

**Hilary of Poitiers
and the Concept of Divine Personhood**

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In loving memory of my mother

Abstract

The primary focus of this dissertation is the development of the notion of divine personhood in the writings of Hilary of Poitiers, doctor and bishop of the Church. The impetus for this study was my Licence thesis, where I first discovered Hilary and began exploring his profound contribution to the understanding of the Trinity in the early Church.¹ This initial thesis has served as an important foundation for my further understanding of Hilary's doctrine, which is expressed in this doctorate.

Although Hilary never set out to present a systematic understanding of the divine persons, in his efforts to combat Arianism, and Sabellianism, this is what he effectively did, primarily in relation to the Father and the Son.² I have chosen to approach his Trinitarian theology through this lens in order to bring out the fundamental insights and contributions, which he made to the development of doctrine. The significance of these, as I show, can be seen in the manner in which they were taken up and developed by important theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas.

In chapter 1, I give an account of the milieu in which Hilary flourished, focusing on the reasons behind the theological crisis which characterised this period, and the significance of the council of Nicaea. In this chapter, I also provide an overview of Hilary's life, which was greatly impacted by the Arian crisis; and in chapter 2, I summarize his most important doctrinal work, *De Trinitate*, which he wrote in response to this crisis. Given that this is the primary source of information for this study, included in my summary is an examination of the methodology which Hilary employed in writing this treatise.

Chapters 3-8 encompass the main body of this dissertation. In these, I analyse in detail Hilary's Trinitarian theology, focusing on his development of the notion of divine personhood. In chapter 3, I explore Hilary's understanding of the divine nature, which is intrinsically linked to his concept of divine personhood; while chapter 4 serves as an introduction to chapters 5-7. In chapters 5 and 6, I examine Hilary's notion of divine

¹ Ann Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", Licence Thesis (University of the Holy Cross, 2011).

² I use the term Sabellianism throughout this thesis to depict the heretical view that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three subsistant persons but rather different modes of the one Godhead. I have chosen this term as Sabellius is mentioned by name in some of the documents from the mid-fourth century such as those drafted at the council of Antioch in 345. (For example, see anathema 6 of the *Ekthesis Makrostichos*, Athanasius, *Syn.* 26).

personhood in terms of the Father and the Son, and in chapter 7, their unity within the one divine substance. In chapters 8 and 9, I examine Hilary's pneumatology. This is a challenging task, given that the Holy Spirit is not the main focus of his theology, and thus his pneumatology is not developed extensively. Furthermore, Hilary does not always express his views on the Spirit clearly and coherently. In order to understand Hilary's pneumatology, I begin my analysis in chapter 8 with a review of the influences upon Hilary's thought, followed by an extensive examination of the phenomenon known as Spirit Christology, which is prevalent in his works. This phenomenon is characterised by the use of the term *spiritus* in reference to the Holy Spirit as well as the Father, the Son and the divine nature, and was prevalent from the 2nd to the 4th century. Such a practice often led to ambiguity in the presentation of doctrine, as it does at times in Hilary's writings, and has been associated by some scholars with binitarianism. Using the understanding gained in chapter 8, I examine Hilary's perception of the person and being of the Holy Spirit in chapter 9. Finally, I draw the results of my analysis together, and present Hilary's most significant insights into the divine personhood of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, showing the importance of this concept to the resolution of the Arian crisis.

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Abbreviations

Works by Hilary of Poitiers¹

<i>Ad. Cons.</i>	<i>Ad Constantium</i>
<i>C. ant. Par.</i>	<i>Collectio antiariana Parisiana (Fragmenta historica)</i>
<i>De Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>De syn.</i>	<i>De synodis</i>
<i>In Matt.</i>	<i>Commentarium in Matthaëum</i>
<i>Instr.</i>	<i>Instructio in Tractatus super Psalmos</i>
Preface	<i>Preface to the Opus Historicum</i>
<i>Tr. Ps.</i>	<i>Tractatus super Psalmos</i>
<i>Tr. Mys.</i>	<i>Tractatus Mysteriorum</i>

Editions, Translations, Series, and Journals

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885–1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>EECh</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Early Church</i> . Edited by Angelo di Berardino. Translated by Adrian Walford. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>NPNF</i> ²	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Philip and Henry Wace. 1886–1889. 14 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.
PG	Patrologia Graeca. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
PL	Patrologia Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864.
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>

¹All English translations of Hilary's works can be found in the bibliography. These will be used, unless otherwise stated.

SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943–.
ST	Thomas Aquinas. <i>Summa Theologiae</i> . In the <i>New English Translation of St Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae</i> . Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm .
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte altchristlichen Literatur
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZAC	<i>Journal of Ancient Christianity</i> / <i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZNTW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,

June 8, 2018.

Introduction¹

Hilary of Poitiers, the tireless defender of the Nicene faith, has over the centuries been the focal point of much scholarly discussion. In recent decades, however, he has maintained a relatively low profile in patristic studies, being overshadowed by the profound work of the Cappadocians and the genius of Augustine. This has started to change with the work of Burns, Beckwith and Weedman, and the recent publication of Ayres, which has brought about a renewed focus on the history of the fourth century.²

The fourth century was characterized by the great Arian crisis. Underpinning this crisis was the desire of the early Church to answer the fundamental questions concerning the faith, “How is God three and one?” and specifically, “How is Christ divine, and yet not a second God”? The council of Nicaea shed some light on the solution by declaring that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, thus implying his divinity and indicating that his unity with the Father is to be found on the level of substance. However, it did not explain how the Son could be truly God, without detracting from the oneness of the Godhead or the divinity of the Father, and at the same time having his own real existence. The solution to the problematic was ultimately to be found in the development of an orthodox notion of divine personhood.

In response to the crisis, Hilary composed his most renowned work, *De Trinitate*. This treatise on the Trinity was primarily a defence of the Nicene faith in which Hilary sought to explain in a coherent and clear manner the Son’s consubstantial relationship with the Father, while decrying the fundamental errors of Arianism and Sabellianism.

In 1944, an in-depth examination of Hilary’s Trinitarian theology by Smulders was published. This proved to be a seminal work, and as such is still a significant source of information for scholars.³ Given the recent scholarship on Hilary and the fourth century milieu in which he lived, as well as the lapse of time since Smulder’s study was published, I thought it worthwhile to revisit Hilary’s Trinitarian thought, aiming to gain further insight into his theology. I do this by examining Hilary’s understanding and development of the

¹ Cf. “Introduction” in Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 1-3.

² Paul C. Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on the Psalms* (Washington, DC: CUA, 2012), *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on Matthew* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1981); Carl L. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De fide to De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³ Pierre Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, *Analecta Gregoriana*, 32 (Rome: Universitatis Gregoriana, 1944).

concept of divine personhood in relation to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, primarily in *De Trinitate*. Hilary's theology was developed in response to the theological crisis that marked the fourth century. For this reason, I examine his thought in the context of this crisis, and present a history of the period in which Hilary flourished. My view of this history differs fundamentally from that portrayed in recent scholarship and I argue that it represents the fourth century crisis in the manner in which Hilary understood it. In presenting the history of this period, I emphasise the significant impact of the council of Nicaea upon Hilary's work, and also the local councils, which were held in the east. Given that the terminology for expressing the unity and diversity within the Trinity was not yet clearly established, I also examine how Hilary employed key terms, such as *persona*, in his writings.

My understanding of the fourth century crisis sets this study apart from the recent work on Hilary's Trinitarian theology published by Weedman. Like myself, Weedman also hopes to shed new light on Hilary's theology by viewing it in the context of the milieu in which he lived and worked. However, Weedman sees this milieu in typically modern terms, thus his approach to Hilary's thought differs significantly from mine.⁴

Finally, I focus on the development of Hilary's pneumatological doctrine, something that scholars have tended to overlook.⁵ No doubt this is due in part to the fact that it was not the main focus of his work and is thus developed only to a rudimentary level. Furthermore, there are inherent difficulties in understanding Hilary's pneumatology, due to the manner in which he expressed it. One of the main issues is his employment of the key term *spiritus*, which he used often in an ambiguous manner to refer to the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father and the Son, and the divine nature. This practice, labelled Spirit Christology by modern scholars, was prevalent in the west in the mid fourth century. Due to its importance in understanding Hilary's pneumatology, and the fact that little information concerning this phenomenon is available in English, I examine it in detail in terms of Hilary's writings.

⁴ In the introduction to his book, Weedman acknowledges the significance of his view of the fourth century theological crisis to his analysis of Hilary's writings. Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 1-3. This modern view of the fourth century will be discussed further on in the thesis.

⁵ Weedman's recent book on Hilary's Trinitarian theology, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, contains no mention of his pneumatology.

1. Hilary & the Fourth Century Theological Crisis

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the life of Hilary, taking into account the milieu in which he lived, and detailing the theological crisis which formed the fundamental backdrop to his life and work as a bishop. It was in the midst of this crisis at the council of Beziers that Hilary emerged as a significant historical figure. At this council, Hilary was condemned for what I will argue was primarily his orthodox position concerning the divinity of Christ, and exiled to the east. It is there that he wrote his most significant theological treatise, *De Trinitate*. In this work he defended the Nicene faith and distinguished himself in the midst of the various theological trajectories that were circulating in the west in the 350s and 360s.¹ Hilary went further than his Latin predecessors in demonstrating how the Son's substantial relationship with the Father can be understood in an orthodox manner, one that avoids both Sabellianism and Arianism. This he did through the development of the concept of divine personhood. In analyzing the fourth century theological crisis, contemporary Patristic scholars have questioned the suitability of such labels as Nicene and Arian to describe the different theological positions that prevailed during this period. In this chapter, I will also enter into this discussion showing how these labels, when understood in a nuanced manner, can be used effectively to identify the two fundamental theological trends, which were at the heart of the fourth century crisis.²

I. *The Fourth Century Milieu*

The fourth century was a period marked by vast changes both politically, socially and theologically throughout the Roman Empire. These changes impacted greatly on the development of Trinitarian theology, and specifically the notion of divine personhood. In order therefore, to understand more fully this development, I will first examine the milieu in which it took place. This will provide an important background to our study of Hilary's theology, which was developed in the context of this milieu.

With the proclamation of the Edict of Milan in 313 a new era was ushered in, one which was characterized by an ever closer relationship between Church and State. Under this regime of religious toleration, and with the significant support of the Emperor Constantine,

¹ Ayres considers Hilary and his writings to be part of the pro-Nicene reaction in the west, which began to emerge in the 350s and 360s. This occurred particularly in response to the promulgation of the creed at Sirmium in 357, which was overtly opposed to Nicaea. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 177 ff.

² As with any label, what is of most importance is the concept it represents. This principal is fundamental when understanding the application of theological terms, which I will look at later in this thesis.

the Church flourished, and Christianity gradually began to replace Paganism, becoming by the end of the century the official religion of the Roman Empire. This new era of freedom also brought with it struggles of a different kind - in an age in which religion was considered an affair of the state, rulers saw it as their prerogative to intervene in Church matters - unity of doctrine was understood to be a necessary pre-requisite for peace in the kingdom, which they sought to establish through the promulgation of laws and appointment of prelates. However, the emperors' views on orthodoxy did not always coincide with the Church's position, resulting often in turmoil as prelates were exiled or appointed depending on whether or not their doctrinal position found favour with the current ruler.

II. *A Crisis Emerges*

With the freedom to focus on theological study and reflection afforded by the Edict of Milan, much energy was invested in this important area. The Church had been praying and baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit since her inception but had not yet developed a coherent and orthodox explanation of the plurality and unity that characterized the Godhead. It was in this struggle to answer the fundamental questions of faith, "How can God be three and one, and yet neither three gods nor three masks of the same person?", and "How do we understand Christ as the Son of God?", that a theological crisis was born, one which would preoccupy rulers and citizens alike for the best part of a century. According to Socrates, the crisis itself began around 318 in the flourishing metropolis of Alexandria when Bishop Alexander delivered a sermon on the Trinity. Arius, a senior presbyter, was offended by the discourse, believing it to be underpinned by Sabellian theology. He deduced that if the Son was begotten from the Father, his existence must have had a beginning, and therefore "there was a time when the Son was not".³ With this "novel train of reasoning", Arius "excited many to a consideration of the question; and thus from a little spark a large fire was kindled".⁴ Alexander excommunicated Arius in the dispute that followed, and Arius, believing that his was the orthodox position, sought support from other bishops including the influential Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia. Soon the whole of the east was divided over the affair – the Arian crisis had begun.⁵

Constantine, who in 324 had become sole emperor after defeating his former co-ruler, Licinius, was disturbed by the turmoil caused by this theological dispute. No longer viewing it as an "insignificant matter"⁶ he commissioned his ecclesiastical advisor, Ossius of Cordoba,

³ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.5-6.

⁴ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.5-6.

⁵ Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 7-8.

⁶ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.

to reconcile Bishop Alexander with Arius. This attempt however met with little success, and so Constantine called for a council, one on a grand scale, inviting all bishops from east and west, with the aim of resolving the dispute. The meeting was initially planned to take place in Ancyra but was transferred later to Nicaea. Shortly before the council, a local synod was held in Antioch (324/325) over which Ossius presided. Here Arius' position was condemned, Alexander's upheld and a profession of faith produced, which all were required to sign. Of the 59 participants, only three refused to do so - Eusebius of Caesarea, Narcissus of Neronias, and Theodotus of Laodicea.⁷ These were provisionally excommunicated in anticipation of the upcoming council.⁸

III. *The Council of Nicaea*

The great council of Nicaea was opened by Constantine in the summer of 325. This was to prove an event of inestimable significance for the Church. Not only were Arius and his followers exiled, but in taking a stance against his views, the Church clarified her own theological position. This she promulgated in the Nicene Creed, which was to become *the* touchstone of orthodoxy. In this statement of faith, the council Fathers declared that the Son is "from the same substance, *homoousios*, of the Father", thus indicating his divinity.⁹ Although the Fathers were focused on articulating an orthodox understanding of the nature of the Son and his relationship to the Father, in response to Arius' heretical position, the creed they expounded was primarily a statement of Trinitarian faith, composed of three articles plus anathemas. Each article began with a statement of belief in one of the persons of the Trinity, starting with the Father and ending with the Holy Spirit, according to the order found in the baptismal passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel (Matt 28:19-20), and used in the Church's liturgy. This focus on each divine person in succession, implied both their distinctiveness and unity. The first two articles clearly showed forth the divinity of the Father and the Son, but in the third article, which concerned the Holy Spirit, this was only inferred, and further

⁷ Manlio Simonetti, "Antioch. II. councils", in the *EECh*, 48.

⁸ The profession of faith formulated at this synod is significant, given the Nicene themes it presents. For example, the Son is described as "unchanging by his nature as the Father is" not "by his will". He is the image of "the actual being (*hypostasis*) of the Father", and "not of the will or of anything else", since He was not begotten "merely by the Father's will". In our discussion of the creeds promulgated after Nicaea, the role of the Father's will in the generation of the Son becomes an important point of differentiation between the so-called Arian and Nicene theological positions. Against Arianism, stress is placed on the Son's generation, as one begotten from the Father, not made. Also, of significance is the fact that 49 of the 59 participants later attended the council of Nicaea suggesting that the theology presented in the Nicene Creed was not something radically new. John N.D. Kelly's *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Longman Inc., 1972), 208-211.

⁹ Kelly's English translation of the Nicene Creed has been used here. The sources for this include the following: Athanasius, *Ep. Jov.* 3; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.8.20; and Basil, *Ep.* 125.2. See G. L. Dossetti, *Il simbolo di Nicea e di Costantinopoli* (Rome: Herder, 1967) for a critical survey of the other sources used by Kelly. *Ibid.*, 215-216. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", footnote 11.

clarification was necessary in order to avoid ambiguity. By declaring that the Son was consubstantial with the Father the council Fathers pointed to the source of unity within the Trinity as the one divine substance, a position which was to have significant implications for a deeper understanding of the person and nature of the Son, and subsequently the Holy Spirit.

IV. *The Aftermath*

Although almost all of the 318 or so council Fathers signed the Creed, Nicaea was not to bring about the longed-for theological consensus. The Nicene profession had answered the first part of the fundamental question of faith, “How is God one?”, by stating that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father. However, it did not explain how the Son could be of the same substance as the Father, while at the same time retaining his distinctiveness, nor how this was possible without any change to the Father’s essence. What was needed was a coherent and orthodox concept of divine personhood, one that explained the Son’s subsistence in terms of his consubstantiality with the Father, while avoiding any Sabellian, Arian, or materialist connotations. Over the course of the following decades, such an understanding was developed gradually and in an indirect manner, as theologians began to identify ways in which the Father and the Son, and eventually the Holy Spirit, could be differentiated on levels other than substance. In the meantime, confusion reigned. It seems that the Fathers signing the Creed understood its fundamental declaration of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father in different ways, judging from the debates that followed Nicaea,¹⁰ and the various theological positions that continued to be held and developed by the signatories. For example, Alexander of Alexandria and Marcellus of Ancyra both signed the Creed, understanding its fundamental doctrine of unity, which underpinned their own theological positions. However, Marcellus, in his attempts to explain the distinctiveness of the divine persons in light of this unity, developed a theology that became associated in the east with Sabellianism.¹¹ Eusebius of Caesarea also subscribed to Nicaea but appears to have understood *homoousios* in a fundamentally different manner, one that also coincided with his own doctrine. This too was problematic as he distinguished the Son from the Father by means of subordination.¹² Furthermore, according to Theodoret and Socrates, some signed for

¹⁰ See the following passages: Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.18.

¹¹ See Marcellus of Ancyra, *Frgs.*, M. Vinzent, *Markell von Ankyra*, in *Supplements to VC 39* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2-21, trans. M.J. Dowling, *Marcellus of Ancyra: Problems of Christology and the Doctrine of the Trinity*, diss. (Queen’s University, Belfast, 1987), 286-362; Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium* in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4.

¹² Richard C. Hanson provides a succinct explanation of Eusebius’ understanding of the key Nicene propositions in his book, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1988), 165-166. See also Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 90-91.

fear of being exiled from their sees, even though they did not hold with the theology expressed.¹³ These theological differences, already present at Nicaea, were to become more sharply defined in the decades following the council, as attempts were made to express the Trinitarian mystery in a more comprehensive manner, one that took into account not only its unity but also its inherent diversity.

V. *The Different Theological Trends*

Traditionally scholars have described the theological disputes related to Nicaea as involving two parties, the “Nicenes” versus the “Arians”. Recently this approach has been criticized as misleading by a number of Patristic scholars. Firstly, they consider it as being too simplistic, and not thus representing the complexity of the fourth century crisis, which they maintain involved a multiplicity of theological positions. For example, in the introduction to his recent book, “Nicaea and its Legacy”, Ayres states that he is offering “a new narrative of the Trinitarian and Christological disputes that takes further the attempt of recent scholarship to move beyond ancient heresiological categories”, and which does not overlook the “wider theological matrices within which particular theological terminologies were situated”.¹⁴

Secondly, Patristic scholars have pointed out that the term “Arian”¹⁵ is not an appropriate label for any party, as Arius himself had few, if any direct followers.¹⁶ Ayres criticizes an approach to the fourth century that applies the term Arian in this manner. According to Ayres,

it is virtually impossible to identify a school of thought dependent on Arius’ specific theology, and certainly impossible to show that even a bare majority of Arians had any extensive knowledge of Arius’ writing. Arius was part of a wider theological trajectory; many of his ideas were opposed by others in this trajectory: he neither originated the trajectory nor uniquely exemplified it.¹⁷

In his article, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, Lienhard also criticizes the use of the term “Arian”, as well as “Nicene”, to identify the opposing fourth

¹³ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.23; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.

¹⁴ Also, according to Ayres, “we should avoid thinking of these controversies as focusing on the status of Christ as ‘divine’ or ‘not divine’”. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 1, 3.

¹⁵ The use of the term “Arian” to describe those following the theological positions of Arius seems to have been first employed by Bishop Alexander very early on the dispute and taken up later with force by Athanasius. See the Letter of Alexander of Alexandria to his Clergy (c.318) in Athanasius, *Decr.* 34.

¹⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 2. In his book, “*Arius, Heresy and Tradition*” Rowan Williams decries the notion that Arianism was a coherent system, founded by a single great figure and sustained by his disciples”. He refers to such a view as “fantasy”. “*Arius, Heresy and Tradition*” (London: Darton, Longman and Todd), 82 ff.

¹⁷ Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 2.

century theological parties. He also points out that although a number of ecclesiastics were sympathetic to Arius, most did not view him as their leader, nor did they tend to hold all of his tenets.¹⁸ This is illustrated in the condemnation of a number of Arian positions by eastern councils following Nicaea.¹⁹ It is also shown clearly in the response of the eastern bishops gathered at Antioch in 341, to the letter they received from Julius of Rome earlier that year. In this letter, Julius accused them of accepting the Arians into communion even though they had been condemned by the council of Nicaea, and implied that the eastern bishops supported the Arian position.²⁰ The first action of the assembled bishops was to draft a response to Julius, expressing their indignation against such an implication, which they emphatically denied:

We have not been followers of Arius - how could Bishops, such as we, follow a Presbyter? - nor did we receive any other faith beside that which has been handed down from the beginning. But, after taking on ourselves to examine and to verify his faith, we admitted him rather than followed him; as you will understand from our present avowals.²¹

Although recent scholarship highlights the multiplicity of theological positions present in the fourth century, there is still a tendency to identify two basic categories of theological thought, at least present at the start of the crisis. This approach is distinguished from the traditional view which describes the two theological categories in terms of parties as opposed to trends or traditions. Such an approach allows for the nuanced positions of individuals to be taken into account. For instance, not everyone aligned with a particular trend subscribed to all of its tenets, although they held the principal ones.²² In the article mentioned above, Lienhard identifies two theological trends which he labels as “miahypostatic” and “dyohypostatic”.²³ When describing the theological milieu of the early fourth century, Ayres also identifies two general theological trends. This he does in the context of introducing four theological trajectories present at the beginning of the fourth century. In the first trend, the “*sameness* of the Father and Son” is emphasized and in the second, the “*diversity* between the two”.²⁴

¹⁸ Joseph T. Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, *JTS*, 48:3 (1987): 416-419.

¹⁹ For example, see the second and fourth creeds of the Dedication council of Antioch (341); the *Ekthesis Makrotichos*; and the creed from the council of Sirmium in 351.

²⁰ Cf. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 109; Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 417-418. See also Julius of Rome, *Letter to the Eusebians* in Athanasius, *Apol. sec.* 21-35.

²¹ Athanasius, *Syn.* 22; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.10.

²² See Ayres for further discussion on the danger inherent in viewing periods in terms of parties. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 13.

²³ Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 422 ff. The “dyohypostatic” and “miahypostatic” labels have not been taken up by scholars. Ayres outlines the problems associated with using these terms to describe the two opposing theological trends in *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 41, footnote 1.

²⁴ Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 41-42.

Taking into account this recent scholarship, I will also approach the theological milieu that characterized the Arian crisis, in terms of theological trends. I agree that two distinct trends can be identified, but unlike the modern approach, which tends to emphasize the multiplicity of theological trajectories present in the fourth century, I maintain that these two distinct theological positions were at the heart of the crisis. My view has been primarily informed by my study of the texts from this period, and in particular those written by Hilary of Poitiers.²⁵ Hilary's *De Trinitate*, the principal text for this thesis, can be described primarily as a defence of the Nicene faith against the Arian heresy. In this treatise, Hilary goes to great lengths to expound the truth of the Nicene faith concerning the divinity of the Son and his relationship with the Father, against the error of the Arian doctrine, which subordinates the Son (and later the Holy Spirit). Although Hilary only once refers to his opponents as *Ariomanitae*,²⁶ he cites Arius' letter to Alexander of Alexandria on two occasions in *De Trinitate*. Each time he uses it as a springboard to develop his defence of the orthodox faith.²⁷ Later on in this treatise, (especially Book 7), we see Hilary focusing his arguments against what has been described as a typically Homoian position, which holds that the Son is like the Father according to will, not essence. Nevertheless, Hilary still identifies this position as following the fundamental error concerning the divinity of the Son found in Arius' letter.²⁸

In reviewing the primary texts associated with the early fourth century, I agree with the view that Arius was not the leader of a particular school of thought, with a substantial

²⁵ My view of the fourth century theological crisis, including my understanding that an authentic concept of divine personhood was required for its resolution, is not something I have read in any modern accounts of this crisis. Such a view sets this thesis apart from the recent work on Hilary's Trinitarian theology by Weedman. Weedman understands Hilary's development in theology in light of the modern view of the fourth century which tends to see the theological crisis in terms of the various theological trajectories that developed, rather than a fundamental struggle between an orthodox understanding of Christ as the Son of God versus a subordinationist position. Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*. My understanding of the fourth century crisis also distinguishes this work from other historical accounts, such as that portrayed by Vaggione. Vaggione understands the "Nicene Victory" as "the capacity to see an inherited faith in formularies that had previously been thought to exclude it". Richard P. Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 365. I, on the other hand, maintain that it was only after an authentic understanding of divine personhood had been developed that formularies such as *treis hypostaseis*, which had been used previously to propound subordinationist theology, could be used in an orthodox manner. See the discussion on terminology later in this chapter.

²⁶ *De Trin.* 7.7.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 4.12-13; 6.5-6.6. This will be discussed in more detail further on in the thesis.

²⁸ *De Trin.* 7.1. In the opening paragraph of Book 7, Hilary states that he is writing this book "against the insane audacity of the new heresy". In the second paragraph he identifies this heresy as the one which states that the Son "was not before He was born". This shows that Hilary is not referring to any heresy other than what I have termed Arianism. This he battles against throughout *De Trinitate*. Although Hilary may focus on positions especially associated with the Homoian view, these can be linked to the fundamental subordinationism found in Arianism. Related to the view that the fourth century can be understood in terms of the struggle to uphold the Nicene faith in light of the Arian heresy, and of importance to our discussion, is Hilary's clear distinction between the Homoiousian theology found in the east, which he identifies as being essentially Nicene, and the Arian doctrine.

following. However, I do not think that such a view precludes the use of the term Arian to describe the subordinationist theological trend that opposed the Nicene faith. Rather, I think it can be used appropriately, albeit in a qualified sense. Although the historical data does not reveal Arius as the leader of this subordinationist theology, he remains a significant representative of it in the history of the fourth century theological crisis. After all, it was Arius' argument with Bishop Alexander that led to the convocation of the council of Nicaea. Furthermore, it is of significance, especially to this thesis, that Hilary cites Arius' letter to Bishop Alexander, not once, but twice in *De Trinitate*, as mentioned, and uses it to identify the tenets of the heretical position that opposes Nicaea. For these reasons, I have chosen to use the term Arian to represent the theological trend that subordinated the Son to the Father. The second trend I have chosen to label as Nicene – a suitable title given that this trend fundamentally upheld the Nicene position concerning the divinity of the Son and his relationship with the Father. Furthermore, it is appropriate in the context of this thesis, given the significance of the Nicene faith to Hilary's life and work.

The first theological trend, which I have labelled as Arian, can be seen in the extant writings of Arius and in the thought of the influential bishops, Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia.²⁹ Although these two bishops differed in some aspects of their theology, they were fundamentally united in their subordination of the Son, and thus together opposed the Nicene position held by Bishop Alexander and, later, Athanasius. In this theological trend, focus is placed on the real existence of the divine persons, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit often being referred to as *hypostases*. The Son is understood as being subordinate to the Father, a position which accounts for the distinctiveness of each. His generation is often described in terms of an act of will of the Father, implying that the Father was somehow prior to him, and therefore that the Son came into existence. This theological trend is also associated with a deep sensitivity to Sabellianism, and any notion that the generation of the Son involved some sort of change to the Father's substance, such as extension or division. Both of these ideas are associated with erroneous understandings of *homoousios*, a term which those aligned with this trend tend to oppose. Underpinning the Arian theology seems to have been the Neo-Platonist approach to the categories of being, developed largely by Plotinus in the third century. Such a philosophical system does not consider the 'uncreated' and 'created' to be distinctive categories, but rather understands them

²⁹ For example, see Arius, *Profession of faith from Arius and his followers to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria*, in *De Trin.* 4.12-13; 6.5-6.6; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praep. ev., Dem. ev.*; and Lienhard, "The 'Arian' Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered", 420.

as belonging to the same continuum, which ranges from ‘the One’ to base matter.³⁰ By means of this system an apparently orthodox understanding of the unity and plurality in the Trinity can be proposed. For example, the Son can be readily distinguished from the Father by being positioned slightly below him, while still remaining above creatures. Based on such a position, the Son can be appropriately referred to as “God” but not “True God”.³¹ In other words, He can be considered as possessing some degree of divinity, although at a lower level than that pertaining to the Father. Most of the eastern bishops, with the notable exception of Alexander, Athanasius and Marcellus, were associated with this trend, while only a few westerners subscribed to its tenets. Among these were the influential Ursacius, Valens, and Germinus, who were all from Illyricum, the place where Arius had been exiled.

The second theological trend, which I have referred to as Nicene, focuses primarily on the ‘identity’ of the Father and the Son.³² According to this position, God is one principle and often referred to in this sense as “one *hypostasis*” or “one *ousia*”.³³ The Son is believed to have been generated from the Father, and thus to possess the same nature and substance as him. This theological trend is greatly opposed to any notion that being can be understood in terms of a continuum, and that there can thus be ‘degrees’ of divinity. Consistent with this position is an understanding that the Son can only be ‘True God’ or not God at all.³⁴ This is the fundamental point which differentiates the Nicenes from the Arians. Another important point of distinction, which is related to this, is the Nicenes’ approach to the Son’s generation. This they understand as being in accordance with his nature, rather than resulting from an act of the Father’s will. To this trajectory belonged most of the western episcopacy, apart from

³⁰ See Christian Wilberg, “Neoplatonism”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/neoplatonism>, and Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 425, 428, footnotes 26, 46.

³¹ For example, see the fragment of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Letter to Euphratians of Balanea*, Opitez, Urkande 3, as cited in Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 430. This is also mentioned by Athanasius in *Syn.* 17.

³² Ayres considers that it is possible to speak of an original Nicene theology, concerning the period of the council and its immediate aftermath. He bases his position on the common themes evident in the writing of those most directly involved in framing the Creed’s terminology, such as Alexander of Alexandria, Marcellus of Ancyra, Eustatius of Antioch and Constantine. See his discussion of the issue in *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 98-100. Lienhard, on the other hand, does not think that the title Nicene is suitable to describe the theology of those who opposed the Arians. He bases his decision on the view that the council of Nicaea did not attain any particular position of authority until some decades after it was convened. Cf. Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 418. I agree with Ayres that Nicene theology was present at the time of the council - this theology was therefore not ‘developed’ at the council, but rather expressed there through the Nicene Creed. Given that this theology was expressed in the Nicene Creed, unlike Lienhard, I maintain that Nicene is a suitable term to designate this theological category.

³³ Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 425.

³⁴ In *De Trinitate*, Hilary of Poitiers strongly opposes any notion that the Son could be considered as less divine than the Father. He illustrates this effectively using the analogy of fire and water in *De Trin.* 5.14. See the citation in Chapter 3, *The Nature of God*, footnote 8.

those mentioned above, as well as the eastern bishops, Alexander, Athanasius, and Marcellus.³⁵ Marcellus is associated with this position due to his understanding of the identity of the Father and the Son, even though he held some problematic views early on in the crisis.³⁶ It was for these views that he was condemned repeatedly by the eastern synods following Nicaea. These associated him with modalism, a position particularly disparaged by the Arians.³⁷ Unfortunately, Marcellus came to be regarded by the Arians as a significant representative of Nicene theology, a misconception that was enforced by his acquittal at a Roman synod in 341.³⁸ Although the Nicenes were not as sensitive to modalism as the Arians, they certainly did not support this position, and like the Arians readily condemned Photinus, whose heretical position seems to have been clearer than Marcellus'. The growing rift between those associated with the Arian and the Nicene theological trends was fuelled by the misunderstandings of each other's positions. The Nicenes saw their opponents as "unadulterated Arians", without acknowledging the underlying reasons for their position, namely, to uphold the Father's primacy and the Son's subsistence, and the Arians associated the Nicenes with Marcellus, whom they considered to be Sabellian.³⁹

In summary, recent scholarship has suggested that the term Arianism, traditionally used to describe the subordinationist theological positions which characterised much of eastern theology during the fourth century, is not appropriate given that few easterners considered themselves to be followers of Arius, even if they were sympathetic to his theological views. This scholarship has also highlighted the nuanced differences between the theologies which developed in the east during the fourth century and has opposed the

³⁵ We do not have many writings from the west during the early decades of the Arian crisis, which reveal the western view. However, the extant texts which are available, suggest that in general they favoured the Nicene position. For example, see the profession of faith from the council of Serdica, which I will discuss in more detail further on. This can be found in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6.

³⁶ For this reason, Ayres includes Marcellus in a general Nicene category, although he also assigns a separate theological trajectory for him. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 62 ff. For further information on Marcellus' theology, see Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum*, 49-68; Alistair H. B. Logan, "Marcellus of Ancyra, Defender of the Faith Against Heretics - and Pagans", *SP* 37 (2001); 550-64; and Sara Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 325-345, 30 ff.

³⁷ For example, see the *Third Creed of Antioch* in Athanasius, *Syn.* 24 and the *Ekthesis Makrostichos*, Explanation 5, in Athanasius, *Syn.* 26.

³⁸ See Julius of Rome, *Letter to the Eusebians*, 32.

³⁹ Although I maintain that the theological crisis was affected by the somewhat mistaken views each side had of one another, unlike Kelly, I do not think that this was the basis for the crisis. Rather, the theological differences between the two sides were real and of fundamental significance. The Arians subordinated the Son in their theology, and even though their reasons for doing so were to account for his subsistence and uphold the primacy of the Father, such a position could never be reconciled with an orthodox exposition of the Trinity. Kelly, on the other hand holds that: "[t]he real battle at this period was between two misrepresentations of the truth, an Athanasian [Nicene] caricature of the Arians as unadulterated Arians, and an eastern [Arian] caricature of the Athanasian position as indistinguishable from that of Marcellus." Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006), 36.

application of one blanket term to them all, in particular, Arianism. Despite the fact that Arius is unlikely to have had a substantial following, he remains an important representative of subordinationist theology in the fourth century. I therefore think that the term Arianism can be used in a qualified manner to appropriately describe this theological trend, which subordinated the Son to the Father, and was thus in opposition to the Nicene faith. Although modern Patristic scholars tend to focus on the various theological strands present and developed in the fourth century, I maintain that for Hilary what was at stake in this crisis was the divinity of the Son proclaimed at Nicaea. For him, the crisis was characterised primarily by the struggle between the Nicene position and a subordinationist view of the Son's relationship with the Father, which I have labelled as Arian.⁴⁰

VI. *Terminological Confusion*⁴¹

Adding to the theological crisis was the terminological confusion that characterized the era. There had not yet been sufficient standardization of terms for describing the unity and plurality within the Trinity. Furthermore, the important terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* that were frequently used to refer to the “threeness” and “oneness” of the Trinity respectively, were also at times used in the opposite manner. This led to many misunderstandings, especially between the Nicenes and the Arians. In particular, issues arose over the use of the term *hypostasis*, which was commonly employed by the Nicenes to refer to the one divine substance, “*mia hypostasis*”. The Arians, on the other hand, used it in reference to the divine persons, “*treis hypostaseis*”.⁴² Consequently, the Arians understood the Nicenes to be Sabellians, and the Nicenes saw the Arians as Tritheists, who differentiated the divine persons according to substance. Similar confusion occurred when texts were translated from Greek to Latin and vice versa. Again, the term *hypostasis* was at the centre of these misunderstandings. The Latin equivalent of this term was *substantia*, which by the mid-4th century had become the preferred Latin term for expressing the fundamental ‘oneness’ within the Trinity, surpassing the use of *essentia*.⁴³ Therefore, the Latin westerners, who mainly followed the Nicene tradition, understood the phrase “*treis hypostaseis*”, commonly associated with the Greek easterners, as denoting tritheism.

⁴⁰ This application of the term Arian is in keeping with that employed by medieval scholars such as Aquinas, and contemporary theologians such as Gilles Emery See Aquinas, *ST* 1.28.1; 1.31.2.; and Gilles Emery's book on Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian theology: *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. F.A. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Cf. Thorp, *Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*, 38-41.

⁴² See Lienhard, “The “Arian” Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered”, 421-425.

⁴³ See Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 152.

Origen was the first Christian author to refer to the divine persons as “*treis hypostaseis*”, which he did when defending the faith against the Monarchians who denied the distinctive existence of each person. However, in his efforts to differentiate the persons, he subordinated the Son and the Spirit to the Father.⁴⁴ It was probably through the influence of Origen that the Arians also began using this formula. Like him, they also subordinated the Son to the Father, thus distinguishing them both. Arius held a more extreme position than many others, declaring that the Son was created and that “there was a time when He was not”.⁴⁵ Although subordinating the Son to the Father enabled the first two divine persons to be differentiated, this was on the level of substance, which if taken to its logical conclusion implied the existence of two gods. However, neither the Arians nor the Nicenes wanted to be associated with such a position, which they unanimously considered to be heterodox.⁴⁶ The phrase, “*treis hypostaseis*”, also caused confusion, as those using it to refer to the distinctions within the Trinity, often understood these distinctions in significantly different ways. For example, when the Homoiousians referred to the divine persons as “*treis hypostaseis*”, they understood them to be ‘like in substance’, not different, as Arius had.

In the Latin west, Tertullian used the term *persona* in reference to the divine persons.⁴⁷ He was also the first to use *substantia* to indicate God in a direct manner. However, although he contributed to the development of the understanding of the Son as a divine person, he did not present a comprehensive explanation of this concept.⁴⁸ It wasn’t until the fourth century, when the divinity of the Son was under attack from Arianism, that an orthodox concept of the Son as a distinct person, united to the Father in the one divine substance, was developed in the Latin west. As I will show, this was achieved by Hilary, the first Latin father to do so, in his attempts to defend the Nicene faith.

From what we have discussed, it is clear that although the terms for expressing oneness and plurality within the Trinity needed to be standardized, this in itself was not

⁴⁴ For example, in his exegesis on John, Origen states that the “Saviour and the Holy Spirit are without comparison and are very much superior to all things that are made, but also that the Father is even more above them than they are themselves above creatures even the highest”. *In Ioh.* 13.25. See Patrology, vol. 2, 78-9; Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation. The Faith of the Early Church*, 84-85; and Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 24-25.

⁴⁵ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.5.

⁴⁶ The easterners in later councils anathematize anyone who holds a position of polytheism, perhaps showing an awareness that on this point they have at times been misunderstood by the west. For example, see the *Ekthesis Makrostichos* in Athanasius, *Syn.* 26; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.19; and the 2nd and 23rd anathemas from the Sirmium creed of 351 in *De syn.* 11.

⁴⁷ See Tertullian, *Ad. Prax.* 2.4, 11.10, 12.7.

⁴⁸ Studer maintains that Tertullian’s theology was too strongly linked to the history of salvation, and therefore did not explain adequately the differences between the divine persons. For this reason, Tertullian was unable to totally avoid subordinationism. Cf. Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation. The Faith of the Early Church*, ed. Andrew Louth, trans. M. Westerhoff (Collegeville: T&T Clark Ltd., 1993), 74 -75. Cf. Thorp, *Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate*”, footnote 42.

sufficient for theological positions to be communicated effectively and unambiguously. The terms themselves, such as *hypostasis*, also needed to represent clearly defined concepts. Furthermore, for an orthodox understanding of the unity and diversity within the Trinity to be developed, these concepts needed to express the distinctions and unity within the Godhead in a manner which showed forth their essential relativity. The notion that there was one divine substance was generally accepted, but exactly what constituted a divine person, and how each divine person was related to the divinity, was not yet understood. Such concepts, together with the establishment of standard Trinitarian terminology, would not be developed in terms of all three divine persons, until the end of the fourth century, largely due to the work of the Cappadocians. These Fathers most clearly expressed the notion of divine personhood in reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, differentiating the persons in terms of properties and origin as opposed to substance.⁴⁹ Such an understanding of the divine persons enabled them to give an orthodox explanation of the unity and plurality within the Trinity, one in keeping with Nicaea. This was expressed through the succinct formula, “*mia ousia – treis hypostaseis*”,⁵⁰ which was accepted both in the east and the west and was fundamental to the resolution of the Arian crisis.

VII. *The Decades Following Nicaea*

In the period following Nicaea significant events occurred which impacted on the development of the crisis. Arius regained favour with the emperor, having signed a rather generalized statement of faith in order to demonstrate his apparent change of heart, and commitment to Nicaea. He, as well as his supporters, returned from exile, although the condemnation of his doctrine at Nicaea remained in force. However, Arius was never formerly readmitted to the Church, dying suddenly in 335, just before the event was planned to take place. Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia was also recalled from exile, and rose to a position of prominence, baptizing Constantine on his deathbed, and later being appointed to the important see of Constantinople. Both he and Eusebius of Caesarea exerted considerable influence in the east, promoting their theological position over and against those who subscribed to the Nicene viewpoint. They seem to have been involved, at least in part, in the deposition and exile of the three important figureheads of Nicene theology, Eustathius of

⁴⁹ See for example, Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 210; 214; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 39.11-12, 40, 41; Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 6.12.

⁵⁰ Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation. The Faith of the Early Church*, 141, 158.

Antioch, Athanasius of Alexandria and Marcellus of Ancyra, which took place before the end of the 330s.⁵¹

Although Nicaea had proclaimed the substantial unity between the Father and the Son, it had not shown how this position could uphold the subsistence of the divine persons. In the east, where sensitivity to Sabellianism was prevalent, there was widespread resistance to the key term *homoousios* due to its modalist connotations. With the growing awareness of the import of the Nicene Creed as a standard of orthodoxy, council upon council was convened in the east, leading to the drafting of a number of professions of faith, all of which avoided the controversial *homoousios* and were aimed at replacing Nicaea.

These creeds were typically trinitarian in structure, following the standard three-fold *taxis* found in Matt 28:19. They included creedal formulae present in earlier professions, especially concerning the salvific life and death of Christ, and were interspersed with scriptural references.⁵² Implicit in these creeds was the fundamental and valid insight concerning the real existence of each divine person, which underpinned Arian theology. However, this theology subordinated the Son in order to preserve his distinction from the Father, thus producing a doctrine incompatible with an orthodox understanding of his consubstantial relationship with the Father. Whilst all the eastern creeds could be understood as presenting Arian subordinationist theology, the earlier ones from Antioch, especially the important 4th creed, were ambiguous and able to be interpreted also in an orthodox manner, as Hilary explained in his *De synodis*.⁵³ In 357, a turning point was reached with the promulgation of a creed at Sirmium that proscribed all substance language, and therefore presented a theology directly in opposition to Nicaea.⁵⁴ From this moment onwards, we see a sharp division in the east between those following a more overt Arian position, and those veering toward Nicaea, preferring the homoiousian doctrine. At the council of Seleucia in

⁵¹ Eustathius seems to have been deposed for theological reasons, and Marcellus clearly so, whereas Athanasius' deposal was attributed to political issues. However, given the opposition between the theological views of the influential Arians and Athanasius, it seems that his deposal was underpinned primarily by theological motives. See Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 105-106.

⁵² For example, see the first and third creeds of the council of Antioch in Athanasius, *Syn.* 22, 24; and the second creed of this council in *De syn.* 29.

⁵³ For a detailed discussion on the reasons why Hilary interprets these creeds in an orthodox manner see my article, "Terminological Confusion in the 4th century: A Case Study of Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*", *Annales Theologici* 27/2, (2013): 391-400.

⁵⁴ Hilary strongly criticizes this creed, referring to it as the "*blasphemia Sirmiensis*", and pointing out the heretical position of its authors who subordinate the Son, denying his divinity as well as his birth from the Father. *De syn.* 10.

359, it seems that the former were in the minority, but with the backing of the emperor who wanted doctrinal unity, they were able to ensure that their theology prevailed.⁵⁵

The westerners in general, subscribed to Nicaea, but their theology was initially unrefined, with no coherent explanation for the distinctions within the Trinity. Furthermore, some such as Marcellus fell into error in this regard. At the council of Serdica in 343, the profession drafted reveals this Nicene focus.⁵⁶ Although the majority of westerners favoured the doctrine of consubstantiality, it seems that at the council of Ariminum in 359, they were persuaded into accepting a profession more in keeping with Arian theology, like their eastern counterparts, by the influential minority who were supported by the emperor.⁵⁷

In terms of pneumatology, we see a focus on the Holy Spirit early on in the eastern councils with three anathemas at the 351 council of Sirmium dedicated to him.⁵⁸ The most important conciliar documents concerning the Spirit come from the council of Alexandria in 362 where his divinity was proclaimed, and his personhood implied. In the *Tomus ad Antiochenes*, an important clarification was made of the use of the controversial term *hypostasis*, which had been the root of much misunderstanding between the east and the west. This document explained how this term could be applied in an orthodox manner to express both the plurality and unity within the Trinity.⁵⁹

In summary, although the creeds issued by the local councils following Nicaea identified the three persons of the Trinity,⁶⁰ none provided a coherent and orthodox explanation of their personhood that was in keeping with the doctrine proclaimed at Nicaea. This proved necessary for the conclusion of the theological crisis, and ultimately doctrinal unity.

⁵⁵ Information regarding this council can be found in the following primary sources: *C. Const.*; Hilary *Coll. Antiar* B 8; Athanasius *Syn.* 12.1-4; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.39.40; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22; Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.2; and Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.26.

⁵⁶ The fundamental Nicene position concerning the divinity of the Son and his substantial relationship with the Father can be seen throughout the profession, even though the term *homoousios* is not specifically mentioned. This essential unity between the Father and the Son is declared with such phrases as “We confess one Godhead of the Father and the Son”, and “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have one *hypostasis*, which is termed *ousia* by the heretics”. A copy of the Serdican Creed can be found in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6.

⁵⁷ Included in the dossier of ancient documents put together by Hilary are texts related to the council of Ariminum, as well as his own commentary concerning this event. These can be found in Wickham, *Hilary of Poitiers, Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth-Century Church*, 80-92. See also Athanasius, *Syn.* 10.1-11, 55.1-7; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.37; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 4.17-19; and Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.18-20.

⁵⁸ *The First Creed of Sirmium* (351), anathemas 20-22 in *De syn.* 38.

⁵⁹ Athanasius, *Tom.*

⁶⁰ Although some scholars, such as Simonetti, maintain that the westerners identified the Holy Spirit with the Son in the Serdican profession of faith, I argue that this is not conclusive. See the discussion on this in Chapter 9, “The Nature and Person of the Holy Spirit”.

VIII. *The Life of Hilary*⁶¹

In this section we will look in greater detail at Hilary's life and his response to the Arian crisis, which fundamentally shaped his life as a bishop.

A. *From Birth to the Synod of Beziers*

It is difficult to construct a chronology of Hilary's life due to the lack of reliable information, in fact very little is known of him prior to the synod of Beziers in 356. Both Jerome and Venantius Fortunatus, his sixth-century biographer, maintain that he was born in or near Poitiers, and most scholars date his birth at around 310-320 and his death between 367 and 368.⁶² Hilary presents some important details of his background in both his *De Trinitate* and his *De synodis*. In Book 1 of *De Trinitate*, Hilary recounts his conversion story, stating that in his search for the truth, he first came to know the God of the Jews, and then Christ, thus implying that he was raised in a pagan household.⁶³ In *De Synodis* he writes that he was baptized as an adult, and was elected bishop only a short time before the synod of Beziers. From this information, scholars have placed the date of his ordination between 350-355. Hilary first learnt of the Nicene Creed just prior to being sent into exile. However, it came as no surprise to him because he had already understood the meaning of *homoousios* from the Gospels and the Epistles, as we discussed earlier.⁶⁴ The only significant work from this period is his *Commentarium in Matthaem*, a brief text in which he recounts and comments upon the main events of Matthew's Gospel.⁶⁵

Little is known about Hilary's education, but from his writings one can deduce that he knew Latin and was familiar with the works of Latin theologians such as Tertullian, Cyprian

⁶¹ This short biography of Hilary has been largely taken from my Licence thesis. See Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 23-29.

⁶² Jerome, *Comm. Gal.*; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm. Mis.*; Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 6.

⁶³ Scholars remain unsure as to whether Hilary was raised in a pagan or a Christian household, with some suggesting that Hilary's conversion story, which is found in *De Trinitate*, was written to encourage his readers, rather than portray the truth. I do not concur with this view, but rather maintain that Hilary expressed the truth concerning his conversion, as he appears to have done in all his writings. It would seem to be at odds with his character to have done otherwise, in other words, given that his whole mission was to proclaim the truth concerning the divinity of Christ, it would seem strange that he would not present the truth about himself. For the various scholarly positions see Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 6-7.

⁶⁴ *De syn.* 91.

⁶⁵ According to Doignon, Hilary's *Commentarium in Matthaem* brilliantly inaugurates his career in the Latin speaking west. Cf. Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'Exil*, 524.

and Novatian, as well as pagan authors including Cicero and Quintilian.⁶⁶ Hilary also had some knowledge of Greek, which he probably learnt during his time in the east.⁶⁷

B. *The Synod of Beziers*

In 356, Hilary was exiled during the synod of Beziers. This synod was the third in a series of synods held in the west and convened by the Arian minded bishops, Valens and Ursacius. The first took place in Arles in 353 and the second in Milan in 355. At these synods all were asked to concur with the deposition of Athanasius and those who refused were sent into exile. However, little is known about the synod of Beziers, and the exact reason for Hilary's exile has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Traditionally it was thought that Hilary was exiled for his defense of the Nicene faith – a view held by a number of Church Fathers.⁶⁸ However, in 1959 the notion that Hilary was exiled for political and not theological reasons was raised by Henry Chadwick. In a standard reference work, he stated that Hilary was condemned for supporting the revolt and usurpation of Silvanus, but without citing any evidence to support this view.⁶⁹ In more recent times, Chadwick's thesis has been revived by Brennecke who agrees that Hilary was exiled due to the incident involving Silvanus. He also suggests that sometime after this Hilary reinterpreted the events of Beziers in theological terms.⁷⁰ Daniel H. Williams sympathizes with Brennecke and although he agrees that Hilary was exiled for political reasons, maintains that these did not involve Silvanus' revolt. He also criticizes the traditional views regarding Hilary's exile, and the elaboration by twentieth century scholars such as Emmenegger and Borchardt.⁷¹ Barnes, Smulders, and Beckwith have also entered into the discussion, but have upheld the traditional view that Hilary's exile was due to theological reasons and backed up their claims with evidence from primary source material.⁷²

⁶⁶ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 8. According to Doignon, the main benefit Hilary received from Tertullian was to discover in his works an intellectual framework for his faith. Cf. Jean Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'Exil* (Paris: *Etudes Augustiniennes*, 1971), 522.

⁶⁷ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 463.

⁶⁸ For further information on this debate see the following articles: Carl L. Beckwith, "The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Beziers (356 C.E.)", *J ECS* 13/1 (2005): 21-38; H. C. Brennecke, *Hilarius von Poitiers und die Bischofsopposition gegen Konstantius II*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 26 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984); and Timothy D. Barnes, "Hilary of Poitiers on his Exile", *VC* 46 (1992):129-140.

⁶⁹ Beckwith, "The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Beziers (356 C.E.)", 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Daniel H. Williams, "A Reassessment of the Early Career and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers," *J EH* 42 (1991): 206–7, 211–12. See Beckwith's discussion of this in "The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Beziers (356 C.E.)", 23.

⁷² See the above works by Barnes, and Beckwith, as well as the following book by Smulders, *Hilary of Poitiers' Preface to his Opus Historicum: Translation & Commentary*.

In his translation and commentary on Hilary's *Preface* to his *Opus Historicum*, Smulders has brought to light new information on the little known synod of Beziens as well as further insight into Hilary's character, and the strong religious convictions that motivated his actions.⁷³ The *Opus Historicum*, of which only fragments remain, is comprised of a collection of documents including those from the various synods and councils held between 343 and 355, a dossier of letters by Liberius, and a similar one pertaining to the council of Ariminum in 359. This work is also known under the title *Adversus Valentem et Ursacium* and as the name suggests this work contains information about the prominent role of the bishops, Valens and Ursacius.⁷⁴ Scholars maintain that the *Preface* and early chapters were written shortly after the synod of Beziens. In the *Preface*, Hilary gives an account of Beziens to his fellow-bishops, explaining the reasons for his actions and exhorting them to witness courageously to the faith.⁷⁵ At this synod many bishops failed to support Athanasius, perhaps being unaware that more was at stake than his name. According to Hilary, the real issue underlying the assembly at Beziens was the confession of faith in Christ as true God.⁷⁶ This he maintains was also the most important concern at the earlier synod of Arles:

From that occasion, for the first time, emerges the insight that it was the confession of faith rather than one's support for the man [Athanasius]; there began the indignity inflicted upon him [Paulinus] who refused them his assent.⁷⁷

In the *Preface*, Hilary implies that this confession of faith was at stake in the synod of Milan as well. Here he recounts the incident at Milan where Eusebius of Vercelli had agreed to condemn Athanasius under condition that the bishops first sign the Nicene Creed. However, the bishop Valens prevented this by tearing up the document.⁷⁸

According to Smulders, Hilary's overall aim for compiling the *Opus Historicum*, as illustrated in the *Preface*, was to incite the western bishops to reflect on the situation at hand, in order to realise its seriousness and the need to witness to their faith, like he and others had done. At the end of the *Preface* Hilary writes

⁷³ *Preface*, 3.6.

⁷⁴ Smulders points out that this title, *Adversus Valentem et Ursacium*, was given to Hilary's work, *Opus Historicum*, by Jerome. *Preface*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Preface*, 149.

⁷⁶ Beckwith, "The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Beziens (356 C.E.)", 25-28.

⁷⁷ "...atque hoc ita fieri non rerum ordo, sed ratio ex praesentibus petita demonstrat, ut ex his primum confessio potius fidei quam favor in hominem intellegatur, ex quibus in eum, qui adsensus his non est coepit iniuria". *Preface*, 4.7. At the synod of Arles (353), Paulinus of Trier was exiled for refusing to condemn Athanasius. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 39.

⁷⁸ *Preface*, 148-149.

But what knowledge of God is to be sought for, what hope of eternity, to what end is perfect truth to cleave, – these are the things that are at stake. This is so weighty a matter that it now behoves everyone to devote such care to the understanding of these things that henceforth he may stand firm by his own judgment, and not follow the opinion of others.⁷⁹

Based largely on Hilary's *Preface*, Smulders argues convincingly that his exile was motivated by theological rather than political reasons. Following on from Smulder's work, Beckwith provides an excellent summary of the recent scholarship on the subject, as well as an analysis of the five key texts that refer directly to the synod of Beziers. Using these texts, he also argues in a compelling manner that theological reasons were behind Hilary's sentence of exile, even though politics played a part in bringing this about.⁸⁰ Beckwith further points out that Hilary's efforts to win the support of his fellow bishops seem to have been effective, for in *De Synodis* we learn that although not all the bishops stood by Hilary at Beziers, many continued to correspond with him. These also later denied communion to Saturninus of Arles, who Hilary cites as being responsible for his exile through his deception of the emperor.⁸¹

C. *In Exile*

The exile to the east was a decisive moment in the cultural and theological formation of the life of Hilary.⁸² Firstly, he came into contact with the writings of eastern Christians, especially those of Origen, which were to influence him greatly; secondly, Hilary encountered a number of eastern Fathers, in particular the Homoiousians, Basil of Ancyra and Eleusius of Cyzicus.⁸³ Through his contact with them he discovered that the Arian controversy was much more complex than the westerners had realised. This deeper appreciation of the theological crisis can be seen in his writings from that period, which show an awareness of the theological trends developing in the east. During his exile, Hilary composed his most famous works - *De Synodis*, *De Trinitate* and the *Opus Historicum*.⁸⁴

In 359, Hilary attended the council of Seleucia, which was surprising as he was still in exile, however it seems that he was able to move around relatively freely. Later that year, he wrote a letter to Constantius in Constantinople requesting an audience with him to discuss his

⁷⁹ "Agitur autem in his, quae cognitio dei expetenda sit, quae spes aeternitatis, in quo perfecta veritas statu haereat, et cum tam gravis rei negotium tractetur, oportet et unumquemque his modo curam cognoscendis rebus inpendere, ut iudicio deinceps proprio consistens opinionem non sequatur alienam." *Preface*, 3.6.

⁸⁰ Beckwith, "The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Beziers (356 C.E.)", 21-38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29. *De syn.* 2.

⁸² Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 37. See also, Simonetti, *La Crisi*, 299.

⁸³ *De syn.* 63, 90.

⁸⁴ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 41-42.

exile and also to explain, in an orthodox manner, the relationship between the Father and the Son. This request was denied and in 360 at the council of Constantinople, the emperor endorsed the Arian faith. Hilary responded with a rather forceful letter, the *Liber Contra Constantium*, in which he accused the emperor of being an enemy of the catholic and apostolic faith.⁸⁵

D. *The Return to Gaul*

In February 360, Hilary returned to Gaul.⁸⁶ Sulpicius Severus maintains that this was due to the request of the emperor who considered him to be “a sower of discord and a troubler of the east”.⁸⁷ However, recent scholarship has suggested that Hilary may well have returned on his own initiative.⁸⁸ In the west, Hilary continued to defend the Nicene faith. He was influential at the council of Paris in 360/1, where he worked with Eusebius of Vercelli to restore the bishops and churches who had succumbed under the pressure of the decrees of Ariminum. In collaboration with Eusebius, he also attempted to have the Arian bishop Auxentius removed from the See of Milan. However, this was unsuccessful, and he was forced to return to his own country. Following this, nothing more has been historically recorded of Hilary’s life. He is known to have composed a number of literary works during this period, which include the *Liber contra Auxentium*, and two exegetical writings. The first of these is his *Tractatus super Psalmos*, which is influenced by Origen; and the second is his *Tractatus Mysteriorum*, in which he interprets passages from the Old Testament in terms of Christ and the Church, employing a typically Alexandrian technique.⁸⁹ Hilary is also the first Latin writer to be certified as a composer of hymns.⁹⁰ At this time, hymns were used in the east by both heretics and orthodox Christians in order to promote doctrinal ideas. It is likely that Hilary became familiar with these during his exile as he seems to have begun writing hymns only after this time.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 9-10.

⁸⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Hilary’s return to Gaul, see Yves-Marie Duval, *L’extirpation de l’Arianisme en Italie du Nord et en Occident* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988), 251 ff.; and Daniel H. Williams, “The anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the ‘Liber contra Auxentium’”, *Church History* 61 (1992):7-22.

⁸⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.45.

⁸⁸ See Williams, “The anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the ‘Liber contra Auxentium’”, 10-14; and Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 10.

⁸⁹ Simonetti, “Hilary of Poitiers” in the *EECh*, 381-2.

⁹⁰ For a discussion on ancient Latin Christian hymns and poetry, see Jacques Fontaine, “L’apport de la tradition poétique romaine à la formation de l’hymnodie latine chrétienne”, *Revue de études latines* 52 (1974): 318-355.

⁹¹ Furthermore, Hilary’s three surviving hymns have a doctrinal tone, which suggests that he composed them as a means of promoting his own ideas. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 53.

E. Hilary's Life – A Summary

Little is known of Hilary's early life, in fact we encounter him for the first time in his role as bishop at the synod of Beziers. Here, despite a lack of support from his colleagues, Hilary refused to agree to the condemnation of Athanasius and more importantly stood up for his faith in the divinity of Christ, which he believed was the real issue at stake. For this reason, he was exiled to Phrygia. Hilary's exile to the east was an important moment in his theological development. Through his contact with the easterners Hilary gained knowledge of their theology, which influenced his own thought. A turning point came with the synod of Sirmium in 357 and the promulgation of the Arian manifesto. In response to this, Hilary seems to have written *De Trinitate* with the aim of defending the Nicene faith against the strong attacks of Arianism, and to show how the *homoousion* could be understood in an orthodox manner, one which avoided Sabellianism. Hilary also wrote *De Synodis* hoping to bring about a rapprochement between the westerners who upheld the doctrine of consubstantiality, and the Homoiousians from the east whose theological position he had come to realise was fundamentally the same. This important letter revealed to the west that the east was not simply Arian, and therefore that many easterners were not necessarily enemies of Nicaea.

After he returned from exile, Hilary continued to promote the Nicene faith and to fight the Arian doctrine. His desire for reconciliation can be further seen at the council of Paris in 361 where, through his moderating influence, a dogmatic position acceptable to both Homoousians and Homoiousians was adopted, and those who had succumbed to the Arian creed of Arius and wished to return to the Nicene faith were received with understanding. Hilary also produced some exegetical works, which reveal the influence of Origen, and was the first westerner to compose hymns. Nothing is known of the circumstances of his death, which seems to have been around 367, only a few years before the definitive resolution of the Arian crisis brought about by the council of Constantinople, in 381.

IX. Conclusion

In conclusion, a generation after Nicaea, a range of theological trajectories existed, which can be categorized as falling into two fundamental categories - Arian (subordinationist), or Nicene. Hilary maintained that the Nicene position was orthodox, and as a bishop felt responsible to ensure that this truth was upheld and presented in an effective manner to his flock, who he believed to be in danger of succumbing to the persuasive, but false Arian

doctrine. To this end, he composed *De Trinitate*, and in doing so contributed to the advancement of Nicene theology through his development of the concept of divine personhood. By means of this concept, Hilary showed how the Son's substantial relationship with the Father could be understood in an authentic manner, one which confirmed his subsistence and avoided Sabellianism. In recent times, scholars have highlighted the nuanced differences between the various theological trajectories present in the mid fourth century. However, these were not of primary concern to Hilary who focused on what was essential, namely whether or not the theology affirmed or denied the Son's consubstantiality with the Father.

2. *De Trinitate* – Composition and Content

In his *opus magnum*, *De Trinitate*, Hilary expounds his most mature and extensive reflection on the Trinity. For this reason, it is the most significant primary source for our study of his Trinitarian thought. In this 12-volume work, Hilary defends the consubstantiality of the Son, and in doing so provides significant insights into the nature of the Triune God. It is principally upon this work that his fame as a theologian rests. At the time of its circulation, *De Trinitate* was the most extensive Latin work to have been written on the Trinity, and it thus represents an important milestone in the development of Latin Trinitarian theology. It was influential not only amongst other Nicene writers of the period but later Latin scholars as well. In his work of the same name, Augustine praised Hilary's exegetical ability and also developed a number of the themes and ideas propounded by Hilary in *De Trinitate*. Hilary's treatise was also especially popular with medieval scholars, judging by the numerous manuscripts surviving from the 11th and 12th centuries.¹ Of particular note, was its use by Aquinas in his exposition of Trinitarian theology in the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as his Commentary on the Gospel of John, and the *Catena Aurea*.² In these latter two works, Aquinas made use of Hilary's extensive exegesis of Johannine passages, which served as the foundation for much of Hilary's Trinitarian theology in *De Trinitate*. Given the importance of this text to our exploration of Hilary's understanding of the Triune God, in this chapter we will review this work, looking at its composition and content as well as the methodology Hilary employed in expounding his theology.

I. *De Trinitate* - Composition

De Trinitate was composed either partially or completely during Hilary's exile to the east from 356-60.³ The original title of the treatise is uncertain - Jerome refers to it as the *Adversus Arianos*,⁴ while both Rufinus and Cassian mention a work of Hilary's by the name

¹ Lesley-Anne Dyer, "The Twelfth-Century Influence of Hilary of Poitiers on Richard of St Victor's *De Trinitate*", in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 69, ed. Markus Vincent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 334-5.

² See Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 3 vols. trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010); *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, vol.4, St. John, repr., trans. John H. Newman, (Southampton: Saint Austin Press, 1997). Aquinas' mention of Hilary in his *Summa Theologiae* will be noted throughout this dissertation.

³ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 9.

⁴ Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 100.

of *De Fide*.⁵ The earliest attestation to the current title comes from Cassiodorus and Hilary's biographer, Venantius Fortunatus, in the sixth century.⁶ Despite Hilary's efforts to present this theological work in a unified and orderly manner, he did not always succeed. A lack of cohesiveness is notable at times in *De Trinitate* due to certain anomalies in its structure and content. This issue has been widely acknowledged by scholars, however, they have been divided over the possible reasons for it.

In his recent book, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, Beckwith attempts to add clarity to the complex process involved in the composition of *De Trinitate*.⁷ Along with other scholars, he maintains that Hilary incorporated two earlier works into *De Trinitate*, which would explain the lack of cohesiveness, mentioned above, in parts of the text.⁸ The first of these is thought to have been the aforementioned *De Fide*, which Beckwith suggests was written following Hilary's condemnation at the Synod of Beziers in 356, and the second, the *Adversus Arianos*. Beckwith suggests that *De Fide* was used for Books 2 and 3 of *De Trinitate*, and *Adversus Arianos* for Books 4–6. He maintains that Hilary made significant editorial changes to these texts, including the addition of prefaces, in an attempt to unify the overall work.⁹ There is certainly evidence to suggest that Hilary incorporated at least one earlier work into *De Trinitate*, since he actually referred to Book 4 as Book 1,¹⁰ and Book 5 as Book 2, once in the text.¹¹ Also, Beckwith's suggestion that the incorporated works were substantially edited seems plausible, given Hilary's desire to present the work in a systematic manner. However, although Beckwith has attempted to identify the precise parts of the text which Hilary amended or added, this is difficult to prove due to a lack of evidence. Furthermore, the final form of *De Trinitate* cannot be compared with possible earlier texts, since there are no surviving manuscripts of these.

In his book, Beckwith mentions that he was influenced by Simonetti's seminal article on the structural and chronological issues associated with *De Trinitate*, even though he does

⁵ Rufinus, *Hist.* 10.32; Cassian, *Incarn.* 7.24.2. Cited by Pierre Smulders in the *Praefatio* to *De Trinitate*, CCSL 62: 6–8. For further information on the title of *De Trinitate* see this preface.

⁶ Cassiodorus, *Institut.* 1.16.3; Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Hil.* 1.14.

⁷ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*.

⁸ Whilst most modern scholars hold this view, E.P. Meijering does not. In the introduction to his book, *Hilary of Poitiers: On the Trinity, De Trinitate 1, 1-19, 2, 3* (Leidman: Brill, 1982), 1 ff., Meijering argues forcefully that Hilary set out to compose a 12-volume work from the beginning. According to Beckwith, this view is false. (See the further discussion above on this subject). *Ibid.*, footnote 1.

⁹ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 71.

¹⁰ In Book 6, Hilary says that he will cite again the letter of Arius to Bishop Alexander, which he cited in Book 4, however he refers to this as Book 1: "we have decided to insert the complete text of this heresy here in Book Six, although we have produced it in Book One". *De Trin.* 4.4.

¹¹ Hilary also refers to Book 5 as the "second book" of his treatise. *De Trin.* 5.3.

not agree with all of his views.¹² For example, Beckwith holds that Book 1 was composed at a later date when Hilary decided to recast his earlier efforts into a more substantial treatise.¹³ Simonetti, on the other hand, suggests that part of Book 1 originally belonged to *De Fide*, and that additional material was added by Hilary when he incorporated it into *De Trinitate*.¹⁴ As discussed above, these scholarly suggestions regarding the complex process by which *De Trinitate* was composed, as well as many others, are primarily conjecture.

II. Introduction to *De Trinitate*

De Trinitate begins with an account of Hilary's journey from paganism to Christianity. Based on natural reason, Hilary professed belief in one God, the Creator, who is eternal, and omnipotent. He considered the life he had been given by this God to be a great gift, and the capacity for knowledge inherent in this life, to be divine. For this reason, he sought an employment that would be worthy of such a gift. Some teachers, Hilary pointed out, advocated the practice of virtue as the foundation of a good life. While Hilary agreed that virtuous living was indispensable for human beings he believed that this was not enough – what he ardently desired was to know the God who was the author of his life. It was in this God that Hilary placed all the certainty of his hope and in his goodness he found rest.¹⁵

In his search for the truth about God, Hilary was dissatisfied with the various understandings of God and creation proposed by the philosophers and pagans. Not only were these belief systems opposed to each other, they presented views which were incompatible with his understanding of God. Around this time Hilary encountered the Jewish scriptures, and immediately felt an affinity with these texts, which confirmed and deepened his existing knowledge of God. He was particularly struck by the self-revelation of God to Moses as “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14), which profoundly reveals the fundamental truth concerning the essence of God, as one who exists. Although the concept of God presented in these scriptures filled Hilary with joy, he still felt apprehensive concerning the eternal destiny of his body and soul. He was convinced that God had not given him existence in order that he would one day not exist, but he wanted to be reassured of this truth:

Moreover, reason itself convinced [Hilary] that it was unworthy of God to have brought man into this life as a sharer in His Council and prudence in order that his life

¹² Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 71, footnote 1. See also Manlio Simonetti, “Note sulla struttura e la cronologia del “*De Trinitate*” di Ilario di Poitiers”, *Studi Urbinati*, 39 (1965): 274–300.

¹³ Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: from De Fide to De Trinitate*, 72.

¹⁴ Simonetti, “Note sulla struttura e la cronologia del “*De Trinitate*” di Ilario di Poitiers”, 278, 286–294.

¹⁵ Cf. *De Trin.* 1.3.

might one day end and his death last for all eternity, that it was unworthy of God to have given existence to him who did not exist in order that when he had come into existence he might not exist. For, this can be regarded as the sole purpose of our creation: that what did not exist began to exist, not that what had begun to exist would cease to exist.¹⁶

Hilary's fears were completely allayed when he discovered the Christian scriptures and their revelation concerning Christ, the Son of God, and Incarnate Word. These revealed that God the Father is not a solitary God, but that he has a Son, who is "God from God". Furthermore, the Father "willed that His Son be born as man from the Virgin", in order that "the entire human race might be sanctified in Him" through his Passion, death and resurrection:¹⁷

By His death we would be buried together in baptism that we might return to eternal life, while death after life would be a rebirth to life and dying to our vices we would be born again to immortality. Renouncing His immortality, He dies for us that we may be raised from death to immortality with Him. For, He received the flesh of sin that by assuming our flesh He might forgive our sin, but, while He takes our flesh, He does not share in our sin. By His death He destroyed the sentence of death in order that by the new creation of our race in His person He might abolish the sentence of the former decree. He allows Himself to be nailed to the cross in order that by the curse of the cross all the maledictions of our earthly condemnation might be nailed to it and obliterated. Finally, He suffers as man in order to shame the Powers. While God, according to the Scriptures, is to die, He would triumph with the confidence in Himself of a conqueror. While He, the immortal One, would not be overcome by death, He would die for the eternal life of us mortals... For this reason my soul was at rest, conscious of its own security and full of joy in its aspirations; it feared the coming of death so little as to regard it as the life of eternity.¹⁸

This soteriological purpose of the incarnation, which is clearly expressed in the above excerpt, is foundational to Hilary's Christology, and his mission to expound the truth concerning Christ's divinity. It is precisely because Christ is God that He is able to save us and grant eternal life. Moreover, in *De Trinitate* Hilary also alludes to the role and importance of baptism, which is mentioned in the above passage. It is through this sacrament that we have access to the saving power of Christ.¹⁹

III. *Aim*

By placing his conversion story at the beginning of *De Trinitate*, Hilary provides a useful introduction to the theological work which he sets out to undertake in this treatise. The overall aim of this work is to present the orthodox truth concerning the divinity of the Son

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 1.9.

¹⁷ *De Trin.* 3.16.

¹⁸ *De Trin.* 1.14.

¹⁹ For example, see *De Trin.* 1.12, 1.14, 12.56-57.

against the Arian attempt to portray him as a creature. In effect, the treatise is a defense of the faith proclaimed at Nicaea. To do so in a plausible manner, Hilary is also conscious of the fact that he must avoid the pitfalls of Sabellianism, which deny the unique personhood of the Son, and tritheism.

As a bishop, Hilary is aware of his obligation to preach the Gospel and to protect his flock from error, in this case from the grave threat of the Arian heresy. According to Hilary, knowledge of the truth about the divinity of the Son and his incarnation, is not only helpful but necessary for salvation: “For there is no other eternal life”, he writes, “if we do not know that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten God, is the Son of God”.²⁰ Even though fearful of inadvertently misrepresenting the truth, it was for these reasons that Hilary undertook the task of defending and presenting the orthodox faith in *De Trinitate* – a task he believed to be indispensable.

IV. Methodology

In his description of his journey to Christianity, Hilary shows that it is possible to come to a certain knowledge of God through reason. However, he points out that this knowledge is limited. For example, the truth concerning the plurality of God, who is one, which is the focus of *De Trinitate*, can only be discovered through divine revelation.

A. Scriptural and Liturgical Foundations

As with all early Christian writers, the scriptures are the foundational source of Hilary’s theological speculation. He interprets these through a Christological hermeneutic, maintaining that both the Old and New Testaments speak of Christ.²¹ Furthermore, Hilary understands the scriptures as being inspired by the one Holy Spirit, and thus presenting a unified doctrine.²² On the basis of this insight, he sheds light on particular scriptural passages

²⁰ *De Trin.* 6.24. See also 6.43.

²¹ *Instr.* 5; *De Trin.* 12.3-5.

²² See *De Trin.* 9.28. For Hilary the order of the text is also highly significant, containing within itself a hidden meaning, which he draws to the attention of the reader. In his exegetical works on Matthew’s Gospel and the Psalms, we also see that Hilary recognises two levels of meaning in the scriptures, one literal and one spiritual, which are not opposed to each other. He often uncovers the spiritual meaning through the use of typology and allegory. For example, when interpreting the psalms, he frequently employs typology to identify figures and events from the Old Testament as foreshadowing those of the New, especially in terms of Christ. Thus, he describes the sufferings of David, as pointing to those of Christ. His *Commentary on the Psalms* is influenced by Origen, though the extent of this influence is difficult to determine, due to lack of complete, extant texts of Origen’s works. Jerome was aware of Hilary’s work on the psalms and recognised its dependence on Origen, however he also acknowledged that Hilary developed ideas of his own. For a more extensive treatment of Hilary’s method of exegesis in the *Tractatus super Psalmos* and also Origen’s influence, see Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on the Psalms*, 60-100.

by means of others, often doing so to prove the validity of his own interpretations. He does this especially against the Arians who also make use of scriptures to support their doctrine, but do so by interpreting them in an erroneous manner.

The liturgy is also of fundamental importance to Hilary's theology, and that of other early Christians, as is summed up in the ancient saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi*.²³ In this regard, the baptismal profession of faith is of great importance to the development of Hilary's Trinitarian theology, as is the Nicene Creed. For Hilary, these sources, together with the scriptures, present the faith handed down by the apostles.

B. The Triune God in Matthew's Baptismal Formula

The principal biblical passage for Hilary's understanding of the unity and plurality within the Godhead is the Trinitarian formula found at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "Go now, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world" (Matt 28:19-20).²⁴ This formula for Hilary is of enormous significance, representing the very mystery of the Godhead, in all its key aspects. It also shows again the importance of a true understanding of the Godhead in relation to the salvation of man:

For, what is there pertaining to the mystery of man's salvation that it does not contain? Or is there anything that is omitted or obscure? Everything is full as from fullness and perfect as from perfection. It includes the meaning of the words, the efficacy of the actions, the order of procedure, and the concept of the nature.²⁵

We will continue our exploration of Hilary's exegesis of this passage in our introduction to his understanding of divine personhood.

C. Philosophical Principles

Although Hilary does not tend to employ philosophical concepts in his theological arguments to the extent of the Greek Fathers, his theology is nevertheless underpinned by significant philosophical positions. The first of these concerns the order of being by which Hilary recognizes the two fundamental categories of "Creator", and "creature".²⁶ Throughout *De Trinitate* he reveals his awareness of the great divide between God, who is infinite and

²³ Prosper of Aquitaine, the 5th century Christian writer, encapsulates this notion with the phrase "*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*". Prosper of Aquitaine, *Ap. ep.* 8.

²⁴ *De Trin.* 2.1.

²⁵ *De Trin.* 2.1.

²⁶ Hilary also acknowledges that there are significant differences within the category of creation especially between humans who are endowed with rational natures, and for example, wild beasts. *De Trin.* 1.1-2.

eternal, and humans who are finite and mortal. Given the limitations of human understanding, he is conscious of the enormous difficulties inherent in his task of trying to grasp and expound the mystery of the divine nature, in some measure. Hilary therefore roots his theological speculation in the sacred scriptures, which have been revealed by God. He surmises that since God is infinite and we are finite, only He can know himself fully.²⁷ He sees our role as humbly accepting God's words in a spirit of reverence:

We must not judge God according to our human sense of values. Our nature cannot lift itself up by its own power to the comprehension of heavenly things... Therefore, since our treatise will be about the things of God, let us concede to God the knowledge about Himself, and let us humbly submit to His words with reverent awe. For He is a competent witness for Himself who is not known except by Himself.²⁸

Even though Hilary acknowledges that the greatest divide in the order of being concerns the distinction between the Creator and creatures, he recognizes the supremacy of humans over other animals. Hilary is very conscious of the incomparable gift of reason with which humans are endowed, and which he believes should be employed in a fitting manner.²⁹

The second philosophical principle which underlies Hilary's theology is related to the first and concerns the nature of a thing. According to Hilary, a thing is said to be of a particular nature if it possesses that nature in its fullness. Thus, if Jesus is God, then He must be truly God, possessing the divine nature in its entirety, otherwise He is not God at all, and lacks all the divine attributes. We will look at some applications of these principles in more detail when we discuss Hilary's notion of the divine essence further on.

The third philosophical principle that is significant to the development of Hilary's theology concerns the natural powers of a thing, which according to Hilary reveal the inherent nature of the thing.³⁰ He makes use of this notion to show that the Son of God is truly God, since his miraculous deeds reveal his divine power. To illustrate his point, he uses the example of wheat, pointing out that we acknowledge that something is truly wheat when we recognize that it possesses those powers and natural characteristics associated with wheat:

No one doubts, however, that a true nature arises from its nature and power. Thus we say, for example, that wheat is true which has grown to a head, has been covered with awn, has been freed from the chaff, has been ground to flour, has been kneaded into

²⁷ *De Trin.* 4.14.

²⁸ *De Trin.* 1.18.

²⁹ See footnote 26 above.

³⁰ Michel R. Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2001), 157-162.

bread, has been taken as food, and has shown in itself both the nature and the effect of bread.³¹

Hilary warns against a philosophical approach to the divinity that relies solely on human reason, quoting the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians a number of times throughout the treatise:

See to it that no one seduces you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:8-9).³²

This philosophical approach, according to Hilary, is akin to the error of the heretics who attempt to comprehend the truth about God within the narrow confines of human understanding, and thus end up distorting it:

They [the heretics] measure the omnipotent nature of God by the weakness of their own nature, not that they exalt themselves to the heights of infinity in their conjectures about infinite things, but confine infinite things within the boundaries of their own power of comprehension and make themselves the judges of religion, since the practice of religion is an obligation of obedience. They are unmindful of who they are, reckless in divine matters, and reformers of the commandments.³³

D. The "Obedience of Faith"

Although aware of the limitations of human reason, Hilary's aim is not to discourage his readers from making use of this gift in order to understand more fully the mystery of God. On the contrary, Hilary encourages this search for the truth, but in a way which avoids the pitfalls of the heretics. He urges his readers to enter the mysteries of the faith by believing in them, thus anticipating the timeless adage of Augustine, "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe".³⁴ In relation to this idea, Hilary speaks of the "obedience of faith [which] carries us beyond the natural power of comprehension" (*ultra naturalem opinionem fidei oboedientia prouehit*).³⁵ To obey in faith has the connotation of both listening, and submitting.³⁶ It therefore points to the necessity of accepting the truths of the faith, as revealed in sacred scripture and professed in the baptismal creed, in order to

³¹ "Nulli autem dubium est, ueritatem ex natura et ex uirtute esse, ut exempli causa dictum sit: uerum triticum est, quod spica structum, et aristis uallatum, et folliculis decussum, et in far comminutum, et in pane coactum, et in cibum sumptum, reddiderit ex se et naturam panis et munus." *De Trin.* 5.3.

³² *De Trin.* 8.53, 9.1, 9.8, 12.20. These verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col 2:8-9) are particularly apposite for Hilary's treatise since they not only warn the readers against those who reduce the mystery of God by attempting to understand it through limited human reason, but also make an important claim about Christ, which Hilary uses as evidence for his divinity on a number of occasions. See for example, *De Trin.* 2.9, 3.3.

³³ *De Trin.* 1.15.

³⁴ Augustine, *Tr. Ev. Jo.* 29.6.

³⁵ *De Trin.* 1.37.

³⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 144.

penetrate more deeply the mystery of the Godhead. According to Hilary, the heretics' fundamental mistake is that they do not accept these truths, especially those concerning the divinity of the Son and his consubstantial relationship with the Father. By accepting these revealed truths, Hilary assures his readers that they will make progress, and thus urges them to proceed, even though he acknowledges that they will never fully comprehend God:

Begin, go forward, persevere. Even though I know that you will never reach your goal, I will congratulate you for having gone ahead. Whoever seeks after infinite things with a pious mind, although he never overtakes them, will still advance by pressing forward.³⁷

E. *The Role of Analogy in Hilary's Thought*

Analogy plays a crucial role in the development and expression of Hilary's theology. While he recognizes the limitations of human understanding when it comes to penetrating the mysteries of God, he is very aware of the usefulness of using creaturely concepts/images for this end. Hilary does so cautiously, recognizing that analogies need to be used with care, given that they cannot present their "divine counterparts" in an exhaustive manner, even though they do provide important insights into them.³⁸

If in our study of the nature and birth of God we shall cite some examples for the sake of illustration, let no one imagine that these are in themselves a perfect and complete explanation. There is no comparison between earthly things and God, but the limitations of our knowledge force us to look for certain resemblances in inferior things as if they were manifestations of higher things, in order that, while we are being made aware of familiar and ordinary things, we may be drawn from our conscious manner of reasoning to think in a fashion to which we are not accustomed. Every analogy, therefore, is to be considered as more useful to man than as appropriate to God, because it hints at the meaning rather than explains it fully.³⁹

F. *Defeating the Heretics*

The polemical context in which *De Trinitate* is written influences the approach that Hilary makes to the mystery of the Trinity. He often uses his engagement with the heretics as the platform from which to launch his own theological speculation. Throughout the treatise Hilary's fundamental aim is to present the orthodox truth concerning the divinity and personhood of Jesus against Arianism and Sabellianism. Hilary is adamant that this is not a new revelation, but the faith of the Church, handed down by the apostles, received at baptism, and promulgated by the Fathers at Nicaea. He frequently speaks of the "apostolic" doctrine,

³⁷ *De Trin.* 2.10.

³⁸ *De Trin.* 7.28.

³⁹ *De Trin.* 1.19. See also 4.2, 6.9, 7.28.

which the heretics distort, and which he tries to defend and expound more clearly using scripture as his basis.⁴⁰

The reason, of course, that led me to mention the teaching of the Apostle at this point was that men who were evil-minded... forced us into the necessity of contradicting them when they insinuated their deadly doctrine... into the guilelessness of their hearers under the disguise of the true religion; they act thus in their presence without any regard for the purity of the apostolic teaching, so that the Father is not the Father, the Son is not the Son, God is not God, and the faith is not the faith. In opposing their insane lies we... proved from the Law that there is God and God...we... made known the perfect and true birth of the only-begotten God from the teachings of the Gospels and the Apostles, and, finally,... we taught that the Son of God is the true God and does not differ in nature from the Father, so that the faith of the Church does not acknowledge a unique God nor two gods, since the birth of God excludes a God who is alone, and the perfect birth does not admit the names of distinct natures in two gods.⁴¹

Hilary's opponents, like all who are engaged in theological debate in antiquity, believe that it is they themselves who hold the orthodox faith. They also try to prove their positions by showing how they are founded on scripture. In his efforts to combat them, Hilary takes the very scriptures upon which they base their arguments and interprets them in an orthodox manner, revealing their false understandings. Hilary points out emphatically that the problems do not lie in the sacred writings themselves, but in the distorted explanation of them:

Heresy does not come from Scripture, but from the understanding of it; the fault is in the mind, not in the words. Is it possible to falsify the truth? When the name father is heard, is not the nature of the son contained in the name?⁴²

Hilary also cites the profession of faith sent by Arius and his supporters to the bishop of Alexandria on two occasions, making use of it to identify some significant tenets of Arianism, which he then attempts to disprove.⁴³

V. *De Trinitate, De synodis and the Council of Nicaea*

Hilary's recognition of the importance of the council of Nicaea and its role in presenting and defending the orthodox faith, is hinted at throughout *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*. In fact, *De Trinitate* can effectively be described as a defense of the *homoousion*. In Book 4, Hilary speaks of the council Fathers' use of the expressions, *ousia* and *homoousios*,

⁴⁰ For example, see *De Trin.* 10.48, 11.24, 12.3, 12.5, 12.28, 12.51.

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 8.2.

⁴² *De Trin.* 2.3.

⁴³ *De Trin.* 4.12-14, 6.5-6.

pointing out the necessity of them as “the best possible defense of the faith against the raging heretics of those days”.⁴⁴

Even though Hilary does not mention the Greek term *homoousios* often in *De Trinitate*, he does use other Latin terms/phrases to present the concept of consubstantiality, such as the Latin equivalent, *unius substantiae*. Furthermore, throughout *De Trinitate* he makes use of phrases found in the Nicene Creed in his defense of the faith against the Arians. In particular, he speaks of “*Deus ex Deo*” to express the plurality within the Godhead, in a way which also respects the oneness of God.⁴⁵ This statement reveals the Son’s source as God, thus implying that He possesses the same nature as his author, while not detracting from him. Hilary recognizes that these statements, when understood in an orthodox manner, represent the apostolic faith – the faith held by the Church and handed down by the council Fathers, as mentioned. Furthermore, in *De Trinitate*, he does not refer to the other local eastern councils which were held after Nicaea, but only Nicaea, which seems to hold pride of place for him. This is also hinted at in *De synodis*, where he attempts to interpret these local councils in an orthodox manner, that is, one in keeping with the faith expressed at Nicaea. The extant literature shows that at the time Hilary composed *De Trinitate*, the council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed were already being spoken about in both the east and the west, and the Creed was gradually being understood as a touchstone of orthodoxy.

VI. *De Trinitate - a Dialogue with God*

Hilary is mindful of his weaknesses and limitations as a human creature faced with the tremendous task of expounding the mystery of the omnipotent, eternal God. Although we can come to a knowledge of the existence of God through our reason, and a certain understanding of his attributes, Hilary is aware that we cannot penetrate further into the very nature of God unless He reveals it himself. For this reason, Hilary roots his theological reflection in the sacred scriptures, however he does not stop there. Hilary’s search for the truth about God, as for other Christian writers of antiquity, is not an academic exercise but one of prayerful reflection. Indeed, *De Trinitate* has been aptly described as “a dialogue with God”, in which Hilary’s reflection is transformed into prayer and this prayer in turn enhances his reflection.⁴⁶ The prayerful spirit in which Hilary approaches the mystery of God is summed up in his petition to the Father at the end of Book 1. This prayer reveals the trinitarian nature of Hilary’s faith. Although its primary focus, like the rest of the treatise, is the Father and the

⁴⁴ *De Trin.* 4.6-7.

⁴⁵ See *De Trin.* 1.10, 4.42, 12.51 etc.

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Saint Hilary of Poitiers*, General Audience, 10 October, 2007, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20071010.html.

Son, Hilary also alludes to the Holy Spirit in his request for the “gift” of the Father’s help, and in his mention of the breath of the Spirit. In this prayer, we also see what is at the heart of Hilary’s theological efforts, namely, the desire to serve God by proclaiming to the heretics and those who do not know him, the truth concerning the eternal Father and his Only-begotten Son:

O almighty God the Father, I am fully conscious that I owe this to You as the special duty of my life that all my words and thoughts should speak of You. This readiness of speech which You have granted to me can obtain for me here no greater reward than to serve You by proclaiming You, and by revealing to the world that does not know You and to the heretic that denies You what You are, namely, the Father of the only-begotten God. Besides this, I must pray for the gift of Your help and mercy that You may fill the sails of our faith and profession which have been extended to You with the breath of Your Spirit and direct us along the course of instruction that we have chartered... We shall speak of subjects which they have announced in the mystery: that You are the eternal God, the Father of the eternal only-begotten God, that You alone are without birth, and the one Lord Jesus Christ who is from You by an eternal birth, not to be placed among the number of the deities by a difference in the true nature, nor to be proclaimed as not being born from You, who are the true God, nor to be confessed as anything else than God who has been born from You, the true God the Father. Bestow upon us, therefore, the meaning of words, the light of understanding, the nobility of diction, and the faith of the true nature. And grant that what we believe we may also speak, namely, that, while we recognize You as the only God the Father and the only Lord Jesus Christ from the Prophets and the Apostles, we may now succeed against the denials of the heretics in honoring you as God in such a manner that You are not alone, and proclaiming Him as God in such a manner that He may not be false.⁴⁷

VII. *Content of De Trinitate*

A. *Book 1*

Hilary uses Book 1 primarily to introduce the treatise. As mentioned above, he begins the book with a description of his conversion from paganism to Christianity, which provides an important backdrop to the treatise. Later in the book, Hilary presents a comprehensive synopsis of the treatise, outlining the contents of each book. He attempts to do so in an orderly fashion, gradually building on the previous books, in order to assist the reader in his/her ascent to the knowledge of God.

B. *Books 2 & 3*

In Book 2, Hilary begins with an elucidation of the baptismal faith, emphasizing the importance of the names of each person of the Trinity. He explains how the unity of the

⁴⁷ *De Trin.* 1.37. See also the prayers in 6.21, and especially at the end of the treatise in 12.52-7.

Father and the Son is founded on the mystery of the divine birth, as expressed in the scriptures, especially the Gospel of John. From this vantage point, he refutes a number of heresies, showing forth the orthodox position concerning the divinity of the Son. Unlike most of the other books, Hilary includes the Holy Spirit in a number of his trinitarian discussions here.

Hilary focuses especially on defending the divinity of the Son in Book 3 against the Arians. Again, the mystery of the divine birth is foundational to his arguments. He cites various scriptural passages to show that although the Son took on humanity, he remained God. Hilary ends this chapter with a discussion of the limitations of human wisdom and the importance of not reducing the mystery of God to the level of human understanding.

C. Books 4-6

As mentioned, Beckwith, as well as other scholars, consider Books 4-6 to be part of an earlier work, the *Adversus Arianos*. In support of their thesis, a certain unity can be noted amongst these books, which share the common purpose of defending the orthodox faith against the Arian heresy. In Book 4, Hilary lists the false understandings of the key Nicene term *homoousion*, promulgated by the heretics, and contrasts them with the true understanding preached by the Church. This term was utilized by the council Fathers, Hilary explains, in order to refute the heretical ideas in the most effective way. Hilary then cites one of the fundamental Arian documents, the letter of Arius to Alexander of Alexandria. The first point of this document concerns the oneness of God, which the Arians understand as being singular. Hilary refutes this false notion, showing that God's oneness encompasses both the Father and the Son, who is "God from God".⁴⁸ He makes use of key Old Testament passages, taken mainly from Genesis, to support his position.

Following on from Book 4, Hilary addresses a second point from the Arian 'manifesto' in Book 5. This concerns the important question - Is the Son of God the true God? In responding to this question, and the heretical position of the Arians, Hilary revisits the Old Testament passages cited in the previous book, to show how they also reveal the truth about the Son's divinity. According to Hilary, it is through the mystery of the divine birth that the Son receives the fullness of the Godhead from the Father.

In Book 6, Hilary continues his efforts to show that the Son is true God, but this time using New Testament passages to form the basis of his arguments. In this chapter, Hilary not only refutes Arianism, but also other heresies, which are used by the Arians in an attempt to

⁴⁸ *De Trin.* 4.15.

show forth the orthodoxy of their own doctrine. They do this by highlighting the heretical nature of other doctrines and contrasting it with their own beliefs.

D. Books 7-12

A number of heresies are also discussed in Book 7. Here, Hilary refutes both Sabellianism and Arianism, along with the heretical positions of Ebion and Photinus. He also resumes his defense of the Son as true God, focusing particularly on his “name, birth, nature, and power”, and basing his arguments on passages from the New Testament.⁴⁹

In Book 8, Hilary refutes the notion that the unity of the Father and Son is to be found on the level of the will. This is a typically Arian (and specifically Homoian) position, which Hilary would have become familiar with during his time in the east. Hilary strongly opposes this view, which undermines the divinity of Christ, explaining that Father and the Son are fundamentally united on the level of substance.

Books 9 and 10 deal primarily with the mystery of the Incarnation. In Book 9, Hilary attempts to demonstrate how passages from the New Testament which reveal the humanity of Christ, and therefore certain weaknesses, can be understood in a manner which does not detract from his divinity. These passages are used by the Arians to support their erroneous views. In Book 10, Hilary deals specifically with the Passion of Christ. However, in his efforts to defend the divinity of Christ against attack by Arians, he does go too far in his understanding of Christ’s humanity. According to Hilary, Christ could experience the forcefulness of passion without the actual suffering, given that he was conceived without the effects of Adam’s sin. In Book 11, Hilary treats of the subjection of Christ to the Father (1 Cor 15:27-28). He explains that Christ subjected his humanity to the Father, not as a sign of weakness, but rather as the means through which God could be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).⁵⁰ Hilary begins his final book with an orthodox explanation of Proverbs 8:22, one of the principal texts used by the Arians. He again uses the notion of the divine birth to show forth the eternal generation of the Son, who is not a mere creature. At the end of this book Hilary also makes some interesting comments concerning the nature of the Holy Spirit. The fact that he mentions him at the end of his treatise, suggests that the Spirit was starting to become the focus of theological discussions at this time in the east.

⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 1.27.

⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 11.40-41.

E. Summary

In summary, *De Trinitate*, Hilary's *opus magnum*, is his most important work in terms of his Trinitarian theology. For this reason, it is the primary source of information for our analysis of Hilary's concept of divine personhood. In this work, which is underpinned by fundamental philosophical principles, Hilary makes extensive use of scripture, to prove against the Arians and Sabellians, that Jesus is truly divine, without being another God, or detracting from the nature of the Father, while at the same time having his own unique subsistence.

3. The Nature of God

In our investigation of Hilary's understanding of divine personhood, we will begin by reviewing his conception of the divine nature, since this is an integral component of this notion. The starting point for Hilary's Trinitarian theology is belief in the Son's divinity, thus in order to show forth the Son's distinct existence in a coherent and orthodox manner, Hilary must do so in a way which is in keeping with his nature, and all of its attributes. For example, if God is immutable, then the generation of the Son can lead to no change in God; if God is perfect, then the Son must be perfect, etc. Hilary's opponents share in his understanding of the attributes of God but fail to comprehend how the Son can be truly God, like the Father, without being another god, or diminishing in some way the divine nature. In response to them, Hilary attempts to show that the Son possesses the divine nature in its fullness, without detracting from the Father, through the development of the notion of divine personhood.

I. "I am who am"

In the first book of *De Trinitate*, Hilary points out that the characteristic most proper to God is "to be (*esse*)".¹ This foundational truth was made known to Moses by God at the burning bush when He revealed himself as "I am who am" (Ex 3:14).² Hilary returns to this significant biblical passage on a number of occasions throughout *De Trinitate* to show forth the fundamental difference between God and creatures.³ According to Hilary, God's existence is not something accidental, but "a subsistent truth, an abiding principle, and an essential attribute of the nature" (*Esse enim non est accidens nomen, sed subsistens veritas et manens causa et naturalis generis proprietatis*).⁴ Furthermore, he explicitly states that the very essence of God, which is to exist, is not only characteristic of the Father but also the Son, who is likewise God:

[What] is proper to God: [is] that He always is (*Deo proprium esse*)... The Gospels testify that the very same attribute is proper to the Only-begotten God, since the Word was in the beginning, since this was with God, since it was the true light, since the Only-begotten God is in the bosom of the Father, and since Jesus Christ is the God

¹ *De Trin.* 1.5.

² *De Trin.* 1.5.

³ For example, see *De Trin.* 4.8, 5.22.

⁴ *De Trin.* 7.11. Aquinas quotes this line from Hilary as a proof text to show that in God essence and existence are the same. Aquinas, *ST* 1.3.4.

over all. Hence, He was and is, because He is from Him who always is what He is (*Erat igitur adque est, quia ab eo est qui quod est semper est*).⁵

II. *The Attributes of the Divine Nature*

Early on in *De Trinitate*, Hilary describes the attributes of the divine nature, starting with God's eternity, his infinity and his oneness.⁶ Throughout the treatise he returns to these attributes and builds on them, never losing sight of the fact that our descriptions of God always fall short of the truth about him, since he is infinite and we are finite:

Language will weary itself in speaking about Him, but He will not be encompassed. Again, reflect upon the periods of time; you will find that He always is, and, when the numerals in your statement have finally come to an end, the eternal being of God does not come to an end. Arouse your understanding and seek to comprehend the totality of God in your mind; you hold on to nothing. ... He is outside of all things and within all things; He comprises all things and is comprised by none; He does not change either by increase or decrease, but is invisible, incomprehensible, complete, perfect, and eternal (*invisibilis inconpraehensibilis plenus perfectus aeternus*); He does not know anything from elsewhere, but He Himself is sufficient unto Himself to remain what He is.⁷

III. *Defending the Divinity of Christ*

We have already discussed certain important philosophical principles, which underpin Hilary's Trinitarian theology. These form the foundation for some of his arguments against the Arians who deny the Son's divinity. Based on the philosophical principle that a thing possesses its nature in its fullness, with all of the attributes pertaining to this nature, or not at all, Hilary formulates an argument against the Arian claim that Jesus is God but not true God. In this argument, he tries to show the ludicrousness of the Arian position through the example of fire and water. According to Hilary, using the adjective "true" in reference to the nouns "fire" and "water" adds nothing to their meaning. If something is fire or water then it can only be "true fire" or "true water", possessing everything in accordance with its nature. Likewise, if the Son is God, then he is "true God", possessing the divine nature in its fullness, or else he is not God at all. In other words, the Son cannot be God by degree:

First of all, I ask what is the meaning of the true God and the God that is not true? If it be said to me: 'This is fire but not true fire, or this is water but not true water,' I do not grasp what these words signify, and I would like to know how a true nature of the same kind differs from a true nature of the same kind? For, that which is fire cannot be anything else except true fire, and, while its nature remains, it cannot be lacking in that which true fire is. Take away from water what water is, and you will be able to destroy it as true water. Furthermore, if it remains water, it must also continue to be

⁵ *De Trin.* 12.24-25.

⁶ For example, see *De Trin.* 1.7.

⁷ *De Trin.* 2.6, 3.2.

true water. In fine, a nature can be lost in such a manner that it does not exist, but it must be a true nature if it continues to exist. Either the Son of God is true God in order to be God, or, if He is not true God, then He cannot even be that which God is... If the nature belongs to Him, then the true nature cannot be wanting to Him.⁸

All of Hilary's opponents agree that the Father is God, what they disagree about concerns the nature/personhood of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Arians, in their efforts to uphold the oneness of God, claim that the divine attributes belong to the Father alone, and not the Son. Again, using the 'all or nothing' principle concerning the nature of a thing, Hilary takes the Arian position to its logical conclusion, showing that if the Son does not possess the divine attributes then he must belong to the order of creatures, and thus be characterized by their limitations. In doing so, he highlights the absurdity of their position. Also underpinning Hilary's argument is the principle regarding the fundamental differences between divine and created beings:

When they [the heretics] say that He [the Father] alone is true, alone just, alone wise, alone invisible, alone good, alone powerful, alone immortal, then in their opinion the fact that He alone possesses these attributes means that the Son is excluded from any share in them. For, as they say, no one else participates in the attributes that are peculiar to Him and if these attributes are in the Father alone, then we must believe that God the Son is false, foolish, a corporeal being composed of visible matter, spiteful, weak, and mortal. He is debarred from all these attributes because no one but the Father possesses them.⁹

IV. Terminology

The language for expressing the divine essence, the source of unity within the Trinity, as well as that for describing the plurality was not yet firmly established at the time when Hilary was writing. This caused much confusion especially since the same terms used to express unity were also employed to denote plurality. The key term *hypostasis* was used by some of the Greek writers, such as Athanasius, to refer to the oneness of the Trinity, whereas others used it to denote the divine persons. Although *ousia* was generally used to refer to the divine essence, and therefore the oneness of the Godhead, it was occasionally employed to express the plurality.¹⁰ Further problems arose during translation since the Greek terms did

⁸ *De Trin.* 5.14.

⁹ *De Trin.* 4.9.

¹⁰ For example, at the council of Antioch in 325, just prior to Nicaea, Eusebius of Caesarea apparently mentioned two *ousiai* in the Godhead, and Narcissus of Neronius, three. Osius was presiding over the council and seems to have been shocked by these statements, as he understood *ousia* to mean substance. It therefore appeared to him that Eusebius and Narcissus believed in a plurality of gods. However, it is difficult to know just what these two bishops meant by their use of *ousia*. Eusebius did subordinate the Son to the Father, thus he seems to have used *ousiai* to signify that the Father and the Son differed according to substance. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 40. See also Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 187-188.

not correspond well to their Latin equivalents and vice versa, leading to many misunderstandings. Moreover, some authors employed terms in an inconsistent manner, thereby adding to the confusion. *Hypostasis*, and its Latin equivalent, *substantia*, presented the most difficulties, given that *hypostasis* was frequently used by the Greeks to denote the persons of the Trinity, whereas *substantia* was understood by the Latins as referring to the essence of the Godhead. Thus, when the Greeks referred to the Trinitarian persons as “*treis hypostaseis*”, the Latins understood them to be indicating three different substances and therefore Arianism; likewise, when the Latins spoke of the Godhead as one *substantia*, the Greeks thought that they meant one person, and therefore Sabellianism.

The term *hypostasis* was also associated with another fundamental problem. Although it was used by a number of Greek writers in reference to the distinctions within the Trinity, these writers often held significantly different views as to the basis of this differentiation. Thus, when Arius referred to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “*treis hypostaseis*” he used the term to signify three different substances, whereas when the Cappadocians referred to the divine persons in this manner, they understood them to be equal in substance.¹¹ In opposition to the Arians, they did not consider the Son to be a creature, but of the same substance as the Father. In sum, although the terminology for expressing the unity and plurality within the Trinity needed to be standardized, this was not sufficient to avoid confusion. The terms themselves needed to portray concepts that were clearly defined.¹²

The key Nicene term *homoousios*, was also a source of much misunderstanding. Although the council Fathers at Nicaea stated that the Son was of the same substance as the Father, they did not explain how this could be possible. Following the council, a number of erroneous interpretations of the term were circulated in the east, which probably accounted for the resistance to it there. The easterners were especially concerned with the modalist connotations associated with *homoousios*, as well as possible materialist interpretations. In order to avoid these problems some opted for the term *homoiousios*, but this was associated with other issues.¹³

¹¹ For example, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Abl.* and the letter from the Synod of Constantinople (382) to the western bishops, which represents Cappadocian thought: “[The 318 Fathers of Nicaea] teach us to believe in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: clearly, to believe in one divinity and power and essence [ουσία] of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in their dignity of equal honour and in their coeternal reign, in three most perfect subsistences [υποστάσεις] or three perfect persons [πρόσωπα].” Cited in Joseph T. Lienhard, “*Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of ‘One Hypostasis’*”, in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins, eds., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 202), 100.

¹² Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate*”, 34-35.

¹³ *Homoiousios* is a problematic term when used in reference to the relationship between the Father and the Son, as it can imply a difference in substance, for the Son is either equal in substance to the Father, or not.

In this section we will review the terms used by Hilary to express the unity/oneness of the Godhead, analyzing both his understanding and application of them in order to gain insights into his Trinitarian theology. Much has been said of his inconsistency in the use of the term *substantia*, especially in *De synodis*. We will therefore also analyse his use of this term, to see whether or not he was caught up in the terminological confusion which characterized the period, as has been suggested.¹⁴

A. The Greek Terms - *Homoousios*, *Ousia* & *Homoiousios*

When speaking about the unity/oneness of God, Hilary uses the Nicene catchword *homoousios* and the related term *ousia* in both *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*. In *De Trinitate* he mentions the terms only a few times. This occurs in Book 4 where he discusses the erroneous interpretations of *homoousios* put forth by the heretics.¹⁵ Since *De Trinitate* is a Latin document aimed at a Latin audience, it is not surprising that Hilary uses the Greek terms sparingly. (He does use the Latin equivalent to *homoousios* - *unius substantiae* - more often, though mainly in his descriptions of the heretical doctrines.)¹⁶ Hilary may also have been reluctant to use *homoousios* in this text due to the confusion and misunderstanding surrounding it. He uses the term and its Latin equivalents more frequently in *De synodis*, where he discusses in greater depth the application of *homoousios* by the Fathers at Nicaea.¹⁷ In this document Hilary also discusses *homoiousios*, showing to the western bishops that it can be understood in an orthodox manner.

In both *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*, Hilary reveals his awareness of the problems associated with the term *homoousios*. In both texts he identifies three erroneous interpretations of the word.¹⁸ The first concerns a modalist understanding whereby the one substance is attributed to the Father and the Son “to teach that there is a solitary personal existence although denoted by two titles”; the second involves the understanding that the substance of the Father is divided with a portion being cut off in order to produce the Son; the third interpretation concerns the notion that there is a “prior substance, which the two equal Persons both possess.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, the term has a certain ambiguity, which Hilary exploits in his *De synodis* when he interprets *homoiousios* in a favourable manner, showing how it can be understood in Nicene terms. *De syn.* 72-73.

¹⁴ See Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy*, 318-381, 487-488.

¹⁵ *De Trin.* 4.4, 4.6.

¹⁶ See *De Trin.* 4.4, 6.10. He also uses this term and its derivatives in *De synodis* in an address to the western bishops concerning the *homoousion*. *De syn.* 67-71.

¹⁷ *De Syn.* 68, 70.

¹⁸ See *De Trin.* 4.4 and *De syn.* 71, 81, 84.

¹⁹ *De syn.* 68.

Hilary probably learned of these erroneous interpretations of *homoousios*, while on exile to the east. In *De synodis*, as part of his attempt to reconcile the orthodox eastern and western bishops, he alerts the westerners to the importance of explaining what they mean when they state that the Father and the Son are of one substance, in order to avoid any misunderstanding:

Therefore, amid the numerous dangers which threaten the faith, brevity of words must be employed sparingly, lest what is piously meant be thought to be impiously expressed, and a word be judged guilty of occasioning heresy when it has been used in conscientious and unsuspecting innocence.²⁰

In the same document, Hilary attempts to convince the western bishops that the Homoiousians in the east are also orthodox. He explains that although they describe the Son as being like in substance to the Father, they basically mean that He is of the same substance:

Therefore, brethren, likeness of nature can be attacked by no cavil, and the Son cannot be said to lack the true qualities of the Father's nature because He is like Him. No real likeness exists where there is no equality of nature, and equality of nature cannot exist unless it imply unity, not unity of person but of kind (*aequalitas autem naturae non potest esse, nisi una sit; una vero non personae unitate, sed generis*). It is right to believe, religious to feel, and wholesome to confess, that we do not deny that the substance of the Father and the Son is one because it is similar, and that it is similar because they are one (*unam substantiam patris filii idcirco non negare, quia similis est: similem vero ob id praedicare, quia unum sunt*).²¹

In *De synodis*, Hilary also addresses the eastern bishops directly, explaining to them how the *homoousion* can be understood in an orthodox manner. By doing so he shows them that those who accept this term, namely most of the western bishops, do hold the true faith. He tries to break down the resistance of the easterners to *homoousios* by answering their objections. Two of these concern possible misunderstandings of the term: firstly, as denoting a substance prior to the Father and the Son; and secondly, as implying a modalist-type understanding of the Godhead as was held by Paul of Samosata. For this latter reason the term was condemned by eighty Fathers at the council of Antioch in 269. Since these council Fathers rejected *homoousios*, the easterners saw all the more reason for them to reject it as well. In response to these concerns, Hilary points out that just because a term/phrase has been misunderstood in the past, it does not mean that it cannot be used later in a valid manner. He argues that if this were not the case then they should reject certain biblical passages on the grounds that they are often interpreted in an erroneous way or might be misunderstood. He

²⁰ *De syn.* 69.

²¹ *De syn.* 76.

shows that such a position is really untenable, as it would render most of the scriptures unusable:

But perhaps on the opposite side it will be said that it [*homoousios*] ought to meet with disapproval, because an erroneous interpretation is generally put upon it. If such is our fear, we ought to erase the words of the Apostle, *There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tim 2:5), because Photinus uses this to support his heresy, and refuse to read it because he interprets it mischievously... Away with the Gospel of John, lest Sabellius learn from it, *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30). Nor must those who now affirm the Son to be a creature find it written, *The Father is greater than I* (Jn 14:28). Nor must those who wish to declare that the Son is unlike the Father read: *But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father* (Mk 13:32)... And though I should not have said it myself unless forced by the argument, we must, if it seems fit, abolish all the divine and holy Gospels with their message of our salvation, lest their statements be found inconsistent... Shall we, because the wise men of the world have not understood these things, and they are foolish unto them, be wise as the world is wise and believe these things foolish? Because they are hidden from the godless, shall we refuse to shine with the truth of a doctrine which we understand?... Some misunderstand ὁμοούσιον; does that prevent me from understanding it?²²

The third objection to *homoousios* concerns its use by the council Fathers at Nicaea. The easterners thought that the Fathers were compelled to use the non-scriptural term, since it was rejected by the Arians. The Arians rejected *homoousios*, says Hilary, because they wanted to say that the Son of God was “formed out of nothing, like the creatures”, not that he was “born of the substance of God the Father”.²³ Since the term was applied in an appropriate manner by the Fathers at Nicaea, Hilary could see no problem with their choice of it, even though it had been rejected by the Arians:

If the godlessness of the negation then gave a godly meaning to the assertion, I ask why we should now criticise a word which was then rightly adopted because it was wrongly denied?²⁴

Another stumbling block for the Homoiousians was the fact that *homoousios* is not found in scripture. Hilary wonders that this could be an issue for them, since their key term *homoiousios*, is not in the sacred texts either. He points out that what is most important about *homoousios* is that it represents the correct sense of scripture, namely that the Son who is born of the Father and is of the same substance as him. This is in direct opposition to the erroneous view put forward by the Arians. Hilary explains that he believed in this truth of the faith before he knew of *homoousios*, but that this term helped his belief.²⁵ He encourages the

²² *De syn.* 85-86.

²³ *De syn.* 83.

²⁴ *De syn.* 83.

²⁵ *De syn.* 88.

easterners to subscribe to the council of Nicaea, accepting the *homoousios*, with the understanding that there is no real difference between this and the *homoiousios*. “We hold one and the same sacred truth”, says Hilary, “You are not Arians” so “why should you be thought to be Arians by denying the ὁμοούσιον?”²⁶

B. *The Latin Terms*

Hilary mainly uses the Latin terms, *natura*, *substantia*, *essentia* and *genera* to denote the unity or oneness of the Godhead, and to defend an orthodox understanding of this oneness against the erroneous notions of the heretics. He is aware of the importance of understanding the significance of these key theological terms, and in *De synodis* he provides a definition of *essentia*, which he equates with *substantia*. In this definition he also explains the close relationship between *essentia* and *substantia* and the related terms *genera* and *natura*:

Essence is a reality which is, or the reality of those things from which it is, and which subsists inasmuch as it is permanent. Now we can speak of the essence, or nature, or genus, or substance of anything. And the strict reason why the word essence is employed is because it is always. But this is identical with substance, because a thing which is, necessarily subsists in itself, and whatever thus subsists possesses unquestionably a permanent genus, nature or substance. When, therefore, we say that essence signifies nature, or genus, or substance, we mean the essence of that thing which permanently exists in the nature, genus, or substance.²⁷

i. *Essentia*

Although Hilary often uses these Latin terms interchangeably, he also employs them in slightly different ways. *Essentia* is used almost exclusively in *De synodis* in the translation and discussion of the Greek creeds promulgated by the eastern councils which followed Nicaea. It is worth noting that Hilary never uses *essentia* in *De Trinitate* and mentions it only three times in his other works. Apparently, the practice of using *essentia* to translate *ousia* had all but fallen away by the time that Hilary began to write, which could explain his reluctance to employ the term more readily.²⁸ Instead of *essentia*, *substantia* was gaining currency as the preferred Latin term for expressing what was fundamentally one in the Trinity. This can be seen in the writings of Tertullian and Novatian.²⁹

²⁶ *De syn.* 88.

²⁷ “*Essentia est res quae est, vel ex quibus est, et quae in eo quod maneat subsistit. Dicitur autem essentia, et natura, et genus, et substantia uniuscujusque rei poterit. Proprie autem essentia idcirco est dicta, quia semper est. Quae idcirco etiam substantia est, quia res quae est, necesse est subsistat in sese; quidquid autem subsistit, sine dubio in genere vel natura vel substantia maneat. Cum ergo essentiam dicimus significare naturam vel genus vel substantiam, intelligimus ejus rei quae in his omnibus semper esse subsistat.*” *De syn.* 12.

²⁸ Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 282.

²⁹ See Novatian, *De Trin.* 31, and Tertullian, *Ad. Prax.* 2-3 etc.

Given that *De synodis* was addressed to the Latin and Greek bishops, Hilary was faced with the unique challenge of ensuring that the letter would be understood by both groups, and that misinterpretations would be avoided.³⁰ For these reasons, in his translations and discussions of the eastern creeds, Hilary may have considered *essentia* the most suitable term for *ousia*, and *substantia* for *hypostasis*.³¹ Hilary's concern that his writing be understood by both Latins and Greeks can be seen throughout *De synodis*. For example, in his definition of *essentia*, which he equates with *substantia*. This definition would have been important especially for the Latin bishops who were probably more familiar with the use of *substantia* in the translation of *ousia* at this time, as discussed. Also, when using *hypostasis* to translate *substantia* in reference to a divine person, Hilary clarifies the use in later discussions, explaining that the eastern bishops were not trying to differentiate the divine persons in terms of substance.³² Again, this clarification would have been important to the Latin bishops for whom *substantia* would normally signify substance.

ii. *Natura*

Hilary's term of choice for presenting the unity/oneness of the Godhead is *natura*. He uses this term especially to denote "that which befits a thing by virtue of its birth".³³ Against the Arians, Hilary points out that the Son possesses his divine nature, and therefore all the attributes associated with divinity, through the mystery of the divine birth, not merely by an act of the will:

*Nec voluntas sola genuit filium... sed ante tempora omnia Pater ex naturae suae essentia, impassibiliter volens, filio dedit naturalis nativitatus essentiam.*³⁴

He is therefore the Son of God by nature, not adoption.³⁵ This connection with the notion of birth may explain, to some extent, Hilary's preference for the term, given the significance of the *divina nativitas* to his Trinitarian theology.

³⁰ There is no mention anywhere that Hilary also translated this letter into Greek for the sake of the Greek bishops, and there are no extant manuscripts of it in Greek. Therefore, it seems that he expected them to be able to read it in Latin or have it translated. Also, in *De synodis* Hilary speaks of the difficulty of translating the Greek creeds into Latin. He says that this had been attempted before, but that the translation was done in such a literal manner that the meaning was obscured. *De syn.* 9.

³¹ According to Smulders when writing *De synodis*, Hilary was influenced by the Homoiousians who used *hypostasis* to refer to the individual persons of the Trinity, and *ousia* in reference to the divine substance. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire*, 287

³² For example, see *De syn.* 32, 33, and my article which deals extensively with this subject: Thorp, "Terminological Confusion in the 4th century: A Case Study of Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*."

³³ Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 283.

³⁴ *De syn.* 59.

³⁵ See *De Trin.* 1.34.

In *De Trinitate*, Hilary speaks of the *indiscretae naturae* of the Father and the Son, and states that there is not a *secunda natura* in the eternal Godhead, but a *naturae aequalitatem* by means of the divine birth; it is through the *indifferentem naturam* that the Father remains in the Son.³⁶ Hilary invites the reader to comprehend the mystery of the *natura non dividua* and argues that the Father and the Son must be *unius naturae* since they do the same work.³⁷ Furthermore, he speaks of the two natures, divine and human, which are united in Christ.³⁸

iii. *Substantia*

Although Hilary employs *substantia* much less frequently than *natura*, this term is extremely significant to his Trinitarian theology. This is due to its relationship with the key Nicene term *homoousios*, which he attempts to defend in *De Trinitate*, as well as in *De synodis*. Hilary uses *substantia* a number of times in these works to show that the divine substance is the source of unity between the Father and the Son. For example, in *De synodis* he explains to the eastern bishops that the Fathers at Nicaea proclaimed the Son's consubstantiality with the Father in order to teach that his subsistence was from no other source than God. In this explanation Hilary also uses *substantia* to show forth the divinity of the Son:

The Holy Council... [declared the Son] to be born of the substance of the Father, not made (*Natus esse de substantiae Patris Filius*): lest while the word born implies His divinity, the word made should imply He is a creature. For the same reason we have [declared] of one substance (*unius substantiae*), not to teach that he subsists as one solitary [person], but that he is born of the substance (*de substantiae*) of God and subsists from no other source, nor in any diversity caused by a difference of substance (*substantiae diversitatae*). Surely again this is our faith, that He subsists from no other source, and He is not unlike the Father. Is not the meaning here of the word ὁμοούσιον that the Son is produced of the Father's nature, the essence of the Son having no other origin, and that both, therefore, have one unvarying essence? As the Son's essence has no other origin, we may rightly believe that both are of one essence, since the Son could be born with no substance but that derived from the Father's nature which was its source.³⁹

Another example is found in *De Trinitate* in a prayer to the Father where Hilary speaks of the substantial unity between the Father and the Son:

³⁶ *De Trin.* 8.51; *De syn.* 42.

³⁷ *De Trin.* 8.41, 9.69.

³⁸ *De Trin.* 9.3.

³⁹ *De syn.* 84. I have made some adjustments to this translation.

I have learned to know that there is a God with You, not different in nature, but one in the mystery of Your substance (*Cognoui tecum illic Deum non alterum in natura sed in sacramento substantiae tuae unum*).⁴⁰

Hilary also uses *substantia* in a negative sense to show that Christ is divine since his source is God:

No other God will be likened to Him, for He does not come from a different substance, but is God from God (*ex alia substantia sed ex Deo Deus est*).⁴¹

Occasionally, Hilary uses *substantia* to emphasize the concrete reality of a thing. For example, he refers to the “Word of God” as the “*substantivum Deum*” against those who claim that He is merely “the utterance of a voice”.⁴²

Finally, *substantia* is employed by Hilary on a number of occasions in his explanation of various heresies, and when relating the erroneous understandings of the *homoousion*. All of these flawed positions have one particular thing in common – they oppose the truth concerning the Son’s substantial relationship with the Father:

According to [the Arians], [Christ] is the Son by adoption and God in name, He is the Only-begotten by favor; He is the first-born in the order of succession, He is wholly a creature, and in no sense is He God, because His procreation is not a natural birth from God, but the begetting of a created substance (*substantia creaturae*).⁴³

Consistency in the Use of *Substantia*⁴⁴

Unlike *essentia*, *genera*, and *natura*, Hilary also uses *substantia* to denote the divine persons. This application of the term is found almost exclusively in *De synodis*, with only two instances in *De Trinitate*. These can be found in Hilary’s translation of the Arian creed contained in the letter sent by Arius to Bishop Alexander, which he cites twice in *De Trinitate*.⁴⁵ Since Hilary often uses *substantia* in a theological sense to refer to the ‘oneness’ of the Trinity, it seems strange that he should also employ this term in reference to a divine person. Scholars have noted this apparent inconsistency and Hanson in particular has studied Hilary’s application of the term. He concludes that

the great defect of Hilary’s theological vocabulary is that he uses *substantia* both to mean what God is as Three (*hypostasis* in the later Cappadocian sense) and for what

⁴⁰ *De Trin.* 6.19.

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 4.42. Cf. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 283-285.

⁴² *De Trin.* 10.21. See also Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 283-285.

⁴³ *De Trin.* 6.18.

⁴⁴ This section is based on my article, which deals with the subject more extensively: Thorp, “Terminological Confusion in the 4th century: A Case Study of Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*”.

⁴⁵ *De Trin.* 4.12-13; 6.5-6.6.

God is as One (*ousia* in the Cappadocian sense), and in some contexts it is almost impossible to determine which sense he intends.⁴⁶

However, a close analysis of Hilary's employment of *substantia* shows valid reasons for his varying uses of the term. In *De synodis*, as mentioned above, Hilary may have chosen *substantia* to translate *hypostasis* in order to avoid confusion for the Greek bishops to whom the letter was partly addressed.⁴⁷ Furthermore, when using *substantia* in reference to a divine person Hilary clarifies his usage in his later discussions of the eastern creeds, pointing out that the eastern bishops were not attempting to differentiate the divine persons in terms of substance.⁴⁸ Hilary seems to have done this for the sake of the Latin bishops for whom the term *substantia* would normally have signified substance. These clarifications imply that Hilary was aware of potential problems relating to terminology, and eager to avoid misunderstandings. This seems likely given that the main purpose of *De synodis* was to bring about a rapprochement between the Latin and Greek Fathers by showing the Latins that not all who were opposed to the *homoousion* were Arian and demonstrating to the Greeks that those who accepted this term were not necessarily Sabellian. Furthermore, in a number of instances when Hilary uses *substantia* to refer to the divine persons, he seems to be doing so in order to emphasize their concrete existences over and against the Sabellian heresy. The easterners were particularly opposed to this heretical position, as evidenced by their hostility to it in their creedal formulas and anathemas. As discussed above, Hilary utilised *substantia* on occasion to show forth the concrete reality of a thing, revealing a certain consistency in his application of the term.

In the two instances where Hilary uses *substantia* in reference to a divine person in *De Trinitate*, he does so in his translation of *hypostasis* in the Arian creed sent by Arius to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. Such a literal translation seems to be in keeping with his practice in *De synodis*. However, unlike similar translations in *De synodis*, Hilary never clarifies his use of *substantia* in the Arian creed. Rather, he seems to be using this term deliberately to show that the Arians distinguish the divine persons by means of substance. Elsewhere in *De Trinitate*, Hilary states that the Arians consider the Son to be different in substance to the Father, and that they, along with other heretics, assign different substances to all three divine persons. For example, in reference to the Arian creed, Hilary states that the

madness of the heretics has gone so far as to deny Him [the Son] while pretending to acknowledge Him... When they profess that there is only one God and this same one

⁴⁶ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy, 318-381*, 486.

⁴⁷ As discussed, *substantia* is the etymological equivalent for *hypostasis*.

⁴⁸ For example, see *De syn.* 32, and 33.

is alone true, alone just, alone wise, alone unchangeable, alone immortal, alone powerful, they make the Son also subject to Him by a distinction in substance (*diversitate substantiae*), not as one born from God into God but adopted as the Son by creation...⁴⁹

Finally, it is important to keep Hilary's apparent inconsistency of his use of *substantia* in perspective. Although he employs the term and its cognates 130 times in *De synodis*, there are only thirteen instances in which he seems to use *substantia* in reference to the divine persons. Of these instances, six involve translations of *hypostasis* in various eastern creedal statements, and four are used in discussions concerning these statements. That leaves four applications of this term which could be considered somewhat ambiguous and/or more difficult to explain. As shown above, Hilary seems to be using *substantia*, in his translation of *hypostasis* from the Arian creed, in *De Trinitate* in a manner consistent with his usual application of the term, which is to indicate the essence/substance of a thing. By using *substantia* in this manner, he shows that the Arians distinguish the divine persons by means of substance.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, we see in Hilary a profound understanding of the divine nature and its attributes. This provides an important foundation for the development of his understanding of the personhood of the Son and also the Father, which is in accord with the truth of their divinity. Also, as we have demonstrated, his use of terminology to express the divine nature/substance is more consistent than has been previously thought. This is important given that understanding Hilary's application of such fundamental terms is necessary for a true grasp of his Trinitarian theology, especially as it relates to divine personhood, which is the aim of this dissertation.

⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 5.34, see also 7.23, 2.4.

4. Divine Personhood - an Introduction

In this section of the thesis, we will investigate Hilary's development of the notion of divine personhood. We will begin our exploration with Hilary's exegesis of the baptismal formula from Matthew's Gospel, which is found near the beginning of *De Trinitate*. This biblical text is foundational for Hilary's entire Trinitarian theology and provides an appropriate entry point for our analysis. In his exegesis of the baptismal formula, Hilary includes the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son - one of the few occasions in which he does so. As in our chapter on the divine nature, we will also review the terminology Hilary employs to express the distinctions within the Trinity. We will focus primarily on his use of the significant term *persona* in his major exegetical and doctrinal works. Also, we will look briefly at some of the phrases he uses to show forth both the plurality and the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. In the following three chapters, we will study Hilary's development of the notion of personhood in terms of the Father and Son, since they are the principal focus of his theological speculation. Although the Holy Spirit is never at the center of Hilary's theological inquiry, he does make some important observations concerning his nature and real existence. Taking these into consideration, in the final two chapters of this section, we will review the extent, if any, that he develops an understanding of divine personhood in terms of the Spirit.

I. *The Revelation of the Triune God in the Matthaean Baptismal Formula*

Hilary's entire notion of personhood is developed as a result of the theological crisis concerning the ontological status of the Son and his relationship with the Father. At stake was a true understanding of the triune God, which forms the basis of our faith and is necessary for salvation. The fundamental truth concerning the mystery of God, who is not singular, but rather a unity of persons, cannot be reached by human reason alone, but can only be accessed through divine revelation. Hilary, well aware of this truth, thus builds his Trinitarian theology on scripture, and in particular on the baptismal formula expounded in Matthews' Gospel. For Hilary, every aspect of this formula is significant:

Everything is arranged, therefore, according to its power and merits. There is one Power from whom are all things, one Offspring through whom are all things, and one Gift of perfect hope (*una potestas ex qua omnia, una progenies per quam omnia, perfectae spei munus unum*). Nor will anything be found wanting to a perfection so great within which there is found in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: infinity in

the Eternal, the form in the Image, and the use in the Gift (*infinitas in aeterno, species in imagine, usus in munere*).¹

Hilary considers the names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be of fundamental importance to an orthodox understanding of the mystery of the unity and plurality within the Godhead. For him, these names are not arbitrary titles, but “of the nature [of God]” because God, who “who cannot be accurately defined”, “posited” (*posuit*) them himself.² For this reason, Hilary exhorts his listeners to “Hold fast to the names of the nature” (*Tene naturae nomina*).³ Furthermore, he considers the order in which the names are revealed to be significant - this points to the primacy of the Father, who is the source (*auctor*) of both the Son and Holy Spirit. Hilary always retains this order in his doxologies, which can be found in a number of his works.⁴

II. *The Notion of Naming*

Hilary uses the names attributed to the divine persons by scripture, as the foundation for a number of his arguments, which he develops primarily against Arianism, and also Sabellianism. Against the latter, he shows that the names reveal the reality of the divine persons, while against the former he uses the names to demonstrate that God’s oneness is concomitant with a unity of persons. In showing forth the distinctiveness of each divine person, Hilary develops a theology focused specifically on the meaning of the names themselves, and the unique properties associated with them. In fact, Hilary’s understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son is based primarily on their names and the associated properties of fatherhood and sonship, which these signify. Hilary also develops his notion of their personhood on the properties related to their origin, which he associates with their names as well. In his exegesis of Matt 28:19, Hilary states that the commandment to baptize “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” can be understood in terms of “the confession of the Origin, the Only-begotten, and the Gift (*auctoris et unigeniti et doni*).”⁵ This interpretation shows forth the primacy of the Father as source of all, who as such is distinguished from the Son, whom He begets, and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from him.

¹ *De Trin.* 2.1.

² *De Trin.* 2.5. Although Hilary acknowledges that God cannot be comprehended by humans, he does maintain that some knowledge of him is possible: “The perfection of learning is to know God in such a manner that, although you realize He is not unknown, you perceive that He cannot be described”. *De Trin.* 2.7.

³ *De Trin.* 3.23. I have adjusted this translation.

⁴ See *De Trin.* 2.1, 2.5, 12.57; *De syn.* 85; *In Matt.* 13.6.

⁵ *De Trin.* 2.1.

The description of the Holy Spirit as “Gift” is also of importance to Hilary’s understanding of his personhood. He discusses this only in terms of his role in the divine economy, but later Christian writers take this notion to a more profound level, understanding it in relation to the Spirit’s position within the immanent Trinity.⁶ Hilary also understands the Holy Spirit as the one who receives from the Father and the Son, and relates this to the notion that He is the Spirit of them both, as mentioned in scripture, and which is in accord with his title.⁷ Although Hilary does not develop his theology of the Spirit to any great depth, he is one of the first Christian writers to appreciate the significance of the scriptural title given to the Holy Spirit as a way into the mystery of his nature and real existence. This insight will be taken up and developed further by writers such as Augustine and Aquinas.⁸

According to Hilary, the names of the divine persons are of ontological significance, rather than mere linguistic designations. This intuition is of fundamental importance for his defense of the faith against the Arians who consider the names to be of nominal value. On account of this position, they deny the foundational distinction between the divine sonship of Christ, and the adopted sonship of Christians. For them, Christ is the Son of God in name only, not according to nature. Hilary is adamantly opposed to this erroneous position, speaking out strongly against his opponents, and pointing out on a number of occasions that such a view it is not in accordance with the scriptures:

Oh, the measureless shame of human folly and insolence for not only finding fault with God by not believing His own statements about Himself but even condemning Him by correcting them... O godless heretics... you declare that He was born because He received existence from nothing, but you give Him the name of Son, not because He was born from God, but because He was created by God, since, as you are aware, God also considered devout men as deserving of this name, and for this reason you confer the title of God upon Him in accordance with the same qualification of the words: ‘I have said: You are gods and all sons of the Most High,’ (cf. Ps. 81).⁹

Hilary also opposes the false notion held by some concerning the reality of the Holy Spirit, again turning to the scriptures as evidence of his real existence.¹⁰

Hilary uses the revealed names not only to explain the uniqueness and reality of each divine person but also to point to their unity. He emphasises this point in his exegesis of Matt 28:19 when he describes each person of the Trinity as “*unus*”:

⁶ See for example, Augustine, *De Trin.* 4.29, 5.15-16, 15.17-19; Aquinas, *ST* 1.38.1-2.

⁷ This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* 15.37; Aquinas, *ST*, 1.36.1.

⁹ *De Trin.* 6.17-18.

¹⁰ See *De Trin.* 2.30-2.32, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

God the Father is one from whom are all things; and our Lord Jesus Christ is one through whom are all things; and the Holy Spirit is one, the gift in all things (*Unus est enim Deus Pater ex quo omnia. Et unus unigenitus Dominus noster Iesus Christus per quem omnia. Et unus Spiritus donum in omnibus*).¹¹

Throughout *De Trinitate*, Hilary also attempts to show that the names ascribed to the Father and the Son, and their associated notions of fatherhood and sonship, reveal the truth concerning their substantial relationship. Just as the names, father and son, when applied to humans, indicate equality of nature, so they do when used in reference to the Godhead. Furthermore, in keeping with this human analogy, the names also indicate distinction in terms of relations. Hilary also uses the name of the Holy Spirit to shed light on his place in the Godhead as the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son.¹² Near the beginning of *De Trinitate* he states emphatically that the names are not at odds with the properties of the divine nature, and therefore the divine unity, but rather point to them:

... the names [Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit] do not deceive us about the properties of the nature, but the properties are kept within the meaning of their nature by means of the names (*non frustrentur naturae proprietatibus nomina, sed intra naturae significantionem nominibus coartentur*).¹³

III. *Terminology of Plurality*

In the previous chapter, we discussed the importance of understanding the terminology employed by Hilary to express the plurality and unity within the Trinity. Given that this chapter is focused on divine personhood, I will examine here Hilary's use of the key term *persona*, in his major exegetical and doctrinal works. I will go into further detail than has been previously done, outlining the history of the term, and also discussing its application in Hilary's works in light of recent research concerning the method of interpretation known as "prosopographic exegesis". I will also look briefly at the verb *subsistere* which Hilary employs on occasion to refer to the divine persons. Finally, I will review some of the phrases Hilary uses to show forth the distinct reality of the divine persons in terms of their substantial unity.

A. *Persona*

1. *The History of the Term Persona*

¹¹ *De Trin.* 2.1.

¹² *De Trin.* 12.55.

¹³ *De Trin.* 2.5.

In secular society *persona* was used initially to refer to the mask of an actor, later it came to indicate the role which was represented by the mask, and finally it was used more widely in reference to a role undertaken of any duration.¹⁴ The meaning of the term *persona* was also linked to the verb, *personare* - “to sound through” - thus giving the sense of the sound coming through a mask.¹⁵ In the highly structured society of the ancient Roman world, the term was also used to indicate the status of a person in relation to civil life. Thus, under Roman law, slaves, who had no rights as citizens, were also not considered as having *persona*.¹⁶

Tertullian was the first Christian writer to employ *persona* in reference to the persons within the Trinity. He did so with such ease and frequency as to suggest that it was already being applied in such a manner. Given that Tertullian was the first significant Christian author to write in Latin, one may suppose that he used *persona* in a similar way to the use of the etymologically equivalent Greek term *prosopon* by other Christian authors. Indeed, Hippolytus, a contemporary of Tertullian’s, employed *prosopon* in reference to the Father and the Son.¹⁷ In secular parlance, *prosopon* had a similar meaning to that of *persona*, representing the mask of an actor.¹⁸ However, neither Tertullian or Hippolytus used the terms *prosopon/persona* in such a manner. Rather, they employed these terms in their defense of the faith against the Monarchian heresy, which attempted to safeguard the unity of the Godhead by maintaining that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were merely different modes of the one God. It is puzzling that Tertullian and Hippolytus should choose to refer to the persons of the Trinity as *prosopa/personae* against such a heresy, given that the secular definition of these terms seems to support rather than oppose the Monarchian view. And yet by using these terms both authors were clearly attempting to show forth the real existence of each person of the Trinity.¹⁹ Furthermore, in his defense of the faith against Praxeas, Tertullian writes in a manner which suggests that he thought his opponent also understood the term in this way.

¹⁴ Cf. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine, to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920), 233.

¹⁵ In his book, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 125-6, Alois Grillmeier attempts to provide an etymology of the term *persona*, tracing it back to Etruscan roots. Such an origin is difficult to prove, given the lack of available data.

¹⁶ Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine, to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon*, 233-234.

¹⁷ Hippolytus, *Noet.* 14.

¹⁸ Boethius, *C. Eut.* 3.

¹⁹ This is particularly notable in the case of Hippolytus given that he was accused of being a ditheist. John N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 3rd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006), 123.

At least part of the solution to this puzzle can be found in reviewing the use of *prosopon* in the Septuagint,²⁰ as well as the Latin equivalent, *persona*, in some of the early Latin translations of the bible, which are cited in the writings of Tertullian and Hilary. In their quotes from these translations we see the terms *prosopon/persona* being used at times to denote the existence of real individuals. Such usage is likely to have influenced the early Christian writers, who used scripture as the basis for their theological reflections. For example, Tertullian's citation and interpretation of the well-known passage from Proverbs 8 is very apropos in this regard:

The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways for his works' sake, before he made the earth, before the mountains were set in their places; yea, before all the hills he begat me... When he was preparing the heaven... I was present with him, and as he made strong above the winds the clouds on high, and as he made safe the fountains of [the earth] which is under heaven I was with him as a fellow-worker, I was she in whose presence he delighted; for daily did I delight in his *persona* (Prov. 8:22-30).²¹

Tertullian uses this passage to support his argument for the concrete existence of the Son. When interpreting this text, he understands the term Wisdom as referring to the Son, which he does in other biblical exegeses.²² The first verse, says Tertullian, is spoken by Wisdom and establishes her as a second person (*secundam personam*). The other verses show her as a separate entity, standing by God.²³

Another part of the solution may be found in the method of literary interpretation known as "prosopographic exegesis".²⁴ This analytical approach was used by scholars of antiquity when studying the writings of ancient poets. These poets often allowed characters to speak in the name of other figures, thus introducing dialogue into what otherwise would have

²⁰ Both Tertullian and Hilary made use of the Septuagint, with Hilary's use being most evident in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, written after he returned from exile to the east. In this commentary, Hilary extols the superior status of the Greek translation. See *Tr. Ps.* 2.2-3, 59.1, 118.4. C.f. Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on the Psalms*, 27.

²¹ "*Dominus creavit me initium viarum in opera sua, priusquam terram faceret, priusquam montes collocarentur; ante omnes autem colles generavit me... Cum pararet... caelum aderam illi simul; et quomodo fortia faciebat super ventos quae sursum nubila, et quomodo tutos ponebat fontes eius quae sub caelo, ego eram cum illo compingens, ego eram ad quam gaudebat; cottidie autem oblectabar in persona ipsius ego eram cum illo compingens, ego eram ad quam gaudebat...*" Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 6.1-2. This Latin version of Proverbs 8 differs from the Vulgate, especially in verse 30. In the Vulgate the important term *persona* is not mentioned: "...cum eo eram cuncta componens et delectabar per singulos dies ludens coram eo omni tempore" (Prov 8:30 Vulg.).

²² Tertullian also understands the terms, *sermo* (discourse/speech), and *ratio* (reason), as referring to the Son. He seems to have held a two-stage theory concerning the generation of the Son according to which "Reason" is always with the Father, while "Discourse", which is in Reason, is expressed at the creation of the world. See Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 5-7; Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, 326; and Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 71. Such a theory is not found in Hilary's mature Trinitarian theology, which is expressed primarily in *De Trinitate*.

²³ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 6.

²⁴ Carl Andresen, "Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffs", *ZNW* 52 (1961): 1-38.

been simple narrative. In order to gain a deeper understanding of their works, scholars would expose the various *prosopa* involved in these dialogues.²⁵ “Prosopographic exegesis” was used not only by secular scholars, but also by the Jewish philosopher, Philo, who applied this approach in his analysis of the speech of Moses. He explains this in the second book of his *Life of Moses*:

I am not unaware then that all the things which are written in the sacred books are oracles delivered by him [Moses]; and I will set forth what more peculiarly concerns him, when I have first mentioned this one point, namely, that of the sacred oracles some are represented as delivered in the person of God by his interpreter, the divine prophet, while others are put in the form of question and answer, and others are delivered by Moses in his own character as a divinely-prompted lawgiver possessed by divine inspiration.²⁶

Possibly influenced by Jewish scholars, the early Christian writers from Justin Martyr onwards²⁷ also used this method of exegesis. They did so mainly in reference to Old Testament passages in order to make sense of the times when God spoke in the plural or seemed to enter into dialogue with himself. They understood these passages in light of the Christian revelation, as showing forth the presence not only of the Father, but also the Son in the Godhead, and used them in their defence of the faith against Jewish, Monarchian and later Arian antagonists. This exegetical method was also applied to the speech of the prophets, which was often understood as originating from either the Father or the Son. Importantly, the *prosopa* identified by the Christian writers in their exegeses were considered as having real existence, unlike those of the ancient literary scholars.²⁸ In light of this discussion it seems quite reasonable to assume that this particular understanding and application of the terms *prospoon/persona* influenced the early Christians’ choice of them in reference to the persons of the Trinity.

“Prosopographic exegesis” can be noted in Tertullian’s writings, especially in his *Adversus Praxean* where he defends the faith against the Monarchian, Praxaeus. Here, in the manner outlined above, he demonstrates how certain passages from the Old Testament reveal the presence of three distinct persons in the Godhead, whom he terms, *personae*. Thus when God says “Let us make man after our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26) and “Behold, Adam is

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger highlights the significance of Andresen’s study in the following article on personhood: “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology”, *Communio* 17 (Fall, 1990), 439-454. See especially 439-443.

²⁶ Philo, *Life of Moses*, 2.35.188.

²⁷ Ratzinger points out that further study needs to be done on the use of “prosopographic exegesis” by early Jewish scholars. He postulates that Christians may have been influenced by their application of it to scriptural texts, rather than its use by scholars in interpreting secular literature. Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology”, footnote 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 442; see also Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 126.

become as one of us” (Gen 3:22), he does so to show that already attached to him is “the Son, a second Person, his Word, and a third Person, the Spirit in the Word”.²⁹ Clearly influenced by Tertullian, Hilary uses almost all the same scriptural passages cited by his predecessor in *Adversus Praxean* to also show forth the plurality within the Godhead, and in particular the divinity and real existence of the Son against Arianism and Sabellianism. This he does primarily in *De Trinitate*. It is worth noting that almost all of Hilary’s uses of the term *persona* are in relation to his “prosopographic exegesis” of the scriptures. This is particularly evident in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, where he uses the term *persona* most frequently, and also in *De Trinitate*.³⁰ We will look at Hilary’s application of *persona* in more detail in the following section.

2. *Persona in the Writings of Hilary*

i. *Persona in the Commentarium in Matthaem*

Although Hilary uses the term *persona* in his exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew, he does so rarely in reference to the Father/Son and usually only in an indirect manner. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to review these uses, given that this is the only extant writing of his from the period before his exile. In the commentary, Hilary uses *persona* and its cognates 14 times. He does so in his efforts to uncover the spiritual meaning of particular passages by showing how certain literary figures can be understood as representing other persons – both human and divine. This can be seen for example in his exegesis of the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:33). Hilary acknowledges that the sense of this parable is clear, but still thinks that it is important to explain the significance of the *personae* mentioned in the text and the comparisons made of them. He does this in some detail pointing out that the landowner represents God the Father.³¹ In the parable concerning the wedding banquet prepared by the king, Hilary again speaks of the importance of understanding the different times and *personae* (Matt 22:2-3). In his explanation of this he implies that the King and his son represent the first two persons of the Trinity.³² Occasionally, Hilary employs the term *persona* in an abstract manner in his exegesis of Matthew’s Gospel. For example, in reference to the parable concerning the unclean spirit that comes out of a man and wanders through arid places (Matt 12:42), Hilary maintains that the man represents the *personam* of the Jewish people.³³

²⁹ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 12.

³⁰ This further supports the notion that the choice of term *persona* as a designation for distinctions within the Trinity, followed in from the use of *prosopon* in “prosopographic exegesis” of the scriptures.

³¹ *In Matt.* 22.1.

³² *In Matt.* 22.3.

³³ *In Matt.* 12.21-22.

In general, Hilary tends to use allegory and typology in order to deepen his understanding of Matthew's Gospel, rather than prosopographic exegesis.³⁴ The latter methodology is usually associated with Old Testament passages for the obvious reason that the Gospel presents Jesus speaking directly. This may account for the different manner in which he utilises *persona* in his later exegetical work, *Commentary on the Psalms*. Here, he uses it primarily in reference to the Father and the Son and occasionally the prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit.

ii. *Persona in De synodis*

As we pointed out in the last chapter, *De synodis* was a challenging document for Hilary to write, given that it was addressed in part to both eastern and western bishops. Hilary's aim was to bring about a rapprochement between the westerners who supported the *homoousion* and the easterners who were weary of this term, due to its Sabellian and materialist connotations, and yet fundamentally held the same faith. He did this by presenting to the western bishops' translations of the eastern creeds from 341 and with the exception of the credal statement of Sirmium in 357, showing how they could be understood in an orthodox manner;³⁵ and how the homoiousians in the east held fundamentally the same faith and explaining to the easterners how the *homoousion*, when understood correctly, represented the true faith.³⁶ Hilary was aware of the difficulties associated with translations and also the importance of his theological views being understood accurately by both groups of bishops. To this end he seems to have paid special attention to his choice and application of terms to express the theological positions. This may explain why he employed certain terms in a manner that is not commonly found in his other writings, which were addressed primarily to Latin speakers. We have already discussed how he used *substantia* to refer to the persons of the Trinity, and *essentia* in reference to the oneness of God, which he does not tend to do elsewhere. Here, we will focus primarily on his use of the term *persona*.

In *De synodis*, Hilary uses *persona* and its cognates occasionally in reference to the divine persons or to describe the modalist view of the Trinity, which presents God as *unam personam*.³⁷ He uses the term specifically to translate the Greek equivalent, *prosopon*, in his rendition and discussion of the eastern creeds. This term is used only twice by the eastern bishops in these documents, possibly because of its Sabellian connotations – Sabellius is thought to have used it in reference to the divine persons. In the first instance, *prosopon* is

³⁴ Hilary is inclined to look at both the literal and spiritual senses of the various Gospel passages when interpreting them.

³⁵ *De syn.* 8-10.

³⁶ See *De syn.* 84 and 91.

³⁷ See the example below.

used in an anathema from the synod held in Sirmium in 351, to describe the modalist position, which is condemned:

If any man says that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are one Person (*unam personam*) [*prosopon*]: let him be anathema.³⁸

In the second instance, *prosopon* is cited in another anathema, but this time from the council held in Ancyra in 358. Again, Hilary translates this as *persona*. In this anathema, the Homoiousians condemn anyone who denies that the Son is like in essence to the Father, even if the reason for doing so is to maintain the *propriety personae* of the Father and the Son against modalism.³⁹ The easterners term of choice for the divine persons at this time was *hypostasis*, which Hilary translates with *substantia*.

Only on two occasions does Hilary use *persona* to directly indicate the divine persons in *De synodis*. The first occurs in his discussion of the second creed from the council of Antioch in 341, in which he translates *hypostasis* with *substantia*. In this discussion, Hilary makes it clear that the eastern Fathers were not trying to differentiate the divine persons according to substance by referring to them as *tres substantias*. Rather, their aim was to emphasize the real existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in opposition to the Sabellian view, which considered them to be mere names:

For that reason [the council Fathers] said that there are three substances (*tres substantias*), teaching by ‘substance’ (*per substantias*), the persons (*personas*) of those subsisting (*subsistentium*), not separating the substance of the Father and the Son by the diversity of a dissimilar essence (*non substantiam Patris et Filii diveritate dissimilis essentiae separantes*).⁴⁰

In the second example, Hilary uses *persona* in his citation of the *Blasphemia* of Sirmium (357), in which the Fathers confirmed the “Catholic doctrine that there are two Persons (*personas*) of Father and Son”.⁴¹ This creedal statement seems to have been originally written in Latin, and so presumably Hilary did not need to translate it. It was also available in Greek, although when it was first presented in this language is not known. Athanasius includes it in his *De synodis*, which is thought to have been composed around 359-362.⁴² In his rendition of the creed Athanasius uses the term *prosopon*, in reference to the Father and the Son.

³⁸ *The First Creed of the Council of Sirmium (351)* in *De syn.* 38. See also Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy*, 318-381, 327.

³⁹ *The Creed from the Council of Ancyra (358)*, anathema 9, in *De syn.* 22.

⁴⁰ *The Second Creed of the Council of Antioch (341)* in *De syn.* 32.

⁴¹ *The Second Creed of the Council of Sirmium (357)* in *De syn.* 11.

⁴² Athanasius, *Syn.* 2.28; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, xi.

Elsewhere, Hilary uses *persona* in relation to the fundamental error of Sabellianism, which considers God to be one person. For example, he points out that God is “one, not in person, but in nature” (*non persona unus est, sed natura*);⁴³ and that the unity between the Father and the Son is one of person, not of nature (*...unum sunt; non unione personae, sed aequalitate naturae*).⁴⁴ On two occasions, Hilary uses an adjectival form of *persona*, again in opposition to the Sabellian heresy. The first of these occurs during his explanation of an anathema from the council of Ancyra (358). He points out that this anathema condemns anyone “who shall proclaim a similarity of nature in the Father and the Son in order to abolish the personal meaning (*personalem significantiam*) of the word Son;”⁴⁵ the second occurs again in reference to the council of Ancyra, but this time in his summary of the theological positions held by the council Fathers. According to Hilary, the Fathers were “repugnant to a confusion of personal names (*personalium nominum*) so that there is not one subsisting (*subsistens*) who is called both Father and Son”.⁴⁶

iii. *Persona in De Trinitate*⁴⁷

Hilary employs *persona* and its cognates 35 times in *De Trinitate*.⁴⁸ The majority of these uses are associated with his exegesis of the Old Testament, in which he uses the approach known as “prosopographic exegesis”. This exegesis is found predominantly in Books 4 and 5, where he uses passages from the Old Testament to show against the Arians the truth about God, who is not solitary, but rather “God and God”⁴⁹, and about Jesus, who is “true God”,⁵⁰ and not God in some derived sense of the term.

Book 4

In Book 4, Hilary cites the Arian creed sent by Arius to the Bishop of Alexandria⁵¹ and proceeds to refute the first statement regarding the oneness of God.⁵² According to the Arians, God is one but singular, He is the Father, the first principle and origin of all things. In order to safeguard this oneness and transcendence of God the Father, they assign the divine attributes to him alone, and subordinate the Son. They thus maintain that the Son came forth from the Father, and received everything from him, whose being is prior to his:

⁴³ *De syn.* 69.

⁴⁴ *De syn.* 74.

⁴⁵ *De syn.* 22.

⁴⁶ *De syn.* 27. I have adjusted this translation.

⁴⁷ In this section I further developed my earlier study on this subject. See Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 51-59.

⁴⁸ Included amongst these uses of *persona* and its cognates is one adjectival application (*personali*) found in *De Trin.* 7.39.

⁴⁹ For example, see *De Trin.* 4.18, 4.22, 4.30 etc.

⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 1.24.

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 4.12-13.

⁵² *De Trin.* 4.15.

He [the Son] was created by the will of God before all times and ages, and has received both His life and His being from the Father, and the Father makes His own glorious qualities exist in Him. For the Father, in conferring the inheritance of all things upon Him, has not deprived Himself of those which have not been made and are still in His possession; He is still the origin of all things... God is the cause of all things, completely alone, without a beginning; the Son, however, has been brought forth from the Father without time, and has been created and has been formed before the world; still, He was not before He was born, but was born without time before everything, and He alone has the same substance as the Father alone. He is not eternal or co-eternal, nor was He uncreated at the same time with the Father, nor, as certain ones say, does He possess His being at the same time with the Father, or according to some, who advance two unborn principles, but as the oneness or principle of all things, in this manner God is also before all things... In so far as God confers upon Him His being, His glory, His life, and everything that has been given to Him, in so far God is His principle. But, He is His principle, that is to say, His God, since He is before Him.⁵³

In refuting the Arians' position, Hilary makes use of the same Old Testament passages which they use to support their claims.⁵⁴ He proceeds to interpret these in an orthodox manner, showing that rather than pointing to the singularity of the Godhead, they reveal the presence of another, namely the Son.⁵⁵ In order to gain an orthodox understanding of these biblical texts, Hilary looks at the overall context in which they were written, and compares them with other passages.⁵⁶ He begins his defense of the true nature of the Godhead by agreeing with the Arians that God is indeed one, as revealed in the first commandment and the fundamental statement of faith found in Deuteronomy: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one" (cf. Dt 6:4).⁵⁷ However, this oneness does not discount the divinity of the Son, and Hilary proceeds to show that this is revealed by other statements made by God through Moses:

In professing our faith in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall have to refer to the testimony of him [Moses] upon whose authority the heretics, while acknowledging only the one God, believe that we must deny to the Son that which God is.⁵⁸

In his argument, Hilary also makes use of New Testament passages that explicitly reveal the plurality of the Godhead, and/or the divinity of the Son, in order to shed light on these Old Testament texts, which implicitly point to the same truths. Thus, armed with the following verse from Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, "One God the Father from whom

⁵³ *De Trin.* 4.9.

⁵⁴ *De Trin.* 4.15.

⁵⁵ *De Trin.* 4.14.

⁵⁶ *De Trin.* 4.14.

⁵⁷ *De Trin.* 4.14.

⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 4.15.

are all things, and our one Lord Jesus through whom are all things” (cf. 1 Cor 8:6)⁵⁹, Hilary examines Moses’ account of the origin of the world. He points out that the declaration of God: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let there be a division between the water and the water. And so it was” (cf. Gen 1:6), reveals the presence of both the Father and the Son.⁶⁰ The Father is “the God from whom” who commands that there be a firmament, and the Son is “the God through whom”, who creates the division (cf. 1 Cor 8:6).⁶¹ Hilary further emphasizes his point by directing the reader to the prologue of the Gospel of John which states that “All things were made through him” [the Son] who was with God [the Father] in the beginning (cf. Jn 1:3).⁶² He cites another passage from Genesis in support of his position: “For he spoke and they were made, he commanded and they were created” (Ps 148).⁶³ According to Hilary this passage also reveals the Father who commands and the Son who performs:

And if you wish to deny that the Father has said: ‘Let there be a firmament,’ you will again hear the same Prophet asserting: ‘For he spoke and they were made: he commanded and they were created.’ Hence, the words that were said, ‘Let there be a firmament,’ reveal that it was the Father who spoke, but when it was added: ‘And so it was,’ and when it is said that God made it, we are to understand by this the *persona* of the agent who made it. For, ‘he spoke and they were made.’ He alone was certainly not the one who willed it and did it. ‘He commanded and they were created.’ Certainly, it did not come into existence because it pleased Him, so that the function of a mediator between Himself and what was to be created would have been superfluous.

Consequently, the God from whom are all things says that they are to be made, and the God through whom are all things makes them, and the same name is applied equally in the designation of Him who commands and for the work of Him who carries it out. If you will dare to claim that the Son is not referred to when it is stated: ‘And God made it,’ what will be your attitude to where it is said: ‘All things were made through Him,’ and those words: ‘And our one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things,’ and that statement: ‘He spoke and they were made’?⁶⁴

Later Hilary explores the text from Proverbs 8, to show that the Son was with the Father in the beginning:

When he placed certain fountains under the heavens, when he made the strong foundations of the earth, I was with him forming it. But it was I in whom he rejoiced. But daily I rejoiced in his sight at all times, when he rejoiced after the completion of the world, and he rejoiced in the sons of men (cf. Prov 8.28-31).⁶⁵

⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 4.15.

⁶⁰ *De Trin.* 4.16.

⁶¹ *De Trin.* 4.16.

⁶² *De Trin.* 4.16.

⁶³ *De Trin.* 4.16.

⁶⁴ *De Trin.* 4.16.

⁶⁵ *De Trin.* 4.21.

Hilary points out that although the persons are distinguished from one another in this text, this is done in such a way that the work could be referred to either of them: “*Personarum autem ita facta distinctio est, ut opus referatur ad utrumque.*”⁶⁶ This is an important point concerning the Son’s divinity since the work referred to in this text is that of creation, a work which only God can perform, although Hilary never explicitly states this.

In his discussion of Genesis 16:7, where the “Angel of the Lord” speaks to Agar, Hilary maintains that this “angel” is actually the Son of God, since the powers he possesses to “multiply her posterity” are beyond that of an angel (Gen 16:9-10).⁶⁷ This argument is underpinned by Hilary’s belief that the power of a thing reflects its nature, which we discussed previously. Hilary’s view that the angel is the Son of God is corroborated by the fact that later Agar refers to this “angel” as the “Lord” and as “God” (Gen 16:13).⁶⁸ Furthermore, Isaiah refers to the Son of God as the “angel of the great Council” (Is 9:16).⁶⁹

What, then, has Scripture testified about the one who, as an angel of God, spoke about matters that are proper to God alone. ‘She called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “Thou, God, who hast seen me.”’ First, the angel of God; secondly, the Lord, for ‘she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her’; then, thirdly, God, ‘Thou, God, who hast seen me.’ The same one who is called the angel of God is the Lord and God. But, according to the Prophet, the Son of God is ‘the angel of the great Council.’ In order that the distinction of persons (*personarum distinctio*) should be complete, He was called the angel of God, for He who is God from God is also the angel of God. But, that due honor should be rendered to Him, He was also proclaimed as the Lord and God.⁷⁰

In his explanation and defence of the orthodox meaning of the oneness of God, Hilary also turns to the psalms, citing the following verse from Psalm 44: “God thy God hath anointed thee”. According to Hilary the two pronouns in this verse, “thy” and “thee”, point to the presence of two distinct persons, while the shared name of “God” reveals the divine nature of each:

For, by ‘thee’ and ‘thy’ a distinction has been made only in regard to the person (*personae*), but none whatsoever in the confession of the nature. For, ‘thy’ has been referred to the author, but ‘thee’ to point out Him who is from the author... But it does not follow that, because the Father, therefore, is God, the Son also is not God, for ‘God, thy God, hath anointed thee.’ That is to say, while he indicates both the author and Him who has been born from Him, he has assigned to both the name of the same nature and dignity in one and the same statement.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Cf. *De Trin.* 4.21.

⁶⁷ *De Trin.* 4.23.

⁶⁸ *De Trin.* 4.23.

⁶⁹ *De Trin.* 4.23.

⁷⁰ *De Trin.* 4.23.

⁷¹ *De Trin.* 4.35.

In support of their erroneous claim that God the Father is a solitary person, the Arians utilise the following passage from Deuteronomy, “There is no God besides me” (Dt 32:39). To interpret this passage in a catholic manner, Hilary points out that it needs to be understood in terms of another passage, “God is in Thee” (Is 45:14).⁷² This latter passage does not reveal the presence of one who is alone, but rather one in whom another abides. Furthermore, the one who dwells is separated from the one in whom he dwells “only by a distinction of person, not of nature” (*personae... distinctione, non generis*).⁷³ According to Hilary, God cannot take up his abode in an alien nature, therefore the Son must also be God.

In summing up Book 4, Hilary explains that the Son of God is not a second God but God from God, as revealed by the scriptures. He is born from the Father and united to him in substance, not person:

For, when Israel hears that its God is one, and no other God will be made equal to God, the Son of God, so that He is truly God, it is revealed that God the Father and God the Son are clearly one, not by a union of person, but by the unity of nature. (*absolute Pater Deus et Filius Deus unum sunt, non unione personae sed substantiae unitate*). The Prophet does not permit God the Son of God to be likened to a second God, because He is God.⁷⁴

Book 5

In Book 5, Hilary points out that the Arians craftily profess belief in the “one God”, whom they confess to be the “one true God”, in order to “exclude the Son of God from possessing the nature or the divinity of God”.⁷⁵ Although they refer to the Son as “God”, they do so in a nominal sense, understanding him to possess this name through means of adoption, not nature.⁷⁶ Hilary devotes Book 5 to responding to this erroneous position by showing that the Son is “true God”, basing his arguments on a number of passages from the Old Testament which he cited in Book 4. In his defense of the divinity of the Son, Hilary also makes use of the important philosophical principle concerning the truth of a thing. This he states is to be found in its powers and nature. To illustrate his point, as discussed earlier, Hilary uses the example of wheat, showing that we acknowledge that something is truly wheat when we recognize its characteristics.⁷⁷ Using this notion, that the power of a thing points to the truth of its nature, Hilary turns to the scriptures to see whether they reveal that the Son, whom Moses called “God”, is “true God”.

⁷² *De Trin.* 4.38.

⁷³ *De Trin.* 4.40.

⁷⁴ *De Trin.* 4.42.

⁷⁵ *De Trin.* 5.3.

⁷⁶ *De Trin.* 5.34.

⁷⁷ *De Trin.* 5.3.

Hilary begins his investigation by reexamining the text from Genesis 1:6: “‘And God said: let there be a firmament... And God made the firmament.’” He points out that this text shows the presence of two persons – one who speaks, and one who acts:

The Law did not indicate any other meaning except that of person (*personae*) when it declared: ‘And God said: let there be a firmament,’ and added: ‘And God made the firmament.’ Moreover, it did not make any distinction in the power, nor did it separate the nature, nor did it make any change in the name, for it merely acquainted us with the thought of Him who speaks in order to bring out the meaning of Him who acts...⁷⁸

Hilary then deduces that if the one who speaks is true God, then the one who makes must also be true God, since he possesses the power to create - a power which is characteristic of the divine nature. Thus, in the creation of the world and the title allocated to him by scripture, the genuine divinity of the Son is revealed, who is equal to God in both name and nature:

To accomplish what has been said belongs to a nature in which the agent can carry out what the speaker has declared... Accordingly, we have a true nature in God the Son of God. He is God, He is the Creator, He is the Son of God, He can do all things... The Son of God, therefore, is not a false God, nor an adopted God, nor a God in name, but a true God. And there is no need to explain anything from the contrary opinion that He is not God, for to me it suffices that there is in Him the name and the nature of God. For, He is God through whom all things have been made. The creation of the world has told me this concerning Him. God is made equal to God by the name; the true nature is made equal to the true nature by means of the work. As the indication of an omnipotent God is contained within the word, so the concept of an omnipotent God is contained in the deed.⁷⁹

Hilary then turns to Genesis 1:26, “Let us make mankind in our image and likeness”.⁸⁰ According to Hilary, these words indicate the presence of God the Father who speaks and God the Son, who is spoken too. They share the same image and therefore the same nature, while at the same time being distinct.⁸¹ In reference to the discussion between Agar and the “Angel of God”, mentioned in Book 4, Hilary points out that just as “God through the Law wished to reveal the person (*personam*) with the name of Father, it spoke of the Son of God as an angel” (Gen 16:7 ff).⁸² The term “angel” was used to indicate his office as a “messenger” of God, while his nature was affirmed when he was later called “God”.⁸³ In the narrative concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Hilary shows how the person of the Son of God is again revealed. He is “the Lord who poured down from the Lord” (cf. Gen 19:24),

⁷⁸ *De Trin.* 5.5.

⁷⁹ *De Trin.* 5.5.

⁸⁰ *De Trin.* 5.7.

⁸¹ *De Trin.* 5.7.

⁸² *De Trin.* 5.11.

⁸³ *De Trin.* 5.11.

the just judge whom Abraham argued would not “kill the just with the wicked” (Gen 18:25), and thus the “true God”.⁸⁴ In Book 5, chapter 24, Hilary provides a summary of those passages from the Old Testament which point to the divine nature of the Son of God. According to him, it is through the Christian revelation that we understand the Old Testament fully and its presentation of Christ as a distinct “person” involved in all the works associated with God - the creation of the world; the formation of “man” in his image; the judgement of people; the distribution of blessings; and the imparting of knowledge concerning God:

We are now of the opinion that the thorough discussion of this subject shows no solid argument that would justify anyone in thinking that there is a true and false God when the Law speaks of God and God and Lord and Lord, and that it has not expressed any distinction either in the names or in the natures, so that we cannot grasp the nature of the names from the names of the nature. The might of God (*virtus Dei*), the power of God (*potestas Dei*), the thing of God (*res Dei*), and the name of God (*nomen Dei*) are in Him whom the Lord proclaimed as God. According to the plan that was revealed in the Gospel, it indicated a distinction in person (*personae significationem*) in the God who is obedient to the commands of God in the creation of the world, in God the Creator forming man according to an image that was common both to Him and to God, and the Lord from the Lord as a judge in passing sentence upon the people of Sodom, as God the angel of God in the distribution of blessings, and in the imparting of knowledge about the mysteries of the Lord.⁸⁵

Persona in New Testament Exegesis

In relation to New Testament passages, Hilary uses *persona* only four times in *De Trinitate*. In Book 3, he shows how the statement from John’s Gospel: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30), provides proof that the Son is of the same nature as the Father.⁸⁶ The Son, who is the “Begotten”, receives everything from the Father who is the “Begetter”, and in this sense they are one, while remaining distinct in person:

When you hear the Son declare: ‘I and the Father are one’, apply this statement to the persons (*personis*), and allow to the begetter (*gignenti*) and the begotten (*genito*) the truth that has been revealed concerning them. They are one as are he who begets and he who is begotten.⁸⁷

Later, in Book 7, Hilary again turns to the Johannine writings in his defence of the Son’s divine nature and personhood. This time he cites John 14:10 “Do you not believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I speak not on my own authority. But the Father dwelling in me, it is he who does his works”.⁸⁸ He points out

⁸⁴ *De Trin.* 5.16.

⁸⁵ *De Trin.* 5.24.

⁸⁶ *De Trin.* 3.23.

⁸⁷ *De Trin.* 3.23.

⁸⁸ *De Trin.* 7.40.

how this text reveals the presence of the divinity abiding in the Son, who is born from the Father. Hilary focuses especially on the second to last verse “The words that I speak to you I speak not on my own authority”, showing how the use of the pronoun “I” points to the distinct personhood of the Son, who speaks not of himself but “bears testimony to the birth of God in Him from God the Father”.⁸⁹

Hilary’s third application of the term *persona* in reference to the New Testament occurs in Book 9. Here, he writes with extraordinary insight on the two natures in Christ, using Philippians 2:6-11 as his reference point. Hilary explains that the Son’s divine nature remains even though he empties himself and takes the form of a slave:

[I]n our Lord Jesus Christ we are discussing a person of two natures, because He who was in the form of God received the form of a slave in which He was obedient unto death. The obedience unto death is not in the form of God, just as the form of God is not in the form of a slave. According to the mystery of the Gospel's plan of salvation, however, He who is in the form of a slave is no different from Him who is in the form of God; still, since it is not the same thing to receive the form of a slave as it is to remain in the form of God, He who was in the form of God could not receive the form of a slave except by emptying Himself, since the combination of two forms is incongruous. But... the change of the outer appearance in the body and the assumption of a nature did not remove the nature of the Godhead that remains, because it is one and the same Christ who changes and assumes the outward appearance (*quia unus adque idem Christus sit et demutans habitum et adsumens*).⁹⁰

Towards the end of Book 9 we see Hilary’s final application of the term *persona* in relationship to a New Testament text. Here, Hilary explains that the Son does exactly what the Father wills because he receives the fullness of the divine nature through his birth from the Father. Therefore, he does not need to learn of the Father’s will through questioning or communication, which would necessitate some change. The birth, says Hilary, is revealed by the designation of the person of the Son, who said: “For I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 6:36).⁹¹ According to Hilary, this text not only shows that the Father and the Son are united in the one nature as they share the same will, but are distinct, for the Son is revealed as a unique person willing what the Father wills.⁹²

iv. *Persona in Tractatus super Psalmos*

Hilary composed the *Tractatus super Psalmos* towards the end of his life, around 364-67, following his exile to the east.⁹³ Like his other exegetical writings and his dogmatic works, the *Tractatus* is fundamentally Christocentric. According to Hilary, the psalms need

⁸⁹ *De Trin.* 7.40.

⁹⁰ *De Trin.* 9.14.

⁹¹ Cf. *De Trin.* 9.74.

⁹² *De Trin.* 9.74.

⁹³ Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on the Psalms*, 1.

to be interpreted in the light of the revelation of Christ, which he implies is the only way they can be genuinely understood:

There is no doubt that the language of the Psalms must be interpreted by the light of the teaching of the Gospel. Thus, whoever he be by whose mouth the Spirit of prophecy has spoken, the whole purpose of his words is our instruction concerning the glory and power of the coming, the Incarnation, the Passion, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our resurrection. Moreover, all the prophecies are shut and sealed to worldly sense and pagan wisdom, as Isaiah says, *And all these words shall be unto you as the sayings of this book which is sealed* (Is 29:11).⁹⁴

Strongly influenced by Origen, Hilary makes extensive use of allegory and typology to expound the spiritual meaning of the psalms, especially in relation to Christ and the mysteries which encompass his life:

The whole is a texture woven of allegorical and typical meanings, whereby are spread before our view all the mysteries of the Only-begotten Son of God, Who was to be born in the body, to suffer, to die, to rise again, to reign forever with, those who share His glory because they believed on Him, to be the Judge of the rest of mankind.⁹⁵

An important aspect of Hilary's methodology involves the identification of the persons speaking in the psalms. Hilary's extensive use of this approach, which we have referred to as "prosopographic exegesis", accounts for the frequent application of the term *persona* and its cognates in the *Tractatus*. He uses this term more often in this work than any other. In his introduction to the *Tractatus*, Hilary points out the significance of identifying the persons speaking in the psalms, which he considers to be of primary importance in understanding the texts. According to Hilary, the *persona* speaking in the psalms is frequently the Father, or the Son, and occasionally the prophet, who speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This person sometimes changes, as is indicated by a pause in the psalm:

The primary condition of knowledge for reading the Psalms is the ability to see as whose person we are to regard the Psalmist as speaking, and who it is that he addresses. For they are not all of the same uniform character, but of different authorship and different types. For we constantly find that the Person of God the Father is being set before us, as in that passage of the eighty-eighth Psalm: I have exalted one chosen out of My people, I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have I anointed him. He shall call Me, You are my Father and the upholder of my salvation. And I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth; while in what we might call the majority of Psalms the Person of the Son is introduced, as in the seventeenth: A people whom I have not known has served Me; and in the twenty-first: they parted My garments among them and cast lots upon My vesture. But the contents of the first Psalm forbid us to understand it either of the person of the Father or of the Son: But his will has been in the law of the Lord, and in His Law will he meditate day and night... obviously it is not the person of the Lord

⁹⁴ *Instr.* 5.

⁹⁵ *Instr.* 5.

speaking concerning Himself, but the person of another, extolling the happiness of that man whose will is in the Law of the Lord. Here, then, we are to recognise the person of the Prophet by whose lips the Holy Spirit speaks, raising us by the instrumentality of his lips to the knowledge of a spiritual mystery.⁹⁶

In his employment of the term *persona* in the *Tractatus super Psalmos*, as in *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*, Hilary always denotes a real subject, as opposed to some sort of mask.⁹⁷ However, unlike *De Trinitate*, where he also uses *persona* in his interpretation of Old Testament passages, Hilary's focus is not primarily on defending the divinity of the Son, but rather on a mystical interpretation of the psalms. In saying this, in the *Tractatus* he confirms certain doctrinal positions concerning the Son's divinity and personhood, which were elaborated upon in *De Trinitate*. For example, in his commentary on Psalm 2, Hilary identifies the presence of the two persons of the Father and the Son - just as they are one in nature, so too they are one in the contempt and honour which they are shown:

Earlier two persons (*duplex persona*) have been distinguished, as it is said: *Adversus Dominum et Adversus Christum eius*; also there is recourse to the twin expressions: "laughter" and "derision". For the contempt of the one is not separated from the other and the religious honor has not been divided from each of the two. For they, who are one in the glory of their divinity through the innate and true nature of the Father and Son in accordance with themselves, are also one both in the injustice of contempt and in the honor of reverence and the one is either honoured or despised in the other... Equality of worship is expected for both and the injustice of contempt for one applies to both.⁹⁸

Hilary's defence of the Son's divinity in the *Tractatus* also ties in with one of the key themes in this work, which concerns the divinisation of humankind through and in Christ.⁹⁹ By becoming man, Christ becomes the instrument and model through which humanity is saved. However, He can only save humankind because He is fully divine. The significance of this truth may explain why Hilary sometimes makes a point of affirming Christ's divinity, when he has identified his humanity in a number of the psalms. In support of his position, he often has recourse to Philippians 2.6-11.¹⁰⁰ For example, in his exegesis of Psalm 2, Hilary quotes the passage from Philippians in full, and follows it with repeated statements to explain that although the Son took on the "form of a slave", He remained divine. He cites the same passage again in his exegesis of Psalm 118, and again affirms the divinity of the Son.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ *Tr. Ps.* 1.1.

⁹⁷ For example, see the citation above.

⁹⁸ *Tr. Ps.* 2.10. This translation is mainly from Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on the Psalms*, 147.

⁹⁹ See Burns, *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on the Psalms*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁰¹ *Tr. Ps.* 2, 118. Cf. *ibid.*, 154.

3. Conclusion

Hilary uses the term *persona* almost exclusively in his doctrinal and exegetical works. However, his use of this term differs somewhat across these works. This could be for a number of reasons, for example, the different aims of the works and their intended audiences; as well as the development of his Trinitarian theology and subsequent need for a term to express the distinct reality of the Father and the Son.

In his *Commentary on Matthew*, written prior to his exile, Hilary uses the term *persona* in his exegesis of Matthew's Gospel with the aim of uncovering the spiritual meaning underpinning this text. For example, he sometimes identifies the person spoken of in the text in order to explain that he/she symbolizes something or someone else. In this work he only uses *persona* occasionally in reference to the Father and the Son.

Hilary uses the term *persona* somewhat differently in *De synodis* where he employs it primarily in his description of the various theological positions held by the eastern bishops, and expressed at their councils. On only a few occasions does he use it in direct reference to the persons of the Trinity. This is probably because the Greek creedal statements that he cites in this letter use the term *hypostasis* for the divine persons, which Hilary translates with *substantia*, the Latin equivalent. Hilary reserves *persona* for his translation of the Greek *prosopon*, which is used only twice in these statements and never to denote the divine persons in a direct manner. From his experience in the east Hilary may have been aware of the Sabellian connotations associated with *prosopon* and therefore its Latin equivalent *persona*. This could account, at least in part, for his limited use of *persona* in reference to the divine persons in this work. Interestingly, on two occasions where he does use *persona* in this manner, he qualifies the term with a form of *subsistentia* to emphasise the real and distinct existences of the Father and the Son. This is the only work where such a qualification is found. It seems to be aimed at the easterners, to whom this letter is addressed in part, and to whom the Sabellian heresy was particularly repugnant.

In *De Trinitate* Hilary employs the term *persona* also in a particular theological manner, but in this work he uses it primarily to indicate the distinct existence of the Son alongside the Father in the Godhead. This is evidenced in the sacred scriptures, and in particular the Old Testament. Although God is one, he is not a solitary person, as the Arians claim, but rather a unity of persons. In *De Trinitate*, Hilary shows how the oneness of God declared by Moses and used by the Arians to support their erroneous position, needs to be understood in the light of other scriptural statements. For example, in the formation of the first human beings God speaks in the plural indicating the presence of two persons - the Father who speaks and the Son who is spoken too. Hilary points out that although the Father

and the Son are revealed as distinct persons, they are also united in the one Godhead, for “man is made perfect as the [one] image of God”.¹⁰² Against the Arians, Hilary also shows that the Son is “true God”, for he is God by nature, not appointment. This is shown by the power of his deeds which could only be performed by God.

Hilary uses the term *persona* more frequently in the *Tractatus super Psalmos*, than in any other work. As in the *Commentary on Matthew*, Hilary uses *persona* primarily in his exegesis of the scripture in the *Tractatus*. However, unlike the Matthaicum commentary, Hilary frequently uses *persona* in reference to the Father and the Son. This is probably due to the fact that the earlier work focused on the Gospel of Matthew that speaks directly of Christ, whereas this work focuses on the psalms which do not. One of Hilary’s major aims is to show how understood in a catholic manner, that is in the light of the Christian revelation, the psalms really point to the life of Christ. Key to their interpretation is the identification of the person speaking, which is frequently the Father or the Son, and at times the prophet under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Although the primary aim of this work is not the defence of the orthodox truth concerning the Son and his position within the Godhead, like *De Trinitate*, this theme is very evident in his exegeses of certain psalms.

B. The Use of Subsistere and Res in Reference to the Divine Persons

Hilary uses the verb *subsistere* on occasion to refer to a divine person.¹⁰³ *Subsistere* indicates the existence of something by means of its substance, in other words *per se*.¹⁰⁴ It also shows forth the mode in which a person exists. For these reasons, its use sheds light on Hilary’s conception of a divine person, who is distinct subject, existing in the Godhead:¹⁰⁵

the life and subsistence of Christ is such that He is within the subsisting God, and within Him, yet having a subsistence of His own. For Each subsists in such wise as not to exist apart from the Other, since They are Two through birth given and received, and therefore only one Divine nature exists.¹⁰⁶

Hilary uses the term *res* on occasion in reference to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. He also uses it to refer to the divine nature of the Son when he points out that the “*res Dei*”, the “*virtus Dei*”, the “*potestas Dei*” and the “*nomen Dei*” “are in Him whom the Lord

¹⁰² *De Trin.* 11.49.

¹⁰³ “*Honoris confessio a naturae nomine non discernit, quos significatio subsistentes esse distinguit.*” *De Trin.* 4.30.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 288-289.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 52.

¹⁰⁶ “...sed ita esse ac subsistere, ut in subsistente insit; ita vero inesse, ut et ipse subsistat. Nam uterque subsistens per id non sine alio est, dum secundum generationem et nativitatem subsistentis natura non alia est.” *De Trin.* 7.41.

proclaimed as God”.¹⁰⁷ On one occasion, Hilary appears to use the term to indicate the real existence of the Son, when he refers to him as the “*res*” of the Father.¹⁰⁸ In regard to the Holy Spirit, He is also referred to once as the “*res naturae*”, which will be discussed in more detail in the chapters on the Spirit.

C. Phrases indicating Unity and Plurality

In *De Trinitate*, we see Hilary taking great care to convey the truth of the Godhead in a manner which upholds the mystery of its plurality and unity. This he does primarily in terms of the Father and the Son. He uses particular phrases to express this truth, which show that while Christ is other than the Father He does not differ from him in terms of nature, and yet they are not two gods but one from one (*non dii duo, sed unus ab uno*).¹⁰⁹

Hilary describes Christ as “God from God (*Deus a Deo*)”, and “Light from Light (*lumen a lumine*)”, using creedal formulae;¹¹⁰ he also refers to him as “the only-begotten God from the one-begotten God (*ab uno ingenito Deo unigenitus Deus*)”;¹¹¹ “the invisible one, from the invisible one, because the image of God is invisible”.¹¹² As well as this, Hilary uses the phrase “*alter ab altero*” to show that “One is from the other”, and “*alius in alio*”, to explain that “one is in the other”.¹¹³ He states explicitly that the two are one (“*uterque unum*”), meaning that they are one substance, and contrasts this with the phrase (“*non duo unus*”), to indicate that they are not one person. Later authors, such as Augustine, state this more clearly using the terms *substantia/natura/essentia* and *persona*.¹¹⁴

IV. Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, Hilary develops his understanding of divine personhood primarily from the sacred scriptures. The fundamental passage used by him, and other early Christian writers, is the baptismal formula found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. For Hilary, the names given to the persons of the Trinity in sacred scripture are of primary importance – these are not nominal but ontological, demonstrating the real existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are divine. These names are integral to Hilary’s understanding of the divine persons, especially the Father and the Son, whom he distinguishes by the properties which

¹⁰⁷ *De Trin.* 5.24. See also, 7.13, 9.37 and CUA 25, Book 5, footnote 24.

¹⁰⁸ *De Trin.* 12.54.

¹⁰⁹ *De Trin.* 2.11.

¹¹⁰ These phrases are found in the Nicene Creed. *De Trin.* 3.4.

¹¹¹ *De Trin.* 2.11.

¹¹² *De Trin.* 2.11.

¹¹³ *De Trin.* 3.4.

¹¹⁴ *De Trin.* 3.4. For example, see Augustine, *De Trin.* 5.9-10. As mentioned, the theological language used to express the unity and distinctions in the Trinity was still being established during Hilary’s time.

correspond to their names, namely, fatherhood and sonship. He also acknowledges the importance of the order of the names presented by scripture, which points to the primacy of the Father, as source of the Son and Holy Spirit.

As we have discussed, the language for expressing both the plurality and unity within the Trinity was still being established during Hilary's lifetime. We see him applying the significant term *persona* in a particular theological manner in *De Trinitate*, to refer to the Father and the Son. To this same end, he also employs on occasion a participle form of the verb, *subsistere*. Furthermore, in this same work, he uses certain phrases to express the distinctiveness of the first two persons of the Trinity, while at the same time showing forth their unity in the one divine substance. It is worth noting that in *De Trinitate*, Hilary uses these terms and phrases only in reference to the Father and the Son. On one occasion he employs the term *res* to indicate the person of the Son; he also uses this term once in a similar manner to refer to the Holy Spirit. This latter application will be discussed in more detail in the chapters on the Spirit.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *De Trin.* 5.24, 12.54.

5. The Person of God the Father

In this chapter, we will focus on Hilary's understanding of the personhood of the Father. This is based fundamentally on his name and the associated property of fatherhood, as well as his relation of origin. According to Hilary, the Father alone is without origin – He is the “*innascibilim Deum* (the Unoriginate God)” or in other words, the “*ingenitum Deum* (the Unbegotten God)”.¹ Hilary builds up his whole understanding of the Fatherhood of God in relation to the Son, whose divinity and personhood he primarily seeks to defend against Arianism and Sabellianism. At the heart of his theology of the Father and the Son is the mystery of the divine birth, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. In distinguishing the Father from the Son and vice versa, Hilary is careful to do so in a way that does not compromise their unity in the one divine substance. This can be seen throughout *De Trinitate*, where he attempts to hold both aspects of the Godhead together in a sort of tension. For example, when describing how the two persons are distinct, he will often qualify his position, with an explanation or confirmation of their unity.² Hilary's aim is to show that the Son is a real person, who possesses the divine nature in its fulness without compromising the Father's divinity, and yet who is not another God. It is in his attempt to fulfil this aim that his understanding of the divine personhood of both the Father and the Son unfolds.

I. *The Arian View of God's Fatherhood*

All of Hilary's opponents agree that God is Father, however they differ regarding the exact nature of his Fatherhood, and therefore regarding the very mystery of the Godhead. In their attempt to preserve and honor the divinity of the Father, the Arians deny the divinity of Christ, believing such a doctrine to be incompatible with an understanding of the Father's divine nature. God, they rightly claim, is one, invisible, and immutable. However, they incorrectly consider this oneness to be singular, and thus they believe only the Father to be true God. This is because they misunderstand the notion of the *divina nativitas*, which, according to Hilary, is foundational for an orthodox understanding of the Son's divinity.³ In

¹ *De Trin.* 2.10, 3.3.

² For example, see *De Trin.* 3.4, 7.41, 11.11.

³ The Arians view the concept of birth only in a creaturely manner, one involving change and pain, which cannot be associated with the Godhead. They fail to accept the possibility that this concept can be applied in an analogical way, and thus shed light on the mystery of God, without detracting from it. Their position, as

denying the divinity of Christ, the Arians also fail to comprehend the true paternity of the Father, whose Fatherhood is expressed through the generation of the eternal Son. For them, the scriptural title “Father” is to be understood only in a nominal sense in reference to the Son, who they believe was created, as other things of the world, and adopted as other sons.⁴ Against this erroneous position, Hilary points out emphatically that the name “Father” is referred to God in a real sense – God is truly Father and as such must have begotten a Son of the same nature, as his name indicates:

You hear of the Son; believe (*crede*) that He is the Son. You hear of the Father; remember (*memento*) that He is a Father... You hear the words ‘Father’ and ‘Son’. Do not doubt that they are what they are named... Realize that He is the Father who begot, and that He is the Son who was born, born with a true nature from that Father who is (*Pater qui est*)...⁵

In the above passage from *De Trinitate*, as in a number of others, it is worth noting Hilary’s exhortatory style, which is emphasized by his occasional use of the imperative. This style reveals the pastoral nature of the document. Hilary, acting in his role as bishop, is attempting to elicit belief from his readers in the divinity of the Son, in view of the influential but erroneous teaching of the Arians. As mentioned earlier, Hilary understands this truth to be of the utmost importance to the faithful, since it is indispensable for salvation - Christ is able to save precisely because He is fully divine. The great lengths Hilary goes to in order to defend the truth concerning Christ’s divinity, such as his exile, and the writing of *De Trinitate*, can be understood in light of its fundamental relevance to the entire Christian life.

II. *The Revealed Truth of God’s Fatherhood*

Foundational to Hilary’s understanding of God’s eternal Fatherhood is his appreciation that this fundamental truth could not have been reached by natural reason alone but needed to be revealed by God. Hilary considers this revelation as being of such importance for the salvation of humankind, that he refers to it as the Son’s greatest achievement (“*summa dispensationis*”).⁶ Indeed, the whole purpose of the Son’s incarnation, and passion, was to show that God is his Father in the true sense of the word. The Arians’ refusal to accept this truth is at the heart of their flawed theology.⁷

well as the concept of the *divina nativitas* will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. See also *De Trin.* 7.1, 7.2, 7.11.

⁴ *De Trin.* 4.3.

⁵ *De Trin.* 3.22, 9.61.

⁶ *De Trin.* 3.22.

⁷ See *De Trin.* 3.22.

III. *Divine Paternity and the Personhood of the Father*

The property of paternity is of primary significance to Hilary's understanding of the divine personhood of God the Father. In his discussions on the subject, Hilary implies that this property constitutes and distinguishes the Father as the first person of the Trinity. He possesses the nature of God as Father, says Hilary, "but He is only Father (*sed Pater tantum est*)".⁸ Hilary emphasizes this point by explaining that his

name does not admit of any parts, so that in one respect He is the Father and in another respect He is not the Father. The Father is the Father of everything that is in Him and all that He has, and not merely a part of what a father is is present in Him - not in the sense that the Father Himself is present in those things that are His own, but that in regard to those things that are His own He is wholly the Father of Him who receives His being from Him.⁹

Furthermore, the Father cannot be separated from his divine nature, for it is in this very nature that He subsists:

God... is the name of the impenetrable nature in the Father. God is invisible, ineffable, infinite. He possesses, indeed, as we have said, the name of His nature in the Father, but He is only the Father. He does not receive His Fatherhood in a human way from anywhere else. He Himself is unborn, eternal, and always possesses in Himself what He is.¹⁰

Against the Arians, Hilary implies that God is essentially Father because He generates a Son. For him, this generation distinguishes him as Father, just as the birth distinguishes the Son.¹¹

IV. *Divine Fatherhood and Analogy*

In deepening his understanding of God's Fatherhood, Hilary makes use of analogical reasoning. He shows how our notion of fatherhood, which we understand in terms of creatures, sheds light on the reality of God's paternity, whereby He generates a Son who possesses the same nature as himself:¹² "Every father", states Hilary, "is the father of all his own, since the birth proceeds from the whole of himself and remains in the whole of the child".¹³ Hilary also points out that just as in the case of human beings, the name, father, indicates the presence of a son, and vice versa, so too in terms of the divine persons.¹⁴ Thus,

⁸ *De Trin.* 2.6.

⁹ *De Trin.* 9.61.

¹⁰ *De Trin.* 2.6.

¹¹ *De Trin.* 11.4. Hilary also uses the term generation in reference to the Son, as it signifies his birth. See *De Trin.* 11.2.

¹² *De Trin.* 9.61.

¹³ *De Trin.* 7.14.

¹⁴ Cf. *De Trin.* 7.31. In this passage Hilary states that "the Son *consummat* the Father", thereby highlighting the importance of a true understanding of God who is Father in a real, not nominal manner. This

by referring to God as Father in the profession of faith, we acknowledge the presence of the Son, since the name, father, “contains in itself”, the name, son. Likewise, “the designation of a son reveals the father to us because there is no son except from a father”.¹⁵ Furthermore, this analogy sheds light on the transmission of the divine nature, which the Father bestows on the Son in its fullness, without any loss to himself.¹⁶

V. *The Fatherhood of God in Light of the Divine Nature*

Hilary is also careful to show the limitations of the above analogy. These are primarily related to the fact that God the Father is divine and thus everything in connection with him, including his paternity, must be understood in the light of his eternal, immutable, and infinite nature. It is only in this way that an orthodox understanding of the paternity of the Father can be developed. Throughout *De Trinitate*, Hilary looks at different aspects of the Father’s paternity in view of this divine nature, drawing the reader into a deeper comprehension of this mystery, which is intrinsically linked to the filiation of the Son. In this section, we will focus on Hilary’s understanding of the Fatherhood of God, in light of the divine attributes.

A. *Simplicity, Immutability and Divine Fatherhood*

God’s paternity is a perfection in him, for through it He is the source of a Son to whom He communicates all that He is, namely his divine nature.¹⁷ This perfection is linked to the attribute of simplicity, which characterizes the divine nature. It is for this reason that the Father can only communicate himself in his entirety and not in parts. Such a position has implications for our understanding of the Son’s nature - if the Father is simple, then He must generate a Son who is simple like himself, possessing the fullness of the divine nature, which is “one”:

The complete God is wholly alive and is one (*totus vivens et unum totum Deus est*). He is not composed of parts but is perfect by reason of His simplicity. Hence, in so far as He is the Father, He must be the whole Father of all His own [attributes] (*omnium suorum*) which are in the one whom He has begotten from Himself, while the perfect birth of the Son, with all of these [attributes] (*suis omnibus*), perfects Him as the Father. If, therefore, He is the proper Father of the Son, the Son must remain in the particular nature (*propriate*) which the Father possesses.¹⁸

phrase has been taken up by modern scholars in support of a view that the communication of divinity and personal identity is not entirely one-way, namely from the Father to the Son, but has a reciprocal dimension.

¹⁵ *De Trin.* 7.31.

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 6.12.

¹⁷ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 67.

¹⁸ *De Trin.* 9.61. I have made some adjustments to this translation.

The birth of the Son, which Hilary describes as perfecting the Father, results in no change or loss in him whose nature is immutable. Although the Arians also maintain that God is immutable, they consider this attribute to be incompatible with the notion of birth, which they can only understand in creaturely terms.

B. Divine Fatherhood and Love

Hilary also shows how God's Fatherhood can be understood in terms of love: "God", Hilary says "does not know how to be ever anything else than love, nor to be anything else than the Father".¹⁹ As Father, God is the source of the Son upon whom He bestows the fullness of his divine nature, holding nothing back for himself. There is no envy in love, states Hilary, thus the "Only-Begotten God" can be aptly described as the "Son of the [Father's] love".²⁰ The Father's total gift of himself to the Son has many implications for their relationship. Included among these is the union of will, since fullness of the Father's will is communicated to the Son by means of his paternity.²¹ It also brings with it "mutual knowledge" and "perfect cognition", "for no one knows the Father save the Son and him to whom the Son wills to reveal him, nor yet the Son save the Father" (Matt 11:27).²²

The Father's gift of himself to the Son differs significantly from that which occurs on a human level, since He gives the divine nature in its entirety to the Son. Thus, God the Son is not an instance of divinity, as a human son is an instance of humanity, but subsists in the divine nature as the Father does. It is the one nature in its fullness that both the Father and the Son possess, but they possess this nature in different modes – the Father in his Fatherhood and the Son in his Sonship, through the mystery of the *divina nativitas*. Hilary sheds light on this mystery by pointing out that the Son receives the divine nature from the Father in such a manner that it is given as it is possessed (*talis data est, qualis et habetur*).²³ In doing so, he reveals a profound insight into the divine birth in regard to the eternal nature of God.

C. The Eternality of the Father and its Implications for the Son

In Book 1 of *De Trinitate*, Hilary identifies God's eternal existence as his most fundamental characteristic, which we discussed earlier on. This was revealed to Moses by

¹⁹ *De Trin.* 9.61; See also 3.3.

²⁰ Cf. *De Trin.* 9.61, 9.60.

²¹ *De Trin.* 9.74.

²² *De Trin.* 2.6. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 67.

²³ *De Trin.* 8.43. Luis F. Ladaria, "Tam Pater Nemo", in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert J. Wozniak (London: T&T Clark International: 2012), 454.

God when He identified himself as “I am who am” (Ex 3:14).²⁴ Hilary recognizes the profundity of this statement which distinguishes God from his creatures, as the one who has no beginning or end, but rather always is.²⁵ Initially, Hilary understands this attribute in terms of God the Father, and then through the revelation of the New Testament, he recognizes it as a characteristic of the Only-begotten Son, who was with God in the beginning (cf. Jn 1:1).²⁶

In the final chapter of *De Trinitate*, Hilary again returns to the notion of God’s eternity, discussing it in greater detail, in order to develop his defense of the Son’s eternal existence. He reiterates that God the Father is eternal and deduces from this that the Son must be eternal also. If this were not the case then God could not be eternally Father, since there would be a time when the Son did not exist:

These names or nature permit nothing else to be between them. Either He is not always the Father if He is not always the Son, or, if He is always the Father, He, too is always the Son. Just as much time as you will deny to the Son so that He may be the Son, so much time is wanting to the Father so that He is not always the Father, so that, while He is always God, He is not always the Father in that infinitude in which He is God.²⁷

Hilary attempts to demonstrate the falsity of the Arian position, which effectively considers the Son to have been born in time, by comparing the notion of human birth with that of divine birth. He shows how the latter must be understood in terms of the eternal nature of God, since it concerns God “who always is”:

And who will doubt, therefore, that what was born in human things has not been at one time? But, it is one thing to be born from him who has not been, and it is another thing to be born from Him who always is... And he is not always a father who has previously advanced into adolescence through boyhood and into boyhood through the beginning of infancy. Hence, he who is not always a father has not always begotten. But, where there is always a father, so too, there is always a son.²⁸

Intrinsic to this argument of Hilary is the belief that if God is Father, in the real sense of the term, then his Fatherhood must be eternal, in keeping with his nature.²⁹

Hilary specifically points out that the attribute of eternity is not limited to the unborn Father, but also pertains to the Son. This he writes in the final book of *De Trinitate* which was probably composed toward the end of his exile to the east in 360. It seems possible that

²⁴ *De Trin.* 1.5.

²⁵ *De Trin.* 1.5.

²⁶ *De Trin.* 1.10.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 12.32. See also 1.41.

²⁸ *De Trin.* 1.23.

²⁹ This is in contrast to the Arians, whom Hilary states profess God’s eternal existence as God, but not as Father. *De Trin.* 12.34.

Hilary was responding to the erroneous position circulating in the east around this time, which considered the property of unbegottenness as a characteristic of the Godhead, and therefore attributed divinity only to the Father, and not the Son. This position was primarily associated with Eunomius of Cyzicus, who wrote a treatise on the subject around 361.³⁰

The Father's unbegottenness is in effect a negative property, which indicates the mode by which the Father is eternal. The Son, on the other hand, is eternal through his birth: Thus, Hilary states, the Father "is always eternal without an author" and the Son is "co-eternal with the Father, that is, with the author".³¹ In this way Hilary alludes to the important distinction between attributes, such as eternality which belong to the divine nature, and personal properties such as unbegottenness and begottenness, which belong to the individual persons and relations. Although he does not do so with the precision and technical terminology employed by later Christian writers, such as Basil of Caesarea and Augustine, he nonetheless anticipates later developments.³²

VI. *Divine Fatherhood and the Mystery of the Godhead*

Hilary uses the notion of God as Father to show that the Godhead is not singular, since God's Fatherhood points to the presence of the Son. At the same time, he is quick to show that the names Father and Son, and the notions they represent do not impede the oneness of God in any way. On the contrary, these names enable an orthodox understanding of this mystery, which concerns the unity of persons in the one divine nature:

The nature, however, is not changed by the birth so that it would not be the same according to the likeness of the nature. It is the same in such a manner that by reason of the birth and generation we must confess the two as one [nature] and not as one [person].³³

VII. *God as Father of the Son and Father of Creation*

The Arians hold that God is the Father of Christ, just as He is the Father of all creation, as mentioned earlier. They claim that Christ is referred to as "Son" because He was made by God, not born from him, and that the title "God" was bestowed upon him in the same manner that it was given to other deserving men.³⁴ In this way they aim to safeguard the

³⁰ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, 306-309.

³¹ *De Trin.* 12.21.

³² "The unengendered (*to agennêton*) indicates that which is not present... If you want to call this privative or an exclusive or a negative or something else of that kind, we will not argue with you. But I think that we have sufficiently shown that unengendered does not indicate that which exists within God". Basil of Caesarea, *C. Eun.* 1.10; Augustine, *De Trin.* 5.6-7. As cited in Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, chap. 8, footnote 95.

³³ *De Trin.* 7.31. I have made a minor adjustment to this translation.

³⁴ *De Trin.* 6.18.

oneness of God the Father, who alone is God. In response to such claims, Hilary explains how God's Fatherhood of Christ differs fundamentally from that of humans and the rest of creation - God is the Father of Christ in the true sense of the word, for through the divine generation He communicates to the Son the fullness of his divine nature; He is not the Father of creation in the same way. For Hilary the names "father" and "son" ascribed to the first two persons of the Trinity by scripture, are fundamental in understanding this truth. These names can only be applied in a real manner to persons who share the same nature, since a son receives his nature from his father by means of his birth. In contrast, the term "father" can be applied in a nominal sense. In such cases the "offspring" do not possess the same nature as their source. In this manner God is referred to as the "Father" of creation – as the source of created things, which do not possess the divine nature:

The heretics... declare that the relationship between the Father and the Son resembles that between the Father and the universe, so that the names Father and Son are rather titular than real. For the names are titular if the Persons have a distinct nature of a different essence, since no reality can be attached to the name of father unless it be based on the nature of his offspring. So the Father cannot be called Father of an alien substance unlike His own, for a perfect birth manifests no diversity between itself and the original substance. Therefore we repudiate all the impious assertions that the Father is Father of a Son begotten of Himself and yet not of His own nature.³⁵

The Arians also contend that God is the Father of the Son through an act of the will, just as He is the Father of creation. Hilary is adamantly opposed to this position for a number of reasons, the most fundamental being that it is incompatible with a catholic understanding of the divinity of the Son.³⁶ If the Son came into existence through an act of the Father's will, as the Arians maintain, then he could not be eternal, since it would mean that the Father was prior to him. As discussed above, if the Son is truly the Son of God the Father, then He must possess all the divine attributes and thus be eternal like him.

VIII. *God as Father of his Adopted Sons*

While Hilary acknowledges the exalted position given to us through baptism, by means of which we become "sons of God", he also distinguishes our particular sonship from the divine sonship of Christ - we are sons by adoption, whereas He is a Son by nature. Hilary emphasizes this point throughout *De Trinitate* through his frequent reference to the Son as the

³⁵ *De syn.* 20.

³⁶ For example, see *De Trin.* 6.18. It is important to note that what is orthodox for Hilary is what accords with an authentic understanding of the scriptures. As mentioned previously (p 69), Hilary maintains that the Arian's erred in their false interpretation of the scriptures.

“Only-begotten (*unigenitum*)”³⁷ – He is not one Son amongst many, but rather the only true Son of the Father:

We do not recognize the Lord Christ as a creature...but as God, the God who is the unique generation (*propriam generationem*) of God the Father. All of us, indeed, have been called and raised to be the sons of God through his gracious condescension, but He is the one Son of God the Father, and the true and perfect birth, which remains exclusively in the knowledge of both of them. This alone is our true faith: to confess the Son not as adopted but as born, not as one chosen (*electum*) but as one begotten (*generatum*).

Furthermore, we can become adopted “sons of God” only through Christ because He assumed our humanity. As the Only-begotten Son of God, He therefore has “brethren” “according to the flesh”, not according to his nature.³⁸

IX. God as Father of Christ’s Human Nature

Hilary also speaks of God’s Fatherhood of Christ in terms of his human nature. In relation to this Hilary maintains that “the Father ...is the Father for [Christ] just as He is for men, and God is God for [Christ] as well as for other slaves”.³⁹ He says this in reference to the Johanine passage where Jesus says “I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Hilary points out that Jesus is speaking here in terms of his human nature, which he assumed as a slave. It is in the form of a slave that He relates to God the Father in a human manner.⁴⁰

When referring to Christ’s assumption of our humanity, Hilary is always careful to point out that this in no way detracts from his divinity. This can be seen clearly in the following excerpt, which is part of the discussion found in Book 11 of *De Trinitate* that we have quoted from above. In this excerpt Hilary also expresses succinctly the different ways in which God’s Fatherhood can be understood in relation to Christ. His main aim is to emphasize the fundamental difference between God as Father of the eternal Word and Father of all flesh:

³⁷ See *De Trin.* 2.1, 2.4 etc.

³⁸ *De Trin.* 11.15.

³⁹ *De Trin.* 11.14.

⁴⁰ In the third part of the *Summa Theologiae* in which he explores the mystery of the Incarnation, Aquinas asks “Whether Christ as man is the adopted Son of God?” In his first objection, he cites the following quote from Hilary’s *De Trinitate*, 2.17: “The dignity of power is not forfeited when carnal humanity is adopted.” Aquinas points out that Christ is a Son by nature and therefore cannot be an adopted Son, since sonship is related to the person not the nature. He goes on to explain that the above statement is said metaphorically in reference to Christ. Aquinas, *ST* 3.23. Although there is some ambiguity in the manner in which Hilary speaks of the different ways Christ relates to the Father in his divinity and humanity, he is not at all suggesting that there are two persons in Christ.

He [Christ] himself, who contains the nature of us all in himself, through the assumption of the flesh, was what we are, nor did he cease to be what he had been, since he then had God as his Father by reason of his nature, and now has God as his father by reason of his earthly state. The Father is the God of all flesh, but not in the sense that He is the Father to God the Word.⁴¹

X. *The Father as the “Unoriginate”*

The second property by which Hilary distinguishes the personhood of the Father is that of ‘unbegottenness’. Hilary points out that this property pertains only to the Father, who alone is the Unbegotten God, without birth or source.⁴² Furthermore, since God is one, there cannot be two persons in God without origin – this is a point of differentiation within the Trinity, not unity.⁴³ At times, he refers to the Father as the “*innascibilim Deum*” (Unoriginate God), or the “*ingenitum Deum*” (Unbegotten God), in contrast to the Son who is the “*unigenitum Dei Filium*” (Only-begotten Son of God).⁴⁴ In this manner Hilary distinguishes between the Father and the Son on the basis of their origin rather than their substance, as his opponents do:⁴⁵

[The Church] knows the one unbegotten (*innascibilem*) God, she also knows the one only-begotten (*unigenitum*) Son of God. She asserts that the Father is eternal and not subject to any origin; similarly, she acknowledges the derivation of the Son from the eternal one, not that He himself has a beginning, but that He is from one who is without a beginning – He does not originate through himself, but from him who is from no one and who always is... He subsists in the nature in which He was born from the Father...⁴⁶

XI. *The Father as Source*

Throughout Hilary’s works we see a certain primacy ascribed to the Father as the fundamental source of all that is. In presenting this notion, Hilary often has recourse to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians where he states that “all things are from [the Father]” (cf. 1 Cor 8:6).⁴⁷ The Father is “wholly alive” and having “life in himself” is the source of life for the Son.⁴⁸ Even though He is the source, the Father never acts alone, but always through the Son due to their unity of nature brought about by means of the divine birth:

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 11.16.

⁴² *De Trin.* 11.16. See also 4.6, 9.54, 10.12, 10.21, 10.25; Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 209-210.

⁴³ *De syn.* 60.

⁴⁴ *De Trin.* 2.10, 3.3.

⁴⁵ For example, *De Trin.*, 2.10, 4.6; see also 3.3, 9.57.

⁴⁶ *De Trin.* 4.6-7.

⁴⁷ *De Trin.* 2.1.

⁴⁸ *De Trin.* 9.61.

[In] the work that the Son does there is the work of the Father and the work of the Son is the work of God... The Father... works in him through the nature of his birth.⁴⁹

This notion of the Father as source is also reflected in the order given to the Trinity in scripture and acknowledged by Latin and Greek scholars alike. In this divine *taxis*, the Father is always given first place followed by the Son and Holy Spirit. Hilary frequently refers to the Father as source of the Son, especially in his efforts to defend the latter's divinity. He also points out that the Father is the origin of the Holy Spirit who proceeds primarily from him. Although Hilary describes both the Son and the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father, he distinguishes between these processions in two important ways. Firstly, he only refers to the Son's procession as a generation. This he associates with the notion of birth – only the Son is born from the Father. Secondly, Hilary describes the Holy Spirit as receiving both from the Father and the Son, as opposed to the Son, who receives all from the Father. In these two processions, Hilary always presents the Father as the ultimate source. This is true even in the case of the Spirit, who receives from the Father and the Son, since what He receives from the Son has its origin in the Father.⁵⁰

XII. *The Father as Auctor*

Hilary often uses the term *auctor* in reference to the Father to denote his fundamental characteristic as source. In one of the most frequently quoted passages from *De Trinitate* he uses this term to distinguish the Father from the other two persons of the Trinity:

He commanded them to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that is, in the confession of the Origin (*Auctoris*), the Only-begotten, and the Gift. There is one source (*auctor*) of all. God the Father is one from whom are all things (*ex quo omnia*); and our Lord Jesus Christ is one through whom are all things and the Holy Spirit is one, the gift in all things.⁵¹

While the term *auctor* could be used to denote the Father's role in reference to the divine economy, in *De Trinitate* Hilary primarily uses the term to indicate the Father's relationship to the Son as the source and origin of his divinity.⁵² It is through the divine generation that the Father is the *auctor* of the Son. Related to this idea is the notion that the Father is the source of the Son's authority (*auctoritas*). According to Hilary, Christ states that He "can do nothing of himself" (Jn 5:19), not in order to reveal any weakness, but to show that the foundation for his authority comes from the Father who is at work in him.

⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 7.21.

⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 8.20.

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 2.1.

⁵² For example, see *De Trin.* 4.35, 5.11, 9.1, 9.31, 12.21, 12.26, 12.35, 12.51.

Christ also performs the same works which He sees the Father doing, revealing that He is equal in power to the Father, having received his nature from him.⁵³

Although Hilary upholds the primacy of the Father as the fundamental source of all, he does not see this as affecting his substantial unity with the Son. On the contrary, this characteristic of the Father distinguishes him from the Son in a manner which supports their unity, since only the Father is the *auctor* of the Son who in turn receives his being from him. However, Hilary does maintain that the Son owes the Father a certain debt of honour, given that he has received all from him.⁵⁴ This we will discuss in more detail when we look at the personhood of the Son.

Finally, as source of all things the Father is also the source of the overall plan of salvation.⁵⁵ It was He who sent his Only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world, and in doing so revealed the extent of his love. Although he focuses mainly on the Father as source, Hilary also hints at his equally important role as the end to which all things tend:

For the Head of all things is the Son: but the Head of the Son is God. And to one God through this stepping-stone (*gradu*) and by this confession all things are referred, since the whole world takes its beginning (*principium*) from Him to whom God Himself is the beginning (*principium*).⁵⁶

XIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the property of fatherhood is of fundamental importance in distinguishing the person of God the Father, in Hilary's Trinitarian theology. God is essentially Father and possesses this property because He generates the Son. Through the mystery of the divine birth, the Father is the source of the Son, who possesses all that He is from the Father, namely his divine nature. According to Hilary, this revelation of God as Father is of utmost importance to our faith, and the primary purpose of the incarnation. The Father is the source of creation as well, but his relationship to creatures is fundamentally different from that of the Son, for they are not divine, but created in time. Hilary also identifies the Father as the source of the Holy Spirit, but does not explain this in any depth, as He does in relation to the Son. He also refers to the Father as the "unbegotten" and "unoriginate" and in this manner distinguishes him from the Son who is the Only-begotten. Hilary is careful to show that the Father, although distinct from the Son, is united to him in

⁵³ *De Trin.* 9.45-46.

⁵⁴ *De Trin.* 9.53.

⁵⁵ This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ "*Et ad unum Deum omnia hoc gradu atque hac confessione referuntur: cum ab eo sumant universa principium, cui ipse principium sit (scil. Deus Pater).*" *De syn.* 60. Aquinas cites this passage in his *Commentary on the Sentences*: 1 Sent. 14.2.2.

the one divine substance through the mystery of the divine birth. For this reason, they always act together, albeit in different modes.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 69.

6. The Person of God the Son

In this chapter, our aim is to investigate Hilary's development of the personhood of the Son. This takes place primarily in the context of his polemic against Arianism, and also Sabellianism, which respectively deny the divinity and real existence of the Son. Hilary bases his arguments fundamentally on scripture, having recourse to passages from both the Old and New Testaments. In Books 4 and 5 of *De Trinitate*, Hilary tackles the Arian doctrine as outlined in the manifesto sent by Arius and his followers to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria just prior to the council of Nicaea (around 320). He bases his arguments primarily on Old Testament texts, which he interprets through the methodology known as "prosopographic exegesis", which we discussed in chapter 2. By means of this approach, he demonstrates how a number of Old Testament passages are really dialogues involving two persons, *personae*, namely the Father and the Son. In order to further validate his interpretations, Hilary refers to New Testament passages, using these as a lens through which to understand the Old Testament texts. Implicit to his methodology is his belief that all the scriptures point to Christ, and as such need to be understood in the light of the Christian revelation.

In defending the Son's divinity and personhood, Hilary identifies two significant properties that pertain specifically to him. The first of these involves his relationship with the Father as the Son of God, and the second relates to his origin as the Only-begotten. These properties correlate with those which Hilary associates with the Father. Thus, as the Father is distinguished by his Fatherhood, so the Son is differentiated from the Father by his Sonship; and as the Father is unbegotten, so the Son is the Only-begotten. Hilary uses these properties to show how the Son is a person distinct from the Father in a manner which in no way impinges on their unity in the one divine nature. The foundational concept for his defense of the Son's ontological relationship with the Father is the *divina nativitas*, which directly relates to the property of Sonship, and thus the title of "Son" given to him in the Gospels. Hilary also goes to some lengths to show how other scriptural titles, such as Word, Wisdom and Power, also point to the Son's divinity. Finally, in this chapter, we will examine Hilary's Christology, focusing on the light it sheds on his understanding of Christ's divine personhood.

I. *The Divine Birth*

We will begin our investigation by looking at the *divina nativitas*, since this is the central concept around which Hilary develops his theology of the first two persons of the Trinity. This analogical concept encompasses the fundamental notions of fatherhood and

sonship, which underpin Hilary's Trinitarian theology and his notion of divine personhood. The *divina nativitas* reveals a certain correspondence between human and divine birth, shedding light on the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead. Hilary explains the notion of birth, which underpins this concept clearly in the following passage:

in accordance with the judgment of the Evangelist and the common consent of all mankind, a son possesses equality with the nature of his father, but the equality is derived from the same nature, because a birth cannot come about in any other way, and every birth bears a relationship with that which begot it, since it has been formed from the same into that which it is.¹

However, the *divina nativitas* transcends the notion of human birth as it pertains to a nature that is divine and therefore spiritual, simple, perfect and eternal. Taking into account these attributes of the divine nature, Hilary shows how the concept of the *divina nativitas* can be applied to the Godhead in a plausible manner. The birth of the Son, points out Hilary, involves the transmission of the divine nature in its entirety, since there are no parts in God, who is simple and pure spirit. This birth is therefore perfect, as would be expected from God who is perfect. Furthermore, the *divina nativitas* represents an eternal notion, since God is eternal, it thus differs essentially from human birth, which takes place in time. On the most fundamental level, Hilary uses the *divina nativitas* to show in a credible and orthodox way, how the Son's nature does not differ from that of the Father's, even though He is a distinct person:

in an inconceivable and ineffable manner, before all time and ages, He [the Father] gave birth to the Only-begotten God from that which in Him was unbegotten, and through His charity and power He bestowed upon His birth everything that God is, and thus from the unbegotten, perfect, and eternal Father there is the Only-begotten, perfect, and eternal Son.²

Hilary's use and development of the notion of the *divina nativitas* in his polemic against the Arians, and other heresies, is a unique characteristic of his theology. He is the first among the Latin and the Greek writers to apply this concept in an extensive manner. Although it is alluded to in the few extant texts of the Homoiousians,³ it does not form the basis of their arguments in the way it does in Hilary's works.⁴ Furthermore, the *divinia nativitas* is not taken up in a direct manner by later writers who tend to focus on the related notions of fatherhood and sonship.

¹ *De Trin.* 9.44.

² *De Trin.* 3.3.

³ For example, see Epiphanius, *Pan.* 18.6 ff.

⁴ See the chapter entitled "The Name and Birth of God", in Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 136 ff.

As mentioned, Hilary develops his notion of the divine birth from the scriptures, and in particular the New Testament. According to Hilary,

we must cite the doctrines of the Gospels and the Apostles for a complete explanation of this faith, in order that we may understand that the Son of God is God, not by a nature alien to or different from that of the Father, but that He belongs to the same Godhead, since He exists by a true birth.⁵

Foundational to the notion of the divine birth are the names, “Father” and “Son”, accorded to the first two persons of the Trinity by scripture. In opposition to the Arians and Sabellians, Hilary understands these as having real, ontological significance. The mystery of the divine birth is also elucidated in the profession of faith, whereby God is said to be “born from God in the manner of a light from a light”.⁶ When a light sends forth its substance it suffers no loss, but rather “gives what it has and has what it gives”, so too when God is born from God.⁷ Thus, by means of the divine birth the Son receives all from the Father, while the Father experiences no diminution. This, says Hilary, is the faith of the Church, who “worships the true Godhead in the Son because of the true nature of his birth”.⁸ He encourages his readers to accept the notion of the birth of the Son from the Father, even though this concept transcends human ideas:

Do not remain in ignorance of the fact that from the unbegotten and perfect God the Only-begotten and perfect Son was born because the power of the birth transcends the concepts and the language of our human nature. And, furthermore, all the works of the world...⁹

A. *The Divine Birth and Heresies*

According to Hilary the fundamental error of the Arians is their rejection of the *divina nativitas*.¹⁰ They consider the notion of birth only in creaturely terms, thus rendering it unsuitable for application to the Godhead.¹¹ In doing so they fail to comprehend its

⁵ *De Trin.* 6.8. See also 7.25 and 8.4.

⁶ *De Trin.* 6.12. Hilary seems to be referring to the Nicene Creed here, which states that “God is from God”, and “light from light” and that the Son is “born from the Father”. The Greek verb used in this latter phrase is *gennetos*, which can be translated into Latin as *natum*, meaning to be born or begotten.

⁷ *De Trin.* 6.12. In *De Trin.* 7.29, Hilary analogically applies the image of a light from a light, and that of a fire from a fire, to the Godhead. He does so to assist his readers in comprehending the mystery of the Godhead, whereby the Son proceeds from the Father, in a manner which renders them both divine, and distinct. While acknowledging the deficiency of the analogy, he also believes that it is of some use.

⁸ *De Trin.* 6.11. Hilary makes this statement in the context of his critique of the Arian manifesto sent by Arius to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. According to Hilary, the Arians condemned certain heresies in this manifesto as part of a move to discredit the notion of the divine birth and its validity in explaining the mystery of the Godhead. *De Trin.* 6.9.

⁹ *De Trin.* 3.20-21.

¹⁰ For example, see *De Trin.* 1.16-17, 3.22, 6.9, 6.14, 6.43, 7.23, 8.4, 8.34, 10.6, 11.2, 11.4, 12.50.

¹¹ In the Arian confession, states Hilary, “only God the Father is the one God, in order that Christ may not be God in our faith, for an incorporeal nature does not admit the idea of a birth”. *De Trin.* 7.2.

importance as an analogical concept, which sheds light on the relationship between the Father and the Son.¹² For them, the Son is not a Son by birth, understood in any real sense, and therefore not God by nature, rather he is “a creature more excellent than the others”.¹³ By not admitting “the birth of a nature from an incorporeal God” they deny the oneness of the Son with the Father, and thus his essential likeness to him and true sonship.¹⁴

In his response to the Arians, Hilary acknowledges that there are limitations in applying the notion of birth to the Godhead in an analogical sense. On a human level, birth is associated with such things as intercourse, conception, time and delivery, which can never be associated with God, who is immutable and incorporeal.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Hilary believes that this notion, when purified of such creaturely connotations, and understood in terms of the divine nature, is indispensable for a true understanding of the divinity and personhood of the Son.¹⁶ It is through the divine birth, that the Son receives the divine nature from the Father, while remaining distinct by means of his relationship.

The Arians concede that the Son was born from the Father, however they understand this birth in a nominal, rather than a real sense. They consider the Son to have been born according to the order of creation, and therefore maintain that He is a creature.¹⁷ Although they recognize his unique relationship with the Father, and superiority to all creatures, they explain this in terms of his creaturely status, declaring him to be the “perfect creature of God”.¹⁸ Their position is however, fundamentally flawed - if the Son is a creature, he can never be truly divine, no matter how much perfection is ascribed to him. Underpinning their position appears to be the persuasive but defective philosophical world view concerning the order of being, which we have discussed. According to this view all being, from the ‘One’ to base matter, belongs to the same continuum. Such a system allows for an understanding that divinity can be held by degrees and therefore that the Son can be distinguished from the Father and yet have a higher standing than other creatures due to his ‘degree’ of divinity.

Another important aspect of the Arian doctrine is the belief that the Son is born from the Father, through an act of the Father’s will, not by means of the divine nature.¹⁹ By emphasizing the role of the Father’s will in the birth of the Son, the Arians secure the pre-

¹² *De Trin.* 7.2.

¹³ *De Trin.* 7.24.

¹⁴ *De Trin.* 7.24.

¹⁵ Cf. *De Trin.* 6.9.

¹⁶ At the same time, Hilary is well aware that any attempt to explain the notion of the divine birth will always fall short of the reality, since this notion concerns the very nature of God, who is beyond human comprehension. *De Trin.* 3.3.

¹⁷ *De Trin.* 6.18, 11.8.

¹⁸ See also *De Trin.* 6.5, 6.18.

¹⁹ *De Trin.* 6.11.

eminence of the Father as first principle and cause of all. However, such a position necessarily subordinates the Son, as it implies the Father's prior existence. In other words, the eternity of the Son is denied and therefore his divinity. Hilary insists that the opposite is true, clearly stating that the Son does not proceed from the Father as an act of his will, as with creatures, but through a perfect birth, by means of which he receives the divine nature. For Hilary, this birth is constituent of the nature:

To all creatures the will of God has given substance: but a perfect birth gave to the Son a nature from a substance that is impossible and itself unborn. All created things are such as God willed them to be: but the Son who is born of God has such a personality as God has. God's nature did not produce a nature unlike itself: but the Son begotten of God's substance has derived the essence of His nature by virtue of His origin, not from an act of will after the manner of creatures...²⁰ Hence, we have those sayings: 'I and the Father are one,' and 'He who has seen me has seen also the Father,' and 'I in the Father and the Father in me,'... because the nature of the birth completes the mystery of the Godhead in the Father and the Son, while the Son of God is nothing else than that which God is.²¹

The Arians also attempt to uphold the Father's position as first principle, as well as the integrity of his nature, by claiming that the Son came forth from nothing, as is the case with all created things. Consequent to this view they ascribe the divine attributes solely to the Father. According to them, "He alone is true, alone just, alone wise, alone invisible, alone good, alone powerful, alone immortal".²² Hilary shows the ludicrousness of this position by taking it to its logical conclusion: "If these attributes are in the Father alone" he states, "then we must believe that God the Son is false, foolish, a corporeal being composed of visible matter, spiteful, weak, and mortal".²³ In reality, the Son receives the divine nature, and therefore all the divine attributes, through his birth. It is the mystery of this birth which is the key to understanding how the Son's possession of these divine attributes in no way detracts from the dignity of the Father - by means of the birth the Father is able to communicate the fullness of his nature to the Son, without diminution to himself. Furthermore, the praise received by the Son, on account of his divinity, does not detract from the Father, but redounds to his glory since it reveals him as the author of a perfect offspring:

²⁰ *De syn.* 58. In *ST* 1.41.2., Aquinas discusses whether or not notional acts are voluntary. As part of his discussion he points out that there are two ways in which the Father can be said to have willed the Son. One of these was held by the Arians who claimed that the Father begot the Son by his will, in the sense of a causal principle. Aquinas points out the error of this claim, citing the above quote from Hilary in support of his position.

²¹ *De Trin.* 7.41.

²² *De Trin.* 4.9.

²³ *De Trin.* 4.9. Hilary's argument is based on the philosophical position that the divine nature must be possessed in full or not at all, and thus the Son is either "true God" with all the divine attributes inhering in his nature, or not God at all. See the earlier discussion on the subject in chapter 3.

The Son has nothing else than birth (*nihil enim nisi natum habet Filius*) and the tribute of praise which the begotten receives tends to the glory of his begetter. Hence, any supposition of disrespect disappears if our faith teaches that whatever majesty the Son possesses will aid in magnifying the power of Him who begot such a Son.²⁴

Ultimately, the Son's birth is his defining factor, as Hilary shows in the above passage.²⁵ It is this characteristic which distinguishes him from the Father.

In their doctrine, the Sabellians also discount an authentic understanding of the divine birth. They preserve the unity within the Godhead by claiming that the Father and the Son are one person, not two. While acknowledging that the miraculous works of the incarnate Christ have their source in God, they maintain that this source is God the Father.²⁶ Hilary utilises the mystery of the divine birth in an argument against them, pointing out that by means of this birth "a natural unity is revealed", while the Son is rendered distinct from the Father.²⁷

II. *Divine Sonship*

Although Hilary identifies two properties in relationship to the Son – sonship and begottenness – his primary focus is on sonship, which he links to the mystery of the divine birth.²⁸ This property is relative to that of fatherhood, since the presence of a son presupposes that of a father. It is of fundamental importance to Hilary's Trinitarian theology, given that filiation reveals the Son as a person, distinct from the Father, who is his source, and yet in union with him through the possession of an inherited, identical nature.

III. *The Importance of the Names "Son" and "God"*

The names "Son" and "God", used in reference to Christ in the sacred scriptures, reveal his filiation and divinity. As the Son of God, He is true God, possessing the same nature as the Father through the mystery of his birth. The Arians refute these claims maintaining that the names "Son" and "God" are referred to Christ only in a nominal sense. According to them, He is "Son" by adoption, and therefore "God" in a derived manner. They consider his sonship to be comparable to that of human beings who are adopted as sons through regeneration. Since they do not accept the divine birth, they cannot comprehend how

²⁴ *De Trin.* 4.10.

²⁵ *De Trin.* 4.10. By equating the Son with the notion of birth, Hilary anticipates later scholars such as Aquinas who cites this statement from Hilary in his *Summa Theologiae* 1.40.3. In this question Aquinas points out that filiation is the fundamental property that characterizes the Son. Cf. FC 25, chap. 4, footnote 28.

²⁶ Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 62.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 7.5.

²⁸ Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 69.

Christ can be the true Son of God in a manner which upholds the oneness of God, and his immutable, incorporeal nature.²⁹

In defending the orthodox understanding of the names “Son” and “God” in reference to Christ, Hilary explains how a name can be applied in two ways. In the first place, a name can be conferred upon a person or thing, in an external manner.³⁰ For example, when Moses was told that he would be “given as god to Pharaoh” (Ex 7.1). In this instance, the name “god” was not used to indicate that Moses would receive the nature of God, but rather that he would be given divine power to perform miraculous deeds. Another example concerns the following verse from Psalm 81: “I have said: you are gods” (Ps. 81.6). Here, the title, “god” is conferred through the will of another.³¹ In the second place, a name can be used to indicate the nature of a subject. This latter instance applies to the manner in which Jesus is called “God” throughout the scriptures. For example, in the Prologue of John’s Gospel, which states that “the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). Hilary understands the use of the verb *erat* here as also pointing to the divine nature possessed by Christ, who *is always* God, or in other words, exists eternally:³²

When I hear: ‘And the Word was God,’ I understand that He is not only called God, but is shown to be God. As we have pointed out above, the name has been added as a title to Moses and to those who are called gods, but here the nature of the substance is indicated. Being (*esse*) is not an accidental name, but a subsistent truth, an abiding principle, and an essential attribute of the nature.³³

The name “God”, which is accorded to the Father and the Son in the scriptures, shows forth the unity that exists between them, since this name represents a nature that is “one and identical”.³⁴ The Father and the Son are therefore not two gods, but one - each subsists in the one divine nature, which the Son receives through the mystery of his birth.³⁵ To support his position, Hilary refers to Peter’s confession that Christ is “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). In this confession, Hilary asserts, Peter was not confirming Christ’s status as an adopted son.³⁶ If this had been the case, it would not have been considered remarkable, since other holy persons also share the same status. Rather, Peter was expressing his faith in the

²⁹ *De Trin.* 7.2.

³⁰ Although he does not say so explicitly, Hilary implies that a name given in this manner indicates that the subject receives some quality/ qualities associated with the name, which are not inherent in the subject’s own nature.

³¹ *De Trin.* 7.10. See Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 137.

³² See the discussion on the nature of God in chapter 3.

³³ *De Trin.* 7.11.

³⁴ *De Trin.* 7.13.

³⁵ *De Trin.* 7.13.

³⁶ *De Trin.* 6.38.

nature of the Godhead abiding in Christ, a truth that was not revealed to him by “flesh and blood”.³⁷ It was for this reason that he was called “blessed”.³⁸ Hilary goes on to present other statements of the apostolic faith which “acknowledge the Son of God and confess that the name belongs to Him not by adoption but by the reality of the nature”.³⁹

IV. *The Names “Word”, “Wisdom” and “Power”*

Hilary argues that the scriptures also use other names in reference to the Son, which point to his divinity. Such is the case with the titles, “Word”, “Wisdom” and “Power”.⁴⁰ These he considers to be substantive properties of God, which the Son receives through the mystery of his birth, without “any loss on the part of the begetter”.⁴¹ Thus, according to Hilary, “[t]he Only-begotten God is the Word, but the unborn God is never wholly without the Word”.⁴² Hilary makes it clear that the title “Word” is not meant to represent the “utterance of a voice”, which would be in keeping with a Sabellian position. Rather, the name, “Word”, indicates that the Son is “God from God”, subsisting through a true birth.⁴³ In a similar way, Hilary refers to the Son as the “Wisdom” and the “Power of God”. Again these do not mean that the Son of God is some kind of “efficacious movement of an internal power or thought, as He is wont to be understood...” but rather show that He is a substantial being, subsisting in the names of the divine attributes, which he receives through the mystery of his birth.

Although Hilary identifies the term “Word” as a title for the Son, his understanding of this title does not reach the level of sophistication seen in Augustine’s treatise on the Trinity.⁴⁴ As discussed above, Hilary links the title “Word” with the other Christological titles, “Wisdom” and “Power”, implying that like them this title can be understood in reference to the essence of the Godhead. In his *De Trinitate*, Augustine makes a clear distinction between the titles “Word”, and those of “Wisdom” and “Power”. He points out that “Word” is a relative term, just as the titles, “Son” and “Image”.⁴⁵ These are used in reference to the Son in

³⁷ *De Trin.* 6.38

³⁸ *De Trin.* 6.38

³⁹ *De Trin.* 6.39.

⁴⁰ *De Trin.* 7.9.

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 7.11.

⁴² *De Trin.* 7.11.

⁴³ *De Trin.* 7.11.

⁴⁴ Augustine’s understanding of the title Word in reference to the Son is picked up and developed further by Aquinas. See Augustine, *De Trin.* 7.2 and Aquinas *ST* 1.34.1.

⁴⁵ “For as Son expresses a relationship to the Father and is not spoken of in respect to Himself, so the Word, when it is also called the Word, expresses a relationship to Him whose Word it is... The Word, however, is also the wisdom, but is not the Word by that by which it is the wisdom, for Word is understood as referring to the relation, but wisdom to the essence.” Augustine, *De Trin.* 7.3. See also 7.1-2.

order to reveal his distinction from the Father in terms of their relations. “Wisdom” and “Power”, on the other hand, are attributes of the Godhead, belonging to the divine essence, and therefore possessed by both the Father and the Son in accordance with the divine nature.⁴⁶

V. *The Son as Image*

Hilary also uses the scriptural title “image” in reference to the Son, whom he refers to as the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).⁴⁷ Based on the notion of image found in this verse from Colossians and also in Hebrews 1:3, he develops an argument for the defense of the Son’s divinity and unique personhood.⁴⁸ By referring to the Son as an “image”, a relationship is implied, since an image is not alone, but is the likeness of another.⁴⁹ In this case the other is God the Father, who is the source of the Son. Hilary explains clearly that the incarnate Christ does not image the Father in respect to his humanity, but rather in relation to his divinity, which is evidenced by the power He exhibits, presumably through his miraculous deeds, which Hilary discusses elsewhere:⁵⁰

For this, which is carnal from the birth of the Virgin, does not help us to contemplate the divinity and the image of God within Him, nor is the form of man which He assumed an example of the nature of the immaterial God which we are to behold. God is recognized in Him, if, indeed, He will be recognized by anyone at all, by the power of His nature, and when God the Son is perceived He allows us to perceive the Father, while He is the image in such a manner that He does not differ in nature, but manifests His author.

Hilary also points out emphatically that the Son is a true image of the Father, not a lifeless image like some of those which are crafted as representations of other things. There is no real comparison between these and the Son of God for they are inanimate objects, while He is “the living image of the living One (*quia viventis vivens imago est*)”.⁵¹ According to Hilary, the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, which describes the Son as “the image of

⁴⁶ According to Augustine, even though the title “Wisdom” can be used in reference to all three divine persons, it is reserved especially for the Son, particularly in New Testament texts like Christ, “the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:18). Augustine, *De Trin.* 7.1.

⁴⁷ See *De Trin.* 2.8.11.24; 7.37; 8.48-50.

⁴⁸ *De Trin.* 3.23. As discussed above, Hilary also builds an argument for the defense of the Son’s divinity and existence based on the following verse from Genesis: “Let us make man in our image and likeness”. His argumentation in relation to this verse is somewhat different from that which he develops in reference to Col 1:15 and Heb 1:13. This is due to the different way the term image is applied in the verse from Genesis where it is used in reference to the Godhead. In the latter passages the term is used directly in reference to Christ.

⁴⁹ Cf. *De Trin.* 3.23.

⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 7.37. See the discussion in the following section on Christology.

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 7.37.

[the Father's] substance" (cf. Heb 1:3) reveals the distinct existence of the Son, while at the same time pointing to his divinity:⁵²

The 'image of His substance' (*imago substantiae eius*) merely distinguishes Him from the one who is, in order that we may believe in His existence (*subsistendi*) and not that we may also assume that there is a dissimilarity of nature. For the Father to be in the Son and the Son in the Father means that there is a perfect fullness of the Godhead in each of them.⁵³

Finally, Hilary believes that the Son is a true image of the Father, receiving the fullness of the divine nature without any loss to him, through the mystery of the *divina nativitas*.

VI. *The Origin of the Son*

The second property belonging to the person of the Son, which we find in Hilary's writings, concerns his origin as the Only-begotten. By means of this property Hilary distinguishes the Son from the Father, the Unbegotten, in a manner which does not impinge on their unity in the one divine nature. As the Only-begotten, the Son is not the source of his being, but rather receives it from the Father.⁵⁴ The name Only-begotten also points to the reality of his sonship and his unique position as the true Son of God. He is the only one begotten from the Father – "one from one" - unlike others who are sons of God by adoption. Furthermore, the Son's eternal procession from the Father and therefore his divinity is reflected in this name.⁵⁵ This point is also emphasized by Hilary's frequent reference to the Son as the Only-begotten God (*unigenitus Deus*).⁵⁶

VII. *The Incarnate Christ and the Mystery of Divine Personhood*

In *De Trinitate*, Hilary attempts to penetrate the mystery of the incarnation, which is fundamentally misunderstood by the Arians. The Arians use the weaknesses associated with Christ's human nature to support their doctrine that He lacks the fullness of divinity possessed by the Father. In response to the Arians, Hilary endeavours to explain how Christ can suffer, and yet be fully divine; and in relation to this, how he can be fully human while remaining divine, and undivided in his personhood. In his efforts to do so, Hilary presents a Christology which is renowned for its difficulties, but less known for its profound insights.⁵⁷ In this

⁵² *De Trin.* 3.23.

⁵³ *De Trin.* 3.23.

⁵⁴ Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 75.

⁵⁵ *De Trin.* 11.18-20, 12.26.

⁵⁶ *De Trin.* 1.11., 1.16, 1.23, 1.27 etc.

⁵⁷ This issue mainly concerns contemporary scholarship, although this trend has been changing recently. For example, see Jarred Mercer's excellent and insightful article on Hilary's understanding of Christ's suffering:

section, we will review Hilary's Christology, focusing on the light it sheds on his understanding of the person of Christ.

A. *Christology and its Relationship to the Trinity*

The starting point for Hilary's Christology is his Trinitarian theology and specifically his understanding of Christ's relationship to the Father, as the Only-begotten Son. This also forms the framework within which he develops his Christology, which is especially evident in Books 9-11 of *De Trinitate*. In these books Hilary seeks to refute the Arian interpretation of certain biblical statements made by Christ, which indicate weakness, and therefore seem to be at odds with an understanding of his divinity. At the beginning of each book he sums up the theology of the Father and the Son, which he has developed in the previous books, namely that Christ is truly God, but distinct from the Father through his divine birth:

We, who acknowledge the birth which subsists without time, have taught that God the Son is not a God of a different nature from God the Father; nor is He co-equal with the unborn one by being Himself unborn, but the Only-begotten is not unequal to Him by birth...⁵⁸

Elsewhere, Hilary points out the importance of distinguishing this divine birth from Christ's birth in time, which took place in accordance with the plan of salvation:

It is one thing to have come forth from God in the substance of birth; it is something else to have come from the Father into the world in order to complete the mysteries of our salvation.⁵⁹

B. *Jesus Christ: true God and true man*

Also underpinning Hilary's Christology is his belief that Christ is one person in two natures - divine and human – a belief which is implicit throughout *De Trinitate* and one that anticipates Chalcedon. According to Hilary this belief, together with the notion of Christ's eternal sonship, is a fundamental tenet of the apostolic faith, and therefore the basis for an orthodox explanation of this faith. In Book 9 he states his Christological position explicitly and clearly: "...in our Lord Jesus Christ we are discussing a person of two natures (*utriusque naturae personam*)".⁶⁰ In relation to this, Hilary also states emphatically that "Christ Jesus is

"Suffering for Our Sake: Christ and Human Destiny in Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate*", *JECS* 22 (2014): 541-568. The medieval scholars tended to view Hilary's Christology in a more favourable light, especially Aquinas, whose references to Hilary will be noted in this section.

⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 10.6.

⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 6.31.

⁶⁰ *De Trin.* 9.14. Ladaria maintains that one cannot be certain about this aspect of Hilary's Christology for in other works he speaks of both the "person of the divinity and of the humanity". Ladaria refers to the following passages from *Tractatus super Psalmos*, 53.5, 54.2, 63.2-3, 141.3.3, 143.9 to support his position.

the true God as well as the true man (*Christum Iesum ut verum Deum ita et verum hominem*)”.⁶¹ Elsewhere in the same book, Hilary explains how Christ himself expressed the same doctrine, though using less technical language:

[Christ] taught us to believe in Him as the Son of God and exhorted us to proclaim Him as the Son of Man. As man He spoke and performed all those actions that are characteristic of God, and then as God spoke and performed all those actions that are characteristic of man, but in such a way that even in this twofold manner of speaking He never spoke without indicating that He was man as well as God.⁶²

In his discussions, including the one above, Hilary insists that Christ is one subject/person even though the scriptures speak of him both in terms of his humanity and his divinity. “He who is in the form of a slave”, claims Hilary, “is no different from Him who is in the form of God”.⁶³ At the same time, he makes clear that Christ is fully divine and fully human, going so far as to state that he has a human soul and will:⁶⁴

[Christ who is truly the Son of God is the true Son of Man, and while a man was born from God He does not therefore cease to be God because a man was born from God... But, just as He assumed a man from the Virgin through Himself, so He assumed a soul by Himself...⁶⁵

Hilary goes to great lengths to refute the erroneous interpretation of the biblical passages denoting Christ’s human experiences, which the Arians use in support of their doctrine. To this end he attempts to provide a genuine explanation of each passage of scripture used by his opponents, that is, one which makes sense of it in the light of Christ’s divine and human natures. The extensive effort Hilary makes indicates his concern and sense of responsibility for those whose faith is immature. He considers these in greatest danger of being swept away in the current of a heresy, which appears legitimate as it claims to base its beliefs on scripture.⁶⁶

According to Hilary, the Arians mis-interpret the scriptures which speak of Christ’s weakness as they do not take account of the context in which they were written, but rather

However, when looking at these particular passages Hilary seems to be using the term *persona* in a particular manner – to distinguish between Christ speaking according to his human nature, or his divine nature. This is in the manner consistent with the methodological approach known as prosopographic exegesis, mentioned earlier. Hilary certainly does not appear to be indicating that there are two persons in Christ. Furthermore, a thorough reading of *De Trinitate* never suggests such a position. Luis F. Ladaria, *San Hilario de Poitiers – Diccionario* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006), 239.

⁶¹ *De Trin.* 9.3.

⁶² *De Trin.* 9.5.

⁶³ *De Trin.* 9.13.

⁶⁴ In his argument in *De Trin.* 10.11, Hilary reveals his belief that Christ possessed his own will: “And if He died of His own will”, states Hilary, “and gave up the spirit through His own will, then there is no dread of death where death is within His own power”.

⁶⁵ *De Trin.* 10.21-22. See also 10.50.

⁶⁶ *De Trin.* 9.2-3.

view them in isolation.⁶⁷ He, on the other hand, examines these statements in relation to others made by Christ, and also in light of the theology found in the Pauline epistles, both of which speak of Christ's divinity. Implicit to his methodological approach is his belief that the scriptures were inspired by the one Spirit, and therefore, if interpreted in an orthodox manner, do not present any contradiction. Hilary also insists that it is the same Christ who speaks of his human experience, as well as his divinity, and who, therefore, cannot present contrary views concerning himself.⁶⁸ In Books 9-11 he begins his refutation of the Arians by contrasting the statements made by Christ, which reveal human weakness, with others that point to his divinity. In doing so, he acknowledges the apparent contradiction between them:

... and the same thing is not contained in the words, 'No one is good but God only,' as in 'He who sees me sees also the Father,' and ... the sentence 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' is at variance with 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' ...⁶⁹

Hilary then seeks to reconcile these differences, showing that a genuine understanding of the passages supports rather than undermines belief in the divinity of Christ.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Hilary alludes to the necessity of faith, received through the Church, for a valid understanding of the scriptures, one which avoids subjecting the mystery of the Godhead to the limitations of human reason. He therefore interprets the scriptures within the context of the faith he has received through baptism, understanding them in the light of the Son of God, who became incarnate for our sake.

An example of Hilary's methodology can be seen in Book 9 in his explanation of Christ's statement "The Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). This, he maintains, needs to be understood in a manner which is in keeping with another statement made by Christ shortly beforehand, "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). The key to interpretation here, according to Hilary, concerns the mystery of the divine birth, through which the Son receives his nature from the Father, rendering them 'one'. It is as the source of the Son's divine nature that the Father is said to be greater than the Son. However, this does not indicate a disparity on the level of nature between the Father and the Son, since the Son receives the divine nature in its

⁶⁷ *De Trin.* 1.29, 1.32, 9.2.

⁶⁸ *De Trin.* 1.29-30.

⁶⁹ *De Trin.* 1.30.

⁷⁰ In reference to apparently contradictory statements concerning Christ in Book 9, Hilary states: "...we are to understand in each instance [ie in each set of statements] the promulgations of the plans of salvation and the deliberate assertions of a natural power [Christ's divinity], since the same individual is also the author of both statements. When we have pointed out the properties of each nature, however, it will be seen that what we teach concerning the plan of salvation, whether the cause, the time, the birth, or the name, pertains to the mystery of the evangelical faith and does not lead to any abasement of the true Godhead." *De Trin.* 1.30.

entirety from the Father and is thus equal to him in glory.⁷¹ This glory is referred to in the biblical account of Lazarus, whom Christ raised from the dead. “Lazarus dies”, states Hilary, “for the glory of God in order that the Son of God may be glorified through Lazarus.”⁷² According to Hilary, this passage not only reveals Christ’s divinity, who is glorified like the Father, but his distinction, since “God” and the “Son of God” are both glorified.⁷³ Another example can be seen in the way Hilary explains Christ’s apparent ignorance “of the day” when the Son of Man will return (cf. Mk 13: 32). Hilary reasons that as Jesus is God, He is equal to the Father. Therefore, it follows that He must possess all that is proper to him, including knowledge of the future.⁷⁴ This is corroborated by the apostle Paul who teaches that “in Christ lie all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (cf. Col. 2.2,3).⁷⁵ Christ’s ignorance over the day of his return cannot be understood, therefore, as due to a lack of knowledge. Rather, this truth is kept hidden for our sake, so that we might remain ever alert and watchful.⁷⁶

In explaining the biblical passages which reveal weakness in Christ, we see later authors making a distinction between those which refer to his humanity and those which indicate his divinity. This distinction is alluded to at times in *De Trinitate*, especially early on in Book 9.⁷⁷ Here, Hilary points out that the heretics attempt to deceive the unlearned by attributing

everything that was said and done through the nature of the man who was assumed to the weakness of the Godhead, and [ascribing] what is appropriate to the form of a slave to the form of God.⁷⁸

In the final paragraph of Book 9, he enunciates this distinction clearly, using it to explain succinctly and effectively that Christ’s lack of knowledge, thirst and hunger pertain to his human nature and therefore do not undermine his divinity.⁷⁹ However, scholars have questioned the authenticity of this passage, pointing out that it is not cited in a number of the

⁷¹ Elsewhere, Hilary also points out that the Father is greater than the Son in terms of his human nature, in a manner similar to us. *De Trin.* 9.53-54.

⁷² *De Trin.* 9.23.

⁷³ *De Trin.* 9.23.

⁷⁴ *De Trin.* 9.61.

⁷⁵ *De Trin.* 9.62.

⁷⁶ *De Trin.* 9.67.

⁷⁷ *De Trin.* 9.15.

⁷⁸ *De Trin.* 9.15.

⁷⁹ “We are not to imagine, therefore, that the Son does not know because He says that He does not know the day and moment, just as we are not to believe that God is subject to tears, fears, or sleep, when in His human nature He either weeps, or sleeps, or is sad. But, while we keep intact the true nature of the Only-begotten in Him amid the weakness of the flesh—the tears, sleep, hunger, thirst, weariness, and fear—in a similar manner we must understand that, when He declares that He does not know the day and the hour, He is referring to His human nature.” *De Trin.* 9.75.

original manuscripts, and that Hilary does not tend to use the argument which it presents as the basis for most of his explanations of Christ's human experiences.⁸⁰ In contrast, Augustine cites this distinction in the first book of his treatise on the Trinity and applies it in a seemingly effortless manner to dismiss erroneous interpretations of such passages as John 14:28.⁸¹

According to Augustine,

[s]ome men have erred either because they were less painstaking in their investigation, or because they did not examine the entire series of the Scriptures, but endeavored to transfer those things, which were spoken of Christ insofar as He was man, to His substance which was eternal before the Incarnation, and is eternal.⁸²

C. *Forma Dei / Forma Servi*

Foundational to the development of Hilary's Christology is the Pauline passage from Philippians 2:6-7, which Hilary has recourse to frequently throughout Books 9-11. In this passage Paul states that although Christ "was by nature God, [He] did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking (*accipiens*) the nature of a slave (cf. Phil. 2:6-7)."⁸³ Based on this, Hilary argues that Christ existed prior to his incarnation, thereby implying his eternality and divinity. As Christ received a human nature, he surmises, he must have already existed, "since to receive (*accipere*) is characteristic of Him who subsists (*subsistat*)".⁸⁴ Furthermore, Christ's self-emptying and acquisition of the *forma servi*, did not bring about a destruction of his divine nature, but rather a change in his outward appearance (*demutans habitum*).⁸⁵

D. *Soteriology and Christology*

In order to understand Hilary's Christology, it is important to consider the soteriology which informs it. For Hilary, the whole purpose of the incarnation is the salvation of humankind. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that in Book 9, before he ventures to explain the biblical statements revealing Christ's experience of human weakness, he provides an overview of the plan of salvation. In his synopsis, Hilary points to the eternal and divine nature of Christ by explicitly referring to him as "God", distinguishing him from the Father as

⁸⁰ *De Trin.* 9.75; FC 25, chap. 9, footnote 96.

⁸¹ In saying this, it is interesting to note that he also interprets Mark 13:32 in a similar way to Hilary. See Augustine, *De Trin.* 1.7.

⁸² Augustine, *De Trin.* 1.7.

⁸³ *De Trin.* 8.45.

⁸⁴ *De Trin.* 9.14.

⁸⁵ *De Trin.* 9.14.

the “Only-begotten”.⁸⁶ He also indicates Christ’s pre-existence by stating that He willed to become incarnate in a plan ordained before the world was created:

But these secrets of the heavenly mysteries were already ordained before the creation of the world, so that the only begotten God willed to be born as man and man would remain eternally in God, so that God willed to suffer in order that the Devil in his rage might not retain the law of sin in us through the passions of human weakness, since God had taken our weakness upon Himself... [it was not] a gain for God to assume our nature, but His voluntary abasement is our exaltation, while He does not lose that which God is, and He obtains for man that He be God.⁸⁷

Through his explanation of the salvific purpose of the incarnation, Hilary provides an orthodox and plausible reason for his assertion that Christ is a person of two natures, divine and human. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, he explains, assumed human nature for the sake of our salvation, while remaining in the mystery of the Godhead. Only as God, made man, could he raise us to the level of the Godhead, as the following passage from Book 3 illustrates vividly:

They [the Archangels, the Dominations, the Principalities and the Powers of heaven] acclaim Him because He, the invisible image of God, has created all of them in Himself, has made the generations, has strengthened the heavens, has formed the abyss, and then, when He Himself was born as man, He conquered death, broke the gates of hell, gained the people as co-heirs with Himself, and brought our flesh from corruption into eternal glory.⁸⁸

This soteriological framework enables Hilary to demonstrate the order of the natures in Christ - what is first and essential in him is his divine nature received through his eternal birth from the Father; what is secondary is the human nature He assumed through his birth from Mary, in accordance with the plan of salvation. We see clearly this order of the natures, and the soteriological purpose of the incarnation in another passage from Book 3:

...that which belongs to Him because of the body that He assumed results from the eagerness of His good will for our salvation. For, since He as one born from God is invisible, incorporeal, and inconceivable, He has taken upon Himself as much matter and abasement as we possessed the power to understand... adapting Himself to our weakness rather than abandoning those things which belonged to His own nature. He is, therefore, the perfect Son of the perfect Father, the only-begotten offspring of the unbegotten God, who has received everything from Him who possesses everything. He is God from God, Spirit from Spirit, Light from Light, and He proclaims with assurance: ‘I in the Father and the Father in Me.’ As the Father is Spirit, so the Son

⁸⁶ *De Trin.* 9.7.

⁸⁷ *De Trin.* 9.7.

⁸⁸ *De Trin.* 3.7.

also is Spirit; as the Father is God, so the Son also is God; as the Father is Light so the Son also is Light.⁸⁹

Although the mystery of Christ's assumption of our human nature is beyond our reason, Hilary assures us that it is not beyond our hope, rather it is the source of this hope, since it is in Christ that we are reborn and renewed.⁹⁰ For this reason, Christ experienced all the stages of human life through his birth, suffering and death. These He freely chose to bear in his divine person, which He could only do as true God and true Man:⁹¹

Thus God was born to take us into Himself, suffered to justify us, and died to avenge us; for our manhood abides forever in him, the weakness of our infirmity is united with his strength, and the spiritual powers of iniquity and wickedness are subdued in the triumph of our flesh, since God died through the flesh.⁹²

E. The Son of God - Gift of the Father's Love for Our Salvation

With profound insight, Hilary links the incarnation and its salvific purpose to the Father, the source of all gifts. According to Hilary, the Father's great love for us is revealed by the fact that He sent his Only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world. If the Father had "bestowed a creature upon creatures", or "given to the world what belongs to the world" or offered a Son whose existence came from nothing in order to redeem those who likewise were made from nothing, such a paltry sacrifice would not have been a worthy sign of his great love.⁹³ But rather, the proof of the Father's love is evidenced in the giving of his Only-begotten Son, his "*filio proprio*" (cf. Rom 8:32), as Paul says,⁹⁴ who is not a creation, nor an adoption, nor a falsehood.⁹⁵ This movement, which began in the Father, comes full circle when we respond to his love by our faith in Jesus Christ, as his Only-begotten Son. Again, we see Christology linked back to mystery of the Godhead, with the plan of salvation finding its origin and fulfillment in the Triune God. Furthermore, the position of the Father as *Auctor*

⁸⁹ *De Trin.* 3.3-4.

⁹⁰ Hilary identifies baptism as the means through which we partake of this salvation and become adopted sons. Through baptism we die with Christ and rise again with him who assumed our nature and conquered death that we might participate in his immortality. Cf. *De Trin.* 1.13.

⁹¹ Cf. Thorp, "*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' De Trinitate*", 79.

⁹² *De Trin.* 9.7.

⁹³ Cf. *De Trin.* 6.40.

⁹⁴ In Book 6, Hilary turns to the writings of the apostle Paul in his defense of Christ's divine sonship: "He who from a persecutor became an apostle and a vessel of election did not preach a different doctrine than this. In what sermons has he not confessed the Son of God? Which of his Epistles does not begin with a reference to the majesty of this truth? In what name does he not indicate the true nature? It is said... 'God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh'... He is His Son: He is the Son of God; He is not his adoption; He is not his creature. The name expresses the nature; the true nature proclaims the divinity, the confession bears testimony to the faith". *De Trin.* 6.44-45.

⁹⁵ *De Trin.* 6.44-45.

within the immanent Trinity, is reflected in the plan of salvation, as He is the ultimate source of the incarnation.

F. Christ's Suffering

In Book 10, in his defense of the divinity of the incarnate Christ, Hilary presents a controversial view of Christ's suffering, maintaining that Christ felt the force of this suffering, but not the pain.⁹⁶ He also claims that Christ acceded to tears, thirst and hunger not out of bodily necessity, but in accordance with the custom of the flesh he assumed. Underpinning Hilary's views are two profound and related insights concerning the incarnate Christ. The first involves the origin of Christ's human nature, which, unlike ours is divine, and is not therefore subject to the defects which result from original sin. These impact directly on the manner in which humans tend to suffer. According to Hilary,

[Christ] had a body, but a unique one which was of His own origin; He did not come into existence through the imperfections of a human conception, but subsisted in the form of our body by the power of His own divinity, for He truly represents us through the form of a slave, but He is free from the sins and the defects of a human body...⁹⁷

The second insight of Hilary's, which is related to the first, involves the voluntary nature of Christ's suffering. Humans suffer out of necessity, as a consequence of original sin, while Christ, who is like us in all things but sin, suffers voluntarily, out of choice. He does so not for his own sake, but for the sake of our salvation, showing forth the soteriological purpose of the incarnation.⁹⁸ This is most powerfully revealed in his passion and death.

Hilary finds his arguments on scripture and a certain understanding of the human person, which seems to have been influenced by Stoicism.⁹⁹ He believes that the body is vivified by the soul and thus undergoes suffering in accordance with the 'strength' of the soul. According to this position, a soul weakened by original sin responds to suffering with pain, whereas Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, feels only the force of the blows etc. In his attempts to explain the manner in which Christ suffered, Hilary has been accused of Apollinarianism.¹⁰⁰ However, this is a misunderstanding of his Christology and anthropology.

⁹⁶ Hilary's approach seems to be influenced by Stoic psychological categories, as argued persuasively by Mercer in his article, "Suffering for Our Sake: Christ and Human Destiny in Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate*", 544 ff. His unusual understanding of Christ's experience of suffering is not taken up by later scholars. However, not many point out the profound insight underpinning it, concerning the humanity of Christ, which will be discussed below.

⁹⁷ *De Trin.* 10.25.

⁹⁸ *De Trin.* 9.7.

⁹⁹ See footnote 96 above.

¹⁰⁰ See Mercer, "Suffering for Our Sake: Christ and Human Destiny in Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate*", footnote 121.

Hilary is not suggesting that Christ's human nature was deified in some way, rendering it 'superhuman', but rather, that Christ was perfectly human, possessing his humanity in its intended perfection, that is, without the defects that result from original sin.¹⁰¹ In support of his view, Hilary calls to mind the experience of the martyrs who, when undergoing suffering, did so without pain or fear. He draws on biblical examples such as the three men in the fiery furnace who neither felt the flames, nor were burnt. And Daniel, who when thrown into the lion's den, experienced no fear. He then poses the rhetorical question - if faith filled men, who longed for glory, did not experience pain when undergoing torments surely such pain cannot be ascribed to "Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory (in the hem of whose garment there is power...)"¹⁰²

G. Voluntary Suffering

Hilary's insistence on the voluntary nature of Christ's suffering is of primary importance to his Christology, which, as we have mentioned, he develops in accordance with the fundamental truth concerning his personhood and divine and human natures. The fact that Christ suffers out of choice for our sake, as opposed to necessity, points to the divine origin of his humanity. His ability to suffer voluntarily also points to his divine nature and personhood, as does the victorious way in which he conquers suffering and death, through his resurrection. It is Christ, the eternal Word, who assumes a human nature, and who, in his person, is in charge of this nature in a manner which does not detract from his human experience yet enables him to freely choose suffering and death.

H. Christ, the Power of God

Linked to his understanding of Christ's voluntary suffering, is Hilary's understanding of Christ's power. For Hilary, "power is the very reality of the nature (*cum virtus naturae res esset*)", therefore the works of a creature that demonstrate its power, also show forth its nature.¹⁰³ This philosophical notion underpins a number of his arguments concerning Christ's incarnation - Hilary maintains emphatically that although Christ emptied himself to assume our human nature, his divine nature was not abolished in the process, even though it remained

¹⁰¹ For further discussion on this point see Mercer, "Suffering for Our Sake: Christ and Human Destiny in Hilary of Poitiers's *De Trinitate*", 563 ff.

¹⁰² *De Trin.* 10.46.

¹⁰³ Barnes suggests that Hilary understood and used the notion of 'power' in a philosophical sense as is demonstrated by the manner in which he defines the term: "Power is the very reality of the nature, and the operation is the capability of the power (*cum virtus naturae res esset*)". *De Trin.* 9.52. Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa*, 159. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", footnote, 237.

hidden. This is attested to in the scriptures which reveal Christ working with the very power of God, especially when performing miracles.¹⁰⁴

For, He had the essence of the nature, but no longer had the form of God, because by His emptying the form of a slave was received. The nature has not disappeared so that it no longer existed, but, while it still remained in Him, is submitted to the humiliation of an earthly birth, while it employed the power of its own nature in the habit of the humility which it had assumed. And the God born from God, and found as man in the form of a slave, while He works as God by His powers, was not only the God whom He revealed by His deeds, but also remained as the man in whose habit he was found.¹⁰⁵

Christ revealed his divinity by pointing to his own powerful works: “Believe Me”, He said, “that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the very work’s sake” (Jn 14:11).¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, through his own power, Christ was conceived, suffered willingly, laid down his life and picked it up again.¹⁰⁷ In this way, He conquered suffering and death in a manner only made possible because He was both God and man. In this argument, we again see Hilary pointing to the divine personhood of Christ whose suffering, death and resurrection were within his own power – a power which He exercised as a single subject/person.

VIII. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, in this chapter we have examined the extent to which Hilary develops an understanding of the Son as a divine person. As mentioned, Hilary does not set out systematically to do this, rather, it transpires as the result of his attempts to defend the truth of the Son’s divinity against Arianism, while at the same time avoiding Sabellianism. Hilary’s starting point for his theology of the Son is the fundamental tenet of the faith that He is God in the full sense of the term, not in any derived manner as the Arians claim. In order to demonstrate this truth in a plausible and orthodox manner, he attempts to show how the Son is divine and yet distinct from the Father. An important aspect of his argumentation involves the identification and application of two fundamental properties which pertain to the Son - filiation, and origin as the Only-begotten. Both of these properties enable Hilary to distinguish the Son from the Father in relational terms, thus avoiding any distinction on the fundamental level of substance. Of these properties, filiation is the most important in Hilary’s thought, as it more clearly reveals the unity between the Father and the Son, while indicating

¹⁰⁴ For example, see *De Trin.* 4.16.

¹⁰⁵ *De Trin.* 9.51.

¹⁰⁶ *De Trin.* 9.52. Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 72.

¹⁰⁷ *De Trin.* 10.47, 10.57-60.

the presence of both. As the Only-begotten, Hilary distinguishes the Son from other adopted sons, and relates him to the Father, who is his source. In contrast, the corresponding term Unbegotten used in reference to the Father, does not indicate the begetting of another, as the name Father does.

The concept which is most foundational for Hilary's Trinitarian theology, and his understanding of the Son as a divine person, is the *divina nativitas*. The extent to which he develops and utilizes this concept sets him apart from other writers, both preceding and following. Later writers tend to focus on the properties of fatherhood and sonship, which are encompassed by the *divina nativitas*. Through this concept, Hilary shows that the Son's name is real, not titular - He is ontologically Son, receiving the divine nature from the Father, through the mystery of his birth, while remaining distinct in his sonship. The *divina nativitas* is perfect and eternal, in accordance with the nature of God, rendering the Son true God, while not detracting in any way from the Father's divinity. The importance of this concept to Hilary's thought can be summed up in his declaration that the "Son has nothing else than birth", and conversely that the Father is Father on account of the generation of the Son.¹⁰⁸ For Hilary, the fundamental error of the Arians, and other heretics, is their failure to comprehend the *divina nativitas*. This, he considers necessary for a catholic understanding of the Son's relationship to the Father and thus of the Godhead.

In the development of Hilary's Christology, we also see reference to the notion of divine personhood. Hilary's Christology is informed by his Trinitarian theology, especially the fundamental truth concerning the divinity and uniqueness of the Son. In turn, this theology is both confirmed and deepened, as Hilary expounds his Christology. The link between Hilary's Christology and his understanding of Christ's divine personhood is illustrated most clearly in his assertion that the Son is "a person in two natures".¹⁰⁹ This fundamental precept of the faith, stated at the beginning of his Christological discussions in Books 9-11 of *De Trinitate*, is foundational to the development of his understanding of the incarnate Christ. Against the Arians, Hilary attempts to show how Christ's human weakness can be understood in a manner which does not detract from his divine nature. In his arguments, Hilary insists that Christ is one person – it is the same Christ, he states, who suffers hunger, thirst and the like, and yet proclaims his divinity.

Although Hilary's Christology is not without its difficulties, especially in terms of his understanding of Christ's suffering, it also contains profound insights, which impact on his notion of Christ's divine personhood. Hilary holds that by his own power Christ was

¹⁰⁸ *De Trin.* 12.31, 7.31.

¹⁰⁹ *De Trin.* 9.14.

conceived, willed to suffer, die and take up his life again. In this way he shows forth Christ's divinity, as evidenced by his power; his eternity, since He exists prior to the incarnation; and finally, the voluntary nature of his suffering. This last point is especially significant and is linked to Hilary's understanding of Christ's humanity. According to Hilary, this is perfect, and thus distinct from ours, by means of its divine origin. Unlike us, the incarnate Christ, does not experience the consequences of original sin, and therefore reacts to suffering in a fundamentally different way - we suffer out of necessity, whereas Christ suffers voluntarily, for our sake. This willingness to suffer for us reveals the fundamental soteriological purpose of the incarnation, which underpins Hilary's Christology. In sum, for Hilary, the incarnate Christ is a divine person, who in keeping with the Father's plan of salvation, voluntarily chose to assume our human nature, without any loss to his divinity. This He did solely for our salvation, so that through his suffering, death and resurrection, He might raise us up to the very level of the Godhead.

7. The Unity within the Godhead

Hilary's concept of divine personhood is intrinsically linked to his understanding of the Godhead, and the unity which exists therein. For him, the Father and the Son are not isolated individuals, but each subsists in the one divine nature. Therefore, God is not singular but "God and God".¹ In this chapter, we will focus on Hilary's exposition of the unity within the Godhead, and especially his notion of circumincession. This notion encompasses and reveals to a certain extent the depth of Hilary's understanding of divine personhood, especially in regard to the Father and the Son.

I. *Unity of Substance vs Will*

For Hilary, the unity which exists between the Father and the Son occurs on the most fundamental level which is that of substance. In Book 8, he defends this truth vigorously against the Arians, who hold that the unity is one "of will and not of nature".² They thus interpret John 10:30, where Jesus declares that "The Father and I are one", as referring to "an agreement of unanimity".³ In defense of their position, the Arians also refer to other New Testament passages such as Acts 4:32 using it to show that the multitude of believers were of one heart and soul due to agreement of the same will. Furthermore, they maintain that when Christ prayed "that all may be one even as thou, Father, are in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (cf. Jn 17:21), He was referring to a oneness of will and not to a oneness of nature or essence.⁴

Hilary accuses the Arians of applying their own ideas to the word of God, pointing out that if Christ wanted to express unity on the level of will he could easily have prayed the following, "Father, just as we will the one thing, so let them also will the same thing, in order that all of us may be one in harmony".⁵ Rather, according to Hilary, Christ spoke the truth

¹ Hilary uses phrases like this, as well as "God in God" and "God from God" to show forth the unity and plurality within the Trinity, in terms of the Father and the Son. See *De Trin.* 5.2, 5.35, 5.37, 6.19 etc.

² *De Trin.* 8.5.

³ *De Trin.* 8.5. It is worth noting that the western Fathers gathered at the council of Serdica in 343 also spoke out strongly against this Arian interpretation of Jn 10:30, explaining that this verse does not refer to the "concord and harmony which prevail between the Father and the Son" but rather points to the oneness of their essence. The only surviving version of this document is in Greek, so it is not known if the same Latin word *unanimitatis*, which Hilary employs, was also used in the original. *The Serdican Creed* in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6. Also, in the *Second Creed of the Council of Antioch (341)* the eastern Fathers described the unity of the three divine persons as one of agreement. This Hilary translated into Latin as follows: "*per consonatiam vero unum*". *De syn.* 29. Regardless of the exact language used, the concept represented is the same, namely the idea that the Father and the Son are fundamentally united on the level of will, as opposed to nature.

⁴ *De Trin.* 8.5.

⁵ *De Trin.* 8.11.

clearly concerning this unity, which is one of glory not will. Likewise, the unity existing between those whom the scriptures state “were of one heart and soul”, is one of rebirth “into the nature of the one life and the one eternity”, not simply of consent.⁶ Hilary acknowledges the rashness in hoping for such a union with God, as well as his inability to understand how this could be brought about in glory. However, he continues to hope since this has been promised by Christ.⁷ Although our union with God far exceeds one of mere will it differs fundamentally from that pertaining to the Father and the Son. It is only proper to them, states Hilary, “to be one by their nature” through the mystery of the divine birth.⁸ But it is by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ that we participate in their oneness and in this way witness to the world that the Father has sent the Son. Hilary explains this succinctly as follows, basing his position on the Johannine verses in chapter 17:20-21:

The world therefore, will believe that the Son has been sent by the Father because all who will believe in Him will be one in the Father and the Son... And He at once teaches us how they will be one: ‘And the glory that Thou hast given me, I have given to them.’⁹

Hilary acknowledges that a union of will also exists between the Father and the Son, however this is not the foundation of their substantial union but rather the consequence of it. Thus, the union of will between the Father and the Son demonstrates and “proceeds from their identity of nature”.¹⁰ Through the divine birth the Father bestows all that He is upon the Son. He therefore has no need of communicating anything further to him, whether it concerns his will or knowledge. However, according to the Arians, the Son is compelled to do the Father’s will. They cite John 6:37-38 in support of their position:

All that the Father gives to me shall come to me, and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.¹¹

While this passage reveals the Son’s mission to do the Father’s will, points out Hilary, it also shows forth his freedom of will, since the Son himself wills to accept those given to him.

According to Hilary, this interpretation is confirmed by the following passage:

⁶ *De Trin.* 8.7.

⁷ *De Trin.* 8.12.

⁸ *De Trin.* 8.12.

⁹ “‘That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.’ The world therefore, will believe that the Son has been sent by the Father because all who will believe in Him will be one in the Father and the Son. And He at once teaches us how they will be one: ‘And the glory that Thou hast given me, I have given to them.’” *De Trin.* 8.12.

¹⁰ *De Trin.* 9.50.

¹¹ *De Trin.* 9.49. Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 79.

Everyone who listens to the Father, and learns, comes to me; not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God, he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, he who believes in me has life everlasting (Jn 6:45-47).¹²

Hilary argues that since only Christ is from God, only He has seen the Father. Therefore, anyone who comes to Christ, and listens to him learns the doctrine of the Father. Both passages reveal Christ operating as a person distinct, but intimately related to the Father. According to Hilary, they testify to the Son's origin from the Father, without sacrificing the unity of nature with him:¹³

[Christ] does not reject those who have been given to Him by the Father, and does not His own will but that of Him who sent Him, not as if He does not will that which He does or as if He Himself is not heard, since He teaches, but to let it be known that He who sent Him and He who is sent possess the reality of the identical nature, for what He wills, does, and says are the will, the works, and the saying of the Father.¹⁴

Hilary points out the Son's "freedom of will" is also evidenced in John 5:21 where He states that: "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will".¹⁵ In saying this, Christ wills everything that the Father wills as is shown by his prayer requesting that all those whom the Father has given him may be where He is. This accords with the Father's will that whoever beholds the Son and believes in him will have eternal life and be raised up on the last day.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Son "does" the Father's will – He does not merely "obey" it.¹⁷ There is a significant difference between the verbs *oboedire* and *facere*: *oboedire* implies an "external necessity (*exteriorir necessitate*)", while *facere* suggests that the Son is able "to do" the Father's will as He possesses the same nature.¹⁸ By these arguments, as the ones cited above, Hilary shows that the Son is a distinct person, freely doing the will of the Father, which points to his union with him:

Thus the nature of the birth and the unity between the Father and the Son are revealed, since the Son is free in this sense, that what He does freely is an act of His Father's will.¹⁹

¹² *De Trin.* 9.49. Elsewhere, Hilary presents a similar argument for the subsistence of the Son and his unity to the Father, when he states that the Son acts through himself when He does the things that are pleasing to the Father; at the same time, He does not act by himself, since the Father remains in him. Cf. *De Trin.* 9.48.

¹³ Cf. *De Trin.* 9.49.

¹⁴ *De Trin.* 9.49.

¹⁵ *De Trin.* 9.50.

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 9.74.

¹⁷ *De Trin.* 9.50.

¹⁸ *De Trin.* 9.50. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 79-80.

¹⁹ "Adque ita inter Patrem et Filium et nativitatis et unitatis demonstrata natura est, cum sic liber in voluntate sit Filius, ut quod volens agit factum paternae sit voluntatis." *De Trin.* 9.50.

II. Circumincession

A certain climax is reached in Hilary's Trinitarian theology through his development of the notion of circumincession.²⁰ Through this notion he expresses most profoundly the unity that exists within the Trinity, as well as the unique subsistence of each divine person, focusing primarily on the Father and the Son, who mutually dwell in one another. Furthermore, he uses this notion to deepen his understanding of our union with God in the plan of salvation. Hilary develops the notion of circumincession in the light of the truth concerning the eternal, infinite and spiritual nature of God within which each divine person subsists. It is also intimately linked to his concept of the *divina nativitas*, by means of which the Son receives all things (cf. Jn 16:15) from the Father, without any loss to his author nor himself being anything other than God:²¹

The Son is from that Father who is, the only begotten from the unbegotten (*unigenitus ab ingenito*), the offspring from the parent (*progenies a parente*), the living one from the living one (*vivus a vivo*). As the Father has life in Himself, so the Son has been given life in Himself... The incomprehensible one from the incomprehensible one (*inconpraehensibilis ab inconpraehensibilis*), for only they themselves know each other mutually. The nature of the Godhead is not different in one and in the other, because both are one. There are not two unbegotten gods, because He is born from Him who is unborn.²²

The foundational text for Hilary's notion of circumincession is John 14:11: "Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father in me". In Book 3 he acknowledges the apparent obscurity of this passage, explaining that it needs to be understood in view of the *divina nativitas* and the nature of God. With this in mind, Hilary explains how this text sheds light on the mystery of the unity within the Godhead, in a manner that avoids any materialist notions, which are at the heart of the erroneous understandings of *homoousios*. The Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, points out Hilary, in a way not possible for material objects, and which we can grasp only "by the wisdom of the divine truth".²³

It does not seem possible that the very thing which is in another is at the same time outside of it, and, since those things which we are discussing [the Father and Son] cannot exist apart from themselves, and, if they are to preserve the number and position in which they are, it seems that they cannot mutually contain each other, so that he who contains something else within himself... can likewise be always present

²⁰ Although he never mentions this word directly, the notion can be found throughout *De Trinitate*. Furthermore, regarding this concept, Hilary is one of the Fathers most quoted by Aquinas. See Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 299-303. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 120-121, footnote 399.

²¹ *De Trin.* 9.31.

²² *De Trin.* 2.11.

²³ *De Trin.* 3.1.

within him whom he contains within himself. Human knowledge will certainly never grasp these truths and a comparison drawn from human things does not afford any similarity to divine things, but what man cannot conceive is possible to God.²⁴

At the end of Book 7, Hilary again returns to John 14:11 in order to explain the mutual indwelling which occurs between the Father and the Son, and which helps us understand that the incarnate Christ is true God. According to Hilary we need to believe from the works of Christ that He is one with the Father, lest our faith become endangered by doubts arising from the “flesh, the body, and the passion” of Christ. These works reveal that “God is in God” and that “God is from God”.²⁵ This mutual inherence is not possible with material natures, points out Hilary, but is only proper to the Only-begotten God, who inheres in the Father through the mystery of his birth. Thus, states Hilary,

there is no distinction between to be and to inhere (*esse et inesse*), but to inhere not as one thing in another as a body in a body, but to be and to subsist in such a manner that He inheres in Him who subsists but inheres in such a manner that He Himself subsists (*sed ita esse ac subsistere, ut in subsistente insit; ita vero inesse, ut et ipse subsistat*).²⁶

Through the notion of circumincession Hilary explains that while the Son possesses the divinity, He also subsists *in it*.²⁷ In this manner, he reveals the Son as a distinct person, yet one who is divine. Furthermore, Hilary points out that the Father does not exist in isolation, since He dwells in the Son.²⁸ He also mentions that the Godhead abides in the Son.²⁹ Hilary thus implies that the divine person, in this instance the Father, is to be identified with the divine nature itself. In humans, such an identity is impossible, given that humans do not possess the same *individual* nature, but rather they are instances of this nature. In contrast, the Father and the Son each possess the same *individual* divinity - in other words, they are not instances of the divine nature. In their mutual indwelling the equality of the Father and Son is most profoundly expressed, as each possesses fully the divinity, although remaining distinct:

From those things, therefore, which are in the Father are also those things which are in the Son, that is, from the whole Father the whole Son is born; He is not from anywhere else, because nothing was before the Son... Whatever is in the Father is also in the Son; whatever is in the unbegotten is also in the only-begotten, one from the other and both are one [substance], not one [person], but one is in the other because there is nothing different in either of them. The Father is in the Son because the Son is from Him; the Son in the Father because He is not a Son from anywhere else; the only-begotten is in the unbegotten because the only-begotten is from the unbegotten. Thus,

²⁴ *De Trin.* 3.1.

²⁵ Cf. *De Trin.* 7.41.

²⁶ Cf. *De Trin.* 7.41.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 7.41.

²⁸ *De Trin.* 4.40, 7.40-41.

²⁹ *De Trin.* 6.10, 7.40.

they are mutually in each other (*in se invicem*), because as all things are perfect in the Father, so all things are perfect in the Son. This is the unity in the Father and the Son, this the power, this the charity, this the hope, this the faith, this the truth, the way, and the life.³⁰

III. *Christology and Circumincision*

Hilary also uses the notion of circumincision to shed light on his Christology, which as we have mentioned, is derivative of his Trinitarian theology. He explains that as the Son's divinity was not abolished by his assumption of our human nature, then the Father must continue to be in him following the incarnation, as he was beforehand. For this reason, when the incarnate Christ performs an act "himself", it is never "by himself" for the Father is in him:

... this is the unity of nature, that He acts through Himself in such a way that He does not act by Himself, and that He does not act by Himself in such a way that He acts through Himself. Grasp the fact that the Son is active and the Father is active through Him! He does not act by Himself, since we have to make known how the Father remains in Him... Thus, the unity of nature (*unitas naturae*) is preserved in the activity, while He Himself who works does not work by Himself, and He Himself who has not worked by Himself works.³¹

The "power of the Father's nature at work within [Christ]" is also revealed in his declaration: "My Father works even until now, and I work" (cf. Jn 5:16), given that the Father dwells in Christ, "it is he who does his works".³² These statements exclude any Sabellian understanding since "the work that is being done by the Father is also being done by the Son".³³ At the same time, they indicate that while the Father and Son perform the same work, they do so in different modes. Hilary turns again to the apostle Paul, in support of these truths. The apostle, he points out, holds fast to the mystery revealed in John 14:11, in his acknowledgement of the one God the Father from whom are all things and the one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). This statement shows forth the unity of the Father and the Son in the one divine nature by the employment of the titles, "God", and "Lord", which indicate their divinity, and by their exercise of the same power in the work of creation - a work that can only be attributed to God. Their uniqueness is shown through the different modes in which they perform the one work, in this case, from the Father, and through the Son.

³⁰ *De Trin.* 3.4. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 106-107, footnote 403.

³¹ *De Trin.* 9.48. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 81.

³² *De Trin.* 9.44.

³³ *De Trin.* 9.44.

Utilising his notion of circumincession, Hilary develops an interesting argument based on the Eucharist. This sheds light on his understanding of the nature of the union conferred by this sacrament, as well as the mystery of the incarnate Christ, and his relationship to the Godhead.³⁴ He presents this argument to counter the Arians' claim that our union with God is merely one of obedience and agreement with the faith, rather than the "reality of a mutual participation in the nature... conferred upon us through the sacrament of the body and blood".³⁵ They use their notion of our union with God to support their position that the Father and Son are also united only through will. Hilary begins his argument with the rhetorical question: "I now ask those who introduce a unity of will between the Father and the Son, whether Christ is in us by the truth of His nature or by the harmony of the will?"³⁶ He then reasons that since the Word became flesh, and we receive the Word when we eat his flesh, then Christ dwells in us, both as God and man. This occurs because He "has mingled the nature of His flesh to His eternal nature in the mystery of the flesh that was to be communicated to us".³⁷ As a result, we become one "because the Father is in Christ and Christ is in us". In this way, Hilary also indicates that the Father is present in the incarnate Christ, who is not only human, but divine. Hilary sums up his argument against the Arians as follows:³⁸

If, therefore, Christ has truly taken the flesh of our body, and that man who was born from Mary is truly Christ, and we truly receive the flesh of His body in the mystery (and we are one, therefore, because the Father is in Him and He is in us), how can you assert that there is a unity of will, since the attribute of the nature in the sacrament is the mystery of the perfect unity?³⁹

IV. Conclusion

Hilary implies throughout *De Trinitate* that the principle of unity within the Trinity, specifically between the Father and the Son, is the one divine substance. It is in this one substance that the Father and the Son each subsists. Given that a thing's most fundamental reality is expressed by its substance, it follows that true unity between things must be found on the level of substance. Therefore, if one of the divine persons is said to differ substantially from another, then He can never be united fundamentally to this person, regardless of his perfection as an individual. It is for this reason that an orthodox explanation of the diversity

³⁴ In presenting this argument, Hilary assumes that his readers believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

³⁵ *De Trin.* 8.17.

³⁶ *De Trin.* 8.13.

³⁷ *De Trin.* 8.13.

³⁸ *De Trin.* 8.13.

³⁹ *De Trin.* 8.13.

and unity within the Trinity cannot be founded on the notion that the Son is a creature, which is the fundamental tenet of Arian doctrine. The difference between a creature and the Creator is substantial, and thus union at the deepest level between them is impossible. Also, the union between the Father and the Son, who mutually abide in one another, cannot be founded on will alone. Rather, according to Hilary, the union of will points to the profound unity which occurs on the level of substance.⁴⁰

In summary, Hilary's view of the substantial unity between the Father and the Son that was proclaimed at Nicaea is vital to his overall concept of divine personhood, which needs to be understood in light of this unity. While, we have focused on the Father and the Son in this chapter, in the next chapters we will look at Hilary's pneumatology, and in particular, his understanding of the Holy Spirit's position within the Trinity, both in terms of his nature and his personhood.

⁴⁰ Cf. Thorp, "*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' De Trinitate*", 105-106.

8. Understanding Hilary's Pneumatology

In the previous chapters, we examined Hilary's conception of divine personhood in terms of the Father and the Son. In the following two chapters, our aim is to investigate his view of the Holy Spirit, and to analyse the extent, if any, that he understood him as a divine person. In order to do so, we first need to address the inherent difficulties associated with Hilary's pneumatology, which have been well-documented by scholars.¹ These largely centre around the fact that Hilary uses the term *spiritus* to refer to the Holy Spirit as well as Christ, and often in a manner that appears ambiguous. This application of the term *spiritus* to the second and third persons of the Trinity is characteristic of the phenomenon referred to by scholars as Spirit Christology (*Geistchristologie*).² This phenomenon was associated with early attempts to expound the mystery of Christ, and was particularly prevalent from the second to the fourth century in the Latin west.³ Spirit Christology petered out towards the end of the fourth century as the doctrine of the Trinity was further developed, especially in terms of the Holy Spirit. Together with this development, the theological use of the term *spiritus* became more defined and was no longer employed in reference to the person of Christ.

Hilary is the last significant Christian writer to be associated with Spirit Christology and is thus an important figure in this stage of the development of pneumatology. Given the paucity of material available in English on Spirit Christology, especially in regard to Hilary, in this chapter we will look at this phenomenon in some detail, focusing on Hilary's writings as well as those of his contemporaries and predecessors.⁴ In conjunction with this, we will

¹ For example, see Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, 325.

² In his recent book, Bucur defines Spirit Christology as the phenomenon whereby terms *spiritus/pneuma* were used in reference to Christ, either in regard to "his divinity as opposed to his humanity, as a characteristic of his divine nature, or as a personal title." Bogdan C. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, VC Supplements, Vol. 95, (Boston, MA, USA: Brill, 2009). The label Spirit Christology is also used in modern theological discussions. The application of this term in these discussions may or may not be related to the manner in which it is applied to the phenomenon that occurred in the third to fourth centuries.

³ Bogdan C. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, VC Supplements, Vol. 95, (Boston, MA, USA: Brill, 2009).

⁴ Although in general very little has been written on Spirit Christology in English, this has begun to change in recent years, with the publication of a few scholarly articles and books which discuss the phenomenon, usually in the context of a particular author. Ibid., Bucur mentions Spirit Christology throughout this book, for example see pages 75-79; see also his article, "Early Christian Binitarianism: From Religious Phenomenon to Polemical Insult to Scholarly Concept", *Modern Theology* 27 (2011): 102-120; Michel Barnes gives a brief overview of the phenomenon in the context of the development of Latin pneumatological doctrine in the following chapter: "Latin Trinitarian Theology", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. P. C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 75-78, and Paul McGuckin discusses Spirit Christology in relation to Lactantius in the following article, "Spirit Christology: Lactantius and his Sources", in *The Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983): 141-148.

give a brief overview of the development of pneumatology up until the time of Hilary's writings as well as the influences upon his thought, both from the west and the east. Armed with a deeper understanding of the manner in which Hilary expresses his pneumatology, and the influences upon it, in the next chapter we will discuss Hilary's exposition of the nature and person of the Spirit.

I. *What/Who Influenced Hilary's Pneumatological Doctrine?*

As with his theology in general, Hilary's primary source for pneumatology is the sacred scripture and associated with this, the baptismal creed. He is also influenced by the writings of his Latin predecessors, especially Tertullian.⁵ Furthermore, it is widely recognised that during Hilary's time of exile, he was greatly influenced by eastern theological thought, however, not much has been written about its impact specifically on his pneumatology. We will thus attempt to fill this lacuna in research in the following section.

A. *The Exile to the East*

Hilary was exiled to Phrygia, a region located in the western central area of modern-day Turkey, around 356-360. This was at a time when heresies concerning the Holy Spirit were beginning to circulate, as mentioned. Hilary was no doubt exposed to some of these, given that he mentions heresies concerning the Holy Spirit in both of the works which were composed, for the most part, during his exile - *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*. In *De Trinitate*, he speaks of two heretical positions concerning the Spirit, and attempts to address each of them. The first of these is the notion that the Holy Spirit is a creature, which was associated with the Macedonian sect;⁶ the second concerns the view that the Spirit has no real existence. There seem to have been two groups associated with this latter position. In Book 2, Hilary mentions "calumniators" who denied the existence of the Spirit, and seem to have been dissatisfied with his arguments to the contrary.⁷ In the same book, he also speaks of certain people being ignorant of the Spirit's real existence due to the manner in which the terms

⁵ An extensive account of the influences on Hilary prior to his exile can be found in Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'Exil*.

⁶ Socrates tells us that the Macedonians increased greatly in number in the Hellespont province west of Phrygia, where Hilary was exiled. It is worth noting that a number of Macedonians came from among the ranks of the Homoiousians, a group whom Hilary was in contact with during his exile. However, Hilary did not associate the Homoiousians with this heresy but rather those who lacked belief in the divinity of the Son, (namely the Arians). Furthermore, those who considered the Spirit to be a creature appear to have held differing views concerning the Son: some followed the Nicene position, others the Homoiousian belief, while still others maintained that he was also a creature. Socrates, *hist. eccl.* 2.45, 4.4, 4.12. See also the brief discussion on the Macedonians by Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 214.

⁷ *De Trin.* 2.29.

“holy” and “spirit” were applied to the Father and the Son.⁸ Hilary attempts to counteract both positions in *De Trinitate*, arguing for the existence and divinity of the Spirit, as revealed in the scriptures, and articulated in the profession of faith. In doing so he presents his most profound insights into the nature and person of the Holy Spirit. Even though these efforts often appear as ‘add-ons’ to the main argument of the treatise, the fact that he makes them also reinforces the notion that while on exile to the east he was exposed to some of the heretical ideas concerning the Spirit, which were circulating there at that time.

Another interesting reference to pneumatological heresies, which is not often mentioned by scholars, can be found in Hilary's *De synodis*. In this document he cites the creed from the council of Sirmium in 351, along with its anathemas, which are notable for their focus on the Holy Spirit. The very inclusion of such anathemas suggests that heresies concerning the Spirit may have been circulating in the east as early as the beginning of the 350s, as we have mentioned.⁹ Hilary briefly comments on these anathemas, justifying their condemnation of the modalist position that the Spirit is either the Father or the Son, as well as the view that the Spirit is a part of the Father or the Son, and the notion that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three gods.¹⁰ Although Hilary does not directly refer to these erroneous views of the Spirit in his other writings, the fact that he is aware of them may have informed, or reinforced certain aspects of his pneumatology.¹¹ For example, his belief that the Holy Spirit is divine, has his own unique existence, and yet is not another god.¹²

Although Hilary's exile to the east seems to have been the impetus for his deeper consideration of the nature and origin of the Spirit, it may have affected him in a more indirect manner, perhaps contributing to the reserve which is evident in his treatment of the Spirit. One can surmise that the increased focus on the Spirit in the east also brought to light gaps in the pneumatological doctrine developed at that time. Hilary's awareness of these and inability to resolve them satisfactorily may have led him to tread with caution in his discussions on the Spirit. Although great advances in pneumatology occurred in the east not long after Hilary's return home, these came from the Cappadocian region, and we have no evidence of his contact with the Fathers there. We only know of Hilary's association with the

⁸ Eunomius may be alluding to the same or related phenomenon when he speaks of those who consider the Holy Spirit to be an *Energeia* and are not aware of his real existence. See Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 215.

⁹ Hilary specifically states that three of the anathemas were written directly in response to heresies. *De syn.* 55.

¹⁰ Interestingly, while he cites the anathema which states that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one person, in his discussion of this, he only mentions the Father and the Son. This may have no other significance than to show that Hilary's focus is on the first two persons of the Trinity, rather than the third, as he attempts to defend the divinity of the Son and his essential relationship to the Father against Arianism. *De syn.* 38, 53-56.

¹¹ *De syn.* 53-56.

¹² These aspects of Hilary's pneumatology will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Homoiousians whose few extant writings reveal very little focus on pneumatology.¹³ Furthermore, Socrates indicates that it was from the ranks of this group that the Macedonians emerged, a sect, which did not believe in the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Given that the Macedonians were concentrated in large numbers in the region of Phrygia where Hilary was exiled, it seems likely that Hilary gained some knowledge of their position. This may have been the impetus for his defence of the Spirit's divinity.

II. *The Gradual Development of Pneumatological Doctrine*

In our investigation of the influences upon Hilary's pneumatology, it is important to keep in mind that the understanding of the person and nature of the Holy Spirit lagged behind that of Christ.¹⁴ The scriptures, which were the fundamental source for theological speculation among the early Christian writers, presented a more developed Christology than pneumatology. These sacred texts revealed Christ as the "Son of God", thus shedding light on his relationship to the Father by using a concept that could be readily grasped, namely, sonship, even though this needed to be purified from creaturely connotations and applied to the divinity in an analogical manner. Although the scriptures mentioned the Holy Spirit, the pneumatology they presented was only in embryonic form. Furthermore, certain heresies, such as Arianism, focused on Christ, and as a result theological speculation was centred on him.¹⁵ It was not until the latter half of the fourth century that heresies concerning the Spirit began circulating. These led to the development of pneumatology and eventually a consistent and coherent exposition of the divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit.

III. *The Phenomenon of Spirit Christology*

During the development of pneumatological doctrine, a number of early Christian writers used the terms *Spiritus/Pneuma* in reference to both the second and third persons of the Trinity. This phenomenon, as mentioned, has been referred to by modern scholars as Spirit Christology and was brought to light especially by Friedrich Loofs. Loofs dedicated a section to the study of Spirit Christology in his book on the sources of Irenaeus, which was published posthumously.¹⁶ According to Manlio Simonetti, Loofs' insights did not gain the attention they deserved as his book was shelved early on by scholars. This was due to certain

¹³ See the letters written by the Homoiousians, Basil of Ancyra and George of Laodicea, between 358-359 in Epiphanius' *Pan.* 2.1 ff.

¹⁴ Manlio Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", *Aug* 12 (1972): 231.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, footnote 18.

¹⁶ Friedrich Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien Adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus* (Leipzig: J.C. Heinrichs, 1930); Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 201.

methodological errors, which amongst other problems led to the exaggeration of the prevalence and significance of Spirit Christology. In a seminal article published in 1971, Simonetti revisited Loofs' work, using the texts he had cited but analysing them in a more scientific manner.¹⁷

Spirit Christology is associated with a number of key scriptural passages. Of these, one of the most important is the Pauline statement from the Letter to the Romans concerning Christ "who was descended from David according to the flesh, and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit" (Rom 1:3-4). This juxtaposition of "flesh", and "spirit" was interpreted by the early (and later) Christian writers as distinguishing between Christ's humanity and divinity. Another significant text is the annunciation passage found in Luke 1:35. Here, the term *spiritus* was interpreted by some early Christian writers as referring to Christ rather than the Holy Spirit, thus removing any hint of the Spirit's role in the incarnation. Also of importance is the text in John's Gospel which affirms the spiritual nature of God: "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24). Simonetti highlights the connection between this assertion and the practice of referring to the divinity of Christ as "spirit". The Stoic tendency to identify the terms "*pneuma*" and "*logos*" also may have influenced the early Christian practice of using these terms synonymously in reference to Christ.¹⁸ (This is not improbable given the prevalence of Stoicism in the society in which Christianity was developing, although much of the knowledge that Christians possessed of this philosophy may well have come from the writings of its detractors.) Already by the middle of the second century the term "*Logos*" was commonly used to refer to the divine component of Christ.¹⁹

Spirit Christology represents a phenomenon which encompasses a great deal of variation. This is perhaps to be expected given that the writers involved came from different cultural settings and historical periods.²⁰ At one end of the scale it concerns those writers who used the terms *spiritus/pneuma* to refer to the divine aspect of Christ, at the other end it includes those who confused the Holy Spirit with Christ, thus presenting a binitarian understanding of the Godhead.

¹⁷ Ibid., 201-232. Simonetti's article has been provided an important foundation for this study of Spirit Christology.

¹⁸ Ibid., 203-4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 209.

²⁰ Simonetti points out that there is an inclination among scholars to speak of Spirit Christology in a sense that is too generic. Ibid., 202. Such an understanding of this phenomenon could lead to issues concerning the authentic presentation of the theological views of writers associated with Spirit Christology, given that there were nuanced differences in the manner in which they employed the term *spiritus* and also the fact that at times their theological views differed markedly.

IV. *Binitarianism and Spirit Christology*

The concept of binitarianism, which is associated with Spirit Christology, was also popularized by Loofs. It concerns those writers whose works do not provide an equal position in the Trinity for the Holy Spirit, alongside the Father and the Son. Although Spirit Christology can be accompanied by a certain binitarian position this is not necessarily the case.²¹ In particular, there is no opposition between the Pauline practice of identifying the divine nature of Christ as “spirit” in distinction from his human nature as “flesh”, and an understanding of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. According to Simonetti, problems arose when authors used the terms *spiritus/pneuma* to indicate the divine person of Christ pre-existent.²² In this manner, the terms were used to designate the person who is later incarnated rather than his divine nature, or the third person of the Trinity. Such a practice could and did lead to much confusion when applied to the scriptures. At times, it resulted in the interpretation of key passages, which were later understood in reference to the Holy Spirit, as referring to Christ. Ultimately, this led to a limitation in the texts available for the development of pneumatology.²³

There has been a tendency amongst scholars to view the early writers who interpreted scriptural uses of *spiritus/pneuma* as denoting Christ, as identifying the Holy Spirit with him, and thus presenting a binitarian theology.²⁴ Although these writers may appear to have been advocating such a position, it is often difficult to make a definitive judgment of binitarianism for several reasons. Firstly, up until the latter half of the fourth century most of the authors in question did not focus specifically on the Holy Spirit, and thus it is difficult to ascertain their understanding of him, given that they usually only mentioned him briefly, and not as the main subject of discussion. Furthermore, they did not usually present their theology in a consistent or systematic manner, tending to affirm rather than explain their positions. Finally, even if the logical conclusion of some of the theological views presented by these authors does indicate a binitarian position, this does not necessarily mean that this was their intention - they may simply not have thought their ideas through sufficiently.

Another difficulty in assessing the theological positions of the writers associated with Spirit Christology is the ambiguity inherent in many of their works. Due to the variety of ways in which they applied the terms *spiritus/pneuma* to express their theological ideas, it is not always easy to understand, with certainty, how they intended to use them in any given

²¹ Ibid., 226; Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, 97.

²² Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 226 ff.

²³ Some of these will be identified and discussed during the course of this chapter.

²⁴ Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 226 ff.

instance. Such texts need to be read with great care, and in the context of the overall works of the authors, in order to minimise the possibility of misunderstanding their views. This is the case with Hilary's writings. At a cursory glance he sometimes appears to be using *spiritus* in reference to the Holy Spirit, whereas a closer look reveals that he is referring to Christ.²⁵

In a recent article entitled, *Early Christian Binitarianism: From Religious Phenomenon to Polemical Insult to Scholarly Concept*, Bucur criticises the concepts of both binitarianism and Spirit Christology as suitable tools for understanding early Christianity.²⁶ In line with our discussion above, Bucur raises the important point that the term binitarianism may not always accurately depict the overall thought of a particular writer, especially when he/she includes Trinitarian formulae in their works.²⁷ He cites a quote from H.E.W. Turner which aptly sums up the issue:

If, however, there is a persistent tendency in the early centuries to interpret the Christian doctrine of the Godhead in a bi-personal rather than in a tri-personal manner...[t]here is no reason to believe that those who worked normally with a Binitarian phrasing in their theology were other than Trinitarian in their religion. There is no trace, for example, of an alternative Twofold Baptismal Formula...

²⁵ For example, in his discussion of Luke 1:35 in *De Trinitate*, Hilary can at first appear to be interpreting the term *spiritus* as referring to the Holy Spirit, whereas a closer reading shows that he understands this term as indicating the pre-existent Christ. See the later discussion on this point. According to Ladaria, a close reading of Hilary's texts, in view of an overall understanding of the diverse ways in which he uses *spiritus*, generally renders a clear meaning. In the conclusion of his thesis on Hilary's pneumatology he writes: "If the analysis of the passages we have examined is correct, we must conclude that there is no confusion between the diverse meanings of the word "*Spiritus*" and even "*Spiritus sanctus*" in Saint Hilary. God is spirit, the Son is spirit for all of eternity, He is spirit and flesh since the time of his incarnation, and it is that which grants mankind the gift of the Holy Spirit, "*tercero*" in the Trinity. Despite the difficulties that any concrete passage may offer, the majority fit into this schema that we have discovered; furthermore, these places of dubious interpretation receive from these coordinates a clear sense that is impossible to obtain in any other form. I do not believe that there is any other passage in all of Saint Hilary's works that unequivocally opposes this schema, proposed here evidently slightly simplified." (This is an informal translation of the Spanish text). "*Si es correcto el análisis de los pasajes que hemos examinado debemos concluir que no hay confusión entre las diversas acepciones de la palabra «Spiritus» e incluso «Spiritus sanctus» en san Hilario. Dios es espíritu, el Hijo es espíritu desde toda la extremidad, espíritu y carne desde su encarnación, y es el que otorga a los hombres el don del Espíritu Santo, «tercero» en la Trinidad. A pesar de las dificultades que pueden ofrecer este o aquel pasaje concreto, la mayoría se adaptan sin violencia ninguna a este esquema que hemos descubierto; más aún, estos lugares de interpretación dudosa reciben a partir de estas coordenadas un sentido claro, de otra forma imposible de obtener. No creo que pueda encontrarse en toda la obra de san Hilario un pasaje que de modo inequívoco se oponga a este esquema, propuesto aquí evidentemente en manera un tanto simplificada*". Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, 328.

²⁶ Bucur, "Early Christian Binitarianism: From Religious Phenomenon to Polemical Insult to Scholarly Concept", 102-120.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 109. Bucur points out that aside from Trinitarian formulae, other indications of an author's understanding of the Holy Spirit can be shown by the way he depicts the Spirit's role in prophecy and "religious experience". For example, Paul states that no-one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

Christians lived Trinitarianly before the doctrine of the Trinity began to be thought out conceptually.²⁸

Despite his reservations about the usefulness of the concepts, binitarianism and Spirit Christology, in the study of early Christianity, Bucur still thinks they have a place in current scholarship. He does suggest however, that the term binitarian be restricted to use in an adjectival form, such as “binitarian tendency” or “binitarian framework”, until other concepts are developed, which provide a more nuanced description of the phenomenon.²⁹

V. *Hilary and Spirit Christology – the Status Questionis*

Several scholars have associated Hilary with the phenomenon of Spirit Christology,³⁰ with some going as far as to claim that his position is binitarian. According to Loofs “binitarian opinions come through strongly” in Hilary’s writings, “in spite of the naturally repeatedly appearing concept “*trinitas*””.³¹ He qualifies this assertion by pointing out that for Hilary “the *spiritus sanctus* belongs undoubtedly to the “*totum*””: He is God’s spirit, but not an “independent hypostasis”.³² Beck also maintains that Hilary is binitarian but goes further than Loofs by proposing that there is no “real” difference between Hilary’s use of the term *spiritus* in regard to the divine nature, or the Spirit Paraclete. Thus, he suggests that Hilary identifies the divinity with the third person of the Trinity.³³

Smulders criticizes the positions of both Loofs and Beck concerning Hilary’s theology. In regard to Loofs, he agrees that in his *Commentarius in Matthaem* Hilary at times seems to identify the Holy Spirit with the divinity of Christ, or the nature common to the Father and the Son.³⁴ Smulders points to Hilary’s exegesis of the passage concerning the blasphemy against the Spirit as an example of this (Matt 12:31).³⁵ Here, he suggests that Hilary identifies the Holy Spirit with the divine substance communicated to the Son by the

²⁸ Henry E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray & Co., 1954), 134-135, 474. As cited by B. G. Bucur, *ibid.*, 112.

²⁹ Bucur, “Early Christian Binitarianism: From Religious Phenomenon to Polemical Insult to Scholarly Concept”, 114.

³⁰ Anton E. Beck, *Die Trinitätslehre des Heiligen Hilarius von Poitiers* (Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1903), 242; Burns, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on Matthew*, chap. 2, footnote 8; Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, 89-99; Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 207-208, 223, footnotes 53, 66; and Loofs, “*Hilarius von Poitiers*” in *RE*, vol. 8, Leipzig, 57-67. Not all of these scholars use the terms Spirit Christology or *Geistchristologie*, but nevertheless they discuss the phenomenon which they signify, namely the use of *spiritus* in reference to Christ as well as the Holy Spirit.

³¹ Loofs, “*Hilarius von Poitiers*”, 60. (The translations used of this text are informal).

³² *Ibid.*, 60-61.

³³ Beck, *Die Trinitätslehre des Heiligen Hilarius von Poitiers*, 242.

³⁴ Cf. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 84; Simonetti holds this position as well. Simonetti, “*Note di Pneumatica Christologie*”, 229.

³⁵ *In Matt 12.17.*

Father. Smulders maintains that a similar identification occurs when Hilary discusses the temptation of Christ in the desert.³⁶ However, in order to label Hilary as binitarian, even based on his *Commentarius in Matthaeum* alone, Smulders maintains that one must ignore the passages where Hilary presents the Holy Spirit as a unique entity who takes the third place in the Trinity after the Father and the Son. To support his argument, he cites the passage concerning the three measures of flour in the *Commentary on Matthew* (Matt 13:33). In this excerpt, Hilary demonstrates that he is aware of another use of the term *spiritus*, namely as a title for the third person of the Trinity. He also makes a startlingly clear statement of the Trinitarian faith - the mystery of three persons who are united. This is written in such a matter of fact way, as to suggest that it was a precept commonly held by believers. Unfortunately, he does not go on to explain it in any detail:

I recall, however, that there are many others who have thought the three measures of flour must be a reference to the mystery of faith, that is, the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*ad fidei sacramentum, id est ad Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti unitatem*), or to the calling of the three peoples from Shem, Ham and Japheth. But I do not know whether the reasoning in this latter example is warranted since, the calling of all peoples is done equitably, Christ is not hidden in them. He is, rather, revealed to them. Given such a multitude of unbelievers, the yeast could not have entirely permeated the whole. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, however, do not require the yeast from an outside source; all things are one in Christ (*Christo omnia unum sint*).³⁷

Smulders suggests that Hilary himself had become alert to the possibility of confusion related to the use of *spiritus*, and that this was associated with his efforts in *De Trinitate* to show how the term could be used validly in reference to the Father and the Son, who are both “holy” and “spirit”, as well as the third person of the Trinity.³⁸ This clarification is further reason, according to Smulders, for not labelling Hilary as binitarian. As he points out, the same word can be employed to signify different things, and although Hilary’s manner of using and understanding *spiritus* in certain scriptural texts may differ from current thinking, it does not prevent him from distinguishing between the Son and the Holy Spirit.³⁹

Although Smulders considers that a theory based on Beck’s proposal has some appeal, given that it could be used to explain some of Hilary’s expressions, he nevertheless maintains that it cannot be justified in terms of Hilary’s overall writings. In particular, such a position

³⁶ “*Nam quod in desertum ductus est, significatur libertas Spiritus sancti hominem suum iam diabolo offerentis et permittentis temptandi et adsumendi occasionem, quam non nisi datam temptator habuisset.*” In *Matt.* 3.1. Cf. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 84-88. Hilary’s use of “*Spiritus sancti*” here is somewhat ambiguous – he may be referring to the Holy Spirit, despite Smulders’ interpretation.

³⁷ In *Matt.* 13.6. Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 87-88.

³⁸ See the discussion on this in the previous chapter.

³⁹ Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 269-270.

would be at odds with the passage mentioned above where Hilary himself points out the various uses of *spiritus*, without making any attempt to identify the Holy Spirit with the divinity of Christ.

Simonetti also refers to Hilary's theology as binitarian, but in a more qualified manner than Loofs. He maintains that an author can be considered as Trinitarian in two senses: The first he describes as the "technical sense". In this instance, the author articulates a conception of the Godhead which recognizes three persons in one divinity, either explicitly or implicitly, assigning the same character to each person, even if not using the later prescribed terms of *hypostasis*, *prosopon* or *persona*. In the second "generic sense" the author considers the Holy Spirit as "being alongside" the Father and the Son in terms of the economic activity of the Trinity. However, He is not placed on an equal footing with the Father and the Son who relate as divine persons within the immanent Trinity. Simonetti maintains that Hilary's writings demonstrate Trinitarian thought according to the second "generic" sense of the term, but fail to do so according to the first more technical sense, and in this manner he considers him to be binitarian.⁴⁰ Although Hilary expounded the divinity and real existence of the Spirit he believes that he conceived of him "only as gift, as *res* of the divine nature", rather than a divine person.⁴¹ Also, for Simonetti, Hilary's lack of reference to the Spirit as a *persona* is significant, and suggests that he did not consider the Spirit as such. He does concede though that Hilary possibly associated the term with generation, and for this reason reserved it for the Father and the Son.⁴²

In his work, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, Ladaria summarizes those aspects of Simonetti's article on Spirit Christology which are especially associated with Hilary.⁴³ He agrees that Simonetti is right in stressing the attention Hilary gives to the economic role of the Holy Spirit, and pointing out that it is not accompanied by a corresponding focus on his relations within the Trinity. However, he believes that Simonetti's depiction of Hilary as presenting only a "generic" Trinitarian position, needs qualifying. Ladaria does this by emphasizing the openness in Hilary's later works to a Trinitarianism that increasingly considers the Spirit to be on the same level as the Father and the Son. He also makes the important point that while Hilary speaks of the Spirit's role in the

⁴⁰ Interestingly Simonetti applies the same verdict to the writings of the important Greek Fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Justin Martyr, whom he describes as being of marginal interest to the study of Spirit Christology. Both authors, while demonstrating the Son's place within the Trinity alongside the Father, do not assign such a position to the Holy Spirit, although they include him in Trinitarian formulae. Simonetti "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", 231.

⁴¹ Simonetti, "Hilary of Poitiers and the Arian Crisis in the West", in Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 60.

⁴² Simonetti, "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", footnote 66.

⁴³ Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers*, 89-99.

economy, he never specifically limits him to this arena. Furthermore, Hilary assigns certain personal attributes to the Spirit in his later works, especially in relation to his action *ad extra*.⁴⁴

Although Hanson does not use the concept of Spirit Christology to analyse Hilary's theology, he alludes to the related concept of binitarianism by stating that Hilary's doctrine of the Holy Trinity must be spoken about "circumspectly" since he did "not teach that the Holy Spirit is included in the internal relations of the Godhead".⁴⁵ Hanson maintains that Hilary understood the Spirit as having a distinct existence, but implies that it is reasonable to believe that Hilary also "tended to see the Spirit as an impersonal influence rather than as God encountered in a personal mode".⁴⁶ In his conclusion Hanson states that Hilary cannot be precisely called a "Trinitarian theologian", although credit cannot be withheld from him for "having made great steps towards a Trinitarian theology, of having striven valiantly to create a satisfactory vocabulary for formulating the Christian doctrine of God".⁴⁷ Despite acknowledging Hilary's understanding of the real existence of the Holy Spirit, Hanson's overall presentation of Hilary's pneumatology is problematic as he does not take into account sufficiently several important factors such as the personal manner in which Hilary speaks of the Spirit, and the way in which he includes him alongside the Father and the Son in his exegesis of Matthew 28:19 in Book 2 of *De Trinitate*. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

VI. *Spirit Christology and Binitarianism in Hilary's Predecessors*

In terms of Spirit Christology, Hilary may have been influenced by his Latin predecessor, Tertullian, who employed the term *spiritus* in reference to the divine nature, Christ and the Holy Spirit. In his polemical work, *Adversus Praxean*, Tertullian uses *spiritus* to denote the divine component of Christ, explaining that Christ is both God and man:

Learn therefore with Nicodemus that *what is born in the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit*. Flesh does not become spirit nor spirit flesh: evidently they can < both > be in one < person >. Of these Jesus is composed, of flesh as Man and of spirit as God: and on that occasion the angel, in respect of that part in which he was spirit, pronounced him the Son of God, reserving for the flesh the designation Son of Man.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid., footnote 114.

⁴⁵ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy, 318-381*, 504.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 503.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 505.

⁴⁸ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 27.14.

In the same document, Tertullian also interprets the term *spiritus* in Luke 1:35 as referring to the pre-existent Christ. He does this in an attempt to defend the faith against the Monarchian position by showing that the Son of God was incarnated in Mary, rather than God the Father:⁴⁹

it is enough that he who was to be born of the virgin was by the angel messenger himself defined as the Son of God: The Spirit of God (*Spiritus dei*) shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, wherefore that which shall be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God (Lk 1:35). They will wish to quibble even here, but the truth will prevail. “Doubtless”, say they, “the Son of God is God, and the power of the Most High is the Most High”, and they are not ashamed to assume that which, if it had been so, would have been so written. For, consideration for whom prevented him from openly stating, God shall come upon thee and the Most High shall overshadow thee? For when he said The Spirit of God (*spiritus dei*), although God is spirit, yet since he did not mention God in the nominative case he wished there to be understood an assignment of the whole which was to go to the Son's account. This Spirit of God (*spiritus dei*) will be the same as the Word. For as, when John says The Word was made flesh, we understand also Spirit at the mention of the Word, so also here we recognise also the Word under the name of the Spirit. For spirit is the substance of the Word, and word is an operation of the Spirit, and the two are one <thing>.⁵⁰

What is interesting here is that in his citation of Luke 1:35, Tertullian uses “*Spiritus dei*” instead of “*Spiritus sanctus*”.⁵¹ This was a quite possibly a deliberate move on his behalf to prevent any misunderstandings concerning his position regarding the Holy Spirit. Earlier on Justin Martyr did something similar with the same passage. In his exegesis of it, he used the term πνεῦμα κύριου instead of πνεῦμα ἁγίου:

the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord (πνεῦμα κύριου) would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her...⁵²

Even though Tertullian does not interpret the term *spiritus* in Luke 1:35 in reference to the Holy Spirit, thus excluding the Spirit from a direct role in the incarnation, he does establish an understanding of the Spirit as a divine person, who is third in the Trinitarian order, alongside the Father, and the Son. This is clearly shown in his *Adversus Praxaeum* where he uses the following passages from Genesis to demonstrate plurality within the Godhead: “Let us make man after our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26) and “Behold, Adam is

⁴⁹ Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 221.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 26.2-5.

⁵¹ See Raniero Cantalamessa, “*La primitiva esegesi cristologica di ‘Romani’ I, 3-4 e ‘Luca’ I, 35*” in *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 2 (1966): 76-80.

⁵² Justin Martyr. *Dial. Tryph.* 100. As cited by Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 219-220.

become as one of us" (Gen 3:22).⁵³ According to Tertullian, God could speak in such a way because "there already was attached to him the Son, a second Person (*persona*), his Word, and a third Person (*persona*), the Spirit in the Word..."⁵⁴ It is also worth remembering that it was Tertullian who coined the term *Trinitas* and was the first to use *persona* in reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even though he did not manage to avoid subordinationism entirely when distinguishing between them.⁵⁵ Simonetti asserts that the Latin scholars following on from Tertullian up until the end of the fourth century did not pay enough attention to his insight concerning the personhood of the Holy Spirit. He contrasts these with their eastern counterparts, who readily took up Origen's notion of three *hypostases*.⁵⁶

Although influenced by Tertullian, Novatian does not refer to the Holy Spirit as a *persona*, like his erudite predecessor. He focuses more on the Father and the Son, developing an understanding of their intratrinitarian relations, while making no mention of the Spirit in this regard. According to Simonetti, Novatian does not sufficiently identify the Spirit as a divine person, and for this reason he considers him to be Trinitarian only in the "generic" sense of the term, as he does Hilary.⁵⁷ DeSimone disagrees with Simonetti's position stating that "[t]o Novatian the Holy Spirit is not a mere creature... but a Divine Person".⁵⁸ He points out that Novatian's aim was to refute the Gnostics rather than to portray the personhood of the Spirit. Despite this, DeSimone maintains that the personal character of the Spirit is implied throughout Novatian's *De Trinitate*. It is also worth noting that Novatian surpasses Tertullian in his account of the Spirit's role in the divine economy, which he bases on scriptural passages. He differentiates the transient presence of the Spirit within the prophets with his permanent presence in the apostles through the resurrection of Christ. In doing so, he also implies the eternal existence of the Holy Spirit who is present throughout the scriptures, both Old and New. Furthermore, his description of the Holy Spirit's role in the economy of salvation implies that He is divine - He is the one who admonished the people through the prophets, was promised by the prophet Joel, who brings about the perfection of the Church, and the sanctification of the faithful. Moreover, his source is Christ:

⁵³ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 12.

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 12.

⁵⁵ See Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 8 and Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, 326-327.

⁵⁶ Simonetti goes as far as suggesting that there was a regression in Trinitarian theology in the west, following Tertullian. Simonetti "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", 231-232. It is difficult to argue conclusively for such a position given the complexity of the development of Trinitarian theology in the Latin west, not to mention the east. For example, Hilary's understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son, in comparison to Tertullian's was more developed, even though he did not expound to any comparable extent the personhood of the Spirit.

⁵⁷ Simonetti, "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", footnote 66.

⁵⁸ Russell J. DeSimone, Introduction to Novatian, in *Trinity, The Spectacle, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters* (Baltimore, MD, USA: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 18.

Next, well-ordered reason and the authority of our faith bid us (in the words and the writings of our Lord set down in orderly fashion) to believe, after these things, also in the Holy Spirit, who was in times past promised to the Church and duly bestowed at the appointed, favorable moment. He was indeed promised by the prophet Joel but bestowed through Christ. "In the last days," says the prophet, "I will pour out from My spirit upon My servants and handmaids!" And the Lord said: "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained..." Now the Lord sometimes calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete and at other times proclaims Him to be the Spirit of truth. He is not new in the Gospel, nor has He been given in a novel way. For it was He who in the prophets reproved the people and in the apostles gave an invitation to the Gentiles... He was, however, in the former only for awhile; whereas He abides in the latter forever... He was not... manifested before the Lord's Resurrection but conferred by Christ's Resurrection.⁵⁹

Although Novatian certainly attributes personal and divine characteristics to the Holy Spirit, there are flaws in his concept of divine personhood, which relate particularly to his apparent subordination of the Spirit and the Son:

the Paraclete receives from Christ the things which He will make known. If He received from Christ the things which He will make known, then surely Christ is greater than the Paraclete, since the Paraclete would not receive from Christ unless He were less than Christ. Now, the fact that the Paraclete is less than Christ proves that Christ is also God, from whom He received what He makes known.⁶⁰

Writing at the turn of the fourth century, Lactantius is also important to mention in terms of Spirit Christology. A rhetorician and convert to Christianity, Lactantius was renowned for his eloquence, which regrettably was not matched by his ability as a theologian. In his most significant work, the *Divinae Institutiones*, Lactantius attempted to explain the presence of good and evil in the world in a dualistic manner. He postulated that God the Father produced two beings - the Son, who is good, and the devil who chose evil over good. Modern scholars have pointed out that this dualistic view of Lactantius provides no place for the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Novatian, *Trinity, The Spectacle, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters*, 29.1-6. See also the rest of this chapter as well as DeSimone, Introduction, 17-18; and Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, 226-233.

⁶⁰ Novatian, *Trinity, The Spectacle, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters*, 16.2-3.

⁶¹ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, 407; Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 228. In the introduction to their translation of Lactantius' *Divine Institutions*, Bowen and Garnsey assert that the emphasis on Lactantius' dualism has been overstated. They point out that Lactantius' position was significantly different from the dualism of the Manichees who proposed two principles - one evil and one good. Rather, Lactantius held that God had created a being that had the potential to be corrupted i.e. the devil, and who subsequently chose evil over good. This evil, according to Lactantius, was necessary for the development of virtue: "if virtue were not beset with evils, it [would] either lose its potency or else not exist at all" (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 2.6). A. Bowen and P. Garnsey, eds., Introduction to Lactantius, *Divine Institutions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), footnote 106. Even though Lactantius did not believe that God created evil directly, he did hold that God created a second being knowing that he would become the author of evil. See also McGuckin, "Spirit Christology: Lactantius and his Sources", 141-148. It is interesting to note that a somewhat similar notion concerning the need to know evil, in order to know good is found in Irenaeus' *Ad. Haer.* 4.39.

Simonetti is one such scholar. In his analysis of Lactantius' writings, and the manner in which he uses the term *sanctus spiritus* in reference to Christ, he concludes that his position can be none other than binitarian.⁶² As part of his discussion on the phenomenon of Spirit Christology he cites the following excerpt from Lactantius' *Epitome*. According to Simonetti, in this text Lactantius identifies the Holy Spirit with Christ pre-existent:

*renatus est ergo ex uirgine sine patre tamquam homo, ut quemadmodum in prima natiuitate spiritali creatus [est] ex solo deo sanctus spiritus factus est, sic in secunda carnali ex sola matre genitus caro sancta fieret...*⁶³

Although Lactantius does seem to be using *sanctus spiritus* here in reference to Christ, this does not necessarily mean that he is identifying the Holy Spirit with him. Rather, in this instance he seems to be using these terms deliberately as a title for Christ, in order to emphasize his divine nature. This excerpt is part of a larger passage in which Lactantius attempts to demonstrate the divinity of Christ by pointing out that his nativity was two-fold, namely spiritual, and carnal:

*Bis enim natus est; primum de Deo in spiritu ante ortum mundi; postmodum in carne ex homine, Augusto imperante...*⁶⁴

Interestingly, elsewhere in this passage Lactantius seems to be referring to the Holy Spirit when he speaks of God sending prophets filled with the *Divinus spiritus*:

*Propterea Deus Prophetas ad eos misit, Divino Spiritu adimpletos, qui illis peccata exprobrarent, et poenitentiam indicerent...*⁶⁵

McGuckin holds a similar position to Simonetti. He maintains that Lactantius' terminology "leads to a pneumatological doctrine that does not *articulate* a threefold, Trinitarian, structure of the deity, and which therefore can be classed as pre-Nicene binitarianism". According to him, Lactantius does not seem to have a concept of a "third spirit" who can also be "called 'God'".⁶⁶ He further points out that Lactantius assigns the functions, which after the council of Constantinople in 381 are attributed to the Holy Spirit, to either the Godhead, or the Son. McGuckin also holds that for Lactantius the spirit is "one and the same with the Son", and thus when he speaks of the "spirit of God" inspiring the prophets, he is actually meaning the Son. He cites the following passages from the *Divinae Institutiones* in support of this view:

⁶² Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 228.

⁶³ Lactantius, *Ep.* 43.9.

⁶⁴ Lactantius, *Ep.* 43.9.

⁶⁵ Lactantius, *Ep.* 43.9.

⁶⁶ McGuckin, "Spirit Christology: Lactantius and his Sources", 142.

As for the way in which he [Jesus] was sent to earth by God and the instructions with which he was sent, the spirit of God (*spiritus dei*) working through the prophet made it plain that when he had faithfully and steadfastly fulfilled the will of his father on high he would receive judgment and eternal power. ‘If you walk in my ways, he says, ‘keeping my commandments, you shall judge my house (cf. Zech 3:7).’⁶⁷

In this second passage, McGuckin maintains that Lactantius presents the “*spiritus dei*” as the one “who suffers the very torments he himself had foretold through the person of David in psalm 21 (22)”:⁶⁸

So too David in psalm 21: ‘They have pierced my hands and my feet, they have counted all my bones...’ The prophet did not speak of himself: he was king, and he never suffered like that; the spirit of God spoke through him, of the one who would endure all those things 1050 years later.⁶⁹

In both of these passages it is difficult to ascertain exactly what Lactantius means by his use of the term *spiritus*. They present good examples of the ambiguity which is often present in the writings of those associated with Spirit Christology. In each passage, Lactantius could be identifying the Holy Spirit with Christ, or in some other way with the divinity, as is the case with the first one, where the prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit seems to be speaking in the name of the Father.⁷⁰ However, in each case Lactantius could also be treating the Spirit as a separate entity.

Although we have focused on some of the ambiguities present in Lactantius’ writings, neither McGuckin’s nor Simonetti’s overall conclusions regarding his theology are unfounded. Even as early as the turn of the fourth century, problems with Lactantius’ understanding of the personhood of the Spirit were noted by Jerome:

Lactantius in his books and particularly in his letters to Demetrian altogether denies the subsistence of the Holy Spirit, and following the error of the Jews says that the passages in which he is spoken of refer to the Father or to the Son and that the words ‘holy spirit’ merely prove the holiness of these two persons in the Godhead.⁷¹

⁶⁷ “*Quomodo autem et cum quibus mandatis a deo mitteretur in terram, declaravit spiritus dei per prophetam docens futurum ut cum uoluntatem summi patris fideliter et constanter inplesset, acciperet iudicium atque imperium sempiternum. Si in uis meis inquit ambulaueris et praecepta mea seruaueris, tu iudicabis domum meam.*” Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 4.14.15-16.

⁶⁸ McGuckin, “Spirit Christology: Lactantius and his Sources”, 145.

⁶⁹ “*Item Dauid in psalmo XXI: effoderunt manus meas et pedes meos, dinumerauerunt omnia ossa mea... Quae utique propheta non de se locutus est. Fuit enim rex et numquam illa peressus est, sed spiritus dei per eum loquebatur, qui fuerat illa passurus post annos mille et quinquaginta.*” Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 4.18.30-31.

⁷⁰ Such an understanding is not incompatible with a notion of the Holy Spirit’s role in inspiring the prophets. This can be seen in Hilary’s *Tractatus super Psalmus* where he frequently points out that the prophet, acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is speaking either in the name of the Father or the Son, as we have mentioned. For example, see *Tr. Ps.* 1.1, 1.3, 2.5, 2.9 etc.

⁷¹ Jerome, *Ep.* 84.7.

When discussing the Godhead in any detail, Lactantius either focused on the oneness of God, over and against the pagan belief in a multitude of gods, or the mystery of Christ and his relationship to the Father.⁷² He never spoke of the Holy Spirit in any depth, and although he talked of the prophets being inspired by the *Spiritus Dei*, he never explained what he meant by this application of the term. In saying this, it is important to keep the deficiencies in Lactantius' theology in perspective. In his *Divinae Institutiones*, Lactantius' aim was to defend the faith against pagan denigration, in the midst of the 'Great Persecution', and to present the true doctrine of Christianity.⁷³ Since pagan criticisms were directed against Christ, it makes sense that his efforts were centered on expressing an orthodox view of him, rather than the Holy Spirit. Also, in presenting a dualistic view of the world, Lactantius was attempting to explain the presence of good and evil, not to expound the mystery of the Triune God. As well as this, he may not have thought his position through sufficiently to identify its logical consequences in terms of the Trinity. As for the letters to Demetrian mentioned by Jerome in the above citation, these are no longer extant so the context in which they were written is not known. Interestingly, despite Lactantius' errors, Jerome still praised his eloquence and ability to refute his enemies.⁷⁴ Augustine also commended Lactantius, referring to him as one of those "good and faithful men" who have put pagan writings into good use in the spreading of the Gospel message.⁷⁵

The presence of Spirit Christology can also be noted in the writings of Victorinus, the bishop of Pettau, who flourished at the end of the third century. For example, in his work entitled *De Fabrica Mundi*, Victorinus seems to identify the *spiritus sanctus* as Christ when referring to the passage from Luke 1:35:

*ea die spiritum sanctum Mariam uirginem inundasse, qua lucem fecit; ea die in carne esse conuersum, qua terram et aquam fecit... ea die in carne esse conuersum, qua die hominem de humo instruxit...*⁷⁶

This, and other such passages, have led Simonetti to consider Victorinus as presenting a binitarian view of the Godhead as well.⁷⁷ However, it is difficult to make such a judgement concerning this author, given both the paucity of his extant writings, and also the fact that the Holy Spirit was not the focus of these. Furthermore, on the occasions where Victorinus mentions the Spirit, he does seem to portray him as a separate entity to the Son:

⁷² For example, see Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 4.29, 4.3.

⁷³ Bowen and Garnsey, Introduction to Lactantius, 51-54.

⁷⁴ See Jerome, *Ep.* 58.10.

⁷⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.61; cf. Bowen and Garnsey, Introduction, 4-5.

⁷⁶ Victorinus of Pettau, *Fabr. Mund.* 9.

⁷⁷ Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 228.

We have said that in His right hand He had seven stars, because the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus Sanctus*) of sevenfold agency was given into His [Jesus'] power by the Father. As Peter exclaimed to the Jews: Being at the right hand of God exalted, He has shed forth this Spirit (*Spiritum*) received from the Father, which you both see and hear (Acts 2:33). Moreover, John the Baptist had also anticipated this, by saying to his disciples: For God gives not the Spirit (*Spiritum*) by measure unto Him. The Father, says he, loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands (Jn 3:35).⁷⁸

This is particularly noticeable in the following passage, which seems to be part of a creedal formula:

For the *measure* of faith is commanded by our Lord, to confess the Father Almighty, as we have learned, and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: before the origin of the world spiritually born of the Father; made man and conquered death; received bodily into heaven by the Father; poured forth the Holy Spirit, gift and pledge of immortality (*Spiritus Sanctum, donum et pignus immortalitatis*).⁷⁹

As with most of the other writers we have mentioned, Victorinus of Pettau also speaks of the Spirit as the one who inspires the prophets and apostles,⁸⁰ and is involved in the sanctification of the faithful.⁸¹ Only one comment stands out in his discussions on the Holy Spirit as being rather odd, and that is his description of the Spirit as “bread”. In saying this Victorinus seems to be inferring that the Spirit is the bread given by Christ for the nourishment of the faithful:

We read also that this typical number is announced by the Holy Spirit (*Spiritu Sanctu*) by the mouth of Isaiah: Of seven women which took hold of one man (cf. Is 4:1). The one man is Christ, not born of seed; but the seven women are seven churches, receiving His bread, and clothed with his apparel, who ask that their reproach should be taken away, only that His name should be called upon them. The bread is the Holy Spirit (*Spiritum Sanctum*), which nourishes to eternal life, promised to them, that is, by faith.⁸²

The statement from the western council of Serdica, held in 343, is another work of interest to our discussion. This was subscribed to by around 100 clerics, and presumably representative of their theological position at the time. For this reason, it is a significant document and also for the fact that few such texts from the Latin west exist from this period. What is interesting about the text is the manner in which the Holy Spirit is treated, especially in the following passage:

⁷⁸ Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 1.6. The translation has been slightly adjusted.

⁷⁹ “For the *measure* of faith is commanded by our Lord, to confess the Father Almighty, as we have learned, and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: before the origin of the world spiritually born of the Father; made man and conquered death; received bodily into heaven by the Father; poured forth the Holy Spirit, gift and pledge of immortality.” Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 11.1

⁸⁰ For example, Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 1.4, 10.2, 21.3.

⁸¹ For example, Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 4.2, 6.1.

⁸² Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 1.7.

Πιστεύομεν δέ και περιλαμβάνομεν τὸν παράκλητον τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ὅπερ ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ὁ Κύριος καὶ ἐπηγγείλατο καὶ ἔπεμψε, καὶ τοῦτο πιστεύομεν πεμφθέν. Καὶ τοῦτο οὐ πέπονθεν, ἀλλ' ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὃν ἐνεδύσατο, ὃν ἀνέλαβεν ἐκ Μαρίας τῆς Παρθένου, τὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν παθεῖν δυνάμενον, ὅτι ἄνθρωπος θνητός, Θεὸς δὲ ἀθάνατος.⁸³

Based on this excerpt, Simonetti concludes that the document posits a binitarian position even though elsewhere in the text Trinitarian formulae are cited.⁸⁴ The above excerpt certainly points to such a conclusion, however, it is interesting to note that the original document was probably written in Latin. This being the case, a rather different interpretation would be possible as the subject could be either *hic* or *iste*, and thus could refer to either *Dominus* or *Spiritus* in the previous sentence. If it referred to *Dominus* then the next sentence could be rendered in the following manner: "It was not the Lord who suffered, but the man that he assumed".⁸⁵ Furthermore, if it did refer to *Spiritus*, it could also mean that this term was being used to denote Christ in the manner typical of the time, especially in the Latin west. In such an application, the authors were therefore not necessarily identifying him with the Holy Spirit.

No criticism of the pneumatology in this document from the period in which it was written or in the decades immediately following exists, which may suggest that the Greek translation is not accurate. Even though Athanasius denied the existence of the document at the council of Alexandria in 362, Eusebius of Vercelli noted his awareness of it when he signed the synodal letter from the same council.⁸⁶ One may presume that Eusebius knew the content of the Serdican document and possibly relayed it to Hilary during the time they were together.⁸⁷ However, there is no mention of it in the dossier of historical texts which Hilary collated and commented on, even though he included documents from both the eastern and western councils of Serdica among these. Therefore, due to a lack of evidence, this remains a point of conjecture only.

VII. *Spirit Christology and Binitarianism in Hilary's Contemporaries*

Phoebadius of Agen, a contemporary of Hilary's, is known for his treatise entitled, *Liber Contra Arrianos*, which he wrote in response to the Arian creed promulgated by the

⁸³ *The Serdican Creed* in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6.

⁸⁴ Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 228-229.

⁸⁵ Expressions such as these were considered orthodox by Theodore of Mopsuestia. For example, see *Cat. Hom.* 8.1.

⁸⁶ Eusebius believed that the "Serdican paper" had been "ruled out, to avoid the appearance of issuing anything beyond the creed of Nicæa". Athanasius, *Tom.* 10.

⁸⁷ In 364 Eusebius and Hilary attempted, unsuccessfully, to overthrow the Arian bishop of Milan, Auxentius. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 38.

council of Sirmium in 357. In this short work, he uses the term *spiritus* in reference to Christ a number of times. No doubt he was influenced by the practice of Spirit Christology, which was so prevalent in the west at this time. In the following excerpt, Phoebadius explains how the terms, “*Verbum/Sermo*”, “*Sapientia*”, and “*Spiritus Dei*”, are titles for Christ. He then interprets Psalm 32, which mentions both “*Sermo*” and “*Spiritus*”, as referring only to Christ.⁸⁸ Later exegetes would understand this text as indicating both Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹

*Nam idem Spiritus Sermo et Sapientia Dei est. Ex cuius persona Salomon: Cum pararet, inquit, caelum, ego aderam illi. Et: Ego, inquit, eram cum illo et mihi adgaudebat. Non ergo consiliarius nemo, quia per ipsum facta sunt uniuersa quae facta sunt. Denique cum eadem Sapientia et Verbum et Spiritus Dei sit, singularium tamen nominum officia nuntiantur. Sapientia condenti omnia Patri aderat: Sermone eius caeli solidati sunt, et Spiritu oris eius omnis uirtus eorum. Adparet ergo unum eundem que uenisse, nunc in nomine Spiritus, nunc in uocabulo Sermonis, nunc in appellatione Sapientiae.*⁹⁰

However, Phoebadius cannot be labelled as binitarian, since he clearly presents the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity elsewhere in the same treatise:⁹¹

*Hoc si cui scandalum facit, audiet a nobis Spiritum esse de Deo, quia illi cui est in Filio secunda persona, est et tertia in Spiritu Sancto. Denique Dominus: Petam, inquit, a Patre meo et alium aduocatum dabit uobis. Sic alius a Filio Spiritus, sicut alius a Patre Filius. Sic tertia in Spiritu, ut in Filio secunda persona: unus tamen Deus omnia quia tres unum sunt.*⁹²

Another important contemporary of Hilary's is Gregory of Elvira who was consecrated as bishop around 357-359. Soon after this (around 360), he composed a doctrinal treatise, *De Fide*, in which he defended the Nicene faith against the Arian creeds promulgated by the councils of Ariminum in 359, and of Sirmium in 357. Gregory revised his treatise in 364 after criticisms that at times it tended towards Sabellianism. In the second edition, he defended himself against his critics in a lengthy preface, and modified certain doctrinal points that had appeared ambiguous.⁹³ Interestingly, Gregory also added information on the Holy

⁸⁸ In this particular instance he may have been influenced by Tertullian, who interpreted Psalm 32 in a similar manner in *Adv. Prax.* 7.3.

⁸⁹ See Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, footnote 36. Hilary also interprets Psalm 32 in this manner in *De Trin.* 12.39.

⁹⁰ Phoebadius of Agen, *C. Ar.* 11.

⁹¹ Like Tertullian, Simonetti does not consider Phoebadius to be binitarian in either the primary or secondary sense of the term. Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, 227.

⁹² Phoebadius of Agen, *C. Ar.* 27.

⁹³ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, 84-89.

Spirit, citing him as the third person of the Trinity, which he had not done in the first edition.⁹⁴

The phenomenon of Spirit Christology can be seen in Gregory's works, especially in his first edition of *De Fide*. What is particularly significant is that in the second edition, Gregory corrected the way in which he used the term *spiritus* in the first. For example, in the first edition we read: "*Nos enim credimus immutabilem et inconvertibilem Verbum et Spiritum id est Filium Dei*"; and in the second edition, this is changed to "*Nos enim credimus immutabilem et inconvertibilem sicut Patrem, ita et Spiritum sanctum et Filium Dei*".⁹⁵

Another difference between the editions, which is worth noting, concerns Gregory's exegesis of the Lucan annunciation passage (Lk 1:35): In the first edition Gregory seems to identify the Spirit with the Son of God: "*Videns ergo ipsum Spiritum, id est Filium Dei, venisse ad virginem et inde Dei et hominis Filium processisse*", while in the second he eliminates any hint of this replacing "*ipsum Spiritum, id est Filium Dei*" with "*Ipsum Verbum, ipsum Dei Filium*".⁹⁶ Such a move points to a growing awareness of the confusion inherent in using the term *spiritus* in reference to Christ and the Holy Spirit. It also points to the growing interest in the person and nature of the Holy Spirit that occurred during the 360s.

Marius Victorinus, the Christian convert and renowned teacher of rhetoric, was also a contemporary of Hilary's associated with the phenomenon of Spirit Christology. Between 358-363 he composed a series of anti-Arian writings in which he refuted the Arian heresy, while defending the Nicene faith and presenting an exposition of the Trinity. His speculation on this fundamental Christian mystery was in large part unique, founded more on Neo-Platonic principles than previous Latin theological works. Despite his efforts, Victorinus did not make a significant impact on later Trinitarian thought, except perhaps in terms of his understanding of the Holy Spirit as consubstantial with the Father and the Son.⁹⁷ He was the first among his contemporaries to express this point and to expound the intratrinitarian

⁹⁴ Simonetti, "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", footnote 37.

⁹⁵ Gregory of Elvira, *De Fide* 933, as cited in Simonetti, "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", 222.

⁹⁶ Gregory of Elvira, *De Fide* 916, as cited in Simonetti, "*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*", 222.

⁹⁷ In an article entitled "The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus – the First Systematic Exposition of the Doctrine of the Trinity", *JTS* 1 (1950): 42-55, Paul Henry argues forcefully that Victorinus significantly influenced Augustine. Although Henry makes some interesting points, he is unable to substantiate his claims adequately due to a lack of evidence. For example, Henry maintains that Victorinus' thought "prepared the way for the *De Trinitate* of Augustine", in a number of ways, such as his contribution to a "strictly theological exposition of the Trinity, as contrasted with the more 'economical' exposition". However, Augustine's interest in the immanent Trinity could have been the result of a variety of factors, including his own personal reflections on sacred scripture. Peter Manchester holds the contrary position to Henry and goes so far as to suggest that at times Augustine seemed to be opposed some of Victorinus' positions. See Peter Manchester, "The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus and Augustine", in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, eds. R. T Wallis, and J. Bregman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 207-222.

relations of the Holy Spirit in some detail, anticipating the theological discussions that marked the following two to three decades.⁹⁸ Victorinus had a rather unusual approach to the mystery of the Trinity, suggesting that it could be understood in terms of two dyads, the first involving the Father and the Son, and the second encompassing the Son and the Spirit. He did attempt to uphold the notion of *homoousios*, stressing the overall unity within the Trinity, as well as the distinctions, but preferred to refer to these as *potentiae* rather than *personae*, which he considered to be an inadequate term.⁹⁹

In his writings Victorinus seems to have been influenced by the practice of Spirit Christology so prevalent in the west at that time, as mentioned. He frequently referred to God as spirit, sometimes using the Pauline *caro/spiritus* distinction to distinguish Christ's humanity from his divinity:

Therefore, according to the flesh the Savior has suffered, but according to the Spirit which he was before he was in the flesh, he is without suffering.¹⁰⁰

In some passages he seemed to go as far as to identify the Holy Spirit with Jesus. For example, when discussing John 14:15-16:¹⁰¹

What is the Paraclete? Someone near the Father who defends and upholds all faithful and believing men. Who is this? Is it the Holy Spirit alone? Or is he also identical with Christ? Indeed, Christ himself said: "God will give you another Paraclete... Insofar as he said "another," he spoke of one other than himself. Insofar as he said "Paraclete," he expressed the likeness of their work and the identity of their action in some manner. Therefore, he is also Spirit Paraclete, and the Holy Spirit is another Paraclete, and he is sent by the Father. The Holy Spirit is therefore Jesus.¹⁰²

However, a closer reading of this particular text suggests that Victorinus used the term *spiritus sanctus* here in reference to Jesus, not the third divine person, whom he called the Spirit Paraclete.¹⁰³ Although he did use the term *spiritus* in reference to Christ, and spoke of the Holy Spirit in an odd manner at times, for example referring to him as the "mother of the

⁹⁸ For example, see Marius Victorinus, *Ad. Ar.* 4.18, 4.10–13: "*Sic enim subiunxit: omnia quaecumque habet pater mea sunt; propterea dixi mea sunt quia, quae pater habet, filii sunt, esse, vivere, intellegere. Haec eadem habet spiritus sanctus. Omnia ergo ὁμοούσια.*"

⁹⁹ *Patrology*, vol. 4, 69-80. See also, Mary T. Clark, Introduction to Marius Victorinus, *Theological Treatises on the Trinity*, FC 69, 3-44.

¹⁰⁰ Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 1.44. See also Simonetti, "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", 208.

¹⁰¹ Simonetti suggests that in this instance Victorinus is identifying the Holy Spirit with Christ. "Note di Christologie Pneumatica", footnote 53.

¹⁰² Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 3.14.

¹⁰³ In this passage Victorinus seems to be referring to the divine substance as "spirit", distinguishing between the Holy Spirit and the Son by showing that the former is divine substance in actuality, and the latter is divine substance in activity. For a more detailed exposition of Victorinus' complex Trinitarian theology see Mark Edwards, "Marius Victorinus and the *Homoousion*" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 46, ed. J. Baun et al., (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 105-118.

Word”,¹⁰⁴ Victorinus’ theology is fundamentally Trinitarian, which is evidenced through a careful reading of his theological works. For example, this position is clearly revealed in the following passages:

What does this mean? If God is Spirit and Jesus is Spirit and the Holy Spirit is Spirit, the three are from one substance. Therefore the three are *homoousion* (consubstantial).¹⁰⁵

It is always said - and this is the whole mystery - that there is one God, and Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God.¹⁰⁶

VIII. *Spirit Christology in the Works of Hilary of Poitiers*

The phenomenon of Spirit Christology is particularly notable in Hilary’s *Commentarius in Matthaeum*. This earliest extant work of Hilary’s represents his theological thought prior to his exile, with his major influences therefore coming from the west. Similar patterns of use and interpretation of the term *spiritus* can be seen in this work, which we have previously noted in other Latin writers.¹⁰⁷ A number of times throughout the commentary Hilary places the flesh (*caro*) of Christ in contraposition to his spirit (*spiritus*). He does this in an effort to show that Christ was not only man, but also God. For example, in his exegesis of the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) Hilary states the following:

The servant who was assigned two talents represents the people of the pagans who have been justified by faith; by their profession of the Son and the Father, they have confessed our Lord Jesus Christ as God and man, both by the Spirit and by the flesh.¹⁰⁸

And in another example, he makes use of marital imagery to express the same notion:

The bridegroom and the bride is our Lord God in the body. For as the Spirit is wedded to the flesh, so the flesh is to the Spirit.¹⁰⁹

Also, Hilary seems to interpret the term *spiritus* as referring to the pre-existent Christ, or the divinity of the Father or the Son in certain biblical passages, which were later understood as referring to the Holy Spirit. For example, in his exegesis of the passage from Matthew concerning the unforgiveable sin - “the blasphemy against the Spirit” (Matt 12:31) -

¹⁰⁴ Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* IB.56.

¹⁰⁵ Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* IA.12.

¹⁰⁶ Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* IA.43.

¹⁰⁷ Hilary also may have been influenced directly by the biblical writers such as the apostle Paul, with his contrast between “spirit” and “flesh”.

¹⁰⁸ “*Ille vero seruus cui duo talenta commissa sunt gentium populous est fide atque confessione et Filii iustificatus et Patris et Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum Deum atque hominem et Spiritu et carne confessus.*” *In Matt.* 27.4.

¹⁰⁹ “*Sponsus atque sponsa Dominus noster est in corpore Deus. Nam ut Spiritus carni, ita Spiritui caro sponsa est.*” *In Matt.* 27.4.

a number of scholars have pointed out that Hilary understands “*Spiritus Sanctum*” as a reference to the divinity:¹¹⁰

[God] promises pardon of all sins, but refuses pardon for blasphemy of the Spirit. While other words and deeds are treated with a generous pardon, there is no mercy if it is denied that God is in Christ. And in whatever way one sins without pardon, he is gracious to us and reminds us again that sins of every kind can be completely forgiven, though blasphemy against the Holy Spirit [*Spiritus sanctum*] cannot be forgiven. For who is so completely beyond pardon as one who denies that Christ is of God, or repudiates that the substance of the Spirit of the Father resides in him? Since Christ accomplishes every work by the Spirit of God, and the Lord himself is the Kingdom of God, and God is reconciling the world to himself in him, whatever sacrilege is directed against Christ is directed against God because God is in Christ and Christ is in God.¹¹¹

Hilary also alludes to this Matthaean passage towards the end of his commentary, where again he appears to understand *spiritus* in terms of Christ’s divine nature:

The Lord had said earlier, *You will fall away this very night on account of me* (Matt 26: 31). He knew that his disciples were going to be terrified and put to flight, and would deny him. Because blasphemy against the Spirit is not forgiven either in this world or in the one to come (cf. Matt 12: 31), the Lord was afraid that they would deny God, when they observed his being killed, spat upon, and crucified.¹¹²

Although the manner in which Hilary uses *spiritus* in the first passage is a little ambiguous, in light of the second excerpt, it is reasonable to assume that he is referring to the divine nature of Christ. This seems all the more plausible given his tendency to utilise *spiritus* in reference to Christ’s divinity, in line with the Pauline *caro/spiritus* distinction. However, it is worth noting that even if Hilary did at times use/interpret the terms *spiritus* and *spiritus sanctus* in reference to Christ, or his divinity, this does not necessarily mean that he confused the Holy Spirit with either of them. Rather, in these cases, it is quite possible that he simply thought that the terms could be employed/understood in this manner.¹¹³

Although Hilary uses *spiritus* in reference to Christ and the divine nature, it is still his preferred term for the third person of the Trinity. He speaks of the Holy Spirit on a number of occasions throughout his works, though usually in terms of his role in the divine economy. It is worth noting that in his later works especially, Hilary also uses the term *paracletus* in reference to the Holy Spirit. He sometimes does this alongside the terms *spiritus* and *spiritus sanctus*.¹¹⁴ Given that Hilary employs *paracletus* only in reference to the third person of the

¹¹⁰ Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 84; Williams, *Commentary on Matthew*, FC 125, footnote 69; and Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, footnote 139.

¹¹¹ *In Matt.* 12.17.

¹¹² *In Matt.* 31.5.

¹¹³ See the later discussion on the use of these terms in *De Trin.* 2.30-31.

¹¹⁴ For example, see *In Matt.* 31.11, cited below; *De syn.* 53-55 and *De Trin.* 8.20, 8.25.

Trinity, it avoids all the ambiguity associated with the term *spiritus*. It also indicates that he understands the Spirit as having a real existence, other than the Father and the Son.

In his *Commentarius in Matthaem*, Hilary writes of the “gift and offering of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and prayer”;¹¹⁵ and the “seven-fold gift of the Holy Spirit”¹¹⁶; he also describes David, as speaking in the Spirit,¹¹⁷ and Christ as equipping the prophets, “like a kind of winepress into which he pours the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit”;¹¹⁸ and in one place Hilary uses *spiritus* in connection with the title, *paracletus*, whom Christ sends to the Apostles following his resurrection (cf. Jn 20:22).¹¹⁹

The next major work of Hilary's, in which we see the phenomenon of Spirit Christology, is his *De Trinitate*. In this treatise Hilary continues to use the term *spiritus* together with *caro* to demonstrate the divinity and humanity of Christ:

And it is equally dangerous to deny that Christ Jesus is God the Spirit as it is to deny that He is flesh of our body.¹²⁰

What is particularly interesting in *De Trinitate* is Hilary's recognition that the use of the terms *spiritus* and *sanctus* in reference to the Father and the Son, as well as the Holy Spirit, has been the possible cause of confusion amongst certain people. Hilary suspects that this may be the reason why some are ignorant of the real existence of the Holy Spirit. In response to this issue, he points out that it is quite in order to use these terms for the Father and the Son, given that they are both spirit and both holy.¹²¹ This discussion in Hilary's *De Trinitate* seems to mark the beginning of an overall awareness amongst early Christian writers of the possibility of confusion associated with the use and interpretation of the term *spiritus*.

In *De Trinitate*, in the same discourse on the Holy Spirit, which we have just mentioned, Hilary describes the role of the Spirit in the divine economy. His reason for doing this seems to be part of his overall effort to clarify the various ways in which the term *spiritus* is employed in the sacred scriptures, and to identify more clearly the role and existence of the third person of the Trinity:¹²²

¹¹⁵ *In Matt.* 19.3.

¹¹⁶ *In Matt.* 15.10.

¹¹⁷ *In Matt.* 23.8.

¹¹⁸ *In Matt.* 22.1.

¹¹⁹ “*Quod autem ad eos reuertens dormientes que reperiens primum reuersus obiurgat, secundo silet, tertio quiescere iubet, ratio ista est, quod primum post resurrectionem dispersos eos et diffidentes ac trepidos reprehendit; secundo, misso Spiritu paracleto, grauatim ad contuendam euangelii libertatem oculis, uisitauit.*” *In Matt.* 31.11.

¹²⁰ *Et eiusdem periculi res est, Christum Iesum uel Spiritum Deum uel carnem nostri corporis denegare.* *De Trin.* 9.3.

¹²¹ Cf. *De Trin.* 2. 30. See footnote 33 in chapter 9.

¹²² “*Haec non quod causa postulet dicta sunt, sed ne quid in his obscuritatis haereret.*” *De Trin.* 2.32.

There is one Holy Spirit everywhere who enlightens all the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the entire assembly of the Law, who inspired John even in his mother's womb, and was then given to the Apostles and to the other believers that they might understand the truth that had been bestowed upon them.¹²³

This passage seems to be an important key in understanding Hilary's perception of the Holy Spirit, and the subsequent way in which he interprets biblical passages which use the term *spiritus*. In his exegetical works we see Hilary following this method of interpretation. For instance, in *Tractatus super Psalmos*, he particularly focuses on the Holy Spirit's role in prophecy.¹²⁴ Interestingly, in the above passage Hilary does not attribute to the Holy Spirit a role in the incarnation, which he assigns to the Son in *De Trinitate*. According to Hilary it is through Christ's own power that he receives a human body:

The Son of God is born of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit for the sake of the human race, and in this work He rendered service to Himself. And by His own power, namely, the overshadowing power of God, He planted the origin of His body and decreed the beginning of His flesh in order that He might receive the nature of our flesh from the Virgin when He became man, and through this commingling and fellowship the body of the entire human race might be sanctified in Him, in order that, as He willed that all should be included in Him through that which was corporeal, so He Himself would again pass over into all through the invisible part of Him.¹²⁵

Hilary's exegesis of this Lucan annunciation passage is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows forth a clear example of Hilary interpreting *spiritus sanctus* in reference to the person of Christ as opposed to the Holy Spirit; and secondly it helps one to understand how Hilary is interpreting this passage elsewhere. Hilary alludes to the Lucan passage a number of times throughout *De Trinitate*, sometimes in a way which clearly manifests his understanding of *spiritus* as indicating Christ,¹²⁶ but other times in such a manner that he seems to be referring to the third person of the Trinity. For example:

In this manner the Holy Spirit coming from above and the overshadowing power of the Most High arrange the beginning of the birth. One thing is comprehended; another is seen; one thing is observed by the eyes; another, by the soul. The Virgin begets; the birth comes from God. The infant weeps; the praise of the angel is heard. The swaddling-clothes are humiliating; God is adored. Thus the majesty of omnipotence is not lost when the lowliness of the flesh is assumed.¹²⁷

This one, therefore, is the one who draws up the covenant with Abraham, who speaks to Moses, who bears testimony to Israel, who dwells in the Prophets, who is born of

¹²³ *De Trin.* 2.32.

¹²⁴ For example, see, *Tr. Ps.* 14.6, 51.1, 51.5.

¹²⁵ *De Trin.* 2.24.

¹²⁶ *De Trin.* 10.15, 10.22.

¹²⁷ *De Trin.* 2.27.

the Virgin through the Holy Spirit, who nails the powers opposed and hostile to us to the wood of His Passion...¹²⁸

It is only by reading these texts in the light of the others mentioned above that an authentic understanding of Hilary's use of *spiritus* can be gained. This is a good example of the ambiguity inherent in the writings of those associated with Spirit Christology and the need to view their use of *spiritus* carefully, and in conjunction with an overall understanding of their works.

Interestingly, in most of these passages where Hilary speaks of the Virgin birth of Christ, and the role of the Spirit in his conception, he tends to do so to show forth the humanity and divinity of Christ. This suggests that he was influenced by the Pauline *caro/flesh* distinction, which we have previously mentioned. This may account, at least in part, for his tendency to interpret *spiritus* in the Lucan passage as a reference to Christ.¹²⁹ No doubt he was also influenced by Tertullian and his contemporaries, who, as we discussed above, understood this text in a similar manner.

It is worth mentioning that in his later work, *Tractatus Mysteriorum*, Hilary seems to alter his interpretation of Luke's annunciation passage. In his allusion to this passage, he seems to point towards the involvement of the third person of the Trinity in the incarnation of Christ, rather than only the second:¹³⁰

*Omne autem opus, quod sacris uoluminibus continetur aduentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi, quo missus a Patre ex uirgine per spiritum homo natus est, et dictis nuntiat, et factis exprimit et confirmat exemplis.*¹³¹

However, Hilary's use of the term *spiritus* here does remain ambiguous, and as he does not attempt to clarify his position further, it is not possible to definitively rule that he changed his interpretation of this text.

IX. The End of an Era

Before concluding our discussion of Spirit Christology, we will briefly mention Niceta of Remesiana, who in a sense represents the end of an era in regard to this phenomenon. Born around 335, Niceta was part of the generation which followed Hilary. His most important work, *Instructio ad competentes*, which he wrote for the instruction of those awaiting baptism, contains a short treatise on the power of the Holy Spirit, *De Spiritus Sancti Potentia*. Despite

¹²⁸ *De Trin.* 4.42.

¹²⁹ This connection between the exegesis of Rom. 1:3-4 and Luke 1:35 is discussed in some depth in an article by Cantalamessa, "La primitiva esegesi cristologica di 'Romani' I, 3-4 e 'Luca' I, 35", 69-80, especially see 76 ff.

¹³⁰ J. P. Brisson, Notes in *Hilaire de Poitiers, Traité des mystères*, SC 19, 73.

¹³¹ *Tract. Mys.* 1.1.

the brevity of this work, it is important for a number of reasons, in particular, the clear manner in which the personhood and divinity of the Spirit is presented, without any hint of subordinationism. It is also significant as it was written in the latter half of the fourth century when the theological discussions concerning the Spirit were very much to the fore. However, the exact date of composition is still a matter of scholarly debate, with Burn suggesting sometime between 370-375 and Patin maintaining a later date, after 381.¹³²

In *De Spiritus Sancti Potentia*, Niceta discusses the practice of interpreting the term *spiritus* in biblical passages as a reference to the Son, rather than the Holy Spirit. He implies that this is a deliberate ploy on behalf of those who wish to avoid assigning a role to the Spirit in creation, by “saying that wherever there is mention of the Spirit as creator, the name and person of the Spirit belong to the Son”.¹³³ According to Niceta, such people are “opposed to the truth”, and do not want to admit that the Holy Spirit is involved in creation since this would indirectly affirm his divinity. Niceta counters this position by using scriptural passages to demonstrate how the Spirit acts alongside the Father, and the Son in the work of creation. In particular, he uses Psalm 32 to support his position, but unlike the other Latin authors we have mentioned, he understands the application of term *spiritus* here as referring to the Holy Spirit, rather than to Christ:

What kind of a faith would it be to believe that man's sanctification and redemption depended on the Holy Spirit, but that his formation and creation did not?... By the ‘word’ we must here understand the Son, through whom, as St. John declares, ‘all things were made.’ And what is ‘the spirit of his mouth’ if not the Spirit whom we believe to be Holy? Thus, in one text, you have the Lord, the Word of the Lord and the Holy Spirit making the full mystery of the Trinity...¹³⁴

Elsewhere in this work, Niceta mentions the Lucan annunciation text, but as with Psalm 32, he interprets *spiritus sanctus* as a reference to Christ. According to Niceta, this passage shows that it was the Holy Spirit who rendered the body of Christ holy. This was not because Christ was unable to do so himself, but, rather, to show forth the Spirit’s own power as a divine person.¹³⁵

X. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, in this chapter we have identified some of the key influences upon Hilary’s pneumatology and the manner in which he expressed it by looking at the impact of

¹³² Gerald W. Walsh, Introduction to *Niceta of Remesiana: Writings*, FC 7, 7.

¹³³ Niceta of Remesiana, *De Spiritus Sancti Potentia*, in *Niceta of Remesiana, his Life and Works*, by Andrew E. Burn (University Press: Michigan, 1905), 8.

¹³⁴ Niceta of Remesiana, *Spir.* 7.

¹³⁵ Niceta of Remesiana, *Spir.* 5.

his exile to the east, and the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries, especially in the context of a detailed discussion on the phenomenon of Spirit Christology.

Although Hilary used the term *Spiritus* in reference to Christ, I argue that he does not present a binitarian doctrine as has been suggested by some scholars. Rather, he understood the term as an apt title for Christ, who is “spirit” and “holy”.¹³⁶ In saying this, Hilary’s practice of using/interpreting *spiritus* in reference to Christ, as well as that of other early writers, does pose significant problems: firstly, it leads to a certain ambiguity in some of his work as at times it is difficult to ascertain whether he is referring to the second or the third person of the Trinity. As mentioned, a careful reading of these ambiguous passages in the context of Hilary’s overall works, usually clarifies his meaning. Secondly, in the case of biblical exegesis, significant passages, which are later understood in reference to the Holy Spirit, are interpreted by Hilary as referring to Christ, leaving little material for the development of pneumatology. The key passage in this regard is Luke 1:35, which later authors use to shed light on the Spirit’s creative role, placing him on a more equal footing with the Father and the Son.

As part of the process of the development of pneumatology, the term *spiritus* underwent a certain purification in its application to theology during the latter half of the fourth century. Eventually it was no longer used to denote the pre-existent Christ, thus marking the end of the phenomenon of Spirit Christology. Hilary, the last significant Christian writer to use *spiritus* in reference to Christ, hints at the start of this process in *De Trinitate* when he draws attention to the possibility of confusion over the use of the term *spiritus*. His awareness of the issue and its implication are demonstrated by the fact that he mentions it in this treatise and goes to some effort to address it.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *De Trin.* 2.30.

¹³⁷ *De Trin.* 2.30-31. Although, as discussed, Hilary attempted to do this by explaining the validity of employing *spiritus* and the associated term *sanctus* in reference to the Father and the Son, as well as the Holy Spirit, rather than by restricting their use to the third person of the Trinity.

9. The Nature and Person of the Holy Spirit

In our discussion of Hilary's understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son, we identified the following key points: the Father and the Son are divine, united in the one nature, and yet distinct by means of their properties of fatherhood and sonship, and origin as the Unbegotten and the Only-begotten. From this we can deduce that for Hilary a divine person subsists in the divine nature, which is the source of the unity within the Trinity, and is distinguished by properties that do not impinge upon this nature. In terms of the divine economy, each person participates in the one divine work, though in a different mode. In view of this understanding, and our preliminary investigation into Hilary's pneumatology, the aim of this chapter is to examine in detail Hilary's perception of the nature and person of the Holy Spirit. In particular, we will ascertain the extent to which he considers him to be a divine person, in a manner similar to that of the Father and the Son.

I. *The Holy Spirit in the Economy of Salvation*

As with most Christian writers up until the 360s Hilary's main references to the Holy Spirit concern his role in the divine economy. Since this is the central focus of Hilary's pneumatology, it is important to review it, in order to gain a better understanding of his overall doctrine. Although we often speak of the mission *ad extra* of a divine person, contrasting it with his position within the Trinity, these two aspects are intimately related. Therefore, studying Hilary's writings on the economic role of the Holy Spirit may give further clues as to his perception of the Spirit's position within the Trinity itself and his divine personhood.

A. *The Spirit and Baptism*

According to Hilary, the Holy Spirit is the gift given to the faithful, initially through the sacrament of baptism, in order to establish them in a new life of grace. This relationship between baptism and the bestowal of the Spirit is important to Hilary's understanding of the divinisation of humanity, and he alludes to it in both of his exegetical works as well as *De Trinitate*. In the *Commentary on Matthew*, Hilary describes Christ's baptism in the Jordan as a prefigurement of our own reception of the sacrament. Although not needing the purification of baptism himself, through his immersion in the Jordan, Christ sanctified the waters for our sake, and by means of the Holy Spirit was anointed with the Father's affection. Hilary explains how "the plan of the heavenly mystery is portrayed in [Christ]" as follows:

After he was baptized, the entrance of heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit came forth and is visibly recognized in the form of a dove. In this way Christ is imbued by the anointing of the Father's affection. Then a voice from heaven spoke the following words: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you (Matt 3:17)." He is revealed as the Son of God by sound and sight, as the testimony of his Lord by means of both an image and a voice; he is sent to an unfaithful people who were disobedient to their prophets. As these events happened with Christ, we should likewise know that following the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit comes upon us from the gates of heaven, imbuing us with the anointing of heavenly glory. We become the sons of God by the adoption expressed through the Father's voice. These actual events prefigured an image of the mysteries established for us.¹

Through baptism, the Holy Spirit begins his work in us by means of the gifts he bestows. According to Hilary, these bear fruit in time:

We who have been reborn in the mystery of Baptism have the greatest joy when we feel the beginnings of the Holy Spirit within us, when there comes into us the understanding of mysteries, the knowledge of prophecy, the word of wisdom, the firmness of hope, the gift of healing, and power over demons. These sprinkle us like falling rain, and after a slow beginning increase into innumerable fruits.²

Although we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, we can also lose this gift through sin. Hilary exhorts his listeners to pray for the gift of the Spirit, and to strive to live lives worthy of meriting this gift. He encourages them through his eloquent description of the many benefits bestowed by the Spirit:

The one gift, which is in Christ, is available to everyone in its entirety, and what is present in every place is given in so far as we desire to receive it, and will remain with us in so far as we desire to merit it. This is with us even to the consummation of the world; this is the consolation of our expectation; this, through the efficacy of the gifts, is the pledge of our future hope; this is the light of the mind, the splendor of the soul. For this reason we must pray for this Holy Spirit; we must strive to merit Him and to retain possession of Him by our belief in and observance of the commandments.³

B. The Indwelling of the Spirit

On a number of occasions Hilary speaks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, or the role of the Spirit in relationship to the indwelling of Christ. As early on as his *Commentary on Matthew*, Hilary describes Christians as being temples of the Spirit:

¹ *In Matt.* 2.6.

² *Tr. Ps.* 64 in Philip T. Wild, *The Divinization of Man According to Saint Hilary of Poitiers* (Mundelein: Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary, 1950), 36.

³ *De Trin.* 2.55. Hilary has a teleological view of man's divinisation, focusing on the final goal, man's *deunitatio* into Christ. For him the Spirit is the pledge of this goal, and as such a sign of our hope.

But an eternal temple is one that is consecrated to be a habitation of the Holy Spirit, ie the temple is a person who is worthy to become a dwelling for God by knowledge of the Son, by confession of the Father, and by obedience to his commandments.⁴

This is the second occasion that Hilary mentions the notion of the indwelling of the Spirit in this commentary, the other is alluded to in the passage on baptism cited above. He does mention the indwelling of the Spirit as well as that of Christ in both *De Trinitate* and the *Commentary on the Psalms*. However, he does not clearly explain how this happens. The closest we get to such an understanding can be found in his discourse in Book 8 of *De Trinitate*. Here he attempts to show that when the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, the Spirit of God⁵ also dwells, but not as a second entity, rather as one Spirit, the Holy Spirit.⁶ In this same discourse he also points out that the Holy Spirit, as a “thing of the nature” makes present the things of God. He thus implies that through the indwelling of the Spirit we are able to participate in some way in the divine nature:⁷

For, Christ dwells in us, and while Christ dwells God dwells. And since the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, still, while the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, no other Spirit dwells except the Spirit of God. If we realize that Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit, we still recognize that the latter is just as much the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Christ. And, since the nature itself dwells in us through the nature of the thing, we must believe that the nature of the Son does not differ from that of the Father, since the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God, is made known as the thing of one nature.⁸

Hilary also points out the intimate relationship between the Spirit and the believer in his discussion of the Johanine passage concerning the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-26). Although he does not specifically speak about the indwelling of the Spirit, he maintains that in order to worship God who is Spirit, one must be “in the Spirit”. Finally, in his exegesis of Psalm 64, which we discussed above, Hilary speaks of the beginning of the Holy Spirit’s

⁴ *In Matt.* 25.1. In his translation, Williams notes that this is an allusion to the Trinity, in terms of knowledge, confession, and obedience. FC 125, footnote 4.

⁵ It is worth noting that in this discussion, as well as elsewhere Hilary has a tendency to equate the term “God” in a particular way with the Father. Thus, Hilary sometimes uses the expression “Spirit of God”, in reference to the spirit of God the Father. What he means can usually be understood by the context in which he is writing. This use of the term God to indicate the Father, which was common amongst early Christian writers, is quite understandable given that there was no dispute among them as to whether or not the Father is God, rather, the issues that arose concerned the position of the Son in the Godhead, and later the Holy Spirit. See also *De Trin.* 8.23-24, where Hilary discusses how the term “Spirit of God” can be used in reference to the Father, and also the Son.

⁶ Hilary’s ultimate aim in this passage is to demonstrate that as the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God are one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is a “thing of the [divine] nature”, then it follows that Christ must also have the same nature as the Father.

⁷ In this discussion Hilary almost implies that the Trinity dwells in us, however, he never demonstrates clearly the unique subsistence of the Spirit.

⁸ *De Trin.* 8.26.

presence in us, through baptism. He describes this in more detail here and with greater eloquence than in his previous works. According to Hilary, by means of this sacrament, we become “inebriated” with the Spirit, who is an inexhaustible source of gifts.⁹

C. *The Spirit as Gift*

The notion of the Spirit as a “Gift” is a central theme running throughout Hilary’s works, beginning with the *Commentary on Matthew*. The fundamental source for this notion is most likely the scriptures, where we see it expressed in the writings of Paul, the Acts of the Apostles, and indirectly in the Gospel of John where he describes the Spirit as one who is sent, thus implying that He is a gift, which is given.¹⁰ In his discussions on the Spirit, Hilary draws especially on the Pauline Epistles and Johannine scriptures as we shall see. Hilary may also have been influenced by Novatian and Origen who identify the Spirit as “Gift” in their writings.¹¹ Of these, his first influence would probably have been Novatian, given that this notion is mentioned in Hilary’s Matthaean commentary, written before his exile. Although Hilary limits his discussion of the Spirit as “Gift” to his role in the economy, he provides the groundwork for later writers such as Augustine and Aquinas, who develop this notion further in terms of the immanent Trinity.¹²

Hilary enumerates the gifts and benefits received from the Spirit, referring directly to the scriptures, especially the Pauline epistles, which he cites on a number of occasions.¹³ It is through the gifts of the Spirit that we can cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15) and are rendered spiritual. Furthermore, we receive power through the Spirit, and the effect of this power in turn reveals the gift of the Spirit at work in us:

The gift of Spirit is not hidden where there is the word of wisdom and the words of life are heard, or where there is the perception of the divine knowledge in order that we may not be like the animals, unaware of the Author of our life through our ignorance of God; or through faith in God in order that we may not be outside the Gospel of God by not believing the Gospel of God; or through the gift of healing in order that by the cure of infirmities we may render testimony to the grace of Him who has granted these gifts; or through the performance of miracles in order that the power of God may be recognized in what we are doing; or through prophecy in order that through our knowledge of the doctrine it may be known that we have been taught by God; or through the distinguishing of spirits in order that we may perceive whether anyone speaks through a holy or an evil spirit; or through the various kinds of languages in order that the sermons in these languages may be offered as a sign of the Holy Spirit

⁹ *Tr. Ps.* 64 in Wild, *The Divinization of Man According to Saint Hilary of Poitiers*, 36.

¹⁰ See Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10; Eph 4:11, John 3:34; Act 2:38; 10:45.

¹¹ See Novatian, *Trinity, The Spectacle, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters*, 29, and Origen, *Commentary on John*, 2.10.

¹² See footnote 6 in chapter 5.

¹³ For example, see *De Trin.* 8.32.

who has been given or in the interpretation of the languages in order that the faith of the hearers might not be endangered through ignorance, since the interpreter of a language makes it intelligible for those who are not familiar with the language. Hence, in all the diversities of these gifts, which have been granted for the profit of everyone, there is a manifestation of the Spirit. That is to say, through the miracles that have been granted for the profit of everyone the gift of the Holy Spirit does not remain hidden.¹⁴

Hilary places special emphasis on the intellectual gifts, in particular the gift of enlightenment through which we come to understand the mysteries of God.¹⁵ He also explains how the Holy Spirit helps us penetrate these mysteries by comparing the Spirit's effect on the faculty of understanding, which he situates in the soul, with the causes which stir bodily faculties into activity. Thus, he points out that just as the eye needs light to perceive an object, so the soul needs the light of knowledge from the Spirit to understand the mysteries of God in some measure:

Just as a faculty of the human body will be idle when the causes that stir it to activity are not present, as the eyes will not perform their functions except through the light or the brightness of day, as the ears will not comprehend their task when no voice or sound is heard, as the nostrils will not be aware of their office if no odor is detected, not that the faculty will be lost because the cause is absent but the employment of the faculty comes from the cause, even so the soul of man, if it has not breathed in the gift of the Spirit through faith, will, it is true, possess the faculty for understanding, but it will not have the light of knowledge.¹⁶

The mystery which Hilary seeks primarily to understand, and which is his main objective in *De Trinitate*, concerns the divinity of the Son and his relationship with the Father. What is interesting to note about this treatise, is the important role accorded to the Spirit, not as the main subject, but rather as the means through which Hilary hopes to receive insight. The entire treatise can be described as a "dialogue with God"¹⁷ in which Hilary seeks to understand and express the truth about the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, within the framework of the baptismal profession of faith. To this end the treatise is framed with prayers to the Father to send the gift of his Spirit. In Book 1 he writes:

I must pray for the gift of Your help and mercy that You may fill the sails of our faith and profession which have been extended to You with the breath of Your Spirit and direct us along the course of instruction that we have chartered.¹⁸

And in Book 12 his last words are:

¹⁴ *De Trin.* 8.30.

¹⁵ *De Trin.* 2.32.

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 2.35.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Saint Hilary of Poitiers*.

¹⁸ *De Trin.* 1.37.

Keep this piety of my faith undefiled, I beseech You, and let this be the utterance of my convictions even to the last breath of my spirit: that I may always hold fast to that which I professed in the creed of my regeneration when I was baptized in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, namely, that I may adore You, our Father, and Your Son together with You, and that I may gain the favor of Your Holy Spirit who is from You through the Only-begotten.¹⁹

This manner in which Hilary relates to the Spirit sheds light on his lived experience of faith, which is clearly Trinitarian.

D. The Holy Spirit Speaks Through the Prophets

The Holy Spirit's role in enlightening the prophets can be seen throughout most of Hilary's works, but predominantly in the *Tractatus super Psalmos*.²⁰ For Hilary, the primary purpose of this enlightenment is that the mystery of Christ might be expounded. According to him, the whole book of the Psalms can only be understood in the light of the Gospel. At times the prophet, inspired by the Spirit, speaks in the person of the Father and the Son, as well as the holy man/woman, but the underlying intention is the same. By describing the role of the Spirit in speaking through the prophets Hilary implies that He is eternal, present throughout history. This he also does when he proclaims his divinity, although he never refers to him directly as God.

E. The Holy Spirit and Christ

The action of the Spirit in the economy of salvation is always closely connected with Christ, which is in keeping with the Christocentric focus of Hilary's works.²¹ As mentioned, the Holy Spirit inspires the prophets so that they might enunciate the mysteries of Christ, and when Christ is incarnated He himself becomes the source of the Holy Spirit, but specifically to those in his immediate surroundings. We see this particularly in Hilary's exegesis of Matthew's Gospel in the passages concerning the public life of Christ.²² For example, the woman with the haemorrhage receives the Spirit from the hem of Christ's garment:

¹⁹ *De Trin.* 12. 57.

²⁰ For example, see *Tr. Ps.* 1.

²¹ According to Ladaria, in Hilary's works, there is no realisation of the Holy Spirit without Jesus Christ. In other words, He is always spoken of in connection to Christ. Luis F. Ladaria, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers* (Madrid: Eapsa, 1977), 258.

²² In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Hilary speaks often of the rejection of Christ by the Jews, which led to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. This theme can be seen in other scriptures, for example in Acts 13: 45-48. In relation to this theme, Hilary mentions the Holy Spirit on a number of occasions highlighting his role in salvation history: For example, according to Hilary, the series of events whereby Joseph initially went to settle in Judaea with "the child and his mother" (Matt 2:13), but instead ended up residing in Galilee, helps us to "understand how the gift of the Holy Spirit was directed to the pagans". Also, Hilary interprets the turning away of the little children by the apostles as a prefiguration of the initial rejection of the pagans, who, in the

And so the woman is confident that by making contact with the Lord as he passed along she would be healed from her bloody flow... [so she] hastened to touch the hem of his garment through faith. In other words, she with the apostles reached out for the gift of the Holy Spirit from the body of Christ in the form of a garment's hem as he walked by and she is immediately healed.²³

Finally, Hilary points out that once Christ has risen from the dead and been glorified, He sends the Spirit to all believers, starting in a particular way with the Apostles.²⁴ For example, in his interpretation of Matt 26:36-46, Hilary shows how Christ's three visits to the sleeping Apostles in the garden of Gethsemane can be understood in terms of his post-resurrection visitations. On the second of these He bestows the gift of the Spirit:

When the Lord returned to them and found them sleeping the first time, he rebuked them; he was silent during the second time; and on the third occasion he told them to take their rest. The interpretation of this is as follows. In the first instance, he finds them scattered, mistrustful, and fearful after his resurrection; in the second, when their eyes were too heavy to perceive the liberty of the Gospel, he visited them, sending the Spirit, the Paraclete. Tied down for some time by an attachment to the Law, the disciples were possessed by a kind of sleepy faith. Yet, on the third occasion, that is, upon his glorious return, he will restore them to confidence and rest.²⁵

II. *The Subsistence and Being of the Holy Spirit*

A. *The Holy Spirit in the Exegesis of Matthew's Baptismal Formula*

As with all of his Trinitarian theology, the foundational biblical passage for Hilary's understanding of the subsistence and divinity of the Holy Spirit is the baptismal formula found at the end of Matthew's Gospel. In his exegesis of this text, Hilary includes the Holy Spirit alongside the Father, and the Son, intimately associating him with them, and thus implying that they are all on an equal footing. Hilary focuses particularly on the names ascribed to the persons of the Trinity as well as the order in which they appear, which we have mentioned previously. According to him, the name Holy Spirit points to the real existence of the Spirit, who is other than the Father and the Son and yet united to them in the profession of faith. It also signifies the personal property of the Spirit as one who receives, just as the names Father and Son show forth the properties of fatherhood and sonship respectively:

divine plan, were destined to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit after the Jews (Matt 19:13-15). *In Matt*, 2.1, 14.3.

²³ *In Matt*, 9.6.

²⁴ Ladaria identifies these different phases of the outpouring of the Spirit, and offers a more detailed discussion of them. See, *El Espíritu Santo En San Hilario De Poitiers* 45ff. and 257ff.

²⁵ Also worth noting is Hilary's exegesis of Matt 9:35-38. While Hilary understands this text in its present context, he also identifies its significance for the future. According to Hilary, God wants to draw firstly from the twelve apostles many harvesters to minister to us. He thus urges us to ask him "to grant an abundance of harvesters who utilize the gift of the Holy Spirit which was prepared." *In Matt*. 10.1-2.

When the name father is heard [in the scriptures] is not the nature of the son contained in the name? Will He not be the Holy Spirit who has been so designated? For, there cannot but be in the Father what a father is, nor can the Son be wanting in what a son is, nor can there not be in the Holy Spirit what is received (*sumitur*).²⁶

Hilary's understanding of the Spirit as one who receives is also linked to other passages of scripture such as Jn 16:14-15, which we will discuss in more detail further on. In his exegesis of the Matthaen text, Hilary also assigns other properties to the divine persons that are associated with their names and alluded to in other passages of scripture. He presents these according to the order of the persons in the text, referring to the Father as the "Origin", the "one from whom are all things", and to the Son as "the Only-begotten", the "one through whom are all things" and finally to the Holy Spirit as the "Gift", "the gift in all things".²⁷ Hilary also emphasizes the subsistence of the Spirit, and implies his divinity, in the same manner he does with the Father and the Son, by referring to him as *unus*, rather than *unum*.²⁸

Although Hilary positions the Spirit alongside the Father and the Son in his exegesis, he tends to discuss his role in terms of the divine economy. This is in contrast to his treatment of the first two persons, whom he speaks of in relation to the immanent Trinity.²⁹

B. The Real Existence of the Holy Spirit

As shown by his exegesis of Matthew's baptismal profession, we see that Hilary's understanding of the real existence of the Spirit is founded upon the scriptures and in particular this passage. It is also closely connected with the profession of faith, which Hilary mentions later in the same book when he directly addresses the issue of the Spirit's real existence. While Hilary asserts that he cannot remain silent about the Holy Spirit because of those who do not know him, he also thinks it not necessary to speak about him. Rather, according to Hilary, we must believe in the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son, whom we profess. In doing so he again points to the real existence and divinity of the Spirit, as one intimately related to the first two persons of the Trinity. Furthermore, Hilary implies that the Holy Spirit has an essential role in the Godhead, which he considers to be imperfect without him:

He [the Holy Spirit]... whom in our profession we must join with the Father and the Son, cannot be separated in such a profession from the Father and the Son. To us, the whole is imperfect if something is missing from it.³⁰

²⁶ *De Trin.* 2.3.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 2.1.

²⁸ *De Trin.* 2.1.

²⁹ *De Trin.* 2.1.

³⁰ *De Trin.* 2.29.

In the same passage, Hilary states emphatically that the Holy Spirit is (*est enim*). He supports his position by pointing out that the Spirit “is given, accepted, and obtained (*donator, accipitur, obtinetur*)”, using verbs which indicate his real existence. Hilary then refers his readers to various passages from the Pauline epistles (Gal 4:6, Eph 4:30, 1 Cor 2:12, Rom 8:9, 11), which speak explicitly of the Holy Spirit’s work in the economy of salvation, stating that these are the source of his knowledge.³¹ In summing up his argument Hilary declares that because the Holy Spirit “is, He is given and possessed, and belongs to God (*Unde quia est et donator et habetur et Dei est*)”.³²

As mentioned, Hilary implies that he is aware of those who deny the existence of the Holy Spirit since he commands these “calumniators” to be silenced. He also acknowledges that “certain people remain in ignorance and doubt because they see this third one (*tertium*), that is, the one called the Holy Spirit, often referred to as the Father and the Son”.³³ According to Hilary, these terms are also suitable for the first two persons of the Trinity, given that “each is a spirit and each is holy”. To prove his point, Hilary turns to the narrative of the Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel (Jn 4:1-26), showing how the term *spiritus* in this passage is sometimes used in reference to God, and other times to the Holy Spirit. According to Hilary, Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman that “God is Spirit” reveals the “invisible, incomprehensible and boundless” nature of God. Although the Samaritans attempt to worship him on a mountain and the Jews in a temple, He cannot be restricted to either of these places, because of his spiritual nature. Therefore, since He is “spirit”, He is everywhere in his fullness, and thus must be “adored in the Spirit”.³⁴ This last phrase indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit, the “gift” in whom we are able to worship God.

Hilary also notes the similarity of this text to the words of the Apostle Paul, who states that “... the Lord is the spirit; but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17)”.³⁵ In interpreting this text, Hilary points out that by stating that the “Lord is the spirit”, the Apostle is indicating the “nature of his infinity”, whereas when he speaks of the “Spirit of the Lord”, he is indicating the existence of the Holy Spirit. Hilary’s emphasis on the importance of the genitive in this text and other scriptures, to show forth the subsistence of a divine person, will be discussed in more detail further on. At the end of this section, Hilary states that there is “one Holy Spirit everywhere (*Est enim Spiritus sanctus unus ubique*)”,

³¹ *De Trin.* 2.29.

³² *De Trin.* 2.29.

³³ *De Trin.* 2.30.

³⁴ *De Trin.* 2.31.

³⁵ *De Trin.* 2.32.

again pointing to his real existence and implying his divinity, given that He is in all places and that he is *unus*.³⁶

The way in which Hilary speaks of the Holy Spirit in his prayers also indicates that he views him as having a real existence - as a being other than the Father and the Son.³⁷ This is also implied in *De synodis*, especially in his explanations of the anathemas concerning the Holy Spirit, which were promulgated by the council of Sirmium held in 351. For example, against the Sabellian notion that the Holy Spirit is the unborn God, Hilary states that “it is most impious to say that He who was sent by the Son for our consolation is the Unborn God”, (cf. Jn 15:26).³⁸ In his efforts to combat the heretical belief that the Paraclete is the Son, Hilary points out that the Holy Spirit and Christ are distinct persons, since Christ “promised to pray that another Comforter should be sent from the Father” (cf. Jn 14:16). This, states Hilary, “shows the difference between Him who is sent [namely, the Paraclete] and Him who asked”.³⁹ Finally, in response to the notion that the Holy Spirit is part of the Father or the Son, Hilary points out emphatically that this is not possible, given that “the name of Holy Spirit has its own signification, and the Holy Spirit the Paraclete has the office and rank, peculiar to His substance. (*Nam cum Spiritus sancti nomen habeat suam significationem, et Spiritus sanctus paracletus habeat substantiae suae et officium et ordinem*)”.⁴⁰ In this last explanation, he again returns to the ontological importance of the name assigned to the Spirit in the scriptures.

In the course of this chapter we will also discuss other ways that Hilary alludes to the subsistence of the Spirit, such as the way in which he refers to him, indicating that he is someone.

C. The Spirit as the One Who Receives

For Hilary the names assigned to the persons of the Trinity by scripture not only point to their real existence, but also reveal properties associated with each person, as we have discussed. They are thus important to the development of his understanding of divine personhood. In Book 8 of *De Trinitate* Hilary explains the property pertaining to the Spirit as the one who receives, in more detail. He does so in a rather convoluted and lengthy

³⁶ *De Trin.* 2.32.

³⁷ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 85-86.

³⁸ *De syn.* 53.

³⁹ *De syn.* 54.

⁴⁰ *De syn.* 55. (A slight adjustment has been made to this translation). Although Hilary uses the term *substantia* here in reference to the Holy Spirit, he appears to be doing so to indicate the real existence of the Spirit rather than to show that He is a unique substance, which would set him apart from the Father and the Son. See my discussion on this in my article, “Terminological Confusion in the 4th century: A Case Study of Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*”, *Annales Theologici* 27/2, (2013): 397.

argument, which he puts forward in his efforts to defend the unity of the Son with the Father. A significant aspect of this argument involves a discussion of the Holy Spirit who both proceeds and receives from Father and the Son. Using Johannine texts as his foundation, Hilary shows that the Paraclete is sent from the Father as well as the Son, and that He receives everything from both the Father and the Son (Jn 16:7, 14-15). This, he explains, is based on the fundamental principle that all that belongs to the Father, belongs to the Son:

That which He [the Paraclete] will receive (whether it is power, or strength, or doctrine) the Son states that it will be received from Him, and again He lets it be understood that the same thing must be received from the Father. For, since He asserts that everything that the Father has is his, and has, therefore, said that they must be received from Him, He likewise teaches that what is to be received from the Father must still be received from Him, because everything that belongs to the Father is His. This unity does not admit any difference, nor is there any distinction in regard to Him from whom it is received, because what is given by the Father is also represented as given by the Son... [As Christ says] “And all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine” (cf. Jn 17:10).⁴¹

What is interesting about Hilary’s pneumatological insights, which are revealed here, is that they imply a fundamental distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Son. The Son receives all from the Father, while the Holy Spirit receives all from the Father and the Son, by implication of the latter’s sonship. This passage also points to the primacy of the Father, who is the principle source of all, even though the Holy Spirit is sent from him and the Son.

D. The Holy Spirit as the Res Naturae

In the same passage in Book 8, Hilary refers to the Holy Spirit as the *res naturae* and is quite possibly the first Christian writer to apply the term in this manner.⁴² By doing so, Hilary makes clear two important points about the Spirit: Firstly, that He is not equivalent to the divine nature as has been claimed,⁴³ and secondly, that He is a distinct “thing”, which “belongs to God”, and is therefore divine.

And now I ask, whether you believe that the Spirit of God indicates a nature or a thing belonging to the nature? For, the nature is not the same as the thing belonging to the nature, just as man is not the same as that which belongs to man, nor is fire the same as that which belongs to fire, and, accordingly, God is not the same as that which belongs to God.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 8.20.

⁴² It is interesting to note that some medieval theologians used the term *res naturae* when referring to the persons of the Trinity. Aquinas specifically mentions it in his discussion on the meaning of the term *persona* and considers it a suitable reference for a human person. *ST* 1.29.2.

⁴³ See the discussion on scholarly opinions regarding Hilary’s pneumatology in chapter 9.

⁴⁴ *De Trin.* 8. 22.

As we have shown, Hilary often focuses on the use of the genitive especially in scriptural phrases, to reveal the Son's distinct existence and distinguish between him and the Father. Thus, he interprets the phrases "God in God", and "God with God", as revealing the first two persons of the Trinity, who are distinct from one another and yet divine. In presenting the Spirit as a *res naturae*, Hilary appears to be presenting an argument for his real existence and divinity along these lines. It is reminiscent of one made by Tertullian in *Adversus Praxaen*. In this treatise, Tertullian attempts to defend the orthodox faith against the Monarchian position by demonstrating that the Spirit who comes upon the Virgin in the Lucan annunciation passage is not God the Father, but the Son, who has a real existence. In his exegesis of this passage, Tertullian interprets the scriptural term *Spiritus*, as referring to the Son, which was typical of the approach to Christology found in the Latin west at that time.⁴⁵ According to Tertullian, the *Spiritus* cannot be God (the Father), since the scriptures describe him as being "of God", therefore He must be another "*substantiva res*".⁴⁶ At the same time, since the *Spiritus* is "from God", He can be considered to be God even though He is not the Father:⁴⁷

As therefore the Word⁴⁸ of God is not <God> himself whose <Word> he is, so the Spirit also, though he is called God, is yet not <God> himself whose <Spirit> he is called. Nothing in genitive dependence is that on which it is dependent. Clearly when a thing is "from him", and is "his" in the sense that it is from him, it can be a thing which is like him from whom it is and whose it is: and consequently the Spirit is God and the Word is God, because he is from God, yet is not <God> himself from whom he is. But if the Spirit of God, as being a substantive thing, will not <be found to> be God himself, but in that sense God as being from the substance of God himself, in that it is a substantive thing and a certain assignment of the whole, much more so the power of the Most High will not be the Most High himself, because it is not even a substantive thing as the Spirit is, any more than wisdom or providence: for these are not substances, but attributes of each several substance.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See chapter 9 on this phenomenon known as Spirit Christology.

⁴⁶ In reference to Luke 1:35, Tertullian considers the *Spiritus* to be a *substantiva res*, whereas for him the power of God is an attribute of the divine nature.

⁴⁷ In his efforts to explain the divinity and distinctiveness of the Son in this polemical work, Tertullian does not quite manage to avoid subordination, describing the Son as a "*portio aliqua totius*". Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 26, 5-6.

⁴⁸ It is worth noting that here Tertullian is using both terms "Word", and "Spirit" in reference to the Son.

⁴⁹ "...sicut ergo sermo dei non est ipse cuius est, ita nec spiritus, etsi deus dictus est, non tamen ipse est cuius est dictus. nulla res alicuius ipsa est cuius est. plane cum quid ex ipso est, et sic eius est dum ex ipso sit, potest tale quid esse quale et ipse ex quo est et cuius est: et ideo spiritus deus et sermo deus, quia ex deo, non tamen ipse ex quo est. quodsi spiritus dei, tamquam substantiva res, non erit ipse deus sed hactenus deus qua ex ipsius dei substantia, qua et substantiva res est et ut portio aliqua totius, multo magis virtus altissimi non erit ipse altissimus, quia nec substantiva res est quod est spiritus, sicut nec sapientia nec providentia: et haec enim substantiae non sunt sed accidentia uniuscuiusque substantiae." Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 26, 5-6.

Interestingly, in the last book of *De Trinitate* Hilary refers to the Son as a *res* of the Father:

It is Your thing (*res*), it is Your Only-begotten, not a portion, not an extension, not some empty name to fit the theory that You have made it, but it is Your Son, the Son who is the true God from You, God the Father, and born from You in the unity of nature.⁵⁰

By doing so Hilary implies that for him the term *res* does not necessarily denote an inanimate object, as the English etymological equivalent, “thing”, suggests. Rather, he seems to be using it in a similar manner to Tertullian, as shown above.

Immediately following his discussion of the *Spiritus Dei* as a “thing of the nature” Hilary points out that the term *Spiritus Dei* can be used to signify the Father, and the Son.⁵¹ He illustrates his position with examples from scripture, in what appears to be another instance of the phenomenon of Spirit Christology. This application of *Spiritus* to other persons of the Godhead, especially the Son, can cause ambiguity in Hilary’s presentation of Trinitarian theology. By interpreting *Spiritus Dei* in reference to the Father or the Son, Hilary aims to emphasise the spiritual aspect of the divine nature. Since the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is not in any sense corporeal, it is not restricted to a particular place, thus wherever the Son is, the Father is also, and vice versa.⁵² Accordingly, Hilary understands the description in Luke’s Gospel of the anointing of Christ by the *Spiritus Dei*, (Lk 4.18), as referring to the presence of the Father and “the power of the nature” in Christ.⁵³ He goes on to explain this further by pointing out that God (especially the Father) is present through his own [things]. Since the *Spiritus Dei* is considered by Hilary to be a *res naturae*, he seems to be implying that it is through his Spirit that God makes himself present:⁵⁴

But God, the living power of incalculable strength, who is present everywhere and is absent from nowhere, shows Himself completely through His own [things], and gives us to understand that His own [thing] is nothing else than Himself, so that where His own [things] are present we know that He Himself is present. We should not imagine, however, that like a body, when He is present in some place He is not also present in every place through His own [thing], since those things that are His own are,

⁵⁰ “*Tua enim res est et unigenitus tuus est, non portio, non protensio, non secundum efficientiarum opinionem nomen aliquod inane; sed Filius, Filius ex te Deo Patre Deus uerus et a te in naturae tuae in genitae genitus potestate*”. *De Trin.* 12.54.

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 8.23.

⁵² *De Trin.* 8.24.

⁵³ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me” (Lk 4.18). *De Trin.* 8.23.

⁵⁴ See also Lewis Ayres’ interesting discussion on these passages in *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2010) 90-91.

nevertheless, nothing else than what He Himself is. We have mentioned these facts, of course, in order that we may understand the meaning of the nature.⁵⁵

Hilary also explicitly identifies the Holy Spirit with the “Spirit of God”, and the “Spirit of Christ”, as part of the same discussion.⁵⁶ In doing so, Hilary reinforces the notion that the Spirit is divine, and also shows forth a certain coherency in his pneumatology, for it follows that if the Holy Spirit receives all from the Father and Son respectively, and proceeds from them both, then he is the “Spirit of God [the Father]”, and the “Spirit of Christ”. A further implication of Hilary’s discussion is that of the mutual indwelling of the Spirit with the Father and the Son. However, Hilary only ever speaks of this notion explicitly in reference to the Father and the Son, never in terms of the Spirit.

E. The Spirit’s Procession

In light of our previous discussions on the Holy Spirit as the one who receives all from the Father and from the Son, by means his relationship to the Father, and on the Holy Spirit as the *res naturae*, it is worth quoting another passage from Hilary’s discourse in Book 8. As with the entire discourse, Hilary’s primary aim is not to present an understanding of the Holy Spirit, but to make use of his role within the Trinity, to show forth the divinity of Christ, who is one in nature with the Father. What is worth noting in this passage is Hilary’s description of the manner in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This notion of the Spirit’s procession is intimately linked to Hilary’s understanding of him as the one who receives from the Father and the Son, and as the *res naturae* as alluded to above:

Accordingly, I now raise the question: in what manner are they [the Father and the Son] not one by nature? The Spirit of truth proceeds from the Father; He is sent by the Son and receives from the Son. But, everything that the Father has belongs to the Son. He who receives from Him, therefore, is the Spirit of God, but the same one is also the Spirit of Christ. The thing belongs to the nature of the Son, but the same thing also belongs to the nature of the Father (*Res naturae filii est, sed eadem res et naturae Patris est*).⁵⁷

In this passage Hilary shows again that both the Father and the Son are a source of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere, he refers explicitly to them as authors/originators of the Spirit (*Spiritu... qui Patre et Filio auctoribus*).⁵⁸ However, he does so in a manner which upholds

⁵⁵ *De Trin.* 8.24. There is a sense in this passage that the Holy Spirit as a “thing of the nature” is more a representative of the Father than a divine person in his own right.

⁵⁶ See the earlier section on the indwelling of the Spirit.

⁵⁷ *De Trin.* 8.26.

⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 2.39. Aquinas mentions this passage from *De Trinitate* in his *Summa Theologiae*, where he answers the question: whether the Father and the Son are one principle of the Holy Spirit? He explains that Hilary’s reference to the Father and the Son as authors does not indicate that they are two principles of the Holy

the primacy of the Father as the principle source of the Spirit, for he also indicates that the Son is a source in virtue of his relationship with the Father.

Earlier in Book 8, Hilary reflects on the following Johannine passage: “When that Advocate has come, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness concerning me (cf. Jn 15:26).” In reference to it, he asks two rhetorical questions concerning the Holy Spirit: “But, what are we to understand by that which He [Christ] sends from the Father? Is it something received (*acceptum*), or sent forth (*dimissum*), or begotten (*genitum*)?”⁵⁹ Hilary responds by stating that one of these modes of procession must apply, since “that which He sent from the Father must mean one or the other of these things”.⁶⁰

And He who proceeds from the Father will send that Spirit of truth from the Father. Hence, there is no longer an adoption where a procession is revealed. Nothing remains but for us to corroborate our teaching on this point, whether we are to understand here the going forth of one who exists (*consistentis egressionem*) or the procession of one who has been born (*geniti processionem existimemus*).⁶¹

According to Smulders, in this excerpt, Hilary places the Holy Spirit on a similar level to the Son, since he considers the Spirit’s procession from the Father to somehow parallel that of the Son’s. Smulders maintains that if this had not been the case Hilary would never have implied that the origin of the Spirit could possibly be a generation.⁶² This suggests that Hilary considers the Holy Spirit to be like the Son in terms of his divinity, and origin, namely, that He also receives divine life from the Father, though in a different mode than the Son. Interestingly, Hilary only applies the notion of generation to the Son, who is the Only-begotten:

I will not even permit this name [creature] to be associated with your Holy Spirit, who has proceeded from You and has been sent through Him, because I will not say that the Holy Spirit was begotten, since I know that You alone are unborn and the Only-begotten was born from you, nor will I ever say that He was created.⁶³

Spirit, but rather that they are two persons spirating. Aquinas, *ST* 1.36.4. See also FC 25, footnote 58. As we have noted, Hilary upholds the primacy of the Father throughout *De Trinitate*. Later Augustine states this point very clearly in *De Trin.* 5.14.

⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 8.19.

⁶⁰ *De Trin.* 8.19.

⁶¹ “*Sed quod a Patre mittit, quid intellegemus, utrum acceptum, aut dimissum, aut genitum? Nam horum necesse est unum aliquid significet, quod a Patre missurus est. Et missurus a Patre est eum Spiritum ueritatis, qui a Patre procedit. Iam ergo non est acceptio, ubi demonstrata processio est. Superest ut confirmemus in eo sententiam nostram, utrum in hoc consistentis egressionem an geniti processionem existimemus.*” *De Trin.* 8.19.

⁶² Cf. Smulders, Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 265-266.

⁶³ *De Trin.* 12.55.

F. Persona in reference to the Holy Spirit

Even though Hilary refers to the Holy Spirit in a manner suited to a person, he does not, generally speaking, use the term *persona* in reference to him as he does the Father and the Son. Only once in his writings does he call the Spirit a *persona*. This occurs in relation to his translation and explanation of the second creed from the council of Antioch (341) in *De synodis*. In this creed, the council Fathers depict the real existence of each person of the Trinity in strong terms, based on the baptismal passage from Matthew's Gospel. According to them this passage speaks of:

...a Father who is truly Father, and clearly of a Son who is truly Son, and a Holy Spirit who is truly a Holy Spirit, these words not being set forth idly and without meaning, but carefully signifying the substance (*substantiam*) and order (*ordinem*) and glory (*gloriam*) of each of those who are named, to teach us that they are three substances (*treis substantiae*), but in agreement one (*per consonantiam vero unum*).⁶⁴

Hilary translates this text using the Latin *substantia* for the Greek term *hypostasis* and goes on to explain that the eastern bishops emphasized the real existence of each person of the Trinity in this way, in order to combat Sabellianism.⁶⁵ He points out that by using *treis substantiae*, their aim was to teach three subsistent persons rather than to introduce any dissimilarity of essence between the Father and the Son (*idcirco tres substantias esse dixerunt, subsistentium personas per substantias edocentes non substantiam Patris et Filii diversitate dissimilis essentiae separantes*).⁶⁶

Although Hilary explains this creed by referring to the Holy Spirit as a person, like the Father and the Son, he qualifies this in a rather peculiar manner in his interpretation of the statement that “they are three substances, but in agreement one”. According to Hilary “it is more fitting that a unity of agreement should be asserted than a unity of essence based on likeness of substance” given that “the Spirit is also named, and He is the Paraclete.”⁶⁷ This obscure explanation has puzzled scholars, since on the one hand it suggests that Hilary is affirming the real existence of the Spirit, while on the other that he is denying his unity of

⁶⁴ *De syn.* 29. I have made a slight adjustment to this translation.

⁶⁵ He tends to do this in *De synodis*, and then to explain how the term is being used by the Fathers to convey an orthodox position.

⁶⁶ Cf. *De syn.* 32. Hilary's constant concern in his explanation of the Antiochian creed is to ensure that the western bishops do not misunderstand their eastern counterparts to be Arian due to the way in which they emphasise the real existence of each divine person, namely as *treis substantiae*. Here, Hilary's attention is focused on the Son and his relationship to the Father, rather than the Holy Spirit, as to be expected in the light of the Arian doctrine. In the following chapter he continues his attempt to show the westerners that the easterners believe in the Son's consubstantiality by referring to other statements from the same creed. See *De syn.* 33 and my discussion on this in my article, “Terminological Confusion in the 4th century: A Case Study of Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate* and *De synodis*”, *Annales Theologici* 27/2, (2013): 395 ff.

⁶⁷ *De syn.* 32.

substance with the Father and the Son, and thus effectively his divine personhood.⁶⁸

Smulders attempts to shed light on it by pointing out that in this statement Hilary is denying the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, not in order to deny his divinity, or even equality with the other divine persons, but rather to avoid any sense that the Spirit is generated. He suggests that for Hilary the notion of consubstantiality is so linked to that of generation that he is constrained from applying it directly to the Spirit.⁶⁹ Smulders explanation seems plausible especially given that Hilary himself speaks of the notion of *homoousios* in relationship to the birth of the Son. Furthermore, as we have shown, Hilary goes to some lengths to defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit in *De Trinitate*, which was written around the same time as *De synodis*. It would therefore seem unlikely that he is trying to deny it here.

According to Simonetti, the fact that Hilary generally does not use the term *persona* in reference to the Spirit is significant, given that Tertullian had already spoken of him in this manner, and that his contemporary, Phoebadius, had done the same.⁷⁰ Although Novatian also refrained from referring to the Spirit as a *persona*, Simonetti considers his position to be quite different from Hilary's since he only had the practice of Tertullian to fall back on. This may have appeared to him as too novel an approach at the time. However, Simonetti does concede, in a similar manner to Smulders, that Hilary may have associated the concept of divine personhood with that of generation, and thus reserved the term *persona* for the Father and the Son only.⁷¹

G. The Spirit as “someone” vs “something”

Although Hilary never directly refers to the Spirit as a *persona*, except in his discussion of the eastern creedal statement mentioned above, he tends to refer to him in a way that is suited to a person - a living, rational being – rather than an impersonal object. This he

⁶⁸ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy, 318-381*, 504; Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 266-268, 278.

⁶⁹ Smulders, *La Doctrine Trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, 266-268. In *De synodis* 88, Hilary explains how he understands the notion of *homoousios* which he relates to the concept of the divine birth: “...I understand by ὁμοούσιον God of God, not of an essence that is unlike, not divided but born, and that the Son has a birth which is unique, of the substance of the unborn God, that He is begotten yet co-eternal and wholly like the Father.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 83. Some of the biblical texts used by Tertullian to show forth the real existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom He refers to as persons, are also used by Hilary. However, when Hilary uses these texts he does so only in reference to the first two persons of the Trinity. Hilary may have focused only on the Father and Son deliberately given that the main purpose of *De Trinitate* was to defend the divinity of the Son, and his relationship with the Father, against the Arians. Tertullian’s concern in *Adversus Praxean*, on the other hand, was to demonstrate the real existence of all three persons against Monarchianism.

⁷¹ Simonetti, “*Note di Christologie Pneumatica*”, footnote 66.

most explicitly expresses in reference to the Pauline passage which describes the Spirit as one who “searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10). In the following prayer to the Father, Hilary uses this text in support of his claim that the Spirit is divine. During this prayerful discourse he also describes the Spirit as one who talks to the Father, probably alluding to Romans 8:26:

According to the Apostle, Your Holy Spirit searches and knows Your profound things, and my intercessor with You talks to You of subjects that I cannot describe. How can I express without at the same time defaming the power of His nature, which is from you through your Only-begotten, by the name “creation”? Nothing penetrates you except Your own things, nor can the intervention of a power, extraneous and alien to Your own, measure the depths of Your infinite majesty. Whatever enters into You is Yours, and nothing is foreign to You that is present within You as a power that searches.⁷²

As we have also discussed Hilary describes the Spirit as one who is “sent” and who is “received”, and who has his own name.⁷³ Furthermore, in *De synodis* he points out that the Spirit has his own office (*officium*) and rank (*ordinem*), as we have mentioned.⁷⁴ Again in *De Trinitate*, he speaks of the *dignitate* and *officio* belonging to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed by the names assigned them in scripture (cf. Matt 28:19). In Latin usage, the term *officium* tended to be related to the duty of a human person, not a thing, or animal.⁷⁵

Furthermore, Hilary often describes the Spirit in a personal manner when discussing the way in which he relays the mysteries of God through the mouth of the prophets. This is most notable in his *Commentary on the Psalms*. For example, in his exegesis of Psalm 1, Hilary attributes the choice of the psalm as an introduction to the psalter to the work of the Holy Spirit, and then proceeds to point out the Spirit’s reasons for his decision. In the course of his discussion, Hilary describes the Spirit as performing various actions that can only be carried out by rational beings. Some of the verbs he employs directly point to this, for example, *adhortari*, *docere*, and *polliceri*:

The Holy Spirit made choice of this magnificent and noble introduction to the Psalter, in order to stir up (*adhortaretur*) weak man to a pure zeal for piety by the hope of happiness, to teach (*doceret*) him the mystery of the Incarnate God, to promise

⁷² “*Profunda tua sanctus Spiritus tuus secundum apostolum scrutatur et nouit, et interpellator pro me tuus inenarrabilia a me tibi loquitur; et ego naturae suae ex te per unigenitum tuum manentis potentiam creationis nomine non modo eloquar, sed et infamabo? Nulla te nisi res tua penetrat, nec profundum immensae maiestatis tuae peregrinae adque alienae a te uirtutis causa metitur. Tuum est quidquid te init, neque alienum a te est quidquid uirtute scrutantis inest.*” *De Trin.* 12.55.

⁷³ *De Trin.* 2.29, 2.31. Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate*”, 85.

⁷⁴ This he does in his commentary on the anathemas appended to the council of Sirmium, which we have previously discussed. *De syn.* 55.

⁷⁵ In saying this, Hilary does employ the term *officio* in reference to the particular action associated with the various sense organs. *De Trin.* 2.35. However, the context in which he applies the term to the Holy Spirit implies that he understands him to be a person.

(*polliceretur*) him participation in heavenly glory to declare (*denuntiaret*) the penalty of the Judgment, to proclaim (*ostenderet*) the two-fold resurrection, to show forth (*monstraret*) the counsel of God as seen in His award. It is indeed after a faultless and mature design that He has laid (*inchoauit*) the foundation of this great prophecy; His will being that the hope connected with the happy man might allure weak humanity to zeal for the Faith; that the analogy of the happiness of the tree might be the pledge of a happy hope, that the declaration of His wrath against the ungodly might set the bounds of fear to the excesses of ungodliness, that difference in rank in the assemblies of the saints might mark difference in merit, that the standard appointed for judging the ways of the righteous might show forth the majesty of God.⁷⁶

In his exegesis of Psalm 9, Hilary again speaks of the Holy Spirit in a manner which indicates his personhood, showing how the Spirit used various kinds of speech to assist humans in their knowledge of God. In doing so, Hilary also implies that the Holy Spirit is the author of the psalms, and as in Psalm 1, presents him as a teacher of the mysteries of God:

Some psalms are easy to understand, while in others the sense is more obscure. This diversity comes from the diversity of prophecy. Indeed, the Holy Spirit has established many and various kinds of speech in order that humankind may come to know God, sometimes embracing the secrets of the mysteries through the realities and comparisons of human order; at other times, pointing out the simplicity of the faith by the clarity of words; and sometimes confirming the order of life by the truth of the precepts; at other times through the person of the prophet who wrote the psalm, what is to be provided and what is to be avoided, showing that through the variety and rich supply of teaching, through certain roles and progressive education, an explanation may be brought together of a total understanding.⁷⁷

III. *Limitations in Hilary's understanding of the Spirit*

At the end of his treatise, Hilary speaks with a certain frankness concerning his limited knowledge about the Holy Spirit in a prayer he addresses to God the Father. In so doing, he seems to reveal a sense of frustration regarding his inability to apprehend the mystery of the Spirit more profoundly. Even though Hilary lacks a deep understanding of the procession of

⁷⁶ "*Speciosissimum autem hoc et dignissimum incipiendorum psalmorum sanctus Spiritus sumpsit exordium, ut humanam infirmitatem per spem beatitudinis ad innocens religionis studium adhortaretur, ut sacramentum Dei corporati doceret, ut communionem gloriae caelestis polliceretur, ut poenam iudicii denuntiaret, ut differentiam resurrectionis ostenderet, ut prouidentiam Dei in retributione monstraret.*

Perfecta scilicet consummata que ratione tantae prophetiae ordinem inchoauit, ut hominum imbecillitatem ad fidei studium beati uiri spes inliceret, spei beatitudinem comparata ligni beatitudo sponderet, insolentem impietatem intra metum denuntiata impiis seueritas coerceret, meriti differentiam in consiliis sanctorum condicionis ordo distingueret, Dei magnificentiam in cognoscendis iustorum uiis aequitas constituta monstraret." Tr. Ps. 1.5.

⁷⁷ "*Quorundam psalmorum absoluta intellegentia est, quorundam obscurior sensus est; diuersitatem utramque adfert diuersitas prophetiae. Per multa namque et uaria genera sermonis ad agnitionem Dei hominem Spiritus sanctus instituit, nunc sacramentorum occulta per naturas et comparationes hominum comprehendens, nunc fidei simplicitatem uerborum absolute commendans, nunc uitae ordinem praeceptorum ueritate confirmans, nunc quid prouidendum sit et cauendum per personam prophetae, qui psalmum scribat, ostendens, ut per hanc multiplicem et diuitem copiam doctrinae, per quasdam partes et incrementa discendi totius intellegentiae aedificatio comparetur."* Tr. Ps. 9.1.

the Holy Spirit, in this prayer we see him again implying that He is both divine and a person. He does this by stating that the Holy Spirit is “from” the Father and likening this to the fundamental mystery of the Son’s birth:

I cannot describe Him whose words to me are beyond my power of description. Just as from the fact that Your Only-begotten was born from You all ambiguity in language and difficulty in understanding are at an end and only one thing remains, that He was born, so, too, in my consciousness I hold fast to the fact that your Holy Spirit is from You, although I do not grasp it with my understanding. I am dull in Your spiritual things... I possess the faith of my regeneration without any understanding on my part. There are no boundaries for the Spirit who speaks when He wills, and where He wills.⁷⁸

Hilary’s concept of the *divinas nativitas* is foundational to the theology he develops concerning the Son and his relationship to the Father. Although he understands the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father, in a manner distinct from the Son’s generation, he does not have a concept parallel to that of the divine birth to enable him to develop this pneumatology further. Rather than risk presenting explanations he is unsure of, Hilary prefers to stick within the boundaries of what he knows for certain, namely, what is revealed by the scriptures and the profession of faith.⁷⁹

Your St. John says that all things were indeed made through the Son, who was God the Word in beginning with You, O God. St. Paul enumerates all the things that were created in Him in heaven and on earth, both the visible and the invisible. After mentioning that all things had been created in Christ and through Christ, he believed that he had designated the Holy Spirit in a satisfactory manner when he referred to Him as Your Spirit. Such will be my thoughts about these questions, in harmony with these men whom You have especially chosen, so that just as I, following in their footsteps, shall say nothing else about Your Only-begotten that is above the comprehension of my understanding save only that He was born, so, too, I shall assert nothing else about the Holy Spirit that is above the judgment of the human mind except that He is Your Spirit. And I pledge myself not to a futile contest of words, but to the persevering profession of an unquestioning faith.⁸⁰

IV. *To What Extent does Hilary Influence Augustine’s Pneumatology?*

In the presentation of these notions concerning the Holy Spirit’s procession from the Father and the Son, and also the manner in which He receives all from both of them, Hilary seems to anticipate Augustine’s exposition of the Holy’s Spirit’s position within the Trinity.

⁷⁸ *De Trin.* 12.56.

⁷⁹ In the opening chapter to *De Trinitate* Hilary speaks about his awareness of the awesome responsibility associated with writing about the things of God. He asserts that one must “humbly submit” to God’s words, since “He [God] is a competent witness for Himself who is not known except by Himself.” *De Trin.* 1.18.

⁸⁰ *De Trin.* 12.56.

Augustine takes these ideas a significant step further than Hilary, largely due to his profound insight into the procession of the Holy Spirit. With his usual clarity he states that

...just as the Father has in Himself that the Holy Spirit should proceed from Him, so He has given to the Son that the same Holy Spirit should proceed from Him, and both apart from time; and that when the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father, it is to be so understood that His proceeding also from the Son comes to the Son from the Father. For if whatever He has, the Son has from the Father, then certainly He has from the Father that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from Him...⁸¹

Hilary also seems to anticipate Augustine in his presentation of the primacy of the Father as the source of the Spirit. As above, Augustine adds much needed clarity and coherency to his exposition of this notion, which implicitly reveals the divine personhood of the Spirit, who is on an equal footing to the Father and the Son:

He, of whom the Son was begotten, and from whom the Holy Spirit principally proceeds, is God the Father. I have added ‘principally,’ therefore, because the Holy Spirit is also found to proceed from the Son. But the Father also gave this to Him, not as though He already existed and did not yet have it, but whatever He gave to the only-begotten Word, He gave by begetting Him. He so begot Him, therefore, that the common Gift should also proceed from Him, and that the Holy Spirit should be the Spirit of both...⁸²

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, our analysis of Hilary’s pneumatological writings has shown that he does develop a rudimentary understanding of the Holy Spirit as a divine person. For Hilary, the Spirit has a real existence and is divine; He proceeds from the Father and through the Son and as the “Gift of God” is sent to sanctify humanity; the Holy Spirit pervades all things and only in him do we offer true worship to God. Although Hilary only refers to the Spirit once using the Latin term *persona*, this may have been because he linked the term to the notion of generation, thus rendering it suitable only for the Father and the Son, and not because he denied the personhood of the Spirit. Rather, by referring to him as a *res naturae*, a title later taken up by medieval scholars, he seems to imply the personhood of the Spirit who subsists and is of the nature of God. Furthermore, Hilary speaks of the Holy Spirit in a personal manner, not as an object. However, what Hilary fundamentally lacks in his notion of the Holy Spirit as a person is a profound understanding of the mode in which He proceeds from the Father, and in relation to this, his relations within the Trinity itself. Hilary develops his theology of the personhood of the Father and the Son on the basis of his understanding of the generation and divine birth. His ability to do the same in terms of the Holy Spirit is limited as

⁸¹ Augustine, *De Trin.* 15.26, 15.47.

⁸² Augustine, *De Trin.* 15.23, 15.44, 17.29.

he lacks parallel concepts. Despite Hilary's incomplete understanding of the Spirit's procession, he is emphatic about his essential role in the Trinity, which the baptismal formula in Matthew's Gospel indicates.⁸³

⁸³ Cf. Thorp, "*Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 95-96.

Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation has been to investigate the development of divine personhood in the writings of Hilary of Poitiers, and in doing so to elucidate more clearly his contribution to Trinitarian theology. I have built on the seminal work of Paul Smulders but distinguished this thesis from his in a number of ways: I have analysed in greater detail Hilary's pneumatology, as well as various aspects of his theology such as his use of prosopographic exegesis. Furthermore, I have taken into account more extensively the fourth century theological crisis in which Hilary was engaged, presenting a view on this crisis that I maintain was in accordance with Hilary's. This view differs fundamentally from that typically espoused by modern Patristic scholars, and in itself distinguishes this work from other recent historical accounts of the fourth century. It is for this reason that this thesis differs significantly from the study recently published by Weedman.¹ In this work, Weedman also aims to shed light on Hilary's Trinitarian theology by examining it in view of the milieu in which he wrote. However, Weedman understands this milieu in typically modern terms, situating Hilary in the midst of what he describes as the "matrix" of the "mid-fourth century Trinitarian controversies."²

I, on the other hand, maintain that Hilary saw this crisis not primarily as involving a multiplicity of emerging theological positions, but rather two fundamentally opposed views. The first of these upheld the orthodox truth proclaimed at Nicaea, namely that Jesus is the Son of God and thus consubstantial with the Father; and the second undermined this truth by subordinating the Son to the Father. I have thus chosen to depict the crisis in terms of these two opposing views, which I have labelled Nicene and Arian respectively. Whilst modern scholarship has highlighted the nuanced differences amongst theologies present in the mid-fourth century that have traditionally been grouped as Arian, I have argued that they all share one fundamental tenet - the subordination of the Son to the Father. Such a position can never be deemed orthodox. It is this foundational error that concerned Hilary, as well as the other orthodox writers of the period.³

It was in direct response to the Arian crisis that Hilary developed his Trinitarian theology, and at the same time deepened the understanding of the Nicene faith. Thus, in order

¹ Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*.

² Cf. *ibid.*, 1-3.

³ Aquinas also views the crisis in this manner, as I have mentioned.

to understand and appreciate more fully his contribution, I have elucidated how he both sought to address the crisis, and the achievements he made, focusing primarily on his major doctrinal work, *De Trinitate*. At stake in this crisis was belief in the divinity of Christ – a foundational principle of the faith, which Hilary considered necessary for salvation. Aware of his responsibility as a bishop to expound the faith and protect his flock from heresy, and given the gravity of the Arian error, Hilary went to great lengths to defend the truth concerning Christ’s divinity. It was with this end in mind that he composed *De Trinitate*. In this treatise Hilary not only confirmed the Nicene faith but explained how it is plausible to hold this fundamental doctrine. He did this by showing how the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father can be understood in an orthodox and coherent manner, one which shows forth the Son’s distinct existence as a divine person, while not declaring him another god, nor detracting from the Father’s divinity. It is this development of his theology that led him to be revered by later scholars, especially in the middle ages. The insights that he made have been passed down to posterity as noted throughout this thesis in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

At the heart of the crisis were the theological questions: “What do we mean when we say that God is three and one?”, and, “How are we to understand Christ as the Son of God?”⁴ To answer these questions effectively, a clear explanation of the unity and plurality that characterised the Trinity was needed, one which was in keeping with the orthodox faith. The Church addressed part of the issue at Nicaea with the proclamation of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father. In this manner she pointed to the divine substance as the source of unity between the Father and the Son, implying that they must be distinguished on another level.⁵ However, she did not explain how this was possible, and confusion abounded. The catchword *homoousios* was widely misunderstood in the east as having Sabellian or materialist connotations, and thus rejected by many. The Arian heresy arose in this region in direct response to Sabellianism, presenting an understanding of the Triune God which emphasized the fundamental truth concerning the real existence of each divine person. However, it did so at the expense of subordinating the Son, and later the Spirit, thus distinguishing them according to substance and ultimately denying their divinity. In the west the Nicene position, which affirmed the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, was generally accepted. However, in the late 350s when Hilary appeared on the scene, an orthodox explanation of the subsistence of the Father and the Son in light of this truth had not yet been elucidated, at least in Latin theological circles.

⁴ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers’ De Trinitate*”, 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*

I maintain that to solve the crisis the Nicene position needed to be explained further in order to show how it supported the doctrine concerning the real existence of the Father and the Son, rather than undermined it. This occurred through the development of a coherent and orthodox notion of divine personhood, one that accounted for the substantial unity within the Trinity together with the subsistence of each person. Hilary did this successfully in terms of the Father and the Son, who were the main focus of his treatise, and to a much lesser degree in reference to the Holy Spirit. In doing so he contributed significantly to the development of Trinitarian theology in the west. Shortly after his death an understanding of the personhood of all three persons was effectively expounded, initially through the work of the Cappadocian Fathers, marking in a particular way an end to the crisis. Although the terminology also needed to be standardised, without an orthodox concept of personhood, this in itself was not sufficient to solve the crisis. This is shown clearly by the fact that Arius employed the term *hypostasis* in reference to the divine persons in order to express his heretical doctrine, and yet this very term was later understood as representing orthodoxy. This is a fundamental point, which tends to be overlooked by scholars, who sometimes point to the terminology as the primary issue underpinning the crisis. Although I acknowledge that the lack of established terms to express the plurality and unity within the Godhead added to the confusion, it was not the primary cause. In fact, the establishment of terms only occurred once an orthodox notion of divine personhood had been developed, which was then used to underpin them.⁶

Hilary's Trinitarian theology is founded primarily on sacred scripture, and the baptismal profession of faith. Throughout *De Trinitate*, he makes extensive use of both the Old and New Testaments to develop his theology and show forth the divinity of the Son against Arianism, while avoiding the pitfall of Sabellianism. In doing so, he develops a profound understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son. He does not set out to do this in any systematic manner, rather, it occurs as a result of his attempt to defend the truth concerning the Son's consubstantial relationship with the Father, in a manner which does not deny his real existence, or undermine the Father's divine nature and primacy.

In this dissertation, I have highlighted the importance of the philosophical principles which underpin Hilary's theology. These, to my knowledge, have not been noted to such an extent by scholars previously. The first of these principles concerns the fundamental difference between God and creatures, who in effect represent two distinct orders of being - divine and created; the second involves the manner in which a thing possesses its nature, namely, either entirely or not at all; and the third, the importance of the power of a thing in

⁶ Cf. Thorp, "*Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' De Trinitate*", 116.

revealing its nature. In contrast to Hilary's theology, the Arian doctrine seems to have been underpinned by a flawed metaphysical position, in which divinity was understood as being on a continuum. It was on this basis that Arius claimed the Son to be God but less divine than the Father, and thus different from him. In order to account for his closeness to the Father and to differentiate him from other creatures, he proposed that the Son was united to the Father on the level of will, and that He was a perfect creature, unlike others. For Hilary, as I have demonstrated, such a position is untenable. According to him the divine nature is possessed in its entirety or not at all, thus the Son is either true God, with all the divine attributes, or not God at all, and thus having none of them.⁷ Furthermore, for Hilary the unity between the Father and the Son cannot be expressed in terms of will alone, since this is not the most fundamental source of their union. Rather, the Father and Son are united according to their one divine nature, and as a consequence of this are united in will. Finally, Hilary argues that the divinity of Christ is proven by the miracles He performs, which reveal his divine power.

Through my examination of the manner in which Hilary uses and understands the term *persona* I have elucidated his notion of distinction within the Trinity, especially in reference to the Father and the Son. In *De Trinitate*, Hilary reserves the use of *persona* only for the Father and the Son. This he does mainly in reference to scriptural passages in order to reveal the presence of the Son in the Old Testament. Thus, against the Arians he defends the fundamental Nicene truth concerning God, who is a unity of persons, not a solitary figure. In doing so he infers that the Son's subsistence in the Godhead does not date to the time of his incarnation but is eternal.⁸

In my analysis of Hilary's understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son I have also identified certain aspects of Hilary's concept of a divine person. These can be divided into two categories - what pertains to the person in terms of his divine nature, and what makes him unique. In terms of the Father and the Son, I have demonstrated that for Hilary, a divine person has a real existence and subsists in the divine substance; each person possesses the Godhead in its fullness, and thus has all the divine attributes, while not being another god or undermining the divinity of the other person.⁹ As well as this, each participates in the one divine work, especially that of creation, and is set apart by the mode in which He performs this work. Hilary distinguishes the Father from the Son and vice versa primarily through the properties of fatherhood and sonship. He does this especially through the notion of the *divina nativitas*, which encompasses these properties, and is in a sense the signature

⁷ Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 114.

⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁹ Ibid., 115-116.

concept of Hilary's Trinitarian theology. This notion, which is more developed in Hilary than in any other early Christian writer, is not taken up by later authors who tend to focus on the associated properties of fatherhood and sonship. Hilary also distinguishes the first two persons of the Trinity in terms of their origin, as later scholars do. For him, the Father is the Unbegotten God, the source of all, while the Son is the Only-begotten God, the only one truly born from the Father. Both these sets of properties enable him to explain the real existence of the Father and the Son, in a manner which upholds their substantial unity and divinity, while maintaining the primacy of the Father.

As I have indicated, Hilary's concept of divine personhood is intrinsically linked to his understanding of the nature of God. He points out that the Father and the Son are each truly God, thus possessing all the divine attributes and yet not in isolation to each other as each subsists in the one divine nature. In *De Trinitate* Hilary reveals this most clearly through the notion of circumincession.¹⁰ This he develops primarily on the basis of John 14:11: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me".¹¹ Through this notion, Hilary expresses his most profound insights into the mystery of the Godhead, both in terms of the immanent and economic Trinity. In doing so, he also advances the understanding of the unity and personhood of the Father and the Son in a manner which surpasses earlier writers, at least in the west. For Hilary, the Father and the Son dwell mutually in one another, as two distinct persons, yet intimately united in the one divine substance:

He is not a God in part only, because the fullness of the Godhead is in the Son... Whatever is in the Father is also in the Son; whatever is in the unbegotten is also in the only-begotten, one from the other and both are one [substance], not one [person], but one is in the other because there is nothing different in either of them. (*non in partem, quia plenitudo deitatis in Filio... Quod in Patre est, hoc et in filio est; quod in ingenito, hoc et in unigenito. Alter ab altero, et uterque unum. Non duo unus, sed alius in alio, quia non aliud in utroque*).¹²

Through the use of this concept, Hilary also avoids any notion that the unity which exists between the first two persons of the Trinity can be understood in materialist terms. This he associates with a false understanding of *homoousios*. According to Hilary, the unity within the Godhead is spiritual, since God is spirit. It thus differs fundamentally from that which exists between material beings.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹ In regard to this notion, Hilary is one of the Fathers most quoted by Aquinas. Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 299-303.

¹² *De Trin.* 3.4. I have made a slight change to this translation.

¹³ *De Trin.* 3.1. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 118.

The notion of circumincession is also used by Hilary to illustrate the work of the Trinity in the divine economy. He points out emphatically that the Son never ceases to be God, even when he took on humanity in the incarnation, and explains this mystery by assigning two natures to Christ, one human and one divine.¹⁴ In this manner he anticipates Chalcedon. Hilary reveals the implications of his Christological position most profoundly in reference to the Eucharist. When we receive the Eucharist, he explains, we are united not only to Christ, but through him to the Father.¹⁵

In terms of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, I have noted the wide-ranging views of scholars - at one end of the scale are authors such as Beck who maintain that Hilary was binitarian, while at the other end are those such as Smulders and Ladaria who identify a rudimentary understanding of the Holy Spirit as a person in Hilary's writings. Through my extensive review of Hilary's pneumatology, I have shown the latter view to be most plausible. I have also used Hilary's notion of divine personhood, which he develops significantly in terms of the Father and the Son, as a reference point. Furthermore, in order to grasp more fully Hilary's pneumatology, I have presented a detailed analysis of the phenomenon known as Spirit Christology, which is evident in his writings. This is the most extensive study of the subject currently available in English, to my knowledge, and the only one which focuses especially on the works of Hilary. It is important, given that Hilary uses the term *spiritus* not only in reference to the Holy Spirit, but also to Christ, and at times in an ambiguous manner. A number of scholars have remarked on this issue, pointing out the difficulties it presents in understanding his pneumatology, which may have been the reason why so few have written on it in any depth.

In my analysis, I have shown that Hilary clearly affirms the divine nature of the Holy Spirit, although he never explicitly states that He is God. Hilary argues that the Spirit is not a creature, because He is *of* God, and thus reasons that He must be divine. Although he does not generally refer to him as a *persona*, as he does the Father and the Son, this may not be because he did not consider him as such. For example, he may have understood the term in relation to the notion of generation, thus rendering it suitable only for the Father and the Son. In terms of titles for the Holy Spirit, Hilary seems to have been the first early Christian writer to refer to him as a *res naturae*. Although he only does this once, it is significant as it implies that he understands the Spirit not only as being divine, but also as possessing his own subsistence. Furthermore, he uses *res* in reference to the Son, thus inferring a similarity

¹⁴ *De Trin.* 7.40.

¹⁵ *De Trin.* 8.13. Cf. Thorp, "Substantia and Persona in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate*", 118.

between the two. He also implies that he considers the Spirit to be a person by the manner in which he speaks of him, namely as a person, not an object or some kind of impersonal force.

On a number of occasions, Hilary identifies the Holy Spirit as the “Gift of God”, inferring that this is a property unique to the Spirit, which distinguishes him from the Father and the Son. He discusses this primarily in terms of his role in the divine economy, while later writers go further, shedding light on the Spirit’s position with the Trinity, through a reflection on this property. According to Hilary, the Spirit’s role as “Gift” is to sanctify the faithful, who offer true worship to God “in the Spirit”.¹⁶

In my analysis, I have highlighted Hilary’s insightfulness concerning the procession of the Spirit, an important aspect of his notion of personhood. Hilary maintains that the Spirit proceeds from the Father in a manner which differs from that of the Son, who alone is generated, but which he implies is parallel. In both the procession of the Son and the Spirit he upholds the primacy of the Father, who is the ultimate source of both. Furthermore, he distinguishes significantly between the Son and the Spirit, by pointing out that while the Son proceeds from the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, through the Son.

Although Hilary states clearly that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, his understanding of his personhood is not complete. What is lacking is a comprehensive understanding of the mode in which the Holy Spirit proceeds. This in turn impacts on Hilary’s ability to explain the Spirit’s relations within the Trinity itself, and to therefore further develop his pneumatological thought. In contrast, Hilary is able to develop a profound understanding of the personhood of the Son and also the Father due to his fundamental insight concerning the Son’s generation, as one born from the Father. Despite his limited comprehension of the Holy Spirit’s intratrinitarian relations, I have shown that for Hilary the Spirit still fulfils an essential role in the Trinity, which is in keeping with the apostolic faith and expressed in the baptismal formula found in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁷

In conclusion, the title, “Athanasius of the West”, is appropriately applied to Hilary, who like his illustrious eastern counterpart, also went to great lengths to defend the Nicene faith against the onslaught of Arianism and Sabellianism.¹⁸ In his efforts to explain the Son’s consubstantial relationship with the Father in a coherent and orthodox manner, he developed a profound understanding of the personhood of the Father and the Son, marking a significant development in Trinitarian thought in the west, and influencing future Christian writers. Furthermore, he developed a rudimentary understanding of the personhood of the Spirit,

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 2.31.

¹⁷ Cf. Thorp, “*Substantia and Persona* in Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate*”, 95-96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

anticipating the declaration at Constantinople and the pneumatology of Augustine. His fundamental insights concern the apostolic faith, that faith held by the Church, propounded in the scriptures, confirmed at Nicaea and celebrated in the liturgy. For this reason, they have stood the test of time, being taken up and developed by later theologians. It is only fitting that I should end my dissertation dedicated to this steadfast defender of the faith, with the same prayer that he composed to conclude his greatest work on the Trinity, *De Trinitate*. In this, he most eloquently expressed the Trinitarian faith, with which his life was imbued:

Keep, I pray You, this my pious faith undefiled, and even till my spirit departs, grant that this may be the utterance of my convictions: so that I may ever hold fast that which I professed in the creed of my regeneration, when I was baptized in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let me, in short, adore You our Father, and Your Son together with You; let me win the favour of Your Holy Spirit, Who is from You, through Your Only-begotten... Amen.¹⁹

¹⁹ “*Conserva, oro, hanc fidei meae incontaminatam religionem, et usque ad excessum spiritus mei dona mihi hanc conscientiae meae vocem: ut quod in regenerationis meae symbolo baptizatus in Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto professus sum, semper obtineam, Patrem scilicet te nostrum, Filium tuum una tecum adorem, sanctum Spiritum tuum qui ex te per unigenitum tuum est promerear... Amen*”. *De Trin.* 12.7. Ibid.

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