



The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches

CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Information for the churches

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EFCC MISSION STATEMENT

TO BE A FELLOWSHIP OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES EFFECTIVELY WITNESSING TO THE GOSPEL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

We want to achieve this by promoting:-

- **Gospel Truth** Advancing Evangelical Christianity through Independent Churches.
- **Gospel Fellowship** Promoting fellowship and encouraging prayer, co-operation and mutual support for the churches as they witness to the gospel.
- **Gospel Independence** Bearing witness to the Scriptural principles of the autonomy of the local church and the freedom of believers in Christ.

The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust

The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust is seeking a Clerk to the Trustees to work in the region of twenty-five hours per month. Remuneration package between £9,000 - £10,000. Position will be home based with some meetings in Central London.

The Memorial Hall Trust maintains the Congregational Library and makes grants to fund the work and mission of the Church.

For further information see

<http://quintapress.macmate.me/CMHT/CMHT.html>

or e-mail minister@bunyanmeeting.co.uk

EFCC LADIES CONFERENCE

14th April 2018 10 am – 3.30 pm

Speaker: Ruth Eardley

Venue: Kings Park Conference Centre, Northampton.

Ladies please book the date in your diary for 2018, details will be available later in the year. Option of overnight stay on the 13th April, the ladies would encourage you to do this.

EFCC COMMITTEE ELECTIONS 2017

The following brethren have been duly elected to serve on the EFCC committee for the next 3 years.

Rev. Bill Harrow, Puckeridge Chapel

Rev. Nick Gray, Staines Congregational Church

Rev. Keith Plant, Stony Stratford Evangelical Free Church

Mr Steve Horton, Crystal Peaks Church, Sheffield

Our grateful thanks to the above brethren for their willingness to serve the fellowship in this way and we would encourage you to uphold them, and the other committee members in prayer.

POSITION PAPERS – these were duly adopted at the AGM

For Ministers and Church Officers and other leaders

IN-SERVICE TRAINING - Saturday 24th June 2017

Venue:

Droylsden Independent Church

Ashton Hill Lane, Droylsden M43 7UB

Details previously mailed to Church Secretaries and Ministers.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING - Saturday 15th September 2017

Venue:

Hayes Town Chapel

St Mary's Road, Hayes UB3 2JP

Details to Church Secretaries and Ministers (regional churches)

EFCC 2018 AGM

12th May - Pontefract Congregational Church

STUDIES CONFERENCE 17TH MARCH 2018

Wesley's Chapel Leysian Mission, London

PRAYER SUPPORT

The EFCC Trust Board meeting 13th June 2017

The EFCC Committee 4th July 2017

Venue for both Bulkington Congregational Church

Devotions

We meet for prayer in the office at 9.30 a.m., please advise us of any prayer matters.

The Lady Hewley Trust – Financial assistance for Ministers

The trustees meet twice a year in June and November to consider grant applications in instances of need and hardship.

Grant application forms are available from the EFCC office.

INFORMATION FOR CHURCH SECRETARIES

Affirmation of Oneness – we are pleased that a good number of churches have returned the card confirming their Affirmation of Oneness, for those churches who have not returned we would encourage you to sign and return the card as soon as possible.

Change of details – we are grateful for those churches who keep us informed regarding changes. Please e-mail changes to efcc1@efcc.karoo.co.uk or send in by mail.

APPLICATION FOR GRANTS

The EFCC Trust Corporation Ltd is responsible for the oversight of a number of Trust Funds including the National Funds. Affiliated churches are eligible to apply for grants from one or more of the Trust Funds as well as from National Funds. Categories:

Ministerial Training/ Ministerial Support/ Welfare/ Evangelism/ Renovation, Repairs and Maintenance/ General Purpose.

Education Fund - We have limited funds available for small grants, we would welcome applications for their use, the funds are available for children of ministers employed full-time by member churches.

Grants up to a maximum figure of £10000 are considered based on the individual circumstances of the church applying, loans will also be considered on an application by application basis, possibly for larger projects such as church building extensions/renovation/new builds. One of the key areas is Ministerial Training/Support, EFCC would want to offer practical support to churches to enable them to consider calling a Minister. EFCC, through their representative Bill Dyer, would work closely with a church as finance is part of a fuller support package.

The Trustees meet three times per year, usually in February, June and September to consider all grant applications. In the case of a particular need it may be possible for an interim decision to be made prior to the next trustee meeting.

Completed application forms need to be returned to the office about 4 weeks prior to a meeting.

Grant application forms are available from Mr A R Harrison, EFCC, P O Box 34, Beverley HU17 0YY or by e-mail – efcc@efcc.karoo.co.uk

The One Will of the Triune Godhead

The Nicene Creed was the primary doctrinal product of the First Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea (325). The Creed was developed and affirmed in the first Canon of the First Council of Constantinople (381), which was the Second Ecumenical Council. The end result is technically called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, but it is usually referred to as the Nicene Creed for convenience.

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made, Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one Catholick and Apostolick Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Creed teaches, in accordance with Scriptural witness and the doctrine of the Church Fathers that the one divine essence of God subsists in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Creed also teaches that there is an order among the persons of the Trinity; the person of the Father is unbegotten, the person of the Son is eternally begotten of the Father (eternal generation), and the person of the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Recent Debate

Recent debate about the personal relations between the Father and the Son in the Trinity prior to creation and the incarnation has drawn attention to the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. A critical element of the argument for eternal subordination is the claim that it is implied by the Creed's statement that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

In my recent review of the late Mike Ovey's monograph, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility*, I cautiously attempted to endorse Ovey's position that before the incarnation, the Son eternally submits to the Father. It is vital to emphasise that Ovey clearly states in his book that eternal subordination is not a 'New Arianism' because he grounds his Trinitarian theology on the Patristic affirmation that God is one being in three persons. Therefore any notion that the Son is ontologically inferior to the Father is impossible because the Son is consubstantial with the Father. Since the publication of my book review my understanding has developed. I will explain the line of argument that has led to this change. But it is first important to state that I consider belief in eternal subordination to be error, not heresy, because it is a debate about the implications of the Nicene Creed rather than the content of the Creed itself.

In this brief article I want to set out the main reason why I now reject the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. I intentionally do not interact with Ovey's book here because I want to honour the memory of a fine theologian and teacher who now beholds the glory of the Triune Godhead in heaven. I also think that extensive interaction with the contemporary debate will increase the complexity of this article, which aims simply to point to what I consider to be the biblical teaching. Towards the end there is a brief summary statement which encapsulates my argument in one short paragraph.

Scriptural passages that speak of the submission of the Son to the Father all share an incarnational context. Christ's prayer in Gethsemane in which he prays 'Not as I will, but as you will' (Matthew 26:39); Christ's statement that he came 'not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me' (John 6:38); Paul's statement that our Lord 'Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:8), serve as three clear examples. Arguing from such passages that the Son eternally submits to the Father, not just in the incarnation, is not reasonable. These passages teach that in the incarnation, Christ submitted to the will of God.

The Incarnation

'The Word became flesh' (John 1:14).

In the incarnation the person of God the Son personally assumed full humanity into union with his divine nature. The humanity of Christ was complete just as ours is, except without sin. Christ's humanity includes human emotions, the intellectual and volitional faculties, as well as the ability to suffer entailed by being a creature. Therefore, in Christ there are two wills; the divine and the human. The human will of Christ ceaselessly submits to the one divine will. The doctrine that there are two wills in the one Christ was formally approved and accepted by the Church at the sixth ecumenical council, the Third Council of Constantinople in 681.

When Christ prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, 'Not as I will, but as you will,' he was submitting his human will to the will of God. He was not submitting his divine will to the divine will of the Father; I will argue that this is impossible. The concept that the will of the Son submits to the will of the Father is foundational to the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son. This conception of intra-divine submission depends upon the notion that in God there are three distinct wills; the will of the Father, the will of the Son, and the will of the Holy Spirit. I assert that this is not a biblical concept of the will of God. Instead the Scriptures speak of one will of God. I will set out the argument for this step by step. This is

grounded in the Scriptures and guided by the writings of a number of the Church Fathers, particularly Maximus the Confessor in his *Opusculum 6*.

In the Lord Jesus Christ there is one person – the person of God the Son. There are not two persons in Christ, a human person and a divine person; this is the heresy of Nestorianism which was anathematised at the Council of Ephesus (431). And yet in the Lord Jesus Christ there are two wills – the divine will and the human will. It is this human will of the Lord Jesus Christ that submits to the will of God in the New Testament. Therefore the faculty of volition is tied to the nature and not to the person. If this were not the case, then in the Lord Jesus Christ there would be but one will, the will of the person of the Son. Instead there is one will in each of Christ's two natures.

The will of God

Applying this to the one divine nature it is clear that there can only be one divine will of God, not three wills in the three persons. This is because the will is tied not to the person but to the nature. One might speak of a Trinitarian expression of the one divine will, but this still excludes numerical distinction in the divine will itself. Scripture does distinguish between the human will of the Lord Jesus Christ and the will of God, but Scripture does not divide the one will of God.

The one will of the one divine nature is in my mind the primary argument against the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. If there is only one divine will, the notion that the Son submits his will to the will of the Father is illogical. Without three wills in God it is meaningless to speak of the submission or subordination of the Son to the Father. However it is entirely Scriptural to state that the human will of Christ submits to the divine will.

Summary

It is helpful to briefly summarise what I consider to be the orthodox interpretation of Scripture on this matter. We believe in one God. The one divine nature subsists in three persons. There is an order among the persons of the Trinity, this order is

reflected in the way we pray to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the one divine nature of God there is only one divine will. In the incarnation the person of the Son personally assumed human nature which included a human will. In the one person of the Lord Jesus Christ there are two wills, one human and one divine. The human will of Christ submits to the will of God. However it is meaningless to speak of the Son submitting his will to the will of the Father before the incarnation because there is only one divine will.

Further Questions

I have presented this argument against the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father as simply as I can. Consequently I have not done justice to the many subtleties of the intra-Trinitarian relations in eternity and in the incarnation. In order to highlight something of this complexity for further reflection, I will close by noting an important aspect of the doctrine of the incarnation.

Why did the Son become incarnate rather than the Father or the Holy Spirit? I submit that it is principally because it is logical that the person of the Father, who is unbegotten, and who eternally begets the person of the Son, and who is the fountainhead of the Triune persons, sends the Son. It would be theologically inappropriate for the Father to be sent by the Son. In the same way it would be inappropriate for the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, to become incarnate. Rather his role is the application of the redemption purchased by Christ at the cross. If it is only the Son who becomes incarnate, and submits his human will to the divine will in the incarnation, what is implied for our understanding of the relation of the Son to the Father in eternity prior to creation and the incarnation?

The implications of this in terms of the one undivided will of God and the relations among the Triune persons are beyond the scope of this brief article, but they raise considerable questions. I have argued that it is meaningless to speak of the Son's eternal subordination to the Father, but in light of the incarnation of the Son and not the Father, perhaps something

may be said concerning the eternal intra-Trinitarian relations beyond the Nicene formula.

I close with two points of caution. First, if we reject the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father we must not then reject the complementarian teaching of Scripture concerning men and women in marriage and the Church. If our primary argument for complementarianism is eternal subordinationism, we must guard against egalitarianism, and must search the Scriptures on this matter within the context of each passage.

Secondly, the call to humble orthodoxy is vital if the Church of Christ is to further her understanding of theology. Debate must be conducted in a way that is worthy of the people of God who have ‘put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24). Paul commands us, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom’ (Colossians 3:16). I am grateful to those who have taken the time to guide my thinking on this issue in a manner worthy of this command, and I pray that the Lord will use this article to bring clarity.

Thomas Brand

The Article is the view of the author and not necessarily the view of EFCC

Book

During the last year I have been very grateful for the hard work done by folk like David Saunders and Alan Best, who was my predecessor as President of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Both as General Secretary of EFCC and now as Pastor at Honiton Evangelical Congregational Church it is not really possible for me to spend extensive time visiting countries abroad and WECF have been very reliant on the hard work they both do in visiting and maintaining contact with member church groups.

I and Margaret are due to visit Macedonia from 10th - 16th May which does account for my absence from the EFCC AGM which I would otherwise have hoped to attend. We hope to hold a number of teaching sessions at the Central Church in Skopje and also (dv) to preach at a couple of other churches. In September 2017, there is a possible visit to Bulgaria again taking seminars and doing some preaching which will enable us to re-establish some contacts. I am hoping that Mark Ladds, who has visited Bulgaria before, will be able to accompany me on this visit.

In November WECF are planning their Mid-Term Conference which will be held in Argentina. We will be in Argentina from 6th - 14th and this will involve a Conference in Urdinarrain where their denominational seminary is based and visits to churches in the area. Please be prayerfully supportive of this venture. The churches in Argentina affiliated to WECF in 2016 and it will be important to get to know them better and build long-term effective working relationships. Rather sadly attending there does mean that I will miss the EFCC Ministers' Prayer Conference I think for the first time since I went to Cannon Park in 1982.

Mike Plant

WECF President