



Sicienski, Edward.

The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιόν,
τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον,
τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον,
τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν.

Et in Sp̄ritum Sanctum, Dóminum et vivificántem:

Qui ex Patre Filióque procedit.

Qui cum Patre et Fílio simul adorátur et conglorificátur:

Qui locútus est per prophétas.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life,
who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
who spake by the prophets.

Students of Church history and trinitarian theology are well aware of the controversy surrounding the addition of the term *filioque* (“and the Son”) to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed at the Third Council of Toledo in 589, which would cause division within the Church long before the Great Schism of 1054. Most students interested in such matters should have a general idea of the basic issues at stake and the arguments for and against each respective position. What they might not be aware of are the many particulars such as the linguistic confusion over Greek

(e.g., ἐκπορευόμενον, προῖέναι) and Latin (e.g., *procedere*) terms for “procession” and their theological implications when used in conjunction with *filioque* (e.g., a denial of the Father’s monarchy, or worse yet, Sabellianism); the various local councils and synods called to discuss, defend, or condemn the *filioque*; the appropriation and/or abuse of patristic witnesses (both Eastern and Western) in the service of each position; or the sordid political maneuvering that took place in the varied attempts to gain or maintain power.

Edward Siecienski (Assistant Professor of Philosophy & Religion at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey) does an admirable job of bringing all of these particulars to light in his easy to read narrative history of the controversy from its inception to its present. *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* is exactly that, a *history* of a doctrinal controversy. It is not a defense or condemnation of the *filioque* or *filioquist* theology, although Siecienski recognizes it as “first and foremost, a theological work.” (vii) It’s a book born of necessity, intending to fill a gap in modern English language history. Siecienski’s goals are modest yet ambitious; he wants to fulfill the need for “a complete and balanced presentation of the history” of the dogma of the *filioque* and its inclusion in the Creed “from beginning to end.” (vii)

Siecienski takes the reader through the requisite New Testament texts (chapter 1) and the works of the Greek (chapter 2) and Latin Fathers (chapter 3) that predate the controversy before spending a chapter on Maximus the Confessor (chapter 4) who was around for the early parts of the major debate and whose theology, especially as found in his *Letter to Marinus*, would serve a foundational role for the defenses mounted by both Eastern and Western theologians throughout the controversy. From here Siecienski provides six more chapters of manageable length (roughly twenty pages each) covering succeeding epochs of the controversy (7th to 11th century [chapter 5]; 11th to 13th century [chapter 6]; Council of Lyons to the Eve of Ferrara-Florence [chapter 7]; Council of Ferrara-Florence [chapter 8]; Florence to the Modern Era [chapter 9]; 20th to 21st century [chapter 10]) before providing copious endnotes, an extensive bibliography, and a detailed index.

In all of this Siecienski offers a competent survey suitable for students at the beginning to advanced levels. There are Greek and Latin terms and phrases peppered throughout the volume but almost always in parentheses after the English translation and always because they play an important technical role in the debate. There are no glaring omissions, be they technical terms, important theologians, or major events, although Protestants have had more to say than Siecienski seems to give them credit for, but their limited role in this book is understandable as it is relative to their limited (and late) role in the history of this debate. This is clearly an area of

history that Siecienski knows well and he tells the story vividly but without unnecessary detail. To use an overused metaphor, he doesn't miss the forest for the trees, but we see the trees well enough that we can notice their distinctive characteristics. So in all, Siecienski has accomplished his stated goals, he has provided a history of this doctrinal controversy from beginning to present, acknowledging that he couldn't have given an account from beginning to end because the controversy still remains.

He also does as good a job as possible at remaining neutral, although if I had to guess, I might suspect that Siecienski has *filioquist* sympathies. This seems evident when he states that he's "firmly convinced that Maximus's *Letter to Marinus* offers a theologically sound hermeneutic capable of bringing together East and West on the issue of procession" (215), but it becomes clear through the reading of this volume that such sentiments are reserved for those who want to present the *filioque* as a defensible theologoumenon rather than a heresy. Maximus believed that the Spirit proceeds/comes forth (ἐκπορεύεσθαι) from the Father while he progresses/flows forth (προϊέναι) through the Son (διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ). For Maximus, if the Latins acknowledged the Father as the sole cause (μία αἰτία) of the Spirit, which at the time of his writing they did, then their use of *filioque* (corresponding to προϊέναι) was within the bounds of orthodoxy.

The problem, so far as I see it, is that Western Christianity has moved beyond the affirmations of the seventh century (which had significant problems of their own) and into territory that is blatantly heretical by claiming that the "Holy Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son, and has his essence and his subsistent being from the Father together with the Son, and proceeds from both eternally as from one principle and a single spiration." (170) In all of the debate recounted in this volume I've yet to see an explanation that adequately nullifies Photius the Great's major objections to the *filioque* in his *Encyclical to the Eastern Patriarchs*:

If the Son participates in the quality or property of the Father's own hypostasis, then the Son and the Spirit lose their own personal distinctions. Here one falls into semi-Sabellianism. The proposition that in the divinity there exist two principles, one which is independent and the other which receives its origin from the first, destroys the very root of the Christian conception of God. It would be much more consistent to expound these two principles into three, for this would be more in keeping with the human understanding of the Holy Trinity.

But since the Father is the principle and source, not because of the nature of the divinity, but because of the property of the hypostasis (and the hypostasis of the

Father does not include the hypostasis of the Son), the Son cannot be a principle or source. The *Filioque* actually divides the hypostasis of the Father into two parts, or else the hypostasis of the Son becomes a part of the hypostasis of the Father. By the *Filioque* teaching, the Holy Spirit is two degrees or steps removed from the Father, and thus has a much lower rank than the Son. If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son also, then of the three Divine Hypostases, the Holy Spirit alone has more than one origin or principle.

The problem is not solved by attributing spiration and procession as properties of the divine nature (*ousia*) rather than the distinct persons (*hypostases*) since in that case consubstantiality would make the Spirit proceed from himself as much as from the Father and the Son. It likewise creates more problems in that the Son would be begotten equally by Father, Spirit, and Self. By removing distinct personal properties and attributing them to the shared nature one ends up past the semi-Sabellianism that Photius warned against and ends up in full-blown Sabellianism. I'm not nearly as optimistic as Siecienski that Maximus can bridge the divide that exists between East and West since the issues are just as political as they are theological, something that is highlighted throughout this volume. Without dropping the *filioque* altogether from the creed I can't see any resolution in sight. With that said, I heartily recommend this volume to anyone who has been touched by the issues surrounding the *filioque*, which in truth should be all Christians.