

Different Orthodox Perspectives
on the Ecclesiological Ramifications
of the *Filioque*:
Trinitarian Ecclesiology and
Eucharistic Ecclesiology

Viorel Coman

Abstract

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By examining the discourse of Orthodox theologians concerning the ecclesiological consequences of the *filioque*, this article does not revive or justify polemics from the past, but adopts an exploratory and descriptive method. The article attempts to identify one of the many factors that have influenced Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae, on the one hand, and Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas, on the other, to adopt different positions when approaching the *filioque* as an ecclesiological question. Coman argues that the variety of approaches to the issue are tied up with the way in which each theologian has articulated his own ecclesiological synthesis between Christology and pneumatology. When the synthesis between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in the life of the Church is formed on the basis of the doctrine of the inner Trinity, as in the case of Lossky and Stăniloae – two main architects of a Trinitarian ecclesiology – the *filioque* is seen to affect the doctrine of the Church profoundly. On the other hand, when the synthesis between Christology and pneumatology is not grounded in the doctrine of the inner Trinity but in the eucharistic event, as is the case with Florovsky and Zizioulas – two leading proponents of a eucharistic ecclesiology – the *filioque* is not perceived as a central ecclesiological question.



The anti-*filioque* rhetoric of Orthodox theologians has raged for centuries but the question of the ecclesiological ramifications of the Western Trinitarian model has only emerged in the pre-Vatican II period.¹ Due to the hostility and rivalry that marked the relationships between the East and the West at that time, a significant number of Orthodox theologians, including Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) and Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993), began to argue that the *filioque* had a negative impact upon the trajectory of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church. The ecclesiological differences between the two traditions, including the primacy of the pope, were conceived by Lossky and Stăniloae as dependent upon the crucial question of the Spirit’s eternal procession. Without minimizing the importance of the pneumatological controversy, other Orthodox theologians, including George Florovsky (1893–1979) and John Zizioulas (b. 1931), have adopted a more lenient approach to the question of the *filioque* as the *radix omnium malorum* in the relationship between the East and the West. In the last few decades there has been impressive ecumenical progress, which has sought a lasting solution to the issue of the *filioque*. This ecumenical shift has encouraged theologians of both traditions to put aside the polemics of the past and reconsider the harsh criticism that arose out of misunderstandings, oversimplifications, and prejudices. Today, apart from members of very conservative circles, no contemporary Orthodox theologian would continue to argue that the *filioque* constitutes

¹ See Viorel Coman, “Dumitru Stăniloae on the *Filioque*: The Trinitarian Relationship between the Son and the Spirit and Its Relevance for the Ecclesiological Synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49, no. 4 (2014): 553–576; Radu Bordeianu, “The Contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae’s Ecclesiology to Ecumenism and Society,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 62, no. 1–2 (2010): 55–85; Robert Lethman, “The Trinity between East and West,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3, no. 1 (2009): 42–56; Matthias Haudel, “The Relation between Trinity and Ecclesiology as an Ecumenical Challenge and Its Consequences for the Understanding of Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 90, no. 3 (2001): 401–408; Avery Dulles, “The *Filioque*: What is at Stake?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1995): 31–47; and André de Halleux, “Orthodoxie et Catholicisme: du personnalisme en pneumatologie,” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 6, no. 1 (1975): 3–30.

‘the root cause’ of all ecclesiological differences between the East and the West.

By examining the discourse of Orthodox theologians concerning the ecclesiological consequences of the *filioque*, this article does not intend to revive or justify the polemics of the past. My method here is more exploratory and descriptive. I will not attempt to prove that one Orthodox position is right and the other one is wrong, but will simply identify one factor that has influenced Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae, on the one hand, and Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas, on the other, to embrace different positions when approaching the *filioque* as an ecclesiological question. In doing so, the article argues that these approaches to the issue at stake are intimately tied up with the way in which each theologian has articulated his own ecclesiological synthesis between Christology and pneumatology. When the synthesis between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in the life of the Church is formed on the basis of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, as in the case of Lossky and Stăniloae – two main architects of a Trinitarian ecclesiology – the *filioque* is seen as affecting the doctrine of the Church in a profound way. When, on the other hand, the synthesis between Christology and pneumatology is not grounded in the doctrine of the inner Trinity but in the eucharistic event, as in the case of Florovsky and Zizioulas – two leading proponents of a eucharistic ecclesiology – the *filioque* is not perceived as a central ecclesiological question.

Part One:

The Filioque and the Doctrine of the Church from the Perspective of Trinitarian Ecclesiology

In the past century Orthodox theology developed two distinctive ecclesiological models, which are difficult to reconcile: Trinitarian ecclesiology and eucharistic ecclesiology. Whereas the first ecclesiological model emphasizes the Trinity as the essential foundation of the doctrine of the Church, the second identifies the Church primarily with the eucharistic