

The Doctrine of the Trinity

and its bearing on the relationship of men and women

1 Introduction

1.1 The Archbishop and the Standing Committee have referred the following proposed resolution (drafted by the Rev Narelle Jarrett) to the Doctrine Commission:

'Since the doctrine of the Trinity has been used in debate to support both an egalitarian and a subordination model for male and female roles in ministry and marriage, Synod respectfully requests the Archbishop to -

- (a) Refer what appears to be a conflict of view on the relation of the persons of the Trinity within the Godhead to the Doctrine Commission for its consideration and report;
- (b) request the Doctrine Commission to report back to the first session of the 45th Synod.'

1.2 The issue has been raised specifically by a paper prepared in favour of the priesthood of women for the Conference on Women's Ministry in May 1998:

'Paul argues no priority of male and female and no subordination, only a fundamental equality. This is all consistent with Paul's idea of headship which is based on his understanding of the Godhead. That God is the head of Christ means that the "Son is eternally begotten of the Father", or "of the same stuff as" and therefore equal to God. By analogy, the female is "of the same stuff as" and therefore equal to the male. For, in creation, God made us human, male and female. There is no order of subordination in this understanding of headship' (*Not Compromise . . .* p2).

'The Athanasian Creed specifies that there is no ordered subordination or hierarchy within the Godhead. The only stated subordination is that Jesus is "inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood". Headship within the Trinity cannot mean "subordinate to" or "under the authority of". Subordination is a matter of the freedom

of the will, not of some imposed order: it is voluntary and mutual, and for us in the Church, it is "out of reverence for Christ" ' (p 3).

- 1.3 An alternative view is put frequently in the literature, as by Dr Thomas R Schreiner, for example:

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

(Schreiner in Piper and Grudem , 128).

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

2 **Suggested Problems with the 'subordinationist' thesis**

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

initiated by God the Father and won by God the Son on the cross, is applied to us by God the Holy Spirit.

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

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

2.4 It is a heresy 'Subordinationism' is certainly the name given by historians of theology to a major heresy, that of suggesting that in substance or in being, ('ontologically') the Son is inferior to the Father¹. The classic form of Subordinationism is Arianism, the doctrine which taught that the Son was a secondary god, unlike and not of the same substance or essence as the Father. But a more moderate form, in which the Son is of like substance to the Father, was also judged inadequate. The Church doctrine states that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are of the same substance, or essence, equal in power, dignity, worship and praise. The

¹ In this Report, the heresy of Subordination is usually spelled with a capital to distinguish it from references to any authentic subordination within the Godhead.

question discussed below is whether the subordinationism asserted in the current debate is the heretical form or not (see s. 3 below). Gilbert Bilezikian claims that it is: 'God and Christ are both persons within the one being of the Trinity. Nowhere in the Bible is there a reference to a chain of command within the Trinity. Such "subordinationist" theories were propounded during the fourth century and were rejected as heretical' (Bilezikian, 279).

2.5 It applies only to the redemptive work of Christ. The second criticism accepts that there is a legitimate form of subordinationism, but insists (as in the quote given in s.1.2 above) that it is applied only to Christ in his redemptive work. As the Athanasian creed (a standard authority for Anglicans) says, 'And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are coeternal together: and co-equal.' In dealing with the Son it says: 'our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is God and Man', and continues later, 'Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood'. Thus hierarchy and subordination are features of the relationship between the man Jesus and his heavenly Father, but (it is claimed) not of the relationship between the Father and the Son before the incarnation. Another version of this criticism widens the scope by saying that the subordination is specifically to do with redemption, not the permanent inner life of the Godhead:

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

This is a matter to which direct appeal must be made to the Scriptures to see whether they throw light on the subject (see s.4 below)

2.6 The analogy with human relationships does not hold. There is a third problem urged from the egalitarian point of view. Even if a form of subordinationism is acceptable, and even if it applies to the eternal relations between the Persons of the Godhead, is it relevant to the subject of the relationships between men and women? Thus, since the divine persons are not Persons in the human sense (they are not 'three people', for example), the analogy between God and human relations is a false one. 'The subordination of individual persons within the one Trinity is quite different from a social order that encodes the subordination of one group (women/wives) to another group (men/husbands) apart from considerations of the abilities, giftedness or mission of the individuals involved' (Grenz and Kjesbo, 117) (See s.5 below).

2.7 In what follows, we discuss each of these points in turn.

3 Subordinationism as a Heresy

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

3.2 But, despite the danger of Subordinationism, the word 'subordination' is still used by orthodox theologians to describe the relation they perceived in Scripture between the Father and the Son. Thus, in the words of H.E.W Turner,

There is an orthodox subordination in the sense that the Trinity must begin with the Father or lead up to the Father, but this is concerned with the order of thought and unity in derivation and does not affect the ontological status of the three persons. (Alan Richardson, 329).

T.C.Hammond states:

In short, the full Christian doctrine demands all three of the following:

1. The unity of the Godhead
2. The full deity of the Son (who was 'begotten') and the Spirit (who 'proceeds' from the Father and the Son).
3. The subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. (T.C.Hammond, 57).

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

4 The Meaning of 'Subordination' in Orthodox Teaching.

4.1 Its biblical roots Pivotal to the whole revelation of the Trinity is the status of the Son of God. What we make of him determines our understanding of the nature of God. His true manhood is the explicit teaching of Scripture (1 Tim 2:5). So, too, is his deity (John 1:1). Correspondingly we read that he claimed unity and equality with God

² Even the Concise Oxford Dictionary (4th edition, 1951), hardly a source of Christian Doctrine, sums up the situation with accuracy in its entry on 'subordinationism': 'Doctrine that second & third persons of the Trinity are inferior to the Father as regards (orthodox view) order only or (Arian view) essence.'

(John 10:30-33), but that he also said 'the Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). In speaking of his relation with the Father, the Gospel of John refers to the way in which the world was made through him (1:3), and also the way in which he had been 'sent' into the world for its salvation (eg 3:16-17). The Scriptures thus themselves bear witness to a subordination which belongs to the eternal relationship between the persons of the Trinity, and not only to the humanity of Jesus in the incarnation, or even in the broader work of redemption. This applies to the Spirit as well as the Son (Jn 14:26). As far as revelation permits us to see in any temporal direction - from before creation (Eph 1:4), to creation (1 Cor 8:6) and to redemption (Jn 3:16-17; 12:49,50), to the gift of the Spirit (Gal 4:6), and forward to consummation (Jn 5:25-26) and beyond (1Cor 15:28) - unity, equality and subordination characterise the life of the Trinity.

- 4.2 The Son's obedience to the Father arises from the very nature of his being as Son. His freedom consists in doing what is natural to him, which is to submit to his Father. He is incapable of doing other than his Father's will. The Son does not ask the Father to submit to him, for example, and cannot do so if he is to have the liberty to be true to his filial nature. The suggestion that, 'Subordination is a matter of freedom of the will, not of some imposed order: it is voluntary and mutual. . . ' (see s.1.2 above), misunderstands the meaning of freedom. The will is not free from the order imposed by the inner reality of personhood. For example, true freedom is enjoyed when a perfectly good person delights in doing good; in this case, when the Son delights to please the Father. Alternative accounts of freedom tend towards individualism and an emphasis on arbitrary choice as the essence of that freedom.

- 4.3 J.Ernest Davey sums up the evidence from John's Gospel in these words:

The human traits in John's picture of Jesus, weariness, thirst, tears, etc., imply a creaturely dependence during the life of Christ in the flesh; but even *John's*

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

- 4.4 Davey has given his answer as to whether the subordination of Son to Father applies only to the incarnation - he sees it as a matter of the eternal relations. Gordon Fee bears witness to the same phenomenon in his treatment of 1 Corinthians. In order to guard the unity and equality of the persons, he speaks at several points of the 'functional subordination' of Son (and Spirit) to Father. In some cases, he specifically links this to the incarnation (on 11:3) and the work of redemption (on 15:28, though notice that this passage is speaking of the Son's submission in the eschatological triumph). But on 8:4-6, which speaks of creation, he refers to what he calls, 'the functional subordination of the Son to the Father.' He then explains, 'God the Father is both the ultimate source and ultimate destiny of all things, including ourselves; the Lord Christ is the divine mediator, through whom God created all things and redeemed us' (Fee, 374). Just as clear is his reference to the 'functionally subordinate' activities of both Son and Spirit (who of course has never been incarnate) in his comment on 12:6: 'the unity of God dominates his thinking in such a way that the Son and the Spirit are subsumed under that unity, and their own activities are seen as "functionally subordinate" (e.g. God gives gifts "through the Spirit," vv. 8-9). On

the other hand, there can be little question that he thinks of Christ and the Spirit in terms of their full deity' (Fee, 588).

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

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

- 4.7 In the course of Christian history there have been many attempts to state the doctrine of the Trinity. All attempts which have produced orthodox answers have followed the soteriological flow of the New Testament. In the Eastern tradition, it has been more usual to begin the process of thinking and talking about the Trinity from the Persons, and thus the priority of the Father. It is as if the Father is the source of the deity enjoyed by Son and Spirit. The danger of heresy is met by the insistence that the Son and Spirit are of one being with the Father, but the position of the Father ensures a hierarchical mode of conceiving God.
- 4.8 The Western tradition, exemplified in Augustine, has as its starting point the Triune life itself in its oneness. The emphasis falls from the beginning on the single essence and hence the unity and equality of the Persons. Even so, however, the order of the Godhead is acknowledged. This is most clearly expressed in the Catholic Creeds which assert both the equality and difference in the relations between the persons of the Godhead. The church did not conceive of the Father, Son and Spirit as just existing together. Rather they were understood as eternally related to each other in distinctive relationships of derivation and being. So the differences between the co-equal persons of the Trinity are not only voluntary or temporary, but go to each's very mode of being.
- 4.9 In the Creeds, the Son and the Spirit are asserted to be equal with the Father, but it is a derived equality. With the second and third persons, the mode of derivation and the relationship of being is distinct. The Athanasian Creed, while strongly affirming the equality of the persons, makes these differences of being most clear: 'The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made or created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is from the Father and the Son, not made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. . . And in this Trinity there is none afore or after the other; none is greater or less than the other.'³

³ It is worth noting that the Athanasian Creed can be understood as expressing the main line of this doctrine. In commenting on the Creed's statement 'none is afore or after other', the nineteenth century Anglican evangelical

- 4.10 A doughty advocate of the ontological equality of the Persons was John Calvin, who insisted on the single essence of God and the self-sustaining deity ('Autotheos') of both Son and Spirit, in order to secure the point that in dealing with Son and Spirit we are dealing with God himself and not some lesser being. Even so, however, Calvin and the Calvinists (Edwards, Berkhof, Hodge, Dabney, Packer, Knox) - not to mention the neo-orthodox (Barth, Brunner) have recognised order, and 'a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but no subordination as far as possession of the divine essence is concerned' (Berkhof, 88-89). As Calvin says of the Father, 'even though we admit that in respect to order and degree the beginning of divinity is in the Father, yet we say that it is a detestable invention that essence is proper to the Father alone, as if he were the deifier of the Son'; and elsewhere, summarising Tertullian, 'there are thus three, not in status, but in degree' (Calvin, 152,157).
- 4.11 Given the issues at stake in debates about the nature of human relationships, there has been a move amongst some scholars to propose a version of the doctrine of the Trinity which is 'egalitarian'. It has been alleged that traditional teaching undergirds political, ecclesiastical and social injustice. Mutual submission of the Persons of the Trinity takes the place of subordination in relations. One such learned work is that of Miroslav Volf (*After Our Likeness*, 1998), who shows through a consideration of two leading representatives of Orthodox (Zizoulas) and Roman Catholic (Ratzinger) theology that the mainstream of thought is 'subordinationist'. His own proposal, based especially on the doctrine of co-inherence, is egalitarian.
- 4.12 Nonetheless, on the basis of the considerations already given above, the Commission regards such a move as a very significant departure from Scripture and the established Church doctrine. We are troubled that a debate about the nature of humanity and

theologian E.A.Litton said: 'If we remove the element of priority of time, which necessarily inheres in human relation, and conceive an eternal generation, we arrive at the catholic doctrine, that whilst a certain inequality must be admitted, the three Persons are, as regards their Deity, co-equal.' (Litton, 102-3)

human relations should have led to a move to change our established understanding of God. If this is the meaning of the paper referred to in 1.2, it must be regarded as having failed to make good its contention that 'There is no order of subordination in this understanding of headship.'

5 The Significance of 'Subordination' in Orthodox Teaching.

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

5.2 Equal and Different? In the first place, there are those who appeal to this doctrine to support the assertion that in personal life equality and subordination can co-exist. This is the view expressed by Dr Thomas Schreiner (cited in s 1.3 above). They argue that in the case of God a strong illustration may be found for their contention that differences in roles, even differences involving subordination, do not necessarily imply inequality of essence. In Schreiner's words, 'there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church or home'. Thus, although in the ordering of family and church life, men are to take the lead, and women are to submit to their husbands and refrain from exercising eldership authority in the church, this in no way implies ontological inferiority, or distorts the basic truth that in Christ there is no male or female (Galatians 3:28). For this point many other cases may be found in everyday life - companies, ships, schools - wherever there is leadership, obedience, and persons who though equal in essence as human beings are subordinate in role. The fact that the inner life of God himself contains the same discernible principle is evidence that it cannot be wrong to enter such relations, and it must be possible to order life in that way with justice.

- 5.3 This line of thought is not troubled by the understanding of subordination as applying only to the order of redemption (as in Jewett, 2.5 above). That God has functioned in the incarnation like this without compromising his equality, is sufficient to establish the case.
- 5.4 Dr Schreiner's position is true as far as it goes. As is shown in s 2.6 above, however, it may be challenged at a deeper level. While personal submission may be a pattern for instances such as individuals in work situations, it serves as an inadequate model, for 'a social order that encodes the subordination of one group. . . to another group. . . apart from considerations of the abilities, giftedness or mission of the individuals involved' (see s. 2.6 above). Subordination (with basic equality) is a common human experience. But the individual who submits does so on the basis of such matters as age, training or willingness to take responsibility. The arguments used by those who see subordination as a feature of church and home appeal to the ineradicable gender difference. They may be thought to be concluding that 'all women should submit to all men'. The Doctrine Commission does not accept this conclusion, but recognises that it is a key reason why the 'egalitarian' contends that in the Godhead the obedience of the Son to the Father is voluntary, temporary and personal, rather than reflecting the essence of the eternal relationship between them. These deeper issues lead us to ask what bearing if any does the doctrine of the Trinity have on the relationship of men and women as such, rather than individuals from either sex?
- 5.5 God's life as a pattern for us In the face of this challenge, a second and more profound exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity in its biblical context is required. Enough has been said to indicate that the idea that the obedience of the Son can be summed up as 'voluntary, temporary and personal' is both inadequate and untrue. It relies on a view of freedom whose tendency is toward the arbitrary and the individualistic (see paras 4.2, 4.4, 4.8 above). The equality and subordination which

'subordinationists' see in the Trinity belongs to the very Persons themselves in their eternal nature, and this has a profound bearing on human relationships. Thus Dr D.B.Knox wrote in his addendum to the General Synod Doctrine Report of 1977, 'The principle of order, of headship and subordination, is clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 where Christ is head over all things and yet himself is subordinate to the Father. Since Christ is both head of every man and himself subordinate to the Father he is the example (in perfect relationship) both of the exercise of headship, i.e. gratitude ("I thank thee Father") and obedience ("I do always the things that are pleasing to him").' (Knox, 31). Indeed, P.K.Jewett is also arguing a version of that case in the extract given in 2.5 above.

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

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

- 5.7 On the other hand, the word 'subordination' on its own hardly does justice to the full range of the relationship of Father and Son as revealed in the Scriptures. In particular, it must be understood in the light of the mutual love and delight that each Person has in the other as is reflected in the words of Dr Knox cited above. The English Bishops speak of, 'a certain "priority" of the Father in both the acts and being of God' (22),

but they are careful to describe the relation between Father and Son in these terms: 'relationships within the Trinity are fully mutual and reciprocal: they are constituted by mutual interaction, giving and receiving. The obedience of Jesus to the Father is a freely given commitment, not resigned submission or servility to a greater power. . . . Likewise, within the Church, while there can be no difference of worth of persons in the sight of God, relationships of obedience and accountability between members may properly exist; and, provided that they are practised within free relationships of mutual giving and receiving, they are able to promote the fulfilment of the Church's calling.' (23).

- 5.8 Nonetheless, the question remains whether the analogy presupposes that the Persons are people, and whether the revealed nature of the one God may in fact be used to illustrate or demonstrate the true relations between human beings. The life of God is very far removed from the life of humans, and the relation between three Persons dwelling perichoretically is unlike any human experience. Does the Bible itself draw any connection between the relations of the Godhead and the ordering of human life? In particular does it speak in this way to the issue of the relation between men and women?
- 5.9 It is true that the Bible carefully safeguards the distinction between God and his human creatures: 'For I am God and not man - the Holy One among you' (Hos 11:9). This is fundamental. On the other hand, there is biblical material which likens man to God: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). Furthermore, the new self is 'being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator' (Col 3:11; cf. Eph 4:24) and it is in this new self in particular that human divisions are, in part, laid aside and 'Christ is all, and is in all'. Likewise, Paul speaks of 'the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name' (Eph 3:15). Such texts demonstrate that God's pattern of creation makes it possible to draw conclusions about the nature of human

life and relationships from God. To avoid mere speculation, however, we must be led by the Scriptures in our thinking. What are the implications of the relations of the Godhead?

- 5.10 In a remarkable statement, the Apostle Paul says: 'Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man (NIV; the RSV gives, 'the head of a woman is her husband'), and the head of Christ is God' (1 Cor 11:3)⁴. The resulting discussion depends upon this set of relations, including those between God and Christ. The passage (11:2-16) is especially germane, because the subject under review by Paul is the relationship of men and women (or husbands and wives) in the exercise of the ministry of prophecy and prayer. Women have the authority to engage in this ministry (11:10), but both men and women must do so in a way which does not blur the distinct ordering of the sexes, which is founded on God's order in creation (11:3-9).
- 5.11 Paul is particularly concerned about the symbolism of head coverings. The point at issue for him is that the head coverings in question have a symbolic purpose in distinguishing priority and reflecting relationships between the sexes (or between husband and wife): 'A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man' (11:7). The 'head' plays both a literal and a metaphoric role in the passage. The covering or uncovering of the literal head is dishonouring to the metaphoric head: if a man is covered, he dishonours Christ who is his head; if a woman is uncovered, she dishonours the man, who is her head (11:3-5).⁵ Paul is also at pains to point out that though man is the 'head' of the woman, man and woman are interdependent: 'For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman' (11:12).

⁴ Opinions differ whether this passage is primarily about woman and man relationships or husband and wife relationships.

⁵ This explains the otherwise odd saying of Paul that *man* is 'the image and glory of God'; he is not hereby denying that woman, too, is in the image of God, but that *in relation to the man*, she, by acting appropriately, manifests his glory or honour. The point is functional not ontological.

5.12 There are a number of exegetical questions raised about this passage - does 'head' imply 'source' or 'authority'? Is it about men and women, or husbands and wives? Is it about the church meeting or private prophecy? Nonetheless, and this is the point at issue in the current discussion, it is clear that an aspect of the relation between God and Christ (whether 'head' implies 'source' or 'authority') is used as the ground of the order between man and woman (whether it means husband and wife or not) in the particular situation of ministry. This is not a matter of differentiation between individuals on the grounds of abilities, giftedness or mission (see para 2.6 above). It is based ultimately on the sexual differentiation, but may primarily belong to the differentiation between husband and wife made clear in Genesis 2. Furthermore, that relation is characterised by both order and interdependence, priority and equality. The point is, of course, all the clearer if, as seems most likely, the word 'head' implies authority. In short, here is a key passage in the Scriptures where the ordering of the Trinity is said to have a bearing on the ordering of the sexes. It thus provides justification for those who make the claim that the subordination of the Son provides a model for that interdependence, with subordination, which is expressed in various ways in family (Eph 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7) and church (1 Tim 2:11-15).⁶

5.13 It is important to note, however, the biblical controls of the procedure. That there is an relation between the sexes which somehow reflects the divine life itself is clear (cf. Gen 1:27). Likewise we may conclude that it has a bearing on the proper conduct of marriage and ministry. But the ordering of the sexes appropriate to home and church is not applied to business, political or professional life. While it may be argued that gender is relevant in relationships between men and women in general (cf. 1 Tim 5:1-2), the vocabulary of 'subordination' is applied to the particular context of the concrete

⁶ Professor Colin Gunton agrees with the understanding of this passage, but is unwilling to accept the consequences because of the hierarchical implications. He therefore writes: 'Paul's exegesis and theology are both questionable'. His is a straightforward, if inadmissible, procedure, and is preferable to an intricate exegesis which tries to turn the passage in a purely egalitarian direction. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (T&T Clark, Edinburgh) 1991, p74.

relationships entered into in home and church. Such is the difference between God and us that we ought to apply trinitarian relations to human relations with caution. It may be best not to move beyond the applications that Scripture itself gives. In fact, the NT more often regulates relations between men and women (husbands and wives) by appeal to the present work of Jesus Christ.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The present discussion has been initiated by conflicting statements such as those referred to in 1.2 and 1.3 above: 'Headship within the Trinity cannot mean "subordinate to" or "under the authority of" '; and, in contrast, 'Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply his inferiority'.
- 6.2 It is not at all surprising that debate about the respective roles of men and women in home and church should reach the lofty heights of the doctrine of God. There may only be a few texts which deal directly with the issue of whether women may be presbyters as such, but the texts themselves are part of a whole network of material in the Bible about men and women, and about Creation, Redemption, the authority of Scripture and about the nature of God. Furthermore, basic ideas about the meaning of human freedom are at stake. That is why these debates engender such passion and such interest in the church and in the community, and that is why various attempts have been made to 'feminise' God and re-order the Trinity in the last decades.
- 6.3 It is inevitable, therefore, that the present dispute should raise the question of what sort of God it is who reveals himself to us. The 'egalitarian' case, although not every egalitarian person, logically leads to a claim for undifferentiated equality in the relation of the three Persons. The 'subordinationist' case will just as logically appeal both to elements of equality and to elements of order that are seen in the relation of the Persons.

- 6.4 The Doctrine Commission agrees that the concept of 'subordination' has significant implications. It concludes, furthermore, that the concept of 'functional subordination', of equality of essence with order in relation, represents the long-held teaching of the church, and that it is securely based on the revelation of the Scriptures. This teaching should, therefore, determine our commitment both to the equality of men and women in creation and salvation, and also to appropriately biblical expressions of the functional difference between men and women in home and church.

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