

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 35

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 21

In our last post, we continued to explore the **Nicene Creed**. In this post, we continue to dig into the third article of faith, keeping with the phrase **who proceeds from the Father and the Son** in the **Nicene Creed**.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON

It would be placing far too great a burden on the **Creed** confessed at Constantinople in 381CE to say that the holy fathers gathered to establish the dogma of the procession of the **Ruach HaKodesh** in all its precision and fullness. In their writings, the **Cappadocians** had noted that the **Ruach** was distinguished from the **Father** and the **Son** by his procession. Thus, the **Creed** uses the language of John 15:26, which speaks most directly of the procession of the **Ruach** from the **Father**: *When the Counselor comes, whom I will send you from the Father - the Spirit of Truth, who keeps going out from the Father - He will testify on My behalf.* (CJB) The phrase, *who keeps going out from the Father* distinguishes the **Ruach** from the **Father** and the **Son**, even as the following phrase of the **Creed** demonstrates that the **Ruach** is to be worshiped and glorified along with the **Father** and the **Son**. Thus, the present phrase provides a distinguishing scriptural characteristic while also tying the **Ruach's** procession to the **Father**.

To a certain extent, both Eastern and Western traditions have emphasized what is known as the **Father's monarchy** in speaking of the **Ruach's** origin. The **Father's monarchy** implies that the **Father** is the source, principle, cause of the **Ruach HaKodesh** and the **Son**. One might even note that both the **Son** and the **Ruach** are spoken of as proceeding from the **Father** in our English Bibles and Latin ones. However, this was part of the problem between East and West that arose beginning around the fifth century, when working in both Latin and Greek was not as expected. In Greek, the origin of the **Ruach HaKodesh** from the **Father** is based on the Greek word *ekporeuetai*, which alone is used of the **Ruach HaKodesh** in John 15:26. The Greeks acknowledge the Latin Church that the **Son** too is spoken of as proceeding from the **Father**. But this does not occur with the Greek word *ekporeuomai* but the Greek word *proiēmi* - an important distinction that Latin does not make. The **Father** was unbegotten, the **Son** was begotten, which was a procession from the **Father**, but not the same as how the **Ruach** proceeds.

The question remained to be asked: *What is the relationship of the Ruach to the Son in this procession, since Scripture, especially the Gospel of John, speaks of the Ruach of the Son, the Son giving the Ruach, breathing out the Ruach, etc.?* This the **Creed** did not answer. As noted, at least up through the fifth century but even beyond, all the way to the time before the great schism of 1054, the dominant patristic understanding is that the *monarchy* of the **Father** is what binds and grounds the **Trinity** in its unity. And so, more often than not, the question of the **Ruach's** procession is first of all addressed in the sense of His procession from the **Father**. But in no way does this exhaust all that the fathers had to say about the procession. The doctrine of the **Ruach HaKodesh** and His procession is not limited to His relation to the **Father**. Still, it is extended to His relation to the **Son** in a way that is not always so easily distinguished or held distinct from that of the **Father**.

One can distinguish different emphases or tendencies between East and West on the **Ruach's** procession even as there are also areas of overlap. The later addition in the West of the **Ruach's** procession from the **Son** began locally in **Spain** at the **Council of Toledo** in 589CE. However, it is preceded as early as the third century by writers such as **Tertullian** and then later with **Marius Victorinus, Ambrose, and Augustine**. The addition eventually received papal authority and became the standard creedal confession in the Western Roman Catholic and later Protestant traditions. The East has always considered it as a unilateral addition to the **Creed** without ecumenical consensus. But it is worth asking why the West perceived the phrase *and the Son* as a necessary addition in the first place? From the Western perspective, if the **Ruach** proceeded from the **Father** alone, this could appear that the **Son** did not have everything the **Father** had. Thus, the **Son** would appear as a subordinate being - especially to the new converts coming from barbarian tribes in the hinterlands of the West who had been heavily influenced by **Arian Christology**, which tended to subordinate the person of the **Son**. Thus, the original purpose of the addition was to protect the **Son** against such subordination by establishing the procession equally from **Father** and **Son**. And so, it is not surprising that the phrase *filioque* began to appear in the **Creed** spoken in the liturgy of the church. How the church worships is an expression of its faith. However, a change in something as basic as the ecumenical **Creed** shared by all the faithful was inadvisable - even if the doctrine itself, charitably and adequately understood, was true. It did not help that the West had no vocabulary for distinguishing the different types of the procession as the East had, even though theologians such as **Augustine** did speak of the **Ruach** proceeding principally from the **Father**. Thus, misunderstandings were inevitable. But neither East nor West was interested in denigrating the **Godhead** of **Father, Son, or Ruach HaKodesh**.

Rather than speaking of the **Ruach** as proceeding from the **Father** and the **Son**, the East spoke in terms of the **Ruach** proceeding from the **Father through** the **Son**, in effect guarding against any understanding that the **Ruach HaKodesh** derived his existence from the **Son** which would thus cause Him to appear as a lesser being. Perhaps it is an oversimplification to describe the emphasis in the East as that of safeguarding the **Ruach's** full divinity. At the same time, the West emphasized a concern to guard the **Son's** full divinity. No doubt other issues such as authority, both of popes and councils, are intertwined in these discussions and have complicated ecumenical discussions far beyond the issue of the **Ruach's** procession. ¹

In my next post, we continue to dig into the third article of the **Nicene Creed: We Believe in The Holy Spirit**.

¹ Elowsky, J. C., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2009). **We Believe in the Holy Spirit** (Vol. 4, pp 217-220).