

Pastoral Letter of the Ukrainian Catholic Hierarchy in Canada to the Clergy, Religious, Monastics and Faithful

On the Creed and the *Filioque*

Introduction

In the year 325, some 318 bishops gathered in Nicaea (present-day Turkey) for an ecumenical council to discuss matters of great importance to the Church.

One of their greatest achievements was the definition of the faith, revealed to them by the Holy Spirit, and composed in the form of a creed.

Several years later, in 381, this creed was endorsed by the 150 bishops gathered in a new ecumenical council at Constantinople, notably with a few additions on the Holy Spirit.

We know this creed today as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

This Creed has survived throughout the centuries as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the people of God.

It is an expression of the basic tenants of our faith in the Holy Trinity:

“I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...

“I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God...

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life....”

The Filioque (“... and the Son”)

A comparison of the Creed from the year 325 and the Creed that we pray today will reveal a discrepancy.

You will note in our Divine Liturgy books that the words in the Creed “and the Son” (*filioque* in Latin) are put in brackets. We might ask ourselves why?

This is not a trivial question since our belief in the Holy Trinity lies at the very heart of our faith.

The words “and the Son” were added by some Fathers of the Latin Church in the fourth century. Later, at the end of the sixth century, the Church in Spain added them to the Creed for local usage only, while the majority of the Roman Catholic Church resisted the change. At that time, the Church in Spain was combating Arianism, a heresy that denied that the Son of God was truly God.

In the eighth century, Emperor Charlemagne decreed that “and the Son” be added to the Creed throughout the Frankish Kingdom in the West. Finally, in the eleventh century, Pope Benedict VIII added these words to the Creed throughout the Latin Church.

Eventually, the Ukrainian Catholic Church added “and the Son” to the Creed, but not until the end of the seventeenth century, in order to be more like the Roman Catholic theology and teachings.

The “Filioque” Dispute

It is important to say from the outset that the Eastern and Western Churches proclaim the same faith in the Holy Trinity, that is, that the Holy Trinity is a mystery of unity in diversity, and of diversity in unity.

God is one and, at the same time, God is three: one essence in three persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

However, in the past, the Eastern and Western Churches have emphasized different aspects of what is called “the procession” of the Holy Spirit.

The difference is very technical and obscure, and difficult to understand. Yet, the words “and the Son” resulted in what has come to be known “the *filioque* dispute” and caused much division in the Church throughout the centuries, the consequences of which are felt even today.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

To help us understand somewhat better this difficult notion in the Churches of the East and the West, it is worthwhile to quote here extensively from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph numbers 243–248.

“Before his Passover, Jesus announced the sending of ‘another Paraclete’ (Advocate), the Holy Spirit. At work since creation, having previously ‘spoken through the prophets,’ the Spirit will now be with and in the disciples, to teach them and guide them ‘into all the truth.’ The Holy Spirit is thus revealed as another divine person with Jesus and the Father” (no. 243).

“The eternal origin of the Holy Spirit is revealed in his mission in time. The Spirit is sent to the apostles and to the Church both by the Father in the name of the Son, and by the Son in person, once he had returned to the Father. The sending of the person of the Spirit after Jesus’ glorification reveals in its fullness the mystery of the Holy Trinity” (no. 244).

“The apostolic faith concerning the Spirit was confessed by the second ecumenical council at Constantinople (381): ‘We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.’ By this confession, the Church recognizes the Father as ‘the source and origin of the whole divinity.’ But the eternal origin of the Spirit is not unconnected with the Son’s origin: ‘The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is God, one and equal with the Father and the Son, of the same substance and also of the same nature.... Yet he is not called the Spirit of the Father alone... but the Spirit of both the Father and the Son.’ The Creed of the Church from the Council of Constantinople confesses: ‘With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified’” (no. 245).

“The Latin tradition of the Creed confesses that the Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father *and the Son* (*filioque*).’ The Council

of Florence in 1438 explains: ‘The Holy Spirit is eternally from Father and Son; He has his nature and subsistence at once (*simul*) from the Father and the Son. He proceeds eternally from both as from one principle and through one spiration.... And, since the Father has through generation given to the only-begotten Son everything that belongs to the Father, except being Father, the Son has also eternally from the Father, from whom he is eternally born, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son’” (no. 246).

“The affirmation of the *filioque* does not appear in the Creed confessed in 381 at Constantinople. But Pope St. Leo I, following an ancient Latin and Alexandrian tradition, had already confessed it dogmatically in 447, even before Rome, in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon, came to recognize and receive the Symbol of 381. The use of this formula in the Creed was gradually admitted into the Latin liturgy (between the eighth and eleventh centuries). The introduction of the *filioque* into the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Latin liturgy constitutes moreover, even today, a point of disagreement with the Orthodox Churches” (no. 247).

“At the outset the Eastern tradition expresses the Father’s character as first origin of the Spirit. By confessing the Spirit as he ‘who proceeds from the Father,’ it affirms that he *comes from* the Father *through* the Son. The Western tradition expresses first the consubstantial communion between Father and Son, by saying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son (*filioque*). It says this, ‘legitimately and with good reason,’ for the eternal order of the divine persons in their consubstantial communion implies that the Father, as ‘the principle without principle,’ is the first origin of the Spirit, but also that as Father of the only Son, he is, with the Son, the single principle from which the Holy Spirit proceeds. This legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed” (no. 248).

Spiritual Renewal in the East

At the prompting of certain Roman Pontiffs, most recently time and time again by Pope John Paul II, the Eastern Catholic Churches are currently undergoing a spiritual renewal, aimed at helping them fully realize their identity, so that the Church as a whole may “breathe with two lungs,” that of the East and that of the West.

Recitation of the Creed in its Original Form

Prompted by the Second Vatican Council, and as part of a comprehensive liturgical renewal in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the Bishops of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada have determined that the Creed once again be recited in its original form, that is, without the words “and the Son.”

We do so in full support of the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

We do so in support of the Roman Pontiff, who himself has publicly recited the Creed without the *filioque* on several occasions. In doing so, he gives witness to the Church in general, and to the Ukrainian Catholic Church in particular, that the recitation of the Creed in its original form is without prejudice to the Catholic faith.

We do so also in a greater desire to renew bonds with our Orthodox sisters and brothers, drawing nearer to that day when we may once again be one as commanded by Jesus Himself: “That they may be one, Father, as You are in me and I am in You” (John 17: 21).

Study and Implementation

Change is oftentimes difficult, yet necessary.

We are fully aware that the decision to return to the recitation of the Creed in its original form will be received enthusiastically by some of our faithful who already recite it without the *filioque*; less so by others.

Yet, by taking the time to study and educate ourselves about this particular issue and the many other matters of faith

that affect our daily lives, we are convinced that your relationship with God and one with another will be strengthened and blessed. Faith does matter.

An excellent booklet and accompanying study guide entitled “The Creed and the Holy Trinity,” can help answer questions you may have and help you better understand the changes taking place in this regard. Ask your parish priest or contact the Chancery Office for a copy.

Given in Winnipeg on September 1, 2005

† Michael Bzdel, Archbishop of Winnipeg, Metropolitan for
Ukrainian Catholics in Canada

† Michael Wiwchar, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon

† Severian Yakymyshyn, Eparchial Bishop of New
Westminster

† Lawrence Huculak, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton

† Stephen Chmilar, Eparchial Bishop of Toronto

† David Motiuk, Auxiliary Bishop of Winnipeg

† Basil Filevich, Eparch Emeritus of Saskatoon

† Cornelius Pasichny, Eparch Emeritus of Toronto

