**Saint Peter Damian’s *Letter* 91 -** On The Filioque[[1]](#endnote-1)

**Introduction**

To Sir Lichoudes, the most blessed patriarch,[[2]](#endnote-2) the monk Peter the sinner offers his servitude.

(2) The devout bishop of the church at Forlimpopoli[[3]](#endnote-3) related to me that he had heard from the lips of the most reverend Dominic [Marango], patriarch of Grado,[[4]](#endnote-4) that you had posed a question of great importance for the Catholic faith in your letter to the Apostolic See, and that with vigilance becoming the episcopal office, you had requested of Pope Alexander [II] that it be resolved with unimpeachable evidence from the testimonies of the Scriptures. This question was: *Why do Latins say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, while the Greeks believe that he proceeds only from the Father?* (italics added). I now make bold to demonstrate what I think about this question with the help of the same Holy Spirit here under discussion. It is not that I have been put under obligation by you in this matter, or that it was commanded by the authority of the Roman pontiff. For why would he deign to assign such a weighty subject to an unskilled person, when it cannot be doubted that there are so many holy and skilled men always at his side? But even though I am a slothful and useless servant in the household of my Lord Jesus, since it is inconvenient for them to accept his request, I am pleased to undertake the task, and no one has seen fit to challenge me.

(3) Your Holiness is to be exalted for his laudable prudence, with deserved acclamation, that in resolving this question about the Holy Spirit you came to not just anyone, but specifically to Peter, whom you undoubtedly recognize as having the keys of wisdom and power. Nor was it proper that you, a man of such dignity and wisdom, should seek out from any other, the hidden things of heavenly mystery, but from him especially, whom flesh and blood could not instruct, but to whom God himself saw fit to reveal his secrets directly. Simon, son of Jonah,” he said, “blessed are you because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”[[5]](#endnote-5) *For the Creator of the world chose him in preference to all other mortals on earth, and granted to him for all time the privilege of magisterial primacy within the Church, so that anyone who wishes to know anything profound about God might have recourse to the divine pronouncements and doctrine of this teacher* (italics added). ...

(7) First of all, therefore, let me explain the source of this ignorance that allows almost all the Greeks and some Latins to maintain that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son, but only from the Father. This they assert from the words of the Lord by which he says, “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”[[6]](#endnote-6) And again, “Behold, I send to you the promise of my Father.”[[7]](#endnote-7) And this statement, “But when the Advocate has come, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father – he will bear witness about me.”[[8]](#endnote-8) Again the Lord says of him, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth.”[[9]](#endnote-9) And elsewhere he says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything.”[[10]](#endnote-10) And again, “If you , then, though you are bad, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will your heavenly Father give the good Spirit to those who ask him.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

(8) Citing these texts, therefore, and the like, not only from the Gospels but from other scriptural evidence as well, they assert that the Holy Spirit in no way proceeds from the Son, but only from the Father. Some such statements which seem to agree with this opinion are often found even in the doctors who use the Latin language. Clearly blessed Jerome, in his explanation of the faith sent to the bishops Alippius and Augustine, says among other things, “We believe also in the Holy Spirit, true God, who proceeds from the Father, equal in all things to the Father and to the Son.” Augustine also, inveighing against Maximus the heretic, Says, “The Son is from the Father, the Holy Spirit is from the Father.” …

(9) *Yet these and similar testimonies from the Scriptures or the words of the holy doctors are not prejudicial to the Catholic faith, by which, just as we believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, so we maintain nonetheless that he proceeds from the Son as well* (italics added). **For while both the Lord himself and the holy doctors of the Church agree in asserting that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, never do they hold that he does *not* proceed from the Son** (emphasis added). Rather, when the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father, it must be believed that he proceeds also from the Son, because there is no doubt that the Father and the Son are of one and the same substance. For when the Son says, “The Father and I are one,”[[12]](#endnote-12) how can the Holy Spirit both proceed and not proceed from that which is one?

(10) But something ineffable, which cannot be conceived by any natural capacity of human reason and cannot be discerned by any insight or application of the mind, must be gathered only from statements found in the Word of God. …For how can human insight attain to the knowledge of how the Father ineffably begets the Son, of how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or from both, unless almighty God reveals it to mortal men through the instrumentality of the prophets or through his Incarnate Word? “For faith,” as the Apostle says, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”[[13]](#endnote-13) …

(11) Moreover, neither among the Greeks nor among the Latins is there any question that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Nor need one cite evidence for this, since the texts we quoted above declare this very thing. But that he *proceeds from the Father, and at the same time, from the Son,* which is the question we are addressing, we learn from the authority of the Gospels, for the Lord says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything (italics added)”[[14]](#endnote-14) And elsewhere, “When the Advocate has come whom I will send you from the Father.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Since, therefore, the Father sends the Advocate in the name of the Son, and the Son sends him from the Father, it is evident that because he is sent by both who are undoubtedly one, he also surely proceeds from both. And since he is often called the Spirit of Truth, and since Christ is the Truth, he who is the Spirit of Truth is undoubtedly the Spirit of the Son. And so elsewhere the Lord says, “He will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine.”[[16]](#endnote-16) He will indeed receive from what is mine, because he is also in me. Thus also in Isaiah the voice of the Father said to the Son, “My Spirit which is in you and my words which I have put in the mouth of your descendants forever.”[[17]](#endnote-17) This same Spirit is the power that went out from him, as we read in the Gospel,[[18]](#endnote-18) and cured them all. …

(13) Therefore, just as when we speak of the Spirit of the Son or of Christ, it does not immediately follow that we can disunite him from the Father, so too when we call him the Spirit of the Father, we cannot separate him from the Son. … But that the Son sent the same Spirit upon the disciples is stated by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, when he says, “Exalted thus at God’s right hand, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and then poured out this gift, which you see and hear.”[[19]](#endnote-19) And so it was that when he had risen from the dead and had appeared to the disciples, that he might clearly show that the Spirit proceeded from him, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

(14) Nor must we think that this bodily breathing , which then disturbed the air, was the Holy Spirit, but by this apt figure he fitly indicated that the Holy Spirit proceeded from him. … But the sound that proceeds from his mouth is the Holy Spirit, who resounded in a marvelous fashion as he came forth from the Son, and with a sudden noise, speaking in a variety of tongues, descended upon the apostles. “And suddenly,” we read, “there came from the sky a sound like that of a wind arriving in great vehemence.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

Among the Church Fathers of the West, Peter Damian selected Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine, and Saint Jerome, and from the Greeks he selected Saint Athanasius and Saint Cyril.

(18) So let us hear what Blessed Ambrose says about the procession of the Holy Spirit in the sixth book *On the Faith* that he sends to emperor Gratian. “It is not,” he says, “as if the Spirit is sent from some place, or as if he proceeds from some place, when he proceeds from the Son.”[[22]](#endnote-22) … Just as the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, thus the Spirit of God is both in the Father and in the Son.”[[23]](#endnote-23)

… Although throughout almost the entire work he composed on the holy Trinity Augustine asserts on countless occasions that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and at the same time from the Son, I will cite at least one of his statements , lest I appear to have neglected him and completely passed him by. “In this holy Trinity,” he says, “there is one Father who alone from himself essentially begot one Son, and the one Son who alone is born essentially of the one Father, and one Holy Spirit who alone essentially proceeds from the Father and the Son.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Jerome also is said to have written the following, “The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and from the Son is coeternal and in all things coequal to the Father and the Son. This is the holy Trinity. That is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: it is one deity and power, one essence, that is, the Father who has begotten, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

(19) But if, on the other hand, those who are acquainted only with Greek and know no Latin should say that doctors in the Roman tongue do not suffice for them, unless I also use Greek-speaking Fathers, let them hear what blessed Athanasius states in the book he wrote against Arius. “I believe,” he said, “that the Son is in the Father, and the Father in the Son, and also that the Spirit, the Advocate who proceeds from the Father, is of the Son as well as of the Father, because he proceeds from the Son, as it is written in the Gospel that by breathing upon them he gave the Holy Spirit to his disciples.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Also blessed Cyril says of this same procession of the Spirit in writing against Nestorius, “For even though in his substance he is his Spirit, and it is understood to have his own personality in that he is the Spirit and not the Son, still he is not alien to him. For he is called the Spirit of the Truth, and the Truth is Christ. Hence in like manner he proceeds from him, just as proceeds from God the Father.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

(23) I could gather still further texts from the Scriptures, nor would it be impossible to use [other] outstanding defenders of the Catholic faith along with their arguments in support of my contention. … Therefore may Your Holiness, venerable father, even though fully and lavishly refreshed by the food of God’s word, hunger more and more for the truth, and in the meantime not despise this meager appetizer from a poor little man, so that afterwards you may enjoy the delights of a royal banquet from the hands of our lord pope, as though through the prophet Habakkuk,[[28]](#endnote-28) or even through an angel.

1. Peter Damian Letters 91-120, translated by Owen J. Blum, O.F.M., *The Fathers of the Church*, Mediaeval Continuation, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, pp. 3- 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Constantine Lichoudes was the patriarch of Constantinople from 1059 to 1063. He is considered a saint of the Eastern Orthodox Church and is commemorated on 29 July. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. In 1073, Peter Damian was sent as a papal legate to Forlimpopoli, Italy, an historic and famous Catholic titular see, to reform ecclesiastical disciplines. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The see of Grado (Italy) was suppressed in 1451 and merged with the Archdiocese of Venice. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Matt 16.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Matt 10.20. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Luke 24.49. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John 15.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. John 14.16-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. John 14.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Matt 7.11; Luke 11.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. John 10.30. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Heb 11.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. John 14.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. John 15.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. John 16.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Isa 59.21. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Cf. Luke 6.19. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Acts 2.33. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. John 20.22. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Acts 2.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Blum, p. 12, fn. 50 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., fn. 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 13, fn. 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., fn. 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., fn. 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., fn. 56 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. Dan 14.31-38.

The End [↑](#endnote-ref-28)