

On the Trinity: An Ecumenical Conversation

ISIDOROS C. KATSOS

Oxford University

Oxford, England

National University of Athens

Athens, Greece

Introduction

This paper explores the potential impact of Fr. Thomas Joseph White's impressive new book on the Trinity for the ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.¹ In doing so, the paper responds to the editors' kind request for an explicitly ecumenical approach to the book. Therefore, this paper concentrates on the issue of *the Trinity* from an ecumenical perspective. But this is not a simple task. *Before* reading the book, the reader might have thought that Eastern and Western theologians had somehow reached a gentlemen's agreement that the insertion of the *Filioque* clause in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had happened sometime somewhere in the Wild West (namely, at the local Council of Toledo in 589). Building on an honest misunderstanding, the Latin Church gradually added to the initial statement of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, according to which the Spirit proceeds "from the Father" (*ek tou patros*), that the Spirit proceeds "from the Father and the Son" (*ex Patre Filioque*).² In the absence of an ecumenical council that would have settled the issue, the creedal addition became the thorniest issue of theological contention between East and West, leading to the "Great Schism." Things took a new

¹ Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022). Citations to pages of this volume will be made parenthetically in the main text of this paper.

² See the North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation, *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue? An Agreed Statement*, October 25, 2003 (cited in White, *Trinity*, 490–91).

turn during the twentieth century when Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras decided that a new rapprochement was desirable and possible.³ Since then, Eastern theologians have showed willingness, for the first time in centuries, to quiet down their concerns about the *Filioque* as unwarranted speculation, if not falsification, of the Trinitarian doctrine of the Church Fathers.⁴ In exchange, they saw their Western colleagues quieting down their own normative claims about the theological necessity of the *Filioque*.⁵ The general sentiment in the theological schools, in the East at least, was that the true reasons of the Schism had relocated from the sphere of theology to the sphere of terminology, history, and culture.⁶ The controversy over the *Filioque* could be seen as an *infelix culpa* that shaped Eastern and Western Christianity as religious communities, a historic misunderstanding of historical proportions. Contextual rather than doctrinal—that seemed to

³ A milestone towards restoring communion between Rome and Constantinople has been the *Catholic–Orthodox Joint Declaration* of December 7, 1965, which lifted the anathemas (sentences of excommunication) exchanged in 1054 (usccb.org/resources/filioque-a-church-dividing-issue.pdf). The *Declaration* stressed the “sincere desire shared in common for reconciliation, and as an invitation to follow out in a spirit of trust, esteem and mutual charity the dialogue which, with Gods help, will lead to living together again.”

⁴ The general sentiment for centuries in the East is captured in the fine words of Joseph Gill, S.J., *Byzantium and the Papacy 1198–1400* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 159: “The theologians of the Eastern Church rejected the *Filioque*, not merely because it was an addition to the Creed, but because they were convinced that it was doctrinally erroneous. Anchored in the old truth enunciated by so many of the Doctors of the Church that the Father is the sole source of divinity, they saw in the *Filioque* a derogation from that fundamental principle and an undermining of the whole economy of the Blessed Trinity. Hence their opposition.”

⁵ On the shift in attitude that occurred during the twentieth century, see the seminal study of A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 193–213, and the more abridged version as “The *Filioque*: A Brief History,” in *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 7–19 (esp. 17–19).

⁶ For emphasis on the terminology, see North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation, *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?*: “The *Filioque* controversy is first of all a controversy over words” (usccb.org/resources/filioque-a-church-dividing-issue.pdf). For emphasis on history and culture, see Vlasios Feidas, *Ekklesiastikē Istoria*, 2 vols.; (Athens: Lithos, 2009), 2:93–97. This is not to say that the *Filioque* ceased to be understood as a first and foremost theological dispute. It is to say, however, that the main reason behind the Great Schism was the growing linguistic, cultural, and historic group of divides between the Latin West and the Greek East, in which the theological dispute over the *Filioque* was instrumentalized as a polemical weapon; and that the *Filioque* became a theological controversy in the first place for similar reasons.

be the shift achieved in the last century.⁷ *After* reading the book, however, the reader might think that we are about to return to the previous state. For White now argues that the *Filioque* is not “just” an *accident* of language, history, and culture, something that could have happened or not, but the only *correct* interpretation of the Nicene faith:

When the Father spirates the Spirit from all eternity, he *necessarily* does so as Father of the Son and so also in the Son and *with* the Son. (108; emphasis mine)

As to the historically contested question of the *Filioque*, there are . . . many scriptural and traditional bases in favor of its affirmation. In addition, Aquinas affirms it as a *necessary* component of Trinitarian theology. (504; emphasis mine)

If White’s argument is correct, it has serious impact on the ecumenical dialogue: it suggests that, regardless of what happened in Toledo in the sixth century, Christian theologians in East and West *ought* to understand the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as entailing that the third person of the Trinity always proceeds from the other two *together*. To put it more pointedly: if the argument of the book is correct, the Orthodox rejection of the *Filioque* must betoken a failure to grasp something true and important about the life of the Trinity.

Clearly, the resurgence of the *Filioque* as a normative claim poses a genuine challenge for the Orthodox reader. If the *Filioque* is the correct Trinitarian doctrine, what room is there left for the Orthodox contrary position? In situations like this in the past, an Orthodox theologian would consider whether to meet the argument head on by producing contrary readings of the same patristic sources or to entirely undermine it by softening its conclusions. I presume this would still be the instinctive reaction of the average Orthodox reader. I find this kind of response not conducive to ecumenical dialogue. Let me then probe here with something new. In what follows, I want to explore the possibility of appreciating White’s argument on its own merits, while maintaining at the same time the full cogency of the Orthodox contrary position. Mine is obviously a response that requires argumentative effort. However, if it can work, it will be

⁷ In his aforementioned book and article (see note 5 above), Siecenski contextualizes the *Filioque* “within the larger political, cultural, and religious environment,” without denying that it remains a doctrinal controversy. I take this approach to be representative of ecumenically minded Orthodox theologians.

extremely rewarding, since it will result in a very powerful reading of the book from an ecumenical perspective—or so I argue.

The Argument for the *Filioque*

The argument for the *Filioque* runs like a thread through the book and is beautifully summarized in less than a page in the conclusion (679). Let me here try to articulate White's argument in my own words. To my understanding, the argument goes something like this:

1. Scriptural revelation attests that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
2. This doctrine is confirmed by the pro-Nicene Church Fathers, especially regarding the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation (*ad extra*).
3. All the actions of the Trinity *ad extra* must in some way reflect or reveal the immanent life of the Trinity *ad intra*.
4. The Church Fathers, especially Augustine, appeal to psychological analogies in order to show how the temporal missions also reveal the eternal processions.
5. It follows that temporal missions reflect the eternal processions: the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, both internally and externally.
6. The *Filioque* is then the correct interpretation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁸

⁸ It should be noted that the *Filioque* is an addition to the Christian Creed in its revised version of the First Council of Constantinople in 381. The Council of Nicaea in 325 contained only the words: "And [we also believe] in the Holy Spirit" with no reference to the Spirit's mode of procession. Thus, the basic contention of the book that "*Filioque* is the Latin phrase that the Latin Church added to the original Nicene creed, which states that the Spirit proceeds from the Father 'and the Son' (*Filioque* in Latin)" (105n22), is not historically accurate. However, this oversight can be easily rectified if one reads the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed" instead of merely the "Nicene Creed." It does not seem to me that this oversight has any bearing on the argument of the book.

Thomas Aquinas theologically grounds this interpretation in a twofold way: regarding theological language (the *modus significandi*), he prioritizes the use of analogy over metaphor; regarding the thing signified (the *res significata*), he theorizes the divine persons as subsistent relations instead of causal derivations.

White suggests that the above argument does not hinder ecumenical dialogue. It is claimed that the basic premise of the *Filioque*, namely the idea that the temporal missions of the Son and Spirit in economy truly indicate to us the processions of the persons in their eternal relations of origin, is shared between Eastern and Western theologians (106). Thus, several places of consensus arise, which “are sufficient for mutual confession of the Trinitarian faith, and ecclesial inter-communion” (497–98).

At a deeper level, however, one wonders how seriously to take these claims. For let there be no misunderstanding that the book is a full-scale deconstruction project of everything that the Eastern Orthodox Trinitarian ontology holds dear. White claims that the Thomistic tradition offers the correct interpretation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and of the Greek Patristic tradition, with Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Dionysius, Maximus, and John Damascene as its protagonists—a move which clearly cuts off the Orthodox theologians from their patristic inheritance and the core of their theological identity. In addition, the two most widely known modern Orthodox theologians are exposed for their vulnerabilities: first, the late Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, is praised for his “extraordinary” grounding of divine personhood on absolute freedom as an ontological category. In a second step, however, it is shown that Metr. John falls into a profound contradiction by conflating, in the case of the self-constituting of the Father as an act of free choice, ontological freedom with elective freedom (509n6). At a third and even profounder level, which is not explicitly argued but becomes, I would suggest, clear to the careful reader, the very edifice of Metr. John’s relational ontology is shaken. By emphasizing the role of the divine unity for a correct articulation of Christian Trinitarian doctrine (viz. Aquinas’s *De Deo ut uno* treatise), White offers a powerful argument against the most fundamental intuition of Metr. John’s relational theology: the thesis that the relational persons precede (and in a way exceed) the divine essence (see 11–12). Similar can be said about the critical assessment of Sergei Bulgakov. On the one hand, Bulgakov’s Sophiology is praised and charitably understood for its aspiration “to recover a properly Trinitarian doctrine of creation” (598). On the other hand, it is deeply criticized for its Hegelian inspiration, which cuts it off from the *De Deo ut uno* dimension of Trinitarian theology, forcing it to “break with the patristic tradition in

radical ways” (597). In fact, White argues against Bulgakov’s signature idea of creation as the kenotic self-emptying of the divine Sophia because the idea of a divine self-emptying contradicts several traditional divine attributes, such as simplicity, aseity and immutability.

At the end of the book, the Orthodox reader feels bewildered. The book has indeed succeeded in showing St Thomas’s indebtedness to the Church Fathers and, at the same time, in questioning the compatibility of the Church Fathers with signature modern Orthodox doctrines. The deconstruction of the Orthodox intuitions about the Trinity happens softly and in a language of reconciliation. The question is: what is left to reconcile after the deconstruction is completed?

“Theological Schools”

Up to now, I have deliberately presented White’s argument as ecumenical in language but anti-ecumenical in substance, the latter due to White’s reinstating the *Filioque* as a theological normative claim. I have done so because I wanted to show how easily the book can be misunderstood for what it really aims to achieve. I now want to suggest that, in fact, the exact opposite is the case: White’s argument works towards a real ecumenical opening, from within the premises of the *Filioque*. In order to understand and appreciate the subtlety of this move, however, I need to say a few things about the theological epistemology that underlies White’s argument.

On the one hand, White makes recurring reference to the concept of “theological schools” (7), “schools of theology,” or “traditions of theological reflection” to signify “diverse religious traditions and schools of metaphysical thought (ancient or modern)” (188n3). Chapter 21 is a long discussion on the differences between three such schools: the early Franciscan, the early Dominican, and the Ockhamist. In the end, these schools are understood in terms of “successive mainstream traditions of theological reception and articulation to which scripture and tradition give rise” (670n1). To my mind, this concept of “theological schools” as “theological traditions” evokes strongly the concept of “traditions” in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre.⁹ Famously, in his book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre speaks of

⁹ The concept of “tradition” is first presented in Alasdair MacIntyre’s epoch-making book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), chapter 15 (204–25 in the American edition). It is further developed in the sequel *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988). It finds its fine-tuning in MacIntyre’s Gifford Lectures in 1988, published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990).

“traditions” to denote conflicting accounts of justice by considering at length four such traditions: Aristotle’s theory; Aquinas’s synthesis of Aristotelianism and Augustinian Christianity; the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scottish tradition; and “liberalism,” loosely identified with “modernity.” It is not a far-fetched assumption to think that White, like MacIntyre, conceives of Thomism as such a tradition. While MacIntyre applies the concept to ethical theory, White applies it to Trinitarian theology. There are complex issues about the cogency of MacIntyre’s “traditions,” issues that we need not belabor here. But I think it is a safe assumption to claim that the book on the Trinity borrows from MacIntyre the language of “traditions” revamped as “theological schools.”

On the other hand, White writes on several occasions of “the grammar of theology” (189), the “grammar for God” (225), the “metaphysical grammar for what scripture affirms” (279), and the “philosophical grammar for the biblical and dogmatic truth” (342). On another occasion, he speaks of “the language of classical dyothelitism” (616). This time, the terminology strongly evokes the famous concept of “language games” that Ludwig Wittgenstein coined to indicate that words acquire meaning by their use, according to the social practices of which they are part.¹⁰ Again, there are issues about the epistemology of Wittgensteinian “language games,” but we do not need to consider White’s strong subscription to the whole Wittgensteinian project. The point is that White thinks of Thomism, Bonaventurism, Ockhamism, and so on in terms analogous to MacIntyre’s “traditions” and Wittgenstein’s “language games.” They are frames of reference, each frame coming with a certain language (or set of distinctive terminology) and corresponding grammar (or theory of predication). In order to decode the epistemology of the book on the Trinity, all one needs is words, their use, and the realities which they signify. This is hinted at in chapter 12, which distinguishes between the mode of signification (the *modus significandi*) and the thing signified (the *res significata*) (222–25). The distinction is ancient, but it is recast in the light of post-modern language games and traditions as theological frames of reference.

Let us now consider the import of opening statements, such as: “This is a Thomistic work of Trinitarian theology” (6). If I am correct, the statement signals to the reader the frame of reference in which the narrative will evolve. Its purpose is to offer a discourse on the Trinity from within a theological tradition, namely classical Thomism, with its own distinctive language,

¹⁰ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

such as the divine persons as subsistent relations, and its accompanying grammar, such as the theory of analogical predication. The intention of the book is to defend the cogency of this theological frame of reference in a post-modern context: "In regard to Aquinas specifically, I presume for the most part that his reflections on the nature of God and the Trinity are true and defensible" (8).

If indeed we can read the book from the backdrop of such epistemological premises, then we must reach a different conclusion about its ecumenical impetus. For it now becomes clear that White's intention is not to exclude the cogency of other *sound* theological frames of reference with their own use of concepts and rules. This is what is alluded to behind seemingly paradoxical statements, such as: "The claim that only Thomists can be true Catholic theologians is itself non-Thomistic and contradicts Aquinas's own criteria" (7). If my interpretation (or re-interpretation) is correct, White's aim is not to vindicate Thomism and the *Filioque* over against the Orthodox East and its Trinitarian theology. Rather, it is only to vindicate the cogency of Thomism over against all sorts of criticisms it has endured, including those from the East. If so, the true intention of the book is genuinely and deeply ecumenical. To quote from the introduction:

This book does argue in favor of the normative value of many positions that arise from Aquinas himself or from the Thomistic tradition. (7)

And here is a longer passage from the conclusions:

In appealing to the Thomistic Trinitarian tradition in order to retrieve the[se] patristic principles, and by interpreting them in a Thomistic way in the process, I am suggesting one particular way that the liveliness of the Nicene Trinitarian tradition can be received and extended into present theological discourse. . . . Of course what I have presented in this book is only one proposal of a Thomistic pathway forward in modern theology, not an attempt to provide a normative declaration of dogmatic definitions. (Theologians who want to live in the Church with others need to learn to distinguish *ecclesial dogma* from *schools of theology*.) Nevertheless, everyone must seek to think about what he or she believes about God in our modern context, and, in this regard, I am arguing that Thomism is a helpful guide for thinking about the contemporary relevance of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, and Dionysius, as expositors of Nicene Trinitarianism. (672–73; emphasis mine)

What is particularly striking in the above quote—and from an ecumenical point of view particularly welcoming and refreshing—is the distinction between “ecclesial dogma” and “schools of theology.” Each school of theology entails a *modus significandi*, which is to say that each theological frame of reference develops its own language game. Thomism is such a frame of reference and the *Filioque* is part of its language game. Eastern Orthodoxy is another frame of reference, and the affirmation of only the *ex Patre / ek tou patros* is part of its language game. What is important in both cases is that the *res significata*, the Trinity itself, remains the same. I here want to ask: Is the *res significata* the same as the “ecclesial dogma”? I want to argue that in one sense it is and in another it is not.

In using different terms and concepts (or in using the same terms and concepts differently), alternative theological languages give rise to alternative meanings. It is one thing to say that both the Thomistic and the Orthodox traditions speak of *the same Trinity*, and another thing to say that they speak of the Trinity *in the same sense*. The *Filioque* and its rejection cannot amount to the same meaning. The meaning of each theological language depends not only on the cogency of its terms but also on their use, that is, the associations and connotations that emerge from the use of language. When a Thomist and an Orthodox speak of the Trinity, one using the language of *Filioque* and the other denying it, they may be speaking about the same Trinity, but they do not mean exactly the same. White makes this point gently but firmly:

Trinitarian theology in the Thomistic tradition does tend to emphasize certain central interpretive tenets (such as the notion of the persons in God as subsistent relations), and does tend to evaluate the antecedent and subsequent tradition in light of such notions. Every school of theology creates hermeneutical points of emphasis of this kind, as does every theologian, however latently, who reflects on such matters. Nevertheless, one can present what one takes to be a conceptually advantageous principle of interpretation of patristic Trinitarian traditions, such as the notion of subsistent relations derived from Thomism, while also acknowledging that in principle notions from this same early tradition can be received and interpreted in alternative ways. (671)

This, then, is how I propose to understand the deep structure of the book. In its thirty-four chapters, it unfolds stage by stage the Thomistic grammar of Christian Trinitarian doctrine. A necessary component of this theological grammar is the language of the *Filioque*. The introduction and the

conclusions of the book, however, contextualize the language of the *Filioque* within a broader epistemological framework of alternative theological languages, like that of the Eastern Orthodox. A necessary component of the Orthodox theological language is the stress on the generation of the Spirit in the immanent life of the Trinity only from the Father (the *ex Patre / ek tou patros* language). Both languages express the same ecclesial dogma of the Trinity, though not in exactly the same way. It is this difference in theological language, *a difference in meaning*, that the book aims to vindicate over against valid but alternative theological schools. This is clearly no longer a difference in doctrine, but in the *articulation* of the doctrine. Eastern and Western Trinitarian theologians do not draw from different sources. Scripture, the Nicene Creed, and its patristic interpretation belong to the shared inheritance of Christian theology, East and West. It is only the case, White playfully suggests throughout the book, that the Thomists are able to express this common inheritance just a bit better.

With these remarks, I believe that the profound ecumenical impetus of the book has been revealed and my promise to the editor has been to a large extent fulfilled. However, I believe that the ecumenical assessment of the argument of the book will remain incomplete as long as I do not explain, albeit very schematically and briefly, something of the Eastern Orthodox intuitions about the Trinity and the *Filioque*. In this last bit of my paper, then, I will argue that, in his magisterial exposition of the patristic doctrine on the Trinity from within Thomistic premises, White makes a significant, perhaps slightly exaggerated, concession that threatens the cogency of his own argument. If explored, the concession will help us understand better the Trinitarian intuitions of the East. It is to this that I now turn.

Ecumenical Light

As someone who has spent several years of his life working on ancient theories of light and their early Christian appropriation, I was a bit surprised to observe that the book underplays significantly the role of the sun/light analogy in the formation and explanation of the Nicene doctrine. Those who have studied Athanasius and the Cappadocians know quite well that one of the most important analogies used by the pro-Nicene Fathers in their effort to capture, in human language, however imperfectly, the generation of the Son from the Father and their consubstantiality is that of the sun and its light. In fact, there are two analogies that appear in the sources: the first is that of the sun and its rays; the second is that of the sun and its luminous aura, often translated as brightness, based on passages such as Wis 7:26 and

Heb 1:3. It is these two analogies that underlie the creedal formula “light from light” and which Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa take extra care to explain in a pro-Nicene way in their anti-Arian and anti-Eunomian writings.¹¹ Interestingly, the creedal formula “light from light” appears in chapter 7 of White’s book on the Trinity but does not become part of the narrative until chapter 22, where it reappears and is on occasion cited until the conclusions, but without ever receiving the close examination that the psychological analogy does. The analogy from light is thus never organically integrated or properly investigated in the book.

In my humble opinion, this silence seems intentional. In exploring analogical language, White distinguishes between two kinds of analogies: analogies of immanent activity, like knowledge and love, and analogies of transitive activity, like wood catching fire (415), fire and heat (343), or, tellingly, the sun transmitting heat and light to plants and animals (264). Only analogies of immanent activity are deemed theologically suitable to explain the immaterial procession of the Son and the Spirit in the inner life of the Trinity, “since God is immaterial and does not have any potency for development” (422). Analogies of transitive activity, which describe the actualization of a potency, are more suitable to denote the causal production of the world by God. As a result, the analogy of light is eclipsed from the Trinitarian narrative because of the materiality that it is assumed that it implies. To quote from chapter 22 on the immanent processions:

There are only two immaterial activities in human creatures, those of understanding and love. (422)

¹¹ On the sun/light imagery and its meaning in early Christian sources, see Isidoros C. Katsos, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral Literature: From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). The origins of the Nicene formula (“light from light”) are discussed in appendix C (191–96). The analogical use of the sun/light language in early Christian literature is discussed in Isidoros C. Katsos, “Light from Light: The Metaphysics of Light of the Early Church,” in *T. & T. Clark Companion to the Early Church*, ed. Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, Ilaria Ramelli, and John Anthony McGuckin (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 466–82. The patristic use of the sun/light image and the early Christian theory of analogy are discussed and explained in detail in Isidoros C. Katsos, “Taking Nicene ‘Light’ Seriously: Analogy, Equivocity and the Theological Hermeneutics of Many Names,” in *Speculation, Spirituality and Authority in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Rowan Williams*, ed. Lewis Ayres, Carol Harrison, and John Behr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

To follow another quote, this time from chapter 27 on Aquinas's arguments for the *Filioque*:

There are only two analogies to immaterial procession we can make, one from knowledge and the other from love. (496)

And tellingly, once more from the key chapter 22:

Therefore, if there are two truly distinct persons who proceed in God, who are intelligible only in light of the analogy of immanent activity by way of immaterial procession, then they will be intelligible only by similitude to immaterial understanding and love respectively. The conclusion one can draw from this stark claim is twofold. On the one hand, we do truly have a proper analogy by which to understand the mystery of the immanent Trinitarian life of God. On the other hand, we have no others. (423)

I find the latter conclusion a bit extravagant. For, it would have sufficed to pay close attention to the passage from Athanasius quoted on chapter 7 on the "Nicene Trinitarian Theology" to realize that the analogy from light is understood from the Church Fathers in immaterial terms, like an activity of the mind. Here is how the Athanasian passage from the *Contra Arianos* concludes:

Scripture speaks of "Son," in order to herald the natural and true offspring of His essence; and, on the other hand, *that none may think of the Offspring humanly, while signifying His essence*, it also calls Him Word, Wisdom, and Radiance; to teach us that the generation was impassible, and eternal, and worthy of God. (135; emphasis mine)

The Greek term for radiance is *apaugasma* and the reference is to Wis 7:26 and Heb 1:3, as already mentioned.¹² Now, it would be the topic of a fascinating but different paper to explain in detail why and how light is treated here as a quasi-immaterial analogy. Let me just say, drawing from the findings of my own research, that in antiquity light is theorized as the most immaterial of all physical substances. Being itself quasi-immaterial, it demarcates the borders between the intelligible and the sensible world.¹³

¹² On this, see Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 191–96 (appendix C).

¹³ See Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 109–27 (section 1 of ch. 3).

It is because of its immateriality that Aristotle uses it in a famous passage in the third book of the *De Anima* as an analogy for the active intellect (3.5 430a10–25). Aristotle’s analogy of the mind in terms of light is important for several reasons: first, it is a rendition of the celebrated analogy of the sun in the sixth book of Plato’s *Republic*, where the sun functions as a symbol of the good and light as a symbol of the truth derived from the good, like the light springs out of the sun as its undiminished natural power (509a). Second, because a few lines later, vital heat is introduced by Plato as a second power of the sun, similar in nature to light, with the exception that it does not cause knowledge of things, as light does, but their very existence and essence through generation, growth, and nurture (509b). Third, because it is the very same passage in which Plato declares:

The good itself is not essence but still transcends essence [*epekeina tēs ousias*] in dignity and surpassing power. (509b)

In terms of reception history, the two similes of light, Plato’s sun simile in the *Republic*, and Aristotle’s simile of mind *qua* light in the *De anima* will have a tremendous impact on the formation of the early Christian doctrine. The Greek fathers will find in Plato’s sun simile an analogical model for divine transcendence, while at the same time they will link Aristotle’s active intellect to the god of the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*, the famous “thought thinking itself,” which will serve as an analogical model for the Trinity. There are thus two analogical models—conceived in terms of light—that underlie early Christian Trinitarian reflection, the sun simile and the mind simile.¹⁴ The way in which the Church Fathers claimed the two similes back from the Arian and the Eunomian camps and integrated them into the pro-Nicene theological grammar that took shape after the 360s in the writings of Athanasius and the Cappadocians is a fascinating episode of Western intellectual history. As already mentioned, it is not my intention to narrate here this episode.¹⁵ It suffices to mention that, once purged from their “heretical” use, the two similes of light were recast in a Christian language to denote the economic mission of the Son and the Spirit in creation as the sun’s light and heat and the immanent life of the Trinity as thinking thought. Interestingly, and for us confusingly, the language of “light from light” applies to both similes.

¹⁴ On the patristic reception of the Platonic and Aristotelian light analogies, see in detail Katsos, “Light from Light,” 466–71.

¹⁵ I do so in Katsos, “Taking Nicene ‘Light’ Seriously.”

It now becomes clear that, in prioritizing the psychological analogy, which is half of the unified pro-Nicene analogy of light, White's book on the Trinity risks missing its other half, that of light and heat as two equipollent powers of the sun.¹⁶ It is not difficult to perceive that, once Eastern and Western theologians were divided into opposite theological schools, each one developing its own language of the Trinity, the one camp prioritized the Aristotelian model and the other the Platonic. In breaking down the once unified analogy and appropriating only one of the two halves, each camp missed something from the original unified vision of the early Church. Western theologians *quieted down* the language of non-relational equipollence of the Son and the Spirit as described in the analogy of light and heat in the Platonic sun simile, while Eastern theologians *quieted down* the language of absolute relationality that is part and parcel of the Aristotelian divine reality as "thought thinking itself." I write deliberately "quieted down" and not "lost" because both traditions retained the original unified vision in their secret reservoirs. In the West, the light and heat analogy was always accessible through its Augustinian reinterpretation as knowledge and love; in the East,

¹⁶ During the oral discussion of this paper, it turned out that the patristic analogy of the Son and the Spirit to light and heat was received with surprise, if not suspicion, by the learned audience. However, the theological analogy from fire and heat is thoroughly documented in the seminal study of Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001). Barnes discusses the analogy of the Son and the Spirit to the illuminating and heating power of fire respectively on 303–4 of his study, with specific reference to Gregory of Nyssa's *De oratione dominica* III (*Third Homily on the Lord's Prayer*; §41 of the Gregory of Nyssa Online ed.; §416 of the *Sources Chrétiennes* ed.). To my mind, the evidence for the connection of the Spirit to (vital, not common!) heat is simply overwhelming: for Plato, vital heat is the concomitant of the sun's illuminating power (*Republic* 509b). For Aristotle, vital heat is an attribute of *pneuma* (*De generatione animalium* 2.3). Thus, Origen speaks analogically of the Spirit as vivifying (and in this sense sanctifying) divine heat in the context of Deut 4:24; 9:3; Heb 12:29 (*De principiis* 2.8.3). So too, the two Cappadocian brothers, Basil and Gregory, in their hexameral exegesis of Gen 1:2b (Basil, *Hexaemeron* 2.6; Gregory, *In hexaemeron* 19). Tellingly, Basil distinguishes between fire's illuminating and heating powers, but only in thought for us, while in actuality for God (*Hexaemeron* 6.3). Gregory applies this distinction to the Son and the Spirit (*De oratione dominica* III). As a result, to the mind of any fourth-century erudite audience, the credal affirmation of the Spirit as "life-giving" at the Council of Constantinople in 381 would have immediately been understood as a reference to the vivifying power of vital heat, as Basil makes explicitly clear in his *Hexaemeron* 2.6. On vital heat in the fourth-century context, see my discussion in Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 118–23, 168.

the psychological analogy remained always accessible through the Origenian tradition and its emphasis on God the Father as *nous*/intellect.¹⁷

Concluding Remarks

By way of a conclusion, let me here parcel out how the above reflections fit in the broader framework of White's book. In the last thousand years, Eastern and Western theologians have formed distinct theological traditions or schools, with their own distinctive Trinitarian languages. The two languages are that of the *ex Patre* / *ek tou patros*, in the East, and that of the *Filioque* in the West. I submit, however, that the underlying grammar is common. It is the theory of analogy, as White repeatedly suggests, though it is also true that the interplay of analogy, metaphor, proper, and equivocal predication takes different shapes in the writings of the Greek Church Fathers and the writings of Thomas Aquinas—different but not incompatible.¹⁸ What is radically different is the *meaning* of the Trinitarian language that Eastern and Western theologians currently employ. With White, I too want to claim that the mode of procession of the Trinity in creation and the economic missions of the Son and the Spirit *must* reveal something of the mode of the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit in the immanent life of the Trinity. What it is that they reveal, however, is differently understood in East and West. In the *ex Patre* language, the Son and the Spirit are generated and spirated like the two productive powers of Plato's sun, namely light and heat. In the *Filioque* language, the Son and the Spirit proceed like the thought springs from the mind, always remaining united with it through their common thinking activity, as Aristotle intimated, Augustine developed, and Thomas further explained. These are two different theological languages, a language of causal non-reflexive relations and a language of reflexive subsistent relations. The meaning of the Trinitarian processions in these languages is therefore different. But difference in meaning is not necessarily a bad thing. To quote a remarkable passage from White's book:

Every school of theology creates hermeneutical points of emphasis of this kind, as does every theologian, however latently, who reflects on such matters. (671)

¹⁷ The latent complementarity of the Eastern and the Western traditions was never lost. For a notable recent attempt to retrieve it, see Khaled Anatolios, "Divine *Disponibilité*: The Hypostatic Ethos of the Holy Spirit," *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003): 287–308.

¹⁸ See Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 5n16; Katsos, "Light from Light," 476n32.

The question is: is it possible to regard the two theological languages of the Trinity as mutually compatible without asking them to denounce their own identity as theological traditions? I believe it is. For, both languages are derived from the common grammar of prepositional metaphysics of the first thousand years, according to which the Spirit proceeds *from* the Father *through* the Son [*a patre per filium*].¹⁹ Different theological traditions, East and West, may unpack the meaning of this common scriptural and patristic inheritance differently. However, this is only a difference in meaning, stemming from the *modus significandi*, and not a difference in substance, arising from a divergence in the *res significata*. To quote White again:

The advantage of a notion of “theological schools” is that it allows one to acknowledge the deeper ground of unity among theologians that emerges from the Church’s common confession of faith, while also allowing for constructive debate, disagreement, convergence or consensus, within a shared culture of reflection. (7)

If White is right, ecumenical dialogue can no longer be about a chimeric quest for doctrinal superiority of one theological tradition over the other. Instead, it must be about the creation of a different culture of theological engagement from within the shared space of the Church’s common confession of faith. Ecumenical dialogue requires a deep sense of unity in diversity. The unity between Trinitarian theologies in East and West lies in their common patristic heritage. Their diversity lies in their alternative interpretations of that common patristic past. In retrieving the normative value of the *Filioque*, White forces his Orthodox readers to consider how seriously they want to take ecumenism. His is not a piecemeal solution, where a part of Orthodoxy can converse with a part of Thomism. Instead, his is a bold vision of uncompromising ecumenism, in which any part of Orthodoxy can converse with any part of Thomism, without any part having to negotiate its theological identity or tradition. The only requirement is that every part proceed in a spirit of collegiality and in love of truth. For offering us such a powerful vision of unity in uncompromised diversity, we owe him our deepest gratitude. NEV

¹⁹ See Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 148–49 (Table 3.2 and accompanying note), with further references.