

THEODOROS ALEXOPOULOS, Photios von Konstantinopel „Mystagogie des Heiligen Geistes“. Übersetzung und theologischer Kommentar (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 153). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2023. 433 pp. – ISBN 978-3-11-079011-5

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Few figures in Byzantine history exerted such a long and multifaceted influence in both ecclesiastical and lay society as Patriarch Photios of Constantinople. Constantly scrutinized by scholars of Antiquity (and not only) for his immense classical erudition, eulogized and castigated alike for his dogmatic positions and Church politics, the learned hierarch represents a significant figure of the Macedonian Renaissance and the Middle Byzantine Period more generally. As a theologian, Photios excelled in almost every conceivable genre: he delivered masterfully elaborated homilies, penned hermeneutical pieces, composed hymnographic canons, contributed to the codification of canon law, drafted exegetical and philosophical epistles (the celebrated *Amphilochia*), and poured out his doctrinal and rhetorical expertise in polemical treatises against ‘enemies of the true faith’ such as the Paulicians and the Latins. This last, ‘combative’ section of Photios’ oeuvre includes the *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, an antirrhetic treatise that the aged patriarch drafted during his second exile and directed against the Latin teaching on the procession of the Holy Spirit ‘and from the Son’ (*Filioque*). The importance of this opus can hardly be overstated: emanating from a decades-long conflict with the papacy and internal turmoil within the Constantinopolitan Church, the *Mystagogy* offers a systematic, if partial, series of scriptural, patristic, and especially logico-philosophical arguments against the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. The intrinsic value of Photios’ treatment of the issue is further enhanced by its remarkable reception in the Byzantine polemical literature of the subsequent centuries: pro-Filioquists (John Bekkos, Nikephoros Blemmydes) as well as anti-Filioquists (Nicholas of Methone, Gregory of Cyprus, Neilos Kabasilas, Gregory Palamas, etc.) would intertextually interact with the *Mystagogy* in order to either uphold or refute the double procession of the Spirit.

On the basis of his *Habilitationsschrift* in Theology at the University of Vienna, THEODOROS ALEXOPOULOS has published a German translation of this fundamental text, accompanied by a historical introduction and

a generous theological commentary. His book opens with an introduction designed to lay out the *status quaestionis* (predominantly German scholarship) and initiate the reader into the broader problem of the *Filioque*. The author voices fair criticism of the infelicities of JOSEPH P. FARRELL's English translation of the *Mystagogy* (p. 4) but fails to mention other versions of the text in modern languages.¹ The theological overview of the issue (pp. 8–36), which makes but minor concessions to the non-specialized reader, proves highly useful and successfully delineates the two major Trinitarian models of the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine, as well as their polemical implications over time. As his other publications also indicate, ALEXOPOULOS is a fine observer of the historical development of the *Filioque* and navigates easily through the textual landscape, both Greek and Latin, relevant to this topic. Nonetheless, it would have been appreciated if the transition between authors chronologically and culturally distant from one another had been more clearly anticipated or contextualized. Additionally, for a better understanding of the exposition, the passage (p. 28) from Trinitarian aspects proper (unity and multiplicity within the Godhead, analogies of the divine Hypostases etc.) to methodological concerns (apophatism and Trinitarian theology) could have been signalled through an additional subchapter or in any case pointed out in the narrative.

Part 1 (pp. 37–134) offers an extensive account of Photios' biography: his cultural formation, political and pastoral enterprises, conflicts with Patriarch Ignatios and the papacy along with their corresponding synods (861, 863, 867, 869, 879/880) are covered in meticulous detail. The encomiastic framing of Photios in the preamble (pp. 37–38) as an antagonist of the expansionary ambitions of the West, 'the incarnation of the ideals of the Christian culture of Byzantium', and 'the defender of the Orthodox Church' derives from the long and confessionally orchestrated reception of the patriarch in Eastern Orthodoxy and should have thus been ideally avoided in a scholarly contribution with an inherently polarizing topic such as the one reviewed here. ALEXOPOULOS' reconstruction of the events relies mostly

1. For instance, the Romanian version of the work should have been included in the discussion, as it is, to my knowledge, the most substantial annotated translation thereof prior to that of THEODOROS ALEXOPOULOS: *Fotie al Constantinopolului, Mistagogia Duhului Sfânt. Exegeze la Evanghelii*. Iași 2013 (bilingual edition and Romanian translation by OANA COMAN; introductory study and chronological overview by IONUȚ-ALEXANDRU TUDORIE; commentaries by OANA COMAN – IONUȚ-ALEXANDRU TUDORIE – ADRIAN MURARU).

on primary sources which he quotes at length. Most translations are his and stand out through readability and precision. In attempting to explain the socio-ideological division between the zealots / rigorists and the moderates characterizing ninth-century Constantinople, ALEXOPOULOS notes in passing (pp. 55–56) that religious development in Byzantium is directly related to the factionalism (Parteigeist) and rivalry between the two parties of the Blues and the Greens. This claim – which I for multiple reasons find problematic – should have been substantiated by arguments, not simply postulated as a working premise. At any rate, ALEXOPOULOS’ historical incursion aptly illustrates the weight of the *Filioque* in the broader canonical struggle between Old and New Rome in the ninth century and raises the reader’s awareness whenever an event or text may be related to the very conception of the *Mystagogy*.

In Part 2 (pp. 135–183), the author puts together a dossier documenting Photios’ engagement with the double procession of the Spirit, namely the famous *Encyclical to the Eastern Patriarchs* of 867 (Epistula 2, ed. LAOURDAS – WESTERINK), the Horos from the Council of 879–880 (at times styled as the Eight Ecumenical Council in Orthodox historiography) and his *Letter to the Archbishop of Aquileia* against the *Filioque* (c. 883–884). ALEXOPOULOS’ examination of these documents is highly competent: he elucidates the circumstances of their composition, structure, auctorial intentions, and the disputed points in the available scholarship. He also interprets their anti-filioquist plea and their attestable continuity in the thought of later Byzantine apologists. Yet the greatest merit of this section consists in the adequate identification of the conceptual dependency and intertextuality between the three texts and the later *Mystagogy*. Thus, ALEXOPOULOS demonstrates that most of what came to be acknowledged as ‘Photian’ counterarguments against the Latins in the *Mystagogy* – the Monarchy (μοναρχία) of the Father, the distinction proper to the Cappadocian Trinitarian model between αἴτιον–αἰτιατόν; the Photian ‘μόνος’; the deployment of Neoplatonic vocabulary and insistence on the incomprehensibility (apophatism) of the mystery of the triune God, etc. – had been foreshadowed or explicitly stated in the dossier. To that end, the *Encyclical to the Eastern Patriarchs* emerges as ‘the foundation stone for the establishment of the anti-filioquist theology in the ninth century’ (p. 148) and the *Letter to the Archbishop of Aquileia* retains in terms of form and content the highest degree of resemblance with the *Mystagogy* (pp. 168, 182–183).

Part 3 (pp. 184–343), the core of the volume, contains a translation and ample theological commentary of the text. In the three preceding subchap-

ters, ALEXOPOULOS expounds the manuscript transmission of the treatise, emphasizes the qualities and minor deficiencies of the recent critical edition by Valerio Polidori (in comparison with Cardinal JOSEPH HERGENRÖTHER's older one),² and establishes the date, authorship, addressee, and structure of the *Mystagogy*. Relying on rhetorical and intertextual evidence, ALEXOPOULOS makes a convincing case for Photios' authorship of the treatise (pp. 190–194). The translation itself is well-executed and reflects ALEXOPOULOS' care to stick as closely as possible to the Greek original. The commentary is rich and comprehensive. The 306 interpretative notes not only explore the depth of Photios' polemical arsenal, his sources, and terminological choices, but also highlight the essential position of the *Mystagogy* in the Byzantine anti-Latin literature through references to loci similes in later anti-filioquist works.

In Part 4 (pp. 344–388), ALEXOPOULOS builds upon the results of his historical-philological study of the *Mystagogy* and goes deeper into several aspects of Photian Trinitarian doctrine along with their ramifications for the contemporary ecumenical dialogue. Subchapter 4.2.2. (pp. 352–365) is of particular interest here. The antinomic problem of the triune Godhead may be articulated in straightforward terms: how could one conceptualize the highest degree of unity within the Trinity while simultaneously preserving the properties and hypostatic identity of the three divine Persons? How is one to distinguish between the perfectly consubstantial and interpenetrated (< περιχώρησις) Hypostases without abolishing the absolute unity of the Trinity? This task depends organically on how one comprehends the 'principle' (ἀρχή) of origination within the Trinity and the relations between the Hypostases deriving therefrom. In the first part of his analysis (pp. 352–357), ALEXOPOULOS reveals the Neoplatonic and Cappadocian basis of the Byzantine 'monarchic' Triadology and equally how this theological design preserves the coherence of the hypostatic relations and attributes. Then (pp. 357–365), he investigates the incompatibility of the Byzantine pattern with the Latin solutions for this dogmatic paradox which are encapsulated in the formulae *tanquam ab uno principio, relationes oppositae*, and *principaliter*. ALEXOPOULOS' clear display of the mechanics of the Latin doctrine on the procession of the Holy Spirit may be of great utility for the students and scholars interested in evolution of the *Filioque* controversy in the Palaiologan period. Starting with the late 13th century, Byzantine

2. Fozio, *Mistagogia del Santo Spirito*, ed. VALERIO POLIDORI (Lingue e letterature Carocci 271). Rome 2018.

culture witnessed a remarkable translation movement of Western theology in Greek (primarily Augustine and Thomas Aquinas). This influx of new texts and ideas rendered the Byzantine apologists increasingly aware of the argumentative lines pursued by the Latins and compelled them to come up with efficient rebuttals in their polemical treatises. ALEXOPOULOS' contribution sheds light on the theological mechanics of this back-and-forth and helps the reader to grasp the long history of these dogmatic disagreements.

A brief epilogue (pp. 389–398) sums up the main conclusions of the work. The volume also features two useful indices (*index locorum auctorum* and *index nominum*).

THEODOROS ALEXOPOLOS' German translation and commentary of Photios of Constantinople's *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* makes a major contribution for the fields of Photian Studies and Byzantine Theology more generally. Underpinned by a solid theological expertise and a scrupulous philological approach, this publication not only unlocks new levels of understanding of Photios' dogmatic oeuvre but can substantially contribute to the advancement of research focusing on the *Filioque* debate in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods.

Keywords

Photios of Constantinople; *Mystagogy*; Filioque; theological controversies in Byzantium