

**Notes on the Issue of Relationship  
among the Divine Persons:  
Papadakis and Meyendorff's  
*The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy***

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Aristeides Papadakis' book, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A. D.*, written in collaboration with John Meyendorff and published in 1994 by St. Vladimir's Press<sup>1</sup> discusses why and how the Roman Church erred in adding the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed of the Christian Church. The addition first made in the 5<sup>th</sup> century was in response to the Arian heresy, which was quite strong in Western Europe, but subsequently it was fully embraced by the Papacy.

The correct version of the disputed passage of the Creed, approved by Ecumenical Church councils in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and affirmed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century states:

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father ; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

The Roman Church made a seemingly minor 'correction' in the Middle Ages, which gradually became a dogma in the Catholic Church:

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<sup>1</sup> Aristeides Papadakis and John Meyendorff, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A. D.*, New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1994.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

This addition, ‘and the Son,’ was done in the most uncanonical manner, without theological justifications, and any consultation with the churches of the east. Many in the Eastern Churches have, therefore, insisted this addition to be unacceptable and completely erroneous.

Papadakis and Meyendorff are among this group scholars of the Orthodox Church. In their book they develop good arguments and make many valid points, but they do make at least one mistake of their own. Specifically, on page 231 they state:

For nowhere do the Greek fathers imply that the Son is a causal or emitting power in the origin of the Spirit. Quite the contrary. Only the *Father is the one cause of the Son and the Spirit* [emphasis added].

It should be stressed that no Orthodox church father ever insisted that Christ was ‘caused’ by God the Father. Few comments should also be made regarding this passage in the Papadakis and Meyendorff book, as it could easily lead the reader to conclude that Christ is a created entity caused by the Father.

First, “cause” is the most unfortunate choice of concepts used in this sentence. Causality always and everywhere implies cause-effect relations, temporality, spatiality, and sequence. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept is also closely linked with determinism. Therefore, the statement on p. 231: “only the Father is the one cause of the Son and the Spirit” is erroneous within the context of divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This could be either authors’ error in judgment or an editorial error or an example of sloppy language.

Two, causality was understood in the East and the West differently during those debates, but neither church has insisted Christ or the Holy Spirit to be ‘caused’ by the Father – such a statement was dangerously close to Arianism for

which neither side had much patience. Top theologians have always been careful to stop short of precise definitions and not to go into idle speculations that would lead them into establishing cause-effect relations between divine persons of the Holy Trinity. Their less scrupulous contemporaries could not or would not restrain themselves, which caused endless grief for themselves and others. The root of disagreement between the East and the West was the starting principles of their world-views: the East favored a Platonic vision of the world, while the Western notions were based on Aristotelian concepts. “Causality” was understood differently by Platon and Aristotle, with contradictory implications (one could recall Aristotle’s ‘four causes’ and Thomas of Aquinas classification of them).

Three, many get tripped by the concept of “procession” as in the Holy Spirit “...proceeds from the Father.” Procession implies ‘process,’ which in vast majority of cases is linked with causality, but not always. One could think of a shadow proceeding from a person as one walks outside on a sunny day – the shadow is not caused by the person, but it proceeds from her and changes shape, length, etc. according to your movement, cloudiness, pavement surface, and so forth. This is an example of a non-causal procession, but this is not an example of how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father – we do not know how the Trinity operates, but we know that non-causal processions are possible.

Arianism insisted that Christ was not fully God, as he was created (caused to exist) by God. Arianism never fully developed a coherent doctrine, but they had this one heretical principle in common: Christ was created by God, therefore, there had been time that Christ did not exist, which means Christ was not eternal and therefore he was not God. Schools of Arianism diverged on the opinion when God made Christ into his equal: when he was born, conceived or when the dove descended on him or before all time. Various schools of Arianism continued to exist into late middle ages and early modern period (the Bohomils in the Balkans, etc.) – subsequently most of these groups were subsumed by Islam – one could see as to why: Islam also denies full divinity of Christ, but regards him as a special prophet of God, caused by God to act in His stead.

Regarding term 'begotten' in the Creed and also in various prayers – this describes relationship among the Holy Trinity in the language of our world (in modern parlance, our four dimensional world with three spatial and one temporal dimensions). This term does not refer to the existence beyond our universe, as the laws of our universe are no longer enough to describe it and we cannot possibly imagine how it works the four-dimensional world. But we still need some words to describe and communicate the idea, and this we could only do in the most economical ways and try not to elaborate it too much – if we do, we could inadvertently introduce new definitions and meanings, just like *filioque* was introduced by the Roman Church, and we do not want to do that.

There are two general ways to comment on God: negative and positive (these aspects were worked out by scholasticism in the West, often going to the extremes to prove some minor points). The positive explanations identify what God *is*, the negative explanations identify what God *is not*. Given the limitations of human language, positive explanations of divinity are much more difficult to communicate correctly than negative ones. For practical purposes it would be preferable to stick with negative explanations – we all know intuitively what God is not and cannot be. In terms of a positive definition, I would stay within the wording of our Creed and would not elaborate further. But could one could do it? Yes, for instance, one could borrow from Hegel and say that Logos is an  $n$ -dimensional entity, fully autonomous and self-sufficient, that defines itself, from itself, within itself. But what does this positive definition tell us? Nothing really, unless one is familiar with Hegel, history of philosophy, and Orthodox theology. Such positive definitions explain a mysterious with an unknown – unknown to all except very few people with special knowledge – while the Orthodox Creed does a beautiful job explaining the same mysterious in a rather accessible language.

Finally, to show difficulties in explaining phenomena that exist beyond our universe in which we operate in three spatial dimensions, we could try a simple exercise: try to draw a one-dimensional thing – that would be a line. Now try to draw a two dimensional object – that could be a circle or a square, etc. Try to draw a three dimensional object – a cube would be the best example of this. Now,

try to draw a four or five dimensional object. For us, it is impossible to add extra spatial dimensions to three-dimensional visual representations, but that does not prevent mathematicians (or physicists) to describe a four, five or  $n$ -dimensional world mathematically, in fact, it is quite routine. But do such descriptions let us understand or imagine or visualize anything about the four, five or  $n$ -dimensional world either on paper or in our mind? I would say no.

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