

Nexus of Christian Mysteries: The *Filioque* and its Doctrinal “Life-Significance”

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Abstract

Neither a recapitulation of the Catholic Church’s teaching on the Filioque nor a comprehensive reconstruction of Thomas Aquinas’ theology of the Spirit, this paper is instead a response to several objections raised against Thomas’ defense of the Filioque by the highly-original Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov. Following his patristic predecessors, particularly Augustine of Hippo and Cyril of Alexandria, and the conciliar tradition, Thomas situates the contemplation of the Spirit’s procession within Christology—for He is the Spirit of Christ (see Rom. 8:9). The Christological framing of the Spirit’s procession *a Filio* leavens theological examination of the doctrine’s expansive influence on the understanding of other Christian Mysteries. By examining Matthias Joseph Scheeben’s speculative reflections on the procession of the Spirit as analogous to the creation of Eve and illuminative of the Church as Bride of Christ, Bulgakov’s most damning criticism, that the Filioque is a theologoumenon lacking in “life-significance” is rebutted. Finally, additional avenues of elaborating upon the Spirit’s procession as indivisibly connected to other mysteries of the faith are advanced.

Keywords

Filioque, Thomas Aquinas, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Christology, Holy Spirit

The ecumenical debate on the procession of the Holy Spirit involves far more than different pneumatologies: scriptural hermeneutics, ecclesiology, theological method, and liturgical and spiritual implications. Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), an Orthodox opponent of the *Filioque*, concludes that the doctrine contributes to Trinitarian impersonalism, fails to establish a relationship between the Son and Spirit in eternity, leads to a practical pneumatological subordinationism, and has little to no “life-significance” for the Church universal. A brief history of the controversy will precede Bulgakov’s critique. By

developing a Thomistic response to each of these false accusations, the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son as from a single principle is reaffirmed as a dogmatically taught, theologically defensible, and spiritually fecund insight into the most holy of Christian mysteries.¹ Rather than a weakness, the Christological context for reflection on the Spirit's procession (adopted from Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria and ecumenical councils) is one of the strengths of the Thomistic tradition. The Son's mediatorial role in spiration catalyzes contemplation of analogous mysteries, the Church in particular, revealing procession *a Filio* as life-giving in the Church's doctrine and worship.

Historical Prolegomena

While one could seek to resolve the conflict between Aquinas and Bulgakov without recourse to the long history of the *Filioque controversy*, this history will make possible the identification of key elements of the controversy as well as potential insights for reconciliation.² The Latin tradition of Trinitarian theology begins with Tertullian. He focused on the order of the communication of the divine substance, affirming the monarchy of the Father and the mediatorial role of the Son in the Spirit's procession.³ Hilary of Poitiers, exiled for his opposition to Arians in Gaul, contended that the Spirit's reality and substantiality is due to His having His source in the Father and Son. Ambrose of Milan was the first to explicitly state that "*Spiritus procedit a Patre et Filio.*" Augustine posits in *De Trinitate* several "psychological" analogies before resolving that the best revelation we have of the Holy Spirit's *hypostasis* is the biblical titles, Love and Gift.

Cyril of Alexandria, the hero of Ephesus, is most clear amongst the Greek Fathers in asserting the Son's role in the procession of the Spirit.⁴ The Tractarian, E.B. Pusey, selected Cyril for his series

¹ The scholarship of Giles Emery and Matthew Levering suffice as articulations of Thomistic theology of the Spirit and His procession. Giles Emery, O.P., *Trinity in Aquinas*, (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006); Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016). See note 74 below for dogmatic definitions of Second Lyons and Florence.

² The historical prolegomena is drawn from: A. Edward Sicienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Brian E. Daley, "Revisiting the 'Filioque': Roots and Branches of an Old Debate, Part One" in *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001): 31-62 and "Revisiting the 'Filioque': Part Two: Contemporary Catholic Approaches" 10 (2001): pp. 195-212; and, Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ Daley, "Part One," pp. 37-39.

⁴ Daley argues convincingly that Cyril conceives of the Spirit as the Son's, belonging to Him in the internal and eternal life of God, of the *ousia* of the Son, and substantially

on the Church Fathers because of Cyrils' support for the *Filioque*.⁵ Pusey even included an essay on the *Filioque* in an introduction to the Alexandrian's commentary on John. The Christ-centeredness of Cyril's theological vision contributes to why he describes the Son's mediatorial role.⁶ The Patriarch of Alexandria's indefatigable dedication to the full divinity of the Son led him to adopt as theological loci Johannine verses (John 14:16; 15:26; and, 16:7) that reference the Son sending the Spirit and Pauline pericopes (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:9; and, Phil. 1:19) that identify the Spirit as Christ's own Spirit.⁷

The creedal formula quoted at Ephesus was that of Nicaea—without the interpolations of Constantinople. Only at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), was the formula of First Constantinople recognized as a normative interpretation of Nicaea. The First Council of Constantinople (381), under the leadership of Gregory of Nazianzus, was intentionally agnostic on questions regarding the Spirit's origin and His relationship to the Father and Son: “As a formula of faith,” Brian Daley contends, “the Constantinopolitan Creed is conservative,

from Father and Son (Daley, “Part One,” 44). The reason for the Son's mediatorial role in his full divinity received in being eternally begotten of the Father. The distinction between theology and economy is consistently avoided by Cyril as he tries to unite God's being with His creative and salvific acts, “God acts in history as God is.” Daley, “The Fullness of the Saving God: Cyril of Alexandria and the Holy Spirit” *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, Cap., and Daniel A. Keating (New York: Continuum, 2003.): pp. 147-48. Norman Russel too describes Cyril as the “easiest [Greek Father] to accommodate to the Western position on the *Filioque*” in Norman Russel, *Cyril of Alexandria* (New York: Routledge, 2000): p. 214 n.96. Russel, however, sides with several other modern scholars in concluding that Cyril only attributed a mediatorial role to the Son in the economy. These scholars include, G.C. Berthold, “Cyril of Alexandria and the *Filioque*,” *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989): pp. 143-7; A. de Halleux, “Cyrille, Théodoret et le *Filioque*,” *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 74 (1979): pp. 597-625; and, A. Theodorou, *He christologike horologia kai didaskalia Kyrillou tou Alexandreias kai Theodoretou Kyrou* (Athens: Theoloike Schole Panepistemiou Athenon, 1955).

⁵ Russel, *Cyril of Alexandria*, p. 68, p. 225 n.4.

⁶ Marie-Odile Boulnois instead sides with Daley and Pusey in arguing for Cyril's compatibility with the *Filioque*. The “continuity between economy and theology” and the linking of the Divine persons in a “threefold way” are given by Boulnois as two reasons for Cyril's articulation of a mediatorial role of the Son in spiration. The language of *ek* and *dia* have to be balanced so that the monarchy of the Father and his perfect begetting of his Son (including the ability to spirate) are equally affirmed. Marie-Odile Boulnois, “The Mystery of the Trinity According to Cyril of Alexandria: The Development of the Triad and Its Recapitulation into the Unity of Divinity,” *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, Cap., and Daniel A. Keating (New York: Continuum, 2003.): pp. 106-8. See also *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie. Herméneutique, analyses philosophiques et argumentation théologique*, (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1994). Jonathan Morgan endorses the careful reading of Boulnois in his dissertation, “Circumcision of the Spirit in the Soteriology of Cyril of Alexandria” (PhD diss, Marquette University, 2013, p. 152 n.112, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁷ Daley, “Part One,” pp. 43-44.

biblical, and carefully crafted to be open to a variety of possible pneumatologies. It is marked as much by what it does *not* say as by what it says.”⁸ Daley suggests that First Constantinople may not have been originally intended to be received as ecumenical in the same way that First Nicaea had been.⁹ However, even Nicaea took decades to be received as normative in the Church.¹⁰ The pneumatological elucidations of the Nicene Creed at Constantinople have to be understood through the Cyrillian and Leonine Christological lens of Ephesus and Chalcedon.¹¹ Pneumatology is inseparable from Christology.

Marcus Plested juxtaposes two modern Greek reactions to the early modern and modern history of Eastern Orthodoxy: Christos Yanarras and Stelios Ramphos. For Yanarras and Ramphos alike, Aquinas is the person who represents that which Eastern Orthodoxy most needs to reject or embrace, respectively. Yanarras laments the colonialization of “Hellenism” by a technocratic paradigm which reduces God to an object of dissection.¹² Ramphos blames the dismissal of linear, rational, and logical Aristotelianism by neo-Platonic Hesychasts for the societal and theological stagnation of the Greek East. Through his paradigm-shifting monograph, Plested is able to uncover the initially positive Byzantine reception of Thomas’ thought and its evolution into post-colonial disdain.

Bulgakov and the Procession of the Holy Spirit

Prior to distilling Bulgakov’s critique of Thomas Aquinas’ pneumatology, it is illuminative to examine his own historical overview of the *Filioque* controversy. Bulgakov notes that the economic *Filioque* cannot be disputed because it is clearly revealed in Sacred Scripture. Bulgakov’s insistence that passages in the Church Fathers that appear to advance the *Filioque*, do not, is repeated in his exposition of Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nyssa, and Ephiphanius. The Greek Patristic use of “through” language, culminating in John Damascene, is simply asserted as having “no connection with the Catholic

⁸ Ibid, p. 43

⁹ No Western bishops were invited to Constantinople. By comparison, Emperor Theodosius II, personally invited Augustine to the Council of Ephesus (431), although Augustine was by then already deceased (+August, 28, 430).

¹⁰ Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., “The ‘Arian’ Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered,” in *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): pp. 415-437.

¹¹ Thomas’ interaction with Cyril is found first in his attention to the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon on which Cyril was the largest theological influence, but also in Thomas’ *Contra errores graecorum* in which Cyril is one of the most frequently cited exponents of the *Filioque* doctrine.

¹² Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, pp. 2-4.

Filioque.”¹³ Cyril of Alexandria is particularly vulnerable, Bulgakov cautions, to exploitation by “Filioque partisans.” Cyril “views pneumatology not from within pneumatology itself but from within Christology, and he touches upon the procession of the Holy Spirit only in passing, only with reference to Christology.”¹⁴ Bulgakov accuses Western Christians, Catholics and Protestants alike, of a Christocentrism that stunts their pneumatological speculation. Rather than deny Bulgakov’s accusation, this Cyrillian Christocentric tradition as amplified by Thomas and Thomism is one of the strengths of the *Filioque* doctrine.

Bulgakov rightly understands Augustine’s Trinitarian theology as constructed around the *Filioque*:

The basic idea of Augustine’s pneumatology, i.e., the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father *and* the Son, is not a random episodic idea for him; rather, it is his central idea, which permeates his entire theology, and one cannot diminish this fact with artificial implications. Historically it is even more important to note that Augustine is not alone here, but is the progenitor of the entire Western theology of the procession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Connected to his articulation of the *Filioque*, is Augustine’s “true discovery”: the Trinity is Love.¹⁶ This insight, according to Bulgakov, contributed to Augustine’s ability to explore the interrelations of the hypostases more deeply than Eastern theologians who merely juxtapose the hypostases. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is lauded by Bulgakov as the “most systematic” and “most remarkable” work on the Trinity and the Holy Spirit in the entire Patristic tradition.¹⁷ Yet, for all his renown, Augustine (and Aquinas for that matter) does not, in Bulgakov’s estimation, escape the impersonalism and modalism that plague the West.¹⁸ Bulgakov is not unique in this accusation. Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, Vladimir Lossky, and Colin Gunton echo the sentiment.¹⁹

Bulgakov lambasts Photius as 1) the origin of the Scholastic obsession with origin; and, 2) as wrongly equated with Orthodox doctrine.²⁰ The Orthodox objections to the *Filioque* are futile as

¹³ Ibid, pp. 77-88, 131.

¹⁴ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, p. 100.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 90. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 42.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁹ Bruce D. Marshall, “Aquinas the Augustinian? On the Uses of Augustine in Aquinas’ Trinitarian Theology” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Dauphinais, David, and Leverying (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2007): p. 44.

²⁰ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, p. 100.

long as Orthodoxy is “hypnotized” by causality.²¹ The *ek monou* of Photius separates the Trinity into two independent dyads: Father-Son and Father-Spirit.²² Photius established the East-West binary on the Spirit’s procession, sterilizing pneumatology.²³ The speculative work of the West is considered superior to the reactionary “anti-dogma” of the East because “theology, even if erroneous, defeats no theology.”²⁴ When residing in Paris from 1925 until his death in 1944 from cancer, Bulgakov wrote his dogmatic trilogy: *The Lamb of God*, *The Comforter*, and *The Bride of the Lamb*. Thomas Aquinas, according to Plested, was the “convenient whipping-boy” for Bulgakov and was a theological force best avoided in the safe-harbor of the Fathers. *The Comforter* (1936) is Bulgakov’s constructive pneumatology and is the subject of the recapitulation and rebuttal below.

Bulgakov, and his theological descendants, are potentially fruitful interlocutors for Catholicism. He argues that the omission of a particular theological concept from the creed does not constitute its refutation.²⁵ The creed instead presupposes subsequent investigation. Bulgakov categorizes Photius’ *ek monou tou Patros*, the West’s *Filioque*, and his preferred pronoun, “*dia*,” as theological opinions, theological clarifications of the non-exhaustive creed.²⁶ Several times, he reiterates that the question of the Holy Spirit’s procession is dogmatically open and that there has been no council to definitively settle the question.²⁷ Catholics must reject this claim. Nevertheless, Bulgakov’s acknowledgment of the *Filioque*’s validity as at least a theologoumenon gives it a chance to be weighed fairly against alternative theological models of the Spirit’s procession (e.g. *ek monou tou Patros*, *dia tou Huiou*, and modern Spirit Christologies).²⁸ Bulgakov makes a notable admission when he states the question of the Spirit’s procession requires not only linguistic precision but dogmatic definition and interpretation.²⁹ This openness to dogmatic resolution allows for a future council or

²¹ Ibid, p. 133.

²² Ibid, p. 77.

²³ Ibid, p. 97.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 119-20.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 93.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 87, 947.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 93, 116, 144.

²⁸ Contemporary Spirit Christologies include François-Xavier Durrwell, *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology*, trans. Sr. Benedict Davies, O.S.U., (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2006; Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995); and, Ralph del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, p. 116.

dogmatic statement accepted by the universal Church reaffirming the doctrine on the Spirit's procession from Second Lyons and Florence.

While Bulgakov does not condemn the *Filioque* as heretical, he does dismiss it as theologically problematic and insufficient. Thomas Aquinas in particular comes under fire as the representative Catholic theologian. Equating the Trinitarian hypostases with their relations of opposition is impersonalism, or worse, modalism.³⁰ The impersonalism of Latin theology is also evidenced in the priority given to nature over persons, leading to a "hypostatic subordinationism of the ontological type."³¹ The Son receives the divine nature from the Father without the capacity to generate and the Spirit receives the divine nature without the capacity to generate or spirate. Second Bulgakov is constantly evoking the need for a theological exposition of the eternal relationship of the Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, the *Filioque* does not meet his standard. The language from the Council of Florence that describes spiration as a single principle is problematic for him:

If the Holy Spirit originates from the Father and the Son, and not in Their hypostatic difference as Two but in Their unity, *una spiratione*, then the required opposition of origination arises not between the Father and the Holy Spirit, or the between the Son and the Holy Spirit but between the Father Son bi-unit and the Holy Spirit.³²

The dyadic procession implies the divine nature is possessed commonly by the Father and Son.³³ To avoid this Father-Son dyad, Bulgakov resolves that the West, if it is to affirm procession from the Father and Son, should teach that it is from two principles rather than one. However, if it was to do so, it would be guilty, he claims, of Photius' accusation that two sources are introduced into the Godhead. The monarchy of the Father, "the very foundation of trinitarian doctrine," is also misunderstood because of an over-focus on origin.³⁴ The Son and Spirit are united as hypostases revealing the Father but differ as modes of this revelation.

The final feature in Bulgakov's attack on the *Filioque* is his inconsistent treatment of its "life-significance." He first denies that "there is any such significance."³⁵ Bulgakov asserts that Christocentrism, and not Christology, is the "religio-psychological" source for Western teaching on spiration.³⁶ Moreover, he contends that Protestantism has exasperated this hypostatic imbalance. Despite admitting

³⁰ Ibid, p. 127.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 124-25.

³² Ibid, pp. 124-25.

³³ Ibid, pp. 139-40.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 149.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 131.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 131.

the interdependence of Catholic Christology, ecclesiology, and the *Filioque*, the analogy between mysteries is unilateral when applied by Bulgakov to the *Filioque*. The *Filioque* is an effect and has no constructive role in illuminating other mysteries as understood by Catholics; it is supposedly outside of Church life and has no effect on veneration of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Yet, Bulgakov insists on the *Filioque*'s significance in the question of papal primacy. He echoes Bolotov that it is "first and foremost, a dogma about the pope."³⁸ This is a reflection on the method by which the *Filioque* was added to the Creed (by Benedict VII) and a perceived relationship between Christocentrism and the Papacy's claim to be the Vicar of Christ.³⁹ Another renowned Russian émigré theologian, Vladimir Lossky, differs from Bulgakov on the question of "life-significance." Lossky is certain that the *Filioque* should be considered heretical and that Photius is normative for Orthodoxy. While Bulgakov wavers, Lossky holds, in Daley's final analysis, that the differences

conceal, instead, a difference in theological mentality and method . . . which has formed not only the two traditions' fundamental understanding of God and salvation but even the shape of their Church structures, their spirituality and their pastoral practice.⁴⁰

Far from being inconsequential for Lossky, the difference between the *ek monou tou Patros* of Photius and Catholicism's *Filioque* is a difference in the very dogmatic structure of the two traditions. Although Lossky's rejection of the *Filioque* is ill-informed, his instinct that it is deeply interconnected with other Christian mysteries is correct.

A Thomistic Rebuttal

Temporarily displaced by the exuberance of post-conciliar theology, the study of Thomas has begun anew. *Ressourcement* Thomism provides the best rebuttal to Bulgakov and offers the greatest hope for theological *détente* and ecclesial *rapprochement*. The Thomistic response to Bulgakov is four-fold. Thomas' reflection on divine persons as subsistent relations will be used as a counter to the accusations of impersonalism. The action of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption and the Spirit of Truth is central to Thomas' *Commentary on the Gospel of John* and is fundamental in his exposition of the relation between Son and Spirit. Aquinas also advances a balanced reading of Augustine's statement that there is one spiration by utilizing

³⁷ Ibid, p. 148.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 144.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 144.

⁴⁰ Daley, "Part One," pp. 3-33.

Augustine's pneumatology of love. This reading preserves the monarchy of the Father and avoids pneumatological subordinationism. Lastly, the biblical theology of Matthias Joseph Scheeben will be presented as an analogy of the *Filioque* to the mystery of the Church.

The unique character of the *Filioque* is evidenced by Aquinas' defense of it in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Rather than begin with objections (as he does on all other doctrines), the Common Doctor begins with biblical, conciliar, and rational arguments.⁴¹ The character of the doctrine lends itself to an entirely different mode of argumentation. If rationalistic necessity was the strongest argument, Thomas could have begun with objections to be refuted; instead, he begins with the evidence for its veracity prior to defending its credibility. Thomas summons the authority of the Athanasian Creed, Didymus' *De Spiritu Sancto*, and Cyril's letter to Nestorius, (known to Thomas as *Salvatore Nostro*).⁴² Cyril's letter was received as authoritative at Chalcedon, a fact recognized by Thomas, thus justifying the earlier assertion of the Christological interpretation of Constantinople. Thomas, moreover, points out that Augustine was included amongst the list of Fathers and Doctors which Second Constantinople (553 AD) decreed it received "wholly."⁴³ Thus, Augustine's teaching of the Spirit's procession *a Filio* is compatible with conciliar dogma. Thomas, uniquely among his contemporaries, evokes a text of Chalcedon that interpreted First Constantinople as a corroboration of the Nicene Faith.⁴⁴ Aquinas concludes, as does Bulgakov, the Nicene Creed is open to further biblically-rooted corroboration such as First Constantinople and the *Filioque*.

a.) A Response to the Charge of Impersonalism: Persons as Subsistent Relations

Bulgakov and many other modern theologians level the weighty charge of impersonalism—or worse, modalism—against Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Rahner accuses Thomas of isolating the treatise on the Trinity and reducing Christianity to a practical monotheism. Giles Emery identifies several thinkers who attempt to rehabilitate Thomas; yet, in the process of rehabilitation, they adopt the dominant preference for "personalism" over against "essentialism."⁴⁵ Bruce Marshall's addresses question of Thomas' potential impersonalism

⁴¹ Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 107.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 109.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 169-71. André Malet, Paul Vanier, Hans Christian Schmidbaur are cited as examples.

without assuming the existence of a dichotomy nor the superiority of “personalism.” Just as Aquinas upholds the veracity and credibility of transubstantiation as taught at Lateran IV in his Eucharistic teaching, he articulates a Trinitarian theology that avoids the condemned errors of Joachim of Fiore who misread Peter Lombard as implying a quaternity.⁴⁶ Augustine was to be interpreted as compatible with Lateran IV, then Aquinas had to explain Augustine’s use of *essentia de essentia* to describe the Son’s generation. Thomas turns to another concept in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* to exegete *essentia de essentia* in an orthodox fashion: relations. Thomas’ teaching on relations is particularly intended for treating the question of the *Filioque* because “it is in the study of the procession of the Holy Spirit that the commentary on St. John gives the most complete exposition on relative opposition.”⁴⁷

Unlike others in the medieval scholastic tradition, Aquinas identifies relations, rather than modes of origin, as that which constitutes the three Persons.⁴⁸ Emery notes a distinction in Thomas between the *esse* and the *ratio* of a relation.⁴⁹ The *esse* of a relation in creatures is its accidental inherence in the subject. In God who is simple, the *esse* of the relation subsists as identical with the divine essence. The *ratio* of a relation in creatures is its reference to another, *ad aliquid*. In God it consists in the “ecstatic” reference of one person to another. *De Potentia* q.8 articulates this distinction,

The relations in God, although they constitute the hypostases and thus make them subsist, do it however insofar as they are the divine essence; indeed, the relation insofar as it is relation does not have anything of what subsists or makes subsist: that belongs solely to the substance.⁵⁰

Thomas’ synthesizing of the two aspects of relation prove that he is not guilty of “essentialism” or an “impersonalism.” In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, Aquinas concludes, “the being of the relations is the being of the essence.”⁵¹ The ratio distinguishes the persons who are themselves the essence. The divine essence is nothing other than the relations. There is no pre-relational Divine Being.⁵² If Bulgakov better attended to Thomas’ own scholastic distinctions, he would know that Thomas prefers a different definition of divine personhood. Thomas’ solution is to define the divine persons as subsistent relations. The name Father “signifies the relation which is distinctive

⁴⁶ Marshall, “Aquinas the Augustinian?” p. 51.

⁴⁷ Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 315.

⁴⁸ Marshall, “Aquinas the Augustinian?” p. 52.

⁴⁹ Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 199.

⁵⁰ *De Potentia*, q.8, a. 3, ad 7 and ad 9. Cited Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 200.

⁵¹ *SCG* IV, 14 (#3502). Cited Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 204.

⁵² Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, p. 207.

and constitutive of the hypostasis.”⁵³ Relation is preferred to origin because origin does not refer to anything intrinsic. Origin presupposes a subsistent person. The Father begets because He is the Father: “paternity is prior to generation.”⁵⁴ Thus, Bulgakov’s reading of Thomas (identifying the persons with their origin) is explicitly ruled out.

b.) The Holy Spirit’s “Autonomy” and a Christological Pneumatology

Brian Daley identifies two concerns of contemporary pneumatology: 1) preserving “a certain autonomy for the Spirit of God: an autonomy that is fundamentally implied in our conceiving of the Spirit as a person, and as divine;” and, 2) establishing a relationship between the Son and the Spirit.⁵⁵ Bulgakov, in his own time, professed these same concerns and the inability of the *ek monou* or the *Filioque* to mitigate them. One must not undermine the basic Trinitarian teaching of the inseparable action of the persons in creation (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*).⁵⁶ The “autonomy” problematic may be construed either as a denial of this foundational axiom or as suggesting an erroneous understanding of the action of the Trinitarian persons as in some way competitive or mutually-exclusive.

The Christological interpretation of the *Filioque* is consonant with the Chalcedonian interpretation of First Constantinople. In *S.Th.* I q. 36, Aquinas notes, Chalcedon declared the validity of developing statements inferred from earlier conciliar formulae but not explicit in them [*sed id quod implicite continebatur in primo symbolo, per aliqua addita explanabatur contra haereses insurgentes*].⁵⁷ Chalcedon adopted the Constantinopolitan expansions of the Nicene Creed. Moreover, Thomas elicits Ephesus as evidence of the implicit support of the *Filioque*.⁵⁸ The arch-heretic Nestorius and his heretical disciple, Theodoret of Cyrus (condemned at Second Constantinople), rejected the procession of the Spirit from the Son. Just as true doctrine is interconnected, Nestorian heresies regarding the person of Christ are of a piece with the denial of the Son’s role in spiration. Pneumatological orthodoxy is situated within Christological orthodoxy by Thomas himself.

Bruce Marshall notices two predominate actions of the Spirit in Thomas’ Johannine commentary: filiation and revelation, the

⁵³ Ibid, p. 207.

⁵⁴ *S.Th.* I. q. 40, a. 4, ad. 1.

⁵⁵ Daley, “Filioque, Part Two,” pp. 208-10.

⁵⁶ Marshall suggests *S.Th.* III, q. 3, a. 4, obj. 1

⁵⁷ Pelikan, “Filioque,” 327; *S.Th.* I, q. 36, a. 2, ad 2.

⁵⁸ Pelikan, “Filioque,” 331; *S.Th.* I, q. 36, a. 2, ad 3.

“soteriological repercussions of the doctrine of Love and of the *Filioque*.”⁵⁹ From this consideration of the Spirit’s role, Thomas constructs a rule of Trinitarian order (similar to that of Irenaeus and Basil), “Just as the effect of the mission of Son was to lead us to the Father, so the effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son.”⁶⁰ In Thomas’s exegesis of *John* 3:8, he observes that it “is in virtue of his own power of free choice that [the Spirit] blows where he will and when he wills, illuminating hearts.”⁶¹ The concern for the Spirit’s autonomy is here assuaged. He adds that this biblical passage is an explicit refutation of the errors of the Macedonians who reduce the Holy Spirit to a mere minister of the Father and Son. A staunch defender of the *Filioque*, Thomas resolves that the Spirit’s being sent does not restrict his “free choice.” Marshall summarizes “Mission implies origin, but origins preserves spontaneity.”⁶² Thomas unquestionably reaffirms the axiom of the inseparable action of the divine persons *ad extra*, but he also, because of his Trinitarian commitments, maintains that each person acts in a different way (“*alium modum*”): “for each kind of action *ad extra* . . . the act itself is the same, but the mode or manner of action is not.”⁶³

c.) *The Monarchy of the Father and the Equality of the Divine Persons*

STh. I q. 36 provides the material for a Thomistic defense of the monarchy of the Father. In a. 4, Aquinas reaffirms the monarchy of the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father “immediately,” and from the Son “mediately.”⁶⁴ It is valid to say that the Spirit proceeds “principally or properly from the Father, because the Son has this power from the Father.”⁶⁵ The Son is not the instrument of spiration nor is his begetting prior to spiration.⁶⁶ In a. 4, ad. 1, Thomas says,

If we consider the spirative power, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son as they are one in the spirative power . . . Nor is there any reason against one property being in two *supposita* that possess one common nature. But if we consider the *supposita* of the spiration,

⁵⁹ Bruce D. Marshall, “What Does the Spirit Have to Do?” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Dauphinais and Levering, p. 66. Emery, p. 291.

⁶⁰ *In Ioan.* 14:26 (#1958). Cited Emery, p. 291.

⁶¹ Bruce D. Marshall, “What Does the Spirit Have to Do?” p. 64, citing *In Ioan.* I, lect. 2, n. 76.

⁶² Bruce D. Marshall, “What Does the Spirit Have to Do?” p. 65.

⁶³ Bruce D. Marshall, “What Does the Spirit Have to Do?” pp. 72-74.

⁶⁴ *STh.* I. q. 36, a. 4, ad. 1.

⁶⁵ *STh.* I. q. 36, a. 4, ad. 2.

⁶⁶ Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, pp. 158-59.

then we may say the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as distinct; for He proceeds from them as the unitive love of both.⁶⁷

Thomas' teaching here is compatible with Second Lyons and Florence and He also displays his indebtedness to Augustine's pneumatology of love. The distinctness of the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son is the singularity of that divine person's love for the other. Thomas carefully balances the single principle of spiration with the reality of "two spirating [*duo spirantes*]."⁶⁸ He, however, rules out language of "two spirators [*duo spiratores*]." Levering expounds upon the importance of this distinction between two spirating and two spirators: "The value... consists in its ability to resist amalgamating the persons while at the same time insisting that the spiration is one act that the Father and Son truly share, due to the Father's communication of spirative power to the Son."⁶⁹ Bulgakov's accusations of a dyad of Father-Son biunity with the Spirit is thus rebutted. The Father and Son each personally spirate. The success of Aquinas' reply here depends on a foundational scriptural passage, "all that belongs to the Father belongs to me (Jn. 16:15)."⁷⁰

Aquinas cleverly uses the monarchy of the Father and the fullness of his self-communication in a. 2, ad.6, as a response to the assertion that the *Filioque* is a kind of pneumatological subordinationism. The Son's reception of all that the Father is, except paternity, is the perfection of the Son's generation. To deny this communication of spiration to the Son would undermine the "Father's unique monarchy, his full power to beget his perfect likeness in all but paternity."⁷¹ If the East wants to refuse this exchange, they must answer how they are not themselves developing a subordinationism in which the Son and Spirit are diminished relative to the Father.

d.) The Analogy of Christian Mysteries: The "Life-Significance of the Filioque for the Universal Church

The final aspect of this Thomistic defense of the procession of the Spirit *a Filio* is the exposition of its implications for the

⁶⁷ *STh.* I, q. 36, a. 4, ad. 1: Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, si attendatur virtus spirativa, spiritus sanctus procedit a patre et filio in quantum sunt unum in virtute spirativa, quae quodammodo significat naturam cum proprietate, ut infra dicitur. Neque est inconueniens unam proprietatem esse in duobus suppositis, quorum est una natura. Si vero considerentur supposita spirationis, sic spiritus sanctus procedit a patre et filio ut sunt plures, procedit enim ab eis ut amor univitus duorum.

⁶⁸ *STh.* I, q. 36, a. 4, ad. 7.

⁶⁹ Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, p. 161.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

contemplation of other Christian mysteries, its “life-significance.” Bulgakov recognizes a complex correspondence between Catholic doctrines in ecclesiology, Christology, and pneumatology. He selects an ecclesiology motivated by the will to power rather than Trinitarian theology as the genesis of the Catholic doctrinal system. There is a real analogy in Catholic dogma between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Trinity.⁷² However, for Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the mystery of the Church (and the hierarchical offices she possesses) are to be understood through the primary mystery of God’s inner life, not the other way around. It must be asked, if this obtains for the Catholic Church, why is the charge of politically-reduced theology not equally applied to the Orthodox Trinitarian models, especially the Photian *ek monou* and caesaropapism? The Latin tradition’s Christocentrism is implicated as conducive to advancing papal primacy since the Pope is called the Vicar of Christ.⁷³ This accusation, however, ignores the fact that the Catholic Church evokes two councils (Second Lyons and Florence), and not simply papal fiat, as the basis for the dogmatic theological note of the *Filioque*.⁷⁴ Further qualifying Bulgakov’s implication is the long history of associating the papacy with both Peter and Paul, a two-fold inheritance that can be interpreted as parallel to the Christological and pneumatological aspects of the Papal office.⁷⁵

If the *Filioque* is inseparably bound to papal primacy, as Bulgakov claims, why have many Protestants who have rejected papal primacy

⁷² See *Dei Filius* 4.

⁷³ Bulgakov explores the connection of the *Filioque* to the “pseudo-dogma” of papal infallibility in *The Comforter*, p. 121.

⁷⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan argues, “[W]e may be entitled to view the dogmatic outcome at Lyons as at least in part an achievement of Thomas Aquinas.” Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Doctrine of the Filioque in Thomas Aquinas and its Patristic Antecedents: An Analysis of *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question 36,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974): p. 318. The Second Council of Lyon defines the following in its “Constitution on the Most High Trinity and the Catholic Faith”: “*Fideli ac devote professione fatemur, quod Spiritus Sanctus aeternaliter ex Patre et Filio, non tamen ex duobus principiis, sed tanquam ex uno principio, non duabas spirationibus, sed unica spiratione procedit; hoc professa est hactenus, praedicavit et docuit, hoc firmiter tenet, praedicat, profitetur et docet sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia, mater omnium fidelium et magistra; hoc habet orthodoxorum Patrum atque Doctorum, Latinorum partier et Graecorum incommutabilis et vera sententia.*” *DS* (43rd ed.) 850. The Council of Florence defines the following in the Bull *Laetentur caeli*: “*quod Spiritus Sanctus ex Patre et Filio aeternaliter est, et essentiam suamque esse subsistens habet ex Patre ex simul et Filio, et ex utroque aeternaliter tanquam ab uno principio et unica spiratione procedit. . . Diffinimus insuper explicationem verborum illorum “Filioque” veritatis declarandae gratia, et inminente tum necessitate, licite ac rationabiliter Symbolo fuisse appositam.*” *DS* (43rd ed.) 1300, 1302.

⁷⁵ William R. Farmer and Roch Kereszty, O.Cist., *Peter and Paul & the Church of Rome: The Ecumenical Potential of a Forgotten Perspective*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

so vehemently defended the veracity of the dual procession of the Holy Spirit?⁷⁶ The Protestants may have unknowingly maintained a doctrine that actively undermines their ecclesiology. The more likely solution is that Western Christianity, regardless of its relationship to the Roman Pontiff, shares a common understanding of the relationship between biblical revelation and God's eternal Trinitarian life. Biblical passages, in particular Christ's own words in the Fourth Gospel, reveal His union with His Father in the Love that is the Spirit. The greatest of the Christological councils, Chalcedon, saw fit to adopt both the pneumatological teachings of Constantinople and Cyrillian Christology. The *Filioque* magnifies the Son. The glory of Christ's divinity is revealed in His sending of His Spirit to the Church to incorporate Her into His Body as His Bride.

While an analogy between the *Filioque* and papal primacy can be presumed since they are both dogmas taught by the Catholic Church, other more foundational ecclesiological resonances are available. Matthias Joseph Scheeben admits that the Church Fathers often cautioned against any discussion of the difference between the processions of the Son and the Spirit.⁷⁷ Despite these admonitions, Scheeben concludes speculation is permissible if the mystery is approached with faith. Speculation of this kind can bear pastoral fruit, for as Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., laments, "complete ignorance" of the distinction between generation and spiration "does not lead to holy wonder and awe, but to complete intellectual frustration."⁷⁸

Mysteries of Christianity incorporates two methods of grasping the revealed truths. The first is dogmatic, philosophical, and propositional. The second is scriptural, Romantic, and poetic. Scheeben fluctuates between the two in his helical ascent to understanding spiration. Scheeben does not rely on the argument of logical necessity alone. The expressions used to detail spiration are less exact than those used to describe generation. This "indefiniteness" is replaced with an "elasticity and pregnancy" which, "though less sharply

⁷⁶ For Lutheranism, see Bruce Marshall, "The Defense of the *Filioque* in Classical Lutheran Theology: An Ecumenical Appreciation," in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 44 (2002): 154-173; for the Reformed Tradition, Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 4 (Baker Academic, 2003): pp. 373-76; for Anglicanism, see Charles P. Price, "Some notes on Filioque," *Anglican Theological Review*, no. 83 (2001)3: pp. 515-35; for Karl Barth, see David Guretzki, *Karl Barth on the Filioque*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

⁷⁷ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1946): p. 45.

⁷⁸ Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995): p. 67, n27.

outlined, is all the richer in coloring and vividness.”⁷⁹ Like an Impressionist painter who captures the light, movement, and emotion of her subject, phraseology like “interior sigh of love,” “love-token,” “giving of self,” “flame,” “aspiration,” “self-donation,” and “pledge” work in concert with one another, like the small brushstrokes of the painter, to illustrate the Holy Spirit as the mutual love between the Father and the Son. The ultimate reason why the Holy Spirit proceeds from two persons is not for the purpose of distinguishing His procession from the Son’s procession (though it does allow for this); the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son because He is the “outpouring of Love” between the first two persons of the Trinity.⁸⁰

After mustering patristic and medieval sources to defend the Holy Spirit’s spiration from the Father and the Son, Scheeben reinforces the dogmatic teaching of the Church with a speculative analogy drawn from the scriptures. Scheeben develops an analogy between the creation of Eve, spiration, and the Church. Because the generation of human offspring by sexual reproduction is the analogue of the generation of the Son from the Father, examining alternative ways that human persons are created is profitable for establishing potential analogues for spiration.⁸¹ Against the Macedonians, Gregory of Nazianzus evoked the production of Eve to suggest alternative origins for human persons.⁸² Scheeben admits that the analogy of Eve’s production can only be properly understood “in and from the personal character of the Holy Spirit.”⁸³ The measure of the analogy’s efficacy is its ability to express the mystery of the Holy Spirit as Love and Gift as revealed in scripture, reflected upon in the Tradition, and experienced in the life of the Church. In light of the nuptial dimension of Christ’s relationship to the Church, the “pregnancy” of spiration language is unveiled:

[T]he divine vital principle which constitutes the Church the bride of Christ was drawn from the side of the new Adam, dying and sunk in the sleep of love. This vital principle is none other than the Holy Spirit who, as He receives His own essence from the divinity of God’s Son, also enters into the Church through and from the Son’s humanity, in order to impregnate it with power of the Son of God.⁸⁴

Because the Spirit animates the Church, He is called the *anima* of the Church. Through Baptism, the Spirit makes Christians members of the Body of Christ. He is the “spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15, cf.

⁷⁹ Scheeben, *Mysteries*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182. Gregory and Scheeben do admit that there does not necessarily have to be a natural analogue for spiration.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Gal. 4:6) which joins the baptized in a one flesh union with Christ, making them sons in the Son.

Scheeben elicits patristic support for this argument from Methodius. Methodius contends that “the septiform Spirit of truth, is quite properly called the rib of the Logos [*costa Verbi*] . . . God takes from Him and forms her who is to be Christ’s helpmate.”⁸⁵ Eve is built from the side or rib of Adam. Because of the physical proximity of the rib to the human heart and the fact that Eve was given out of and for love, her production is out of Adam’s love. Thus, when elevated to describe spiration, the Holy Spirit, because He is a procession of reciprocal love, is said to spirate “from the heart of the Father and the Son.”⁸⁶ The nuptial imagery of Adam and Eve is not normally applied to the Trinity of Persons. The marriage of Christ and the Church is usually the focus of the Fathers’ allegorical readings of Eve’s production. Like Eve from Adam, Christ’s bride is formed from His pierced side on the Cross. Earlier in this paper, Scheeben was cited as referring to spiration language as pregnant. At first glance, this adjective only seemed to signify a promising openness to expansion. In Methodius’ allegory, the New Eve is the Church, not the Holy Spirit, although the Holy Spirit is the rib of the New Adam. The Church serves the role of helpmate to Christ through evangelization, corporal works of mercy, the Sacraments, and prayer. Methodius’ ecclesial allegory may seem to undermine some of the potential of Scheeben’s speculative position on spiration. Yet, all the Body of Christ’s actions, liturgical, charitable, or otherwise, are only possible through the action of the Holy Spirit in the baptized. The Holy Spirit is Christ’s helpmate working through His Body still on pilgrimage.

The Holy Spirit as the *costa Verbi* preserves the Father and Son as the principle of the Holy Spirit and respects the revealed language of scripture, patristic exegesis, and the dogmatic definitions of the Church. The rib is given to the New Adam with all but the Father’s paternity. The Son is then able to make a reciprocal gift of love from His own Sacred Heart. Prior to creation, this loving gift of the *costa Verbi* is not to His ecclesial Bride, but to His Father. The Eve-spiration analogy also affords an active role to the Holy Spirit within the immanent Trinity. Critics of the *Filioque* claim it relegates the Holy Spirit to passivity. Yet, the *costa Verbi* is the divine love which constitutes the union between the Father and Son. Only the Holy Spirit is understood in His personhood as being an action. Fatherhood and Sonship are states of being. The Spirit is an eternal

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 185. Citing St. Methodius, *Convivium decem virginum*, III, c. 8; PG, XVIII, 73.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 184. See also Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality*, pp. 45-64, on reciprocity as necessary for charity and friendship in the Godhead and between Christians and God.

bond of love. He, more so than either the Father or the Son, reveals that God is pure act, *actus purus*.

Conclusion

Bulgakov observed that Augustine and Thomas' theology is permeated by the Spirit's procession *a Filio*. The mutual dependence of Christology and Pneumatology is inherited from Augustine, Cyril, and the earliest ecumenical councils. Building upon his historical study of the sure foundation of the Fathers and dogma, Thomas deploys his speculative work on the persons as subsistent relations to articulate a theology preserving the Father's monarchy, the Son's perfect begetting, and the Spirit's relationship to both Father and Son. Far from the impotent fabrication of a papal monarch caricatured by Bulgakov, the procession of the Spirit from Father and Son unveils the Trinitarian communion of love to the believer. It illumines and is illumined by the mystery of the Church.

It remains to be shown the full implications of the *Filioque* upon Catholic dogmatics and what other mysteries can be illumined in the light of the Spirit proceeding *a Filio*. Promising areas of further study by analogy to the *Filioque* are sacraments, Mariology, and the papacy. Augustine's insistence on the necessity of charity for sacramental fruitfulness in contrast to mere validity against the Donatists could provide one entry point. Maximilian Kolbe's meditation that Mary is the Created Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit the Uncreated Immaculate Conception could be explored with Christological contextualization with reference to the doctrine of the *Filioque*. The dual Petrine and Pauline character of the Bishop of Rome can be expanded upon. May the Spirit that is Himself that loving union of Father and Son, the *costa Verbi*, unify the Church in this life so that its final number may increase in the next.

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