

If we drop eternal generation, what then shall we say of eternal Sonship? That is an entirely different matter. There can be no doubt . . . that 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' are words intended by the writers of the Scriptures to indicate eternal relationships within the Triune Godhead. . . . It should not be difficult to understand the words 'Father and Son' as conveying a personal relationship in the eternal Trinity, without in any sense involving the thought of generation, or of any essential subordination.¹⁶

G. The economic subordination of the three Persons

By "economic" is simply meant the arrangement that God has been pleased to make, in which the various Persons of the Trinity do different things in the carrying out of God's great Purpose as respects creation, providence, redemption, and judgment. The three Persons of the godhead are equal in their essence, but unequal in their working.

To employ a very imperfect analogy, in moving the great ocean liner of the Purpose of the triune God toward its goal, the Father functions as the captain, the Son functions as the chief executive officer, and the Spirit functions as the crew. The captain gives orders; the chief executive officer goes to carry out the orders and to see that they are completed; and the crew does the work and fulfills the tasks assigned to them. Although all three Persons of the Trinity are active in the divine works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment, nevertheless they do different things in the carrying out of these works. In the work of redemption, for example, the Father initiates redemption by sending His beloved Son into the world, the Son accomplishes redemption by becoming incarnate and by making an atonement for our sins, and the Spirit applies redemption by uniting us to Christ and to the benefits of His atoning work. Of course, my analogy fails because the officers and crew of the ship are separate and different beings, whereas the Persons of the Trinity are united and identical in their characteristics. But perhaps this imperfect analogy can serve to aid our understanding of the distinction between essential equality and subordination of office and working. Subordination refers to function, not to essence.