

**BABEȘ – BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
ECUMENE DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

DOCTORAL THESIS

**The Filioque Debate as Field of Confrontation
for Theology and Politics - A Quest for
Ecumenical Solutions
- Ph.D. Thesis Summary -**

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Content

Keywords	4
Abbreviations	5
Introduction	6
1. Status Quaestionis	19
1.1. The Filioque from the viewpoint of the history of theology	20
1.2. The Filioque from the perspective of systematic theology	26
1.3. Religion and nationalism in contemporary scholarship	36
2. An overview of the main patristic sources	42
2.1. Introduction	42
2.2. The content of the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit	43
2.3. The role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit	52
2.4. The relationship between the immanent and economic Trinitarian theology	61
2.5. Features of the theological discourse with respect to the issue of procession	66
2.6. Conclusions	71
3. Contemporary perspectives regarding the Filioque-debate	74
3.1. Introduction	74
3.2. The content of the doctrine of procession	76
3.3. The role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit	83
3.4. The relationship between the immanent and economic Trinitarian theology	103
3.5. Features of the theological discourse with respect to the issue of procession	112
3.6. Conclusions	121
4. Religious nationalism as a sociopolitical limitative element of the contemporary Filioque-debate	129
4.1. Religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena	130
4.1.1. Analogy as identification	131
4.1.2. Analogy as a mode of the social organization	136
4.1.3. Analogy in terms of claim of political rights	143
4.1.4. Summary	146
4.2. Religion as explanation of nationalism	147
4.2.1 The role of religion in local nationalism	148
4.2.2. The symbol of the chosen people in ideology and dialogue	151

4.2.3. The confessionalization as premise of the nationalism	154
4.2.4. Summary of the second model	158
4.3. The intertwining of religion and nationalism	159
4.3.1. The two ways of the intertwining	159
4.3.2. The interaction of religious and nationalistic rhetoric	168
4.3.3. The addressee of religious-nationalist rhetoric as addressee of the Filioque-debate	172
4.3.4. Summary	175
4.4. Religious nationalism as a distinctive kind of ideology	177
4.5. Conclusions based on the four models	184
5. Perspectives of the ecumenical dialogue in the context of theology and religious nationalism	194
5.1. Introduction	194
5.2. The main aspects of the Orthodox position regarding the ecumenical movement	196
5.3. The text context of the Filioque-dialogue	200
5.4. The most important ecumenical and ecclesial documents regarding the Filioque	205
5.4.1. The Klingenthal Memorandum	205
5.4.2. The Clarification of the Pontifical Council of 1995	213
5.4.3. The Joint Declaration of the North American Orthodox and Catholic Bishops' Conferences	225
6. Conclusions	232
7. Bibliography	241

Keywords

Filioque, ecumenical movement, politics, nationalism, Holy Spirit, Trinity, Trinitology, contemporary history, nation, community, essence, person, communion, South-East Europe.

Abstract

Overview of the research

The dissertation addresses the Filioque-debate from a complex perspective, not only as a theological topic, but as a contemporary field of interaction and confrontation between theology and politics. The research starts from the hypothesis that understanding 20th century political processes and identifying the role of political factors in the evolution of the contemporary Filioque-debate may contribute to the resolution of the theological differences regarding the Filioque-debate. The topic may seem marginal and outdated in Western theology, due to the extensive research performed from a historical theological perspective, but in fact it is highly relevant in Orthodox contexts, as it plays a major role in contemporary Orthodox theological discourse as a strong element of self-identification and delineation from Western cultural and social views.

Ecumenical dialogue has made significant progress during the last decades regarding the understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit in patristic literature and the history of the Filioque clause and the related debate. Western theology has rediscovered the theology of Maximus the Confessor, as a possible mediator between the Eastern and the Western position. The Declaration of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1999 pointed to his teaching as a viable perspective on the Filioque-debate. Yet, the issue continues to divide Orthodox and Western (notably Catholic) theology and to shape national and religious identity in a polemical way.

In my thesis I focus on the work of the main contemporary Eastern-European (notably Romanian and Russian) Orthodox theologians in their political context. Theology in these countries focuses on defending Orthodox faith and national identity against what is perceived as an expansionist Western Church and culture. In contemporary theology, the Filioque-question is inevitably on the agenda of contemporary Orthodox theology, as an

element of identity and a distinction marker between the *ortho-dox* and *hetero-dox* (Western) believers.

I identify the political trends that have shaped the Filioque-debate, by paying attention to the perspective of the Russian Orthodox emigration, the standpoint of Romanian theologians (notably Dumitru Stăniloae) in the inter-war and the Communist period, focusing on the intertwining of nationalism and religion in Eastern Europe. I argue that the Filioque-issue is not only a theological question, but also a symbolic-emblematic topic for construing religious identity. Its (negative or positive) assessment stands in strong correlation with scholars' attitude towards Western culture and Churches, with the acceptance or rejection of the ecumenical dialogue, as well as with their perspective on nation and nationalism. On the other hand, authors' attitude towards Western Christianity and theology is shaped by their political-cultural context, which determines their definition of the interrelation between religious identity and national identity. Therefore, in the assessment of the 20th century Filioque debate we need to distinguish between the theological issue proper and its use for political-national purposes and in the construal of identity.

The Orthodox Church has had a significant role in shaping the nation-state, and in Eastern European countries with an Orthodox majority it usually has the formal or informal status of national Church. In view of this socio-political role of the Church, national identity and nationalism are interwoven with religious identity, and nationalism influences theological discourse.

My research explores both the theological literature and the political theories on Eastern European religious nationalism. The theological literature about the Filioque-question is very rich and many-sided, as the topic has its renaissance in Orthodox theology. We may notice a similar resurgence of the research on the relationship between Church, faith and politics. In this vast literature, the Filioque-question has been mentioned only marginally as an ecumenical issue shaped by regional political evolutions. I propose therefore a comprehensive overview on the characteristics of East European nationalisms and their strong relationship with religion. The topic was analysed notably by Rogers Brubaker, who proposed several models of interpretation regarding the relationship between religion and nationalism. Applying Brubakers' models allows a better understanding of my topic. I also discuss the results and deficiencies of the current ecumenical dialogue.

Understanding the political factors that obstruct the ecumenical dialogue will allow outlining possible solutions for a longstanding theological discussion. My dissertation is a humble contribution that will hopefully bring a new perspective on the Filioque-debate in contemporary theological discourse, in a changing ecumenical context.

Conclusions

The research regarding the intertwining of theology and politics in the contemporary Filioque-debate, on the impact of religious nationalism on systematic and ecumenical theology has allowed me to formulate a number of conclusions and perspectives regarding the premises and tasks of further ecumenical discussions:

1. The Filioque issue is not out; on the contrary, it is a much-disputed issue in contemporary Orthodox theology that continues to shape theological discourse in South-East Europe.
2. The rejection of the Filioque-clause is prominently present in religious nationalist rhetoric. Rejecting the doctrine of Filioque distinguishes the orthodox believer and member of the nation from heretics and strangers, defining and defending the right understanding of society and ecclesial community against individualistic philosophies and Western cultural colonization.
3. The ecumenical dialogue is obstructed by religious nationalism, which is using the Filioque as a symbol of identification, because a possible inter-confessional agreement can be interpreted as an action against the national interests.
4. Although the Filioque-doctrine is a complex issue, ecumenical dialogue should continue on the basis of already achieved agreement, doubled by the understanding of the complex sociopolitical issues addressed in this dissertation, as only such comprehensive approach may sustain the hope of a long-term consensus.

Based on this research a number of suggestions regarding the subsequent inter-confessional dialogue may be construed:

1. The Orthodox Churches need to elaborate a common official statement regarding the Filioque-debate, which includes the issues that should be clarified. The Orthodox Church should respond thereby to the Pontifical Council's Clarification issued in 1995, *The Greek and Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit*. (This suggestion was made already by the Pro Oriente Foundation in 1998.)

2. Catholic and Protestant theology should pay more attention and attempt to understand the sociopolitical context that influences Orthodox theology, and should strive to comprehend the way Orthodox theology conceives the relationship between Trinitarian theology and local, national identity and tradition.

3. A clear agenda of the ecumenical dialogue should clarify the premises and the expectations of the Churches, the goals and steps to be followed, and the minimal agreement that has to be reached. From my perspective, such a minimum would be the normative character of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the withdrawal of the heresy charges. Maximus the Confessor has argued that originally there was no fundamental antagonism between the Eastern and Western position; understanding his view could be the point of departure for further research of the Filioque-doctrine and for ecumenical dialogue.

4. Orthodox theologians should attempt to understand the historical and theological reasons that determined the Western Church to introduce the Filioque-clause in the creed. In the same time, I concur with the position of Yves Congar, who argued that there are good reasons to use the original form of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without the Filioque.

5. In the Catholic Church, dropping the Filioque-clause in liturgical practice has been done already in some contexts or geographic areas. This does not mean questioning the role of the Son in the procession and sending of the Holy Spirit. The task of the future dialogue is not to elaborate a mutually acceptable formula for the Creed, but to clarify the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, the possibilities and limits of the knowledge of God, the contribution of Palamite theology and the soteriological aspects of the topic.

6. Theology and ecumenical dialogue should pay attention to the next generations and should strive to formulate the theological issues related to the Filioque in an intelligible way, focusing on the shared doctrine instead of the divisive issues. The success or failure of ecumenical dialogue depends not only on theologians, but also on religious education and educators. In this sense religious education should promote inter-confessional tolerance and avoid notions with negative connotations (like labelling those belonging to other denominations as heretics or schismatics).

PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS

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3. *Az első világháború és következményeinek hatása a gyergyószentmiklósi Fogarassy Leánynevelő Intézet tevékenységére (The Impact of World War I on the Activity of the Fogarassy Highschool for Girls from Gheorgheni)*, Certamen III. Edited by Egyed Emese, Pakó László, Editura Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2016, 347-352. (CEEOL).
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2. *Ágostoni visszhangok Dumitru Stăniloae szentháromságtani szeretet-modelljében? (Augustinian Echoes in the Trinitological Model of Love of Dumitru Stăniloae?)*, in *Fiatal Kutatók és Doktoranduszok VIII. Nemzetközi Teológuskonferenciájának tanulmánykötete*, Edited by Gábor Kiss, Pécs: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, 2017, 199 – 208. ISBN/ISSN: 978-615-5579-18-9.
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INSTITUTIONAL PROJECT

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Title: *A vallásos nacionalizmus jellemzői, különös tekintettel az orosz és a román helyzetre. (The Characteristics of the Religious Nationalism, With a Focus on the Situation in Romanian and Russia.)*

2018:

21 September 2018 – National Conference of Doctoral Students, Universitaria Consortium, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj

Title: *Naționalismul ca o piedică în calea dialogului ecumenic în problema Filioque (Nationalism as Obstacle for the Ecumenical Dialogue of the Filioque)*

9–12 July 2018 – The World Council of Churches Commemorating 70 Years of Ecumenism Pro Oriente Foundation, Wien, Austria

Title: *The Filioque Debate as Field of Confrontation for Theology and Politics – a Quest for Ecumenical Solutions*

10–11 February 2018: The VIIIth International Conference of Young Theologians and Doctoral Students, Pécs, Hungary

Title: *A Filioque-tétel értelmezési kísérlete a Brubaker-modell alkalmazásával (The Filioque – an Interpretation Attempt by Applying the Brubaker Models.)*

2017:

20 October 2017– Consultation: *Religie și drepturile omului (Religion and Human Rights)* Centre of Biblical Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

Title: *Modelele lui Rogers Brubaker privind relația dintre religie și naționalism. O aplicare în controversa Filioque. (Models of Rogers Brubaker Regarding the Relationship between Religion and Nationalism. An Application in the Filioque Controversy.)*

12–13 May 2017 – IInd Conference of Transylvanian History Doctoral Student (Erdélyi Történetek–Történetek Erdélyről), Oradea, Romania

Title: *Transylvania, Nationalism and Theology*

10–12 February 2017: The Vth International Conference of Young Theologians and Doctoral Students, Pécs, Hungary

Title: *Echoes of the Augustinian Love Model in the Trinitology of Dumitru Stăniloae?*

2016:

11–13 November 2016: International Conference „Theology for Society“, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, Cluj-Napoca

Title: *Social Aspects of the Filioque Debate in the 20th Century*

9 April 2016: International Conference of Doctoral Students, Selye János University, Komarno, Slovakia

Title: *Position of the Romanian Orthodox Theology in the Filioque-Debate*

2014:

22 November 2014: The Days of the Hungarian Science in Transylvania, Hungarian Museum Society, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Title: *The Ist World War's Influences on the Activity of the Fogarasy Girls' Institute in Gheorgheni*