

THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIALOGUE ON THE FILIOQUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ORTHODOXY

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Abstract. This article examines the theological and historical implications of the Filioque doctrine within the context of contemporary Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, emphasizing its relevance amid the current challenges facing Orthodoxy, including ecclesiastical and political divisions. It traces the evolution of the Filioque controversy, highlighting key theological contributions from Orthodox scholars such as Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae and their perspectives on Orthodoxy's identity. The paper discusses the Filioque's impact on ecumenical efforts, noting the divergence in approaches between Orthodox and Western traditions. Furthermore, it explores the influence of nationalism and geopolitical conflicts, particularly the Russian-Ukrainian war, on inter-Orthodox relations and their effect on broader ecumenical dialogues. The article concludes by proposing that while institutional dialogue may be hindered by these crises, academic and theological exchanges remain vital for fostering understanding and advancing unity.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Filioque, Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, Theological Controversy, Nationalism in Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Relations

Introduction

Today, the situation of Orthodoxy in Europe and worldwide is undoubtedly determined by Russia's war against Ukraine. This has had a direct and drastic impact on ecumenical dialogue and, in particular, on the development of the Filioque issue. Since the joint declaration of the North American Orthodox and Catholic Bishops' Councils in 2003,² there has been no noteworthy progress on

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- 2 *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?: An Agreed Statement*; North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, 2003, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/>

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this issue, and there is little prospect of it at present, given the relationship between the Orthodox Churches. For the Catholic Church, it would be important if a united Orthodox position on the question of the Filioque could be formulated in the course of the dialogue, and a common Orthodox reflection on the documents of the Holy See and the ecumenical documents could be developed, because this would give a better chance of moving forward towards unity. In this paper, I will review the main contemporary Orthodox trends on the Filioque issue and the difficulties that the current divisions in Orthodoxy cause, and on this basis try to outline the possibilities for further progress together.

The latest in Orthodox-Catholic dialogue

In both Catholic and Protestant theology, we can speak of a roughly unified position on the question of the Filioque, without these excluding differences of emphasis by one theologian or another. The most of Catholic theologians follow the position of the Church, which has remained essentially unchanged since the Council of Florence-Ferrara in the 15th century. In 1995, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued a clarifying statement that did not change the Church's position in substance, but merely increased openness on the question of the interpretation of theological concepts, shifting the emphasis to the analysis of biblical and patristic texts.³ The clarifying statement was based on the 1982 Munich Declaration of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches,⁴ which does not directly address the question of the Filioque but the meaning of the patristic conceptual system, and thus sought to make a gesture by the Catholic Church towards Orthodoxy. At the same time, it was hoped that the statement of the Pontifical Council would provoke a significant response from the Orthodox Church and theologians, which would lead to a revival of dialogue. However, this has failed

ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/ filioque-church-dividing-issue-english.cfm (23. 10. 2024)

- 3 The Greek and the Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit, *Information Service of the Secretariat of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, 89, II-III (1995). 88–92.
- 4 *Le mystère de L'église et de L'eucharistie à la lumière du mystère de la Sainte Trinité* 3, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820706_munich_fr.html. (2024. 10. 23.)

to materialize in Europe, although John Paul II made a similar gesture in the liturgical sphere when he ordered that the Creed be recited without the Filioque at Masses celebrated in the presence of Orthodox guests.⁵

An important consequence of the 1995 Clarification Statement⁶ is the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic bishops in North America, which was concluded in 2003 with the joint statement *The Filioque: a Church-Dividing Issue?* The dialogue examined the question of the Filioque from theological, historical, and hermeneutical perspectives, analyzing differences and common ground. The document concluded that, while there are linguistic and theological differences between the Eastern and Western traditions, there is also a substantial commonality. The statement emphasizes the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit and the role of the Father as the primary source, while acknowledging the mediating role of the Son in Western theology. The debate is fundamentally linked to historical, cultural, and ecclesiological contexts, especially the question of papal primacy. The document made recommendations, such as the abandonment of the Filioque on symbolic occasions and the withdrawal of the former anathemas. The North American context has helped to foster an impartial dialogue, although the implementation of the proposals is still to be seen. In a spirit of moderate optimism, the declaration contributes to the theological rapprochement between the two traditions.⁷

The starting point for Protestant theology on this issue is that the question of the Filioque is an integral part of the Lutheran tradition, so the goal of ecumenical dialogue should focus on a common understanding of the biblical texts without questioning the origin of the Holy Spirit from the Son.⁸ Adherence to ecclesiastical tradition has not been an obstacle to Protestant-Orthodox dialogue, which has in many cases been more intense than Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, although in

5 Avery, DULLES, Filioque: What is at Stake?, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 1–2 (1995), 33.

6 A detailed analysis of the document see: ANDRÁS Szabolcs, *A Filioque mint a teológia és a politika konfrontációja. Megoldási kísérletek az ökumené szolgálatában*, Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020, 252–266.

7 *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?: An Agreed Statement*; North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation.

8 Some Protestant Theologians think the controversial part of the Filioque-debate is irrelevant for the Protestant theology, it is only an Orthodox-Catholic issue. Peter, GEMEINHARDT, The Dynamics of Mutual Condemnations in the Filioque Controversy, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 91. 2 (2015), 201–222.

most cases the question of origin has not been at the heart of the dialogue. It is also worth noting here that Karl Barth undertook an in-depth analysis, including not only scriptural but also ecclesiological aspects in his understanding of processions,⁹ from which neither the Orthodox nor the Catholic side can depart.

Main trends in contemporary Orthodox theology on the Filioque question

There is a rich literature on the theology of the Filioque in Orthodoxy, with different approaches, which it is not possible to present in full here, so I will only present some of the important positions that have influenced the actualization of the issue and the development of ecumenical dialogue.

I think that Vladimir Lossky has had the most important influence among contemporary Orthodox theologians, and he has put the Filioque issue back at the center, even if this has not necessarily led to positive results. For Lossky updated the Filioque debate not in a theological

sense but in terms of the preservation of Orthodox identity, when he concluded from the situation of Orthodox in diaspora that it is the attitude to the Filioque that distinguishes an Orthodox from the heterodox (Catholics and Protestants).¹⁰ Lossky's contention is therefore that an integral part of the Orthodox faith is the rejection of the Filioque and the confession of procession from the Father alone, because on the one hand this is dictated by the patristic and Byzantine tradition, and on the other hand the icon of the Father's monarchy is the most representative of the social image of Orthodox peoples. The Orthodox theologian proclaimed a radical return to the Church Fathers and to Gregory Palamas, which has had a major impact on contemporary theology.

In the view of Lossky and his followers, the significance of Gergely Palamas is reassessed and takes on new meaning. The Byzantine monk's debate with Barlaam of Calabria in this new perspective did not so much revolve around monasticism and Jesus-prayer, but Palamas was the embodiment of Orthodoxy, while Barlaam was the filioquist West.¹¹ It is important to add here the critical remark that this

9 Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, I./1, (trad.: Bromiley, G. W.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 481–490.

10 Vladimir LOSSKY, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1957, 44–47.

11 A. Edward, SIECIENSKI, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 211–212.

dialectical categorization is wrong because Barlaam, although a Catholic, never accepted the Filioque.¹² Lossky's position is not without precedent. A few decades earlier, Nikolai Velimirović and Justin Popović had already formulated similar conclusions for Serbian theology: Orthodoxy must return to its Cappadocian and Byzantine roots, so that it can preserve its identity in the face of heterogeneous elements. What belongs in the group of heterogeneous elements usually varies from author to author: for Velimirović, communism was the source of danger,¹³ while Popović identified the Church with society, thus rejecting any state interference.¹⁴ For them, St. Sava and St. Palamas are historical and hagiographic figures whose following is one with defending the Church and the Orthodox faith. Although the Filioque did not play a key role for Serbian theologians, they had a great influence on the Orthodox generations that followed them, who also looked up to Lossky. One such was the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae.

Stăniloae's great merit is that he created a comprehensive synthesis, among other things, on the question of the Filioque, which he rejected following Lossky, but his thought is also clearly influenced by St Augustine, in addition to the Palamasian ideas.¹⁵ In his view, the basis of the Orthodox doctrine of the origin of the Holy Spirit is to be found in the Cappadocian Fathers and Byzantine theologians, while all other approaches are incomplete or erroneous, and he criticized the work not only of Western theologians but also of various Orthodox theologians.

Stăniloae starts from the Cappadocian thesis that the origin of the Holy Spirit is part of the immanent, intratrinitarian life of God, of which we know only what is revealed in Scripture, namely that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father (John 15, 26). This in itself does not imply a rejection of being also from the Son, and Stăniloae (though sympathetic to Patriarch Photios'

formulation "only from the Father") never rejected some kind role for the Son, and even used the phrase "through the Son", following St Gregory of Nyssa,

12 BAÁN István, Útkeresés Kelet és Nyugat között. Kalábriai Barlaám (1290-1348), *Vigilia*, 68/6 (2003), 429–435.

13 Nicolae, VELIMIROVICI, *Capete*, (trad.: Ionuț Gurgu), București: Predania, 2015.

14 Iustin POPOVICI, *Credința Ortodoxă și viața în Hristos*, (trad.: Paul Balan), Galați: Bunavestire, 2003, 77.

15 ANDRÁS Szabolcs, Ágostoni visszhangok Dumitru Stăniloae szentháromságtani szeretetmodelljében? in: Kiss Gábor (ed.), *Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok VIII. Nemzetközi Teológuskonferenciájának tanulmánykötete*, Pécs: Pécsi Püspöki Hittudományi Főiskola, 2017, 199–208.

primarily as an economic character. For man, the presence of the Holy Spirit through the Son means that, although the natural difference of existence between God and man limits man's possibilities of knowing God, he cannot grasp the divine essence, but he can experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in prayer. This is the point where Cappadocian and Palamas theology are linked: in the Jesus prayer in particular, man can experience that God cares for him, loves him, through the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory of Nyssa used the concept of dynamism to describe how the divine intratrinitarian life is the continuous flow of love from the Father to the Son and vice versa, and this dynamism is realized in the Holy Spirit, in the third person, who moves out of the intratrinitarian framework to the level of the economy, so that man can realize that it is in the Holy Spirit sent by the Son that his path leads him towards God.¹⁶ Here Palamas uses the term energy, which is nothing other than the tangible divine presence that sustains the world. For Palamas, the problem was that when the Holy Spirit is poured out into the world, the traditional teaching that the boundary of knowledge and existence between God and man is impenetrable is dissolved. In his view, the doctrine of the Filioque further reinforces the idea that man can see into the intratrinitarian being because it is a positive theological statement that exceeds the immediate scriptural framework and disrupts the monarchy of the Father.¹⁷ Hence, the doctrine of uncreated energy emerged in Byzantine theology, which on the one hand eliminates the need to deduce the mode of origin of the Holy Spirit from the economical sending, and makes the Holy Spirit part of the created, empirical world, and on the other hand explains the authenticity of the Jesus-prayer: although God is unknowable, he can be experienced through energies.

In Byzantine theology and its contemporary followers, there is no uniform understanding of how energies are related to the Trinity. While for some theologians, they proceed from the Father or the divine essence (*ousia*) as a kind of fourth hypostasis, for others they are expressions of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the activity of divine love in the world. It is towards the latter position that Stăniloae tends, with his emphasis on love, and it is at this point that we can undoubtedly recognize the influence of Augustine.

16 Gregorius NYSSENSIS, *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, Jacques Paul MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* 45, Paris, 1863, 15.

17 Gregory PALAMAS, *The Triads*, E.III.i.16., Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1983, 72.

God is love itself, this is the expression of his essence, and it is expressed at the intratrinitarian level in the Father giving the Spirit to the Son, who gives him in return. Without the Holy Spirit there is no Trinity. At this point, Stăniloae makes a conscious effort to break away from Augustine, claiming that the reciprocal giving of the Holy Spirit does not imply a common origin and sending, because the Son loves the Father so much that he cannot want to assume his monarchical role in order to process the Spirit from him. The love relationship is fulfilled precisely in the fact that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father - through the Son. This is primarily an economic term referring to the sending of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

For Stăniloae, theology is not an abstract science, but a very practical one. Every dogmatic statement also speaks about man, and so it is with processions. It is not only about God's inner dynamic of love, but also about the way God wants the world he has created to be. When orthodoxy insists on the monarchy of the Father, it also speaks of Trinity as the icon of human society, which must follow the triune model. Accordingly, at the macro level, the Church stands at the head of society as the image of the Father, with the state and the family below her. At the micro level, the family also bears the icon of the Trinity, with the father as the head of the family, the wife and children subordinate to him. With the Filioque doctrine, Western theology questions the monarchy of the Father and with its traditional Christian society, says Stăniloae. The Filioque suggests that the Son wants to act as an individual, making this doctrine synonymous with a decadent Western society. Therefore, Stăniloae agrees with Lossky that the doctrine of the Filioque is not only about the Trinity, but also about identity, only by rejecting it can one be a true believer and a faithful member of the nation. He differs from Lossky in that he recognizes the full form of orthodoxy in only one nation, and thus nationalism is given an important role in his theology.¹⁹ This is also worth noting because it leads to an understanding of why Orthodoxy is divided today: the emergence and development of national churches has been accompanied by the emergence of national theologies which not only reject „heterogeneous“ elements but are often at odds with each other.

Like Stăniloae, several Greek theologians, such as John Romanides and Christos Yannaras, interpret the Filioque question in a national ideological framework.

18 Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost Iubirea*, București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2012, 77.

19 Dumitru STĂNILOAE, Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii, in: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 1. (1967), 44.

The latter takes a radical stance and, like the monks of Mount Athos, considers as heretics all those who accept or tolerate the Filioque doctrine, which he sees as the source of all theological problems, and therefore rejects ecumenical dialogue.²⁰ Romanides is not an isolated member of contemporary Orthodox theology but voices the opinions of many. Yannaras differs from him only in that he interprets the significance of the doctrine of the Filioque in a cultural rather than a theological framework. In his view, this doctrine is the calling card of Western individualistic culture, which has been a destructive influence on Hellenistic culture for centuries. Hellenism is to be understood as a combination of the Greek and Byzantine tradition which provided the framework for the development of Christianity, and it is therefore the task of the Greek nation today to ensure the survival of orthodox Christian civilization.²¹

Several representatives of Greek theology criticize the position of Romanides and Yannaras for the importance they attach to dialogue on controversial theological issues and reject the inclusion of nationalist ideology in the trinitarian doctrine. John Zizioulas stresses that the appropriation of the idea of the chosen nation is contrary to the universality of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is the universal savior of all and that the celebration of the Eucharist is a celebration of the one Church. Although he rejects the Filioque doctrine, he considers dialogue important, calling in particular for an analysis of the scriptural foundations. This included a critique of the tendency marked by Lossky, that patristics cannot be equated with revelation, but that a critical perspective can be applied to the work of both the Church Fathers and contemporary theologians.²² Aristotle Papanikolaou has shown that the anti-Western views of Romanides and Yannaras contributed to the popularization of authoritarian political regimes in Greece and beyond.²³

The same phenomenon can be observed in Russian theology. Both Pavel Florensky and George Florovsky approach the subject primarily from a cultural

20 Ioannis ROMANIDES, *Dogmatica patristică ortodoxă. O expunere concisă*, trad.: Dragoș Dâscă, Sibiu: Ecclesiast, 2010, 44–45.

21 Christos YANNARAS, *Orthodoxy and the West*, trad.: Peter Chamberlas – Norman Russel, Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006, 24.

22 Ioannis ZIZIOULAS, *Prelegeri de dogmatică creștină*, trad.: Florin Caragiu, București: Sofia, 2014, 164.

23 Aristotle PAPANIKOLAOU, Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God, *Modern Theology*, 19/3. (2003), 360.

perspective. According to Florovsky, the Orthodox Church, and the Russian Church in particular, has a civilizing mission, to educate the peoples who have come under the rule of the empire and to show the way to other civilized peoples. The Russian Church has been given a special mission because it has preserved and continued the Greco-Byzantine tradition, opposing the Westernizing tendencies which would have meant, among other things, the adoption of the Filioque.²⁴ In Florensky's case, we can recognize a mixture of neo-gnostic views with neopalatism, the divine feminine principle, the Sophia, mediating between God and man, and therefore no need for a Western doctrine such as the Filioque.²⁵ It is an interesting fact that similar neo-gnostic elements can be found in Russian theologians who were tolerant of the Filioque doctrine. Vladimir Soloviov, Alexei Homiakov or Sergei Bulgakov sympathized with or explicitly professed the Sophia doctrine and tended to accept the place of the Filioque in Catholic-Protestant doctrine as a particular theological element, as a theologoumenon, for ecumenical reasons. At the same time, they also articulated (long before Lossky) that the self-definition of orthodoxy could not be a negation: it is not the orthodox who reject papal primacy or the Filioque, but the orthodox who profess doxology. A similar view is shared by John Meyendorff, who places the interpretation of the Filioque in the history of the development of theology, highlighting the political, cultural and ecclesial elements that have contributed to the emergence of the present face of Christianity over the last two thousand years, including the polarization of orthodoxy, which is not a recent phenomenon.²⁶ With this in mind, one can theologially criticize the Filioque, but to accuse Western Christianity of heresy has always meant radicalization.

The insights of important Orthodox theologians could be listed at length, but I believe that what has been outlined so far has shown that there are basically two major trends in Orthodox theology regarding the Filioque doctrine. One is a radical rejection of it, often seeing it as heresy, and one is also closed to ecumenical dialogue. The other tendency also criticizes it, but accepts that it has a strong

24 George FLOROVSKY, *The Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, *The Ecumenical Review*, 12/2 (1960), 191.

25 Pavel FLORENSKY, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth. An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trad.: Boris Jakim, Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, 237–239.

26 See: John MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1983.

tradition in Catholic theology and seeks to answer the legitimate need of what we can say about the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the context of origins. The Filioque seemed to be a possible answer for Western theology, the lessons of which are worth discussing, ecclesiological, cultural, and other aspects.

The current ecclesiastical and political divisions in Orthodoxy

It is not news to anyone that the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 has deeply divided Orthodox churches and countries with significant Orthodox populations. However, the roots of this division go back further, to the beginning of the emancipation of the Ukrainian Church after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The failure of the Pan-Orthodox Synod in Crete, planned for 2016, showed that the opposition between the Orthodox churches has deepened to the point where there is little dialogue between them,²⁷ making ecumenical dialogue between Orthodoxy and the Western churches practically impossible.

From an ecumenical point of view, the schism between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople is particularly important and serious, because they are the two most important centers of Orthodoxy. As soon as the Ecumenical Patriarch began to support the establishment of an autocephalous Ukrainian Church, Moscow not only tried to prevent it, but also to retaliate.²⁸ One of the first victims of this was the Patriarchate of Alexandria, which sided with Constantinople, because the Russian Church had set up its own missionary organization in Africa, dividing the already small African Orthodox community.²⁹ The process can also be observed in Europe, for example in Hungary, where until 2010 most of the Orthodox institutions and churches belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople (or Romanian and Serbian), but now, with the cooperation of the government,

27 Ionuț BILIUȚĂ, The Romanian Orthodox Church Between the Alliance for the Union of Romanians and the Putinist Temptation: Ultranationalist Propaganda among Orthodox Clergymen and the Russian War Against Ukraine, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 127.

28 Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, The War in Ukraine as a Challenge for Religious Communities: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Prospects for Peacemaking, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 45.

29 The Patriarchate of Alexandria defrocked the second „Exarch in Africa” of the Patriarchate of Moscow, *Orthodox Times*, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-defrocked-the-second-exarch-in-africa-of-the-patriarchate-of-moscow/> (2024. 10. 10.)

the presence of the Moscow Patriarchate is growing. A prominent moment in this process was the transfer of the seat of Metropolitan Hilarion, who had been responsible for the ideological background to the war in Ukraine, to Budapest.³⁰

The Russian – Ukrainian conflict dates back to at least 2014, when it became clear that Ukraine wanted to break with its imperial past. At the same time, President Poroshenko, as part of the independence process, began to push for Kyiv to have an ecclesiastical leadership independent of Moscow, with autocephalous status, and his efforts were supported by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In practice, however, the Ukrainian church was split into three parts, but ultimately the creation of a national church was achieved.

In the war so far, it is clear that the conflict is not only on the front line, but also at the ecclesiastical level. Patriarch Kiril of Moscow has proclaimed forgiveness for soldiers who have served in the army and died on the battlefield. Russian church publications regularly talk of a holy war, which has not escaped the apocalyptic terms, suggesting that the very survival of Christianity is at stake, with Russia actually fighting for universal Christianity.³¹ The foundations of this idea can already be found in the document *Church and Society*, published in 2000, and considered by many to be the first Orthodox social teaching. The document states that in Russia the Church and the military are historically intertwined, the country can legitimately launch a war in its national interest, which the Church will support, as it has done in the past. For the Russians, both church and military service are, and will remain, a sacred mission.³²

It is not surprising that in a situation of war, we also find on the Ukrainian side that the Russian Church is the schismatic one, and that the Ukrainian Church and State represent true Christianity. Symbolic expressions such as St. Javelin were also coined. However, this tendency towards self-mystification is also evident in other national churches, as in Romania, where it is increasingly being said that the country is the Garden of Our Lady, or the public figures of the extreme right in the

30 Recently Hilarion was removed due the sexual scandal in Budapest, see: Russian Orthodox Church demotes scandal-prone former bishop, *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/12/28/russian-orthodox-church-demotes-scandal-prone-former-bishop-en-news> (28. 12. 2024)

31 Katharina KUNTER, Still Sticking to the Brother. History, German Protestantism and the Ukrainian War, *Studia Theologica Latina*, LXVIII, 1 (2023), 74.

32 *Biserica și societatea sau Fundamentele concepției sociale a Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse*, Sinodul episcopal jubiliar al Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse, Moscova, 2000. 33–37.

1920s and 1930s who mixed Orthodox and chauvinist ideas are being promoted.³³ It is not surprising that the radicalization of public life in Central and Eastern Europe is being driven by the powerful role of Russia, which is trying to create divisions between the allied states in a war situation.

In addition to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there are a number of other problems that complicate the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches. To mention only a few, the situation in Georgia, where there has been a serious internal political crisis since the Russian invasion in 2008. The believers' community in the Republic of Moldova is also divided over the dispute between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Bucharest.³⁴ In the Balkans, there are also many problems, such as the attempts of the Church of North Macedonia to become autonomous (not only from the Serbian Church but also from the Bulgarian Church), and Montenegro is in a similar situation, where Belgrade is trying to prevent the establishment of an autocephalous ecclesiastical center in Podgorica.³⁵ In addition, of course, the Orthodox Churches are also facing a massive demographic decline due to emigration and secularization. One could go on at length about how the Orthodox churches outside Europe have changed their relations with the mother churches, trying to distance themselves from these conflicts, which is strengthening their efforts to become more autonomous. To sum up, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Orthodoxy today is in a serious crisis, which limits the possibilities for ecumenical dialogue.

Conclusions

The Filioque issue is itself a theologically, historically, culturally charged conflictual element of the Christian belief system that has long divided Christianity, although seeks to answer the simple question of the relationship between the Son

33 I. BILIUȚĂ, *The Romanian Orthodox Church Between the Alliance for the Union of Romanians and the Putinist Temptation*, 128.

34 Eka CHITANAVA, *The Georgian Orthodox Church: National identity and political influence*, Adam HUG (ed.): *Traditional religion and political power: Examining the role of the church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2015. 40–52.

35 Vladimir JOVANOVIĆ, *Lavrov: The Montenegrin Orthodox Church is part of the Serbian Orthodox Church*, *Actuelno*, <https://www.aktuelno.me/clanak/lavrov-the-montenegrin-orthodox-church-is-part-of-the-serbian-orthodox-church> (2024. 10. 20.)

and the Holy Spirit in the context of processions. Formally, its role was to affirm the deity of the Son in opposition to late Arianism. During the Middle Ages, the Franco-Byzantine rivalry made this theological thesis a victim of political interests and then an important element of division. Saint Maximus the Confessor already drew attention to the fact that East and West should engage in dialogue due to the linguistic, translation, and interpretation problems observed in the doctrine. I think that the Council of Lyon in 1274 did not help the dialogue, while the Council of Ferrara-Florence in the 15th century was a better attempt to seek unity, but the historical-political conditions were not there. In the 20th century, more serious steps towards dialogue were taken by the parties, such as the Klingenthal Declaration or the 1995 Clarification Declaration. Unfortunately, since the North American Joint Declaration of 2003, there has been no significant progress.

The key question now is: is there a possibility to continue the dialogue? The current state of Orthodoxy is not really conducive to a comprehensive, institutional church-level dialogue in which Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant positions are universally represented. I think that the Orthodox Churches are completely preoccupied with the Russian-Ukrainian war and its regional implications, and therefore there is no possibility for the Orthodox Churches to present a united position in the current situation. The end of the war must be followed by a long healing process that will settle the fraternal relations between the autocephalous churches.

However, the current situation does not have to mean a complete suspension of dialogue, which can and should be continued at the level of theological academic schools, workshops, conferences. The search for agreement, for a common understanding of the Filioque question can contribute to the healing process mentioned above. Here, then, the Catholic Church has a responsibility and a mission, as do theologians, who must enter into communion with their Orthodox brothers and sisters in difficulty.

The dialogue on the Filioque issue must always adapt to the opportunities available but must not be interrupted. Whether at individual, committee, or ecumenical organizational level, it should be pursued and should seek not only to explore its historical dimension, but to understand why it is important in the context of Orthodox identity. Dialogue should also include an examination of the relationship between faith and politics (nationalism) and its impact on theology, so that it can be clarified so that theological dialogue can move forward independently of political interests. There is still a long way to go in the ecumenical dialogue on the Filioque.

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