

## **FILIOQUE**

A Latin word meaning “and from the Son” added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Latin [church](#) after the words “the Holy Spirit . . . Who proceeds from the Father.” It was the subject of dissension between Eastern and Western churches.

### **History of the Filioque Controversy**

Ideas akin to those expressed by the *filioque* were accepted in the West at a comparatively early date: the so-called Athanasian Creed refers to the procession from the Father and the Son. At the Third Synod of Toledo in 589, the [Visigoth](#) king Recared confirmed his abandonment of ARIANISM by announcing that “the Holy Spirit also should be confessed by us and taught to proceed from the Father and the Son,” and he recited both the NICENE CREED and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed with the addition of the *filioque*. The *filioque* and the doctrine it expressed were particularly useful as a means of combating or explicitly rejecting Arianism. The idea, though not the *filioque* itself, had reached England by the late seventh century; and Pope Martin I included the word in the synodal letter he sent to Constantinople in 649. But though the idea of the double procession obviously had gained some currency by this time, its general significance was still limited.

The *filioque* became a matter of more general controversy when it penetrated the Frankish kingdoms and became enshrined in Frankish religious policy and ideas of kingship. It appears to have been discussed (in relation to the Greeks) at the Synod of Gentilly summoned by Pepin the Short in 767. It has been suggested that, because of a delay in the sending of a Mass book from Rome when it was requested by Charlemagne in 785, Alcuin set to compiling a work of his own in which a version of the creed with the *filioque* was interpolated.

Whatever the truth about the route by which the *filioque* reached the

Franks (there have been several theories), it soon became an [orthodox](#) doctrine to be defended by Charlemagne and his theologians. The conclusion of the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which saw the defeat of the iconoclasts, was the occasion for a defiant trumpeting of the Frankish view of doctrine and theology. The *Libri Carolini* (790) subjected the acts of the council to scathing criticism and took issue with Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople, who had dared to say that the procession of the Holy Spirit was from the Father through the Son. Pope Hadrian I attempted to justify Tarasius' doctrine to the Franks, but in 794 Charlemagne called his own supposedly universal council to Frankfurt, where the *filioque* was used to condemn the heresy of adoptionism. At the slightly later Synod of Friuli, [Paulinus](#) of Aquileia defended the legitimacy of additions to the creed that do not contradict the teachings of the [church](#) fathers.

About 807 a dispute broke out on the Mount of Olives between Greek and Frankish monks over the latter group's use of the *filioque*. Pope Leo II, to whom they had appealed for support, made it clear that he had no doctrinal objections to the *filioque*, though he later told a group of Frankish churchmen that while he had allowed the creed to be sung in the Mass throughout the empire, he could not sanction any additions to it. Moreover, he advised the Franks to stop having the creed sung in the Mass, while the *filioque* was quietly removed. It seems only fair to assume that Leo was annoyed at the way the *filioque* had, in 809, been transformed into the official doctrine of the [church](#) in the Western empire. His final action on the subject was to have two silver tablets engraved—one in Greek, the other in Latin—with the uninterpolated Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and to hang one at each side of the tomb of Saint Peter in Rome.

Renewed friction was generated by the use of the *filioque* later in the ninth century when a mission to the Bulgars headed by Bishop Formosus of Porto not only requested the khan to dismiss Byzantine missionaries but also was found to be using the interpolated creed. The patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, had already clashed with Pope Nicholas I over

the matter of Nicholas' election. He now energetically attacked the use of the *filioque* and eventually declared Nicholas deposed on a charge of heresy. Photius is sometimes accused of insincerity. It is alleged that he would never have raised the question of the *filioque* had it not been for the difficulties surrounding his elevation to the patriarchate. This, however, is to overstate the case. Photius consistently complained not of any injury done to him but of that done to the creed and the fathers of the church. His most ambitious defense of the anti-*filioque* position was the *Mystagogia*, completed in exile after his deposition of 886. In this work, he attempted to show that the *filioque* implied not one but two causes in the Trinity, destroyed the principle of a *monarchia* within the Trinity, and seemed to relegate the Holy Spirit to an inferior rank. The Western replies to Photius came, not surprisingly, from Frankish theologians such as Ratramnus of Corbie, who quoted scripture, [councils](#) of the church, and both Latin and Greek [church](#) fathers in an anti-Greek tract composed before the council of 879-880 at which Photius had succeeded in obtaining from Roman legates not only acceptance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without additions but also an agreement that no additions should be made to it.

Nevertheless, by the eleventh century, the Franks had succeeded in imposing the *filioque* on the papacy. It is generally agreed that Benedict VIII acceded to the wish of the German emperor Henry II, who had inherited this theological and liturgical legacy, and the creed with the *filioque* was sung in Rome. This did not mean its automatic dissemination throughout the West as a whole; we learn from Alexander of Hales that it was not in use in Paris as late as 1240. But the papacy's acceptance ensured that it was mentioned in 1240. One of the accusations leveled at Constantinople in that year by Humbert of Silva Candida and his companions, papal legates seeking reconciliation of the Eastern and Western churches, was that the Greeks had omitted the *filioque* from the creed. Other considerations, such as that over the azymes, had hitherto played a more prominent part in the dispute, but it is noteworthy that

Michael Cerularius' *Panoplia* gave priority to a defense of the Eastern version of the creed, before returning to the azymes and other matters.

By the late eleventh century, however, there was some degree of willingness on the part of some prominent churchmen to try to account for the differences that had grown up between East and West on the subject of the *filioque*. Theophylact, archbishop of Ochrida in Bulgaria, while unequivocally condemning the West for innovating in matters of faith and stressing the gravity of their error, believed that the Latins erred through ignorance more than through wickedness. They did not understand the meaning of the word "procession," on which the whole debate about the relations of Father, Son, and Spirit turned; even then, there was some excuse to be made for them on account of the poverty of the Latin tongue.

At the Council of Bari in 1098, Anselm of Canterbury admitted of a difference between the versions of the creed used in East and West but strove to show that the addition of the *filioque* was not an innovation; rather, it was a matter of doctrinal clarification. In his *De processione Spiritus Sancti* (1102) he argues his own view of the Trinity while presenting possible Greek counterarguments. Although at first glance his view of the internal relations of the Trinity looks remarkably similar to the Eastern view of a monarchy within the Trinity, he is in fact stressing the double procession of the Holy Spirit and the common essence of the three Persons. As for the matter of addition to the creed, for which the Greeks criticize the Latins, he merely says that it was difficult for the Latins to consult on the issue at the time. This looks like a rather more hard-line defense of the Latin position than do his remarks at Bari, but he was also capable of saying that differences should not lead to argument and that the Greek [church](#) was no less faithful than the Latin.

In the twelfth century discussion involving the *filioque* took place between Greek and Latin churchmen in the form of theological debates that were not usually surrounded by any great mutual animosity. In the

thirteenth century, however, new developments took place. After the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, the rulers of the Greek successor states to Byzantium found themselves faced on more than one occasion with politico-military threats of such magnitude that the backing of the papacy was a necessity. The way to achieve this backing was to hold discussions on the vexing subject of [church](#) union. Under the Nicene rulers John Vatatzes and Theodore Lascaris such avenues were explored, and during Vatatzes' negotiations, it became clear that even if the Greek [clergy](#) were willing to submit to Rome, they still believed that only the sanction of a general council could legitimately add the *filioque* to the creed.

After the recapture of Constantinople by the Greeks in 1261, Michael VIII Palaeologos faced the prospect of a Western "crusade" against his empire by Charles of Anjou and therefore urged a union on his [church](#) and populace, which was confirmed at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. There was no theological discussion at Lyons, which in any case was attended by only a few Greeks as representatives of the emperor. They repeated the *filioque* several times during the proceedings. Although the *filioque* was by now, in the eyes of the West, a doctrine that the Greeks would have to accept as a prelude to union, it is interesting to note that the form its acknowledgment took was an anathema upon those who denied the *filioque* and upon those "who have presumed with audacious temerity to assert that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from two principles rather than one." In his patriarch, John Bekkos, Michael VIII appears to have found a man who was personally convinced of the identity of Greek and Latin doctrines on the procession of the Holy Spirit, and who would continue to defend these beliefs even after the rejection of union by the Greeks as a whole, and his deposition and imprisonment.

The final attempt at union of the churches took place at the Council of Florence in 1438-1439 (see FLORENCE, COPTS AT THE COUNCIL OF); there the *filioque* was the object of eight months of debate between

Greek and Latin theologians. The occasionally bizarre aspects of this debate have sometimes been overstressed—rather a lot of attention has been devoted to the episode in which the most obviously antiunionist Greek clergyman, Mark of Ephesus, was accused of falsifying, or conniving at the falsification of, a text of Saint [BASIL THE GREAT](#), whom he had cited in an attempt to clarify a passage from Epiphanius. The public sessions of debate on the *filioque* did not achieve any change in the Greek viewpoint there and then, and it is perhaps worth remembering in this context that the Greeks were subject to considerable pressure from their emperor, who sought union in the face of military threat.

Nevertheless, the chief interlocutor on the Latin side, John of Montenero, had affirmed that the Latins perceived only one cause in the Trinity (thus avoiding, as the Lyons formula doubtless had sought to avoid, Greek accusations of creating two principles in the Trinity). Greeks well disposed to union, such as Bessarion and Scholarios, confessed themselves disappointed in the arguments of their own side. Bessarion was to argue, after hearing the seemingly interminable arguments in which both Greeks and Latins cited [fathers of the church](#)—and often the same fathers of the [church](#)—in defense of their respective viewpoints on the question of the *filioque*, that the saints could not err and could not, in reality, contradict each other. It has been argued that Bessarion was influenced by his reading of Aquinas, some of whose work had been translated into Greek by this time. The conclusion reached on the *filioque* when union was finally proclaimed was that “the Holy Spirit is ultimately from the Father and the Son, that he takes his essence as well as being from Father and Son, that he proceeds eternally from one and from the other as if from one principle and one spiration. . . . the *filioque* has been reasonably and legitimately inserted into the symbol [creed].”

### **Theological Background and [Interpretation](#)**

There have been many attempts to discern behind the history of the inclusion of the *filioque* in the Western creed and the subsequent East-

West controversies, the existence of two distinct and contradictory trinitarian models, which can be perceived through the complaints of one side against the other and through the references of both sides to patristic writers, both Greek and Latin.

The master of Western trinitarian thought is Augustine, whose theology is eventually expressed in the *filioque*. In his *De Trinitate* he declares, “Neither can we say that the Holy Spirit does not also proceed from the Son, for the same Spirit is not without reason said to be from the Father and the Son.” Augustine combines stress on the divine essence in the Trinity with the use of the [Aristotelian](#) category of relation to produce a concept in which it is the divine essence, common to all the Persons of the Trinity, that is of real significance and also a causal agent. The Persons themselves, or the idea of Person, is not particularly emphasized. The Spirit is the Spirit “of the son”; he proceeds from the Son; and since the Spirit is sent by the Son—the West does not tend to distinguish between the procession and the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit—therefore the Spirit must come from Him; and as the Spirit is the common bond between Father and Son, it must proceed from both. Augustine believes that the Father has given the power of spiration to the Son; the Spirit proceeds from both, and (as he makes explicit in *Tractatus in Joannem Evangelium*) at once.

Augustine’s thought was extensively used and quoted by the West. The Carolingian and post-Carolingian theologians involved in controversy over the *filioque*, such as Theodulf of Orleans, the anonymous author of the *Libellus de processione Spiritus Sancti*, Aeneas of Paris, and Ratramnus of Corbie, all used him. Nor does Anselm’s basic thought differ substantially from that of Augustine. The explanatory framework of the *De processione* is Anselm’s own but, like Augustine, he concentrates on the essence rather than the Persons of the Trinity. Saint Thomas Aquinas was also dependent to a degree on Augustine, especially when dealing with the charge— also leveled against the Latins by the Greeks—of teaching two principles in the godhead through the *filioque*. He used

Augustine's *De Trinitate* (though not word for word) to show that the Father and Son are not two principles but one principle of the Holy Spirit. Augustine also was used by Aquinas to state that "the Father is the principle of the entire godhead." Again, this might be used as a counter to Eastern claims. Since much of the difficulty over the *filioque* stemmed from inadequacies of vocabulary and problems over terminology, it is interesting to note that Aquinas championed the Latin idea of "principle" in the Trinity rather than the Greek "cause," believing that the latter word implied some degree of subordination within the Trinity.

The patristic background to and theological implications of the Eastern view of the Trinity present considerable difficulties. Most writers seem to agree that the East does not concentrate on the essence (the Western, Augustinian concept of essence) but comes to agree on one *ousia* (substance) and three hypostases (persons). It also seems to be beyond dispute that the East regarded the hypostasis of God the Father as the cause and fountainhead of being in the Trinity—hence the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed's "from the Father."

After this point, however, substantial problems arise. It is noteworthy that considerable use was made by Western theologians of quotations from Eastern patristic writers. Both eighth- and ninth- century writers, for instance, the quote from Saint ATHANASIUS I, DIDYMUS THE BLIND, Saint [Basil](#) the Great, SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, and [CYRIL](#) I in an attempt to provide justification for the *filioque*. Part of the problem may have been resolved by recent work that shows that many of the passages or works used in this context are not authentic or, at least, have been interpreted out of their general context. This still leaves the more general question of interpretation. For J. Gill, the theology of [Cyril](#) and the Alexandrian school was developed by Augustine and eventually took shape in the West in the *filioque*. A. Palmieri sees in the works of the Cappadocians similar adumbrations of *filioque* theology. Recent work fastens on the *ek Patros di Uiou* as the real expression of Eastern trinitarian thought, emphasizing its relation to the

theory of *monarchia* in the Trinity and to the idea of one cause and origin expressed by Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote of the Trinity in terms of one cause and two causes, the Son caused directly by the Father and indirectly by the Spirit.

In the eighth century, Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople maintained “from the Father through the Son.” Yet it is still difficult to say whether “through the Son” is universally acceptable as being the true expression of Eastern patristic or medieval thought on the procession. Part of the problem lies in the circumstance that Western thinkers then and now tend to fasten on the expression “through the Son” as proof of the Father, and more than one historian of the Eastern [church](#) regards the *ek Patros di Uiou* as a compromise formula. Of the Eastern writers, Photius gives what is probably the most extreme defense of “from the Father” alone—but this is a concept not incompatible with that of the Father as cause expressed by other Eastern theologians; and Photius was, in any case, defending the creed against interpolation. And while it was possible for pro-unionists such as Bekkos to quote from other Eastern theologians in defense of the *filioque*, Photius defies this approach to such an extent that Bekkos makes him one of the real authors of the schism between East and West. (Palmieri [1913] seems to share a similar point of view.)

The formula *ex Patre Filioque tanquam ab uno principio*, used at Lyons in 1274 and at Florence in 1439, might be thought to overcome at least some of the Greek objections to the *filioque*, in that it deals with the problem of more than one cause or principle of origin in the Trinity. It is noteworthy that Bekkos felt able to declare that there was only one single production of the Holy Spirit. At Florence, during the long textual and metaphysical discussions on the *filioque*, John of Montenero reaffirmed, on behalf of the Latins, a belief in one principle. But both before and after Florence the idea that “from the Son” and “through the Son” were “identical in force” ran into a good deal of skepticism from Greeks who believed that this was simply another way of foisting the unacceptable *filioque* on them.

For the East, including the Coptic church, the *filioque* represented an illicit addition to the creed. It has been said that even if the Eastern [church](#) had believed the *filioque* to be theologically acceptable, the interpolation would still have been condemned. Photius, it should be remembered, at one time managed to obtain a retraction of the *filioque* from papal representatives and a promise that no further additions should be made to the creed. The West frequently argued that there was no substantive difference in belief and that the word had been used only for purposes of clarification. Another western argument was that the First Council of EPHESUS (431) had not forbidden alteration of the creed itself but, rather, any formulations contrary to its spirit, and that the Nicene Creed had itself been altered at the First Council of CONSTANTINOPLE in 381.

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