

“MISSING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES”: HOW A SINGLE WORD CAUSED A STIR

Until recently, many would say that a seat at the Academy Awards is traditionally the hottest ticket in town because, as they say– “**anyone** who is **anybody**” attends it. Well, not so much in my estimation, but again I am just not into Hollywood– at all! However, in 1274 A.D. one of the **hottest tickets** in town was the ecumenical **Second Council of Lyon**. Nearly 300 bishops, sixty abbots (including from the famous abbeys of Cluny, Citeaux and Clairvaux) and heads of the major religious orders attended. So too did King James of Aragon while the Kings of France, Germany, England and Sicily sent personal envoys. The world’s leading theologians were present. Sadly, while on his way to the Council, **St. Thomas Aquinas** died at the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova. One can only imagine the contribution he would have made! It was a veritable “who’s who” of the Church world, bearing an ambitious agenda.

After the death of Pope Clement IV in November 1268, two years and nine months passed before a new pope was elected! This was unacceptable, but thankfully Lyon II ratified a papal bull that dealt with papal conclaves. Eerily entitled *Ubi Periculum maius intenditur* (“Where greater danger lies”), details over papal elections (conclaves) were spelled out, including a requirement to wait no more than 10 days from the pope’s death for the arrival of the Cardinals to begin the conclave. It also included a provision for the **confinement and isolation** of the Cardinal electors to **minimize** outside influence. The pope wasn’t messing around! Pope Gregory X outlined three themes for the Council: union with the Greeks, the crusade, and the reform of the church. Comprising **six sessions** held between May and July of 1274, the re-union of the Greek Church with the Latin church was announced, “ending” the 11th century schism with the East.

It didn’t last long, in many respects a reunion lacking the “buy in” of the clergy and faithful. The two Byzantine bishops sent as delegates had no opportunity to explain the Eastern theological perspective. It was a *fait accompli*. It was never received by the Eastern clergy and faithful, or vigorously promoted by the Popes in the West after Leo X. One key issue centered upon a creedal dispute over the procession of the Holy Spirit. Just **one word** of the Nicene Creed (originally written in Greek) caused a huge stir. What happened? At Mass, we recite: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father **and the Son...**” The bolded words appear in the **Latin** version of the Creed, which adds the single word *Filioque* (“and the Son”). Just a single added word (in Latin) wreaked havoc with Church unity. This dispute revealed what was bubbling just beneath the surface– akin to the “burnt toast” that triggers an argument between loving spouses that they instantly regret, the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. Poor communication made matters worse.

Eastern Christians were spot on in objecting that the **Creed never** contained that phrase; it only appeared later. Most scholars believe that both versions may be understood in an orthodox manner. A prominent Orthodox scholar maintains that by adding “and the Son,” to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, the role of the Holy Spirit was diminished **without justification**. For his part, in 810 A.D., **Pope Leo III** affirmed the orthodoxy of the word *filioque* and approved its use for catechesis, but explicitly asked that it **not** be used in the Sunday Mass. Not everyone was trying to cram this addition down the throats of eastern Christians. Our Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (written in 325 and expanded in 381), appeared for the **first time** in the Sunday Mass by order of a local **Council of Toledo**, Spain (589) in Spain. However, its inclusion into the Eucharist in Rome was late, in the 11th century. The process whereby the *filioque* was

inserted remains unknown, a detail that is rather important, don't you think?

In a joint statement issued in 2003 by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation (overseen by the USCCB), this **painful history** was addressed **honestly** and **respectfully**. Liturgical traditions differ between East and West to this day. Early theologians speculated that the Holy Spirit came forth “from the Father through the Son” as they **grappled** with how to articulate the mystery of the Holy Trinity. All three persons share a single divine substance. One writer describes the Spirit as “coming forth from the Father” and being “sent by the Son.” (Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 12.55). But in the same treatise, he also described the Spirit as being ‘from the Father through the Son’ (*ibid.* 12.56); and as ‘having the Father and the Son as his source’ (*ibid.* 2.29) Confused yet? So were they!

The joint statement notes that **St. Ambrose of Milan** (ca. 380 AD) openly asserted that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” without ever being separated from either (*On the Holy Spirit* 1.11.20). Please forgive the focus on *minutiae* and realize that the Church **labored for centuries** to articulate the faith comprehensively. **Details matter!** Here, there is no question that many on both sides of the Bosphorus missed the forest for the trees. Few were scholars with access to manuscripts and libraries to evaluate the question objectively. Rome had approved the *filioque* wording— case closed. It's never that simple— absent dialogue, they lacked the assent of Eastern clergy. Lyons II missed a **golden opportunity** for authentic reunion between East and West. (To be continued).

- Better late than never! Kudos to Pope Francis for announcing his intention to name **St. Irenaeus** as a Doctor of the Church. For many years, I wondered why he had been passed over. Under the title of “Doctor Unitatis,” meaning “Doctor of Unity,” the Holy Father notes the tremendous contributions of the 2nd century theologian who **labored intensely** for the unity of the Church. Irenaeus is celebrated both by East and West— born in the Eastern Aegean coastal city of Smyrna, before moving to Lyon in France.
- Total fail! **White Bear Lake Middle School** is removing the letter grade “**F**” from its report cards. Now, I am not advocating for 1st graders to receive letter grades— but middle school? Failure is part and parcel of life in this “valley of tears” which we traverse. Failure is best seen as “tuition” for learning lessons that motivate us to improve.
- **Supply Chain** issues abound. You are correct if you have noticed that our **church bells** still have yet to be repaired. The repair was delayed yet again due to an **inability** to get the parts here as promised. Additionally, we hope to re-start **Coffee and Donuts** in November— we are still awaiting the main components of the new brewing system. Thank you for your patience— I'll keep you posted.
- Archbishop Hebda will celebrate Sunday's 5:00 p.m. Mass, using the “**Mass for a Synod**” formularies. We gather to unite our own Archdiocese with the universal Church.
- Pope Francis recognized a miracle attributed to the intercession of **Pope John Paul I**, paving the way for “the smiling pope's” beatification. He served just 33 days before his sudden death in 1978. Believe it or not, ten popes in history have had shorter reigns.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector