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A Lutheran Perspective on the *Filioque*
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Should Christians confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*? [1] Since the ninth century, the addition of the word *filioque* to the Nicene Creed by the Western church has been a contentious issue between East and West. The Eastern church rejects both the change to the wording of the Creed without official endorsement by a council and the doctrine that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. [2] In recent years, this question has taken on new life in Evangelical circles in America. Among Evangelicals, the question is one avenue into deeper disagreements over the correct approach to trinitarian theology and is intertwined with debates over the relationship between men and women. These debates are a timely impetus for Lutherans to revisit the arguments that support a confession of the *filioque*.

Debates over trinitarian theology have arisen in Evangelical circles as some have rejected the idea that the Father generates or begets the Son. Seeing insufficient scriptural evidence to establish a relation of begetter/begotten as the eternal origin of the Son, alternative suggestions of how the Father and the Son are distinguished have been advanced. [3] One prominent alternative is the idea of eternal functional subordinationism (EFS), that from eternity the Son (and, for our purposes here, the Holy Spirit) submits to the Father. [4] In a strong version of the argument, such submission is the basis for the distinction of Father and Son. [5] This direction in

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[1] This essay is adapted from a panel paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society's 73rd annual meeting, November 16–18, 2021, in Fort Worth, TX.

[2] A useful survey of the history of the debate from the Orthodox perspective is found in John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 91–94.

[3] Wayne Grudem, as one example, reinterprets the language of "begetting" and "proceeding" to indicate nothing more than "relating as a Son" or "relating as a Spirit." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 254 n. 38. Grudem's definitions here are part of a move away from "begetting" and "proceeding" as relations of origin within the Trinity. John Peckham lists several examples of those rejecting eternal generation: Millard Erickson, John Feinberg, Paul Helm, Bruce Ware, and William Lane Craig. John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 141.

[4] While the Holy Spirit is included in this submission, the focus is more often on the Son. For a survey of the debate and the term EFS, see Keith Whitfield, *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2018), 5–10.

[5] Kevin Giles diagnoses this move and has written against it. Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 139.

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trinitarian theology derives, in part, from a desire to respond to feminist theologians who deny an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.[6] That is, Evangelicals have looked to the eternal subordination of the Son as a basis for Christian life, particularly as part of an argument for the proper roles of man and woman. Other Evangelicals have, in reply, contended that the eternal generation of the Son is a crucial insight into trinitarian theology that cannot be given up.[7]

This broader conversation about the Trinity has led to reengagement with the *filioque*. Evangelical authors taking a fresh look at the Trinity question whether there is sufficient biblical warrant for the *filioque*. They ask whether the doctrine is based on tradition rather than Scripture.[8] For instance, Malcolm B. Yarnell III critiques the *filioque* in light of Scripture. He finds sufficient warrant to conclude that the Son relates to the Father by being generated, while the Spirit relates to the Father by proceeding. This difference in vocabulary (*begotten* vs. *proceeding*) is sufficient, Yarnell argues, to distinguish Spirit and Son. He is ambivalent on the question of the *filioque*, finding evidence in John's Gospel of an eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father, but only evidence for an economic sending of the Spirit by the Son.[9] William Lane Craig uses the same exegetical criteria to push further. Craig holds that, while the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit are creedally affirmed, these doctrines have virtually no biblical warrant. Moreover, Craig argues that they introduce subordinationism into the Godhead. His model of the Trinity does not hold to a derivation of one person from another. At the same time, he does not wish to preclude such a derivation. Regardless, Craig thinks it a foundational mistake to assume that the economic Trinity reflects the eternal, ontological

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[6] See the essays in Bruce Ware, ed., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015). Not all Evangelicals opposing feminism give up the eternal generation of the Son. See Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002); and Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2012).

[7] Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017). For a critique of using the trinitarian life as a model for relations between husbands and wives, see Darren O. Sumner, "Obedience and Subordination in Karl Barth's Trinitarian Theology," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 144–146. For one example that lays out the relation between Father and Son as the model for husband and wife, relying on perichoresis to frame both relations, see Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), especially 239–269. In the background for much Evangelical thought in recent years (including Smail's work) is Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) and, more broadly, Karl Barth's trinitarian theology.

[8] Whitfield, *Trinitarian Theology*, 5–13; Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 137, 140–141.

[9] Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 153–154.

Trinity.[10] Obviously, if Craig is correct and the Spirit does not eternally proceed in any sense, then there is no *filioque*.[11]

The Lutheran approach to the *filioque* differs from these Evangelical approaches in at least three ways. First, Lutherans hold to an identity of the economic and ontological Trinity, as shown below. This flows out of a robust Christology at the heart of Lutheran theology. By way of contrast, Evangelicals take different approaches to how much the economic Trinity reveals of the ontological Trinity. Fred Sanders surveys possible answers, addressing the question of the temporal sending of the Spirit specifically. Sanders reports that some Evangelicals maintain that the temporal sending of the Spirit by the Son reveals "nothing" about God's eternal nature, others maintain that it reveals "everything," and more are in between these two extremes. At the very center of the spectrum is the answer that the temporal sending of the Spirit reveals the eternal relation of Son and Spirit.[12] That would mean that the temporal sending of the Spirit by the Son is evidence for the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Son along with the Father. Sanders's work makes clear that while some Evangelicals share with Lutherans the idea that the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity, other Evangelicals do not. Second, as we will see, Lutherans stand in line with a Western tradition that does not see the different terms of *begotten* and *proceeding* as sufficient to distinguish Son and Holy Spirit. Given these Evangelical debates, the Lutheran stance on the *filioque* is part of a broader approach to trinitarian theology. The Lutheran defense of the *filioque* is a defense of a creedal trinitarian faith that sees significance in the eternal relations of origin within the Trinity. Third, if it is not already clear, Lutherans place more value on the tradition when approaching a doctrine like the Trinity than some Evangelicals who approach Scripture with a blank trinitarian slate.

Lutherans, with almost no exceptions that I have found, uphold the teaching that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This Lutheran doctrinal commitment was made clear already in the sixteenth century and remains true to this day. Lutherans insisted on the *filioque* in a literary exchange between Lutherans at Tübingen and the Eastern Patriarch Jeremiah already in the 1570s.[13] Later, the seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian Johann Conrad Dannhauer wrote a 320-

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[10] William Lane Craig, "Is God the Son Begotten in His Divine Nature?," *Theologica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 3, no. 1 (2019): 25–31.

[11] Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 140–141.

[12] Fred Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity & Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 23.

[13] George Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople: The Correspondence between the Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982). Mastrantonis gives a helpful survey of the correspondence on pages 12–20.

page treatise defending the *filioque*, showing commitment to and interest in the question.[14] Both the long history of the doctrine within Lutheranism and the attention given to the doctrine by Dannhauer point to the *filioque* playing a significant role in Lutheran theology. The role of the *filioque* suggests that Lutherans today do well to attend to the doctrine and the questions surrounding it. Particularly as conservative Evangelicals debate the *filioque* and trinitarian theology more broadly, Lutherans need to be equipped with scriptural arguments to diagnose and root out problematic approaches to the Trinity. Attitudes toward the *filioque* often reveal deeper commitments to trinitarian theology, and being clear on the *filioque* equips theologians to identify sound trinitarian doctrine.

While Lutherans remain committed to the *filioque* today, the exact force of this doctrine is changing among some Lutherans. Various Lutheran theologians in the last few decades have reached different conclusions about whether or not the *filioque* is a necessary doctrine, and some have reinterpreted it in light of new approaches to the Trinity. This paper will survey Lutheran arguments for the *filioque*, arguments which have remained fairly stable throughout the history of Lutheran theology and are still current among Lutherans today. I will then give some attention to a few new Lutheran framings of the *filioque*, which do not change these arguments as much as put them into different contexts to move ecumenical dialogues forward. The central argument of this essay is that Lutherans hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* in terms of the Spirit's eternal origin and defend the doctrine with arguments from historical, exegetical, and systematic theology. I have organized typical Lutheran arguments, roughly, by these theological disciplines.[15] My hope is that this survey of Lutheran arguments for the *filioque* will bolster Lutherans in their confession that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and increase appreciation for a classic Western approach to the Trinity.

Historical Arguments

Lutherans hold to a higher view of the ecclesial and theological tradition than other Protestants. Identifying Lutherans as conservative Reformers captures the

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[14] Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Stylus Vindex Aeternae Spiritus S. a Patre Filioque Processionis, Internae Immanentis Emanationis, Avita Religione Hactenus Creditae Ac Necessario Credendae, Nudius Tertius in Dubium Vocatae et Negatae* (Straβburg: Staedelius, 1663), https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb11402570. See Bruce D. Marshall, "The Defense of the *Filioque* in Classical Lutheran Theology: An Ecumenical Appreciation," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 44, no. 2 (2002): 155.

[15] Such distinctions are, of course, not an exact science. Good systematic arguments derive from scriptural evidence (exegesis) and are frequently in conversation with historical sources. Nevertheless, I have sorted out arguments by how the major emphasis of the argument aligns with each theological discipline.

Lutheran ethos that critiques tradition on the basis of Scripture while holding a high view of traditions that pass the scriptural test.[16] In regard to the *filioque*, this respect for the history of the church and doctrine applies first to the text of the Creed and second to the Lutheran view of patristic sources.

Lutherans retained and confessed the ecumenical creeds as they received them in the West, both in worship and in their doctrinal works. They were and are aware that the version of the Creed codified in 381 did not contain the *filioque*. However, they point out that the original Creed does not assert that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.[17] The absence of the *filioque* from the Creed does not deny the doctrine. For Lutherans, this means that more is needed on either side of the argument than a discussion of conciliar authority and of illegitimate additions to the Creed.

Moreover, the version of the Nicene Creed included in the Lutheran Book of Concord contains the *filioque*. The confessional statements assembled in the Book of Concord are held as a correct interpretation of Scripture. Part of this confessional standard is a commitment to the ecumenical creeds, the two relevant for the *filioque* being the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.[18] Since the Athanasian Creed says that the Spirit "is from the Father and the Son, not made or created or begotten but proceeding," Lutherans argue that this Creed contains the idea, if not the precise formulation of the *filioque*.[19] Moreover, the text of the Nicene Creed printed in the Book of Concord includes the *filioque*. This gives the *filioque* greater ecclesial authority among Lutherans than it has for other traditions; while the patristic councils did not include the phrase in official doctrinal formulations, the Book of Concord does.[20] For Lutherans who hold a robust (*quia*) subscription to the Book

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[16] Such a characterization comes from Charles P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology: As Represented in the Augsburg Confession and in the History and Literature of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1871).

[17] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 242.

[18] The Kolb and Wengert edition retains the language of the *filioque* in its translation of the Nicene Creed, but puts the phrase in brackets. The brackets reflect the ecumenical thought among some Lutherans detailed below. "We believe . . . in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 22–23. A footnote in the Kolb-Wengert edition explains this complicated history, noting that the word is missing from Greek manuscripts, was added to the Nicene Creed by the Council of Toledo in 589, and was an "innovation" critiqued by Pope Leo III in later centuries. Without denying the doctrine, the notes and brackets suggest that this is a problematic addition to the Creed. Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 23 n. 28.

[19] Carl Beckwith, *The Holy Trinity*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, ed. Gifford A. Grobien, vol. 3 (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Luther Academy, 2016), 246.

[20] The language of the Creed with the *filioque* is echoed in Lutheran dogmatics texts. See, for instance, Leonard Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology: A Summary of Christian Doctrine, Derived from the Word of God and the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* trans.

of Concord, the *filioque* is binding doctrine.[21] For those with a weaker (*quatenus*, merely a "historical witness," or similar) subscription to the Book of Concord, this is not a doctrinal commitment but still stands as an important witness.

A further historical argument raised by Lutherans is patristic witnesses to the *filioque*. Lutherans hold the church fathers in high regard. Careful Lutheran scholars have read the fathers with appreciation due to the belief that Lutherans remain part of the church catholic.[22] As such, Lutherans see church fathers who hold to the *filioque* as authoritative voices on this question.[23] To be clear, patristic witnesses are secondary authorities for Lutherans, as the church fathers are to be normed by Scripture. Furthermore, Lutherans have long noted disagreements among the fathers on many things, including the *filioque*.[24] An appeal to the church fathers as impartial judges on the *filioque* question fails for this reason. Such an appeal also fails because interrogating the church fathers of the first five centuries on the *filioque* is an anachronism. Nevertheless, Lutherans find it significant when the fathers speak in terms that agree with the *filioque*. Lutherans note that Augustine teaches something like the *filioque* and argue that his words carry theological weight. They repeat Augustine's formula that the Spirit proceeds principally from the Father and also from the Son.[25] Additionally, Lutherans are aware that the *filioque* arose out of the Arian controversy and remain vigilant against incursions of Arianism, including

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H. E. Jacobs and G. F. Spieker (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Book Store, 1868), 22; and Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Joh. Guilielmi Baieri Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia-Verlag., 1879), 2:68–69.

[21] For a contemporary reflection on the significance of confessional subscription, see Scott R. Murray, "Confessional Loyalty or 'I Let That Subscription Lapse'?," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (January 2022): 25–42. For a confessional Lutheran on the *filioque*, see David Jay Webber, "The Nicene Creed and the *Filioque*: A Lutheran Approach," *LOGIA* 8, no. 4 (Reformation 1999): 45–52.

[22] This conviction is behind the seminal *Magdeburg Centuries* of Matthias Flacius Illyricus. Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 233–242.

[23] For instance, see Gerhard's treatment of the *filioque* question, in which he cites numerous fathers throughout. Johann Frederick Cotta, ed., *Iohannis Gerhardi theologi quondam Jenensis celeberrimi Loci Theologici cum pro astruenda veritate* (Tübingen: Georg Cotta, 1762), 1:319–331; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4. This particular *locus* does not appear in the 1863 Preuss edition or the English translation published by Concordia Publishing House. And note that in the 1762 edition, this section mis-numbers the locus as "V" instead of "IV" on the pages, while correctly identifying it as "IV" in the index. For a useful reference guide to what is included in the various editions of Gerhard's *Loci*, see the "Comparison of Editions of Gerhard's Loci" in the introductory section of each of the Concordia Publishing House translations of the *Loci*; one instance is Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis II–III: On the Nature of God and on the Trinity*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), xii.

[24] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 239–243.

[25] Webber, "Nicene Creed and the *Filioque*," 47.

any that might come from a denial of the *filioque*.[26] While they note that many fathers do not use the language precisely, Lutherans argue that the fathers intended to say the same thing as the *filioque* with phrases such as "depending on the Son" or "flowing forth from the Son."[27] While they note these patristic witnesses, for Lutherans, patristic sources are insufficient to establish doctrine. The real test for Lutherans is whether a doctrine has scriptural support. They find such scriptural support for the *filioque*.[28]

Exegetical Arguments

Lutherans turn to numerous Scripture passages as evidence for the *filioque*. I will group these together here in three unbalanced categories. The first is a central passage on the question in the Lutheran view, John 16:13–15. Second, Lutherans see passages that speak of the "Spirit of Christ" as evidence for the *filioque*. Finally, passages that speak of Christ sending the Spirit provide exegetical evidence.

In John 16:13–15, Jesus promises that the Spirit will come and guide the disciples into all truth. Key for Lutherans is the point that the Spirit "will take what is mine [Christ's] and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine [Christ's]; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (vv. 14–15).[29] These words of Jesus make clear that the Spirit receives something from Jesus, and Jesus and the Father share in all that the Father has. Identifying what the Spirit receives and what Jesus and the Father share are critical for answering the *filioque* question.

Lutheran exegesis is built on the conviction that the divine essence is what Father and Son share and what the Spirit takes from Jesus. Luther himself sets the direction for Lutheran exegesis, interpreting "what" the Spirit receives in John 16:13–15 as the divine essence.[30] If not the divine essence, Luther reasons, then what

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[26] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "More Promise than Ambiguity: Pneumatological Christology as a Model for Ecumenical Engagement," in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten*, ed. Alberto A. García and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 192–193.

[27] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 246–247. Webber notes that Chemnitz and Andreae read the fathers this way also. Webber, "Nicene Creed and the *Filioque*," 48.

[28] For a particularly clear instance, see Beckwith, who argues that this doctrine is more than just a point in the history of dogma. Rather, the Lutheran position on the *filioque* is scriptural truth. The scriptural truth is the key issue here, as even the tradition of the *filioque* arose from early readings of Scripture and not from later disputes over the wording of the Creed. It is also significant for Lutherans today, who ought to teach the *filioque* because it is scriptural. The creedal and historical concerns are secondary to Scripture. Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 244–245, 261–262.

[29] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[30] "There the Holy Spirit is true God with Christ and the Father, but in such a way that he has his divine essence not from himself, but from both the Father and Christ. For Christ here says that

could the Spirit take from Christ? Not a piece or a crumb of the Godhead, for this essence cannot be divided. Luther concludes that this is a reference to the Spirit receiving the divine essence from the Father and the Son. Since Jesus also talks of having all that the Father has in these verses, Luther reads the entire section as a discussion of what the persons of the Trinity have in common: the divine essence. The Spirit is true God, sharing in the same essence which he has taken from the Son and the Father. The sole distinction of the Spirit is that he is a different person than the Father or the Son.[31] Later Lutherans follow Luther on this point. Since Spirit and Son already share the divine essence, Christ has nothing else that the Spirit might take. The Spirit, for instance, is already omniscient and so could not take some particular knowledge from the Son. So it is all or nothing: either the Spirit takes the divine essence from the Son, or there is nothing for the Spirit to take from the Son.[32] At first glance, such a reading does not seem to account for the future tense of "will take." Lutherans understand the future tense as a reference to the work of the Spirit in time to make truth known to the disciples and to the church after Christ's resurrection and ascension. But they ascribe the "taking" to the eternal origin of the Spirit, that is, the *filioque*.[33] If the Spirit and the Son are consubstantial, the argument goes, there is nothing that the Spirit could take from Christ that he did not already possess.

The second scriptural argument for the *filioque* comes from passages that speak of the "Spirit of Christ." Scripture contains numerous passages that use the phrase.[34] While recognizing that genitives may have different force, Lutherans argue that "Spirit of Christ" is a genitive of origin, identifying the eternal relation of the Spirit and the Son. They observe that this is parallel to scriptural identifications of the "Spirit of God" or the "Spirit of the Father."[35] Since this last "Spirit of the Father" represents a genitive of origin, and Lutherans read "Spirit of Christ" as a parallel construction, they take the meaning to be that the Spirit proceeds from the Father

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the Holy Spirit eternally takes that which is his own, namely the divine essence, not from the Father alone, but also from Christ." Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 46:66.23–29 (hereafter WA). Luther interprets the same thing about the Father and the Son: "All that the Father has is mine" is a reference to the eternal sharing of the Father and Son in the divine essence and therefore all things. WA 46:66.36–67.13. See also Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 169.

[31] WA 46:68.33–69.2; Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 170.

[32] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 170. For a later theologian picking up the argument, see Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 1:144.

[33] One example is Gerhard, *Loci* 1:325–326; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, §§ 78–80.

[34] For instance, Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19; and 1 Peter 1:11.

[35] See, for instance, Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:143–144; Gerhard, *Loci* 1:319–320; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 49, 1:323–324; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 73. In the last reference, Gerhard adds that the plural "Elohim" in "Spirit of Elohim" is a reference to the divinity of the Father and the Son.

and the Son.[36] Furthermore, the order is never reversed: Scripture does not speak of the "Son of the Spirit."[37] The very order of the persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is traced back to these kinds of passages as evidence for the *filioque*.

Finally, Lutherans look to scriptural texts that speak of the Son sending the Spirit. The key texts here are in John, including Jesus' discourse after the Last Supper (John 15:26; 16:7) and his post-resurrection appearance to the disciples when he breathes on them and gives them the Spirit (John 20:22).[38] Lutherans read these passages and interpret them as a giving of the person of the Spirit, not just the gifts of the Spirit. While the Spirit comes with the gifts, Lutherans see Jesus' gift to the disciples as the person of the Spirit who bears the gifts to them.[39] For the Son to give the Spirit, Lutheran dogmaticians argue that he must have the power of sending (*potestas mittendi*). This is a power held by some persons of the Trinity, but not all, according to Lutheran dogmaticians. When the Son sends the Spirit, they take this as evidence that the Son has this power. They then reason that this power must be grounded in the eternal, immanent Trinity.[40] This particular line of thought is only one of the ways in which Lutherans argue that the temporal sending of the Spirit is grounded in the eternal origin of the Spirit.[41] Linking temporal mission to eternal origin in this way is part of a larger Lutheran commitment to the notion that the immanent Trinity is identical to the economic Trinity. And that point takes us beyond exegetical arguments into systematic arguments.

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[36] The argument stretches back to sixteenth-century Lutherans; see Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 232. Here Abraham Calov is clear: "Just as he is called the 'Spirit of the Father' . . . and the Spirit 'of God' . . . because he is breathed by the Father (*spiratur a Patre*) . . . and is from the Father by eternal procession, so also he is equally named the Spirit 'of the Son' . . . and Spirit 'of Christ' because he is equally from the Son by eternal procession, and is breathed by the Son of God, just as by the Father." Abraham Calov, *Systema* (Wittenberg, 1659), 3:812; quoted in Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 158. See also Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 252–253; and Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. Richard A. Krause and James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 2:188–189.

[37] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 159. Lutherans point to these genitive constructions as the source for the order of trinitarian persons. Gerhard holds that if the Spirit does not proceed from the Son, the order of the persons is uncertain. Gerhard, *Loci* 1:326; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 82.

[38] For an example in a short book on the Holy Spirit as a simple catechetical tool, see William Dallmann, *The Holy Ghost* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1930), 10. Dallmann references John 15:26, and notes that in Galatians 4:6 God sends forth the Spirit of his Son. Along with similar passages, these are sufficient for Dallmann to demonstrate why Lutherans hold to the *filioque* over against the Greek church. See also Gerhard, *Loci* 1:319; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 49.

[39] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 163; Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:145–146.

[40] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 164.

[41] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 164. Hoenecke restricts the sending of the Spirit in John 14 to temporal mission, but he also identifies the Son's breathing out the Spirit as an *opus ad intra*. Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 2:188–189.

Systematic Arguments

In my estimation, the systematic arguments over the *filioque* are at the heart of the matter. Historical questions about the text of the Creed, as widely recognized, cannot resolve the debate. The church fathers do not present a consensus on the issue.[42] Scriptural interpretations lead to systematic commitments which, in turn, shape how passages are read. For instance, Christian theologians in the creedal tradition (or at least all with whom I am familiar) grant that in time and in the economic Trinity, the Son sends the Spirit and the Spirit proceeds from the Son. To interpret Jesus' promise to send the Spirit as evidence of an eternal procession depends (in large part) on a commitment to the economic Trinity being the same as the immanent Trinity.[43] Lutherans hold to this identification with tenacity due to a systematic commitment to how God reveals himself. After working out why Lutherans insist that temporal sending must reflect eternal origins in the Trinity, I will lay out the particular Western approach to the Trinity used by Lutherans, and then turn to some more recent, novel systematic arguments for the *filioque* arising from Lutherans.

For Lutherans, the self-revelation of God occurs through the Son. The Son, as the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), makes God known to humans. Lutherans will (at least on occasion) push this to the point of asserting that the only knowledge we have of God comes from Christ.[44] This line of thinking goes all the way back to Luther, who wants no God outside of Christ.[45]

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[42] On these points, Peckham is correct in noting the limitations of historical theology, a theme running through his chapter on theological method and the Trinity. Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 154–169.

[43] Lutherans are not alone among Western theologians in asserting this identity. Among Roman Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner makes it a foundational principle (see below). Other Western theologians are less committed to the principle. Another Roman Catholic, Yves Congar, accepts Rahner's rule with some reservations or limits. First, Congar is comfortable identifying the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity (since the content of God's revelation is himself), but is concerned with identifying the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity. That is, what is significant for Congar is the order of what is being identified with what . He is hesitant to equate the free economic Trinity with the necessary immanent Trinity. Furthermore, Congar places a limit on what humans can know of God. Short of the beatific vision, human knowledge of God in himself is necessarily limited. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The Complete Three-Volume Work in One Volume*, trans. David Smith, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad Herder, 2000), 3:11–22. Some Evangelicals question Rahner's principle. See Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, "Introduction," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 17–18. They suggest that the rule is either "trivially true, or extremely controversial."

[44] For a contemporary work of Lutheran Christology that takes the humanity of Christ as the entry into knowledge of Christ, see Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

[45] WA 54:66–69; Martin Luther, *Last Words of David* (1543): vol. 15, pp. 313–316, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House,

Carl Beckwith nicely summarizes how this point leads to identification of the economic and immanent Trinity. He argues that we may know God only as he reveals himself. Because of our reliance on divine revelation to know God, whatever we say about the Trinity is learned from history as God reveals himself to us. We conclude from these points that what God does in time for our salvation reveals his eternal being to us.[46] Since the only knowledge we have of God comes from God's revelation of himself in history as he comes to save, that temporal mission is our window into the eternal nature and being of God. The economic Trinity is identical to the immanent Trinity, even as the two are distinct.[47]

An emphasis on God's revelation of himself as the source of our knowledge of God sets the Lutheran view of the economic and immanent Trinity apart from other views. The terminology of "economic" and "immanent" is rather recent; Fred Sanders traces the distinction back to the Lutheran theologian Johann August Urlsperger (1728–1806).[48] Not all Lutherans since Urlsperger have adopted this particular vocabulary. Francis Pieper does not use the terms when discussing the Trinity, but retains a more traditional discussion of God's works *ad extra* in relation to inner-trinitarian relations.[49] The most well-known adherent of the terminology of "economic" and "immanent" was the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. Rahner used the terminology as a way to integrate trinitarian theology into all of theology by insisting that the Trinity happens in us. He feared that the doctrine of the Trinity was only superficially incorporated into theology, and particularly feared that the argument that any person of the Trinity could become incarnate reduced trinitarian theology to something superfluous to Christian theology. He counters that only the Son can become incarnate, with the result that the economic Trinity must be identical to the immanent Trinity. Furthermore, each person of the Trinity communicates himself to man in a way proper to his personal being. Thus the self-

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1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE. WA 40/1:77–78; AE 26:28–29.

[46] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 248.

[47] Adolf Hoenecke dissents from this principle to some extent. Hoenecke argues (against Philippi) that the experience of salvation is only an apparent proof of God's eternal relations. Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 2:189–190.

[48] Fred Sanders, *The Triune God,* New Studies in Dogmatics, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 147–148.

[49] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 371–463. While the terminology is new, ancient tradition considers the works of God *ad extra* as indivisible. Lutheran theologians have accepted this rule from Augustine with the qualification that the properties of each person remain distinct. For a concise and insightful summary of *opera ad extra*, see Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 315–335. This discussion depends on some kind of distinction between the Trinity in itself and the works of the Trinity extending into creation. However, the terminology of "economic" and "immanent" Trinity is a more recent development.

communication of God to us is not an image or analogy of the immanent Trinity, but is the Trinity itself. The Trinity takes place in us; it is not a reality expressed in dogmatic terms.[50] With these arguments, Rahner integrates trinitarian theology into all doctrine, so that Christian theology would not be possible without the Trinity. In the process, Rahner collapses any distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity. This is a different approach to the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity than the one Lutherans take. Lutherans, as noted above, look to God's actions in history to reveal who God is to us. A Lutheran stance on the economic and immanent Trinity insists that the God we know in revelation is the same as the God who is otherwise hidden from us.

Drawing an implication from their understanding of the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity, Lutherans insist that the Son's temporal sending of the Spirit must be grounded in the eternal origin of the Spirit in the Son as well as the Father. That is, the temporal sending of the Spirit presupposes the Spirit's eternal procession from the Son.[51] Lutherans from the sixteenth century onward have been aware that Eastern Orthodox churches see the distinction of temporal sending and eternal procession as more significant, such that the Son can send the Spirit in time without the Spirit proceeding eternally from the Son.[52] Nevertheless, Lutherans insist that the power to send the Spirit must be grounded in an eternal origin of the Spirit from the Son.[53] And they are insistent that the Son's temporal sending of the Spirit reveals the eternal relation between the Son and the Spirit. Jesus gives the Spirit in order to show who God is from eternity. When Jesus breathes out the Spirit on his disciples, this act reveals the eternal relation of the Son and the Spirit.[54]

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[50] Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smith (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 77–102. For more details, see Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (1970; repr. New York: Continuum, 2001).

[51] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 223–228; David P. Scaer, "*Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur:* The Spirit Understood Christologically," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61, nos. 1–2 (January–April 1997): 102–103, who also cites Quenstedt in support.

[52] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 223–224.

[53] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 164. For one word of caution on this equation, see Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God and of Christ*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1997), 176–181. Thielicke does not see the two Trinities as antithetic, but cautions lest the economic Trinity be absorbed by revelation. He is concerned that since revelation happens in this world, God will be constricted to human, philosophical categories. Nevertheless, Thielicke begins with the idea that our knowledge of God comes from divine self-disclosure in time, the basic premise with which Lutherans begin as they consider the Trinity in time and in eternity.

[54] Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:143. On this point, Lutherans are following a particular argument of Augustine. More broadly, see Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:144, for Jesus' temporal sending of the Spirit as a

Lutherans further bolster the argument by pointing to the language of Scripture. The language that Scripture uses to describe the Son sending the Spirit runs parallel to language of the Spirit proceeding eternally from the Father. In John 14, Jesus says that the Father will send the Spirit (read widely as the eternal procession of the Spirit), and uses the same language to describe Jesus' sending of the Spirit.[55] The parallel language, the argument runs, means that the Son's sending the Spirit in time is identical to Father and Son breathing out the Spirit in eternity. Moreover, the same parallel in language is found in the relation of the Father to the Son. The Son proceeds from the Father in eternity and is sent by the Father in time. The temporal sending of the Son reflects the Son's eternal origin in the Father. The alignment of the Father's temporal sending of the Son with the Son's eternal origin in the Father suggests that the Son's sending the Spirit in time reflects the Spirit's eternal procession from the Son as well as from the Father.[56] Gerhard puts forth as a principle that a divine person is not sent by another divine person unless the one sent proceeds (broad sense of *proceeding*; see below) from the one sending.[57] By these various sendings in time, the triune God saves.[58] And the way God reveals himself in his temporal mission to save humans (here, Son sending the Spirit) identifies who God is from eternity, as the parallel language for eternal and temporal sending makes clear.

But, one might object, Scripture is quite clear that the Spirit comes to rest on Jesus and leads and directs Jesus on his earthly mission. Would this not then prove that in eternity the Spirit must come to Jesus as well, rather than proceeding from him? This point is critical to a new direction in the *filioque* charted by Leopoldo Sánchez and surveyed below.[59] Here I note that Lutherans have long recognized the objection. Their traditional response has been to argue that the Spirit's leading of Christ is carried out on account of his human nature. The Spirit is leading the person, but that leading is needed because of Christ's assumed human nature, a nature which he took on in time and did not possess from eternity.[60] Accordingly, the Spirit leading Christ does not reflect eternal origins, but arises in time on account of the incarnation. By appealing to the human nature as cause for the Spirit leading

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revelation of the eternal Trinity. Gerhard later reiterates the point that the temporal sending is a "manifestation" of the eternal God. Gerhard, *Loci* 1:319; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 49.

[55] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 248–249.

[56] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 251–252.

[57] Gerhard, *Loci* 1:324; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 76.

[58] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 263.

[59] See footnotes 87ff.

[60] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 167–168; Gerhard, *Loci* 1:324; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 76.

Christ, Lutherans push this counterargument aside to cling to the main point that the economic Trinity is identical to the immanent Trinity.

The second major systematic argument Lutherans make for the *filioque* arises from their commitment to Western trinitarian theology. Much could be said here; space permits only a review of some relevant points. Following Augustine and the Western tradition, classic Lutheran trinitarian theology begins with the unity of God's essence. The persons of the Trinity are distinguished only by their relations to one another.[61] These relations are limited: paternity, filiation, passive spiration (procession). Along with the Father being unoriginated and active spiration, there are no other distinguishing relations between the persons of the Trinity.[62]

Aquinas sharpens thought about these relations. Since the only thing distinguishing persons are a small number of interpersonal relations, what is necessary to distinguish the persons are pairs of opposite relations. The Father is distinct from the Son because the Father begets and the Son is begotten. The Father is distinct from the Spirit because the Father breathes out the Spirit and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. But what distinguishes the Son from the Spirit? There must be some opposed pair of relations, but only a handful of relations from which to choose. Moreover, to maintain the unity of the Spirit, the Spirit's relation to the Son must be the same as the Spirit's relation to the Father: passive spiration or proceeding. If there were some other relation, this would lead to two Spirits instead of one. From this the *filioque* necessarily follows: for the Son and the Spirit to be distinct, there must be a pair of opposing relations. That pair is spiration: the Son breathes out the Spirit and the Spirit proceeds also from the Son. Minor points support this as well: the only thing the Father can do apart from the Son is beget the Son. And breathing out the Spirit is an action that the Father and Son do jointly.[63]

Lutherans adopt this line of trinitarian argumentation from Aquinas. Evidence for this dependence on Aquinas runs throughout the Lutheran tradition from the sixteenth century on.[64] Lutherans describe the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son as from a single divine essence, or "one essential source."[65] Like Aquinas, Lutherans fear that without the *filioque* the Son and the Spirit will be indistinguishable. Both the Son and the Spirit, loosely speaking, come forth or

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[61] For a short summation of this approach to the Trinity, see Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 2:185–186. For a more detailed survey of Western theological approaches to the Trinity with a focus on the *filioque*, see Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:19–132. See also Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:63–79.

[62] For a summary of this approach among Lutheran systematicians, see Baier, *Compendium*, 2:3–75.

[63] Avery Dulles, "The *Filioque*: What Is at Stake?," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59, nos. 1–2 (January–April 1995): 36.

[64] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 225. Gerhard explicitly points to Aquinas in his treatment of the *filioque*. Gerhard, *Loci* 1:326; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 83.

[65] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 232–234.

proceed from the Father.[66] For many Lutherans, the difference in scriptural vocabulary between begetting and proceeding is insufficient to distinguish the two persons. Here Augustine is in the background. He contends that whatever is begotten also proceeds, but not the other way around. So to say that the Son is begotten means that the Son proceeds. Since both Son and Spirit proceed from the Father, what would distinguish the Son from the Spirit?[67] A pair of opposing inner-trinitarian relations is needed to distinguish them. And the only pair available is active and passive spiration—a new pair would lead to two Spirits.[68] Lutherans, at this point, typically confess that they do not know the exact force of "begetting" or "proceeding" in this trinitarian context. What is clear is that both terms mean receiving the divine nature.[69] But rather than explain what they mean, Lutherans are content to confess (say the same thing) as Scripture does.

It is worth pausing here to reiterate that this Western approach to the Trinity begins with and is primarily concerned with preserving divine unity and simplicity. A bare minimum of relations is asserted to distinguish the persons of the Trinity, who as a single essence have everything else in common. This concern to preserve divine unity is evident from Lutheran criticisms that denying the *filioque* will divide the divine essence. If the Spirit proceeds only from the Father as from an essence, Lutherans have argued, then the essence of the Father would differ from the essence of the Son and the unity of the divine essence would be divided.[70] Or, to put it positively, the Son receives the divine essence from the Father. Since Father and Son are consubstantial, the Spirit receives his essence from the essence that is common to the Father and the Son.[71] Furthermore, the Son must have everything that the Father has in order to be consubstantial with the Father, save what is necessary to

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[66] In Latin translations, this was more than loosely speaking. The verb *procedere* was used to translate the Greek ἐξῆλθον of John 8:42 and ἐκπορεύεται of John 15:26. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:87–88. Congar analyzes Thomas Aquinas, who states clearly the concern that since both Son and Spirit come forth from the Father, something more than a different term is required to distinguish them from each other. Thomas uses *procession* to mean simply "comes forth from," a dynamic that is true of both the Son and the Spirit and that accordingly complicates the distinction between Son and Spirit. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:116–121.

[67] Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:144–145. Chemnitz notes that Maximus, an Arian, challenged Augustine by asking why we do not say that the Holy Spirit is begotten, since both "begotten" and "proceeds" mean "to receive one's essence from." Chemnitz holds that the correct response is that what is not written is not to be believed or said. Since Scripture does not say that the Holy Spirit is begotten, neither should we. And while there must be a difference between generation and procession, Chemnitz observes (with Augustine) that we cannot know what that difference is.

[68] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 160–161.

[69] Gerhard specifically includes this receiving of the divine nature in his definition of "proceed." Gerhard, *Loci* 1:320; locus 4, pars 3, caput 4, § 76.

[70] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 225.

[71] Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:144.

distinguish the Father and the Son. Otherwise the *homoousios*[72] itself would be lost.[73] No *filioque*, Lutherans fear, and no *homoousios*.

In a similar vein, Lutherans also view the *filioque* as necessary to avoid subordinationism.[74] The Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz lays out this concern succinctly in a way that represents the broader Lutheran tradition. If the Spirit proceeds only from the Father, rests on the Son, and then passes through the Son to created beings, Chemnitz observes a hierarchy being established. The Father is highest, then the Son, then the Holy Spirit, then angels, etc., in a descending order.[75] The *filioque* is a way to subvert a kind of hierarchy among divine persons based on an overly great commitment to the monarchy of the Father. Like the concern for the *homoousios*, this concern derives from the Western approach to the Trinity through the single divine essence. We shall consider how this differs from the fundamental Eastern approach to trinitarian theology shortly when I turn to ecumenical dialogues. But first, I note two recent systematic arguments from Lutheran theologians.

The first comes from Carl Beckwith, who argues from the sacramental life of the church to the *filioque*. The Father would have us know him only in the Son; the Son would have us know him only in the Spirit. That Spirit comes in the church by Word and Sacrament. As people hear the Word in church, they come to know the Spirit first as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit who leads people to know God in Christ. Any other Spirit—a Spirit leading away from Christ, even if going away from Christ means going directly to the Father—would be a false Spirit, opposed to Christ.[76] Sacramental theology, part of God's saving mission, is a further reflection of the eternal nature of God, and the Spirit's procession also from the Son. Note again that this argument depends on the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity, so that the Trinity's work in time reveals his eternal being.

The second argument comes from David Scaer, who draws the *filioque* as a conclusion from the doctrine of inspiration. The Spirit who inspires Scripture must proceed from the Son if the Son is to have a role in the inspiration of Scripture. Since the Spirit proceeds from the Son, this Spirit necessarily includes the Son in the work of inspiration. The *filioque* functions to keep the work of inspiration an indivisible

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[72] "Of the same substance," the crucial description of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, confessed in the Nicene Creed against Arianism.

[73] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 171.

[74] Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, 237. See Dulles, "The *Filioque*," 40, a Roman Catholic who raises the same concern over divine unity and the equality of persons.

[75] Chemnitz, *Loci* 1:143.

[76] Beckwith, *Holy Trinity*, 262. This argument runs parallel to a point raised by Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, 2:298. If there is no *filioque*, Thielicke argues, then salvation is directly between the Father and humans, bypassing the Son entirely.

external work of the Trinity: the Spirit who inspires is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ.[77] Whether these new systematic arguments will take root among Lutherans remains to be seen, but the arguments are evidence of continuing thought about and support for the *filioque* among Lutherans.

Ecumenical Endeavors

Trinitarian theology, and the *filioque* in particular, has been reframed in recent years by Lutherans, particularly in light of theological dialogues with Eastern Orthodox churches. Before turning to these developments, here I note one Lutheran who reframed the Trinity in such a way as to exclude the *filioque*. This theologian was the German Lutheran Wolfhart Pannenberg. He grounded the Trinity in threeness, beginning with the three persons and working from them to God's unity and essence. He based the distinction between divine persons not on relations of origin but on reciprocal relations, placing the Trinity into a Hegelian framework of mutuality. For Pannenberg, "person" is a relational, correlative term. "One gains one's personality by giving oneself to one's counterpart; thus identity is gained in separation from, yet also in dependence on, the other."[78] In this way, Pannenberg sought to preserve a true mutuality among the persons of the Trinity, and moved away from an emphasis on origin in the conception of inner-trinitarian relations.

Pannenberg thought that it is a mistake to reduce the relations of the trinitarian persons to relations of origin (begotten, proceeding). For him, emphasis on relations of origin leaves no room for reciprocal relations between the persons. In particular, Pannenberg was concerned that identifying the Father as unoriginate leaves no room for trinitarian mutuality. Since the Father can only be the Father in relation to the Son, the Father's identity is in some way dependent on the Son. To avoid an exclusive focus on relations of origin, Pannenberg spoke in terms of "self-distinction" far more than "begotten" or "proceeding." The result is that Pannenberg claimed that the Son receives his deity in his act of self-distinction from the Father. Pannenberg's principles of preserving divine mutuality and not reducing the persons to relations of origin shaped his view of the *filioque*. He argued that the term *filioque* is uncanonical and should be removed from the Creed. While he did not condemn the term as heretical, Pannenberg did conclude that it is an inappropriate

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[77] Scaer, "*Cum Patre et Filio*," 107–110.

[78] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 131. For a helpful overview of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology, see the entire chapter in Kärkkäinen, *Trinity*, 123–150.

formulation because it describes the divine fellowship in the vocabulary of a relation of origin.[79] But Pannenberg is an outlier among Lutherans discussing the *filioque*.

Most Lutherans continue to uphold the *filioque*, including some who make other moves to advance ecumenical dialogues. Ecumenical conversations between East and West in recent years have led some Lutherans to retain but reframe the *filioque*. Official dialogues between Lutherans and Eastern churches have only rarely touched on the *filioque*.[80] The most conversation on the *filioque* came between American Lutherans and the Orthodox, leading to a Lutheran/Orthodox Common Statement adopted in 1999. Some in the dialogue suggested that, on the question of the *filioque*, East and West have similar motives. Both wish to preserve the monarchy of the Father and the equality of the Spirit as a distinct hypostasis. The differences on the question of the *filioque* were in linguistic usage rather than doctrinal content.[81] Despite members of the dialogue advocating for this understanding, the Lutheran/Orthodox Common Statement did not go that far. Lutherans grant in the document that the addition to the Creed was illegitimate and problematic. Many Lutherans, the Statement holds, are ready to confess a Creed without the word "*filioque*" to help relations with the East. But they will not completely abandon the doctrine, nor grant that it is a heresy. Instead, the Common Statement explains: "Lutherans can now acknowledge that the *Filioque* is not ecumenical dogma, but has the status of a local tradition which is not binding on the universal church."[82] The stance on the liturgical usage of the Creed does not signal a shift on the doctrine itself, other than relativizing its importance to a "local tradition." In the same document, the Orthodox report that they cannot grant the *filioque*, but are open to talk of the Spirit proceeding through the Son as well as proceeding from the Son in the Spirit's temporal mission.[83] One of the participants in the dialogue, Bruce Marshall, has written after the dialogue to defend the *filioque*. Or perhaps more precisely, he assembles arguments to show that the *filioque* is compelling, and hopes to dispel the notion that ecumenical dialogue has settled the

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[79] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 1:300–327.

[80] Here I rely on Risto Saarinen, who continues to survey dialogues between East and West. See Risto Saarinen, "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue from 2004 to 2015," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 50, no. 3 (December 2016): 226–239, as well as the articles and resources on Saarinen's blog at https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue-2/ (accessed February 21, 2023).

[81] Risto Saarinen, "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogues 1995–2013," available at https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/z2/ (accessed February 21, 2023).

[82] "A Lutheran-Orthodox Common Statement on Faith in the Holy Trinity," https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/A_Lutheran_Orthodox_Common_Statement_on_Faith_in_the_Holy_Trinity.pdf (accessed February 21, 2023).

[83] "A Lutheran-Orthodox Common Statement on Faith in the Holy Trinity."

issue in favor of the Eastern view.[84] It should be noted that the Lutherans involved in this document do not represent the confessional Lutherans of North America, such as the LCMS, WELS, and ELS, who continue to confess the *filioque* in the Creed.

A different reframing of the doctrine is evident in the work of Robert Jenson. Jenson upholds the doctrine, but only within a new way of approaching the Trinity. In short, Jenson argues that both East and West get the Trinity wrong by approaching the Trinity through pagan (i.e., classical Greek) philosophical categories. Those categories, defining *being* in terms of persistence, force the Trinity into the category of a fixed, frozen substance—a view that falls short of a living, dynamic God. Instead, Jenson holds that the Trinity is identified by narrative. God's self-identity is defined by *dramatic coherence*. Like a drama, God is unfolding in events that are unpredictable but the result of preceding events; the causation is only seen after the fact. In this view, God is identified by narrative: whoever raises Jesus from the dead, for instance, is God. So while Jenson can and does read John's Gospel and declare it sufficient to establish the *filioque*, he rejects both East and West as off base on the Trinity. The problem in both East and West is the focus on *being* as a persistent category and the related question of origin. Better, Jenson holds, to start with divine teleology and ask where God is going. Better also to broaden talk of relations to relations in time—such as the Spirit glorifying Christ. The end result is that Jenson holds that the *filioque* establishes that the Spirit derives his *energia* (participation in the divine life) from the Son, but not his being.[85]

I am not convinced that Jenson has escaped the problem of philosophical categories that dictate theological conclusions. Jenson's defense of the *filioque* relies on postmodern philosophical commitments that reject substance and insist that everything is always becoming something else. These postmodern commitments displace traditional categories shaped (in part) by Greek philosophy. This argument would be more compelling, I think, if the case were made more carefully that Greek philosophy unduly influenced traditional trinitarian theology, rather than taking every use of a term from Greek philosophy as an encroachment of philosophy on theology.[86] This is particularly necessary, because Jenson's approach to the Trinity

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[84] Marshall, "Defense of the *Filioque*," 172.

[85] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 64–70, 148–159.

[86] One example of this nuanced analysis of the relation of Greek philosophy and theology can be found in the work of Trevor Hart, albeit in taking up different theological questions than the *filioque*. Hart carefully distinguishes when Greek philosophy is dominating the account and when theological sources are prominent and philosophical categories are in a subservient role. Trevor Hart, *In Him Was Life: The Person and Work of Christ* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2019). Another theologian defending classical philosophical principles as aids to theology is Reinhard Hütter. He has recently argued that the metaphysical category of "substance" does not eliminate

uses postmodern categories without asking if they themselves are a corrupting encroachment of philosophy into theology. After all, the idea that there is no fixed substance may in fact twist the scriptural witness in different directions than Greek metaphysics, but directions that still corrupt the biblical view of God.

On the other hand, confessional Lutherans continue to insist on the *filioque* as scriptural and binding doctrine. Recent examples include David Scaer, David Jay Webber, and Carl Beckwith.[87] This is unsurprising given a strong subscription to the doctrine in the Book of Concord among confessional Lutherans.

One such confessional Lutheran charting a new path as an ecumenical suggestion based on a perichoretic model of the Trinity is Leopoldo Sánchez. Sánchez hopes to meet both Eastern and Western concerns through a Spirit Christology—Christology that focuses on Jesus as the one who receives and bears the Spirit. He maintains the eternal divinity of Christ (as opposed to some Spirit Christologies). Of interest is his suggestion that, at least alongside the *filioque*, theologians ought to assert that the Son is begotten "*in spiritu*," in the Holy Spirit.[88] This would involve the Spirit in the begetting of the Son in some way, namely as the space or horizon in which the Father and the Son love one another.[89] This works with a similar commitment to identification of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity as noted above, but now applies this commitment to the Son receiving the Spirit in time. Sánchez argues that Christ receiving the Spirit in time reflects an eternal resting of the Spirit on the Son.[90] This is a version of a perichoretic Trinity with the three persons mutually entwined.

The likelihood of any of these ecumenical approaches succeeding depends, I think, on whether they can satisfy the questions that lie underneath the *filioque*. It is widely, if not universally known, that underneath the differences on the *filioque* is a

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faith or mystery, but is critical to grounding faith and mystery in received reality. Reinhard Hütter, *Aquinas on Transubstantiation: The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 7–8.

[87] Scaer, "*Cum Patre et Filio*"; Webber, "Nicene Creed and the *Filioque*"; Beckwith, *The Holy Trinity*.

[88] Sánchez sets this apart from suggestions that the Son comes from the Father and the Spirit. For instance, Jürgen Moltmann holds to such a *spirituque* Christology. Moltmann advocates removing the *filioque* to allow one to say that the Father breathes out the Spirit in the Son and begets the Son in the Spirit. In this way, talk of either the Son coming forth from the Father or the Spirit always involves talk of the Third Person of the Trinity. The coming forth of the Son and the Spirit are not two separate acts, but an act in which each is in the other. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 71–73. Sánchez is aiming for the same kind of mutuality within the persons of the Trinity, but wants to retain the *filioque* alongside the idea that the Son is begotten *in spiritu*.

[89] Sánchez, "More Promise than Ambiguity," 189–214; Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 110–141, 239.

[90] Sánchez, *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver*, 138–139.

difference in the primary category used to think of the Trinity between East and West.[91] As noted, the West begins with the single divine essence. The three persons are seen as strictly identical to the divine essence, save those relations noted above.[92] The East begins with the category of *hypostasis*, or the tri-personality of God. John Meyendorff, the noted Eastern Orthodox theologian, rightly argues that the real question between East and West is whether tri-personality or consubstantiality ought to come first in trinitarian theology.[93] I suspect that until this question is dealt with, ecumenical efforts on the *filioque* will not lead to real results. Is one approach right and the other wrong? Are they different ways of saying the same thing? What distinguishes the persons of the Trinity, and how do they relate to the single divine nature? These seem to be the questions to discuss before moving on to the *filioque*.

Other formulations will, I fear, only run afoul of theologians in both traditions who object to them based on their own starting principles. The East will continue to question whether the *filioque* collapses the persons of the Trinity into the divine essence.[94] Can the persons of the Trinity be reduced to hypostatic relations within the divine essence?[95] Conversely, the West will continue to ask if the absence of the *filioque* lessens the divinity of the Son, divides the divine essence along the lines of a social Trinity, or subordinates the Son and the Spirit to the Father. And Evangelicals will not reach a consensus on the *filioque* until they have some consensus on the relations of origin among the trinitarian persons.

Much work remains to be done. Perhaps the unique Lutheran contribution to the conversation rests on the commitment to God's self-revelation in Christ. If Christ is the heart of theology and is the one who makes God known to us, then

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[91] See, for instance, Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:xv–xx; and Crisp and Sanders, "Introduction," 14. Note also a current objection to this view of East and West as outlined by Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 135–136.

[92] Sánchez, "More Promise than Ambiguity," 19; Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:200–202.

[93] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 94.

[94] From Photius onwards, the basic objections from the Eastern church are that Latin theology thinks of God as a single and philosophically simple essence and that this essence precedes God's existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The East objects that God's personal/hypostatic existence is reduced to the concept of mutual relations between the three persons. And they fear that attributing procession of the Spirit to the Father and the Son confuses the hypostatic characters of Father and Son and so falls into Sabellianism. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 60–61.

[95] "As time went on, it became increasingly clear that the *Filioque* dispute was not a discussion on words—for there was a sense in which both sides would agree to say that the Spirit proceeds 'from the Son'—but on the issue of whether the hypostatic existence of the Persons of the Trinity could be reduced to their internal relations, as the post-Augustinian West would admit, or whether the primary Christian experience was that of a Trinity of Persons, whose personal existence was irreducible to their common essence. The question was whether tri-personality or consubstantiality was the first and basic content of Christian religious experience." Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 94.

Lutherans reason that his Spirit must be the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son from eternity. Confessional Lutherans have good reasons to confess the *filioque* as outlined above. These arguments and the scriptural points they express help us recognize better the christocentric confession of the triune God in whom we trust for salvation and life.