Why We're Gendered Beings--A Trinitarian Perspective
The Difference Difference Makes©
ETS November, 2006---Rev. Dr. Gary W. Deddo

I've been asked to address the topic of the doctrine of the Trinity and any light it might shed on why God created us as human beings with gender. In my mind an evangelical theological exposition of this topic will involve a biblically grounded critical appropriation of the teaching of the church throughout the ages.

There is, however, not sufficient time to establish such a comprehensive treatment of the topic. It is important to note at the outset that what follows is built on a biblical foundation that I believe provides these basic elements: First, that any consideration of the relationship of men and women must fall under the more universal constraints of all Christian discipleship. The ethic of love must undergird any and every other ethical obligation of men and women together. Second, we are biblically obligated to recognize that God's own love revealed in Christ provides the norm for our loving of one another even as men and women. Third, we are biblically warranted to analogically compare the relationship of men and women to God's relationship to us in Christ and that relationship may be analogically compared to the relationship of the Triune persons. In theological terms Scripture encourages us to discern an analogy of relations, but not an analogy of being between God and humanity.

The primary biblical teaching that directs us to look for light to fall on our human relationships from the Christological and Trinitarian relationships is found in Jesus' drawing of those comparisons in John 15: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn. 15:9). And then a little later: "As I have loved you, so you ought to love one another (Jn 15:12, cf. 13:34). The simple word "as" conveys the astounding intention that there be a likeness of relationships. In John 17, we find three simple terms of comparison among these three relationships: love, oneness and glory. There we also find a comprehensive reciprocal sharing/exchange/interchange between the Father and Son. The Father gives the Son his name, word, and mission as well as love, oneness and glory. The Son in turn shares all those things with his people including love, oneness and glory. Given the comprehensive scope of Jesus prayer and the universal command to love one another, there is every reason to believe that the patterns of relationship spoken of here necessarily include the relationship of men and women. I believe that Genesis 1 and 2 and Ephesians 5 confirm that the relationship of gender cannot be excluded.

Finally, I should make clear that the critical appropriation of the church's trinitarian theology assumes that the description of the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit in John 13-17, especially chapter 17 is indispensable for grasping the nature of the intra-Triune relationships. That briefly constitutes the biblical foundations upon which this paper proceeds.

A Critical Appropriation of the Doctrine of the Trinity
I want now to turn our attention to the matter of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

In the current controversy the unity of the Trinity is agreed upon. Neither the oneness in being of the Three nor the oneness in being of man and woman is being questioned by either "side." The

divine and human persons are regarded as being of the same value, significance, dignity and honor. So the following discussion will assume the unity of God and the unity of humanity. We affirm without further discussion that human loving across the genders ought to embody a unity that analogically bears witness to the unity of being in relation among the Triune persons. Proper use of theological analogy requires that it be unidirectional, from God to creatures and that it not be an analogy of being but rather serves as an analogy of relationship.

The key question I want to consider then is: What difference does the distinction of the trinitarian persons make for how we understand the difference in relationship between men and women?

I'm going to suggest that, in alignment with biblical teaching, sufficient understanding of the Trinity can be critically appropriated from the key insights gleaned from the leading trinitarian theologians of early church and confirmed by reference to two ecumenically affirmed creedal statements: the Athanasian Creed (dated as early as 361 AD and formulated in provincial synods perhaps under the direction of Athanasius) and the most recent ecumenical "Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity" issued in 1991 by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the leading representatives of the whole of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.[1]

I want to offer six theses regarding how the differences among the Persons, especially the Father and Son were understood in the doctrine of the Trinity as presented in these sources. The first four theses are negative; the last two are affirmative.

The claim I'm making is that a scripturally grounded critical appropriation of the church's teaching on the Trinity:

1. Denies that the differentiation of the Persons is constituted by a difference in roles.

2. Rules out construing the difference of the Persons as being constituted through differing functions, i.e., particular actions or divine operations.

3. Rules out any division of the various divine attributes, most especially those of power or authority, for distribution among the divine Persons.

4. Rules out any internal conflict or division or difference of wills among the divine Persons, whether before, during or after the Incarnate life of the Son on earth

Now positively expressed in two more theses, a critical appropriation of doctrine of the Trinity requires we affirm that:

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[1]Called together to address the divisive issue of the *filioque* clause, this "Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity" was the result of meetings and consultations beginning in 1977 leading to the formation of a joint Commission of Theologians representing the World Alliance of Reformed church and representatives from all fourteen Orthodox Churches in the Pan-Orthodox Communion. See *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, 2 Volumes, Scottish Academic Press, , Edinburgh, 1985 and 1993 respectively, edited by Thomas F. Torrance. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*; T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994.

5. The differences between the Trinitarian Persons is constituted without remainder by the differences of the Persons in themselves (that is their Personal identity) and by their unique eternal intra-Trinitarian relations. The claim that the essential difference of true distinct divine Persons depends upon any of the aforementioned differentiations indicated in theses 1-4 is thereby excluded, ruling out all subordinationism (the danger for some complementarians).

6. The Trinitarian inter-Personal differences constitute an eternal non-interchangeability of the Persons and their relations, thereby ruling out any claim that the test of the unity and equality of Persons must be the interchangeability of the Persons or their relations. Failure to sufficiently guard against the interchangeability of the Persons threatens to dissolve the Personal differences of God, depersonalizes the Triune Persons, and leads to the heresy of modalism (the danger for some egalitarians).

Thesis 1. The difference of the Persons are not constituted by and cannot be reduced to the difference of roles.
The early church and the ecumenical creeds of the church did not utilize the idea of roles to affirm the difference of the persons but excluded it. In fact, the notion of role, *prosopon* in classical Greek, which primarily stood for the mask worn by actors to distinguish the various characters they would play in Greek drama, was quickly recognized as inadequate for use in speaking of the Trinitarian persons. This is why, following Athanasius' and especially Basil the Great's (329-379) insight,[3] the favored term which came to have a controlling and normative value for the doctrine of the Trinity became *hypostasis*, not *prosopon*. *Hypostasis* stood for an objective reality that could be perceived in thought, by the intellect. It stood for the essence of God as Trinity. Basil grasped that the three persons could not be understood as three different appearances, or three modes of the one God. Such roles were temporary and did not really distinguish between the persons. Understood as roles, none of the Persons could be said to be eternal and so there would, then, be a time when there was not a Father, not a Son, not a Spirit. If role was essential to the difference of the Persons then there was a time when God was not triune. As he saw it, this necessarily led to Sabellianism, the heresy of modalism. Although you find the term *prosopon* used in the later Christological Creeds it occurs only in conjunction with *hypostasis* thereby giving *prosopon* a new definition by infusing it with the foundational meaning of *hypostasis*.[4] The idea of role was so completely rejected that *prosopon* is now translated not role, much less mask, but person, when found in Christian trinitarian teaching. Indeed the understanding of what a person is underwent a radical shift under the impress of the theological deliberations of the church.

So Gregory of Nyssa adamantly rules out any "*ranking*" of the three Persons (hypostases) either within the Trinity or in their working toward creation. Such ranking according to differing ministry, he says, calls into question the unity of God. He says, "If the Father is King, and the only Begotten is King, and the Holy Ghost is the Kingship, one and the same definition of Kingship must prevail through this Trinity. (Gregory of Nyssa, On the Holy Spirit, Oration 41.9. NPNF 2 5:320-21.)

[3] Ep. 236,6 (PL 2, 1670). See also John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, chapter 1.
[4] From the Chalcedon Definition: "one Person (*prosopon*) and one Subsistence (*hypostasis*)"

John of Damascus contends that all the divine names must be "simply" and "unconditionally" applied to each of the hypostases (subsistences) following the Apostle Paul, who said "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we in him: and one Lord Jesus Christ by Who are all things, and we by him." (I Cor. 8:5). This, says John, explains Gregory the Theologian's understanding: "For the words 'of Whom' and 'through Whom' and 'in Whom' [all indicating what we might call differing roles] *do not divide the natures* (for neither the prepositions nor the order of names could ever be changed) but they characterize the properties of one unconfused nature. [In scripture] they are once more gathered into one [according to the Apostle Paul, Rom. 11:36] 'Of him and through him and in him are all things, to him be the glory for every and ever, Amen'" (On the Trisagion).

Athanasius writes: "Inasmuch as there is in the Holy Trinity oneness of essence *and equality in rank*, who then, would dare to separate either the Son from the Father or the Spirit from either the Son or the Father. Or who would be so rash as to say that the Trinity is dissimilar and of diverse nature within Itself" (Four Letters to Serapion, I, 20). The oneness of essence requires affirming equality of rank. Rank [having different roles] cannot be the basis for there being a differentiation of Person.

So the Athanasian Creed announces: "we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person *by himself to be God and Lord* (19).... And in this Trinity none is afore or after another, *none is greater or less than another*, but the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal so that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped." (25-27)

And finally according to the Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity (1991), quoting Gregory the Theologian and speaking of the three persons, "'One is not more or less God, nor is One before and after Another,' 'for there is not greater or less in respect of the *Being or the consubstantial Persons*'(Or. 31.14.40.43). All three Persons are coeternal and coequal. They are all perfectly one in the identity of their Nature and perfectly consubstantial in their Being. Each Person is himself Lord and God, and yet there are not three Lords or Gods, but only one Lord God, and there is only one and the same eternal Being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are perfectly and completely consubstantial in their mutual indwelling of one another and in their containing (*perichoresis*) of one another. 'The Trinity praised, worshipped and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees (*aschematistos*), and he is united without confusion, just as the Monad also is distinguished in thought without division. For the threefold doxology, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord" offered by those venerable living beings, denotes the three perfect Persons, just as in the word "Lord" they indicate his one Being' (Athanasius, In ill. om. 6)."

So although the three persons may act externally, *ad extra*, towards creation in distinguishable ways [they may *have* roles], the roles do not distinguish the Persons, the roles are not essential to the Persons and do not constitute the difference of the Persons.

Thesis 2. The differences of the persons cannot be understood or explained or grounded in any difference in external action, function, working or aspect of mission. A critical appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity may distinguish between the various works of God, most especially Creation, Redemption and Sanctification. It also allows for each Person making a unique

contribution to the various workings of God. But these differences do not determine, ground or constitute the difference of the Persons. They are decidedly not essential to the respective persons. To differentiate the Persons in terms of their unique contribution to the various operations of God is to unravel the unity of God in the mind of the early church and the ecumenical Creeds.

According to Athanasius, "There is a Trinity holy and perfect, acknowledged as God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, having nothing foreign or external mixed with it....It is consistent in Itself, indivisible in nature, and Its *activity is one*. The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit; and thus the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved; and thus there is preached in the Church one God, "who is over all, and through all, through the Word; and in all, in the Holy Spirit." (Four Letters to Serapion, 1,28).

The witness of Ambrose is "And as he who is blessed in Christ is blessed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, because the Name is one and the Power one; so, too, when *any divine operation*, whether of the Father, or of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit, is treated of, it is not referred only to the Holy Spirit, but also to the Father and the Son, and not only to the Father, but also to the Son and the Spirit" (Ambrose, On the Spirit 1.3.40.[5]).

The conviction of Didymus is as follows: "Therefore whoever shares in the Holy Spirit shares immediately in the Father and the Son. And he who has love from the Father has it from the Son and joined with the Holy Spirit. And he who has a share of the grace of Jesus Christ has that grace given by the Father through the Holy Spirit. For in all these things it is proven *that the operation* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit *is the same*. But those who have the same operation have the same substance, because those things which are *homoousia* in the same substance have the *same operations* and those which are of different substance and not *homoousia* are different and separate in operation" (Didymus, On the Holy Spirit 24).[6]

The Athanasian Creed reads: "So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty (13).

The Agreed Statement affirms: "The Holy Trinity is thus perfectly homogeneous and unitary, both *in the threeness* and oneness of God's *activity* and in the threeness and oneness of his own eternal unchangeable Being." Further on it states: "The three Divine Persons are also inseparably conjoined in all the manifestations of God's *activity*, in creation, providence, revelation and salvation, as they are consummated in the Incarnate Economy of the Son. In fact *all divine activity* begins with the Father, extends through the Son and reaches its fulfillment in the Spirit [following St. Basil]."

St. Augustine simply put it: "All the works of God *ad extra* are indivisible."[7]

The differences of the external actions or works are in no way intrinsic to the differences of the Persons since all are involved in each of the different operations. Thus these operations cannot

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[5] NPNF 2 7:98.
[6] MC 3:116; PL 23:119.
[7] "opera ad extra sunt indivisa," *On the Trinity*, Book I, sec. 7, *NPNF*, ser. 1. vol 3, Eerdmans 1956, p. 17-228

constitute the personal differences and asserting so was regarded as disassembling the divinity of the persons, and the unity of God. What each Person contributes to the one action of God is not essential to the respective person but a relative manifestation of a different order of difference within the Triune life. While one Person may be said, by way of appropriation, to take the lead in a certain work, the operations of the Triune God cannot be construed as a division of labor, where each takes a separate function. In each operation they act as one.

Thesis 3. A critical appropriation rules out any distribution of the divine attributes among the persons, most especially those attributes of power or authority. All the attributes of God are regarded as shared in the same way by all the divine Persons. The difference of the Persons is not constituted by a difference in attributes and so they all must said to share equally in power and authority.

From the Council of Rome, 382: "If anyone denies that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one divinity, *authority*, majesty, *power*, one glory, dominion, one kingdom, and one will and truth: he is a heretic. If anyone denies that the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are true persons, equal, eternal, containing all things visible and invisible, that they are omnipotent, judge all things, give life to all things, make all things, and conserve all things: he is a heretic" (Council of Rome, 382, The Tome of Damasus 1, 3, 10, 16-24).[8]

"There is one ousia, one lordship, one *authority*, one will unchangeable from what it is....Three hypostases, of which none are prior to or later than another and there is *no distinction* ... one will, one glory, one lordship." (Anonymous Liturgical Homily (17A of Narsai).

John of Damascus proclaims: "[The Holy Spirit] is inseparable from Father and Son, possessing *all the qualities* that the Father and Son possess, save that of not being begotten or born" (On the Orthodox Faith 1.8).[9]

According to the Athanasian Creed: :So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord and the Holy Spirit Lord: And yet they are not three Lords but one."

Opening the Agreed Statement, we hear: "According to this [evangelical and ancient Faith of the Catholic Church] there is one godhead, Power and Being of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *equal* in Honour, Majesty and eternal sovereignty in three most perfect Subsistencies (*hypostases*), that is, in three perfect Persons (*prosopois*)" (Ep. Syn. Constantinopolitanae, AD 382).

Continuing: "While the three Divine Persons differ from one another precisely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they are nevertheless conjoined in all their distinctiveness, for so the entire and undivided Godhead resides in each person and each Person dwells in or inheres in the Other: so that the whole of one Person is imaged in the whole of the other. In the terms used by Athanasius, "There is only one Form (*eidos*) of Godhead" (Athanasius, Sy syn. 52; Con. Ar. 3:16). In fact for Basil and Athanasius it is in the image of the Son that we see the form and face of the Father![10]

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[8]TCT 125-127; PL 13, 358-361.
[9] NPNF, 2 9:9
[10] Basil, Ep., 28.8 and Athanasius, Con. Ar., 2:18, 22; 3.3

The Son and Spirit each have their distinguished yet undivided authority along with Father. There may be an order to it, but the order cannot be construed as essentially asynchronous, uncoordinated, uncooperative, oppositional. If there is something in the Son's sonship that is reflected in his earthly obedience according to his humanity it would seem to point to an eternal humility in God in which none of the divine Persons insist on their own independence but cooperatively receive from the other what they cannot give themselves, and give the other what the other cannot have independently. The earthly obedience mirrors the humility of God in that the Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father. Glorifying one's self is really not glorious. We should remember that both biblically and theologically the Son shows us the Father, not merely or even primarily himself. The humility of the Son shows us the humility of the Father. So the Agreed Statement declares: "Thus the Son reveals the Father as his complete image, and the Spirit does the same to the Son. The Father is revealed through the Son in the Holy Spirit, and it is in the Spirit and through the Son that we come to the Father. Each and all reveal the whole Godhead, and thus none can be regarded as being partial in any way as compared with the other two: each Person is 'whole God' and the 'whole God' is in each Person."

Thesis 4. A critical appropriation rules out any internal conflict or division or opposition of wills, whether before, during or after the Incarnate life of the Son on earth. This thesis is, of course, entailed by all that has been said above. Since the Persons cannot be differentiated by role, action, or attribute, the unity of will would necessarily follow. The Persons share one divine undivided will.

Quoting again from the Council of Rome: "If anyone denies that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have one divinity, authority, majesty, power one glory, dominion, one kingdom and *one will* and truth: he is a heretic" (Tome of Damasus 1, 3, 10, 16-24).

And from the Liturgical Homily of Narsai: "[There is] one lordship, one authority, *one will* unchangeable...One Divinity: *three hypostases...one will*, one glory, one lordship."

The Agreed Statement quotes Athanasius: "there is a Trinity ... indivisible in nature*, one in activity*. The Father *does all things* through the Word in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved and thus One God is preached in the church, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:16) 'over all' as Father, as beginning and fountain: 'through all' through the Word; but 'in all' in the Holy Spirit" (Ad Ser. 1:28).

There can be no opposition of willing between the divine Persons for claiming such is to tear asunder and deny the unity of the Trinity. Whatever the obedience of the Son means, it cannot presuppose a disjunction of the wills between the Persons of the Father and the Son. God would then be opposed to God and a division would be contemplated in the very divine life. A differentiation of wills is ruled out in the doctrine of the Trinity along with a differentiation of roles, functions or attributes. Construing the differences along the lines of differing wills denies the oneness of God and the divinity of the Three Persons.

So then, what does constitute the eternal difference of persons in the Trinity? What can possibly be left? That brings us to our fifth thesis.

Thesis 5. The entire difference between the Trinitarian persons is constituted without remainder by the differences of the Persons themselves and their unique eternal intra-Trinitarian relations.

So Gregory Nazianzen says: "All that the Father has the Son has also; except the being Unbegotten; and all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except the Generation" (Gregory Nazianzen. Oration 41.9).[11]

"This is what the crying of 'Holy' three times means: but that of 'Lord' makes known that the nature of the Deity is one. Holy is the Father, who has the property of fatherhood, and is the cause and begetter, and not the begotten. Holy is the Son, who has the property of generation, who from the Father is begotten eternally without beginning. Holy is the Spirit, who has the property of procession, who proceeds from the Father, and is beyond (all) times. With these (words) all the Church cries out and returns to silence" (Anonymous, Liturgical Homily (17A) of Narsai).[12]

"Three hypostases the Church learned from our Savior—Father and Son and Holy Spirit—one Divinity: three hypostases, of which none is prior to or later than another, and there *is no distinction, save only as to the properties—fatherhood, and generation, and procession*—one will, one glory, one lordship: a mystery which is altogether hidden and concealed and covered over away from all. Even the watchers are too feeble to examine the secrets that are here" (Anonymous, Liturgical Homily (17A) of Narsai).[13]

Gregory of Nyssa has put it directly: "[We] believe except for the distinction of order and person, *no variation in any point is to be apprehended*. We assert that while [the Spirit's] place is counted third in mere sequence after the Father and Son, third in the order of the transmission*, in all other respects* we acknowledge his inseparable union with them: in nature, in honor, in godhead, glory, majesty, almighty power, and in all devout belief" (Gregory of Nyssa, On the Holy Spirit 2, 6-7, 14).[14]

The Athanasian Creed lays out the sole differentiation in the Trinity: "And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity: neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of Son and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit if of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created nor begotten, but proceeding."

The Agreed Statement affirms, along with Gregory the Theologian, that the fact that the Trinitarian formulae found in the New Testament do not follow an invariant ordering of the Persons indicates that "the order does not detract from full equality between the three Divine Persons" (Gregory the Theologian, Orations 36.15). *All that the Father is the Son is, apart from*

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[11] NPNF 2 7:382
[12] "The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai" in J. Armitage Robinson, *Texts and Studies,* Vol. 8 (Cambridge, 1916), 12-13.
[13] "The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai" in J. Armitage Robinson, *Texts and Studies,* Vol. 8 (Cambridge, 1916), 12-13.
[14]NPNF 2 5:315-20; PG 45:1304-1317.

"Fatherhood," and likewise all that the Son is the Spirit, is apart from "Sonship." Thus the order inherent in the Trinitarian relations is grounded on the fact that the Son is begotten of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father.

So the doctrine of the Trinity establishes that nothing (not roles or functions, not attributes of power or authority, not willing) distinguishes the Persons except their own personhood and the inherent relations intrinsic to them. Fatherhood, Sonship and Spirithood; Begetter, Begotten and Spiration or Procession: these are all that distinguish the Persons. Any other distinguishing factor made intrinsic or necessary to differentiate the Persons is regarded by all these witnesses as a dissolution of the unity of God and of the divinity of the Persons.

The Father is the Father not the Son, the Son is the Son not the Father or the Spirit. And so they each uniquely relate to one another. The Persons in relation are what distinguish the Three. So the difference and ordering of the Persons and relations cannot be regarded as an ordering of role, function, power or authority or will. The order is a structure of unique relationships among the Triune persons. That is, the internal Triune order is solely and simply that the Father is always the Father and never the Son, and the Son is always the Son and never the Father or Spirit.

So the Agreed Statement pronounces: "In the New Testament witness to God's Revelation 'the Father,' 'the Son,' and 'the Holy Spirit' are the unique and proper names denoting three distinct Persons or real Hypostases which are neither exchangeable nor interchangeable while nevertheless the same divine Being. There is one Person of the Father who is always the Father, distinct from the Son and the Spirit: and there is another Person of the Son who is always the Son, distinct from the Father and the Spirit; and another person of the Holy Spirit who is always the Spirit distinct from the Father and the Son." The nature of their own personhood and relations distinguished them eternally. That is the sole and complete nature of the order of the Persons in the Trinitarian life.

On Derivation. Now what about the problem of the notion of the derivation of the Son and the Spirit from the Father, a phrasing that was used among the Cappadocians and was and is common throughout the Eastern Church? How does that fit in? In their minds the unity of God resided in the Father and so the Father was first and properly divine while the Son was begotten of him, and so had an equal but yet derived divinity. But, it is very important to recognize that one of the Cappadocians, Gregory Nazianzen, had strong reservations about the notion of derivation especially when is was spoken of as a matter of causation or origination (Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on Holy Baptism, 40.41, 43; 43.30 NPNF 360-377). Understood this way, he says, would communicate the inferiority of the Son and would necessarily suggest a division in the nature of God the Son being less in substance/essence. The Fatherhood of God and the begetting of the Son, Gregory argued, must not taken in this way despite what the terms used clearly suggested. He himself did not, however, suggest an alternative understanding.

It should be noted that Athanasius also had serious reservations about construing the relations along the line of derivation as origination and causation from the Father. Although he agreed on almost every other point with the Cappadocians he did not regard merely qualifying the notion of derivation as sufficient. Rather he saw that the unity of God should not be found in the Person of the Father. Rather he promulgated the view that the unity of God resided in the Triunity. The coinherent relations of the Father, Son and Spirit constituted the unity itself. This was further

explicated by his saying that the whole of divinity was present in each person since each person was present in the others. Each Person was wholly and fully God. The terms used were that each person was *enousia* or *enhypostasis*, each had being in the other. Later, for instance in Calvin, this idea was strongly affirmed and captured by the notion that each person was *autotheos*, God in and of himself.

The understanding of the unity of God not being located in the Father (or any other person of the Trinity) is taken up and given central and controlling emphasis in the later Athanasian Creed, which although not written directly by him nevertheless captured the essence and distinctive contribution of his Trinitarian theology. "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity ... so that in all things aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped." The phrasing has a specific technical sense that locates the oneness or unity of God within the persons in relationship. God is one because of the unique Triune relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit which constitute both the unity of God and the difference of the Persons. There were at least two other notable theologians about the same time who followed Athanasius in this correction to the Cappadocian understanding: Didymus the Blind and Epiphanius.

However, while Athanasius, Didymus and Epiphanius avoided speaking of the Monarchy of God in the Father alone, as the source of the Son, they did not break with Cappadocian thinking at all points. In fact they were emphasizing another strong and important strand of their understanding of the Trinitarian relations, namely, the coinherence of the Trinitarian persons. The Three Persons were said, by the Cappadocians themselves, to co-indwell or co-exist in one another They took their clue from the NT, especially the Gospel of John, where we hear that the Father is "in" the Son and the Son "in" the Father. This understanding of the mutual indwelling of the Persons in divine communion came to be enshrined in the notion of *perichoresis*, which means a containing or enveloping or even making room for one another (often mistakenly identified with the wrong Greek root and translated as "dancing around with one another").

Now the Reformers, notably Calvin, grasped the significance of the mutual coinherence of the Persons for the unity of the Godhead. And more recently in the "Agreed Statement on the Trinity" (1991)[15] the Orthodox and Reformed representatives affirmed that there was a tension in the Cappadocian formulations of the unity of the Trinity and that Gregory Nazianzen, Athanasius, Didymus and Epiphanius were right and also in alignment with Calvin and Reformed thinking. It was determined that the tension between the Cappadocian notion of coinherence of the Persons and locating the monarchy of God in the Father must give way to truth that the Unity of God resided in the Trinitarian relations of the coinherent persons, not solely in the Person of the Father. So the Son does not receive his divinity from the Father, but has divinity by being one of the Triune Persons in coinherent relations with the Father and the Spirit. What the Son receives from the Father is not the divinity of his being, but the relationship that confirms his distinction and difference of sonship. So the Agreed Statement announces "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are perfectly and completely consubstantial in their mutual indwelling of one another and in their containing (*perichoresis*) of one another. ... Since there is only one Trinity in Unity and one Unity in Trinity, there is only one indivisible Godhead and only one Arche or Monarchia. As such, however, Gregory the Theologian reminds us, 'It is a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person' (Or 29.2). 'The Godhead is one in Three and the Three are One, in whom all the godhead is, or to

[15] http://warc.ch/dt/er11/13.html (accessed November 10, 2006).

be more precise, who are the Godhead' (Or. 39.11). Each person is God when considered in himself; as the Father, so the Son , and the Son, so the Holy Spirit: the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because consubstantial; one God because of the Monarchy" (Or. 40.41) Quoting Epiphanius: "In proclaiming the divine Monarchia we do not err, but confess the Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, One Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Haer. 62.3) The Agreed Statement continues: "The Holy Trinity remains invariable, known in one godhead and one Monarch, but in which Each of the three Divine Persons indwells and is indwelt by the Others." And quoting Hilary declares: "They reciprocally contain One Another, so that One permanently envelopes, and is permanently enveloped by the Other whom he yet envelopes" (De Trin. 3.1). Specifically correcting the notion of derivation as cause or origin the Agreed Statement confesses: "The three Divine Persons are also conjoined through their special relations. Thus the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and abides in the Son, in eneffable ways that are beyond all time (achronos), beyond all origin (*anarchos*), and beyond all cause (*anaitios*). The generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit are unknowable mysteries which cannot be explained by recourse to human or creaturely images....They indicate distinctions in relations not partitions or divisions." And quoting Didymus, the Agreed Statement continues, "The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are thus to be heard and known, worshipped and glorified 'as one Person (*prosopon*)'" (De Trin. 2.36).

Thus a critical appropriation of the various formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity leads, faithfully and truly I believe, to this most recent ecumenical statement where the tension present in the classical Cappadocian formula is finally resolved with full integrity by letting go of an improper and potentially misleading understanding of the Triune persons which attempts to locate the unity and divinity in the person of the Father with the result that the Son and Spirit have said to have a derived divinity. With this Agreed Statement the last loophole of any subordinationism or modalism in the doctrine of the Trinity has been finally eliminated. Given this trajectory of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, we should no longer be tempted to exploit today that lacuna found the some of early church's formulations. We ought to let the Agreed Statement be our faithful guide in this matter.

We now come to our last thesis. It is really a corollary of our previous thesis and substantiated by the identical theological formulations. A critical appropriation of the doctrine of the Trinity requires we affirm that:

6. The Trinitarian Persons, distinguished solely by their unique coinherent relations, are eternally non-interchangeable.

This is to say that the Persons are eternally identical to themselves (*autotheos*) and that they have their being in their respective unique eternal relationships with one another (*enousia*). There was never a time even in the divine Life when the Father is not or is not the Father or is not the Father of the Son. There was never a time when the Son is not or is not the Son, or is not the Son by virtue of being the Son of the Father. There is never a time when the Spirit is not, or is not the Spirit and or is not the Spirit by virtue of Proceeding from the Father through the Son. God would not be God and God would not be one, were God not Eternally Triune as Father, Son and Spirit.

To quote the Agreed Statement again, according to the New Testament revelation "'the Father', 'the Son', and 'the Holy Spirit' are the unique and proper names denoting three distinct Persons or real Hypostases which are neither exchangeable nor interchangeable while nevertheless the same divine Being."

This means that the whole of what differentiates the Persons are their personal identities in relation to the other Persons. But the personal identities in relations do in fact eternally and essentially distinguish them so that they are in no way exchangeable or interchangeable. The persons in relations cannot be confused or rearranged or separated. Thus any attempt to establish and secure the unity of God by means of calling for interchangeability of persons in the same roles, functions, actions or willings actually erodes the basis for the actual and real basis for the abiding difference of the Persons by locating the unity in that which is not essential to the persons, namely in the roles, functions, willings or a differentiated set of divine attributes. It leads to the heresy of modalism. Neither the unity nor the differences can be located in any differences that are not essential to the Persons.

Implications for Being Gendered

What then are the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for relations of men and women? We have already noted the more obvious answer that as human beings, differentiated as men and women, we are to bear witness to the holy love of God in Jesus Christ. But the more pointed problem is just how does the difference of gender figure in that pattern of imaging God's kind of love for us in Jesus Christ? What difference does the difference make?

I think we are biblically and theologically warranted to draw an analogy of this sort: The divinity of God is one and can be essentially differentiated according to the Triune Persons. This can be analogically compared to the unity of human being that can be essentially differentiated into male and female. As divine is to three persons, human is to male and female. So the purpose of being gendered is to mirror in our relationships something of the Trinitarian relationships.

Now of course this is an analogy: how the persons are related within divinity amounts to a unity of being, whereas the relations of men and women do not amount to the same kind of unity of being. But if, as stated before, we are called to trace out the analogy of relations, but not an analogy of being with God, then we are not looking to secure an ontology of the way things are, but to discover an ethic of how things ought to be among men and women in their relationships. But pursuit of the question of why we're gender beings need not exceed this boundary.

Following the pattern of our Trinitarian discussion above we can draw out the following ethical implications for right relationships. First in the negative:

1. There should be no essential roles assigned to the genders. The normative pattern of loving relations that bears witness to the character of Divine love cannot and should not be established on the basis of roles. Roles are not the distinguishing factor in divine relations. Roles cannot be the distinguishing factor in the relations of men and women. Beginning with the question, What roles should men and women take? starts us in the wrong place. The meaning of gender for the purpose of love is not determined either by establishing distinguished roles or by securing role interchangeability. Roles are not essential for differentiating men and women.

Certainly there may be implications for any roles that we may happen to play, but one of them will not be that gender distinctions either require distinct roles or the interchangeability of roles. The Father-Son relationship is indeterminate for roles. Recall that regardless of roles what is determinate in the Triune relations is that the Father is and remains the Father of the Son and the Son remains the Son of the Father and that they are not interchangeable no matter what roles they play. Roles are extrinsic and non-essential to either divinity or humanity and making them essential de-divinizes and divides the Persons in God and depersonalizes and dehumanizes men and women. Gender is its own unique kind of human difference and cannot be reduced to sociological or psychological categories any more that Father and Son could be so reduced. Men and women must not submit their personal identities to roles. Roles ought to serve persons, not persons roles. Gender distinction does not require role distinction. It requires the personal recognition of human beings as being men and women, men or women, non-interchangeably. Gender itself differentiates humanity. Woman is everything the man is except man, and man is everything the woman is, except woman.

2. *There ought to be no essential functions assigned to men and women.* The differing operations of God and classes of tasks among humans do not determine the essential differences. Persons are to use functions, persons are not to serve or find their identity in functions. Doing so depersonalizes and dehumanizes persons. In this regard potential childbearing ought not to be considered a biological function, but a personal differentiating aspect of being female. Being a mother or a father is not a role or a function but a differentiating aspect of one's being in relationship. One is a mother or a father in relationship to a child. They do not just function as father or mother; these are not roles. Parenting becomes essential to human being in differentiated ways between men and women. This is also true of what it means to be a child. All persons are in their beings children and being a child cannot be reduced to a functional description without doing damage to the child and to the relationship. Some children become husbands and wives, but those are not roles, but aspects of their being in relationship. And some husbands and wives become parents of children and that relationship is one of being in relationship not role or function. Being a carpenter, a student, a baseball player, a scholar, a librarian are functions and roles. They are not aspects of our being in relationship essential to humanity especially as male and female. One can be human without being any of these things. One cannot be a human without being male or female. As function does not differentiate essentially the divine persons, so they must not be used to differentiate human persons.

3. *There ought to be no conflict of wills.* In the Trinity there is no opposition of willing among the Persons, so to there ought not be an assumed a necessary opposition of willing in the relationships of men and women, especially within the covenant of marriage. Assuming that the relationships of men and women, necessarily, intrinsically and eternally involve the conflict or competition of wills falls short of God's calling to men and women and of our ultimate hope. Of course there will be in this fallen world conflict. But seeking a solution to this problem short of a harmonization of the wills (reconciliation) cannot mirror the unity and difference of the Triune relations.

Beginning with the fallen human situation of conflict between men and women or between human fathers and sons and then understanding the divine relations in those terms is, strictly speaking, not theology but as Athanasius called it, mythology. Interpreting the Triune relations in terms of human obedience, submission or even hierarchy is thinking of God as if God could be understood within creaturely terms. And whatever the earthly obedience of the Son means, it cannot mean, so

far as we are referring to the intra-Trinitarian Persons,[16] an opposition of wills in which one Person's will takes precedence over the other as might occur in the relationship of a creature to God. Thinking of the eternal relations in God in terms of the creaturely opposition of wills amounts to a subordinationism since first the unity of God would be disjoined and second the Son of God would have been viewed as obeying God as if a creature within the Triune relations. The difference of the Father and Son is not predicated on the distinction/opposition of wills any more than a distinction of natures.

In the Creeds the essence of Father-Son relationship is not obedience but rather is understood in terms of begetting. The overt intent of this analogy was to emphasize not their difference, but their shared, exact same nature. Begetting is placed in direct contrast to God's making or willing. That which is begotten is of the identical (*homoousios*) nature to the begetter. That which is willed or made, namely creation, is of an entirely different nature (*heteroousios*) in relationship to God, its Maker. Jesus is begotten not made. His eternal relationship with the Father cannot be compared with the relationship of a creature to God.

If we begin with the Trinitarian relations and let them shed light on human relations then we would have to say that the Son's will is always and voluntarily coordinated with the Father's and the Father's with the Son's. Neither the Father nor the Son wills his own independent will. They do not will their own autonomy but only will cooperatively. They will the correspondence of their wills and acts because they are one in being but distinct in person. The Persons subordinate their wills to the common willing. If this is the model for men and women, then in marriage especially each ought to will a common will and trust that by the grace of God they can find such when obscured. This means that in marriage neither men nor women ought to seek independence or autonomy, but rather interdependence where they find a common willing that reflects the harmony of the willing of the Father and the Son as One.

4. There ought to be no division of powers or authority. As the attributes of divinity cannot be properly divided and distributed among the Triune Persons, so the attributes of humanity cannot be divided and distributed between men and women. Rather the differentiation of humanity in a way that is analogous to the Trinity calls both men and women to exercise their powers and joint authority together. The imaging of God cannot be done by men alone or by women alone, but only through the cooperative working of both in a coordinated fashion where each contributes from his or her own gendered "angle" to the one will and mission of God for humanity to be fruitful and bring blessing and caretaking to the whole of creation. This is especially poignant in the special gift of procreation. Procreation requires the exercise of joint power, each making his or her own contribution to new human life. As Paul says, neither is man without the woman nor woman without the man. Furthermore, all relationships that involve gender differences would benefit from following this pattern in a general way. The ministry of the Body of Christ calls for men and women ministering as men and women together in unity maintaining the distinction of gender as gender, but does not require a distinction of authority or power.

[16] We are leaving behind the matter of the incarnate Son's obedience in his humanity to the Father. Suffice it to say that orthodox theology has affirmed two wills in Christ, each appropriate to his two natures and that it was the human fallen will that needed to be brought into the alignment of the divine coordinated wills of the Father and the Son.

A Coinherence of men and women in relationship.

Now parallel to the last two positive Trinitarian theses which affirm the unity, difference and non-interchangeability of the Persons, we can sum up by saying that men and women ought to mirror the divine coinherence of Unity in Trinity in their own relationships. *Analogically the human coinherence of men and women in relations is honored when gender itself is regarded as the sole essential and irreducible differentiation of humanity and so any reductionism of gender differences to sociological, psychological or functional distinctions must be resisted. Otherwise the very foundation of the difference of gendered persons will be eroded.*

The following six brief positive implications state how we might live out God's design for our being gendered beings.

1. We honor the difference of gender when we neither confuse nor separate the genders. Being male and female indicates an asymmetry or a polarity essential to humanity that goes deeper than our biological natures. The eternal existence of Father and Son seems to bear witness that there never will be a time when we are not in some way male or female (although apparently without marriage). The unity yet gender differentiation of humanity may very well be an eternal unity and differentiation mirroring in a creaturely way the eternal Trinity. Humanity is a unity in gendered polarity. As Father means Father of the Son and Son means Son of the Father so that they have their being by being in relationship so men and women have their human being by being in relationship with each other. Intergender relationship is essential to humanity. Men cannot discover what true masculinity is except in right relationship with women and vice versa. Masculine and feminine only have their meaning and spiritual significance over and against and in right loving relationship with each other. The unity of humanity does not extinguish the difference, the difference does not threaten the unity. The unity of humanity resides to some extent in the coinherence of the genders: in unity and differentiation, neither confused nor separated.

2. In our human relations we affirm the difference when we rejoice in the good gift of our being created male or female. We uphold the difference when we put away envy or jealousy of the other gender. Our relationships should be cooperative, correlative, corresponding to one another in joy. In whatever roles we are serving there should be no attempts at interchangeability. Masculine and Feminine are not interchangeable parts any more that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interchangeable parts. The coinherence of male and female means that each must freely contribute through self-revelation and self-giving of his or her own unique person in freedom and gladness.

3. We acknowledge the difference when we recognize that interchangeability is a false test of equal dignity, honor, humanity. Men should not feel a need to impersonate women, nor women men whether in identical roles or not. If there is a defect in masculinity it is not that it needs to have an inner balance with a feminine side or vice versa. The healing of a wounded masculinity calls for becoming more masculine as God intends, not become something other than it is, feminine. The same would be true for women. The differentiation of humanity is a created creaturely good, irreducible to any other good, and since essential to our humanity likely to be an eternal blessing. We receive this blessing as we live in hope of it in our relationships today.[17]

[17] Of course this theologically informed grasp of the meaning of gender is the foundation for why homosexual relations cannot represent healthy humanity, but uncovers a broken humanity that needs the grace and healing.

4. In right relationship there should be no competition that pits men and women against each other as men and women. Social arrangements, activities or organizational structures should avoid ordering men and women along these lines. Such ordering tempts us to view the sexes as being in tension and in confrontation with each other, such that the relationship is construed as win-lose situation in which the stronger prevails, and independence or perhaps autonomy is the idea or the real. Rather, as a mirror of the Triune coinherence, we ought to order our relationships in a cooperative way. Following the pattern of reciprocal exchange in John 17 men and women should share each in their own way in the common mission and ministry of God rather than a conflict of powers and authorities. Through the reciprocal exchange of giving and receiving of all things the loving purposes of God are manifested in the relationship of men and women, husbands and wives. Submission is humble willing cooperation.

5. We should recognized that in such exchanges of giving and receiving there will likely be a sense of equal partnership, but also a certain sense of inequality too. What one gives as male will not be exactly what one receives from the female. There is an ineradicable asymmetry to the exchange because there is an abiding and essential differentiation. Attempts to quantify, standardize, functionalize or structure equal exchanges of men and women in the common calling of God will not overcome the sense of some incommensurability within the relationships. Submission must be seen in terms of a great humility that calls for receiving from the other what you cannot independently give yourself. The Father gives the gift of Sonship to the Son and the Son receives it. In return, the Son recognizes and affirms the Fatherhood of the Father and the Father receives that glory. We so often want to make things even by paying back in kind. But the asymmetry of humanity renders futile attempts to gauge in formal or legal ways the equality of an exchange. The genders are not reducible to each other and neither are their gifts to one another.

6. Finally, what if such theological reflection on the meaning of our being gendered does not account for all of the differences God has purposely built into humanity? What if there are certain kinds of unequal differences so far unaccounted for which might suggest perhaps something more hierarchical? I think the Trinitarian relations have a powerful relevance even if [mis]construed in this way. Returning to the biblical revelation of the Triune relations, especially as depicted in the Gospel of John and chapter 17, how do we see the differences of the persons used in relation to each other? I think it is clear. The Father uses all his difference as Father to include, enable, empower, and raise the Son up to his own glory so that all that is the Father's is the Son's and all that is the Son's is the Father's. The Father uses his unique Personhood to share with the Son his name, work, words, mission, people and glory in unity/oneness, mutual indwelling and coinherence. We so often use our differences of whatever sorts to protect ourselves, insure our own independence, or even take advantage of the other. We are tempted to lord it over others, especially those who are different. But we see none of this at all in the Triune economy. All the power and authority of the differences in the Trinity are in the end used to coinherently glorify the other. In the Son's case it involves Father's raising the Son up to share in every element of the Father's authority, mission and accomplishment. We could say that in the history of the interrelations in the Trinity, including the Incarnate life of the Son, the Father used all his fatherliness to eliminate all the difference, except of course that of being the Father in relation to the Son and Spirit. Analogously, then if there are differences between men and women, even if somehow of an unequal sort, then men should use those differences to bless and glorify women so as to virtually eliminate those differences, except of course the glorious difference of being men

and women created to mirror in their own relationship the love in the Blessed Trinity. For that is why we're gendered beings.

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