, but rather as voluntary, self-inflicted, missionally-motivated humiliation. Philippians 2:7–8 articulates these two points explicitly: “... but [he] emptied *himself* [ἐαυτόν (*heauton*)], by taking the form of a servant, *being born* in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled *himself* [ἐαυτόν] by *becoming* [γενόμενος (*genomenos*)] obedient to the point of

analogical language, however, is not the answer, but the question—namely, how much of the term used is univocal, or to put it more popularly, what portion of the analogy is to be taken literally, and to what extent?” (“Language, Logic, and Trinity: A Critical Examination of the Eternal Subordinationist View of the Trinity,” *Priscilla Papers* 31.3 [2017]: 10).

⁵³For an example, see Bird and Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity,” 274–275.

⁵⁴In Phil 2:6, the present active participle of ὑπάρχω (*hyparchō*; “to exist”) is used to indicate that the state in which the Son existed prior to the incarnation was that of being in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ [*en morphē theou*]). The following clause clarifies precisely that this state is equality with God (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ [*to eivai isa theōi*]) without qualification. Further clarification is given in Phil 2:7, where the present active participle of λαμβάνω (*lambanō*; “to take”) is used. There the Son is said to empty himself by *taking* (not by giving something up) the form of a servant or slave (δούλου [*doulou*]), which he did not have prior to his taking of it. Clearly, then, the Son did not function as a servant or slave of the Father prior to the self-emptying and self-humbling that took place in Christ’s incarnation. See also John 17:5.

death.”⁵⁵ The reader should notice that the Father did not empty and humble the Son in this text; rather the Son emptied and humbled “himself.”⁵⁶ Moreover, when this passage says that the Son *was born* in the likeness of humanity and *became* obedient, it implies that he was not in the likeness of humanity previously and also did not offer obedience prior to his self-humiliation in the incarnation.⁵⁷ Hebrews 5:8 suggests this very same idea: “*Although* he was a son, he *learned* obedience through what he suffered.”⁵⁸ Bilezikian pinpoints the significance of this text for this discussion:

Three remarks must be made about this text. (1) The fact that he learned obedience “although” he was a Son indicates that the nature of his Sonship excluded the necessity of obedience. He learned obedience despite the fact that he was a Son. (2) The fact that he “learned” obedience indicates that it was something new in his experience as Son. Obedience was not a mark of his eternal relation to the Father. He learned it for the purpose of ministry. (3) The fact that he learned obedience “through” what he suffered indicates that obedience was required in relation to his suffering and that it was not an eternal condition. Christ’s experience of obedience was confined to his redemptive ministry as suffering servant.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Emphasis added.

⁵⁶In Phil 2:7–8, Paul used the active aorist indicative form of both κενόω (*kenōō*; “to empty”) and ταπεινῶω (*tapeinōō*; “to humble”) to indicate that the Son (not the Father)—the nominative masculine singular relative pronoun ὃς (*hos*; “who”) in Phil 2:6, which refers back to Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ or “Christ Jesus” in Phil 2:5—is the obvious subject of those active verbs and thus the one who was performing these actions. To emphasize this further, the accusative reflexive pronoun ἑαυτὸν (*heauton*) is employed twice to function as the direct object of both ἐκένωσεν (*ekenōsen*) and ἐταπεινώσεν (*etapeinōsen*). Thus, the passage emphatically points to the Son’s own volition and action in the incarnation.

⁵⁷Paul could have easily used the static verb of being, εἰμί (*eimi*; “to be”), to indicate that the Son’s obedience was a state that was true of Christ prior to his incarnate self-emptying and self-humiliation. However, he utilized the dynamic verb of being, γίνομαι (*ginomai*; “to become”), to indicate a change process of the Son’s state from not rendering obedience prior to the incarnation to becoming obedient at the time of his incarnate self-emptying and self-humiliation.

⁵⁸Emphasis added. The concessive conjunction καίπερ (*kaiper*) or “although” is used to clarify the concessive nature of the participial clause ὢν υἱός (*ōn huios*; “being a son”).

⁵⁹Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping,” 65. Grudem does recognize that the incarnation was cause for some change in the relationship between the Father and the Son but only minimally, calling it “a new kind of obedience ... that was consistent with the eternal pattern of obedience that he had shown to the Father for all eternity” (“Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father.” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock], 242; emphasis original). He argues that Phil 2:6–8 does not explicitly say that “the Son for the first time became obedient” or “that the Son had not previously been obedient to the Father” (*ibid.*). But neither does the text say that this is “a new kind of obedience.” Nevertheless, the emphasis of the

Therefore, Christ's incarnation is not an example or carrying out of his eternal, functional submission to the Father or of any sort of eternal intra-Trinitarian hierarchy that is essential to the Godhead *ad intra*. Rather, the incarnation was a profound *change* in the Son's experience prior to it!⁶⁰ Furthermore, the self-emptying, humiliation, and obedience that he experienced during the incarnation was *voluntary* and *contextually limited* to that period of time, not extending to his existence prior to or after it. This indicates that Rahner's Rule should not be used to read the incarnation univocally into the immanent Trinity. Furthermore, it is biblically and theologically more accurate to describe Christ's incarnation as *temporary, voluntary self-humiliation* that had the purpose of revealing the profound love of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for the world (John 3:16).⁶¹

Sending Language in the New Testament

Fourthly, those who endorse EFS/ERAS often argue that the “sending” language used in the New Testament, especially in the Johannine writings, indicates the Son's functional

passage along with its language seems to focus on the incredible self-sacrifice and change to which Jesus subjected himself for humanity's redemption in at the time of and during the incarnation. To recognize change in the incarnation in Grudem's very minimal way amounts to a diminishment of the significance of the incarnation. According to Erickson, “On the Ware-Grudem view, Jesus took on human form and the limitations thereof, but there really was no surrendering of equality of authority. His subordination to the Father had always been true of him” (“Language, Logic, and Trinity,” 14). Moreover, it also diminishes the post-ascension exaltation of Christ (Phil 2:9–11). Erickson writes, “The significance of the exaltation is similarly reduced. Jesus did not reassume equality of authority with the Father. The ascension becomes primarily a change of location, rather than of status” (ibid.).

⁶⁰“The incarnation does make a difference. ... Jesus' human nature counts. The incarnation simply does not mean that the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father is now lived out in human flesh as though the incarnation does not really make any relational difference. ... In other words there is an asymmetry between the inner workings of the Trinity (*ad intra*) and the external workings (*ad extra*) of the Trinity. The latter cannot simply be appealed to in order to illuminate the former. ... Rahner's Rule that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity must be applied with care, lest referent and meaning be confused” (Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 173). For Rahner's Rule, see Rahner, *The Trinity*, esp. 22.

⁶¹Ibid., 59.

submission and obedience to the Father, and the Holy Spirit's functional submission and obedience to the Son and to the Father.⁶² It is true that the Father is always spoken of as the one having the function of sending the Son (Matt 10:40; 15:24; Mark 9:37; Luke 10:16; John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23–24, 36; 6:29, 57; 7:28–29, 33; 8:16, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44–45; 13:20; 15:21; 17:3, 8; 17:18, 23, 25; 20:21; Acts 3:26; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9–10, 14) for his incarnate ministry and the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Pet 1:12; Rev 5:6) for his empowering post-Pentecost ministry, and this sending is never reciprocal (the Son and the Holy Spirit are never said to send the Father). It is also true that the Son is spoken of as also having the function of sending the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7; 1 Pet 1:12; Rev 5:6).

However, there are three important underlying assumptions to be considered in regard to the EFS/ERAS interpretation of the “sending” language. First, it is assumed that “sending” language implies submission of the one sent to the sender. However, as Thomas H. McCall and Keith E. Yandell note, this “is less than obvious; it is not self-evident nor are we presented with any evidence for it.”⁶³ Second, and related to the first, there is an assumed premise that whoever did the action of sending made the decision to do so unilaterally. However, as Erickson readily points out, “We really do not know how that decision regarding the incarnation was made, nor who made it.”⁶⁴ Certainly, reading paternal monarchy into the Trinitarian “sending” language is one interpretative option, but there is another possible reading. Many theologians have understood the plan of redemption and its associated works, including the economic role of sending, as a mutual decision of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together in a pre-

⁶²For examples, see Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 406; Cowan, “The Father and Son,” 115–135.

⁶³McCall and Yandell, “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” 345.

⁶⁴Erickson, “Language, Logic, and Trinity,” 11.

creation covenant often called the *pactum salutis* (i.e., covenant of redemption or council of peace). This was the covenantal agreement of the three persons of the Trinity in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit unitedly designed a plan of salvation for how they would unitedly resolve the problem of sin and voluntarily assume personal functions or roles in the carrying out of this plan to redeem humanity and restore the *cosmos*.⁶⁵ If this be the case, which seems more demonstrable than the former reading, then who would take up the operation of sending in the divine economy of salvation was mutually determined.

Third, as proponents of EFS/ERAS have argued, the Son does have the function of sending the Holy Spirit, but many of them have missed the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit, like the Father, has the function of sending the Son. McCall and Yandell highlight this function

⁶⁵For possible biblical evidence of the *pactum salutis*, see Pss 2:7–9; 110; Joel 2:28–32; Zech 6:12–13; Matt 22:41–45; Mark 12:34–37; Luke 20:41–44; 22:29; Acts 2:32–36; 13:32–33; Rom 1:1–4; 1 Cor 2:7–10; 15:24–28; Gal 4:4; Eph 1; 4:4–10; 2 Tim 1:9–10; Heb 1; 5:5–10; 6:13–20; 7; 8:1–6; 10:12–17; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8. Helpful exegetical-theological commentary on some of these passages can be found in J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2016), 49–124. See also Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 141–142; Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Trinity,” *ISBE* 5:3020–3021; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 121–122, 187, 207–208. In his theological retrieval project, Fesko defines the *pactum salutis* in this way: “At its most fundamental level the covenant or redemption is the [eternal], intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect. The covenant entails the appointment of the Son as surety of the covenant of grace who accomplishes the redemption of the elect through His incarnation, perfect obedience, suffering, resurrection, and ascension. The covenant of redemption is also the root of the Spirit’s role to appoint and equip the Son for His mission as surety and to apply His finished work to the elect” (*Trinity and the Covenant*, 131–132). Note that Fesko writes from a Reformed and Classical Trinitarian perspective, thus some of his conclusions regarding the *pactum salutis* and the Trinity differ from those that are presented in this paper (e.g., his views on election, predestination, eternal generation of the Son, eternal procession of the Spirit, single will of the Trinity, etc.). Unfortunately, Fesko portrays the *pactum salutis* in unilateral, rather than mutual, terms, namely the Father commands the Son to be the covenant surety and the Son obediently complying with the Father’s command (e.g., *ibid.*, 192–193). Even if Fesko’s hierarchical understanding of the *pactum salutis* is true, it does not follow that such a hierarchy of authority exists in the eternal life of God outside of the economy. This is because the *pactum salutis* is eternal in the sense that it predates the fall (at the least) and likely creation; however, it is not eternal “in the sense that it belongs to the perfect life of God” because the *pactum salutis* is part of the economy (Holmes, “Classical Trinitarianism,” 96–99). As Holmes argues, the *pactum salutis* “is very clearly the beginning of the works of God—the beginning of the great work of redemption. If God had chosen to remain alone in perfect eternal bliss and not to create, there would never have been a *pactum salutis*. So the *pactum* tells us nothing about the eternal life of God” (*ibid.*, 97). Butner, Jr. rightly sees EFS/ERAS—with its concepts of eternal paternal authority and filial obedience—and the *pactum salutis* as “distinctive dogmatic claims” and, thus, rejects Fesko’s unilateral understanding of the *pactum salutis* (*Son Who Learned Obedience*, 61, 58). Note that Butner, Jr. also affirms a Classical Trinitarian articulation of the *pactum salutis* that again differs with some of the views presented in this paper concerning the Trinity and the *pactum salutis*. See *ibid.*, 57–61.

in the act of the Holy Spirit sending Jesus into the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1).⁶⁶ Philip R. Gons and Andrew David Naselli reject this “sending” of the Son by the Holy Spirit as comparable to that of the Father’s sending of the Son and thus declare that it is not an eternal relation for four reasons: (1) the timing of the sending (before *versus* during the incarnation), (2) the location of the sending (the world *verses* the wilderness), (3) the status of the Son at the time of sending (*qua* God *versus qua* God-man), and (4) the above passages do not use the typical sending language of ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*) or πέμπω (*pempō*) that is used elsewhere of the Father’s act of sending the Son.⁶⁷ However, this is not the only time that Scripture describes the Son being sent by the Holy Spirit. For example, in Luke 4:18–19 Jesus reads from Isa 61:1–2 in a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath, applying it to himself. This passage prophetically announces the Spirit of the Lord’s work of anointing and *sending* the Messianic Son “to proclaim good news to the poor, ... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, [and] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” This passage seems to be immune to the concerns raised by Gons and Naselli. Using the typical “sending” term ἀποστέλλω, Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit sent him as the Messiah into the world to accomplish this gospel-proclaiming, liberating, and healing mission. Thus, if proponents of EFS/ERAS are right in saying that “sending” language implies submission of the one sent to the sender, then the Son not only submits to the Father but also to the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, if the Son and the Holy Spirit send (ἀποστέλλω) one another, then this is evidence of mutuality and reciprocity not hierarchy. Thus, the premise of EFS/ERAS regarding “sending” language

⁶⁶McCall and Yandell, “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” 345.

⁶⁷Philip R. Gons and Andrew David Naselli, “An Examination of Three Recent Philosophical Arguments against Hierarchy in the Immanent Trinity,” *God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction in Persons, Implications for Life*, ed. Bruce A. Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 211.

demonstrates the opposite of its thesis, namely that “there is *mutual* submission within the Trinity.”⁶⁸

Prayer and the Trinity

Fourthly, some proponents of EFS/ERAS have argued that Jesus’s model prayer in Matt 6, famously known as the Lord’s Prayer, expresses EFS/ERAS pragmatically in the prayer. On this view, prayers should be exclusively directed to the Father as the head of the Trinity just as Jesus demonstrated in the Lord’s Prayer.⁶⁹ Ware, for example, argues that the “Christian’s life of *prayer* must rightly acknowledge the roles of Father, Son, and Spirit as we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. ... To pray aright, we need a deep appreciation for the doctrine of the Trinity” (i.e., the EFS/ERAS variety).⁷⁰ Without question, Jesus instructed his disciples to address their prayers to the Father: “‘But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. ... Pray ... like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’” (Matt 6:6–9; cf. Luke 11:2; Phil 4:6). In a later teaching, Jesus taught that such Father-directed prayers should be prayed in his name (John 14:13–14; 16:23–24). Some of Jesus’s disciples under inspiration further exhorted believers to pray “in the Spirit” (1 Cor 14:15; Eph 6:18; Jude 20). Thus, Christians would do well to follow Jesus’s teaching and example and that of the New Testament authors to pray to the Father, through the name of Jesus, in the Holy Spirit. But, is this the *only right way* believers should pray? Can prayers be addressed

⁶⁸McCall and Yandell, “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” 346. See the full articulation of their argument in *ibid.*, 345–346.

⁶⁹Not everyone who subscribes to EFS/ERAS believes prayer must be conducted in this way. For example, Grudem sees no problem with prayers that are directed to the Son and/or the Holy Spirit for they too are God. See *Systematic Theology*, 380–381.

⁷⁰Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*, 18; emphasis original.

directly to the Son and/or to the Holy Spirit, disregarding a supposed authority-submission structure in the Trinity?

To maintain that Christians should not direct prayers to the Son or the Holy Spirit because Jesus never explicitly instructed his disciples to do this, is to make an argument from silence. The New Testament itself contradicts such a claim. Worthy of notice is the fact that several prayers found in the New Testament were directly addressed to the Son, not the Father, by persons who not only understood and had a deep appreciation for the doctrine of the Trinity but also were responsible for handing over that doctrinal tradition to later generations of Christians via the New Testament. For example, sometime after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9–11), the apostles gathered in the upper room and prayed to the “Lord” for guidance in selecting Matthias as the replacement of Judas Iscariot among the twelve (1:15–26, esp. 24). Later in Acts, Stephen, while being stoned to death as the first Christian martyr, prayed to the resurrected Christ, ““Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”” (7:59–60).⁷¹ Paul, too, prayed three times to “the Lord,” whom he later identified as “Christ,” for the removal of the “thorn ... given [him] in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7–10). In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul prayed the often-repeated prayer, “Μαράνα θά” (*marana tha*) or “Our Lord, come,” who he again identified as “the Lord

⁷¹In fact, what Jesus prayed to the Father on the cross, is nearly the same as what Stephen prayed directly to Jesus during his stoning. Jesus prayed, ““Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”” (Luke 23:46). Stephen prayed, ““Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”” (Acts 7:59). Jesus prayed, ““Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”” (Luke 23:34). Stephen prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Erickson sees this as warrant “to regard Jesus’ command to pray to the Father as the logical way to pray during Jesus’ earthly ministry (although note that the numerous requests brought to Jesus were actually prayers to him uttered in his bodily presence)” (*Tampering with the Trinity?*, 229). He points out that now “that [Jesus] has ascended to his previous place, at least some prayers may and even should be addressed to him, although not necessarily exclusively so” (*ibid.*).

Jesus” and “Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 16:21–24). At the conclusion of the Apocalypse, John prayed a similar prayer, writing, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).⁷²

It certainly appears that the early Christian disciples thought it right to pray directly to the Lord Jesus Christ without mention of the Father. Implicit biblical support for praying directly to the Holy Spirit, who is deeply involved in our praying and intercedes for us (Rom 8:26, 27), may be found in some of the invocations and benedictions found in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Rev 1:4–5).⁷³ All of this seems to suggest that a biblical understanding of the Trinity and prayer in the New Testament allows for the Father, the Son, and/or Holy Spirit to be the direct addressee, instead of mandatorily following some hierarchical formula. In fact, it

⁷²See Erickson, *Tampering with the Trinity?*, 227–232; idem, “Language, Logic, and Trinity,” 9.

⁷³Should believers address prayers directly to the Holy Spirit? If the Holy Spirit is eternally, fully, and equally God with the Father and the Son, and it is permissible to pray directly to the Father and Son, then it seems implied that praying to the Holy Spirit is also permissible. Some have claimed that there is no biblical precedent for praying to the Holy Spirit and, therefore, it should not be done. This is an argument from silence. Several theologians find biblical evidence for divine honor being paid to the Holy Spirit or invoking him in prayer and worship. George Smeaton argues that passages that declare that “THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST can never be forgiven” (Matt 12:30–32; Mark 3:28–29; Luke 12:8–10) evince a divine honor due him (*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882; 2nd ed., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016]; emphasis original). See also Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 106, 617; John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.15; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 1:528. Smeaton also identifies three biblical passages in which the Holy Spirit is invoked in baptism, benediction, and prayer—Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Rev 1:4–5 (*Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 107–108). See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 98; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:528; Michael S. Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God’s Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 32; idem, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 277; Philip Melancthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, 2nd ed., trans. J. A. O. Preus (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011), 32; R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit: Discover the Work of the Living Spirit of the Living God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1990), 18–19, 30–31; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit,” in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 523. Berkhof and Horton add Rom 9:1 to this list. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 98; Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 32; idem, *The Christian Faith*, 277. In addition to this, Graham A. Cole notes that Augustine understood the phrase “who worship by the Spirit of God” in Phil 3:3 as indicative of the worship of the Spirit. However, Cole admits that the text “may be affirming only that it is by the instrumentality of the Spirit that God is to be worshiped,” namely that the Spirit is the divine initiator of true worship of God within the depths of human nature (*He Who Gives Life*, 72). Frank M. Hasel sees Ps 95:6–9 (cf. Heb 3:7–9) as connecting the Holy Spirit to worship. See “The Holy Spirit: His Divinity and Personality,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. Paul B. Petersen and Robert K. McIver (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 135. Perhaps, this is enough biblical evidence to warrant prayers directed to the Holy Spirit.

seems that, according to Scripture, believers can and should address and invoke, at least, the Father and the Son and, most likely, the whole divine Trinity in prayer. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God and capable of answering prayers of faith. This seems to undermine a hierarchical view of the Trinity.

Unilateral Hierarchy or Mutual–Reciprocal Equality in Intra-Trinitarian Relationships?

Fifthly, all the aforementioned biblical arguments are utilized by supporters of EFS/ERAS to assert that Scripture presents intra-Trinitarian relationships in terms of an eternal, unilateral hierarchy in which the Son *exclusively* submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit *exclusively* submits to the Father and the Son (for those who accept the *filioque*), as is represented in **figure 6** below.⁷⁴ This “one-way” hierarchy of intra-Trinitarian relationships is said to always function in this order in Scripture without exception.⁷⁵ But these assertions crumble when one analyzes carefully (1) the triadic ordering patterns in the New Testament, (2) the economic activities of the three persons, and (3) the specific intra-Trinitarian relationships between the Father and the Son and between the Son and the Holy Spirit, as they are portrayed in Scripture.

⁷⁴See Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 549; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249–250; idem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 47; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 21. Some advocates of EFS/ERAS deny any mutual, functional submission in the economic Trinity. For example, the Council of Adventist Pastors writes, “We do not read anywhere in the inspired writings about mutual submission among members of the Godhead” (*Adventist Ordination Crisis*, 62).

⁷⁵Some complementarians who are sympathetic to EFS/ERAS say that the same kind of unilateral, hierarchical relationship is mirrored in relations between males and females.

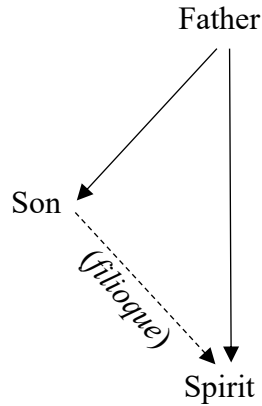


Figure 6. Unilateral-Hierarchical Model of the Trinity

Trinitarian Ordering Patterns in the New Testament

First, there seems to be no consistent unilateral ordering pattern of the three persons of the Trinity in Scripture, such as the traditional ordering that is found in Matt 28:19, as well as in other passages—(1) the Father, (2) the Son, and (3) the Holy Spirit. A representative handful of primary Trinitarian texts in the New Testament is sufficient evidence to demonstrate this phenomenon (see **tab. 1**).

Table 1. Ordering Patterns of the Persons of the Trinity in the New Testament

Passage	Trinitarian Ordering		
Matt 28:19	τοῦ πατρὸς (Father)	τοῦ υἱοῦ (Son)	τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Spirit)
Acts 2:38–39	Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)	τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Spirit)	κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (Father)
Rom 15:30	τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)	τοῦ πνεύματος (Spirit)	τὸν θεόν (Father)
1 Cor 12:4–6	τὸ ... αὐτὸ πνεῦμα (Spirit)	ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος (Son)	ὁ ... αὐτὸς θεός (Father)
2 Cor 13:14	τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)	τοῦ θεοῦ (Father)	τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Spirit)
Eph 4:4–6	ἐν πνεῦμα (Spirit)	εἷς κύριος (Son)	εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ (Father)
Heb 2:3–4	τοῦ κυρίου (Son)	τοῦ θεοῦ (Father)	πνεύματος ἁγίου (Spirit)

1 Pet 1:2	θεοῦ πατρός (Father)	ἁγιασμῶ πνεύματος (Spirit)	Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)
Jude 20–21	πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (Spirit)	θεοῦ (Father)	τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)
Rev 1:4–6	ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Father)	τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων (Spirit)	Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Son)

Source: Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism,” 19–20.

In 1 Pet 1:2 and Rev 1:4–6, the Father is listed first, like the traditional ordering, but the Holy Spirit is mentioned before the Son. However, Paul changed up the traditional ordering even more. In the benediction of 2 Cor 13:14, the Son appears first, followed by the Father, and then the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 2:3–4 bears this same ordering. Paul in Rom 15:30 and Luke (with Peter speaking) in Acts 2:38–39 also had the Son ordered first, but the Holy Spirit follows him directly, and the Father is mentioned lastly. In 1 Cor 12:4–6 and Eph 4:4–6, Paul completely reversed the traditional ordering by placing the Holy Spirit first, the Son second, and the Father last. Like the last two passages, Jude 20–21 has the Holy Spirit first, but the Father is listed second and the Son third.

In his research on Trinitarian ordering patterns in the New Testament, Roderick K. Durst identifies “seventy-five triadic order passages,” like the above, in which all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned within a range of one to five verses.⁷⁶ He classifies each of these passages “according to the order of the persons named in the Trinity.”⁷⁷ He found that by

⁷⁶Roderick K. Durst, *Reordering the Trinity: Six Movements of God in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 68. See his more comprehensive table in *ibid.*, 309–318. For Durst, “the quantity of divine triadic instances is so profound and in such a diversity of orders that it constitutes a qualitative *matrix* of Trinitarian consciousness. Trinity is how the New Testament authors inadvertently thought and viewed reality” (*ibid.*, 66; emphasis original). For other listings of Trinitarian passages in the New Testament, see Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 839–942; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 63–69; Arthur William Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 237–247.

⁷⁷Durst, *Reordering the Trinity*, 68. However, it should be pointed, as Giles does, that the “exact number of passages in each category can be disputed” (Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 109n71). This is due to the fact that in

“[u]sing this method, the seventy-five triadic instances identified can be organized into six categories of orders, with all six used in surprisingly balanced percentages overall” (see **tab. 2**).⁷⁸

Table 2. Categories and Occurrences of Triadic Ordering Patterns

Pattern Category	Number of Occurrences
Father-Son-Spirit	18
Son-Spirit-Father	15
Son-Father-Spirit	14
Father-Spirit-Son	11
Spirit-Father-Son	9
Spirit-Son-Father	8
Total	75

Source: Durst, *Reordering the Trinity*, 68–69.

This means that in these seventy-five triadic ordered passages, “the Father is named first twenty-nine times ... , the Son is named first twenty-nine times, ... and [the] Spirit is named first seventeen times”⁷⁹ Thus, the data reveals that all six mathematically possible orderings of the three persons of the Trinity are present in the New Testament with relatively balanced occurrences.

Kevin N. Giles argues that “[t]his evidence suggests that Paul” and the other New Testament writers “did not believe the three divine ‘persons’ are ordered hierarchically.”⁸⁰

“several cases members of the Godhead are mentioned more than once in the one context, and so where one begins and ends, the selected passage determines the answer” (ibid.). See Tinkham Jr., “Neo-subordinationism,” 267n110.

⁷⁸Durst, *Reordering the Trinity*, 68. Durst utilizes the majority of his book to analyze contextually each of these six ordering patterns. His analysis leads him to conclude that each pattern signifies a special economic “movement” of the Godhead in the plan of salvation. See ibid., 79–81. See also his chapters 5–10, where he discusses his exegetical and contextual analysis of each Trinitarian passage in detail (ibid., 157–282).

⁷⁹Giles, *Rise and Fall*, 84–85. See also ibid., 98.

⁸⁰Idem, *Jesus and the Father*, 110. Giles also has a table that outlines several different ordering patterns in the Pauline literature of the New Testament. Sixteen of his selected Pauline passages order Christ first, nine order the Spirit first, and six order the Father first (see ibid., 109–110). Gerald Bray has a similar table, yet with no textual references (*The Doctrine of God*, *Contours of Christian Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 146). Bray concludes his analysis of Trinitarian passages by saying that “the personal operation is remarkably stable” (ibid.). The following sections of this paper will suggest otherwise. The important point of Giles’s and Bray’s tables for this section of the paper is that Paul obviously had no consistent Trinitarian pattern of ordering that would indicate a unilateral hierarchy.

“These passages indicate that order in divine life ... is not to be understood as a hierarchical order; the Father is not always ‘first,’ the Son ‘second,’ and the Spirit ‘third.’”⁸¹ Indeed, it would seem that if the human authors of the New Testament had a Trinitarian conception that was a unilateral hierarchy in nature, then one would expect a non-variant use of the traditional ordering pattern (Father-Son-Spirit), much like what is observable in contemporary theological literature. As Benjamin B. Warfield rhetorically inquires, “If in [the Bible writers’] conviction the very essence of the doctrine of the Trinity was embodied in [the Father-Son-Spirit] order, should we not anticipate that there should appear in their numerous allusions to the Trinity some suggestion of this conviction?”⁸² But this is simply not the case in the New Testament. Similarly, John S. Feinberg says, “If the three were inherently unequal, then we might expect a consistent order in listing them whenever they are mentioned together. This might even seem like a formulaic prioritizing of the three. However, the NT refers to the three together in a variety of order.”⁸³ Therefore, the New Testament’s “multiplicity of six triadic orders ... demonstrates,” according to Durst, “that God works as One without a hierarchical order, yet with distinctions retained. Whatever God does in the world, He does as Three together. The diverse orders of the Three communicate oneness, distinction, and missional economy.”⁸⁴ Scripture does not have a

⁸¹Giles, *Rise and Fall*, 98.

⁸²Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations* (London: Tyndale, 1958), 108.

⁸³John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 468.

⁸⁴Durst, *Reordering the Trinity*, 297. “[T]he intimacy shared between the distinct identities in the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit witnesses to a ‘No Hierarchy Zone’ with respect to the inner relations of the Divine Three” (ibid.). The key insight of Durst’s research for this present study is that this balanced variety of orderings of Trinitarian persons in the New Testament is evidence for there being no unilateral hierarchy in the immanent or economic Trinity. “There is no ranking of the three who are one God” (Petersen, *God in 3 Persons*, 22). Similarly, T. H. Jemison says, “Often in theological writings, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are referred to as the First, Second, and Third Persons of the Godhead. This designation has nothing to do with position, honor, power, or authority, but is simply a variant means of identification. It has nothing to do with relationships within the Godhead or with our attitude or relation to its members” (*Christian Beliefs*, 84n1). See also Giles, *Jesus and the Father*, 109–

unilateral, hierarchical ordering pattern of the Trinitarian persons. Rather, all six mathematically possible orderings of the three persons of the Trinity are present in the New Testament with relatively balanced occurrences.⁸⁵

Shared Economic Operations

Second, when one looks carefully at the economic interactions of the three persons in Scripture, it appears that the textual data significantly “blurs the lines” of the clearly defined, essential Trinitarian hierarchy proposed by advocates of EFS/ERAS. While there are some distinct operations of the three persons outlined in Scripture that help to differentiate them (e.g., the Son, not the Father or the Holy Spirit, came to earth as the incarnate one to die as the atoning sacrifice for sin, and the Holy Spirit, not the Son or the Father, came upon the disciples as tongues of fire at Pentecost), there is also a plethora of texts, especially in John’s Gospel,⁸⁶ that speak of two or more of the persons of the Trinity having the same title, functioning in the same redemptive role, or accomplishing the same soteriological work. What follows is a sampling of some of these passages.

The Father (Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; Eph 3:9; 1 Tim 4:3–4; Rev 4:11), the Son (Ps 102:25; John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 2:10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2, 10), and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Ps 104:30 [cf. Isa 32:14–15]; Isa 40:12–14) are mutually involved in the work of creation. Life and resurrection from the dead are given by the Father (John 5:21; 17:3), the Son

110.

⁸⁵See n85 in this paper.

⁸⁶For example, in his book on the Holy Spirit, James M. Hamilton Jr. provides a table that features many of the actions that are common to two or more of the persons of the Godhead in John’s Gospel alone. See *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2006), 56.

(John 5:21, 25–26, 40; 6:33; 17:3), and the Holy Spirit (John 3:6, 8; 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6). The Father (John 1:33), the Son (John 13:19, 26, 36–38; 14:3, 29; 16:1–4, 16–28, 32; 20:18), and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) proclaim the future. Both the Father and the Son (Isa 9:6) bear the title “Father,” and the titles “the Alpha and Omega,” “the first and the last,” and “the beginning and the end,” are also shared by the Father (Rev 1:8; 21:5–6) and the Son (1:17; 2:8; 22:12–13).

The Father gives the Son (John 3:16–17), and the Father (John 3:34; 4:10–14; 14:16) and the Son (4:10–14; 7:37–39; 20:22) give the Holy Spirit. The Son is sent by the Father (John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23–24, 36; 6:29, 57; 7:28–29, 33; 8:16, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44–45; 13:20; 15:21; 17:3, 8, 18, 23, 25; 20:21) and the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18–19), and the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father (John 14:26; 15:26) and the Son (John 15:26; 16:7). As ambassadors of the Trinity, the Son (John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 12:49–50) and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) speak not from themselves, but both the Son (John 3:32, 34; 5:30; 8:26, 40; 12:50; 15:15) and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) speak only what they hear. That which the Son (John 1:18) and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13–14) declare is that which belongs to God. As such, the Son is ἡ ἀλήθεια (*hē alētheia*) or “the truth” (John 14:6) and the Holy Spirit is τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (*to pneuma tēs alētheias*) or “the Spirit of the truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Son has the role of παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) or “Advocate” (1 John 2:1) and the Holy Spirit is ἄλλος παράκλητος (*allos paraklētos*) or “another Advocate” (John 14:16; cf. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

The work of conviction upon the human heart is attributed to both the Son (John 3:19–20; 4:16, 18; 5:27; 8:7, 34, 40; 11:40; 12:7–8; 13:8) and to the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11). The world did not know or receive the Son but hated him (John 1:10–11; 15:18); and it does not see or know the Holy Spirit, nor can it receive him (John 14:17). As such, the world will appear before the judgment seat of the Father (Rom 14:10) and the Son (2 Cor 5:10). Judgment is a

work of the Father (John 5:30; 8:50; Acts 7:7; 17:31; Rom 2:2–3, 5, 16; 11:33; 1 Cor 5:13; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 4:1; Heb 12:23; 13:4; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 14:7; 16:7; 18:8; 19:1–2), the Son (John 5:22, 27, 30; 9:39; 12:48; Acts 10:42; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 11:32; 2 Tim 4:1; Heb 10:30; Rev 19:11), and the Holy Spirit (John 16:8, 11).

Oppositely from the world, the Son (John 1:10–12) and the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; 14:17) are received by believers. Sinners become believers and concurrently experience the “new birth” that is sometimes described as a spiritual circumcision of the heart. This is both a christological and pneumatological experience of conversion that happens ἐν Χριστῷ (*en Christō*) or “in Christ” (Phil 3:3; Col 2:11–12) and ἐν πνεύματι (*en pneúmati*) or “in the Spirit” (Rom 2:28–29⁸⁷; Phil 3:3). Also, the Son (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26–27) intercede for those who come to God.

This conversion experience prepares believers for the experience of “walking” the Christian “walk.” The New Testament often uses the metaphor of “walking” (from the Greek verb περιπατέω [*peripatéō*])—as does the Old Testament—to describe the way in which believers are to behave or conduct their lives.⁸⁸ It is an ethical metaphor. The believer’s experience of “walking” is prescribed to be experienced both ἐν Χριστῷ (*en Christō*; Col 1:10; 2:6; 1 Thess 4:1–12; 1 John 2:6) and ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος (*en kainótēti pneúματος*) or “in the newness of the Spirit” (Rom 6:4; cf. 7:6), ἐν πνεύματι or “in the Spirit” (1 Cor 3:1–3; Gal 5:16; 1 Thess 4:1–12), or κατὰ πνεῦμα (*katà pneúma*) or “according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). This Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered “walking” results in the believer bearing what is called the

⁸⁷See discussion in Trevor J. Burke, “Romans,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 134.

⁸⁸See “περιπατέω,” BDAG, 803.

καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός (*karpòs tou̅ pneumatòs*) or “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23). But the New Testament notes that fruit-bearing in the life of the believer is accomplished not only by the Holy Spirit (Rom 7:4–6; Gal 5:22–23), but also through the Son (Phil 1:6, 9–11). The believers are enabled to “walk” this new way of life and bear virtuous “fruit” by being taught by the Father (John 6:45; 7:16, 17; 8:28), the Son (John 7:14; 8:2; 8:20; 13:13–14), and the Holy Spirit (John 14:26) and by the experience of indwelling. Believers are indwelt or dwelt among by Christ (John 14:20, 23; 15:4–7; 17:23, 26; Rom 8:9–11; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27), the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19), and possibly even the Father (John 14:23; 1 Cor 3:16). Norman R. Gulley has a table in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* that succinctly summarizes some “qualities,” that are equally experienced by believers “in Christ” and “in the Spirit,” (see **tab. 3**).⁸⁹

Table 3. Shared Qualities of Being “in the Son” and “in the Holy Spirit”

Qualities	“In the Spirit”	“In Christ”
righteousness	Rom 14:17	2 Cor 5:21
justification	1 Cor 6:11	Gal 2:17
faith	1 Cor 12:9	Gal 3:26
sanctification	1 Cor 6:11	1 Cor 1:2
peace	Rom 14:17	Phil 6:7
joy	Rom 14:17	Phil 3:1; 4:4
love	Col 1:8	Rom 8:39
sealing	Eph 4:30	Eph 1:13
charisma (gift)	1 Cor 12:9	Rom 6:23
standing	Phil 1:27	Phil 4:1
being in	Rom 8:9	1 Cor 1:30
being filled	Eph 5:18	Col 2:10
speaking	1 Cor 12:3	2 Cor 2:17
testifying	Rom 9:1	Eph 4:17

⁸⁹Norman R. Gulley, *Creation, Christ, Salvation*, vol. 3 of *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 681. “This sharing of qualities,” says Gulley, “does not negate the functional distinctions among the Trinity in carrying out the work of salvation. The Father does the sending of His Son. The Son is the only One who became also human and lived a human life and died a substitutionary death, totally dependent upon the Father and Spirit. The Spirit is the One who brought Christ to be born as the Son of Man through Mary in a miracle of the Trinity” (ibid.).

the temple	Eph 2:22	Eph 2:21
one body	1 Cor 12:13	Rom 12:5
<hr/>		
Source: Norman R. Gulley, <i>Creation, Christ, Salvation</i> , vol. 3 of <i>Systematic Theology</i> , 4 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 681.		

This whole post-conversion experience of the believer, commonly called sanctification is often wrongly credited to the Holy Spirit exclusively. According to the New Testament, while believers are indeed sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:4; 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Thess 4:3, 7–8; 1 Pet 1:2), the Father (John 17:17–19; 1 Thess 4:7–8; 5:23) and the Son (1 Cor 1:2, 30; Eph 5:26–27; Col 1:22; 1 Thess 3:13; Heb 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12) are also deeply involved in the work of sanctifying the believer ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (*en Christō Iēsoū*) or “in Christ Jesus” (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 1:2) or ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (*en tō onōmati tou kyriou Iēsoū*) in “the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 6:11).

Finally, spiritual gifts are imparted to believers to equip them for service in edifying the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor 12:7; 14:4–5, 12, 26; Eph 4:11–13). While the Holy Spirit is emphasized as the primary giver of these gifts in 1 Cor 12 (esp. vv. 7–11; cf. Heb 2:4), it is also a work of the Father (1 Cor 12:6) and the Son (1 Cor 12:5). Moreover, the discussion of gift-giving in Eph 4 is intriguingly focused on the Son (vv. 7–16), although the whole Trinity—including the Father (v. 6) and the Holy Spirit (vv. 3–4)—is mentioned to introduce the Son’s act of gift-giving (vv. 1–6). The New Testament also presents both christological and pneumatological connections to individual spiritual gifts. As an example, the Holy Spirit is said to be the source of wisdom (σοφία [*sofia*]), knowledge (γνώσις [*gnōsis*]), and understanding (σύνεσις [*synesis*]) (1 Cor 2:6–16; 12:8, 11; Eph 1:17; Col 1:9), and so also is the Son (1 Cor 1:23–24, 30; Col 2:2–3, 8). Another example can be found in the book of Revelation, where both the Son (Rev 1:1–3, 9; 12:17) and the Holy Spirit (1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 19:10) are involved in the giving of

revelation or prophecy to John and the prophets.⁹⁰

There is much more canonical data available that could be supplied, which identifies overlapping roles and shared activities of the economic Trinity throughout salvation history.⁹¹ That which was provided is sufficient to assert that Scripture appears to support the well-known Trinitarian saying, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, meaning “the external works of the Trinity are indivisible.” In other words, “the actions of any one of the persons of the Trinity are actually actions in which all three persons participate.”⁹²

⁹⁰Ranko Stefanovic shows how deeply the concepts of “the testimony of Jesus” and “the Spirit of prophecy” are interconnected in the book of Revelation (see “The ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ in the Revelation of John,” in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, ed. Dwain Neilson Esmond and Alberto R. Timm [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2015], 186–197). He demonstrates that “‘the testimony of Jesus’ is the self-revelation of Jesus to His church given through the gift of prophecy” (ibid., 193) and that “the spirit of prophecy” means that “the Spirit ... inspires and puts into the mouth of the prophet the words of Christ enabling them to communicate the prophetic word to God’s people on earth” (ibid.). Thus, the two together, as in Rev. 19:10, mean that “‘the testimony of Jesus’ is ‘the word of God’ conveyed by Christ as His testimony to the church by means of ‘the spirit of prophecy’” (ibid.). An example of the Son and the Holy Spirit both revealing prophecy is seen in the messages to the seven churches. John Christopher Thomas points out that while “the refrain” at the end of each of the seven messages—which says “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)—“places emphasis upon what the Spirit is saying, it is clear that these words are the prophetically spoken words of the resurrected Jesus, who begins speaking in 1.17 and continues uninterrupted until 3.22, making it clear that the words the Spirit is saying are coterminous with the words prophetically spoken by Jesus. In point of fact, Jesus himself makes this identification between his words and that which the Spirit is saying. Such a declaration is reminiscent of the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit of Truth in the Fourth Gospel (FG), where the Spirit will say what he hears and make known the things of Jesus (John 16.13–15). This refrain also puts the hearers on notice that the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is an especially close one in the Apocalypse. ... Jesus and the Spirit speak with one voice” (“Revelation,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014], 259). See also Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 32. All of this demonstrates how the Son and the Holy Spirit both share the function of giving revelation and prophecy.

⁹¹See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 308; idem, *Tampering with the Trinity?*, 123–132.

⁹²Idem, *Christian Theology*, 308. See Augustine, *Trin.* 1.5.8; 1.8.15–9.19; *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 20.3; Calvin, *Institutes* 2.12.2. See also Ambrose, *Spir.* 1.3.40. Whereas the Trinitarian oneness that Augustine and Calvin asserted is shared, the metaphysical explanations with which they achieve this oneness seem to cause other theological problems. Additionally, the reality of Trinitarian oneness in action does not deny that Scripture teaches some functional differences among the three persons (e.g., only the Son became incarnated). However, these differences are clearly restricted to the time and operations of creation, redemption, and consummation, and, thus, they do not imply eternal, ontological and/or functional, unilateral authority and submission. For a helpful explanation of these functional differences, see Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 520–523.

The Mutual-Reciprocal Nature of Intra-Trinitarian Submission

Finally, there are several lines of biblical evidence that support *mutual* and *reciprocal* submission among the persons of the Trinity in the plan of redemption, instead of a hierarchical order of authority and submission.

The Mutual-Reciprocal Relationship of the Father and the Son

First, consider the economic relationship of the Father and the Son. While there is, indeed, a temporary, voluntary, and functional self-humiliation of the Son during the incarnation *qua* human, in which he offered obedience to the Father's will, there is also an equalizing temporary, functional "submission" of the Father to the Son that Fernando L. Canale refers to as "delegation."⁹³ Notice the following three texts from the gospel of John: (1) John 3:35 states, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand;" (2) the first clause of John 13:3 reads, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands;" and (3) the first part of John 16:15 says, "All that the Father has is mine." The Father has surrendered everything pertaining to the plan of redemption to the Son's authority, including the judgment, which determines the salvation of all (John 5:22). Canale points out that "[i]n delegating everything to the Son, the Father is binding Himself to the results of Christ's salvific mission."⁹⁴ This submission or "delegation" of the Father is the precise counterpart of the Son's temporary incarnate submission in the economic Trinity.

This mutual, functional submission of the Father and Son can also be seen in the complex Pauline passage, 1 Cor 15:24–28. While advocates of EFS/ERAS have used this passage

⁹³See Canale, "Doctrine of God," 126.

⁹⁴Ibid., 128.

extensively to support eternal submission of the Son to the Father,⁹⁵ but it does not need to be read in this way. It should be noted that, even if this passage does indicate an eternal submission of the Son to the Father, at most, it can only be used to proffer a submission of the Son to the Father that extends forever forward into the future from the temporal-historical point of reference in the passage—the enthronement of the Son as the priest-king. In other words, 1 Cor 15:24–28 nowhere speaks of an eternal submission of the Son to the Father that extends forever backward into the past, as some suggest. Arguably, this passage does not indicate such a future intra-Trinitarian reality, and neither does it speak of God’s eternal inner life.⁹⁶ Instead, this passage seems to emphasize intra-Trinitarian *mutuality* and *reciprocity*.⁹⁷

Martin F. Hanna helpfully maps out the mutual and reciprocal submission that takes place between the Father and the Son in this passage. First, “[t]he Father has put (*hupotasso*, submitted) all things under Christ’s feet (1 Cor 15:27).”⁹⁸ This is the “delegation” of the Father

⁹⁵For examples, see Dahms, “The Subordination of the Son,” 351–353; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249; Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 549–559; Stephen D. Kovach, “Egalitarians Revamp Doctrine of the Trinity,” *CBMW News* 2.1 (1996): 4. See also Keener, “Subordination within the Trinity,” 47–49.

⁹⁶Holmes argues, “the teaching of Paul in Corinthians [15] that the last act of God’s saving work will be the Son’s handing over the Kingdom to the Father might appear to speak of an act of submission or subordination in eternity, but again it is, if the language may be allowed, the wrong eternity: it is the consummation of the divine work, not an aspect of the divine life” (“Classical Trinitarianism,” 97).

⁹⁷Gulley also sees mutual Trinitarian submission present in this passage. He writes, “In love the Father makes all enemies subject to Christ (lifting the crucified Christ which draws all to Christ, and causes them to bow and proclaim His justice). Thus, in love, the Father makes Christ the head of all things in heaven and on earth which will continue in the age to come (eternity). The other reference [1 Cor 15:28] says that the Son subjects Himself to His Father, whom He loved to glorify when on earth. Here is an insight into the mutual magnification of each other, which is compatible with Trinitarian reciprocal love” (*God as Trinity*, 153). Reeve too sees this mutuality of submission and suggests that this passage “must be balanced with the recognition that ‘all the fullness dwelt in Christ’ (Col 1:19) and the Father likewise places all things under Christ (Eph 1:22) and places Christ’s name above all names (Phil 2:9–10)” (“First Corinthians 11:2–16,” 250–251).

⁹⁸Martin F. Hanna, “Men and Women in Church Order,” in *Women and Ordination: Biblical and Historical Studies*, ed. John W. Reeve (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 299. See also the more compressed discussion in idem and Cindy Tutsch, eds., *Questions and Answers about Women’s Ordination* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2014), 33–34.

to the Son about which Canale writes.⁹⁹ The exception at the end of 1 Cor 15:27, that all except the Father is put under Christ's feet, should be understood in the context of the passage's theme: Christ's victorious death and resurrection has resulted in the defeat of death and the grave for redeemed humanity, which will be realized fully in the eschatological resurrection. Thus, the exception clause of 1 Cor 15:27 communicates that the "submission of the Father [to the Son] is complete, but [that] He is not in submission under the feet of Christ as an enemy."¹⁰⁰

Second, Christ reciprocates and "submits 'when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father' (15:24). Therefore, 'When all things are made subject (*hupotasso*) to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject (*hupotasso*) to Him who put (*hupotasso*) all things under Him, that God may be all in all' (15:28)."¹⁰¹ Now, what is the nature of this submission of the Son and his kingdom to the Father at the end of time?

The Son's submission in this passage should not be understood as *ontological* submission. Rather, in context of the whole chapter, the Son submits himself as the second Adam (15:21–22), the representative and mediator of the kingdom of redeemed humanity. As the second Adam and mediator of the covenant, Jesus is described in 15:20–28 as being enthroned and inaugurated as the heavenly priest-king. This is clear from the language of the passage, which matches that of other New Testament passages that reference the Son's enthronement and inauguration as the priest-king after his ascension (cf. Ps 45:6–7; 110:1–2; Dan 7:13–14; Matt 22:41–46; 25:31–34, 41; 26:57, 62–66; 28:18; Mark 12:35–37; 16:19; Luke 20:41–44; John 3:35; 5:22; 13:3; 17:2; Acts 2:22–41; 5:29–32; 7:54–56; Rom 8:31–34; 1 Cor 15:20–28; Eph

⁹⁹Canale, "Doctrine of God," 126.

¹⁰⁰Hanna, "Men and Women," 306n19.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 299.

1:3–23; 2:1–10; Phil 2:9–11; Col 1:13–20; 2:8–15; 3:1–17; 1 Tim 6:13–16; Heb 1:1–14; 2:5–18; 5:5–6; 8:1–2; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:18–22; Rev 4–5; Rev 11:15–18; 12:5, 10; 19:11–16). Furthermore, whenever allusions to Pss 2:7–9; 45:6–7; and/or 110:1–2 occur in the New Testament (as in 1 Cor 15:24–28), the resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ as the inaugurated priest-king is in view.¹⁰² Therefore, it is at the eschaton when the Son submits himself in this redemptive *role* with its *functions* to the Father.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, this submission does not bring an end to the Son’s kingdom. Elsewhere his

¹⁰²Note that the whole concern of Paul in 1 Cor 15 is the resurrection of Christ and its subsequent consequences (Christ’s priest-king work of defeating his enemies, especially death, and resurrecting his followers).

¹⁰³Calvin observed that this passage is “at first view at variance with what we read in various passages of Scripture respecting the eternity of Christ’s kingdom” (*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols., trans. John Pringle [Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1848], 2:31). He asked, “For how will these things correspond—*Of his kingdom there will be no end*, (Dan 7:14, 27; Luke 1:33; 2 Pet 1:11) and *He himself shall be subjected?*” (ibid., 2:31). He resolved this by stating, “We acknowledge, ... , God as ruler, but it is in the face of the man Christ. But Christ will then restore the kingdom which he has received, that we may cleave wholly to God. Nor will he in this way resign the kingdom, but will transfer it in a manner from his humanity to his glorious divinity” (ibid., 2:32). To explain what Calvin meant by this, the editor of the commentary footnoted a comment by John Dick: “The mediatorial kingdom of Christ ... will end when its design is accomplished; he will cease to exercise an authority which has no longer an object. When all the elect are converted by the truth, and, being collected into one body, are presented to the Father ‘a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;’ ... nothing will remain to be done by the power with which our Saviour was invested at his ascension; and his work being finished, his commission will expire. ... [S]o our Redeemer, who now sways the sceptre of the universe, will return his delegated power to him for whom he received it, and a new order of things will commence under which the dependence of men upon the Godhead will be immediate; and Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one in essence, counsel, and operation, will reign for ever over the inhabitants of heaven” (John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 2 vols. [n.p.: M. W. Dodd, 1850], 2:141). Thus, both Calvin and Dick connected this submission of the Son to the Father to the consummation of Christ’s mediatory ministry for humanity so that human beings can once again commune directly with all the persons of the Trinity. This makes God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—“all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). This particular discovery is dependent upon Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 154. See also Augustine, *Trin.* 1.8.15–10.21; Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 333–334. Timothy J. Arena suggests a similar explanation that focuses on Christ as the second Adam, stating that “the most plausible explanation for the subjection of [the Son in] verse 28 is that Christ is here subjecting Himself as the Representative of humanity, the ideal Man who reversed the curse of the Fall, gave life to the dead, and is restoring all things” (“Eternally Equal: A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Analysis of Intertrinitarian Relationships” [paper presented at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and the 2016 Autumn Symposium of the Adventist Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, 16 November 2016], 34, <http://www.atsjats.org/site/1/docs/2016/papers-triune-god/Arena%20-%20Eternally%20Equal%20-%20ATS%202016.pdf>). In this way, the eschatological submission of Christ can be read not as ontological, but as merely functional. Thus, a key point of the passage is “Trinitarian mutuality” (ibid.). See also Butner, Jr., *Son Who Learned Obedience*, 162–172; Petersen, *God in 3 Persons*, 17–18; Roland D. Meyer, “A Study of Paul’s Concept of the Saving Act of 1 Corinthians 15:27–28,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. Paul B. Petersen and Robert K. McIver (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 47–63.

rule is said to be eternal (Ps 45:6; Isa 9:6–7; Dan 7:14, 27; Luke 1:33; 1 Tim 6:13–16; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:11). The Son rules at the right hand of God and his throne as the inaugurated priest-king after his ascension (Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42; 22:69; Acts 2:33–34; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). However, texts that refer to the time during or after the *parousia* and the consummation of all things, the throne is said to be equally occupied by and belonging to both the Father (Matt 5:34; 23:22; Heb 8:1; 12:2; Rev 1:4; 3:21; 4:2, 9–10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10–11, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5) and the Son (“his throne” in Matt 19:28; 25:31; Rev 12:5?; “your throne” in Heb 1:8; “my throne” in Rev 3:21); it is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1, 3). The Son, with the Father, sits in the middle or center (*ἀνά μέσον* [*ana meson*]) of their throne (Rev 7:17), not merely at God’s right hand. At that time, the kingdom will be transferred from the Son and mutually shared in the Godhead forever (cf. Dan 2:44; Rev 1:6; 11:15).

Furthermore, it is helpful to understand 1 Cor 15:24–28 in light of the reciprocal love of the Trinity and the mutual submission and magnification between the Father and the Son that was already discussed. This harmonizes the apparent contradiction between the subjugation of everything under the Son in Eph 1:10, 20–23 so that he may “fill all in all” and the subjugation of everything under the Father in 1 Cor 15:24–28 so that “God may be all in all.” This eschatological act of the Son and the Father completes the plan of redemption and places all under the Godhead so that “the Father, Son, and Spirit as God will be all in all.”¹⁰⁴ In light of this, the most contextually appropriate reading of 1 Cor 15:24–28 is of a soteriological-eschatological (economic) nature rather than of a theo-ontological kind.

¹⁰⁴Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 154. See also Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 128.

The Mutual-Reciprocal Relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit

Also consider the economic relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As previously noted, advocates of EFS/ERAS claim that the Holy Spirit offers a “one-way” eternal submission to the Son (*filioque*), as well as to the Father. The New Testament shows that the Holy Spirit does indeed function in a servant role during the post-ascension and pre-*parousia* period. In this period, the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father (John 14:16–18) and by the Son (John 16:7), receives the truth content he is to give to the disciples from both the Son (John 16:13) and the Father (John 16:14–15), and is supposed to testify of and glorify the Son (John 15:26; 16:14). Thus, one could say that the Holy Spirit functionally and temporarily submits to the Father and the Son during this period until his redemptive role is accomplished (though submission does not need to be read into these passages).¹⁰⁵

However, there is also much biblical evidence that shows that the Holy Spirit did not submit to the Son prior to this period of time, but that the inverse was true. As Graham A. Cole says, “So very often these days the Spirit is subordinated to Jesus in our thinking. But pre-Pentecost the incarnate Son is very much under the empowerment of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁶ In particular, during the incarnation, the Son is described as living obediently to and dependently upon the Holy Spirit. Gulley comments, “As the Son of Man on earth, Christ was subordinate to the Holy

¹⁰⁵See Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 147–148.

¹⁰⁶Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 150. Abraham Kuyper said, “... the Church has never sufficiently confessed the influence of the Holy Spirit exerted on the work of Christ. The general impression is that the work of the Holy Spirit begins when the work of the mediator on earth is finished, as tho [*sic*] until that time the Holy Spirit celebrated His divine day of rest. Yet the Scripture teaches us again and again that Christ performed His mediatorial work *controlled* and *impelled* by the Holy Spirit,” (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 97, as cited in *ibid.*; emphasis added). Fesko also notes that the fact that “the Spirit plays an important role with regard to the Son’s mission” has been “forgotten or overlooked,” (*Trinity and the Covenant*, 342).

Spirit who made His incarnation possible (Matt 1:18–20; Luke 1:35).¹⁰⁷ After the Son’s anointing of the Holy Spirit to his earthly ministry at his baptism (Matt 3:16), he was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where the devil severely tempted him. In his account, Mark employs the strong term ἐκβάλλω (*ekballō*), meaning “to throw out,” to communicate the idea of the Holy Spirit “driving” or “compelling” the Son to enter into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). Furthermore, the Son’s earthly ministry involved perpetual submission to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁸ He was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1), who anointed and sent him to “proclaim the good news to the poor,” “to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19), and to “cast out demons” “by the Spirit of God” (Matt 12:28). Thus, when the Son declared in John 5:30, “I can do nothing on my own,” he not only voluntarily, temporarily submitted to the Father in his incarnated ministry but also implicitly to the Holy Spirit (John 5:19). Therefore, “Jesus lived under the authority of the Spirit. ... There is a subordination of the Son to the Spirit as the Son carries out his messianic vocation.”¹⁰⁹ As Cole states, all of this reveals that there is “a story of successive subordinations” in the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁰ “In the state of humiliation the Messiah is directed by the Spirit. In the state of glory, the vindicated Messiah directs the Spirit.”¹¹¹

Furthermore, the Son is dependent on the Holy Spirit to represent him, to testify of and

¹⁰⁷Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 145.

¹⁰⁸See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 29–30, 34; idem, *The Holy Spirit*, 6.

¹⁰⁹Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 171.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 207.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

glorify him, and to make his presence available to his disciples during his absence between his ascension and second advent (John 14:16–19; 15:26; 16:5–8, 14). “So the Spirit is dependent upon Christ to be sent, to know what to say, and to bring glory to Christ. But at the same time Christ is dependent upon the Holy Spirit to be made spiritually present on earth while He ministers bodily in heaven’s sanctuary.”¹¹² Therefore, the submission between the Son and the Holy Spirit during the period from the ascension to the *parousia* is not *unilateral*, but *bilateral*, that is, *voluntarily* and *mutually* reciprocated between them.¹¹³

Intriguingly, Ware, one of the key proponents of EFS/ERAS, acknowledges the submission of the Son to the Holy Spirit in addition to the submission of the Holy Spirit to the Son, yet he only limits the Son’s submission to the Holy Spirit to the economy.¹¹⁴ He writes,

Although Jesus was fully God, as a man he chose to rely not on his own divine nature but on the power of the Spirit. ... In short, the ‘human Jesus’ needed the Spirit in ways that the ‘divine Jesus’ simply did not ... need him. But since Jesus came as ‘one of us,’ as it were, as a full human being who lived our life and died in our place, he came in need of the Spirit of God to empower his life, ministry, obedience, miracles, and all that he did in obedience to the Father. Understanding that Jesus lived his life as a human being, in reliance on the Holy Spirit, is important in making sense of how Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, could submit himself fully to the Spirit.¹¹⁵

It is curious as to why Ware chooses to read the economic submission of the Holy Spirit to the Son into the Trinity *ad intra*, but restricts the Son’s economic submission to the Holy Spirit to the Trinity *ad extra*. It would seem that the principle of consistency would require that

¹¹²Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 148.

¹¹³Aurelius Ambrosius (c. 340–397), or simply Ambrose, pointed out the presence of mutuality in the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit when he wrote, “The Spirit was upon Christ; and ... as He sent the Spirit, so the Spirit sent the Son of God. For the Son of God says: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He hath anointed Me, He hath sent Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind’” (*Spir.* 3.1.1, as cited in Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit*, 25).

¹¹⁴See Ware’s discussion in *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*, 87–98.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 91.

both or neither forms of submission between the Son and the Holy Spirit be understood immanently, especially since both forms of submission are framed economically in the New Testament. Nevertheless, he provides no rationale or textual support for his selectivity. Apparently, Ware chooses to limit Jesus's submission to the Holy Spirit only to the economy *a priori* in order to maintain his unilateral hierarchy of the immanent Trinity in which "the Son is ... under the Father but over the Spirit."¹¹⁶ Thus, his presuppositions seem to overrule the implications of the actual data in the New Testament text.

Bird appears to do the same thing as Ware. He affirms EFS/ERAS¹¹⁷ *and* recognizes the Son's submission and obedience to the Holy Spirit, which he calls the Spirit's "dominance" over the Son. He writes,

The Gospels depict the Messiah as the bearer and dispenser of the Spirit. That is why so much in Jesus' life and ministry can be closely connected to the Holy Spirit. ... The Holy Spirit can even be considered the *dominant* partner in their work. That is why Jesus does not do any miracles until he himself receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism. That *dominance* is expressed when the Spirit "led" Jesus into the wilderness to face the accuser and to win the victory over Satan that Adam and Israel failed to win (Matt 4:1–11/Luke 4:1–13). Jesus engages in his itinerant ministry "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). Jesus even experienced "joy through the Holy Spirit" (10:21).¹¹⁸

Again, he appears to regulate the Son's submission to the Holy Spirit to the economy (*ad extra*), yet casts the Holy Spirit's submission to the Son into their relations *ad intra*. Thus, both Ware and Bird, though acknowledging the Son's submission to the Holy Spirit in the economy, still fall prey, as do most other exponents of EFS/ERAS, to the exclusivity of thinking that was pointed out by Cole.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 97.

¹¹⁷Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 120.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 624–625; emphasis added.

All of the above representative scriptural evidences—and those not discussed due to present limitations—lead one to the conclusion that the submission in the economic Trinity is qualified by being *mutually experienced* among all the persons of the Godhead and *temporally limited* to the time in which the plan of redemption is implemented for the saving of humanity (see **fig. 7**). It does not affect the ontological equality of the immanent Trinity because it is not an inner history of eternity past, nor does it appear to be carried into eternity future. Once the plan of redemption is fully consummated, the submission in the economic Trinity is likewise ended (1 Cor 15:24–28).

Therefore, an exclusive, unilateral, eternal, functional submission model of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son is not reflected in Scripture.

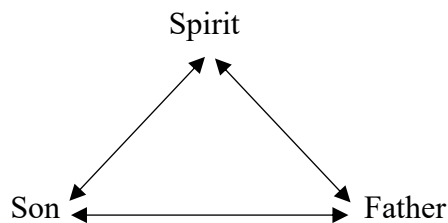


Figure 7. Mutual-Reciprocal Model of the Trinity

Scripture’s Description of the Eternal Intra-relationships of the Trinity

Finally, proponents of EFS/ERAS assert that the eternal relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit *ad intra* are biblically ordered in terms of eternal authority and submission, arranging their relationships vertically in a unilateral hierarchy, and that this ordering is the only fundamental difference by which they can be distinguished. Without it, one could not tell the three persons apart from one another.¹¹⁹ However, while Scripture does

¹¹⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251; *Evangelical Feminism*, 406, 433.

describe their *economic* relationships in vertically oriented terms of authority and obedient submission at times,¹²⁰ it discusses their *eternal* intra-Trinitarian relationships in *horizontally* oriented terms, namely love.

At the most fundamental level of his nature, God is love. John wrote in 1 John 4:8, 16, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*. ... So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. *God is love*, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”¹²¹ Theologian Richard Rice comments,

Another factor that contributes to the concept of the trinity is the nature of love. Love is inherently social; it involves relationship between the lover and the recipient or object of love. In other words, love requires an object of devotion. Accordingly, if love is what God *is*, as Christians affirm, if love is the very essence of the divine reality, then there must never have been a time when God did not love. God must have experienced love within himself from all eternity. The understanding of Father, Son, and Spirit as relations of love within the divine reality makes this comprehensible.¹²²

Indeed, this is how Scripture describes eternal intra-Trinitarian relations. Speaking to the Father in prayer, Jesus said, “‘you loved me *before the foundation of the world* [πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (*pro katabolēs kosmou*)]’” (John 17:24).¹²³ Throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity, the persons of the Trinity have experienced an inner history of love with one another that eternally pre-dates

¹²⁰Neither does the Bible speak about eternal intra-Trinitarian relations in terms of origin or derivation or processions (i.e., the Father is *unbegotten* [paternity], the Son is *begotten* [filiation or generation], and the Holy Spirit is *spirated* [spiration]). This will be addressed later in the section below that discusses Christian church history.

¹²¹Emphasis added. “Love describes the inner reality of God. ... Love is the essence of God’s nature. Love is what it means to be God. According to the Bible, love is not only God’s most important quality; it is also his most fundamental quality. All his attributes arise from love. The assertion *God is love* therefore includes everything there is to say about God” (Richard Rice, *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, 2nd ed. [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997], 53–54; emphasis original).

¹²²*Ibid.*, 58; emphasis original.

¹²³Emphasis added. Note the clear textual indicator (i.e., πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου) that guides the reader permission to read what is said in this text about the relationship of the Father and the Son into the immanent Trinity.

the creation of the κόσμος (*kosmos*).

The nature of this eternal love is not unilateral but mutual-reciprocal, as was their economic submission shown to be. For just as Scripture declares the love of the Father for the Son (Matt 3:17; John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9–10; 17:23–24, 26), so too it proclaims the love of the Son for the Father (John 14:31). Furthermore, according to Paul, the Holy Spirit has divine love and is the source and dispenser of it to believers in Christ (Rom 5:5, 15:30; Gal 5:22; Col 1:8).¹²⁴ By inference, then, the Holy Spirit must also experience the divine love that he possesses and provides to others. Therefore, one can deduce that he too both loves the Father and the Son and is reciprocally loved by both of them. John C. Peckham describes these eternal intra-Trinitarian relations of mutual love in the following way:

whatever else may be said with regard to the relationship between God’s essence and love, since [1 Jn 4:8, 16] proclaims that ‘God is love,’ all that God *is* and *does* must be understood as congruent with divine love. That is, God’s character is itself love, and God is essentially loving. The members of the Trinity have always been involved in a love relationship (compare Jn 17:24). Intratrinitarian love is thus essential to God, a product of God’s trinitarian, essentially related nature. ... This requires a theo-ontology that allows for reciprocity Indeed, such a theo-ontology is hinted at by the intratrinitarian love relationship, three coeternal persons (centers of consciousness) in love relationship with one another who equal the one God (Jn 17:24).¹²⁵

The mutuality of their love is manifested *ad extra* in their reciprocal glorification and testimony of one another. The Holy Spirit glorifies (John 16:14) and testifies about (15:26) the

¹²⁴Intriguingly, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” is placed in parallel with “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the love of God” in a Trinitarian benediction (2 Cor 13:14; cf. Phil 2:1).

¹²⁵John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 252, 257; emphasis original. Gulley similarly says, “Scripture presents God as a relational Trinity, in which the three Persons of the Godhead experience an eternal divine, reciprocal love among themselves, which necessitates a temporal experience in the give-and-take exchange in their nature as a God of love. God is a relational God. This must be said before anything else, because this is how the Father, Son, and Spirit have existed together forever. This is what they have always experienced. This what they will always experience. There is nothing else they could experience and still be the God of love. We gain insights into their inner history from their revelation in human history, from biblical revelation” (*God as Trinity*, 3).

Son. The Son parallels, glorifying and testifying about the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31–32; Mark 3:29; Luke 10:21; 12:10; John 3:3, 5–8, 10–13; 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15) as well as about the Father (2:16; 9:3–4; 11:40; 12:28; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1, 4–5; 21:19) and himself (1:14; 2:11; 8:12–14, 18; 13:31–32; 17:5, 24). Likewise, the Father glorifies (John 5:22–23; 8:50, 54; 13:31–32; 17:1, 5, 22) and testifies about the Son (John 5:32; 6:27; 8:18) and glorifies himself (John 4:23; 12:28; 13:31–32). Presumably the Spirit also glorifies the Father (if not at the least by inspiring Christian worship [Eph 5:18–20; Col 3:16] and guiding biblical authors, such as Paul, to glorify the Father in Scripture [e.g., Phil 1:9, 11; 2:10–11; 4:19–20]).

Therefore, when Scripture speaks about the eternal relations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit *ad intra*, they are horizontal in orientation, characterized by eternal, mutual-reciprocal love. This is manifested in their mutual actions of glorifying and testifying of one another *ad extra*. It is also displayed in their relations of authority and submission, which—though vertically oriented—are also mutual relations (see above). These relations are exclusively relations *ad extra*, that is economic relations established in covenant by the persons of the Trinity “for the works.”¹²⁶

In sum, the Bible nowhere connects the EFS/ERAS model of the triune God to male-female relations. Those advocates of EFS/ERAS who have made such an one-to-one analogy for the purpose of buttressing their position of the submission of women to men in the gender debate have employed deficient hermeneutics that have provided an inadequate model for understanding the Trinity from Scripture.¹²⁷ If they desire to maintain the submission of women to men in the

¹²⁶A common phrase quoted by my seminary professor John W. Reeve in numerous conversations with me concerning the Trinity. It is originally from Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–298–373 CE), who used it to qualify Jesus’s submission against the subordinationism of Arians as a temporary economic submission, especially when explaining Prov 8:22–31 christologically. See *C. Ar.* 2.19–22 (*NPNF*² 4:4372–4392).

¹²⁷The complementarian, Robert Letham, recognizes the magnitude of grounding the submission of women to men “ontologically in the being of God,” and how it strongly reinforces the complementarian position by

family, church, and society, they should attempt to do so on other grounds, and not on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹²⁸

Furthermore, an eternal, unilateral hierarchy of authority and submission between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is also absent from the available data in Scripture. Rather, upon hermeneutically careful examination, a horizontally oriented picture of eternal reciprocal love (*ad intra*) and temporary mutual submission (*ad extra*) in history between the persons of the Trinity emerges from the biblical text, which affirms their eternal, essential equality both ontologically and economically.

Theological Problems of EFS/ERAS

Finally, EFS/ERAS has several negative implications for Christian theology. Only a few of these can be assessed here due to present constraints. If the logical and systematic implications of EFS/ERAS are advanced, they inevitably lower Christ functionally, and, arguably, ontologically (as discussed below), to the position of a mere subordinate of the Father. This lowering of God the Son logically leads to grave systematic consequences for the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of salvation, theodicy (i.e., the character of God), and Christian ethics, that is if one is being consistent and coherent. This is apparent in the following

essentially eliminating any past or future possibility for functional equality between men and women (“The Man-Woman Debate,” 74). He writes, “Consequently, the headship of the man is not a punishment on the woman deriving from the fall and is not therefore something which redemption in Christ is designed to erode and to replace. It is not a past phenomenon which we have a duty and privilege to eradicate. Instead, it belongs to the future. Since it is grounded ultimately on the eternal relations of the Trinity and is native to man from creation, sin has not introduced it but spoiled and defaced it, while redemption is not to replace it but to fulfill and to purify it. It is to be embodied increasingly and progressively in this present age. ... It will be perfected at the parousia” (ibid.).

¹²⁸Woodrow W. Whidden II, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve agree: “We would therefore suggest that the Trinity provides no compelling clues, one way or the other, when it comes to the issue of what sort of leadership roles each gender should receive in the church. We must decide the issue on other biblical principles” (*The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002], 277).

ways.

Consequences for the Doctrine of God's Triunity

A shocking philosophical incoherence can be found in EFS/ERAS; this incoherence entails grave consequences for one's doctrine of God, namely the illogical nature of God's special self-revelation (i.e., Scripture) and the denial of ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*).¹²⁹ As an example, notice how the following statement by Ware entails the above:

An authority-submission structure marks the *very nature of the eternal Being* of the one who is three. ... The Father possesses the place of supreme authority, and the Son is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. As such, the Son submits to the Father, just as the Father, as eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son. And the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son. This hierarchical structure of authority exists in the eternal Godhead even though it is also eternally true that each Person is fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence.¹³⁰

First, the question must be asked of Ware and those who support his above reasoning: how can there be an “authority-submission structure” in the “very nature” (which is another word for “essence”) of God all the while the three persons are still “fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence,” when the “very nature of the eternal Being” or the “commonly possessed essence” is “marked” by the Son submitting to the Father and the Holy Spirit submitting to the Father and the Son? In the above statement, the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit logically seem to be less than the person of the Father (and the Holy Spirit also less than the person of the Son) because the three persons share a common divine nature that is characterized by an necessitates an eternal hierarchy of tiers. Advocates of EFS/ERAS claim that the persons are fully equal because they share a common divine nature,

¹²⁹For other logical and philosophical problems with EFS/ERAS, see Erickson, *Tampering with the Trinity?*, 169–194.

¹³⁰Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 21; emphasis added.

but the very nature that they are said to share that makes them equal requires that the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit eternally submit to the person of the Father (and the Holy Spirit also eternally submits to the person of the Son). This is obviously and overtly contradictory.

Some complementarians who embrace EFS/ERAS, such as Grudem, bring this incoherence into the debate over human gender roles by establishing the relationship between the Father and the Son as the model for how husbands and wives are to relate. Grudem writes, “Just as the Father and Son are equal in deity and equal in all their attributes, but different in role, so husband and wife are equal in personhood and value, but they are different in their roles God has given them. Just as God the Son is eternally subject to the authority of God the Father, so God has planned that wives be subject to the authority of their husbands.”¹³¹ Yet, how can one who permanently submits in role because of an intrinsic ontological property, be equal in essence to the one to whom he or she submits?

Adam Omelianchuk highlights this inconsistency in the context of male-female relations: “Woman is subordinated to man solely by virtue of her femaleness; this is the decisive factor that assigns her to a place of subordination. Although woman is said to be equal [to man] in her essential being, she is considered subordinate (unequal) because of her essential being. Such a contradictory conclusion is incoherent and denies that the Bible is logical.”¹³² Applying Omelianchuk’s argument to the EFS/ERAS identifies the same inconsistency. If the Son

¹³¹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 46.

¹³²Adam Omelianchuk, “The Logic of Equality,” *Priscilla Papers* 22.4 (2008): 25. See also Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “‘Equal in Being, Unequal in Role’: Exploring the Logic of Woman’s Subordination,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 301–332. An interesting dialogue on this issue is found in Steven B. Cowan, “The Metaphysics of Subordination: A Response to Rebecca Merrill Groothuis,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14 (2009): 43–53; Adam Omelianchuk, “Ontologically Grounded Subordination: A Reply to Steven B. Cowan,” *Philosophia Christi* 13.1 (2011): 169–180; Cowan, “Complementarianism Unfazed: A Reply to Adam Omelianchuk,” *Philosophia Christi* 13.1 (2011): 181–187.

eternally submits to the Father because of his said intrinsic and essential property of being the Son, then it follows that the Son is not equal in essence to the Father. The contradiction primarily enters when one attaches the descriptors “eternal,” “permanent,” “essential,” “necessary,” and/or “unchanging/unchangeable” to the Son’s functional submission to the Father in a way that is “immutably person-defining,” or also when it is linked to a necessary ontological property of that person.¹³³ In such a case, the submission is no longer merely functional; it is ontological.

Thus, it seems tautological to suggest, as do some advocates of EFS/ERAS, that the Son is equal in essence yet eternally submits to the Father because he is ontologically the Son, just as it is to say, when applied to the arena of human gender, that women are equal in nature but permanently submit to men because of their ontological “femaleness.”¹³⁴ As Omelianchuk perceptively notes, such an assertion would imply that God’s self-revelation in “the Bible is illogical.”¹³⁵

Furthermore, some theologians claim that EFS/ERAS occasions the denial of ὁμοούσιος, that is the denial of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sharing or consubstituting in the *same* (ὁμο-) single divine nature (-ούσιος). The concept of ὁμοούσιος has been considered crucially important for any truly orthodox and monotheistic Trinitarianism, since arising out of the Arian controversy of the fourth century.¹³⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 298–373 CE); the

¹³³Kevin N. Giles, “Response to Michael Bird and Robert Shillaker: The Son is Not Eternally Subordinated in Authority to the Father,” *TrinJ* 30 (2009): 240.

¹³⁴A tautology is a “needless or meaningless repetition in close succession of an idea, statement, or word” (“Tautology,” *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, 2344).

¹³⁵Omelianchuk, “The Logic of Equality,” 25.

¹³⁶Arius (250 or 256–336 CE) was an ascetic and presbyter at the church of the Baucalis in Alexandria, Egypt, who is most well-known for the fourth-century controversy he agitated by his extreme subordinationist theism. Subordinationism was a basic model proposed to explain the Trinity that was later declared heresy. It excluded modalism by affirming the full personhood of the Son and the Spirit, but it “implied that the Son and the Spirit were secondary and tertiary subordinates to the one true God” ontologically (Giles, “Trinity and Subordinationism,” 273). Arius’s version of subordinationism asserted that since the Son is not an emanation of,

Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great of Caesarea (330–379 CE), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 331–395 CE), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390 CE); Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE); and others rigorously argued for the Trinitarian formula, μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, “one nature, three persons”), meaning that God consists of one single (i.e., *unum in numero*, “one in number” or “numerically one”) indivisible divine nature (Greek: οὐσία [*ousia*]; Latin: *substantia* or *essentia*) in which three divine *hypostases* or subsistences or persons (Greek: πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*)¹³⁷ or ὑποστάσεις [*hypostaseis*]; Latin: *personae, subsistentiae*, or *substantiae*) consubstist or share equally.¹³⁸

The term ὁμοούσιος helped to clarify the nature of that μία οὐσία and its relation to the τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις. In response to the Arian controversy, the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE was called by emperor Constantine to address this matter. Out of that council came a Christian creed, which was refined and expanded in 381 CE at the Council of Constantinople and reaffirmed at the Councils of Ephesus (431 CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE), known as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It excluded monarchianism,¹³⁹ Arian subordinationism, and tritheism

consubstantial with, or a being similar to the Father, he must out of necessity have a beginning. See Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 1:262–263. Thus, there was a time when he did not exist.

¹³⁷Note that, early on, the Greek word πρόσωπον, originally meaning “face” or “mask,” was used for “person” as a synonym for ὑποστάσεις. This term was associated with the Greek theatre; actors wore masks on stage in order to convey their character to the audience. The term was later abandoned and replaced by ὑποστάσεις because of its perceived modalistic implications, namely that that Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were merely “faces” or “masks” or “modes” of the one God.

¹³⁸For an example, see Augustine, *Trin.* 1.4.7–6.13; 5.8.10. See also the discussion in Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity*, 138–156.

¹³⁹Monarchianism, meaning “sole sovereignty,” was one of the first basic models of the Trinity proposed. The dynamic monarchianism (built on adoptionism) of Theodotus of Byzantium (who came to Rome around 190 CE) asserted that God the Father was the only supreme, eternal, self-existent God, and that Jesus “was an ordinary man, although a completely virtuous one,” who became Spirit-filled at his baptism to perform powerful miracles of God. Some of his followers believed that Jesus became divine at one point. See Guley, *God as Trinity*, 83; Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 142–143; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 303. Sabellius (fl. c. 217–c. 220) proposed modalistic monarchianism, which “denied all distinctions within the Godhead ... and affirmed that the Son and the Spirit were simply modes in which God appeared” (González, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:145). Noetus of Smyrna (c. 200

by championing the position of Athanasius that God is ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*; Latin: *consubstantialis*)¹⁴⁰ or one “same nature” in three ὑποστάσεις or “persons.” The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not merely ὅμοιος (*homoios*) or “similar,” ὁμοιούσιος (*homoiousios*) or “similar in nature,” and certainly not ἀνόμοιος (*anomoios*) or “unsimilar” and ἕτεροουσιος (*heteroousios*)¹⁴¹ or “different in nature.” Therefore, all of the essential or necessary incommunicable (e.g., eternity, aseity [i.e., self-existence], omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, sovereignty, etc.) and communicable (e.g., holiness, love, wisdom, truth, justice, etc.) attributes of deity that characterize the single divine nature are possessed fully, equally, and eternally by each of the three persons of the Trinity because each of the three persons share in the single same divine nature fully, equally, and eternally. The Son, as well as the Holy Spirit, is “of one substance with the Father” (cf. Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).¹⁴² All of this is to say that a denial of ὁμοούσιος is a serious accusation.

Using the philosophical categories of necessary/essential and contingent/accidental attributes,¹⁴³ Erickson reasons:

CE), Epigonus, and Praxeas also taught modalism in the second and third centuries, though in a less complete and sophisticated form. See Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 142–143; Gullely, *God as Trinity*, 83; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 304. Christianity did not adopt Theodotus’s or Sabellius’s versions of monarchianism for the obvious reason that the former rejected the full divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the latter denied their distinct personhood from the Father.

¹⁴⁰The Greek prefix ὁμο- is similar to the use of the “homo-” prefix in the English terms “homogeneous,” meaning “of the same kind,” and “homosexual,” meaning “of the same sex.”

¹⁴¹The Greek prefix ἕτερο- is similar to the use of the “hetero-” prefix in the English terms “heterogeneous,” meaning “of a different kind,” and “heterosexual,” meaning “of a different sex”

¹⁴²John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), 215–216, as cited in González, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:267.

¹⁴³Properties or attributes of any given object can be categorized into two basic types: (1) essential or necessary attributes and (2) accidental or contingent attributes. An attribute that is considered necessary and essential is one that an object must have and cannot lack to be that same kind of object at all times in all possible worlds. An attribute that is considered accidental or contingent is one that an object happens to have but could lack and still be the same kind of object. It has the property at some times in some possible worlds, but not at all times in all possible worlds. For example, consider the following statement: the red square has four right angles. The

If the Father's authority over the Son and Spirit and the Son's and Spirit's subordination to the Father is a part of the very structure of the Trinity, so that it could not be otherwise, then this superiority and subordination are not contingent, but necessary, characteristics of each of the persons. That means that they are not accidental but essential qualities, and the essence of the Son is different from and inferior to that of the Father. In other words, invariable and inevitable differences in authority imply ontological, as well as functional, subordination.¹⁴⁴

Thus, for Erickson, Ware's reasoning above is "equivalent to saying that [the Father and the Son, as well as the Holy Spirit,] are not *homoousios* with one another."¹⁴⁵

Using the tools of analytic philosophy¹⁴⁶—particularly the modal logic of *de re* (i.e., ontological) modality (as opposed to *de dicto* [i.e., notional] modality)¹⁴⁷ and possible worlds

property of possessing "four right angles" is an essential and necessary attribute. A square must have four right angles in order to be a square. If it lacked four right angles, then it would not be a square because the property of possessing four right angles pertains to the ontology or nature of a square. Now, the attribute "red" in the above statement is an example of an accidental or contingent attribute. A square may be red or it may be another color. A square is a square no matter its color. The square in the statement above just happens to be red. It could lack this attribute and still be a square by nature.

¹⁴⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 308. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis echoes this same concern: "If Christ's subordination is not limited to a specific project or function but characterizes his eternal relationship with God, then Christ is not merely functionally subordinate; he is by nature subordinate. Subordination is what he is, what he always has been, what he always will be. It is a matter of ontology (i.e., being), not merely of function" (*Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997], 57). See also idem, "'Equal in Being, Unequal in Role': Exploring the Logic of Woman's Subordination," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 301–333.

¹⁴⁵His full statement is, "If authority over the Son is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Father, and subordination to the Father is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Son, then something significant follows. Authority is part of the Father's essence, and subordination is part of the Son's essence, and each attribute is not part of the essence of the other person. That means that the essence of the Son is different from the essence of the Father. The Father's essence includes omnipresence, omniscience, love, etc., and authority over the Son. The Son's essence includes omnipresence, omniscience, love, etc., and submission to the Father. But that is equivalent to saying that they are not *homoousios* with one another" (*Tampering with the Trinity?*, 172). See also idem, "Language, Logic, and Trinity," 9–10.

¹⁴⁶For a helpful explanation of the analytic tradition in Western philosophy, see Aaron Preston, "Analytic Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, n.d., <https://www.iep.utm.edu/analytic/>.

¹⁴⁷For a helpful introduction to modal logic, see Johan van Benthem, "Modal Logic: A Contemporary View," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, n.d., <https://www.iep.utm.edu/modal-logic/>. For an explanation of the modalities *de re* and *de dicto*, see Alvin C. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 9–13.

semantics¹⁴⁸—Thomas H. McCall more strongly asserts that EFS/ERAS “flatly entails the denial of the *homoousion*.”¹⁴⁹ To demonstrate this, McCall first establishes the basic philosophical-theological assertion of EFS/ERAS as follows, focusing on the Father and the Son: “the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father in all time segments in all possible worlds; there are no time segments in any possible worlds in which the Son is not subordinate to the Father.”¹⁵⁰ He, then, argues that this assertion occasions the denial of ὁμοούσιος in this way:

- (1) If [EFS/ERAS] is true, then the Son has the property *being functionally subordinate in all time segments in all possible worlds*.
- (2) If the Son has this property in every possible world, then the Son has this property necessarily. Furthermore, the Son has this property with *de re* rather than *de dicto* necessity.
- (3) If the Son has this property necessarily (*de re*), then the Son has it essentially.
- (4) If [EFS/ERAS] is true, then the Son has this property essentially while the Father does not.
- (5) If the Son has this property essentially and the Father does not, then the Son is of a difference essence than the Father. Thus the Son is *heteroousios* rather than *homoousios*.¹⁵¹

The rest of McCall’s argument continues to demonstrate that EFS/ERAS seems to inescapably encounter this logical conundrum.¹⁵²

Certain theologians, some who accept and others who reject EFS/ERAS, have called Erickson’s and McCall’s above objections to EFS/ERAS into question, demanding that they

¹⁴⁸In modal logic, a possible world is any possible consistent state of affairs—“one that is possible in the broadly logical sense”—that must be “complete” or “maximal” (ibid., 44). “In other words, a possible world is a comprehensive conception of the way *all* things might be, where ‘all things’ includes the entire history of that possible world” (John C. Peckham, [*Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 6). At least and at most one and only one of these possible worlds obtains, or is actual. (See Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 45). The *actual* world, then, is simply one of the many possible worlds. In fact, “it is the maximal possible state of affairs that is actual, that has the distinction of actually obtaining” (ibid.).

¹⁴⁹McCall, *Which Trinity?*, 188.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 178.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 179–180.

¹⁵²See the rest of his argument in ibid., 180–188.

retract this particular objection.¹⁵³ Gons and Naselli’s response to Erickson and McCall is representative and worth quoting here at length in order to understand the full force of their very technical argumentation. After accusing McCall of equivocating “essential” with the divine “essence,” they make the following argument:

Does a fundamental [i.e., essential] property difference necessarily entail that the Father and the Son are not consubstantial? It depends. ... An eternal function is a necessary function, and a necessary function does indeed find its grounding in one or more essential or fundamental properties. So the Son’s eternal subordination to the Father in terms of his role or function in the Godhead derives from a fundamental difference between him and the Father. However, the Trinity has more than one referent to which *essential* or *fundamental* may rightly apply. The Trinity is more than essence; the Trinity is one essence *and* three persons, each of which may have fundamental properties. Properties of the essence are just as essential or fundamental to the essence as properties of the persons are to the persons. McCall’s argument leaves no room for this fundamental difference to be attributed to anything other than the one essence. ... The church has historically distinguished between (1) the one divine essence that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit hold in common and (2) the personal properties that differentiate each person from the others. ... The orthodox tradition has maintained that each person, each property bearer, has two sets of essential or fundamental properties:

1. The properties of the one *substantia* or οὐσία, which he shares equally with the other two persons
2. The properties of his unique *persona, subsistentia*, or ὑπόστασις, which belong to him alone

Consequently, there are four sets of essential or fundamental properties in the Trinity:

1. The properties of the one *substantia* or οὐσία
2. The properties of the Father’s unique *persona, subsistentia*, or ὑπόστασις
3. The properties of the Son’s unique *persona, subsistentia*, or ὑπόστασις
4. The properties of the Spirit’s unique *persona, subsistentia*, or ὑπόστασις

All of the properties of the one *substantia* or οὐσία belong equally to all three persons. The properties of the three *personas, subsistentias*, or ὑποστάσεις belong to only one of the three persons. ... [T]hey are unique incommunicable properties. Vital to any discussion about properties in the Trinity is identifying whether the property belongs to the one *substantia* or οὐσία or to one of the three *personas, subsistentias*, or ὑποστάσεις. ... According to EFS, *being in authority over the Son* inheres in what it means for the Father to be Father, not in what it means for the Father to be God; and *being in submission under the Father* inheres in what it means for the Son to be Son, not in what it means for the Son to be God. As such, these are not properties of the one essence, but

¹⁵³For examples, see Butner, Jr., *Son Who Learned Obedience*, 20–25; Gons and Naselli, “An Examination,” 195–213; Maxwell, “Authority Analogy?,” 541–570; Ware, “Denial of *Homousios?*,” 237–248. Previously, Butner, Jr., affirmed that neo-subordinationism entails a denial of ὁμοούσιος. See “Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will,” *JETS* 58.1 (2015): 131–149, esp. 131–132.

unique incommunicable properties of the persons that define their intratrinitarian relationships. Properties that inhere in the persons and not in the essence do not entail a denial of *homoousion*.¹⁵⁴

The problem with this response, and the others like it, is the sharp demarcation drawn between essential attributes of the divine nature and the differentiating essential properties of the three persons.¹⁵⁵ Distinguishing between essential attributes and personal properties does not appear to be problematic per se; without such distinction the three persons of the Trinity would have nothing to differentiate them essentially from one another other than the fact that each person is a unique bearer of the essential attributes of divinity.¹⁵⁶ However, these theologians seem to imply that essential personal properties cannot impact the essential attributes of the shared divine nature. Thus, according to them, as long as an essential distinction is attributed as an essential personal property, it has nothing to do with the divine essence. This would mean that the traditional personal properties of the Father's eternal¹⁵⁷ paternity, the Son's eternal

¹⁵⁴Gons and Naselli, "An Examination," 201–202, 204–205; emphasis original.

¹⁵⁵The following rebuttal is informed by McCall, *Which Trinity?*, 175–188; idem, "Gender and the Trinity Once More: A Review Article," *TJ* 36 (2015): 268–277; McCall and Yandell, "On Trinitarian Subordination," 354–365; and discussions with the chair of my dissertation committee, John C. Peckham.

¹⁵⁶Perhaps all that may be necessary for sufficient distinction is the fact that each of the persons of the Trinity is a unique bearer of the essential attributes of the divine nature.

¹⁵⁷The term "eternal" in this context of the intra-Trinitarian processions refers to the Greek metaphysical concept of timelessness, meaning outside of time or incompatibility with time (no succession of past, present, and future). See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 29.3.

generation or filiation,¹⁵⁸ and the Holy Spirit’s eternal spiration or procession¹⁵⁹ predicate nothing regarding the divine nature and have no implications for it. Likewise, the personal properties of authority and submission/obedience attributed to the Father and the Son respectively in EFS/ERAS predicate nothing regarding the divine nature and have no

¹⁵⁸The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed reads, “[We believe] in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only [Μονογενῆ] Son of God, begotten [γεννηθέντα] from the Father before all ages, [God from God,] Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten [γεννηθέντα], not made, of one Being [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father, through whom all things were made” (Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et al. [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000], 22–23). “The eternal generation of the Son is commonly defined to be an eternal personal act of the Father, wherein, by necessity of nature, not by choice of will, he generates the person (not the essence) of the Son, by communicating to him the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation, or change, so that the Son is the express image of his Father’s person, and eternally continues, not from the Father, but in the Father, and the Father in the Son” (Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology: Rewritten and Enlarged* [New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878], 182). See also Origen, *Princ.* 1.2.11.

This problematic doctrine of Christian tradition was primarily based upon misunderstandings of the Greek words μονογενής (*monogenēs*) as “only-begotten” instead of “one-and-only” or “only unique” (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) and πρωτότοκος (*prototokos*) as literally “firstborn” instead of covenantal “firstborn” in the sense of “supreme/preeminent one” (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5); an odd christological reading of Prov 8:22–30; and eternal, ontological interpretations of the messianic titles (i.e., Son), passages (i.e., Ps 2:7), and incarnation. On μονογενής, see discussion in Petersen, *God in 3 Persons*, 14–15; idem, “Jesus—The ‘One and Only,’ or ‘Only Begotten’: The Meaning,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. Paul B. Petersen and Robert K. McIver (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 29–34. On πρωτότοκος, see Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 121–129; Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Firstborn in Colossians 1:15,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. Paul B. Petersen and Robert K. McIver (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), 65–86. The odd christological reading of Prov 8:22–30 as describing the eternal generation of the Son goes beyond a direct exegetical reading of σοφία or “wisdom” as merely being poetically personified by the original author in order to praise God’s employment of divine wisdom in his creation of the heavens and the earth. Interpreting Prov 8:22–30 christologically in terms of the eternal generation of the Son was, of course, the polemical attempt of early orthodox theologians to avoid the extremely subordinationist christological reading of that passage by Origen of Alexandria, Arius, and other early heterodox theologians. Perhaps a strict exegetical reading of Prov 8:22–30 would have sufficed to respond to the heterodox Christologies erected on this passage. Due to space limitations the problems of reading the title “Son,” ontologically instead of covenantally and messianically cannot be discussed. See Ty Gibson’s helpful popular study *The Sonship of Christ: Exploring the Covenant Identity of God and Man* (n.p.: Ty Gibson, 2018). The dangers of reading the Son’s incarnation back into eternity and into God’s experience *ad intra* have already been discussed. See the helpful critique of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son in William David Spencer, “The Need for Caution in the Use of Eternal Birth Language for Jesus Christ in the Early Church and Today,” *Africanus* 10.1 (2018): 5–22.

¹⁵⁹The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed reads, “[We believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds [ἐκπορευόμενον] from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets” (Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 23). The eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit “designate[s] the relation which the third person sustains to the first and second, wherein by an eternal and necessary, i.e., not voluntary, act of the Father and the Son [*filioque*], their whole identical divine essence, without alienation, division, or change, is communicated to the Holy Ghost” (A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 189–190). This problematic doctrine was largely argued from an eternal and ontological, as opposed to a contextually economic, reading of John 15:26.

implications for it.

Nevertheless, personal properties can be of such a nature that they contradict the essential attributes of the divine nature, compelling one either to dispense with the offending attributed personal properties, to redefine (or possibly even reject) the essential attributes of the divine nature with which it conflicts, or deny ὁμοούσιος. Intriguingly, some of the personal properties assigned to the certain persons of the Trinity in EFS/ERAS do indeed contradict the essential attributes of the divine nature. Those who have attributed them are not making the former two moves, which inevitably (though unintentionally) leaves them with the latter one, making the three persons ἑτεροουσιοις instead of ὁμοούσιοις with one another.

To demonstrate this, focus will be placed on the essential attribute of the divine nature known as omnipotence. Omnipotence is normally defined as the complete and absolute power of God to will and to bring about *any* state of affairs he wishes unless it is (1) logically impossible,¹⁶⁰ (2) contrary to the other essential attributes of his divine nature (i.e., eternity, omniscience, etc.), or (3) incongruent with the moral virtues of his character (i.e., perfect goodness, love, truth, justice, holiness, etc.).¹⁶¹ Traditionally, Christians have agreed that

¹⁶⁰For helpful discussions concerning logical impossibility and omnipotence, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.25.3; C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1944; repr. New York: HarperOne, 2001), 16–27, esp. 16–19.

¹⁶¹For example, while Scripture asserts that “with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37) and “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26; Mark 10:27), Heb 6:18 states that “it is impossible for God to lie” and Jas 1:13 asserts that “God cannot be tempted by evil.” Thus, God’s ability to do all things is qualified by his moral attributes. Since God is truthful and trustworthy, it is impossible for him to lie. Since God is perfectly moral and good, he cannot be tempted by evil to bring about evil.

William L. Rowe, Shares the following more expansive account of divine omnipotence: “[I]t would be a mistake to think that for God to be omnipotent he must be able to actualize any state of affairs whatever. ... For God to be omnipotent is for God to have the power to bring about *any* state of affairs that is contingent provided it is not inconsistent with some fact wholly about the past, not already actualized and such that it can never be actualized again, not consisting of a free action of some other agent, and not such that God’s bringing it about is inconsistent with any of his essential attributes” (“Divine Power, Goodness, and Knowledge,” in *The Oxford Handbook of*

omnipotence is a necessary and essential attribute of the divine nature and that, as divine persons, both the Son and the Father are omnipotent necessarily and essentially. Therefore,

- (1) If the Son is ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ (of the same divine nature with the Father), then both the Son and the Father are omnipotent.

Now, when isolating a particular potential personal property pertinent to omnipotence—i.e., possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity—one is able to see how it can impact the divine nature.

- (2) If the personal property of incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity is logically possible and not contrary to the moral attributes of the divine nature, then omnipotence includes the personal property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity.
- (3) If both the Son and the Father are omnipotent, then both of them have the property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity.

In the above, no problem is created for the essential attribute of omnipotence.

However, exponents of EFS/ERAS assert that the persons of the Trinity cannot have interchangeable roles. The respective roles of the Father and the Son just cannot be reversed, otherwise, “the Father would have ceased to be the Father and the Son would have ceased to be the Son.”¹⁶² The Father always commands and the Son always obeys. The Father sends and the

Philosophy of Religion, ed. William J. Wainwright, Oxford Handbooks in Philosophy [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 17, 20). In short, “[f]or no matter how powerful a being is, no being can bring it about that an impossible state of affairs (a state of affairs that simply cannot be actual) is, nevertheless, an actual state of affairs. ... The fact that no one, including God, can actualize an impossible state of affairs does not detract from the power of anyone, including God. ... [I]t is no limitation of power to be unable to bring about something that is logically impossible. For power extends only to what is possible” (ibid., 17, 21).

¹⁶²Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 250. See also ibid., 251. Contra Grudem, McCall points to Thomas Aquinas, who argues, “*Sed contra, quidquid potest filius, potest pater, alioquin, non esset eadem potentia trium. Sed filius potuit incarnari. Ergo similiter pater et spiritus sanctus. ... Sic ergo divina virtus potuit naturam humanam unire vel personae patris vel spiritus sancti, sicut univit eam personae filii. Et ideo dicendum est quod pater vel spiritus sanctus potuit carnem assumere, sicut et filius.*” which means “On the contrary, Whatever the Son can do, so can the Father and the Holy Ghost, otherwise the power of the three Persons would not be one. But the Son was able to become incarnate. Therefore the Father and the Holy Ghost were able to become incarnate. ... Therefore the Divine power could have united human nature to the Person of the Father or of the Holy Ghost, as It united it to the Person of the Son. And hence we must say that the Father or the Holy Ghost could have assumed flesh even as the Son” (*Summa Theologiae* 3.3.5). He also highlights Richard Cross’s work, in which Cross demonstrates that

Son incarnates. Etc. So,

- (EFS1) If EFS/ERAS is true, then the Son has the personal property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity and the Father does not have the personal property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity.
- (EFS2a) If the Son has the personal property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity, then the Son is omnipotent.
- (EFS2b) If the Father does not have the personal property of possibly incarnating in a submissive way to another person of the Trinity, then the Father is not omnipotent.
- (EFS3) If the Son is omnipotent and the Father is not omnipotent, then the Son is of a different nature than the Father. Thus, the Son is *ἕτεροουσιος* rather than *ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ* (with the Father).¹⁶³

This, then, amounts to a quite robust denial of *ὁμοούσιος*.

If, on the other hand, one rejects these personal properties that EFS/ERAS (as well as those of the Christian tradition¹⁶⁴) have assigned to the persons of the Trinity and attribute only

“virtually everyone in medieval Christology” believed that the act of incarnation was a possibility for any of the three divine persons (McCall, *Which Trinity?*, 182n28). See Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 179. See also McCall and Yandell, “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” 351–353. Gons and Naselli respond to McCall’s reading of Aquinas by pointing out that, a little later in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argued that it was more suitable for the Son to come as the incarnate one. See “An Examination,” 206–209; Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 3.3.8. See McCall’s rejoinder in “Gender and the Trinity,” 274–276. However, Gons and Naselli’s response can be easily met by rejecting the eternal processions as unbiblical. Without the eternal processions, there is nothing about the Son that makes it more suitable for him to incarnate than for the Father or the Son.

¹⁶³Similarly, “[i]f only the Son has the property *possibly being incarnate* (and has it essentially),” McCall writes, “then the Son again has an essential property that the Father does not have” (*Which Trinity?*, 182). In this way, the Father and the Son “do not share the property of *omnipotence*: on this account the Father would be limited in his abilities to perform actions that are logically possible (i.e., becoming incarnate), even actions that are possible for a morally perfect being—thus the Father would be less than omnipotent” (*ibid.*). See also the articulation of this similar argument in *idem* and Yandell, “On Trinitarian Subordinationism,” 355–356.

¹⁶⁴I agree with Gons and Naselli that this similarly applies to the eternal processions of the persons of the Son and the Spirit. See “An Examination,” 199–200. This is one of the many reasons why the traditional personal properties of eternal paternity, filiation, and spiration are problematic. This is especially seen when placed in relationship to omnipotence. (EP1) If the Christian tradition is true, then the personal property of eternally generating another person of the Trinity is logically possible and not contrary to the moral attributes of the divine nature. / (EP2) If the personal property of eternally generating another person of the Trinity is logically possible and not contrary to the moral attributes of the divine nature, then omnipotence includes the personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity. / (EP3) If both the Son and the Father are omnipotent, then both of them have the property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity.

However, the Christian tradition denies that the Son has the personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity. This is an exclusive personal property of the Father, the only one which differentiates him from the Son and *vis versa*. So, (EP4) If the Christian tradition is true, then the Father has the

personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity and the Son does not have the personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity. / (EP5a) If the Father has the personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity, then the Father is omnipotent. / (EP5b) If the Son does not have the personal property of possibly eternally generating another person of the Trinity, then the Son is not omnipotent. / (EP6) If the Father is omnipotent and the Son is not omnipotent, then the Son is of a different nature than the Father. Thus, the Son is ἐτεροουσιος rather than ὁμοουσιος τῷ Πατρὶ (with the Father).

Another relevant concern regarding the doctrine of eternal processions is its seemingly inherent tendency toward some form of subordinationism. Dahms who affirms both the eternal processions and EFS/ERAS states, “Eternal generation [and assumedly eternal spiration] provides the ontological basis for eternal subordination, and eternal subordination lends significance to eternal generation [and spiration]” (“The Subordination of the Son,” 363). First, it is necessary to note that the eternal processions are different from EFS/ERAS in that the persons of the Trinity in the former were distinguished not by authority, role, or function (as exponents of EFS/ERAS suggest) but by personal properties of eternal derivation and causality—the Father is eternally ungenerated (or unbegotten), the Son is eternally generated (or begotten) from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is eternally spirated (or proceeds) from the Father and the Son (*filioque*). Nonna Verna Harrison demonstrates this in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. See “Gregory of Nyssa on Knowing the Trinity,” in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, ed. Khaled Anatolios, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 55–61. It is crucial to understand that this distinction was not intended to detract in any way from the full equality of the Trinitarian persons. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ors.* 29.12–17; 40.43; 42.15. Christopher A. Beeley demonstrates that Gregory of Nazianzus never saw a contradiction between the monarchy of the Father as the cause of the Son (eternal generation) and the Holy Spirit (eternal spiration) and the full equality of the three persons. See *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, OSHT, ed. David C. Steinmetz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201–217. Rather, it was purposed to explain God’s “threeness” in “oneness” and to defend it against monarchianism, Arian subordinationism, and tritheism or polytheism. Thus, the general historical trajectory of orthodox Christianity was to combat notions of subordinationism.

Nevertheless, the problematic formulation of Trinitarian derivation left the door open for some Christian thinkers to assert some form of subordination in the Trinity. This is due to the fact that in modern logic the idea of origination or derivation—whether or not it is eternal—intuitively seems to indicate some kind of subordination. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 307–308. Yet even before modernism early theologians, such as Origen and Arius, understood the eternal processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit as indicative of ontological subordination. Gulley points out that “the Nicene concept of a shared nature (*homoousion*) between Father and Son should have been sufficient to accomplish” the defeat of Arian subordinationism (*God as Trinity*, 100). But this ultimately failed due to the assertion of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, which “placed the Son in a subservient position to the Father, which was the same in kind (not degree) as the position of Arius (Son created by the Father in eternity)” (*ibid.*). Canale agrees that the eternal processions imply subordination: “Unfortunately a subtle form of Monarchianism and ontological subordinationism is preserved when the differences of the persons are explained metaphysically by recourse to the ideas of generation and procession (“Doctrine of God,” 144). See also Remwil R. Tornalejo, “Reexamining the Eternal Generation of the Son and Its Implications to the Doctrine of the Trinity” (paper presented at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and the 2016 Autumn Symposium of the Adventist Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, 16 November 2016), <http://www.atsjats.org/site/1/docs/2016/papers-triune-god/Tornalejo%20-%20Reexamining%20the%20Eternal%20Generation%20of%20the%20Son%20-%20ATS%202016.pdf>.

Interestingly, some modern-day proponents of EFS/ERAS have previously expressed strong doubts over the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son in their published writings, yet maintain EFS/ERAS. See Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 162n3; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 254n38, 1233–1234. In order to support their contemporary belief in EFS/ERAS without eternal generation, they turn to early Christian theologians, even though those theologians maintained eternal generation without eternal submission. In November of 2016, during a panel discussion at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, Texas, both Grudem and Ware verbally changed their position on the eternal generation of the Son presumably due to pressures from the evangelical community. During their surprising announcement, they explained that they now embrace the eternal generation of the Son but are unclear as to what it means in particular. Nevertheless, it is a teaching included in the early Christian creeds, and so they have accepted it as a valid Trinitarian conception. See Mark Woods, “Wayne Grudem Has Changed His Mind On The Trinity—Just Not Enough, Say Critics,” *Christian Today*, 1 December 2016, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/wayne-grudem-has-changed-his-mind-on-the-trinity-just-not-enough->

revealed personal properties to the persons of the Trinity, then no such contradiction with the essential divine attributes is present. As discussed previously, the Father has the personal property of loving two other persons of the Trinity. The Father loves the Son (Matt 3:17; John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9–10; 17:23–24, 26); the Son loves the Father (John 14:31); and, as the source and dispenser of divine love *ad extra*, the Holy Spirit must also experience the divine love *ad intra*, meaning that the Holy Spirit both loves the Father and the Son and is reciprocally loved by both of them (Rom 5:5, 15:30; Gal 5:22; Col 1:8). John 17:24 notes that this Trinitarian love is not just a love *ad extra* but also a love *ad intra*, one that was shared before the creation of the *cosmos* among themselves internally and eternally.

Now, while each of the persons are equal in having the personal property of eternally

say-critics/102617.htm. Even so, they misuse the original intention of eternal generation, which was to defend against Trinitarian subordination, not support it. This appears to be a case of “grasping” for historical authorization. See Erickson’s discussion in *Tampering with the Trinity?*, 179–184. See also Spencer’s critique in “The Need for Caution,” 5–22.

Giles, an egalitarian who has written much to oppose EFS/ERAS, is supportive of the Christian tradition’s affirmation of the eternal generation of the Son in spite of modern logic pointing toward subordination (see his defense of this doctrine in *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012]), but he asserts that it excludes the idea of subordination, as did early Christian orthodox theologians (*Jesus and the Father*, 239–240). He asserts that eternal generation serves merely to differentiate the Father and the Son in their intimate, loving, and coequal relationship. However, it seems that even if the Son is said to be generated/begotten timelessly or eternally, the logical implication of subordination in the concept of derivation or origination cannot be avoided for modern thinkers. Therefore, it seems difficult to uphold the full ontological and functional equality of the Father and Son and yet continue to maintain eternal generation and eternal procession.

Most importantly, though upheld in some of the Christian creeds, this teaching of derivation in the Trinity is foreign to Scripture. Thankfully, Giles acknowledges this to some degree. He says that the eternal generation of the Son is “not directly taught in Scripture,” even though he still sees it as implied there. He goes on to state that the “eternal procession of the Spirit does not seem to be mentioned at all in Scripture” (*ibid.*, 239n166). In this case, Grudem’s originally published sentiment that the concept of eternal generation should be taken out of modern theological conceptions of intra-Trinitarian relationships is shared (*Systematic Theology*, 1234). Erickson agrees: “It appears to me that the concept of eternal generation does not have biblical warrant and does not make sense philosophically. As such, we should eliminate it from theological discussions of the Trinity” (*Tampering with the Trinity?*, 251). Canale also agrees: “There is ... no ground within the biblical understanding of the Godhead for the idea of a generation of the Son from the Father” (“Doctrine of God,” 126). Thus, “[t]he procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; 14:16, 26; Acts 2:33) is to be understood not in an ontological sense, but rather in a historical sense as the inner divine activity involved in sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the representative of Christ’s presence, sacrifice, and ministry. In other words, the procession of the Spirit does not refer to an inner process in the makeup of the trinitarian being as classical theology came to believe” (*ibid.*, 132).

loving two other persons of the Trinity, each is personally distinguishable *ad intra* by the two other persons of the Trinity who are being eternally loved. So, the Father is distinct and distinguishable from the Son and the Holy Spirit because he is the person of the Trinity who eternally loves the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is distinct and distinguishable from the Father and the Holy Spirit because he is the person of the Trinity who eternally loves the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is distinct and distinguishable from the Father and the Son because he is the person of the Trinity who eternally loves the Father and the Son. In this way, the revealed personal properties of the three persons do not impact the divine nature but they do sufficiently distinguish them from one another *ad intra*, more so than merely being unique bearers of the essential divine attributes.¹⁶⁵ There may be other essential personal properties that the persons have, but these are simply unknown because they have not been revealed in Scripture.

All this is to say that it is incorrect that attributing something to the personal properties does not impact the shared divine nature and its essential attributes. It can, depending on the nature of the personal properties being attributed! And, because of this, McCall and Erickson's charge against EFS/ERAS that it denies ὁμοούσιος stands.

Therefore, it goes without saying that such a denial is deeply injurious to the doctrine of God and triunity. It quite obviously amounts to, at the least, an embrace of Arianism in some form. Moreover, having multiple divine persons who possess *different* divine natures or essences ultimately results in some kind of tritheism or polytheism. Of course, such an account of theism

¹⁶⁵Of course, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are also easily distinguishable by their distinctive actions in the economy, that is *ad extra* (e.g., the Son is distinguishable from the Father and the Holy Spirit because he is the person of the Trinity who became incarnate; the Holy Spirit is distinguishable from the Father and the Son because he is the person of the Trinity who descended on Christ's disciples during Pentecost).

is simply untenable for a Christian theology that has the desiderata of consistency with biblical teaching of divine “oneness” (cf. Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:39; 2 Sam 7:22; 1 Kgs 8:60; 1 Chron 17:20; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 42:8; 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21; 46:9; Zech 14:9; Mark 12:29–34; 1 Cor 8:4–6; Gal 3:20; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19), the full and equal deity of the Son (John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–14) and the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15; Acts 5:3–4) with the Father, and the Nicene–Constantinopolitan tradition of ὁμοούσιος. Thus, the concept of “oneness” inherent in the term ὁμοούσιος is a necessary protective factor against Arianism and other versions of polytheism.¹⁶⁶

Consequences for Soteriology and Theodicy

Regarding the *locus* of soteriology, Bilezikian perceptively asserts that “[a] low Christology results in a weak soteriology.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the lower Christology of EFS/ERAS poses significant harm to a coherent biblical view of the doctrine of salvation in numerous ways. First, Scripture teaches that only God himself could truly redeem the world from sin as the needed perfect and blameless sacrifice, since “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23) and since “all ... like sheep have gone astray” (Isa 53:6). If Jesus is lowered in any way from full equality with the Father, his eligibility to serve as covenant Surety, Sacrifice, and Savior for the human race begins to crumble. Because “the redemptive power of the cross derives from the fact that the One who

¹⁶⁶Ellen G. White affirmed the concept of ὁμοούσιος in the following statement: “With what firmness and power he [Jesus] uttered these words [John 10:25–30]. The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, ‘I and my Father are one.’ The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were *of one substance*, possessing the *same* attributes. The Jews understood his meaning, there was no reason why they should misunderstand, and they took up stones to stone him” (“The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd,” *The Signs of the Times* 20.4 [27 November 1893]: 54; emphasis added). She most likely acquired the phrase “of one substance” from the first three “Articles of Religion” from the Methodist Episcopal Church in which she grew up and was baptized. See Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: George Lane, 1840), 9–10.

¹⁶⁷Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping,” 66.

died on it was fully God,” Christ’s death on the cross is undermined and minimized when Christ is made merely a subordinate of the Father.¹⁶⁸ God himself must be fully and equally in Christ (Col 2:9) to pay the penalty for sin (Rom 6:23) so to reconcile the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19).¹⁶⁹

Second, by implication, EFS/ERAS presents the incarnation and passion of Christ as merely obedience to the authority of the Father that is an outflow of his eternal submission to the Father. This has a significant impact on the way one understands the motivation of Christ in the work of redemption and the extent of his sacrifice for humanity. Bilezikian points out that “[i]t makes a lot of difference whether God in Christ offered his life out of sacrificial love, as the Scriptures affirm he did, or whether Christ acted out of obedience because he had no choice but to subject himself to the authority of the Father.”¹⁷⁰ If EFS/ERAS indeed suggests that Christ was motivated by a command of the Father to serve as a sacrifice for the world, then a motivation of voluntary love is precluded. On this view, the cross event is not so much a demonstration of the love of God and Christ for the world (Rom 5:5–8), as it is a demonstration of Christ’s eternal submission to the Father’s authority over him.

Third, EFS/ERAS precludes the *pactum salutis*. The whole idea of a covenantal council seems to imply an intra-Trinitarian deliberation of some sort since covenants are, generally speaking, contractual agreements mutually negotiated between the covenanting parties. But any

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Proponents of EFS/ERAS do not intend to do any harm to the ontological equality of the Son and the Father, but vigorously claim to uphold it. Thus, the assertion above could be viewed as an invalid concern about their view of the Trinity. However, as was discussed in the section on logical problems, making the Son’s functional submission eternal, essential, and based on his being as Son—as does EFS/ERAS—logically lowers the Son ontologically in relation to the Father. There is no doubt that this will have significant negative impact on redemption, if this thinking is carried throughout one’s theological system.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

kind of deliberation would simply not be needed if the Father issues commands and the Son and the Holy Spirit merely obey those commands. In such a scenario, about what are they to deliberate or upon what are they to agree? Everything appears to be already determined by the commands of the Father. However, if the way in which the persons of the Trinity relate to each other is viewed in terms of equality, mutuality, and reciprocity, then the concept of a *pactum salutis* seems logical and theologically necessary. On such a view, the persons of the Trinity harmoniously deliberated and covenantally agreed upon a blueprint plan for the redemption of humanity that flowed from their shared divine love. In this way, “the triune God shared an intra-trinitarian love among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which was the ultimate source of the covenant of redemption.”¹⁷¹ An EFS/ERAS view of the *pactum salutis* would appear to impede one from conceptualizing intra-Trinitarian love in this way, if not emptying the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* of content altogether.

Fourth, EFS/ERAS can devastatingly affect transactional theories of Christ’s atonement. These theories depend upon Christ, as fully ὁμοούσιος with humanity, offering non-obligatorily active and passive obedience unto death as a supererogatory¹⁷² gift in order to satisfactorily pay to God the debt owed by humanity that resulted from the fall (e.g., the satisfaction theory of Anselm of Canterbury [1033–1109 CE]) and bearing voluntarily the full punishment of God’s just judgment against human sin (e.g., the penal substitutionary theory of Calvin [1509–1564 CE]).¹⁷³ D. Glenn Butner, Jr. aptly describes the dilemma in which proponents of EFS/ERAS

¹⁷¹Fesko, *Trinity and the Covenant*, 43.

¹⁷²Supererogation (which comes from the Latin term *supererogatio*, a combination of *super*, meaning “above” or “beyond,” and *erogare*, meaning “to expend” or “to pay out”) is a term used to describe actions that go beyond what the call of duty requires; such actions are good and/or righteous but not morally necessary or obligated.

¹⁷³For biblical support for transactional theories, see Isa 53:4–6, 8, 10–12; Rom 5:6–11, 18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13–14; Phil 2:7–8.

find themselves in regard to such models of the atonement. He notes that of “central importance to transactional models of atonement” is the preservation of “the non-obligatory and voluntary death of Christ,” which was “a consequence of and thus consequent to the shared eternal decision of Father, Son, and Spirit to send the Son to die for the salvation of the faithful” (i.e., *pactum salutis*).¹⁷⁴ Exponents of EFS/ERAS, however, are seemingly unable to uphold coherently this aspect of Christ’s death along with the essential, eternal obedience that they predicate of the Son in the following way.

If the Father eternally commanded the Son to die, then the Son was eternally obligated to die. If this is the case, then Christ’s death did not offer anything supererogatory to God, nor anything above what was required. Instead, when Christ died he gave to God precisely what was due: obedience. He did nothing to earn merit on our behalf for he obeyed for his own sake. ... As long as Christ’s death is not fulfilling an obligation to the Father, it can count as a supererogatory gift, earning the merit which serves as the basis of our justification. However, when we posit (as advocates of [EFS/ERAS] do) that in all divine acts the Son submits to the Father, then the Son is obligated to obey according to an antecedent necessity—the command of the Father that obligates the Son to obey for his own sake.¹⁷⁵

Without the voluntary, non-obligatory nature of Christ’s active and passive obedience, transactional theories of the atonement are without a leg upon which to stand. As such, EFS/ERAS “simply does not fit with an atonement theory rooting our justification in the supererogatory obedience of Christ.”¹⁷⁶ As such, this means that supporters of EFS/ERAS may need to reject it or transactional atonement theories in order to achieve theological coherence. Dispensing with the latter would be devastating for Christian theology of the evangelical variety.

Finally, EFS/ERAS can also negatively impact theodicy, deeply tainting the character of

¹⁷⁴Butner, Jr., *Son Who Learned Obedience*, 113.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 111, 113.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 113. See his fuller discussion in 95–114. Note, again, that Butner, Jr. writes from a Classical Trinitarian perspective with Trinitarian and christological views that differ from those of this paper in significant ways.

God, by leading one to question the very ethics of transactional theories of atonement, especially that of the penal substitutionary view. Romans 3:21–26 describes the sacrifice of Christ for human sin as an expiation and propitiation (ἱλαστήριον [*hilastērion*]) that removes the sin-barrier between God and humanity, satisfies divine justice, and turns aside the wrath of God against human sin by bearing its punishment.¹⁷⁷ When Christ is understood, as the Scriptures teach, as being equal ontologically and functionally with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the passage

¹⁷⁷The verbal cognate ἱλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*) in Heb 2:17 and the masculine nominal cognate ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*) in 1 John 2:2, 4:10 of ἱλαστήριον are also used concerning Christ’s sacrifice for sin. In both classical Greek and Greco-Roman literature, the Greek word ἱλαστήριον was indicative of an implement by which one achieves both expiation to remove what is offensive and propitiation to appease a god or ruler’s wrath. Contemporary authors of Paul largely used ἱλαστήριον substantively as a technical term to refer to the golden lid of the ark of the covenant of the Hebrew sanctuary—commonly called the “mercy seat”—which was the place where propitiation and expiation were accomplished in the Hebrew sacrificial system. Philo used ἱλαστήριον a total of six times, all of which are references to the “mercy seat” (*Her.* 166; *Fug.* 100, 101; *Cher.* 25; *Mos.* 2.95, 97). However, it may also indicate an implement of a propitiatory and/or expiatory function. Josephus uses ἱλαστήριον substantively as an object of propitiation/expiation (*Ant.* 16.179–182). Of the twenty-eight occurrences of ἱλαστήριον in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), twenty-one of them (Exod 25:17–22; 31:7; 35:12; 38:5, 7–8; Lev 16:2, 13–15; Num 7:89) are used substantively to translate the Hebrew word, כַּפֹּרֶת (*kapporeth*), which is the Old Testament term to designate the “mercy seat” (six of the other occurrences are also connected to other parts of the sanctuary: five appearances are in Ezek 43:14, 17, 20 in reference to the side of the altar of burnt offering and one in Amos 9:1 referring to the top of the pillars in the sanctuary). The last remaining occurrence of ἱλαστήριον is in 4 Macc 17:22 in speaking of martyrdom. Importantly, ἱλαστήριον is used attributively in this passage to modify θανάτου (*thanatou*; “death”) in the context of sin, God’s wrath against that sin, a divinely provided ransom and purification through blood, and the giving up of life to achieve the ransom. Hence, a clear propitiatory and expiatory usage emerges from this passage. In the New Testament, ἱλαστήριον appears only once outside of Rom 3:25 and is found in Heb 9:5. The author of Hebrews uses ἱλαστήριον substantively in alignment with the tradition of the LXX simply to indicate the lid of the ark of the covenant.

Harmonizing the use of ἱλαστήριον in Rom 3:25 with all of this data leads one to conclude that ἱλαστήριον in this text carries both expiatory and propitiatory senses. First of all, according to Isaiah 59:1–2 (LXX), ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*; “sin”) separates humanity from God. In Rom 1:18–3:20, Paul made it abundantly clear that universal sin makes all human beings worthy of a revelation of God’s wrath and judgment and deserving of the punishment of death (Rom 1:18, 32; 2:12, 19). Thus, in order for humanity to stand justified before God and experience reconciliation in their relationship with him, the sin-barrier must be expiated—removed and cleansed. The use of τὴν πάρεσιν (*tēn paresin*; “the passing over”), along with ἁμαρτυμάτων (*hamartumatōn*; “sin”) in Rom 3:25, clearly indicates that Jesus’s death is addressing the sin problem—to “pass over” it—thus, expiation.

Second, Rom 3:25 follows a lengthy description of the revelation of the wrath of God in Rom 1:18–3:20. In order for God to be just and demonstrate his righteousness, a key concern of Rom 3:25–26, sin cannot simply be excused. God’s wrath and judgment must be satisfied; in other words, someone must bear sin and experience God’s wrath against it. Isaiah stated in Isa 53:4 that Jesus as the suffering sin-bearing Servant was stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God. Furthermore, Paul wrote later in Rom 5:9—seemingly to expound on what he wrote in Rom 3:25, since their contents are very similar—that believers are saved from God’s wrath through Christ’s blood sacrifice. This implies that Jesus bore God’s wrath on the cross so that those who believe may escape it—thus, propitiation. In sum, Paul’s use of ἱλαστήριον in Rom 3:25 to refer to Jesus’s sacrificial death indicates that it served as an expiation of the sin barrier between God and humanity, as well as a propitiation to turn divine wrath away from humanity. Thus, the penal substitutionary view of the atonement is in view in Rom 3:21–26.

portrays the triune God as removing the sin-barrier on his own initiative and placating his own wrath against sin by himself through suffering the death penalty in place of humanity in the person of the Son (Rom 6:23), who was made “to be sin who knew no sin” (1 Cor 5:12). Thus, God is both the subject and object of divine wrath against sin. In this way, a rich witness is given concerning the character of God and his profound love in the plan of redemption.¹⁷⁸

However, viewing Christ as one who eternally submits to the Father emphasizes his role as the object of wrath and can diminish his balancing role as the subject. In such a case, God could be regarded as bloodthirsty and sadistic, demanding the life of his Son in order for his wrath to be dissuaded; and indeed he has been. Woodrow W. Whidden II, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve observe that “[m]any Christians ... have expressed deep misgivings about the whole concept of Christ offering a sacrifice of substitution to satisfy God’s nature of justice. They argue that such a view is not only morally questionable, but that it makes God resemble some angry ogre intent on taking out His wrath on an unwilling third party.”¹⁷⁹ Butner, Jr. also notes that there is “widespread concern” with such a model of the atonement because of its potential for promoting “a culture of violence against the powerless.”¹⁸⁰ The overemphasis of the Son as the object of wrath, which honors a “power structure resulting in suffering of the subordinate,” can

¹⁷⁸“The deity of Christ is the full deity of the entire triune Godhead. ... Therefore we can truthfully say that God, in satisfying His nature of loving justice, did not take His wrath out on an innocent third party or some unwilling victim. Rather, in Christ He has met the needs of justice through His own willingly given divine self-sacrifice. ... The great truth of the Holy Trinity and the atoning death of Christ speaks eloquently that God has, in His Son, borne the penalty of sin as our substitute and made an infinitely valuable and powerful provision for the full reconciliation of the entire human race” (Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity*, 267). See also Woodrow W. Whidden II, “God Is Love—Trinitarian Love!,” *JATS* 17.1 (2006): 118–119.

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 261. See also Whidden, “God Is Love,” 113.

¹⁸⁰D. Glenn Butner, Jr., “Crumbling Cathedrals of the Mind: How Eternal Functional Subordination Undermines Transactional Atonement Theory,” *Preserving the Trinity* (2016): 13.

easily be “echo[ed] in the created order in ways that harm the weak and powerless.”¹⁸¹

EFS/ERAS can legitimize this major objection against the biblical penal substitutionary view of Christ’s atonement¹⁸² However, maintaining the ontological and functional equality of the Trinitarian persons and, thereby, keeping the balance of Christ as both subject and object of divine wrath helps to answer this objection. Therefore, as demonstrated here, EFS/ERAS can undermine the loving and sacrificial character of God.¹⁸³

Consequences for Christian Ethics

EFS/ERAS as Possible Perpetuator of Victimization of the Vulnerable

When EFS/ERAS is carried into Christian ethics, particularly in gender ethics—as do some complementarians—a very disconcerting portrayal of prescribed interpersonal dynamics emerges. Notice that, in Eph 5:22–33, a wife is called to submit to her own husband, who is exhorted to love her in a way that reflects Christ’s self-sacrificial love for the church. In this way, the one traditionally perceived as the person of authority in complementarianism “is the

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸² Perhaps this is one of the major reasons why some postmodern theologians, as well as many young adults, are presently abandoning this theory of the atonement and are turning toward alternatives, such as variations of the moral exemplar or moral influence theory of Peter Abelard (1079–1142 CE), that seem more “loving” than violent and oppressive. The moral influence theory of the atonement—also known as the example theory—asserts that Christ’s death on the cross was a supreme revelation of God’s character of perfect love that forms the basis of the Christian’s justification. As sinners contemplate God’s perfect love for humanity—as it was displayed in the death of Christ—a transformation takes place in their hearts that leads them to repentance of their sins and justification. Additionally, Christ’s death serves as a moral example that influences believers to live ethical lives of selfless love and righteousness toward others and to turn away from selfishness and sin. Certainly, the death of Christ was a demonstration of the love of God (John 3:16; Rom 5:5–8; 1 John 4:7–12) and has a moral influence in the lives of believers (1 Peter 2:21–24). However, there are other portrayals of Christ’s atonement in Scripture that go beyond this one to include other concepts, such as *Christus Victor* (1 John 3:8; Heb 2:14), ransom (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim 2:5–6; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Rev 5:9), and satisfaction and penal substitution (Isa 53:4–6, 8, 10–12; Rom 3:21–26; 5:6–11, 18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13–14; Phil 2:7–8; Heb 9:14; 1 John 2:2),

¹⁸³For a more detailed discussion of the impact that EFS/ERAS can have on transactional theories of the atonement, see the fuller discussion in *ibid.*, 9–15.

same one who sacrifices and suffers for the one in submission.”¹⁸⁴ However, when a complementarian co-opts EFS/ERAS for their sociological purposes, a one-to-one analogy is created in which the Father is linked to the husband and the Son is linked to the wife. “In this case, the Father is in authority, but the submissive Son is the one who suffers and sacrifices,” and thus, “in an appeal to eternal submission the one who submits is the one who sacrifices and suffers at the command of another.”¹⁸⁵ This, of course, contradicts the typical complementarian view of Eph 5:22–33.

Moreover, it is the opposite of the interpersonal ethic that “the first will be last and the last first” (Matt 20:16; cf. 19:30; Mark 10:31) and that “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Matt 20:25–28, esp. 26–27; cf. Mark 10:42–45). Jesus both advocated and embodied this ethic “by voluntarily taking on death in the form of a servant” (Phil 2:5–11).¹⁸⁶ However, as Butner Jr. says, whereas Phil 2:1–11

teaches us to follow the example of Christ who forsook power to humble himself for the salvation of the powerless, [EFS/ERAS] implicitly teaches the powerless to submit themselves to the powerful even to the point of death. In an ethical vision derived from the theology of [EFS/ERAS], the least of these are no longer served for Jesus’s sake (Matt 25:34–40) but sacrificed in his imitation, and the power of God is no longer made evident in the weakness of self-humbling (2 Cor 12:9) but in the authority of one who can subdue the weak.¹⁸⁷

This obviously can perpetuate cultures and relationships of domination, oppression, abuse, and

¹⁸⁴Idem, *The Son Who Learned*, 118. Of course, one can make a strong exegetical case for mutual submission in Eph 5:22–33 since verse 21, which exhorts believers to submit “to one another out of reverence for Christ,” provides the framework for what follows.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 118–119.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 119.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

victimization. This would especially have severe repercussions for women and children. “In short, the image implied in the way theologians appeal to the eternal submission of the Son often rejects the biblical picture of ethics.”¹⁸⁸

Ethical Trajectories of the Father-Son and Male-Female Connection

Finally, finding an analogous connection between the Father-Son and male-female relationships in the first place is a questionable leap of logic¹⁸⁹ that is certainly not biblically warranted.¹⁹⁰ Craig S. Keener anecdotally points out that

Christological views [do not] coincide as closely with views on gender roles as some of the advocates of either position claim. Thus, for example, I frequently talk with Christians who espouse a complementarian view of gender roles while expressing surprise that anyone would deny the full equality in all respects of the Father and the Son. By contrast, I and some other scholars I know who support a very broad range of women’s ministry affirm the Son’s subordination to the Father. To be sure, that subordination may be voluntary, and we do not draw from it the same conclusions many of our complementarian colleagues do; but the fact remains that one’s view on gender roles does not enable one to predict one’s view of relations within the Trinity, or vice-versa.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Paul C. Maxwell, who subscribes to EFS/ERAS, recognizes this by stating that “[t]he ‘analogy’ between Father-Son and husband-wife does not exactly fit. ... The minimalistic dynamics of oneness and sameness among the relative persons do not carry over into marriage. The claim that there is an analogy between the Trinity and marriage emerges as a more seriously strange concept the more the specifics of the claim are considered. ... The line of analogical continuity and discontinuity is drawn in such a convenient place [only a corresponding authority analogy] that it should put the clear lack of evidence, combined with the sheer hermeneutical gymnastics these appeals require, in a light of theological suspicion. There is radical discontinuity intertwined with the very terms claimed to have continuity in these sorts of appeals, which should at the very least give both camps [complementarians and egalitarians] pause to reflect on whether their appeals are biblical” (“Authority Analogy?,” 566).

¹⁹⁰Cole perceptively points out that “when the NT writers want to inform the [social] consciences of their readers, they move from some aspect of the narrative of the gospel to do so. ... NT writers emphasize imitating the historic Christ in his post-incarnation ministry, not in the inner life of the essential Trinity (e.g., Rom. 15:1–3; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Pet. 2:21–23; 1 John 2:6)” (*He Who Gives Life*, 89). This is definitely true in the case of Eph 5:21–33. See n185 in this paper.

¹⁹¹Keener, “Subordination in the Trinity,” 39. McCall similarly writes, “Since [the Trinity and human gender] are conceptually distinct—one can consistently be a ‘complementarian’ with respect to human gender issues and opposed to [EFS/ERAS], while one can also consistently be an ‘egalitarian’ on gender issues and supportive of [EFS/ERAS] in theology—surely it would be better to ‘let the doctrine of God be the doctrine of God’” (“Gender and the Trinity,” 279).

Thus, intuition causes one to wonder where is this supposed connection between the Trinity and human gender. When looking at the two kinds of relations, there seems to be no obvious or necessary parallel between them. Even if the relationship between the Father and the Son correlated univocally with human relationships, it would seem most obvious for it to be applied to those kinds of human relationships that exist between father and son or parent and child, not between male and female, but, even then, there are grave analogical differences.

Moreover, making a direct connection between the Father-Son relation and the male-female relation creates theological problems in the area of Christian ethics. Giles identifies some of these problems:

The Trinity is a threefold relationship; the man/woman relationship is twofold. In only appealing to the Father/Son relationship, this argument leaves out the Holy Spirit. He is forgotten. If God's threefoldness were stressed, and it was agreed the Trinity was prescriptive of human relations, then threesomes would be the ideal! Furthermore, the Father/Son relationship is a picture of a male/male relationship, not a man/woman relationship. Most of us would not want to build on this observation! ... It seems the correlation between the Trinity and the man/woman relationship simply does not make sense.¹⁹²

Some theologians actually have gone as far as making the parallel between the Father-Son relationship and male-male relationships—a more logical, but biblically and theologically problematic, parallel. This has been accomplished by building on the analogy between the Trinity and sexual relations that the twentieth-century Roman Catholic complementarian theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar had established.¹⁹³ While Balthasar did not intend the

¹⁹²Kevin Giles, "CBE and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 25.4 (2011): 21.

¹⁹³According to Maxwell, Balthasar "wrote that the foundation for sexual difference between husband and wife should be located in the ontological relationship ... between the Father and the Son" ("Authority Analogy?," 566; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5 of *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998], 91). See also Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 201.

sexualization of the Trinity (which he rejected), says Paul C. Maxwell, “in painting such a strong ontological analogy between human sexual difference and the Trinitarian relations, Balthasar may have opened an analogical door which he cannot shut.”¹⁹⁴ Indeed he has.

To illustrate what modern theologians have done with this open door, Maxwell uses an article by Gavin D’Costa in which D’Costa argues that “queer relationships are at the ontological heart of the Trinity” because of Balthasar’s “analogy between the Trinity and human gender relations.”¹⁹⁵ “Thus, queer relationships are divinely sanctioned as long as such relationships also represent an overflowing love to the wider community.”¹⁹⁶ In evaluation of D’Costa’s argument, Maxwell writes,

In a sense, it is difficult to refute D’Costa’s basic Trinitarian point: that if the Trinity is an archetype for sexual difference ... , and if at its very heart is a male-male relationship between a Father and Son, then there seems to be a closer one-to-one analogy between a homosexual relationship than a heterosexual one. The point here is merely that an established authority analogy between the Trinity and marriage opens the door to granting an uncomfortable amount of theological legitimacy for queer theology.¹⁹⁷

Indeed, modern theologians have opened the door of sexual ethics even more widely with this Trinity and human gender analogy in order to support incest (although this is discouraged

¹⁹⁴Maxwell, “Authority Analogy?,” 567n69. See also Barbara K. Sain, “Through a Different Lens: Rethinking the Role of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs Balthasar,” *Modern Theology* 25.1 (2009): 72, cited in Maxwell, “Authority Analogy?,” 567.

¹⁹⁵See Gavin D’Costa, “Queer Trinity,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 272–279, cited in Maxwell, “Authority Analogy?,” 567–568; DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 201. Maxwell cites a few other examples (see *ibid.*, 567n72): Kathy Rudy, who additionally argues for communal sex, particularly that which takes place in some gay bars (“Where Two or More Are Gathered: Using Gay Communities as a Model for Christian Sexual Ethics,” *Theology and Sexuality* 2 [March 1996]: 81–99, cited in DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 201); and Robert E. Gross (“Proleptic Sexual Love: God’s Promiscuity Reflected in Christian Polyamory,” *Theology and Sexuality* 11 [2004]: 52–63).

¹⁹⁶Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2001), 56, as cited in DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 202. See also Cheng’s use of Trinitarian theology to support the queer Asian American experience in “A Three-Part Sinfonia: Queer Asian Reflections on the Trinity,” in *New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez (Upland, CA: Sopher Press, 2012), 173–191.

¹⁹⁷Maxwell, “Authority Analogy?,” 568.

because of potential power differentials in such relationships), *ménage à trois*, polygamy, and communal sex, in addition to homosexuality.¹⁹⁸ Thus, “[b]y sexualizing ... the relationality between the members of the Trinity, [complementarian proponents of EFS/ERAS] are inadvertently weakening the very sexual ethic they are working so hard to defend.”¹⁹⁹ This is not a door that most, if not all, advocates of EFS/ERAS would want to leave open!²⁰⁰

Moreover, the connection of the Son’s incarnate submission to the Father with male-female relations entirely misses a crucial point regarding Christ’s obedience to the Father. In John 15:10, Jesus compared the obedience and love of his disciples to his commands with his own obedience and love to the Father during his incarnation. Furthermore, 1 John 2:6 states explicitly that “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” In other words, Jesus’s ethical life of incarnate obedience to God is a biblical call for

¹⁹⁸DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 186–239. She highlights Marilyn McCord Adams, an Episcopal priest and philosopher, who makes a case for *ménage à trois*, polygamy, incest, and homosexuality, building it on the analogy of the Trinity and human gender. See *ibid.*, 200; Marilyn McCord Adams, “Trinitarian Friendship: Same-Gender Models of Godly Love in Richard of St. Victor and Aelred of Rievaulx,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (London: Blackwell, 2002), 352. Adams notes, however, that incest has a problem, namely, “inequality—the imposition on a minor who is unable to grant consent. But, given the equality and coeternality of Father and Son, incest in the Trinity does not suffer from the same weakness” (DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 200). See Adams, “Trinitarian Friendship,” 335.

¹⁹⁹DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 186. She makes this comment regarding Stanley Grenz’s and John Paul II’s social models of the image of God and human sexuality, but it equally applies to the Trinity and human gender model that some EFS/ERAS complementarians assert.

²⁰⁰Some complementarians have claimed that the egalitarian view of male-female relations opens the door for the acceptance of homosexuality and transgenderism in the Christian church. For examples, see Council of Adventist Pastors, *The Adventist Ordination Crisis*, 111–114; Koranteng-Pipim, “Homosexuality and the Church,” in *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2005), 535–563; Wellesley Muir, *Daughters of Inheritance: A New Look at Women’s Ordination* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2010), 65–88. As has been demonstrated in this paper, it is the EFS/ERAS hermeneutic, which connects male-female relations to the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity to support complementarian gender roles, that, in reality, has provided a fruitful foundation for queer, feminist, and other kinds of theologians to build their cases for the adoption of a plethora of alternate sexual practices to monogamous, heterosexual marriage—including homosexuality—in the Christian church. For more examples, see Patrick S. Cheng, “Radically Inclusive Models of God,” in *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians*, ed. Robert E. Shore-Goss, Thomas Bohache, Patrick S. Cheng, and Mona West (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 29–32.

all who claim to be his disciples to follow in his footsteps. Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo rightly point out that “the complementarian argument misunderstands [this] intent of Christ’s example. Nowhere does the New Testament assert that the Son’s obedience to the Father is a model of how one gender (women) should relate to the other (men). ... Jesus’ obedience to the One he called “Abba” serves as the model for how all human beings—male or female—should live in obedience to God.”²⁰¹ The biblical call to follow the moral example of Jesus’s obedience during his incarnation is given to *all* Christians, whether male or female.²⁰²

A connection between the Father-Son relationship and male-female relations, then, is logically inconsistent, ethically problematic for evangelical Christians, and nowhere asserted in Scripture. As Bird and Shillaker state, “The analogy does not work and, in fact, if construed differently, Trinitarian relations could potentially prove the opposite conclusion” of complementarian sexual ethics.²⁰³ “Therefore, lacking clear scriptural warrant, no analogy between gender roles and the Trinity is appropriate” for either complementarians or egalitarians to devise.²⁰⁴ Otherwise, theologians who wish to erect some kind of analogy between the Trinity

²⁰¹Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 153. See also Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, 57. In fact, when Paul desired to ground theologically his call for wives to respect and submit to their own husbands and for husbands to love, cherish, and sacrifice themselves for their own wives, he did not use an analogy of intra-Trinitarian relations. Rather, he did so by making an analogy between the Christ-church relation (a christological-ecclesiological, not Trinitarian, analogy) and the wife-husband relation. See Eph 5:22–31. “[T]he Bible only compares the husband’s leadership role to that of Christ’s in the church, not to that of the Father over the Son during the incarnation,” (Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity*, 276). Similarly, Bird and Shillaker say, “[W]e should be very careful about suggestions that what is true of Trinitarian relationships is also true of male-female relationships. Scripture gives us a better analogy to apply directly to male-female relations and that is the image of Christ and the church in Eph 5:21-33” (“Subordination in the Trinity,” 281).

²⁰²“I do not believe that the relation of the Son to the Father is directly relevant to the current gender role debate at all—except as a model to all Christians in our loving submission to God and to one another” (Keener, “Subordination within the Trinity,” 50).

²⁰³Bird and Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity,” 282.

²⁰⁴Butner, Jr., *Son Who Learned Obedience*, 156.

and human gender run the risk of succumbing to projection rather than reaching biblically and theologically sound conclusions.²⁰⁵

EFS/ERAS, then, is a significant deviation from Scripture with numerous dangerous theological implications. It offers a lowered Christology that collapses into some form of Arianism or, ultimately some kind of polytheism. This lowered Christology weakens soteriology by warping Christ's motivation of self-sacrificial love that stands behind the cross event, turning it into a mere demonstration of authority and obedience. It also precludes any need for the Trinitarian *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption. Even more so, it contradicts the voluntary and non-obligatory nature of Christ's death that is needed for transactional theories of the atonement and particularly distorts the penal substitutionary view of the atonement that was accomplished for humanity through the death of Christ. This, in turn, impacts theodicy, defaming the character of God by portraying him as violent and bloodthirsty. All of this, ultimately has very practical consequences for the experience of believers by prescribing a system of ethics that stands in contradistinction to the ethics taught and embodied by Jesus himself whom they are to follow.

Summary

In summary, the eternal, functional submission of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son as an analogy for male-female relations is a relatively new argumentation that some complementarians have introduced to strengthen the foundation of their position on the role submission of women to men in the gender debate. This argumentation of EFS/ERAS creates some serious, unwarranted problems for Christian theology. It fails to provide

²⁰⁵See *ibid.*, 152. "Any such application risks projection given that great dissimilarity between God and creation and the lack of scriptural guidance" (*ibid.*, 156).

the evangelical community with an adequate Trinitarian model for all the theological, christological, and pneumatological data revealed in the canonical Scriptures. Furthermore, it also could severely damage the doctrine of God, undermine the atonement of Christ, void the *pactum salutis*, mar the true character of God, contort Jesus’s ethical teachings, and provide an analogy for grounding unbiblical sexual practices, that is if the full extent of its implications is carried consistently throughout one’s entire theological system.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Moving Forward

In conclusion, because of its lack of canonical support and its problems and weighty implications for Christianity, one should be careful not to make a one-to-one analogy between the Father-Son relationship and male-female relations.²⁰⁶ As such, EFS/ERAS should be excluded from the discussion on gender roles.²⁰⁷ Evangelicals, including Seventh-day

²⁰⁶This is not to say that theology proper should not inform one’s entire theological system of faith and practice. It should, but its influence should only go as far as Scripture allows. In other words, this does not mean that there are no legitimate analogies that can be made between the Trinity and humanity, but that any analogy that is made must arise exegetically (as opposed to eisegetically) out of the textual data found in the canon. As Butner, Jr. says, “Where God has explicitly revealed a correlation between the Trinity and created realities Christians can speak of an analogy with confidence” (*Son Who Learned Obedience*, 153). For instance, Scripture seems to make an analogy between the oneness that the Father and Son share and that which Jesus prayed that the disciples may share (John 17:11, 20–23). There also seems to be an analogy of the love shared in the Trinity and that shared among Christ’s disciples (cf. John 15:9, 12; 17:23–26). Detailed exegetical and canonical-theological exploration of these analogies is needed to determine the precise meaning of these analogies and their analogical limits.

Regarding gender roles, the above principle entails affirming what is exegetically and canonically-theologically “discernible, demonstrable, and defensible” in the text regarding male-female relations (John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 209). This first requires, at the least, an unqualified affirmation of the full equality and “relationality” (unity in plurality) of all humanity—no matter one’s gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc. (Gal 3:28)—because all bear the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26–28). This even includes fallen human beings who still bear the *imago Dei* (image of God), even though sin has marred it to a significant degree. For an excellent discussion on what is meant by “relationality” and “unity in plurality,” see Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, 29–72; Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 91; Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 123–124. Second, this would require study of analogies between God and male-female relations found in Scripture. No one-to-one analogy between the Trinity and human gender, of which I am aware, is ever given in Scripture (as demonstrated above, 1 Cor 11:3 does not fit the bill). However, a very pertinent analogy given in Scripture for gender relations is that between the Christ-church relation and the husband-wife relation (Eph 5:21–33). Again, careful exegetical and canonical-theological work will need to be done to understand the exact meaning of this analogy when applied to husbands and wives and its analogical limits.

²⁰⁷Cole is also “not convinced” that scholars should be erecting “social models for marriage, church, and

Adventists, and other Christians, who are now involved in the discussion on gender roles, should return to the utilization of proper biblical and theological hermeneutics; conduct, once again, biblical and historical studies that explore relevant data in the areas of anthropology and ecclesiology; and avoid projecting the ontology of humanity and the church into the ontology of the triune God. It is inappropriate to read perceived differences of gender roles into the economic functions and then into the immanent relationships and being of the persons of the Trinity in order to have a stronger grounding for one's sociological position. This is making God into one's *own* image. As Bilezikian writes, "If some people's belief system requires the subordination of women, they should not build their hierarchy at the expense of Christological orthodoxy."²⁰⁸

Furthermore, because of the insurmountable multitude of biblical and theological problems of EFS/ERAS, it seems most prudent that theologians should abandon it altogether. It should be replaced with the traditional position of Christianity taught in Scripture that, in the intra-Trinitarian *pactum salutis*, Christ voluntarily covenanted and later implemented a temporary experience of submission and obedience to the Father and the Holy Spirit in his incarnate ministry unto death, and the Holy Spirit voluntarily covenanted and later implemented a temporary experience of submission to the Father and the Son in his applying and empowering ministry from Pentecost to the eschaton so that the triune God could accomplish the full redemption of humanity and the complete restoration of the *cosmos* from sin. In this vein, one should carefully consider Bilezikian's three recommendations.²⁰⁹ Firstly, do not muddle with the

society based on speculative reconstructions of the inner life of the Trinity" (*He Who Gives Life*, 91). See also Maxwell, "Authority Analogy?," 565–569; Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 120.

²⁰⁸Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-jumping," 67.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 66–68.

triune Godhead; especially do not lower the majesty of Christ when Christians are called to exalt him. Secondly, cease using the term “subordination,” which is reminiscent of Arianism, and, in its place, speak of Christ’s voluntary self-humiliation. Lastly, “[l]et us not use God to push our ideological agendas.”²¹⁰ “Let the Father be God, let Christ be God, let the Holy Spirit be God—all three in one, ‘equal in power and glory’ for all eternity.”²¹¹

²¹⁰Ibid., 68.

²¹¹Ibid.

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