

Ten After Ten Session 11: The Trinity, Continued

246. The Latin tradition of the Creed confesses that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).”

247. The affirmation of the *filioque* does not appear in the Creed confessed in 381 at Constantinople. But Pope St. Leo I, following an ancient Latin and Alexandrian tradition, had already confessed it dogmatically in 447... The use of this formula in the Creed was gradually admitted into the Latin liturgy. The introduction of the *filioque* into the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Latin liturgy constitutes moreover, even today, a point of disagreement with the Orthodox Churches.

248. At the outset the Eastern tradition expresses the Father’s character as first origin of the Spirit. By confessing the Spirit as he “who proceeds from the Father,” it affirms that he comes from the Father through the Son. The Western tradition expresses first the consubstantial communion between Father and Son, by saying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*). It says this legitimately and with good reason, for the eternal order of the divine persons in their consubstantial communion implies that the Father, as the principle without principle, is the first origin of the Spirit, but also that as Father of the only Son, he is, with the Son, the single principle from which the Holy Spirit proceeds. This legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed.

249. From the beginning, the revealed truth of the Holy Trinity has been at the very root of the Church’s living faith.

250. During the first centuries the Church sought to clarify its Trinitarian faith, both to deepen its own understanding of the faith and to defend it against the errors that were deforming it. This clarification was the work of the early councils, aided by the theological work of the Church Fathers and sustained by the Christian people’s sense of the faith.

251. In order to articulate the dogma of the Trinity, the Church had to develop its own terminology with the help of certain notions of philosophical origin: “substance,” “person” or “hypostasis,” “relation,” and so on... These terms, which from then on would be used to signify an ineffable mystery, infinitely beyond all that we can humanly understand.

252. The Church uses (I) the term “substance” (rendered also at times by “essence” or “nature”) to designate the divine being in its unity, (II) the term “person” or “hypostasis” to designate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the real distinction among them, and (III) the term “relation” to designate the fact that their distinction lies in the relationship of each to the others.

253. The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the “consubstantial Trinity.”⁸³ The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire.

254. The divine persons are really distinct from one another... “Father,” “Son,” “Holy Spirit” are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another... The divine Unity is Triune.

255. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another.

256. St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

I give you but one divinity and power, existing one in three, and containing the three in a distinct way. Divinity without disparity of substance or nature, without superior degree that raises up or inferior degree that casts down... the infinite co-naturality of three infinities. Each person considered in himself is entirely God... the three considered together.... I have not even begun to think of unity when the Trinity bathes me in its splendor. I have not even begun to think of the Trinity when unity grasps me....

257. God freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life. Such is the plan of his loving kindness... It unfolds in the work of creation, the whole history of salvation after the fall, and the missions of the Son and the Spirit, which are continued in the mission of the Church.

258. The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine persons... However each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property. Thus the Church confesses, following the New Testament, “one God and Father from whom all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit in whom all things are.”

259. Being a work at once common and personal, the whole divine economy makes known both what is proper to the divine persons and their one divine nature... Everyone who glorifies the Father does so through the Son in the Holy Spirit; everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and the Spirit moves him.

260 The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God’s creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity.