

An examination of the seven pillars on which the case for the permanent subordination of women stands.

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I have been involved in the debate among evangelicals over the status and ministry of women for over thirty years. As time has passed I have come to recognize that the case for the permanent subordination of women in the church and the home, as it has developed since the 1970s, is consistently and foundationally predicated on a number of linguistic and theological constructs that determine how the Bible is read. The way forward in resolving this painful divide among evangelicals as to what the Bible actually presents as God's ideal for the man-woman relationship I now believe lies not in one more study of the meaning of the word *kephale*/head in 1 Cor.11.3, or of the verb *authentain*/authority, or of the force of the *ou .. de* construction in 1 Tim 2:12, but in examining what determines how these texts, and indeed the whole Bible, is interpreted by hierarchical-complementarians. The matters I raise are so pervasive and inherent to the contemporary case for women's subordinate status in the home and the church that no footnoting is needed. In what follows I list the consistently given key arguments for the permanent subordination of women basic to the hierarchical-complementarian position and point out why they fail to convince me and many other evangelicals with a high view of Scripture.¹

1. Women's subordinate position is grounded in "the order of creation." All evangelicals accept that the apostles exhort women to be subordinate, and in 1 Tim 2:12 Paul commands women not to teach or exercise authority. Where we disagree is on the application of these comments. Hierarchical-complementarians argue that these texts convey timeless, transcultural truth that is to be obeyed until Christ returns. In contrast, egalitarian-complementarians argue that the apostolic exhortations to wives to be subordinate, like those to slaves, are simply practical advice to women living in a culture that took the subordination of women and the institution of slavery as cultural givens. They do not address women living in a culture where the equality of women is assumed.

¹ This essay is a development of my more extended discussion of these issues in Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers grove, Ill.: InterVarsity) 2002, 141-268.

Paul's command to women given in 1 Tim 2:11-12, egalitarians argue, is a specific directive related exclusively to problems in the Ephesian church of that time. It cannot be a universal, transcultural command because elsewhere Paul endorses the leadership of women in the life of the church,² and people in leadership teach.

In reply to this now widely endorsed egalitarian interpretative approach, which opens the way for the full emancipation of women, hierarchical-complementarians insist that the subordination of women is grounded in a *hierarchical social order* instituted by God before sin entered the world. It is not practical, culture-bound teaching. It is timeless, transcultural truth that reveals *God's ideal* for the man-woman relationship. Man is to lead, woman obey. Proof of this assertion is found in 1 Tim 2:13 where we are told Paul grounds his prohibition on women teaching and exercising authority in the church on God's ordering of the male-female relationship as given in Genesis chapter two. Women are not to teach and exercise authority "for (Gk *gar*) Adam was formed first then Eve." All the exhortations to wives to be subordinate, unlike those to slaves it is added, are similarly grounded on this creation given, permanently-binding, social ordering.

The problems this argument raises are profound and insurmountable. I briefly outline them.

i. 1 Tim. 2:13 does not refer to a once-given, hierarchical *social order* prescribed before the fall but explicitly to the *chronological order* of the creation of man and woman as set out in Genesis chapter two. This is how exegetes until the 1970s interpreted this verse. Man was created first and is thus "superior" or super-ordinated, woman second and thus "inferior" or subordinated. The problem here is that created second does not logically imply or indicate subordination. Calvin with his characteristic candor says, "Paul's argument that woman is subject because she was created second, does not seem very strong, for John the Baptist went before Christ in time and yet he was far inferior to him."³ He is right. Created second indicates neither super-ordination nor subordination. It

² A woman apostle, women prophesying, women evangelists, women deacons, women house church leaders etc.

³ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians and the Epistles of Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964) 217.

is a mute detail in the story. That Paul appeals to this chronological order to support his appeal that women in Ephesus in that specific place for a very specific reason, or generally as a principle, not teach or exercise authority, does not determine the meaning of the Genesis account. Sometimes New Testament writers give more than one interpretation of the same Old Testament text, or give it a meaning that historical critical exegesis cannot support.⁴ In any case Paul simply says that “Adam was formed first then woman.” The force of this statement is an interpretative deduction.⁵

ii. The idea that in creation God laid down a number of unchanging “creation orders” (social structures/structuring) that apply to all of life, such as marriage, the state, work, etc, was first developed in the 19th century.⁶ In this devised theological construct “orders of creation” apply to all of creation, they are inescapable universals. They are to be contrasted with “orders of redemption” that apply only to Christians, usually in the home and the church. Contemporary evangelicals who appeal to “the order of creation” as the basis for women’s unchanging and unchangeable subordinate status always have in mind this theologically developed understanding of this expression. Whether or not we accept the idea that in creation God established a number of creation social givens, one thing is crystal clear, 1 Tim. 2:13 does not allude to this idea or justify it. In the Timothy text Paul alludes simply to *chronological order*.

iii. What is more, if women are indeed subordinated in one of the theologically constructed “orders of creation,” then they are subordinate in all spheres of life: all creation. Women should be barred from leadership in the home, the church *and the state* (public life). Evangelicals who appeal to “orders of creation theology” are inconsistent at best and disingenuous at worst in using this argument. If they want to base women’s subordination on a once-given creation social order then they should demand that women

⁴ Eg. 1 Cor. 10:1-5, 2 Cor. 3:2-18, Gal. 4:21-31.

⁵ On the exegesis of 1 Tim 2:11-15 see Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority in 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, eds Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004) 205-223. On the force of the Greek *gar* translated “because” Belleville p. 204 points out it “typically introduces an explanation for what precedes not a cause.”

⁶ First by Adolf von Harless (1806-1879). On the theology of creation orders see in more detail, Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 172-174.

be subordinate in the world, the church and the home, as most theologians did for long centuries. They need either to consistently apply their creation order theology to all of the creation, or abandon it completely.

iv. Notwithstanding what I have just said I think the idea that God instituted certain social structures in creation is a helpful theological idea as long as it is *not* thought that these structures are unchanging, static realities. What should be thought of as given in creation are such things as marriage, the state and work, not the how these things are ordered. The manner in which the state is ordered can and has changed over the centuries, and often Christians have been at the forefront in working for change. Similarly the nature of work and the form of marriage has changed over the centuries. What we have learned from these changes is that all social ordering is a human construct and for this reason human beings can change it. Appeal to static, God-prescribed social ordering is always an attempt by those holding power and privilege to maintain the *status quo* for their own benefit. The Bible in contrast envisages social change and often bears testimony to it. Thus the Scriptures encourage God's people to be agents of social change when it promotes justice and equity. On this basis many evangelicals are committed to working for justice for the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden, and specifically for the emancipation of women.

v. The idea of timeless, unchanging social structures is a Greek, pagan idea.⁷ The Bible sees God working out his purposes in history with a strong eschatological orientation. The future discloses God's ideal for humankind not the past. Thus in the first scene of the unfolding Biblical drama set in the Garden of Eden the devil is present and sin is possible. In the last scene set in heaven the devil is not present and sin will not be possible. For Paul, the new creation inaugurated by Christ introduces a step forward in salvation history going beyond the old creation (2 Cor. 5:17). What he awaits is the perfection of creation on the last day (Rom. 8:22-25).

⁷ For the most recent expression of this fact see, A. McGrath, *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology* (Malden, UK: Blackwell, 2006) 183-193.

2. *There is a profound theological difference between the exhortations to slaves to be subordinate and women to be subordinate.* This contrast should be made, hierarchical-complementarians tell us, because all the exhortations to woman are based on “the order of creation,” whereas none of the ones to slaves are. Again this argument cannot bear scrutiny.

The fact is that none of the exhortations to wives to be subordinated are grounded on an appeal to Genesis chapters one or two. In Eph. 5:31, Gen. 2:24 is quoted solely in relation to the unity of the sexes established by marriage. The two possible exceptions are 1 Tim. 2:11-14 and 1 Cor.11:3-16. In the first passage, women are forbidden to teach or exercise authority for we are told “Adam was formed first” and “Eve was deceived not Adam.” One reference to the *chronological* order in which man and women were created and to the idea that somehow woman is more culpable for the Fall than man does not prove that *all* the exhortations to wives are based on a *hierarchical social order* given in creation. In 1 Cor.11:3ff Paul argues that women should cover their “heads” and men leave theirs uncovered when the two sexes in parity lead in prophecy and prayer in the congregation. Then follows more than one appeal to the creation stories to justify women covering their heads.⁸ However, in this case virtually all Christians hold that what a woman wears on her head in our culture is of no significance. Paul’s directive on head covering, although supported by appeals to creation, is a time-bound, culturally specific teaching, not applicable today.

Then to make things even more difficult for my hierarchical-complementarian friends, no

⁸ I note that Benjamin L. Merkle, “Paul’s Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14; An Apparent Inconsistency Answered”, *JETS*, 49/3 (2006) 527-548 tries hard to deflect this observation. He and I agree completely that throughout this passage Paul is seeking to insist on sexual differentiation. All egalitarians are united in affirming unequivocally that God made us men and women. Paul wants women to cover their head and men to leave theirs uncovered when both lead in prayer and prophecy to illustrate their gender difference. I am, however, totally unpersuaded that all Paul’s creation arguments that follow are solely concerned with sexual differentiation as such. The text itself shows that each argument he gives relates to what one has or has not on their head (see 11:6, 7-10, 13, 15). It is on the matter of head covering that the apostle appeals to the creation stories for support. The claim that Paul is also seeking to impose “role” differentiation is also patently false. If the word “role” is used according to its dictionary meaning as alluding to what people do then Paul is here saying men and women can do the same things in church, both can assume the role of leading in prayer and prophecy – so long as they minister as men and women.

one before the 1970s ever suggested there was a profound difference between these two sets of apostolic exhortations, indeed the consensus was that they were of the same nature and force, and no contemporary scholarly study as far as I can see gives any support to this idea.⁹ The truth is that the Bible says much more that can be read to support the institution of slavery than it does on the supposed permanent subordination of women. What we have here in this argument is a piece of special pleading found only in evangelical writings with a specific agenda. The hard facts of the matter are that the exhortations to wives and slaves stand side by side and are of the same nature, exhortations to people living in a culture that took the institution of slavery and the subordination of women as cultural givens. Neither applies today.

How slavery is dealt with by hierarchical-complementarians is to be carefully noted. Despite the extensive teaching on slavery in the Old and New Testaments, which most Christians across the centuries have read to endorse the institution of slavery until very recent times, my debating opponents insist this teaching is *not* applicable today. What the Bible says on slavery is simply practical advice to masters and slaves living in a culture that accepts slavery as a social norm. Slavery is not pleasing to God in our age, they tell us. In other words they are explicitly arguing that the historic interpretation of these texts should be abandoned to be replaced by a new interpretation that makes this teaching in Scripture time-bound and culture-limited. If this is the case then egalitarian evangelicals are only following exactly the same line of reasoning in reference to slaves *and* women. In a changed cultural context, they conclude, the historic interpretation of these parallel exhortations to be subordinate need to be abandoned as mistaken. God's ideal is that every human person be equally valued and allowed to express their full potential. No adult human being is permanently locked into a subordinate status by God. The exhortations to women and to slaves are exactly alike, time-bound, culture-specific practical advice to people living in a society that took the institution of slavery and the subordination of women as cultural norms. They do not apply in an egalitarian culture.

⁹ I set out the evidence for this claim in Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 251-258. No reply has been given.

3. *Prophecy and teaching are very different ministries.* Hierarchical-complementarians consistently argue that the Christian teacher speaks with God-given authority, simply applying inspired objective biblical revelation. In contrast, the prophet speaks on the basis of a subjective Spirit-given revelation which he may not receive perfectly so what he says must always be judged by the hearer. On the basis of this argument the prohibition in 1 Tim 2:12 on women teaching and the many Biblical endorsements in the Old and New Testaments of women prophesying can be reconciled. So we are told God has given to men alone the authority to teach in church although women may prophesy (at least in theory. I have yet to meet a hierarchical-complementarian who encourages women to prophesy in church.)

On a common sense basis I find this distinction very difficult. Surely Christians must judge both what the teacher and the prophet say. I personally often listen to evangelical teachers/preachers who claim that all they are saying is based squarely on the Word of God but as a long-time student of Scripture I am not convinced. Much of what they say seems to speak more of their concerns and opinions than those of God almighty. I for one certainly keep my critical faculties awake when I listen to Christian teachers/preachers. I very much suspect the apostles would commend me for this. If not, why do they give so many warnings against false teachers?¹⁰ Do not these warnings imply the need to be vigilant when listening to teachers in church: to judge what is taught by anyone whether they claim to be an apostle, prophet, teacher or whatever.

When it comes to what the Bible says on teaching and prophecy, or the teacher and the prophet, any claim to a sharp and clear distinction between these two ministries is problematic.¹¹ In support of a distinction between the prophet and the teacher, two Pauline texts can be quoted (1 Cor.12:28 and Eph. 4:11).¹² However, if the Bible as a whole is our guide what these texts seem to imply should not be universalized. The Old

¹⁰ Matt. 7:15-20, Acts 20:30, 2Cor. 11:13, Gal. 1:6-9, Col.2:8, 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 2 Tim. 4:3, Titus 1:10-11, Jude 3-4 etc.

¹¹ Here it is to be noted that David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) argues that teaching is the primary function of the prophet.

¹² See further on what follows, Kevin Giles, "Prophecy, Prophets, False Prophets", *The Dictionary of the Later New Testament Writings and Its Development*, eds., Ralf D. Martin and Peter H. David (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997) 970-977.

Testament endorses both the ministry of male and female prophets,¹³ and it is quite clear that among other things Old Testament prophets taught God's people.¹⁴ Jesus is depicted as a prophet and he accepts this title, yet he is primarily a teacher.¹⁵ As far as Luke is concerned he held that all forms of authoritative speaking in the power of the Spirit may be thought of as prophetic speech and once he seems to equate the ministry of the prophet and the teacher (Acts 13:1). In the book of Revelation Jezebel is described as a prophet who gives false teaching (Rev. 2:20). Even Paul allows that prophecy and teaching are closely related ministries. Thus he says the work of the prophet is to "upbuild, encourage, and console" the congregation (1 Cor.14:3), things teacher/preachers do, and he says when prophets speak "all may learn" (1 Cor.14:31) – learning happens when teachers teach.

But the most difficult problem for the thesis that the teacher has greater authority than the prophet is the fact that Paul sets the apostle and the prophet above the teacher. It is his view that, "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers" (1 Cor.12:28, cf. Eph. 4:11). In the wider circle of missionary apostles, which Paul would seem to have in mind in both these texts, he makes the ministry of the apostle "first" in the church. Among this group of apostles Paul mentions by name several men and one woman, Junia (Rom. 16:7). The now compelling evidence that Junia is rightly considered to be among those "first" in the church, on its own destroys the case that Paul thought women could only have subordinate ministries.¹⁶ These missionary apostles were certainly evangelists and as such must have been involved in teaching their converts. Evangelising and teaching, are the very things that Luke has the missionary apostles Barnabas and Paul doing (Acts 13:13-52). When it comes to the ministry of the prophet, which Paul places "second" in pre-eminence, nothing in the New Testament suggests that the prophet speaks with less in authority than the teacher. The prophet in the Old Testament speaks for God, Luke has the highest regard for the ministry of the

¹³ Miriam Ex. 15:19-21; Deborah Judges 4:4; Huldah 2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chron. 34:22; Noadiah Neh. 6:10-14. See John T. Willis, "Huldah and other Biblical Prophetesses, in Carroll D. Osburn ed, *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, 2, (Joplin, Miss.: College Press, 1995) 105-124.

¹⁴ E.g. Is. 1:10, 8:16, 9:15, 50:4, Jer. 32:33.

¹⁵ Jesus is called a prophet in the Gospels (Jn 4:19, 7:40, Lk 24:19) and he accepts this designation (Matt 13:57).

prophet and so does Paul (cf. 1Cor.14:1-5). Both these apostolic writers have prophets, men and women, speaking the Word of the Lord in the power of the Spirit. The prophet's words need to be judged but so do those of the teacher.

4. *Only a hierarchical understanding of the man-woman relationship safeguards sexual differentiation.* In hierarchical-complementarian literature there are repeated warnings that the egalitarian case invariably leads to a blurring at best, and a denial at worst, of sexual differentiation. The argument is that only by insisting that in creation God set the man over the woman as the unchanging ideal can sexual differentiation be maintained. How this conclusion is reached is not rationally explained, or explainable. To begin with no egalitarian denies sexual differentiation. Indeed most go out of their way to unambiguously endorse that the Bible is predicated on the equality *and* the differentiation of the sexes (Gen. 1:28). In my over thirty years in this debate I have never heard or read an egalitarian questioning divine differentiation in any way. Many times I have challenged my debating opponents to come up with one example of such a denial and they have not been able to find one.

Behind this claim that sexual differentiation is undermined by the egalitarian case seems to be the mistaken premise that if you deny the subordination of women you deny sexual differentiation. Thus the minute a hierarchical-complementarian hears someone affirming the equality of the sexes they jump to the conclusion that they are arguing for a sexless society, no matter what they say to the contrary. In response, it is hard to know whether to cry or to laugh at such reasoning. Equality and differentiations are in no way contradictory ideas. I give one racial example. A Chinese person and a Polynesian person are differentiated but in God's sight they are equal and thus should be accorded equal dignity and equality of opportunity in society and the church. However, the final blow to this confused and flawed argument is found in the primary divine declaration on the sexes. Man and woman are alike made in the image and likeness of God, equal in being, and alike given mandate to rule over God's world, equal in function, yet differentiated as man and woman (Gen.1:27-28). Equality of dignity and opportunity never calls into

¹⁶ Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia, the First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, Fortress) 2005.

question the possibility that two people may be differentiated superficially or very profoundly.

Because egalitarian unambiguously endorse sexual equality *and* differentiation, following Gen 1:27-28, they are unambiguously *complementarians*. They see man and woman standing side by side each contributing to all of life as men and women - complementing each other. In marriage, the man contributes his maleness to his beloved and the woman contributes her femaleness to her beloved. This is why marriage is such a complex and wonderful relationship. In ministry it is the same. A woman as a missionary apostle, prophet, evangelist, deacon, house church leader, pastor, or whatever, ministers as a woman: a man in the same ministry ministers as a man. Each contributes according to their sexual identity given by God. The church is much poorer when women are excluded from all significant leadership positions. The truth is all evangelicals are complementarians, some are hierarchical-complementarians, envisaging men standing over women: some are egalitarian-complementarians, envisaging men and women standing side by side in the world, the church and the home. For one side to claim to be “complementarians,” at the exclusion of the other side, may be a triumph in tactics, paralleling the naming of the pro-abortion lobby “pro-choice”, but it does not further the cause of truth or meaningful interaction.

5. If it is held that how the Bible is interpreted may change when significant social change occurs then surely the acceptance of homosexual marriages and gay clergy must follow. Closely allied to fears about undermining sexual differentiation many hierarchical-complementarians fear that the logic of the egalitarian position must open the door to the acceptance of homosexuality. We are told, if you are arguing that women should be accorded equality because contemporary Western culture has granted equality then surely the acceptance of homosexual marriages and homosexual clergy must follow. In answer to this oft-heard charge it must be said first of all that no evangelical holds that culture determines what is to be accepted or do not accepted in scripture. Scripture has ultimate authority. Egalitarians are not questioning the authority of the Bible but pointing to the undeniable truth that Christians often change their *interpretation* of the Bible when

massive intellectual and social change occurs. When the world changes they invariably see things in scripture hitherto unseen and read it differently. The realization that the earth was not flat and that the sun did not revolve around the earth are examples of conceptual changes that resulted in a change in interpretation and slavery is another. When Christians lived in a culture that accepted slavery as part of everyday life they did not see the passages in scripture that called this institution into question. Then something changed and now virtually all Christians see in the Bible verses that imply that slavery is not God's ideal. To change one's *interpretation* of Scripture on some matter because what is seen in scripture, possibly for the first time, demands this change is not to abandon the evangelical doctrine of scripture. Here it needs to be remembered that while we have inspired scriptures that may be thought of as inerrant, we do not have inspired interpretation or inerrant interpreters.

Egalitarian evangelicals have no trouble in endorsing the equality of the sexes and not endorsing homosexual sexual relations because the two issues are categorically different. They endorse the equality of the sexes because the Bible undeniably asserts that by God's creative act man and woman are alike made in the image and likeness of God and alike given authority over God's world. This the view of the sexes Jesus endorsed by example and direct teaching. Furthermore, egalitarians hold that to demand the subordinate position of women, simply because they are women and for no other reason, puts women down and demeans them. It is unfair and unjust. When it comes to homosexuality things are different. Homosexuals as human beings made in the image and likeness of God must also be respected and treated justly. Few dispute this. The issue for orthodox Christians is about homosexual sexual activity. On this matter biblical teaching is consistent. Same sex, sexual relations are condemned by the Scriptures, just like the Scriptures condemn adultery. There are no let out clauses. Only muddled thinking or special pleading can confuse what is central in these two debates, and why they should not be equated.

6. *Men and women are equal: God has simply given them differing roles.* In the 1970s when women's emancipation was changing the world a new way of expressing the historic case for the subordination of women was needed. No longer could Christians

simply assert that God had made man “superior” and woman “inferior”, as virtually all theologians had done for centuries. In this critical hour one of the most innovative evangelical theologians of the twentieth century stepped forward with a novel solution. George Knight III argued that women were not “inferior” to men, God had simply given men and women differing “roles”.¹⁷ This sounded to modern ears perfectly acceptable. Who could disagree that women bear children and men do not, or that in most homes men and women tended to take responsibility for different things? The use of this word “role” to explain in a seemingly innocuous way “the difference” between men and women caught on like a bush fire in socially conservative circles. In just over thirty years, it has become the agreed way to correlate the equality of the sexes and the permanent subordination of women. It is now one of the foundational pillars in support of the evangelical case for the permanent subordination of women. However, once again this key element in the hierarchical-complementarian position cannot bear scrutiny.

First it must be recognized that in embracing the sociological term “role” to explain male-female differentiation, biblical revelation is undermined. Nothing in the Bible would suggest that God has differentiated the sexes primarily by what they do, their roles. The Bible in fact grounds sexual differentiation in God’s creative act. In Gen.1:27-28 we are told in crystal clear terms that God created at the apex of his handiwork one species, humankind, in two forms, male and female. Modern biology has shown that one indelible aspect of this God-given sexual differentiation is our differing chromosomes. To define sexual differentiation primarily in terms of social roles is biblically and scientifically insupportable.

Over the centuries theologians have adopted many terms not found in the Bible that have proven helpful in clarify and giving precision in the formulation of doctrines (e.g., *homoousious* (one in being), Trinity). The word “role” cannot be judged as one of these because it confuses and obfuscates what is being argued. In sociological and popular usage, the word “role” refers to what people do: who mows the lawn, washes up, pays the

¹⁷ *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1977).

bills, etc. It is also understood that “roles” can change and that they may differ from culture to culture. This is *not* how this word “role” is used in hierarchical-complementarian literature. In this literature it refers solely to who exercises authority (men) and who is to obey (women). It speaks not of what people do but of who exercises power and who does not, not of *role relationships* but of *power relationships*. What is more these power relationships/roles can never change, they are *permanent and person defining*. Men because they are men are the ruling sex, women because they are women are the subordinated sex. Given this is in fact what is being argued then the contemporary evangelical case for the *permanent subordination of women* does not safeguard the equality of the sexes. This position is predicated on the belief that women as women lack something given by God only to men, leadership potential. On this key matter, they are men’s inferiors. Simply to deny this with a loud voice does not overcome this problem.

Here it should be noted that the most important critique of the use of role terminology by hierarchical-complementarians to define male-female differentiation is given by the erudite German evangelical scholar, Walter Neuer, who is of this persuasion.¹⁸ He argues that this terminology undermines biblical revelation and is profoundly mistaken. He concludes that “in the cause of truth we should give up talking about the roles of the sexes.”¹⁹ I agree completely. The use of the term role confuses rather than clarifies what is being argued.

7. The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity sets the Father eternally over the Son in functional authority. This is the ultimate basis for man’s functional authority over women and it explains how two “people” can be ontologically equal and yet one eternally subordinate in functional authority. This appeal to the Trinity is also a key supporting pillar for the evangelical case for the permanent subordination of women. In this paper, I do not wish to discuss this matter. I simply point out that for the pro-Nicene Fathers their belief was that if the divine three were one in being then they were one in

¹⁸ *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans. Gordon J. Wenham (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990). However, see also the excellent article by Rebecca Groothuis, “Equal in Being, Unequal in Function”, in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, op cit, 301-333.

¹⁹ Neuer, *ibid*, 30.

divinity, one in power/authority and they work as one (“inseparably”).²⁰ Thus the Athanasian Creed declares that in the Trinity “none is before or after, greater or lesser,” all are “co-equal.” All the Reformation and Post-Reformation confessions likewise insist that the divine three are one in being *and* authority. Historic orthodoxy condemns any attempt to eternally subordinate the Son. As Christians, we are bound to confess him as “Lord.”

Conclusion.

I have spoken very bluntly and provocatively. I encourage a response of the same nature that explicitly addresses the issues that I have raised. These matters cannot simply be avoided or overcome by personally attacking the one who raised them. In “the cause of truth”, to use Neuer’s expression, I plead with you my debating opponents to address these matters I have been raising publicly for many years. Women who are half the human race stand waiting to hear the reply you make.

²⁰ See more on this in my book, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan,) 2006.