

# ETERNAL FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATION IN THE WORK OF WAYNE GRUDEM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CONTEMPORARY ADVENTISM<sup>1</sup>

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Theological developments in regards to what is understood by many as the most foundational Christian doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity, seem to have always been with us. Yet, in recent times, there has been somewhat of an emphasis on a trend within evangelical Christianity –including Adventism- that proposes than an *eternal functional subordination* (hereafter EFS)<sup>2</sup> exists among the members of the Trinity. One of EFS’ main contemporary voices is evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the primary

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a work in progress and part of a larger project. In this particular forum I will present a section that is mostly descriptive and deals with overarching theological concepts and ideas rather than with the Scriptural data underlying these. Yet, I believe that the descriptive task is an essential step in the process of understanding Wayne Grudem’s Eternal Functional Subordination as well as in understanding how Adventist thought relates to his views.

<sup>2</sup> This trend has received different names throughout the years, but will I consistently identify it as *eternal functional subordination (EFS)* as this is, in my opinion, the term more frequently used. I want to acknowledge that Grudem does not use the terminology EFS, and instead refers to *economic subordination* in referring to the same concept, but I will nevertheless utilize EFS in order to be more consistent with the broader usage of the concept in this discussion. As of late, a more recent terminology has surfaced as Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission (ERAS). Again, for the purposes of this paper I will retain the EFS terminology.

Additionally, I want to clarify that the terms “function” and “role” seem to be virtually interchangeable in the work of the authors featured in this paper, and therefore I will also use them interchangeably as I discuss their work in this research.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem is current Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, Arizona. For more information on Grudem see [www.waynegrudem.com](http://www.waynegrudem.com).

Grudem’s views certainly did not come in a vacuum. Without intending to take away from the complex historical background of EFS as well as the various proponents of this position, I would like to use Grudem’s work as a contemporary representative. Besides Grudem, the work of Bruce Ware seems to be quite influential in this line of thought. See particularly Bruce A. Ware and John Starke. *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), and Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationship, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005). For an excellent survey and historical background of the key thinkers, issues and controversies involved around EFS, see Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), as well as Bruce Ware, Keith Yandell, Tom McCall, Wayne Grudem, “Do relations of authority and submission exist eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?” (Trinity Debates: January 1, 2008,

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<http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/resource/do-relations-of-authority-and-submission-exist-eternally-among-the-persons-of-the-godhead/>, accessed March 12, 2014).

Other helpful references for understanding this trend in contemporary discussion are the following: Gilbert Bilezikian, "Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/1 (1997): 58; Chung-Hyun Baik, *The Holy Trinity – God for God and God for Us: Seven positions on the Immanent-Economic Trinity Relation in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011); Gilles O. P. Emery and Matthew Levering, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kevin Giles. "The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordinationism" (*Evangelical Review of Theology* (2004) 28:3, 270-284); Giles, "The Evangelical Theological Society And The Doctrine Of The Trinity" (*Evangelical Quarterly* (2008) 80.4, 323–338); Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006); Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A new path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006); Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of more than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishers, 2006); Grudem, ed. *Biblical Foundations For Manhood And Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); Grudem, *Women In the Church: A Biblical Study On The Role Of Women In The Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987); Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Denis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds. *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), particularly see chapter 2: "Equal in Essence, Different in Roles" by Bruce A. Ware, chapter 10: "Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father" by Wayne Grudem, chapter 11: "The Trinity Without Tiers" by Kevin Giles, and chapter 16: "The Inconceivability of Subordination Within a Simple God" by Dennis W. Jowers.; Roderick T. Leupp, *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology: Themes, Patterns & Explorations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Giulio Mapero, and Robert J. Woźniak, eds. *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012); Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Thomas McCall. "Theologians, Philosophers, and the Doctrine of the Trinity" in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); McCall, *Which Trinity? Which Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), see specifically chapter seven.; Peter C. Phan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, gen eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005); John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood And Womanhood: A Response To Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991); Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); Ben Witherington III, "The Eternal Subordination Of Christ And Of Women" (Wednesday, March 22, 2006, <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2006/03/eternal-subordination-of-christ-and-of.html>); Keith Yandell, "How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?" in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

focus of this research is to present the basic tenets of EFS as they are proposed by Grudem. Because Grudem’s EFS view has also marginally surfaced within Adventism, the secondary focus of this research is to briefly present how contemporary Adventist thinkers are relating to it. But let us first turn to Grudem.

### **Wayne Grudem’s Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS)<sup>4</sup>**

In a section of his well known *Systematic Theology* entitled “All Analogies Have Shortcomings,”<sup>5</sup> Grudem states that “Scripture nowhere uses any analogies to teach the doctrine of the Trinity,”<sup>6</sup> and that “no analogy adequately teaches about the Trinity”<sup>7</sup> since “all are misleading in significant ways.”<sup>8</sup> However, despite of these precautionary statements, Grudem seeks to understand the Trinity largely through the Father-Son analogy. He substantiates his venture partly by arguing that “in the Bible a person’s name is a description of his or her character” and that “likewise, the names of God in Scripture

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 240-241. Although he has written elsewhere on the topic, I will mainly focus on Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, since it is in this particular work that he has developed his view of EFS more at length. I consider Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* to be most beneficial to understand EFS also because it includes some chapters and sections where he particularly addresses his Trinitarian views in isolation from his views on gender roles, unlike most of his works. It is a book that has been widely used and distributed across evangelical communities. Apart from it, Grudem has mostly written about the topic in connection with gender roles and his views have been featured in multiple academic and non-academic forums as well as in social media. His most popular work in regards to gender roles is: *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). Other of his works that go along the same line are *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006); *Biblical Foundations For Manhood And Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002). Multiple other resources can be found on his webpage [www.waynegrudem.com](http://www.waynegrudem.com).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

are various descriptions of his character.”<sup>9</sup> As he sees it, “the closest we come to an analogy [for the Trinity] is found in the titles “Father” and “Son” themselves, titles that clearly speak of distinct persons and of the close relationship that exists between them in a human family.”<sup>10</sup> Grudem clearly acknowledges the distinction of persons as well as the relational closeness portrayed by the Father-Son analogy. And yet, Grudem goes on to argue that this analogy predominantly refers to distinctions in roles of authority and subordination.

### *Distinctions in Roles of Authority and Subordination*

Grudem emphatically asserts that the three persons of the Trinity are fully divine and share all the attributes of God.<sup>11</sup> And yet he believes that in order for the Trinity to be composed of three legitimate individual persons, the following question needs to be asked: “what are then the distinctions between the persons?”<sup>12</sup> In other words, for the Trinity to be three different persons, there needs to be at least one necessary

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 241. Yet, Grudem cautions “not to take any of these descriptions by itself and isolate it from its immediate context or from the rest of what Scripture says about God. . . . Each description of one of God’s attributes must be understood in the light of everything else that Scripture tells us about God. If we fail to remember this, we will inevitably understand God’s character wrongly.” Ibid., 241.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 248. Grudem distinguishes attributes from personal distinctions. For him, attributes are blended with God’s being, as they are “not . . . only characteristics of some part of God, but rather . . . characteristics of God himself and therefore characteristics of all of God.” Ibid., 178. Grudem clarifies that we “should not think that the personal distinctions are any kind of additional attributes added on to the being of God.” Ibid., 253. Thus, when it comes to identifying a necessary distinguishing element among the persons of the Trinity, he argues that “the only way it seems possible to do this is to say that the distinction between the persons is not a difference in “being” but a difference in “relationships.”” Ibid., 253. (See how he elaborates in regards to the “being” of God on Ibid., 252-255.) He justifies this by explaining that “*somehow* God’s being is so much greater than ours that within his one undivided being there can be an unfolding into interpersonal relationships, so that there can be three distinct persons.” Ibid., 253, emphasis mine. This seems to be why, according to Grudem, the differences of role do not touch upon the “being” or “essence” of God.

<sup>12</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 248. Grudem distinguishes between person and being. See Ibid., chapter 14, section 3, entitled “What Is the Relationship Between the Three Persons and the Being of God?”

distinguishing element.<sup>13</sup> In identifying this necessary distinction, Grudem makes reference to the “different functions” of each person “both in creation and redemption.”<sup>14</sup>

In this regard he writes:

The only difference between them is the way they relate to each other and to the creation. The unique quality of the Father is the way he *relates as Father* to the Son and Holy Spirit. The unique quality of the Son is the way he *relates as Son*. And the unique quality of the Holy Spirit is the way he *relates as Spirit*.<sup>15</sup>

Further on, the way that the members of the Trinity relate to each other, according to Grudem, has to do with certain roles that mark their relations of authority and subordination. As he see it, God the Father has the function or role to “plan, and direct

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<sup>13</sup> Philosopher of religion Keith Yandell (Affiliate Professor of Philosophy at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.) has argued that Grudem’s eternal functional subordination presupposes the philosophical concept known as *indiscernibility of identicals*, which states that things that exactly resemble one another cannot be distinct. The complete definition of the term as it appears in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* reads as follows: The Identity of Indiscernibles “is a principle of analytic ontology first explicitly formulated by Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Section 9 (Loemker 1969: 308). It states that no two distinct things exactly resemble each other. This is often referred to as ‘Leibniz’s Law’ and is typically understood to mean that no two objects have exactly the same properties. The Identity of Indiscernibles is of interest because it raises questions about the factors which individuate qualitatively identical objects. Recent work on the interpretation of quantum mechanics suggests that the principle fails in the quantum domain (see French 2006).” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-indiscernible/>) Other sources: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/59094-leibniz-s-principle-of-identity-of-indiscernibles/>, accessed March 25, 2016). See also Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz’s Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).) On a very informative debate at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) entitled “Do relations of authority and submission exist eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?” (Trinity Debates: January 1, 2008), Yandell states that in embracing this concept Grudem is departing from a philosophical assumption and imposing it on the biblical data. Yandell strongly questions “the assumption that Christian doctrine entails that particular reading of the indiscernibility of identicals” while candidly stating: “I simply don’t think that any of the biblical authors had foresight and had read the *Discourse on Metaphysics*.” Yandell, Trinity Debates: January 1, 2008. (Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics* is where he expounds the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. See, for example, G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 9th edition.) Further on, Yandell argues that the persons of the Trinity don’t have to be necessarily different in roles (functions) or any other attribute in order to be distinguished as different persons, since “the fundamental difference could be in the bearers of the properties even if the bearers are identical in properties.” Yandell, Trinity Debates: January 1, 2008. He also argues that, given the uniqueness of God, we need a concept different than the Greek philosophy concept of substance in order to define Him. *Ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 248. He connects these to the “economy of the Trinity.” *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

and send the Son and the Holy Spirit,”<sup>16</sup> and the Son has “the role of obeying, going as the Father sends, and revealing God to us.”<sup>17</sup> In short, the Father has “the role of commanding” and the son “the role of obeying.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, for Grudem, the Father-Son analogy speaks of roles which portray relations of authority and subordination among these divine beings.

It is worth clarifying at this point that although Grudem’s main focus seems to be the Father-Son analogy, he does to an extent feature the role of the Holy Spirit. About the Holy Spirit he writes:

We may say that the role of the Father in creation and redemption has been to plan and direct and send the Son and Holy Spirit . . . . The father directs and has authority over the son, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the directives of both the Father and the Son.<sup>19</sup>

In this Grudem identifies the role of the Holy Spirit by analogy and not by direct reference to specific Bible texts, unlike the cases of the Father and Son.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, he seems to be comfortable with this interpretive procedure, concluding that in their roles “the Father eternally is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 246. Grudem states the following: “if the Son together with the Father sends the Spirit into the world, *by analogy* it would seem appropriate to say that this reflects eternal ordering of their relationships. This is not something that we can clearly insist on based on any specific verse, but much of our understanding of the eternal relationships among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes by analogy from what Scripture tells us about the way they relate to the creation in time. Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 214.

Having argued for these Trinitarian roles, Grudem goes on to distinguish them from what he identifies as the ontological Trinity.

### *Role-Being Dichotomy*

Grudem goes on to argue that while “the Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father,” they are still “subordinate in their roles”<sup>22</sup> to the Father. The distinction of these concepts – “equal in deity” and “subordinate in roles” - calls for clarification. On one hand, Grudem identifies the Trinity’s divine being, nature or essence, as “ontological equality.”<sup>23</sup> Thus he states, “it may be said that there are no differences in deity, attributes, or essential nature between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God and has all the attributes of God.”<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Grudem identifies the differences in roles separately from what he regards as the ontological Trinity.<sup>25</sup> Basically, for Grudem, the members of the Trinity have “ontological equality but economic subordination.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, they are “equal in being but subordinate in

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<sup>22</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 251. For Grudem, “the word ontological means ‘being.’” Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 251. Grudem places the roles under the “economic subordination” of the Trinity.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. He adds: “Both parts of this phrase are necessary to a true doctrine of the Trinity: If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. For example, if the “Son” is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally “Father” and the Son is not eternally “Son.” This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed . . . This is why the idea of eternal equality in being but subordination in role has been essential to the church’s doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene Creed, which said that the Son was “begotten of the Father before all ages” and that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” Surprisingly, some recent evangelical writings have denied an eternal subordination in role among the members of the Trinity, but it has clearly been part of the church’s doctrine of the Trinity (in Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox expressions), at least since Nicea (A.D. 325).” Ibid., 251.

role.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the differences that Grudem attributes to the members of the Trinity are placed at the level of divine roles (functions), and not, according to him, at the level of divine being (ontology).

A further development in Grudem’s view is his understanding of these Trinitarian roles of authority and subordination to be *eternal*. This indeed could be considered the core of Grudem’s EFS view.<sup>28</sup>

### *Eternal Roles of Authority and Subordination*

In a significant addition to his Trinitarian role subordination view, Grudem states that “differences in role are not temporary”<sup>29</sup> but these are indeed “the different ways the three persons act as they relate to the world and . . . to each other for all eternity.”<sup>30</sup> He explains this in more detail as follows:

If we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally “Father” and the Son is not eternally “Son.” This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> This is precisely the core debatable point when it comes to EFS discussions. Almost all will agree that there is a temporary subordination of the Son in regards to the fulfilling of the plan of salvation, but not everyone would agree that the subordination is indeed eternal.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 251. He adds: “But why do the persons of the Trinity take these different roles in relating to creation? Was it accidental or arbitrary? Could God the Father have come instead of God the Son to die for our sins? Could the Holy Spirit have sent God the Father to die for our sins, and then sent God the Son to apply redemption to us? No, it does not seem that these things could have happened . . . These roles could not have been reversed or the Father would have ceased to be the Father and the Son would have ceased to be the Son. And by analogy from that relationship, we may conclude that the role of the Holy Spirit is similarly one that was appropriate to the relationship he had with the Father and the Son before the world was created.” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249)

Thus Grudem advocates EFS to be necessary in order for the very idea of the Trinity to be sustained, maintaining that the distinctions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit “are essential to the very nature of God himself, and they could not be otherwise.”<sup>32</sup>

A presupposition that Grudem recurs to in order to sustain EFS is “the immutability of God.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, he explicitly argues that eternal relationships of authority and submission within the Trinity can partly be concluded “from the unchangeableness of God.”<sup>34</sup> Grudem asserts that, since God is unchangeable, his hierarchy in authority cannot change in the past, present or future: “God cannot be other than he is, for he is unchanging.”<sup>35</sup> He further explains it thus:

Before the Son came to earth, and even before the world was created, for all eternity the Father has been the Father, the Son has been the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been the Holy Spirit. These relationships are eternal, not something that occurred only in time . . . . If God now exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then he has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

From this follows that, for Grudem, the relations of authority among the members of the Trinity are unchangeable, just as God is unchangeable. According to Grudem,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 250. He adds: “Therefore, the different functions that we see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit performing are simply outworkings of an eternal relationship between the three persons, one that has always existed and will exist for eternity. God has always existed as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See Ibid. A short but informative section on this topic can be found also in in Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With the Trinity?*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. See “f. The Importance of God’s Unchangeableness” Ibid.,168. He defines the term thus: “We can define the unchangeableness of God as follows: God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations. This attribute of God is also called God’s immutability.” Ibid.,163. Wayne Grudem discusses some other philosophical presuppositions in his *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 250.

some examples found in Scripture that describe this unchangeable relationships among the members of the Trinity “before the creation of the world”<sup>37</sup> are the Father’s “initiator act of choosing,”<sup>38</sup> the “foreknowledge of God the Father,”<sup>39</sup> and that the Father “gave his only Son” and “sent the Son into the world.” These references, Grudem states, “indicate that there was a Father-Son relationship before Christ came into the world”<sup>40</sup> and that “the Son did not become the Son when the Father sent him into the world.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, Grudem aims to show how the Father has the highest authority among the Trinity eternally.

As it was mentioned before, throughout his argumentation about EFS, Grudem continues to identify the eternal roles of authority and subordination as somehow separate from what he regards as the ontological Trinity. This dichotomy between roles and being (ontology) also features in Grudem’s linkage of the Trinity and the human family, a link that constitutes one of the trademarks of Grudem’s Trinitarian theology.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. He adds: “before the creation of the world, it speaks of the Father choosing us “in” the Son: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph. 1:3–4). The initiator act of choosing is attributed to God the Father, who regards us as united to Christ or “in Christ” before we ever existed. Similarly, of God the Father, it is said that “those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29): Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., This, he argues, is “in distinction from particular functions of the other two members of the Trinity (1 Peter 1:2 NASB; cf. 1:20). Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. He adds: “Rather, the great love of God is shown in the fact that the one who was always Father gave the one who was always his only Son: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . .” (John 3:16). But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). When Scripture speaks of creation, once again it speaks of the Father creating through the Son, indicating a relationship prior to when creation began (see John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; also Prov. 8:22–31). But nowhere does it say that the Son or Holy Spirit created through the Father. These passages again imply that there was a relationship of Father (as originator) and Son (as active agent) before creation, and that this relationship made it appropriate for the different persons of the Trinity to fulfill the roles they actually did fulfill.” Ibid.

## *The Trinity and The Human Family*

Interestingly, Grudem understands the eternal roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as analogous to what he considers to be the roles of the members of the human family. Following this analogous relationship, Grudem also emphasizes ontological equality but differences in roles among husbands and wives: “Just as the Father and Son in the Trinity are equal in deity and equal in importance but different in roles, so the husband and wife in marriage are equal in human personhood and equal in importance but different in roles.”<sup>42</sup>

Grudem’s parallel between the Trinity and the human family mainly addresses women and men’s authority and submission relations and pairs them with those of the Son and the Father respectively. That is, calling for wives (paired with the Son) to be submissive to their husband’s authority (paired with the Father).<sup>43</sup> Although briefly, Grudem also pairs the role of children in the human family with the submissive role of the Holy Spirit. This is how he explains the whole equation:

The husband’s role is parallel to that of God the Father and the wife’s role is parallel to that of God the Son. Moreover, just as Father and Son are equal in deity and importance and personhood, so the husband and wife are equal in humanity and importance and personhood. And, although it is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, the gift of children within marriage, coming from both the father and the mother, and subject to the authority of both father and mother, is analogous to the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son in the Trinity.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 207.

<sup>43</sup> Grudem argues that in marriage “we see, not a triunity as with God, but at least a remarkable unity of two persons . . . man and woman.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 257.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 257. He argues that the Father in the trinity is “after whom all human fatherhood is patterned.” *Ibid.*, 249. About the Holy Spirit, he also writes: “by analogy from that relationship [the Father and the Son’s], we may conclude that the role of the Holy Spirit is similarly one that was appropriate to the relationship he had with the Father and the Son before the world was created.” *Ibid.*, 249. On “personhood” see footnote 12 of this paper.

And that seems to be why Grudem confidently argues that a “parallel” of the human family with the Trinity remarkably proves “that it is possible to have equality in being but difference in roles.”<sup>45</sup>

*Response to Criticism on Subordinationism*

Lastly, in responding to criticism to his EFS views, Grudem has argued that it would be erroneous to call him a *subordinationist*.<sup>46</sup> Grudem continues to identify his view with orthodoxy and argues that “Subordinationism” refers to a heretical concept that entails “the Son being inferior or “subordinate” *in being* to God the Father.”<sup>47</sup> Appealing to his dichotomous view on eternal roles and divine being (ontology), he states that “the heresy of subordinationism . . . should be clearly distinguished from the orthodox doctrine that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father *in role or function*.”<sup>48</sup>

Having looked at Grudem’s EFS, let us briefly explore relationship of Adventism with this view.

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<sup>45</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 208. See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of more than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishers, 2006); Grudem, ed. *Biblical Foundations For Manhood And Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); Grudem, *Women In the Church: A Biblical Study On The Role Of Women In The Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987).

In Grudem’s works that touch upon gender issues Grudem expresses a general concern that feminist tendencies might affect what he understands as orthodox Christian theology. At the same time, I wonder if his identification of God the Father with male figures and God the Son with female figures could not be also unintentionally portraying Jesus as a feminine figure since it offers to the woman the “role” of Jesus himself. This might encourage some of the trends that he is concerned about.

<sup>46</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 243-245.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 244, emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote 27, emphasis mine.

## Adventist Relationship to Grudem's EFS<sup>49</sup>

Grudem's EFS view has incited plentiful discussion amid the evangelical world at large<sup>50</sup> -both in academic and non-academic circles, and Adventism has not been an exception. Although interaction with Grudem's work within Adventism has tended to focus on gender issues related to ordination to the pastoral ministry,<sup>51</sup> some Adventist

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<sup>49</sup> Because this is an ongoing discussion, what follows might not be a complete survey on the topic. Yet, I believe the sources that I will provide here are representative –at least at the moment- of the arguments involved in the discussion and therefore can be useful in showing the relationship of Adventist thinkers to Grudem's EFS views.

For a brief but informative survey on the topic of the Trinity within Adventism see Denis Fortin, "God, the Trinity, and Adventism: An Introduction to the Issues" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 4–10) and Merlin D. Burt, "History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 125–139). These articles do not include the latest trends that are discussed on this paper, but they are useful in providing a general guide in terms of historical background and some other relevant issues.

Both of these articles were originally part of the Adventist Theological Society 2006 "Trinity" Bible Symposium, in Collegedale, Tennessee. I encourage the reader to review the documents in order to get an idea of the issues that were being discussed back then. EFS does not seem to have been a major topic at the moment. There are, nevertheless, some isolated references that can somehow relate to the current discussion on EFS. For example (at the risk of advancing some of the conclusions of this section), Richard Davidson argues, based on insights found in Proverbs 8, that "it is not possible to posit either an eternal or an economic subordination within the Godhead before Christ's incarnation." See Richard M. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 33–54). Edwin Reynolds also discusses some ideas that relate to the present discussion on EFS such as the ontological equality and differences in roles of the members of the Trinity, with God the Father portrayed as the "figurehead," Reynolds does not explicitly present these as eternal in this article. See Reynolds, "The Trinity in the Book of Revelation" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 55–72).

Other than that, the rest of the articles that featured in this symposium are the following: Gerhard Pfandl, "The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Seventh-day Adventists" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 160–179); Pfandl, "The Trinity in Scripture" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 14/2 (Fall 2003): 80–94); Jerry Moon, "The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White's "Heavenly Trio" Compared to the Traditional Doctrine" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 140–20); E. M. Clouzet, "The Personhood of the Holy Spirit and Why It Matters" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 11–32); Woodrow W. Whidden, "Trinitarian Evidences in the Apocalypse" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 11/1-2 (2000): 248–260); Whidden II, "God Is Love—Trinitarian Love!" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 98–124); Norman R. Gulley, "Trinity in the Old Testament" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 (Spring 2006): 80–97); Gulley, "A One-sided Trinity in Theology: Its Continuing Impact" (*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16/1–2 (2005): 43–74).

<sup>50</sup> See footnote 3 of this paper.

<sup>51</sup> See 2013-14 GC Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) resources at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-tosc>. Examples of Adventist authors that sympathetically quote Grudem in terms of gender issues and distinction of ontology and roles, but not specifically connected to Trinitarian views are: Laurel Damsteegt, "Women of the Old Testament: Women of Influence" (*Theology*

thinkers have interacted more directly with his EFS views in respect to the doctrine of the Trinity in particular. In this regard, Adventist sympathies to EFS seem to be somewhat divided, with a minority of Adventist thinkers embracing either EFS or nuanced versions of it, and a majority of Adventists thinkers rejecting it.<sup>52</sup> That being said, I would like to look specifically –although brief and concisely- into what are the main statements or arguments of Adventist thinkers as they agree or disagree with EFS. I would like the reader to keep in mind that in Adventist discussions Grudem’s EFS views surface in both direct and indirect ways. Let us see this in more detail.

### *Embracing of EFS*

First let us survey some representative examples of Adventist thinkers who are sympathetic to EFS.

In “Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship in First Corinthians,”<sup>53</sup> Edwin Reynolds<sup>54</sup> states that it is “God the Father, from whom derives all properly constituted

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of Ordination Committee, July 2013) and Paul S. Ratsara and Daniel K. Bediako “Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3: Ontological Equality and Role Differentiation” (Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and Valley View University, Ghana respectively, Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 23, 2013). An earlier reference is Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture” in *Prove All Things: A Response To Women In Ministry* (Mercedes H. Dyer, ed., Adventists Affirm, 2000), as well as Bacchiocchi, *Women In the Church: A Biblical Study On The Role Of Women In The Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), which features a foreword by Grudem himself.

<sup>52</sup> To detail these statements will have to be the task of another research project. For now, my main basis for stating this is that official statements of beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church on the Trinity do not presently feature EFS in any prominent role nor in a favorable light. See, for example, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005). Thus, for the moment, I stand in affirming that EFS is not a majority view within Adventism.

<sup>53</sup> Edwin Reynolds “Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship in First Corinthians” (Theology of Ordination Committee, July, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Edwin Reynolds is religion professor at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee.

and delegated authority.”<sup>55</sup> He argues that relations of authority and submission are “characteristic of the role relationships between Christ and His Father that extend from eternity past to eternity future”<sup>56</sup> and that these are not “in conflict with full ontological equality.”<sup>57</sup> According to Reynolds, role relationships are not in conflict with ontological equality because the eternal headship of the Father and eternal submission of the Son are both “grounded in differences in function rather than in essence.”<sup>58</sup>

On his part, evangelist Stephen P. Bohr<sup>59</sup> offers a similar argument in “Issues Relating to the Ordination of Women with Special Emphasis on 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28”<sup>60</sup> In a section entitled “The Godhead Model”<sup>61</sup> Bohr argues that “the Father and the Son are one and ontologically equal and yet have different roles, with the Son being subject to His Father’s authority”<sup>62</sup> He believes that “there is significant evidence in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy that Jesus has been, is now and will ever be equal to His Father. And yet there is also persuasive evidence that Jesus has been, is now, and will be subject to His Father’s authority.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Reynolds, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship,” 44.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Bohr is an Adventist minister and evangelist who serves as president and main speaker for Secrets Unsealed, a legally incorporated non-profit organization that focuses on evangelism with headquarters in California.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen P. Bohr, “Issues Relating to the Ordination of Women with Special Emphasis on 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28” (Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Senior Pastor Fresno Central Church, President Secrets Unsealed, July 23, 2013)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Further on, there are a few thinkers that could be considered to hold a nuanced version of EFS. For example, in “Restoration of the Image of God: Headship and Submission,”<sup>64</sup> John W. Peters<sup>65</sup> seems to fully join Grudem’s EFS line of thought in writing the following:

In eternity past, prior to the foundation of the world, the Son was subject to the Father; in the Creation the Son was subject to the Father; following the incarnation the Son was subject to the Father; from His ascension, the Son has been subject to the Father, sitting at His right hand; today, as He intercedes for us, the Son is subject to the Father; and when death is destroyed, the Son will be eternally subject to the Father.<sup>66</sup>

Peters continues to argue that “since God never changes,”<sup>67</sup> these “authority-obedience” roles among the members of the Trinity are “fixed,” “mandatory,” and exist “throughout eternity”<sup>68</sup> (that is, “eternity past” and “eternity future”<sup>69</sup>). Furthermore, he argues that this eternal “authority-obedience relationship” is simultaneous to “their equality of being.”<sup>70</sup> Yet, in an open letter entitled “Response to Rodriguez’s Critique on

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. He adds: “though the Father and Son are ontologically equal they have distinct and complementary roles with the Son being submissive to the will of His Father as His head.” Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> John W. Peters, “Restoration of the Image of God: Headship and Submission” (Pennsylvania Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee, January, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> John W. Peters is an Adventist minister serving in the Pennsylvania Conference. He holds a PhD in Chemistry from UCLA.

<sup>66</sup> Peters, “Restoration of the Image of God,” 56-57.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 53-54. This is a quote from Grudem. In a section of his paper entitled “Submission of the Holy Spirit” he argues that the Holy Spirit is submitted to the Son.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 54. See details in sections entitled “God is the Head of Christ—Eternity Past” and “God is the Head of Christ—Eternity Future” Ibid., 55. He also states: “Although it might be assumed that the Son took on the “role of Son” at the incarnation or at some point in eternity past . . . the distinction in names, “Father” and “Son,” has always existed, implying role differentiation. Christ has always been the eternal, self-existent Son.” Ibid., 52. He also states: “Christ never has changed His position, or role, or office in relation to the Father. The term “role” underscores the fact that it is a relationship willingly entered into by

Headship,”<sup>71</sup> Peters offers a clarification of his arguments. He clarifies that in referring to the Son’s submissive role in “eternity past” he is rather referring to “some point in eternity past, prior to the creation of the universe.”<sup>72</sup> Despite of these clarifications, he still seems to subscribe to some mode of EFS in the sense that he goes on to sustain an indefinite future eternal subordination. In fact, he writes that since “ontological equality (equality of being) and functional submission . . . constitutes the image of God from the standpoint of the created universe,” it follows that “the Son will continue in that functional role of submission into the indefinite eternity future.”<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, he recurs

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the Son from before the beginning of creation with respect to the Father, and thus it is not permanent in the sense of somehow being inherent in the Son's being.” Ibid., 53.

<sup>71</sup> Peters, “Response to Rodriguez’s Critique on Headship,” (<http://www.womenordination.com/free-resources/articles-and-documents/id/1772/response-to-rodriguez-critique-on-headship-by-john-w-peters#sthash.03Io9UUW.dpuf>), accessed November 1, 2016. This is an open letter. See also Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Evaluation Of The Arguments Used By Those Who Oppose The Ordination Of Women To The Ministry” (Theology of Ordination Study Committee, January, 2014), 10, footnote 15, where he refers to Peters’ position and clarifications. Note what Rodriguez writes in this regard: “I was pleased when John W. Peters informed me that he did not believe in the eternal submission of the Son to the Father. In his unrevised paper he certainly gave the impression that the submission was eternal: “The ‘mystery of godliness’ captures the biblical principle of headship and submission, and this mystery which is inherent in the Trinity is to be manifested in conduct and order within the church” (“Restoration of the Image of God: Headship and Submission,” Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Columbia MD, January 2014, 26). However, in the revised edition of the paper he continues to argue that “a relationship of authority and submission between the Father and Son has existed in parallel with their equality of being from before the beginning of creation” (51). In the same revised edition he goes on to say, “Equality of being and the principle of headship/submission are inherent within the nature of the Trinity, and this nature of the Trinity, the image of God, was reproduced in the creation of mankind, male and female” (28). The level of speculation is distressing. He states that “since the principle of authority and submission exists among angels in heaven, angels would expect to see the principle reflected in beings on earth. Alternatively, since man was created in the image of God and angels recognize the headship principle among members of the Trinity, the angels expect to see the principle manifested in ‘male and female’ created in the image of God” (50). You have to ask yourself, where is the evidence for such dogmatic statement? There is none. This is simply his personal opinion. His original paper included an appendix dealing with the patristic fathers and Trinitarian headship that suggests to me that may have been influenced by the catholic theology of the eternal procession of the Son from the Father.” Ibid, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Peters, “Response to Rodriguez.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Peters writes: “The Son of God, at least since the creation of the first intelligent beings, functioned in the submissive (condescending) role as Commander of the angels, and the Son will continue to be subject to the Father in eternity future (1 Corinthians 15:28).” Ibid.

to mystery as he states that “arguing about the eternal nature of the Trinity is fruitless, since the nature of the infinite God is beyond our comprehension and forever will be.”<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, in “Adam, Where Are You? On Gender Relations,”<sup>75</sup> Ingo Sorke<sup>76</sup> argues that “the Godhead functions in a (ontological) personal equality” that is also a “hierarchical, functional subordination”<sup>77</sup> in which “the Son submits to the Father, the Holy Spirit submits to the Son.”<sup>78</sup> In terms of the duration of this hierarchical, functional subordination, he maintains that “whether this subordination is eternal or just incarnational is immaterial”<sup>79</sup> Sorke’s reasoning gives the impression that he is not sure whether or not EFS it is relevant for the arguments at large, while at the same time leaving the door open to it.

Although somewhat brief, the examples referred in this section could serve as representative of Adventist thinkers who seem to argue for the validity of Grudem’s EFS views, including perhaps some nuances versions of it.

### *Rejection of EFS*

I will now present some representative examples of Adventist thinkers who reject EFS.

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.womenordination.com/free-resources/articles-and-documents/id/1772/response-to-rodriguez-critique-on-headship-by-john-w-peters#sthash.03Io9UUW.dpuf>

<sup>75</sup> Ingo Sorke “Adam, Where Are You? On Gender Relations” (Joshua, TX, Theology of Ordination Committee, July, 2013).

<sup>76</sup> Ingo Sorke is theology professor at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, TX.

<sup>77</sup> Sorke, 24. According to Sorke, this refers to “functional subordination rather than ontological denigration.” Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. This, he argues, is because “a modeling paradigm in divinity still exists within the NT writers.”

In *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*, co-authors Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve<sup>80</sup> provide a straight forward statement in regards to EFS. They write:

We find no convincing biblical evidence that Christ's subordination has been for all eternity. His subordination was only temporary. Furthermore, the scriptural evidence is that the subordination of Christ to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son is merely for the practical purposes of creation and redemption among those otherwise equal in their shared divine nature.<sup>81</sup>

On his part, Norman Gulley<sup>82</sup> also addresses the matter in his *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity*.<sup>83</sup> Gulley maintains that issues related to EFS "would have never been raised if theologians had rejected the Greek view that God is timeless."<sup>84</sup> This view, he argues does not allow space for embracing the possibility of change within the persons of the Trinity. He writes: "Any attempt to read this incarnational reality into time before His incarnation isn't logical. For the incarnation brought a change to the second Person of the Godhead. He also became human, which was not true before the

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<sup>80</sup> Woodrow Whidden is retired professor of religion at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI.; Jerry Moon is retired professor of Church History at Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs; John Reeve is professor of Church History and current chair of the Church History Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI.

<sup>81</sup> Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*, (Review and Herald Publishing Association: Hagerstown, MD, 2002), 275-277. Although in this work there is the concession that "quite possibly the fact of Christ's subordination to the leadership of the Father may suggest some clues about leadership roles in the church and the family," they also suggest "that the Trinity provides no compelling clues, one way or another, when it comes to the issue of what sort of leadership roles each gender should receive in the church. We must decide the issue on other biblical principles." *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>82</sup> Norman Gulley is retired Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee.

<sup>83</sup> Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* (Andrews University Press: Berrien Springs, MI, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 130.

incarnation.”<sup>85</sup> Gulley also questions EFS’ usage of the Father-Son analogy in order to establish the ontology of the persons. In this regard he states that the “Father-Son relationship” is not “an actual ontological reality, for even Christ is addressed as the “Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6b).”<sup>86</sup> He argues as well that “the fact that Scripture says that the Father gave his Son in the incarnation . . . has no relevance to the two beings related as Father and Son from eternity.”<sup>87</sup> Additionally, Gulley critiques EFS’ selection of authority as the primordial element to be taken into account in Trinitarian relations, and instead calls for a prioritizing of “eternal reciprocal love” as the main aspect.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 122. Interestingly, in interacting with Grudem’s EFS views, Erickson links Grudem’s position to human philosophy as he argues that it “resembles the ancient Greek doctrine of virtual immobility, rather than the Christian doctrine of dynamic mobility.” Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With the Trinity?*, 214-215. He adds: “According to the latter, God is able to act and to act in different ways. Presumably, he can assume different roles at different times and in different situations. Grudem’s argument seems to have fallen into the category of excessive proof: by attempting to guarantee the eternality of the relationship, he may have proved more than he intended. He may have proved that God cannot change the way he acts. In fact, given this model of immutability, he may have precluded the possibility of a member of the Trinity becoming incarnate.” And he adds: “In recent years, there have been efforts by evangelical theologians to redefine the doctrine of immutability to separate it from the influence of Greek philosophy. One of the leaders in this endeavor has been Bruce Ware. It may be significant that Ware does not employ Grudem’s argument at this point, for it seems to have more far-reaching consequences than those that Grudem states.” Ibid. Erickson refers the reader to the following sources: “John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 264-76; Bruce Ware, “An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 4 (December 1986): 431-46. (Ibid.)

<sup>86</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 122. To this he adds: “As the term *Father* applied to Christ is not literal, so the term *Father* applied to God the Father is not literal.” Ibid., 155.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 122. He adds: “Why would this subordination of function be eternal when the plan of salvation, for which it is needed, is but a mere moment in future endless eternity?” Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 142, footnote 3. In interaction with Grudem’s EFS, Gulley points to the role of relational love under a different theological big-picture: “Grudem focuses on the way the Persons of the Trinity relate to each other through different roles. By contrast I believe that the Persons of the Trinity relate to each other through their eternal reciprocal love in their inner history. There is a big difference between these two views of the Trinity. The latter view does not need the eternal subordination in which the Father has commanding authority over the Son and Spirit. Such a hierarchical relationship seems to exclude the reciprocal love relations they have with each other. Granted there was a temporary role that each Person of the Trinity took, but this came out of the context of their unchanging mutual love.” Ibid. Thus, for Gulley, the distinguishing focus and worthy basis for Trinitarian Father-Son analogy is love, not authority. Additionally, Gulley writes: “A contemporary problem resulting from the subordination doctrine is that some have used their belief in the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father to formulate a doctrine that

In a similar fashion, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez<sup>89</sup> rejects EFS. In “A Question of Sonship,”<sup>90</sup> Rodríguez states that EFS “redefines the Biblical doctrine of God”<sup>91</sup> because, among other things, it introduces a false dichotomy between nature and function (role and being). He rejects the “distinction between nature and function” in the context of EFS because:

the concept of an eternal headship within the Godhead is incompatible with the distinction between equality of nature and functional differentiation within the Trinity. If the Son had been eternally under subjection to the Father, then this is what defined Him; this is who He is . . . . He would have always existed in subordination to the Father. . . . An eternal submission is not something a person does but the eternal state of that person. Therefore submission, function, and being cannot be separated from each other.”<sup>92</sup>

Thus Rodríguez confidently states: “There is no dichotomy here.” He also considers the implications of EFS for the atonement and its portrayal of God’s self-sacrificing love:<sup>93</sup>

The eternal headship of the Father could imply that the sacrifice of the Son was the result of an order given by the Father to Him to save us; the assignment of a function. This would destroy the biblical doctrine of the atonement and would damage in a radical way the biblical understanding of the nature of divine love.<sup>94</sup>

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subordinates women to men (wives to husbands). In doing this they overlook the Christian relationship of mutual submission of husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22-33), which images the reciprocal love relationship in the ontological or immanent Trinity. This subordination affects their understanding of the creation of both male and female in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; volume 3).” *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>89</sup> Ángel Manuel Rodríguez is a Seventh-day Adventist theologian and retired director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI).

<sup>90</sup> Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “A Question of Sonship,” *Biblical Research Institute* (<https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/godgodhead-jesus-christ/question-sonship>), accessed March 25, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* He states that “at the core of the atonement is the love of God manifested in self-sacrificing and disinterested divine salvific actions toward sinners.” *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Even if proponents of EFS would argue that this submission was eternally voluntary, thus, seemingly allowing for divine self-sacrificing love in freedom, Rodríguez sees this as “a logical inconsistency”<sup>95</sup> given that for him “‘voluntary’ means that up to a particular moment in eternity the Son was not under submission to the Father.”<sup>96</sup> Thus he concludes that a voluntary subordination “could not have been eternal”<sup>97</sup> and thus “headship within the Godhead cannot be eternal.”<sup>98</sup> Further on, in a section entitled “Headship and the Godhead”<sup>99</sup> in his “Evaluation Of The Arguments Used By Those Who Oppose The Ordination Of Women To The Ministry,”<sup>100</sup> Rodríguez explicitly states that proponents of EFS incur in “serious deviation from Adventist theology and doctrine” and that this theological trend presents “serious implications . . . for our body of beliefs.”<sup>101</sup> Ultimately, he believes that “an eternal, loving relationship” does exist among the members of the Trinity, while an eternal relationship of authority and submission does not.<sup>102</sup>

Lastly, in “God in Three Persons: Blessed Trinity,” Jo Ann Davidson states that although “the three divine persons are equal but not identical,” yet “there is no hierarchy

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. (Or “logical contradiction”)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Rodríguez, “Evaluation Of The Arguments,” 10.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

or subordination suggested by an unchangeable order in the presentation of their names.”<sup>103</sup>

Again the examples examined in this last section could serve representatives of Adventist thinkers who reject the validity of Grudem’s EFS views.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

As one of the main contemporary proponents of EFS, Wayne Grudem argues that eternal roles of authority and subordination are necessary for the Trinity to exist as such. Although eternal and necessary, Grudem distinguishes these functional roles from the Trinity’s equality in being (ontology), thus advocating for an eternal role-being dichotomy. In these eternal roles, Grudem places the Father as the highest authority, with the Son being submissive to the Father and the Holy Spirit being submissive to both the Father and the Son, and adds the particularity of a certain linkage of the persons of the Trinity and the members of the human family in terms of roles. Grudem’s understanding of the immutability of God is an important element, among others, for sustaining his EFS view, which he considers orthodox.

Adventist thinkers have engaged directly or indirectly with Grudem’s views of EFS. Those who embrace EFS seem to harmonize with Grudem’s views of the eternal nature of roles of authority and subordination as well as with the dichotomous concept of differentiation between eternal roles and equality in being (ontology). Those who hold to

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<sup>103</sup> Jo Ann Davidson “God in Three Persons: Blessed Trinity,” (<https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/god/trinity/article/go/-/god-in-three-persons/>), accessed March 25. This is one of two articles that accompanies the Fundamental Doctrine of the Trinity on the *Seventh-day Adventist Church* website.

nuanced versions of it seem to hold to either an indefinite beginning and ending point to EFS, or to the opinion that whether or not EFS is held is not relevant. On the other hand, those Adventist thinkers who reject Grudem's EFS views seem to deny the eternal nature of relations of authority and subordination among the members of the Trinity, and question the validity of the eternal roles-divine being dichotomous thinking. They also interpret the Father-Son analogy in different terms than a focus on relations of authority and subordination rather focusing on eternal loving relationships. Thus, Adventist thinkers featured in this paper, all influential in their own sphere, represent two different lines of thought present in Adventism. This certainly presents Adventism with a call to resolution in regards to such a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith.

In closing, understanding Grudem's EFS view, has served two purposes: that of better understanding a relevant trend within evangelicalism, and that of facilitating ideas and context that are helpful in understanding the relationship of Adventist thinkers to views such as his.