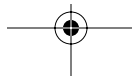
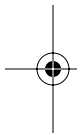


## Introduction

More than three years have passed since I decided to write a journal article of a few thousand words in response to the ever-growing number of evangelicals who were speaking of the eternal subordination of the Son in the Trinity. My areas of expertise are New Testament studies and hands-on pastoral ministry, not systematic or historical theology. But from what I remembered of my undergraduate studies, the subordination of the Son had been deemed a heresy in the early church. I imagined, as I began, that if I read widely from the books on the Trinity that have been accumulating over recent years at a nearby theological college library, I would soon have the information I needed to complete an essay. How wrong I was.

The learned tomes I turned to invariably said nothing about subordination in the Trinity, except in relation to the pre-Nicene fathers and the fourth-century debates about Arianism. What is more, they made no comment about “the headship” of the Father in the Trinity, they seldom discussed the significance of the Son’s subordination to the Father in the incarnation, and they said nothing about the three persons’ differences being grounded on their differing roles or functions—three matters central to the discussions on the Trinity in contemporary evangelical literature. As I reread what evangelicals who advocated the eternal subordination of the Son in the Trinity were saying, I noted that they were consistently and emphatically claiming that their position was historic orthodoxy. In support, they quoted theological luminaries such as Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, Charles Hodge and Louis Berkhof as well as the Nicene and Athanasian





Creeds. It soon dawned on me that it would take a lot of effort to unravel the issues and work out an answer. I would need to read for myself Athanasius, Augustine and Calvin on the Trinity, in addition to the more important contributions by contemporary Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians. So began a fascinating journey of discovery that has culminated in this book.<sup>1</sup>

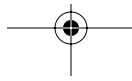
I began my work with one goal in mind—to determine what was the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity—but as I progressed in my reading, I discovered that the debate about the Trinity was in essence a debate about theological method, something right at the forefront of evangelical thinking today.<sup>2</sup> Behind this particular debate lay the interrelated questions, how does one settle a theological dispute when what is asked is not directly answered by the Bible, and how does one weigh differing arguments when both sides appeal to the Bible to substantiate their opposing conclusions? The moment I realized these issues were central in the historic discussion on the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity, I immediately saw a profound and far-reaching connection between this debate and the contemporary discussion on the relationship between men and women in the home and the church.<sup>3</sup> Here too the problem is, how does one resolve a complex theological dispute that the Bible does not anticipate (e.g., what freedoms and responsibilities do women have in a culture that



<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Gary W. Deddo, my editor at InterVarsity Press, who has been a constant encourager and help in preparing this book for publication. He has himself published an important scholarly work on the Trinity: *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human: Towards an Ethic of the Family* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). He has constantly pushed me to sharpen my argument, tighten my logic and take into account matters I had passed over. He has been a hard taskmaster and a valued mentor. I would also like to thank my copyeditor, Jennifer Conrad Seidel, who worked through the manuscript in the final stage, making innumerable helpful suggestions and picking up dozens of slips of pen. She has an amazing eye for detail.

<sup>2</sup>See Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty-First Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Stanley J. Grenz and J. R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 2001); Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Joel B. Green and M. Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000); and, earlier in the debate, Kevin N. Giles, "Evangelical Systematic Theology: Definition, Problems, Sources," in *In the Fullness of Time*, ed. D. Peterson and J. Pryor (Sydney: Lancer, 1992), pp. 255–76.

<sup>3</sup>I have been actively involved in the gender debate for thirty years. My first journal article was "Jesus and Women," *Interchange* 19 (1976): 131–36, and my first book was *Women and Their Ministry: A Case for Equal Ministries in the Church Today* (Melbourne, Australia: Dove, 1977). See also my book *Created Woman* (Canberra, Australia: Acorn, 1985).





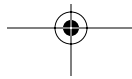
has rejected patriarchalism), and how does one decide the issue when it is possible to quote verses that would support opposing viewpoints? It became apparent in the debate on the Father-Son relationship during the fourth century A.D.—as it has also become apparent during the debate on the woman-man relationship over the last thirty years—that quoting biblical texts and giving one’s interpretation of them cannot resolve complex theological disputes. In the fourth century, this approach to “doing” theology had to be abandoned, and I believe this approach should also be abandoned today because it always leads to a “text-jam.” The most recent scholarly book on what the Bible teaches on the ministry of women comes to just this conclusion.<sup>4</sup> What we have today is a bitter stalemate. A better way to understand how the Bible contributes to theology and what is involved in “doing” evangelical theology is obviously demanded.

### Reading the Bible Theologically

Athanasius was one of the greatest theologians of all time. In reading his writings, I discovered that centuries before he had come to exactly the same conclusion: quoting texts cannot resolve complex theological debates. How these texts should be interpreted and how they relate to other texts in Scripture are the first questions; one must then ask, how does the teaching of these texts address the new question arising out of a new historical and cultural context? Arius accumulated an impressive number of texts to support his doctrine, but Athanasius was convinced Arius was in error. He argued that the texts Arius quoted to prove the subordination of the Son were selectively chosen and interpreted to give credence to what was already believed. Arius’s methodology simply showed that given enough time, a clever theologian could find texts and interpretations to prove almost anything. Athanasius argued in reply that to “do” theology, one needed a profound grasp of what he called the “scope” of Scripture—the overall drift of the Bible, its primary focus, its theological center.<sup>5</sup> This gave a “double account” of the Son. It taught, on the one hand, that the Son is eternally one in being and action with the Father and, on the other hand, that the Son gladly and willingly subordinated himself temporarily for us and our salvation. On the basis of this theological premise Athana-

<sup>4</sup>Craig L. Blomberg and J. R. Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), esp. p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Athanasius *Orationes contra Arianos* 3.26.28–29 (*NPNF* 4:409). As indicated by the abbreviation *NPNF*; this and other quotes from the writings of Athanasius are taken from *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series 2, ed. Phillip Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971). I have made a few cosmetic changes to the English translation to modernize the language.





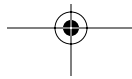
sus found that everything in Scripture made sense and spoke with one voice.

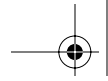
The “scope” of Scripture for Athanasius was to be seen in the Bible by those who had spiritual eyes to see, but it was made plain by the “tradition.” “Our faith is right,” he said, because it “starts from the teaching of the apostles and the tradition of the fathers.”<sup>6</sup> For him, “tradition” was what those who preceded him believed the Bible taught, and this tradition agreed that the Son of God was eternally equal with the Father in divinity, majesty and authority; only in the incarnation did the Son assume an inferior or subordinate status for our salvation. It was on this given theological premise that Athanasius read the Scriptures. Later, as I read Augustine, I discovered that he too repudiated the quoting of texts in isolation to prove what was already believed. He demanded what he called a “canonical” reading of Scripture in the “doing” of theology.

Athanasius also saw that theological answers to questions asked by those living long after the completion of the New Testament invariably needed to go beyond what Scripture explicitly said. These questions demanded something more than reiterating what was in Scripture. Arius and, later, the “Arians” asked questions about the *being* of the Son, an idea taken from Greek philosophy. Beginning with a Greek understanding of God as pure spirit, they concluded that God could not enter this material world and take on human flesh. The Son must be therefore a subordinate god, of *different being or substance* from the Father. For the biblical writers, what God did and what he was like were the central issues. The *being* of God was something that did not gain their attention. To exclude Arius’s presuppositions and teaching, Athanasius found he had to use the non-biblical word *homoousios* (one in being or substance), which he maintained captured the trajectory set by Scripture. Thus he insisted that to be faithful to the tradition, one needed to confess the Son of God as *one in being* with the Father. Again we see the greatness of Athanasius as a theologian. He saw, more than a thousand years before any one else did, that as God’s work in history moved forward and as culture changed, appealing to the Bible alone could not resolve the new questions a new age raised. To answer questions the Bible does not anticipate, the theologian must first determine what is primary and foundational in Scripture on the matter under consideration and then work out the implications of this in dialogue with those theologians of other opinions. I have come to be convinced that a similar approach is demanded today to resolve the debate on the woman-man relationship.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Athanasius *Epistula ad Adelphium* 6 (NPNF 4:577).

<sup>7</sup>In this introduction I do not intend to document what I discuss later in detail. I give footnotes on only those matters not specifically mentioned later or not footnoted subsequently.





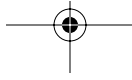
In the twentieth century, conservative evangelicals often discounted tradition, claiming that “our” theology comes directly from the Bible. More recently, however, as evangelicals have begun to reflect on the art and science of hermeneutics and on theological method, conservative evangelicals have recognized and affirmed tradition as an important “source” or contributor in theology.<sup>8</sup> Scripture remains the supreme authority for evangelicals, but tradition—understood as how the Scriptures have been interpreted or read by the best of theologians in the past—is accepted as an important, yet secondary, authority. It is not to be ignored, because it offers guidance in the present from the past. It tells us how theologians across the centuries have understood the Bible. Evangelicals on both sides of the contemporary debate on the Trinity are in complete agreement on this matter. Tradition so understood is important. This is demonstrated in that evangelicals on both sides of the Trinity debate claim their reading of the Bible’s teaching on the relationship of the Father and the Son is supported by tradition.

Tradition should always be taken seriously and should never be ignored, but sometimes it needs to be corrected or rejected. The sixteenth-century Reformers gave to tradition, as understood above, great respect. They constantly appealed to the creeds and the fathers to substantiate their theology.<sup>9</sup> When the tradition was given by a decree of one of the great councils of the early church or enshrined in one or more of the three catholic creeds, the Reformers assumed this prescribed how the Scriptures were to be read. These traditions defined orthodoxy and directed the interpretative process. Nevertheless, when the Reformers were convinced on the basis of Scripture that the Church of Rome had erred, they did not hesitate to reject the traditional way Scripture had been read, for it supported ideas and practices excluded by clear biblical teaching. Thus, the Reformers insisted that salvation was by grace alone, not earned by works; that ministers of the gospel were not priests who made sacrificial offerings to God in the Eucharist; and that the pope did not speak for God. On these matters and others, the Reformers broke with tradition.

Because the dispute today among evangelicals on the Trinity—like that between Arius and Athanasius—cannot be resolved simply by quoting texts, both

<sup>8</sup>See the very fine discussion on tradition in Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 188–91. See also McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, passim; Richard Bauckham, “Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason,” in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason*, ed. B. Drewery and Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 117–45; Giles, “Evangelical Systematic Theology,” pp. 265–70.

<sup>9</sup>See the important and interesting study by A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000).





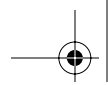
sides, as has been noted already, appeal to tradition to substantiate their understanding of the Father-Son relationship. Thus, to bring resolution to this matter we need to determine who is in fact accurately reflecting historical orthodoxy. Some evangelicals who have been taught that all theology springs immediately from the Bible may be inclined to reply along these lines: “Even if you can show that Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, the creeds and confessions, and most modern theologians reject the eternal subordination of the Son in being or role, all you have done is outline historical information. We will continue to believe the Father is set over the Son as his authoritative ‘head’ because the texts we quote clearly prove this.” It is possible for evangelicals to take this route, but if they do, they then set themselves outside of the orthodoxy the creeds and the Reformation confessions define and put themselves at odds with most other Christians, past and present. I very much doubt that any evangelical really wants to do this. Most evangelicals want to believe that the evangelical faith is historical orthodoxy. Thus the question remains, on whose side is the tradition?

#### **Tradition in Relation to the Subordination of Women and Slavery**

Once the importance of tradition in the debate on the Trinity is highlighted, another fascinating parallel with the man-woman debate comes into focus. Right at the heart of the hierarchical understanding of the man-woman relationship is an appeal to tradition. Those who adopt this position like to call it the “traditional” or “historic” position, and they accuse people such as myself of breaking with tradition, of advocating a “progressive hermeneutic” and of giving a “novel” reading of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> Most egalitarians seem to accept this charge and the self-designation their opponents use—I do not—and this puts them at a disadvantage. Just before beginning this book I wrote a two-part article for *Evangelical Quarterly* in which I maintained that the contemporary arguments for the ongoing subordination of women were in fact “novel,” a radical break with tradition.<sup>11</sup> As I drew toward the end of my work on the Trinity, it became clear to me that what I had argued in this essay directly related to

<sup>10</sup>This is one of the main themes in the book *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>I would particularly like to thank Professor I. Howard Marshall, the editor of *Evangelical Quarterly*, for permission to reprint in revised form material from four articles I published in that journal (three are listed here; the fourth is given in the next footnote): “A Critique of the ‘Novel’ Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, Given in the Book, *Women in the Church*,” parts 1 and 2, *Evangelical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2000): 151–67; no. 3 (2000): 195–215; and “Women in the Church: A Rejoinder to Andreas Köstenberger,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2001): 225–44.



my work on the woman-man relationship. I thus decided to rework this material, which now makes up part two of this book. Closely allied at all times with the contemporary debate about the woman-man relationship has been the question of what the Bible teaches on slavery, another matter on which I have published.<sup>12</sup> Again, the two sides hold diametrically opposed points of view on what the Bible actually says.

*Egalitarians* consistently argue that the Bible treats the issues of slavery and the subordination of women in much the same way. The writers of the Bible—as men living in cultures that accepted the institution of slavery and the subordination of women as unquestioned facts of life—depict both social realities as if they are agreeable to God. Neither are ever condemned or specifically questioned in Scripture. Given another cultural context, egalitarian evangelicals argue, slavery and the subordination of women are to be repudiated because, at a primary theological level, the Bible depicts every human as being of equal worth and dignity, never prescribing some social roles to men and others to women.

In contrast, *hierarchicalists* argue that the Bible treats the issues of slavery and the subordination of women very differently. The Bible regulates, but does not legitimate, slavery. It never suggests it is acceptable to God. The subordination of women on the other hand is depicted as prescribed by God. It is the ideal given in the creation stories before sin entered the world.

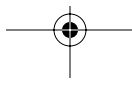
Who is right? Both sides assert their mutually exclusive alternatives ad infinitum. It is possible that tradition may be the deciding factor in the debate on slavery as well. In part three of this book I will explore this matter further.

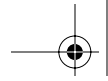
What should be noted at this point is how evangelical thinking on these three matters relates to tradition. It is not the same. In regard to the Trinity both sides appeal to tradition to substantiate their position. It is my argument that tradition should be followed but that it does not support in any way the eternal subordination of the Son in being or function. One side has misread the tradition that is enshrined in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and the Reformation confessions of faith; the other has read it correctly.

In regard to male-female relations, the hierarchicalists argue that they represent the tradition and that egalitarians have broken with tradition. It is my argument that under the effect of the far-reaching and profound social change popularly called “women’s lib,” all Christians have abandoned the traditional in-

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<sup>12</sup>Kevin N. Giles, “The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1994): 3–18. See also my *Women and Their Ministry*, pp. 97–104, and *Created Woman*, pp. 43–47.





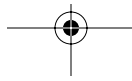
terpretation that God has made women “inferior” to men, more prone to sin and incapable of leadership. One side readily admits this and maintains that their new theology for this changed world captures “the scope” of Scripture which makes primary an equal valuing of women and men that demands equality of consideration. This was previously hidden to theologians who wore the cultural spectacles of their patriarchal social world. The other side denies rejecting the tradition but, as we will show, actually does just this. They argue for the permanent subordination of women *in role*, building on ideas not found in Scripture or the tradition—an unchangeable created order, role theory and the idea that difference implies subordination.

On the matter of slavery, virtually all contemporary evangelicals deny the tradition. They simply ignore it as a general rule. They argue that the Bible regulates but does not legitimate slavery. It never endorses this cruel and inhuman institution. They begin with the altogether modern idea that slavery is an evil. If slavery is evil, they conclude, it cannot be endorsed in the Bible because the Bible cannot legitimate what is evil. The problem is that the tradition gives no support to such an idea. Until the latter half of the eighteenth century, virtually every theologian held that the Bible regulated *and* legitimated slavery, and the strongest advocates of this position were the nineteenth-century learned evangelical theologians of the Old South. It was only when cultural values changed as God’s work in history moved forward that human beings for the first time came to see that slavery must be rejected and opposed. In this new social context teaching hitherto passed over in Scripture came to the fore: all people are made in the image of God, all are loved by God, all are to be set free in Christ. As a result, this change in culture led to a change in theology. The tradition was rejected and new ways of interpreting relevant biblical passages emerged.

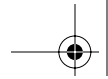
The very close parallel with the contemporary women’s debate cannot be missed. If such a turnaround could happen in the case of slavery, why not also in the case of women? I suggest an honest account of what took place with slavery may well open up the way forward in the debate on whether or not the Bible permanently subordinates women to men. Like slavery, this matter has come onto the theological agenda because God’s work in history has made the tradition unacceptable to people of our age who judge the subordination of women to be ethically unjustifiable and in many cases practically unworkable.

**The Hermeneutical Issue: Do Changed Historical-Cultural Contexts Demand and Provide New Interpretations of the Bible?**

This book is predicated on the view that the Bible can often be read in more



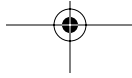


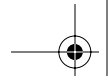


than one way, even on important matters. This comment is uncontroversial because it is undeniable. History gives innumerable examples of learned and devout theologians who have differed from others in their interpretation of the Bible on almost every doctrine or ethical question imaginable. In relation to the doctrine of the Trinity my argument is that the tradition should prescribe the correct reading. This is claimed because this tradition is the fruit of deep and prolonged reflection by the best and most respected theologians across the centuries on what the Bible teaches on the Trinity, and their conclusions are now codified in the creeds and Reformation confessions of faith.

In contrast, I argue in the opposite way in the debate over what the Bible teaches on the status and ministry of women and on the issue of slavery. I hold that the tradition in these instances should be honestly acknowledged and categorically rejected. It reflects a reading of Scripture that was dictated by the world in which the interpreters lived. No other reading was open to them. This tradition is not the product of prolonged theological debate, and it was never endorsed by a universal church council, creed or confession. It is nothing more than the acceptance of what everyone in earlier times—Christian and non-Christian alike—believed on these matters. Only when God's work in history changed cultural values did another reading of Scripture become possible in both cases.

This claim is controversial for evangelicals because it allows that the Bible can be read in different ways in differing historical-cultural contexts. In one historical context an interpretation of Scripture can gain well nigh universal support and in another well nigh universal rejection. This suggests that the historical-cultural context is part of the exegetical outcome. Change the context, and matters closely related to culture in the Bible will be seen differently. Part of culture is, of course, the presumed scientific understanding of the world. Telling examples of changed interpretations of biblical teaching coming in the aftermath of a scientific discovery abound. Once the Bible was read as teaching that the Earth was flat, that the sun revolved around the Earth and that the world was created in six (literal) days about seven thousand years ago. The biblical writers at points reflect these views, and certainly most Christians for centuries with some justification thought this was what the Bible taught. No other interpretative possibility was open to the exegetes and theologians of earlier times. Yet new scientific discoveries have demanded that the old interpretations, with their good textual support, be abandoned. Only in a different cultural context could theologians discover a different reading of Scripture that made sense of the changed understanding of the world, an understanding that God himself had brought to pass.



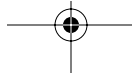


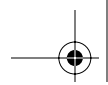
The Bible's teaching on women and slavery illustrates this hermeneutical rule in regard to social ordering. Theologians living in a world that accepted without question the subordination of women and slavery, in exactly the same way as the biblical writers accepted these things, presumed that biblical teaching on these matters reflected the unchanging mind of God: he endorsed these social structures. Again, I say, no other options for interpreting the Bible were open to them. Then the world changed. For the first time in human history, slavery came to be seen as cruel and unjust; then women's subordination came to be seen as devaluing of women and unjust. In this new historical-cultural world theologians returned to the Scriptures to see what passages indicate that God's ideal was emancipation. In both instances, as I will show, all Christians—more specifically, all evangelicals—found new ways to read the Bible. They rejected the tradition, and rightly so, in the changed world in which they found themselves. The change in culture led to a change in interpretation.

Many conservative evangelicals find this argument very difficult because they have been lead to believe there can only be one correct interpretation of any given text, only one correct reading of the Bible on any particular matter. Modern discussions on hermeneutics, to which evangelicals have made very important contributions, have called this dogma into question.<sup>13</sup> It is now recognized that the human interpreter always reads through the "spectacles" given by his or her theological commitments, culture, scientific understanding of the world and much more. Given texts cannot mean just anything, but more than one interpretation is possible. The human author's intent is one limiting and controlling factor in determining what the text may mean, but with the Bible one must always remember that there are two authors—one human and one divine. God in his sovereign purposes may relativize what one biblical author intended by giving teaching elsewhere in Scripture that offers another perspective on the same matter.

Texts are not self-interpreting. They are only symbols on a page until a human agent gives them meaning. All texts, like all acts of communication, have to be interpreted. The interpreting agent, as has been noted, always reads through the "spectacles" given by the presuppositions she or he holds and takes for granted. There can be no interpretation in which the reader does not bring

<sup>13</sup>See in particular Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in the Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998).





something to the text that becomes part of the interpretation. From this observation the following hermeneutical rule may be deduced: *Context contributes to meaning*. Once this is recognized, one can no longer think of the Bible as a set of timeless, transcultural rulings or as propositions that speak in every age with one voice. The Bible is to be seen rather as a book written in history by human authors, inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, through which and in which the Holy Spirit speaks afresh time and time again. The Westminster Confession of Faith clearly reflects this pneumatic understanding of Scripture, which growing numbers of evangelicals have come to embrace in recent times.<sup>14</sup> It declares, “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are determined . . . can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scriptures.”<sup>15</sup>

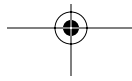
The effect of context on interpretation can be illustrated by imagining a town at the base of a high mountain. A traveler visiting the town only sees what is immediately before his eyes—buildings, streets, people. It is impossible for him to get an overall perspective on the town in that setting. But then he begins climbing a path up the mountain, and from every stopping point the town looks different. His changing context changes his perception of the town. The town does not change, but how he sees it changes. It would almost seem that God has purposely made the Bible like this. It is a Spirit-book that can speak for God in different contexts when things of necessity are seen in a different way.

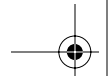
### **The Key Issues in the Debate Among Evangelicals on the Trinity**

Before I conclude this introduction, it may be helpful for me to explain the argument on the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is the most important doctrine of all because it articulates what is most distinctive and fundamental to the Christian understanding of God: that he is triune. It is, however, the most difficult doctrine to comprehend in its developed expression. The first and major part of this book is not a general introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather a detailed study of one key aspect of the doctrine now dividing evangelicals: that is, the eternal subordination of the Son. In dealing with this issue, I have had to cover the history of the development of trinitarian doctrine and sought to unravel many complex ideas and opposing positions. To help my readers travel this path with me, I will give a brief overview of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and explanations of the key issues.

<sup>14</sup>So Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning*, pp. 424–28; Bloesch, *Theology of Word and Spirit*, passim; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 57–92.

<sup>15</sup>*Westminster Confession*, 1.10.





### The Historical Development of the Orthodox Trinitarian Tradition

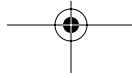
As a result of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit, the first Christians were forced to rethink the doctrine of God they had inherited from Judaism. They remained faithful to the Jewish belief that there is one God, not least because Jesus himself affirmed this truth (Mk 12:29–32); but they had to account also for Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who they were sure made the one God present. The New Testament writers in complementary ways attempt the first answers to the questions raised by the advent of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They agree on the following points:

- There is only one God (1 Cor 8:4; Eph 4:6; Jas 2:19).
- This one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14).
- The Son, in taking human flesh and becoming the man Jesus, humbled himself as a servant and died on the cross (Phil 2:7–8; Jn 14:28; 15:8–9; Heb 5:8).
- God the Father raised him from death, exalting him to be Lord of all (Phil 2:9–11; Mt 28:18; Acts 2:36; Col 2:10).
- Jesus, the exalted Son of God, is now to be worshiped as God (Mt 28:17; Jn 9:38; 20:28; Heb 1:6; Rev 7:11–14).
- The Holy Spirit is God present with his people (Mt 28:19; Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor 3:17).

These answers were adequate for the questions asked by the first generation of Christians, but subsequent generations of Christians raised other questions that these answers did not directly address. Often the answers offered to new questions, though supported by biblical texts, appeared to contradict other teaching in Scripture. In this centuries-long debate, the historic doctrine of the Trinity was slowly and painstakingly developed, with a few key people making the biggest contributions.

One of the first questions to be asked after the age of the apostles was, how are the divine three really one? Some early Christians who were concerned about safeguarding the unity of God argued that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were only successive *modes of revelation* of the one God. This answer, known as *modalism*, was rejected because it undermined the eternal personal existence of the three divine persons. Subsequent orthodox theologians, including contemporary theologians, seek to avoid modalism in their formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. They are at pains to stress that each of the divine three is a personal entity and, *as such*, eternally exists and so is eternally differentiated from the others.

Early in the early third century, Arius, a presbyter in the Egyptian port city of



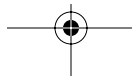


Alexandria, raised yet another profound question: is the Son of God really and truly God in human flesh? He answered in the negative. He held a Greek understanding of God as a pure spirit who could have no contact with this material world. For him the Son of God must be a secondary god, *different in being or substance* from the Father. Arius's teaching was a form of what theologians call *ontological subordinationism*. In Greek, the word *ontos* designates the *being*, the essential nature or essence, of something or someone. Arius argued that because the Son is subordinated eternally in his being/essence/nature, he was also subordinated in his work or role to the Father. The Son had to do as he was commanded. At the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 the assembled bishops rejected Arius's teaching that the Son was different in being or substance from the Father, insisting instead that he was *one in being or substance* (Greek *homoousios*) with the Father. The publication of the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325 did not, however, silence the followers of Arius. They grew in numbers and their "proofs" from Scripture multiplied. One man—almost alone at first, and at great personal cost—stood against them: Athanasius. He saw that if there were a disjunction between the Father and the Son, then the Son could not perfectly reveal the Father for he was not truly God, nor could he make salvation possible because only God himself could save.

Athanasius gave profound answers to a number of fundamental questions on the Christian doctrine of God. His grasp of Scripture and his theological ability have been equaled by few others. I will highlight a few of the more important conclusions he reached.

The difference of the persons is indisputable for Athanasius because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are clearly distinguished in Scripture and they are differentiated by their relations with each other. The Father is eternally the Father *of* the Son; the Son is eternally the Son *of* the Father. For Athanasius this difference does not imply subordination. Repeatedly he says, "The same things are said of the Son which are said of the Father except him being said to be Father."<sup>16</sup> Building on what Scripture says about the Father and the Son's being "one" and about their each abiding in the other (Jn 10:30, 38; 14:10–11; 17:21), Athanasius

<sup>16</sup>Athanasius *Orationes contra Arianos* 2.20.54 (NPNF 4); 3.23.4; 3.23.5. See also *Contra Arianos* 3.23.5 where Athanasius continues, "What is said of the Father is said of the Son also"; *De Synodis* 3.49 (lines 3–4) where he says, "What is said of the Father is said in Scripture of the Son also, all but his being called the Father"; and *De Synodis* 3.49 (lines 66–67) where he states, "All that you find said of the Father, so much will you find said of the Son, all but his being Father." Cf. also *Illud Omnia* 3, "For what belongs to the Father belongs to the Son. For he that honours the Son honours the Father," and *Illud Omnia* 4, "For what belongs to the Father belongs to the Son."



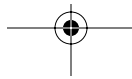
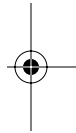


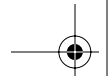
spoke of the interpenetration, or coinherence, of the persons of the Trinity. Not surprisingly, given his profound emphasis on the unity of the persons, Athanasius rejected the idea that the Son was eternally subordinated either in his being or in his works or functions. For Athanasius the three divine persons are one in being and one in action. *Who they are* and *what they do* cannot be separated. Thus, Athanasius never depicts the Father as commanding and the Son obeying.

The unity of being and action among the Father, Son and Spirit is a constant theme in the development of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. In humans it is possible to separate who we are (our being) from what we do (how we function). The best of theologians have always argued that this separation cannot be made with God. Who the triune God is (his being) and what the triune God does (his acts) are one.

Athanasius's key allies in the fight against Arianism in the later part of his life were the Cappadocian fathers (three learned theologians who were all born in Cappadocia in Asia Minor). They took as their starting point the divine three, whom they called in Greek *hypostases*. The three *hypostases* are one because they share the one divine being or nature (Greek *ousia*) in perfect fellowship together. The danger in this approach was not modalism but tritheism. In developing Athanasius's thinking, they underlined the distinctions by stressing the differing relations between the divine three, but in their case they grounded these differing relations on their eternal origins: the Father is "unbegotten," the Son "begotten" and the Spirit "proceeding." In contrast to Athanasius, the Cappadocians spoke of the Father as the "sole source or sole origin" (Greek *monarchē*) of the Son and the Spirit. They nevertheless categorically denied that derivation of being implied "a difference in being." The Son and the Spirit shared equally in the one being (*homoousios*) of the Father.

In the contemporary debate among evangelicals on the Trinity, a key issue is how the divine persons are differentiated. Those who think of God the Father (and men) as exercising "headship"—understood as "authority over"—insist that differentiation is indicated only if the subordination of the Son (or women) is upheld. Those who reject this approach argue that the tradition rejects the differentiation of the divine persons on the basis of their being, work or function. The general consensus is that differentiation can only be construed by stressing the personal identity of the divine three (Father, Son and Spirit), by stressing their differing relations (the Father is the Father of the Son, the Son is the Son of the Father, etc.) and by stressing their differing origins (the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, the Spirit proceeding). Any other differentiation inevitably opens the door to the errors of tritheism, modalism or subordinationism.





In A.D. 381, at the Council of Constantinople, Arianism was again rejected, the oneness of being of the Father and the Son was reaffirmed, and the divinity of the Holy Spirit was confessed.

Early in the fifth century, in the western part of the Roman Empire, another great theologian, Augustine of Hippo (a city in North Africa), gave his mind to restating the doctrine of the Trinity. In his presentation of this doctrine he begins with the unity of the triune God: he is one substance. Augustine then explains how the divine three are distinct “persons.” Because the three persons are one in their inner life, this meant for Augustine that in their external operations, works or functions the three are also one. Particular works, he said, could be appropriated to each person, but they always acted as one. The Father, the Son and Holy Spirit in their external works functioned in perfect unison and harmony.

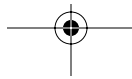
After Augustine’s death, his conception of the Trinity was encapsulated in the so-called Athanasian Creed. This creed stresses the unity of the Trinity and the equality of the persons. It ascribes equal majesty, power and authority to all three divine persons: “In this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; . . . the whole three Persons are . . . co-equal.” The Son is only “inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” A more explicit rejection of the *eternal* subordination of the Son in being, function or authority is hard to imagine.

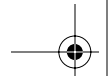
Among the sixteenth-century Reformers, Calvin gave the most thought to the doctrine of the Trinity. He was opposed to subordinationism of every kind known to him, insisting that texts that spoke of the subordination of the Son alluded only to his work as the mediator of our salvation. The Reformation confessions likewise all reject the eternal subordination of the Son.

Unfortunately, from this time on, Protestants and Roman Catholics marginalized the doctrine of the Trinity and often stated it in ways that were contrary to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservative evangelicals were among those with a very weak and sometimes erroneous grasp of the historically developed doctrine of the Trinity.

### The Contemporary Scene

In the last thirty years or so, the church has seen a widespread reawakening of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. Karl Barth initiated this revolution for Protestants and Karl Rahner did the same for Roman Catholics. More has been written in this period on this doctrine than on any other doctrine. Those interested in this movement have returned to the historic sources and developed new insights that complement the best work from the past. In this process,





many have found the contribution of Athanasius particularly instructive. The emphasis in this renewal of trinitarian theology has fallen on the unity of being and work among the divine three and on their perichoretic (interpenetrating) community.

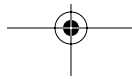
Strangely, in the same period that most Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians have been stressing the divine three's unity of being and action, their communality and their mutual submission, conservative evangelicals who want to maintain the traditional pattern of male "headship" have begun speaking of the *eternal* subordination of the Son and the Spirit: just as man is *permanently* the "head" of the woman, so God is *eternally* the "head" of the Son.

Both sides agree that the doctrine of the Trinity should inform human relations. It is a practical doctrine with application to everyday living. The Trinity provides us with a model of relating that should direct our relationships. Those who depict the Trinity as three divine persons bound together in a unity of being and action, mutually indwelling one another and mutually subordinating to the others think that the doctrine of the Trinity makes egalitarian relations and flexibility in roles the ideal. In contrast, those who depict the Trinity as a hierarchy in some form think the ideal is seen in ordered relations where some are forever in the commanding role and others are forever in the subordinate role.

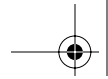
What seems to have happened is that contemporary conservative evangelicals who are opposed to women's liberation in the church and the home have read back into the Trinity their understanding of the subordination of women: God the Father has become the eternal "head" of Christ, and the differences among the divine persons have been redefined in terms of differing roles or functions. Rather than working as one, the divine persons have been set in opposition—with the Father commanding and the Son obeying.

### Subordinationism

Those who argue that the Son (like the Holy Spirit) is *eternally* set under the Father are called *subordinationists*, and this point of view is called *subordinationism*. At least seven different arguments for the Son's eternal subordination can be delineated. Later I will outline each of them separately. The most common expression of subordinationism involves the ontological subordination of the Son and the Spirit, but even this idea can take many forms. In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American evangelicalism, ontological subordinationism was expressed in the idea that the Son and the Spirit were subordinated in their "subsistence"—that is, in their personal existence as the Son and the Spirit. Some evangelicals today endorse ontological subordinationism in







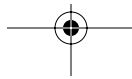
one form or another, but the most popular expression of subordinationism found in contemporary evangelical literature rejects ontological subordinationism, arguing that the Son is only eternally subordinated in role or function. In this view, the Father is thought of as the (authoritative) “head” of the Son. The Father commands, and the Son obeys.

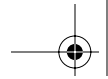
Role or functional subordination is based on the premise that the Son and, likewise, women can be permanently subordinated in function or role without in any way undermining their personal worth or equality. Role subordination, we are told, does not imply inferiority. This is generally true, but once the note of permanency is introduced and competence is excluded, this is not true. If one party is forever excluded from certain responsibilities—no matter what their competency may be—simply on the basis of who they are, then this indicates they lack something that only their superior possesses. In other words, they are inferior in some essential way.

### **The Immanent and Economic Trinity**

Finally, in seeking to help readers understand the contemporary debate on the Trinity, I explain the common modern practice of distinguishing between the immanent Trinity (the eternal triune God as he is in himself that no human can ever fully comprehend) and the economic Trinity (the triune God as he has revealed himself in history). There is, of course, only one Trinity. This distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is simply a reminder that what can be known about God is given in his revelation of himself. There is no independent access to knowledge of God outside of God’s interactions with creation, which reached its apex in Jesus Christ. Our Lord himself implied this when he said, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27).

Evangelicals who argue that the Son is in some way eternally subordinated to the Father endorse the principle that the economic Trinity reveals all that we may know of the Father-Son relationship, but they limit the historical (or economic) revelation to the incarnation. Thus they note that the Gospels depict the Son as sent by the Father, obedient to the Father and dependent on the Father. This temporal revelation, they conclude, discloses what is eternally true. The Father commands, and the Son obeys. Others who reject the idea that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father also accept that the economic Trinity reveals all that we may know of the Father-Son relationship, but they do not limit this revelation to the incarnation nor to what the incarnation reveals of the Son

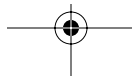


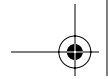


alone. For them, the economy of God's self-revelation begins at creation and is consummated only at the end of time. So the revelation of the economic Trinity includes the triune God's work in creation, in salvation history and in the Son's present reign as Lord and "head over all things" (Eph 1:22; Col 2:10). Moreover, they believe the subordination of the Son in the incarnation reveals as much about the Father as it does of the Son. It discloses that the God of the Bible is a God who gladly stoops to save. Voluntary subordination is godlike.

Thus the primary question in this debate is, can any subordination in being or function be ascribed to the Son (and the Spirit) in the eternal or immanent Trinity? All agree that in the incarnation Christ temporally and voluntarily subordinated himself to the Father. Some evangelicals believe the subordination seen in the incarnation discloses the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son; other evangelicals and, I will argue, historical orthodoxy reject this deduction.

In what follows, this question is to be kept in mind at all times. This is the central issue in this debate.

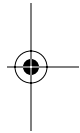




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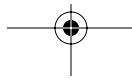
# WOMEN IN THE MODERN WORLD & IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

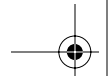
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**D**etermining what is the historically developed orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is an important exercise in its own right. Evangelicals can, however, learn very important lessons from studying the process by which this doctrine came to be established. These lessons are of particular interest at this time, a time when evangelicals are giving considerable thought to how to do evangelical theology and are sharply divided over what should be believed on the man-woman relationship. In the second part of this book, I argue that under the pressure of the profound change in culture, expressed in the post-1970s women's movement, all evangelicals have changed their theology of the sexes. They have broken with tradition and constructed a new theology for a new age. Cultural change has forced evangelicals to change their interpretation of the Bible. The altered social context has altered how the Bible is read. What has emerged is not one agreed-on new theology, but two competing alternatives. It is my argument that the lessons learned from the development of the doctrine of the Trinity can offer a way forward on this specific theological dispute, which now divides the church and which is stalemated.

One important matter that unites the debate on the doctrine of the Trinity

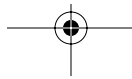
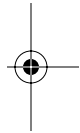


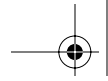


and the debate on women is that in both disputes, the protagonists quote texts that initially appear to support their position. This was a problem Athanasius and Augustine had to face in the fourth and early fifth centuries and that evangelicals have had to face in the late twentieth century and are facing at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The historic answer was that one had to first determine what is central to Scripture on the issue in question and then read the whole Bible in this light. Because we are more aware today of the diversity in Scripture, we should be more aware than those who have gone before that such a theological reading of Scripture is demanded. Whatever unity there may be at a theological level, this does not eclipse the diversity in Scripture as it confronts us. This diversity alone excludes the thought that theology can be done simply by quoting proof-texts and arguing about the meaning of words and the exegesis of passages. A more mature and adequate understanding of the theological enterprise is demanded.

In the Trinity debate, the contribution of tradition—how earlier theologians had understood the Bible’s teaching on the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit—made a very important contribution. Each theologian built on the work of those who had gone before, and each new advance was codified in a creed or confession that then gave hermeneutical guidance to those following. Evangelicals on both sides of the contemporary debate about the man-woman relationship are agreed on the importance of tradition as a secondary and guiding contributor in the theological task. This is shown by those who argue for the permanent subordination of women in the church and the home. They insist on calling their theology the “traditional” or the “historic” position. They claim that they are representing the view of the church that goes right back to the apostles; their opponents are the ones who have given a new reading of Scripture and abandoned the tradition. They, of course, insist that the primary authority for their theological position is the Scriptures. The tradition simply confirms that they are the ones who are interpreting the Bible correctly.

To counter these arguments, evangelicals who want to reject the idea that the subordination of women is God’s ideal for all times and all cultures have to demonstrate that the texts quoted and interpreted to prove this point are read in such a way that they counter what is theologically primary in Scripture in regard to the man-woman relationship; these evangelicals also have to prove that either the appeal to tradition is mistaken or that the tradition is to be rejected for very good reasons. In this second part of this book, I will explore these options. I will argue that the contemporary case for the permanent subordination



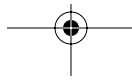


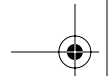
of women is “novel,” a break with the tradition; that the historic tradition on women is to be rejected for very good reasons; and that the texts quoted to prove the permanent subordination of women do not reflect the primary theological perspective on the sexes within Scripture.

### **Evangelicals Reformulate Their Theology of the Sexes**

In the late 1960s in the Western world one of the momentous social revolutions in human history erupted: the women’s movement, or women’s liberation. It has transformed modern life in almost every way imaginable. The revolution has its roots in the nineteenth century, although it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that all the ingredients to make this revolution possible came to be present. Educational opportunities for women had been increasing from the 1850s, but it was only in the 1960s that women started completing high school and entering universities in large numbers. Once women were educated, it became obvious that they were not lacking in intelligence, physical endurance or leadership capabilities. However, it was the invention of “the Pill” that precipitated this monumental social revolution. For the first time in human history, women were able to control their own fertility. Educated and freed from the uncertainty of pregnancy, women entered the work force in growing numbers. This gave them, also for the first time in human history, financial independence from men. This meant they did not have to marry or to stay in marriages where they were treated poorly or disrespectfully. They could support themselves. It also meant that for marriages to work, women had to operate on more equal terms than ever before. Men could not have it all their own way. The partnership model of marriage had become the ideal.

So profound has been this revolution that all Christians have been forced to restate their theology of the sexes in this new context. Evangelicals have not been exempted. Both the evangelicals who argue for the permanent subordination of women and those who argue for the full emancipation of women have, in the last thirty years, created theologies without antecedents. They have broken with tradition, developing novel interpretations of what the Bible teaches on the man-woman relationship. *Cultural change has generated new interpretations of the relevant biblical material.* Those who oppose the full emancipation of women will clap with delight to hear me so openly confess that my position is a break with tradition. They have long claimed this. They will not be so pleased to hear me claim that this is also true of their position. It is their repeated assertion that they alone preserve the tradition. This is simply not true. The interpretations they give





of their proof-texts are novel—they are a radical break with tradition. The contemporary hierarchical—or “traditional” or “historic”—case for the permanent subordination of women has been “invented” in response to what has taken place. While it is true that the traditional interpretation subordinates women to men, what I am arguing is that the way the Bible is read to support this idea and how it is selectively applied is novel. To make my case I will first outline how the great exegetes and theologians of the past have interpreted the Bible’s teaching on women; then I will compare this with how scholarly, contemporary conservative evangelicals, who are committed to the permanent subordination of women, interpret the Bible’s teaching on women today.

Radical reinterpretations of the Bible are common in Christian history. Tradition sometimes has to be rejected. Often this happens when a scientific or social revolution forces Christians to rethink their understanding of what the Scriptures teach. Numerous examples can be given. It was for centuries taught that the Bible forbade “usury” (lending money at interest), and texts were quoted in support. The emerging capitalism of the sixteenth century demanded this tradition be rejected. The new interpretation was that the Bible only forbade lending money at exorbitant interest—something none of the texts quoted imply.<sup>1</sup>

When it was believed that the sun revolved around the Earth, and the Bible could be cited in support, it was believed this was the cosmology prescribed by Scripture. Johannes Kepler and Copernicus forced Christians to abandon this interpretation of Scripture.

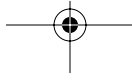
Once the rule of kings or emperors was the most common form of government. In the Old Testament the role of King David idealized such rule and in the New Testament, Christians are called on to obey and respect Caesar. This led to a way of reading the Bible in support of “the divine right” of kings to rule. The ascendancy of modern forms of democracy spelled the downfall of this reading of the Bible.

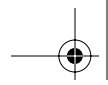
The change in how creation has been understood is another example. Until the late nineteenth century, Christians believed on the basis of what is said in Genesis that the world was created in six literal days about six thousand years ago. This was largely an unquestioned tradition. The growing scientific acceptance of evolution, and of the great age of the Earth, called into question this interpretation. Most Christians now read the Genesis creation story in a very different way.

In part three of this book I will outline how Christians for nearly eighteen

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<sup>1</sup>See Ex 22:25; Deut 23:19ff.; Lk 6:34–35.





centuries believed the Bible regulated *and* legitimated slavery. All Christians now think the Bible does not do this.

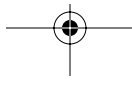
These examples remind us that historical, cultural, social or scientific developments can be powerful incentives for Christians to rethink how they understand and read the Bible. I will illustrate this process of reinterpretation in the “light” of profound social change in regard to women in this second part of the book and in regard to slavery in the third part. I use the word *light* deliberately because such changes seem to enable Christians to “see” in Scripture things hitherto unseen. Again I state the hermeneutical rule: *A change in cultural context often leads to a change in the interpretation of the Bible.* One interpretative tradition gives way to another.

Conservative evangelicals who work on the premise that any one text in the Bible can have only one true and correct interpretation and that there can only be one true and correct overall reading of the Bible on any particular issue explain these changes in interpretation on the basis of one interpretation being true and the other being false. In most of the above examples it is now confidently said, “Today we understand better what the Bible is teaching. Our exegesis is right, and theirs was wrong.” Contemporary discussions on hermeneutics offer an alternative explanation that is far more convincing. *The historical context has determined the interpretation in each of the examples given.* It was not possible for those in earlier cultural contexts to think otherwise than of women as inferior and subordinate, of slavery as acceptable to God and of creation as taking place by the direct and immediate acts of God. In their context theologians read the Bible in the only way open to them. In another context God himself opens up other possibilities. In what follows on the issues of women and slavery, competing interpretations of the same texts are outlined, and it is argued that the change in interpretation that can be seen is due to a change in the cultural context.

### Women in Christian Tradition

Across the centuries, Christian theologians have consistently appealed to Scripture to substantiate their teaching on women. Many things have been concluded, but on the issues that concern us, I have been amazed to find so much unity of thought until recent times. This is a tradition where one finds more agreement than disagreement on what the Bible teaches. The conclusions listed below were well nigh universally held until the twentieth century, even if some express themselves more starkly than others.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>My main source of information for what follows is older commentaries. See also G. Tvard, *Women in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1973); and A. J.





*God has made women as a race or class inferior to men, excluding them from leadership in the home, the church and the world.* In almost every pre-twentieth-century commentary or theological text, we find theologians affirming that men are “superior” and women “inferior.” Often 1 Timothy 2:11–14 is given as proof. John Chrysostom, commenting on these verses, says that God made man first to show male “superiority” and to teach that “the male sex enjoyed the higher honor . . . having pre-eminence in every way.”<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther asserts, “This passage makes woman subject. It takes from her all public office and authority.”<sup>4</sup> In his commentary on Genesis, he explicitly adds that the female sex is “inferior to the male sex.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Calvin says this passage teaches that “women by nature (that is by the ordinary law of God) are born to obey, for all wise men have always rejected the government of women (*gunaikokratian*, γυναικοκρατιαν) as an unnatural monstrosity.” In addition, a little later he adds, “The true order of nature prescribed by God lays down that the woman should be subject to the man. . . . The reason that women are prevented from teaching is that it is not compatible with their status, which is to be subject to men, whereas to teach implies superior authority and status.”<sup>6</sup> Woman, he continues, was created “to be a kind of appendage to man on the express condition that she should be ready to obey him.”<sup>7</sup>

John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, is of the same opinion. Appealing to the Bible and the church fathers, he concludes that men are superior and women are inferior. He maintains that “woman on her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man.”<sup>8</sup> The idea that a woman should be the ruler of a state, he

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Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced: How Culture Shaped Sexist Theology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1989). My richest secondary source for references to check in the original was Daniel Doriani, “History of Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 213–67. He argues that the position taken in this book exactly reflects the historical understanding of women, yet almost every example he quotes counts against his case! His “theology” seems to blind him to what his sources are actually saying.

<sup>3</sup>John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of John Chrysostom: Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, *Library of the Fathers*, trans. James Tweed (Oxford: Parker, 1853), pp. 63–64.

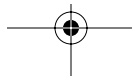
<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther, *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy*, vol. 28 of *Luther's Works*, ed. H. C. Oswald, trans. E. Sittler and M. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), p. 276.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1–5*, ed. J. Pelikan, trans. G. Schick, vol. 1 of *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), pp. 1–5, 69.

<sup>6</sup>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), p. 219.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” in *Selected Writings of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995), p. 371.







argues at length, is contrary to the interpretation of the Bible given by the Holy Ghost. It is, thus, “monstrous.” The Puritans are equally adamant that women are an inferior class.<sup>9</sup> They believed that God set men over women by assigning, to quote William Gouge, “degrees of superiority and inferiority.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Robert Bolton says God made the male body “to his superiority, and set the print of government in his very face, which is sterner and less delicate than the woman’s.”<sup>11</sup> The eloquent Matthew Henry, commenting on 1 Corinthians 11:3ff., says that women “are placed in subordination to the man; and it is a shame for them to do anything that looks like an affection of changing rank. . . . The woman was made subject to the man, and she should keep her station.”<sup>12</sup> Repeatedly in his comments, he concludes that the Bible teaches that man is superior and woman is inferior. In America, Jonathan Edwards commends “modesty and shamefacedness in inferiors to superiors,” and then quoting 1 Timothy 2:9, he applies this principle to women.<sup>13</sup> John Wesley says the command that women keep silent in 1 Timothy 2:11–12 was given because woman is inferior to man and because a woman is “more easily deceived and more easily deceives.”<sup>14</sup> Robert Louis Dabney, commenting on 1 Timothy 2:9–15, says the principle stands at all times and in all situations, “man is the ruler, woman the ruled.”<sup>15</sup> “Her race,” he writes, “is a subordinate race.”<sup>16</sup> Charles Hodge writes, “[man’s] superiority . . . enables and entitles him to command. . . . This superiority of the man is . . . taught in scripture, founded in nature and proved by all experience.”<sup>17</sup> For this reason Hodge believed that “the general good requires us to deprive the whole female sex of the rights of self-government.”<sup>18</sup>



<sup>9</sup>See in detail J. Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education 1560–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 142–71.

<sup>10</sup>William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, for William Bladen, 1662), p. 591.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Bolton, *Some General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (London: John Legatt for Edward Weaver, 1634), p. 245.

<sup>12</sup>Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (London: Ward Lock & Co., n.d.), 6:1047. He lived from 1662 to 1714.

<sup>13</sup>*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 4:426–27.

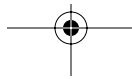
<sup>14</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (London: John Mason, 1862), p. 327.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Louis Dabney, *Discussions Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 2:111.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1964), p. 312. Doriani is simply mistaken when he claims that Hodge did not think the permanent subordination of women implied their “inferiority” (“History of Interpretation,” p. 255). Hodge uses this very word frequently.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Hodge, “The Bible Argument for Slavery,” in *Cotton Is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments*,





Adam Clarke, writing in 1859 in England, says, “God designed that he [the man] should have the pre-eminence. . . . The structure of woman plainly proves that she was never designed for those exertions required in public life. In this is the chief part of the natural inferiority of woman.”<sup>19</sup> Charles Ellicott, writing five years later, says that 1 Timothy 2:11b sets the agenda for what follows: Paul is teaching that “woman, i.e., any one of her class . . . [must be] yielding in all cases. The  $\pi\alpha\varsigma$  (all) in ‘all subjection’ [is] extensive rather than intensive.”<sup>20</sup> I can find no dissenting voice in any commentary or in the writings of any theologian until the twentieth century. All are agreed that the Bible teaches that women are an inferior class or race who are not competent to lead or exercise authority in any sphere of life. This is the tradition—this is how the Bible has been interpreted by the best of past exegetes and theologians.

*Women should keep silent in public.* Because women as a class were understood to be a subordinate race, inferior to men, it was maintained that they should not speak in public; they were to keep silent. Two texts were read to support this rule, 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12. Most of the comments on these texts apply them directly to a church setting, but when the public scene comes into view, it is clear that this rule is thought to apply universally. Origen wrote, “It is not proper for a woman to speak at the Assembly, however admirable or holy what she says may be, merely because it comes from female lips.”<sup>21</sup> Chrysostom commenting on 1 Timothy 2:11 says Paul’s words mean that women should “not speak at all in church” or in “public . . . for the sex is naturally somewhat talkative and for this reason he [God] constrains them on all sides.”<sup>22</sup> Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:34, he says women are to keep silent because by nature they are “easily carried away and light headed.”<sup>23</sup> Jerome ruled that women should be absolutely silent in church: they were not even to sing.<sup>24</sup> In expounding 1 Corinthians 14:34, he takes this to mean women should be silent in all public gatherings: “It is contrary to the order of nature and of the law that women should speak in a gathering of



ed. E. N. Cartwright (1860; reprint, New York: Basic Afro-American Reprint Library, 1968), p. 863.

<sup>19</sup>Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible with Commentary and Criticism* (London: W. Tegg), 6:448.

<sup>20</sup>Charles Ellicott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 36.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted from George Tavard, *Women in Christian Tradition*, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup>Chrysostom, “Homily on 1 Timothy,” in *Homilies of John Chrysostom*, pp. 69–70.

<sup>23</sup>John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on 1 Corinthians*, *Library of the Fathers*, ed. and trans. H. K. Cornish and J. Hedley (Oxford: Parker, 1853), p. 37.

<sup>24</sup>Jerome *Adversus Pelagianos dialogi* III 1.25.





men.”<sup>25</sup> Thomas Aquinas concluded, “The voice of women is an invitation to lust, and therefore must not be heard in church.”<sup>26</sup> Luther believed Paul’s command that women “keep silent” applied to all “public matters,” but he said, “I want it to refer to public ministry, which occurs in the public assembly of the church. There a woman must be completely quiet.”<sup>27</sup> Calvin was of a similar opinion: interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11 he says, “Quietness means silence, they [women] should not presume to speak in public,” adding that Paul bids women to “be silent and abide within the limits of their sex.”<sup>28</sup> Knox likewise demanded that women keep silent in public. He wrote that St. Paul “names women in general excepting none.”<sup>29</sup> This silence, he claims, is what the “Holy Ghost commands.”

The Puritans also held the Scriptures taught that women should hold their tongue not only in church but also in public. Gouge, commenting on the command to silence in 1 Timothy 2:11–12, says this means that Paul “speaketh [not only] of a woman’s silence in church, but also of a wife’s silence before her husband.”<sup>30</sup> Her words should be “few, reverend and meek.” She is forbidden absolutely from “speaking in public assemblies and churches.”<sup>31</sup> As late as 1890, the Southern Presbyterian Synod of Virginia forbade women to sing in church.<sup>32</sup>

In the nineteenth century, as women began to assert their independence and to seek enfranchisement, much of the opposition came from clergy who quoted 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12. In 1837 a pastoral letter was published by the clergy of Massachusetts against Angelina and Sarah Grimke, who were speaking in public gatherings in favor of the abolition of slavery. In 1840 Catherine Beecher was forbidden to speak in public on female education: her brother had to read her speeches.<sup>33</sup> The same opinion is given voice by the best of nineteenth-century theologians. In Germany, Heinrich Meyer interpreted 1 Corin-

<sup>25</sup>Jerome *In Primam Epistolam Ad Corinthios* 14.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, vol. 14, *Divine Government*, trans. T. C. O’Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1975), p. 89.

<sup>27</sup>Luther, *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians*, p. 276. See also the discussion on this point in J. D. Dempsey, “The Image of God in Women as seen in Luther and Calvin,” in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari E. Borrensen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 243.

<sup>28</sup>Calvin, *Second Epistle of Paul*, pp. 216, 217.

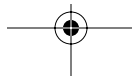
<sup>29</sup>Knox, “First Blast,” p. 388.

<sup>30</sup>Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp. 281–82.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>32</sup>See Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced*, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup>These stories are taken from Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced*, pp. 154–55.





thians 14:34 to be directed against all “public speaking by women.”<sup>34</sup> In England, Ellicott takes the command to be silent in 1 Tim-othy 2:12 as prohibiting women from speaking in church or in public. It is at “variance with women’s proper duties and destination.”<sup>35</sup> In North America, Hodge interpreted 1 Corinthians 14:34 to be forbidding women from “speaking in public, especially in church.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Albert Barnes concluded that this text enjoins the complete silence of women in public: “The rule is positive, explicit and universal. There is no ambiguity.”<sup>37</sup> Again, the tradition speaks with one voice, even if on this matter there are some minor divergences. The Bible teaches that women are to be silent in church, although most conceded that they may sing hymns. This rule is but a particular application of the general rule that women should keep their mouths shut in the public arena.

Now we consider the reasons why it was thought that the Bible taught that women were an inferior race or class, excluded from leadership in society and the church, and why they were to keep silent in public.

*Women are not equally made in the image of God.* The texts most often quoted in support of this idea were Genesis 1:27 and 1 Corinthians 11:7. In the second of these texts Paul calls woman “the glory of man” and omits to say she is made in the image of God. This led exegetes to ask whether the Genesis text really meant that both men and women were equally made in the image of God. In the interesting book *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*,<sup>38</sup> edited by Kari Borrensen, this debate is documented and discussed. Professor Borrensen argues that Augustine was the first church father who hesitated to accept that 1 Corinthians 11:7 teaches “men’s exclusive Godlikeness.”<sup>39</sup> He was puzzled by the fact that Genesis 1:27 seems to say that man and woman bear equally the image of God, whereas Paul does not say this. His conclusion is that woman only bears the image of God when united with a man in marriage.<sup>40</sup> Ambrosiaster, in contrast, explicitly denies

<sup>34</sup>Heinrich Meyer, *1 Corinthians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), p. 117.

<sup>35</sup>Ellicott, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 37.

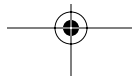
<sup>36</sup>Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), p. 305.

<sup>37</sup>Albert Barnes, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 5 of *Notes on the New Testament* (London: Blackie & Son, n.d.), p. 274.

<sup>38</sup>Kari E. Borrensen, ed., *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). See subsequent to this book, N. V. Harrison, “Women, Human Identity and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretation,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 205–49.

<sup>39</sup>Borrensen, *Image of God*, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 200.





that woman is made in the image of God.<sup>41</sup> This becomes the dominant tradition. Thus “between the 8th and 12th centuries, monastic exegesis and legal texts either presume or deny women’s creational God-likeness.”<sup>42</sup> Among the medieval theologians, Peter Aberlard and Peter Lombard deny that women bear the image of God, while Bonaventura argues man has it in greater measure.<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, like Augustine, gives a yes and a no. In the end, he concludes men more fully bear the image of God: “With reference to interior qualities, it can be said that man is more especially God’s image according to the mind, since his reason is stronger.”<sup>44</sup> Luther and Calvin both allow that woman is made in the image of God, yet they hold that she has this image in lesser measure.<sup>45</sup> Luther, commenting on Genesis 1, writes, “Although Eve was a most extraordinary creature, similar to Adam with respect to the image of God . . . still she is a woman. . . . She does not equal the glory and worthiness of the male.”<sup>46</sup> Calvin, commenting on Genesis 2:18, says, “Certainly it cannot be denied that woman also, though in second degree, was created in the image of God.”<sup>47</sup> Knox assumes a similar position: “Woman compared to other creatures is in the image of God, for she bears dominion over them. But in comparison to man she may not be called the image of God, for she bears not rule and lordship over man.”<sup>48</sup>

*Woman was created second and is therefore of second rank, inferior to man.*

The most enduring and most voiced argument for woman’s inferiority is that because woman was created second, according to Genesis 2, she is second to man.

The premise is that the chronological order in which God created the sexes determines their status and freedoms. Chrysostom says God made man first to show male “superiority” and to teach that “the male sex enjoyed the higher honor . . . having pre-eminence in every way.”<sup>49</sup> For Jerome the creation of women second is yet further evidence of women’s inferiority:

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 191–92.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 217–20.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>45</sup>See in greater detail Dempsey, “Image of God,” pp. 236–66. She concludes her very sympathetic account of Luther and Calvin’s views on women by saying both were “deeply influenced by the tradition which sees men as more fully made in the image of God than women” (p. 260).

<sup>46</sup>Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>47</sup>John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John Keny (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), p. 129.

<sup>48</sup>Knox, “First Blast,” p. 397.

<sup>49</sup>Chrysostom, “Homily on 1 Timothy,” in *Homilies of John Chrysostom*, p. 70.





There is something not good in the number two. . . . This we must observe, at least if we would faithfully follow the Hebrew, that while scripture on the first, third, fourth and sixth relates that, having finished his works of each, "God saw that it was good," on the second day he omitted this altogether, leaving us to understand that two is not a good number.<sup>50</sup>

Aquinas asks, does the fact that man was created first and woman second imply she is a deficient or defective male? He answers in the affirmative. He describes women as "by nature of lower capacity and quality than man."<sup>51</sup> In the sixteenth century, Luther argues that women are to take second place because they were created second and thus are inferior to men. In commenting on 1 Timothy 2:13 he says what is "first [is] the most preferable," and "this passage makes woman subject."<sup>52</sup> Calvin also based his understanding of woman's subordination on the chronological order in which she was created. This is his primary argument for the inferiority, subordination and public silence of women: "The true order of nature prescribed by God," he says, "lays down that the woman should be subject to man."<sup>53</sup> Then follows a startling comment that shows both Calvin's sharp logic and the importance of *chronological* order for him: "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 was far inferior to him." Nevertheless, he argues we are to conclude that in Genesis, Moses is teaching that "woman was created later to be a kind of appendage to the man, on the express condition that she should be ready to obey him. . . . The apostle is right to remind us of the order of their creating in which God's eternal and inviolable appointment is clearly displayed."<sup>54</sup> English divines likewise cite the creation of women second as the primary reason given for her subordinate status, inferiority and silence in public. It is stated repeatedly in the many Puritan discussions on the family.<sup>55</sup> Matthew Poole concludes that Adam was created first to show that "the man had priority over the woman in God's creation."<sup>56</sup> In

<sup>50</sup>Jerome, quoted in Jane Barr, "The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women," in *After Eve: Women, Theology and Christian Tradition*, ed. J. M. Soskice (London: Collins, 1990), p. 96.

<sup>51</sup>Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 13, 35–36. Doriani's attempt to explain away such comments in Aquinas is not convincing ("History of Interpretation," pp. 231–32).

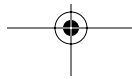
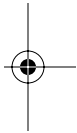
<sup>52</sup>Luther, *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians*, p. 276.

<sup>53</sup>Calvin, *Second Epistle of Paul*, p. 217.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 217, 218.

<sup>55</sup>As Doriani admits explicitly ("History of Interpretation," pp. 243–46.).

<sup>56</sup>Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (1685; reprint, London: Banner of Truth, 1969), 3:778.





the nineteenth century Henry Liddon writes that “Adam was formed first: then Eve. This priority in creation implies a certain superiority.”<sup>57</sup> In America, Patrick Fairbain concluded, “For Adam was first formed . . . then Eve; the precedence in time implying superiority in place and power.”<sup>58</sup> Writing as late as 1957, Donald Guthrie says that “the priority of man’s creation places him in a position of superiority over woman, the assumption being that the original creation, with God’s own imprimatur upon it, must set precedent for determining the true order of the sexes.”<sup>59</sup> Six years later J. N. D. Kelly, in his comments on 1 Timothy 2:13–14, says, “Paul advances two arguments in support of this ban. The first is that Adam was created first and then Eve. In other words, what is chronologically prior is taken in some sense to be superior.”<sup>60</sup>

Again, the tradition is well nigh uniform. Most exegetes, until recent times, have interpreted the Bible to be teaching that because woman was created second in chronological order, she is to take second place.

*Women are more prone to sin and deception.* A third exegetical tradition on which woman’s subordinate status and inferiority are based builds on Genesis 3 and 1 Timothy 2:14. These passages were taken to mean that Eve is to be blamed for all evil and death and that she and all her sex are more prone to sin and error than are men. Women are subordinated as a class or race because Eve is responsible for the Fall. “Having become disobedient,” Irenaeus concludes, “she [Eve] was made the cause of death, both to herself and the whole human race.”<sup>61</sup> Tertullian is the most outspoken: speaking to women he says, “And do you not know that each of you is Eve? . . . You are the devil’s gateway: you are the first deserter of the divine law.”<sup>62</sup> Chrysostom says women are to be subject because they are “captivated by appetite.”

<sup>57</sup>Henry Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy* (1897; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 19.

<sup>58</sup>Patrick Fairbain, *Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles* (1874; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1956), p. 128.

<sup>59</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Tyndale, 1957), p. 77.

<sup>60</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963), p. 68. In the final editing stage of this book, I had in hand William J. Webb’s book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001). He has an appendix listing quotes which stress woman was created second that, he thinks, mainly apply to the primogeniture of Adam. I am not entirely convinced, but I was pleased to use a couple of his examples I had not previously noted.

<sup>61</sup>Irenaeus *Against Heresies*; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:22.

<sup>62</sup>Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 4:33.





Their sex is “weak and fickle . . . collectively. . . .” “She taught once and ruined all.”<sup>63</sup> Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 he describes women in comparison to men as “some sort of weaker being and easily carried away and light minded.”<sup>64</sup> Luther says it was Eve who went “astray”—she “brought on transgression.” This shows that “Adam is approved as superior to Eve” because “there was greater wisdom in Adam.”<sup>65</sup> Calvin concludes that because the woman “seduced the man from God’s commandment, it is fitting that she should be deprived of all her freedom and placed under a yoke.” To woman, he says, is to be imputed “the ruin of the whole human race.”<sup>66</sup> Puritan Poole believed that 1 Timothy 2:14 was penned by the apostle “to keep the woman humble, in low opinion of herself, and the lower order wherein God hath fixed her.”<sup>67</sup> Matthew Henry writes, in his comments on Genesis 3, that “it was the devil’s subtlety to assault the weaker with his temptations. . . . We may suppose her inferior to Adam in knowledge, and strength, and presence of mind.”<sup>68</sup> Writing late in the nineteenth century, Liddon concludes, “The experience of all ages [is] that woman is more easily led astray than man.”<sup>69</sup> In 1957 Guthrie is still interpreting 1 Timothy 2:14 in accord with this tradition. He says Paul has “in mind the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray.”<sup>70</sup>

The tradition is uniform. Once more, we have seen that the best of past theologians interpreted the Bible to be teaching that women are more prone than men to sin and error.

There is little ambiguity or dissension within the tradition. Across the centuries, until very recent times, exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible to be teaching that women are a subordinate class or race who are inferior to men and, as such, are to be excluded from leadership in society and the church. They are to keep silent in public—especially in church—and they are to obey men, whom God has made superior. Women are to accept their lot in life because they were not made fully in the image of God, because they were created second and because they are more prone to sin and are more easily deceived

<sup>63</sup>Chrysostom, “Homily on 1 Timothy,” in *Homilies of John Chrysostom*, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup>Chrysostom, “1 Corinthians Homily,” in *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on 1 Corinthians*, p. 521.

<sup>65</sup>Luther, *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians*, pp. 278–79.

<sup>66</sup>Calvin, *Second Epistle of Paul*, pp. 218–19.

<sup>67</sup>Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:779.

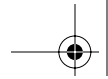
<sup>68</sup>Henry, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:21.

<sup>69</sup>Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis*, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup>Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 77. For more examples of this interpretation of the Bible, see Webb, *Slaves*, pp. 263–68.







than men. Women as a “class” or “race” need men’s protection and leadership. The subordination of the wife to her husband is simply a particular application of the God-given rule that women are set under men. For nineteen centuries, this is how the Bible has been interpreted.

