

The Subordination of the Exalted Son to the Father

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When I was at university I attended an SCM conference. The main speaker addressed us on the person and work of Christ in John's gospel. He spoke much about his finished work. At the end of his lecture a student startled him by saying, "You have had lots to say about what Christ did for us 2000 years ago. But what is he doing for us now?"

Initially, the lecturer was thrown by the question. Then after a period of silence, he said that the work of Christ had ended with his ascension. Since Christ had rejoined his Father in heaven he was no longer directly at work here on earth. He had left his Spirit behind to do the work of God in the hearts of people. The Spirit took over where Christ had left off.

That incident has stuck in my mind and haunted me ever since. I knew that the speaker was wrong, but at that stage in my theological development I could not pin down why he was wrong, let alone give a Biblical answer to that important question. Only gradually did I realise that the answer lay in the right understanding of Christ's ascension and his ongoing ministry through the means of grace. That teaching is the foundation for this paper in which I would like to explore some of the Trinitarian implications of Christ's real presence in the church and his apparent subordination to God the Father.

Now, when I argue that the Son is, in some senses, subordinate to the Father, I utterly reject the heresy of subordinationism.¹ It teaches that the Son is not "of one being with the Father." He is, instead either created from the Father's being (Arianism) or is only similar in being to the Father (Semi-Arianism). Both these positions deny the full divinity of Christ. The argument in this paper presupposes that the Son is in no wise inferior to the Father as God as confessed by the Athanasian Creed; like the Holy Spirit he is "equal in glory and in majesty" to the Father.

* This is a second of two papers delivered to the Queensland District Pastors' Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia in June 2004. The first paper, "Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament," provides important context for this essay, was published in *LTR* 17 (2004-05) 45-59.

¹ This paper is part of a larger debate that has been pursued mainly in evangelical circles between so-called "subordinationists", who hold that the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, and "so-called "egalitarians", who hold that any teaching of subordination is inconsistent with the Son's equality with the Father. The present state of this debate is summed up by four publications. On the one side, the argument for the functional role-subordination of the Son is summarised by the 1999 report of the Sydney Diocesan Commission on *The Doctrine of Trinity and its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women*, www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/doc/trinity, and the essays in Wayne Grudem (ed.), *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton: Good News, 2002. The other side of the debate is presented most forcefully by Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002. His use of Barth and Rahner to enlist the tradition of the church to support his arguments has received a devastating critique from Mark Baddeley, "The Trinity and Subordinationism: A Response to Kevin Giles," *The Reformed Theological Review* 63:1 (2004): 29-42.

This paper also assumes that subordination does not necessarily entail inferiority. Let me illustrate. All orthodox theologians agree that the eternal Son was subordinate to his Father in his earthly life. According to Luke 2:51, he was also subordinate to his parents. Yet none of us would therefore conclude that he was inferior to the Father in divinity by becoming a human being, or inferior to his parents in humanity by becoming their child.

In this paper I wish to address the question whether the risen Lord Jesus is in any way subordinate to the Father. This means that that I will not deal with three other related matters. The first is the question whether the pre-incarnate Son was subordinate to the Father. This was the focus of the debates in the Early Church. It was resolved by the councils of Nicea and Constantinople and is summarised in the Nicene Creed with two complementary assertions. On the one hand, since there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Son is “of one being with the Father.” Both the Father and the Son are equally divine. On the other hand, there is an order of persons in the one God, an order of origin and orientation in the Trinity. The Son is “eternally begotten **of** the Father, God **from** God, Light **from** Light, true God **from** true God,” while the Holy Spirit “proceeds **from** the Father and the Son.” The Son then is “subordinate”² to the Father as the eternal source of his sonship and his divinity as Son.³ He is always the Son of the Father, just as the first person of the Trinity is always the Father of his only Son. The second matter that will not be considered is the uncontroversial question of the Son’s subordination to the Father in his earthly ministry. The third matter that will not be considered is the rather speculative question whether 1 Corinthians 15:28 teaches that the Son will be eternally subordinate to the Father after the end of the world.

My basic thesis is that the order of the Son’s relationship to the Father in his exalted state determines the order of his ministry in the church, the exercise of his three-fold office as prophet, priest and king. That order does not basically consist in a chain of command from the Father through the Son to the church⁴, but in a chain of reception that comes from the Father and returns to the Father. It is a process of giving and receiving, the way in which the Father delivers the Holy Spirit and every spiritual gift to his people through the Son, as well as the way in which we offer ourselves and our

² It may, of course, be debated whether subordination is the best word to describe this reality. Thus Pannenberg prefers to speak of mutual dependence (Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 308-313,321), but this does not do full justice to the asymmetrical order and character of the relation of the persons to each other, even though it is backed up in part by Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 3:23.

³ The Eastern theologians, beginning with Athanasius, spoke of the Father as the “source” (Greek *αρχή*; Latin *principium*) of the Son and the Holy Spirit (see Thomas T. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: A Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988, 312-313). Thus he alone is their source. Thus when they spoke of the “monarchy” of the Father, they did not refer to his rule as King, but to their “origin” (*αρχή*) from him and orientation toward him. Because this was so important for the theologians of the Eastern churches, they rejected the Western addition of the phrase “and the Son” (*filioque*) to “who proceeds from the Father” in the Nicene Creed. This addition was meant to safeguard the Scriptural teaching that we do not receive the Holy Spirit directly from the Father but only through Christ. In my class on the history of dogma Dr Sasse suggested that both these teachings about different aspects of the Trinitarian order would be best preserved by the confession “who proceeds from the Father through the Son.”

⁴ While the order is not basically a chain of command, St John shows that this order of transmission and reception does involve Christ’s obedience and our obedience to commandments of the Father (John 12:49; 13:34; 14:15,21,31; 15:10,12,14,17).

gifts to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, in short, the order by which we have access to the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18).

1. The Trinitarian Dynamic and its Order.

As Lutherans we confess and teach that the risen Lord Jesus is present in the church in his humanity and divinity.⁵ By his ascension he did not withdraw himself from his disciples and become inaccessible to them. Instead, he extended his presence, so that it was no longer limited by time and place and matter. Invisibly present, he became accessible to all people everywhere. By his exaltation he filled the whole universe with his presence so that he could give himself and his gifts to all his people (Eph 4:7-10). He was exalted so that he could be closer to us than ever before. He returned to the Father in order to bring the Father to us and us to the Father.

Three things follow from this. First, since the exalted Lord is with us, he is still at work among us. As Luke implies in Acts 1:1-2, Jesus continues to do God's work and teach his word through the ministry of the apostles in the church.⁶ Second, since he has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, he now pours out on the church the Holy Spirit that he receives from the Father (Acts 2:33). All three persons of the Trinity are therefore now equally present and active in the church. None of them operate separately, or apart from each other. Third, since all three persons work together to deliver salvation to us and all people, the New Testament does not assign particular tasks exclusively to any one person in the Trinity, such as redemption to Christ and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. Yet even though all three persons are always at work in all aspects of our salvation, they, like a man and woman in the conception of a child, operate differently, according to their position and relation to each other as persons in the Trinity. Thus neither the Father, nor the Spirit, functions as the mediator between God and us. The order of relations in the Trinity determines how all three persons work together with each other in dealing with us. That order sets the pattern for the operation of the Trinitarian dynamic in the life and work of the church.

Well, what is that order? We may come at it in two complementary ways,⁷ like the operation of an escalator.⁸ On the one hand, we may begin from below with how we discover it and come to be involved in it. Here Christ is central. We receive the Holy

⁵ See FC SD V111, 78: "he (Christ) is present with his church and community on earth as mediator, head, king, and high priest. Not part or only one-half of the person of Christ, but the entire person to which both natures, the divine and the human belong is present. He is present not only according to his deity, but also according to and with his assumed human nature, according to which he is our brother and we flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone (Eph 5:30)."

⁶ Luke emphasises this by his use of the verb "began".

⁷ The best summary that I know of the Pauline data on this is: Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zum Verhältnis von Christozentrik und Theozentrik in den Paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, Münster: Aschendorff, Second Edition, 1969.

⁸ See the discussion by Thomas T. Torrance on the orthodox correlation of Christocentricity and Patrocentricity in *The Trinitarian Faith: A Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988, 47-65. He sums up his case thus (64): "The kind of Christocentricity that characterises the Nicene theology, therefore, is not one that detracts in any way from Theocentricity, but rather serves what we might well call a 'Patrocentricity', and thus gives unreserved place to the Spirit of the Father who is conveyed to us through the Son and on the ground of his saving and reconciling work."

Spirit as a gift from the Father through him (John 7:37-39). We therefore come to the Father **through** the Son by the Holy Spirit (John 14:6; Eph 2:18). Thus the God-ward, ascending order of operation is: through the Son by the Spirit to the Father. On the other hand, we may begin from above with the way that the three persons work together as one in their dealings with us. Here the Father is central; everything comes from him. So just as the Father eternally begets the Son and causes the Spirit to proceed from himself and the Son, so, in time, he pours out the Holy Spirit abundantly upon his adopted children **through** Jesus Christ in baptism (Tit 3:4-7; cf. John 14:16,25). Thus the human-ward, descending order of operation is: from the Father through the Son with the Holy Spirit.

Whichever way we look at it, we have the same basic order, the same way of working, the same fundamental dynamic. The remarkable thing about this order is that by its operation we are included in the life and work of the Holy Trinity by virtue of our union with Christ. This is the objective order of salvation, the way that the triune God delivers all spiritual blessings as gifts to us here and now in the church through word and sacrament. It is also the way by which the triune God delivers the gift of salvation through the church to those who have not yet been drawn into the life and work of the triune God. Thus this order does not present us with an ideal pattern that we must copy, by being like Christ and acting as he has done. It is something that is given to us, a reality that is created by the presence of Christ with us, the way that he works, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to revive and energise, to sanctify and transform us.

It is worth noting that we do not create this order, nor do we generate the spiritual dynamic that is at work in it. This order exists whether we are aware of it or not; it does its work whether we acknowledge it or not. It is to be found wherever the gospel of Christ is preached and enacted, wherever people receive the gospel and believe in Christ. If that is so, we have two ways of relating to it. On the one hand, we can fit in with it, by trusting in God's word, and going along with it in our obedience to his word, so that it has its way with us. If we accept this order and accommodate ourselves to its claim on us, we will discover its power and enjoy its blessings. In fact, the more fully we live and act in keeping with it, the greater will be the blessings that will come from the triune God to us and the people around us. On the other hand, if we spurn this Trinitarian order and defy its dynamic, we will not receive the blessings that God wishes to lavish on us through it. In fact, the more that we live and act in defiance of it, the more we will suffer spiritual deprivation and impoverishment.

This teaching about the way that the three persons of the Trinity work together in engaging us is intensely practical and actual. The dynamic order by which they reach out to us and include us in their life and work shapes everything that happens in the church. It shapes the way that we evangelise unbelievers by preaching the pardon that they receive from God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ; it shapes the way we baptise and disciple them; it shapes the way we worship and the way we pray; it shapes the way we administer the means of grace and the way we pastor people; it shapes the way we receive the Holy Spirit and the way we live as members of Christ's priesthood. And so on! By our reception of God's gifts and cooperation with God in this order, we live as sons of God, together with his Son, here on earth.

2. The Relationship of the exalted Son to God the Father

I would now like to focus on one part of the Trinitarian order, the position of Jesus as the exalted Christ and his relationship with the Father in his ongoing work in the church. This is covered in the Apostles Creed by its confession of his enthronement “at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.”⁹

If we are to make sense of that confession, we need to remember three things. First, this imagery comes from royal ideology and its symbolism in the ancient world. On ceremonial occasions the deputy of the king, his vice-regent, his prime minister, sat on a throne at the right side of the king.¹⁰ That position was occupied either by the first-born son of the king, his heir, or by his oldest brother, if his son was not yet old enough to serve as his deputy. That position was no mere ceremonial office. In fact, the vice-regent ran the royal bureaucracy and administered the government of the kingdom. Sometimes he even functioned as the king’s co-regent, as was the case with Jotham, after Uzziah had become a leper (2 Chr 26:21). Yet even though he reigned together with the king, he was still under the authority of the king.

Second, David and his descendants did not reign as supreme monarchs, but as the anointed deputies of Yahweh. The king was the Lord’s messiah, his christ, his anointed one. That title had to do with his office and status as the earthly vice-regent of the Lord. So when God the Father anointed and enthroned Jesus as the Christ, he set him in that vice-regal office (Acts 2:36; 10:38).

Third, even though the office of king was so strictly separated from the office of the priesthood that no king was ever allowed to serve as a priest at the temple in Jerusalem, Psalm 110 prophesied the eventual combination of these two offices by the enthronement of the future Messiah at the Lord’s right hand. This was confirmed by the double crown that Zechariah made and set on the head of the high priest Joshua, when he made his prophecy about the future king-priest who would build the new temple of the Lord. Jesus affirmed both these prophecies and applied them to himself in his great confession at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:66-70). So when the New Testament teaches that Jesus is enthroned as the Messiah at the right hand of the Father, it does not just refer to his office as king. It includes his office as priest who serves before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. In fact, Hebrews 1:1-4 goes even further than that by teaching that the exalted royal Son of God holds the triple office of prophet, priest and king.¹¹ These are therefore now no longer three separate offices, but they form a single office, which fulfils and so transcends them all. In that office the risen Lord Jesus is under the authority of his heavenly Father, even though he is equal in divinity with the Father who has honoured him by giving him the name above all names and calling him Lord (Phil 2:9-11).

I do not have time to explore how Jesus exercises all three aspects of his Messianic office together with the Father and yet under him. I will therefore concentrate on the

⁹ See Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-36; 5:31; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20-23; Col 3:1; Heb 1:1-4; 8:1-2; 10:12-14; 1 Pet 3:22.

¹⁰ See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, London: SPCK, 1978, 256-268.

¹¹ See *A Catholic Catechism for Adults: The Church’s Confession of Faith*. Ignatius: San Francisco, 1987, 176-178.

prophetic and priestly work of the exalted Christ, because these two aspects have been most neglected by theologians in my lifetime. While the teaching on the prophetic work of Christ shows how we as pastors are involved in the order of the Trinitarian dynamic, the teaching on his priestly work shows how the whole church is involved in that dynamic as God's holy priesthood.

The exalted Son of God occupies a prophetic office that did not end with his ascension (Heb 1:1-4). He is still the Father's spokesman, his mouthpiece. He does not speak his own word, but he utters the powerful, life-giving, judging and saving word of the Father who sent him (John 3:34-35; 5:19-30; 7:16; 8:26-28,38,40; 12:49; 14:10,24; 16:12-15). Jesus does not speak on his own authority, but on the authority of the Father (7:16-18; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). By speaking the word of the Father, he does his Father's will and performs his work (John 14:10; cf. 5:19-23,30,36). He says what the Father commands him to say, and does what the Father commands him to do (John 12:49). He passes on the life-giving word of the Father to the apostles, so that they, in turn, can speak that life-giving word to others (John 17:8,14-21). As I said before, this prophetic work did not end with his ascension, for by his return to the Father he included his apostles and their successors in his own prophetic ministry (John 14:10-14). Thus the writer to the Hebrews claims that God's speaking through his prophets culminated in his speaking through his exalted Son in these last times, the age of the church. Yet the exalted Son is much more than just a prophet. He does not just speak God's word, like all the prophets in the Old Testament; he is God's word, the one who brings us grace and truth from God the Father by his incarnation and exaltation (John 1:1-2,14,18).

Thus the order for the proclamation of God's word is its passage from the Father through the Son to the citizens of earth. Just as the Father sent the Son to speak his Spirit to the apostles on Easter Sunday, so the Son commissioned the apostles to speak the Holy Spirit to their hearers and to pronounce the Father's absolution¹² (John 20:21-23). As they, and those who are ministers of God's word, preach in the church, they stand in Christ before God (the Father) and speak the word that comes from him to their hearers (2 Cor 2:17¹³; cf. 12:19). What we have, then, is a chain of tradition in which Christ hands on the word that he has received from the Father to his apostles (John 3:34-35; 12:49; 17:6,14); they, in turn, pass on the word that they have received from Christ to others (John 17:20; 1 Cor 11:23-25; 2 Tim 2:2).

The exalted Christ also occupies a priestly office that only really began with his ascension to the Father and entry as the God-man into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:24)¹⁴. He serves as our priest before God (the Father), our great high priest who appears on our behalf in presence of God (Heb 9:24)¹⁵. Since he is our priest in the presence of the Father, he is also the mediator between him and the

¹² I take the clause "they are forgiven" as a divine passive, a Jewish convention to avoid naming God. In the New Testament it is used to refer to the work of the first person of the Holy Trinity.

¹³ A literal translation of this is: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, with purity, we speak in Christ as from God in the presence of God."

¹⁴ Hebrews uses the verb *perfect* (τελέω) in a ritual sense to speak about the completion of Christ's ordination and installation as priest in the heavenly sanctuary (2:10; 5:9; 7:19,28; see Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1997, 65).

¹⁵ See Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:24; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21.

human family (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24¹⁶). As our high priest he not only stands in for us before the Father; he also stands in for the Father with us.¹⁷ Yet that is misleading, for he does not just act on behalf of the Father and on behalf of us in our absence from each other. He actually brings God the Father and his gifts to us (Matt 11:27; Rom 5:1-2); he also presents us and our offerings together with himself to the Father (Col 1:22; Heb 2:13; 1 Pet 3:18). We therefore have access to the Father through him (Eph 2:18).

There are two sides to his work as our high priest - the descending, human-ward, sacramental aspect, and the ascending, God-ward, sacrificial aspect¹⁸. On the one hand, the risen Lord delivers us the fruits of his atoning sacrifice for us in word and sacrament. God presented him, and still presents him, to us as our mercy seat, the means by which we receive atonement through faith in his blood, the one in whom we have justification and redemption (Rom 3:21-25). He is therefore now the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). He who atoned for our sins by his death on the cross and his entry into the heavenly sanctuary, now offers us cleansing and justification before God the Father (Heb 2:17);¹⁹ he sprinkles us with his cleansing, sanctifying blood in Holy Communion (Heb 12:24)²⁰. We therefore now receive reconciliation with God (the Father) **through**²¹ our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:11). **Through** him we have peace with God (the Father) and gain access to his grace (Rom 5:1-2). We share in God's holiness in Christ (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 12:10). In Christ God the Father now blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm (Eph 1:3).²² We receive every good thing from the Father **through** him (Heb 13:21). Paul describes the descending side of Christ's priestly work well in 1 Corinthians 1:30. He says: "You are from him (God the Father) in Christ, who has

¹⁶ Note the frequent reference to Christ's work as both the mediator of our justification before God and the mediator of our intercession to God in the Lutheran Confessions: AC XX, 9; XX1, 2; Ap IV, 80-81, 162-165, 213-215, 313, 314, 316-318, 358, 360, 372, 375, 376, 378, 387; XII, 43, 64, 76; XV 5-9; XX1, 14-25; XXIV, 58; FC SD 111, 55-56; V111, 47, 78.

¹⁷ The fact that he mediates between the Father and humankind does not mean that he is any less divine than the Father. In fact, Athanasius and the theologians who drew up the Formula of Concord argue that he had to be fully divine and fully human to bring the Father to us and us to the Father (FC SD 111, 55-56; V111, 47, 78).

¹⁸ As one would expect, Melancthon emphasised this aspect of Christ's priestly office in the Apology in his debate with the Roman Catholic theologians. While they emphasised the sacrificial aspect of Christ's work, he gave priority to the sacramental aspect. So when he discussed Christ's work as high priest and mediator, he spoke most frequently about Christ as our propitiator or our propitiation (IV, 41, 46, 80, 81, 82, 157, 165, 179, 211, 212, 213, 215, 221, 222, 223, 230, 231, 238, 242, 244, 245, 246, 253, 269, 291, 299, 382, 387, 389, 392; X11, 43, 76; XX1, 17, 34). Ironically, those modern Reformed theologians who have written extensively and well on the work of Jesus as high priest, such as the Torrance brothers, largely overlook this aspect, because of their emphasis on the finished work of Christ and their rejection of his real presence in the sacrament. You can see this most clearly in the discussion by Thomas F. Torrance on "The Mediation of Christ in our Human Response," in *The Mediation of Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992, 83-98. See also James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996, 32-83.

¹⁹ See the remarks on this by Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1997, 69.

²⁰ See John W. Kleinig, "The Blood for Sprinkling: Atoning Blood in Leviticus and Hebrews," *LTI* 33/3 (1999) 124-135.

²¹ See the careful analysis of the function of *διά* in both a causal and instrumental sense by Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zum Verhältnis von Christozentrik und Theozentrik in den Paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, Münster: Aschendorff, Second Edition, 1969, 164-237.

²² As Luke 24:51 shows us, the ascended Lord Jesus blesses his disciples from heaven, just as the Israelite high priest conveyed God's blessing to the Israelites with the Aaronic benediction in the earthly temple at the end of the morning and evening burnt offering.

become wisdom for you from God: righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”²³

On the other hand, the risen Lord Jesus also brings us back to God (the Father) (1 Pet 3:18). We come to God the Father **through** him (John 14:8). As our advocate and intercessor, he pleads for us and our justification before the Father (Rom 8:31-34; 1 John 2:1-2). By virtue of his ongoing intercession on our behalf, we can approach God the Father **through** him (Heb 7:25). **Through** Jesus we are able to present to God (the Father) Spirit-produced offerings that are acceptable and well-pleasing to him (1 Pet 2:6; Heb 13:15-16). Since Christ is the one and only mediator between God (the Father) and humankind, the church prays for the world together with him (1 Tim 2:1-6). The church therefore gives thanks to God the Father and glorifies him²⁴ **though** the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 1:8; 7:25; 16:27; 2 Cor 1:20; Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11; Jude 25).

The God-ward work of Jesus as our high priest and mediator is most evident in his teaching on prayer and our practice of prayer. By giving us the Lord’s Prayer, his own prayer in which he intercedes for us and the whole world, Jesus includes us in his filial relationship with the Father and in his intercession for the world.²⁵ He gives his prayer and his praying to us. When we pray this prayer, we stand in the shoes of Jesus the Son and pray to the Father together with him. This is the reason why he gave the name Father to his disciples as the proper name for the first person of the Trinity (John 17:6,26). In John’s gospel Jesus also teaches his disciples about this gift, by authorising them to pray to the Father **in his name** (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; cf. Eph 5:20). Luther explains the significance of this most vividly in his sermon on John 16:19-24:

Christ prayed for me, and for this reason my prayers are acceptable through His. Accordingly, we must weave our praying into His. He is forever the Mediator for all men. Through Him we come to God. In Him we must incorporate and envelop all our prayers and all that we do. As St. Paul declares (Rom 13:14), we must put on Christ; and everything must be done in Him (1 Cor. 10:31) if it is to be pleasing to God. But all this is said to Christians for the purpose of giving them the boldness and the confidence to rely on this Man and to pray with complete assurance; for we hear that in this way He unites us with Himself, really puts us on a par with Him, and merges our praying into his and His into ours....What greater honor could be paid us than this, that our faith in Christ entitles us to be called His brethren and coheirs, that our prayer is to be like His, that there is really no difference except that our prayers must originate in Him and be spoken in His name if they are to be acceptable and if He is to bestow this inheritance and glory on us. Aside from this, He makes us equal to Himself in all things;

²³ See Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zum Verhältnis von Christozentrik und Theozentrik in den Paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, Münster: Aschendorff, Second Edition, 1969, 15-18.

²⁴ See the use of ancient doxology in the Communion Service: “Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place, and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen” (LBW 71,91,112; LHS 72).

²⁵ See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992, 87-89.

His and our prayer must be one, just as His body is ours and His members are ours. (AE 24, 407)

Since Christ is our intercessor, we pray together with him. Hence, normally,²⁶ our prayers are addressed to the first person of the Holy Trinity.²⁷ That, too, is why we end our prayers by saying: “through Jesus Christ our Lord” or “in the name of Jesus.”²⁸ In prayer we come to the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:15-16,26-27; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 5:15-20). Prayer depends on the ongoing priestly work of Christ; it involves us in a Trinitarian enactment.²⁹

The order by which the triune God reaches out to us and includes us in the life and work of the Holy Trinity is summed up by a simple credal formulation in 1 Corinthians 8:6.³⁰ There Paul says: “For us (there is) only one God, the Father, from whom (are) all things and to whom we (are), and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (are) all things and through whom we (are).” Here the prepositions are significant. On the one hand, everything – and that includes us as creatures and as children of God – comes from the Father and returns to him. On the other hand, all creatures exist, and we too exist, through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The Father creates and regenerates us through the Son, who brings us back to the Father.

The exalted Christ therefore holds a unique office over against God the Father and over against the church. In that office he is “under” the Father and “over” us. He occupies a unique position within the working order of the triune God in the church and the world for the duration of this age. That position derives from his status as the only begotten Son of God, the one who is from the Father, with the Father and in the Father’s bosom (John 1:1-2,14,18). In the descending order of God’s working, Jesus brings the Father and his gifts out to us; in the ascending order Jesus brings us and our offerings together with him back to the Father.

Conclusion

Well then, is the exalted Christ in any way subordinate to the Father right now? The answer is both “yes” and “no.” It all depends on whether we are speaking about him in his nature as God, or about him in his office as the exalted Son of God. On the one hand, he is not subordinate to the Father in his divine essence, status and majesty. On the other hand, he is, I hold, subordinate to the Father in his vice-regal office and his work as prophet, priest, and king. He is operationally subordinate to the Father. In the present operation of the triune God in the church and the world, he is the mediator between God the Father and humankind. The exalted Christ receives everything from

²⁶ The Council of Hippo went so far as to decree that liturgical prayer was to be offered to God the Father.

²⁷ See Joseph Jungmann, *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, London and Dublin: Chapman, 1965. We may, of course, pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, since they too are divine. But even when we do pray to them in the divine service, we do so in a Trinitarian way by ending the prayer with the clause: “for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit/Son, one God, now and forever.”

²⁸ It therefore makes no sense to pray to Jesus in the name of Jesus as is often done, even though it is quite proper to address him in prayer.

²⁹ See *A Catholic Catechism for Adults. The Church’s Confession of Faith.*, Ignatius: San Francisco, 1987, 77.

³⁰ See Wilhelm Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum: Studien zum Verhältnis von Christozentrik und Theozentrik in den Paulinischen Hauptbriefen*, Münster: Aschendorff, Second Edition, 1969, 225-232.

his Father to deliver to us, so that in turn, he can bring us back to the Father. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.