

# In Reply

ROGER BECKWITH

comments on the article by Gerald Bray

As being one of the two evangelicals on the Anglican-Orthodox Commission, and as being criticized by name in this article for agreeing to the proposal about the *filioque* in the Moscow Report, I have been invited by the editor to add a comment. Evangelicals on official Commissions must be ready to be criticized by others in their constituency for the reports to which they consent, and I have often myself exercised the right to criticize other reports which have numbered evangelicals among their signatories. It is for readers to judge, on this as on other occasions, whether or not the criticisms are on target.

May I add that I usually enjoy Mr Bray's slashing articles, when they are not directed against myself! That no doubt shows how circumstances alter one's reaction.

On p 126, the author says that after the abortive Council of Lyons in 1274, the Orthodox objection to the *filioque* on grounds of canon law lost its significance, because the *filioque* had now, in virtue of this council, acquired catholic consent. 'Canonical arguments might continue to impress Anglican divines and others whose knowledge of church history was sketchy', but after this date the theological objection was the only one that counted. There is a serious misunderstanding here. For, first, canon law bulks very large in Orthodox thinking (far larger than in Anglican), and the canons of the ecumenical councils are even today the basis of Orthodox church-discipline. It is symptomatic of the seriousness with which the canons are studied that there exists at least one periodical solely devoted to Orthodox canon law (*Kanon : Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen*). Secondly, Lyons did not, in the eyes of the Orthodox, provide the *filioque* with the catholic consent which it lacked. A council is not recognized in the East as having a catholic character unless its decisions were subsequently accepted by the church at large (see T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 1963, pp 255-8). Those of Lyons were not. Consequently, say the Orthodox, the prohibition of new creeds by the third ecumenical council still stands, and excludes the *filioque*. Thirdly, the historian of the Council of Florence, which met two and a half centuries after Lyons, states that the canonical argument was even there 'the basis of the Greek position' (J. Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 1961, p 149).

On p 128, the author infers, from his previous misunderstanding, that any proposal to drop the *filioque* from the western text of the Nicene Creed (such as is made in the Moscow Report) is a tacit assent

to the Orthodox charge that the *filioque* is theologically false. It seems a bit less than frank to say this without mentioning what Fr Ware writes in the Moscow Report volume, where he quotes largely from the minutes of the discussions so as to show the very reverse, and rightly observes 'how firmly certain Anglicans . . . resisted any attempt to condemn the *doctrine* [his italics] of the *filioque*.' (*Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue*, pp 62-7) I might add that this is one of the three points on which I had to give formal notice at Moscow that I would dissent from the report unless it was amended. The fuller discussion of the theological issues related to the *filioque* had taken place in a subcommittee of the Commission, which had met during the two years preceding the Moscow Conference, and the conclusions it had reached were such that it was necessary to prevent any statement at all being made in the Moscow Report on the theological issues, lest it should be a wrong one. If the Moscow proposal is in fact adopted, and the *filioque* is dropped, not as being theologically false but as being no original part of the creed, the Augustinian doctrine of the double procession of the Spirit will continue to be expressed elsewhere in the Anglican formularies (Article 5, Athanasian Creed, Litany, Veni Creator), and so will remain an Anglican doctrine, even if not such a prominent one. Incidentally, not all the Orthodox do regard the *filioque* as theologically false. Bolstoff and Bulgakov did not (see *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Vol. 58, 1968, pp 81-108) and, as the author concedes on p 132, an agreement on the theology of the *filioque* was achieved by those present at the Council of Florence, even though it did not prove acceptable to the eastern church as a whole.

On p 133, the author quotes, as a glaring example of the supposed unfamiliarity of many Anglican members of the Anglican-Orthodox Commission with Orthodoxy, a statement from *Across the Divide* (1977, p 25)—to which I contributed—that in discussions with Roman and other Catholics and with the Orthodox, evangelicals do not find 'divergence on the Holy Trinity' or on the other truths of the Creed, as they do in discussions with liberal Protestants. If one turned to p 2 of *Across the Divide*, one would find that the chapter quoted is not in fact my work, but I was glad to assent to what the other contributors wrote, there as elsewhere, because the meaning obviously is that 'Catholics' and Orthodox accept the doctrines of the Creed, while liberal Protestants frequently deny them. To suppose the passage to mean that the tradition of theological thought about the Trinity, Christology or soteriology, which leads to and issues from acceptance of the Creed, has been exactly the same in the East as it has in the West, is to take the passage right out of its context.