

THE DOUBLE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY TODAY: DO WE STILL NEED IT?

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The important topic of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other members of the Godhead brings us to the very heart of our faith and of our experience of Christ. At the same time it brings us also to the edge of the deepest of divine mysteries, which is the coinherence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the one being of God. I use the words “to the edge” consciously because, even after the most profound theological reflection, who of us could presume to have sounded the depths of our ineffable Creator and Redeemer?

Furthermore, when we come to speak of the Holy Spirit we ought to be conscious of an even greater reticence, one that is present in Scripture itself. Among the persons of the Godhead, it is he who remains the most shadowy figure. This has long been agreed upon among theologians, though at first sight it seems like a strange thing to say. After all the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; he dwells in our hearts by faith; he builds up the Church by his gifts. Yet perhaps this very closeness to us makes us more conscious of the deep mystery of his being.

The Father reveals himself to us, but at the same time he also remains hidden in unapproachable light. The Son becomes one of us, but in so doing he acquires and maintains that sovereign independence of mind and spirit that is the hallmark of every human being. In their different ways, both of them reveal their essential otherness even as they speak directly to us. But the Holy Spirit comes into us, making us one with him and therefore also one with the Father and the Son. How can he retain his divinity, his essential otherness, except by concealing himself from us in ways the other two persons do not have to use?

Much of the history of the Church can be written in terms of trying to grapple with the mystery of the Holy Spirit. From the very beginning, Christians wondered why the different spiritual gifts had been distributed to some people but not to others. More fundamentally, the first few centuries of Christianity were a time when believers were challenged to discern who had the right message of salvation and therefore who was really inspired by the Spirit with the eternal word of God. As we all know, the Church came through that challenge with flying colors. Each one of us who reads the NT is deeply indebted to those who carried on the struggle against Marcion, against the gnostics and against all the “new agers” of their time. If we look at a later

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period, most of the debates of the Reformation centered around issues raised by the work of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of that great struggle lay the fundamental question: Does the Holy Spirit operate directly in the heart of believers, or is his work mediated through the Church, the priesthood and the sacraments? Today we are once again faced with the challenge of trying to understand how the Holy Spirit binds us to God, this time because a renewed interest in spirituality and “having the Spirit,” or “being in the Spirit,” is a central theme of Church life everywhere.

In the current spiritual climate, questions touching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit are bound to be of considerable interest in Christian circles. By far the most ancient of these questions is the one concerning his personal relationship to the Father and the Son within the Godhead. In theological language this is called the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit, and it tends to be abbreviated by using the Latin term *filioque*. This represents the addition originally made to the Nicene Creed in Spain sometime in the sixth century, and it means “and from the Son.” Today both Protestants and Roman Catholics accept it, but the Eastern Orthodox do not. We cannot point to a specific date or occasion when this first became a hot topic of theological discussion, but it is safe to say that it has been on the theological agenda for at least a thousand years, long before the Reformation and, for the most part, quite independent of it. Western Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, have taken only a sporadic interest in the issue. But the Eastern churches have made the procession of the Holy Spirit a fundamental tenet of their whole theology—largely in reaction, it is fair to say, to what they perceive as a Western innovation. In ecumenical discussions the representatives of the Eastern churches are adamant that we Westerners must abandon our position on this issue, and the truth is that since most of the Western representatives know and care so little about it they are usually inclined to give in to this demand without argument, if only for the sake of ecumenical peace.

Evangelical Christians, who are wedded to the belief that Scripture alone should be the foundation of Christian belief and teaching, often have little to say on this subject. Many simply take the double procession, as the Western view is called, for granted. They barely mention it in their theologies. The work of the Holy Spirit has been discussed in an endless series of thick tomes, but his person has been neglected or, rather, taken for granted. Catholic theologians who have defended the double procession have often used arguments that are drawn from tradition or from their understanding of Church authority. Evangelicals do not usually share these and are often unsympathetic to them, which makes it difficult for us to engage fully in the debate. For example, when Eastern theologians attack the *filioque* as a sign of papal arrogance and Catholics defend it because Rome has spoken and cannot be contradicted, where will evangelical sympathies most naturally lie? What is more, it can safely be said that the teaching of Scripture on this particular point is less than crystal clear, though of course that does not mean that the Bible has nothing at all to say about it. After all, it can just as easily be said that Trinitarian theology as a whole is not set out in Holy Scripture with the degree of clarity and precision that some defenders of a *sola Scrip-*

tura position would like, but that does not excuse us from having to hold and defend the Biblical truth proclaimed by that doctrine.

It would certainly be hard to argue that the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other two persons of the Godhead is not a central theme of the NT, since it forms a major part of the teaching of Jesus as this is recorded in John's gospel and underlies virtually everything the apostle Paul says in his epistles. It may even be the central question of NT theology, at least if we study it from the perspective of its practical application to the life of the believer. For if it is true that the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts by faith and that the Church is the fruit of Pentecost, then surely it must be a matter of more than passing interest for us to know how this Spirit is linked to the Father to whom we pray and to the Son of whom we bear witness in the world.

I. THE DOCTRINE

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father has been expressed in terms of procession at least from the time of Gregory of Nazianzus. Of course Gregory did not invent the term. He found it in John 15:26, where Jesus tells his disciples: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (NIV). I am not sure what persuaded the NIV translators to render *ekporeuetai* as "goes out," but theologians have traditionally translated it as "proceeds," and I hope that it will become clear in the course of my argument why I think it is better for us to retain that term today. As with virtually everything else in the NT, the precise meaning of the word has been debated by Biblical scholars, but their findings can be summarized as follows.

1. *The verb is used in the present tense, indicating a continuous action.* In this respect, it stands in contrast to the words used to describe the eternal generation of the Son, all of which suggest a completed action. How much should be made of this is hard to say. After all, it would be odd if the Son were portrayed as being eternally in the process of being begotten. Nevertheless it is important for us to recognize that the procession of the Holy Spirit is not presented in Scripture as a completed and therefore past event but as something that is continually in process, suggesting a vitality and dynamic relationship that might otherwise be less obvious.

2. *The verb is a compound of ek and poreuetai, which has led some scholars to ask what the force of the ek might be.* The matter is slightly complicated by the fact that the Greek has *para tou Patros* for "from the Father," which raises the question of whether there is any significant difference between *ek* and *para* in the context. In my opinion the answer to this must be negative. The *para tou Patros* recalls what John says in the same passage about how the Son comes from the Father (16:28), and that seems to be why it is used here. John could not have written *paraporeuetai*, since a word like that would suggest some kind of deviation away from the Father. So the only alternative would have been to put *ek tou Patros*, which would have obscured

the parallel with the Son. There does not seem to me to be any need to pursue the matter further than this: In this context at least, *ek* and *para* are synonymous.

3. *It has sometimes been objected, mostly by Eastern Orthodox scholars, that the Latin procedere is an inappropriate or inadequate translation of the Greek ekporeuesthai. This may or may not be so in purely lexical terms. But it seems to me to be a pseudoargument, to the extent that the word procedere has come to be used as the equivalent of ekporeuesthai and therefore means the same thing, whatever its original limitations may have been. It is true that Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) blamed the conceptual inadequacy of the Latin language for having caused the problem of the double procession. But this explanation—which Maximus incidentally used to excuse the Western “error”—is really too simple. If Latin lacked theological precision in Maximus’ day, it soon came to acquire it. Incidentally we may point out here that the NIV rendering “goes out” is open to a similar objection, because it might suggest that the Holy Spirit has left the Father’s presence, or something like that. Whether we like it or not, procedere and its derivatives (procedens, processio) have provided the technical terminology in which the historical debate has taken place. Within that context we ought to be prepared to accept complete lexical equivalence on the understanding that whatever ekporeuesthai can mean procedere can mean also.*

4. *In recent years many NT scholars have concluded that there is no real difference between the language of procession used of the Holy Spirit in John 15 and that of “sending,” which John frequently uses of the Son’s relationship to the Father. If this is the case, then it would appear that the Holy Spirit is sent (or proceeds) from the Father just as the Son does, an understanding that would favor the Eastern view that the Father alone is the source of the Godhead. This interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that in 15:26 Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father. If sending and proceeding are identical, then 15:26 would favor the double procession since the Holy Spirit is described as being sent by the Son as well as proceeding from the Father. Historically, of course, theologians have always interpreted the language of “sending” as referring primarily to the temporal mission of the Son and the Spirit, whereas the language of generation or procession has been used primarily of the eternal relations of the persons within the Godhead. If there is no difference between the Son and the Spirit at the level of their relationship to the Father, then we are faced with the possibility that the Holy Spirit is a second Son—Christ’s twin brother, in effect. Such an idea is not totally without Scriptural foundation, at least to the extent that by his indwelling presence we are adopted as sons of God and brethren of Christ, so that it could be argued that if the Holy Spirit is imparting something of his own character to us he might reasonably be called the Son’s brother. But it has to be said that such an interpretation is rather farfetched and finds no support in anything Jesus says about his own relationship to the Spirit. Furthermore there is a real danger that if such an interpretation were ever to be adopted it might be interpreted as al-*

lowing access to the Father by the Spirit without taking the Son or his work into account. The lack of emphasis given to the atoning work of Christ in recent spiritual-renewal movements is a warning to us that this danger cannot be dismissed as purely hypothetical. In fact I would go as far as to say that some of the teaching being given in charismatic circles effectively sidelines Christ in precisely this way, offering people a religion of miraculous experiences with no mention of such unpleasant things as sin and repentance.

5. *Finally we have to say something about how the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit on earth is connected with his eternal relation to the Father in heaven.* Everyone agrees that John 15:26 is speaking primarily about the Spirit's temporal mission, so the verb *ekporeuetai* must presumably have some connection with that, a connection that to me seems to have been over-emphasized by the NIV translation. But this can neither be subsumed in the temporal mission (which would be the case if the verb were regarded as being synonymous with "sending") nor separated from the eternal relation of the Spirit to the Father, since the temporal mission of the Spirit depends on that. It is a basic principle of Biblical thought that the temporal mission of both the Son and the Holy Spirit reflects their eternal relations within the Godhead, since otherwise the authenticity of our knowledge of God would be called into question. To put it more simply: In Scripture, what a person does is entirely dependent on who or what that person is. A good example that illustrates this principle is the case of Jesus and his miracles. The scribes and Pharisees who questioned him about them were not interested in the technique. They did not say to Jesus, "Where did you get this ability from?" What they wanted to know was who he was, by what authority he did these things. And of course it was precisely this dimension that allowed Jesus to challenge them. Either he was from God or he was from the devil—and were the Jews going to say that the miracles he did were somehow diabolical?

It is clear from John 15:26 that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and nobody has ever disputed this. The only question is whether the Holy Spirit can also be said to proceed from the Son. This is not expressly stated anywhere in Scripture, and two divergent lines of thought have grown up about it. The first, which has been the semiofficial position of the Eastern churches since the time of Photius (ninth century) and in essence since the time of John of Damascus (d. ca. 749), is that the word *ekporeuetai* is an explanation of the mode of the Holy Spirit's divinity, which he derives from the Father alone. The reason for this is that only the Father can truly be said to be the source of divinity. To say that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son would be to posit a second source of divinity, which in turn would destroy the Church's fundamental monotheism.

The second position, which goes back at least to Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and which has come to be characteristic of Western theology both Protestant and Catholic, is that *ekporeuetai* is essentially a relational term and that the relation of the Spirit to the Son is parallel, if not exactly identical, to the relationship between the Spirit and the Father. The theological motivation for this is basically an aversion to Arianism. Arians could, and some apparently did, claim that if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father but

not from the Son, and if the stated reason for this is that the Father alone is the source of divinity, then it was clear that the Son could not be fully God. This of course would then have enormous implications for our salvation, since we would have no direct experience of God either in Christ or in the Holy Spirit. Everything would be mediated to us through beings who, however superior they might be to us, were nevertheless still no more than creatures.

That conclusion was obviously unacceptable, and so the Western Church, which had to face Arianism in places like Spain, quickly adopted Augustine's formula: The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The earliest confessional text that contains this doctrine is the so-called Athanasian Creed, composed in southern Gaul sometime in the first half of the sixth century. It provoked little or no comment then, and by the time Spanish Arianism was condemned at the third Council of Toledo in 589 it had already been introduced into the local version of the Nicene Creed.

This addition gradually spread throughout western Europe, being adopted by Charlemagne in 794 and by the Roman Church about 1014, the long delay being due more to Rome's innate liturgical conservatism than to any dispute over the doctrine as such. It has thus become a major bone of contention between East and West quite apart from its innate truth or falsehood. The Eastern churches demand to know by what authority a local church can add something to a commonly agreed basis of faith without consulting the others. Here it is essential to recognize that we have moved from the question of truth to that of propriety. For even if we accept for the sake of argument that the double procession of the Holy Spirit is true, what right have we to add it to the Creed unilaterally? The Roman Catholic Church has a ready answer to this question by saying that papal approval of the move is all that is required for it to be legitimate. This of course, as I have already mentioned, is an answer guaranteed to alienate both the Eastern churches and Protestants and, if anything, make the latter more inclined to accept the Orthodox argument that it should be dropped.

We may and probably should regret that the *filioque* clause was added to the Nicene Creed without universal consent, but the Eastern churches ought to understand that for the West to drop it after so many centuries raises a different issue altogether. Even if the reasons given for this deletion are ones of propriety, most people will assume that a question of truth is involved as well. To drop the *filioque* would seem to many to be a rejection of the doctrine of the double procession, even if technically that is not the case. The truth issue will not go away: Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Son as well as from the Father—and, if he does, does this matter? We must not forget that the Eastern churches, however much they may play on the propriety issue, are also concerned with the question of truth. Most of their theologians want the West to drop the *filioque* not merely because it was added without their consent but because they believe that it is a false doctrine. This is the nub of the issue—and, unless it is decided one way or the other, tinkering with the words of the Nicene Creed will make very little difference either way.

II. THE TWO POSITIONS

From the Western point of view the great weakness of the Eastern position is that without a doctrine of the double procession it is hard to say what the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit is. The Eastern churches have never defined this relationship dogmatically, but their theologians have developed two possible ways of looking at it. The first way is to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. This approach safeguards the special position of the Father as the source of deity but gives the Son the important role of mediator in the divine procession of the Spirit, so that it is not possible to say that the Spirit derives his being from the Father independently of the Son. In 1439 the Western theologians at the Council of Florence agreed that this doctrine could be harmonized with that of the double procession, because the essential point was that the Holy Spirit derives his divinity from each of the other two persons according to their respective being. In other words the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father in his capacity as Father, which presupposes the existence of the Son, and he proceeds from the Son on the understanding that the Son derives his divinity from the Father. Thus they concluded that through the Son and from the Son amounted to the same thing in the end.

But the mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy has generally favored a different approach to the question, which cannot be harmonized so easily with the Western doctrine of the double procession. It wants to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son, just as the dove rested on Jesus at his baptism. In this way of thinking, the Holy Spirit is the light that illuminates the Son, the radiance of the glory by which we see him. The supporters of this approach killed the compromise worked out at the Council of Florence in 1439, and their modern descendants have been largely responsible for the renaissance of Orthodox theology in the twentieth century. If the Son is regarded as the recipient of the Holy Spirit, then of course it is impossible to accommodate the Western doctrine of the double procession as far as the internal relations of the three persons of the Trinity are concerned. The only sphere in which it could be said to have some validity is that of the temporal mission of the Spirit, since to us he appears to come from the Son as well as from the Father because he is the Son's radiance. Such an understanding, however, would destroy the essential harmony between the inner relations of the persons and their temporal missions and must appear to any representative of the mystical tradition as just another crude Western attempt to explain a divine mystery. From this point of view the Holy Spirit radiates the light of Christ's glory in order to demonstrate the fact that when he comes to dwell in us he will radiate the divine glory in us as well. In other words—and Eastern theologians of this type do not hesitate to use the term—we shall be deified in the light of Christ.

If we consider this teaching closely and compare it with the development of the Eastern tradition as a whole, we shall see that the key to understanding it lies in the connection with the baptism of Jesus. Students of early-Church history will remember that the baptism of Jesus was the event that

Paul of Samosata, who was condemned at a council in Antioch in the year AD 268, regarded as the moment when Jesus of Nazareth was formally adopted by his heavenly Father and became the Son of God. To put it another way, adoptionism is really the belief that Jesus was the first Christian because we too, by our baptism, are made children of God. No doubt his sonship was far greater than ours, but essentially it is a matter of degree rather than of kind.

Here we have touched upon something that I would regard as the latent heresy of the Eastern tradition, which later came out in the form of Arianism and which, in my opinion, has continued to affect the mystical tradition of the Eastern Church. This is obviously a sensitive subject, so let me explain what I mean. It is not that the Eastern tradition is Arian. Rather, it is susceptible to Arianism because of certain fundamental principles from which it works. To put this in context, we may equally well say that the Western tradition is susceptible to Sabellianism or modalism because of its fundamental principles, a fact that Eastern theologians have not been slow to notice. By stressing the fundamental equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Western tradition runs the risk of confusing the persons and regarding them as no more than different labels for the one God. But to believe that the Father alone is the source or fount of deity is inevitably to raise the possibility that the Son and the Holy Spirit are inferior to him in this vitally important respect. It does not necessarily entail the belief that the Son is a creature, which is the Arian teaching, but it makes such a position easier to hold. We must not forget that the double-procession doctrine was originally adopted by the Spanish Church precisely because of this danger, and it has always figured in Western calculations.

If the baptism of Jesus is to be taken as a model of the eternal relationship of the Son to both the Father and the Holy Spirit it raises the specter of adoptionism once again, a specter that is only reinforced if there is then some connection between the Spirit's descent on him and the Spirit's indwelling in us. The thrust of Eastern mysticism may be to raise us to the level of God by developing the concept of deification, but the danger is that in fact Jesus will be lowered to the level of the Christian, deprived of his eternal deity and assimilated to other Spirit-filled believers. Such a conclusion would horrify Eastern theologians, and rightly so. But it is essential for them to understand what Western fears are before condemning the doctrine of the double procession outright.

From the Eastern point of view, the main weakness of the Western position is that it appears to turn the personal relationships within the Godhead into abstractions and even to do away with the personhood of the Holy Spirit altogether. To argue as Augustine did that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father and that this love must be equal on both sides for it to be perfect is not reassuring to them, precisely because it seems to confirm their impression that as far as Western theologians are concerned the Holy Spirit is not a person at all. They want to know what his own relationship to the Father and to the Son is, not whether or to what extent he expresses the relationship of the Father and the Son to each other. Probably very few Western theologians would think of the double pro-

cession as a factor in the relative depersonalization of the Holy Spirit, but it would be hard to deny that something of that kind has taken place in our theological perception, whether or not the double procession has anything to do with it. The Eastern criticism of our position seems to me to be just as perceptive, and just as valid, as our criticism of theirs is. It is not the whole story, of course, but it is an issue that we must address if we wish to resolve this ancient and apparently intractable problem.

III. AN EVANGELICAL APPROACH

Whatever position we are going to adopt on the question of the double procession of the Holy Spirit, it is essential that we do everything possible to maintain the full and complete personhood of the third person of the Trinity. This personhood must not appear simply as an afterthought, something that we require in order to harmonize the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son but that has little practical significance. We must admit that our tendency to skip over this issue and go directly to that of the work of the Spirit is unbalanced and unhelpful, not least because the work the Spirit does is directly dependent on who the Spirit is, and his identity is defined by his relationship to the Father and the Son. In this respect, therefore, the question of the Spirit's procession is fundamental to our understanding of how he works in the life of the believer and of the Church. If the Holy Spirit really is a person in his own right, we ought to avoid language that calls him the "bond of love" between the Father and the Son, even if there is a sense in which this is true, because the language itself has a depersonalizing effect. We might say, for example, that a married couple is joined by a bond of love that makes them more than just two people sharing a common residence, but this bond is not a third person. Similarly the Father and the Son must surely be capable of loving each other fully without thereby needing or necessarily producing a third person to objectify that love. The Holy Spirit may well bind the Father and the Son together in a way not dissimilar to the bond that a child creates between his parents, but he is not essential to their relationship.

The Eastern view, which is that personal relationships must be freely established between responsible agents and not be the byproduct of some other relationship or process, seems to me to be quite correct. In other words, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Son must be a free connection between equal persons. In the case of the Father and the Son, the importance of this can be illustrated from Phil 2:5–11. There we are told that Christ, who was in the form of God and who did not think it robbery to be counted equal with God, nevertheless took upon himself the form of a servant and became man in order to bring about our salvation. The essential point here is that the Son's servanthood was voluntarily assumed, and his incarnation was the result. To think, as many people do, that the Son's servanthood was the inevitable result of his incarnation is mistaken. The Son's servanthood was not the result of his inferiority to the Father. On the con-

trary, it only assumes the meaning it has because of his fundamental equality with the Father. His was a voluntary submission willingly assumed for our salvation, which explains how it is that when we enter into that relationship in the Holy Spirit we experience the freedom of being sons, not the restrictions placed on servants or slaves. It is still true, of course, that he was sent by the Father and that he obeyed the Father's will, but this was by choice and not by compulsion.

Applying the same principle to the Holy Spirit we must conclude that although he was also sent into the world by the Father and the Son he came voluntarily. How would he be able to give us the freedom of sons if he does not enjoy that freedom himself? Some theologians have imagined that the persons of the Trinity have agreed among themselves as to how they would work together for the salvation of the world and that the tasks allotted to the Son and to the Spirit were the result of a common decision. Something like this must be true, though it is difficult to think of God working as a kind of committee. Here we have reached the edge of the divine mystery, which human minds cannot penetrate. But what we can and must say is that the Holy Spirit was not a subordinate participant in the determination of God's will and that whatever role is assigned to him is one he has willingly accepted.

It seems to me that this is of the greatest importance for an evangelical understanding of the Holy Spirit's procession. First of all, there must be a relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit that is eternal. It cannot be a relationship of dependence, whether this is conceived of as a common dependence on the Father or a dependence of the Spirit on the Son (or vice versa). It must be a mutually-agreed-upon relationship between equals. We are told in Scripture that the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father is one of procession, just as the relationship between the Son and the Father is one of generation. But we must not forget that the Church has always resisted the notion that the generation of the Son implies subordination to the Father and explicitly condemned the belief that there was ever a time when the Son did not exist. In the *filioque* debate, all sides would agree that the Spirit's procession is eternal and that it cannot be understood without the presence of the Son, just as the Son's generation cannot be understood without the presence of the Holy Spirit. The only question is this: What is the eternal relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit?

The belief that the doctrine of the double procession of the Holy Spirit implies that there are two sources of divinity does not fit evangelical theology because of our conviction that all three persons are *autotheos* (God in himself). However we interpret the concepts of generation and procession, we cannot say that any of the persons of the Trinity derives his divinity from the Father since all three are coequal and coeternal. Nor are we comfortable with the decision of the Council of Florence in 1439, which said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son "as if by a single spiration," since that appears to assimilate the action of the Father to that of the Son in a way that blurs their distinctiveness and also lapses back into the language of process and event as if there were a time when the Holy Spirit had not yet proceeded. We may further agree with the Eastern churches—

and indeed with Augustine—that because the Father and the Son are different persons the relationship of the Holy Spirit to each one of them must be distinct, even if it is analogous. To the extent that the traditional language of the double procession has obscured this distinction we ought to reject it. What we cannot do, though, is remain silent on the question of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit, because our evangelical convictions will not permit this. Why not?

Evangelical theology is different from Catholic and Orthodox theology primarily in the realm of Christian experience, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is primary and immediate. Without such a work a human being cannot know that he is saved and therefore cannot really be called a Christian. It is also to say that the Spirit's work is not necessarily mediated through other agencies like the institutional Church with its ministry and sacraments, even if these may be (and usually are) the means of grace that God chooses to use. What we mean by this is not that a person will not come to know God through the ministry of the Church but that the Church has no right to claim control over the believer on the ground that without its ministry, salvation for the individual is impossible. The practical implications of this for the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit can be seen in two areas. (1) We cannot subscribe to the view that the double procession somehow increases the authority of the pope, because we do not accept that he is the Vicar of Christ on earth. (2) We do not believe that the Holy Spirit comes down into the sacramental elements by an act of invocation or *epiclesis* (as it is known in Eastern theology). That idea fits in very well with the mystical notion of the resting of the Spirit on the Son, but it is unacceptable to evangelicals because we do not believe that the Spirit works in that way. It is not through the ministry or the sacraments but by a direct conviction of sin in our hearts that the Spirit builds up the Church.

It is in this context that evangelical discussion of the double procession of the Spirit must take place. For us the main question can be put as follows: Does the Holy Spirit work in our hearts on Christ's authority as well as on that of the Father, or is he sent by the Father to show us Christ? At first sight it may seem that there is little practical difference between these alternatives. The Eastern position does not bypass the Son in the way that some Western charismatics have a tendency to do. It is quite clear that the work of the Spirit is to point us to Christ and to illuminate what he means for us. The Western churches of course agree with this, as far as it goes. We would hardly wish to deny that the Holy Spirit teaches us about Christ or that he draws us into a closer union with him. The real question is one of authority. Does Christ have all power in heaven and earth, or is he dependent on the Father in some way? If the Holy Spirit does not proceed from him, does this mean that he must rely on the Father to send the Spirit? Of course we understand that the Father would never refuse to do such a thing, and we know that all three persons work together for the salvation of believers. But still we must ask whether Christ sends the Spirit by divine right or only by divine permission. This ultimately takes us back to the whole question of

Arianism, which is where the debate originally began. If Christ sends the Spirit only by permission, then there is a sense in which he is not fully and ultimately God.

The Eastern churches do not draw this conclusion, of course, but here we must ask them whether their concept of “derived divinity” really makes sense. If divinity is absolute being, how can it depend on something (or someone) else? Either a being is divine and therefore absolute, or it is not. By regarding the Father as the “source of divinity” in an exclusive way, have the Eastern churches not exposed themselves to the charge of Arianism? I am not saying this in order to try to score points against another tradition of Christian theology but in order to point out that both the Eastern and the medieval Western Trinitarian traditions have not absorbed the full implications of what it means to say that each person of the Godhead is *autotheos*, a statement that was first clarified by John Calvin but that is surely latent in the entire theological tradition of both East and West. The formulation of the doctrine of the double procession adopted at Florence is inadequate to do justice to the complexity of Trinitarian relationships, but abandoning the doctrine altogether is not the right way forward. What we must do is express our belief in a way that does justice to the distinctiveness of both the Father and the Son without compromising the full authority of Christ. When we talk about the double procession of the Spirit we mean that the Father and the Son relate to him in common, even though they are distinct persons. The Father and the Son share everything with each other, and this must include their relationship with the Holy Spirit if we are to be certain that there is no discrepancy between them.

In approaching the ancient controversy over this issue, evangelicals have little hope of resolving it as long as the traditional positions of each side remain the standard points of departure for theological discussion. But we do have an important contribution to make at a more fundamental level, which would shift the whole basis of the debate and, God willing, provide the key for reconciling traditionally opposing views. This key is the belief that each of the persons is *autotheos*, which does justice to the unique personhood of each one of them and allows this to be combined with the recognition of Christ’s full authority. In other words it overcomes the dangers of both latent Sabellianism and latent Arianism. It provides a way in which West and East can overcome their opposition, though obviously not without cost. Ultimately we must ask both Catholic and Orthodox believers whether they are prepared to revise their traditions in the light of Scripture—not in a way that is destructive of the past but in a way that points toward a deeper understanding of the divine mystery. This is the true glory of a *sola Scriptura* approach. Far from being reductionist (as its detractors so often claim) it goes deeper, if it is properly used, into the heart of the issues and provides a means whereby those issues can become a source of blessing, rather than a cause of dissension, for the universal Church.