

Subordinationism

Advanced Information

A doctrine that assigns an inferiority of being, status, or role to the Son or Holy Spirit within the Trinity. Condemned by numerous church councils, this doctrine has continued in one form or another throughout the history of the church. **In the early centuries, the struggle to understand the human and divine natures of Christ often led to placing the Son in a secondary position to the Father.** Justin Martyr, Origen, and Tertullian all evidence a certain amount of subordinationism in their writings.

This incipient subordinationism, especially that of Origen, eventually led to **Arianism** and other systems such as **Sabellianism, Monarchianism, and Macedonianism.** Arius, who would allow no intermediary being between the supremacy of the One God and his creatures, denied the full deity of Christ. From this it followed that Christ the Word was less than God incarnate and was instead a subordinate image of the Father. **In subordinationism lay the roots from which modern unitarianism and related theologies were to spring.**

The Nicene fathers ascribed to the Son and Spirit an equality of being or essence, but a subordination of order, with both deriving their existence from the Father as primal source. Athanasius insisted upon the coequality of the status of the three Persons of the Trinity, and Augustine that these Persons are coequal and coeternal. Ancient and modern theologians have argued for a subordination in the role of Son and Spirit to the Father and cite in support such passages as Matt. 11:27; John 5:26 - 27; 6:38; 8:28; 14:28. Some apply a doctrine of subordination of woman to man on the basis of a similar relationship within the Trinity (1 Cor. 11:3). Others argue that passages that seem to teach a subordination of Son to the Father speak of Christ's voluntary humiliation when he assumed human form (Phil. 2:5 - 8). In his exaltation, however, he returned to the equality of the eternal relationship expressed in such passages as John 1:1; 5:17 - 23; 10:15, 30; Titus 2:13; Rom. 9:5; 1 John 5:7.

The Athanasian Creed declared that in the Trinity "none is before or after another: none is greater or less than another," and the Second Helvetic Confession, the second most influential confession in Reformed tradition, condemns as heretics any who teach a subordination of Son or Holy Spirit (III, v).

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(Elwell Evangelical Dictionary)

Bibliography

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<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/subordin.htm>