

The “Filioque” Controversy: Hidden Fact of History...Both East and West Accepted That It Was Wrong To Include It!

As far as Ecumenical Councils go the Greek Orthodox East and the Latin West appear to be divided at the point where the Eighth Ecumenical Council is introduced. Both Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics accept the first Seven Ecumenical Councils. Beyond these Seven Councils, however, the Roman Catholics enumerate several others, which bring the total number to 21, Vatican II being the latest. The Orthodox Church does not enumerate any more beyond the Seven, although she accepts several Councils which occurred afterwards and call themselves "Ecumenical" (as their minutes show). One of them is the so-called Eighth Ecumenical or Constantinople IV (879-880).

Lack of enumeration does not imply lack of application. Orthodox conciliar history and relevant conciliar documents, clearly indicate the existence of several Ecumenical Councils after the first Seven, which carry on the conciliar life of the Church in history in a way which is much more rigorous than that of the Latin Church. These Councils [including that of Constantinople 879/880, the "Eighth Ecumenical" as it is called in the Tomos Charas of Patriarch +DOSITHEOSD who first published its proceedings in 1705 and also by Metropolitan +NILUS (Rhodi)] have not been enumerated in the East because of Orthodox anticipation of possible healing of the Schism of 1054, which was pursued by the Orthodox up to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. There are other obvious reasons that prevented enumeration, most of which relate to the difficult years that the Orthodox Church had to face after the capture of Constantinople and the dissolution of the Roman Empire that supported it.

The OCA-UAOC believes that contemporary dialogue between Orthodox and Western Christians should make the theological issue over the Filioque a criterion for restoring communion between them.

From an Orthodox point of view the distinction between what is "canonical" and what is "theological" is a juridical one and does not carry any real weight.

In 1974 the American Orthodox scholar Richard Haugh, in a study of the history of the Trinitarian controversy between East and West, with special reference to the Filioque, stated that "the sixth session of the Council of 879/880 had enormous bearings on the Triadological controversy."

The OCA-UAOC believes the grounds are Biblical for they are based on the teaching of St. John's Gospel and on the explicit saying that the "Spirit proceeds from the Father." They are also theological in that by adding the Filioque it introduced two causes and two origins in the Trinity and thus utterly destroyed the monarchy of the Holy Trinity.

Sadly, the centuries of controversy between East and West has kept hidden the fact that this was "a successful Council of union!" The restoration of unity was the reason for the convocation of the Synod of 879-880. More precisely, perhaps, it celebrated peace once more in the Church of God; this unity means first of all unity in the same faith. St. Photios was a strong defender of the purity of doctrine, where orthodoxy was concerned, St. Photios was the true spokesman of the Byzantine Bishops. The West also attached great value to the purity of faith, but in fact concentrated more on the question of devotion to the Church of Rome.

At the Synod of 879-880 the Fathers' care for purity of doctrine emerged in the Horos (the formula of faith of the Synod) which they proclaimed. This Horos cannot be understood as a dogmatic definition ... but rather as the true expression of the ecclesiastical feeling of the Synod ... expressed by the conciliar Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople ... There is no doubt that St. Photios opposed the addition of the Filioque to the Creed on dogmatic grounds. In his famous encyclical to the oriental Patriarchs he complained about this addition by the Frankish missionaries working in Bulgaria, because he considered it theologically unacceptable.

His whole argument is based on the conviction that this addition undermined the unity of God. We find the same reasoning in his *Mystagogia* and in his letter to the Archbishop of Aquileia. St. Photios knew, of course, that the Roman Church had not approved of the Frankish Filioque, and hence she agreed on the conciliar refusal of inserting it into the Creed. He also knew, however, that the Franks were striving to introduce the Filioque into the Creed on theological grounds as they eventually did. There is no doubt that the Horos of the Photian Synod officially disapproved of the [theological and for that matter canonical] use of the Filioque by the Frankish missionaries in Bulgaria and nothing was directed against the church of Rome which at that time did not use the addition either.

In 1985 Dr. Constantine Siamakis stated, **"At this Ecumenical Synod the Filioque was condemned as teaching and as addition into the Symbol of the Faith."** In his description of the 6th session of the Council he stated: **"The Filioque is condemned ...etc."** and further on, **"without mentioning the Filioque, the emperor asks for an Horos of the Synod and the synodical members present at this meeting propose the Horos of the first two Ecumenical Councils, i.e. the Symbol of the Faith, but without any addition and with the stipulation that any addition or subtraction or alteration in it should incur the anathema of the Church. This is accepted by the emperor who signs it and the synodical members who express their satisfaction."** It is important to note that Siamakis attempted a critical investigation of the text of the Minutes and exposed the intention of various Western manuscripts (e.g. Cod. Vaticanus Graecus 1892 of the 16th century) and of the various Western editors of the Acts of this Council (e.g. Rader's edition of 1604) to hide the fact that the Horos is in fact an implicit but clear condemnation of the Frankish Filioque.

More recently in 1994 Professor Phidas of Athens University stated the same point of

view in his new and impressive manual of Church History. In his discussion of the Photian Council of 879/880 he wrote, that **"the antithesis between the Old and the New Rome was also connected with the theological dispute over the "Filioque," which did not inhibit at that time the restoration of communion between Rome and Constantinople, since it had not been inserted into the Symbol of the Faith by the papal throne, but had acquired at that time a dogmatic character in the obvious tendency of diversification between East and West."** Phidas also suggested, that **"apparently the papal representatives may not have realized the scope of the suggestion of restating the traditional Creed in the Horos of the Council which was implicitly connected with the condemnation of the Filioque addition to this Creed, which had been already adopted in the West by the Franks ... Yet all the participating Bishops understood that this was meant to be a condemnation of the Filioque addition to the Creed."** Furthermore Phidas determined that the acceptance of the *Horos* by Pope John VIII was due to the influence of Zachariah of Anagne, librarian of the Vatican, papal legate at the Council and a friend and sympathizer of St. Photios to whom the latter addressed an epistle as a vote of thanks.

The above references clearly indicate that contemporary Orthodox scholarly opinion is unanimous in understanding the *Horos* of the Photian Council of 879/880 as having a direct bearing on the *Filioque* controversy. It condemns the *Filioque* not only as an addition to the Creed but also as a doctrine. It is acknowledged, of course, that this condemnation is *implicit* and not *explicit* in the strong and vehement condemnation in the *Horos* of any kind of addition to the Creed. That this implication is unavoidable is based both on the historical context of this Council, the conflict between St. Photios and the Frankish theologians, which lies in the foreground and background to this Council. To restrict this implication to a mere "*canonical issue*" which has no theological bearing, is unwarranted by the text and the *implicit* context which entails St. Photios' opposition to the Frankish doctrine on the Filioque. This becomes more apparent by looking afresh at the *Horos* itself.

A fresh look at the Horos itself of the Eighth Ecumenical Council

The following text is the first complete translation of the *Horos* of the Eighth Ecumenical Council which appears in both the minutes of the sixth and the seventh acts:

"Jointly sanctifying and preserving intact the venerable and divine teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which has been established in the bosom of our mind, with unhesitating resolve and purity of faith, as well as the sacred ordinances and canonical stipulations of his holy disciples and Apostles with an unwavering judgment, and indeed, those Seven holy and ecumenical Synods which were directed by the inspiration of the one and the same Holy Spirit and effected the [Christian] preaching, and jointly guarding with a most honest and unshakeable resolve the canonical institutions invulnerable and unfalsified, we expel those who removed themselves from the Church, and embrace and regard worthy of receiving those of the same faith or teachers of orthodoxy to whom honor and sacred respect is due as they themselves ordered. Thus, having in mind and declaring all these things, we embrace with mind

and tongue and declare to all people with a loud voice the Horos (Rule) of the most pure faith of the Christians which has come down to us from above through the Fathers, subtracting nothing, adding nothing, falsifying nothing; for subtraction and addition, when no heresy is stirred up by the ingenious fabrications of the evil one, introduces disapprobation of those who are exempt from blame and inexcusable assault on the Fathers. As for the act of changing with falsified words the Horoi (Rules, Boundaries) of the Fathers is much worse than the previous one. Therefore, this holy and ecumenical Synod embracing whole-heartedly and declaring with divine desire and straightness of mind, and establishing and erecting on it the firm edifice of salvation, thus we think and loudly proclaim this message to all:

"I believe in One God, Father Almighty, ... and in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord ... who proceeds from the Father... [the whole Creed is cited here]

Thus we think, in this confession of faith we were baptized, through this one the word of truth proved that every heresy is broken to pieces and canceled out. We enroll as brothers and fathers and coheirs of the heavenly city those who think thus. If anyone, however, dares to rewrite and call Rule of Faith some other exposition besides that of the sacred Symbol which has been spread abroad from above by our blessed and holy Fathers even as far as ourselves, and to snatch the authority of the confession of those divine men and impose on it his own invented phrases put this forth as a common lesson to the faithful or to those who return from some kind of heresy, and display the audacity to falsify completely the antiquity of this sacred and venerable Horos (Rule) with illegitimate words, or additions, or subtractions, such a person should, according to the vote of the holy and Ecumenical Synods, which has been already acclaimed before us, be subjected to complete defrocking if he happens to be one of the clergymen, or be sent away with an anathema if he happens to be one of the lay people."

The solemnity and severity of this statement is quite striking. The reference to the Lord, the Apostles and the Fathers as guardians of the true faith clearly imply that what is at stake here is a theological issue. The issue is not just words or language but thought and mind as well. The whole construction clearly implies that there is some serious problem in the air which, however, is not explicitly named. The focus is the Creed, which is said to be irreplaceable. It is totally unacceptable to replace it with anything else. It is worse, however, to tamper with it, to add or to subtract from it. The addition or subtraction is not merely a formal matter, but has to do with the substance of the faith into which one is baptized and on which salvation in the Church is established. To commit such a mistake can only mean rejection of the faith once delivered to the saints and therefore can only incur expulsion from the Church. What else could St. Photios have in mind but the *Filioque*? Was there any

other threat to the Creed at that time?

The *Filioque* was the only problem, which he himself above every one else had detected and denounced earlier on when he became fully aware of its severity. This is also the creedal problem, which he will pinpoint again shortly after this Synod, and will produce his extensive treatise on it. The purpose of this *Horos* could not be anything else but a buffer against the coming storm (a break in union between East and West), which he foresaw. The Frankish theologians had already committed this error and were pressing for it with the Popes. Rome had resisted it, but for how long? He must have thought that an Ecumenical Council's *Horos*, which included severe penalties on those who tampered with the ancient faith, would be respected and the danger would be averted. That this was not only the mind of St. Photios but of the whole Council becomes obvious in the reactions of the Bishops to the reading of the *Horos*.

We read in the minutes of the Sixth act that after reading the *Horos* the Bishops shouted:

"Thus we think, thus we believe, into this confession were we baptized and became worthy to enter the priestly orders. We regard, therefore, as enemies of God and of the truth those who think differently as compared to this. If one dares to rewrite another Symbol besides this one, or add to it, or subtract from it, or to remove anything from it, and to display the audacity to call it a Rule, he will be condemned and thrown out of the Christian Confession. For to subtract from, or to add to, the holy and consubstantial and undivided Trinity shows that the confession we have always had to this day is imperfect. [In other words the problem which is implied but not named has to do with the Trinitarian doctrine]. It condemns the Apostolic Tradition and the doctrine of the Fathers. If one, then having come to such a point of mindlessness as to dare do what we have said above, and set forth another Symbol and call it a Rule, or to add to or subtract from the one which has been handed down to us by the first great, holy and Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea, let him be Anathema."

The minutes go on to record the approbation of this solemn statement by the representatives of the other Patriarchates and finally by the Emperor himself. The Emperor's statement and signature leave no doubt of the seriousness of this theological *Horos* which was issued by an ecumenical Council of the Church:

"In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Basil Emperor in Christ, faithful king of the Romans, agreeing in every way with this holy and ecumenical Synod in confirmation and sealing of the holy and ecumenical Seventh Synod, in confirmation and sealing of Photios, the most holy Patriarch of Constantinople and spiritual father of mine, and in rejection of all that was written or spoken against him, I have duly signed with my own hand."

By way of epilogue it may be pointed out that the image of St. Photios that emerges from the acts of the Eighth Ecumenical Council is one of moderation, sensitivity and maturity. Confrontation is avoided but without compromising firmness in matters that relate to the faith. Generosity towards others is displayed and maturity permeates everything. This is

indeed the image, which the famed Prof. Henry Chadwick has recently resolved to promote. This is the authentic image of the East.

The Photian Council of 879/880 is indeed the Eighth Ecumenical of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Western and Orthodox. It is a *Council of Unity* the last one before the storm of the great Schism based on the common Holy Tradition and especially on the unadulterated faith of the Ecumenical Creed.

References to the Facts:

On the Eighth Ecumenical Council the Roman Catholic Hubert Jedin writes: "*The Catholic Church recognizes the assembly of 869-70 as an ecumenical council. Not so the Greek Church. St Photios was rehabilitated and at the death of Ignatius he was once again raised to the patriarchal see. A synod assembled by him in 879-80 rejected the decisions of the previous council. The Greeks count this synod as the eighth ecumenical council, but a second schism was apparently avoided*" (from his *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A Historical Outline*, Herder: Freiburg, Nelson: Edinburgh, London 1960, p. 58). Jedin is inaccurate on several counts, but this is typical of most Western writers. The Council was summoned by Emperor Basil and was attended by the legates of Pope John VIII and of all the Eastern Patriarchs. Jedin says that the schism was apparently avoided, but does not explain that this was the case because the Pope through his legates had accepted not only St. Photios' restoration, but also the condemnation of the previous anti-Photian councils in Rome and in Constantinople. We should add here that the Minutes of the Ignatian Council (869/70), which have not survived in the original, are found in two edited versions: Mansi, vol. xvi: 16-208 (Latin) and xvi: 308-420 (Greek) and differ considerably from each other. On this and for a full description of the 10 Acts of these Minutes see Siamakis, *op. cit.* pp. 54-75. It is important to recall here that this Council was most irregular in its composition, since it included false legates from Alexandria and Jerusalem, more royal lay people than bishops (only 12) at the start and during the first two sessions. Eventually 130 bishops are mentioned in the Minutes but only 84 actually appear signing (*op. cit.* p. 56f). Most important irregularity, however, was the fact that the Minutes were mutilated at the most crucial points, especially the section of the condemnation of the *Filioque* (*op. cit.* p. 74)!

The condemnation of the Roman Catholic Eighth Council (the anti-Photian Council of Constantinople of 869/70) by Pope John VIII is first given in this Pope's *Letter to the Emperors Basil, Leo and Alexander*. In this Letter which was read at the second session of the Photian Council of Constantinople of 879/80 and is included in the second Act of the Minutes, Pope John VIII writes: "*And first of all receive Photios the most amazing and most reverend High-Priest of God our Brother Patriarch and co-celebrant who is co-sharer, co-participant and inheritor of the communion which is in the Holy Church of the Romans... receive the man unpretentiously. No one should behave pretentiously [following] the unjust councils which were made against him. No one. as it seems right to many who behave like a herd of cows, should use the*

negative votes of the blessed Hierarchs who preceded us. Nicholas, I mean, and Hadrian as an excuse [to oppose him]; since they did not prove what had been cunningly concocted against him... Everything that was done against him has now ceased and been banished..." (The Latin text is this *Ac primum quidem a nobis suscipi Photium praetantissimum ac reverentissimum Dei Pontificem et Patriarcham, in fratrem nostrum et comministrum, eundemque communionis cum sancta Romana ecclesia participem, consortem, et haeredem... Suscipite virum sine aliqua exrusatione. Nemo praetexat eas quae contra ipsum factae sunt innjustas synodos. Nemo, ut plerisque videtur imperitis ac rudibus, decessorum nostrorum beatorum Pontificum, Nicolai inquam, et Hadriani, decreta culpet... Finita sunt enim omnia, repudiata omnia, quae adversus cum gesta sunt, infirma irritaque reddita... Mansi vol xvii, cls. 400D & 401BC. For the Greek see Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 281f).*

A similar condemnation is found in Pope John VIII's *Letter to Photios* where he writes: "*As for the Synod that was summoned against your Reverence we have annulled here and have completely banished, and have ejected [it from our archives], because of the other causes and because our blessed predecessor Pope Hadrian did not subscribe to it...*" (Latin text: *Synodum vero, quae contra tuam reverentiam ibidem est habita, rescidimus, damnavimus omnino, et abjecimus: tum ob alias causas, tum quo decessor noster beatus Papa Hadrianus in ea non subscripsit...*" Mansi vol. xvii cl. 416E. For the Greek see Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 292).

Finally in Pope John VIII's *Commonitorium* or *Mandatum* ch. 10, which was read by the papal legates at the third Session of the same Council, we find the following: "*We [Pope John VIII] wish that it is declared before the Synod, that the Synod which took place against the aforementioned Patriarch Photios at the time of Hadrian, the Most holy Pope in Rome, and [the Synod] in Constantinople [869/70] should be ostracized from this present moment and be regarded as annulled and groundless, and should not be co-enumerated with any other holy Synods.*" *The minutes at this point add: "The Holy Synod responded: We have denounced this by our actions and we eject it from the archives and anathematize the so-called [Eighth] Synod, being united to Photios our Most Holy Patriarch. We also anathematize those who fail to eject what was written or said against him by the aforementioned by yourselves, the so-called [Eighth] Synod."* (Latin text: *Caput 10. Volumus coram praesente synodo pomulgari ut synodus quae facta est contra praedictum patriarcham Photium sub Hadriano sanctissimo Papa in urbe Roma et Constantinopoli ex nunc sit rejecta, irrita, et sine robore; neque connumeretur cum altera sancta synodo. Sancta Synodus respondit: Nos rebus ispsis condemnavimus et abjecimus et anathematizavimus dictam a vobis synodum, uniti Photio sanctissimo nostro Patriarchae: et eos qui non rejiciunt scripta dictave nostra cum in hac dicta a vobis synodo, anathematizamus.* Mansi vol. xvii, cl. 472AB. See also cls. 489/490E which repeats these points as accepted by the Synod. See also Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 345 and p. 361). I have included these texts here because I repeatedly encounter comments in the works of Western scholars, especially Roman Catholics, who offer confusing and even disputed information about the unanimous Eastern and Western condemnation of the anti-Photian Council of 869/870.

St. Photios first wrote on the problem of the *Filioque* in 864 in his Letter to Boris-Michael of the Bulgarians [PG 102:628-692. Critical edition by B. Laourdas & L. C. Westerink *Photius Epistulae et Amphilochia*, BSB B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft 1983, pp. 2-39. For an English translation see Despina Stratoudaki-White and Joseph R. Berrigan Jr., *The Patriarch and the Prince*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline Mass 1982].

This most famous of St. Photios' texts dealing with the problem of the *Filioque* was written only 4 years after the eighth Ecumenical Council, a fact indicating that the issue was still looming great in the relations of East and West at that time. For the Greek text, apart from that published in PG 102 (see footnote 16 above), see also *On the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit by Saint Photius Patriarch of Constantinople*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Studion Publishers Inc. 1983, which gives the Greek text with an English translation on opposite pages (Translator: Ronald Wertz). Another English translation with a useful introduction is that of Joseph P. Farrell, *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Holy Cross Press, Brookline MA 1987.