

Roots of Christianity

IV.B. The Major Controversies of Christianity Continue

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Platytera

Filioque

- Augustine (+430 AD), bishop of Hippo, heavily influenced by Plato, reflecting on the Trinity, wrote, “The Son is from the Father, the Spirit is also from the Father. But the former is begotten, the latter proceeds.” This is totally orthodox.
- He continues, “So the former is Son of the Father from Whom He is begotten, but the latter is the Spirit of both since He proceeds from them both...The Father is the author of the Spirit’s procession because He begot such a Son, and in begetting Him made Him also the source from which the Spirit proceeds.”

Filioque

- As Jo 15:26 clearly states the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The sending of the Spirit by Jesus (also in Jo 14:26) is only a future event. Thus, Augustine warns that the Spirit does not have two sources or principles as the action of the Father and Son in bestowing the Spirit is common as is the action of all three Persons in creation.
- The Father remains the primordial source of the Spirit inasmuch as it is He from Whom the Son derives His capacity to bestow the Spirit.
- This is the Filioque and is quite orthodox.

Aftermath

- The Franks introduced the Filioque into the Western creed in 792 AD over the objections of Pope Leo III.
- Both the Fourth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils had stated that the Creed could not be altered.
- This objection was repeated by the Orthodox at the failed Council of Ferrara-Florence (1445).

Photius

- Photius (+895), Patriarch of Constantinople, replied to those misinterpreting Augustine, Frankish missionaries in what is today Romania and Bulgaria, recapitulating the teaching of the Church, that “if something is in God but not seen in the unity and oneness of nature of the omnipotent Trinity, this obviously belongs to one of the Three. The procession of the Spirit does not pertain to the supernatural unity which is seen in the Trinity. Therefore it pertains to one single hypostasis of the Three.”

Photius

- According to essence there is no separation in the Trinity (circumcession).
- There is a distinction according to properties characteristic of each hypostasis.
- Photius continued, The eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit was not a matter of the divine nature shared by the Three, but the specific hypostasis of the Father; therefore, there could be no procession also from the Son, for whatever was common to two hypostases had to be common to all three, and then the Holy Spirit would also proceed from Himself.

Aftermath

- The bestowal and sharing occurs outside the Godhead in time (Jo 14:26).
- This is consonant with Augustine.
- This is also the position of the non-Chalcedonian Oriental Orthodox Church.
- The Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Lyons in 1274 AD adopted the doctrine of double procession of the Spirit in the economy of salvation.

Aftermath

- The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholics acknowledged the single procession of the Spirit in the Godhead at Munich (1982 AD).
- At Balamand, Lebanon, in 1972 AD, the heads of the Oriental Orthodox Church acknowledged the common Christology shared with East and West. The Assyrian Church (The Church of the East) had done so in the 17th Century.
- Mary is the bearer of the Christ, our Savior and God.

Trinity

- Augustine (+430 AD) treats God first as a monad (following Plato) and not as a Trinity.
- Augustine holds the Persons in the Trinity are identical with the essence of God; yet they must be in some sense unlike the essence. They are unlike in their relation (following Aristotle).
- The essential distinction that makes up the Trinity is one of relationships within the Godhead. These relationships describe God's self-knowledge and love.

Trinity

- God the Father represents God. God's self-knowledge or awareness is the Son. The Holy Spirit, then, proceeds from that reciprocal love of Father and Son as well as is love itself.
- The Cappadocian fathers (e.g., Basil the Great, +370AD; Gregory of Nyssa, +395 AD, Gregory the Theologian, +389 AD) proceed on the basis of hypostases (concrete existence of the divine essence) as did Athanasius (+373 AD). This is the reasoning behind the Nicene Creed.
- Both are correct representations of the Divinity.

Trinity

- Only because a triune God exists does one of the divine hypostases (namely the One Who stands in relationship to the Father as Son and, as man too, can remain within this affectionate relationship as Son) become incarnate, placing all his human brothers within this relationship as sons to the heavenly Father, or indeed placing His Father within a paternal relationship to all men
- John of Damascus, +749 AD.

Trinity

- Through grace the Holy Spirit identifies Himself with us so that through grace, we may identify ourselves with Him. Through grace the Spirit eliminates the distance between our ego and Him, creating between us and the Father, through grace, the same relation He has by nature with the Father and the Son. If in the incarnate Son we have become sons by grace, in the Spirit, we gain the consciousness and boldness that comes from being sons.

Trinity

- The Holy Spirit makes spiritual the humanity assumed by the Son and deifies it, making it fit to participate in the love with the divine hypostasis of the Son has toward the Father.

Holy Spirit

- God the Father to Augustine as later to Boethius and Aquinas, is not the ultimate source of the Son and the Spirit, but rather an impersonal essence is the source of them all. The Godhead is viewed first as a monad (following Plato) and not as a Trinity.
- Augustine holds the Persons in the Trinity are identical with the essence of God; yet they must be in some sense unlike the essence.

Holy Spirit

- To Augustine (following Aristotle), the Persons are unlike in their relation; but Person signifies relation, which in God, is the same as essence.
- Augustine, following Aristotle, sets the Persons against one another (relation of opposites).
- Thus, when he writes the Spirit is the ineffable communion between the Father and Son, and is Love itself.

Holy Spirit

- A life of holiness and love is the most nearly adequate expression of divine truth. “The matrix of prayer is silence and prayer is the manifestation of the glory of God.” (Synod of 1341 AD)
- The true spiritual person is one whose dedication to Christ enables him, by divine grace, to acquire a mystical awareness of the divine presence, to partake of the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4). This is the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ.



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Transubstantiation

- In defending the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (against the Calvinists), the argument is made that the essence of the bread and wine become divine essence (transubstantiation) while retaining the appearance (accidents) of bread and wine. The Calvinist argument is that the accidents would also change. No change, no real presence.
- The Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church accept the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist without providing the philosophical argument.
- Lutherans accept the real presence only during the liturgical celebration.

Justification

- Until the 15th Century salvation was seen as comprehending all life.
- Salvation is granted by the mercy of God to righteous men and women.
- Those who are baptized into Christ are called to believe in Him and to do good works.
- The argument with Luther centered on the Roman Catholic insistence on the Church as a repository of the merits of the saints whose indulgence could then remit sin and whose penances or works could be rewarded to remit a punishment after death (viz Sixth Session, Council of Trent 1545-62 AD).

Justification

- The Law was written by God on tablets of stone (2 Cor 3:3) and given to the Jews through Moses (Rom 2:12).
- The Law is pedagogic: revealing the difference between good and evil; making the world accountable to Godñ manifesting sin (Rom 3:19-20).
- The Law is grace (Jo 1:15) and leads us to Christ (Gal 3:24). It cannot save.

Justification

- Natural law is written in the heart of everyone who has ever lived. It is the conscience.
- As the natural law can be dulled or obscured completely by sin, there is no agreement as to what constitutes that law.
- For the pure of heart, the natural law is a reliable guide to God's righteousness (Rom 2:14).

Faith

- The synergy (cooperation) of our faithfulness with God's (Rom 3:27) that is fully revealed in Christ.
- It alone is the means by which we attain the righteousness of God.
- Both the natural law and the Mosaic Law bear witness to faith.
- Those who become righteous by grace through faith fulfill in Christ the Law.

Faith

- The power and life of the Holy Spirit active in those who by faith in Christ live out their baptism and chrismation to the fullest possible degree makes the righteousness of God gained by faith real in one's life. Sin is defeated and the Law is fulfilled. The innermost being is oriented towards God and restores the power of the spirit over the flesh.
- The Apostles called this:
 - The law of Christ (Gal 6:2);
 - The law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2);
 - The law of liberty (Jas 1:25, 2:12).

Works

- Living works are deeds good in themselves (fasting, prayer, almsgiving) and done for the glory of God.
- “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10)
- Living works contribute to our faith.

Works

- Dead works are works of the flesh (Gal 5:19), those that are evil, the power of sinful passions in our mortal humanity (Rom 7:25; 8:2).
- Physical passions are normal, strong, and must be disciplined else they overpower the will and the body dominates the soul. Their overindulgence is sinful.

Works

- Dead works are also good works done for the wrong reasons.
- Self-glorification (selfish motivation) turns good works to dead works.
- Only God's grace can bring victory for righteousness.
- Fasting, prayer, alms giving turn one from self-glorification. These are the good works that manifest faith.

Works

- “You see then that a man is justified by his works and not by his faith alone” (Jas 2:24).
- When we do living works, we seek to bring glory to God, not to ourselves through what we do.
- We rely upon the strength and grace of God.
- The Christian actively cultivates a habit of doing living works for the glory of God and as a way of life.
- God’s judgment looks at motivations, not actions

Works

- If we are joined to Christ and cleansed from the dishonor of the past, we become a “vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).
- God sets us apart to Himself so we will be productive and useful to Him.

Justification by Faith

- Justification (becoming righteous) by faith in God is part of being brought into a covenant relationship with Him.
- Israel was under the Old Covenant; salvation came through faith as revealed in the Law.
- The Church is under the New Covenant; salvation comes through faith in Christ Who fulfills the Law, and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, leading us to the knowledge of God the Father.

Justification by Faith

- While we are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law” (Rom 3:28),
- “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas 2:17).
- Justification is not a legal acquittal before God.
- Justification by faith is a covenant relationship with God, centered on union with Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and Man.

Justification by Faith

- It is first God's mercy and not our faith that saves us. It is God who initiates or makes the new covenant with us.
- “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:1).
- Faith is living, dynamic, continuous; a way of life.

Justification by Faith

- Christians are no longer under the demands of the Law (Rom 3:20).
- “His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life an devotion through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and power. Through these, He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in this world because of evil desire” (2 Pt 1:3).

Have I been saved?

- I have been saved being joined to Christ in baptism.
- I am being saved, growing in Christ through the sacramental life of the Church.
- I will be saved by the mercy of God at the Last Judgment.
- “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).
- We are judged on our works (Mt 27:11-31).

Reconciliation

- We are justified in baptism. But baptism is not repeatable.
- Men sin.
- How then can one return to Christ?
- The Church as the Body of Christ has power over sin.
- “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jo 1:9)

Reconciliation after sin

- The faithful bring their sins to God in repentance and receive cleansing and forgiveness.
- In the early Christian communities, the people would stand and confess their sins to God in the presence of the community (“tell it to the church”, Mt 18:17; “confess your trespasses to one another” Jas 5:26). Repentance was a public act.

Reconciliation after sin

- In the early Christian communities, the penitent sinner was excluded from the Eucharist and had to stand apart from the saints in the assembly.
- Out of mercy, confessions began to be witnessed privately on behalf of the church.
- Acts of repentance became private.

Reconciliation after sin

- Jesus gave his disciples the power to forgive sin (Mt 16:19, 18:18; Jo 20:23).
- Jesus called and appointed them (Jo 15:16).
- To these same disciples He promised, “It is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit” (Mk 13:11). Whom God calls, He equips.
- It is the grace of the Holy Spirit that endows the confessor with the discernment and compassion to speak the words of remission on behalf of Christ (2 Tim 1:6).

Reconciliation after sin

- One filled with the Holy Spirit may forgive sin (Jas 5:16). From the earliest days this was the practice in monastic communities.
- The sacrament of repentance is provided by God to deliver from sin.
- It is easy to pray in isolation but remain in denial. It is far more effective to confess aloud to God before a spiritual father and benefit from his guidance and help.
- “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor 11:31).

Reconciliation after sin

- It is to Christ to Whom we confess.
- When we tell God all, naming our sins and failures, we hear the words of Christ's promise of forgiveness of all our sins.
- If we resolve to "go and sin no more" (Jo 8:11), we are justified by faith.

Sinlessness of Mary

- The Fathers of the Church teach that the Theotokos is sinless, immaculate, chosen by God.
- Her conception was dispassionate (without the lust associated with intercourse). She inherits the consequences of the sin of Adam (mortality) but does not sin personally (dispassionate conception).
- Her flesh, then is “fallen”. Jesus takes flesh from Mary; however, as his conception is not through intercourse, that flesh is not “fallen” and is purified in His person. “What is not assumed is not healed.”

Sinlessness of Mary

- As sin is personal, Mary does not sin.
- At age 3 she is taken into the Holy of Holies. Only one without sin is permitted to enter the sanctuary. The High Priest first had to offer sacrifice for himself to be able to enter the sanctuary.
- Mary is raised in the Temple and “fed” by the Angels.
- Her assent to Gabriel at the Annunciation is her full, willing participation with God (theosis).

Sinlessness of Mary

- The prophecy of Simeon at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (the “sword” that shall pierce the heart) refers to the doubts she will confront throughout her life.
- Doubting is not a sin. Acting on doubt is sinful. There are various instances in the New Testament of Jesus (gently) correcting his mother.
- Mary dies as is the usual course of events for Man.
- The Church celebrates the Dormition of Mary and her bodily Assumption on August 15, an example of the future resurrection.

Sinlessness of Mary

- The Franciscan position that Mary is free of “original (ancestral) sin” dogmatized by the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th Century is not accepted by the Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Church.
- All agree that Mary is “justified” in Christ.
- Moses, Ezra, and John the Evangelist were also assumed bodily into Heaven.
- They, too, faced a personal judgment.
- Enoch and Elijah were taken into Heaven but will return in the Last Days and die as is the common fate of Man. Their resurrection will follow.

The Last Judgment

- But we must not take the outcome of God's Last Judgment for granted.
- Nothing is hidden from God (Rom 2:4).
- A repentant heart is grateful for God's patience and abides in Christ, practicing a lifetime of repentance that produces confidence before Him at the judgment (Ps 51; Rom 2:28).

The Last Judgment

- We are judged according to our deeds (Rom 2:6).
- Our faith with works, the unity of intentions with actions is the basis for the judgment. Even non-believers are rewarded for good works apart from spiritual understanding (Rom 2:14).
- Faith without works does not save (Rom 2:13).

The Last Judgment

- “Seek first the Kingdom of God” (Mt 6:33).
- The doers of truth practice virtue from pure and repentant hearts (Jas 1:21).
- The presence of God’s law in our conscience (Rom 2:15) condemns anything we do that is contrary to true human nature. All have an internal law from God according to which God will judge us.
- Because we all fail, we need God’s mercy (Rom 3:19).

The Last Judgment

- Those who are condemned choose to reject God.
- There is no fated automatic condemnation.
- God's judgment is based on our exercise of free will.
- Although sin impairs our powers, it does not destroy God's image in us or our free will.

The Last Judgment

- In the Day of Judgment we are not judged directly by God the Father, Whom we cannot see, but by the incarnate Son Whom we do see, Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31, Jo 3:16).
- Christ will judge us on the basis of the light He Himself has given to each of us (Jo 1:9) and our response to His light (Jo 3:16).
- “The secrets of men” are “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Purgatory

- The Jews did not begin with the pagan premise that the soul is immortal.
- There are hints of a bodily resurrection (at the time of the Messiah and the Final Judgment). This is strongly expressed in 2 Maccabees 12:39-45.
- That there is a bodily resurrection implies the soul is immortal.
- Between death and the Final Judgment the soul is in Hades. At the Day of Atonement, a prayer is made to be included with the righteous in the Book of the Living.

Purgatory

- Those who are not written in the Book of the Living will be raised at the Final Judgment and turned into ash. (Annihilation?)
- The righteous will be with God. There will be no Gehenna.
- The Church acknowledges a personal judgment at death (with an experience related to one's life in the body) prior to the Final Judgment.
- Irenaeus (+202 AD) condemns the idea of Toll Houses in *Against Heresies* 1.V.21. It is a metaphor.

Purgatory

- As we are creatures we must be somewhere in space and time.
- The righteous are participating in God.
- Those who are not righteous do not participate fully in God.
- It is believed that repentance cannot occur after death, yet we offer prayers for the dead to an impassible God.

Purgatory

- In Medieval times, the Roman Catholic Church expressed the chastisement of souls not righteous (but not damned) as a series of punishments for which prayers and alms were effective means of remittance, thus allowing participation in God.
- The damned are confronted with their alienation from God. No one, however, is in Hell as yet.

Predestination

- Double predestination is an election by the divine intellect but willed relatively depending upon how men responded.
- The Roman Catholic view is libertarian: God does not coerce acceptance of salvation.
- The later Calvinist view simply accepts that election as foreordained (which raises the question of whether God is good).
- Gregory of Nyssa (+395 AD), the “Father of the Fathers”, and Isaac of Nineveh (+700 AD) openly speak of the restoration of all (and the salvation of all).

Equality of bishops

- College of Bishops patterned on Roman Senate.
- Jurisdiction of Metropolitan that of civil community.
- Bishop of Rome accorded a primacy of honor with respect to other apostolic sees.
- Concrete jurisdiction of Bishop of Rome as appellate court of last resort as a result of a function within which the episcopal college invested him.

Equality of bishops

- Moral leadership.
- Disputations of faith resolved at Ecumenical Council summoned by Emperor.
- No serious scholar accepts the maximalist arguments of Mt 16:16 (viz 1 Cor 10:8 re Num 20).

Roman claims of primacy

- First Vatican Council (1869 AD) claims for the Bishop of Rome ordinary jurisdiction, which is truly episcopal and immediate, over all other churches, which binds the pastors and faithful to the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience.
- The Papal Encyclical (*Mystici corporis*, 1943 AD), maintains by divine right that canonical communion with the Roman pontiff is essential for salvation.

Roman claims of primacy

- Second Vatican Council (1963-65 AD) nuanced but reaffirmed this decision.
- For Roman Catholics this is a matter of faith.
- Yet none of the seven Ecumenical Councils, presumably under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accepted this claim.
- This definition of primacy is the stumbling block to intercommunion as it has been since the Council of Lyons and the Council of Florence-Ferrara.

Date of Pascha

- The date to celebrate Pascha (Easter) has been controversial since the 1st Century. The community of John celebrated at Passover.
- No community celebrated Pascha before Passover.
- To avoid depending upon the Jewish calculation of Passover, the Fathers at Nicea (+325 AD) set a commission to calculate the date of Pascha.
- That formula is still utilized by both East and West.

Dates of Pascha

- The date of the Vernal Equinox was fixed as March 21. Also fixed was that of the first full moon after the Equinox (14th day of the lunar cycle) . Pascha was to be celebrated the Sunday following the first full moon after the Equinox.
- The new calculation was not widely accepted.
- The Synod of Whitby in England (664 AD) was called to set a uniform date for the celebration of Easter (following Nicea and not that of the Irish monks at Iona who followed the custom of the community of John).
- This calendar is still followed in the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Dates of Pascha

- The Julian calendar utilized in the East is inaccurate because of the formula used to calculate the leap years. It also miscalculates the length of the solar year.
- The Gregorian reform of 1582 AD corrected the calculation of leap years, adjusted the length of the solar year, and followed the rules set down for the calculation of Pascha at Nicea.
- Neither the date of the Equinox nor of the full moon after the Equinox were fixed.

Dates of Pascha

- The Gregorian calendar reform placed the civil and ecclesial calendar in the West on the correct astronomical calendar.
- In practice this accounts for the difference in the Western date and a later Eastern date.
- However, the failure to prohibit the celebration of Pascha prior to the Jewish Passover has led the Catholic Church to observe Pascha prior to the Jewish Passover in 2008 and 2016.

Baptism

- Baptism is unique and unrepeatable. Paul compares this to circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). It is the sign of the covenant with God; we are united with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)
- It is a joining to the death of Christ. The Holy Spirit is given to us with the forgiveness of sins and sealed with the ability to live a resurrected life (blessed to live righteously because of the indwelling Spirit as noted in Rom. 6:4)).
- Infant baptism has been practiced since the early days of the Church (1 Cor. 1:16; Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33). It is pointed to in Mt. 10:13-16 and Lk. 18:15-16.

Baptism

- “No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being begotten of water and the spirit.” (Jo 3:5)
- Baptism is performed “in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28: 19). No other formula is acceptable.
- In the Didache (ca 100 AD), baptism is performed by immersion (possibly, submersion) as well as by infusion (pouring).
- The rebaptism controversy stems from the innovation Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain in 1702 AD in response to the union of the Church of Antioch with the Church of Rome.

Marriage

- The principal legal function of marriage is to ensure the rights of the partners with respect to each other and to ensure the rights of the children within a community.
- Jewish belief holds that marriage was instituted by God. It makes the individual complete. Procreation of children is a primary aim.
- Jesus reaffirmed the spiritual nature and indissolubility of marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God's love for men (Mt. 19:4-6). Children represent the tangible overflow of God's love in the creation and care of the world. Eden.

Marriage

- As Moses provided for divorce because of the hardness of hearts (Mt. 19:9), the Church also recognizes reasons for dissolving a marriage (Mk. 10:11-12; Mt. 5:32; Is. 50:1; Jer. 3:8; 1 Cor. 7:10-15).
- While the ideal is for a widow or widower to remain faithful to the departed spouse (who is alive in Christ) by remaining single, the possibility of remarriage is also permitted. (1 Cor. 7:9)
- The Church has accepted annulment or divorce of rulers to permit remarriage for the propagation of heirs to avoid dynastic conflict and civil war. A single marriage is the norm, however.

Marriage

- In the Orthodox Church, a penitential rite precedes remarriage.
- Marriage is only permitted with a believer (2 Cor. 6:14; Ezra 9-10).

Ontological communion

- “Ecclesial communion has its root and center in the Holy Eucharist” which is where the Church expresses her most essential form. While present everywhere, she is only one, just as Christ is one.” (Communis notio, 1992 AD)
- The Church exists in history as a local church or communion of Eucharistic communities united around their bishop, which make present the universal Church, not as a sum of individual realities, but because the presence of the apostolic Church is realized in each one of them.

Ontological communion

- How then could Pope John Paul II continue to acknowledge the apostolic nature of the Orthodox Church;
- and permit intercommunion with Oriental Orthodox churches (1984 AD)?
- Or give communion to the Protestant founder of the Taize community?

Ontological communion

- There are Orthodox communities who reject the declaration of Balamand (1982) that acknowledged the validity of Roman Catholic sacraments.
- However, rebaptism of Catholics who convert to Orthodoxy is an innovation of Nicodemus the Hagiorite in the 18th Century.
- In Syria there is intercommunion of Orthodox, Catholic (Melkite), and Syrian Orthodox.

Ontological communion

- The Body of Christ is not divided.
- There is only one true Church and that Church is visible.
- Orthodox, Catholic, and Oriental Orthodox Churches each maintain it is the only one visible.
- (Autocephalous or autonomous Orthodox churches in canonical communion constitute one Church.)
- There are no branches that constitute a true Church that is only known to God.
- Either there is ontological communion or there is no Body of Christ.

Suggested reading

- **Joint Catholic-Lutheran Agreement on Justification** (1999 AD).
- Adriano Gurati, **Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Dialogue**, Ignatius Press. San Francisco. 2004. An excellent presentation of the various theological positions.
- Elias Zoghby, **We are all schismatics**. God is With Us. Boston. 1982.