

# An English view of the "filoque" question, as bearing upon the reunion movement

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Revue internationale de théologie = Internationale theologische Zeitschrift = International theological review**

Band (Jahr): **5 (1897)**

Heft 17

PDF erstellt am: **09.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-403370>

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## AN ENGLISH VIEW OF THE “FILIOQUE” QUESTION, AS BEARING UPON THE REUNION MOVEMENT.

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The late movement in Western Christendom, of which the Encyclical *Satis cognitum* and the inquiry into Anglican orders are among the most recent developments, indicates a strong and widely extending desire to put an end, if possible, to the miserable schism between the Roman and Anglican communions. For many years past there have been great searchings of heart, and a sincere longing for reunion, if only it could be brought about on a sound basis, without the surrender of vital principles. And the temper in which the subject has been approached of late is in marked and happy contrast with that by which, at least on our side of the water, it was commonly handled in years gone by. Our passions are no longer inflamed by excited declamations about the idolatry of the Mass, or by angry narratives of persecution; and the recent utterances of the Holy Father breathe a spirit of love and gentleness which calls for grateful recognition.

Yet, these hopeful conditions notwithstanding, the prospect of outward corporate union between the Churches of Rome and England seems to be as distant as ever. For Rome still maintains the recognition of her supremacy as the essential basis of reunion; and England finds in this demand an insuperable bar to progress towards the end so earnestly longed for by both sides.

Let it not be thought that we in England are determined to surrender nothing: we do not pretend to speak with

authority, but we believe that, for so great a benefit, most English churchmen would be willing to surrender much, even though they might feel that they had a right to maintain it, if the question were only one of personal or even national dignity: indeed we think that many an Englishman, whether priest or layman, would prefer an ultimate appeal in spiritual matters to an ecclesiastical court, such as would no doubt result from corporate reunion with Rome, to that of an appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Few would be personally affected by the change, but many would feel it a vast relief that matters of faith—such as those involved in the cases of *Gorham v. the Bishop of Exeter*, and *Flavell v. Cook*—were to be decided by an ecclesiastical and not by a secular court.

Unspeakably valuable would be the abolition of rival claims to Episcopal jurisdiction and all that flows therefrom, and of the misery of separate Eucharist and prayer. We should be no longer exposed to the extreme and contrariant variety in doctrine and ritual which is the scoff and wonder of our opponents, and the sorrow of Churchmen. What a gain it would be to have an end put to the schism in regard to religious ministrations in hospitals, unions, and prisons, and especially in the religious education of our children in elementary schools: how delightful the idea, how grand the effect, of working side by side in missions among the heathen, instead of perplexing them by the spectacle of non-recognition, and even of quarrels in separate missions both professedly Christian.

Yet, with all this before our minds, we cannot, we dare not, admit the Roman claims. If it were indeed the will of our Divine Lord that the Bishop of Rome should be His viceroy on earth, holding the supremacy over the whole visible Church, there would of course be nothing more to be said: the claim must be accepted with thankfulness and submission, whatever consequences might ensue. But if, after a candid and exhaustive examination, we fail to discover any indication that this is His will, we are not bound to admit—we should be wrong to admit a claim which (whatever its apparent advantages) has been the parent of grievous schism in time past, and the admission of which on our part would only aggravate the evil.

The readers of the *Revue internationale* need not be reminded of the existence and claims of the Orthodox Churches of the East, including that of Russia, an empire which is said to comprise one sixth of the territorial surface of the globe; or of the rivalry between the Patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople; or how charges of aggression, innovation, or defect were made from time to time by either party against the other; or how the Church of Rome at length adopted the addition of *Filioque*, which had gradually crept into use in the West, notwithstanding its insertion had been forbidden by one of her own Patriarchs, Leo III.

It matters little under which Pope, or at what precise date, this clause was formally adopted into the Roman Creed. St. Antony says that Photius charged Pope Nicholas I. with accepting the addition; but Vossius shews that this is at least questionable (*De Tribus Symb. XXXIV and XXXV*); and Dr Döllinger attributed its formal insertion to Pope Benedict VIII., on the demand of the Emperor, in 1014. It was at any rate made one count in the accusation of Cerularius a few years later, that he “had cut out from the Symbol the Holy Spirit’s Procession from the Son” (*Labbé and Cossart’s Concilia, XI. col. 1362, 1460, Ed. Ven.*); and the admission of the clause was thence forth demanded as one chief condition of continued inter-communion. The Patriarch Cerularius however remained obdurate, and at length that horrible sentence of excommunication was laid upon the Altar of the great Church of Constantinople by the legates of Leo IX. in 1054.

Nearly four centuries passed away, in the course of which several efforts were made to bring about a reunion, but they were not attended with any lasting effect. The fortunes of the Eastern empire meanwhile step by step declined, and in their extremity one last attempt was made to effect a union, and so to obtain the help of the West against the Turks.

A great Council, which was opened at Ferrara, and after a time transferred to Florence, was attended on behalf of the Greeks by the Emperor and Patriarch in person, as well as by their leading theologians and by representatives of the other Patriarchs of the East. But Rome abated nothing of her claims, and it was insisted on her behalf, especially by Andrew of Rhodes and John of Forolivium, evidently with the sanction

of the Pope and of the whole Roman party, that it was lawful for the Roman Church “to explain and promulge” the *Filioque*: that it was not necessary that others should be invited to a Council in order to effect this; but that the Roman Church “alone” might do it, provided the Pope were present. (Sessions VII. and X. Labbé and Cossart’s Conc. XVIII. cols. 120, 125, 132, 168.)

Month after month passed by in weary debate, until nearly a year and a half had elapsed since the Greeks left Constantinople. Then, homesick and worn out by this long delay, their Patriarch lying sick unto death, deserted by two of their leaders, Bessarion and Isidore, and distressed by absolute want, the Greeks began to give way, and, with the exception of Mark of Ephesus, at length agreed to the terms demanded by Rome; the doctrine of the *Filioque* and its addition to the symbol were alike accepted, and the supremacy<sup>1)</sup> of the Roman Pontif was acknowledged in ample terms. The union was proclaimed with jubilation on July 6, 1439, and the Council was dissolved. But in the East and in Russia the people—clergy and laity alike—would have nothing to do with the false union, which was denounced in various local synods; and from that day to this the schism has been persistently maintained.

Within 100 years from the close of this Council Western Christendom was convulsed in the throes of that mighty struggle which is called the Reformation. It is not our purpose to review the causes of which the Reformation was the outcome, but we are convinced that the exorbitant claims of the Papacy contributed as much as any thing else to the miseries and schisms which followed. For those claims were inconsistent with the liberty of national Churches, and a barrier to needful reforms. Hence arose a wide-spread revolt against them, and with it a revolt against authority in general, and the rise of that fatal claim that every man may believe and do as it may seem good to him.

Out of this mighty struggle the Church of England emerged with the recovery of much that was Catholic but not Roman,

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<sup>1)</sup> ἀρχή, primatus: explained to signify that the Pope is “Petri successor, Christi vicarius, et judicet et regat catholicam Ecclesiam” (col. 514),.... omnes patriarchas parere ejus voluntati, &c. (col. 515, 527).

but with the loss of much that perhaps might have been a great deal better retained. And she failed to recover the Nicene Symbol in its pure and authorized form; for the word *holy* as a characteristic of the Church was omitted, and the *Filioque* was retained. There seems to be some ground for thinking that the omission of *holy* was due to a printer's or writer's error, and with regard to the *Filioque*, we fail to discover any indication that it was advisedly retained. Churchmen had become thoroughly used to it, for it had been sung in the Symbol at least from the time of Archbishop Theodore, who held the Council of Haethfeld, in 680 <sup>1)</sup>, and it seems to have been accepted without question as part of the Creed. We have turned to the Parker Society's Publications in the hope that we might gather some information from them; but we find that in all the 53 vols. issued, the index to which forms an 8vo of 811 pages, the subject of the *addition* is not even noticed. There are a few meagre references to the *doctrine* of the Procession in the writings of Bullinger (a Swiss), Hutchinson, Philpot, T. Rogers, and Whittaker; of whom the last two speak of the Procession from the Father only as an error of the later Greeks, and Rogers, writing on the 5<sup>th</sup> Article, adduces the Nicene Creed as a testimony in favour of Procession from the Son! Bullinger teaches a twofold procession, one eternal, the other temporal, but Rogers says that this is "an error of Peter Lombard, uncontrolled hitherto, and therefore well liked by the Papists" (p. 74). Upon the whole we gather that, throughout the long period of the Reformation, the subject of the Procession was not called in question, and the Nicene Creed was accepted simply as it had been accepted in England for some 900 years.

But if the *Filioque* were left in the Creed at the Reformation through simple inadvertence, it does not follow that the Church of England is bound to retain it for ever: nor does a prescription of even 900 years authorize the addition, first introduced we hardly know when and where, then rejected by Leo III., but subsequently insisted upon by his successors,

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<sup>1)</sup> It is remarkable that this council, which acknowledged *Spiritum sanctum procedentem ex Patre et Filio inenarrabiliter*, should have been presided over by Theodore of Tarsus. But Theodore was sent by Rome. What had been his antecedents?

in defiance of the prohibition by the Œcumenical Synods of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and of the repeatedly-urged challenge of the Orthodox Churches.

We ask then—and we put the question especially to the conscience of the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England—Is it not her duty to remove this blot from the Creed which she calls the Nicene? To this question we think there can be but one answer, and that in the affirmative. We urge that it is her duty to do this, in loyalty to Christ, in charity to the brotherhood, and in furtherance of a return to external union. “We confess our faults”, said the Abbé Portal a few weeks ago, “and in confession find the road to unity.” He was speaking of the constitution of the Church, in which things Divine are ministered by human agents; but the sentiment is applicable with even greater force to the case before us.

The voluntary removal of the *Filioque* from the Book of Common Prayer would be a really practical step, and a step of vast importance, in the recovery of Intercommunion, so far as the Orthodox Churches of the East are concerned; and, though it would be little liked by Rome, it would scarcely render the gap between England and Rome wider than it unhappily is at present.

And let it be noted that it is not *explanation* of the *Filioque* that we want. No explanation, whether it be on the ground that some early Fathers used *διὰ*, or that the *Filioque* clause includes the temporal mission as well as the eternal Procession, will be satisfactory either to ourselves, or to the authorities of the Orthodox Churches. To use the language of the Patriarchs in their letter to the Nonjurors (d. April 1718), they would allow neither *διὰ* nor *ἐκ*, and would receive none who add the least syllable, either by way of insertion, commentary, or explication; and they demanded that if any word had been inserted, “it must be strook out, and the Creed continue unaltered”. (The Orthodox and the Nonjurors, by G. Williams, 1868.) Without the removal of the addition, union with the Holy Eastern Churches would be hopeless, however sincere may be the amenities that pass between us. Mutual friendliness is most encouraging, but it is not union.

But, even though no thorough union with the Holy East should seem likely to result from the removal of the *Filioque*,

we still desire it, and we desire it earnestly. We are not so fast bound to the Form of the Nicene Creed as it stands in the Book of Common Prayer, that we must decline to entertain any proposal for its reconsideration, simply because it has received the imprimatur of the Reformed Church of England in that Form. As Catholics in intention and will, we have a right to ask that our great Creed shall be maintained for us as the Œcumenical Synods delivered it and handed it on, with an express prohibition against any change either by omission or addition.

We are indeed very sensible of the difficulty attending any proposed alteration of the Book of Common Prayer; a difficulty owing in part to the connexion of the Church of England with the State, and in a still greater degree to the fear that, if touched in one portion, a clamour might be raised for further changes, with results that might be disastrous. But the Prayer Book has been touched with far less reason within the last thirty years. The Table of Lessons has been entirely remodelled, and the Order of week day prayer has been much modified. Again, the Canons of 1603 have been twice altered by authority within the last few years—once in regard to sponsors, and again in regard to the hours for marriage. We think, therefore, that if only the Bishops and Clergy were really in earnest about this matter, a way to surmount the difficulty would be found. Convocation might at least take it in hand, and the subject would be well worth consideration at the forthcoming Conference of Bishops in communion with the Church of England. To make appeal to Primitive Antiquity, and yet to maintain the *Filioque* is an inconsistency with which we trust the Church of England will not be much longer chargeable.

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Since the last few lines were written, the inquiry referred to at the commencement of this Paper has been brought to a conclusion, and it is adverse to the Validity of Anglican Orders. Had the inquiry been conducted by the Orthodox Churches of the East, the decision would have been looked for with far deeper interest, not to say anxiety; and it would have been felt that at least the Eastern Churches were not judging



in their own cause. The case is very different with Rome: the particular objection now put forward—Defect in the Form—has been considered and answered over and over again in the last 80 years, and we simply rest as we were. But the gap is still further widened between Rome and ourselves. Reunion with Rome is now of course hopeless—indeed it was not possible before, on the conditions demanded. Yet, as was pointed out in the *Guardian* and in the *Church Times* in August 1896, this is the less to be regretted because, if it could have been brought about, such a step, so far from being taken in the direction towards the Reunion of the whole of Catholic Christendom, would have retarded that Reunion immeasurably, because we must have again, with our eyes open, deliberately accepted the addition of the *Filioque*.

This addition, at first disowned by Pope Leo III., but afterwards found to be a convenient instrument for the assertion of Rome's supremacy, has been ever since demanded as a condition of intercommunion; and to accept it is an admission of the right of Rome to alter and enlarge the Symbol at her pleasure, and by herself alone, without the consent of other Churches.

G. B. HOWARD.

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