

## SEVERAL BOOK REPORTS ON THE “TRINITY”

### Names/Titles of Books and Their Authors:

“*Who’s Tampering With the Trinity/An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*”, by Millard J. Erickson, published by Kregel Academic and Professional in 2009, and

“*Jesus and the Father/Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*”, by Kevin Giles, published by Zondervan in 2006, and

“*The Holy Spirit*” by Gregg R. Allison & Andreas J. Kostenberger, published by B & H Academic in 2020.

First Impressions: It is, at this early stage of the Book Reports which I, your Reviewer have been asked to prepare, that I am supposed to provide my personal, initial assessment of the books which I have reviewed. So why have I combined three books into this single Report? I have done so because of the manner in which these three books have personally impacted me, a non-theologically educated, lay theologian Reader. These three books have caused me to actually consider, in depth, the highly important Christian Doctrine of “*the Trinity*”, a doctrine to which I had previously paid but scant attention or thought. I readily admit that reading and studying these three books has not given me confidence that I fully understand this doctrine, or *the Trinity*, matters which I would respectfully submit are beyond true understanding or comprehension by most day to day Christians (of which I am certainly one). However, such reading and studying of these three books has caused me, a true novice theologian, to feel that I have been drawn closer to God, and to His eternal existence as a Divine Community of Three Distinct Persons, who exist, and have for all eternity existed, and who will for all future eternity exist as a Unified One, who are bound together by Love and who have always worked together and will always work together as a unified One, with all of their work being the work of all three of them, even though some of their work might, by Scripture, be appropriated to one of them or be carried out through one of them.

So I have considered the contents of these three books as something of a unit, a unit which has given me, and which I believe will give you, the Reader, a better appreciation for *the Trinity* and for the hugely (in my view indispensable) Christian Doctrine of the Trinity. While I have considered the three books as such a Unit, two of them deal with a hugely controversial issue which has recently been re-advanced and brought to the forefront by several prominent Evangelical Theologians, with the leading one of those being Wayne Grudem. What is that issue? It is the one raised by the arguments asserted by Grudem, Bruce Ware and others to the effect that Jesus, the Son in the three person Trinity, was not only subordinated to the authority of the Father during His earthly period of His Incarnation (including His earthly mission, death and resurrection) but that He, the Son, has been and will be eternally subordinated to the authority of the Father, not just during His earthly incarnation but in the *immanent* Trinity (meaning the Trinity as it has for all eternity existed, and as it currently exists and will always exist, outside of, and over and above the works of the Trinity with the earth and mankind, sometimes referred to as the *economic Trinity*). In other words, the contention of these theologians is that the Son has been, is and will be permanently subordinated in Authority to the Authority of the Father. While

this contention does not specifically address the Holy Spirit, its logical implication is that the Holy Spirit, like the Son, has been for all eternity, and is and will always be permanently subordinated in Authority to the Authority of the Father, and, possibly, to the Authority of both the Father and the Son. These theologians argue that while Jesus was fully God, in all of His *essence*, and that all of the Persons of the Trinity are of the same *essence*, and are fully God, they occupy positions of a gradient of Authority. These arguments are based, in some substantial part, upon the clear subordination of the Son to the Authority of the Father during the Son's period of earthly ministry.

In their respective books, each of Millard Erickson and Kevin Giles takes strong issue with this so called "permanent subordination" theory. However, Erickson does so in a much less strident or argumentative manner than does Giles. That said, each of these authors, Erickson and Giles, by an extensive review of and analysis of the arguments of those who support the permanent subordination theory, and of the various passages and overall narratives of Scripture which are argued as being both in support of and contrary to such theory, together with the relevant Creeds of Christianity and the writings and conclusions of the ancient Church Fathers, including Augustine, Calvin and many others, and the relevant Church History and Traditions, concludes that this permanent subordination theory is not only an erroneous theory but that it is a very dangerous, almost heretical theory. As noted above, however, Erickson's conclusion in this respect is asserted in a somewhat "softer tone", if you will, than is the conclusion of Giles.

So two of the books reviewed herein deal with the so called "permanent subordination" theory, and seek to refute it by a very extensive analysis of the arguments for and against this theory (including those asserted in ancient times and in current times by Church Fathers and current day theologians), and of the relevant passages and overall narratives of Scripture, together with Christian Creeds and Church history and Traditions, as well as the basic theorems of Philosophy. Even leaving aside the permanent subordination arguments, I personally found these two books to be extremely informative about (and to provide excellent examples and case studies of) the ways in which two highly respected theologians, Erickson and Giles, have developed and apply their respective theological methods in seeking to confront a complex theological issue of substantial importance. So the Reader can, by reading these two books, regardless of his or her position on permanent subordination, receive a wonderful education in the development of his or her theological method, and of the sources to be used in applying that method in a very studied, highly researched attempt to resolve a highly complex theological issue.

All of this said about the books of Erickson and Giles, I found myself to be somewhat comforted by their respective conclusions that the Son (and by implication the Holy Spirit) have for all eternity been and are and will for all eternity be (in the so called "*Immanent Trinity*") completely God and are God, in every respect, and that while they are distinct Persons they are a Unit (meaning One) and that, as such, they work and operate together, in complete Unity of Essence, Will and Purpose, while certain parts of their Work are conducted through one of them or are appropriated to or terminated in one of them; provided, however, that during the earthly period of the Incarnation, the Son, Jesus, was voluntarily subordinated to the authority of the Father and was, as a fully human man, assisted by and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Erickson and Giles would argue that we can look to the *economic* actions of the Trinity (meaning the

actions of God, the Trinity, in and for the world and with and for mankind) as being a true *Revelation* of God, but not as being a complete *Revelation* of God (and of the Trinity) as God (and the Trinity) is and has been and will for all eternity be, meaning as the *Immanent Trinity*. To put it succinctly, the *economic Trinity* (meaning its actions in implementing God's Plans (i.e. the Plans of the Trinity)) are a true *Revelation of God*, insofar as that *Revelation* goes, but are not a complete *Revelation of God* (or of the Trinity) as God (and the Trinity) exists and has always existed and will always exist (the so called *Immanent Trinity*) since we, as fallible human beings, can never fully know everything about God. We can know what God has revealed through the various sources of His revelation, which are true revelations of God but are not complete revelations of God, meaning that we cannot know everything about God. As a totally novice theologian, and as an everyday Christian, I find these conclusions of Erickson and Giles to be completely consistent with the manner in which I have somehow, innately, viewed the Trinity, and as I contemplate the Trinity in my prayers and devotions. I just cannot comfortably believe that the Son or the Holy Spirit, while being fully God, are somehow Persons who are in positions which are "inferior" (and that is my word) in Authority to the Father. To me being in a position of *inferior authority*, by implication, means that the Person in the position of *superior authority* can somehow command or direct the Person in the position of *inferior authority* to take certain actions (e.g. to be incarnated as man and to live as a man and die on a cross). I cannot reasonably contemplate or believe these propositions to be correct in my contemplation of, worship of and prayers to the Persons of the Trinity. So, for whatever it is worth, I commend the books of Millard Erickson and Kevin Giles, both as examples of excellent applications of Theological Method and for their conclusions denying the correctness of the permanent subordination theory.

Now I must address my Initial Impressions of the book, *The Holy Spirit*, which is the book of our other authors, Gregg R. Allison and Andreas Kostenberger. This book is a part of a Series of Books which are declared to be "Theology For The People of God." I view the "People of God" as being all Christians, who include not just academic theologians, professional theologians, seminary teachers, pastors and church leaders, but who also include the everyday person who professes a belief in Christ and in His Lordship and in His gift of redemption. In other words the day to day folks who sit in our congregations are just as included in the "people of God" as are the more "learned" theologians. Quite simply, this book cannot have been intended by its authors to be addressed to the "ordinary" (and no Christian is "ordinary" in God's eyes) Christian, and must have been intended by its authors to be directed to academic theologians others who consider themselves as being learned "theologians" or as being in capacities where they are called upon to advise and assist pastors and church leaders. It cannot have been intended by its authors to be directed to the day to day, down and dirty, everyday, real world Christian. In summary, it contains far, far too much information to be even very partially absorbed by most of us, but is information which is likely of benefit to academic theologians. All of this is not to say that this book of Allison and Kostenberger is of no value. Far from it. It is of great value to academic theologians and it provides a wonderful library resource for those who are studying the Holy Spirit, the position of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, or the revealed actions and roles of the Holy Spirit as revealed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This book is an extensive (very extensive) and highly researched study of the Holy

Spirit (sometimes referred to as “pneumatology”) which seeks to answer the questions: *Who Is The Holy Spirit, and What Has the Holy Spirit Done and What Does the Holy Spirit Do?* I must say, in summary, that wrestling with this book (and sometimes wading through its extensive information and discussions) which presented me with a very heavy chore, has caused me to have a much deeper understanding and respect for the sometimes over-looked Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. More on that conclusion will follow below.

What is (are) the Author (Authors) Doing With What the Author (Authors) is (are) Saying/Summary of the Contents of the Books:

I believe that much of what our authors, Millard Erickson and Kevin Gillis, are saying is accurately summarized by the “First Impressions” section of this Report, which appears above. However, I have prepared an earlier, March, 2022, Book Report on Erickson’s book which should be available to the Reader. That earlier Report contains an extensive outline or summary of the contents of Erickson’s book. While the books of Giles and Erickson differ in some respects, suffice it to say that, in each of their books, each of Erickson and Giles opposes the conclusion reached by some current day evangelical theologians that the Son is, and has for all eternity been, and will always be in a position whereby the Son is Subordinated in Authority to the Authority of the Father (and, while not specifically stated in either of such books, this “subordination of authority” theory would also apply to the Holy Spirit). Each of Erickson and Giles comes from what might be referred to as an “orthodox Evangelical position”. Each of them strongly holds to what had been an orthodox view of the Trinity, which is that, while each of the three Persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a distinct Person, they each are (and have for all eternity been and will for all eternity be) completely, and totally God, equal in all respects, and that they have been and are and will always be of the same *essence*, the essence of God with all of the attributes of God, and are in positions of equal Authority, with none of them having Authority over any of the others of them; provided that, during the period of His Incarnation, the Son, as Jesus, was voluntarily subordinated in authority to the authority of the Father. This orthodox position has, in more recent years, been challenged by some prominent Evangelical theologians who hold that the Son is, and has for all eternity been, and will for all eternity be subordinated in authority to the authority of the Father, although He is (“otherwise”) fully God and is, in his *essence* of the same *essence* as that of the Father. In each of their books, each of Giles and Erickson, engages in an extensive (very extensive) analysis of the arguments for and against this “Subordination of Authority” theory, and of the relevant Scriptural passages, Christian Creed components, Church Tradition and Church history, and ancient and current writings of Church fathers and leaders and theologians, all of which have been cited, both in favor of and in opposition to this “Subordination of Authority” theory. (Note: Surprisingly, many of the same Scriptural Passages (particularly those in the Gospel of John), and many of the same references to Church Creeds, and Church Traditions, History and writings are cited by both the proponents of, and the opponents of this Subordination of Authority theory.) Each of Giles and Erickson, using his well thought out and explained Theological Method, comes to the conclusion that this “Subordination of Authority” theory is not only wrong, but is dangerous,

with Erickson fearing that it can lead to very bad theological conclusions, even one that Jesus was somehow not fully God. Giles is even more adamant in his conclusion that the Subordination of Authority conclusion verges upon (if it is not in fact) heresy. Each of these books of Erickson and Giles is recommended to the Reader as providing an excellent case study for the development of and application of a Theological Method and for the identification of, and uses of the sources for "Truth" or "Theological Truth" which are to be utilized in the application of such a Method. So, whether or not the Reader agrees with the Authors' conclusions or arguments about the Subordination of Authority theory, he or she, by reading each of the books of Erickson and Giles, cannot help but learn a good deal about how to approach a complex, and possibly controversial theological issue, using a proper theological method.

The book of Allison and Kostenberger, "*The Holy Spirit*" is much more difficult to summarize than are the books of Erickson and Giles if, for no other reason, than the length of, and huge volume of information contained in *The Holy Spirit*. I must confess that I really struggled to complete this book. It is, at least for me, overwhelming in its volume and in the extent of its information which has been, for me, difficult to absorb and even partially retain. That said, if the Reader will wrestle with this book he or she will find that his or her respect for, and knowledge of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit is hugely increased. I don't think that I would be making an overstatement or an erroneous statement if I said that "The Holy Spirit is (to adopt a word used by professional athletes in discussing their contracts or roles with their teams) 'Disrespected' by most day to day Christians", and even in most of our church services. I must apologetically admit that, in my devotions and prayers, I am almost always thinking of, and praying to the Father, or Jesus (the Son), with little regard for the Holy Spirit. Rightly or wrongly, I think that most of us "ordinary Christians" (although no one is "ordinary" in God's eyes) thinks and acts, in his or her devotions and prayers and thinking, as I have done. We just don't think about the Holy Spirit or about His enormous and important role in assisting and strengthening us and in providing us daily wisdom in our efforts to achieve some degree of Christian Maturity or in our efforts to think and act as God would have us think or act, or in our struggling efforts to be as God intends for us to be. Now assuming that my conclusions in these respects are accurate, how will this book, *The Holy Spirit*, help pastors and church leaders in their efforts to help us "ordinary Christians" whom they are called upon to lead, teach and help, in order that we might lead more God honoring, abundant, thriving lives (and "ordinary" Christians will never read this book as it is too overwhelming)? I would submit that, by reading this book such pastors and leaders (and those professional theologians who are trying to help and advise such pastors and leaders) will:

- 1) Be given the benefit of those limited (but still numerous) Old Testament passages going back to the beginning, the Creation Story of Genesis, which refer, throughout the Old Testament, to the Holy Spirit and which describe His role as God, and His workings as God (in concert with the Father and the Son) throughout the Old Testament (well before the day of Pentecost, when we are sometimes taught that the Holy Spirit arrived on the scene).

- 2) Be given the benefit of those numerous New Testament passages, particularly those in the Gospels, which describe the pre-Pentecost role and workings of the Holy Spirit in

strengthening and working with Jesus during His earthly period of His Incarnation.

3) Be given the benefit of a thorough analysis of the Book of Acts, which might be referred to as “the Acts of the Spirit”, in bringing about the miracle of God’s earthly church.

4) Be given the benefit of those New Testament passages and teachings which show that Pentecost represented a, so to speak, “watershed” in the workings and role of the Holy Spirit through His indwelling within each believer, and in assisting that believer as he or she seeks to become more as God would have him or her be, all as predicted in the writings of Isaiah and other prophets, and as promised by Jesus.

5) Be given the benefit of a well thought out Systematic Theology description and analysis of the Holy Spirit, who He is and what He has done and is doing and will do.

6) Become convicted with a firm belief (and enable those whom he or she is caused upon to teach and help to be convicted with a firm belief) that the Holy Spirit is, like the Father and the Son, fully God in all of His very *essence* and being and in all respects.

7) Become convicted with a belief that (and help those whom he or she is called upon to teach and help to become convicted with a firm belief that) each of the three Persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a distinct Person, but that all such three Persons are and have always been a “Unified Community” and are in Combination, “One”, a Unified “One”, and that, while certain roles or results are described in Scripture as being those of one of them or as being “appropriated” to or as “terminating” in one of them, they all act together, with the actions of any one of them being the actions of all of them, even though they might act (or be described in Scripture as acting) through one of them. For example, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit might act through the Holy Spirit, but all three of them are so acting.

8) Acquire knowledge which will help him or her to aid those whom he or she is called upon to teach or assist to acquire a new, strengthened belief in the continual strengthening and wisdom providing presence of the Holy Spirit, thereby enabling those whom he or she is called upon to teach or assist to feel the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, and to approach, with confidence all Persons of the Trinity through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. (A personal note: In our church services we almost always talk about, and think about, and pray to the Father and/or to Jesus, and seldom is the Holy Spirit mentioned or is His name directly invoked. This book convinces me that this overlooking of the Holy Spirit should change.)

9) If nothing else, become aware of this book, which will provide a continual source of material, and will serve as a great library reference book, which he or she will want to consult, if he or she is called upon to teach or write about the Holy Spirit, Who He Is and What He Has Done and Is Doing, or about the subject of the Trinity, and how its distinct Persons act and work in unity.

I also found that this book, *The Holy Spirit*, contains some very valuable nuggets of information about the Pentecostalism movement and to its related movements, the Charismatic movement and the “third-wave evangelical” movement, all of which share some, or much of the Pentecostalist theology, and its views of the Holy Spirit, and of what might be referred to as a “Second Baptism with/by/in the Holy Spirit”, and of Spiritual Gifts or Powers, including those of healing, and speaking in tongues. As the authors state: “Pentecostal and Charismatic

theology....locates baptism with the Spirit as either logically or temporally subsequent to the initial experience of salvation.... (and)....salvation is the necessary ground for baptism with the Spirit". Three movements which emphasize the Holy Spirit have arisen since the onset of the twentieth century. These are Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement, and "third-wave" evangelism. These three movements are discussed by, and contrasted at length by the authors. They opine that Pentecostalism is a movement in and of itself, whereas the Charismatic movement is "a development within mainline churches and denominations (e.g. Anglican, Catholic) , beginning in the 1960s, that embraced certain doctrines of Pentecostal theology". By contrast, Pentecostalism has mushroomed as a global movement, numbering, according to recent estimates, 600 million adherents, or 27 percent of the world's 2.2 billion Christians. Pentecostal theology emphasizes a separate baptism in/with/by the Holy Spirit, which, among other things, empowers the recipient with enhanced spiritual gifts, sometimes including the gift of "speaking in tongues". The "third-wave evangelicalism" movement began in the 1980s, and, among other things, holds that all of the spiritual gifts and miraculous signs continue in the church today. The early Vineyard Churches were adherents of this third-wave movement. Each of these three movements, Pentecostalism, Charismatic and Third-Wave, is a movement which includes numerous adherents and which cannot be ignored in any discussions of the Church or of Evangelicalism. Each of them shares some of, or many of the attributes of the Pentecostal theology and movement. These movements are discussed (and contrasted) at great length by the authors. This information enables the reader to have a better grasp of these three movements. I found this information to be of great value to me in my attempts to better understand the various movements within Christianity in general and Evangelicalism in particular.

To What Audience or Readership Are These Three Books Directed?: These books are not directed to a readership made up of the general Christian public. I don't think that any of the folks of that general Christian public will be particularly helped by any of these books. Each of these books is directed to academic theologians and, perhaps, to "professional theologians" who are called upon, in their daily work, to assist pastors and church leaders in their approaches to theological issues. To a lesser extent pastors and church leaders, particularly teaching pastors would be benefitted by each of these books. Theological or seminary students would be greatly benefitted by the Giles and Erickson books as they work with their studies and with their efforts to establish their respective theological methods and to identify the resources which are to be used in implementing those methods when attempting to address complex, sometimes controversial theological issues.

Can These Books Be Used in TEI/ECLI?: In my opinion the answer to this question must be NO, although the Erickson and Giles books do provide very good case studies of, or examples for the development and application of a sound theological method to be used in approaching a theological issue. Of course, if questions arise in a class about the "Permanent Subordination" theory, or the relative or gradational degrees of authority among the three persons of the Trinity, then the Giles and Erickson books can be used as a resource for providing responses to these

questions. The Allison and Kostenberger book certainly provides valuable insights into the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third-Wave movements which are useful in a study of Evangelicalism and its various movements, particularly the very influential movements which are grounded in the Pentecostalist theology. All of this said, these books are valuable library reference books and should be held in any theological library for use in theological research work. Academic theologians, professional theologians, pastors and church leaders, as well as theological and seminary students will find needs for consulting these books. Therefore, they are valuable additions to any theological library.

How To Read These Books: Unless the prospective reader has an intense interest in the study of the Holy Spirit, or the “Permanent Subordination” theory, then I don’t think that he or she can be encouraged to read any of these three books, in its entirety. However, these books are valuable library resources, and just knowing the general nature of their subject matters makes them valuable for future research, writing and speaking purposes. That said, a general review of the Table of Contents, the Preface and Introduction and Conclusion for each of these books (and, possibly, the “Conclusion” for each of its Chapters) should suffice to acquaint the reader with the book’s contents. I believe that such a cursory knowledge of the contents of each book will keep the book sufficiently in the mind of the reader so that the reader can put the book on the library shelf, and then go back and consult it when specific issues that are dealt with in each book arise. While I have read each of these books, cover to cover, I cannot recommend that every reader do so. Just knowing that the book is there, and what its subject matter is provides the reader with sufficient knowledge to know when he or she should consult the book in the future.