



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

The Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

This line concludes our profession of faith in the triune (three-in-one) Godhead – ending with our profession of belief in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of Holy Trinity. The first thing to notice here is that we call the Holy Spirit “Lord.” This automatically shows that we believe the Holy Spirit to be co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. There are other “holy” spirits such as angels, but this Holy Spirit is different in that he is God. Next, we say that the Holy Spirit is the “giver of life.” Why do we call the Holy Spirit the giver of life? Well, perhaps an even better question is what do we mean by “life”? In the context of the faith, when we talk about life, we are talking about the spiritual life. The life of the human spirit only has *true* life when it is united to God. It is for this reason that when we are in a state of mortal sin, we call this a sort of spiritual death, cut off from the life-giving source – God himself. What reunites our soul to God? Love. God extends his love to us and we accept this gift, entering into a covenant relationship with him by loving him back. Now, the Holy Spirit *is* the love of God, and it is for this reason that we say the Holy Spirit is the giver of life inasmuch as it is through the love of God (The Holy Spirit – Love in person) that we are made spiritually alive.

Next, we say that it is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. There are a couple of important things to note here:

* That the Holy Spirit “proceeds.”

** That the Holy Spirit proceeds from not just the Father, but also the Son.

Looking at the first part* what does it mean to proceed? Generally speaking, it means to come forth or to be set in motion. Things can proceed outwardly from something such as sap coming out of a tree (the tree producing something distinct and other than itself), and things can proceed inwardly such as a thought coming from a thinker (producing something that is distinct but *not* other than itself). Of course, the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Father and the Son outwardly, or else it would be something other than God as an effect. Now, just as the Son proceeds inwardly from the Father as his “thought” or knowledge of himself, the Holy Spirit proceeds inwardly as his love for himself.

Looking now at the second part**, why do we say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from *both* the Father and Son, and not just the Father. Believe it or not, this was a huge source of tension in the early church which led to the East-West Schism. In the original Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Nicene Creed), it simply said that the Holy Spirit proceeded “from the Father” as it is written in John 15:26. It wasn’t until the late 6th century that the term *filioque* – “and the Son” was added in order to provide greater clarity to the divine processions and to show that the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. To explain this, we know that the Persons of the Trinity are not *absolutely* distinct because they would be three Gods, which is impossible. So, we say that the distinction is *relative* meaning that they are distinguished only by how they relate to each other. But if we say that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father, then there would be no relation between the Son and the Holy Spirit, making them the same person. Yet, we know that they are not the same person both by scripture and by reason, hence the clarification in the Creed. A good way to understand this even better is that while the Father is the “principle” of the Son insofar as the Son “comes forth” from the Father as thought from the thinker, the Holy Spirit comes forth from both the Father and the Son (who are both co-principles of the Holy Spirit), since the Holy Spirit comes forth by the love expressed between the Father and the Son.

Lastly, just as we professed that the Holy Spirit is “Lord,” following from this fact, we say that along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit too must be adored and glorified as God himself. Just as the scriptures tell us that the Spirit spoke to the prophets, we acknowledge that this “Spirit” (uppercase “S”) is indeed God himself and not some other “spirit” (lowercase “s”).