

The Reception of the Synod of Constantinople (879–880) in Modern Orthodox Theology:

Ecclesial Memory, Synodality, and the Preservation of Tradition

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Abstract

This article examines the reception of the Synod of Constantinople (879–880) in selected trajectories of modern Orthodox theology, with particular attention to ecclesial memory, synodality, and the preservation of Tradition. It distinguishes three analytical levels that must not be conflated: the historical claims that can be established from the conciliar acts and related ninth-century evidence; the subsequent Orthodox reception of the synod; and the constructive theological appropriation of the event in modern Orthodox ecclesiology. The Greek Horos remains the primary textual point of departure, especially its prohibition of subtraction, addition, and alteration of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The article further distinguishes the canonical-symbolic question of unilateral interpolation into the Creed from the Trinitarian question of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. It argues that reception should be understood not as an autonomous mechanism that constitutes conciliar truth, but as the ecclesial manifestation and recognition of a council's conformity to the apostolic faith. By bringing the Horos into closer conversation with Photius's own pneumatological theology, historical source criticism, selected modern Orthodox theologians, and contemporary Orthodox-Catholic documents on primacy and synodality, the study presents 879–880 as a privileged locus for examining how doctrinal continuity, conciliar authority, communion, and ecclesial memory interact without reducing Holy Tradition to the textual immutability of the Creed alone.

Keywords: Constantinople 879–880; Photius; Horos; Orthodox reception; ecclesial memory; synodality; Filioque; Tradition.

Introduction

The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 occupies a singular and still insufficiently integrated place in Orthodox theological consciousness. It is not merely an episode in the history of the so-called Photian controversy, nor only a canonical settlement following the conflict between the supporters of Ignatius and Photius. Historically, the synod restored Photius to communion, received Roman legates, and reaffirmed the inherited Symbol of faith. In its subsequent Orthodox reception, these acts came to be read together as a witness to the inseparability of ecclesial communion, conciliarity, and fidelity to the received confession. The Horos gives this reception a particularly dense textual point of reference in the formula “οὐδὲν ἀφαιροῦντες, οὐδὲν προστιθέντες, οὐδὲν ἀμείβοντες” — “subtracting nothing, adding nothing, altering nothing.”¹

The importance of the Synod of 879–880 becomes clearer when it is read against the background of the preceding council of 869–870 and the broader crisis of authority between Rome and Constantinople. Modern historiography has shown that the Photian conflict cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between Roman primacy and Byzantine resistance, nor to a personal struggle between Ignatius and Photius. The events of the ninth century involved imperial politics, Roman-Byzantine jurisdictional tensions, the Bulgarian question, divergent understandings of primacy, and competing memories of legitimate conciliarity.² Francis Dvornik’s classic revision of the “Photian legend” remains decisive in this respect. By distinguishing historical evidence from later polemical construction, Dvornik demonstrated that the Western anti-Photian tradition was shaped by a long process of reception, reinterpretation, and canonical memory rather than by

¹ Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta, vol. 1/2: *The Oecumenical Councils from Nicaea I to Nicaea II (325–787) and related conciliar material*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, section Concilium Constantinopolitanum 879–880, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Horos, Greek text, lines 17–19: “οὐδὲν ἀφαιροῦντες, οὐδὲν προστιθέντες, οὐδὲν ἀμείβοντες.”

² Valerio Polidori, “Photius and the Councils (AD 859–880),” *Studi sull’Oriente Cristiano* 28, no. 1 (2024): 35–66.

the simple preservation of original facts.³ His work opened the way for a more nuanced understanding of Photius not as the author of schism, but as a patriarch whose rehabilitation and synodal recognition in 879–880 formed part of a real ecclesial settlement.

The state of research may be arranged around four principal lines. The first is historical and source-critical, represented above all by Hergenröther, Grumel, Dvornik, Stiernon, and recent studies of the Photian councils. It concerns the reconstruction of events, the transmission of the acts, the role of papal correspondence, and the status attributed to the synods of 869–870 and 879–880. The second line concerns the doctrinal and pneumatological significance of the Horos and its relation to the Filioque controversy. Here two questions must be distinguished: the canonical-symbolic question of altering the common Creed and the Trinitarian question of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. The third line concerns primacy, synodality, and the historical forms of Roman-Constantinopolitan communion. The fourth line, which is central to this article, concerns the subsequent Orthodox reception and modern theological re-appropriation of 879–880. These trajectories overlap, but they are not identical and must not be treated as if the theological meaning assigned to the synod in later Orthodox thought were simply transparent in every detail of the ninth-century acts.⁴

Recent scholarship has significantly refined the historical picture. Valerio Polidori's overview of the Photian councils emphasizes the multiplicity of synods between 859 and 880 and rightly warns that the terminological distinction between local synod, general council, and ecumenical council is itself a problem

³ Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), xi–xii, 279–305, 398–432.

⁴ Joseph Hergenröther, *Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel: Sein Leben, seine Schriften und das griechische Schisma*, 3 vols., Regensburg: Manz, 1867–1869; Venance Grumel, “Le Filioque au concile photien de 879–880 et le témoignage de Michel d’Anchialos,” *Échos d’Orient* 29 (1930): 257–264; Venance Grumel, “Le décret du Synode photien de 879–880 sur le symbole de foi,” *Échos d’Orient* 37 (1938): 357–372; Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*; Daniel Stiernon, *Constantinople IV*, Paris: Éditions de l’Orante, 1967.

requiring theological and historical caution.⁵ He also notes that even after Dvornik's historiographical revolution, Photius continues to generate confessional partisanship, sometimes to the detriment of scholarly quality.⁶ This observation is methodologically important for the present study. The question is not whether one should repeat an Orthodox apologetic narrative or a Latin anti-Photian narrative, but how the Synod of 879–880 functions in Orthodox theology as a site of memory in which history, doctrine, and ecclesiology converge.

The Greek Horos provides the indispensable textual point of departure. Its prohibition of alteration — “οὐδὲν ἀφαιροῦντες, οὐδὲν προστιθέντες, οὐδὲν ἀμείβοντες” — must be read together with the warning against composing another exposition and imposing it as a rule of faith. The text therefore directly concerns the preservation of the common Symbol. In subsequent Orthodox interpretation, this textual act has acquired a wider ecclesiological significance because the Creed is confessed as the common faith of the Church. Yet the argument of this article does not equate Holy Tradition with the textual immutability of the Creed. Scripture, liturgy, episcopal succession, patristic teaching, ascetical and sacramental life, conciliar discernment, iconography, and the Church's Spirit-bearing continuity also belong to the reality named Tradition. The Horos is treated here as an exceptionally authoritative expression of that Tradition, not as an exhaustive definition of it.

The present article therefore asks: how has the Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 been received in modern Orthodox theology as a witness to ecclesial memory, synodality, and the preservation of Tradition? More specifically, it asks: first, how does the Horos articulate the relation between doctrinal continuity and ecclesial communion? Second, how did modern scholarship, especially after Dvornik, alter the theological conditions under which Orthodox reception of the synod could be interpreted? Third, in what sense does the synod offer a model of synodality that avoids both papal unilateralism and conciliar relativism? Fourth,

⁵ Polidori, “Photius and the Councils,” 35–36.

⁶ Polidori, “Photius and the Councils,” 36.

how can the synod be read today within the broader Orthodox-Catholic discussion on primacy and synodality?

The central thesis of this article is therefore deliberately limited. The Synod of 879–880 functions in selected trajectories of modern Orthodox theology as a conciliar memory of Tradition preserved in communion. This claim is not identical with the historical assertion that the synod itself explicitly formulated every later Orthodox principle of reception, primacy, or eucharistic ecclesiology. Rather, the article argues that the Horos and the settlement of 879–880 provided a historically concrete event that later Orthodox theology could receive and interpret as a witness to doctrinal continuity, conciliar discernment, and restored communion. In this perspective, memory is not nostalgia, synodality is not merely administrative procedure, and Tradition is not repetition; but neither is Tradition reducible to a single conciliar formula.

Methodologically, the article employs a theological-hermeneutical reading of sources, combining philological analysis of the Greek conciliar text, historical source criticism, reception history, and ecclesiological interpretation. The method requires explicit control of the transition from evidence to interpretation. Accordingly, statements about what the Horos or the acts say are distinguished from statements about how the synod was subsequently received in Orthodox tradition, and both are distinguished from constructive theological judgments proposed in the present article. This threefold distinction is especially important because historical events, dogmas, canons, theological language, and non-theological factors interact without being reducible to one another.⁷

Throughout the study, reception is used in a qualified sense. It does not designate an independent juridical mechanism by which a council becomes true or authoritative merely because it is later accepted. Orthodox theology has never possessed a single universally defined reception theory of that kind. Reception is understood here more modestly as the ecclesial manifestation and recognition that

⁷ Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality* (Graz, October 2018), II, §§ 17–26 (“Hermeneutical Reflections”).

a conciliar act corresponds to the apostolic faith already confessed by the Church. This formulation preserves the theological importance of reception without making subsequent acceptance an autonomous source of conciliar truth.⁸

The original contribution of the present study is therefore twofold. First, it reads the Synod of 879–880 as a privileged case for examining the recognition of doctrinal continuity, conciliar authority, and ecclesial communion in Orthodox consciousness, rather than as a self-sufficient 'receptional criterion' that mechanically determines ecumenicity. Second, it distinguishes historical-critical reception, explicit ecclesial commemoration, modern theological re-appropriation, and polemical use. The designation 'Eighth Ecumenical Council' is consequently treated as a specified receptional category whose meaning varies across historical, liturgical, theological, and confessional contexts.

The source corpus is treated as part of the argument itself. The primary layer consists of the Greek Horos and the conciliar acts, together with the ninth-century correspondence associated with the settlement, including the Roman legation and the letters connected with John VIII. Photius's own theological voice is also indispensable: his *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* and his correspondence provide a primary Photian horizon for distinguishing the pneumatological question from the canonical question of interpolation into the Creed. The historical-critical layer includes Dvornik, Grumel, Polidori, Hergenröther, and Stiernon; the conciliar and receptional layer includes Florovsky, Dvornik's work on ecumenical councils, and Hilarion (Alfeyev); and the constructive modern theological layer includes Florovsky, Meyendorff, Lossky, Schmemmann, Zizioulas, Ware, and Stăniloae. These authors are not treated as a single homogeneous 'Orthodox position' but as selected and sometimes divergent trajectories.⁹

⁸ Georges Florovsky, "The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of the Fathers," in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 1 (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 93–103; Hilarion (Alfeyev), "The Reception of the Ecumenical Councils in the Early Church," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47, nos. 3–4 (2003): 413–430.

⁹ Photius, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987); Photius, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1983–1988).

The structure of the article follows this methodological sequence. The first part examines the Greek Horos and places it in conversation with Photius's own Trinitarian theology. The second part presents the historiographical reconfiguration of the Photian controversy and clarifies the distinction between historical reconstruction and later reception. The third part examines synodality, primacy, pentarchy, and reception while avoiding the attribution to the ninth-century synod of a fully developed modern ecclesiological system. The fourth part considers selected trajectories of modern Orthodox theological reception. The fifth part offers a constructive theological synthesis in which the preservation of the Creed is located within, rather than identified with, the wider reality of Holy Tradition.

I. The Greek Horos as a Theology of Ecclesial Memory

The theological centre of the Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 is the Horos. Its importance lies not merely in the fact that it transmits the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without the Filioque, but in the manner in which it frames the preservation of the received Symbol. The text invokes continuity with the councils and Fathers and refuses subtraction, addition, or alteration of the inherited confession. Historically, these are claims about the integrity of the Symbol and the authority of the received conciliar faith. The wider proposition that the Horos embodies a complete ecclesiology of communion is a subsequent theological reading and should be identified as such.¹⁰

The three verbs are decisive. The first, *aphairein* — to subtract — indicates the danger of diminishing the fullness of the inherited confession. The second, *prostithenai* — to add — names the opposite danger: not the development of theological understanding as such, but the imposition of a new formula into the Symbol as if the received confession were incomplete. The third, *ameibein* — to alter or change — gathers both movements into a broader category of doctrinal

¹⁰ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, section Concilium Constantinopolitanum 879–880, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Horos, Greek text, lines 17–19: “οὐδὲν ἀφαιροῦντες, οὐδὲν προστιθέντες, οὐδὲν ἀμείβοντες.”

displacement. The Horos therefore does not oppose theological reflection; it opposes the transformation of the Church's common confession into another rule of faith. It guards the boundary between legitimate theological articulation and illegitimate symbolic innovation.

This distinction is fundamental for interpreting the later Orthodox reception of 879–880. The Horos does not present the Creed as an antiquarian artifact, but neither should its textual inviolability be made equivalent to the whole content of Tradition. In Orthodox theology, the Symbol is a privileged conciliar and liturgical concentration of the apostolic faith within the broader life of Scripture, worship, episcopal succession, patristic witness, sacramental practice, ascetic experience, and conciliar discernment. The significance of the Horos is therefore best stated proportionately: it protects a uniquely authoritative common confession whose integrity serves as a visible sign of continuity within the wider life of Holy Tradition.

The Greek text of the Horos is especially important because its theological density is not fully conveyed by later polemical summaries. The synod speaks in the name of continuity with the holy and ecumenical councils and with the Fathers who guarded the apostolic preaching. Its prohibition of alteration is directed against those who would compose or impose another exposition of faith. In the seventh session, as Polidori notes, the warning is clarified in relation to subtraction from or addition to the confession of the holy, consubstantial, and undivided Trinity. This evidence establishes the canonical-symbolic seriousness of the issue. It does not by itself amount to a complete conciliar treatise on every possible Latin account of the Spirit's relation to the Son.¹¹

Photius's own *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* supplies the primary theological context that the conciliar Horos itself does not elaborate systematically. In the *Mystagogy*, Photius defends the Father's monarchy and the hypostatic procession of the Spirit from the Father, developing a specifically Trinitarian critique of formulations that in his judgment compromise the Father's causal uniqueness.

¹¹ Valerio Polidori, "Photius and the Councils (AD 859–880)," *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 28, no. 1 (2024): 61–63.

This theological argument must be distinguished from, even while historically related to, the synod's canonical-symbolic concern with alteration of the common Creed. The distinction is essential: an Orthodox theologian may reject unilateral interpolation into the Creed as an ecclesiological and canonical act while still recognizing that the theological evaluation of Latin formulas concerning the Spirit and the Son requires separate and more exact Trinitarian analysis.¹²

The same distinction is strengthened by Photius's correspondence and by the diplomatic dossier surrounding John VIII. The Roman-Byzantine settlement of 879–880 cannot be reconstructed responsibly from the *Horos* alone. Papal letters, legatine instructions, the political setting, and the transmission of the acts must be assessed historically before later ecclesiological conclusions are drawn. For this reason, the present study uses the conciliar text as primary evidence for what the synod confessed, while treating claims about its enduring model of primacy, reception, and communion as subsequent Orthodox interpretations rather than unmediated propositions of the acts themselves.¹³

For this reason, the Synod of 879–880 became in subsequent Orthodox memory more than a council of reconciliation. The title and acts point to an ecclesial purpose of restoring unity, while later Orthodox reception interpreted the reaffirmation of the common Creed as evidence that reconciliation and doctrinal fidelity belong together. It is methodologically safer, however, to say that the synod was subsequently received as a conciliar testimony to communion in the inherited

¹² Photius, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987); cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 57–76; John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979).

¹³ Photius, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1983–1988); Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 279–327, 398–432; Valerio Polidori, “Photius and the Councils (AD 859–880),” *Studi sull’Oriente Cristiano* 28, no. 1 (2024): 35–66.

faith than to claim that the acts themselves articulate a complete eucharistic or anti-juridical ecclesiology.¹⁴

The rehabilitation of Photius likewise has to be interpreted on two levels. Historically, it formed part of a changed political and ecclesial situation in which Ignatius and Photius had moved toward reconciliation, Rome's position was affected by the Bulgarian question and wider diplomatic concerns, and John VIII sent legates to Constantinople. Theologically, subsequent Orthodox reception could read this restoration together with the Horos as an instance of ecclesial healing in continuity with the received faith. The second claim is a receptional interpretation of the first, not a substitute for historical reconstruction.¹⁵

Selected Orthodox receptions of the synod emphasize precisely this conjunction of communion and fidelity. Yet the significance of 879–880 should not be reduced either to an anti-Latin polemic or to a modern theory of synodality projected backward into the ninth century. The more defensible claim is that the event supplied later Orthodox theology with a historical and conciliar locus through which questions of doctrinal integrity, ecclesial communion, and the limits of unilateral action could be reconsidered.

Dvornik's reconstruction is indispensable here because it prevents the interpreter from reading the Synod of 879–880 through later confessional caricatures. His analysis of the "Photian legend" showed that the image of Photius as arch-schismatic was not simply a direct continuation of ninth-century evidence, but the result of a complex process of Latin reception and polemical memory.¹⁶ At the same time, Dvornik's work also allows modern Orthodox theology to avoid an equally simplistic counter-legend. Photius need not be idealized in order for the synod's theological meaning to be recognized. The question is not hagiographical exaggeration, but ecclesial discernment: how did the Church remember, receive, and interpret this synod as a witness to communion in truth?

¹⁴ Polidori, "Photius and the Councils," 56.

¹⁵ Polidori, "Photius and the Councils," 56–61.

¹⁶ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, xi–xii, 279–305, 398–432.

This methodological control is also necessary for the theology of Tradition. Tradition is not a passive archive of inherited formulae, but neither is it exhausted by the verbal preservation of the Creed. Florovsky's account of the living patristic mind of the Church is useful precisely because it holds together continuity and living appropriation. The Horos can be read within this broader framework as one authoritative conciliar act of fidelity, while Scripture, liturgy, the Fathers, episcopal succession, sacramental life, ascetic practice, and conciliar discernment remain irreducible dimensions of the same Tradition.¹⁷

The relation between memory and authority must therefore be stated with care. Ecclesial memory is not subjective remembrance, and reception is not a plebiscite conducted after a council. Florovsky's discussion of conciliar authority and Hilarion's analysis of the reception of the ecumenical councils both caution against reducing ecumenicity to a single external criterion. Conciliar truth is recognized within the Church because the Church discerns continuity with the apostolic faith; reception manifests this recognition but does not manufacture the truth received.¹⁸

This qualified understanding also has consequences for contemporary discussions of primacy and synodality. Modern Orthodox-Catholic reflection increasingly treats primacy and synodality as interrelated modes of ecclesial communion rather than simple opposites. Reading 879–880 in that horizon may be theologically fruitful, but it remains a constructive application. The historical synod contributes a concrete case in which Roman legates, Byzantine conciliarity, disputed jurisdictions, and a common Creed intersected; it does not by itself settle every contemporary question about universal primacy or synodal governance.¹⁹

¹⁷ Georges Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church," in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 1 (Vaduz: Bucharvertriebsanstalt, 1987), 73–92; Georges Florovsky, "The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of the Fathers," *ibid.*, 93–103.

¹⁸ Georges Florovsky, 1987, 93–103.

¹⁹ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority* (Ravenna, 2007).

In the Orthodox theological imagination, the Synod of 879–880 thus functions as a memory of healed communion. It remembers not only a conflict, but the overcoming of conflict through a return to the common confession. Its continuing relevance lies here. The modern Church does not receive 879–880 only to repeat a ninth-century controversy. She receives it in order to remember that doctrinal integrity and ecclesial unity are inseparable. The synod's deepest witness is therefore not negative but positive: the Church preserves Tradition because Tradition preserves the Church.

II. From Photian Polemic to Ecclesial Reception: The Historiographical Reconfiguration of 879–880

The modern reception of the Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 cannot be understood without first considering the historiographical transformation of the so-called Photian question. For many centuries, the figure of Photius and the synod that restored him to communion were interpreted through mutually opposed memories. In the Latin West, Photius was often remembered as the initiator of rupture, the representative of Byzantine resistance to Roman authority, and the theological antagonist of the Filioque. In the Byzantine and later Orthodox East, by contrast, he was remembered as a saint, confessor of the integrity of the Creed, defender of conciliar order, and guardian of the apostolic tradition. The problem is therefore not only historical. It is hermeneutical: how does the Church remember a council, and how do later polemical traditions shape the meaning of that memory?

The classical Western historiographical tradition was decisively shaped by Joseph Hergenröther, whose monumental study of Photius gave systematic scholarly form to the anti-Photian interpretation.²⁰ Hergenröther's work was not merely a historical reconstruction; it also became a framework through which subsequent Western theology interpreted the ninth-century crisis. Photius was read within a narrative of resistance to Roman primacy, and the council of 879–

²⁰ Joseph Hergenröther, *Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel: Sein Leben, seine Schriften und das griechische Schisma*, 3 vols., Regensburg: Manz, 1867–1869, vol. 2.

880 was often subordinated to the prior recognition of the council of 869–870 as the “Eighth Ecumenical Council” in the Latin tradition. This framework created a double asymmetry: the council that condemned Photius was remembered as ecumenical, while the council that restored communion was treated as secondary, ambiguous, or merely disciplinary.

The intellectual context of Photius also requires a broader Byzantine horizon. Erismann’s study of John the Grammarian and Photius shows that ninth-century Byzantine theology was shaped not only by jurisdictional conflict but also by debates on depiction, visual perception, individuality, and verbal description.²¹ This wider context prevents the reduction of Photius either to an administrative actor or to an anti-Latin symbol; his reception belongs to a theological culture in which dogmatic, philosophical, rhetorical, and ecclesiological questions intersect.

This older paradigm began to be destabilized by source-critical research in the twentieth century. Venance Grumel’s studies on the decree of the Photian synod and the Filioque question already showed that the problem could not be reduced to inherited confessional simplifications.²² Yet the decisive reconfiguration came with Francis Dvornik’s *The Photian Schism: History and Legend*. Dvornik’s contribution was not simply to defend Photius. His deeper achievement was methodological: he distinguished between the history of the ninth-century events and the later construction of the “Photian legend.”²³ This distinction remains essential for any modern Orthodox theological use of 879–880. Without it, Orthodox reception risks becoming merely reactive, defined by opposition to Latin polemic rather than by a positive ecclesiological reading of the synod itself.

²¹ Christophe Erismann, “John the Grammarian and Photius: A Ninth-Century Byzantine Debate on Depiction, Visual Perception and Verbal Description,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 70 (2020): 67–87, <https://doi.org/10.1553/joeb70S67>.

²² Venance Grumel, “Le Filioque au concile photien de 879–880 et le témoignage de Michel d’Anchialos,” *Échos d’Orient* 29 (1930): 257–264; Venance Grumel, “Le décret du Synode photien de 879–880 sur le symbole de foi,” *Échos d’Orient* 37 (1938): 357–372.

²³ Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, xi–xii.

Dvornik's analysis showed that the traditional narrative of a second Photian schism was shaped by later processes of reception, canonical transmission, and polemical interpretation. This observation is important, but it should not be turned into a general theory according to which reception creates the authority of an event. Rather, it demonstrates historically that ecclesial memory is mediated: documents are selected, transmitted, interpreted, authorized, contested, and sometimes distorted. Reception history therefore studies how an event comes to be remembered; theology must still ask how that memory relates to apostolic faith and conciliar truth.²⁴

At the same time, Dvornik's revision must not be used simplistically. It does not abolish the complexity of the Photian crisis, nor does it transform every Western interpretation into mere legend. The ninth-century conflict involved real questions of jurisdiction, canonical order, papal authority, imperial policy, and the Bulgarian mission. Dvornik's achievement is rather that he restored the possibility of reading the synod of 879–880 as a genuine act of ecclesial reconciliation, not merely as a Byzantine counter-council. The council appears, in this perspective, as a moment in which communion between Rome and Constantinople was restored on the basis of Photius's recognition, the reception of the inherited Creed, and the rejection of unilateral alteration.

Recent historiography has sharpened this point by situating 879–880 within the entire sequence of Photian synods. Valerio Polidori rightly emphasizes that between 859 and 880 there was not one simple conflict but a dense series of synodal acts in Rome and Constantinople, each responding to changing ecclesiastical and political circumstances.²⁵ This multiplicity is important because it prevents the interpreter from isolating 879–880 as an abstract theological event. The synod was the culmination of a process: the contested election of Photius, the synod of 861, Roman reactions, the Bulgarian question, the council of 869–870, the death of Ignatius, the restoration of Photius, and the search for renewed

²⁴ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, 279–327.

²⁵ Valerio Polidori, "Photius and the Councils (AD 859–880)," *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 28, no. 1 (2024): 35–36.

communion. The theological meaning of 879–880 emerges from this history, but it also transcends it.

The question of ecumenicity remains one of the most disputed points in the reception of the synod. In the Latin tradition, 869–870 came to be received as the Eighth Ecumenical Council, whereas 879–880 has often been given exceptionally high, and in some Orthodox contexts ecumenical, authority. The difficulty cannot be resolved by a single formal test. Imperial convocation, papal participation or confirmation, episcopal representation, doctrinal continuity, and subsequent ecclesial recognition all belong to the historical discussion, but Orthodox theology has not defined a universally binding juridical 'reception theory' by which later acceptance alone constitutes a council as ecumenical. Florovsky, Dvornik, and Hilarion are especially useful here because they present conciliar authority as inseparable from the Church's recognition of apostolic truth while resisting a merely mechanical criterion.²⁶

The contrast between 869–870 and 879–880 should therefore be stated as a matter of subsequent ecclesial reception rather than as a self-evident verdict contained in the historical events themselves. The former condemned Photius; the latter restored him in a broader settlement and reaffirmed the inherited Creed. Orthodox memory subsequently assigned different theological significance to these acts. Such judgments belong legitimately to ecclesial reception, but historical description and theological evaluation should remain distinguishable.²⁷

The historiographical reconfiguration of 879–880 also affects the interpretation of the Filioque. Older polemical readings often treated the synod either as a comprehensive dogmatic condemnation of the Filioque or, conversely, as if the doctrine were irrelevant because the term was not developed in a

²⁶ Francis Dvornik, *The Ecumenical Councils* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961); Hilarion (Alfeyev), "The Reception of the Ecumenical Councils in the Early Church," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47, nos. 3–4 (2003): 413–430; Florovsky, "The Authority of the Ancient Councils," 93–103.

²⁷ Polidori, "Photius and the Councils," 35–36, 56–63; Evangelos Chrysos, "The Council of Constantinople in 869–70: A Minority Council," *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 49, no. 1 (2020): 139.

scholastic manner in the Horos. Both alternatives are inadequate. The conciliar text directly concerns the integrity of the inherited Symbol and the prohibition of another rule of faith. Its relevance to the Filioque is therefore immediate at the canonical-symbolic level. The distinct Trinitarian question of the Spirit's eternal procession must be reconstructed from a broader theological dossier, above all from Photius's *Mystagogy* and related patristic argumentation, and only then compared with later Latin formulations.²⁸

Modern scholarship also shows that the Photian crisis cannot be understood apart from the broader question of Roman and Constantinopolitan authority. Yet the categories of 'primacy', 'synodality', and especially 'pentarchy' must be used historically. Chrysos's work provides an important horizon for examining the place of the patriarchal sees and the forms of Byzantine ecclesial order, but it would be anachronistic to treat the synod as if it had explicitly formulated a modern systematic theory of primacy and synodality. The safer conclusion is that the historical configuration of 879–880 later became available for Orthodox theological reflection on how primacy may operate within conciliar communion.²⁹

Contemporary Orthodox-Catholic documents help clarify the constructive level of this interpretation. The Ravenna document (2007), the Chieti document (2016), the Saint Irenaeus text *Serving Communion* (2018), and the Alexandria document (2023) all treat primacy and synodality as historically differentiated but interrelated dimensions of ecclesial communion. None of these documents is a direct commentary on 879–880, and they should not be used as evidence for what the ninth-century synod itself meant. They are, however, appropriate hermeneutical partners for asking how a disputed case from the first millennium

²⁸ Photius, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell. 1987.

²⁹ Evangelos Chrysos, "The Principle of Pentarchy in Byzantine Ecclesiology," in *Κωνσταντίνω Γ. Πισάκη Μνήμης χάριν*, ed. Maria Giouni and Lydia Paparriga-Artemiadi, Athens: Academy of Athens, 2023.

may illuminate contemporary reflection without collapsing historical reconstruction into systematic theology.³⁰

The current state of research therefore reveals a more precisely defined gap. Much has been written about the Photian controversy, the authenticity of sources, the Filioque, the councils of 869–870 and 879–880, and Rome-Constantinople relations. What remains less developed is a methodologically controlled account of how the synod has been appropriated in selected modern Orthodox theological trajectories. The present article seeks to contribute to that task by keeping primary evidence, subsequent ecclesial reception, and constructive theological interpretation analytically distinct.

The transition from polemic to reception is thus not a move from history to an all-purpose ecclesiological criterion. It is a move toward examining how historical events acquire theological significance in ecclesial memory. A receptional reading asks how 879–880 was remembered, why the Horos became important in Orthodox consciousness, and how later theologians used its themes. It must nevertheless resist the temptation to make later theological categories retroactively identical with the explicit historical claims of the synod.

The historiographical reconfiguration of 879–880 therefore permits, rather than compels, a constructive theological conclusion. In its subsequent Orthodox reception the synod can be read as a witness to the conjunction of doctrinal fidelity, conciliar discernment, and restored communion. The phrase 'can be read as' is important: it marks the passage from historical reconstruction to theological appropriation instead of presenting the latter as the transparent historical meaning of the acts.

³⁰ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority* (Ravenna, 2007); *Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church* (Chieti, 2016); *Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today* (Alexandria, 2023); Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality* (Graz, 2018).

III. Synodality, Primacy, and Reception: Historical Evidence and Ecclesiological Re-appropriation

The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 stands historically at the intersection of contested jurisdiction, conciliar deliberation, Roman participation, the rehabilitation of Photius, and the reaffirmation of the common Creed. These features make it highly relevant to later Orthodox reflection on synodality, primacy, and reception. They do not, however, justify attributing to the synod a fully developed modern ecclesiology. This section therefore distinguishes the historical configuration of authority visible in 879–880 from the ecclesiological principles that subsequent Orthodox theology has drawn from that configuration.

The synodal character of the event is not accidental. The crisis that preceded it had been marked precisely by contested authority: the disputed deposition of Ignatius, the election and consecration of Photius, Roman interventions, Byzantine synods, papal judgments, imperial pressures, and the unresolved Bulgarian question. The final settlement could not therefore be achieved by private agreement or unilateral declaration. It required a conciliar act capable of restoring communion. Polidori's reconstruction of the sequence of synods between 859 and 880 demonstrates that the Photian controversy was not a single event but a prolonged ecclesial process in which councils and counter-councils became instruments of judgment, conflict, and eventual reconciliation.³¹

The significance of 879–880 lies not simply in reversing the outcome of 869–870. In subsequent Orthodox reception, the two councils came to embody contrasting memories: condemnation and division on the one hand, restoration of Photius and renewed communion on the other. It is therefore more accurate to say that Orthodox reception discerned in 879–880 a different ecclesial logic than to claim that the conciliar acts themselves systematically articulated one. This distinction preserves the theological force of the reception while respecting the limits of the historical evidence.

³¹ Valerio Polidori, "Photius and the Councils (AD 859–880)," *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 28, no. 1 (2024): 35–36.

Reception is consequently best understood as a mode of ecclesial recognition, not as an independent constitutive mechanism. The Church's later recognition of a council as expressive of apostolic faith is theologically significant, but no universally agreed Orthodox formula reduces ecumenicity to subsequent acceptance alone. Conciliar authority involves doctrinal fidelity, ecclesial communion, historical circumstances, and the Church's recognition that the council speaks within the apostolic Tradition. Reception manifests that recognition; it does not confer truth upon an otherwise neutral conciliar act.³²

The Greek Horos supplies the clearest doctrinal datum of the synod: the inherited Symbol is to be preserved without subtraction, addition, or alteration. From this it follows historically that the council refused another exposition imposed as a rule of faith. A wider conclusion about the ministerial character of ecclesial authority is a legitimate theological inference in Orthodox reception, but it should be presented as inference. In this reading, authority serves rather than creates the apostolic confession; the Horos becomes a privileged illustration of that broader ecclesiological principle.

The relation between primacy and synodality must likewise be formulated with historical restraint. Rome's role, the presence of John VIII's legates, and the papal-Byzantine correspondence belong to the historical fabric of the event. What these materials demonstrate is a complex process of negotiation and conciliar settlement, not a ready-made dogmatic theory of universal primacy. In subsequent Orthodox reception, 879–880 can be read as evidence that primatial service operates within, and not apart from, conciliar communion and fidelity to the common confession. This is a theological appropriation of the event rather than a verbatim proposition of the acts.

This interpretation converges with themes developed in contemporary Orthodox-Catholic reflection. Ravenna describes authority and conciliarity at local, regional, and universal levels; Chieti examines synodality and primacy in the first millennium; *Serving Communion* emphasizes their mutual relation; and *Alexandria* extends the discussion into the second millennium and the present.

³² Hilarion (Alfeyev), 2003.

These documents do not authorize a direct projection of contemporary terminology onto 879–880, but they demonstrate why the ninth-century case remains a fruitful historical interlocutor for current ecclesiology.³³

The Bulgarian question illustrates the complexity of this ecclesiological situation. Jurisdictional conflict over Bulgaria was not a peripheral matter. It exposed different assumptions about ecclesial territory, missionary authority, patriarchal jurisdiction, and Roman-Constantinopolitan relations. Yet the Synod of 879–880 did not define unity by administrative victory. Its deepest theological act was the reaffirmation of the unaltered Creed. This does not mean that jurisdictional questions were unimportant. Rather, it means that jurisdictional reconciliation could not be separated from doctrinal communion. The Church could be healed only by restoring both order and confession.

In its subsequent Orthodox reception, 879–880 can therefore be used to criticize two reductions: a purely juridical account of unity and a merely procedural account of synodality. The historical *Horos* itself directly guards the received Creed; the broader conclusion that authentic ecclesial authority is ministerial, conciliar, and confessionally bounded belongs to theological re-appropriation. Stating the levels separately makes the argument stronger rather than weaker.

The principle of pentarchy provides an additional historical horizon, but it requires particular caution. Byzantine pentarchic consciousness cannot simply be equated with a timeless dogmatic constitution of the universal Church, nor can 879–880 be presented as a formal definition of pentarchy. Chrysos's studies illuminate how the patriarchal sees and their relative roles were understood in Byzantine ecclesial order. Within that historical frame, the synod may subsequently be read as a case in which Roman primatial presence and Eastern conciliarity interacted without either element being reducible to the other.³⁴

³³ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, 2007.

³⁴ Evangelos Chrysos, 2023.

For modern Orthodox theology, the significance of this case lies precisely in its openness to theological appropriation. Selected Orthodox authors have read first-millennium conciliarity as a corrective both to universal juridical monarchism and to the fragmentation of ecclesial communion. The Synod of 879–880 can contribute to that argument, but it should not be made to carry more systematic weight than the evidence permits. It is a historical case that can illuminate a theology of communion; it is not by itself a complete blueprint for contemporary Orthodox governance.

Ecclesial memory is therefore not merely retrospective, but neither is it unrestricted constructive projection. The Church remembers in order to discern, and theological reflection asks what a received event may disclose for present ecclesial life. The methodological discipline of the present article is to keep that disclosure explicitly marked as reception and re-appropriation whenever it exceeds what can be demonstrated directly from the ninth-century sources.

Within these qualifications, four principles may be proposed as conclusions of subsequent Orthodox reception rather than as four definitions promulgated by the synod itself. First, synodality is a fundamental mode of ecclesial discernment. Second, primacy is interpreted as service within communion rather than authority detached from communion. Third, reception is the Church's recognition and manifestation of conciliar fidelity, not an autonomous source of truth. Fourth, doctrinal preservation and ecclesial healing need not be opposed. These principles explain why 879–880 remains theologically suggestive while respecting the historical limits of the evidence.

The Orthodox reception of the synod as a council of restoration is therefore not a mere confessional preference. It reflects a judgment about the nature of the Church. The Church is not healed by suppressing memory, but by purifying memory through truth. The Photian controversy generated competing memories, but the reception of 879–880 in Orthodox theology preserves a specific ecclesial insight: communion must be restored through fidelity, not through amnesia; through conciliar recognition, not unilateral coercion; through the Creed, not diplomatic compromise alone.

For this reason, the synod remains relevant to contemporary Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. The Ravenna, Chieti, Saint Irenaeus, and Alexandria documents show that primacy and synodality are still being examined through the shared and contested history of the first millennium. The case of 879–880 does not solve those debates, but it disciplines them by showing why historical context, doctrinal confession, conciliar procedure, and later ecclesial reception have to be considered together.³⁵

IV. Selected Trajectories of Modern Orthodox Reception: 879–880 as Ecclesial Memory

There is no single, homogeneous 'modern Orthodox reception' of the Synod of Constantinople of 879–880. Modern Orthodox theologians differ in method, vocabulary, ecclesiology, and the extent to which they address the synod directly. It is therefore more accurate to speak of selected trajectories. In this section, direct reception denotes explicit historical, canonical, liturgical, or polemical treatment of the synod itself; theological re-appropriation denotes the use of broader Orthodox categories, Tradition, communion, liturgy, pneumatology, catholicity, and conciliarity, to interpret themes associated with 879–880 even where a theologian does not make the council an independent object of study.³⁴

Florovsky provides one influential grammar for this re-appropriation. His theology of Tradition rejects both mechanical repetition and arbitrary innovation, describing the Church's fidelity as a living patristic continuity. Read through this lens, the Horos of 879–880 may be understood as one authoritative act within the wider life of Tradition, not as a definition that exhausts Tradition. Florovsky's separate discussion of the authority of the ancient councils is particularly important here because it refuses to reduce conciliar authority either to external

³⁵ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, 2007.

formalities or to a later plebiscite of reception. The Church recognizes the apostolic faith in the councils, and reception manifests this ecclesial recognition.³⁶

Meyendorff makes visible another trajectory: the intersection of the Filioque controversy with ecclesial authority. His account helps explain why unilateral insertion into the common Creed can be an ecclesiological problem independently of the full Trinitarian evaluation of the Latin doctrine. The Synod of 879–880 can therefore be brought into conversation with Meyendorff's categories, but the direction of dependence should be clear: Meyendorff supplies a modern interpretive framework; he is not evidence that the ninth-century synod explicitly formulated the later framework in systematic form.³⁷

Lossky sharpens the Trinitarian dimension, but here Photius must speak first. The Mystagogy provides the primary Byzantine theological argument concerning the Father's monarchy and the Spirit's hypostatic procession. Lossky's critique of the Filioque may then be used as a twentieth-century trajectory of Orthodox appropriation rather than as a substitute for Photian theology. This ordering also clarifies the distinction required throughout the article: the canonical-symbolic prohibition of altering the Creed and the dogmatic assessment of the Spirit's eternal relation to the Son overlap historically, but they are not identical questions.³⁸

Schmemmann's liturgical theology offers a further, explicitly constructive trajectory. Because the Creed is confessed within the worshipping assembly, its preservation may be interpreted as concerning the Church's common doxological voice and not merely the integrity of a documentary formula. This is a fruitful liturgical re-appropriation of the Horos, but it should be described as such:

³⁶ Georges Florovsky, 1987.

³⁷ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), sections on Trinitarian theology, ecclesiology, and the Filioque controversy.

³⁸ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 1979.

Schmemmann is not a direct historical witness to the reception of 879–880, and the synod itself does not articulate Schmemmann's later liturgical ecclesiology.³⁹

Zizioulas provides another distinctive trajectory through his communion-oriented ecclesiology. His categories make it possible to ask how primacy and synodality serve communion in the apostolic faith. They should not, however, be treated as the normative or exhaustive Orthodox interpretation of 879–880. Read with this qualification, Zizioulas allows the synod to function as a historical case capable of theological re-appropriation without collapsing ninth-century evidence into a twentieth-century ontology of communion.⁴⁰

Ware and Stăniloae represent still other modes of appropriation. Ware situates Photius and the Filioque within the wider narrative of the divergence of East and West, while Stăniloae's dogmatic theology places Revelation, Tradition, the Holy Spirit, and ecclesial communion within a broader theological synthesis. Neither should be made a direct witness to a uniform modern reception of the council. Their value lies in showing how themes associated with 879–880 can be located within different Orthodox theological projects.⁴¹

The distinction between direct reception and theological re-appropriation is therefore decisive. Dvornik, Grumel, Polidori, the conciliar editions, commemorative material, and studies explicitly addressing 879–880 belong principally to the first category. Florovsky, Meyendorff, Lossky, Schmemmann, Zizioulas, Ware, and Stăniloae belong principally to the second insofar as their broader categories are used to illuminate the event. Calling these 'selected

³⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 13–35.

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 123–143.

⁴¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 51–80; Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 37–60.

trajectories' avoids the misleading impression that they constitute a single reception, a unified school, or a universally normative Orthodox theory.⁴²

Photius himself must occupy a position prior to both categories. He is neither merely an object of later reception nor simply one modern theological trajectory among others. His *Mystagogy* and correspondence belong to the primary theological dossier of the controversy. Bringing his voice more fully into the argument prevents the council from being interpreted chiefly through Dvornik or twentieth-century theologians and allows the distinction between Photian pneumatology, conciliar textual evidence, and later Orthodox appropriation to remain visible.⁴³

The theology of memory proposed here is consequently a qualified one. Historical recollection reconstructs events from sources; ecclesial reception recognizes and remembers events within the Church's continuing confession; constructive theology asks what those received events may disclose today. These three acts are related but not interchangeable. Dvornik's source criticism can correct polemical memory, while Florovsky, Lossky, Schmemmann, Zizioulas, and others can illuminate later theological meanings; neither operation should be mistaken for the literal content of the *Horos*.

The synod also challenges contemporary Orthodox self-understanding. It cannot be invoked only as a weapon against Roman centralization. If 879–880 is truly a witness to conciliarity, then Orthodox churches must receive its ecclesiological logic internally. Synodality must be more than an anti-papal argument; it must shape Orthodox practice in matters of authority, reception, autocephaly, diaspora, and inter-Orthodox communion. The council cannot be applied mechanically to every modern dispute, but it offers a grammar:

⁴² For the distinction between direct historical reception and theological appropriation in the present article, compare Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, 279–432; Polidori, “Photius and the Councils,” 35–66; Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 51–80; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 1, 37–60.

⁴³ Photius, 1988.

communion is preserved through fidelity to the common confession, mutual recognition, and conciliar discernment.

In these selected trajectories, 879–880 may be understood as a conciliar memory of fidelity within communion. The formulation is intentionally receptional rather than historical: it does not claim that every element of a modern theology of Tradition, liturgy, communion, and primacy is contained explicitly in the ninth-century acts. It claims instead that Orthodox theology has found in the synod a historically concrete locus through which those themes can be articulated and tested.

V. The Preservation of Tradition as Ecclesial Healing

The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 can be received theologically as a witness to the conjunction of doctrinal continuity and ecclesial healing. Historically, the council restored communion and reaffirmed the inherited Symbol; constructively, Orthodox theology may interpret that conjunction as evidence that reconciliation is not achieved by treating doctrine as indifferent. This conclusion should not be expanded into the stronger historical claim that the synod itself formulated a complete therapeutic ecclesiology.

The Symbol protects the Symbol without subtraction, addition, or alteration. The theological importance of this act is considerable, but its scope must remain clear. The Creed is a condensed, authoritative conciliar and liturgical confession of the apostolic faith; it is not identical with the totality of Holy Tradition. Tradition also embraces Scripture, worship, sacramental and ascetical life, the Fathers, episcopal succession, iconography, and the Church's continuing discernment in the Holy Spirit. The preservation of the Creed is therefore one privileged mode by which the Church guards her continuity, not the sole definition of that continuity.⁴⁴

In subsequent Orthodox reception, 879–880 can thus be read as holding continuity and communion together. Such a reading avoids two opposite

⁴⁴ Georges Florovsky, 1987.

reductions: a traditionalism that treats fidelity as textual immobility, and an adaptationism that detaches development from the received apostolic confession. The synod's historical action becomes the locus for a later theological synthesis, but the distinction between event and appropriation remains explicit.

The same qualification applies to the language of healing. The ninth-century crisis involved persons, jurisdictions, papal and imperial policies, the Bulgarian question, and doctrinal controversy. The restoration of Photius, renewed communion, and reaffirmation of the Creed belong to the historical settlement. To describe these elements together as an ecclesial act of healing is a legitimate theological interpretation of the settlement, not a neutral paraphrase of every historical source.

For this reason, the synod may be read as a model of conciliar healing. It does not erase the past, but reorders it within the truth of the Church. Ecclesial memory does not mean refusing to remember conflict. It means remembering conflict in such a way that the Church discerns what in it belongs to truth and what belongs to distortion. Dvornik's historical reconstruction is valuable precisely because it helps to distinguish the event from the later legend.⁴⁵ Theologically, this distinction allows the Church to remember 879–880 not as a weapon of resentment, but as a witness to restored communion.

The preservation of Tradition is therefore not merely negative. It is not only the refusal of addition. It is the positive act of remaining in the same apostolic confession. The Horos defends the Creed because the Creed gives the Church her recognizable form. Without the received confession, communion becomes undefined; without communion, confession becomes isolated assertion. The synod shows that Orthodox ecclesiology requires both: the truth confessed and the communion in which that truth is received.

This has direct implications for the contemporary theology of reception. Reception is not passive acceptance after the fact, but neither is it a quasi-judicial procedure that generates conciliar authority. It is better described as the Church's recognition and manifestation that a conciliar act belongs to the apostolic faith she

⁴⁵ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, 279–305, 398–432.

already confesses. Florovsky's theology of conciliar authority and Hilarion's historical analysis of ecumenical reception support this more cautious formulation.⁴⁶

The relation between Tradition and development must be handled with the same precision. Orthodox theology does not deny the historical clarification, defense, and articulation of doctrine. What the Horos directly rejects is subtraction from, addition to, or alteration of the received Symbol through another imposed rule of faith. The wider distinction between legitimate development and illegitimate doctrinal mutation is a theological conclusion drawn from the event in light of the broader Tradition, not a complete theory set out by the synod itself.

The Filioque remains paradigmatic precisely because two dimensions have to be kept together without being confused. At the canonical-symbolic level, 879–880 protects the integrity of the common Creed. At the Trinitarian level, Photius's *Mystagogy* supplies the more developed argument concerning the Spirit's procession and the monarchy of the Father. Later Orthodox theologians, including Lossky and Meyendorff, receive and reformulate these concerns in different ways. The article therefore refuses both to collapse the Filioque into a merely textual problem and to read a complete later pneumatology directly out of the Horos.⁴⁷

In selected modern Orthodox trajectories, the enduring significance of 879–880 lies in precisely this combination of fidelity and living appropriation. Tradition is living, but its life is fidelity; fidelity, however, is not exhausted by preserving the wording of a single text. The synod becomes theologically significant within the wider Spirit-bearing life of the Church, in which conciliar confession, Scripture, worship, patristic theology, sacramental communion, and ecclesial discernment belong together.

The ecclesial memory of 879–880 may also be given a liturgical interpretation because the Creed is confessed by the worshipping Church. Schmemmann's categories make this connection particularly fruitful: the Symbol is not merely read as a historical document but proclaimed within the Church's

⁴⁶ Hilarion (Alfeyev), 2003.

⁴⁷ Photius, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell, 1987.

prayer. This is a modern liturgical re-appropriation of the synod's concern for the Creed, and its status as constructive theology should remain explicit.⁴⁸

The Synod of 879–880 may therefore be understood as a defense of the Church's liturgical catholicity. Catholicity is not an administrative extension, but the fullness of the same faith confessed in every local Church. The unaltered Creed is the sign that the Churches do not merely coexist, but share one confession. In this sense, the synod's prohibition of alteration is an act of communion: it protects the common voice by which the Church recognizes herself in every place.

This qualified ecclesiology remains relevant for contemporary Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. Ravenna, Chieti, Serving Communion, and Alexandria demonstrate the continuing effort to relate primacy and synodality within ecclesial communion while taking the shared first millennium seriously. The Synod of 879–880 can illuminate this discussion as a complex historical case, but contemporary dialogue should not be presented as merely restating an ecclesiology already formulated in full by the ninth-century council.⁴⁹

The synod also offers a challenge to Orthodox theology itself. If Tradition is preserved as communion, then fidelity to Tradition cannot be reduced to slogans of anti-Latin identity. The Orthodox Church must receive 879–880 not merely as a proof-text against others, but as a summons to live synodally, to preserve unity truthfully, and to resist both authoritarian and centrifugal distortions of ecclesial life. The memory of the synod is authentic only when it becomes a criterion of Orthodox self-examination.

Thus, the preservation of Tradition in 879–880 is inseparable from ecclesial healing. The Church heals by remembering rightly; she remembers rightly by returning to the Creed; she returns to the Creed by recognizing that the faith is not hers to alter but hers to confess. The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 remains theologically powerful because it witnesses to this order: memory, confession, communion, healing.

⁴⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, 1986.

⁴⁹ Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium, 2006.

Conclusion

The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880 is best understood through a disciplined distinction between historical evidence, subsequent Orthodox reception, and constructive theological appropriation. The Greek Horos stands at the centre of the historical and theological discussion because it explicitly protects the inherited Symbol from subtraction, addition, and alteration. In subsequent Orthodox consciousness, this act has become a powerful witness to doctrinal fidelity within ecclesial communion. Yet the preservation of the Creed must be located within the wider reality of Holy Tradition rather than made equivalent to it.⁵⁰

Modern historiography, especially since Dvornik and Grumel and more recently Polidori, makes it possible to read 879–880 beyond inherited confessional simplifications. It also requires restraint: the historical synod should not be made to bear a complete modern ecclesiology of reception, primacy, pentarchy, or eucharistic communion. Those categories belong to subsequent theological interpretation and should be identified as such. Photius's *Mystagogy* and correspondence further deepen the primary theological foundation by distinguishing his Trinitarian argument from the canonical-symbolic problem of altering the Creed.⁵¹

The article has therefore spoken not of a single 'modern Orthodox reception' but of selected trajectories. Florovsky, Meyendorff, Lossky, Schmemmann, Zizioulas, Ware, and Stăniloae illuminate different dimensions of Tradition, pneumatology, worship, communion, and authority, but they do not constitute one undifferentiated Orthodox system. Their categories allow 879–880 to be re-appropriated theologically while the primary historical evidence remains analytically distinct.

⁵⁰ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), section Concilium Constantinopolitanum 879–880, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Horos, Greek text, lines 17–40.

⁵¹ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, xi–xii, 279–305, 398–432.

Within these qualifications, 879–880 remains a significant conciliar memory for Orthodox theology. Its reception can call the Church to doctrinal integrity without triumphalism, synodality without relativism, primatial service without unilateralism, and communion without indifference to the apostolic confession. Reception, on this account, is not the source that makes a council true; it is the ecclesial recognition that the truth confessed in a council belongs to the faith the Church has received. The continuing theological value of 879–880 lies precisely in this interaction of history, confession, memory, and communion.

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