

of their reception into the Faith should they renounce their heresy and seek admission into the Orthodox Church; some are to be received by Holy Baptism, while others are properly received by Holy Chrismation. Finally, Canon c condemns the painting of pictures that corrupt the mind or morals. Upon their passage, the Canons of the Quinisext Synod became an integral part of the Holy Canons of the universal Orthodox Church.

Although the decisions of the Quinisext Synod were signed by Papal legates, Pope Sergios I himself, annoyed particularly at the Thirteenth Canon, which allowed a married clergy and forbade married clergy from casting out their wives, rejected these decisions, causing the Emperor much irritation. Yet a bit later, Pope Constantine I of Rome traveled to Constantinople, where he negotiated a compromise with Justinian II, in which most of the Canons of the Quinisext Synod were accepted by Rome, with exceptions to certain Canons being allowed the Western Church since it had long followed different customs. Much later, at the time of the Seventh Œcumenical Synod, Pope Adrian I endorsed the Holy Canons of all of the Œcumenical Synods, touching specifically on those of the Quinisext Synod, although his acceptance had no apparent effect on the divergent practices of the West.

The Synod of Constantinople of 879–880

There is a fiction that there have been no Œcumenical Synods in Orthodoxy after the Seventh. It is said that since the Western Church is no longer in communion with Orthodoxy, Synods cannot be truly Œcumenical, that is, worldwide or universal, without the participation of the West. This is an absurd theory when examined closely, as absurd as maintaining that Synods after Chalcedon could not have been Œcumenical since the bulk of the Egyptian Church was after that time no longer in communion with Orthodoxy. The meaning of the appellation “Œcumenical,” with reference to Orthodox Synods, encompasses solely that which is within the Church, not that which has departed

from Her bosom. Orthodoxy remains one and whole even when regional ecclesiastical bodies drift into heresy and thereby separate themselves from the Church. Consequently, there is nothing preventing additional Œcumenical Synods beyond the Seventh. In fact, there are many in the Orthodox Church today, including a number of distinguished Hierarchs and theologians, who maintain that there are Nine Great Synods that should rightly be acknowledged as Œcumenical. The Eighth such Synod, they insist, is the Synod of Constantinople of 879–880. Among other things, they point out that the *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848* deems this Synod “The Eighth Œcumenical Synod.”⁵ As we shall see, it has all of the attributes of an Œcumenical Synod, its teaching is dogmatic, and its decisions have been accepted by the whole Church. Let us briefly explore the history of this Synod.

At the end of the second Iconoclast period, Saint Methodios I of Constantinople decisively favored the Iconodule position in the controversy over the Holy Icons. Inherent in his resolution of this controversy was a policy of moderation towards the formerly Iconoclastic clergy, a policy that left them unmolested as long as they confessed the True Orthodox Faith, including, of course, the veneration of Icons. But a rigorist party, insisting that harsh punishment be meted out to all who had participated in the Iconoclast repression, opposed him. Such views, Saint Methodios thought, would only exacerbate residual antipathies over the issue of sacred images and thereby extend the controversy on into the future. Moreover, a policy towards the Iconoclasts that suggested persecution might even give them renewed strength, while a moderate and forgiving policy would bring an end to decades of rancor, allowing Iconoclastic sentiment to die a natural death. Upon his repose in 847, Saint Methodios I was succeeded by Saint Ignatios I, a rigorist in outlook who reversed some of the policies

⁵ *Τὰ Δογματικά καὶ Συμβολικά Μνημεῖα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* [*The Dogmatic and Credal Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church*], ed. Ioannes Karmires, 2nd ed., Vol. II (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1968), pp. 987, 989.

of his predecessor. A man of the purest intentions, Saint Ignatios was nevertheless severe in his judgments, not only regarding the formerly Iconoclastic clergy, but in other matters as well. Since he could also be tactless and contentious, he finally lost the favor of Emperor Michael III, or rather, the Emperor's uncle Cæsar Bardas, whose immoral behavior Saint Ignatios had bluntly denounced. Saint Ignatios I was therefore deposed and exiled to a monastery in October of 858. In his place was chosen the Imperial Chancellor, Saint Photios the Great, a renowned scholar and professor, the most brilliant man of his time, and an ecclesiastical moderate. Since he was a layman at the time of his selection, he was Ordained through the Priestly ranks and Consecrated Hierarch. Upon his elevation to the Patriarchal Throne on December 25, 858, Saint Photios wrote letters to his Brother Patriarchs, as was customary, assuring them of his Orthodoxy and explaining the circumstances that had brought him to his high and sacred office.

Pope Nicholas I of Rome, sensing an opportunity to advance his powers, responded that he would immediately send two legates to the Imperial Capital to investigate the particulars surrounding the change in Patriarchs. In addition to determining the canonicity of Saint Photios's election, the legates had instructions to request the return of the patrimonies of Sicily, Calabria, and Illyricum to Roman jurisdiction. These territories had been transferred from Roman to Constantinopolitan jurisdiction more than a century before, during the reign of Emperor Leo III. The legates determined that the election and elevation of Saint Photios was indeed canonical, but they failed in their quest to gain the return of the disputed territories. Reporting their findings to Pope Nicholas, the legates enraged him when they explained that he had gained nothing. In his anger, Pope Nicholas excommunicated the legates and called a local Synod at the Lateran Palace, at which he deposed Saint Photios the Great and restored Saint Ignatios I, evidently hoping that Saint Ignatios would be more accommodating in his dealings with the Roman See. The Synod's decisions

were, of course, meaningless in Constantinople, which ignored the Pope's fit of temper and his unilateral "deposition of the Patriarch of Constantinople—a thing never before heard of."⁶

We should bear in mind, here, that fundamental changes had arisen in the Roman Patriarchate around this time, changes that would gradually separate brothers in Christ and send Rome down a new path, outside of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. In contrast to their predecessors, certain Roman Popes of this era, prompted by documents such as the spurious *Donation of Constantine*,⁷ had come to imagine themselves rulers of the whole Church, or even of the whole world. Since these issues came to the fore during the Patriarchate of Saint Photios the Great, a man of the deepest piety and learning, they were naturally challenged by him, in high hopes that a spirit of sobriety and humility would return to the Western Church. However, the spirit emanating from Rome under the haughty Pope Nicholas I was anything but sober and humble; in fact, his power-hungry actions debuted the incipient heresy of Papism:

The arrogant and ambitious Pope Nicolas I..., who supported Ignatius, took the opportunity of the controversy to assert openly for the first time the pretension of the Popes of Rome to jurisdiction "over the whole earth and over the universal Church." To the primacy of honour of the Roman Church and her authority as arbiter in matters of dogma—especially when the Arian, Monothelite and iconoclast heresies were being promoted by Emperors in Constantinople—the Papacy now ascribed to itself the hegemonic claims which the Frankish Empire...could no longer sustain. On the initiative of authoritarian Popes, the Papacy sought to exercise a supremacy over the whole Church that was supposed to have been granted by Christ Himself and to have given the Popes the right to

⁶ Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion*, Vol. III, p. 425.

⁷ Archbishop Peter writes that this forgery, more correctly called *Constitutum Constantini* ("Constitution of Constantine") than *Donatio Constantini* ("Donation of Constantine"), dates from "the second half of the eighth century or...the beginning of the ninth" (*The Church of the Ancient Councils*, p. 284).

intervene in the domestic affairs of other Churches, and to impose on them all the usages of the Roman Church....⁸

To make matters worse, the proliferation of the *Filioque* heresy in the West brought consternation to the Eastern Romans (Byzantines), magnifying the acrimony. Let us now briefly examine the matter of the *Filioque*.

The Orthodox Symbol of Faith states that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, “Proceedeth from the Father.” To these words, the proponents of Filioquism interpolated the words “and the Son” (“*Filioque*”), thus declaring that the Holy Spirit “Proceedeth from the Father and the Son.” The issue here is one of adherence to the True Orthodox Faith as expressed by the Œcumenical Synods, which knew no *Filioque* and forbade both additions to the Symbol of Faith and the generation of innovative theologies, theologies at odds with the Œcumenical Synods, with all of Patristic thought, and with the whole history of the Church. And how is the *Filioque* at odds with the whole of Holy Tradition? The Orthodox Christian Faith teaches that outside the existence of time, the Son is eternally Begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally Proceeds from the Father; thus, the Father is in eternity the Source of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The *Filioque*, in the words of Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “compromises the unitive monarchy of the Father, subordinating one Hypostasis of the single Trinity,”⁹ that is, subordinating the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Son. To assert that the Holy Spirit Proceeds eternally “from the Father and the Son” brings confusion to the doctrine of the Trinity by introducing into it two sources, and also confuses the Procession of the Holy Spirit in eternity, on the one hand, with the action of the Holy Spirit in time and in the world, on the other. In time, in this world, the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father *through* the Son, Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself makes this clear when He says: “But when the

⁸ Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion*, Vol. III, pp. 424–425.

⁹ Archbishop Chrysostomos, *A Guide to Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 55.

Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which Proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me.”¹⁰

When Pope Nicholas sent Latin missionaries into Bulgaria, a land already being taught the Orthodox Faith by missionaries commissioned by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and began teaching the people to reject married Priests and to add the accursed *Filioque* to the Creed, Saint Photios of Constantinople responded by writing to the Eastern Patriarchs:

Impious and abominable men, men who emerged from the darkness..., sprang onto the ones who were newly converted and on to the newly established nation.... After they had divided the beloved and newly-planted vineyard of the Lord, by their feet and teeth, namely by their shameful conduct and corruption of the dogmas..., they have ravaged it. ...[T]hey have dealt craftily to corrupt them and to detach them secretly from the true and pure dogmas and the pure faith of the Christians.¹¹

A Synod called by Saint Photios in Constantinople in 867 and attended by representatives of all of the Eastern Patriarchates excommunicated Pope Nicholas I of Rome and condemned Filioquism. As it turned out, Pope Nicholas died on November 13 of that same year, before the news of his condemnation arrived in Rome, and his successor, Pope Adrian II, once again unilaterally deposed Saint Photios the Great, in 869. Meanwhile, in September of 867, Emperor Michael III was assassinated, and Emperor Basil I the Macedonian, his Co-Emperor, became sole ruler. Seeking rapprochement with Rome, Emperor Basil, in coöperation with Pope Adrian, convened the Synod of Constantinople of 869–870, which deposed Saint Photios and returned Saint Ignatios I to the Patriarchal Throne. This synod—at which “only

¹⁰ St. John 15:26.

¹¹ Quoted in Asterios Gerostergios, *St. Photios the Great* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1980), pp. 63–64.

twelve bishops were present at the first session"¹²—is regarded by the Orthodox Church as a *latrocinium*, but from the eleventh century onward, the Synod of 869–870 has been counted by the Papal Church as its Eighth General Council. "...[A]lso known as the Ignatian Council, because it restored Ignatios to the Patriarchal throne,"¹³ it condemned Saint Photios of Constantinople and exonerated the deceased Pope Nicholas I of Rome.

Having been deposed by Emperor Basil I, Saint Photios retired quietly and with dignity to a monastery, wishing above all to avoid any additional uproar within the Church. With the passage of time and the cooling of passions, the Emperor, recognizing the gifts of Saint Photios and regretful that the former Patriarch had been treated unfairly, recalled Saint Photios from exile, gave him rooms in the Imperial Palace, appointed him tutor to his children, and allowed him to return to his professorial chair.¹⁴ During this time too, Saints Photios and Ignatios, "victims of the rivalry of contrary parties which had made use of their names,"¹⁵ were reconciled, each mutually forgiving the other on bended knees, amid many tears. Until the death of Saint Ignatios in 877, Saint Photios acted as the Patriarch's advisor, after which he himself was reinstated as Patriarch, Saint Ignatios having designated Saint Photios his successor.¹⁶

In hopes of finally bringing concord to the Church, Saint Photios of Constantinople held a Great Synod in the Cathedral of Ἁγία Σοφία in 879–880. In attendance were four hundred

¹² Despina Stratoudaki White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople: His Life, Scholarly Contributions, and Correspondence Together with a Translation of Fifty-two of His Letters* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981), p. 35.

¹³ Fr. George Dion. Dragas, "The Eighth Ecumenical Council: Constantinople IV (879/880) and the Condemnation of the *Filioque* Addition and Doctrine," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. XLIV, Nos. 1–4 (1999), p. 358.

¹⁴ See White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion*, Vol. III, p. 427.

¹⁶ See Despina Stratoudaki White and Joseph R. Berrigan, Jr., *The Patriarch and the Prince: The Letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Khan Boris of Bulgaria* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982), p. 22.

Hierarchs, including a representative of Pope John VIII of Rome, successor of Pope Adrian II, as well as representatives of Patriarch Michael II of Alexandria, Patriarch Michael I of Antioch, and Patriarch Elias III of Jerusalem. The Synod thoroughly investigated the entire series of disputes during the reigns of Saints Ignatios and Photios, ruling that Saint Photios's election and Consecration as Patriarch had been wholly canonical. Moreover, the decisions of the false Synod of 869–870 were revoked. The Synod of 879–880 also implicitly condemned the *Filioque* by publishing the full original text of the Symbol of Faith, the Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in the texts of its Ὅμοος, anathematizing anyone who would add to or subtract from it or alter its text in any manner whatsoever. This Ὅμοος reads:

Jointly sanctifying and preserving intact the venerable and divine teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which has been established in the bosom of our mind, with unhesitating resolve and purity of faith, as well as the sacred ordinances and canonical stipulations of his holy disciples and Apostles with an unwavering judgement, and indeed, those Seven holy and ecumenical Synods which were directed by the inspiration of the one and the same Holy Spirit and effected the [Christian] preaching, and jointly guarding with a most honest and unshakeable resolve the canonical institutions invulnerable and unfalsified, we expel those who removed themselves from the Church, and embrace and regard worthy of receiving those of the same faith or teachers of orthodoxy to whom honor and sacred respect is due as they themselves ordered. Thus, having in mind and declaring all these things, we embrace with mind and tongue (τῇ διανοίᾳ καὶ γλώσσῃ [τέ διανοία καὶ γλῶσσε]) and declare to all people with a loud voice the Horos (Rule) of the most pure faith of the Christians which has come down to us from above through the Fathers, subtracting nothing, adding nothing, falsifying nothing; for subtraction and addition, when no heresy is stirred up by the ingenious fabrications of the evil one, introduces disapprobation of those who are exempt from blame and inexcusable assault on the Fathers. As for the act of changing with falsified words the Horoi (Rules, Boundaries) of the Fathers is much worse than [sic] the previous one. Therefore, this holy and ecumenical Synod embracing

whole-heartedly and declaring with divine desire and straightness of mind, and establishing and erecting on it the firm edifice of salvation, thus we think and loudly proclaim this message to all:

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

Thus we think; in this confession of faith we were we [sic] baptized; through this one the word of truth proved that every heresy is broken to pieces and canceled out. We enroll as brothers and fathers and coheirs of the heavenly city those who think thus. If anyone, however, dares to rewrite and call Rule of Faith some other exposition besides that of the sacred Symbol which has been spread abroad from above by our blessed and holy Fathers even as far as ourselves, and to snatch the authority of the confession of those divine men and impose on it his own invented phrases (ιδίαις εὐρεσιολογίαις [idíais heuresiologíais]) and put this forth as a common lesson to the faithful or to those who return from some kind of heresy, and display the audacity to falsify completely (κατακιβδηλεύσαι ἀποθρασυνθεῖν [katakibdeleúsai apothrasyntheî]) the antiquity of this sacred and venerable Horos (Rule) with illegitimate words, or additions, or subtractions, such a person should, according to the vote of the holy and Ecumenical Synods, which has been already acclaimed before us, be subjected to complete defrocking if he happens to be one of the clergymen, or be sent away with an anathema if he happens to be one of the lay people.¹⁷

Regarding this Ὁρος, Protopresbyter George Dionysios Dragas comments:

The solemnity and severity of this statement is quite striking. The reference to the Lord, the Apostles and the Fathers as guardians of the true faith clearly imply [sic] that what is at stake here is a theological issue. The issue is not just words or language but thought and mind as well. The whole construction clearly implies that there is some serious problem in the air which, however, is not explicitly named. The focus is the Creed, which is said to be irreplaceable. It

¹⁷ Quoted in Dragas, “The Eighth Ecumenical Council,” pp. 363–364.

is totally unacceptable to replace it with anything else. It is worse, however, to tamper with it, to add or to subtract from it. The addition or subtraction is not merely a formal matter, but has to do with the substance of the faith into which one is baptized and on which salvation in the Church is established. To commit such a mistake can only mean rejection of the faith once delivered to the saints¹⁸ and therefore can only incur expulsion from the Church.¹⁹

Therefore, it is crystal clear, indisputable in fact, that the *Filioque* was condemned. But why was the heresy not *explicitly* condemned? At that time, the West was increasingly dominated by the Franks, who had wholly embraced the *Filioque* as part of their unique theological system. That system is what Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos calls a “secular theology functioning outside the traditional patristic framework...[that]...attempted to interpret everything about God by reason.”²⁰ The new Frankish theologians “considered themselves superior to the holy Fathers of the Church and also considered human knowledge, which is a product of reason, to be higher than Revelation and experience.”²¹ Since the Orthodox Popes in that era were continually menaced by overt threats of Frankish military action against them, they were forced to employ the utmost finesse in their dealings with the Frankish rulers, a situation to which the Synod was sensitive.

The decisions of the Synod of 879–880, seen at the time as a Synod of reunion of the Eastern and Western Churches, received the unanimous approval of the delegates, of the Eastern Patriarchates, and of Pope John VIII of Rome. So, at that time, the Roman Church, too, condemned the *Filioque*. It should be remembered that no Pope up to that time had officially accepted the *Filioque*, but rather tolerated its propagation in the West under pressure from the Franks. Only in 1274, at the Council of Lyons, did the heretical addition to the Holy Creed become dogma in the Papal Church.

¹⁸ Cf. St. Jude 1:3.

¹⁹ Dragas, “The Eighth Ecumenical Council,” pp. 364–365.

²⁰ Hierotheos, *The Mind of the Orthodox Church*, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.