

The Nicene and Reformed doctrine of the Trinity.

(A paper given by Kevin Giles at the plenary forum on the Trinity at the Evangelical Theological Society annual conference, 15th November, 2016 at San Antonio. The other speakers were Dr Bruce Ware, Dr Millard Erickson and Dr Wayne Grudem; Dr Sam Storms presided.)

Kevin Giles

Thank you, Dr Storms, for your welcome. It is a huge honor to be invited to give the introductory address at this ETS plenary forum on the Trinity.

In putting my case this afternoon I am going to speak very forthrightly and unambiguously, as from past experience I am sure Dr Grudem and Dr Ware will do.¹ Dr Erickson who stands with me in opposing Dr Grudem and Dr Ware's teaching on the Trinity I am sure will be the clearest in what he says and the most gracious. I speak bluntly because the issues we are discussing are of monumental importance for the evangelical community. I believe what Dr Grudem and Dr Ware teach on the Trinity, and now very large numbers of evangelicals believe, contradicts what the Nicene creed, the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant confessions and the ETS doctrinal statement teach.

To begin my presentation, I make three matters perfectly clear. First, I have no distinctive doctrine of the Trinity. My exposition of the Trinity which follows is simply an outline of what I consider to be the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as spelt out in the Nicene Creed. I know absolutely nothing about a so-called "evangelical egalitarian doctrine of the Trinity"

¹ In my public presentation, I omitted this paragraph and the one on what Dr Fred Sanders wrote to me because of time constraints.

What this means is that I have basically the same understanding of the Trinity as the many complementarian confessional Reformed theologians who have “come out” in opposition to Dr Grudem and Dr Ware’s teaching on the Trinity.² What this immediately reveals is that the divide on the Trinity is not between evangelical egalitarians and complementarians but between creedal and confessional evangelicals and non-creedal and confessional evangelicals.

Second, I want to state clearly and unambiguously that I think the doctrine of the Trinity has absolutely nothing to say about the relationship of the sexes. I personally do not ground my gender egalitarian commitments on the Trinity and virtually no evangelical egalitarian does. I have been publishing on women in the Bible since 1975 and I have never appealed to the Trinity to support the substantial equality of the two sexes.

The gender complementarian, Fred Sanders, who is giving the lecture on the Trinity after this forum confirms what I say. On his blog and in a personal email to me he says, “I have *not* been able to find one sentence where Kevin Giles works to secure his own [gender] egalitarian position by appeal to the Trinity.”

I do not appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity because I believe the doctrine of the Trinity is our distinctive Christian doctrine of God, not our social agenda, but why and how the doctrine of the Trinity might inform our doctrine of the sexes, whatever that may be, completely escapes me. The Trinity is three divine persons, all analogically spoken of in male terms. Why and how we must ask, can a threefold analogically all “male” relationship

² Such as Robert Letham, Carl Trueman, Fred Sanders, Liam Goligher, Aimee Bird, Keith E Johnson, Stefan Linbad, Todd Pruitt, Michael Horton and Rachel Miller.

inform a twofold male-female relationship on earth? No analogical correlation is possible.

The argument just does not make sense. The logic of this argument is that threesomes are the ideal, or male-male relationships are the ideal!!! None of us I imagine would affirm these deductions!

The impossibility of correlation is made clear by Dr Grudem in his *Systematic Theology*. On page 257 in an attempt to make a connection, he likens the Trinity to dad, mum and their one child. In doing so he feminizes the Son - the Son becomes an analogue of the woman. Worse still, this family picture of God has nothing to do with the revealed doctrine of the Trinity. It sounds more like Greek mythology.

This observation takes us right to the heart of what I believe is the fundamental and inherent error in Dr Grudem and Dr Ware's doctrine of the Trinity; depicting God in human terms, instead of how he is revealed in Scripture.

My consistent argument for nearly twenty years has been that that if we evangelicals want to get right our doctrine of the Trinity, the primary and foundational doctrine of the Christian faith, we must sharply and completely separate out doctrine of the Trinity and our doctrine of the sexes. They are in no way connected and when they are connected both doctrines are corrupted.

I have not time to discuss 1 Corinthians 11:3 in any detail but I am sure this one text does not justify connecting the doctrine of the Trinity and our doctrine of the sexes. This is not a trinitarian text; the Spirit is not mentioned, and it would seem that the Greek word *kephale* (Eng. "head") almost certainly carries the metaphorical meaning of "source". Woman comes from man (Adam) (1 Cor 11:8, 12) and the Son comes "from" the Father.

Now my third point by way of introduction. In my presentation, this afternoon I am arguing that what Dr Grudem and Dr Ware teach on the Trinity is a sharp and clear breach with historic orthodoxy as spelt out in the Nicene Creed.

There can be no denying that we have starkly opposing doctrines of the Trinity. Dr Grudem and Dr Ware argue on the basis of creaturely analogies for a hierarchically ordered Trinity where the Father rules over the Son, claiming this is historical orthodoxy; what the church has believed since 325 AD. I argue just the opposite. On the basis of scripture, I argue that the Father and the Son are coequal God, the Father does not rule over the Son. This is what the church has believed since 325 AD. You could not have two more opposing positions. There is no middle ground.

When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity we are not discussing a theological question where one side can assert something and the other side the opposite and resolution is not possible. In this case, there is absolutely no uncertainty as to what constitutes trinitarian orthodoxy. No other doctrine has been more clearly articulated by the great theologians of the church across the centuries and none more clearly and consistently spelt out in the creeds and confessions of the church.

The Nicene Creed is the definitive account of the doctrine of the Trinity for more than two billion Christians. It is binding on all Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Reformed Christians. These 2 billion believers agree that anyone who denies what is taught in the Nicene Creed stands outside the catholic faith, and any

community of Christians that rejects what the Nicene Creed teaches is by definition a sect of Christianity. On this basis, we do not accept Jehovah's Witnesses as orthodox Christians because they cannot confess this creed, even though like us evangelicals they uphold the inerrancy of Scripture.

Be assured, I do not place this creed or any other creed or confession above Scripture in authority or on an equal basis with Scripture. For me, and for 2 billion Christians, this creed expresses what the church has agreed is the teaching of Scripture. I believe every single statement in this creed reflects what the Bible says or implies. In my view, we have in this creed the *most authoritative interpretation of what Scripture teaches on the Father-Son relationship*.

The Nicene Creed of 381.

In this creed, the Son is *communally* confessed in these words. Note the "we" – we Christians:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only (*monogenēs*) Son of God, **eternally begotten** (*gennaō*) **of the Father**, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, **begotten** (*gennaō*) **not made**, of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and our salvation he came down from heaven, by the power of the Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

Let me now highlight seven things this creed says clearly and unambiguously about the Son of God.

1. First, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ." These words reflect exactly 1 Corinthians 8:6. In this verse as you all know, Paul makes the Jewish *Shema* (Deut 6:4),

which is a confession that God is one, a confession that the one God is God the Father and God the Son. Again, as you all know Lord/ *Kurios* is the name of God in the Greek OT. In this confession, we are therefore saying we believe the “one Lord”, identified as Jesus Christ, is God without any caveats, yet not a second God. In other words, we are confessing Jesus Christ to be Yahweh, omnipotent God.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ is confessed as “Lord” over 600 times. The title Lord excludes the thought that Jesus Christ is eternally subordinate or submissive God.

This first clause in the Nicene Creed immediately draws to our attention the logical impossibility of confessing Jesus as Lord and at the same time arguing he is set under God the Father and must obey him. If the Father and the Son are both rightly confessed as Lord, the supreme co-rulers over all, then *they are not differentiated in authority*. They are one in dominion, rule, power and authority.

Let me illustrate the point I have just made. After hearing an Anglican complementarian theologian in Australia put the case that the Son must obey the Father, I asked him how he could confess Jesus as Lord on Sundays in church and then during the week teach that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father and must obey him? He replied, “ I see no contradiction, the Son is just a little bit less Lord than the Father.”

In arguing unambiguously and repeatedly that the Father and the Son are essentially and eternally differentiated in authority, Dr Grudem and Ware contradict the first clause of the Christological confession in the Nicene Creed

2. Second, the Nicene Creed says, “We [Christians] believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only (*monogenēs*) Son of God, Again, we all know that the word *monogenēs* means “only” in the sense of “unique”; “one of a kind”. The Greek church fathers of course as Greek speakers also knew it meant “only” in the sense of “unique”; “one of a kind”. None of them thought it meant “only begotten”. What is more, none of them appealed to this word or the texts in which it is found as the basis for their doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son.

John uses the word *monogenēs* of Jesus Christ five times (Jn 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 Jn 4:9). This designation of the Son was deliberately included in the creed because it explicitly excludes the disastrous error made by all the Arians of various brands, namely that human sonship defines divine sonship. All the Arians argued that because Jesus Christ is called the Son of God he is like a human son, he is subordinate to and must obey his father.

What this clause in the creed is saying is that Jesus’ sonship is *not* like human sonship. There is something about his sonship that is absolutely different to creaturely sonship.

In saying Jesus’ sonship is not like human sonship I am not saying anything novel. The best of theologians across the ages with one voice have insisted that human relationship and human language cannot define God. Our creaturely language is adequate to speak of other creatures but inadequate to speak of the Creator. The fourth Lateran council (1215 AD) made this point very starkly, “For between Creator and creature, no similarity can be expressed without implying greater dissimilarity”. What this means is that human language used of God is *not* to be taken literally, “univocally”, but analogically.

To argue that human language can define God is possibly the most serious theological error any one can make. It leads to idolatry; making God in our own image. We evangelicals should not define divine fatherhood and divine sonship by appeal to human experience as liberal theologians are wont to do. We should define divine fatherhood and sonship in the light of scriptural revelation.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ is called the Son/Son of God to speak of his kingly status, not his subordination. The Reformed theologian and “complementarian”, John Frame, says,

There is a considerable overlap between the concepts of Lord and Son. ... Both [titles] indicate Jesus’ powers and prerogatives as God, especially over God’s people: in other words, [the title Son speaks of his] divine control, *authority*, and presence.³

I agree completely with Dr Frame. I believe the NT calls Jesus Christ “the Son of God” to speak of his kingly status NOT his subordinate status.

Dr Grudem and Dr Ware again in stark contrast to the Nicene Creed’s confession that Jesus is the Son in *a unique way*, constantly and consistently argue that Jesus Christ is to be understood like any human son and as such is subordinate and necessarily obedient to his father. Note very carefully their theological methodology; they define God in creaturely terms, not by what is revealed in Scripture.

In absolutely rejecting Dr Grudem and Dr Ware’s theological methodology I follow the gender complementarian, Dr Robert Letham. He roundly condemns Drs Grudem and Ware in *One God in Three Persons*, for predicating their understanding of the Son of God on fallen

³ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002, 658. Italics added.

human relationships. He says, this is an Arian argument that must be categorically rejected.

He writes,

“The Arian argument that human sons are subordinate to their fathers led to their contention that the Son is subordinate to the Father. The church rejected the conclusion as heretical and opposed the premise as mistaken. Rather, [it taught], the Son is equal with the Father in status, power and glory”.⁴

Let me say it very clearly; to confess Jesus Christ as the *monogenēs*, the unique Son, is to say I believe he is *not like any human son*. He is more dissimilar than similar to all human sons.

3. Third, the Nicene Creed says, We [Christians] believe ...the unique Son of God, is “eternally begotten (*gennaō*) of the Father.”

Now we come to what is called “the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son”, what I and most other orthodox theologians believe is the foundational element in the doctrine of the Trinity. You can see how important it was to the Bishops who drew up this creed because they have us confessing twice the generation of the Son, once at the beginning and once at the end of the christological clause. This doctrine is like two book ends. I have put the words in bold in my Power Point. Remove these words from the creed and there is nothing to support what stands in the middle.

The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is affirmed in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and by all the Reformation and post-Reformation confessions of Faith and by virtually every significant theologian over the last 1800 years.

⁴ “Eternal Generation”, in, *One God*, 122.

The doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit seek to explain threefold eternal self-differentiation in the life of the one God. It does this by noting that the Bible speaks of the “begetting” of the Son “from” the Father, and the “procession” of the Spirit “from” the Father. It is a doctrine arising out of Scripture that explains so much in Scripture. It is an eloquent doctrine. It has very solid biblical support. To argue that the greatest theologians across the centuries have taught a doctrine for which there is no biblical warrant is mind boggling. It is implausible.

For the authors of the Nicene Creed, and virtually all orthodox theologians, the primary basis for distinguishing and differentiating the Father and the Son is that the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father. This is the ONLY difference between the Father and the Son the Nicene Creed mentions and allows, and this difference is essential to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Both Dr Grudem and Dr Ware openly reject the doctrine of eternal generation. Dr Grudem says it would be best if the words about the begetting of the Son were deleted from the Nicene Creed and from all “modern theological formulations” of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵ Dr Ware says, this “doctrine is highly speculative and not grounded in biblical teaching”.⁶ At this point there is no ambiguity; both Dr Grudem and Dr Ware undeniably say they reject the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son as it has been understood for 1800 years and thus deny what indelibly and eternally differentiates the Father and the Son.

4. Fourth, we note that immediately after the confession of the eternal begetting of the Son the Nicene Creed says the Son is, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true

⁵ *Systematic Theology*, 1234.

⁶ *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 162.

God”. What these words assert is that on the basis of his eternal generation the Son is everything the Father is but he is not the Father but the Son. Derivation does not imply any diminution of the Son in any way, or any division or separation between the Father and the Son. These words are in the creed to say emphatically that while the Son is “begotten of the Father”, and “from” the Father he is no way less than, inferior to, eternally subordinated to or submissive to the Father in any way.

To argue that the Nicene Creed speaks of the eternal begetting of the Son to teach the eternal subordination of the Son, as Dr Grudem and Ware do,⁷ is to put it very bluntly perverse. For the bishops who promulgated this creed and all orthodox theologians across the centuries the eternal generation of the Son teaches that the Son is “God from God, light from light, True God from True God.” The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son rather than teaching the eternal subordination of the Son teaches the eternal co-equality of God the Father and God the Son.

5. Then fifth, follows the knockout blow. We believe the Son is “one being/*homoousios* with the Father”. This is not a word the Bible uses of the Son. It is an implication drawn from the confession that the Son is “God from God”. Let me explain the force of the Greek word *homoousios*.

All of us share *the same* human being but we are *not one in being*. The Father and the Son uniquely are *one in being*. They are both God in all might, majesty and glory without any caveats whatsoever.

⁷ *Systematic Theology*, 251-252, 1234, *Countering the Claims*, 239-240, *Evangelical Feminism*, 210-213;

If the Father and the Son are *one in being* this means that they cannot have three wills; they cannot be separated in what they do, the one God cannot be divided into the Father who rules and a Son who obeys, and their glory is one. The word *homoousios* allows for *no dividing or separating of the divine persons*. It excludes absolutely any possibility that the Son can be eternally subordinated to the Father and thus other than the Father in might, majesty, dominion, authority and glory.

None of the various schools of Arian thought in the fourth century could endorse the word, because as fourth century men living in a Greek culture they understood that to confess that the Father and the Son are *one in being* meant the Father and the Son cannot be divided or separated in any way. Modern day evangelicals who separate and divide the Father and the Son, setting the Father above the Son, accept the term because they do not understand its force. They think it means simply that they have the same divine being.

Both Dr Grudem and Dr Ware say that they affirm that the Father and the Son are *one in being* but at the same time they sharply separate and divide the one God into the Father who rules and the Son obeys, implying two wills in God, and thus in reality deny that the Father and the Son are *one being*.

6. Six, the Nicene Creed says, of the Son that, “Through him all things were made”. These words reflect exactly the words of scripture (1 Cor 8:6, Jn 1:3, Heb 1:2, cf Col 1:16). For the Nicene fathers the most fundamental division in the whole universe is between the creator and what he creates. These words are thus included in the creed to make the point emphatically that the Son is the omnipotent co-creator, yet as in all things, he and the Father

contribute to this work distinctively as the Father and the Son. In this instance, the Father creates *through* or *in* the Son (Col 1:16).

In contrast, Dr Grudem says, the Son in creation is simply “the active agent in carry out the plans and directions of the Father”⁸ – which is exactly what Arius taught. Dr Ware, says the Son “creates under the authority of the Father”.⁹ I definitely see no support for these assertions in the Nicene Creed and indeed I think the wording of the scriptures and the creed exclude the idea that the Son is the subordinate creator. Scripture speaks of him as the co-creator.

Before moving on I must digress for a moment. Because orthodox theologians seek to take into account everything Scripture says on the divine three persons they affirm “order” in divine life and actions. They agree that nothing is random or arbitrary in God. Scripture speaks of patterned ways God acts. One example that we have just noted is that he creates “through” or “in” the Son and not in any other way. More importantly from Scripture we learn that the Father begets the Son and sends him into the world. Such patterning differentiates the divine persons, not subordinates any one of them. Orthodoxy accepts order in divine life and actions but not hierarchical ordering. This conclusion is confirmed by noting that in the roughly 70 times where the New Testament writers associate together the three divine persons, sometimes the Father is mentioned first (Matt 28:19); sometimes the Son (2 Cor 13:13) and sometimes the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-6).¹⁰

⁸ *Systematic Theology*, 266.

⁹ “Equal in Essence, Distinct Roles: Eternal Functional Authority and Submission among the Essentially Equals Divine Persons of the Godhead”, *JBMW*, 2008, 13.2, 49.

¹⁰ See the very full account of this phenomenon by the complementarian theologian, Roderick Durst, *Reordering the Trinity: Six Movements of God in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015.

7. Seventh, the Nicene Creed says, We [Christians] believe that “For us and our salvation he [the Son] *came down from heaven*, by the power of the Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, *and became man*”.

In this phrase the creed reflects Philippians 2:4-11. Jesus Christ, God the Son, had “equality with God [the Father] yet he

“emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death.”

What Philippians 2 teaches is *the willing and self-chosen subordination and subjection* of the Son for our salvation. On this basis, orthodox theologians with one voice insist that the subordination and obedience of the Son seen in the incarnation should not be read back into the eternal life of God. To do so is huge mistake.

In the incarnate Son, we meet in the Gospels we see *kenotic-God*, self-emptied God; the Son of God who came down from heaven. To read back into the eternal life of God any of the human limitations of the *kenotic* Son, or his obedience to God the Father as the second Adam, is just bad theology.

With Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, I believe to interpret Scripture rightly we must recognize that in Scripture there is “a double account of the savior”, one in “the form of God” and one “in the form of a servant” and the two should not be confused. What these great theologians concluded is that the *kenotic* Son does not reveal fully the exalted Son. I agree.

The Arians of the fourth century read the Son's incarnational self-subordination, obedience to the Father as the second Adam and his human limitations back into the eternal life of God. Dr Grudem and Dr Ware do exactly the same and thus sharply break once again with the Nicene Faith and virtually every major theologian who has written on the Trinity since 325 AD.

I leave the Nicene Creed at this point. Before concluding I need to comment specifically on Dr Grudem's claim in his *Systematic Theology*, page 251, that *the eternal role subordination of the Son* has been the church's doctrine at least since the council of Nicaea in 325.¹¹ This is simply not true.

"Role subordination" is definitely not found in the 325 or 381 versions of the Nicene Creed as we can see from the quotation on our screen. The word "role" does not appear, nor any synonym, nor the idea.

The very first person in history to speak of *the role* subordination of the Son was George Knight III in his 1977 seminal book, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role relationship of Men and Women*.¹² It was he who first introduced the concept of the Son's "*role subordination*" into Evangelical theological circles. It was not known before this time. Many theologians across the centuries have spoken of the "subordination of the Son" but none have spoken of the "role subordination of the Son or the Spirit" before Knight. To have done so before late nineteenth century is impossible because the French word "role" appeared first in

¹¹ *Systematic Theology*, 251-252.

¹² Grand Rapids; Baker, 1977.

English in 1875 to speak of the part an actor plays, and first in the sociological sense to refer to characteristic behavior in 1913.¹³

The more general claim that *the eternal subordination of the Son* has been the teaching of the church since 325 is likewise objectively false. We have just seen, the Nicene Creed seeks to exclude the eternal subordination of the Son in a number of ways: relationally, the Father and the Son rule as the one Lord; temporally, the Son is eternally generated by the Father and as such is “true God from true God”, and ontologically, the Son is *one in being* with the Father. The Athanasian Creed is even more explicit. I wish I had time to outline what it teaches. This is summed up when it declares that the three divine persons are “co-equal” God.

Then we have all the Reformation and Post-Reformation confessions of faith that likewise seek to exclude the eternal subordination of the Son in a number of ways. With one voice they affirm that the three divine persons are “eternal” and importantly “*one in being and power*”. It is not just temporal and ontological subordination they reject but also relational subordination; they teach, *the Son is less in power than the Father*. The Belgic Confession of 1561 is the most specific, adding that the Son is neither “subordinate nor subservient.”

The words “power” and “authority” often overlap in meaning in English like the words house and home but in both cases the words are not exact synonyms. However, when it comes to divine life the words “power” and “authority” in English and in Greek may be taken as synonyms. If the Son has all power then he has all authority and if he has all authority he has all power. Both terms speak of divine attributes shared identically by the divine persons.

¹³ www.dictionary.com/browse/role.

What is more, Paul insists that the Son who reigns over all has “all authority (*exousia*), power (*dunamis*) and dominion” (cf. Eph 1:21).

“Equality” in being *and* power, we should also note, is affirmed by the Evangelical Theological Society doctrinal statement to which we have all subscribed. We ETS members all confess the Father, the Son and the Spirit to be “*one in essence/being and equal in power and glory*”. To confess that the Father, Son and Spirit are *equal in power* of course means that one does not rule over the other in any way. The Father *and* the Son are God almighty, omnipotent God.

I also note that Dr Ware stands in opposition to the ETS doctrinal statement in that he rejects “equality in glory”. He says, the Father has “the ultimate supremacy and highest glory”.¹⁴ For him, the Son is less in glory and for this reason must give “ultimate and highest glory to his Father”.¹⁵ In saying this he not only denies the ETS doctrinal statement but also the teaching of scripture where the Father and the Son are alike glorified (1 Cor 2:8, Gal 1:3-5, Eph 1:3-5, Heb 1:3, Rev 5:12-13, 7:9-12, etc) and again the Nicene Creed which says the divine three persons “together” [are to be] “worshipped and glorified”.

To be faithful to our doctrinal statement we ETS members we must reject what Dr Grudem and Dr Ware teach on the Trinity.

¹⁴ *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 50, 65. In this book time and time again Dr Ware speaks of the “supremacy” of the Father and often of his “priority” and “preeminence” in the Godhead. For him the divine persons are not “co-equal” as orthodoxy with one voice asserts.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6755

Some of you may be tempted to dismiss what I have argued for one reason or another but please note that on my side now stand dozens of highly respected theologians, some gender complementarians some gender egalitarians, some evangelicals some not.

Kyle Claunch from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, speaking specifically of Dr Bruce Ware and Dr Wayne Grudem's doctrine of the Trinity, agrees completely with me that what they teach is not historic orthodoxy. He says their doctrine of the Trinity entails a commitment "to three distinct wills in the immanent Trinity",¹⁶ an idea proscribed by orthodox theologians. And he adds more significantly that,

[Their] "way of understanding the immanent Trinity does *run counter* to the pro-Nicene tradition, as well as the medieval, Reformation, and Post-Reformation Reformed traditions that grew from it."¹⁷

What could be clearer? Clyde Claunch, says explicitly that what Dr Grudem and Dr Ware teach on the Trinity "*runs counter*" to the Nicene Faith and the Reformation confessions. This is exactly what I have argued. He and I agree absolutely.

I conclude: In the Nicene Creed seven wonderful affirmations about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are made. I unequivocally endorse them all. I love them. These seven affirmations give content to my faith. I have written in the past and have spoken today to encourage us all to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in these words because this is the faith of the church; what the vast majority of Christians past and present believe is the teaching of scripture.

Postscript.

¹⁶ "God the Head of Christ", in *One God*, 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

After I sat down Dr Ware spoke. He began by saying, “I have now changed my mind.” He then went on to tell the several hundred evangelical theologians present that he now endorses the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son because he now recognizes it has good biblical support. It is foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity!!! It was as if the air had been sucked out of the room. He did not mention me but as I am the only evangelical who has written a book on the doctrine of the eternal generation I take it he was saying I had convinced him that he had been in error and needed to say sorry to the evangelical community for leading it reject the foundational element in the doctrine of the Trinity.

After Dr Erickson had spoken, Dr Grudem spoke. He too began by saying that he now believed the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and that he would be correcting his *Systematic Theology* when he revised it!!! I thought to myself, how long will it be before these two hugely influential evangelical theologians will confess that teaching the three divine persons are hierarchically ordered is also mistaken and a threat to the historic faith.

On the matter just mentioned, the eternal subordination of the Son, Dr Grudem and Dr Ware stood firm. They argued that “in eternity past”, in his incarnation, and in “eternity future” the Son was necessarily obedient to the Father. This they claimed was what the Bible taught.

Professor Erickson spoke after Dr Ware. He made three points. He first argued that if the Son’s subordination in “role” or “relations” was necessary and eternal then it was ontological. Second, that many of the things Dr Grudem and Dr Ware argued were logically inconsistent. And third, that Dr Grudem and Dr Ware’s appeal to the Bible was all too often illegitimate. The texts to which they appealed to support their views did not say what they claimed.

In the very brief time at the end of the forum for exchange between the four speakers Dr Ware took me to task on two matters; Dr Grudem did not address me. It was as if I had not spoken. Dr Ware first said that unlike me he made a clear distinction between the words “power” and “authority”. He accepted that the Son was “equal in power”, as the ETS doctrinal statement ruled, but not in “authority”. In the minute I had to reply I asked him could he say that men and women were “equal in power” since basic to his position was the Father-Son relationship (for him not me) prescribes the man-woman relationship? He made no answer.

Second, he accused me, as he had in his talk, for making an invalid distinction between the Son as he is revealed in history (his incarnation) and as he is in eternity. He said this implied that what was revealed in scripture was not a true revelation of the Father-Son relationship for all time. For him, he said, “everything” we learn of the Father-Son relationship in the Gospels speaks of what is true in eternity. In reply I asked him did he believe the Son in heaven got tired, was ignorant of certain things, went to the bathroom and could die? He replied, “Of course there must be some differences”. What this means is that we simply disagree on what in the revelation of the Son in history eternally true and what is not. I follow what is said in Philippians 2:4-1; in eternity the Son is “equal” to the Father in all things, in becoming man he took the “form of a servant” and became obedient to the Father to win our salvation. In eternity he is not a servant/slave. He rules as Lord and King.