

**“When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” (Jn 15:26)**

✚ **Lecture III: The Filioque Controversy** ✚

✚ **Definition:**

The English translation of the Latin term “*Filioque*” is “*and from the Son.*”

✚ **Historical Background:**

- The Nicene Council in A.D. 325 was concerned with defending the Divinity of The Lord Jesus Christ against the Arian heresy. As such, the creed formulated by its fathers said little about the Church’s belief about The Holy Spirit.
- The Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 was again concerned with defending the Divinity of The Lord Jesus Christ, but was also concerned with defending the Divinity of The Holy Spirit. For that reason, it expanded the Creed formulated by the previous Council in the section pertaining to the Church’s belief regarding The Holy Spirit. This section then read:

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the life-Giver, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets ...”

- The Creed formulated by the Council of Constantinople is commonly known as the “Nicene Creed” and more technically as the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.” Since then, Orthodox Christians have steadfastly refused to modify the Creed in any way. Unfortunately, there are some who elected to follow another path.
- In A.D. 587, the local council of Toledo (Spain), attempting to combat Arianism by emphasizing The Son’s equality with The Father, added the *Filioque* clause to the creed. This changed the Creed to:

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the life-Giver, who proceeds from the Father **and from the Son**, who with the Father and Son is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets...”

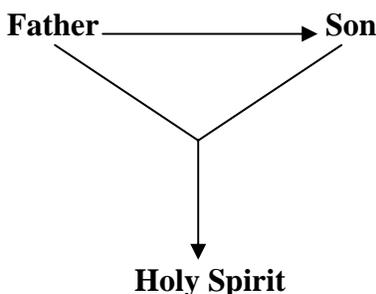
- From Spain, the Filioque spread to the Germanic tribes of the Franks (modern day France). It was embraced by Charlemagne who, wishing to assert himself as sole Emperor went so far as to discredit the Orthodoxy of the East by using the Filioque to accuse the Byzantine Empire of intentionally omitting it from the ancient Creed.
- Pope Leo III (795-816) intervened and forbade any alteration in the Creed. He ordered the Creed – without Filioque – to be engraved in Latin and Greek on two silver tablets and mounted to the right and the left of the entrance to the crypt of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. He said that he did this, “for love and defense of the Orthodox faith.”
- The Franks ignored the Pope and continued to use the Filioque.
- The dispute between east and West grew and became the focus of the council of Constantinople in A.D. 879-880. This Council reaffirmed the Creed of A.D. 381 and declared any and all additions to the Creed invalid.
- Still, the Filioque continued to be used by the Franks and even spread to other Germanic tribes. Eventually, even Rome began to use the Filioque – at the coronation of Henry II in 1014 as Emperor by Pope Benedict VIII (1012-1024), due to his dependence on the Roman Empire for military protection. In time, belief in the Filioque became dogma in Roman Catholicism by the Council of Lyon 1274.

→ The Filioque debate is of importance, both as a theological issue in itself, and also as a matter of importance in the contemporary relations between the Eastern and Western Churches. The basic issue at stake is whether the Holy Spirit may be said to proceed from the Father **alone** or from the Father **and** Son.

### ✦ Theological Background:

- Before discussing the issue at hand let us remember what St. Gregory the Theologian said: “You ask what is the procession of the Holy Spirit? Do you tell me first what is the unbegottenness of the Father, and I will then explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit, and we shall both of us be stricken with madness for prying into the mystery of God.” Also John of Damascus said, “We have learned that there is a difference between generation [begetting] and procession, but the nature of the difference we in no wise understand.”
- St. Athanasius’ application of the term ‘*homoousios*’ to the Holy Spirit had the effect, not only of asserting that the Spirit is also of one Being with the Father, but of implying that the procession of the Spirit is from the Being (*Ousia*) of the Father and not from what came to be spoken of as the Person (*Hypostasis*) of the Father in distinction from, though inseparable from, His *Ousia* as God.
- For St. Athanasius, the procession of the Spirit from the Being of the Father is bound up with the generation of the Son; something that exceeds and transcends the thoughts of men and since it would not be reverent, therefore, to ask how the Spirit proceeds from God, St. Athanasius did not and would not entertain the question. Thus, the problem of a so-called ‘double procession’ of the Spirit simply did not arise for him.
- For St. Athanasius, the fact that the Son and the Spirit are both of the *Being* of God the Father meant that there is one activity of God which is manifested in the distinctive operations of the three Divine Persons and always takes the form of a unitary movement from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit.
- The Cappadocian theologians called for a clear distinction between *Ousia* and *Hypostasis* in order to bring more sharply into focus the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their different modes of existence and identifying particularities. They thought of *Ousia* as having the same relation to the *Hypostasis* as the common or generic to the particular.
- This has led to a shift in the approach from emphasis upon the *homoousios* as the key to the identity, intrinsic oneness, and internal relations of the Holy Trinity, to emphasis upon the three *Hypostasis* (Persons) as united through the Monarchy of the Person of the Father and through having one Being in common.
- In holding that the Spirit proceeds from the Person of the Father, thus understood, rather than from the Being of the Father, the Cappadocians were nevertheless intent on rejecting any suggestion that the Spirit, who is not begotten of the Father like the Son, is to be regarded as created by God as He was held to be by the Arian and Macedonian heretics. While their intention was certainly right in rejecting Arian error, the problematic role they gave to the Person of the Father in relation to the Son and the Spirit provoked the reaction associated with the *filioque* clause which the western Church unecumenically inserted into the Creed.
- In view of the idea that the Spirit proceeds from the Person (*Hypostasis*) Father, Western theologians felt obligated to hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Person of the Son as well as the Father, otherwise, they held, the Son would be regarded as subordinate to the Father, as an adopted creature of God, and not really as God of God – thus they too were rejecting Arianism.

#### The Western Approach To The Holy Trinity:



- Eastern theologians, on the other hand, felt that the idea of a procession of the Spirit from the Person (*Hypostasis*) of the Son as well as the Father, appeared to posit two ultimate Principles or *Archai* in the Godhead – hence they kept the original formula expressing the procession of the Spirit *from the Father only*. They defended this by reference to the teaching of Lord Jesus in (**Jn 15:26; 16:7**), which implies a distinction between *procession* and *mission*, that is between the *eternal* procession of the Spirit from the Father, and the *historical* mission of the Spirit by the Son.

#### ✚ **Questions & Answers:**

**Q1: St. Cyril of Alexandria said: ‘The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, for He belongs to the divine Being and inheres in it and issues from it substantially.’ (*Thesaurus de Trinitate*, PG, 75, 577, 580f, and the whole section 575 – 617) – He also said that the Holy Spirit is ‘from the Father and the Son’, that ‘He arises from the Son’ and that He is ‘the proper Spirit of the Son’.**

**Don’t these expressions correspond entirely to the doctrine of the double procession?**

**A1:** St. Cyril is the preeminent guardian of the spiritual and theological heritage of St. Athanasius and is also one of the great Champions of Orthodoxy. Therefore, we need to examine the authenticity of the documents in question since there are many Pseudocyrillian documents that are not written by St. Cyril.

Nevertheless, in a remarkable study, Fr. Jean Meyendorff has shown how the teaching of St. Cyril is situated on the soteriological level. Certain expressions may seem to correspond to the doctrine of the double procession, but they are side by side with others that cannot possibly be interpreted in this sense. For example, St. Cyril writes, ‘the Spirit derives, that is from God the Father, as from a Source, but He is sent to the creature by the Son.’ (*La Procession du Saint Esprit chez les Peres Orientaux*) - Boris Bobrinsky in his book ‘The Mystery of the Trinity’ p. 254 said, “ St. Cyril, in his apologetic endeavor to defend the divinity of the Son, is carried beyond the domain of the economy of salvation, and creates analogies between the salvific missions and the eternal processions. Rather than speculating on the ‘Filoquist’ doctrine of St. Cyril, by imprisoning him in considerations that would be alien to him, I Prefer to deepen this theme of the unity of the Son and the Spirit, by bringing out its main lines of force.”

→ We also need to remember that throughout the early Church, the term *Father* was understood in a two-fold but indivisible way, as the One Being of the Godhead, and as the Father of the Son, whose Person is distinct from the Person of the Son and from the Person of the Spirit and that St. Cyril used the terms *Ousia* and *Hypostasis* interchangeably as did St. Athanasius and his words should be interpreted in the light of the concept of *perichoresis* and the doctrine of coinherence in the one identical Being of God, according to which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another and contain one another.

**Q2: Our Lord said, “All things that the Father has are Mine” (Jn 16:15) – Doesn’t this imply that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father?**

**A2:** St. Athanasius said, ‘whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except *Father*.’ Thus, the term “all things” does not include the Hypostatic properties of the Father or else we would end up with two fathers and two sons in the Trinity, which is absurd. Our Lord was referring to the Godhead as was written about Him, “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (**Col 2:9**) Therefore, we believe that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are indivisible One, eternally coinherent in one another as the Holy and Blessed Trinity.

**Q3: In theological language, the Son is referred to as ‘begotten’ of the Father and the Holy Spirit as ‘proceeding’, but our Lord said, “I proceed forth and come from God” (Jn 8:42) – What does this mean?**

**A3:** The Greek word ‘*exeelthon*’ used in this verse is different from the word ‘*ekporeuomai*’ used in (**Jn 15:26**) to refer to the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. It is possible that our Lord was referring to His coming to the world in the fullness of time and not to His begottenness from the Father before all ages.

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