THE *FILIOQUE* CLAUSE: EAST OR WEST?

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In this essay, I intend to examine the *Filioque* clause and its underlying theology from a historical and scriptural angle. For those not familiar with the debate, *Filioque* is Latin for 'and from the Son', and refers to a contentious point of Trinitarian doctrine, on which the Eastern and Western branches of the church went different ways, namely: in the ontological Trinity (the Trinity in its eternal relationships), does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father alone (the Eastern view), or both from the Father and from the Son (the Western view)?

Historical Developments

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the originator of what Eastern Orthodox call 'Filioquism' – the theology expressed by the *Filioque* clause in the Western version of the Nicene creed. (When I refer to Filioquism, I do so simply as shorthand, without any pejorative connotations.)

Prior to Augustine, the general tendency of patristic theology – especially in the East – was broadly to conceive of the oneness of God primarily in terms of God the Father.[1] According to the maxim of Greek patristic theology, 'There is one God because there is one Father.'[2] It is easy for those reared in Western Trinitarian thinking to misunderstand this. To say that God in his oneness is primarily the Father does not, for the anti-Arian church fathers, mean that the Son and the Holy Spirit are any less divine than the Father. It means that the Father is the 'fountain of deity', the principal possessor and source of the divine essence. The Father, in other words, possesses the divine essence in and from himself alone, whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit possess it from the Father. In that specific sense, the oneness of God rests primarily in the Father. The being of the Son and the Holy Spirit is indeed fully and truly divine – but for this very reason, that it is the Father's true being communicated to them by the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. The Son's deity, invisibility, immortality and eternity are precisely the Father's own deity, invisibility, immortality and eternity, truly possessed by the Son through his eternal generation from the Father.

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1 See, for example, Gregory Thaumaturgus' *Confession of Faith* and Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures* 4:4-8.

2 See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (London, 1957), ch.3, especially p. 58.

The subordination involved is not an ontological subordination of essence, but a relational subordination of Persons (hypostaseis), referring not to the divine essence itself, but to the manner or mode of possessing it. The Father is God *simpliciter*; the Son is 'God from God', *theos ek theou*, as the Nicene creed states, God proceeding forth out of God by eternal generation. Likewise the Holy Spirit is 'God from God', God proceeding out of God by eternal spiration ('breathing forth').

We should note this important point in the pre-Augustinian understanding: the being of God is precisely identical with the being of the Father. There is no being of God which can – either really or conceptually – be distinguished from the Father's being. One cannot, as it were, dig beneath the Father's essence to uncover some more fundamental and generalised essence of God. Thus, in the old pre-Augustinian understanding, the Father constitutes the source and bond of unity in the Trinity. The Father binds together all three Persons or hypostaseis as one God because the essence of God is, principally, the Father's essence. The one God, who is the Father, begets from himself the one God who is the Son, and breathes forth from himself the one God who is the Spirit, like an eternal fountain with two eternal streams. All three are equally God; but the Father is necessarily 'first' Person of the Trinity, because he is the fountain of deity, communicating his entire essence to the Son by eternal generation, and to the Spirit by eternal procession or spiration.

Augustine

When we come to Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, we find an important shift of basic emphasis. For Augustine, the oneness of God does not rest primarily in the Person or hypostasis of the Father; the oneness of God resides primarily in the divine essence itself. As Augustine says in his *De Trinitate* 1:8:15, 'The divinity, or to express it more precisely, the Godhead itself, is the unity of the Trinity.' Hence the maxim of Western Augustinian theology, 'There is one God because there is one divine essence' (as contrasted with the Eastern maxim, 'One God because one Father'). Augustine has – conceptually at least – distinguished between the Father's essence and the essence of God, in the sense that he no longer sees an exact and unbreakable equivalence between the two. Augustine is happy (if I may so express it) to separate out the divine essence from the Person of the Father, and to treat the essence itself – 'divinity, the Godhead' – as the all-pervading source of oneness in the Trinity. The shift in theological nuance is from Person to essence: from the Father as hypostatic bond of unity, to the essence as non-hypostatic bond of unity. As Eugene Portalié says, for Augustine 'God did not mean

directly' Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but 'the more general notion of the Godhead, conceived concretely and personally no doubt, [but] not as any one Person in particular'.[3]

Having said all this, let us be very clear that Augustine did not wholly abandon the older way of thinking. His dominant focus on the divine essence was novel; but as soon as he conceived that essence as existing personally in the Father, he then continued to regard the Father as the 'fountain of deity', at least as far as the Son was concerned. The problem arose over the way Augustine related the Father's 'fountain of deity' role to the Holy Spirit, as we shall see. The point I am making here is simply that Augustine did introduce into the still fluid state of Trinitarian theology this new 'colour' – the divine essence as itself the non-hypostatic foundation of the Trinity's unity – which had the effect of shifting the theological emphasis from the Persons to the essence.[4]

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[3] Portalié, *Guide to the Thought of St Augustine* (Norwood, 1975), pp. 130-31.

[4] Some extreme Augustinians, as if hypnotised by the glories of the 'one essence', try to deny all subordination between the Persons within the ontological Trinity. Let it be clear that Augustine himself never denied the personal subordination of the Son to the Father, not just in the incarnation, but from all eternity. As W.G.T. Shedd notes in his introductory essay to Augustine's *De Trinitate*: 'He [Augustine] maintains, over and over again, that Sonship as a relationship is second and subordinate to Fatherhood; that while a Divine Father and a Divine Son must necessarily be of the very same nature and grade of being, like a human father and a human son, yet the latter issues from the former, not the former from the latter. Augustine's phraseology on this point is as positive as that of Athanasius, and in some respects even more bold and capable of misinterpretation. He denominates the Father as the "beginning" (principium) of the Son, and the Father and Son the "beginning" (principium) of the Holy Spirit.... "In their mutual relation to one another in the Trinity itself, if the begetter is a beginning (principium) in relation to that which he begets, the Father is a beginning in relation to the Son, because he begets him." V. xiv. 15.' Shedd, 'Introductory Essay' to the *De Trinitate* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 3, pp. 4-5. Augustine's innovation did not involve any denial of the 'fountain of deity' role of Father in relation to Son, but lay in his assertion (which we will soon examine in the main body of the essay) that the divine essence common to Father and Son acted as a single non-personal 'fountain of deity' in relation to the Holy Spirit. This was made

Flowing from this subordination of the divine Persons to the divine essence, Augustine then argued that the Persons of the Trinity existed only relatively to each other. They were concretised as Persons, and distinguished one from another, only by their relations with each other – what Thomas Aquinas was to call 'relations of opposition', *e.g.* the relationship 'Father-Son', where each term is purely relative to the other.[5] The East was always to reject this way of thinking as being modalistic in tendency; the Persons of the Trinity were indeed distinguished from one another by their differing relationships, but this did not mean that one could (so to speak) strip them of their concrete individuality by making them just relationships of the essence with itself. In Aquinas this came perilously close to sheer modalism, as far as the East was concerned, when Aquinas actually defined the Persons of the Trinity as relationships – that is, a divine Person was basically an internal relationship within the all-dazzling essence. The East shook its head sadly; a Person has relationships, exists in the context of relationships, but cannot be reduced to a relationship.[6]

According to Augustine, the Father and Son are constituted as personally concrete, and clearly distinguished from each other, by virtue of the Person of the Father being the cause of the Person of the Son, in the act of eternal generation. The Father is also the cause of the Holy Spirit, in the act of eternal spiration. Now if the Father as Father causes the Son, and if the Father as Spirator ('breather-forth') causes the Spirit, there are two 'relations of opposition' – generation (Father-Son) and spiration (Spirator-Spirit) – clearly to distinguish Father and Son from each other, and Father and Spirit from each other.

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possible by Augustine's structural shift of emphasis from Person to essence in the Trinity.

5 By 'relations of opposition', Aquinas means corresponding opposites, as in 'Father-Son'. The term 'opposition' here does not signify antagonism but inter-related correspondence.

6 Bernard Lohse notes in *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia, 1985), 'Augustine felt strongly the inadequacy of the term *persona*. He always used it with hesitation, and as a rule substituted for it the concept of *relatio* (relation). The three co-called Persons, he said, are not something different, each in himself. They are different only in their relation to each other and [therefore] to the world.' (p. 68). Aquinas says, 'As the Godhead is God, so the divine paternity is God the Father, Who is a divine Person. Therefore a divine Person signifies a relationship subsisting [in the divine essence]' (*Summa Theologiae*, part 1, q.29, art. 4).

But what clearly distinguishes the Holy Spirit from the Son? Where is the 'relation of opposition' to constitute them as two distinct Persons in relation to each other? Why here: the Holy Spirit is caused by the Son as well as by the Father. So we have the uncaused Father, the Son caused by the Father, and the Holy Spirit caused jointly by the Father and the Son. There, in a nutshell, is the *Filioque* clause: the Holy Spirit being caused by, proceeding from, being spirated from, the Father and the Son. It is the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son which decisively distinguishes the Spirit from the Son who proceeds singly from the Father alone.[7]

Here is Augustine on the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son:

> Because it is most difficult to distinguish generation from procession in the co-eternal, equal, incorporeal, ineffably unchangeable and indivisible Trinity, let this suffice.... The Holy

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[7] Thomas Aquinas puts it like this: 'It must be said that the Holy Spirit is from the Son. For if the Spirit were not from the Son, he could in no way be personally distinguished from him.... The divine Persons are distinguished from each other only by their relations. Now the relations cannot distinguish the Persons unless they are relations of opposition. This appears from the fact that the Father has two relationships; by one of these he is related to the Son, by the other to the Holy Spirit. But these two relationships [generation and spiration] are not relations of opposition [to each other], and therefore they do not make two Persons, but belong only to the one Person of the Father. So if in the Son and the Holy Spirit there were two relations only, by which each of them was related to the Father, these relations would not be relations of opposition between Son and Spirit.... It would follow from this that since the Person of the Father is one, therefore the Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit would be one Person, because their two relations of opposition [Sonship and Spirithood] would only be with the Father's two relations [generation and spiration]. But this is heretical; it destroys faith in the Trinity. Therefore the Son and the Holy Spirit must be related to each other by relations of opposition' (*Summa Theologiae*, part 1, q.36, art. 2). The Eastern position is simply that the Son and the Holy Spirit are two Persons, not one, because they derive from the Father in mysteriously different ways – the Son by generation, the Spirit by spiration/procession. One cannot help suspecting that if the apostles had heard Aquinas propounding the mind-boggling dialectics above, they would have asked each other, 'What is he talking about?'

> Spirit certainly proceeds from him [the Father] from whom the Son derived his divine nature, for the Son is God from God. The Son also has it from the Father that from the Son too proceeds the Holy Spirit. And hence the Holy Spirit has it from the Father himself that he should proceed from the Son also, just as he proceeds from the Father. Here too in some way may it also be understood (as far as it can by us) why the Holy Spirit is not said to be begotten but to proceed. For if he too were called a Son, he would certainly be called the Son of both [Father and Son], which is most absurd (*De Trinitate* 15:27:48).

To Augustine, then, the procession of the Spirit 'from the Son also' was important to safeguard the distinct identity and personhood of the Spirit – to prevent him being another Son. This, of course, created tension with the pre-Augustinian understanding of the Father as fountain of deity, for in the case of the Spirit, we now seem to have Father and Son as double fountains, double spirators. This was to be an oft-repeated Eastern objection: how can there be two sources of the divine essence? Does this not split apart Father and Son into two Gods? For Augustine it did not, because he had already relocated the unity of God away from the Person of the Father to the divine essence itself. Therefore Augustine argued that it was the divine essence common to Father and Son which acted as single source of the Spirit. Augustine puts it like this:

> It must be admitted that the Father and the Son are a single source of the Holy Spirit, not two sources; but as Father and Son are one God, one Creator and one Lord, in relation to creation, so are they one source in relation to the Holy Spirit (*De Trinitate* 5:14:15).

Eastern theologians never ceased to attack this 'collapsing' of Father and Son back into the divine essence in order to be the single source of the Spirit. They pointed out that it conflicted with traditional Trinitarian theology, as wrought out in the fourth century by Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers. If the divine essence was the source of an act not peculiar to one of the Persons, it was shared by all three Persons, not just two of them; whereas if there was any act not shared by all three Persons, that act constituted a peculiar property of one of the Persons, belonging to his particular hypostasis and distinguishing him from the other two. Augustine had violated both rules. First, he had postulated an act of the divine essence – spiration – shared by two of the Persons to the exclusion of the third. Second, he had ascribed the peculiar hypostatic property of 'spiration' to the hypostaseis of Father and Son alike; and this, according to traditional Trinitarianism, ought to have compressed them into a fourth divine hypostasis, a sort of Siamese Father-Son twin, with a

new single personal identity (God the Spirator) in relation to the Holy Spirit.

Augustine's use of the concept of causality in his understanding of the double procession of the Spirit was (perhaps rather oddly) something he shared with the Arians. They had used it as a standard argument against the deity of Christ that the Father caused the Son, whereas the Son did not cause the Father, and as causality was a primary attribute of deity, it followed that the Father was God, but not the Son. Augustine accepted the premises but not the conclusion. Yes, he said, causality is a primary attribute of deity; but the Son does possess this attribute, for he causes the Holy Spirit who is a divine Person. Therefore the Son who causes the divine Spirit must be truly God. Here, I think, lies the theological heart of Filioquism: the anti-Arian zeal to assert the equality of the Son with the Father. What better way of spotlighting that equality than to affirm that Father and Son are equal as the one common fountain of the Holy Spirit?

The philosophical argument, however, becomes slightly complex here. In this Augustinian scheme of things, with its employment of causality as proof of deity, one wonders how the Holy Spirit can be God – he causes neither the Father nor the Son, nor yet does he cause some fourth divine Person. In other words, if one argues for the deity of the Son because he is equal with the Father in causing the Spirit, how does one then argue for the deity of the Spirit, who causes no divine Person? Augustine solved this problem by maintaining that the Holy Spirit was in effect the divine essence, because he was the love by which Father and Son loved each other. 'God is love' referred to the Spirit. In Augustine's words:

> Whether the Spirit is the unity of both [Father and Son], or the holiness, or the love, or whether he is the unity because he is the love, and the love because he is the holiness, it is manifest that he is not one of the two [Father and Son], because he is the one through whom the two are joined, through whom the Begotten is loved by the Begetter, and loves him who begot him, and through whom... they are 'keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', which we are commanded to imitate by grace, both towards God and towards each other.... And therefore they [the Persons of the Trinity] are not more than three: One [the Father] who loves him [the Son] who is from himself, and one [the Son] who loves him [the Father] from whom he is, and Love itself [the Spirit]. And if this last one is nothing, how can God be love? If this last is not substance, how can God be substance? (*De Trinitate* 6:5:7).

In other words, just as everything starts from the divine essence, which for Augustine has a certain priority over the divine Persons, so

everything ends where it began, with the divine essence, love, the Holy Spirit – the process is complete. As Thomas Aquinas was to put it, 'the cycle is concluded when by love it returns to the same essence from which the proceeding began' (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 4:26:6). Once we have the lover (the Father), the beloved (the Son), and the love that unites them (the Holy Spirit), there is no more room for a fourth Person in the Godhead. The cycle is complete even though the Spirit causes no other Person, thus lacking the causality which proves Father and Son to be God. Augustine was so sure he could identify the Holy Spirit with the divine essence as love that he even argued that the entire Trinity was in a sense the Holy Spirit. 'Because the Father is spirit and the Son is spirit, because the Father is holy and the Son is holy, since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, and God is holy and God is spirit, therefore, the Trinity can also be called Holy Spirit' (*De Trinitate* 5:11:12). The Holy Spirit as a distinct Trinitarian Person was a sort of concentration or summing-up of what the entire Trinity was in its shared essence – spirituality and holiness. (For Augustine, love was the essence of holiness.)

This quasi-identification of the Holy Spirit with the divine essence as love was a strange reversal of pre-Augustinian theology, which had identified the Father with the divine essence (in the sense of being its primary possessor and source). This was accompanied by yet another strange reversal. As a corollary of the pre-Augustinian view, we remember, the Father was the bond of unity in the Trinity; but for Augustine, it was the Holy Spirit who was the bond of unity – not because the Spirit was the fountain of deity, but because for Augustine (as we have seen) the Spirit was the love with which Father and Son loved each other – the 'bond of love' (*vinculum caritatis*) binding Father with Son together in their eternal communion of love:

> Scripture teaches us that he is the Spirit neither of the Father alone, nor of the Son alone, but of both; and so his being suggests to us that mutual love by which Father and Son love each other (*De Trinitate* 15:17:27).

After Augustine

Augustine's dominating influence on Western theology meant that his understanding of the Trinity became the unchallenged view of the Western church. How the East would have responded if it had known Augustine's writings we may infer from Theodoret of Cyrrhus, the fifth-century champion of Antiochene theology. When Theodoret's arch-enemy Cyril of Alexandria seemed to imply – possibly by careless language – that the Spirit proceeded from the Son as well as from the Father, Theodoret pounced on Cyril with all the ruthless

fervour of a politician whose opponent has made a gaffe: 'If Cyril means that the Holy Spirit has his existence from or through the Son, we repudiate this as irreligious blasphemy. We believe in the Lord's own words that the Spirit proceeds from the Father.'[8]

Tensions between East and West over Filioquism did not arise until the West started tampering with the Nicene creed. This was the most revered creed in Christendom, promulgated by the second of the ecumenical Councils, the Council of Constantinople, in 381, marking the conclusive defeat of Arianism in the church. The section on the Holy Spirit declared, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, who spoke through the prophets.' From the sixth century onwards, many Westerners added the words 'and from the Son' (in Latin *Filioque*), so that the Western creed now said, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father *and from the Son.*' This seems to have begun in Spain; the Spanish council of Toledo added *Filioque* to the creed in 589. Other parts of the Western church followed their example. This caused great controversy between East and West. The East protested that the Western church had no authority to alter one of the ecumenical Creeds, and that in any case this particular alteration was false – the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son, but from the Father alone.

The defining moment in the growing *Filioque* controversy came with Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance in the West in the eighth and ninth centuries. Charlemagne's theologians, such as Alcuin of York and Theodulph of Orleans, defended the *Filioque* clause with a passion. Despite the veto of pope Leo III, Charlemagne personally supported the insertion of the *Filioque* clause in the Nicene creed. Pope Leo agreed with the Western position theologically, but opposed the actual insertion of the *Filioque* clause into the creed. Charlemagne, however, ignored Leo's protests, and gave the imperial sanction to the *Filioque* clause at the council of Aachen in 809. Thus the newly-born Holy Roman Empire committed itself theologically to Filioquism – a fateful step.

The next phase of the controversy came through the intensely personal conflict between pope Nicholas I (pope from 858) and patriarch Photius of Constantinople (patriarch from 858). We need not go into the complex background of this conflict. Suffice it to say that it came close to open war through the passionate rivalry between Western and Eastern missionaries in Bulgaria. The two rival groups of

[8] Quoted by H. Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (London, 1970), p. 275.

missionaries began attacking each other on every issue on which East and West differed – and the quarrel came to focus on the *Filioque* clause. Photius responded to Western attacks on the East's rejection of the *Filioque* clause by writing in 867 an encyclical letter to the other Eastern patriarchs, in which he denounced the *Filioque* as heretical. Photius also summoned a church council in Constantinople which excommunicated pope Nicholas, who had already excommunicated Photius in 863. The event is known as the 'Photian schism'.

At this point the chances and changes of Byzantine politics suddenly toppled Photius from the patriarchate (although he came back in 877). The downfall of Photius restored political peace and ecclesiastical fellowship between Rome and Constantinople. The theological dispute over the *Filioque* clause, however, was by no means dead. Photius' encyclical letter of 867 had made it a central and burning issue in the frictions between East and West. Photius also wrote a highly influential book on the subject, his *Treatise on the Mystagogia of the Holy Spirit*, which scholars regard as Photius' theological masterpiece. In the *Treatise*, Photius states with clarity, vigour, invective and enduring impact all the Eastern objections to the *Filioque* clause.

By the time the Eastern and Western branches of the church conclusively separated into two in the great schism of 1054, the *Filioque* clause was the chief source of theological dissension between them. The papacy had finally given official approval to the insertion of the *Filioque* into the Nicene creed sometime early in the eleventh century – we are not sure exactly when. Since the West excommunicated the East in 1054 for everything in which it differed from Rome, this meant that the *Filioque* lay at the doctrinal heart of the schism. Whenever East and West negotiated about the possibility of reunion (prior to the advent of modern ecumenism), the *Filioque* was always the biggest theological hurdle, although the Western doctrine of purgatory and indulgences also caused much boggling among Easterners. The development of scholastic theology in the West made the gulf over the *Filioque* still deeper, as the great schoolmen, notably Aquinas, refined the arguments for the *Filioque* clause to new levels of subtlety and sophistication.

When the Reformation brought about the secession of half Western Europe from its papal allegiance in the sixteenth century, one might have thought that the Reformers would look again at the *Filioque* debate. After all, they were not bound by what Rome had done in 1054, and Eastern Orthodoxy was a potential ally in the struggle against the papacy. Amazingly, however, the Reformers did not re-examine this issue. They took over, lock, stock and barrel, the pre-

Reformation Western concept of the Trinity, and reproduced it. This can perhaps be explained by the Reformers' loyalty to Augustine, who was the fountainhead of Filioquism. In the *Institutes*, Calvin simply says, as though it were virtually self-evident, 'The Son is said to come forth from the Father alone; the Spirit, from the Father and the Son at the same time' (*Institutes* 1:13:18). By and large, this Protestant acceptance of Filioquism has remained the case to the present day; with rare exceptions, Protestant theologians have championed the *Filioque* clause and its underlying concept of the Trinity (apart, of course, from those who have stopped believing in the Trinity altogether). All you have to do to see this is to look at almost any Protestant systematic theology. For all his defects, Karl Barth was the greatest Protestant systematic theologian of the twentieth century, and he zealously defended the *Filioque* clause. So does Wayne Grudem in his recent popular tome of *Systematic Theology*.

Let me just mention two notable exceptions to the almost universal Protestant endorsement of the *Filioque* clause. The exceptions are both nineteenth-century American Southerners – the Baptist James Pettigru Boyce (1827-88), and the Presbyterian Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-98). In Boyce's *Systematic Theology*, he expresses considerable scepticism about the traditional Western arguments for the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Son.

> Would it not be a more exact statement of the Scripture teaching to say that the Son, or Christ, sends the Spirit, and gives the Spirit, which is his, because the right to bestow it is his, either essentially, or as given him in his office as Messiah, and that the Spirit thus sent forth proceeds from the Father? In this event the Father would be the source of the procedure, and the Son the agent in sending it forth.[9]

However, having virtually embraced the Eastern position, Boyce then suddenly seems to draw back at the last moment saying:

> These points are presented for consideration, while it is admitted that the assertion that the Spirit proceeds also from the Son is less objectionable than the denial. The Scriptures seem to leave it so doubtful as to forbid any positive statement about it. But the preponderance of evidence is in favour of a procession from both Father and Son.[10]

Boyce's approach as he stands on the threshold of the *Filioque* clause looks like some sort of bizarre theological hoky-koky: in, out, in , out,

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[9] Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville, KY, 1882), p. 152.

[10] *Ibid.*

shake it all about, and end up neither out nor fully in. Still, at least he was prepared to question it.

Fortunately Robert Lewis Dabney was much more lucid than Boyce. Dabney's view of the East-West controversy was as follows:

> To the dispassionate mind, the dispute cannot but appear of small importance, and the grounds of both parties uncertain.... [He dismisses as inconclusive the traditional Western arguments, then continues:] And hence it appears to me that this is a subject on which we should not dogmatize. Should it be that the Son does not share with the Father the eternal spiration of the Spirit, this would no more imply an essential inferiority of the second Person than does his filiation. Enough for us to know the blessed truth that under the Covenant of Grace, the Divine Spirit condescends economically to commit the dispensation of his saving influence to the Son as our king.[11]

Dabney, then, rejects Filioquism, although not out of a positive commitment to the Eastern alternative – rather from a conviction that Scripture simply does not provide adequate material to assert the Spirit's eternal procession from the Son, so that a reverent agnosticism is the best attitude. All we can definitely affirm, Dabney says, is an economic mission of the Spirit from the Son as Messiah to the church, in the administration of salvation, rooted in the Spirit's committal of his 'saving influence' to the Son. There is Scripture proof of this, but not of an eternal procession from the Son in the ontological Trinity.[12]

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[11] Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (r.p., Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 198-9.

[12] The Northern American Baptist, Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921), also rejects the *Filioque* in his *Systematic Theology* (r.p., London, 1981), but in a very perfunctory manner: 'The Greek church holds that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only; the Latin church, that the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son. The true formula is: The Spirit proceeds from the Father through or by (not "and") the Son.' (p. 323). Despite this brusque repudiation of Filioquism, the general patterns of Strong's Trinitarian thought remain Augustinian, notably in his overriding stress on the divine essence. The great Anglican evangelical bishop, J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), also expresses grave scepticism about the *Filioque* clause in his commentary on John 15:26, but Ryle's scepticism takes the form of questioning whether anyone can really know which side is right, East or West. He thinks that as far as human argument goes the Western position is probably better, but then dismisses the whole subject with, 'Let us take care that we ourselves have the

The Teaching of Scripture

What is the Scriptural basis for the Eastern view of the Trinity, in relation the Holy Spirit's eternal procession from the Father alone? Let me outline how I myself came to be persuaded from Scripture of the Eastern view. For many years I held the Western view out of a sort of geographical loyalty. Then, as critical reflection displaced loyalty, for a good number of years I sat uncomfortably on the fence. What finally brought me off it on the Eastern side? What it boiled down to was the connection between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity – that is, the eternal relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, irrespective of creation and redemption, and those relationships as we see them played out in creation and redemption. Does the economic Trinity reflect and reveal the ontological Trinity? This had previously been for me a crucial question when I was pondering the debate over the eternal Sonship of Christ. In that debate, it seemed to me that if what we see in the incarnate Jesus is meaningfully to constitute divine revelation, a genuine revealing of what God is really like, then the filial relationship, the filial communion, between Jesus and his heavenly Father must be an enfleshing of an eternal reality. Deny this, and the whole doctrine of the Trinity is undermined. The second Person of the Godhead ceases to be eternally Son, the first Person ceases to be eternally Father, and we are left with an economic Trinity which bears little or no relation to what God actually is in the depths of his being.

I eventually concluded that the same reasoning had to apply to the *Filioque* question. The relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit which we see in incarnation and redemption must reflect and reveal the ontological Trinity. So, what do we see? One of the traditional Western arguments for the *Filioque* was that, in the economy of salvation, Christ bestows the Holy Spirit on his disciples. The Spirit flows from Christ, not just from the Father. Therefore, the argument ran, in the ontological Trinity, the Son must be equal with the Father as a common source of the Spirit. But surely, I thought, in the New Testament Christ bestows the Holy Spirit on his church for a particular reason: namely, that as Head of the church, the Father has first bestowed the Spirit on Christ. It is not a case of a common source; it is a case of the Spirit flowing from the Father to the Son. I thought of the Father's bestowal of the Spirit on Christ at his baptism. I recalled the old Nicene retort to the Arians: 'If you wish to see the

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Holy Spirit in our hearts; and when we die we shall know all about the point in dispute' (*Expository Thoughts on John's Gospel*, r.p., Welwyn, 1977, vol. 3, p. 128).

Trinity, go to the river Jordan.' That made sense in Eastern terms: one goes to the Jordan and sees the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father to the Son. But how did this make sense in Western terms? Then I thought of how this came across still more strongly in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost: 'therefore, Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you see and hear' (Acts 2:33). Here was the same pattern of movement: the Holy Spirit flowing from Father to Son, then overflowing from the Son to the church. Surely, I thought, the Western appeal to the economic Trinity to defend the *Filioque* clause is suicidal. It proves the opposite. It establishes the Eastern view.

I then looked afresh at the classic text over which East and West had fought for centuries, John 15:26: 'When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify of me.' The East has constantly pointed out that a procession of the Spirit from the Father is here clearly spoken of, but not from the Son – 'the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father'. The Western counter-argument was that Jesus also says that the Holy Spirit is he 'whom I shall send to you'. Ergo, Father and Son are a common source. But was that what the text said? I looked again. Jesus said of the Spirit, 'whom I shall send to you from the Father'. Not, 'whom I shall send to you from myself', or 'from us', but 'from the Father'. So again, there was this pattern of movement: the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father to the Son, and then from the Son to us. Christ sends us the Spirit from the Father.

Next I considered the traditional Western argument that the New Testament titles 'Spirit of Christ' and 'Spirit of the Son' proved that the Son was a common source of the Spirit together with the Father. In the light of what I had already seen, these phrases seemed to me to prove nothing of the sort. Surely the Holy Spirit could very properly be called 'Spirit of Christ' and 'Spirit of the Son' because the Spirit rested on the Son, abiding in him. I reflected that there were two ways in which one thing could belong to another: by original possession and by being bestowed. If I earn a fortune by hard work, the fortune is mine by original possession. If I marry, that fortune is now my wife's too – really and truly hers, but by being bestowed in the marriage bond. If the economic Trinity is truly grounded in the ontological Trinity, could we not say that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father by original possession, and the Spirit of the Son by an eternal proceeding of the Spirit to the Son from the Father, so that from all eternity the Spirit rests on the Son and abides in him – that the Son is the eternal abode, the timeless holy temple, of his Father's Spirit?

And by taking flesh in the incarnation, the Son has now sanctified humanity in himself to be the Spirit's earthly temple. I perused some Eastern writings and found, to my amazement, these hesitant thoughts of mine set forth by Eastern thinkers. For instance, I read this in John of Damascus' *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*:

> We must contemplate him [the Spirit] as an essential power, existing in his own proper and peculiar subsistence, proceeding from the Father and resting in the Logos [the eternal Son], and showing forth the Logos, capable of disjunction neither from God in whom he exists, nor from the Logos whose companion he is.[13]

And this in Photius' *Treatise on the Mystagogia of the Holy Spirit*:

> The true prophet of the Word [John the Baptist] cried out, 'I saw the Spirit descending as a dove and abiding on him' (John 1:32). The Spirit, coming down from the Father, abides on the Son and in the Son (if you will accept this latter phrase).... The prophet Isaiah, the expounder of almost equal oracles, says of Christ's Person, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me' (Isa. 61:1). Now, having already heard that the famous Gregory and Zacharias [Gregory the Great, and Zacharias, pope 741-52] said, 'The Spirit abides in the Son' (for perhaps your lack of shame has dissolved into fear), why do you not in this respect instantly think of Paul's statement, 'the Spirit of the Son'?.... Is this not the proper meaning of the statement 'the Spirit of the Son'? I am convinced that the reason why Scripture says the Spirit is 'of the Son' is perfectly certain – and Scripture does not say it for the reasons you say it in your violent crime [of altering the Nicene creed]. Scripture says 'Spirit of the Son' because the Spirit is 'in the Son'. Which statement gives the meaning closest to the apostolic statement: 'The Spirit abides in the Son', or 'The Spirit proceeds from the Son'?[14]

Photius' argument from Isaiah 61 opened up another line of thought. The very name Christ, Messiah, meant the Anointed One – anointed with the Holy Spirit. Here was that movement again, of the Spirit from

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[13] John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition* 1:7, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 9, p. 5.

[14] Photius, *Mystagogia* 84, tr. J.P. Farrell, *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Brookline, MA, 1987. Or as the Eastern liturgy for vespers on the feast of Pentecost says: 'Holy and immortal, Paraclete Spirit, proceeding from the Father and resting on the Son'. Seraphim of Sarov (1756-1833) puts it like this, 'Our Lord God the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son and is sent into the world for the Son's sake' (from Seraphim's celebrated conversation with N.A. Motovilov).

the Father to Jesus. Did this not reflect something in the eternal relations of Father with Son? Could we not say that in some sense the Father has always, eternally, been anointing his Son with his Holy Spirit? This is really to say no more than John of Damascus and Photius say, that the Spirit eternally rests and abides in the Son, except that we are now describing this as 'anointing'. And when the Son became flesh, this relationship was then inserted into, and enacted within, the Son's humanity.[15]

I then examined what the West seemed to consider its most crushing rebuttal of the Eastern view: namely, that if the Son were not equal with the Father as source of the Spirit, it undermined the full deity of the Son. This seemed to me to be no argument at all. The Eastern riposte was valid: namely, that on such reasoning, it would also undermine the full deity of the Holy Spirit, if the Spirit were not equal with the Father as source of the Son. No-one accepted the latter; why should we accept the former? The West's anti-Arian enthusiasm to assert the Son's equality with the Father had unwittingly led to an argument which, if accepted, led logically to the downgrading of the Spirit to a second-class member of the Godhead. According to the Western view, the Son's equality with the Father means equality in spirating the Holy Spirit; indeed, the Son's spiration of the Holy Spirit proves his equality with the Father; but no such considerations (it seemed) applied to the Spirit himself in his relationship with the Father. He was not equal with the Father in begetting the Son; therefore one could not prove the Spirit's equality with the Father by pointing to any shared role in the Son's generation. How then could one argue (as the West did) that the Son's equality with the Father demanded that the Son be a common source of the Spirit when the Spirit's equality with the Father – for the Spirit too is truly God – did not demand that he be a common source of the Son? The whole argument self-destructed in futile inconsistency. If taken seriously, the Western view could lead only to a denial of the Spirit's equality with the Father, undermining the Spirit's deity: the very crime the East was accused of perpetrating against the Son! The Western pot was calling the Eastern kettle black.

With this, as it seemed (and still seems) to me, the Eastern case is complete. Scripture points positively to an eternal procession of the

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[15] I do not mean that at Christ's baptism the Spirit anointed him as God. In the river Jordan, it was as man that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. This is the primary reference of the title 'Christ'. I am suggesting that Jesus' anointing as man and Messiah is an 'enfleshing' of the eternal resting and abiding of the Spirit in and upon the eternal Son within the Trinity.

Holy Spirit from the Father, but not from the Son too. Still further, it points to a procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father to the Son, so that the Spirit eternally rests on the Son and eternally abides in him, shining forth from him. These eternal relationships within the ontological Trinity are then fleshed out in the economy of salvation – grafted into human being and life through the incarnation of the Son. The Holy Spirit proceeds economically from the Son as Messiah to the church, but only because the same Spirit has proceeded first from the Father to the Son – both economically and ontologically.

Practical Implications?

Everyone these days wants to know what practical difference a doctrine makes. I distrust an overemphasis on this tendency as human-centred. There are probably all kinds of subtle long-term differences which believing a doctrine has on us; we cannot necessarily see what they are at the time, if ever. If we are always hastening to ask, 'How will this doctrine edify us?' or 'How does this affect our outlook in life, society, politics, art?', we open ourselves to the serious danger of losing our passion for truth itself. Our real centre of interest has become humankind and his world; we are concerned about divine truth only so far as it has a human interest. Or that is the peril. A sad day has come for the church when the fact that a doctrine is true is no longer a good enough reason to believe it, or not the most relevant reason. Perhaps our motto – not exclusively, but more often – should be, 'Make sure you believe the truth, and let consequences look after themselves.'

Still, one cannot deny that it is an interesting question: what are the differences in practice which are produced by the Eastern and Western views on the *Filioque* ? To be honest, I am not entirely sure. For me it was always genuinely a question of truth – which view was true? – rather than a question of practice. I wanted to know what this Trinity whom I worshipped was like ('my Trinity', as Gregory of Nazianzus said). As for practical consequences, sweeping claims have certainly been made by both East and West, each attributing all that it finds most vile in the other's piety and practice to its acceptance or rejection of the *Filioque* clause. I have yet to be persuaded that these claims have, on the whole, been anything but alarmist propaganda – from both sides. However, let us look for a moment at a cluster of Western claims. The most common, repeated *ad infinitum*, most recently in Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, is that the Eastern rejection of the *Filioque* clause 'breaks the bond' between the Son and the Holy Spirit, leaving the Spirit as a sort of

free-floating entity, and thus encouraging a non-Christ-centred mysticism.[16]

I have never been convinced that this style of polemic does much service to theology. Ironically, the accusation itself bowls a pyrotechnic googly at fundamental Trinitarian doctrine, and incidentally reveals an unfortunate absence of acquaintance with Eastern spirituality (which, admittedly, seems almost universal among us Westerners, especially Protestants). First, it sets up a theological 'straw man' which one cannot help thinking is authentically strange coming from the champions of Western 'essence-is-everything' Trinitarianism. The charge is that a denial of the Spirit's procession from the Son breaks the bond between Son and Spirit. But are not the Son and the Holy Spirit one God? Do they not possess the self-same divine essence? There is indeed only one divine essence, communicated in all its absolute fullness and numerical oneness by the Father to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. So how has any bond between Son and Spirit been broken by the Eastern view? Son and Spirit are united by the closest bond conceivable, the ontological bond of being the same God. Just as the Father is the same in essence (*homoousios*) as the Son, and the same in essence as the Spirit, so the Son and Holy Spirit are the same in essence as each other. Indivisible numerical oneness of essence between Son and Spirit – here is a bond which, for deep and literally 'essential' unity of being, infinitely transcends anything in the created realm.

Furthermore, it misrepresents the Eastern view to think that it leaves the Holy Spirit and the Son unrelated as Persons in their specific personhood (putting aside their complete ontological unity of essence). As far as their peculiar personal relationship is concerned, the Spirit rests upon and abides in the Son; or in John of Damascus' phrase, the Spirit is the Son's eternal companion. It may suit Western polemics to picture the East as having the Son fly off from the Father in one direction, and the Spirit in the opposite direction as fast as his wings will carry him; but you do not need a degree in Freudian or Jungian psychology to suspect that that says rather more about a Western imagination in wish-fulfilment mode than it does about actual Eastern theology.

As for non-Christ-centred mysticism, it ought to be a well-known fact that Eastern 'mysticism' has always been so Christ-centred that a better accusation might be a tendency to downplay the Father. At the heart of Eastern mysticism, such as it is (the term being nefariously nebulous), lies the 'Jesus prayer' – 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' The prayer should not be uttered

[16] Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 246-7.

mindlessly, but with an intense and loving concentration on what each word means – *i.e.* it presupposes a sound knowledge both of the Gospels and of theology. We Westerners (especially we Reformed) may indeed be unhappy with various aspects of this Eastern practice of the Jesus prayer, but it seems massively untrue and unjust to stigmatise the 'mysticism' of which it is the heart as somehow 'non-Christ-centred'.[17] And has not mysticism flourished extensively also in both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant West? Why did Filioquism not prevent it? It is arguable that the real mystical trap actually lies in a preoccupation with 'the one Godhead' behind or even beyond the Trinitarian Persons, a mysticism of the divine essence, such as we do indeed find in great Western mystics like Meister Eckhart. This is something no Easterner would dream of; it is ruled out by the overwhelmingly Person-oriented structure of Eastern Trinitarianism.

As for Eastern spirituality in general, my reading of Eastern devotional literature and my experience of meeting Orthodox folk do not lead me to believe that the Holy Spirit acts as a competitive rival to Christ in their piety (more a problem for Western 'Holiness movements', Pentecostalism, and charismaticism, I would have thought). There is a distinctive flavour and ambience in Orthodox spirituality; but it is hard to articulate precisely what forms it. My strongest impression is that it revolves around a more vividly pervasive sense of the deity of Christ than is usual in Western spirituality, accompanied by a deep reverence for his Person untouched by the gushing sentimental feeling so often encountered among us. How this relates to the Eastern rejection of the *Filioque* clause is not presently apparent to me.

And so we could go on. But it would probably turn into a slanging match. And I would probably have to concede that I am almost as unimpressed, broadly speaking, with Eastern arguments about all the horrors that flowed forth in the West through its Filioquism, although I

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[17] Besides, such accusations sound a bit Monty Pythonesque in the mouth of Wayne Grudem, well known for his own espousal of precisely that kind of 'charismatic' pneumatology which has left the church defenceless against the 'Toronto Blessing' – an apotheosis of Christless mysticism, if ever there was one. Western Filioquism did not stop that. But just think what anti-charismatic Filioquists would have said if the Toronto Blessing had originated within Eastern Orthodoxy! 'There you are, the fruit of denying the *Filioque* clause.' Alas, it originated resolutely in the West, infecting most Western churches, including Rome, but leaving Orthodoxy comparatively unscathed.

incline to feel in certain moods that there may be slightly more to the Eastern case in this respect – see below.

Let us be positive. Perhaps I can best and most fruitfully answer the question about the practical consequences of the Eastern view by sketching two differences it seems to have made to me since adopting it.

First, and generally, embracing the Eastern view has led to a renewed emphasis on the concrete reality and individuality of the three Persons of the Trinity in my theology and spirituality. I have acquired a new instinctive tendency to see the activity of all three Persons in every area of the divine economy – creation, providence, incarnation and redemption. I shudder when I see Western systematic theologies discussing 'God' as an abstract unity for reams of pages – the existence of 'God', the nature of 'God', the attributes of 'God' – before finally arriving at a (sometimes brief) consideration of the fact that this God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then, when one passes on to consider creation, providence, ethics, we are back to 'God' again. What has become of 'my Trinity' in all this? Is my God not Father, Son and Holy Spirit when I discuss his existence, his nature, his attributes, his creation, his providence, his moral values?[18] Ingrained in the Western doctrinal psyche seems a tendency to conceptualise these things, and interpret their significance, in terms of God's oneness – *e.g.* most strikingly, God in relation to ethics and moral values ('rarely rises above a moral monarchy', as Jürgen Moltmann commented on the Western attitude to God and morality).[19] This may well flow from the Augustinian preoccupation with the 'one essence'. Its drift, I fear, is to dislodge the doctrine of the Trinity from its proper centrality both for theology and for spirituality.[20] I

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[18] Compare this with John of Damascus' *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. His opening treatment of God's incomprehensibility, unutterability, existence, nature and unity (1:1-5) are permeated by Trinitarian references and thinking. Book 1: 6-10, where John deals explicitly with the Trinity, are twice as long as the first five chapters.

[19] Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London, 1974), p. 236.

[20] I am conscious that Augustine himself tried to find 'footsteps of the Trinity' in triadic patterns which he discerned in the created order. But his famous examples – understanding, memory and will in the human soul, and the lover, the beloved and love – have themselves an inbuilt 'oneness' ethos. Understanding, memory and will are the threefold psychological activity of a single person. The love that unites lover and beloved is not a person, but an internal disposition within the person of the lover and the person of the

sometimes think that the Eastern observation may be right: popular Western piety has powerful Sabellian modalistic tendencies, evidenced by the way many evangelical folk confuse the Persons of the Trinity in their prayers, thanking the Father for dying for us and the Son for sending himself. Is this perhaps the long-term fruit of an Augustinian fixation on the one single simple divine essence? I am not sure. But I do testify that I feel far freer of that tendency now than I ever did before.

Secondly, and strangely, the Eastern view has ushered me into a deeper appreciation of the Son as the one through whom the Holy Spirit comes to believers – the Son as 'Spirit-bestower'. Somehow, when I held the Western view, I simply bracketed the Son with the Father as the one source of the Spirit – Father and Son shimmering and blending into one (theologically, collapsing back into the divine essence), so that I had no real or vital sense of the Son as a distinct agent in the Spirit's bestowal. But now, having adopted the Eastern view, I see the Son as distinct from the Father in the giving of the Spirit, in that the Holy Spirit flows to us ultimately from the Father as fountain, but through the Son as the Father's medium and channel. So the distinct place of the Son in the Spirit's bestowal has been impressed on my mind and my prayers. O Christ, eternal Son of the eternal Father, give me to share in your Father's Spirit!

Yes, I think it is time for us to do what the Reformers failed to do, and re-examine the *Filioque* clause. It would be a betrayal of the Reformation if Protestant tradition forbade us to do this, or anathematised those who tried.

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beloved (a perilous thought, when one considers that Augustine regarded the Holy Spirit as the love which united Father and Son: evidence, arguably, of how Filioquism tends to downgrade the Spirit).