

K. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006. (320pp.)

Trinitarian theology is at once the most fascinating and foundational Christian doctrine and the most complicated. Theologians have wrestled with the Christian doctrine of God for millennia and, in the process, have developed creeds, confessions, monographs, and teaching which, collectively, amount to what we know today as Christian orthodoxy. Such orthodoxy is summarised by Giles as follows (pp.309-311):

1. The God of Christian revelation is one divine being and three 'persons'.
2. The three divine 'persons' are inseparable in operations.
3. The three divine 'persons' are indivisible in power and authority.
4. The three divine 'persons' have one will.
5. The three divine 'persons' are eternally differentiated but not divided.
6. There is order among the divine three persons.
7. The Son is subordinated in the incarnation.

On these seven points contemporary Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants are in agreement. But, as the saying goes, the devil is in the details.

Giles articulates the post-1970s phenomenon of conservative Evangelical Christians appealing to the doctrine of the Trinity to support the subordination of women to men in church and wives to husbands in the home. In particular, theologians such as Wayne Grudem, who has written the highly influential theology textbook *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), Bruce Ware, and several Australian Anglicans such as Robert Doyle (head of systematic theology at Moore Theological College, Sydney), and Mark Baddeley. The specific context, however, to which Giles is responding, is Sydney evangelical Anglicanism which has, in recent years, sought to bolster arguments for the subordination of women with appeal to the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, thus supplying divine warrant and analogy for female subordination to males.

Giles has one simple thesis in this work:

It is...a plea from the heart to my fellow evangelicals who in growing numbers in recent years have begun arguing for the eternal subordination in function and authority of the Son to the Father. I say to them, 'Go back, you are going the wrong way.' To

set God the Son eternally under God the Father is to construe the Trinity as a hierarchy and thereby undermine the coequality of the differentiated divine persons, the core truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. (p.9).

According to Giles the contention that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father in power or authority or being is an ontological claim, and, therefore, is tantamount to arguing of the Son's eternal subordination to the Father in essence or being. This, argues Giles, is classic Arianism, that heresy so roundly refuted by such thinkers as Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, the council of Nicaea and Constantinople, and later, Calvin and the Reformed confessions. Of special importance to Giles is the theology enshrined in the so-called Athanasian Creed which unequivocally teaches the eternal equality of the Son in power, authority, and function, but also the eternal differentiation of the three divine persons. Giles' work is a refutation of complementarian evangelicals who claim the Trinity in support of their position. As far as Giles is concerned, the eternal subordination of the Son is a heresy that was resisted in the early church, at the time of the reformation, and in our day must be resisted with equal vigour.

In an earlier work entitled *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), Giles sought to give a comprehensive rebuttal of the post-1970s' conservative evangelical case for the permanent subordination of women. As a result he received criticism in several high profile publications, largely over the (un)reliability of his claims that the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father was a theological novelty in Christian theology. The book under review here is his attempt to set the record straight by examining the tradition in detail looking for teaching, universally accepted, on the eternal subordination of the Son.

Through eight chapters Giles canvasses Scripture and the tradition seeking clarity on what these authorities have to say on the equality and unity of God in being, authority, and function, along with how the differentiation of the divine persons is explained. Due to his critics' comments Giles is also forced to interact with certain contemporary voices, notably Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, and Thomas Torrance. Due to the influence of Barth on renaissance of trinitarian thought, and the claim by Giles detractors that Barth is 'on their side', Giles devotes the final chapter to a survey of Barth's thought on the supposed eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.

According to Giles' analysis, what certain contemporary evangelicals are claiming is on a par with the basic tenets of fourth-century Arianism

(Giles does provide a basic taxonomy of fourth-century 'Arianisms' and shows that this was not a monolithic movement, however certain features are endemic to each), defined as follows (pp.306-309):

1. All Arians confess 'Jesus is God' but that he is not 'co-equal' God. By 'co-equal' Giles means 'equal in being, function, and authority with the Father'.
2. All Arians appealed to Scriptural proof texts for their position but failed to articulate an adequate biblical theology that put the seemingly contradictory teaching of Scripture into a framework which made sense of the whole.
3. For fourth-century Arians, subordination in being, work, and authority were inextricably linked.
4. The titles *father* and *son* when used of God are understood literally, not analogically. For this reason, Arians argue, the Father has prominence.
5. The trinity is ordered hierarchically. The Father is over the Son, and the Son is over the Spirit. Order means hierarchy for all Arians.
6. The fourth-century Arians with one voice put to the fore the differences between the Father and the Son. The Father alone is true God, absolute in power and authority.
7. Fourth-century Arians apply the subordination of the incarnate Son in the economy to the eternal Son in the immanent Trinity and so make the Son eternally subordinate to the Father.

Giles then contends that on almost every point there is a direct correspondence between what fourth-century Arians teach to what post-1970 complementarian evangelicals teach on the Trinity. Giles stops short of calling these contemporary evangelicals 'twenty-first century Arians', but his critique of their position borders on such a charge.

My charge is rather that in arguing for the *eternal* subordination of the Son to support the doctrine of the *permanent* subordination of women, my debating opponents' primary and consuming concern, they have in ignorance broken with how the best of theologians and the creeds and confessions have concluded the Scriptures should be read and understood. Unintentionally they have embraced fundamental aspects of the Arian heresy in its varied forms, producing a strange amalgam of truth and error. (p.309).

Giles is well placed to canvass the issues covered in this work, given his academic background (ThD, Tübingen University), his ministry (vicar of St Michael's Church in North Carlton, Australia), and the

immediate context within which the issue of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father came to prominence (the 1999 *Sydney Anglican Diocesan Doctrinal Commission Report*, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity and Its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women'). Throughout this work Giles is respectful, honest, and meticulous in his selection of citations, interaction with primary works, and the immense secondary literature. His articulation of the relationship between Scripture and doctrinal formulation is well made (pp.67-74) and well worth reminding ourselves of, especially in light of the fact that too many Evangelicals simply do not understand how theological sources such as tradition and the creeds and confessions of the Church function in theological construction. Giles makes a compelling case that the eternal subordination of the Son is a theological novelty, first articulated by fourth-century Arians, and revived today by certain Evangelicals. His use of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Calvin, Thomas Torrance, and even Karl Barth is compelling and convincing in the final analysis. To claim the eternal subordination of the Son in being, function, or authority is no longer plausible if one wishes to stand in line with Scripture and the tradition. For this Giles' work is an invaluable contribution to the contemporary discussion on this issue.

Beyond the immediate concerns of men's and women's relationships the present work is a fine introduction to trinitarian theology in biblical and historical perspective. Classical themes such as the unity of the divine being and the differentiation of the divine persons are opened with skill and explained with care. This work makes for a fine trinitarian primer in its own right and should be compulsory reading for all interested in grasping the fundamental tenets of trinitarian theology. Doctrines such as the *homoousios to patri* are simply explained and the significance is clearly shown. Especially important in this volume is the analysis of the differentiation of the divine persons. Giles explains, from the tradition how the Father is not the Son or the Spirit and so forth, and yet all three persons are one God. Through Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine in particular, Giles provides a conceptual tour through the difficult notions of differing origination, the doctrine of appropriation, and the *taxis* or order of the divine persons. This is fine theological work which rewards those who 'take up and read'.

There were occasions where Giles was guilty of the offence he accuses his detractors of, that is, of assuming a position and citing authorities in support. While this was infrequent it was apparent when he fails to grasp the nuanced theology of some Evangelical complementarians when they argue for differentiation of the divine persons which is worked out in a *voluntary* subordination of the Son to

the Father. Giles is absolutely right in arguing against the necessary eternal subordination of the Son but in his analysis of Barth's theology he does come close to recognising voluntary submission as a distinct argument. While he finally rejects Barth's theology of trinitarian relations, and with good reason, he could perhaps have considered interacting directly with proposals which, while not explicitly recognising Barth as its motivation, veer close to some of the implications of his ideas. If the Son voluntarily submits to the Father in person, and yet in being all three divine persons are one, is this still classic subordinationism? If so, how would Giles respond? I suspect this will be the latest incarnation of complementarian argumentation and had Giles anticipated such a move his work would prove even more important.

Trinitarian theology is foundational and if we don't get this right, and by right I mean – biblical and orthodox – then the rest of our theological constructions will suffer. Giles highlights one current example of how faulty theology can lead to defective practice and for that his work is important. The fact that he manages to do this with theological precision, Christian grace, and simple prose (considering he is discussing complex theological doctrines!) makes this work invaluable. This work deserves a wide reading and a fair hearing before one uses the doctrine of the Trinity to support contemporary practice.

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