

## **The Filioque: the Vital Orthodox Understanding of the Procession of the Holy Spirit**

*by Father Patrick Ranson*

On the day of Holy Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the appearance of cloven tongues of fire, He fully revealed the mysteries of our faith to them, the mysteries which were foreseen by the Prophets, preached by the Apostles, dogmatized by the Fathers, and accepted by the Church which constitute, in a word, the Orthodox Faith, the hope of the world and the salt of the earth. Likewise, in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the deified Fathers, the Holy Spirit has granted us, the Orthodox, to understand the meaning of History: the history of the world, as St. Athanasios puts it, went from darkness to Light (that is to say, from ignorance and enmity with God to Golgotha and the Rising of the Lord) and it will go back again from Light to darkness.

Nowadays many people who claim to be Orthodox Christians think that a new Pentecost is to come, and among them, some false prophets, following Soloviev and Berdyaev, predict a new reign of the Spirit, with new revelations and new criteria of Truth; others merely imagine a rebirth of Russia, the signs of which they seem to see in recent events.

But we already possess in the Orthodox Faith the absolute criterion of the Truth; the Lord says in the Gospel according to St. Luke, 18,8: When the Son of man cometh, shall he find THE faith on the earth? He does not merely say faith or some faith, that is, any kind Of faith or belief, but THE Faith as it was Preached by the Apostles and dogmatized by the Fathers. it is this Faith, the Orthodox Faith, which is confessed by so few people nowadays, and which is, unfortunately, even denied by many supposedly Orthodox people.

Among all the ecumenical activities that have taken place in recent years, one, in particular, should be mentioned, for it Presents us with an accurate image of the Great Apostasy of the last days: I mean the Assisi Conference Of 1986. Among the participants one could find so-called orthodox clergymen, who prayed not only with heterodox believers, but with even with Moslems, Buddhists, and pagans of all kinds. They said that they had prayed for peace to the one and only God whom they perhaps believe to be above and transcending the Holy Trinity. But who is this one and only God? He is an abstract God, an empty God! It is but an idol. For they could not pray to the Holy Trinity with those who do not know Him or reject Him; with those who can by no means know the Father, because they do not know the Son and the Holy Spirit; for, as St. Gregory the Theologian says:

*It is through the Holy Spirit that the Father is made known, that the Son is glorified; and through them only is He known.*

So the Assisi Conference has paved the way for the Great Apostasy, and in the face of such an Apostasy, very few are, and few will be the true worshippers of the Holy Trinity; these are the "last few" who will be persecuted, who will enjoy no homeland on earth, but will say with St. Basil the Great:

*Our homeland and our life is the Holy, Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity, the Only God.*

It is this God alone - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - that we confess, the God Who was manifested on the day of the Baptism of the Lord, at Holy Theophany, when the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, as the Dismissal Hymn of the Feast says. What was revealed on that day is what we confess in the Church of Christ. As St. Gregory the Theologian says:

*When I say God, I mean the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, without extending the Godhead beyond this number of persons, for fear of introducing a plurality of Gods, and without restricting Him to a smaller number, for fear of being accused of diminishing the Godhead; by admitting only one principle, I would fall into Judaism, and by admitting several, into paganism.*

We confess the three persons or hypostases of the Holy Trinity, the only God. Since their divine essence or nature is one, the three hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit possess all in common, except their personal or hypostatic properties:

- *the property that distinguishes the Father is that He is unbegotten;*
- *the property that distinguishes the Son is that He is begotten of the Father;*
- *the property that distinguishes the Spirit is that He proceeds from the Father.*

As St. Gregory the Theologian says:

*What is common to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit is the divinity or uncreated nature. (What is common to the Son and to the Holy Spirit is to have their origin from the Father.) The attribute proper to the Father is to be unbegotten, generation is proper to the Son and procession is proper to the Holy Spirit.*

Likewise St. John Damascene says:

*The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in all things, except for being unbegotten, for being begotten and for proceeding. The three hypostases differ from one another merely in these personal properties, but not in their essence.*

Our knowledge, therefore, is a very limited one. Very little has been revealed about the eternal existence of the Holy Trinity because very little knowledge is necessary for our salvation. And even what has been revealed remains incomprehensible to us, for, as the Prophet Esaias says: Who shall declare his generation? (Es. 53,8). The divine essence is totally unknowable not only to us, but even to the Holy Angels. We only know that God's uncreated energies, namely, Love, Will, Righteousness, and so forth, which are common to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are infused into those who have prepared themselves to receive them, as much as they can endure, according to the economy of our salvation, in the Church of Christ, by participating in the Holy Mysteries and living the life in Christ.

Therefore, we confess the genuine Trinity that has revealed Himself - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; they are One distinctly and distinct jointly, St. Gregory the Theologian says, and he adds: however paradoxical this phrase may be, in order to show the revealed nature of this mystery, which is incomprehensible to human reason.

We must point out, however, that false trinities have arisen from philosophical and religious speculations. But they are nothing more than human inventions. Such were, for instance, the Trinity of the Platonic philosophical school; the Trinity of Hinduism, which was named Trimurti and made up of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu (Creator, Destroyer and Preserver); the Ancient Egyptian Trinities, (1) Atoum, Shou, Tefnout or (2) Amon, Re, Ptah, or (3) Re, Chepri, Atoum, and so on. Such also are the false Trinities of the heretics, and for that reason, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote:

*Let us in a similar manner keep away from the contraction of Sabellius and the division of Arius, these opposite evils, both equal in ungodliness.*

Sabellius heretically claimed that the Godhead was only one person bearing three names, who was called now Father, now Son, now Spirit. On the other hand, Arius maintained that there were several natures in the Holy Trinity.

According to the Holy Fathers, these false Trinities all lead to atheism for, as St. Gregory Palamas says, heresy and atheism are one and the same thing. That is the reason why the Western teaching on the double procession of the Holy Spirit, which claims that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son (filioque), constitutes a false trinity, a trinity that has not been revealed, a speculative, philosophical trinity. And the whole heretical doctrine of the filioque, because it creates a false trinity that does not exist, leads logically to atheism, to the atheistic deism that makes possible such denial of the revealed truth as we saw in the Conference of Assisi.

The true creator of the filioque doctrine is Augustine, the famous bishop of Hippo. His theology was systematically developed later on by Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas and became the official theology of the West (As the Roman Catholics say: *Suum Ecclesia fecit* - he made the Church his own.) That Augustine invented the filioque is not the opinion and claim only of the Latins, who seek thus to find an ancient authority to justify their false dogma; it was also the opinion of the great and holy Patriarch of Constantinople, Gennadios Scholarios, who had read Augustine's writings in Latin:

*Augustine was, among the Latins, the first one who built up and shaped this doctrine... you can easily verify this fact not only from his books in Latin... but from the few that have been translated into our tongue [Greek]."*

We shall see that there are different meanings or aspects to Augustine's doctrine, but first we must emphasize that the filioque is first and foremost the result of a wrong approach to theology. Augustine thought that one could know the Holy Trinity by means of philosophical speculation, that is to say, outside the economy of divine revelation. For instance, he believed that the Platonists of old had a knowledge of the Trinity. In particular, that is what he thought about Porphyrios, who was one of these philosophers. Now, Porphyrios was a great enemy and persecutor of the Christians. How could such a man have known the Trinity, and at the same time, hate Christ? Yet, this was Augustine's opinion. His doctrine, being so profoundly speculative and philosophical, was to face great resistance and opposition, even in the West, and that for a long time.

That is why there arose, during the Middle Ages, the famous so-called legend of the Angel:

*Saint Augustine was meditating upon the mystery of the Trinity. One day, as he took a walk on the seashore, he came across a little child who was playing with a spoon, digging a tiny hole in the sand of the beach. "What are you doing?" Augustine says. The child answers that he is trying to spoon out all the water of the sea, and to pour it into the little hole. As Augustine wonders at such an unattainable undertaking, the child suddenly proves to be an angel and, before vanishing, tells him: "It would be easier for me to do this, than for you to exhaust the deep and profound mystery of the Trinity by the resources of human reason alone.*

Such a thought process cannot be properly called theology, for, as you know, theology in the true sense does not result from speculation, but from the knowledge and experience of God through grace, such as that which Moses received.

Moses, the model of theologians, saw God at the top of Mount Sinai: God revealed Himself to him in a manner beyond human understanding. Since this, and not mere book-learning, is what constitutes true theology, the name of theologian has been given to very few saints in the Orthodox church. These are St. John the Theologian, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. Symeon the New Theologian. Nowadays, some people add St. Gregory Palamas to that number because he has recapitulated the whole Patristic theology concerning the uncreated essence and energies of God. Thus, the fallacy in Augustine's theological method, and, subsequently, in the Western theological method, is the cause of the fallacy in his doctrine about the Trinity.

The foundation upon which the filioque dogma is constructed is a misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures that was propagated in the age of Charlemagne, by illiterate theologians. In a passage from St. John's Gospel, the Lord expressly says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (Jn. 15:26). The text runs thus:

*But when the 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.*

The Fathers of the Church are unanimous in their commentaries on this passage. They all make a distinction between the phrase, The Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, which signifies the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father, and the phrase, Whom I will send to you, which signifies not an eternal relationship within the mystical life of the Holy Trinity, but only the temporal sending of the Holy Spirit by the Son in time, in human history, as part of the economy of our salvation. This sending took place on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit fulfilled the promise made by the Son to His Apostles. This sending or mission of the Holy Spirit is operated by the Son as an ECONOMY, but Augustine uses it as an argument to establish the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father AND the Son, that is to say, the double procession as part of the Holy Trinity's eternal, inner life. He sometimes makes the further remark that the Spirit proceeds from both as from a single principle (De Trin. XV, 17,29).

This interpretation, as you can see, is surprisingly crude, and manifestly contrary to the Orthodox tradition of the Fathers. But here is the paradox: because it was so crude, some Orthodox Fathers refused to admit that such an ancient and highly-regarded author as Augustine could have thought such a doctrine. For instance, St. Mark of Ephesus said he was certain that the works of Augustine had been

corrupted by later forgeries. Others tentatively developed an interpretation of the questionable assertions, of Augustine that would be more acceptable to Orthodoxy.

Another point we must emphasize is that it took a long time for this doctrine to prevail in the West. As a matter of fact, in the seventh century, St. Maximos the Confessor, in his well-known letter to Marinos, said that, in those days, the Romans clearly distinguished between the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the temporal sending of the same Spirit by the Father and the Son, acting together for the economy of our salvation. The confusion (between the sending in time, in human history, and the timeless procession in eternity) was made widespread for the first time by Frankish theologians who, as we have said, were ignorant of the first principles of Patristic theology.

In the West, during the Middle Ages, the transcribers of manuscripts in the monasteries, being theologically ignorant and relying upon a false certainty--namely, that the filioque was actually to be found in the Holy Scriptures - were induced to falsify Patristic writings. Wherever they saw a statement to the effect that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, they immediately added: and from the Son (filioque), perhaps believing that they were restoring the text. Some, in fact, may have been sincere; but many others certainly made these alterations knowingly, as did, for example, Pope Urban IV (the fourth), who wished to win the Orthodox over by any means he could. He had Patristic texts falsified, and false texts forged, in the workshops of the Vatican. These forged documents were collected by the Pope and used by Thomas Aquinas in his polemics against the Orthodox. Thus, the famous book by the great Theologian of the West, entitled *Against the errors of the Greeks*, is constituted of forged and truncated texts. In this respect, the medieval doctrine of the filioque should be considered as a disgrace to the West when one thinks that for many centuries this doctrine has depended on a vast number of forgeries and falsehoods made to impute to the Fathers doctrines alien to them.

It is worthy of note that Adam Zernikaw, as far back as the 17th (seventeenth) century had rightly detected all the forgeries made in Patristic literature by medieval copyists. Zernikaw was an earnest Lutheran who once attended a lecture by a bishop from Constantinople. The bishop spoke about the heretical character of the addition of the filioque Zernikaw out of love for the Truth, could not rest until he learned the genuine doctrine of the Fathers concerning the difficult question of the procession of the Holy Spirit.

He visited all the libraries in European countries where he could find ancient manuscripts of Church Fathers: Germany, France, England and Spain; there he discovered the above-mentioned forgeries. Convinced that the Orthodox Faith is the Truth, he left for Moscow for the sake of further research. On his way to Moscow, while going through Little Russia, he became an Orthodox Christian and a monk with the name of Adam. He is said by some authors to have lived afterwards in the monastery of the Kiev Caves. Before he died, he wrote his book on the procession of the Holy Spirit, in which he mentions all the forgeries.

The book was written in Latin and translated into Russian in the 18th (eighteenth) century, and later into Greek by Eugene Bulgaris. In the 19th (nineteenth) century, Kyriakos Lampryllos, a pious man from the Greek island of Cephalonia, wrote a book entitled *The Fatal Mystification*, an Orthodox Study on the Filioque. He wrote it in French, with a missionary aim in view - to make the basic points of Zernikaw's book widely known.

One can see what kind of zeal and love for the Truth motivated Zernikaw, Lampryllos and the Bishops from Constantinople who came to preach the Truth in Germany during the 17th (seventeenth) century. Despite all cultural or political relativism, a zeal such as Zernikaw's testifies..... to the world of the Scriptures: To him that knocketh it shall be opened (Mt. 7,8). Nowadays, our missionary efforts must be governed by the same zeal.

Let us now come to the second heretical meaning of the Filioque. According to Augustine of Hippo, followed by Thomas Aquinas and by the whole of Western Theology, the Holy Spirit is to be defined as the love common to the Father and the Son.

This misconception appears even in the Latin doxology; in fact, they conclude some prayers with the phrase: By Jesus Christ, Thy Son with whom Thou art blessed, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, because, in their mind, the Holy Spirit is the unity of the Father and the Son. This conception identifies the Hypostasis, that is, the Person of the Holy Spirit, with the Divine Love; but Love, according to the Fathers, is a Divine, Uncreated Energy common to the three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The first reason that this conception is complete nonsense, as Meletios Pigas explains, is that it confuses Personhood with Energy. In fact, this false teaching reduces the Hypostasis of the Holy Spirit to an Energy by which the Father and the Son love each other. This means a destruction of the Trinity since there are no longer three real Persons because the Person of the Holy Spirit no longer has a specific property and hypostatic existence of His own, but is merely as impersonal energy shared by the Father and the Son. In other words, the Western doctrine of the Filioque is an anti-trinitarian doctrine, or, at least, a false Trinitarian doctrine.

Moreover, by changing the Spirit into the love or bond between the other two Persons, this doctrine makes the Holy Spirit to be the very principle of the Trinity. But according to Church Fathers and to the Orthodox Faith, it is the Father alone who is the cause and principle.

This false teaching of the West, contrary to what some modernists now say, cannot be interpreted in an orthodox sense; one might say, in an orthodox manner, that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, but it would be necessary to add that the Son is the mutual love of the Father and the Spirit, and that the Father is the mutual love of the Son and the Spirit, since love is common to the three hypostases. But this is not what Augustine and Thomas Aquinas mean to say by their doctrine, as demonstrated in their writings.

We must add that this false doctrine was rejected once and for all by the Orthodox Church in the past. Thus, according to the great Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios, the doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as their mutual love is, I quote, an unbearable grossness. He then adds:

*Where in the Holy Scriptures is it clearly written out that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son? In what hidden treasury might this dogma be hidden? And how could it have escaped the other Fathers who yet have carefully examined everything?*

This false, non-scriptural and non-patristic dogma was explicitly rejected by the Council of Constantinople of 1722, which clearly asserted that Love is common to the three Persons or hypostases of the Holy Trinity, and is by no means the special property of the Holy Spirit.

The third heretical meaning of the Filioque, also originating in the writings of Augustine of Hippo, was especially developed by Western scholasticism and Thomas Aquinas: I mean the notion that the Divine Persons are merely relations within the Divine Essence. According to this idea of Augustine's, Sonship and Son are one and the same thing: the Son is a relationship to One, that is, to the Father. The Holy Spirit is nothing more than relations within the Godhead, the Holy Spirit must proceed from the Father AND the Son in order to be distinct from the Son.

According to the Orthodox Tradition, however, such a doctrine is nonsense, for reasons of both theology and logic. First of all, the nature of a being, created or uncreated, does not exist outside the person. The nature of essence does not exist as an abstraction, but only in concrete, persons or hypostases. We will never meet or become acquainted with some abstract thing called human nature, but we meet Peter or John, that is, concrete persons who bear this human nature. Likewise, in God, the nature is not self-existent; it is only in the Divine Hypostases of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the Divine Nature, which is common to all three, has its existence.

To found the theological understanding of the Holy Trinity upon the notion of an abstract essence and to define the Persons as relations within the essence, as did Thomas Aquinas whom the Papists consider as their common Teacher, is to do away with the Trinity, since one believes first in an abstract essence divorced, so to speak, from the specific Persons of the Trinity, and then only in a secondary sense does one consider the three Persons. In the divine essence, moreover, where all is common to the three Persons, no personal properties distinguish the Father from the Son and from the Holy Spirit any longer. These intra-trinitarian relations, which, for the Papists, have replaced the distinction according to hypostasis, bear much resemblance to the names in the Sabellian heresy. For this reason, the Orthodox Church has always considered the filioque as a form of Sabellianism.

A great hesychast, who is also a great theologian of the Orthodox Church, Callistos Angelikoudis, wrote a commentary in the XIVth (fourteenth) century on one of Thomas Aquinas's major works. He thought that his heresy was worse than the doctrine of Sabellius, because, like Eunomius, Thomas Aquinas added to Sabellius's error his philosophical speculation on the inner life of the divine essence, which, according to the fathers, is incomprehensible even to the angels. The reason for Thomas Aquinas's errors is, once again, philosophical speculation, which by analogy applies the laws of the sensible world to the Divine Mysteries. It begins not with God, and how He has chosen to reveal Himself to man, but with man's own mind and how man chooses to conceive of God. Nilus Cabasilas sums up this idea:

*Thomas did not receive the things he says from the teaching of the Spirit, or from the Ecumenical Councils, or from the fathers... but he borrowed them from the sensible world, and introduced them into theology, rashly, not to say ignorantly.*

If you examine the doctrine of the West, of the Latins and the Franks, and especially the theology of the supporters of the Papacy, concerning the Mystery of Mysteries, the Holy Trinity, you discover that this false theology is only a religious philosophy, not a revelation. God, according to this theology, is an abstract essence, which does not communicate itself to men by its energies; it is a philosophical and imaginary God to whom we can neither pray nor be united.

According to this conception, man cannot unite to God, and the Holy Spirit does not communicate to men the deifying energy which is absolutely necessary for our salvation. This state of things incited the Latins to invent created intermediaries between God and men. Such is, for example, the Pope of Rome, being vicar, (vicarius) of God.

In their theology, these created intermediaries, being created graces, are supposed to unite men to God, but they forever estrange Him from them, because once man believes in this non-existent created grace, there is no room left for the divine and uncreated power that belongs to God alone to save man. The supporters of such a heretical doctrine ignore or fight the transfiguring force of the Holy Spirit, because they believe in a created parody of it. Therefore, since the Western God is an abstract, empty deity, in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are but names and relations, nothing in such a theology prevents union with Moslems or Pagans.

The only God whom Western people pray to, before praying to the Holy Trinity, is first and foremost the essence of God, that is, this conception of God's essence as something abstract and existing apart from the Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Union with Moslems, Jews or Pagans can be logically inferred from such a conception, since the Latins believe in the essence of God, transcending any notion of Trinity, rather than in the God that has revealed Himself in the Gospel; in a word, they prefer an idol to the true Trinity.

The orthodox or so-called orthodox people involved in Ecumenism are aware of this and seek to find in the Western doctrine of the filioque a positive aspect that would be acceptable to the Orthodox mind. In France, we can quote two recent examples: 1) A Professor in dogmatics of the St. Sergius Institute in Paris has written a book on The Mystery of the Trinity; in his examination of the Filioque question, he seeks to define the positive aspect of this doctrine. 2) A priest belonging to the Greek New Calendar Church in Marseilles has published a book in a collection edited by Christos Yannaras. He writes that the filioque is not a heresy, and has been a heresy in name only. In another work, this author says that the same can be said of Monophysitism, and he recognizes the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, a Monophysite Church, as the true Christian Patriarchate. No one has officially protested against this book.

To safeguard us from falling into such error, we have the Orthodox confession of the Holy Trinity: nobody knows the Father without knowing the Son and the Holy Spirit; nobody knows God, if he does not confess the Holy Trinity that has revealed Himself to the Prophets, the Apostles and the Saints. How could we pray and unite with those who confess a false Trinity, a philosophical and imaginary one? Did the Fathers pray together with the neoplatonic philosophers? Did Prophet Elias pray to Baalim - foreign gods? Is it possible that the Holy Spirit dwells among those who do not confess Him at all or who confess Him not as the Church does? How can the Ecumenists be so blind to the false dogmas of the heretics to whom they want to be united?

St. Mark of Ephesus, who is called the Atlas of Orthodoxy, wrote an Encyclical Letter in which he mocked the pro-Latin Orthodox. These people, even at that time, found positive aspects in the Filioque. He compares them to the mythological centaurs, since they make hybrid, imaginary mixtures of two creeds. Here is what he says about the pro-Latins, whom he calls Latino-greeks, asking how they should be treated:



*What attitude should we adopt towards these lukewarm 'Latino-greeks' who, loving middle-of-the-road solutions, divide Latin dogmas and rites into three categories: those which they openly and unreservedly approve of, those which they approve of without adhering to, and those which they totally disapprove of?*

And he answers:

*Keep away from them! Keep away from them as from snakes, as from wholesalers or retailers of Christ, or even worse. For these are 'men,' as the divine Apostle says, 'who suppose that gain is godliness,' and of whom he says, 'from such withdraw thyself.'*

In order to remain faithful to the teachings of the Fathers, the Councils and the whole Church, we are in communion neither with any of those who are involved in Ecumenism, and confess the branch theory, nor with those who are in communion with such people. For this very reason they struggle against us, and they stridently insist that we are not canonical, since we are not in communion with those who, unfortunately, are affected by heresy. Those who say so, do not know what a canon is. The Canons are based on the dogmas, and, above all, they have been established by the Apostles and their successors to keep and safeguard the dogmas. When the canons are abided by, concord reigns, as the 34th (thirty fourth) Apostolic Canon says, and God is glorified as the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, Canons are meant for the Orthodox; and those who mock the dogmas, who remove the boundaries set by the Fathers by entering directly or indirectly into communion with the heterodox, are no longer entitled to speak of the canonical order of the Church. If our faith is right, so is our ecclesiology; if our ecclesiology is right, so is our faith, and in peace and concord we may glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One and Only God.

To conclude, I wish to mention the words of a Russian bishop who died in France, just before the Second World War, and lived as an anchorite near Tours.

His name was Theophan of Poltava, who was famous for his godliness and zealous love for the dogmas. Having emigrated after the Revolution, when the modernists came to talk him into reforming the Church, he flatly refused. They told him that he would remain alone. He answered that he did not mind remaining alone, as long as he remained united to the Holy Vivifying Trinity from Whom they had fallen away. Later on, Archbishop Theophan, commenting on the situation of the Church, explained that the words of the Apocalypse concerning the stars falling from heaven symbolize the bishops that give up the true faith. We would see a vast number of them, he added, fall this way in days to come.

We ourselves have seen how true his prophecy is, since all the churches nowadays have been infected by Ecumenism and the branch theory. Nevertheless, we give thanks to God, for despite this tragic situation, we are not totally isolated as we help one another spiritually; and we have also been able to find true bishops of the Church of Christ: His Eminence Auxentius, and his synod. Thanks to you, the genuine confession of the Faith is safeguarded and guaranteed. Thus, despite our sins, we remain faithful to the Holy Fathers of our Church. Glory be to God for this, since we may say with a quiet conscience and without lying at every Church service:

*By the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord*

*Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us.*