

TRDL7061: Modern Orthodox Theologians
Orthodox dogmatic theology: The Filioque:
Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae

Orthodox dogmatic theology has often been articulated in moments of crisis. The great Christological debates of the early Church are a good case in point. According to the conventional Orthodox perspective, heresy arises and creates problems that are then redressed through the formulation of orthodox doctrine. Traditionally, the original state of theology is presumed to be orthodoxy and heresy is therefore portrayed as a falling away from orthodoxy (famously, this perspective can be found in the first pages of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*). A few recent Orthodox theologians, warming to Walter Bauer's *Heresy and orthodoxy in earliest Christianity*, have begun to think that the background from which heresy emerges is, rather than orthodoxy as such, a 'pre-critical' stage of theological reflection. But what is in any case generally still agreed is that Orthodox theology is generally reserved and that Orthodox theologians as a rule prefer keeping silent to speaking out.

Christology is not the only theological topic to be debated in this way. Orthodox theologians have treated the question of the origin, and mode of origination, within the Trinity of the Holy Spirit in a similar way. Controversies between Eastern and Western theologians about the precise role that God the Son plays in the origin of the Holy Spirit date back to the early middle ages. From as early as the fifth century, Latin theologians – perhaps to refute Arian claims that the Son is inferior to the Father – had begun to insist that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son* (in Latin, 'filioque'). By insisting that the Son with the Father is the source of the Holy Spirit, these theologians sought to safeguard the full equality of the Father and the Son. Now the term *filioque* was eventually incorporated into the Latin version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the expanded creed eventually became widely accepted as a matter of tradition in the Latin Christian world. Western theologians, even those like Pope Leo III (died 816) who rejected the modification of the creed, were sympathetic to and even supportive of the theological claims about the Trinity expressed by the *filioque*.

The difference in creedal affirmations about the Spirit led to a difference in theological conceptualisation by the Latins and the Greeks – and even to a difference in how they conceived of their histories, which can be seen in the tendency to magnify the differences between the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers and that of Augustine of Hippo and to evaluate those differences polemically (a tendency that survives to this day). By the time of the Carolingians, and especially during the time of Patriarch Photius the Great (c. 820-93), these differences became the focus of intense controversy about how God is understood. Whilst the western theologians insisted that the Son and the Father are both the source of the Spirit, the eastern theologians on the other hand asserted that the

Father alone is the source of divinity and as such the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. For this reason, the eastern position is sometimes called 'patrimonism' (from the Greek, literally meaning 'Father-only-ism'), in parallel to the term 'filioquism' (from the Latin, literally meaning 'and-the-Son-ism') as used to describe the western position. Eventually, the debate between Latin and Greek theologians developed into a debate between Catholic and Orthodox theologians. Over time, Orthodox opposition to the *filioque* became a stable feature in Byzantine 'Lists of Errors', which are echoed to this day in Orthodox doctrinal theology.

The subtle, but important, difference in understanding of the Trinity that is debated in these terms is in terms of classical Christian doctrine the major dividing point between eastern theology and western theology. Whereas the heritage of Christian orthodoxy links east and west in matters pertaining to Christology, the two groups split over the technical question of how – or from whom – the Holy Spirit proceeds. As such, this divisive issue has tended to be linked by Orthodox theologians to other perceived differences. In other words, many contemporary Orthodox theologians tend to conceive of 'patrimonist' Trinitarian theology as being the node in the network of Orthodox belief and therefore they tend to think of the whole of Orthodoxy as being connected (in one way or another) to denying the *filioque*. By contrast, some Orthodox theologians will maintain that to affirm the *filioque* is necessarily to affirm a network of other beliefs; this network is, basically, Roman Catholic Christianity and other forms of western 'filioquist' Trinitarian theology.

In this unit, we consider the works of two recent Orthodox theologians as regards the *filioque*. First will be the Franco-Russian lay theologian Vladimir Lossky (1903-58), then the Romanian priest and professor Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-93).

Vladimir Nikolayevich Lossky (8 June 1903 – 7 Feb. 1958), son of a prominent professor of philosophy, lived with his family in St Petersburg until they were exiled from Russia in 1920. Like others of his generation, Lossky's initial education was in Russia, which he continued in Prague; unlike others, Lossky was a student of the mediaeval west – particularly Meister Eckhart – and carried out his doctoral studies at the Sorbonne. He spent the rest of his life in Paris where he taught, and eventually served as Dean, at the Institut Orthodoxe Français de Paris Saint-Denys and was a highly visible member of the Russian Orthodox community who remained directly accountable to the Patriarch of Moscow (despite the political difficulties that were entailed by loyalty to the Church under the Soviet regime).

Lossky's twin interests in mysticism and negative theology, already evident in the doctoral research on Eckhart, were carried forward in his best-known work: *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (originally published in French in 1944). That study is an important early example of the 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis,' which will consider in greater detail in Unit Four, below. For our purposes at present, what

matters chiefly is that, through the exposition of historical teachings, Lossky sought to provide in systematic form an account of Orthodox theology that retains an organic connection to the experience of the mysteries of Christian life. As regards the Trinity in particular, Lossky's defence of the traditional Orthodox position regarding the Holy Spirit is embedded in an experiential description of the Spirit's participation in the life of the Church. For Lossky, the historical witness of eastern Fathers regarding the procession of the Spirit from the Father alone in itself discloses important facts about the constitution of the Church, such as the sacramental character of the Church, the Church as the reality in which the Spirit is revealed, and the distinction within the co-operative work of salvation that must be observed between the roles of the Son and of the Spirit.

The treatment on the Holy Spirit by Dumitru Stăniloae that we will consider is, at first glance, not as representative of Stăniloae's work as the chapter by Lossky is of Lossky's. Stăniloae (16 Nov. 1903 – 5 Oct. 1993) is relatively unknown, despite being one of the greatest theologians of the Twentieth Century without qualification, primarily because few of his theological contributions have been translated. Some of those writings are unlikely ever to be translated because of their cultural specificity – such as his 1928 dissertation on Dosoftei of Jerusalem, a hugely important churchman in the Romanian principalities of the mid- to late-Seventeenth Century. Another example is Stăniloae's massive translation into Romanian of the *Philokalia*, a collection of monastic and ascetic literature which was seminal for the revival of Orthodox theology in the modern world. Stăniloae was no simple antiquarian: in addition to translating the contents of the *Philokalia*, he augmented it with other comparable literature which he judge to be pertinent to contemporary Romania. This work was an extension of his early research into Gregory Palamas in 1929 and 1930. The practical and ascetical experience of the Byzantine heritage is a persistent theme in his theological writings. Stăniloae followed up these academic interests through his involvement, from 1950, in a movement called 'Rugul aprins' ('The Burning Bush'), which brought intellectuals and academics into fruitful contact with monastics. But as a result of intensifying political circumstances, he was arrested in 1958 and after a trial incarcerated until 1963.

However, Stăniloae brought his profound knowledge of historical and ascetical theology to bear in contemporary ecumenical conversation. Unsurprisingly his characteristic emphasis on monasticism and Byzantine literature has given Stăniloae's ecumenical theology a distinctive flavour. In his comments on the Second Vatican Council, Stăniloae draws on the charismatic and communitarian heritage of Orthodox asceticism and with reference to those themes re-asserts a classical claim that differences in the ecclesiastical structures of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches are rooted in differences in Orthodox and Roman Catholic conceptualizations of God. But rather than a simple assertion of Orthodox superior and derogatory comparisons to the Catholic position, Stăniloae marshalls historical

(including biblical) evidence before going on to explain how the Holy Spirit on the Orthodox understanding works to create that meaningful whole that is the Church. The closest he comes to rehearsing standard polemic is when Stăniloae insists that the Holy Spirit is not to be seen as 'merely an impersonal milieu' – which is an allusion to the Orthodox perception that the *Filioque* de-personalizes the Holy Spirit by reducing the Spirit to a relationship between the Father and the Son.

Although Stăniloae does not shy away from making honest evaluations, his treatment of the *Filioque* is nested in his account of Orthodox Trinitarian thinking, which is basically positive and which integrates key features from Stăniloae's work as a whole.

Vladimir Lossky

Source:

'Economy of the Holy Spirit', in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957: 156-173.

Other major publications:

In the Image and Likeness of God, London: Mowbrays, 1975.

The Vision of God, Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1963.

with Leonid Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons*, Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1982.

Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart, Paris: Vrin, 2002.

Secondary literature:

Laats, A., *Doctrines of the Trinity in Eastern and Western Theologies*, Frankfurt am Mainz and New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Papanikolaou, A., *Being with God: Trinity, apophaticism, and divine-human communion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

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Id., 'Eastern Orthodox Theology,' in Ford, D. and Muers, R., eds. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, third edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005: 572-588.

Dumitru Stăniloae

Source:

'The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church,' in *Theology and the Church*, trans. and ed. R. Barringer, new edition, Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1997: 45-71.

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The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, trans. I. Ionita and R. Barringer, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994-; N.B. two volumes have appeared so far, corresponding to Vol. I of the original Romanian: *Revelation and knowledge of the triune God* (1994) and *The World: Creation and deification* (2002).

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