

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Topic: Attempts at Mutual Understanding concerning Filioque
Convener: Anthony Keaty, Blessed John XXIII National Seminary
Moderator: Robert Imbelli, Boston College
Presenters: David Coffey, Marquette University
Valerie Karras, Southern Methodist University

David Coffey showed up the weaknesses of the Roman Clarification, which in his view suffered from an over-reliance on the work of one theologian. It too readily adopted a rigid division of the regular Greek and Latin meanings of “procession” into variations on personhood and consubstantiality, respectively. This in turn led to a simplistic solution to the Trinitarian problem between the two churches. It also neglected the teaching of the Council of Florence, to which the Catholic Church is committed. The North American Statement, on the other hand, though offering no long-term solution, was a scholarly document suitable for serious study by both churches. In Coffey’s view, given certain safeguards, the present level of faith agreement between the two churches on the Trinity was sufficient to justify practical moves toward corporate reunion. In a spirit of faith the achievement of complete harmony could be left to the healing and sanctifying Holy Spirit.

Valerie Karras introduced her paper by noting that for the Greek Orthodox, since one’s salvation requires relationship with God and since relationship with God involves an appropriate understanding, the matter of the filioque is of vital importance. Karras further observed that one must give priority to the text of Scripture over theological speculation that goes beyond what Scripture says and that one must give priority to the decisions of the universal church over decisions of local churches. Karras divided her paper into three parts, a brief history of the filioque, the core issue raised by the filioque, and an evaluation of recent documents concerning the filioque. In her overview of the history of the filioque, Karras argued that while the creed of Constantinople (381) used Scripture to affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit, later developments in the creeds used in the Latin speaking church were more concerned to protect the divinity of the Son. The core issue raised by the filioque in Karras’ view is the subordination of the Spirit to Father and Son due to the Father sharing His personal property with the Son but not with the Holy Spirit, as Photius had argued earlier. In her assessment of recent statements on the filioque, Karras observed that the statements tend to equate “through the Son” and “from the Son” and that the statements make no distinction between the immanent trinity and the economic trinity.

In the discussion that followed, the question of returning to the original formula of Constantinople in the liturgies of the Roman Catholic Church was raised. Some concern was expressed about the effects of changing such a long standing practice. One questioner asked whether the differences between East and West on the filioque were church dividing. Karras observed that Maximus Confessor’s under-

standing of filioque was acceptable to the Greek Church. David Coffey, in his closing reflections, urged a deeper study of both Greek and Latin fathers' writings on the topic of the Holy Spirit.

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