

# Anglicans debate the Filioque, issue that divides West and East

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The worldwide Anglican Communion will soon make a decision that could have a profound impact on world history. At issue is whether the member churches of that Communion should delete the *Filioque* clause from the Nicene Creed.

This is no arcane theological matter. The *Filioque* was the principal factor behind the Christian schism a millennium ago, and continues, to this day, to represent the fundamental dividing point between the antithetical cultural matrices of East and West.

Latin for "and from the Son," the *Filioque* represents the most important component of Western, Augustinian Christianity. By insisting that the Holy Spirit (love) proceeds from the Father *and* from the Son, the *Filioque* asserts that Christ is necessary to the process of Creation, along with the Father, and firmly rejects attempts by various heretical strains to undermine the divinity-and-humanity of Christ, and hence the divine potential of man.

It is Christ, who, as both God and man, holds out to man the promise and possibility of participating in God's divinity. This, in turn, provides the basis for insisting upon the sacredness of the individual soul, and the unique position of the human person in God's Creation.

Thus, any effort to diminish Christ within the Trinity, which the elimination of the *Filioque* would do, would also destroy the philosophical and theological basis for the concept of man made in the image of God. It is the absence of this idea in Eastern Orthodoxy, and Eastern culture, which accounts for the bestial concept of man epitomized in both pre- and post-revolutionary Russia.

Were the Anglican Communion to abandon the *Filioque*, as the Russian Orthodox Church insists it do as a condition for "reconciliation" between the churches, it would be tantamount to throwing over the entire legacy of Western culture, in favor of the brutish and brutal cultural and social conditions characteristic of oriental despotism.

Without the *Filioque*, Western civilization would lose its basic underpinnings, a fact which the *Filioque*'s foes well recognize. Listen to the testimony of one passionate oppo-

nent of the *Filioque*, Prof. William Green of the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas, an American member of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue committee. In a recent interview, Green stated that the Anglican Church "overemphasizes its Western tradition," identified with St. Augustine, and puts far too great a stress on "rationality." This has caused a "dichotomy between theology and spirituality" in Western Christianity, "which simply does not exist in the Orthodox tradition." Abandoning the *Filioque*, Green said, would be an important step toward reasserting the Eastern, mystical side of Anglicanism. This would have a "profound impact" on society as a whole, and would help create a new "theology of creation" which would emphasize the importance of "ecology."

## Runcie vs. Augustine

The idea of the *Filioque* is now under direct attack from certain powerful forces in the Anglican world, who want to eliminate it, not simply out of a desire to appease Moscow and its religious foundation, the Russian Orthodox Church, but because they themselves deeply despise its cultural and social ramifications: the West's commitment to science and technology, to the rule of reason and natural law, and to human life itself.

The assault on the *Filioque* was instigated by the Robert Runcie, whom Queen Elizabeth II appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1979. Prior to his elevation, Runcie had served as co-chairman of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue committee, and had garnered a reputation as one of the chief proponents of political and theological compromise with Holy Mother Russia's rulers.

According to Rev. William Norgren, an American representative on the dialogue committee, "Most of what we did on the committee was to define what we didn't mean by the *Filioque*, to try to allay some of the fears and misconceptions" held by the Orthodox.

Norgren's description of the Runcie committee's work is borne out by the reports issued by the committee, the Dublin

and Moscow statements, which generally take the Orthodox position on the Trinity. For example, the Dublin report contains an assertion which is totally false, namely, "Whereas some in the West had maintained in the past that the Son was equally the cause of the Spirit as the Father, this language has fallen into disuse. This is not what the West means by the *Filioque*. The West believes that the Father is the *sole* source of deity."

As Pope John Paul II's latest pastoral letter, on St. Augustine, states, the Father may be the *principal* source of deity, not the *sole* source (see p. 61)

Runcie's political and theological pronouncements make it patently obvious where he stands in the broad cultural battle between East and West. When Runcie visited the United States in 1981, this reporter asked him what he thought of *Global 2000*, the Carter administration report which called for eliminating 2 billion human beings by the year 2000, on the grounds of "resource scarcity." "I believe *Global 2000* is a gift from God," Runcie responded.

At Runcie's direction, the Anglican side of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue committee recommended to the member churches of the Anglican Communion, about 10 years ago, that they initiate studies of the *Filioque* to determine whether it should be retained. Runcie and his allies argued that the Orthodox Churches were right in claiming that the *Filioque* had been added to the Creed "uncanonically," and that, since it represented such an obstacle to Christian-Orthodox relations, the Anglicans should drop it.

Runcie's proposal elicited a strongly negative response from many Anglican churches, and even from the Episcopal Church in the United States, one of the most liberal members of the Anglican Communion. In 1976, when the Episcopal Church's general council approved the new Book of Common Prayer, in which the *Filioque* was eliminated from one version of the Creed, the House of Clergy and House of Laity disapproved, although the bishops' council supported it. "Most of the resistance came from seminary faculties, who feared that we would be overturning the Western doctrine," one source said.

So strong was the opposition, that Runcie and his co-thinkers were forced to adopt a fallback position, claiming they simply wanted to remove the *Filioque* from liturgical usage, rather than dispose of the doctrine itself. While some supporters of the *Filioque* apparently fell for this sophistry, their opponents are not so naive. As Prof. William Green expressed it, "Once the average churchgoer stops reciting the *Filioque*, he will eventually forget about the doctrine itself."

Moreover, a substantial faction within the Anglican Communion publicly opposes the *Filioque* doctrine. Prominent among these are Boone Porter, editor of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based *Living Church*, and Dr. Hugh Whybrew of the Church of England. As a founder of *Sobornost* magazine, and a key figure in the pro-Moscow Society of St. Albans and St. Sergius, Whybrew has long been a pivotal player in

the East-West religious "backchannel." There is little doubt that Runcie also falls into this camp.

### **Battle at Lambeth?**

Thus far, according to the Rev. William Norgren, at least five of the churches affiliated with the Anglican Communion have thus far endorsed, at least in principle, eliminating the clause. Perhaps the most important to take this step was the U.S. Episcopal Church, which, after a decade of controversy, voted in favor of deleting the *Filioque* at its general convention last September.

The final determination of the *Filioque*'s fate is supposed to be made at the Lambeth Conference in 1988, the once-a-decade convocation of the 25-plus members of the Anglican Communion. The issue is expected to spark a major debate at Lambeth, where the Australian and South African Churches are expected to lead a fight to retain the *Filioque*.

Several Episcopal Church experts have told *EIR* that a contingent from the Church of England may also challenge Runcie on the issue. It is significant, they stress, that the Church of England has not rejected the *Filioque*—despite Runcie's predilections. "Just because he is the Archbishop of Canterbury, he does not have the authority to create doctrine," says Prof. Charles Price of the Virginia Theological Seminary, and one of the principal supporters of the *Filioque* within the U.S. church. "What Archbishop Runcie's personal opinions are, don't necessarily reflect themselves in the Church of England."

The Runcie faction has been marshaling its forces for the showdown. Norgren reported that a pre-Lambeth discussion paper on Christian Unity will be prepared under the direction of the new Archbishop of Canada, Archbishop Peers, who reportedly considers Christian-Orthodox unity to be of the utmost importance. His paper will deal at length with the *Filioque*, and Fr. Norgren expects that it will firmly support its elimination.

There is some speculation that Graham Leonard, whom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher chose as Bishop of London several years ago—much to the dismay of the Runcieites—may also take a stand against dropping the *Filioque*. Leonard has regularly taken Thatcher's side, while Runcie has taken Queen Elizabeth's, in the ongoing political feud between the prime minister and the House of Hanover that erupted into the open this summer.

Although no one from the Royal Family, including Queen Elizabeth, the official head of the Church of England, has, as far as we know, taken a public position on the matter, everyone is quite clear on that fact that the Hanover-Windsors are behind the effort to get rid of the *Filioque*. They sit at the center of The Trust, the confluence of Eastern and Western oligarchical families, whose current policy is to assist Moscow in becoming the globe's hegemonic imperial force, and to eliminate the last vestiges of Augustinian civilization in the process (see p. 50).