

## II. TEOLOGIA WSCHODNIA

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WACŁAW HRYNIEWICZ OMI  
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### **THE SPIRIT WHO ISSUES FROM THE FATHER: THE *FILIOQUE* IN THE DIALOGUE OF CHRISTIANS TODAY**

The divine Paraclete, the Spirit of truth “issues from the Father” (JB) or “goes out from the Father” (Jn 15:26 NIV)<sup>1</sup>. This is the only New Testament witness about the so-called “procession” of the Holy Spirit who takes his origin from the Father. In the Latin version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, at least since the late sixth century, the word *Filioque* (“and from the Son”) was added to its confession that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father”. The unilateral modification in the wording of the Creed and the underlying differences in understanding the origins of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity have long been considered a dividing issue between the Western and the Eastern Churches.

This highly controversial problem belongs rather to the general doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but is significant as it sheds light on the role of the Third Person in the history of salvation. Additionally it is important from the ecumenical point of view. For this reason it cannot be passed over in silence.

Although a great deal has already been written, the theology of the Holy Spirit still remains an underdeveloped area of Christian theological reflection. This seems to be true also of the question of the origin of the Holy Spirit, an is-

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<sup>1</sup> The New Testament texts will be quoted according to *The Jerusalem Bible* (JB), 1967. Quotation marked NIV is taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1998.

sue which spawned polemical atmosphere in the past. The time has come when a genuinely ecumenical spirit should guide us in our search for new ways of expressing the biblical and early Christian understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This might direct all the Churches towards a creative ecumenical consensus. One can only hope that this process of reflection on the theology of the Holy Spirit will also take into account new formulations consonant with the most valuable insights of the Christian tradition.

## 1. In Search of an Ecumenical Solution to the Old Problem

The last decades have witnessed the growth of ecumenical interest in this problem. The Commission Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches initiated the debate during two ecumenical consultations (1978, 1979) and issued the so-called "Klingenthal Memorandum" on the *Filioque* from the ecumenical point of view.<sup>2</sup> After more than fifteen years a new ecumenical impulse came also from the Vatican. Urged by John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published a clarification of the traditional doctrine of the *Filioque* (1995), intended as a contribution to the dialogue carried out by the Joint International Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.<sup>3</sup> In its first report (1982) on "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (I,6) the Commission mentioned the centuries-old difficulty concerning the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit:

Without wishing to resolve yet the difficulties which have arisen between the East and the West concerning the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, we can already say together that this Spirit, which proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26) as the sole source in the Trinity and which has become the Spirit of our sonship (Rom 8:15) since he is also the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6), is communicated to us particularly in the Eucharist by his Son upon whom he reposes in time and in eternity (Jn 1:32).

The idea of the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and "reposes" on the Son in time and eternity was particularly close to the Antiochene-Syrian tradition. It offers, as we shall see later in our reflections, a possibility of a new approach to understand the relationship between the Son and the Spirit.

An international conference organized by the Foundation "Pro Oriente" (May 15-17, 1998) in Vienna was devoted to the Vatican clarification. The participants

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<sup>2</sup> *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi. Ökumenische Überlegungen zur Filioque Kontroverse*, hg. von L. VISCHER, Frankfurt am M. 1981, 9-23.

<sup>3</sup> *The Greek and the Latin Traditions regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, The Vatican 1996 (in French, Greek, English and Russian). Originally published in "L'Osservatore Romano" September 13, 1995.

opted for restoring in the liturgy the original text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without addition of the *Filioque*.<sup>4</sup>

In fact some events seem to point to an ever-growing willingness on the part of the Vatican to recognize the normative character of the original Creed. When Ecumenical Patriarchs paid a visit to Pope John Paul II (Dimitrios I in December 1987, and Bartholomew I in June 1995), on both occasions they proclaimed with him in St. Peter's Basilica the Creed in Greek, i.e. without the *Filioque*. It was also the case during the visit of Patriarch Teoctist in Rome (October, 2002), when both hierarchs did the same in Romanian at a papal Mass. The document "Dominus Iesus" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (August 6, 2000) begins with the text of the Creed of 381, also without the *Filioque*. These events suggest a new awareness on the Catholic side of the normative value of the original Greek text of the Creed.

A very important contribution to the debate came shortly after that from America. Since June 1999 the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation continued its in-depth examination of the divergent teachings of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches about the origin of the Holy Spirit within the inner life of the triune God. On October 25, 2003 an agreed statement appeared under the title "The *Filioque*: A Church-dividing issue?"<sup>5</sup> It presents the teaching on the Holy Spirit found in the Scriptures, offers historical considerations and theological reflections, and finally puts forward some theological and practical recommendations. One can hope that the statement will significantly contribute to the growth of mutual understanding of this difficult question on both sides.

The controversy concerning the unilateral addition by the Western Church of the word *Filioque* to the ecumenical confession of faith has already lasted for more than a thousand years. In endless polemics which led to the events of 1054 (symbolical date of schism), the Eastern Church pointed to the *Filioque* question as one of the main causes of division within Christianity. In consequence also the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed has ceased to be a clear sign of unity in common Christian faith. No wonder this situation has become an urgent challenge to all Churches. The problem of *Filioque* can be ecumenically resolved only when Western theologians learn to treat seriously the objections of the Orthodox, and simultaneously when Orthodox theologians critically reflect on theological legacy of the West with equal openness. This must be a mutual learning process. One has to take into account specific points of view of both traditions. It is a necessary hermeneutical principle of a truly ecumenical proceeding.

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<sup>4</sup> *Vom Heiligen Geist. Der gemeinsame trinitarische Glaube und das Problem des Filioque*, hg. von A. STIRNEMANN, G. WILFLINGER, Innsbruck-Wien 1998 (Pro Oriente, vol. XXI).

<sup>5</sup> See the text of the common statement in "St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly" 48 (2004) 1.

An ecumenical approach to this question requires that the Orthodox try to understand the original theological intentions behind the addition of the *Filioque* to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It took place in a situation where no in depth-knowledge of the great conciliar tradition was available. The Western Church officially acknowledged the controversial formula only at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier it had begun to appear in some official statements (among others on the local synod of Toledo in 589), although there was no intention to oppose the teaching of the Eastern Church. The insertion of the *Filioque* aimed to counteract the spread of Western variants of arianism and adoptionism, reaffirming in this way the divinity of Christ. Towards the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century the formula was added to the Creed especially at the court of the emperor Charlemagne, who, together with his theologians, tried to persuade pope Leo III (795-816) to approve this modification. The Pope refused to do so and ordered for the display in St. Peter's of two silver plates containing, in Greek and Latin, the original text of the confession of faith established by the great ecumenical councils. The memorable words of this Pope about the *Filioque*: "let it be removed from the Symbol" (*illud de symbolo tollatur*)<sup>6</sup> are also today an encouragement to move a bold ecumenical decision.

Despite papal directives the Carolingians continued to use the Creed with the *Filioque* during the Eucharist in their dioceses. The wise attitude of Leo III who did not want to render the relations with the Eastern Church more difficult was ignored. Western theologians did not realize the seriousness of the situation created by the addition of the *Filioque* and its implications. More understanding in this respect would have strengthened the opposition to any innovation and spared the Church unending controversy and animosity. In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine missionaries were expelled from Bulgaria. They returned to Constantinople and reported on Western practices of Frankish missionaries who used the Creed with the *Filioque*. This practice was strongly condemned by Patriarch Photios as blasphemous.

After two centuries of papal resistance, at the request of the Roman emperor Henry II, the custom of adding the *Filioque* was sanctioned under the pontificate of Benedict VIII (1012-1024). Since the coronation of this emperor in 1014 the Creed was regularly sung at papal masses in Rome with this addition, regardless of further negative consequences for the history of Christianity. In the tumultuous events of 1054 Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, the legate of Pope Leo IX, accused the Byzantines of arbitrarily deleting the *Filioque* from the Creed! At the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1445) the controversial formula was interpreted as having the same meaning as the position of some early Eastern Fathers that the Spirit proceeds "through (*diá*) the Son".

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<sup>6</sup> PL 102, 971-976.

## 2. The Consensus in the Dogmatic Core of the Creed

After many centuries of polemical distortions the *Filioque* has finally become the object of a thoroughgoing ecumenical reflection. The Churches rediscover the common understanding of the dogmatic core in confessing the faith in the Holy Trinity. The Eastern and Western traditions affirm that the Holy Spirit is a distinct divine Person (*hypóstasis*) within the mystery of God, equal to the Father and the Son, and therefore is not just a creature or personified energy of God acting in the world. This means that in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed both traditions confess the common faith that the Holy Spirit is the true God who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified. Both the Christian East and the West affirm that the Father alone is the principle (*archē*), the sole primordial source (*pēgē*) and ultimate cause (*aitia*) of the divine being, and of all God's operations in the created reality of the universe. Both sides maintain that all the operations of God in the history of the world are the common work of the three divine Persons, even though each of them has a distinctive role within those activities (creation, sustaining in being, redemption and ultimate fulfillment).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of faith does not determine the mode of the procession (*ekpóreusis*) of the Holy Spirit. The reticence of the conciliar Fathers, who did not want to define the relationship between the Spirit and the Son was intended, wise and well-taken. The Council chose to restrict itself to the language of the Gospel. The formula says simply this: the Spirit issues from the Father inasmuch as he is the Father of the Son. The procession of the Spirit from the Father presupposes a relationship existing within the Trinity between the Father and the Son who is eternally the Son of the Father. The analogy between the *ekpóreusis* (the “coming forth”)<sup>7</sup> of the Spirit and the eternal “generation” of the Son clearly excludes any thought that the Spirit may be subordinate to the Son, either within the inner life of God or in God's saving action in time.

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<sup>7</sup> The noun *ekpóreusis* and the verb *ekporeuesthai* (“issue forth”) suggest a “passage outwards” from within the Father's own eternal Person being the source of the Divine Being. This implies a kind of mysterious “movement out of (*ek-*)” the Father. Greek theology used to restrict these technical terms to the coming forth of the Spirit from the Father. Other Greek words, such as *proienai* (“go forward”) are used by the Greek Fathers to refer to the Spirit's historical saving “mission” from the Father and the risen Christ. – Instead the Latin words *procedere* and *procession* suggest simply “movement forward”, without the connotation of ultimate origin or of the starting-point of that movement hinted at by the Greek. They denote origin of any kind, both the generation of the Son as well as the breathing forth of the Spirit and his mission in time. Both the primordial origin of the Spirit in the eternal Father and his “coming forth” from the risen Christ tend to be designated, in Latin, by the same word *procedere* and *procession*, while Greek theology normally uses two different technical terms. – Therefore it is easy to image how many misunderstandings were possible on both sides because of the subtle difference between the Latin *procedere* and the Greek *ekporeuesthai*.

This dogmatic core of the Creed serves the ecumenical consensus of the Churches also today. The Greek original of the Symbol contains the necessary fullness of the faith in the Holy Spirit. The new climate of the dialogue offers a unique possibility of restoring the original text of the confession of faith. An encouraging sign is the fact that the Vatican clarification clearly affirms the normative character of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in its original form:

The Catholic Church acknowledges the conciliar, ecumenical, normative and irrevocable value, as expression of the one common faith of the Church and of all Christians, of the Symbol professed in Greek at Constantinople in 381 by the Second Ecumenical Council. No profession of faith peculiar to a particular liturgical tradition can contradict this expression of the faith taught and professed by the undivided Church.

Reading these words one can wonder what prevents this from being the end of the centuries-long controversy on the insertion of the word *Filioque* into the Latin translation of the Symbol. This feeling is further strengthened when the same document gives the following interpretation of the Council's teaching on the basis of *Jn 15:26*:

The Father alone is the principle without principle (*archē ánarchos*) of the two other persons of the Trinity, the sole source (*pēgē*) of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore takes his origin from the Father alone (*ek mónou tou Patrós*) in a principal, proper and immediate manner.

The Orthodox could easily recognize the language of Patriarch Photios and long Eastern tradition in this formulation. We do not find in The document does not, however, lead to the conclusion that from now onwards the Catholic Church should use the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol without the *Filioque*. Instead an effort is made to explain the *Filioque* from a theological and a linguistic point of view, and to show that the Latin liturgical tradition does not contradict the ecumenical Symbol. The document regards the Greek and Latin teaching about the procession of the Holy Spirit as an expression of the "legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed". Thus, from the dogmatic point of view, the *Filioque* is orthodox in the Latin terminology, because the word *procedit* has a meaning different from the Greek term *ekporeuómenon*.

This explanation, although conducive to further dialogue, does not remove the main obstacle. In fact, the question of the theological interpretation of the *Filioque* is something else than its unilateral addition to the Latin translation of the Creed. The main obstacle in the dialogue is not the theology of the *Filioque* as such, but the very presence of this addition to the Symbol of faith. The Christian East does not require that the Western Christians renounce their theology considered to be a legitimate development. For many centuries the East has been requesting the Western Christianity to restore in its liturgy the origi-

nal text of the Symbol, recognized now as “conciliar, ecumenical, normative and irrevocable”.

The question of the participation of the Son in the “procession” of the Holy Spirit from the Father does not constitute the dogmatic core of the Christian faith in the Holy Trinity. For this reason it should be submitted to a certain *ridimensionamento*, i.e. reduced to its real dimensions and proportions. In fact, we are dealing here with secondary differences in the theological interpretation of the doctrine on the triune God.

The Roman document does not mention the unilateral insertion of the *Filioque*-clause into the Latin translation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. One cannot detect in it any sign of readiness to recognize unequivocally the historical error and to ask for forgiveness, as required by ecumenical sincerity and honesty. This, rather than undermine the credibility of the whole Western tradition, would contribute to the process of purifying the memory of the past. True readiness to learn from the East requires above all the willingness to overcome the traditional attitude of superiority which so often comes to the surface in Western Churches.

### 3. Hope for a Greater Openness

The Symbol of unity requires all Christians to use the same normative text of the Creed in its accurate translation into different languages. In this situation there is only one truly ecumenical solution: “a particular liturgical tradition” (the Latin one in this case!) should give way to the universal consciousness of the Church. Therefore one has to restore the original text of the Creed without the insertion of the *Filioque*. As a theologian engaged for many years in the official dialogue with the Orthodox Church, I painfully experience the lack of determination and the wavering of my Church. Further delay can only reinforce the mistrust among the Orthodox.

The restoration of the original text of the Symbol would be the most effective and encouraging ecumenical boost, a sign of sincerity and reconciliation. All other efforts seem to be only a substitute solution which unnecessarily prolongs the period of inflexibility and uncompromising attitudes. A clear recommendation was given already by the Klingenthal Memorandum:

Therefore we recommend (...), that the original form of the third article of the confession of faith without the *Filioque* be everywhere recognized as normative and restored, so that the whole Christianity may confess through this formula its common faith in the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 22-23.



This recommendation made by the Commission Faith and Order encountered positive reception in some Western Churches in the last decades. The eighth plenary assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Curitiba (1990) allowed the possibility of omitting the *Filioque* from the liturgy, especially during ecumenical services, or in the countries where there are many Orthodox Christians. This decision was, on the part of the Lutherans, a sign of cautious openness to an ecumenical solution of a sensitive problem.<sup>9</sup>

In its pragmatism the Anglican Church went even further. In 1988 the Lambeth Conference affirmed the earlier suggestions to remove the *Filioque* and it recommended the publication of modified editions of liturgical texts without the *Filioque*-clause. Anglicans admit that this clause does not belong to the historical and canonical context of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol. This historical decision was taken in the conviction that the removal of the later addition would promote the cause of Christian unity. It is a promising example of ecumenical courage and sensibility.<sup>10</sup>

When the Western Churches restore the original form of the Creed, they do it without any feeling of betrayal of the theological heritage of the West. The theological interpretation of the *Filioque* is further regarded as an alternative truth developed in the Western teaching on the Holy Trinity. One can only hope that sooner or later also the Roman Catholic Church will restore to permanent liturgical use the original text of the Symbol of faith. A well-known Orthodox theologian Boris Bobrinskoy from Paris wrote in 1981:

When the Latin dogma of *Filioque* loses in the eyes of the Orthodox its binding force; when the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol recovers its original common form, and becomes the symbol of unity and love – then the *Filioque* will cease to be considered as sin against love and unity.<sup>11</sup>

An equally firm position was taken in 1991 also by a Greek Orthodox theologian from the United States, Theodore Stylianopoulos. If we are able, as Christians, to recite together the Symbol of faith without the *Filioque*, “it will mark a golden moment in our ecumenical journey”.<sup>12</sup> Orthodox theology has always regarded the approval by Popes of the use of *Filioque* in the Latin Creed as usurpation of the dogmatic authority which belongs to ecumenical Councils alone.

Such witnesses give courage to take bold decisions. They are important signs of good will to change the situation. The duty of the Roman Catholic Church is to make a decisive step forward. An old proverb says: where there is a will, there

<sup>9</sup> See M.E. CHAPMAN, *A Lutheran Proposal for the Neuralgic Question of the “Filioque”*. *The L. W. F. at Curitiba, Brasil 1990*, “Journal of Ecumenical Studies” (1991) 2, 239-259.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. TH. STYLIANOPOULOS, *An Ecumenical Solution to the Filioque Question?*, “Journal of Ecumenical Studies” (1991) 2, 260-280, esp. 266-268.

<sup>11</sup> B. BOBRINSKOY, *Das “Filioque” gestern und heute*, in: *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 119.

<sup>12</sup> TH. STYLIANOPOULOS, *art. cit.*, 272.



is a way. The removal of *Filioque* from the Symbol of faith would become an unmistakable sign of reconciliation. This decision would not imply a rejection, or discredit of the valid insights of the Western tradition. The legitimate truth contained in this theological tradition could become an object of future debate, but initiated in a new climate of mutual confidence. One can expect that the Orthodox could then recognize the *Filioque* as a Western *theologoumenon*, i.e. Latin explanation of the Symbol, an interpretation which does not intend to add anything to the dogma proclaimed by the Second Ecumenical Council.

Orthodox theologians regard the Vatican clarification of 1995 as useful and valuable for further theological dialogue, although they do not conceal their reservations. The words of appreciation go on to make a new vision of the role of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. One cannot be sure, however, what consequences should be drawn from this new vision. According to Olivier Clément, the role of the Spirit had long been neglected, especially in Western ecclesiology, and prophetic aspects of the Church were subject to “sacramentalism”, what provoked in turn the reaction of the Reformation.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. The Spirit Who “Reposes” on the Son in Time and Eternity

The time has come to search jointly for ways leading to an ecumenical understanding of controversial issues. The new approach requires much courage, honesty and an open attitude of the mind and heart. The long controversy about *Filioque* seems to have no chance of solution if both sides only try to justify their traditional positions.

The Klingenthal Memorandum points to an alternative patristic approach which suggests that the Son is not alien to the procession of the Spirit and, on the other hand, the Spirit is not alien to the generation of the Son.<sup>14</sup> Eastern theology teaches about the Spirit who “reposes” on the Son, “shines” and “radiates” through him. In this perspective it would be easier to comprehend or to imagine that the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit go together simultaneously, and are inseparably linked with one another. Both aspects could be distinguished only logically, but they should not be separated from one another.

Great theologians of the East rightly emphasized the simultaneity of the eternal origins of the Son and the Spirit from the Father. St John of Damascus compares the Spirit with the Breath (*Pneuma*) of the Father, and the Son with his Word (*Logos*). This telling metaphor says that both the Son and the Spirit simul-

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<sup>13</sup> O. CLÉMENT, *Enfin, un oecuménisme créateur*, “Contacts” (1996) 173, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 20.

taneously have their origin in the Father.<sup>15</sup> This means that the Father never was without the Word, and the Word never was without the Breath. The Word must always have its Breath. The Divine Spirit eternally accompanies the Word and reveals its action.<sup>16</sup>

Before Christ communicated the gift of the Spirit to people, he was himself the one on whom the Spirit “reposed”. This fact gives witness to the divine reciprocity and mutual belonging of the Son and the Spirit. The “mission” of the Spirit in the world involves the Son, who receives the Spirit into his humanity at his baptism in the river Jordan, breathes the Spirit forth on his disciples late on the day of the resurrection, and sends the Spirit into the world at Pentecost. According to the Gospel’s account the Spirit first “descended on [Jesus] in bodily shape, like a dove” (Lc 3:22) during his baptism, and permeated his messianic presence and the whole earthly activity. Jesus is fully obedient to the Spirit: “led by the Spirit through the wilderness” (Lc 4:1), begins then to preach “with the power of the Spirit in him” (Lc 4:14). It was the same Spirit who had “prepared” the event of the incarnation of the Son: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lc 1:35) – said the angel to Mary. On the other hand, before his death, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit from the Father: “I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate [Paraclete] to be with you for ever”, “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you” (Jn 14:16.26).

The role of the Spirit in the whole life of Christ reveals something of the eternal mystery of God. The Spirit “reposes” on the Son in eternity as he “reposed” on Jesus during his earthly life. This long neglected aspect of the New Testament teaching (manifested especially in St Luke’s Gospel which later found a strong repercussion in the Syrian tradition), throws some light also on the theology of the eternal “procession” of the Spirit from the Father. The eternal and perfect reciprocity between the Son and the Spirit is in turn the reason of the Spirit’s presence in the saving mission of the Son in time.

The insight showing the Spirit who reposes on the Son in time and in eternity offers perhaps the best possibility of a new approach to the understanding of mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit with all of its implications. This vision a priori excludes any possible tendency to subordinate the Spirit to the Son. The resistance of the Orthodox theology to the *Filioque* derived in large measure from fear that this addition, present in the Latin version of the Creed, would diminish the role of the Holy Spirit also in the life of the Church – freedom and prophetic spirit risk to be submitted to institutions, structures and juridical regulations. The *Filioque* does not say anything about the mutual relationship

<sup>15</sup> JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 7-8. PG 94, 804-805.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 8. PG 94, 824.

between the Son and the Spirit. Thus it creates a certain difficulty also for the Western theology which claims to be faithful to the biblical and patristic data.

## 6. Towards a Reconciliation of the Eastern and Western Traditions

The mode of the divine “processions” – the Son’s by “generation” and the Spirit’s through “coming forth” (*ekpóreusis*) – is incomprehensible to the human mind. All we can resort to are metaphors and remote analogies only. From a logical point of view the two mutually interdependent orders or movements can be distinguished: the movement “from” and the movement “to” (or “towards”). The Filioque speaks only a language of the movement “from” (“who proceeds *from* the Father and the Son”), but says nothing about the movement “towards” within the mysterious interpersonal process of the divine processions. By emphasizing only one movement and one aspect of the eternal inner life of God one runs the risk of subordinating the Spirit to the Son and of diminishing his personal equality with the other persons of the Trinity as well.

The Christians of the two traditions, both Eastern and Western, could already today confess together their faith that the Spirit comes forth eternally *from* the Father *towards* the Son, and returns *from* the Son (or through the Son) *to* the Father, in one mysterious cycle of the divine life of the Trinity. According to St John of Damascus, the Spirit comes forth *from* the Father *to* the Son, in order to “repose” (*anapaúein*) on the Son and abide in him.<sup>17</sup> But the Spirit who reposes (or rests) on the Son returns, as it were, from or through the Son to the Father, who is the ultimate principle, source and cause of the divinity of the two other Persons. In other words, the Spirit abides in the Son and thus eternally reveals or manifests him (*ekpháinei*) to his beloved Father.<sup>18</sup> The idea of “manifesting” the Son to the Father implies certain shining forth or radiating (*éklampsis*, *éllampsis*) of the Spirit from/through the Son to the Father. For this reason the same Damascene spoke about the mutual indwelling and interpenetration (*perichōresis*) of the divine Persons:

For the Son is in the Father and in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is in the Father and the Son, whereas the Father is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, however without any fusion, mingling or identification. The unity and identity exist only concerning the movement, because all three Persons have the same one surge [or impulsion, *égzalma*] and the one movement (*kínēsis*). This cannot be traced in the created nature.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* 1,7.8.13. PG 94, 805.821.857.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* I,13 (856).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem* I,14 (860). Cf. M.D. TORRE, *St John Damascene and St Thomas Aquinas on the Eternal Procession of the Holy Spirit*, „St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly” 38 (1994) 3, 303-327, esp. 320.

Needless to say, this can only be our imperfect human image of the unending communion (*koinonía*) of love between the divine Persons – the image of mutual reciprocity and eternal exchange of love: “God is love” (1Jn 4:8.16). The “coming forth” of the Spirit presupposes the generation of the Son on whom he reposes and in whom he remains as the love of the Father who is always the Father of the Son.

It is true that the Greek and Latin theological traditions display some tension and are difficult to reconcile with each other. I am deeply convinced, however, that they no longer need divide us. In the light of the above interpretation they are able to come closer together and contribute to the process of mutual reconciliation. Recent ecumenical attempts to close the old controversy take into account theological sensibility of both sides.

In this way the Christian theology of the Holy Trinity may regain some of its existential relevance. It would be easier then to understand that God’s Spirit always leads us to Christ, because he eternally comes forth from the Father *to* the Son. At the same time the Spirit leads us through the Son back *to* the Father, because he eternally returns from the Son to the Father, from whom they both come.

## 7. A Plea for More Modesty in Our Knowledge of God

At the end of our reflections we may simply ask: who is really interested today in the problem of the *Filioque*? Certainly not the vast majority of the faithful in our Churches. Most often they do not even understand the meaning of this question, and do not attribute any existential value to it. At the time when so many people lose their faith in God or do not hide their skepticism, theologians still seem to be victims of their excessive curiosity and inquisitiveness. Why not take seriously into account the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*)? An internationally renowned linguist, Anna Wierzbicka from the University of Canberra in Australia wrote not long ago:

After twenty centuries of Christianity, the sense is growing among Christians and non-Christians alike that the creeds that congregations recite in churches each week are largely incomprehensible even to the congregations, let alone to the outsider. It would, of course, be an illusion to assume that people who publicly confessed their faith in the past always understood the creeds of their churches. But perhaps the need to understand in order to believe was felt less acutely then than now. As individual reasoning and opinions have become the ultimate arbiters of what can and should be accepted as true, understanding has increasingly become essential to faith.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A. WIERZBICKA, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*, Oxford 2001, 444.

We realize more and more clearly the difficulty of the whole of the hermeneutical problem. The mystery of God's inner life surpasses the ability of our mind and heart. One can reasonably assume that the long controversy on the *Filioque* would have been less acrimonious and acute, if both sides had shown epistemological modesty, a living consciousness of the insurmountable limitations of our human knowledge of God. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity should not become merely a domain of theological speculations. It has an existential character. Theologians have to become more realistic and sober in approaching the issues which they have not been able to solve for the centuries.

The lesson of the past should not be forgotten. Who really wants to discuss the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit finds himself or herself in face of the ineffable mystery of faith. This mystery requires, both in the East and the West, a wise and reverent attitude inspired by the feeling of deceptiveness and inadequacy of all human concepts and analogies. We all need an acute awareness of the transcendent reality and freedom of God, which imposes prudence and circumspection on our theological judgments. One can properly speak about the mystery of the triune God using above all the language of negative, i.e. apophatic theology which emphasizes the limitations of human thoughts, words and concepts.

An apophatic consciousness warns against any attempt to adjust the mystery of God to our fragile categories of thinking. However, Christians are not entirely doomed to complete silence in face of this mystery. They have to speak about God, to bring Good News to the world, give witness to it, and at the same time to confront their words with the witness of the Holy Scriptures.

There is one more important aspect of the theological language concerning the attempt to solve the problem of *Filioque*. The above mentioned Klingenthal Memorandum reminds all of us that "every speech about the Trinity is by its nature doxological".<sup>21</sup> This remark can serve as one of the basic hermeneutical principles. The centuries-long controversies on the *Filioque* have contributed in large measure to undermining the credibility of the Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity. Polemical distortions in which each side caricatures the position of the other risk to discredit this teaching. Today one has to go back to the language of the Bible and the early tradition, which was above all a language of doxology (*dóxa* – glory) which praised God for what he has done for the world in the history of salvation. Our task is to rediscover the original character, wisdom and far-sightedness of this language.

The thinking and language of the early Church concerning the doctrine on the Holy Trinity developed in the doxological context of the confession of faith. The doxological statements are not just abstract definitions and descriptions. Their task is to lead people to the all-embracing, ineffable reality of God. They give

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<sup>21</sup> *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 15.

guidance to human hope, thinking, speaking and acting. Doxology is directed above all to the living God, addresses him but is not exhausted in linguistic form of prayer and adoration. Every kind of thinking, hope and action may become doxological when it is inspired by invocation of God, and points to the future.

Doxology is closely linked with Christian hope, because our God is “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13). The aim of doxological utterances is to give witness to the triune God, to praise him, and to invoke with confidence his holy name. The invocation (*epiclesis*!) is a sign of trust in God, expression of gratitude and thanksgiving. When the invocation takes form of the confession of faith, it becomes witness that the eternal God remains always the same as the One revealed in the history of humanity, and that he desires to bring all to the fulfillment in the new world of the resurrection. Thus hope traces out the orientation to doxology, becomes expectation and anticipation of the unseen reality (cf. Hbr 11,1). The words of doxology and hope anticipate the ultimate fulfillment. They partly realize already now what they mean, and therefore have a performing and creative character.

Doxology, confession of faith, hope and invocation go together. The Vatican clarification referred to at the beginning of this chapter only briefly mentions at the end the need “for constant invocation (*epiclesis*) of the Holy Spirit and his action (*enérgeia*)”. A truly ecumenical text should combine much closer the question of the procession of the Spirit with language of doxology, hope and invocation, as this was emphasized by the Klingenthal Memorandum.

One has to continue this effort in the conviction that the language of doxology, invocation and hope remains the best human instrument testifying to the presence of the triune God in the history of the world. The faith in the divine Trinity would then disclose its fuller meaning and come closer to our daily experience. If the Scripture says about the Holy Spirit that he “issues” or “goes out from the Father”, we have to confine ourselves to this statement. An authentic intellectual courage of thinking imposes the limitations on its inquisitiveness. Let us not want to see more than is really needed! In this sense one can read the beginning of Cardinal John-Henry Newman’s verse *The Pillar of the Cloud*:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom  
Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home –  
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene – one step enough for me.<sup>22</sup>

We all have to recognize the limitations of our ability to make definitive assertions about the inner life of God. Such an attitude helps us to discover “a reverent modesty” in all discussions about the origin and person of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>22</sup> J.H. NEWMAN, *Prayers, Verses, and Devotions*, San Francisco 2000, 572.

within the mystery of God, and about the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit with each other.<sup>23</sup> In this way one can grow together in respect for the wisdom of our Christian faith and its real depths.

### **Duch, który od Ojca pochodzi: *Filioque* w dialogu chrześcijan dzisiaj**

#### Streszczenie

Jedyne świadectwo Nowego Testamentu mówi o „Duchu Prawdy, który od Ojca pochodzi” (J 15,26). Według wprowadzonego z czasem do Credo Nicejsko-Konstantynopolitańskiego (381) łacińskiego dodatku, Duch Święty pochodzi od Ojca „i Syna” (*Filioque*). Stało się to przyczyną wielowiekowego sporu między Wschodem i Zachodem chrześcijańskim. Kościół zachodni oficjalnie wprowadził *Filioque* do Credo dopiero na początku XI wieku. W nie kończących się polemikach, które prowadziły do Wielkiej Schizmy Kościół wschodni wskazywał na *Filioque* jako na jedną z głównych przyczyn podziału chrześcijaństwa. Formuła *Filioque* stanowi do dzisiaj źródło kontrowersji między Wschodem i Zachodem chrześcijańskim. W konsekwencji także Credo Nicejsko-Konstantynopolitańskie nie jest wyraźnym symbolem jedności, lecz podziału we wspólnej wierze chrześcijańskiej. Dlatego właśnie stało się ono ekumenicznym wyzwaniem dla wszystkich Kościołów.

Problem *Filioque* można rozwiązać prawdziwie ekumenicznie tylko wówczas, gdy teologowie zachodni nauczą się traktować poważnie zastrzeżenia prawosławnych, a teologowie prawosławni ze swej strony podejną krytycznie, z równą otwartością, do teologicznego dziedzictwa Zachodu. Chodzi o wsłuchiwanie się w głos drugiej strony, rozumienie i uczenie się od siebie nawzajem. Główną przeszkodą w porozumieniu nie jest teologia *Filioque* jako taka, lecz sama obecność tego dodatku w Symbolu wiary. Wschód chrześcijański nie domaga się, aby Zachód wycofał się ze swojej teologii, uważanej przezeń za prawdziwą. Zwraca się od wieków z prośbą do Kościoła Zachodniego, aby przywrócił w swojej liturgii ten tekst Symbolu wiary, który sam obecnie uznaje za „soborowy, ekumeniczny, normatywny i nieodwołalny”. Przywrócenie oryginalnego brzmienia

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<sup>23</sup> The „*Filioque*”: a Church dividing issue? An Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation (2003), part III.



Symbolu nicejsko-konstantynopolińskiego byłoby aktem najbardziej ekumenicznym. Wszystkie inne zabiegi wydają się próbą rozwiązań zastępczych, wydłużających jedynie okres wahania i nieustępliwości.

Ostatnie dziesięciolecia przyniosły nowe próby rozwiązania tego kontrowersyjnego problemu w duchu prawdziwie ekumenicznym. Autor ukazuje sens i kierunek tych prób i wyraża nadzieję na większą otwartość ze strony Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w dążeniu do przywrócenia pierwotnej wersji Credo. W artykule podkreślona została prawda wspólna dla obydwu tradycji, iż Duch Święty „spoczywa” na Synu w czasie i wieczności. Myśl ta była szczególnie bliska tradycji antiocheńsko-syryjskiej. Stwarza ona być może najlepszą możliwość nowego podejścia do zrozumienia relacji między Synem i Duchem.

Chrześcijańska nauka o Trójcy Świętej nie może stać się dziedziną teologicznych spekulacji. Ma ona charakter egzystencjalny. Teologowie powinni odnaleźć większą trzeźwość i pełną czci skromność poznawczą w podejściu do zagadnień, których nie byli w stanie rozstrzygnąć przez całe wieki. O tajemnicy Boskiej Trójcy mówić można właściwie w kategoriach teologii negatywnej, apofatycznej, świadomej granic ludzkiego języka. Trzeba dziś świadomie powracać do języka Biblii i wczesnej tradycji, który jest przede wszystkim językiem doksologii, wyrażającym pochwałę Boga za to, co uczynił dla świata w dziejach zbawienia.