

ETERNAL FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATION AND THE PROBLEM OF THE DIVINE WILL

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The doctrine of eternal functional subordination (hereafter EFS) has been growing in support in evangelical circles in recent years. EFS claims that the Father and the Son are eternally distinguished by an “authority-submission structure”¹ such that the Son eternally submits to the Father and the Father eternally has authority over the Son. This structure is the pattern for all created male-female relationships. Advocates of EFS are confident in their theology. We are told that “if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another,” such that, if we reject EFS, “we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.”² Those who reject EFS are said to be “condemning all orthodox Christology from the Nicene Creed onward” because the Nicene Creed affirms that the Son is eternally begotten.³ This paper will suggest against such claims that EFS is completely contrary to classical Christology, but it will do so using a different argument than the standard one presented by opponents of EFS.

The most prevalent philosophical and theological argument⁴ against EFS charges the doctrine with undermining the fact that the Father is *homoousios* with the Son, and therefore claims that the advocates of EFS are Arians. Millard Erickson presents the standard argument in its briefest form:

The problem is this: If authority over the Son is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Father, and subordination to the Father is an essential, not an accidental, attribute of the Son, then something significant follows. Authority is part of the Father’s essence, and subordination is part of the Son’s essence, and each attribute is not part of the essence of the other person. That means that the essence of the Son is different from the essence of the Father.... That is equivalent to saying that they are not *homoousios* with one another.⁵

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¹ Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005) 21.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 251.

³ *Ibid.* 251 n. 35

⁴ I recognize that certain exegetical disputes as well as appeals to the tradition seem more prevalent than these arguments, but the emphasis of this paper will be on the implications of EFS for systematic theology.

⁵ Millard Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009) 172.

The fundamental problem, according to many of its opponents,⁶ is that EFS attributes one property to the Father and a different and distinct property to the Son. By virtue of these divergent properties, the Father and Son purportedly have a different essence. Thus, ontological subordination and Arianism are purportedly entailed by EFS, even if its supporters explicitly reject both of these ancient heresies.⁷

Though the conclusion that EFS entails a rejection of homoousianism ultimately holds true, I do not find the standard argument against EFS compelling. This is because if one cannot apply a unique word to each hypostasis—at the very least the terms “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit”—then there is no way to distinguish the persons. The problem with EFS is not Arianism, but the fact that it entails tritheism. Advocates of EFS are correctly using classical trinitarian metaphysics but incorrectly replacing terms like “unbegotten” and “begotten” with the ideas “authority” and “submission.” If a critic of EFS does not want to preclude the notion of personal properties, he or she must turn to a different argument to reject EFS. Furthermore, Arius sought to make Christ the preeminent creature of the Father by affirming what might be called monotheistic homoiousianism, a stance insisting that only the *ousia* of the Father was divine, and that the Son was created with a different, non-divine *ousia* at some point in time. EFS is more in the line of what might be called polytheistic homoiousianism, whereby the Father and the Son have distinct natures, but each is still eternally divine. This problem is only clear when the metaphysics of dyothelite Christology are applied to the trinitarianism promoted by EFS. Many advocates of EFS affirm dyothelism, the belief that Jesus Christ has both a human will and a divine will. Because Chalcedonian Christology insists that Jesus has two natures but only one hypostasis, dyothelism as a development of Chalcedonian Christology necessitates the recognition that a will must be a property of nature in order for there to be two wills in Christ. To posit such terms as “obedience” and “submission” that imply a distinction of wills between the Father and the Son while affirming dyothelite Christology entails a distinction of natures between the Father and Son (and Spirit) resulting in tritheism. This “dyothelite problem” leads me to conclude that EFS must be strongly opposed by evangelical systematians in order to avoid the risk of tritheism.

This paper will begin with a historical survey of the monothelite controversy, emphasizing Maximus the Confessor’s dyothelite Christology as a soteriologically grounded response to the question of whether Christ had two wills. A brief survey

⁶ Similar accusations of Arianism are found in a number of sources: Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 178–79; Keith Yandell, “How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity* (ed. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 160; Peter Carnley, *Reflections in Glass: Trends and Tensions in the Contemporary Anglican Church* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2004) 234; Gilbert Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” *JETS* 40 (1997) 64; Kevin Giles, “The Trinity without Tiers,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (ed. Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012) 267.

⁷ *Ibid.* 257.

of several key figures who advocate EFS will demonstrate that they too adhere to dyothelitism in such a way that their Christological position is contradictory to their trinitarian theology. After this historical account, a word study of the term “sub-mission” will demonstrate that the term clearly implies an activity of the will yielding to another will and should therefore be rejected as an eternal property of a divine hypostasis. The terms “unbegotten” and “begotten,” grounded in the divine procession of eternal generation, will be presented as the predominant historical means of understanding the divine *taxis* of the Trinity by those who affirm one will in God. Finally, the paper will conclude by considering three objections: that the Scriptures teach that the Son eternally submits to the Father, that the one divine will can be possessed in a unique way by each hypostasis to validate the idea of EFS, and that perichoresis offers a viable alternative to the dyothelite position.

I. EFS AND THE DYOTHELITE PROBLEM

1. *The theology of Maximus the Confessor.* After the Council of Chalcedon, patristic and early Byzantine Christology took a decisive shift. While Nicene-era Christological debates primarily focused on explaining the divinity of Christ, post-Chalcedonian debates often focused on explaining how the Son could be, in the words of the Chalcedonian definition, “perfect man,” “truly man,” and “of a rational soul and body.” In short, the church was extensively wrestling with the fact that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). This was in part a purely Christological matter: what must the Church believe in order to claim that Jesus was tempted (Matt 4:1–11 and parr., Heb 4:15), “grew in wisdom” (Luke 2:52), and “suffered in the flesh” (1 Pet 4:1)? However, it was even more a soteriological matter: who must Christ be in order to save humanity? The soteriological implications of Christ’s humanity were aptly summarized in a formula from Gregory Nazianzus. “That which [Christ] has not assumed he has not healed.”⁸ Christ had to be fully human in order to fully redeem humanity.

The monothelite controversy unfolded against this Christological background when the Byzantine patriarch Sergius sought a formula that might reconcile the Chalcedonian imperial position and anti-imperial monophysites. His proposed monothelite/monoenergist formula “two natures, one activity (*energeia*)”⁹ was challenged by dyothelites, who consistently held that both an activity and a will were primarily properties of a nature and not of a hypostasis.¹⁰ Therefore, Christ must have two wills because he has two natures. The most able of the theological opponents of monothelitism was Maximus the Confessor, a theologian who precisely developed the relationship between nature, hypostasis, and will. In fact, Maximus is

⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cleodius Against Apollinaris (Epistle 101),” in *Christology of the Later Fathers* (ed. Edward R. Hardy; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954) 218.

⁹ See the helpful discussions of the political background to the monothelite controversy in J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 13–16; Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 55–67.

¹⁰ Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom* 154–55.

likely the first person to systematically develop a notion of the human will as a “full-fledged faculty.”¹¹ Maximus distinguished between a will and a mode of willing, attributing the former to a nature and the latter to a hypostasis.¹² Similarly, Maximus posited a natural will proper to nature and a gnostic will involved in deliberation that is proper to the hypostasis.¹³ The gnostic will is a deliberative mode of willing. The basis for attributing a natural will to nature is almost entirely soteriological. Maximus recognized that sin entered the world through human will at the fall, and that, in accordance with Gregory of Nazianzus’s formula, the Son must have assumed a human will in order to redeem it.¹⁴ Therefore, if Jesus did not assume a human will, he came for naught, leaving the root of our sin uncleansed. The human will in Christ is important so he can fulfill the law and the prophets as the perfect human being (Matt 5:17), and as a new Adam undoing the effects of the disobedience of the first Adam (Rom 5:12–18). When Jesus was tempted, he “put off the powers and principalities, thereby healing the whole of human nature,” freeing the human will from captivity to the passions by rightly using it to the glory of God.¹⁵ In order to accomplish the work of salvation, Jesus must have had two wills. Only the heretical Nestorians claimed that there were two hypostases in Christ, and therefore, logically, a will must be a property of nature.

Building on this soteriological foundation, Maximus’s teachings about the will of Jesus are clear. Jesus has both a human will and a “divine will, which is both his and the Father’s,”¹⁶ because it is “*by nature* the same as the Father’s.”¹⁷ Maximus is clear that there cannot be a composite will in God without God having a composite nature;¹⁸ because the Father and the Son share the same simple *ousia*, they share a single natural will. Since wills are a property of nature, Jesus must have assumed a human will. If he did not assume a human will, he did not truly assume a human nature.¹⁹ However, the Son did not assume a gnostic will in the incarnation because this is a property of a human hypostasis, which Christ did not assume. If Christ were only a human, he would deliberate “in a manner like unto us, having ignorance, doubt and opposition, since one only deliberates about something which is

¹¹ Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 189. Cyril Hovorun suggests that, “Prior to the seventh century, the concepts of *energeia* and will were scarcely distinguished (especially will) and remained underdeveloped” (*Will, Action and Freedom* 163).

¹² Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ* 120.

¹³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends & Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974) 38.

¹⁴ Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom* 129–30.

¹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium 21*, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 113.

¹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 6*, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 174.

¹⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 3*, in *Maximus the Confessor* (trans. and ed. Andrew Louth; London: Routledge, 1996) 194, italics mine.

¹⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of our Father among the Saints* (trans. Joseph P. Farrell; South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1990) §27.

¹⁹ Maximus, *Opusculum 3* 195.

doubtful,” but because Christ was fully God, he did not deliberate, because he naturally has “an inclination to the good, and [a natural] drawing away from evil.”²⁰ Maximus’s theology of the two wills of Christ was included in the sixth ecumenical council (Constantinople III 680/1) whose statement of faith affirms a “difference of nature being recognized in the same one hypostasis by the fact that each nature wills and works what is proper to it, in communion with the other.”²¹ In the West, the first Lateran Council (649) also affirmed the theology of Maximus.²²

Maximus explicitly connects his soteriologically grounded Christological conclusions to Trinitarian theology on several occasions. When his opponents suggest that a will must be jointly a property of nature and hypostasis and not solely of nature, Maximus points out that this would either mean that “the blessed monad will also be a triad of natures,” or, perhaps, “if there is one will of the triad beyond being, there will be a Godhead with three names and a single person.”²³ Because in God there are three hypostases and one nature, and because as we have shown above a will must unavoidably be a property of the nature in order for Christ to accomplish his salvific work without necessitating two hypostases, then positing a discrete, unshared will for each hypostasis would necessitate either three natures (tritheism) or one person (sabellianism). Therefore, a will must be solely a property of nature in order to avoid destroying the metaphysics of the Trinity. Insofar as such terms as “obedience” and “submission” attribute distinct wills to Father and Son, as will be shown below, Maximus’s question to his interlocutor Pyrrhus could just as easily be put to modern advocates of EFS: “Wilt thou say that ... because there are three hypostases there are also three wills, and because of this, three natures as well, since the canons and definitions of the Fathers say that the distinction of wills implieth a distinction of natures? So said Arius!”²⁴

2. *Submission as an operation of a will.* Does Maximus’s question in fact apply to advocates of EFS? A word study of “submission” shows that it clearly pertains to an operation of one will toward another such that advocates of EFS run afoul of the dyothelite problem. The Greek word most commonly used for “to submit” is *hypotassō*. The denotation of the word is fairly straightforward. BDAG suggests that the word may mean “obey” in the passive, but “to bring someone to subjection” in the active.²⁵ The passive rendering as “obey” is shared by patristic and classical lexicons.²⁶ Therefore, the appropriateness of using the passive meaning for a hy-

²⁰ This lack of a gnomic will in Christ will be important at a later stage of this paper. Maximus, *Disputation* §87.

²¹ The same statement also repeatedly speaks of “natural wills” (“The Statement of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople (Sixth Ecumenical),” in *Christology of the Later Fathers* 384).

²² The canons of the First Lateran Council condemn those who do not affirm that Christ has two wills, and that “through each of His natures the same one of His own free will is the operator” (can. 10), and that these wills are “preserved substantially,” indicating that they pertain to the substance/nature (can. 13), (“Canons of the Lateran Council 649,” in *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* [ed. Henry Denzinger; trans. Roy J. Deferrari; Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 1954]).

²³ Maximus, *Opuscula* 3 195–96.

²⁴ Maximus, *Disputation* §15.

²⁵ BDAG 1042.

²⁶ PGL 1462; LSJ 1897.

postasis is connected with the appropriateness of using the word “obedience” of a divine hypostasis. However, the notion of “obedience” seems inappropriate insofar as it implies one person yielding their will to follow the directives of another person’s will. Thus, from denotation alone there is warrant for rejecting *hypotassō* as appropriately used of a divine hypostasis.

In its connotation, *hypotassō* clearly indicates an opposition of wills. Delling suggests that “the general rule” for understanding submission “demands readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others.”²⁷ Bergmeier suggests that the term is often paraenetic, especially in the household codes in which the term is applied to the relationship between women and men.²⁸ Such paraenesis implies that submission requires a change of will. Spicq repeatedly emphasizes that submission is a matter of “accepting” what God has ordained,²⁹ where Merriam-Webster defines “to accept” as “to receive *willingly*.”³⁰ Clearly, the connotation of *hypotassō* suggests a distinct will from the one who submits to the one with authority. Interestingly, the active of *hypotassō* may mean “to place under,”³¹ a term that would not require distinct wills for Father and Son, insofar as one could be “placed under” another in a non-volitional way. However, the English word “submit” does not retain this meaning, and rather signifies, to again cite Merriam-Webster, “to yield oneself to the authority or will of another.”³² The *Oxford Dictionary* defines “submit” as “to accept or yield to a superior force or to the authority or will of another person.”³³ Therefore, any rendering of *hypotassō* that intends to merely point to an ordering is best translated by something other than the English word “submit.” Otherwise, both the Greek *hypotassō* and the English “submit” too strongly suggest a distinct will belonging to the one who submits to allow for their use in the Trinity given the dyothelite belief that a will is a property of nature.

The word “submission” does not just suggest that the Father and Son have distinct wills according to the word’s definition, but also according to its specific usage among advocates of EFS. The longest discussion of the meaning of “submission” that I have found written by Wayne Grudem describes submission as a “disposition to yield.” In husband-wife relationships this is not “an absolute surrender of her will” because the wife may have to take a stand against the husband’s “sinful will.” Though not “absolute,” Grudem certainly considers submission a *qualified*

²⁷ TDNT 8.45.

²⁸ R. Bergmeier, “ὕποτάσσω,” EDNT 408.

²⁹ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the NT* (trans. and ed. James D. Ernest; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 3.425–26.

³⁰ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (11th ed.; Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003) 7, italics mine.

³¹ LSJ 1897; EDNT 408; TDNT 8.39.

³² This is the preferred definition of the verb when used in an intransitive sense, as it is used by advocates of EFS (*Merriam-Webster* 1244).

³³ *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2d ed.; ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 1760.

yielding of one will to another.³⁴ Similarly, EFS advocate Tom Smail describes the eternal subordination of the Son as a “*willing* responsiveness” which is the “*proprium*, the defining hypostatic characteristic” of the Son.³⁵ Robert Letham’s definition is equally clear: submission is a “free action *chosen willingly* by the one who submits.”³⁶ Time and again, advocates of EFS use the word “submission” according to its proper lexical meaning to indicate a yielding disposition of the Son’s will toward the Father’s will, clearly implying two wills.

3. *EFS and the problem of the divine will.* This is the “dyothelite problem” on which either the theory of EFS must fall, or the advocates of EFS must abandon dyothelite Christology in favor of a monothelite alternative. If a will is a property of nature, then the Trinity only has one will and thus one person of the Trinity cannot *qua* divinity eternally “obey” or “submit” to another. Most of the advocates of EFS consistently reject monothelite Christology in favor of dyothelitism. Wayne Grudem claims that “it seems necessary to say that Jesus had two distinct wills ... and that the wills belong to the two distinct natures of Christ.”³⁷ Grudem understands the soteriological implications of monothelitism. Jesus must be fully human “for representative obedience” so he could “obey in our place.”³⁸ It seems that Grudem is unaware that making will a property of a hypostasis jeopardizes this representative obedience. Likewise, Bruce Ware agrees that Jesus must take on “a full human nature.”³⁹ Ware accurately summarizes William G. T. Shedd’s understanding of the temptations of Christ, which he explicitly connects with Constantinople III and the affirmation of dyothelitism.⁴⁰ However, Ware goes even further than Shedd in teaching that not only did Christ experience temptation because he had a human will, he also overcame temptation by virtue of a “perfect obedience”⁴¹ accomplished through “all the resources given to him in his humanity.”⁴² This is basically a restatement of the position of Maximus the Confessor. How Ware can connect a Christology built upon the dyothelite position while explicitly advocating an “eternal subordination of the Son to do the will of the Father”⁴³ and repeatedly affirming P. T. Forsyth’s claim that the Son has a “yielding will” and the Father an

³⁴ Wayne Grudem and John Piper, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991) 61.

³⁵ Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 169, emphasis mine.

³⁶ Robert Letham, “Reply to Kevin Giles,” *EvQ* 80 (2008) 344, italics mine.

³⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 560.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 540.

³⁹ Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 75–76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 88.

⁴² *Ibid.* 84.

⁴³ Ware, *Father, Son, and Spirit* 81.

“exigent will”⁴⁴ remains unclear. Is a will a property of nature, whereby Christ could overcome temptation by virtue of his human will, or is will a property of a hypostasis, whereby the Son could eternally submit to the will of the Father? Robert Letham is most explicit: “to speak of three wills is heterodox, implying tritheism.”⁴⁵ Yet in the same article that Letham makes this claim, he advocates the eternal submission of the Son, defining submission as a “free action *chosen willingly* by the one who submits.”⁴⁶ How the Son can willingly chose *qua* hypostasis⁴⁷ to submit to the Father without suggesting that the Son has a distinct will from the Father’s will is not explained. Further examples could be provided, but the point has been made: dyothelite Christology is not easily affirmed in conjunction with a doctrine of the Trinity understood in terms of EFS. I must conclude that the Christology of many advocates of EFS is logically inconsistent with their trinitarian theology.

II. THE HISTORICAL DYOTHELITE MEANS OF DISTINGUISHING THE PERSONS

Advocates of EFS such as Bruce Ware would have us believe that a rejection of EFS leaves one unable to answer “why the eternal names for ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ would be exactly *these* names.”⁴⁸ If the word “submission” cannot appropriately be used to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son, does that therefore mean that there is no basis for distinguishing between the Father and the Son? The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms the basic terminology classically used to distinguish the persons. The Son is “begotten of the Father before all ages” and the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father [and the Son?].” However, contra claims by Wayne Grudem,⁴⁹ this was not classically understood to support EFS. Rather than indicating submission and authority, it explicitly and exclusively indicated a form of causation distinguished from creation. The Son was “begotten, not made” and “true light of true light.” Neither comparison signifies an authority-submission structure, so the terminology does not even hint of two distinct wills in the Father and the Son. Therefore, the classical terminology can be retained without being confronted with the dyothelite problem.

Historically, we see a pattern of affirming one will of God shared by three persons who are distinguished by divine processions understood in terms of origin and not submission. Prior to the monothelite controversy the systematic justification for affirming one will in God was not as clearly articulated, yet Gregory of

⁴⁴ Ibid.; cf. Bruce Ware, “Equal in Essence, Distinct in Roles,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* 36; idem, “How Shall We Think about the Trinity?,” in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God* (ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 274.

⁴⁵ Letham, “Reply” 340.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 344, italics mine.

⁴⁷ If the free choice is made “by” the one submitting, it would seem to be an operation of the hypostasis.

⁴⁸ Ware, “Equal in Essence” 16.

⁴⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 251.

Nazianzus⁵⁰ and Augustine,⁵¹ among others, explicitly taught that there is only one will in God because God has one nature. Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa developed a formula to understand all trinitarian action whereby “there is one motion and disposition of the good will which proceeds from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit.”⁵² Every divine action has “its origin in the Father, proceed[s] through the Son, and reach[es] its completion by the Holy Spirit.”⁵³ In human beings we can distinguish between the actions of individual human beings who undertake the same task, but this is not the case for the three divine Persons, whose actions (including willing) are indistinguishable.⁵⁴ For Gregory, this is the basis of affirming the Trinity without affirming three gods. The order Gregory proposes corresponds to the causal structure within the Trinity where Father begets the Son, and Father spirates the Spirit through the Son. Gregory is clear: “We do not deny a distinction with respect to causality. That is the only way by which we distinguish one Person from another.”⁵⁵ Thus, we see in the patristic period a pattern that will become more fully developed after the monothelite controversy. God has one will and is only distinguished in terms of causal origin, not by submission. While the advocates of EFS have made numerous appeals to historical sources, the majority of their citations belongs to this pre-monothelite period or to the post-Enlightenment era after the significance of dyothelitism appears to have been minimalized. Many of the examples cited falsely equate procession with submission, and those patristic examples that do speak of obedience are taken from an era before the faculty of the will was well defined by Maximus, and before the monothelite controversy had made it clear that a will must be a property of nature.⁵⁶

After the monothelite controversy the reason for attributing one will to the divine nature is much clearer. I will only briefly mention two major figures as representative of the Eastern tradition. John of Damascus, the great Orthodox synthesizer of the tradition, clearly wrote that in God there is “one substance, one godhead, one virtue, *one will*, one operation, one principality, one power, one domina-

⁵⁰ [John 6:38] does not mean that the Son has a special will of his own, besides that of the Father, but that he has not; so that the meaning would be, ‘Not to do my own will, for there is none of mine apart from, but that which is common to, me and thee; for as we have one Godhead, so we have one will’ (Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Theological Orations,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers* IV.12).

⁵¹ “The will of the Father and the Son is one, and their operation is inseparable” (Augustine, *The Trinity* [trans. Stephen McKenna; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962] II.5).

⁵² Gregory of Nyssa, “An Answer to Ablabius: That We Should Not Think of Saying That There are Three Gods,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers* 262.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 261.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 266.

⁵⁶ For example, the list of historical sources defending the notion of EFS offered by Kovach and Schemm points almost entirely to examples that affirm divine processions, without recognizing that the processions were generally, as is the case here with Gregory of Nyssa, considered only in terms of cause and not along an authority/submission hierarchy as is supposed by advocates of EFS (Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm Jr., “A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son,” *JETS* 42 [1999] 461–76).

tion, one kingdom.”⁵⁷ John explicitly affirms *taxis* within the Trinity, though his belief that God has one will prohibits him from attributing this *taxis* to the submission or obedience of the Son. Rather, he teaches that, “if we say that the Father is the principle of the Son and greater than the Son, we are not giving to understand ... any other thing save causality. That is to say, we mean that the Son is begotten of the Father, and not the Father of the Son, and that the Father is naturally the cause of the Son.”⁵⁸ Any ranking of the triune persons is grounded in the processions understood in terms of causation alone, and not in submission. God has only one will. Similarly, Gregory Palamas later clearly taught that God has one will which operates according to the formula of Gregory of Nyssa. He writes, “the activity of the divine will is one, originating from the Father, the primal Cause,⁵⁹ issuing through the Son, and made manifest in the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁰ In the East, origination understood along causal lines and not as submission was the basis of distinction between the persons, who shared a single undivided will.

In the West, the main trinitarian texts circulating in the early Middle Ages were those of Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, and Boethius, each of which antedated the monothelite controversy. However, in the late eleventh century and continuing into the twelfth century a renaissance of trinitarian theology swept the European theological landscape. Two important figures exemplify a trend that continued throughout the Middle Ages: Anselm of Canterbury and Richard of St. Victor. Anselm is quite clear that the divine will is an attribute of nature. “In no way does any willing or power belong to the Father and the Son by reason of their proper characteristics themselves, that is fatherhood and sonship,” writes Anselm, “but by reason of the substance of the divine nature, which is common to them.”⁶¹ He affirms that the Son is begotten from the Father, and says “in ordinary language, ‘begotten from’ means ‘has its existence from.’”⁶² Anselm, who first systematically developed the satisfaction theory of atonement, rightly understood the importance of dyothelete Christology and its insistence that a will is a property of nature. In *Why God became Man*, after affirming that Christ was one person in two natures Anselm teaches that, “Christ himself of his own volition underwent death in order to save mankind.”⁶³ “That particular *man*, Christ, owed this obedience to God his Father, and his humanity owed it to his divinity.”⁶⁴ Jesus *qua* his humanity owed obedience to Father and Son. “Christ, therefore, did not come to do his will, but the will of his

⁵⁷ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings* (trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr.; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958) I.8, italics mine.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Note Palamas’s emphasis on processions as a matter of causation and not submission.

⁶⁰ Gregory Palamas, “Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth; trans. and ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware; London: Faber & Faber, 1995) 4.398 (§112).

⁶¹ Anselm of Canterbury, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 241 (§2).

⁶² Anselm of Canterbury, “Monologion,” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* 63 (§56).

⁶³ I.8.

⁶⁴ Ibid. I.9 (emphasis mine).

Father, because the just desire that he had did not come from his humanity but from his divinity.”⁶⁵ Jesus in his human will obeyed the one undivided divine will of the Trinity even to the point of death. Thus he fulfilled the obligations of all human beings while offering a gift of infinite worth back to God, insofar as Jesus in his divinity underwent death for the sake of obedience as well. Jesus secured our salvation because he honored “the whole of the Trinity” when “he offered up his humanity to his divinity.” Anselm clarifies “so that we can express our meaning more clearly, while remaining steadfast to the same truth” that this also means “the Son voluntarily offered himself to the Father.”⁶⁶ Satisfaction theory teaches that if there is no human will in Christ, then there is no voluntary offering of the humanity of Christ to the divinity, and there is no salvation. Anselmian theories of the atonement cannot be retained if dyothelitism is rejected.

Richard of St. Victor’s *On the Trinity* is one of the most original articulations of the Trinity from the Middle Ages. According to Richard, “a ‘divine person’ is nothing else than an ‘incommunicable existence.’”⁶⁷ An existence can be distinguished by origin, by nature, or by origin and nature.⁶⁸ Because the divine persons have the same attributes, they can only differ by origin.⁶⁹ Origin is the only aspect of their existence that is incommunicable. Note here that Richard does not suggest that a role is a means of differentiating an existence. This is not a historically rooted notion but a novel introduction to trinitarian theology in the modern era. Richard explicitly teaches that the Trinity has a single will, a single charity, a single goodness.⁷⁰ In this, he merely follows in the footsteps of his predecessor Hugh of St. Victor, who taught that “as Father and Son and the-Love-of-Father-and-Son are one in nature, so also they cannot *not* be one in will and love.”⁷¹ Elsewhere Hugh writes that “these three, since they are of one substance, are one and entirely one where there is no diversity of natures, no diversity of wills.”⁷² Consistently, the medieval period considered the will a property of nature, refused to admit a plurality of wills in the divine persons, and therefore distinguished between the divine persons by origin, and not along the lines of submission and authority. In this, they remained in fundamental continuity with the dyothelite Christology that they continued to advocate.

The Trinity was not a major source of disputes between Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation, so there were fewer Reformation-era exhaus-

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. II.18.

⁶⁷ Richard of St. Victor, *Richard of St. Victor, On the Trinity: English Translation and Commentary* (trans. Ruben Angelici; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011) IV.18.

⁶⁸ Ibid. IV.13.

⁶⁹ Ibid. IV.15.

⁷⁰ Ibid. V.22.

⁷¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Three Days*, in *Trinity and Creation: A Selection of Works from Hugh, Richard and Adam of St. Victor* (ed. Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale M. Coulter; Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011) II.23.3, italics his.

⁷² Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (trans. Roy J. Deferrari; Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951) II.1.4.

tive studies on the Trinity by Protestants. Despite this, there are clear instances in which the Reformers affirmed the unity of the divine will. For example, the Second Helvetic Confession, written by Heinrich Bullinger, is quite clear in its wording:

We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach that the Son and Holy Spirit are God in name only, and also that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity, and that there is something unequal in it, a greater or a less, something corporeal or corporeally conceived, *something different with respect to character or will.*⁷³

Though they did not write extensively on the subject, the Reformers remembered that a will must be a property of nature so that Jesus could have a human will with which he could accomplish our salvation. This trend continued into the Puritan period, where John Owen affirmed the will as a property of nature, teaching, “The wisdom, the understanding of God, the will of God, the immensity of God, is in that person, not as that person, but as the person is God.”⁷⁴ In other words, the will of God does not belong to Father and Son hypostatically but substantially. Likewise, William Ames teaches that, “The will of God is single and totally one in him,”⁷⁵ while differentiating the persons by spiration and begetting.⁷⁶ Because of this differentiation, one can say that the Father is first and the Spirit last, but only in terms of origin and their manner of subsisting as unbegotten, begotten, and spirated.⁷⁷ The fact that Ames considers the *taxis* of the Trinity in terms of processions, explicitly teaches that God only has one will, and suggests that this will cannot change,⁷⁸ indicates that he continues the trend of affirming differentiation of the divine Persons on a ground different than submission and obedience because he understands that a will is a property of nature.

The options before us are clear. To suggest that the Father and the Son are distinguished by eternal submission and obedience is to suggest that the Father and the Son have different wills. If the advocates of EFS continue to maintain the dyothelite position and the resulting consequence that a will is a property of nature, then this means that the Father and Son have different natures. The result is tritheism. Or, if many modern evangelicals continue to affirm EFS and thereby reject the dyothelite position, they do so contrary to the majority position of the historical Church ever since Constantinople III, and in so doing they jeopardize the salvific work of Christ. The time has come to abandon EFS and to return to origination as the eternal basis for distinguishing Father and Son.

⁷³ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Second Helvetic Confession*; <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm>, italics mine.

⁷⁴ John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (ed. William H. Goold; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965) 407.

⁷⁵ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (trans. John D. Eusden; Boston: Pilgrim, 1968) I.4.58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* I.5.12–14.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* I.5.6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* I.4.60. The notion of submitting, as noted above, suggests that one Person of the Trinity yields to another, changing his will.

III. A RESPONSE TO POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

1. *Scriptural warrant for eternal subordination?* Thus far, I have argued that dyothelitic Christology, which was endorsed by the sixth ecumenical council, and which is affirmed by most of the advocates of EFS, requires that a will is a property of nature. Applying words such as “submission” to one hypostasis of the Godhead, however, suggests that each hypostasis has its own will. The logical conclusion from this for a dyothelitic would be that each hypostasis must have its own nature, rendering the *homoousios* void. I would like to pause for a moment to consider several objections to ensure the validity of the argument.

The most obvious and important objection comes from the Scriptures. As an evangelical, I affirm the Scriptures as the highest theological authority. I have suggested that dyothelitic Christology makes it unacceptable to use the word *hypotassō* in reference to the hypostasis of the Son *qua* divinity. However, the advocates of EFS claim that the scriptures do precisely this. If they are correct, then I would admit that either the word *hypotassō* does not entail a distinction of wills, or that dyothelitic Christology must be mistaken in making a will a property of nature. However, as a general rule, whenever an interpretation is contrary to an ecumenical council that has been accepted by Bible-believing Christians for centuries, it is generally wise to take time to carefully exegete the passage(s) in question to ensure that the initially offered interpretation is not mistaken. Upon closer examination, I do not find scriptural warrant for the claim that the Son *qua* divinity eternally submits or obeys the Father.

Many of the scriptural passages that speak of the Son submitting to or obeying the Father or doing the will of his Father can be interpreted as referring to his obedience *qua* humanity (John 4:34; 6:38; 8:28–29; etc.). While the Son was incarnate, he obeyed the Father’s will as a human being. Both sides of the debate are in agreement on this.⁷⁹ Wayne Grudem claims that “at least 31 verses teach the authority of the Father and the submission of the Son prior to Christ’s earthly ministry and after he returned to heaven.”⁸⁰ This claim sounds more compelling than it actually is. In fact, the actual word “submission,” *hypotassō*, is only applied to Christ prior to his earthly ministry or after his return to heaven in a single verse: 1 Cor 15:28. Every other passage to which Grudem appeals uses a different set of words to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. Consider one example. Grudem cites Eph 1:3–5, Rom 8:29, Eph 1:9–11, 1 Pet 1:19–20, 2 Tim 1:9, Eph 3:9–11, and Rev 13:8, all of which speak of the Father’s eternal foreknowledge, election, and purpose which was set forth before the ages and accomplished in the Son. Trinitarian theologians typically distinguish between divine missions, which are redemptive acts uniquely accomplished by one person of the Trinity, and appropriations, which are acts that all persons of the Trinity work together to accomplish, but which are fittingly applied most commonly to one person. Each of these

⁷⁹ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* 73; Wayne Grudem, “Biblical Evidence for the Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father,” in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* 246.

⁸⁰ Grudem, “Biblical Evidence” 259.

verses can plausibly be interpreted in line with Gregory of Nyssa's formula noted above. Predestination can be seen as a work of all the persons of the Trinity, but it is fittingly appropriated to the Father in whom it originated, and it is said to be accomplished through the Son, for the Son is the one who proceeds from the Father. Thus it is no surprise that the verses Grudem cites repeatedly follow Nyssa's pattern: the Father "chose us *in* him [Christ]" and "predestined us for adoption *through* Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3–5), "predestined [us] to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29), we are united in the Son and receive an inheritance in the Son (Eph 1:9–11), and so forth. Grudem interprets each instance of "in Christ" or "through the Son" as signifying "in Christ who eternally obeyed the Father's decree" or as "through the Son's eternal submission," but these ideas simply are not found in the text, and alternative explanations are possible. Yes, these verses clearly demonstrate divine *taxis*, but no they do not necessitate interpreting this *taxis* along the lines of submission and obedience.

The only possible explicit scriptural challenge that I see to my suggestion that the dyothelite problem should necessitate abandoning EFS is 1 Cor 15:28. Bruce Ware claims that, "there is no question that this passage indicates the eternal future submission of the Son to the Father."⁸¹ I must disagree. In context the passage reads as follows:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'all things are put in subjection,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20–28)

The first important thing to note is that both Ware and Grudem begin citing the passage at verse 24, ignoring the context of verses 20–23.⁸² However, these verses clearly speak of Christ concerning his humanity insofar as he is the "man" who brought about the resurrection of the dead (15:21). The parallel between Adam and Christ in verse 22 again suggests that the Son is being considered in terms of his humanity. Indeed, Christ's humanity is in focus when Paul speaks of the second Adam elsewhere. In Rom 5:19 Paul explicitly speaks of Christ's obedience as "the one *man's obedience*"⁸³ by which "many will be made righteous" in contradistinction to Adam's disobedience.

⁸¹ Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* 84.

⁸² Grudem, "Biblical Evidence" 251; Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* 83.

⁸³ Italics mine.

Paul cites two Psalms in the pericope that explain in what sense the Son will be subjected at the end. He draws the phrase “[He] put all things in subjection under his feet” in verse 27 from Ps 8:6. In Psalm 8, the Psalmist is marveling about the creation of man, who was “made a little lower than the heavenly beings” and who has been “given dominion over the works of [the Lord’s] hands” (Ps 8:5–6).⁸⁴ Psalm 8 is cited elsewhere in the NT to point to Jesus’ incarnational ministry (Heb 2:6–9). Paul’s point in citing this Psalm is that when Christ in his humanity fully exercises dominion over the earth at the second coming and the general resurrection, defeating sin and death, he will have finally and completely fulfilled the creation mandate given to the first Adam to rightly rule creation. He will also have undone the consequences of the first Adam’s sin. At the second coming all things, even death, will be subject to the new Adam, Jesus Christ. Then, having fulfilled his role as the new Adam, Jesus’ human mediatorial role will no longer be required in the same way, and the Son, having fulfilled the *telos* of humanity, will in his humanity transfer dominion to Father who will come to live immediately with humanity without need of a mediator (cf. Revelation 21). In 1 Cor 15:25, Paul teaches that Jesus “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” This is taken directly from Ps 110:1. There is some consensus that Psalm 110 refers to a promise to David or to one of the subsequent kings of Judah, and perhaps is even an enthronement Psalm.⁸⁵ Insofar as “all his enemies” includes death, the victory of the human Jesus is seen as the final completion of the promise given in this Psalm to the king. If death is our enemy, God’s promise is finally fulfilled once death is defeated in the general resurrection. Once this victory is attained and the promises are fulfilled, the fulfillment of Christ’s human role will no longer be complete, and so after the millennial kingdom of the human Christ, the mediatorial office of the king can be eliminated. This, then, is the subjection that Christ in his humanity will eschatologically experience: the elimination of the mediatorial roles of kingship and of the Second Adam.⁸⁶

There is therefore exegetical warrant to interpret the passage as not referring to the eternal functional subordination of the Son. Based on the context of verses 20–23 the pericope appears to be speaking of Jesus in his humanity, and the OT passages cited in the passage refer to Christ’s role as human mediator. There is nothing in the text to strongly suggest otherwise.⁸⁷ If the passage speaks of Christ in his humanity, then it does not speak of the *eternal* relationship between the Father and the Son because Jesus assumed humanity *in time*. The work in view here is

⁸⁴ The reference to being given dominion refers back to Gen 1:28 where human beings were given dominion over creation.

⁸⁵ See the helpful survey in Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–50* (rev. ed.; WBC 21; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002) 111–13.

⁸⁶ I do not intend to imply that Christ will give up his humanity when he is finally subject to the Father, but rather that his roles as king and new Adam will be completed.

⁸⁷ Several interpreters have suggested that the use of “the Son,” a unique usage in the NT, indicates that the passage is speaking of the divine hypostasis. See, e.g., David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 713. However, I believe the word could just as easily allude to the Davidic promise in 2 Samuel 7 where the king will be “a son” to the Father.

Jesus' work *qua* human being obedient to the Father and does not clearly seem to reveal anything about the relationship between Father and Son in the immanent Trinity apart from this human nature and mediatorial role. Finally, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 offered here is not a novel invention of the author but does have its advocates among biblical exegetes.⁸⁸ Therefore I must conclude that the only passage that explicitly speaks of the Son submitting to the Father before or after his first-century incarnate life speaks of Jesus in his humanity and does nothing to illuminate the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son *qua* divinity. Since none of the other passages offered by the advocates of EFS uses the term submission but these passages rather speak of "sending" or "predestination" or "giving," and since these terms can be interpreted in terms of the economy of salvation as grounded in the Father's eternal generation of the Son rather than in terms of eternal submission, and since the "dyothelite problem" gives us strong systematic reasons for interpreting these passages along the lines of divine processions instead of along the lines of divine submission, I find no scriptural reason to affirm EFS or to jeopardize the classical metaphysics of Christology, soteriology, and the doctrine of the Trinity as grounded in dyothelitism.

2. *Unique hypostatic modes of willing?* Several advocates of EFS have admitted that God only has one will, but they suggest that each person possesses this will in a unique way. For example, H. Wayne House writes, "Even though the Father, Son and Spirit share the same will of the divine being, the way in which they express that will cannot be identical."⁸⁹ House points out that the Father "wills to love the Son, to give the Son, to send the Son" and the Son "wills to love the Father, to be given by the Father, to be sent by the Father."⁹⁰ This may be a problem of semantics, insofar as we could also say that the Father and the Son will that the Father sends the Son, thus having an identical will. However, there is a deeper point being made here, namely, that the Son could have the same will as the Father, but that the Father possesses this will in an authoritative way and the Son in a submissive way. House's point is an important one to consider, but I believe there are systematic reasons that would be affirmed by the advocates of EFS that make it inappropriate to speak of submission even in this way.

What would it mean for the Son to possess an identical will to the Father but to possess it in a way that could appropriately be called submission? J. Scott Horrell, an advocate of EFS, has clearly stated that we cannot posit that the Father and the Son would be free to differ from one another.⁹¹ I agree strongly with Horrell on

⁸⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer suggests that the final subjection of the Son will be "because Christ's regnal and salvific role will be at an end" (*First Corinthians* [Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008] 574). See also Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 294; George T. Montague, *First Corinthians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 274.

⁸⁹ H. Wayne House, "The Eternal Relational Subordination of the Son to the Father in Patristic Thought," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* 164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ J. Scott Horrell, "Complementarian Trinitarianism: Divine Revelation is Finally True to the Eternal Personal Relations," in *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?* 356.

this claim, as it would seem to be impossible for two omnipotent beings to will contrary things. If the Son is not free to differ from the Father, then by EFS advocate Robert Letham's definition of submission (noted above), the Son cannot submit to the Father because such submission requires freedom.⁹² We can also deduce from the doctrine of God that the Father and the Son could not will different outcomes if these outcomes have any moral aspect. Thus Norman Geisler, an advocate of EFS⁹³ who openly has affirmed dyothelite Christology,⁹⁴ rightly teaches, "the Scriptures affirm that God cannot contradict His nature (Heb 6:18; 2 Tim 2:13; Titus 1:2)."⁹⁵ Under a section entitled, "God's Will Is Based in His Wisdom," Geisler writes that "an all-wise God knows the best means to the best end for everything. The best means for the best end for each creature is God's will for that creature."⁹⁶ Likewise, Ware teaches that "God's eternal character could not be other than it is," and that God has "ethical immutability."⁹⁷ If the Father and the Son are equally wise and equally good, then both will equally will the best outcome for each creature. Neither can diminish the divine character in such a way as to will otherwise. Furthermore, because both Father and Son are omniscient as well as good and wise, they will each know the best course of action to maximize the good. This has been a major part of dyothelite theology, ever since Maximus the Confessor taught that God does not have a gnostic will. If the Son and the Father will the same outcome as a result of having the same wisdom and moral character, in what sense can the Son be said to possess the divine will in a submissive way? There is certainly no "yielding" here, as the word "submit" implies in its English denotation. Finally, because the Father and the Son both have perfect foreknowledge, then both will know from all eternity what the best outcome will be. The Father does not first know this outcome and then instruct the Son of the outcome so that the Son may obey and submit to this knowledge of the Father.

I grant House's point that the Father and Son may hypostatically possess an identical will in a unique way, but it seems to me that this uniqueness must be grounded in the personal properties of unbegotten and begotten, rooted in the relation of eternal generation. The Son does receive the identical will of the Father (along with all of his being) through generation, but I do not see how we can therefore say that the Son possesses this will in a submissive way. The Son is not free to act differently than the Father, cannot will a different outcome than the Father, does not temporally possess this will later than the Father, and does not have a numerically distinct will from the Father. I see very little reason to advocate the use

⁹² Letham, "Reply" 344.

⁹³ Norman Geisler teaches that there is a functional subordination in the Trinity, and that the Son eternally submits to the Father (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 2: *God, Creation* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003] 290–91).

⁹⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 73, 76.

⁹⁵ Geisler, *God, Creation* 159.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 216.

⁹⁷ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004) 141.

of the word “submission” of the way the Son possesses the divine will, particularly as a purported image of the submission given by a wife to a husband. The latter would entail freedom to act differently on the part of the husband and wife, different desires of the wills of husband and wife, and a temporal process in which the wife would yield her numerically distinct will to that of her husband. It would not, however, indicate that the wife received her faculty of willing from the husband, as the notion of eternal generation suggests of the Father-Son relationship. There simply is no correlation here.

3. *Perichoresis and dyotheletism.* Let us consider one final objection, this time from Millard Erickson, an opponent of EFS. Erickson is the only opponent of EFS whom I have seen explicitly connect the idea that God has one will with dyotheletism.⁹⁸ Giles surveys Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Calvin to demonstrate the notion that there is only one divine will, but he skips over the period of the monothelite controversy.⁹⁹ Interestingly, though Erickson makes the connection between the one will of God and dyotheletism, he claims that this is only one possible way of understanding the Trinity. As an alternative, he points to “the doctrine of perichoresis.” “In one version of this model,” he says, “there are three wills, but the persons are in such close harmony that their willing is one of consensus. Not one will, but three acting in unity is the case.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, Erickson only develops this idea in passing. It is unclear how this would resolve the “dyothelete problem.” If dyothelete Christology necessitates the idea that a will is a property of nature, and if perichoresis necessitates the existence of three wills, then these wills would either have to be identical to preserve the *homoousios* of the natures, or, if different, perichoresis would have to be seen as a communion of three different *ousias*. The former approach would seem to preclude submission insofar as the three persons would will the identical outcome, and the Son would not have to yield to the Father’s will. The latter approach would turn trinitarianism into tritheism. Beyond the fact that the perichoretic model proposed by Erickson does not resolve the “dyothelete problem” is the fact that the historical development of perichoresis in no way posited three wills. We have already discussed above the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus and John of Damascus, the theologians who first developed the idea of perichoresis.¹⁰¹ Each of them explicitly affirms the fact that God has a single will. Therefore, while it is perhaps possible for a perichoretic model to explain the Trinity with three wills, the burden would still be on the advocates of this model to explain how three wills could differ without resulting in a difference of natures. Were such a viable model offered, those who held to it should at least recognize that it is a novel application of perichoresis, and not claim to have the entire history of Christian theology behind the doctrine of EFS.

⁹⁸ Erickson, *Who’s Tampering?* 216–17.

⁹⁹ Giles, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.

¹⁰⁰ Erickson, *Who’s Tampering?* 217. A similar argument is made by J. Scott Horrell, “Complementarian Trinitarianism” 361.

¹⁰¹ James D. Gifford Jr., *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer’s Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011) 18–19.

IV. CONCLUSION: ETERNAL FUNCTIONAL SUBORDINATION SHOULD BE REJECTED

As an evangelical educated and active in non-evangelical circles, I had limited familiarity with the debates surrounding EFS until a renowned advocate of the theory presented his view of the Trinity in a local church in my town. Amid applause, EFS was presented as the clear biblical doctrine of the Trinity that had been historically affirmed by all orthodox theologians throughout history. Those who disagreed with EFS were said to be simply following human intuition and ignoring the clear teaching of the Scriptures. The dyothelite problem demonstrates that such grandiose claims are untenable. This paper has argued on Christological grounds that EFS is incompatible with classical conceptions of who Jesus Christ was and of what he accomplished. In positing a will as a property of a hypostasis, the metaphysics of EFS flatly contradict the metaphysics of classical dyothelite Christology. If, as dyothelitism suggests, a will is a property of nature, then there can only be one will in the Trinity because there is only one nature. To posit two wills or three wills in the Godhead is to posit two or three natures and thereby to undermine the idea of a Trinity altogether. On the other hand, to posit that a will is actually a personal property of a hypostasis, such that the Son can have a submissive will and the Father an authoritative one, is to undermine dyothelite Christology. Because the incarnation was, according to Chalcedon, one hypostasis in two natures, this would mean there is only one will in Christ. If Christ lacked a human will, he lacked the means to achieve our salvation according to classical models of the atonement. More than this, if Christ lacked a human will, he was not fully human, because human beings are thinking, feeling, and willing beings. The Bible is clear that “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2–3).

This article is not written with reference to the gender debate or with the intention of advocating one particular view on gender. Rather, it is written under the strong conviction that positing submission within the Godhead jeopardizes the metaphysical foundations of classical Christology and soteriology. Until such time as EFS can be reconciled with classical Christology, and until the ramifications of EFS for other major theological loci have been explored, I urge systematicians to proceed with caution. When treading on contentious ground, it is best to warn others of possible instability beneath their feet, so at the very least such caution should prohibit advocates of EFS from boldly proclaiming to the church at large the indisputability of their position. As I see it, much more is needed than a cautious presentation of claims of eternal submission. It is my contention that the dyothelite problem is insurmountable for EFS and the notion of EFS should be entirely rejected. This debate is not just a matter of egalitarians versus complementarians. It is a matter of fidelity to the theology we have been given so that we can rightly proclaim the gospel today and preserve sound doctrine for the generations to come.