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Socially Constructing God: Gender, Culture, and a Stratified Trinity

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ABSTRACT

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTING GOD: GENDER, CULTURE,
AND A STRATIFIED TRINITY

by

Landon P. Schnabel

Adviser: Darius Jankiewicz

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

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Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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The Problem

Both hierarchicalist and equivalentist evangelicals use Trinitarian relations to argue for their opposing views on gender roles. How can this stalemate be broken if the Bible, the typical evangelical foundation for resolving doctrinal disputes, is used by both sides to argue their contrasting positions?

Methods and Procedures

I explored the cultural determination of worldview, bringing the fields of sociology, psychology, history, and philosophy to bear on this theological debate and considered whether it may be differing presuppositions and subsequent opposing interpretations that cause the conflicting positions, rather than what the biblical text means. By looking through the eyes of experts in this mix of fields, I gained insight on

the development and impact of gender presuppositions in regard to role stratification in the conceptualization of the Trinity.

Findings

I found that culturally determined presuppositions seem to be at the root of the disagreement. It would seem that the divine is being conceptualized and stratified according to contemporary human society. Until each side of the debate can understand their presuppositions and recognize the extent to which they are creating God in their image, constructive dialogue will be limited and I project that the debate will continue passionately and divisively.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTING GOD: GENDER, CULTURE,
AND A STRATIFIED TRINITY

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
Landon P. Schnabel

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

When trying to understand the current gender debate within Christianity and its subsequent effect upon human conceptions of Divinity, it is important to look to the historical context of the present tension. In 1949, existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, protégé of Jean-Paul Sartre, famously stated that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one.”¹ By saying this, Beauvoir asserted that female inferiority is not inherent, but is a societal construct. Psychologist John Money coined the term “gender role” in 1955. To Money, gender roles were not a person’s biological sexual identity, but a socially constructed identity involving cultural norms which defined appropriate behavior.² Also in 1955, Talcott Parsons, a sociologist who established the sociology program at Harvard University, explored familial roles and developed a model of the nuclear family. He compared the two poles of familial structure between which people operate: total separation of male and female roles (which was labeled Model A) and

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 13.

² John Money, "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings," *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 96, no. (1955): 253-264. In this seminal article Money stated that the term “gender role” signifies that which a person says or does to express her or himself as holding the status of girl or woman, boy or man, respectively. See also David Haig, "The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Title, 1945-2001," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 33, no. 2 (2004): 87-96.

complete dissolution of gender roles (Model B).³ Interest in women's studies continued to develop within various academic fields exploring gender, gender roles, and familial models throughout the 1950s, which were followed by the second wave of feminism⁴ in the 1960s which called for legal and social equality for women.

Some Christians joined the feminist cause for equality, including evangelicals who used the Bible as the foundation for their belief. In 1968, Mary Daly wrote *The Church and the Second Sex*,⁵ making a connection between the important work by Simone de Beauvoir⁶ and the Christian community. Daly and others challenged the idea that God intended for women to be subordinated to men. In 1973, evangelicals led by Ron Sider met in a Chicago YMCA to discuss an agenda for progressive evangelicals. Though only six women were invited to this male-dominated conference, they were able to push through "a statement that appeared in the Chicago Declaration text itself: 'We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.'"⁷ Christian feminism grew as a movement, and in 1975 a conference of evangelical feminists in Washington, D.C., was attended by 360 participants. The Equal Rights Amendment was endorsed here and the Evangelical Women's Caucus, meant to

³ Talcott Parsons and Robert Freed Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955).

⁴ The first wave refers to woman's suffrage movements who called for women's right to vote in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁵ Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

⁶ Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* translates into English as "the second sex."

⁷ David R. Swartz, "Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 21, no. 1 (2011): 92.

raise consciousness about women's rights issues from a conservative Christian perspective, arose.⁸ Virginia Mollenkott, one of the pioneers of evangelical feminism, declared, "We did not become feminists and then try to fit our Christianity into feminist ideology. We heralded the feminist movement because we were convinced that the church had strayed from a correct understanding of God's will for women."⁹ However, not all evangelicals agreed that the Bible supported role equality for women.

Those who opposed the evangelical feminists believed their understanding of full equality from the Bible had been corrupted by society, and developed a theological reaction to the growing evangelical feminist movement. Some evangelicals were willing to break with historical thought on the inferiority of women to some extent; they agreed with evangelical egalitarians that women were not ontologically inferior, but did not accept full equality. To separate equality of being and authority, they adopted the sociological term "role." Agreeing with the evangelical feminists that women are not inferior to men in being, but disagreeing about equality in authority, George Knight III wrote, in 1977, what would become a watershed in how many Christians thought about gender roles. In the book titled *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*, Knight "formulated an entirely new set of theological arguments in support of the permanent subordination of women. Men and women are created equal, yet women are differentiated from men by the fact that God has assigned to them a

⁸ Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 122.

⁹ Quoted in Phyllis E. Alsdurf, "Evangelical Feminists: Ministry Is the Issue," *Christianity Today*, July 21, 1978, 47.

subordinate *role*” (emphasis his).¹⁰ Knight said that “for the basis of man’s headship and woman’s submission, the apostle Paul appeals to the analogy of God the Father’s headship over Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:3).”¹¹ Knight saw Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 11:3 (“God is the head of Christ”) as “given to answer the objection some bring to the headship of man in reference to woman.”¹² Knight connected an equal being but eternally subordinate role of women to men with a similar relationship between the Father and Jesus. Many influential theologians agreed with and began to utilize this analogy, such as Wayne Grudem who co-authored *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*¹³ with Knight in 1985. Knight has since taken a special interest in responding to what he labels evangelical feminism, writing against those who would call themselves “equivalentists,”¹⁴ such as Kevin Giles and Millard Erickson. Some equivalentists are concerned with what they see as a “re-inventing” or “tampering with” the Trinity for the sake of maintaining “ordered” gender roles.¹⁵ Scholars have written extensively on both sides of this issue, and opposing journals were even published. The

¹⁰ Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 20.

¹¹ George W. Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ George W. Knight and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).

¹⁴ This is Erickson’s term from Millard Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009). He labels the opposing theologians “gradationists.” Both are in specific reference to the authority relationship of Jesus and the Father, and correlatively women and men.

¹⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (1997): 57-68; Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*; Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

*Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*¹⁶ has sought to uphold a position of eternal role subordination for both Jesus and women and the *Priscilla Papers*¹⁷ has argued for equal authority between Jesus and the Father, and between women and men.

¹⁶ Articles printed by the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* on gender and the Trinity include Jack Cottrell, "Christ: A Model for Headship and Submission: A Crucial Verse in 1 Corinthians 11 Overturns Egalitarian Interpretations," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 2, no. 4 (1997), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-2-No-4/Christ-A-Model-for-Headship-and-Submission> (accessed 12/8/10); Wayne Grudem and Bruce A. Ware, "JBMW Forum: Q & A on the Trinity," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 12, no. 2 (2007), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-12-No-2/JBMW-Forum-Q-and-A-on-the-Trinity> (accessed 12/8/10); Jason Hall, "A Review of Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity by Kevin Giles," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 12, no. 1 (2007): 32-39; Stephen D. Kovach, "Egalitarians Revamp Doctrine of the Trinity: Bilezikian, Grenz and the Kroegers Deny Eternal Subordination of the Son," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 2, no. 1 (1996), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-2-No-1/Egalitarians-Revamp-Doctrine-of-the-Trinity> (accessed 12/8/10); John MacArthur, "Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6, no. 1 (2001), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-6-No-1/Reexamining-the-Eternal-Sonship-of-Christ> (accessed 12/8/10); Russell D. Moore, "The Surrendered Christ: The Christological Confusion of Evangelical Feminism," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 11, no. 1 (2006), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-11-No-1/The-Surrendered-Christ> (accessed 12/9/10); Benjamin B. Phillips, "Method Mistake: An Analysis of the Charge of Arianism in Complementarian Discussions of the Trinity," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13, no. 1 (2008), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-13-No-1/Method-Mistake-An-Analysis-of-the-Charge-of-Arianism-in-Complementarian-Discussions-of-the-Trinity> (accessed 12/8/10); Peter Schemm, "The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women' (Ch 19) by Kevin Giles," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10, no. 1 (2005): 81-87; Peter R. Schemm, "Kevin Giles's the Trinity and Subordinationism: A Review Article," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-7-No-2/Review-of-The-Trinity-and-Subordinationism>; Peter R. Schemm, "Trinitarian Perspectives on Gender Roles," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6, no. 1 (2001); Randy Stinson, "Does the Father Submit to the Son? A Critique of Royce Gruenler," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6, no. 2 (2001), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-6-No-2/Does-the-Father-Submit-to-the-Son> (accessed 12/8/10); Bruce A. Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6, no. 1 (2001), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-6-No-1/Tampering-With-the-Trinity> (accessed 12/8/10).

¹⁷ Articles printed by the *Priscilla Papers* relating to gender and the Trinity include Phillip Cary, "The New Evangelical Subordinationism: Reading Inequality into the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 4 (2006): 42-45; Gary W. Deddo, "The Trinity and Gender: Theological Reflections on the Differences of Divine and Human Persons," *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 4 (2008): 4-13; Patrick S. Franklin, "Women Sharing in the Ministry of God: A Trinitarian Framework for the Priority of Spirit Gifting as a Solution to the Gender Debate," *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 4 (2008): 14-20; Kristin L. Johnson, "Just as the Father, So the Son: The Implications of John 5:16-30 in the Gender-Role Debate," *Priscilla Papers* 19, no. 1 (2005): 13-17; Pam Morrison, "The Holy Spirit, Neglected Person of the Trinity, and Women's Leadership," *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 4 (2008): 21-24; Alan G. Padgett, "Beginning with the End in 1 Cor. 11:2-16: Understanding the Passage from the Bottom Up," *Priscilla Papers* 17, no. 3 (2003): 17-23.

Both equivalentists and gradationists¹⁸ have proclaimed that their perspective is biblical, and both have created elaborate systems of texts to persuasively argue their point. Furthermore, both sides have looked through church history and have asserted that their position is traditional orthodoxy. Each side has done analysis of contemporary Greek sources and detailed exegesis of 1 Cor 11:3 to show that the “headship” relationship in both the Trinity and the nuclear family supports their position of either ordered authority or mutual submission.

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that gender issues have become one of the most polarizing topics in biblically conservative Christianity today. Authors on either side are accusing those of the opposing persuasion of meddling with the Trinity, the core doctrine of Christianity. Both positions seem to present a cogent argument, but the proposed interpretive solutions have led to a “text-jam.”¹⁹ Both evangelical groups, who seem to place the Bible in the prime position for resolving doctrinal disputes, believe they are interpreting the Bible correctly.

The Problem

When both sides can “prove” their position, neither can be truly proved. How can this stalemate be broken if the Bible, the typical evangelical foundation for resolving doctrinal disputes, is used by both sides to argue their position? The problem is that the rival “biblical” positions are contradictory, and biblical argumentation regarding

¹⁸ Equivalentists believe there is equal authority between the Father and Son and men and women, while gradationists believe there are differing levels of authority and that there is a necessary functional hierarchy in the relationships.

¹⁹ The term “text-jam” comes from Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 3. By using it, he refers to the situation where two opposing sides with differing hermeneutics quote proof-texts, sometimes even using the same texts, against each other.

authority has led to a stalemate which needs to be solved outside the text at the presuppositional level. An important question arises: Do socially determined presuppositions color interpretation of the text to the extent that they shape the human conception of God?

The Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to work towards productive dialog within the text-jam by examining the culturally determined presuppositions that contribute to the debate between gradational and equivalent views of authority.

Justification

This area is important because relational stratification of female and male is integral to society, and the nature of the relationship of the Father and Son leads to important theological issues such as the freedom of will and the basis of salvation. Both equivalentists and gradationists largely affirm Gen 2 when it says that humans, both female and male, were created in the image of God. However, it would seem that at least one side of the debate is recreating God in their image based upon their socially constructed views about gender. Therefore it would seem that the issue lies in the realm of social and religious presupposition, which requires further study.

There has not yet been a multidisciplinary discourse on the extent to which socially constructed gender presuppositions determine how religious texts on the Trinity are interpreted in general, and particularly 1 Cor 11:3 in this case. This work seeks to begin that discussion.

Methodology

I explore the social construction of religious beliefs in a systematic exploration of theological, sociological, historical, and philosophical writings with special attention to the formulation of religious ideology about gender and its effect upon textual analysis and subsequent stratification of the divine. A significant parallel is drawn between changing cultural views on slavery and women in developing an understanding of how religious beliefs are in part a product of socialization. By looking through the eyes of experts in the necessary mix of fields²⁰ I investigate the development and impact of gender presuppositions in regard to role stratification upon conceptualization of the divine.

Limitations

It is not my purpose to cover the theologies of headship or the Trinity comprehensively. Neither is it my purpose to develop a biblical argument for or against any theological position. I do not necessarily solve the subordination vs. equality debate. I simply explore the impact of socially constructed gender ideology upon biblical interpretation and conceptualizations of the divine.

I want to re-emphasize that the reader should not come to this thesis expecting it to provide a big-picture understanding of the Trinity, male headship, or any related macro theological concept. It is exclusively a systematic reflection upon the social determination of our presuppositions concerning authority relationships and the divine.

²⁰ Theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and psychology.

Outline

This work is divided into five chapters: (1) introduction, (2) gender, (3) culture, (4) a stratified Trinity, and (5) summary and conclusion.

The introductory chapter consists of a version of the proposal revised for inclusion within the thesis. The second chapter on gender examines the evolving understanding of gender in Western culture over time, feminism and Christian responses to second-wave feminism. The debate between two evangelical responses to cultural change is introduced. The third chapter dealing with culture explores the sociocultural development of religious beliefs, reactionary religious responses to culture, and finally adjustments in interpretation of Scripture as society changes. The current gender debate is examined briefly in light of the parallel slavery debate of the nineteenth century. The fourth chapter, on the Trinity, briefly introduces stratification and how it applies to the gender/Trinity subordination debate. Then, the development of orthodoxy in regard to the Trinity is examined. Subsequently, recent hierarchical evangelical thought is presented with social ordering, or stratification, emphasized. In chapter 5, I summarize my findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for further discourse.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER

Introduction

Various terms have been applied to express the experience of women throughout history. A 1970 article proposes three such terms as possibilities: women as (1) caste, (2) class, or (3) oppressed sex.¹ In one way or another, women have experienced variations and combinations of the treatment inherent in the three terms, as well as others, in different societal contexts. For the most part, world history has been characterized by various forms of patriarchy, with women assuming subordinate positions.² However, following a cultural shift and three waves of feminism, society, at least in the industrialized West, developed a novel understanding of sex and gender which theoretically provides greater equality to women. Despite these advances for the cause of women, inequality continues and tension persists. Not all agree with the cultural transition towards equality, and some present both archaic and novel ideological arguments for the continued subordination of women.

¹ Evelyn Reed, "Women: Caste, Class or Oppressed Sex," *International Socialist Review* 31, no. 3 (1970): 15-17, 40-41.

² Cultures and societies have treated women differently. The existence of limited quasi-matriarchal societies shows that women's experience has not been unilaterally subordinate. However, the proposal, based in large part upon the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, of a prehistory that saw a prevalence of matriarchy which was developed in the 19th century and promoted in second-wave feminism has been discredited. Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

This chapter examines evolving attitudes towards women from the ancient world to the three stages of feminism. After changing cultural perspectives have been explored, a debate between two Christian responses to the shift towards women's equality is introduced.

Ancient Perspectives on Women in the West and Near East

Cultural Diversity

Understanding the position and experience of women throughout the ancient world is foundational to understanding subsequent developments.³ There is not a simple “ancient” way in which women were treated. There was great diversity from one society to the next and even within the same society across class and time in the roles and protections afforded women.

For example, the Greeks viewed women as inherently inferior, only slightly intellectually superior to children. Greek society was firmly patriarchal, with girls under the rule of their fathers until they were married in their mid-teens, typically to men in their thirties or forties who would then assume authority over their young bride. Within her new family, the woman's primary role was bearing and caring for children. Male children were preferred, and it was not uncommon for a family to be willing to raise only one female child. It was socially acceptable at the time to expose unwanted infants to the elements; those who did not die might be picked up by slave dealers and become a slave,

³ For example, a recent work by Jenifer Neils seeks to analyze ancient visual representations of women for the roles of women in societies. J. Neils, *Women in the Ancient World* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011). In 1984, Peradotto and Sullivan tried to ascertain the experience of women in the West through literary analysis. J. Peradotto and J.P. Sullivan, *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984). While people like Neils are continually seeking to produce new understanding, there is a substantial body of knowledge already available as indicated by such tertiary sources as J.E. Salisbury, *Women in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001).

a prostitute, or both.⁴ It was socially appropriate for a married man to visit prostitutes and utilize female servants sexually, though in some cases this extended to male servants who were required to assume the “feminine” sexual role.⁵

In contrast to Greek sexual exploitation, the ancient Egyptians treated their women with relative parity compared to other societies; women were protected by the law and considered eligible to seek joy in life and even experience love and emotional support in marriage. While ancient Egypt was still a male-dominated society, a few women even became important leaders, such as Cleopatra and Neferiti.⁶

As a further example, ancient Judaism based its gender ethic on traditional understanding of the Torah and other complementary writings. In Jewish society, men tended to control the household and social community, while women were considered dependent and usually directly connected to a father, husband, or male son who cared for them. A wife’s greatest honor came in bringing her husband a male heir. If unable to conceive, she could have children vicariously through a servant. Both multiple wives and concubines were acceptable to varying degrees. Women were in some ways viewed as

⁴ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995).

⁵ When a Greco-Roman male servant was utilized sexually by a male master they were to assume the subordinate, or feminine, position. When a subordinate was used sexually they were seen as female and thus the union was not viewed as homosexual. This included what is known today as pederasty. Orientation was not as much of an issue as whether one assumed the dominating masculine penetrator role, or the passive, feminine receiver role. Adult men of social standing were not to assume the passive role. Men who broke the sexual order in this way were considered deviant. See Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶ Anne K. Capel and others, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996); Carolyn Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor: Women in Ancient Egypt* (London: Continuum, 2010); Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Barbara Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

property and as such the responsibility for adultery was placed largely on them, as illustrated in John 8 where a woman is caught in adultery and held on trial without a male counterpart. Though the basis of practice was different from surrounding cultures, the Jewish patriarchal system meant parallels existed between the Hebrews and some surrounding societies.⁷

Cross-Cultural Similarities

While differences must be recognized, similar gendered practices were in place across cultural lines in the ancient world. One widespread view of the woman as property was present as early as the eighteenth century BCE in Hammurabi's code. This important ancient document is illustrative of social structures of its time and informative for understanding the historical rootedness of later societal practices in the ANE. In the code, marriage included the man owning the woman's sexuality, but not necessarily the inverse. Adultery was defined as a married woman sleeping with someone other than her husband. However, a married man was less culpable if he slept with an unmarried woman. If a woman was accused of adultery by her husband, she had the opportunity to swear innocence in the presence of a priest. However, if someone else made an accusation, the woman had to swear innocence before the gods and jump in the river. If she was saved by the spirits and lived, it meant she was innocent. Death proved guilt, the

⁷ See Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "Women's Exemption from Shema and Tefillin and How These Rituals Came to Be Viewed as Torah Study," *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period* 42, no. 4/5 (2011): 531-579; Judith R. Baskin, "Review Essay: Approaches to the Representations of Women in Rabbinic Literature," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 9 (2005): 191-203; Tal Ilan, "The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism During the Second Temple Period," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 1-34; Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001); Susan Marks, "Women in Early Judaism: Twenty-Five Years of Research and Reenvisioning," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6, no. 2 (2008): 290-320; Chad Spigel, "Reconsidering the Question of Separate Seating in Ancient Synagogues," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 63, no. 1 (2012): 62-83; Dvora E. Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009).

reverse of the later European ordeal when socially disdained women were thought to be guilty of witchcraft if they survived drowning.⁸

Directly related to the common conception of women as property, bride price⁹ and dowry¹⁰ were widely practiced traditions in the ancient world. Marriage was typically an economic union of male-led families. Predictably, a marriage involved the transference of ownership of the woman from the father to the groom. In that system, it was assumed that a woman would not be able to provide for herself in the case of disaster. The bride price or dowry both cemented the new connection between two families and could be used to support a woman subsequent to desertion or her husband's death. However, this required that the woman have a male son. Without this, the goods remained with the bride's father's household, where she was to return.¹¹

Having briefly considered attitudes towards women in some ancient societies, the next logical step in exploring the progression of perspectives on gender in the Western world is a summary of both Roman and Christian attitudes in the early Common Era. Each will proffer foundational views for the shifts that will be later examined. The

⁸ L.W. King, *The Code of Hammurabi* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 13. The adultery rules are according to codes 131-132. The meaning of jumping into the river is provided in the second code which says, "If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser."

⁹ Money or goods brought to the union by the husband's side of familial partnership. Gifts from the one side of the new union could be reciprocated by a gift from the other.

¹⁰ Money or goods brought to the union by the wife's side of the familial partnership.

¹¹ J. Goody, *The Oriental, the Ancient, and the Primitive: Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-Industrial Societies of Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Diane Owen Hughes, "From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe," *Journal of Family History* 3, no. 3 (1978):

Roman viewpoint provides the social context in which Christianity developed its tradition, while Christian patriarchy will become the backdrop of the world from which both feminism and evangelicalism will emerge.

Western Views on Women in the Early Common Era

Roman Perspectives

Like Greek culture before them, the Romans had clearly defined roles for men and women.¹² Characteristically, men dominated women, whose agency¹³ was typically limited because they were not seen as full persons apart from male control and guidance. Women tended to be considered as homemakers, while men assumed a more active role in society. While free-born women could be citizens of Rome, they were effectively disenfranchised through exclusion from holding public office, voting, or otherwise wielding real political power.¹⁴ Though women were limited in their public role and ability to enact policy, intimate partner violence was illegal according to Roman law.¹⁵

Men ruled Roman society and husbands ruled their households, which included wife, children, and slaves. Fathers typically arranged marriages and partially turned their

262-296; Gary B. Jackson and A. Kimball Romney, "Historical Inference from Cross-Cultural Data: The Case of Dowry," *Ethos* 1, no. 4 (1973): 517-520.

¹² Nevertheless, women were viewed slightly more positively in Rome than they had been in Athens due to Etruscan influence. Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 22.

¹³ Agency is the capacity of an individual to act of their own accord within a social structure. In this case, it is the woman's inability to exercise her own free-will within patriarchal families and a male-dominated society.

¹⁴ See Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A. J. McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 231-232 and 457; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 211 and 268.

¹⁵ Frier and McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law*, 95.

“charge” over to the groom.¹⁶ In the time of the empire,¹⁷ a father maintained some continued control over his daughter after her marriage which, surprisingly, gave her increased freedom. A daughter was to maintain loyalty to her father who continued to hold some dominion over her. A daughter’s fealty to her father sometimes meant disagreeing with her husband. This in effect gave a husband less than full reign over his wife.¹⁸

However, a few women were able to function on their own competency apart from male dominion. Though male priests predominated, the Latin word *sacerdos* could be used of either gender. The Vestals, a college of six women priests, were the only professional full-time clergy, and these women were no longer under the guardianship of their fathers.¹⁹ While still living under male guardians, women of higher classes had greater rights and freedoms than women of lower classes. Lowest in the hierarchy were female slaves for whom the law provided extremely limited protection. Rape of another’s slave was considered a crime only if it physically damaged them since they were considered property. Furthermore, Roman law was such that slaves could be forced into prostitution by their masters.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷ This was less true in the time of the republic.

¹⁸ A father may have been geographically separated from his daughter, further increasing her agency in day-to-day affairs because, in this case, her father was a distant ruler limited in his ability to micro-manage. Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 139.

¹⁹ Phyllis Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, ed. Harriet I. Flower (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 143.

²⁰ While this happened most often to female slaves, it could happen to males as well. Thomas A. J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 56.

In conclusion, while Roman women were typically treated better than Greek women before them, they were nonetheless under the authority of a man, lacked suffrage, and in general had severely limited agency compared to Roman men. This Roman world with its gendered structuring was the social backdrop in which Christianity arose.

Early Christian Perspectives

Early Christianity emerged within the Roman Empire and was heavily influenced by Jewish thought on the sexes. Early Christian texts in some ways reflected the social norms of the day and in other ways countered these norms. The Gospels included counter-cultural actions and sayings of Jesus, including his conversation with an adulterous Samaritan woman (John 4:3-42) and placement of responsibility for adultery upon men (Matt 5:27-30). Pauline epistles include apparently contradictory statements. For example, Paul said in Gal 3:28 that there is no more male or female, both are one in Christ, while in 1 Tim 2:12 he said women should not have authority to teach and in 1 Cor 14:34 stated that women are to be silent in church. Though Pauline writings have been interpreted in various ways, it is possible they were counter-cultural while sufficiently accommodating to contemporary Roman culture and its various sub-cultures.²¹

As an eventually outlawed sect, incipient Christianity was founded upon counter-

²¹ On Paul's writings in relation to women, see Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

cultural teachings promoted by its founders and appealed to both women and slaves.²²

However, misogynistic statements were made by important figures early in church history. Two statements from the second century are especially potent. Clement of Alexandria stated, "Every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman. . . . The consciousness of their own nature must evoke feelings of shame."²³

Tertullian, speaking to women, said, "You are the devil's gateway."²⁴

In the later period of the officially sanctioned Christianity,²⁵ stalwartly misogynistic church fathers included Jerome, Chrysostom,²⁶ and Augustine.²⁷ Lewis Okun has suggested that while Jesus' words could be interpreted to support equality, the Church fathers ensured that "the older Roman and Jewish patriarchal values would persist under Christianity"; Okun thus asserted that "just as Roman law was liberalizing in its

²² On the sociological phenomenon of a correlation between counter-cultural sectarian religion and higher regard for women, see Laura Lee Vance, *Seventh-Day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

²³ T. Starr, *The "Natural Inferiority" of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), 45.

²⁴ Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

²⁵ Constantine, "the first Christian emperor of Rome, had his young wife boiled alive when she became inconvenient to him." L. Okun, *Woman Abuse: Facts Replacing Myths* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 3.

²⁶ Chrysostom was known as a great orator. The following statement comes from this "golden mouthed" man: "The whole of her body is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum and the fluid of digested food. . . . If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and the cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is only a whitened sepulchre." John Chrysostom, quoted in Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 58. On historical Christian misogyny, see Helen Ellerbe, *The Dark Side of Christian History* (San Rafael, CA: Morningstar Books, 1995); Starr, *The "Natural Inferiority" of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males*.

²⁷ On patristic sexism, see Beverly N. McGill, *Raising Awareness to the Victimization of Women through Religious-Based Sexism* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2009), 41-47. On cultural influences upon the church fathers and their subsequent influence on future thinkers, see Alvin J. Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced: How Culture Shaped Sexist Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), xv.

treatment of women, the rise of Christianity reestablished the traditional extent of the husband's patriarchal authority."²⁸ Total exclusion of females from leadership established firm roots as Christian tradition and theology developed, which continued to and through the reformation.

In the fifteenth century, Friar Cherubino of Siena, in his *Rules of Marriage*, declared: "When you see your wife make an offense . . . scold her sharply, bully and terrify her. And if that still doesn't work . . . take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul. . . . Readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity . . . for [her] soul, so that the beating will redound to your merit and her good."²⁹ Religiously justified subordination and functional enslavement of women would continue without sufficient collective opposition to enact social revolution until the rise of Feminism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was not the traditional, established Christian church which questioned the culturally ingrained subordination of women. Instead, the profeminists who challenged subordination were often scorned by society and the church.³⁰

²⁸ Okun, *Woman Abuse: Facts Replacing Myths*, 3.

²⁹ Cherubino of Siena in *ibid.*, 3.

³⁰ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Protofeminism: Fifteenth Century to Eighteenth Century

While Luther³¹ and Calvin sought to reform some aspects of traditional Christianity, male hegemony appears to have been left intact. In fact, wife abuse seemed to be justified by these Reformers.³² Nonetheless, precursors to feminism arose in the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries.

These important figures, today known as protofeminists, because they laid the foundations for feminism, include Christine de Pizan (15th century), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (16th century), Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi (16th century), Anne Hutchinson (17th century), François Poulain de la Barre (17th century) and Mary Wollstonecraft (18th century). These thinkers and authors laid the groundwork for Western culture's shift in attitudes towards women. Writing in a period of male chauvinism, they challenged the assumption that women are by nature inferior to men.

The first of these protofeminists was Christine de Pizan, who lived from 1363 to about 1430. She became well educated for a woman of her time, in spite of the fact that she was a widowed mother of three by the age of twenty-five. De Pizan became a prolific author of both poetry and prose, a career of necessity for an accidentally independent woman who cared for her three children, as well as her mother and a niece. Whether she

³¹ Luther said: "Men have broad and large chests, and small narrow hips, and more understanding than the women, who have but small and narrow breasts, and broad hips, to the end they should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children." Martin Luther, William Hazlitt, and Alexander Chalmers, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), 299. See also Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians* (London: Temple Smith, 1973), 196-197. While Luther's views may have become more positive over time, it is not likely since he had already been married more than five years when he said this in 1531. He said this when he was 47, and in later life his views tended to become more extreme.

³² For example, Luther considered himself indulgent because, as he said, "when Katie gets saucy she gets nothing but a box on the ear." Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 180. See also P. Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and*

should be considered an early feminist is contested,³³ but there is no doubt that she challenged contemporary attitudes towards women and proposed that they could move beyond the bounds of only family responsibility to play an important role in society at large. Simone de Beauvoir proclaimed that de Pizan's *Épître au Dieu d'Amour* was "the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex."³⁴ Christine de Pizan's challenge of assumptions and promotion of the value of women marked a significant step towards society's inquiry into the validity of medieval attitudes towards women.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) was another intriguing profeminist, who at times utilized satire to present his argument. He reversed traditional exegesis and asserted that original sin came into the world through Adam instead of Eve, since God's command was to Adam. In line with words attributed to the apostle Paul, Agrippa wrote that Adam, not Eve, condemned humanity to suffer death. While both Adam and Eve sinned, Adam was held responsible since he sinned knowingly, while Eve sinned in ignorance. Agrippa claimed that Jesus was born a man to expiate the sin of Adam, the first man, and because men are in general more sinful. To deal with their greater sinfulness than women, men were priests, representing Christ, who represents Adam, the male originator of sin. Furthermore, he observed that Christ's male followers abandoned him after his death, while no women deserted him. Finally, he claimed that all heresies have been the invention of men, and male sinfulness would have been all the

the Church's Response (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 51; Okun, *Woman Abuse: Facts Replacing Myths*, 4.

³³ Earl Jeffrey Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine De Pizan* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 1-2.

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), 105.

more apparent if women had written histories instead of men.³⁵ When trying to understand the purposes of these satirical assertions, it may be helpful to remember Agrippa's central mantra that something can be disproven as easily as it can be proven.³⁶

What is most significant for society's changing view of women was Agrippa's suggestion that the inferiority of women in his day was not part of the natural order but instead "imposed by social convention and male tyranny." Included in his general lambasting of the status quo was his proclamation that in ancient Rome women played significantly more prominent roles, as priestesses, prophets, philosophers, and rulers, than what would be permitted in his day. Agrippa suggested that women were not ontologically inferior and that the functional subordination of women was not rooted in a decree of God or nature, but simply based upon oppressive customs and laws, the exclusion of women from education and even male violence.³⁷ His book had a significant impact on what discussions took place in his day on the function and status of the female sex.

³⁵ It is possible that some of his propositions were meant to show the absurdity of contemporary thought on male superiority by drawing parallel conclusions to support female superiority. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and Bernard Dubourg, *De La Supériorité Des Femmes (1529)* (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1986); Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and Albert Rabil, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁶ This is central to his book which attacks contemporary scientific thought in general: Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De Incertitudine Et Vanitate Scientiarum Atque Artium Declamatio Invectiva* (Cologne: 1526).

³⁷ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2011), s.v. "Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa Von Nettesheim."

The next precursor to feminism never saw her most important work published. Modesta Pozzo's (1555-1592) best-known work, *The Worth of Women*,³⁸ was published posthumously in 1600, under the pseudonym Moderata Fonte.³⁹ The publication of the book eight years after her death may have been instigated by the appearance of a treatise entitled *The Defects of Women* by Giuseppe Passi of Ravenna in 1599,⁴⁰ to which Pozzo's work functioned as a retort of sorts.⁴¹ Pozzo's work was composed of a dialog of a seven Venetian women (some married, some widowed, and some unmarried) who pondered why it seems that men are destined to make women unhappy and considered the ultimate purpose and value of marriage. Pozzo's work inspired future Venetian women authors.⁴²

Another protofeminist, Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), was born in England, and became influential in the development of religious freedom in America. Her father was a minister with Puritan sympathies who was imprisoned for two years for criticizing

³⁸ Moderata Fonte and Virginia Cox, *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). The original title was *Il merito delle donne*.

³⁹ Modesta Pozzo means "modest well" while her adopted pseudonym, Moderate Fonte, means "moderate fountain." The pseudonym was adopted with her first publication, a poetic work: Moderata Fonte, *Tredici Canti Del Floridoro* (Venice: Francesco Rampazetti, 1581). The adoption of a pseudonym was rare at the time, but may have been taken to better avoid ridicule since Venetian upper-class women did not tend to play a prominent role in public life. Furthermore, the fact that she was unmarried placed increased limits upon what could be considered appropriate actions. Eleonora Carinci, "Una Lettera Autografa Inedita Di Moderata Fonte (Al Granduca Di Toscana Francesco I)," *Critica del testo* 5, no. 3 (2002): 9.

⁴⁰ Giuseppe Passi di Ravenna, *Dei Donneschi Difetti* (Venice: I.A. Somascho, 1599).

⁴¹ Ravenna's work also led to the commissioning of a response from Lucrezia Marinella by a Venetian publisher, Giambattista Ciotti. Translated, the polemic work was entitled *The nobility and excellence of women, and the defects and vices of men*. Lucrezia Marinella, *La Nobiltà Et L'eccellenza Delle Donne* (Venice: Giambattista Ciotti, 1599).

⁴² Because of her perceived noteworthy role in the development of protofeminism, her *Il merito delle donne* has received substantial feminist critical attention.

Anglicanism. Hutchinson, who had the opportunity to become relatively well educated,⁴³ immigrated with her husband and numerous children to New England in part due to her own Puritan leanings. She began ministering to women, and eventually men, in her home. In addition to operating outside proper gender roles by functioning as a minister, Hutchinson critiqued Puritan clergy for legalism and rejected the state's right to impose official religious interpretations and rites. As tensions rose, Hutchinson was called to trial, at the age of forty-six and pregnant, for inciting heretical theology and the breaking of gender norms in what would come to be known as the Antinomian Controversy. After her trial and conviction, she was banished from Massachusetts Colony in 1638 and along with followers established the settlement of Portsmouth in what would become Rhode Island.⁴⁴ Hutchinson lived and taught a progressive understanding of the equality and rights of women, believed in the freedom of conscience in religion, and generally challenged religious and cultural mores to the distress of religious and civil authority.⁴⁵

François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1725), like Hutchinson, came from a highly religious background. He was a Catholic priest who eventually converted to Protestantism. He promoted social equality and believed the subordination of women was

⁴³ Women who considered themselves equal to men tended to be well educated. It is no surprise that a largely uneducated class of people tends to feel "inherently" inferior to another class which receives a systemic educational advantage. In the seventeenth century, Marie Le Jar de Gournay insisted that women must be educated and that dependency upon men could have deleterious effects.

⁴⁴ Roger Williams, with whom Hutchinson interacted, encouraged this move.

⁴⁵ Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson, the Woman Who Defied the Puritans* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

not based upon natural order, but on a culturally determined injustice. Furthermore, he encouraged education for women.⁴⁶

A British philosopher and author, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) also believed that women were not naturally inferior to men, even though, as she observes, it may seem so because of a lack of education and other opportunity. Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)⁴⁷ advocated character-building education for girls who she believed could make a positive contribution to society.⁴⁸ Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790)⁴⁹ opposed monarchism and aristocracy and promoted republicanism. Finally, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)⁵⁰ she argued that women should not be treated as property but as equals who should have the same rights as men. She considered men superior in brute strength, and even valor, and admitted that the character of many women in her day reinforced the belief that the female sex was

⁴⁶ François Poullain de la Barre, *De L'éducation Des Dames Pour La Conduite De L'esprit Dans Les Sciences Et Dans Les Mœurs, Entretiens* (Paris: Chez Jean du Puis, 1674); François Poullain de la Barre, *De L'égalité Des Deux Sexes, Discours Physique Et Moral Où L'on Voit L'importance De Se Défaire Des Préjugés* (Paris: Chez Jean du Puis, 1673). His first two writings were largely ignored, so he wrote a rebuttal to his own arguments, which he subsequently countered, to bring greater attention to his perspective. François Poullain de la Barre, *De L'excellence Des Hommes Contre L'égalité Des Sexes* (Paris: Chez Jean du Puis, 1675). See Siep Stuurman, *François Poulain De La Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Barre can be accessed in English in a translation accompanied by an introduction and annotations published by the University of Chicago Press: François Poullain de La Barre, Marcelle Maistre Welch, and Vivien Elizabeth Bosley, *Three Cartesian Feminist Treatises* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, with Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1787).

⁴⁸ Her beliefs about the education of girls seem to have had some direct impact in her family life as her daughter, Mary Shelley, wrote the classic *Frankenstein*.

⁴⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1790).

⁵⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792).

dependent upon men. However, like Barre, she believed that this apparent inadequacy was a result of unequal opportunity rather than inherent inferiority.⁵¹

These protofeminists and others laid the ideological groundwork for what would become first-wave feminism. They proposed that women were not ontologically inferior to men and could be contributing members of society at large.⁵²

First-Wave Feminism: Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century⁵³

The American women's rights movement grew out of ideological shifts and social influences resulting from the writings of protofeminists, the abolitionist movement, and the Second Great Awakening.⁵⁴ Beginning in 1832, William Lloyd Garrison formed abolitionist organizations that allowed women to be fully involved. In 1840, Garrison and another noteworthy abolitionist, Wendell Phillips, encouraged Elizabeth Coffin Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to travel along with their husbands and other American abolitionists to the first World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Mott, Stanton, and the other women in their group were not allowed to participate in the convention, but

⁵¹ It is due to ambiguous statements about the full equality of men and women, rather than simple equality in the eyes of God, that Wollstonecraft is considered as a protofeminist rather than a full-fledged feminist. Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Virago, 2006); Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jean Spence, Sarah Jane Aiston, and Maureen M. Meikle, *Women, Education, and Agency, 1600-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000).

⁵² While now a term carrying significant connotational baggage, feminism simply defined is a socio-political stance in favor of the end of sexism and the promotion of equal rights for women.

⁵³ The title "First-wave feminism" was applied retroactively in the 1970s by those who labeled themselves a part of "second-wave feminism" in recognition of those who had gone before them. Though the terminology that will be used here did not exist at the time of the so-called first-wave feminism, this commonly accepted denotation will be utilized.

⁵⁴ Kathryn Kish Skla, ed., *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2000).

significant relationships were developed between the women. At the same time that some abolitionists fought for the equal rights of women, the reform arm of the Second Great Awakening challenged various aspects of popular American culture,⁵⁵ including traditional gender roles in religion.⁵⁶

Religious progressives and social reformers collaborated at the Seneca Falls Convention eight years after the anti-slavery convention in London (July 19-20, 1848), held in a Methodist church in Seneca Falls, New York. The convention was organized by local Quaker women and Elizabeth Stanton (a skeptical non-Quaker), when Lucretia Mott (a Quaker) visited from Boston. About 300 men and women were in attendance, including Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave and leader in the abolitionist movement.⁵⁷

The *Declaration of Sentiments*, composed in conjunction with the convention, began with a pronouncement modeled on the *Declaration of Independence*:

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights

⁵⁵ Reforms sought by American Christians motivated by their beliefs in the period of the Second Great Awakening included abolition, temperance, and women's rights. See Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

⁵⁶ Nancy F. Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1975): 15-29; Nancy Hardesty, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Revivalism and Feminism in the Age of Finney* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991). For example, Ellen Gould Harmon White, following the Great Disappointment of 1844, emerged as a co-founder of what would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. See Gary Land, *Adventism in America: A History*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998).

⁵⁷ Douglass was influential in the ultimate decision to seek women's suffrage following a debate in which Mott urged the removal of this goal. C. Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 140.

governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.⁵⁸

The document further asserted that men have throughout history injured and controlled women in the hopes of establishing and maintaining “absolute tyranny” over them. The document concludes: “In view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half of the people of this country . . . we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.”⁵⁹ Proponents of suffrage hoped it would empower women to challenge the injustices done to them, including abuse at the hands of their husbands. When the right to vote was gained in 1920, the movement for equality receded for a time.

While Christians populated both sides of the debate, many considered early feminism to be anti-Christian and even “demonic.” In 1914, Mary Nash Crofoot, a Catholic concerned that some priests were in favor of enfranchisement, labeled those in favor of suffrage as socialists who were “opposed to anything Christian” and wrote that they “bitterly hate[d] and attack[ed] Catholics.”⁶⁰ Evangelical authors, including the editor of *Our Hope*, spoke with at least equal fervor against the suffragist movement promoted by secularists and radical, corrupted Christians: “Woman leaving her sphere, becomes by it an instrument of Satan. . . . Corruption of the vilest kind must follow.”⁶¹ Suffragists were called “unsexed solecisms” and even “demon-possessed and criminal”:

⁵⁸ "Declaration of Sentiments," in *Seneca Falls Convention* (Seneca Falls, NY: 1848).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mary Nash Crofoot, *Lest Catholic Men Be Misled* (Omaha, NE: November 2, 1914).

⁶¹ B.A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 53.

These Satanic instruments seem to stop short of nothing. Like their master, who is a murderer from the beginning, they may resort to poison and destroy human life. It is significant how Satan uses women in these closing days of our age. . . . He goads them on to perpetrate these wicked actions. Woe unto this world when they get the leadership they desire.⁶²

Women gained suffrage in spite of these reactionary sentiments. Though some in the churches who were the predecessors of what we today call “mainstream Christianity” embraced equal rights for women, it was not until the 1960s that significant numbers of “evangelicals” joined the cause for equality.

Second-Wave Feminism and Beyond: Christian Responses and Developments

While first-wave feminism focused on a legal barrier to equality, voting rights, second-wave feminism (1960s to the early 1990s) sought to broadly address cultural bias and persisting legal inequality in the workplace and family. Though able to vote following first-wave feminism, women were still largely confined to roles in the home⁶³ and commonly viewed as the inferior, or second, sex.⁶⁴ It was in the 1960s that feminist concerns more broadly addressed the problem of the “subordination and victimization of women in the family.”⁶⁵

Legal victories of second-wave feminism include the 1963 Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Women’s Educational Equity Act (1974), the

⁶² Ibid., 53.

⁶³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963). See also Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁶⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

⁶⁵ Ola W. Barnett, Cindy L. Miller-Perrin, and Robin D. Perrin, *Family Violence across the Lifespan: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 10.

Equal Credit Opportunity Act (1974), and the illegalization of marital rape, though this was not ratified by all states until 1993.⁶⁶ Not only were there legal victories, but also widespread change in social attitudes towards women.⁶⁷ This movement significantly diminished, though did not eliminate, inequality in education, the workplace, and the home. The more diverse⁶⁸ third wave of feminism emerged in the 1980s and continues today in response to observed needs for improvement upon what was or was not accomplished by the second wave.⁶⁹

Emergent Evangelical Feminism and Egalitarianism

While some radical and mainstream Christians had strongly pushed women's equality and rights⁷⁰ before the 1960s, evangelical egalitarians emerged in conjunction with second-wave feminism.⁷¹ As large numbers of women entered and thrived in

⁶⁶ See S. Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Susan Wright, *The Civil Rights Act of 1964: Landmark Antidiscrimination Legislation* (New York: Rosen Pub. Group, 2006).

⁶⁷ This was brought about in large part by feminist authors with groundbreaking works, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Gurley Brown, and Betty Friedan. Important activists in this period include Bella Abzug, Lorraine Bethel, Charlotte Bunch, Angela Davis, Andrea Dworkin, Jo Freeman, Michele Wallace, and Ann Simonton.

⁶⁸ Third-wave feminism recognizes and embraces the differences arising from different cultural experiences, taking particular interest in the dimensions of race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. For an example of this perspective, see Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael A. Messner, *Gender through the Prism of Difference*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ See Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2009); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Viking, 2006).

⁷⁰ Especially Quakers.

⁷¹ Nancy Hardesty argues that evangelical feminism existed in the 19th century as a result of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999). However, this increase in equality experienced by women in some movements following the Great Awakening faded significantly during the rise of fundamentalism, which came about in response to the perceived secularization of mainstream Christianity in the early 20th century. The decrease of women's status and roles subsequent to the rise of fundamentalism can be seen in Laura Vance's examination of gender in

universities in the 1960s, it became clear that they had the same potential to assume positions of leadership as men.

Progressive evangelical sentiments that developed through the 1960s and into the 70s led to a significant gathering in the summer of 1973. Ron Sider, now a preeminent evangelical scholar,⁷² sent invitations to about sixty evangelicals for a workshop on evangelical social concern at the Chicago YMCA hotel. The meetings took place on Thanksgiving weekend, November 23 to 25. Jim Wallis, now editor of *Sojourners*,⁷³ and others joined Sider to plan for the event with the intention of finding ways for evangelicals to enact social justice. The three major topics were militarism, economics and women's liberation.⁷⁴ Attendees of the workshop engaged in lively discussion and

Seventh-day Adventism, a movement and then religion which emerged from the Second Great Awakening that, in 1881, approved a motion to ordain women. At a December 5, 1881, General Conference session a motion was made to ordain women to ministry: "Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry." "General Conference Business Proceedings," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 58, no. 25 (December 20, 1881): 392. Though this was not ultimately passed, it shows a surprising openness to the ordination of women to ministry for the time. There was a sharp drop-off in women's standing in the church and their function in ministry beginning in the early 20th century, which continued to intensify until the 1950s, the low point of women's status in Seventh-day Adventism. Vance, *Seventh-Day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion*, 219-222.

⁷² Sider is the founder of Evangelicals for Social Action and has authored over 30 books, including Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007); Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*, 20th anniversary revision ed. (Dallas: Word Pub., 1997); Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008); Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005).

⁷³ *Sojourners* is a magazine and ministry promoting faith in action for social justice. Wallis has written numerous books, including Jim Wallis, *Faith Works: How to Live Your Beliefs and Ignite Positive Social Change* (New York: Random House, 2000); Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); Jim Wallis, *Peacemakers, Christian Voices from the New Abolitionist Movement* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

⁷⁴ While women's rights were to be a focus of the workshop, only seven women were in attendance.

developed a document that became known as the “Chicago Declaration,”⁷⁵ which stated: “We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.”⁷⁶ This document was circulated, and increasing numbers of evangelicals took up the cause for equality.

Gender Hierarchy Re-Imagined and the Emergence of the Current Evangelical Gender Debate

As egalitarianism became more prevalent in evangelicalism, some theologians became concerned with what seemed to be a secularizing feminism creeping into evangelical theology. Though hierarchical evangelicals re-affirmed role subordination, societal transformation forced all Christians to “restate their theology of the sexes” in a post-1960s context.⁷⁷ While more progressive evangelicals embraced the full equality of women in being and role, others were more hesitant to adopt changing cultural mores.

Resistant to giving up what was perceived as the creation order instated by God, George Knight III discovered an ingenious parallel to maintain an eternal functional subordination of women to men while still acceding ontological equality. This scholar provided the alternative to egalitarianism, and his 1977 work became a watershed for hierarchical-complementarianism, which proposes that women are in essence equal to men, but that God eternally placed man over woman functionally. This is supported by a

⁷⁵ Ronald J. Sider, *The Chicago Declaration* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974).

⁷⁶ Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 14.

⁷⁷ Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 143.

claim that an ontologically equal yet still hierarchical relationship of the Father and Son in the Trinity is theologically analogous to the relationship of men and women.⁷⁸

According to Australian evangelical theologian Kevin Giles, Knight's 1977 work "formulated an entirely new set of theological arguments in support of the permanent subordination of women. Men and women are created equal, yet women are differentiated from men by the fact that God has assigned to them a subordinate *role*."⁷⁹ The new Christian discussions about a theology of gender following second-wave feminism began to utilize sociological terms such as *role* and *social order*.⁸⁰ These terms were not previously utilized because a functional social order was not necessary to maintain male hegemony.⁸¹ Instead, it was clear that women were inherently inferior to men and necessarily dependent upon men because they could not function independently. Now that feminism had challenged the *status quo*, some evangelicals welcomed Knight's

⁷⁸ Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*.

⁷⁹ Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 20.

⁸⁰ Kevin Giles tells us that "in no commentary prior to 1960 could I find a claim that the Bible set women under men on the basis of a once-given, forever-binding, *social order* given in creation. Those who discovered this idea in Scripture, after the 1960s, discovered something no one had seen before." Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 162.

⁸¹ Giles considers both egalitarian and hierarchical evangelicals to have broken radically with the historic tradition: "In former centuries commentators and theologians agreed that the Bible depicted women as a class or race inferior to men because of the *chronological order* in which they were created by God. Man was created first, and therefore men are superior; woman was created second, and therefore women are inferior. In the contemporary hierarchical-complementarian case for role subordination, everything is grounded on a *constitutive and prescriptive social order* given in creation." Modern evangelical theologians seem to agree that God created Eve and Adam equal, but that he created a social order in which man is the head (over) woman. Ibid., 162. While some evangelicals, such as Piper and Grudem, see "headship" as clearly coming from a creation order and that "in the Bible, differentiated roles for men and women are never traced back to the fall of man and woman into sin. Rather, the foundation of this differentiation is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin," others, such as Richard Davidson, still believe the Bible teaches the headship of a husband over his wife but see it as a result of the Fall and that we should seek to return to Eden as far as possible in a disordered world. Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007); John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 35.

well-written solution, which skillfully utilized the very sociological terms developed by feminism.

As the post-second-wave-feminism theological gender debate developed as a result of Knight's work, so did a rift in evangelical circles. There did not seem to be common ground between hierarchical and egalitarian evangelicals, and theologians began writing polemics against one another.⁸² In 1985, a revised edition of Knight's 1977 work appeared,⁸³ with Wayne Grudem, Knight's protégé, appearing as the co-author.⁸⁴ The same year that Knight and Grudem's book was published, Gilbert Bilezikian presented the opposing viewpoint in his book, *Beyond Sex Roles*.⁸⁵ As time elapsed, increasing numbers of articles and books were produced on either side of the debate. Both evangelical hierarchicalists and egalitarians refined their increasingly intricate and carefully developed biblical arguments to show that their perspective was biblical while their opponents' perspective was in error due to faulty presuppositions.

The development of the theology of role subordination, according to Giles, "came to full fruition" with the 1994 publication of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An*

⁸² Drew Trotter, "Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible by Gilbert Bilezikian and the Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching by George W. Knight III," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. (1987): 101.

⁸³ Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*.

⁸⁴ Knight and Grudem, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*.

⁸⁵ In this book, Bilezikian argues that the big-picture narrative of the Bible needs to be in mind when considering gendered relations. Central to Bilezikian's argument are the stages of Creation, Fall, and Redemption with a call to return to God's pre-Fall ideal. He also calls upon Trinitarian analogy, but instead of speaking of hierarchy, Bilezikian presents the Trinity as coequal. Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985).

Introduction to Biblical Doctrine.⁸⁶ Giles states that “the impact of this book on evangelicals cannot be overestimated” in part because it “is now the most widely used systematic theology text in evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges in North America and most other English-speaking countries.”⁸⁷ The discussion of gender and the Trinity became deeply intertwined in this seminal work. Grudem applied the role subordination of women as set forth by George Knight III to the Trinity. He wrote: “The Father has the role of commanding, directing, and sending” while the Son has “the role of obeying, going as the Father sends, and revealing God to us.”⁸⁸ He championed this as historic orthodoxy,⁸⁹ a position which egalitarians such as Kevin Giles have contended is a 1977 innovation allowing women to be subordinated but still equal as required by the social environment.

Conclusion

While some evangelicals continue to maintain male primacy, the way it is discussed has changed drastically. There has been a general cultural shift from the ancient to the modern world in attitudes towards women. Prior to various women’s rights movements, women were assumed to be ontologically inferior and dependent property to be controlled by men. Today, the Western world considers women to be ontologically

⁸⁶ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994).

⁸⁷ Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 20.

⁸⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 250.

⁸⁹ While previously asserted as historic orthodoxy in his *Systematic Theology*, this claim is expressed “most starkly” in Grudem’s 2004 book, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*.

equal to men even as inequalities persist. For the most part, evangelicals now promote ontological equality while disagreeing about gender roles.

The evangelical connection of gender roles and views of the Trinity, initiated by Knight's 1977 book, is central to my exploration of the social development of human conceptions of God. It would seem that elements of what started as an evangelical gender debate were eventually applied to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The next chapter explores the role of culture in interpretation and the construction of meaning in preparation for the concluding chapter on the Trinity, which explores an important question: While it would seem that a divine relationship was used to clarify human stratification, could it be that a culturally determined human social ordering was used to define the divine in the current evangelical gender debate?

CHAPTER 3

CULTURE

Introduction

The previous chapter explored changes in cultural attitudes towards women and explored a recent shift in evangelical thought on both gender and the Trinity. This chapter deals with culture's influence on the development of socially determined a priori presuppositions and their role in how reading communities explore meaning and establish their present truth over time. A quote attributed to Anaïs Nin is apropos to this exploration of how a priori worldview can determine understanding: "We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are."¹ Could it be that some theologians within the contemporary evangelical gender debate have understood reality not as it is, but according to who they are? Another related question might arise: Have theologians properly utilized the adopted sociological terminology, such as "gender roles"² and

¹ A related quote is sometimes attributed to her, also without the benefit of citation in a published source: "We see the world as 'we' are, not as 'it' is; because it is the 'I' behind the 'eye' that does the seeing."

² It is generally thought that the term "gender role" was coined in 1955 by John Money in an article entitled "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings." According to Money, "the term *gender role* is used to signify all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively. It includes, but is not restricted to, sexuality in the sense of eroticism." John Money, quoted in Haig, "The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Title, 1945-2001," 91. Before this, however, Margaret Mead's 1935 *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* gave feminist studies an earlier distinction between strict biology and the culturally constructed aspects of what it is to be "male" or "female." Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: W. Morrow & Company, 1935). According to the World Health Organization, "'Sex' refers to the biological and

“social order,”³ or could it be that these terms have been divorced from their descriptive character in their original fields and redefined theologically in contradiction to their original meanings?⁴

Some theologians who tend to misappropriate this sociological terminology to debate gender in contemporary evangelical circles have also used it to reframe how they

physiological characteristics that define men and women. ‘Gender’ refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. . . . “Male” and ‘female’ are sex categories, while ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are gender categories. Aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly.” “Gender, Women and Health,” World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/index.html> (accessed 12/26/2011). On the shift in the academic usage of the terms “sex” and “gender,” see Haig, “The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Title, 1945-2001.”

³ The term “social order” has been in its present form for a long time, but its basis continues to be debated. The term seems to have been used at least as early as the 16th century. In the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes, among others such as John Locke, dealt with the question of social order and developed the concept of social contract for the proper relationship between the governors and those governed. Later, social theorists, such as Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, discussed what forms the basis of social order. Karl Marx was a materialist, seeing social order based upon products and production; Durkheim saw it as social norms and it has since increasingly been understood to be founded upon norms, values, and language, rather than the materially oriented perspective of Marx.

⁴ For example, gender roles are talked about by some theologians in normative, rather than descriptive, ways that sociologists may have never imagined: “eternal role subordination,” “functional (role) subordination” and “social order of creation.” In the social sciences, “gender roles” were, and still are, typically seen as relatively fluid and changing, and most importantly, socially determined within culture. The term “role” originated from the part an actor would play in a theatrical production and would in no way be equated to a prescription of what should be eternally. According to social scientists, “social order” is a hegemonic structuring of society in a stratified system, arising not from what should be, but what is. This social ordering is often seen as unjust, protecting the *status quo*, a means by which social institutions persist and those in power maintain their privileged position by defining and enforcing what is “normal,” “appropriate” or even “good.” For a brief introduction to sociological understandings of gender and gender roles, see Mary Holmes, *What Is Gender? Sociological Approaches* (London: Sage, 2007). On social order and stratification, see Leonard Beeghly, *The Structure of Social Stratification in the United States*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2007); Michael Hechter and Christine Horne, *Theories of Social Order: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Sciences, 2009); David Inglis and John Bone, *Social Stratification: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Brian J. Jones, Bernard J. Gallagher, and Joseph A. McFalls, *Sociology: Micro, Macro, and Mega Structures* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995); Pierre Moessinger, *The Paradox of Social Order: Linking Psychology and Sociology* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000); Jacob Neusner, *Religion and the Social Order: What Kinds of Lessons Does History Teach?* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994); Marjorie Reeves, *Christian Thinking and Social Order: Conviction Politics from the 1930s to the Present Day* (London: Cassell, 1999).

discuss the divine.⁵ For example, hierarchicalist evangelicals tend to speak of the Son as being ontologically equal to the Father, but his “role” is to be *eternally* functionally subordinate to the Father.⁶ This has developed into a highly interdisciplinary issue, with systematic theology, historical theology, and philosophy included;⁷ however, it appears that hermeneutical presuppositions may lie at the base of this discussion. Could it be that some evangelicals are twisting sociological terminology to fit prior theological commitment?

⁵ Evangelical publications using the term “roles” to discuss gender and the Trinity include, among many works, the following: Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion,” *Trinity Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008); Wayne A. Grudem, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*; Knight and Grudem, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*; John Piper, *What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005). Gilbert Bilezikian has questioned the normative “roles” proposed by some evangelicals: Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible*; Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

⁶ A common theme in Millard Erickson’s *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* and Kevin Giles’s *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* is that sociological terminology has been twisted to fit theological commitment. They consider it philosophically incoherent to speak of ontological equality and eternal functional subordination. They are unsure of the gradationist evangelical idea that a being can be by default eternally subordinate in function and yet still be equal in essence. According to Erickson, “the equivalentists hold that the subordination involved is only temporary, being (in the case of the Son) for the purpose of the Son’s redemptive ministry while incarnate as the God-man”; it was voluntary. On the other hand, gradationists “insist that this subordination is eternal. The Father has always been the supreme person of the Trinity, having superior authority over the Son and the Spirit”; subordination is “permanent and even intrinsic,” existing eternally, but this does not preclude “equality of being.” Erickson considers it philosophically suspect to consider two entities completely equal in their being if by the very nature of the existence of the beings one always has authority over the other, while the other, intrinsically, submits in every possible case. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, 70 and all of chapter 6, “Philosophical Issues.”

⁷ Millard Erickson’s book assessing the subordination debate includes chapters on “the biblical evidence,” “the historical considerations,” “the philosophical issues,” and “the theological dimensions.” Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*.

Sociocultural Development of Worldview: Social Determination of Cultural Beliefs

Social Construction

While others, such as Millard Erickson,⁸ have explored some of the interdisciplinary issues involved in the subordination debate, I intend to build upon the work of theologians who have expounded upon biblical, theological, historical, and philosophical issues and bring attention to the need to consider cultural and sociological thought in relation to the debate and the terminology it employs. This thesis utilizes the title “Socially Constructing God” to suggest that aspects of the Christian doctrine of God may be affected by human social context, particularly that presuppositions regarding human social ordering and gender roles might affect how some theologians within the subordination debate discuss the function of the Father and Son in the Christian Trinity.⁹ To better understand how presuppositions such as these arise, it will be helpful to briefly consider theories proposed by the fields of cultural studies and sociology.

⁸ Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*.

⁹ A simple definition of a social construct is pertinent to the goal of this thesis, as to what it means to socially construct something. According to constructionists, a social construct (or artifact) is an idea or practice that is the result of human action and speech within a particular group. Conceptual constructs frame the way in which individual learners come to understand their surrounding reality. It is understood to be the by-product of human choices. Therefore, constructs recognized as such should be understood differently from being or proposition regarded to be supernaturally revealed or inherent in nature that is objectively “true” (biblicists and higher critics differ greatly here in their view of the extent to which the Bible is a direct divine revelation [one end of the spectrum here would be innerantists who believe in verbal inspiration] or just human expression [the other end would be non-believers who see the Bible purely as an anthology of diverse expressions of the Jewish cultural experience]). To say that something is socially constructed means that it comes into being and meaning through the actions and speech of humans in a social setting. An example of a social construct practice is the method of greeting that is considered appropriate in a people group. What is done and said may have a clear meaning, but it is a meaning understood by the group because of how they enact the greeting, rather than it being an essentially true greeting imbued with universal meaning. Without social interaction, that greeting will not be used and understood to mean the same thing by people in separate locales. Another example of a more conceptual social construct is money, in that the paper itself does not hold value, but its function is based upon the socially agreed upon understanding that the paper stands for a set value of goods and/or services. For more on this perspective, see the groundbreaking constructionist work by Peter L. Berger and Thomas

Social constructionism, a sociological theory which has been influential in the field of cultural studies, seeks to understand a culture from its own perspective, using its own meanings, before placing it within a larger comparative framework.¹⁰ Important to the early development of this theory was Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). He founded cultural-historical psychology, the precursor to cultural studies, which explores the social nature of the roots and maintenance of people groups. Study of the role of culture and social interaction in child development was among the significant contributions of his short life.¹¹ He investigated the ways in which social interaction and experience within a culture contributes to the construction of the aspects of a child's knowledge, which come through the internalization of the shared knowledge of that culture.¹²

Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1966).

¹⁰ Social constructionism can be understood in contrast to essentialism, which proposes that every entity possesses inherent properties it must possess. Platonic forms are one theory of essentialism, in which all matter has a more real inherent essence than is readily apparent when utilizing empirical methodology.

¹¹ Vygotsky died of tuberculosis at the age of 37.

¹² Throughout his writings, Vygotsky emphasized the socio-historical context in which a person comes to know as the basis for how reality is understood. Especially significant for future thought on the social construction of knowledge were Vygotsky's *Mind in Society* (originally published in 1930) and *Thought and Language* (originally 1934). L.S. Vygotsky and M. Cole, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); L.S. Vygotsky and A. Kozulin, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986). In 1987, a six-volume collection of the works of Vygotsky was compiled. In 2004, an abridged version was available entitled *The Essential Vygotsky*. L.S. Vygotsky and others, *The Essential Vygotsky* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004). Significant secondary source material continues to be written on this figure that has been and continues to be highly influential in psychology, sociology, and education. H. Daniels, *An Introduction to Vygotsky*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Harry Daniels, Michael Cole, and James V. Wertsch, *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); René van der Veer and Anton Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky in English: What Still Needs to Be Done," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 45, no. 4 (2011): 475-493; René van der Veer, *Lev Vygotsky* (London: Continuum, 2007); Anton Yasnitsky, "Vygotsky Circle as a Personal Network of Scholars: Restoring Connections between People and Ideas," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 45, no. 4 (2011): 422-457. While incompatible with Platonic essentialism, Vygotsky's sociocultural theories were compatible with the dialectic I-thou relationship with permeable boundaries between the self and other presented by Martin Buber. Humans have two types of relationship, I-it and I-thou. The first is about experience and perception, while the second is about relationship. Important to Buber's thesis is perspective taking, the ability to see it as thou sees it. Throughout his significant work *Ich und Du* [I and Thou], Buber asserts that our relationships with others bring us into relationship with the Divine, the Eternal Thou. Martin Buber, *I and*

Building on the thought of Vygotsky and others, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman published *The Social Construction of Reality*¹³ in 1966. They argued that all which we know, including what is often considered “instinctual” or “common sense” knowledge, is gained and maintained through social interaction. In other words, human understanding of reality comes not from innate ideas, or even the ability to individualistically create a framework of knowing, but by human interaction with knowledge progressing as we develop across the lifespan in our particular social context. They suggested that the things we assume most basely are those things which our parents, or other authority figures, socialized us to think or do from infancy. It is suggested that new human concepts become a part of our reality through objectivation¹⁴ and that through reification¹⁵ people no longer recognize that these are human constructs. Relating this theory of social constructionism to the gender debate, it would seem that some of our most basic understandings about gender may be ingrained in us from an early age. Some of the gender norms which individuals assume to be essentially true may in fact be socially constructed presuppositions with which they began to be socialized into at such an early age that it predates conscious memory.

Thou, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937); Martin Buber, *Ich Und Du* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1923).

¹³ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Peter Berger is one of the foremost sociologists of religion today and is currently Professor Emeritus of Religion, Sociology and Theology at Boston University.

¹⁴ Objectivation is conversion into an object.

¹⁵ Reification is the making of something non-real or nonconcrete into something real or concrete.

Gender as a Social Construct

While many evangelicals oppose the hermeneutical framework which results from the aforementioned social constructionism, by using the terms “gender role” and “social order” they either implicitly suggest an assumption that gender, as it is acted out, is socially constructed or they are misappropriating the terms.¹⁶ Discussion might be better facilitated if the perspective of scholars from the terms’ original field were understood. The social scientists who use these terms tend to assume that gender is a social construct. This does not mean that they discount biological sexual difference between men and women, but instead that they believe biology does not account for all the differences in the way that men and women live their lives.¹⁷ While it is possible to argue persuasively that there are some distinctive characteristics of women or men based upon biological differences, such as males being naturally more aggressive than women because of typically higher levels of testosterone, it is a quite tenuous position to argue that socialization and changing norms in society do not have an effect upon how individuals gender their lives.¹⁸

The effect of society’s changing norms upon gender construction could be illustrated by generational differences in beliefs about gender. If socialization from parent

¹⁶ This is the assumption beneath these sociological terms which are descriptive, not prescriptive.

¹⁷ While gender had been used in medical literature for more than a decade, “gender” became standard social science terminology in Ann Oakley’s 1972 book, *Sex, Gender and Society*, five years before George Knight III’s *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. “Sex” implies the biological characteristics that define “man” and “woman.” “Gender” is the socially constructed roles, attributes, and behaviors that differentiate males and females in a society. Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972). Before the clarifying term “gender” emerged, the word “sex” was used for both what we now call “sex” and “gender.”

¹⁸ For an excellent introduction to the way in which lives are gendered in America today, see Julia T. Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, 10th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2011).

or guardian to child were the only contributing factor to ideological development, there could be some fluctuation from generation to generation in how people gender their lives, but there would not be vast societal shifts. It would seem that culture at large has progressed and that the values of one generation were not passed down directly to the next. For example, changing societal norms in America since the 1960s has led to increased ideological and political support for women's equality in being, rights, and roles. Furthermore, intimate partner violence (IPV) has come under widespread condemnation.¹⁹ When considering these examples of progression, it can hardly be denied that gender norms differ in various contexts in place and time. This in turn may indicate that one's social setting does impact the gendering of thoughts and actions.

For example, in a famous study on personal advertisements by Simon Davis published in 1990, it was found that societal measures of success are highly gendered. As illustrated in hospitals where as soon as the sex of a newborn is determined, females tend to be labeled "beautiful" and males "strong." Davis's research likewise implied that social influences lead males to be viewed as "success objects" and females as "sex objects."²⁰ Research such as this seems to support constructionist opposition to essentialism,²¹ suggesting that at least part of "gender is about conforming to social

¹⁹ See Thomas R. Simon and others, "Attitudinal Acceptance of Intimate Partner Violence among U.S. Adults," *Violence and Victims* 16, no. 2 (2001): 115-126.

²⁰ See Simon Davis, "Men as Success Objects and Women as Sex Objects: A Study of Personal Advertisements," *Sex Roles* 23, no. 1/2 (1990): 43-50.

²¹ As discussed in an earlier footnote, social constructionism can be understood in contrast to essentialism, which proposes that every entity possesses inherent properties it must possess. Platonic forms are one theory of essentialism, in which all matter has a more real inherent essence than is readily apparent when utilizing empirical methodology.

expectations.”²² Simone de Beauvoir,²³ and later Erving Goffman,²⁴ spoke about how the desire to be “normal” affects how gender is acted out and the way one becomes a man or woman beyond biology alone.

The distinction between the biological and cultural determinants of the differences between men and women, as introduced by Ann Oakley,²⁵ suggested that while there are clear differences between men and women that cannot be denied, biological differences do not account for the full extent of connotations the terms “man” and “woman” carry in a given society. Exploration in this area has continued to develop, but it is commonly accepted by those in the social sciences that “sex” is that which is biologically determined, while “gender” is that which is culturally determined. While this topic is complex and the nature-versus-nurture debate continues, this terminological division within the social sciences suggests that sex is the biological actuality while gender is a social construct.

Social Construction of Presuppositions

Social construction theory is applied by social scientists to religion in addition to gender. However, I have not and will not deal with theories of constructionism as they apply to the formation of religious foundation, which, for evangelical Christianity, is the

²² Holmes, *What Is Gender? Sociological Approaches*, 90.

²³ Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

²⁴ Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Erving Goffman, *Stigma; Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

²⁵ Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*.

Bible. Instead, I will explore how socially constructed presuppositions affect its interpretation.

Presuppositions have their root in the individual's social context. The subject interpreting the object, or text, is typically in a location indicative of some aspects of their cultural context. The items surrounding them, including the text they are reading and the media form they read it upon, are in some ways characteristic of their culture, creating the material context they currently inhabit. The particular objects that will surround a person are affected by culture, and the meaning assigned to those objects is formed by the micro and macro social setting in which an individual has come to "know." Physical objects gain and refine their meaning within cultural context, but the abstract ideas and values which form an individual's ideology are the socially constructed product, and subsequently refining determinants, of sociocultural context.²⁶

In the evangelical subordination, both sides agree on the authoritative text to utilize when arguing their perspective. The difference in perspective is the meaning that is assigned to that text. Therefore, the following section explores hermeneutical concerns.

Hermeneutical Concerns: Static Scripture, Dynamic Culture, and Evolving Interpretation

While most evangelicals accept the Bible as a direct revelation from God, does this conviction allow them to assume their method of interpretation is free from cultural

²⁶ On coming to know within social and material context, see Jay L. Lemke, "Cognition, Context, and Learning: A Social Semiotic Perspective," in *Situated Cognition: Social, Semiotic, and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. D. Kirshner and J.A. Whitson (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997); Angela K. Leung and others, "Embodied Cultural Cognition: Situating the Study of Embodied Cognition in Socio-Cultural Contexts," *Social & Personality Psychology Compass* 5, no. 9 (2011): 591-608; Hana Shepherd, "The Cultural Context of Cognition: What the Implicit Association Test Tells Us About How Culture Works," *Sociological Forum* 26, no. 1 (2011): 121-143; Robert S. Wyer and Thomas K. Srull, "Human Cognition in Its Social Context," *Psychological Review* 93, no. 3 (1986): 322-259.

impact? Both macro and micro²⁷ social presuppositions can be brought to any text. Therefore, even a text with a message thought to be unaffected by culture could still be read through the subject's "knowing," which has been socially constructed within their cultural context.²⁸

While the content of the Christian Bible has remained static since the canon closed, the culture in which individuals have interpreted it throughout the Common Era has continued to change. Could it be that evolving presuppositions have been brought to the text as the social setting of interpretation changed? Two examples of shifts in the "biblical" perspective following cultural changes in the Western evangelical experience may shed some light on this question: slavery and gender.

Slavery and Gender

While the opposing sides of the subordination debate disagree on the extent to which the experience of blacks and women are similar, it is important to understand some of the similarities and differences regardless of the extent to which they are culturally or hermeneutically related.²⁹

²⁷ In the basest sense, macro means large and micro means small. In the social sciences, macro theories focus on societies as a whole over long periods of time and resulting systemic issues, considering the big picture. Micro theories seek to understand the individual and their daily experience and place within the larger society. Psychology is thought to be a more micro-focused social science, while sociology has a greater macro emphasis.

²⁸ See Vygotsky and Cole, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*; Vygotsky and Kozulin, *Thought and Language*.

²⁹ While this possible connection has been of particular interest to recent egalitarian theologians, Harriet Martineau did comparative analysis of slavery and the position of women in the Western world a quarter of a century prior to the American Civil War. Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, 3 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837); Harriet Martineau and Deborah Anna Logan, *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

Similarities

While no analogy is perfect, slavery and subsequent prejudice and inequality had significant cultural and hermeneutical similarity to the experience of women within Christianity. Painting with a broad stroke, it could be said that for much of history women were exchanged for goods between privileged men, as were slaves.³⁰ The idea that one human could own another was challenged in nineteenth-century Western society while traditionalist Christians, particularly in the American South, used the Bible to combat change and protect their hierarchical social order. A century later, in the 1960s, both Blacks and women sought equal rights and hoped to overturn long histories of injustice, which had been largely assumed and perpetuated by those holding power. Both groups now experience, in at least some circumstances, a subtle, often unconscious, racism or sexism that continues to pervade American society as a whole, which would include Christian churches.³¹

³⁰ In fact, Charles Hodge argued that slavery was logical because though men should be treated as equals, you would not treat child-like “vicious savages” or women as full humans who can be responsible for their own governance: “In this country, we believe that the general good requires us to deprive the whole female sex of the right of self-government. They have no voice in the formation of the laws which dispose of their persons or property. When married, we despoil them almost entirely of legal existence.” Charles Hodge, “Bible Argument of Slavery,” in *Cotton Is King, and Proslavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject*, ed. E.N. Elliot (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 863.

³¹ Both racism and sexism are enacted in more subtle ways in contemporary times. On subtle racism, see Polycarp Ikuenobe, “Conceptualizing Racism and Its Subtle Forms,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 41, no. 2 (2011): 161-181; Landon D. Reid and Rob Foels, “Cognitive Complexity and the Perception of Subtle Racism,” *Basic & Applied Social Psychology* 32, no. 4 (2010): 291-301. Sexism is now understood as ambivalent in that there are two apparently opposing forms reinforcing traditional gender roles and the patriarchal nature of society. Social scientists note that while hostile sexism and benevolent sexism might appear to be polar opposites, they are two sides of the same coin, which assumes that women are a lesser sex and treats them as such. Hostile sexism is characterized by domination and degradation and can be acted out through violence, offensive jokes, and other such speech and action. Benevolent sexism appears to be characterized by positive attitudes towards women, especially those who conform to traditional roles, in which men feel that they need to protect and idealize good, but weak, women. It is said that benevolent sexism can be enacted through unsolicited, and possibly unwanted, help carrying things or assistance coming out of a car or down from a podium. While hostile sexism is generally disapproved, benevolent sexism is thought to be both more culturally accepted and subversive. On the two

Dissimilarities

While there are some similarities, there are obviously vast differences between the experience of African-Americans and women, such as the fact that women were not the property of men in the same way that slaves were and that Black men had voting rights fifty years before women.³² Nevertheless, lessons in culture's effect upon biblical hermeneutics can be gleaned. Kevin Giles agrees. He states: "Contemporary hierarchical-complementarians want to completely separate the discussion on slavery from the discussion on women, but this is not possible" because of close parallels; "both the Old and New Testaments accept slavery and the subordination of women as facts of life

sides of ambivalent sexism, see M. Barreto and N. Ellemers, "The Burden of Benevolent Sexism: How It Contributes to the Maintenance of Gender Inequalities," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no. (2005): 633-642; Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, "An Ambivalent Alliance: Hostile and Benevolent Sexism as Complementary Justifications of Gender Inequality," *American Psychologist* 56, no. (2001): 109-118; Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 3 (1996): 491-512; Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, "Hostile and Benevolent Sexism: Measuring Ambivalent Sexist Attitudes toward Women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. (1997): 119-135. Both similarity and difference in contemporary racism and sexism are emphasized by different studies: Lavinia Gianettoni and Patricia Roux, "Interconnecting Race and Gender Relations: Racism, Sexism and the Attribution of Sexism to the Racialized Other," *Sex Roles* 62, no. 5/6 (2010): 374-386; Jessica D. Remedios, Alison L. Chasteen, and Jeffrey D. Paek, "Not All Prejudices Are Experienced Equally: Comparing Experiences of Racism and Sexism in Female Minorities," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 15, no. 2 (2012): 273-287. On possible connections between conservative religion and prejudice, see Eric D. Hill and others, "The Role of Social Cognition in the Religious Fundamentalism-Prejudice Relationship," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4 (2010): 724-739; Megan K. Johnson and others, "A Mediation Analysis of the Role of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Religious Fundamentalism in the Religiosity-Prejudice Link," *Personality & Individual Differences* 50, no. 6 (2011): 851-856; Brian Laythe and others, "Religious Fundamentalism as a Predictor of Prejudice: A Two-Component Model," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 4 (2002): 623-635; Brian Laythe, Deborah Finkel, and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Predicting Prejudice from Religious Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism: A Multiple-Regression Approach," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 1 (2001); Gary K. Leak and Laura L. Finken, "The Relationship between the Constructs of Religiousness and Prejudice: A Structural Equation Model Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 21, no. 1 (2011): 43-62; Kenneth I. Mavor, Winnifred R. Louis, and Brian Laythe, "Religion, Prejudice, and Authoritarianism: Is RWA a Boon or Bane to the Psychology of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 1 (2011): 22-43.

³² Though they had the right to vote, various tactics were used by Whites, especially in the South, to maintain their hegemony and keep Blacks from voting: from literacy restrictions and "grandfather" regulations, in which you could vote if your grandfather could vote, which excluded Blacks, to widespread threatened and actualized violence. Therefore, an incredibly low percentage of former slaves actually voted.

without direct criticism.”³³ In the Bible, the subordination of slaves and women was often connected, with the household codes applying similarly to women and slaves. While according to Paul in Gal 3:28 there is, in Christ, neither slave nor free, neither man nor woman, until relatively recently many Christians tended to assume and affirm the realities of both slavery and the subordination of women. Throughout most of the Common Era, Christians did not read this text, or others, to say that there should not be slavery or that gender inequality is wrong. However, culture shifted and challenged the traditional Christian positions. In Western culture, first slavery was seen as unjust and then later women’s subordination. In changed cultural contexts, theologians of all traditions inevitably reconsidered what they had previously believed the Bible taught about slavery and gender. As they deliberated upon these two social issues, some considered new interpretations, while others defended tradition.³⁴ Subsequently, opposing groups appropriated the Bible as they argued against the other. While the slavery debate seems to have ended with theologians in unanimous opposition to slavery, evangelical theologians continue to debate women’s subordination. Predictably, both sides appeal to the Bible to affirm their position.

Reactionary Responses to Changing Culture: Perpetual Opposition to Perceived Secularization

With some cultural shifts on social or scientific issues there comes a point when evangelical theologians are compelled to either accept new interpretations or reassess and

³³ Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 215.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

refine traditional interpretations in ways to make them compatible with their contemporary society.³⁵ Might this be what has happened in the evangelical gender debate? Central to evangelical Christianity is a desire to base religious beliefs upon the Bible. Therefore, change has happened not in the primary source (the Bible) which has been used to establish evangelical gender beliefs, but in the interpretation of this text. The race discussion provides a framework for, and a glimpse into the future of, the contemporary evangelical gender debate.

When slavery was questioned in the late eighteenth and then nineteenth centuries, many Christians opposed what they perceived as a secular challenge.³⁶ According to them, the Bible clearly taught that slavery was part of the biblical, and thus eternal, social order and exhorted slaves to be obedient to their masters. Some evangelical theologians

³⁵ The differing perspectives can lead to division in churches and even the split of denominations, which happened in the case of slavery. Major denominations that split in the 19th century over the slavery debate were the Methodists, who reunited in 1939; the Presbyterians, who reunited in 1983; and the Baptists who are still split. William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1996), 305.

³⁶ The Klu Klux Klan, a White, Protestant, Christian organization, was created by former confederate soldiers shortly following the Civil War. After its initial decline, it re-formed in 1915 with a highly religious tone, seeking to oppose the supposed deleterious influence of such groups as Blacks, immigrants, Jews and Catholics. The KKK recruited Christian ministers. Clergy who joined the clan did not have to pay the entrance fee and were afforded positions of influence. It came to be that two-thirds of the national Klan spokespersons were Protestant. Brian R. Farmer, *American Conservatism: History, Theory and Practice* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 208. See also Kelly Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011). It was not uncharacteristic of clergy to uphold the cause of WASP hegemony, which they believed was clearly taught by the Bible. Previously, when the Civil War broke out, "large numbers of Southern clergy took up arms against the 'infidel' Yankee because they believed the authority of Scripture was at stake. . . . The loss of the war did not change their mind. Southern evangelicals, until fairly recently, remained virtually united in their belief that the Bible sets whites over blacks and endorses and legitimates slavery." Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 230.

even developed what Giles calls a “biblical theology of slavery.”³⁷ They argued that God established slavery in the curse on Ham,³⁸ that slavery was practiced throughout the Bible, and that the Bible provided moral regulation upon slavery without prohibiting it. Moreover, they noted that Jesus articulated parables which included slaves without directly condemning the practice and that the epistles called slaves to accept their position in life.³⁹

Those who developed the theology of slavery considered it thoroughly biblical and irrefutable for Christians. For example, prominent theologian Charles Hodge, principal of the Princeton Theological Seminary for over twenty-five years, spoke assertively against abolitionists: “If the present course of the abolitionists is right, then the course of Christ and the apostles [was] wrong”; to consider slavery unjust is “a direct impeachment of the Word of God.”⁴⁰ Hodge clearly believed that the contemporary social order, which made Blacks slaves and Whites their owners, was divinely established. In a commentary on 1 Corinthians, he wrote on the household regulations: “Order and subordination pervade the whole universe, and is essential to its being. . . . If this concatenation be disturbed in any of its parts, ruin must be the result.”⁴¹ Possibly

³⁷ Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 221.

³⁸ Gen 9:20-27.

³⁹ Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 221. See also Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Hodge, “Bible Argument of Slavery,” in *Cotton Is King*, 849.

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Carter, 1860), 206.

most germane to the issue of cultural change and hermeneutics are the words of the anti-abolitionist Albert Bledsoe:

The history of interpretation furnishes no examples of more willful and violent perversions of the sacred text than are found in the writings of the Abolitionists. They seem to consider themselves above the Scriptures: and when they put themselves above the Law of God, it is not wonderful that they should disregard the laws of men. Significant manifestations of the result of this disposition is to consider their own light a surer guide than the Word of God.⁴²

While pro-slavery theologians developed a complex argument for slavery, pressure from an evolving social conscience eventually compelled all theologians to reinterpret the text to recognize the presence of slavery as an unjust social condition present in, but not endorsed by, the Bible. Kevin Giles writes that “the Scriptures interpreted through the eyes of self-interest led them astray.” It took almost nineteen centuries for the majority of Christians to denounce this social hierarchy and abolish slavery.

While hierarchical-complementarians do not favor comparison of slavery and the subordination of women, Kevin Giles argues that “virtually no difference can be seen in the way the Bible discusses slavery and the subordination of women.”⁴³ In fact, he believes that the so-called “biblical” case for slavery is stronger than that for the subordination of women. According to Giles, hierarchical evangelicals may be basing a system of belief on a single text, or “proof-texting.”⁴⁴ Giles asserts that there is only a

⁴² A.T. Bledsoe, *An Essay on Liberty and Slavery* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1856), 223-224. Bledsoe goes on to connect abolition and women’s rights, proclaiming that the abolitionists are out of line with God’s word because, among other things, some of their publications hold “anarchical opinions . . . on the rights of women.” *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴³ Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 216.

⁴⁴ On proof-texting and contextomy, or the art of quoting out of context, see Paul F. Boller, *Quotemanship: The Use and Abuse of Quotations for Polemical and Other Purposes* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1967); C. Norman Kraus, *On Being Human: Sexual Orientation and the Image of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Matthew S. McGlone, “Contextomy: The Art of Quoting out

single text,⁴⁵ besides those which also address slavery, which can be called upon to subordinate women, and suggests that there is more biblical data to support slavery than the subordination of women.

Social Location and Presuppositions in the Case of Origen

Presuppositions and the Interpretation of Experience within Social Context

Whether one agreed with slavery tended to correlate with the region in which they lived. This shows that one's larger cultural context forms a part of this socially constructed understanding and experience of reality. Also of importance is an individual's social setting within family, religion, and other social subgroups within the larger society. Furthermore, it is important to note that these factors alone will not fully determine ideological outcome. Personal experience is another significant influence.

An individual's personality and autobiography shape their understanding of reality, but, dialogically, their understanding of reality affects their self-perception and subsequently their autobiography. One person having a particularly vivid dream that seems to predict circumstances of the following day may assume it is of supernatural origin, while another will see it as a simple coincidence. Our experiences shape our understanding of reality and, subsequently, this evolving understanding is superimposed upon future experience. This will eventually tend to reinforce what one thinks, as will the individual's chosen social group and the authors they read.⁴⁶ Social location in time and

of Context," *Media Culture Society* 27, no. 4 (2005): 511-522; Matthew S. McGlone, "Quoted out of Context: Contextomy and Its Consequences," *Journal of Communication* 55, no. (2005): 330-346.

⁴⁵ 1 Tim 2:11-14.

⁴⁶ People tend to choose to identify and interact with people who see the world in a similar way as they do.

place affect the way humans interpret and process all information and the interpretation of a social group's grounding text will be affected by the dynamic coming to "know" of each person within the group. The group a person is born into and implicitly accepts or a different group they explicitly choose to join will create and recreate the social environment in which they seek to understand life, including their belief, or nonbelief, in the existence in and understanding of supernatural entities. Therefore, while an adolescent's ideology is relatively pliable, over time one's presuppositions and worldview tend to solidify and become increasingly impervious to alteration.

Presuppositions and the Interpretation of Religious Text: An Historical Example

Socially constructed *a priori* "knowing" and increasingly solidified presuppositions play a significant role in the contemporary gender and Trinity debate, in which both sides have formed presuppositions that are strong enough to cause sincere theologians to disagree vehemently over what particular texts, or even a single word,⁴⁷ mean.

The debate between the opposing schools of thought centered in Alexandria and Antioch was an historical example of the social determination of disparate interpretations. The Alexandrian school promoted allegorical interpretation, while the Antiochian school advocated literal interpretation. Nothing takes place in a vacuum and no thinker develops their ideas free from influences of their intellectual environment. The geographic basing of the opposing viewpoints makes this debate particularly significant for understanding opposing hermeneutics developed through environmentally determined presuppositions.

⁴⁷ The meaning of *kephale* or "head" is a key example.

Origen will serve as a specific example for the development of hermeneutic within social context. Thought-environment influence was clearly visible in the thought of Origen, who was a notable thinker of patristic Alexandria where Greek philosophy was prevalent and (Neo-) Platonic influence caused allegorical interpretation to predominate.

Origen, who has been labeled “the greatest biblical scholar of antiquity,”⁴⁸ illustrates the impact of his location in this divided thought environment, both on himself and through him onto others. Origen’s influence has continued throughout history and continues to impact Christianity today, which makes him a valuable example for understanding the impact of personal context upon hermeneutics. The fact that tradition develops as a process is illustrated by the succession of thought from Greek philosophy to Alexandrian patristic biblical interpretation, which progresses from Socrates, to Plato, to Philo, to Clement, and finally to Origen and beyond.

Origen studied under Platonic philosophers, was the protégé of Clement, whose hermeneutic was heavily influenced by Philo, a Jewish thinker who harmonized biblical and Platonic thought, and lived in a region amenable to an allegorical hermeneutic, which allowed him to forge Christian doctrine in such a way that it was compatible with Plato. He was then able to utilize Platonic dualism to deal with particularly troubling biblical passages, such as the otherwise highly sexual Song of Solomon.⁴⁹ Alexandrian Platonism,

⁴⁸ Gerald Lewis Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 83.

⁴⁹ It is possible that Origen considered sexual temptation to be a particularly problematic personal vice since it is rumored that he castrated himself to stem the tide of lust. For more on the influence of Alexandrian Platonism upon Origen’s subsequent allegorical hermeneutic, see my unpublished manuscript entitled *The Alexandrian Origen: The Platonic Context Which Gave Rise to His Allegorical Hermeneutic*. In this paper which I presented at the 2012 Andrews University Seminary Scholarship Symposium, I explored the influence of Origen’s Alexandrian thought environment on his personal philosophy and hermeneutics and the impact he has made upon Christianity. The paper can be accessed at the following

especially through Philo, gave rise to Origen's allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, which attempted to harmonize Christianity and Hellenism, and has since permeated biblical hermeneutics.⁵⁰ Other great minds who continued the Platonic vein of thought and interpretation after Origen include the foundational theologian Augustine, and Plotinus who, five centuries after Plato, founded Neoplatonism, and was said to "understand the Master's [Plato's] intentions even better than the Master himself. As Plato is to Socrates, Plotinus is to Plato."⁵¹ More than two millennia after Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, some Christian theologians are becoming increasingly aware of and are trying to address the significant effect of Greek philosophical presuppositions that have shaped the worldview in which their God and religious text are understood.⁵² The literal versus allegorical debate, which is largely founded upon philosophical presuppositions, is both an example from the past and an argument that continues to this day.

web address:

http://iub.academia.edu/LandonSchnabel/Papers/1550946/Origens_Allegorical_Hermeneutic_-_Revised_for_Seminary_Scholarship_Symposium

⁵⁰ This influence extends to this particular debate because of his direct and indirect (through such subsequent theological greats as Athanasius) impact upon even current strains of Trinitarian thought; especially important are the widespread belief in the immutability of God and his sending of the mutable Son.

⁵¹ John M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 24. The significance of this is that Neoplatonism is thought by some to be alive and well in modern thought. In what was originally a plenary talk at the *Jean Gebser Symposium* in Dresden, Germany, philosopher Allan Combs asserted that many modern thinkers could be labeled Neo-Platonists, including Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, Coleridge, Emerson, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung, Jean Gebser, and Brian Goodwin. Allan Combs, "Inner and Outer Realities: Jean Gebser in a Cultural/Historical Perspective," *Journal of Integral Studies* (2000), <http://www.cejournal.org/GRD/Realities.htm> (accessed 9/16/10).

⁵² See Fernando L. Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987); Clark H. Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

Conclusion: Contemplating the Divine within Culture

Utilizing the historical illustrations of American slavery and Origen of Alexandria, this chapter has explored the effect of social factors upon worldview and culture in general and gender in particular. The term “sex” refers to that which is biologically determined, while “gender” appears to refer to that which is socially constructed. Evangelicals tend to disagree upon the meaning of their shared text due to presuppositions, which are socially influenced within the current cultural context. While slavery and gender subordination are certainly not the same, there seem to be significant textual and cultural parallels relevant to the evangelical subordination debate. Nineteenth century theologians seem to have argued in support of slavery in a manner similar to how some evangelicals defend the subordination of women today.

Within the contemporary gender debate, both sides believe they have the better developed theology of gender. Not only this, both tend to say the other side is ruled by cultural bias and that their hermeneutics are faulty because they are using a small number of texts in opposition to the majority of texts that support the “biblical” position. Both sides argue that the others’ presuppositions are coming from the culture in which they operate, claiming that their subsequent interpretations are socially, rather than logically, divinely or otherwise, determined.⁵³ While it is not within the scope of this project to provide a complete social theory of the cultural influences in the development of

⁵³ It will be helpful to recognize that presuppositions are not deleterious unless they inhibit growth. In fact, presuppositions and habitualization are necessary foundations upon which humans operate. According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, habitualization, “by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasions.” Berger and Luckmann, quoted in L.D. Edles and S. Appelrouth, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era: Text and Readings* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 291.

religious belief as a whole, the next chapter explores conceptions of the divine in cultural context, particularly the Christian doctrine of God.

CHAPTER 4

A STRATIFIED TRINITY

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the role of culture in the social construction of human understanding, including presuppositions and how they influence interpretation. This chapter explores the ways in which an individual's social context can determine their hermeneutic and affect their conception of the divine as well as connect recent cultural developments with a shift in the way evangelicals talk about the Trinity. While the first chapter of the Bible says, "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,"¹ this thesis proposes the reverse that, at least to a certain extent, humankind has created God in their image. Cultural presuppositions about human relationships have impacted the understanding of the divine, with Christians stratifying the Trinity similarly to the social ordering and inequality of power within human society. Prior to looking at the Trinity and how it has been conceptually stratified in parallel to human relations, it is important to introduce social stratification to readers who are not social scientists.

¹ Gen 1:27, NRSV.

Social Stratification: What Is It?

Stratification is the construction of layers. Something is stratified when it is organized in strata. The term is used in various fields, such as biology and the earth sciences, for a layered configuration. Social stratification is the arrangement of people in a group, typically the classification of sub-groups into strata or classes. Various factors can determine the basis for this classification of a person's place within their social context. While social stratification typically references classes within society as a whole, often spoken of in such terms as "upper class," "middle class," and "lower class," stratification can be broadly likened to hierarchical organization, which can happen within micro units (i.e., the family or family-like social entities).²

The title of this chapter, "A Stratified Trinity," can be understood as a layered social ordering in which there is a hierarchy based upon characteristics of differentiated members, in which the "upper class" holds a commanding role. In a stratified system, the privilege held by the ruling class includes their exclusion from unpleasant tasks requisite to physical and social upkeep because, by the very nature of the hierarchy, those of lower status undertake these actions by default. Finally, within power stratification, those above can command those below them against their will, limiting their agency, or freedom of will.³

² See Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 436; John J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 14th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

³ Wendy Bottero, *Stratification: Social Division and Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53.

Karl Marx on Stratification

It will be helpful to briefly explore the roots of social stratification theory to better utilize social stratification theory as a way to understand differentiated roles. When developing early theories of stratification, Karl Marx focused on capital, believing that property formed the fundamental societal substructure, while the derivative superstructure was made up of ideology, educational processes, forms of family life, and other such cultural factors. He believed that classes developed based upon “the different positions or roles which individuals fulfill in the productive scheme of a society.”⁴ For Marx, the capacity to produce was the key ingredient to class status. Marx divided society into two classes: (1) the ruling class and (2) the working class. He recognized that, within capitalism, there were some who held the means to production and some who were the means to production. While the ruling class held material capital, the working class could only hope to gain the necessities of life through their labor. In the employer/employee relationship, the employer sought to utilize their capital and the labor of the employee to create more wealth for themselves. This capital gain would not be shared with the employees, who then had to continue to sell their labor to the employers to survive. Marx believed that in order to protect their power, the ruling class would promote hegemonic ideology. This would be disseminated through various mediums to maintain the *status quo* and thus an unequal society characterized by privilege and poverty. He believed that workers would eventually revolt once they threw off the “false consciousness” which led

⁴ Melvin M. Tumin, *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985), 11.

them to accept capitalistic ideology and exploitation of their labor by the hegemonic ruling class. Influenced by utopian socialism, he proposed an egalitarian society characterized by opportunity for laborers to partake in the increase in wealth resulting from their labors and the absence of class conflict.⁵

Max Weber on Stratification

Half a century later, Max Weber was heavily influenced by Marx's views on stratification, yet modified them significantly. Whereas Marx had focused on the ownership of capital, Weber held a more multifaceted view of stratification. To Marx's economic form of stratification, Weber added power and prestige. He saw these as three separate, though interacting, foundations upon which the hierarchies of society are established.⁶ An important part of Weber's work was the concept of life chances: life chances are the opportunities an individual has to enact agency in such a way that they can improve the quality of their life. This is related to what is now called social mobility, which is the potential for movement of individuals within the class system.⁷

While Weber still generally observed and discussed stratification on the societal

⁵ Primary source material written by Marx: Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975). Secondary source materials: Terrell Carver, *Marx's Social Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Michael Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996); Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶ Bottero, *Stratification: Social Division and Inequality*, 38; R.F. Levine, *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 6.

⁷ R. Pandey, *Mainstream Traditions of Social Stratification Theory* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1989), 66.

level, the power stratification he spoke of, which is acted out interpersonally between two individuals, relates more directly to this project's examination of gender and the Trinity than Marx's singular focus on capital stratification.⁸ Power, in Weber's thought, was the ability to get one's way against the will of another who was less powerful and did not hold as much authority.⁹

Weber recognized three forms of authority: (1) charismatic, (2) traditional, and (3) legal (rational). Put simply, charismatic authority is based upon an individual's charm and persuasiveness. Traditional authority is founded on past tradition and a desire to maintain the *status quo*. Legal, or rational, authority lies not in an individual, but an office to which the official who holds it must be obedient. Weber considered legal authority to be the form of modern government. In this legal approach, which is associated with liberal democracy, social policy and responsibility are based on agreed-upon rational law and leaders are selected for their competency and willingness to carry out and be accountable to an office, rather than personal charisma or the simple continuation of what was done, and who led, in the past.¹⁰

⁸ Though the Trinity, as its name signifies, is thought to consist of three separate entities, the status of the Holy Spirit tends to be tied to the status of the Son in comparison to the Father (and is often less prominent) in the evangelical subordination debate.

⁹ L. Udehn, *The Limits of Public Choice: A Sociological Critique of the Economic Theory of Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 152.

¹⁰ Principle sources: Max Weber and Translated by Dagmar Waters, Tony Waters, Elisabeth Hahnke, Maren Lippke, Eva Ludwig-Glück, Daniel Mai, Nina Ritzzi-Messner, Christina Veldhoen and Lucas Fassnacht, "The Distribution of Power within the Community: Classes, Stände, Parties," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2010): 137-152; Max Weber, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge Classics in Sociology (New York: Routledge, 2009); Max Weber, A. M. Henderson, and Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); Max Weber and Stephen Kalberg, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Secondary sources on Weber and stratification: Charles E. Hurst, *Social Inequality: Forms, Causes, and Consequences*, 7th ed. (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2010); Karl Löwith, T. B. Bottomore, and William Outhwaite, *Max Weber and*

Power Stratification: What Does It Effect?

Since Marx and Weber, sociologists have developed, refined, and recreated their theories on social stratification.¹¹ Subsequent sociologists tended to follow more the nuanced perspective of Weber rather than that of the singularly focused Marx. Succeeding sociologists considered further the complexities and subjectivities involved in stratification.

Considering social stratification in a more nuanced way, W. Lloyd Warner looked beyond the actual situation of individuals to consider self-concept of class and increased the number of categories in the American class system to include such groupings as “upper-middle” and “lower-middle” classes.¹² *The Power Elite*¹³ by C. Wright Mills, another significant sociologist who explored stratification, has become a classic of American thought. In it, Mills argued “that *power* is the key concept in social relations” (emphasis original).¹⁴ For this discussion, it is important to see that stratification is created and maintained by the ability of those with the most power to get others to do what they want. While theorists within varying schools of thought differ in their approach to stratification and how it is constructed and acted out, it seems clear that stratified social relations effect diverse forms of unequal social interactions, in which the entity with

Karl Marx (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982); Tumin, *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*.

¹¹ While social stratification theory has changed significantly since their time, both theorists are still considered foundational.

¹² W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), 58-72.

¹³ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

¹⁴ Tumin, *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*, 15. While Mills understood effective power as arising from advantageous positions facilitated by favorable economic conditions, this is the societal level (macro) application.

greater power commands while the subordinate obeys.¹⁵ This understanding may prove illuminative within the current evangelical gender and Trinity debate.

The Development of Trinitarian Orthodoxy in Early Christianity: A Brief Overview

Before examining whether modern evangelicals have stratified the Trinity in this manner since the rise of the current evangelical gender debate, it will be beneficial to briefly present the Christian doctrine of the Trinity within its historical emergence.

While gender relations is a polarizing topic in many churches today, the relationship of the Father and Son may have been the most polarizing topic throughout Christian history and is likely the most significant dividing factor between Christianity and Judaism, and even Islam. The central Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which is not held by other progenitors of ethical monotheism, generally teaches the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three equal distinct persons in one divine Being, called the Trinity.¹⁶

Early Ruminations on the Trinity and the Beginning of Conflict: Origen, Paul of Samosata, and Athanasius

This three-in-one unity and distinction understanding took a while to develop. Attempts to understand the divine relationships started early in Christian history and revealed both variances and similarities between theologians of whom we have extant

¹⁵ Hurst, *Social Inequality: Forms, Causes, and Consequences*; Tumin, *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*.

¹⁶ S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 209. See also Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

works. Origen, who died circa 254 CE, used both the term οὐσία and ὑπόστασις,¹⁷ though not with the same “dogmatic distinction . . . established at the council of Constantinople in 381.”¹⁸ Operating within a philosophical system that centered in a God so transcendent and immutable that he could not become incarnate himself, Origen believed in the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. Predetermined by his Platonic philosophy, it would have to be a created being capable of change who could be incarnated within mutable reality.¹⁹

Beginning about ten years after the death of Origen, the synods of Antioch, held between 264 and 269, dealt with Paul of Samosata who had been elected bishop of Antioch around 260 CE and rejected the term ὁμοουσία.²⁰ Today, Paul’s beliefs might be labeled “Arian.”²¹ Theologically, his main interest was “affirming Christian

¹⁷ The Christian God is largely understood as one genus of οὐσία (ousia) while being three distinct ὑπόστασις (hypostasis). Οὐσία is “that which exists and therefore has substance” while ὑπόστασις is understood as the “substantial nature” of an entity. Bauer, BAGD, s.v. “ousia” and “hypostasis.” Though similar in meaning, a distinction was developed between these terms which led to the orthodox statement of three distinct hypostases in one united God. It may be helpful to understand *ousia* as “substance” and *hypostasis* as “entity.” Thus the statement could be rendered as “three distinct entities in one united substance.”

¹⁸ Origen, *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 112. The quote is from Greer’s introduction to his translation of Origen.

¹⁹ Origen operated within the Platonic (and shortly thereafter Neo-Platonic) city of Alexandria where Greek philosophical thought thrived and influenced his worldview. I have explored the influence of Origen’s Alexandrian thought environment upon his personal philosophy and hermeneutics and the impact he subsequently had upon Christianity in an unpublished paper presented at the 2012 Andrews University Seminary Scholarship Symposium: Landon Schnabel, “The Alexandrian Origen: The Platonic Context Which Gave Rise to His Allegorical Hermeneutic,” Unpublished Manuscript, http://iub.academia.edu/LandonSchnabel/Papers/1550946/Origens_Allegorical_Hermeneutic_-_Revised_for_Seminary_Scholarship_Symposium. The paper can be accessed at the following web address: http://iub.academia.edu/LandonSchnabel/Papers/1550946/Origens_Allegorical_Hermeneutic_-_Revised_for_Seminary_Scholarship_Symposium

²⁰ *Homoousia* is “similar substance,” while *ousia* is simply “substance.”

²¹ Arius, who was born in 250 CE in Alexandria, would have been a teenager at the time of these synods of Antioch.

monotheism,” which he strove to do through “establishing a marked difference between the Father and the Son, in such a manner that only the Father is God.”²² The synods of Antioch portended later discussion on the relationship of the Trinity and made apparent the need for further discussion.

Born about three decades after the synods of Antioch, Athanasius, “the great defender of orthodoxy,” was a “member of the Alexandrian school” and thus was influenced by the doctrine of eternal generation “which originated with Origen.” He was prolific on “the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the relationship between Father and Son” because much of what he wrote was against the Arians.²³

Arius and Arianism

Arius (ca. 250-336), for whom the Arians were named, was a presbyter from Alexandria. Church historian Bruce Shelley has said that “sometime around 318, Arius openly challenged teachers in Alexandria by asserting that the Word (Logos) who assumed flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:14) was not the true God and that he had an entirely different nature, neither eternal nor omnipotent. . . . He was a created Being—the first created Being and the greatest, but nevertheless himself created.”²⁴ Thus “Christ had his own essence, which was divine, but which was independent of God’s essence.”²⁵ Shelley

²² Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, rev. ed., Vol. 1 of 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 249.

²³ Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, 146.

²⁴ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 100.

²⁵ Donald Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 408. This perspective is seen as the roots of Trinitarian subordinationism today.

proposed that this perspective was appealing in a time when many in the church were former pagans: “Converts from paganism found it hard to grasp the Christian belief that the Word existed from all eternity, and that he is equal with the Father. Arius made Christianity easier to understand.” Shelley asserted that Arius’s claims made Christ “a kind of divine hero: greater than an ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God.”²⁶ Though this viewpoint was attractive to former pagans who had a background in Greek thought, it created tension in the church where Arius’s ideas were less compatible. A synod was called about 320 CE and held in Alexandria, where “the assembled churchmen condemned Arius’ teaching and excommunicated the former pastor.”²⁷ However, Arius was able to win the backing of his friend Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. According to Shelley, “the theological quarrel became a test of strength between the two most important churches in the East: Nicomedia, the political capital, and Alexandria, the intellectual capital.”²⁸ Arius returned to Alexandria with the backing of Nicomedia and “riots erupted in the streets. Constantine recognized that the explosive issues had to be defused. So, in 325, he called for a council to meet at Nicaea.”²⁹

²⁶ Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 100.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed: Three Entities in One Substance

The Council of Nicaea condemned Arianism and formulated the original Nicene Creed, which was revised and finalized at the Council of Constantinople in 381. This was the first Ecumenical³⁰ Council, with about 300 bishops coming from both the East and the West.³¹ There was much theological turmoil at this time when Christianity had new political clout. Concerns circulating at the time included such “heresies” as Monarchianism.³² Not many bishops had yet developed firm opinions on the main issue to be discussed: Arianism.³³

While there were convicted Arians led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, and bishops in direct opposition led by Alexander of Alexandria, the vast majority of attendants held views somewhere in between and were mainly concerned with unity within the church. Renowned historian Justo González wrote that when Eusebius asserted

that the Word or Son was no more than a creature . . . [,] angry reactions [broke out] from many of the bishops: “You lie!” “Blasphemy!” “Heresy!” Eusebius was shouted down, and we are told that his speech was snatched from his hand, torn to shreds, and trampled underfoot. The mood of the majority had now changed. Whereas earlier they hoped to deal with the issues at stake through negotiation and compromise, without condemning any doctrine, now they were convinced that they had to reject Arianism in the clearest possible way.³⁴

³⁰ Or universal.

³¹ Though there were bishops from both East and West, most were from the Greek-speaking East.

³² Monarchianism emphasized that God was one and tended to assert either that Jesus was a mode of God, as in the modalism of Sabbelius (i.e., Sabbellianism), or that Jesus was a separate being adopted and granted godhood (i.e., Adoptionism).

³³ González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 266.

³⁴ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 164-165.

After further discussion, the assembly eventually agreed upon a creedal formula that rejected Arianism outright.³⁵ This formula was then revised at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and became the Nicene Creed as it is known today.³⁶ From this point on the doctrine of the Godhead did not develop much further and the enumeration of the Trinity within the Nicene Creed is still the orthodox understanding: the Three within the One are considered distinct but wholly equal and completely united.³⁷ While equality in nature was debated in the past and is now orthodox, the contemporary evangelical Trinitarian controversy focuses on whether or not there is functional hierarchy in the Trinity characterized by eternal role differentiation.³⁸

While the statement “three entities in one substance” provides a basic idea of the relationship of the members of the Godhead, it fails to explain how they relate to one another functionally. Though the orthodox statement promotes ontological equality, some evangelicals have argued that this does not automatically lead to egalitarianism. A foundational philosophical question continues to be debated: Is ontological equality

³⁵ “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit. But those who say that there was when He was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from which is not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance (hypostasis) or essence (ousia), or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes.”

³⁶ The importance of this creed to historical and current Christianity is revealed in the fact that it is still the standard by which orthodoxy is determined in the Roman, Eastern, Anglican and some other Christian groups. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 102.

³⁷ In the *filioque* (“and from the Son”) controversy, the Eastern Orthodox Church proposed a view of the monarchy of the Father, believing that the Spirit comes only from the Father and not the Son, which was the view of the Western Catholic Church. This disagreement was a large part of what led to the East-West schism in 1054.

³⁸ Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 43.

compatible with eternal role subordination or does true ontological equality exclude eternal role subordination, while allowing voluntary temporary role differentiation? To this question, I add another: Even if ontological equality were compatible with eternal role subordination, would this not still indicate that the contemporary gender debate has given rise to a novel stratifying of the Trinity?

Is the Trinity Really Being Stratified? Gender Roles, God's Roles

George Knight III: Conflating Gender Roles and God's Roles

The current gender-based evangelical Trinity debate was not facilitated until the 1977 work by George Knight III which, according to Kevin Giles, “formulated an entirely new set of theological arguments in support of the permanent subordination of women. Knight suggested that men and women were created equal, yet women were differentiated from men by the fact that God has assigned to them a subordinate *role*” (emphasis original).³⁹ George Knight stated his theological connection between gender roles and God's roles quite clearly: “For the basis of man's headship and woman's submission, the apostle Paul appeals to the analogy of God the Father's headship over Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:3).”⁴⁰ Knight believed Paul's statement in 1 Cor 11:3 (“God is the head of Christ”) was “given to answer the objection some bring to the headship of man in reference to woman.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*, 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., 33.

Wayne Grudem: Continuing and Popularizing Knight's Tradition

After this initial formulation, an increasingly sophisticated theological framework was developed and resulted in an understanding of the Trinity culminating in and entering popular evangelical thought through Wayne Grudem's 1994 *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.⁴² In this watershed of a book for evangelicals, Grudem further applied the role subordination of women as set forth by George Knight III to the Trinity. He wrote: "The Father has the role of commanding, directing, and sending" while the Son has "the role of obeying, going as the Father sends, and revealing God to us."⁴³ Grudem stated unequivocally that "these relationships are eternal, not something that occurred only in time."⁴⁴ Going beyond gender relations, Grudem included intergenerational family dynamics in his allocution: "The Father and

⁴² Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Kevin Giles, for whom the contemporary gender and Trinity debate has become the focus of his scholarly work, has written of Grudem's tome: "The impact of this book on evangelicals cannot be overestimated" because it "is now the most widely used systematic theology text in evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges in North America and most other English-speaking countries." Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 20. Giles's research seems to be considered noteworthy on both sides of the debate; those who disagree with Giles consider what he has written significant enough to merit response. Hall, "A Review of Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity by Kevin Giles," 32-39; Andreas J. Kostenberger, "Women in the Church: A Response to Kevin Giles," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2001): 205-224; Schemm, "The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women' (Ch 19) by Kevin Giles," 81-87; Schemm, "Kevin Giles's the Trinity and Subordinationism: A Review Article."

⁴³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 250. Key articles by Grudem shortly after his *Systematic Theology* was published include: Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of 'Head' in the Bible: A Simple Question No Egalitarian Can Answer," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 1, no. 3 (1996), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-1-No-3/The-Meaning-Of-Head-In-The-Bible> (accessed 12/8/10); Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning Source 'Does Not Exist': Liddell-Scott Editor Rejects Egalitarian Interpretation of 'Head' (*Kephale*)," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1997), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-2-No-5/The-Meaning-Source-Does-Not-Exist> (accessed 12/8/10).

⁴⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 250.

the Son relate to one another as a father and son relate to one another in a human family: the father directs and has authority over the son, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. . . . The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles.”⁴⁵ According to Grudem, this is historic orthodoxy.⁴⁶ This assertion is present in his *Systematic Theology* and is expressed “most starkly”⁴⁷ in his 2004 book, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*.⁴⁸

In regard to both gender and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Grudem believes that ordering is necessary to maintain differentiation. According to Grudem, if the Father could submit to the Son, “it would destroy the Trinity.”⁴⁹ He presented his ordering in what has become foundational research for those who hold a hierarchical view of the Trinity.

To further study and bolster his position, Grudem analyzed the meaning of “head” as it relates to and connects gender and the Trinity in 1 Cor 11:3 by exploring the meaning of *kephale* in contemporaneous Greek literature. For this word, he asserted that “the meaning ‘ruler, authority over . . . in Greek literature at the time of the New

⁴⁵ Ibid., 249.

⁴⁶ Being outside of the scope of this work, the question of historic orthodoxy will be left to the reader. The purpose here is to examine whether recent evangelical writing stratifies the Trinity in ways similar to gendered subordination and whether this is novel since their gender debate emerged in response to second-wave feminism.

⁴⁷ Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 21.

⁴⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 405-443. Speaking unequivocally, he asserted that his perspective “has been the historic doctrine of the church.” Ibid., 422.

⁴⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 251.

Testament . . . was a well-established and recognized meaning.”⁵⁰ Though this conclusion has been disputed by equivalentists,⁵¹ it has become foundational for authority gradationists in the understanding of the Trinity in relation to gender roles. Grudem continued to write on this topic,⁵² and has been highly influential on this and other issues in the Trinity and gender debate.

⁵⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, "Does *Kephalē* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority over' in Greek Literature: A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 1 (1985): 80.

⁵¹ Responses to Grudem’s conclusions on the meaning of *kephale* in the Greek literature can be found in Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible*, 215-252; Richard Cervin, "Does *Kephalē* Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature: A Rebuttal," *Trinity Journal* 10, no. 1 (1989): 85-112. Philip Payne provides “fifteen key reasons [which] favor interpreting κεφαλή as ‘source’ rather than ‘authority’ in 1 Corinthians 11:3.” Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, 119-137. In summary, his fifteen reasons are:

1. The Greek OT (LXX) shows that most of its translators did not regard “head” (κεφαλή) as an appropriate word to convey leader.
2. “Authority” is not a well-established meaning of κεφαλή.
3. In contrast, “source” is an established meaning for κεφαλή listed from the earliest Greek lexicons to the present.
4. Paul refers repeatedly to Christ as κεφαλή in the sense of source of life or nourishment: e.g., Col 1:18, “he is the head [κεφαλή] of the body, the church, who is the ἀρχή,” the “origin” (NEB) or “the source of the body’s life” (TEV); Col 2:19, “the Head, from whom the whole body . . . grows”; and Eph 5:23, where κεφαλή is in apposition to “Savior,” the source of the life of the church.
5. The items listed in 1 Cor 11:3 are not listed in a descending or ascending order of authority, but they are listed chronologically: man came from Christ’s creative work, woman came from “the man,” Christ came from God in the incarnation.
6. All attempts at interpreting each of these references to κεφαλή as “authority over” end up with three quite different authority relationships.
7. “Source” fits better than “authority” in the meaning of κεφαλή in “the Christ is (ἐστιν) the κεφαλή of every man” (1 Cor 11:3).
8. “Source” fits better than “authority” as the meaning of κεφαλή in “the man [with an article] is κεφαλή of woman.
9. “Source” fits better than “authority” as the meaning of κεφαλή in “God [with an article] is the κεφαλή of the Christ.”
10. κεφαλή as “source” is perfectly suited to understand 1 Cor 11:3 as setting the theological stage for Paul’s ensuing arguments.
11. This passage discusses disgraceful head-covering practices in prayer and prophecy, not hierarchical roles.
12. Verses 8 and 12 affirm woman’s source from (ἐκ) man.
13. This passage says nothing about man’s authority, but rather affirms woman’s authority.
14. First Corinthians 11:11-12, which Paul introduces as his central concern, repudiates a hierarchy of man over woman.
15. Much of the early Greek commentary on 1 Cor 11:3 specifically interprets κεφαλή to mean “source.”

⁵² Grudem, "The Meaning of 'Head' in the Bible: A Simple Question No Egalitarian Can Answer."; Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of *Kephalē* ('Head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and

Other Hierarchicalists

Bruce Ware

Other evangelical theologians have continued the tradition established by George Knight and popularized by Wayne Grudem. According to Millard Erickson, a conservative evangelical whose 1986/1998 *Christian Theology* is a top rival for Grudem's *Systematic Theology*⁵³ in evangelical seminaries, Bruce Ware provided the "most extended treatment"⁵⁴ so far on the gradational-authority view of the relationship and roles of the Trinity. Ware has written numerous articles⁵⁵ and a 2005 book on the Trinity with a title that revealed its focus: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*.⁵⁶ Ware stated unequivocally that "an authority-submission structure marks the very nature of the eternal Being of the one who is three. . . . This hierarchical structure of authority exists in the eternal Godhead even though it is also eternally true that each Person is fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence."⁵⁷ Those who hold a similar perspective often build upon each other,⁵⁸ and Ware

Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. (2001): 25-26; Grudem, "The Meaning Source 'Does Not Exist': Liddell-Scott Editor Rejects Egalitarian Interpretation of 'Head' (*Kephale*)."

⁵³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998).

⁵⁴ Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, 36.

⁵⁵ Articles he has written on this include Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-7-No-1/Male-and-Female-Complementarity-and-the-Image-of-God> (accessed 12/9/10); Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father."

⁵⁶ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that George Knight, Wayne Grudem, Robert Letham, and John Frame, some of the most prominent American proponents of the subordination of women and eternal subordination of the Son, were all trained at Westminster Seminary. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 40.

utilizes Grudem's research on 1 Cor 11:3,⁵⁹ presenting it "as proof that the Father, as 'head,' is the supreme over the Son, and as well, that man is the head of woman."⁶⁰ Ware looked at the history and saw a gradational-authority view in the history of orthodoxy,⁶¹ though Kevin Giles, an equivalentist, has disagreed.⁶² Ware has provided some of the most important material on the Trinity from the subordinationist viewpoint, though he prefers the term "submission" to "subordination."

Robert Letham

Another hierarchicalist, Robert Letham, whose perspective Erickson considers "in many ways . . . the most moderate of the current gradational views,"⁶³ has provided the longest work on the Trinity so far by a modern gradationist. In illustration of the fact that he was more moderate than some evangelicals who speak of the Son as eternally subordinate,⁶⁴ he preferred the term "order" to "hierarchy" and "subordination." Letham's book was primarily historical, dealing with theologians and their views over time.⁶⁵ While his approach was historical, his own views were apparent within the work both directly and tacitly through how he read the history. Letham quoted T.F. Torrance to

⁵⁹ Ware used Grudem's research on the meaning of *kephale*.

⁶⁰ Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, 41.

⁶¹ Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father."

⁶² Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*; Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*; Ware, "Tampering with the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father."

⁶³ Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, 49.

⁶⁴ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 399.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

support his own views, saying that “in this ‘irreversible relation’ between the Father and the Son, in which ‘the Father naturally comes first,’ the Son is all that the Father is, except for being the Father.”⁶⁶ While Giles, Erickson, and others question how a permanent social order with unequal roles characterizes full equality, Letham espoused Torrance’s idea that the “inner-Trinitarian order is distinguished ‘by position and not status, by form and not being, by sequence and not power, for they are fully and perfectly equal.”⁶⁷ He considered order necessary, asserting that the Father is, and must be, always in the first position. While, he marked the Father and Son as equals, he also said that the Son eternally submits to the Father in a permanent sequential ordering in which the Father is in the first position and the Son in the second. This is a more nuanced position in comparison to other gradationists, and himself previously.⁶⁸

The Other Side of the Debate: Kevin Giles, Millard Erickson, and Others

The perspective of the thinkers presented thus far—some of the most important advocates of the permanent ordering position—expresses the ideology of one side of the contemporary evangelical gender and Trinity debate. On the other side are individuals who have become concerned that fidelity to gender constructs has altered the evangelical doctrine of the Trinity. Those who critique this permanent ordering and eternal role subordination trend since Knight’s 1977 book include, among others, Kevin Giles and Millard Erickson. Giles is concerned about both gender equality and subordination in the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 400.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ He had previously written about the “ontological” relations of the persons of the Trinity. Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52, no. 1

doctrine of the Trinity. Erickson focuses on the Trinity, which has been central to his writing for some time,⁶⁹ though, in exploring the issues in the contemporary gender debate, he seems to have developed a stronger opinion on gender relations. Giles has written two books examining how the current debate has affected the doctrine of God: *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (2002) and *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (2006). Erickson entered the discussion later with a 2009 book: *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*. Both argue that Jesus' submission in the incarnation was voluntary and temporary, and that ontological equality and eternal role subordination are incompatible. If they are right and permanent functional submission indicates inequality between the Father and the Son, then the

(1990): 68. However, he later decided this term was not appropriate and intentionally did not utilize it as before. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 490, 493.

⁶⁹ Erickson's systematic theology does not connect the Trinity and gender in the same way that Grudem's does. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. On the whole, Erickson is more concerned with setting forth a well-developed theology of the Trinity than asserting his position on gender. He has written important works on the Trinity, though his interests also extend into hermeneutics and engaging different viewpoints. His focus on the nature of God and the Trinity and philosophical interaction makes his well-written *Who's Tampering with the Trinity* one of the most significant books on the gender debate. Among the many books and articles Erickson has written, a significant number have dealt with the Trinity or philosophical issues and the importance of hermeneutics. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*; Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993); Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997); Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Mind and Heart: Perspectives on Theological and Practical Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993); Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995); Millard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998); Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998); Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Millard J. Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991); Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

historic doctrine of the Trinity as three fully equal, yet individual, entities has been altered in evangelical writing in reaction to cultural shifts since second-wave feminism.

Conclusion

Regardless of which side of the argument is “correct” on this theological and philosophical point regarding the Trinity, prescriptively differentiated roles and permanent social ordering have become central ideas in the contemporary gender-and-Trinity debate since Knight’s 1977 groundbreaking work. Evangelical equivalentists claim that eternal role subordination precludes ontological equality, while hierarchicalists suggest that ontological equality and eternal role subordination compatibly characterize the relations of both men and women and the Father and the Son of the Trinity. Irrespective of which side is right, those who promote a permanent social order prescriptively stratify the Trinity.⁷⁰

Since the nineteenth century, social theorists have developed increasingly nuanced frameworks for understanding inequality in human relationships. Their understanding of inequality in social hierarchies, especially among professedly equal people, provides insight into the suggested role subordination in the Trinity. It would seem that some evangelicals are conceptualizing divine relationships within the framework of stratified human relations, with the Father eternally holding power and commanding and the Son permanently submitting and obeying. The implications of this are that the Son, though purportedly equal, had no choice but to undertake undesirable labor so that the privileged Father would not have to lower himself to menial and

⁷⁰ For some hierarchical evangelicals, this might not be seen as a bad thing as suggested by equivalentists, but instead what should be.

unpleasant tasks.⁷¹ It seems that both the hierarchicalists' and equivalentists' proposed human social orders are clearly present in their conceptualization of the divine. However, the hierarchicalist model for gender and the Trinity is more representative of actual human social stratification. I will draw some conclusions on the divine being conceptualized according to human relations in the next chapter.

⁷¹ On the proposed authority hierarchy and subsequent "commanding" and "obeying" in the Trinity suggested by hierarchicalists, Roger Olson has written the following: "Of what use is authority where there is one will? I suggest that once we have rightly understood the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (something the complementarians claim to care about believing), the whole concept of authority over and subordination under becomes meaningless. Did the Father order the Son to become incarnate? Why would he have to? Was the Son reluctant? . . . I simply cannot conceive of any purpose for authority over or subordination under within the immanent Trinity. The words become empty; they have no references. At least not that we can conceive of" if the Trinity is of one will, which is the historically orthodox position. Roger Olson, "Is There Hierarchy in the Trinity? Part 3," <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2011/12/is-there-hierarchy-in-the-trinity-part-3/> (accessed 5/2/12).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Chapter 1 showed that in recent decades, evangelicals have passionately debated whether there is prescriptive functional subordination or full equality inclusive of functional equality between both women and men, and the Son and Father in the Christian Trinity. This debate is rooted in George Knight III's 1977¹ response to second-wave feminism, in which he explicitly connected the relationship of men and women with the relationship of the Trinitarian Father and Son as a parallel of equality in being but eternal subordination in function. He posited that in the Trinity, the Father, being the head,² always commands and the Son always obeys while they remain equal in being, and that likewise man, being the head, should always command and woman always obey, while asserting that they were also still equal in being.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that, historically, women were considered inherently inferior to men and it was not necessary to include equality of being in a hierarchical theory. The subordination of women to men was typically considered natural. However,

¹ Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*.

² 1 Cor 11:3 was central to this comparison.

as a result of societal shifts, Western culture has come to adopt an increasingly egalitarian perspective on sex and gender. Since the 1970s, in response to changes in American society, some evangelicals have appealed to the Trinity, utilizing Knight's foundational work, to maintain the functional subordination of women while other evangelicals promoted full equality.

It is indicated in chapter 3 that cultural factors seem to have a significant impact in this debate and its historical development. Presuppositions learned within social context brought to the Bible tend to affect how it is read. It has been suggested by Kevin Giles³ that the current evangelical gender debate finds historical hermeneutical analogy in the American slavery debate of the mid-nineteenth century. In that debate, culturally determined presuppositions led proslavery theologians to use the Bible to argue that subordination in the owner and slave relationship was established by God.

Chapter 4 showed that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity developed and was established in opposition to Arianism, which argued for the subordination of the Son to the Father. As a result of these discussions, the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity asserts that the relationship of the Father and Son is characterized by full equality, inclusive of functional equality. In recent years, in reaction to second-wave feminism and on the basis of Paul's statements in 1 Cor 11, some evangelicals developed a carefully stratified system of both gender and the Trinity in which women and the Son are supposed to be eternally functionally subordinated, though still equal, to men and the Father, respectively. These evangelicals have come to be labeled hierarchicalists (or

³ See the section on slavery in Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, 215-268.

subordinationists), while those who present the opposing viewpoint have come to be called equivalentists (or egalitarians).

Conclusion

Both hierarchicalist and equivalentist evangelicals use the Bible to argue their perspective. Cognizance of personal context within culture and subculture is vital in understanding why it is that these evangelicals see different meanings in the same text. Worldview is often compared to glasses. It is the framework through which everything is seen. Unlike optical lenses, however, everyone wears these worldview glasses, even if they are not aware of it. Every individual thus reads and interprets their religious text, in this case the Bible, through these socially constructed lenses.

Presuppositions are implicit assumptions, arising through social worldview learning within cultural context, which are taken for granted. The presuppositions of each side have been lambasted in the evangelical gender-and-Trinity debate by the other. It is not indicative of ignorance or intellectual inferiority to have presuppositions. In fact, presuppositions are required for an individual's ability to process their surroundings without being overwhelmed and for meaningful communication to take place. Presuppositions can operate as necessary, and even valuable, heuristics if properly understood and utilized.

For example, in writing this sentence, I assume that the reader will understand English and be able to garner meaning from what I write. Without this assumption in place, I would be incapacitated with uncertainty as to whether what I seek to express will be at least marginally understood, and thus worth writing. Rather than seeking to remove all presuppositions from internal and external attempts to gather and express meaning,

those who seek to grow in their comprehension of their surrounding world should instead bring their presuppositions into conscious awareness and scrutiny. When awareness of presuppositions and cognitive tendencies is gained, thought patterns can be analyzed for cognitive biases. It is only through cognizance of the tacitly assumed foundation of thinking that one can seek to judge their worldview, including their conception of the divine, by any objective standards.⁴

Stratifying the Trinity and Otherwise Conceptualizing God within Religio-Cultural Context: Humans Create God in Their Image

As illustrated in chapter 3 by the example concerning Origen and the allegorical Alexandrian school which was, and in some circles still is, in tension with the literal school within hermeneutics, meaning develops within one's social, philosophical, and ideological setting. Origen, whose thought shaped the hermeneutics of future thinkers, read the texts according to his social context. The same seems to be true of theologians in

⁴ On the nature of presuppositions and how they affect interpretation and ascription of meaning to reality, see Mohamed Chaib, Berth Danermark, and Staffan Selander, *Education, Professionalization and Social Representations: On the Transformation of Social Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Gennaro Chierchia, *Dynamics of Meaning: Anaphora, Presupposition, and the Theory of Grammar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Judy Delin, "Presupposition and Shared Knowledge in It-Clefts," *Language and Cognitive Processes* 10, no. 2 (1995): 97-120; Benjamin R. George, "Presupposition Repairs: A Static, Trivalent Approach to Predicting Projection" (M.A. thesis, UCLA, 2008); Takao Gunji, "Towards a Computational Theory of Pragmatics—Discourse, Presupposition and Implicature" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1981); Diane Horton and Graeme Hirst, "Presuppositions as Beliefs," in *COLING '88 Proceedings of the International Conference on Computational Linguistics* (Stroudsburg, PA, Association for Computational Linguistics, 1988), 255-260; Paul Kay, "The Inheritance of Presuppositions," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 15 (1992): 333-381; M. Reimer and A. Bezuidenhout, "Would You Believe It? The King of France Is Back! Presuppositions and Truth-Value Intuition," in *Descriptions and Beyond*, ed. M. Reimer and A. Bezuidenhout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 269-296; Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *Mind* 14 (1905): 479-493; Philippe Schlenker, "Local Contexts," *Semantics and Pragmatics* 2, no. 3 (2009): 1-78; Scott Soames, "How Presuppositions Are Inherited: A Solution to the Projection Problem," *Linguistic Inquiry* 13 (1982): 483-545; Rob van der Sandt, *Context and Presupposition* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Rob van der Sandt, "Kontekst En Presuppositie: Een Studie Van Het Projektieprobleem En De Presuppositionele Eigenschappen Van De Logische Konnektieven" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 1982); Robert van Rooij, "Strengthening Conditional Presuppositions," *Journal of Semantics* 24 (2007): 289-304. For an introductory piece, see *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2011), s.v. "Presupposition."

the contemporary evangelical gender and Trinity debate.⁵ The social setting in which an individual develops and reinforces their “knowing” will shape their understanding of the divine. This social construction proves true in the gender-and-Trinity debate with equivalentist and hierarchicalist evangelicals disagreeing on whether or not the Trinity is stratified in parallel with gendered human role relations.

While evangelicals, mainstream Christians, and Catholics have differed somewhat in how they talk about the Trinity, the contemporary gender debate has created a greater ideological divide. Not only are evangelicals separated from other Christian groups in the way they talk about the Trinity,⁶ but there is now a chasm between opposing evangelical groups, even amongst those within the same denominations. Evangelical conceptions of God have changed and some are now stratifying the Trinity in order to reinforce their gender presuppositions, effectively re-conceptualizing the divine.

The tendency for humans to create gods in their own image has been recognized for millennia. Xenophanes (c. 570-475 BCE), expressing his skepticism of the immoral and highly anthropomorphic Greek gods, said: “If cattle and lions had hands with which to depict the gods, then they would make the gods in a shape like their own.”⁷ People tend to recognize when others project self upon their understanding of the divine, but do

⁵ The key American proponents of the subordination of women and eternal subordination of the Son were all trained at Westminster Seminary. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 40.

⁶ Such as Catholics, Eastern Christians, and mainstream Western Protestants.

⁷ Hegel provided this abbreviation of Xenophanes. G.W.F. Hegel and others, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2006), 58. The longer theory of Xenophanes is as follows: “But if cattle and horses and lions had hands or could paint with their hands and create works such as men do, horses like horses and cattle like cattle also would depict the gods' shapes and make their bodies of such a sort as the form they themselves have.” Xenophanes made another similar statement: “Ethiophians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians that they are pale and red-haired.”

not always apply the same critical perspective to themselves. While monotheists have long said that other religious groups create God in their own human image, it would seem that some evangelicals have a God with a stratified social order quite similar to their view of how the society should function. Modern evangelicals are not necessarily the only ones guilty of doing this. It may be that all groups project the context of their self and ego-loyalties upon their beliefs about the divine. While it is outside the scope of this thesis to deal with the extent to which humans psychologically project God in their own social group's image, it seems clear that it does happen to some degree.⁸ Though both Jews and Christians believe humans are created in God's image, it would seem that humans are applying their socially developed stratified order upon their understanding of God.

Socially Constructed Presuppositions Determine Interpretation

Both sides of this evangelical debate base their arguments upon the Bible and assert that the perspective opposing their own is the result of faulty presuppositions predetermining erroneous interpretation. As a result of this study, I conclude that those on both sides of the debate may have the tendency to conceptualize God in their image according to their socially constructed presuppositions.

Humans come to know socially.⁹ All "knowing" develops in a cultural environment and all religious "knowing" arises within a religio-cultural context. Socially

⁸ This is evident in the White Jesus which has been and still is depicted and disseminated by a historically White-dominated religion. Another example of presenting God in terms favorable to one's ego-group is the prosperity gospel presented by those who are already prosperous and the liberation theology of the oppressed. Both groups believe in a God who favors their social group within a stratified world.

⁹ On social cognition, see chapter 4, "Social Cognition," in Elliot Aronson and Joshua Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 11th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2012). We learn from those around us how society is ordered and where we fit into this system. Therefore, it is a socially constructed order to which the Trinity is compared in the evangelical subordination debate.

constructed presuppositions may subsequently determine how the Bible is interpreted. While the text remains static, its interpretation is as dynamic as the culture in which it is read and studied. Some evangelicals are stuck in a “textjam” over the meaning and implications of certain biblical texts.¹⁰ Both sides in the gender and Trinity debate sincerely believe they hold the true biblical position and that the others are letting their presuppositions determine their interpretation.¹¹ To determine whether the Bible teaches that the current social order is a prescriptive ideal requires analysis of worldview and recognition of presuppositions and processing shortcuts, or heuristics, to avoid cognitive biases which promote eisegesis and limit exegesis.¹² This is particularly important in an evangelical debate since evangelicals purpose to have the Bible as the unchanging standard of belief, instead of subjective human thought processes arising within fluid culture.

In the conflated evangelical gender-and-Trinity debate, hierarchicalists and equivalentists accuse each other of being ruled by faulty assumptions. Both sides

¹⁰ Such as 1 Cor 11:3 in which the word *kephale* is used to connect gender and Trinitarian relations.

¹¹ While presuppositions predetermine both positions, it would seem that hierarchical evangelicals, following in the vein of George W. Knight III, may have twisted sociological terminology and reimagined the doctrine of the Trinity in order to maintain prior theological commitment to the subordination of women.

¹² Many shortcuts and biases exist, many of which can lead to erroneous conclusions. For example, a possibly distorting shortcut used to understand and categorize something based upon similarity to a known model is the representative heuristic. See Elliot Aronson, Timothy D. Wilson, and Robin M. Akert, *Social Psychology*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 63. The confirmation bias is the tendency to favor information that supports one’s presuppositions and existing belief system. This particular bias will lead people to gather information selectively and be more likely to read that which will support their perspective, and to read confrontationally anything that comes to conclusions that fail to support their existing belief system. See Scott Plous, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*, McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 233. See also Reid Hastie and Robyn M. Dawes, *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World: The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010). A religion specific bias is the tendency of humans to project

sincerely believe they hold the true biblical position and that the others are letting faulty assumptions determine their interpretation. A better understanding of presuppositions may be the key to breaking the evangelical subordination “text-jam.” I propose that to move forward effectively, both sides need to first understand themselves and their own presuppositions.

Final Remarks for Debates between Those Who Hold a *Sola Scriptura* Perspective: Setting the Stage for Further Study

Because this is an evangelical debate being discussed by people who tend to believe in a *sola scriptura* or *prima scriptura* approach to establishing their truth, resolving this debate may come down to forming a biblical worldview and accompanying standards by which cultural norms, and particularly social order, are evaluated. The discussion has broken down at the textual level, but exploration at the level of “macro-hermeneutical” presuppositions may provide an opportunity for evangelicals to come to greater agreement over how to read the text according to the text rather than according to their socially determined biases of what is a proper social order. Work at the level of “macro-hermeneutical” presuppositions has been done and is continuing to develop in relation to philosophical presuppositions arising from Greek thought and influencing Christian tradition.¹³ Those who work in this area tend to assert that reading the Bible

their own attributes upon their conceptualization of the divine. See Richard Dayringer and David Oler, *The Image of God and the Psychology of Religion* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2004).

¹³ See Tiago Arias, "The Influence of Macro-Hermeneutical Presuppositions in Recent Interpretations of Genesis 1: An Introduction to the Problem," in *The Book and the Student: Theological Education as Mission*, ed. Wagner Kuhn (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 131-145; Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*; Fernando L. Canale, "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 95-130; Fernando L. Canale, "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12, no. 2 (2001): 16-34; Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.

according to Greek philosophical presuppositions has led to Christian belief in such extra-biblical ideas as hell, the immortality of the soul, and infinite divine foreknowledge. These writers, upholding the standard of *sola scriptura*, call for a radical return to biblical presuppositions. Their approach to understanding how Greek philosophy has affected hermeneutics may provide the necessary framework for evaluating the ways in which social learning has determined relational presuppositions and subsequent stratified conceptualization of the divine.

In this study I do not provide solutions, but offer different way of framing the questions which I hope will lead to more fruitful discussion. Theologians need to engage in more careful metacognition, or thinking about how they think. Further study is needed in the area of metacognition, macro-hermeneutics, and the social construction of presuppositions and their implications in order to facilitate constructive discourse in the future.¹⁴

¹⁴ Analysis of whether specific cognitive biases are operating in the debate may prove particularly fruitful.

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