

Discuss the filioque in the background of Orthodox ecclesiology, the theology of deification and the Orthodox Biblical exegetical methodology.

Introduction

This essay will discuss the filioque clause in terms of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis. It will consider whether the clause was a permissible addition to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and whether and to what extent it is a permissible theological idea.

The nature of Orthodox theology is that there is a close relationship to all its various parts, which are distinguished to enable discussion and reflection rather than to mark out separate and unrelated fields of study. This is not surprising given the Orthodox practice of looking at the divine energies as “indivisibly divided”¹, that is the various energies can be distinctly named but they are not divided from each other. Thus, when discussing the filioque, its relevance has connections to the whole scope of theology and it has implications for the aspects to be discussed in this essay, that of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis.

Specifically, unlike the hope of resolution to the Creed expressed in the Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation² or that of Theodore Stylianopoulos³, this essay will attempt to demonstrate that the issue of the filioque is at the tip of a widely divergent theology of the Trinity that can be witnessed in different approaches to ecclesiology, biblical exegesis and the theology of deification. It will be argued that any unambiguous resolution to the filioque clause being in the Creed would only be possible for either or both parties to change its theological way of thinking to either that of the other party or to something neither party presently holds formally, even allowing for variation within each party. It will be argued that there can be no surface resolution to the problem in words because it would fail to address the real and deeper divergence underlying the opposed views on the filioque. This is supported by Boris Bobrinsky,

¹ Gregory Palamas, “Topics of Natural and Theological Science”, in St Nikodimos and St Makarios (eds.), G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (trans.) *The Philokalia*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995) Chapter 74, p. 380

² North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, ‘The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue?’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 48. No 1, 2004 pp. 93-123 (pp. 121-123)

³ Theodore Stylianopoulos, ‘An Ecumenical Solution to the Filioque Question?’ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 28/2, Spring 1991 pp.260-280 (p. 276)

although he would be more open to a solution that allows for “positive theological content of the filioque”.⁴

The essay will consider some of the issues raised in the Consultation and by Stylianopoulos. It will then consider some of the key points of Orthodox understandings of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis and show how the filioque cannot be justified on any of these grounds with Orthodox theological thought. From here it will be argued that until there is a shared theology of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis there can be no meaningful resolution of the filioque. This of course would mean one side or the other abandoning its present position as erroneous and accepting that of the other or both agreeing that they have a different faith and continuing on their own paths recognising that they can be properly labelled “heretics” by the other.

Issues

Some of the issues raised that give hope to the resolution of the filioque is that the problem grew in an environment of varied languages and geographical separation. Once these factors have been overcome then there is a possibility of resolution. Also, there is a hope that an agreed expression could be used to allow both understandings to remain but as different aspects of the same truth. This expression has been considered best as the Spirit proceeds *from the Father through the Son*⁵, which is used by Eastern Fathers⁶. However, it will be demonstrated below that such an expression fails because what is meant in the different theologies of the filioque is quite contradictory and such an expression can be interpreted too widely to ensure any real commonality of mind that is required for a true resolution. It also assumes that the divergent theologies can be or are both correct.

Another issue is that of ecclesiology both in the Roman Catholic understanding of the Papacy and also the understanding relation of the Church to Christ. There is a belief that the Papacy can unilaterally change the Creed without the consent of all Bishops⁷. This raises issues regarding both the place of the Pope but also about Tradition and the place of other Ecumenical Councils. It will be demonstrated that the Papacy cannot change the teaching or position of the Church in earlier

⁴ Robert Haddad, ‘The Stations of the Filioque’, *St Vladimirs’ Theological Quarterly*, 4. No 2, 2002 pp.209-268 (pp. 265-66)

⁵ Theodore Stylianopoulos, ‘An Ecumenical Solution to the Filioque Question?’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 28/2, Spring 1991 pp.260-280, p. 277

⁶ North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, “The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue?”, p. 108

⁷ Henry Chadwick, *East and West: making of a Rift in the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 237

councils by unilateral degree without disrupting the unity and very being of the Church. The filioque also has implications for how the Church relates to Christ, the Son of God.

There is also thought by Bobrinskoy that there can be a solution to the filioque along Palamite grounds⁸. This is shared by a number of Orthodox theologians such as Lossky and Staniloae⁹. However, it will again be argued that these grounds will also fail to produce a solution because it would require the acceptance of Palamite theology, such as the distinction between essence and energies¹⁰, otherwise it may end with the ambiguities inherent in compromise formulae. Accepting Palamite theology would effectively be to accept Orthodox theology and to reject western theology because Palamas, whose teachings are accepted as Orthodox teachings,¹¹ gives no place for a theology that does not recognise the distinction of essence and energies¹² and he is clear that the Spirit is only sent by both Father and Son to man and that His existence is “from the Father alone, and hence He proceeds as regards His existence only from the Father.”¹³ So, the solution comes back to a conversion rather than a united continuation of present Trinitarian theologies held respectively by each party.

The Trinity and the filioque

The Trinity consists of three hypostases, or persons: the Father; the Son; and the Holy Spirit, possessing one essence, power and energy¹⁴; “one God in three hypostases”¹⁵. The early theological disputes about the Trinity often witnessed objections to this and tended to make the Son and/or the Holy Spirit either creatures or not persons. Arianism is a particular case of this and one of the largest non-orthodox groups during the early post-Constantine centuries of the Church and, named after Arius, claimed that the Son was not God but a creature and, by extrapolation, so also the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Haddad, “The Stations of the Filioque”, p. 266

⁹ Ibid., pp. 265-6

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 257

¹¹ At the Councils of Constantinople 1341 and 1351. Ibid., pp. 257-8

¹² Palamas, “Topics of Natural and Theological Science”, Chapter 134, p. 410

¹³ Ibid., Chapter 36, p. 362

¹⁴ Ibid., Chapter 114, p. 399

¹⁵ Ibid.

Each of the Persons is related to the others and all Trinitarian theologians agree that the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds because this is expressed in Scripture. The Orthodox, following the Cappadocians, stress that the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit and this cause, described as monarchy¹⁶, is understood to unify the Trinity¹⁷. Western theologians have tended to follow Augustine in focusing on the essence as the unifying factor of the Trinity¹⁸. This divergence of stress has implications for the relationships between the hypostases, although the views are not necessarily opposed¹⁹.

The filioque clause, Latin for *and the Son*, was added to the Creed after the clause *the Spirit proceeds from (out of) the Father*. The clause regarding proceeding from the Father clearly parallels the earlier clause in the Creed that the Son is *begotten from (out of) the Father*. The clause also parallels the Scripture in John 15:26 but the Greek word $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha$ (from) is changed to the Greek word $\epsilon\kappa$ (out of)²⁰ in line with the word used for the Son's begetting. This change tends to signify the intent of the Fathers to use the clause to confirm the Spirit's eternal relation and equality with the Father in line with that confirmed for the Son earlier. Thus, adding the filioque clause had implications for the eternal relationship of the Son and the Spirit and it could not be considered to refer only to a temporal relationship at this point in the Creed. The intention of the Council of Toledo in 589 in adding the clause to combat Arianism was clearly to underline the eternal equality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son.²¹ This precludes any resolution that attempts at a reconciliation on the understanding that the clause refers to a temporal procession of the Spirit from the Son, which is allowed by some Orthodox. This also tends to refute arguments that the matter is merely one of language. Again, the intention at Toledo points to the understanding of the filioque to the Latin mind to be that which the Greek mind understood when the clause was met. Rather the historical issues have been about the clause in its underlying meaning for the eternal relationships of the hypostases of the Trinity. These issues were largely covered from an Orthodox perspective by St Photios in his work, the *Mystagogy*.²²

¹⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1957) pp. 58-59

¹⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 63

¹⁸ Haddad, "The Stations of the Filioque", p. 214

¹⁹ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 52

²⁰ North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, "The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue?", p. 114

²¹ Haddad, "The Stations of the Filioque", p. 211-212

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233

For Patriarch Gregory II, as expressed in the Council of Blachernae in 1285, there is relationship with the Son and the Spirit in the Spirit's procession as signified by the term "through the Son". While this has temporal meaning, it also has grounding in the eternal relationship between the Son and the Spirit²³. This at once both provides a bridge between western and Orthodox views but also testifies to a theology of the Trinity that is irreconcilable to western Trinitarian models. The reason is that in Gregory's perspective the Spirit proceeds from the Father and *rests* in the Son²⁴. While this means that the Spirit proceeds because of the Son (i.e. the Spirit would not proceed without the Son being begotten, so the Son is related to the cause of the Spirit), and through the Son, it also means that the Son is a recipient of the Spirit, the object of the Spirit's procession and not the subject²⁵. It proceeds from the Father *to* the Son, not *from* the Son. This makes the filioque clause completely impossible in the Gregory II's and, also later, Palamas's view²⁶.

It will also be ventured²⁷, following these lines, that herein lies the difference between procession and generation, although not defining what these mean because they have no bearing in space-time as these words are experienced by humans. Nevertheless, there is nothing other than God, the Son being generated becomes other than the Father whereas the Spirit is not generated out of the Father but proceeds. Procession implies movement to another and the only other than the Father is the Son. So, the Spirit proceeds to the Son from the Father and rests in Him. In this view there is no room for procession from the Father and the Son because there is no other to which to proceed²⁸. This latter view would rather mean that the Spirit is generated by the Father and the Son and destroys the reason for different words to describe the cause of the Spirit and also establishes a different relationship within the Trinity.

²³ Haddad, "The Stations of the Filioque", pp. 252-53

²⁴ Ibid., p. 253 (A view also associated with Photios.)

²⁵ Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science", Chapter 36, p. 361

²⁶ Haddad, "The Stations of the Filioque", p. 253

²⁷ cf. Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 63

²⁸ Photios (Joseph Farrell trans.), *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987) Chapter 7, p. 62

Deification and the filioque

The doctrine of deification can be summed up by the verse from St Peter's epistle²⁹ of becoming partakers of the divine nature³⁰. Another way of describing this is that the Son of God became man so that man might become god³¹. Deification means participating in the life of the Trinity³². It means participating and sharing the divine attributes such as all the virtues of the Spirit³³. This deification is complete at the end of time³⁴ but man participates in it from baptism and the lives of the saints are testimonies to this deification with the gifts of the Spirit, such as foreknowledge, prophecy and understanding of mysteries³⁵. The Orthodox view³⁶ is that it is by participation in the uncreated divine energies, which are distinct from the essence, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit³⁷. Thus, man is deified by the energy (grace)³⁸ of God, although man still does not become God in essence because this is forever unobtainable to man³⁹.

Deification is only considered possible for those purified⁴⁰ in Christ⁴¹; that is those united to the Son of God in His humanity in the Church⁴². This means for those baptised into the Church, participating in the Eucharist, and living the life of repentance/purification to acquire the Holy Spirit. It is in becoming sons of God by grace, that is sharing the same relationship of the Son to the

²⁹ II Peter 1:4.

³⁰ Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science", Chapter 105, p. 393

³¹ Athanasios. Incarnation 54:3, p. 328 (p.232)

³² Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 213-215

³³ Galatians 5:22 and Ephesians 5:9

³⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 196

³⁵ Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science", Chapter 76, p. 381

³⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 71

³⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 213-214

³⁸ Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science", Chapter 69, p. 378

³⁹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp. 305-306

⁴⁰ Palamas, "Topics of Natural and Theological Science", Chapter 93, p. 390

⁴¹ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 215

⁴² Georgios I. Mantzaridis *The Deification of Man* p. 41

Father as the Son⁴³ that permits man to participate in the Divine life⁴⁴. This is because the Divine life is complete in the Trinity. There is no existence apart from the Trinity⁴⁵. Creation, although created of a different essence than God, is nevertheless, created in God or, more specifically, in/through/by the Son in the Spirit. That is, creation finds its relationship to God within the internal relations of the Trinity. It is in and through the Son that creation comes to and knows the Father, that is God; there is no other way⁴⁶. There is not an extrinsic relationship with the Father apart from the Son. Thus, it is the Son that brings fallen nature back to the Father through His Incarnation⁴⁷. This is all worked in the Spirit⁴⁸. Creation, and principally man, participates in life by sharing the same hypostatic relationship of the Son to the Father. If this was not the case then man could not know the Father, God, because there would be a new relationship for God, between God and created man, thus necessitating a change in God, Who is unchangeable. Sharing the same hypostatic relationship does not mean having or being the same hypostasis, the Son of God has His uniquely as does each man; thus preserving the uniqueness of each person but rather each hypostasis has the same relationship with the Father as does the Son⁴⁹. It is also required that man participates in the humanity of Christ thus becoming one flesh with Him⁵⁰. This is important because flesh and form divide⁵¹ and man could not share in the unity of the Trinity without becoming one flesh with the Son. Having one flesh unites man in the Trinity, although each man preserves this flesh in his own hypostasis with his own unique distinctions.

The Spirit proceeding from the Son would mean that man could not share in the same hypostatic relationship as the Son to the Father because the Spirit could not proceed from created man. According to Photios, if the procession belongs to the hypostasis of the Son then it must be said the Spirit proceeds from the Son in His divinity and in His humanity⁵², which includes the Church. Men

⁴³ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2006) p. 170

⁴⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: The Experience of God* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994) p. 248

⁴⁵ cf. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 65-66

⁴⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 249

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 248

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 248, 267-268

⁴⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, pp. 240-241

⁵⁰ Ephesians 5:29-32

⁵¹ cf. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, pp. 221, 227

⁵² Photios (Joseph Farrell trans.), *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Chapter 91 & 92, p. 108

could not be said to be sons of God because being a son means sharing in the procession of the Spirit and hence man could not be deified. (If one is to say that the procession is only from the divinity of the Son then one either separates Christ into two persons, leading to Nestorianism, or says rather that the Spirit proceeds from the essence and not from the hypostasis thus denying any meaning of the Spirit proceeding from the Father, as hypostasis⁵³.)

Rather the Palamite view, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone and *rests on* the Son, allows for man to participate in same relationship as the Son to the Father by also receiving the Spirit of the Son, as the Son, and so becoming sons of God by adoption. This allows the deification of man without any change in the Trinity nor the adding of any new relationships, which would make the Trinity imperfect/incomplete in itself.

Thus, because the filioque as a belief provides an erroneous understanding of the Trinity and denies the possibility of our deification and salvation, it can be said by the Orthodox Church that the filioque is properly a heresy. Thus, one cannot remove the charge of heresy from the filioque without ignoring its intrinsic relationship to deification and salvation.

Orthodox Ecclesiology and the filioque

An issue that is relevant to the debate about the filioque is the position of the Pope of Rome to determine doctrine by his own authority. The filioque being endorsed by the Pope means that it is considered an irrevocable part of the Roman Catholic Creed. This is not a concern for other western confessions that have been more willing to reconsider the matter of the filioque but it is a definite hurdle in Orthodox and Roman Catholic discussions.⁵⁴ Thus, the filioque becomes tied in also with the issue of Papal primacy, especially the doctrine of Papal infallibility.

This also has wider implications than the rights and wrongs of the filioque. Unless a solution can be found that allows for both Trinitarian theologies to be considered valid and permissible, both the ecclesiastical theology and structure of either church is called into question and along with this, the very question of either church being the Church. This is because as much as the Roman Catholic Church argues that the Papacy with infallibility is an essential part of the Church⁵⁵, the Orthodox

⁵³ Photios, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 66-67

⁵⁴ Stylianopoulos, "An Ecumenical Solution to the Filioque Question?", pp. 262-271

⁵⁵ Catholic Catechism Section 2 Chapter 3 Article 9 881-882 and 889-891

argue that it is incompatible with the Church⁵⁶. Neither has room for the Church being as the other understands it.

Because the filioque is a matter of heresy, each church in holding resolutely and unrepentantly to its confession could be correctly named “heretical” regarding the other confession. If the Roman Church is wrong on its understanding and expression of the filioque then the infallibility of the Papacy is open to question and also the whole existence of the Roman Catholic Church as “the Church”, as it can be clearly distinguished from the Orthodox Churches since the papal reforms of the 11th Century from Pope Gregory VII⁵⁷. The same also applies to the Orthodox Churches, existing as “the Church”, in their refusal to accept the western confession of the filioque because heretics are considered outside the Church⁵⁸. Thus, much is at stake in surrendering ones position regarding the filioque and hence the pressure to find a resolution that avoids the charge of heresy⁵⁹.

Another issue regarding ecclesiology is the manner in which the filioque was confirmed in the west in the 11th Century unilaterally by the Papacy. This was unacceptable in Orthodox ecclesiology and reinforces the fundamental divergence in ecclesiologies, especially of Primacy, since the 11th Century, although the development of this divergence can be traced much earlier⁶⁰. These issues are grounded in some important ecclesiological understandings.

The most central understanding is that the Church on earth is the Incarnate presence of Christ that is seen in its physical presence linked through the laying on of hands, baptism and the Eucharist⁶¹. Without the participation in these there is no participation in the Church. The Church is also one Body as Christ is one and it has one Faith⁶².

Primacy must be understood in the context that there is one Bishop, who is Christ. All Bishops are in a Mystery the concrete presence of Christ in the Church in His capacity as “high priest”,

⁵⁷ Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁵⁸ cf. Canon 1, St Basil the Great

⁵⁹ cf. North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, “The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue?”, p. 122

⁶⁰ Chadwick, *East and West: making of a Rift in the Church*

⁶¹ Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri De Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*, 194

⁶² Ephesians 4:5

“teacher” and “master”; the Head of the Church⁶³. There is no Christ of Christ and rightly no Bishop of Bishops⁶⁴. The Roman Catholic system gives the impression, whether or not it is formally taught, that the Pope has an exclusive, or greater, manifestation of Christ compared to the other Bishops; he is set apart as “The” Vicar of Christ and somehow a “Christ of Christs” or Bishop of Bishops.

In Orthodox ecclesiology, all Bishops are the same being from the same Christ⁶⁵. However, Christ gives Peter the keys to the Kingdom alone (initially but later to all the Apostles) to show that gift is one and given wholly to one⁶⁶. It is not given in parts to a team of Apostles but it is given whole to one. This signifies that there is one Bishopric not many different Bishoprics. However, it would be impractical for one man to physically oversee the whole Church in the world so there are appointed many Bishops to do this, all sharing the whole gift as did Peter and succeeding him in holding the keys.

To ensure that the oneness of the episcopacy is maintained, Bishops are organised into groups with a definite head so that they speak and act as one⁶⁷. The head gives this focus, although he is not above the others and acts not alone but with their unanimous consent⁶⁸ (majority voting is a system of economy for the weaknesses of man but not the true *modus operandi* of the group, which is to act all as one⁶⁹). From studying this issue, my opinion is that these groups are then structured to one, which is at the head of the world, i.e. the Bishop of Rome as the centre and voice of Church unity. He is located where the whole world looks, the capital of the Empire, (although this wasn't practically true; it carried this sense for the Roman people and the symbolism of the position is what is important) and he reflects to the world the episcopacy of Christ. When the Empire gains another capital, the Church follows this and appoints another centre of Church unity equal to Rome, although Rome is respected in age. Constantinople does not replace Alexandria as second but rather

⁶³ John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001) p. 60

⁶⁴ St Cyprian of Carthage, “Concerning the Baptism of Heretics” in A. Roberts and J Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* (Albany: Ages Software, 1997) Volume 5, p. 1154

⁶⁵ Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, p. 162

⁶⁶ St Cyprian of Carthage, “The Unity of the Catholic Church” in Allen Brent (trans.) *On the Church: Select Treatises* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2006) Chapter 4, pp 152-155

⁶⁷ Canon 34 of the Apostles

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ cf. Canon 6 of the First Ecumenical Council

shares first place with Rome as the New Rome⁷⁰. It shares the same place as Rome but reflects the unity of the Church to the Eastern Empire as Rome does to the West. This models Peter and Paul. Paul who joins the Apostles later shares the place with Peter as the chief Apostles⁷¹, the centre of unity of the Apostles. Peter displays this to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles⁷². Both share the same headship although Peter maintains the honour of time and the Primacy is named from him⁷³. This division into two does not negate the primacy of one but helps to remind us that the unity is Christ and not the human establishment in itself.

This primacy of Rome is not about internal jurisdiction within other dioceses but about the witness and action of the Church beyond these boundaries. Their jurisdiction is universal but only as a point of appeal⁷⁴ and supervision of matters pertaining to the witness of the Church in general when the Church needs to speak as with one voice and mouth. It does not mean jurisdiction or authority within the jurisdiction of other Bishops, groups or Patriarchates but only on matters of world wide concern with the consent of all other Bishops (through the tiered structure). Free will is always paramount and Sees of Primacy can fall into heresy; no Bishop is infallible.

So, each Bishop contains the fullness of Christ in the Mystery of the Bishop and yet one Bishop, in Rome, is shown forth to the world to demonstrate that the Church is one, with one episcopacy. This Bishop does so because he is a Bishop, like the others, and also because he is (was) at the centre of the world (Empire). The Church is not an amalgamation of many parts⁷⁵ neither is it reduced to one concrete See but it is one and the same throughout the world. This means that all local churches are equal⁷⁶ but also that one can be chosen from the rest and shown to the world as the “ideal and complete” church, truly representative of all the churches and of the Church.

The filioque affects the ecclesiology of the Church and it affected by it. Firstly, the acceptance of the filioque without an Ecumenical Council and without the consensus of at least the majority of the

⁷⁰ Canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council

⁷¹ Chrysostom p. 985

⁷² Galatians 2: 7-9

⁷³ Canon 3 of the Council of Sardica

⁷⁴ Canons 9 and 17 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and Canon 3 of the Council of Sardica

⁷⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, “The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology”, in John Meyendorff (ed) *The Primacy of Peter*, (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1992) pp. 145-171, (pp. 150-151)

⁷⁶ Schmemmann, “The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology”, p. 164

Churches presupposes a disunity of the Church that is not speaking as one. Thus, the Church is not truly the one body of Christ with Christ as its Head. The action also went against the Tradition of the Church, which is preserved in its Canons. Thus, in breaching the Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council forbidding changes to the Creed⁷⁷, there was a break from the living Tradition of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever⁷⁸.

The notion of Primacy in the Church is also an issue. The Church being the Body of Christ is both infallible and yet does not require an infallible head because Christ is directly its Head. Thus, the authority of the See of Primacy comes not in that it declares to the Church what it should believe but that it declares to the world what the Church already believes. Its authority lies in it truly reflecting the Faith believed by all the Churches in one voice because it is one faith. Thus. The See of Primacy cannot in its authority add something or change something in the Faith or practice of the Church but only declare authoritatively what is already the practice and Faith of the Church. It has no authority over the Church but it has the authority of the Church. Thus, Rome declaring the filioque valid is ineffectual in Orthodox ecclesiology because it is not declaring something believed by the Church but rather the belief of a few members of the Church. Rome is not therefore speaking the Faith of the Church but of some members of the Church that may be mistaken.

Having the filioque proceed from the Son means that the Church cannot be truly the Incarnate presence of Christ. This is because the Spirit cannot proceed from the Church because it began in time. Thus, the Church becomes separated from the Christ and only attached to Him in an extrinsic manner rather than being the living organic Body of Christ, of the Son of God on earth. This separation tends to lead to the idea of the Church on earth needing a head on earth, i.e. a Pope, and rejects the mystical leadership of the Bishops as the living icons of Christ in each local Church without whom there is no local Church⁷⁹.

The Orthodox view of the filioque is more consistent with its ecclesiology. The Church receives the Spirit as its members are the sons of God. Like the Son the Church also gives/sends the Spirit from the Father to those coming into the Church through the Mysteries. These are conducted by the Priests who are the public image of Christ thus indicating that it is Christ who bestows the Spirit

⁷⁷ Canon 7, Third Ecumenical Council.

⁷⁸ Hebrews 13:8

⁷⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, pp. 87, 127

and not man. The Church participates in the giving of the Spirit just as also the Son from the Father. Thus the Church and the Son are united and the Church finds its place in the life of the Trinity.

Biblical Exegesis and the filioque

The Orthodox Church when approaching the Bible does so in the context of Tradition.⁸⁰ It does not divorce interpretation from the Tradition. Thus, the Scriptures are interpreted in harmony with those that have gone before⁸¹, especially of key interpreters such as St John Chrysostom. In fact, there is a Canon (19 of Sixth Ecumenical Council) forbidding Priests to teach other than in accordance with the Fathers. This is not a matter limiting interpretation statically in time⁸² because Christ is unlimited in being known but rather a permanent model⁸³ that ensures that the interpretation is of the same Christ, Who transcends space/time to be the same yesterday, today and forever⁸⁴. Tradition provides hermeneutical keys that are required to understand Scriptures correctly and to understand the force and implications of some texts that without these keys could be interpreted in a manner contrary to unchanging Tradition⁸⁵. As example of this is with free will. St John Chrysostom holds this paramount and so texts indicating otherwise are interpreted in a manner consistent with free-will.⁸⁶ The divinity of the Son of God is also another key. These keys are also in Scripture but Tradition ensures that their importance is maintained in reading the Scriptures and prevents doctrines such as Calvin's from arising as legitimate in the Church. The Fathers also sought to harmonise difficult passages and used certain principles in their interpretation to qualify potential meanings of the Scripture so that these Scriptures could be understood correctly in context of the rest of Tradition. Also, most importantly, the Scriptures were understood as primarily testimonies to Christ⁸⁷; He is the principle hermeneutical key to the Scriptures. Once the Canon of Scripture had

⁸⁰ John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church*, (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001), p. 10

⁸¹ Photios (Joseph Farrell trans.), *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Chapters 48-51, 84, 88, pp. 82-83, 101-102, 106

⁸² Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: The Experience of God* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994) p. 47

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 46

⁸⁴ Hebrews 13:8

⁸⁵ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 46

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans" in Philip Schaff (ed), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889) First Series: Volume 11. p. 577

⁸⁷ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 39

been settled, the Fathers accepted this and they did not reopen the issue again to find authentic Scriptures.

Scripture is also interpreted in the Spirit. The Scripture testifies to the Son and shares the name of the Word. So, the Spirit of the Word, Who also testifies to the Word, works in the written incarnation of the Word in Scripture. Where the Word is so is the Spirit.⁸⁸ The Church being “the fullness of Him filling all things in all”⁸⁹ contains also the Scriptures. Thus, the Scriptures belong to the Church and are known in the Church where the Word is. Those apart from the Church, the Word and the Spirit cannot know the Scriptures because they are divorced from Him to Whom they testify and they lack the Spirit, Who makes alive the Word in the Scriptures.⁹⁰

The text of the Creed regarding the Spirit’s procession, as decided in the Second Ecumenical Council, is based on the words of Christ in John 15:26 that the Spirit proceeds from the Father using almost the same words but changing $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$ to $\epsilon\kappa$. The filioque, or Greek equivalent, clause is not found in this verse but those supporting it assume it from various other texts in the Scriptures⁹¹.

How are we to interpret John 15:26? Does it allow for the filioque or does it exclude it? To answer this question in an Orthodox manner, we need to consider how the Fathers understood the passage in the Tradition of the Church. St John Chrysostom in his commentary of John 15:26 says: “Behold, it is no longer the Father alone, but the Son also who sendeth.”⁹² The use of the phrase “it is no longer” means that Chrysostom understood the eternal procession to be from the Father alone and the temporal procession to include the Son. Of interest, St Augustine does not touch on this matter in his lectures on this verse in the Gospel of John⁹³. Chrysostom’s interpretation provides strong evidence that there was no tradition of understanding the Scripture to include the filioque rather it testifies to the exclusion of the filioque. Chrysostom wrote these homilies soon after the Second

⁸⁸ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 30-32

⁸⁹ Ephesians 1:23

⁹⁰ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 38-40

⁹¹ Haddad, “The Stations of the Filioque”, pp. 240, 248

⁹² John Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Gospel of St John” in Philip Schaff (ed), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889) First Series: Volume 14, p. 422

⁹³ Augustine, “Tractate 92” in Philip Schaff (ed), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Gospel of John* (Albany: Ages Software, 1997) First Series: Volume 7. p. 727

Council giving support to the idea that not mentioning the Spirit proceeding from the Son means that it was done so in the understanding that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.

Because the Creed takes from the Scripture and is also established in the Church in the Spirit, its text concerning the procession of the Spirit can be assumed have the same meaning as the Scriptures. Thus, following Chrysostom, it must be considered that the Creed is referring to the eternal procession of the Spirit and not to His temporal sending. So, the filioque is inadmissible in the Creed because the only possible favourable reading of the filioque as a temporal sending by Christ would imply a similar reading of the Scriptural passage creating an inconsistency with Chrysostom's interpretation of the passage. This would run contrary both to the one Spirit establishing both as testimonies of Christ in the Church and to the Orthodox interpretation of Scripture within the unchanging rule of Tradition, thus requiring the Orthodox to abandon their tradition of exegesis and accept western models, as a conversion.

Conclusion

In the background of Orthodox understandings of deification, ecclesiology and biblical exegesis, the filioque is an inappropriate phrase to be included in the Creed. It is so in the context of deification because the filioque adds an aspect to the Father and the Son's relationship, which cannot be shared by the human nature, so man cannot share in the sonship of the Son to become sons of God by grace. Without this place in the Son, there can be no relationship to the Father and hence there is an exclusion from life in the Trinity and deification. It is inappropriate in the context of ecclesiology because it was not established consensually by all, in the Tradition of the Church, but rather added and maintained by only some local churches. The Papacy, even with a position of primacy in the Church, could not impose a new theological idea on the Church. Finally, on biblical grounds, the filioque does not fit in the context of the Scriptures, which provide the source of the phrase used in the Creed regarding the Spirit's origin. The Tradition of interpretation of this phrase was to understand it as the Spirit proceeding eternally from the Father alone. The Fathers, in using this Scriptural phrase for the Creed, would be doing so with this interpretation and, so, the inclusion of the filioque would be contrary to their intentions.

Because the filioque is contrary to Orthodox understandings of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis, there can be no unambiguous resolution to the filioque clause being in the Creed unless it is either abandoned by the western confessions or accepted by Orthodox Christians, with the abandoning of their tradition of deification, ecclesiology and exegesis. Such a step would be in

effect a conversion to the other side, as what happened in the Councils of Lyons and Florence, although subsequently rejected by the Orthodox churches, as witnessed in councils such as the Council of Blachernae.

So, unlike the hopes expressed in the Agreed Statement or by Stylianopoulos, no ecumenical resolution is possible, other than conversion.

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