



Hilary of Poitiers Makes East and West Meet: The Conciliatory Theology of *De Synodis*

Jannel N. Abogado, OP

This study on the attempt of Hilary of Poitiers to conciliate the western homoeuseans and the eastern homoeuseans focuses on the doctrinal reflection on the divinity of the Son and his proper ontological relation to the Father, as offered in his work, *De synodis*. It analyses the doctrinal solution of Hilary in two fronts. In the first, it specifies how Hilary communicates to his western colleagues the conviction that the theology of the eastern homoeuseans was not contrary to their essential faith in the divinity of the Son and the oneness in nature of the unbegotten Father and the Son that He has begotten. Such is demonstrated in three steps, that is, in the discussion of the homoeusean council of Ancyra in 358, in the explanation of the eastern creeds that this same group of bishops held as normative in their belief, and in the demonstration that the term *homoiousios*, the preferred term of the easterners for the description of the relationship of the Son to the Father, appropriates their teaching on the Son, as encapsulated in their doctrine of the Son as *homoousios* to the Father. In the second thrust, Hilary turned to the easterners to argue that the several objections they raised on the use of the homoeusean formula were also upheld by the homoeuseans as inappropriate to apply to the conception of the Son of God, and that the homoeusean formula was affirmed for its positive senses and not for the erroneous ideas.

Keywords: Hilary of Poitiers, *De synodis*, Trinity, Trinitarian controversy, conciliation theology, *homoousios*, *homoiousios*, homoeuseans, homeouseans, homoeans, neo-Arians

Introduction

This research aims to study the effort of the eminent bishop of Poitiers to conciliate the western homouseans and the eastern homoeouseans. He appraised these two ecclesiastical parties as defending the same faith against those who denied the divinity of the Son and his coessential relationship with the Father, although they were at odds with each other due to their different usages of seemingly mutually exclusive formulae to express such faith.

Information about the life of St. Hilary is scarce. However, scholars do agree on the opinion that he was probably born between 310 to 320,¹ that he was, as he himself claimed, baptized as an adult,² was ordained bishop not prior to 350, since, in *De synodis*, he wrote that before the Synod of Beziars (356) he was already serving as bishop for a short time,³ and finally that he died in the year 367 or 368.⁴ Accounts written about his life either by others, or by him commenced with his career as the bishop of his birthplace, Limonum, or Pictavi, as it was later called, the present day Poitiers. He was best known as a bishop who resisted the Arian heresy in the West—a fact allowing scholars to ascribe him the title Athanasius of the West,⁵—and who made an effort to mediate the theologies of the predominantly pro-Nicene Westerners and the homoeousean party of the East.

Indeed, it was not just a case of him being compelled out of “religious duty to write sound and faithful words”⁶ to his fellow pastors in the Church to promote ecclesial unity,⁷ but he was also adept for the job. He was one of those few theologians of the period who was profoundly knowledgeable about both the Western theological tradition, to which he belonged, and the Eastern theological legacy. It was due to his exile in the east that he had the opportunity and the proper environment to acquaint himself with the contemporary theological issues occupying the eastern part of the empire. As a result, he was able to discern astutely the nuances of the different existing ecclesiastical parties, and thus avoided the mistake committed by his contemporaries of branding all who did not approve of the Nicene Creed as Arians.

¹ C.F.A. Borchardt, *Hilary of Poitiers' Role in the Arian Struggle*, The Hague 1966, 184.

² Hilary, *De syn.* 91 (PL 10,517A; NPNF 9,28).

³ Hilary, *De syn.* 91 (PL 10,519A; NPNF 9,28).

⁴ J. Emmenegger, *The Functions of Faith and Reason in the Theology of Saint Hilary of Poitiers*, Washington 1947, 16.

⁵ Cf. K. Hase, *Kirchengeschichte*, Leipzig 1836, 137, quoted in C.F.A. Borchardt, vii.

⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 2 (PL 10,459B; NPNF 9,4).

⁷ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 8 (PL 10,463BC; NPNF 9,6).

Overcoming the West's suspicion that the easterners uphold Arianism

In *De synodis*, Hilary argued to his Latin colleagues that the easterners' description of the Son as *homoiousios* to the Father could actually be reconciled with the doctrinal confession of Nicaea. He demonstrated this in three steps: scrutinizing the document produced at Ancyra 358; clarifying the creeds espoused by the easterners on whose authority the homoeouseans anchored their theological pronouncements about the Son; and sharing that the *homoiousios* doctrine does not only advocate the relationship of the Father and the Son on the level of essence, but it also preserves the distinct hypostatic existence of the Son from the Father.

1. Hilary's appraisal of the theology of the Ancyran Synod of 358

Let this analysis take its cue from this declaration of Hilary: "Now it seems to me right and appropriate, before I begin my argument about suspicions and dissensions as to words, to give as complete an account as possible of the decisions of the Eastern bishops adverse to the heresy compiled at Sirmium."⁸

The expression, 'suspicions and dissensions as to words', the analysis of which Hilary postponed momentarily for the discussion of the Ancyran Creed refers to the use of the terms *homoousios* and *homoiousios* by the Nicenes and homoeouseans respectively to define the nature of the Son in relation to the Father. This misplaced dispute Hilary would want to clarify because in substance, as will be shown shortly, the individual views of the concerned ecclesiastical groupings on the nature of God were not mutually opposed to each other. He argued this point to his colleagues starting with the explanation of the theology of the synodical letter of the eastern bishops that were convened at Ancyra in 358. He procured the homoeousean theology elaborating on the intent of the anathemas of the Ancyran synod.⁹

The main concern of Hilary in discussing the Ancyran document was to "make known... the grounds of those mutual suspicious which exist between [the Latin] and the Eastern bishops."¹⁰ To carry out his objective, Hilary, it can be discerned,

⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 9 (PL X,463A; NPNF 9,6).

⁹ Hilary, though, was selective as regards the anathemas he included in his text. It could be conjectured that Hilary limited himself to the demonstration of his objective which is to introduce the orthodoxy of the homoeousean theology. The picked anathemas were deemed sufficient to render this objective. However, one interesting exclusion from the list was the proscription of the term *homoousios*. The proscription is directed against the Sabellian usage of *homoousios* and not the Nicene usage. But, just the same, Hilary must have decided not to comment on it to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding.

¹⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 8 (PL X,463B; NPNF 9,6). The context of the quotation is the soon to be celebrated twin synods, Hilary wished that the unfounded differences between the easterners and the western bishops might be resolved so that they, in unity of spirit, might engage the heresy advanced by the homoean/neo-Arian alliance.

resolved to stress three themes in the theology of 358 Ancyra. These three themes were related as to the three objectives that he religiously pursued in the presentation of his case. The first thrust was to show the similarity of the homoeousean doctrine to the Nicene view of God. Secondly, he also showed clearly that the homoeousean theology was different from the Arian perspective of God. This measure was demanded because many among the homousean bishops identified all those who did not approve of the homousean formula with the Arian position. Thirdly, he also made it clear that the homoeousean opinion was antagonistic to the Sabellianist notion of God.¹¹ These three identified aims, according to the specified order, will be followed in the ensuing discussion.

The first point: One fundamental doctrine of the homoeouseans that Hilary stressed for his Latin colleagues to ruminate on, is the affirmation of the substantial unity of the Father and the Son. Commenting on the third anathema¹² of the Ancyran synod, Hilary offered both the formulae ‘Only-Begotten Son of God’ and ‘image of the invisible God’ as justifications for the precept that the Son “should be of an essence similar in species and nature” with the Father.¹³ While the understanding of the latter has been illustrated in the preceding section of the same work, relating to the amplification of the first anathema, as conveying substantial relationship,¹⁴ the sense of the former as indicating the same meaning is not introduced, but merely assumed. It is so because in the succeeding pages its proper sense would be elaborated. It is delivered in the context of Hilary’s commentary on Prov 8:22, which the Arians likewise appealed to as confirmation of the claim that the Son is merely a creature.

According to the interpretation of Hilary, the title ‘Only-begotten’ has been understood by the homoeouseans as bearing the sense of ‘natural son,’ the only one derived from the substance of the Father. This was in view of counteracting the deemed blasphemous opinion that speaks of the Son as created from nothing. Hilary achieved this by demonstrating the proper exegesis of “The Lord formed me or created me,” whose true meaning the Arians, accordingly, have distorted so that they might persist in their error. In the opinion of the homoeouseans, rightly observed Hilary, the Arians misrepresented the sense of the biblical passage by deliberately

¹¹ One needs only to read Hilary’s conclusion to his analysis of the Ancyran document, found in *De synodis* 27, to determine these three objectives.

¹² And if any one hearing that the Only-begotten Son is like the invisible God, denies that the Son who is the image of the invisible God (whose image is understood to include essence) is Son in essence, as though denying His true Sonship: let him be anathema.” (Hilary, *De syn.* 14; PL X,468B; NPNF 9,7; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,10,4; GCS 31,281; *The Panarion*, 444).

¹³ Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468B; NPNF 9,7).

¹⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 13 (PL X,467B; NPNF 9,7).

excluding the next sentence (“as the first born of all creatures”), which alludes to the birth of the Son, the main revelation of Wisdom about Himself.¹⁵ Accordingly, the phrase, which yields indication of the creation of the Son, from which rests the authority of the claim of the Arians, is an added detail to qualify the begetting of the Son in order to make an important teaching that the impassible nature of the Father is preserved even as He authored the generation of the Son. Hilary wrote about this:

So Wisdom, who said that she was created, does in the next sentence say that she was also begotten, using the word creation of the act of the changeless nature of her Parent, which nature, unlike the manner and wont of human parturition, without any detriment or change of self created from itself what it begot.¹⁶

Having ascertained the impassible nature of the Father, with the injunction that, just as in the act of creation, the generation of the Son did not require the Father to succumb to passion, the homoeouseans assumed that the affirmation that the Son is begotten from the Father should no longer present a problem. The homoeousean assertion that the generation from the Father is the principal revelation of the Son about Himself gave Hilary the opportunity to propose the significance of the nature of the birth. The bishop of Poitiers argued that the Son by virtue of his birth subsists in the substance of the Father because the act of generation demands that the begetter necessarily begets a nature not foreign to his own.¹⁷ The natural birth of the Son, in this respect, guarantees the Son’s similarity in essence to the Father.

Meanwhile, as regards the designation of the Son as the ‘image of God,’ Hilary intimated that it is the belief of the homoeouseans that “he who is an image, if he is to be truly an image, must have in himself his original’s species, nature and essence in virtue of the fact that he is an image.”¹⁸ According to this thinking, an image that bears not in itself the exact reality of the original is no image at all. This is so because the image will not be able to reflect the being of the original if there is even a slight difference in the essence of the original being and its image. Henceforth, the Arian proposition that the Son was unlike in essence to the Father, on account of this revelation of the Son as ‘image of the invisible God,’ is rendered moot.

In addition, Hilary has amplified the teaching of the Orientals about the indistinguishable nature of the Father and the Son, claiming, in *De synodis* 15, that the Son has been invested with the properties of the Father, namely, “glory, worth,

¹⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 17 (PL X,470B; NPNF 9,8).

¹⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 17 (PL X,470A; NPNF 9,8).

¹⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 23 (PL X,474A; NPNF 9,10).

¹⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 13 (PL X,467B; NPNF 9,7).

power, invisibility, essence.”¹⁹ There is no doubt that this argument was crafted to address specifically the Arians who advocated the subordination of the Son. Hilary cited the reasoning provided in this Arian argument in the following passage: “And further that in saying the Father was greater in honor, dignity, splendor and majesty, they implied that the Son lacked those things which constitute the Father’s superiority.”²⁰

The polemical character of the indicated passage from section 15 is further specified in the statement following it, which refuted the said homoean statement, emphasizing that the Son has appropriated for Himself the fullness of the Father’s divinity, and, in order not to give his opponents room to breathe in their objection, included the specification, “both in kind and in amount.”

And while these prerogatives of divinity are equal we neither understand the one to be less because He is Son, nor the other to be greater because He is Father; since the Son is the image of the Father in species, and not dissimilar in genus; since the similarity of a Son begotten of the substance of His Father does not admit of any diversity of substance, and the Son and image of the invisible God embraces in Himself the whole form of His Father’s divinity (*omnem divinitatis paternae*) both in kind and in amount (*qualis et quanta*): and this is to be truly Son, to reflect the truth of the Father’s form by the perfect likeness of the nature imaged in Himself.²¹

This affirmation of substantial unity on strength of the reasoning that the same divine prerogatives, which the Father has in Himself, the Son also has in Himself is premised on the biblical declaration that “the Father has life in himself, so also has He given life to the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26).²² Hilary made this connection as he offered a clarification on the thought of the fourth anathema. The term ‘life’ here, as was understood in accord with the Latin tradition,²³ refers to the fullness of being of the Father, which the Son likewise possessed in Himself as properly His own. The ‘life’ of the Father, including all the divine prerogatives spoken thereof in the preceding section, the Son has received from the Father, the “whole form [of it] ... both in kind and in amount,”²⁴ with the discretion, of course, that the Father “did not relinquish the property of His natural substance.”²⁵ Even if

¹⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468A; NPNF 9,7).

²⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 10 (PL X,464B; NPNF 9,6).

²¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468A; NPNF 9,7-8).

²² Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468B; NPNF 9,8).

²³ Marius Victorinus also gives the same interpretation to the concept of ‘life’ (J. Abogado, *Hilary of Poitiers on Conciliating the Homouseans and the Homoeouseans. A Historico-theological inquiry on the Fourth-Century Trinitarian Controversy*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Rome 2013, 183).

²⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468A; NPNF 9,8).

²⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 16 (PL X,469A; NPNF 9,8).

the Father has communicated to the Son the fullness of His divinity, still His divinity did not experience diminution.

There is one interesting detail in the immediate passage quoted at length above that needs to be put in evidence, as it supports the conclusion made about the title ‘Only-begotten’ having the sense of natural son. In the said extract, the substantial unity is proclaimed in the two titles of the Son, namely, the ‘begotten of the substance of His Father’, and ‘image of the invisible God.’ It is not difficult to prove that according to this reasoning, the former expression is equated to the concept ‘Only-begotten.’ The offered deduction in respect to the identification of the two affirmations is easily proved by the fact that at the beginning of the same commentary the ‘Only-begotten’ is coupled with the ‘image of the invisible God’ and in its closing argument, which corresponds to the passage presently under consideration, the ‘image of the invisible God’ has been paired with the ‘begotten of the substance of the Father.’

Doctrinally speaking, Hilary was constructing here an explicit connection between the homoeousean discussion of the concept of the ‘Only-begotten’ and the ‘begotten of the substance of the Father,’ which was the same reading stipulated by the fathers at Nicaea 325,²⁶ explaining that the Son is called the ‘Only-begotten’ because He is the natural offspring of the Father, a Son who by virtue of his natural birth has proceeded from the same substance of the Father who begot Him. The exiled bishop from Poitiers was not reinterpreting the homoeousean theology in order to make it agreeable to the theological perspective of his colleagues in Gaul, but only making a faithful representation of its teaching, as could be verified from this declaration of the homoeouseans themselves: “The Only-begotten (ὁ μονογενής) is to be understood... in the proper one (κυρίως), as an only Son begotten of an only Father (ὡς μόνος ἐκ μόνου γεννηθείς), in the essential likeness of the Father (ὁμοίως κατ’ οὐσίαν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς) whose Son he is called, and is understood to be.”²⁷

A final clause about this first point, Hilary has also discerned in the assertion that both the Father and the Son have the same power,²⁸ as conveyed in the revelation

²⁶ J. Abogado, 44-52.

²⁷ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,5,7 (GCS 31,275; *The Panarion*, 438).

²⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 18-19 (PL X,471A-472C; NPNF 9,9). This is found in the context of Hilary’s commentary on anathema 11 of the 358 Ancyran document: “And since the Son reveals to us his likeness in essence to the Father through his words, *For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself*, but reveals his likeness in activity through his teaching, For what things soever the Father doeth, these also the Son doeth likewise—[therefore], if anyone grants him only the likeness in activity but denies the Son his likeness of essence, the cornerstone of our faith, and denies himself eternal life in the knowledge of the Father and the Son, let him be anathema.” Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,11,2 (GCS 31,282; *The Panarion*, 445).

of the Son himself in the Scriptures, a proof of the proclaimed equality of nature of the Father and the Son: “For they cannot deny that the Son’s power is the same, seeing that He has said *What things soever the Father does, these also does the Son likewise.*”²⁹

It is not merely the affirmation that the Son likewise performs whatever the Father does that is the bone of this assertion as it is superficial to base on it the tenet on essential likeness. Two beings could both do the same thing and yet be different in nature. If it were to be founded on the correspondence of activities it is not difficult to interpret it according to the Arian view that the unity of the Son to the Father is merely moral, the Son being so compliant in respect to the will of the Father, whom He obeys unconditionally. The Ancyran document itself acknowledges that such evidence only highlights the likeness of the Son to the Father in will and activity only.³⁰

On the other hand, a similar power can only be the consequence of similar nature, for, as Hilary inferred from the speculation of the homoeouseans, “similar might can only be the result of a similar nature. For a lower nature can never attain to the might of a higher and more powerful nature.”³¹ The Son can do what the Father can do, not just because the Son is the perfect Son of the Father who is ever obedient to His will, but more so because—the idea of capability not just the mere correspondence of actions is underscored here—the Son is just as powerful as the Father to carry out actions proper to divinity, such as creation of the world, or effecting salvation to humankind, since both are God, the Son being begotten by the Father in the same “identical divine substance.”³² Hilary pursued the homoeouseans’ insistence on the one power of the Father and the Son as it exhibits the incongruity of the view of the Arians, for by maintaining that the Son is dissimilar in nature from the Father, and yet asserting that the Son does the work of the Father, the Arians in turn denigrated the majesty of the Father. As Hilary put it: “What will the men who make these assertions say about the omnipotence of God the Father, if the might of a lower nature is made equal to His own?”³³

By refusing to admit that the Son is of the same nature with the Father, the homoeouseans were actually reducing the excellence of the Father because they were allowing a creature, the Son, according to their own understanding, to have equal powers with the almighty Father.

²⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 19 (PL X,471B; NPNF 9,9).

³⁰ Cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,11,2 (GCS 31,282; *The Panarion*, 445).

³¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 19 (PL X,471B; NPNF 9,9).

³² Hilary, *De syn.* 19 (PL X,471B; NPNF 9,9).

³³ Hilary, *De syn.* 19 (PL X,471B; NPNF 9,9).

The second point: Hilary would want that his Latin colleagues realize how different the homoeousean theological perspective from the Arian precept. Such is not entirely divorced from the first objective already outlined above, but rather it adds more cogency to its case. Hilary discerned that the demonstration of the similarity of the homoeousean doctrine of God with the Nicene view was not enough. He was being perceptive of the sentiment of his Latin colleagues who have been deceived several times by the homoean bishops at the previous councils conducted in the West into agreeing to their agenda on the pretext that they shared a common faith, only to discover later that the said group of bishops had concealed from them their true doctrine. There was then a need to categorically assert that the homoeouseans considered as doctrinally unacceptable the Arian view of the relationship of the Son to the Father, to get the Latin bishops a guarantee of the sincerity of the homoeouseans.

Hilary exhibited this by showing that the homoeouseans repudiated the homoean view on the likeness of the Father and the Son, contemplated according to will and activity only, thereby opposing to the view that the Son is merely a creature of the Father. At the council of Nicea, the Arians fought for the exclusion of the use of the *ousia* language precisely because they did not want to speak of the unity of the Father and the Son on the level of the substance of God. Hilary's colleagues in the West knew this very well—as can be deduced from Hilary's reminder to his colleagues of the Arian's intention to restrict the Son to the reality of creatures in section 10³⁴—as they were likewise approached to endorse such blasphemous confession, which they resolutely refused having discerned its inimical character to the Catholic understanding of the relationship of the Father and the Son. Hilary's account of the homoeousean's adverse reaction to the Sirmian manifesto of 357 brought out the doctrinal difference of the homoeousean standpoint from the Arian view.

Hilary had to convince his colleagues in Gaul that he was definite that the homoeouseans were against the doctrine that reduces the Son into a creature. This motivation prompted, for instance, his account of the homoeousean commentary of Proverbs 8:22, the same scriptural basis the Arians offered to account for the inferior status of the Son. The homoeouseans claimed, observed Hilary, that its correct interpretation needs the inclusion of the statement succeeding it—accordingly the key thought of the passage in question—to show that it proclaims the divinity of the Son.³⁵ Hilary illustrated the exegesis of the homoeousean in the following: “Therefore the heresy which has dared to aver that the Son of God is a creature is condemned because while the first statement shows the impossible perfection of the divinity, the

³⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 10 (PL X,464B-C; NPNF 9,6).

³⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 18 (PL X,471A; NPNF 9,8-9).

second, which asserts His natural generation, crushes the impious opinion that He was created out of nothing.”³⁶

Reflecting on the assertion of the nature of the Son as the true Son of God, Hilary inevitably dwelt as well on the argument based on the natural quality of the names Father and Son. The homoeouseans, he continued, opposed the Arian opinion that considers the name ‘Son,’ assigned to the offspring of God the Father, as merely bearing conventional usage, more specifically specifying a sense of adoption, the sense accorded to the rest of creatures, which allowed them to “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.”³⁷

Hilary clarified that, contrary to the nominalist view of their opponents, the homoeouseans considered the names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ as bearing ontological value.³⁸ In fact, in the theology of the homoeouseans, Hilary stressed, it was because of this natural relationship of the Son to the Father that He is known as ‘Father,’ for He cannot be called Father if “no reality can be attached to the name of father unless it be based on the nature of his offspring.”³⁹ The implication is that the nature of the Son is not alien to that of the Father as it is the similarity of the nature of the Son to the Father that allowed the revelation that God is the Father of the Son. He would not be called ‘Father’ if no being has been derived from Him worthy to be called His real offspring,⁴⁰ a being whose existence is derived from the Father “according to similarity of identical nature.”⁴¹ Alluding to the Arian teaching that the Son is like the Father in activity and will only, Hilary summarized the argument of the homoeouseans in the notion of natural birth, declaring: “We shall not call God Father for having a creature like Him in might and activity, but for begetting a nature of an essence not unlike or alien to Himself: for a natural birth does not admit of any dissimilarity with the Father’s nature (*quia diversitatem paternae naturae nativitas naturalis non recipit*).”⁴²

Another Arian precept that the homoeouseans repudiated is the insistence on the temporal priority of the Father over the Son.⁴³ The opposed view is a residue

³⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 18 (PL X,471A; NPNF 9,8-9).

³⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 20 (PL X,472A; NPNF 9,9).

³⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 20 (PL X,472B; NPNF 9,9).

³⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 20 (PL X,472B; NPNF 9,9).

⁴⁰ This point is undoubtedly in reference to the homoeousean point that the primary reference of ‘father/son’ relationship belongs to the divine relationship and from which human category of ‘father/son’ is derived.

⁴¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 64 (PL X,499B; NPNF 9,21).

⁴² Hilary, *De syn.* 20 (PL X,472B; NPNF 9,9).

⁴³ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 23-24 (PL X,474A-475A; NPNF 9,10-11). This is found in the context of

of the old Arian charge that there was a time when the Son was not, that is, the Son is created in time out of nothing. In reply to this, Hilary reported the homoeousean appropriation of the ontological sense of the name ‘Father’ which He bears even before the existence of time since “He is not bound in time, for the eternal and infinite God cannot be understood as having become a Father in time.”⁴⁴ Inasmuch as the Father is eternally Father, then it likewise countenances the view that the Son is ever a Son, for one cannot be a Father without having a real Son of his own. More importantly, Hilary expounded on the argument for the eternity of the Son from the prologue of John offered by the homoeouseans, commenting that the Word, the Only-begotten of God, “is recognized even in the beginning rather to be with God than to be born.”⁴⁵ It thus reinforces the conclusion that the Son is co-eternal with the Father and if co-eternal, not a creature.

Similarly, Hilary cautioned that the likeness in essence of the Son to the Father should not be reckoned as implying a modalist perspective of the unity of God.⁴⁶ Certainly, Hilary was intimating to his colleagues in Gaul that the homoeousean view of substantial unity has likewise taken the initiative to exclude from it any indication of Sabellianist meaning. But, it is also possible that he was directing his charge to the heretics themselves, in particular reference to those who were compelled to take a radical stance against the theology of Nicaea because they falsely thought that the solitary view of God is the sense provided in the Nicene teaching of substantial unity. Around this period, Hilary was still entertaining the idea that heretics could change their mind only if shown the understanding of the right faith.⁴⁷ The solicitousness of Hilary not to abandon the heretics in their error is for instance expressed in this passage from *Contra Constantium*:

And in the meantime, I did not consider it reprehensible to engage in conversation with them, or, notwithstanding the suspension of social communion with them to enter their houses of prayer, or to hope for peace

Hilary’s commentary on anathema 16 of the 358 Ancyran document: “And if anyone holds that the Father is Father of the Only-begotten Son in time and does not believe that the Only-begotten Son has originated impassibly from the Father beyond all times and differently from any human thought—thus abandoning the preaching of the apostles, which rejected time with reference to the Father and the Son, but faithfully taught us, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*—let him be anathema.” Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,11,6 (GCS 31,283; *The Panarion*, 446).

⁴⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 24 (PL X,475A; NPNF 9,11).

⁴⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 24 (PL X,475A; NPNF 9,11).

⁴⁶ In order to show this, Hilary has selected and commented on two of the anathemas pronounced by Ancyra 358, namely, anathemas 14 and 18.

⁴⁷ Indeed the optimism of Hilary was not in vain because there were bishops who previously ranked among the homoeans and have changed allegiance to support the Catholic doctrine as upheld by the majority of bishops at Rimini before its conclusion was derailed by the authority of the emperor. One example of this bishop is Germinius, the bishop of Sirmium (See *Adv.Val.et Urs.* 3,5; L. Wickham, *Hilary*, 99).

that is to be desired, so long as we aim at their redemption from error, their return from anti-Christ to Christ through repentance.⁴⁸

Hilary revealed that there were those who appraised the ‘likeness according to essence’ as likewise supporting the view that the Father and the Son are one and the same person: “For many heretics say that the Son is like the Father in divinity (*similem secundum divinitatem Filium Patri*) in order to support the theory that in virtue of this similarity the Son is the same Person as the Father: for this undivided similarity appears to countenance a belief in a single monad.”⁴⁹

The alluded heretics are the homoeans and the neo-Arians who tried to connect the ‘likeness in essence’ formula with the view of the school of Marcellus and his student Photinus. The identification of Marcellus as supporter of Nicaea gave the old Arians the pretext to misconstrue the Nicene doctrine in accord with Marcellus’ teaching. Apparently, the second generation Arians also applied the same strategy in dealing with the doctrine of the homoeouseans. Hilary then endeavored to correct this faulty interpretation of the tenet of essential likeness of the Father and the Son. Hilary would achieve this by emphasizing the distinct hypostatic existence of the Father and the Son according to the tenet of the birth of the Son in the doctrine of the homoeouseans.⁵⁰

The third point: Even with the understanding of the natural birth of the Son, Hilary acknowledged two extreme attitudes. The first sentiment subscribes to the notion of essential likeness sustained by the natural birth, but interpreting it as implying unity of person. The second attitude is a radical assertion of the one God justified by its absolute denial of the concept of the natural birth. These two extreme positions emerged from the wrong perception of the nature of birth. The first opinion is right to maintain that the concept of natural birth implies similarity in essence because a true birth necessarily signifies that the begotten is like in essence of the begetter whose offspring he is. However, the conceived similarity of essence is articulated in terms of the fusion of the two personalities of the Father and the Son into one single reality. Against it, Hilary specified that it is absurd to state that the begetter has begotten not another being but himself. The reality of birth always involves two personalities, the parent and its offspring, as Hilary summarized in the following: “So then the truth as to the birth supports the similarity of essence and the similarity of essence does not undermine the personal reality of the birth. Nor again does a profession of belief in the Begetter and the Begotten exclude a similarity

⁴⁸ Hilary, *Con.Cons.Imp.* 2

⁴⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 21 (PL X,473A; NPNF 9,9).

⁵⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 21 (PL X,473A; NPNF 9,10). More shall be said about this in the succeeding pages.

of essence; for while the Begetter and the Begotten cannot be one Person, He who is born and He who begets cannot be of a different nature.”⁵¹ The modalist view of the unity of the Father and the Son that proceeds from the radical reading of the Son’s ‘likeness in essence’ to the Father is thus refuted by the right understanding of the nature of birth itself.

Secondly, the promoters of the second opinion were no less in league with the modalist view of the unity of the Father and the Son substantiating their belief with the denial of the birth.⁵² Such radical view no doubt was offered in reaction to the refusal of the homoeouseans to place the birth of the Son in time. The denial of the birth in time is taken by these people to mean as endorsing the “opinion that there was no birth, so that He whose birth is not in time might be considered not to have been born at all.”⁵³ For these people there is no other concept of birth except a birth in time. If the Son was not born in time it only implies that He was not born at all. The exclusion of the idea of the temporal birth of the Son is employed to ascertain the belief in the identification of the Son to the Father who is unborn, and in so doing proclaimed that the Son of God and the Father is a single and unique personality.

Hilary put in evidence the incongruity of this position, that is, the exclusive identification of the concept of the unborn with the concept of being outside the category of time. He argued his case thus: “For it is one thing to be outside time and another to be unborn; the first admits of birth (though outside time), the other, so far as it is, is the one sole author from eternity of its being what it is.”⁵⁴ With this point clarified, Hilary continued that the Father is unborn, but the Son is born of the Father, though his birth takes place in eternity. The Son then, although of the same eternal nature with the Father, cannot be fused to Him, because of the fact that the Father is the unborn God while the Son is the begotten God.

In closing, Hilary has communicated to his colleagues three facts about the homoeousean theology. Foremost of which is that the homoeouseans likewise espoused the unity of the Father and the Son according to essence. This theme is reiterated in the summary of his account of the Ancyran document nine times in different formulations—such as the Son is “under the qualities of an identical essence,” “image of the Father in virtue of a real likeness,” “does not differ in substance from the Father,” “undistinguished from the Father’s nature,” and “the Father can have nothing different in substance from that which the Son received

⁵¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 23 (PL X,474C; NPNF 9,10).

⁵² Hilary, *De syn.* 26 (PL X,476A; NPNF 9,11).

⁵³ Hilary, *De syn.* 26 (PL X,476A; NPNF 9,11).

⁵⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 26 (PL X,476A-B; NPNF 9,11).

to have,” “their essence admits of no difference,” “likeness of nature is the same in each,” “no distinction in essence,” and finally, “the Father by begetting the Son in no wise degenerates from Himself in Him through any difference of nature,”⁵⁵ which shows how central it was in his exposition. Hilary similarly distinguished the homoeousean theology from the Arian teaching that the Son is merely a creature of God by stressing its teaching on the co-eternal status of the Son. Hilary restated at the end of his exposition that the Son is of divine status and is co-eternal with the Father in plain expressions, such as “the begotten Son is not a creature”⁵⁶ and that “there the truth of God’s Fatherhood is not bound by limits of time: there the Son is not later in time: there beyond all time is a perfect birth which refutes the error that the Son could not be born.”⁵⁷ Finally, Hilary also demonstrated that Sabellianism is in no way present in the teaching of the homoeouseans. His summary sustains this with the following statements: “the Person of the Son is not annihilated and confounded with the Father” and “the proper qualities which mark this likeness are repugnant to a confusion of Persons, so that there is not one subsisting Person who is called both Father and Son.”⁵⁸ In short, Hilary has practically shown that the homoeousean theology upholds the major doctrinal themes—substantial unity of the Father and the Son, the divine status of the Son, and the distinct hypostatic existence of the Father and the Son—that the Nicene confession taught.

2. *The creeds of the easterners do not replace the theology of Nicaea*

After having finished exploring the theology of the homoeouseans from the anathema pronouncements of the Ancyran synod of 358, Hilary commenced with enumerating the eastern creeds, which the same homoeouseans have accepted and acknowledged as the sources of their theology in the Tradition of the Church. The introductory note carefully formulated by Hilary to introduce this section, as it is directly significant in connection with the objective of this section, “The reason for its promulgation was the fact that they were bidden to say nothing of the *homoousion*. But even in former times, through the urgency of these numerous causes, it was necessary at different occasions to compose other creeds, the character of which will be understood from their wording.”⁵⁹ The need to clarify the doctrine discussed in these creeds according to the view of the homoeouseans is necessary because the same creeds have been employed by the Arian school to support their doctrine and were offered as substitutes for Nicaea.

⁵⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 27 (PL X,476C; NPNF 9,11).

⁵⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 27 (PL X,477C; NPNF 9,11).

⁵⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 27 (PL X,477A; NPNF 9,11).

⁵⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 27 (PL X,477C; NPNF 9,11).

⁵⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 28 (PL X,477B-478A; NPNF 9,12).

There are two points that need emphasis concerning the passage cited. The first is that Hilary clarified to his Latin readers, lest it be misinterpreted, that the composition of these creeds was prompted by the situation confronting the Church that required immediate resolution. Hilary knew very well that the Latin bishops were very sensitive as regards formulation of new creeds inasmuch as they approved of the confession of Nicaea as the only orthodox confession of the Church, hence the necessity of this introduction so as not to offend the doctrinal sensibility of the bishops. Secondly, Hilary secured, again to assure his audience that he was not compromising the Nicene theology, the notion that the offering of the creedal statements was not meant as alternative or replacement of the Nicene confession because, as noted in the above mentioned quotation, they have spoken nothing against the theology of ὁμοούσιος. These creeds emerged not in reaction to the Nicene theology, but rather in response to the current doctrinal threat that each addressed respectively.

The first eastern creed considered was the Dedication Creed of Antioch. One aspect of the creed that Hilary felt needed urgent explanation is its seeming denial of the “identical similarity (*indifferenti similitudine*) of the Father and the Son”⁶⁰ because of its declaration, in connection to its remark in reference to the baptismal mandate, that it was commanded as such in order “to teach us that they are three Persons (*substantiae*), but in agreement (*consonantia*) one.”⁶¹ That this issue was central in the concern of the Latin is announced by the fact that it was the first theme that Hilary detailed and commented on immediately following the offer of the full text of the creed. It indicates that for the Latins, this particular issue was crucial in determining whether the creed under consideration is compatible or not to the Nicene view. It is because the same declaration has been exploited by the Arians to verify the claim of diversity of essences in the Father and the Son. R.P.C. Hanson precisely highlights this Arian interpretation in his analysis of the Dedication creed, persuading him to advance the observation that “undoubtedly [it was] intended to replace Nicaea.”⁶²

It should be noted that the Dedication Creed has not emerged from an exclusively Arian context, antagonistic to the teaching of Nicaea. It is necessary to call to mind that the old eastern alliance, the one responsible for the promulgation of this confession of faith, was actually composed of several religious factions professing different views about the Godhead. But at that time such difference in doctrine was not yet evident to cause the impending dissolution of the alliance.

⁶⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 31 (PL X,480A; NPNF 9,12).

⁶¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 30 (PL X,479B; NPNF 9,12).

⁶² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian controversy 318-381*, Edinburgh 1988, 290. The treatment of the Dedication Creed in Hanson’s work starts from page 286 to 382.

Hence, the possibility of the one faction making sense of this promulgated creed different from that of the other faction is not an unfounded assumption. The work of Hilary suggests that apart from the customarily assumed Arian reading of the Dedication Creed, there is yet another sense given to it, the one advocated by the homoeouseans, which is not incompatible with the faith of Nicaea.

Hilary demonstrated the orthodoxy of the Dedication Creed directing the attention of his readers to the doctrinal question that occasioned the assembly of bishops and fuelled them to draft the said statement of faith. According to Hilary, its statement that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three substances becomes intelligible when read bearing in mind the fact that the chief concern of the Dedication Creed was the exclusion of the modalist teaching of Marcellus.⁶³ Hilary expressed this observation in the following: “Consequently they declared there were three substances, meaning three subsistent Persons, and not thereby introducing any dissimilarity of essence to separate the substance of Father and Son.”⁶⁴

The concept *substantia* in this particular context is understood as having the meaning of person, that is, distinct subsistence, and not essence. Therefore, the advancement of the teaching on the dissimilarity of essence, which the Arians were so eager to affirm, is not included in the original intent of the document, considered from this standpoint. What the “assembly of saints,” as Hilary called them, wished to achieve is “to strike a blow at that impiety which by a mere counting of names evades the truth as to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,”⁶⁵ which regards them as mere names referring to one single Person.

Having clarified the sense designated by the term *substantia*, Hilary proceeded to explain the right sense of the phrase “in agreement are one” (*per consonantiam unum*),⁶⁶ which he knew was just as controversial in the thought of his colleagues in that it was similarly employed to accord validity to Arian teaching, writing: “For the words *to teach us that they are three in substance, but in agreement one*, are free from objection, because as the Spirit is also named, and He is the Paraclete, it is more fitting that a unity of agreement should be asserted than a unity of essence based on likeness of substance.”⁶⁷

The bone of contention here is that the unity of the Trinity is coined in terms of ‘agreement’ (*consonantia*), not in the usual orthodox form that links it with the notion of essence, which allows for the opinion that the unity conceived in the creed

⁶³ M. Weedman, *The Trinitarian theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, Leiden 2007, 107.

⁶⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 32 (PL X,480C-481A; NPNF 9,13).

⁶⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 32 (PL X,480B; NPNF 9,13).

⁶⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 29 (PL X,479B; NPNF 9,12).

⁶⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 32 (PL X,480C-481A; NPNF 9,13). Italics are mine.

might have been confined merely on the level of will and activity. Hilary explained that its decision to express the Trinitarian unity according to *consonantia* and not according to essence is influenced by the fact that the unity under consideration involves the three Persons of the Trinity and not just the relationship of the Father and the Son.⁶⁸ The relationship of the Father and the Son defined by the birth of the Son from the essence of the Father, producing in the Son an essence not foreign from the Father, makes the formula “unity of substance” appropriate for its depiction. However, the procession of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son does not fall within the same process of generation, hence the “unity of agreement” was deemed more applicable.

In other words, the likeness of identical essence of the Father and the Son guaranteed by the generation of the Son from the essence of the Father is not denied in the statement that the Persons of the divine Trinity are ‘in agreement one.’ This understanding is not just an imposition from Hilary because the creed itself supports the offered explanation. The bishops gathered at Antioch taught no distinction in nature between the Father and the Son, and that their unity is contemplated according to substance as indicated in the “creed’s X from X language.”⁶⁹ The series of formulae, “God of God, whole God of whole God, One of One, perfect God of perfect God, King of King, Lord of Lord,” affirms that the plenitude and totality of the divinity of the Father also resides in the Son.⁷⁰

When it was asserted that the Son was begotten ‘God of God, whole God of whole God,’ the possibility of admission of any dissimilarity in nature between the Father and the Son is excluded since these expressions confirm that Son is likewise born in and with the same wholeness of divinity that God the Father possesses in Himself.⁷¹ Similarly, the formulae ‘One of One, perfect God of perfect God’ indicate that the Son was begotten not from any source except the Father and therefore is the same in essence with the Father who begot Him.⁷² Finally, the expressions ‘King of King, Lord of Lord’ specify that both the Father and the Son have the same power as expressed by the same title.⁷³ It means that the power of the Father is also the power of the Son and in the theology of the homoeouseans the same power rejects dissimilarity of essence since similar power only proceeds from similar nature.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 32 (PL X,480C-481A; NPNF 9,13).

⁶⁹ M. Weedman, 107.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481; NPNF 9,13).

⁷¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481A; NPNF 9,13).

⁷² Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481B; NPNF 9,13).

⁷³ Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481B; NPNF 9,13).

⁷⁴ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,11,2 (GCS 31,282; *The Panarion*, 445).

A more important concept than those already mentioned above, which helps substantiate the teaching on the Son's similarity to the Father on the level of essence, is the concept of 'exact or unvarying image.' Hilary announced the paramount significance of this concept in the homoeousean's drive against the view that the Son is alien from the essence of the Father in the following: "But plainest of all is the statement appended after several others, 'unable to change or alter, the unvarying image (*incommutabilem imaginem*) of the Godhead and essence and might and glory."⁷⁵

The bishop of Poitiers then labored to communicate how the concept 'image' is understood in the theology of the homoeouseans. In his amplification of the anathemas of the 358 Synod of Ancyra, Hilary has already outlined the homoeousean's basic understanding for the designation of the Son as 'image of God.' There it was revealed that the Son is the image because of his essential likeness with the Father.⁷⁶ More particularly in *De synodis* the concept of image is described in the following manner: "So an image is the figured and indistinguishable likeness (*imaginata et indiscreta similitudo*) of one thing equated (*coaequandae*) with another."⁷⁷

The concept 'image' sustains two important characteristics, namely, indistinguishable essence and equality of essence with the being whose image it is.⁷⁸ If the Son were alien in nature with the Father, there would be no sense calling the Son the image of the invisible God. If his equality of essence with the Father were denied, why would He be called the 'image of the invisible God'?⁷⁹ The implication of the designation of the Son as 'image of God' is rather emphasized in the homoeousean's use of it to justify their refusal to admit temporal priority of the Father to the Son:

Lest He who is the image of God, who is the Word, who is God with God in the beginning, who is like the Father, by the insertion of times between Himself and the Father should not have in Himself in perfection that which is both image, and Word, and God. For if He be proclaimed to be younger in time, He has lost the truth of the image and likeness: for that is no longer likeness which is found to be dissimilar in time.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481B; NPNF 9,13).

⁷⁶ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 13-15 (PL X,467B-468A; NPNF 9,7-8).

⁷⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 13 (PL X,467B; NPNF 9,7).

⁷⁸ Cf. C. Barba Avila, *Teología de la Imagen de Dios en San Hilario de Poitiers*, in *Excerpta et Dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia*, 46, Navarra 2004, 29-43.

⁷⁹ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481B; NPNF 9,13). Compare this with Marius Victorinus' teaching on the species of the original as constituting the essence of the image (J. Abogado, 182).

⁸⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 25 (PL X,475B; NPNF 9,11).

The idea of temporal priority of the Father to the Son is denied because the precept of image simply would not allow any dissimilarity of essence or any slight of difference in essence between the two.

Moreover, the qualification “unvarying” (*incommutabilis*) is an important detail attached to ‘image’ to preserve the Son from the mundane conception of image, and in so doing defends the conception of the Son from the Arian objection. The Arians also admitted the Son as the image of God. However, for them He is image by grace only, that is, in so far as He participates in the divine attributes bestowed upon Him by God. The Son is image of the divine substance not because He subsists in it personally, but because He was singularly favored to have been blessed with it out of the generosity of the Father. Still, according to this vision of image, the Son is no similar in essence to the Father.⁸¹ The Dedication Council of Antioch 341, Hilary stressed in his work, qualified the ‘image’ as ‘unvarying’ to contradict this Arian view of image and preserve the teaching of the immutable essence of the Son.⁸² This attribute of immutability is a quality that He received from no one else but the Father, whose nature the Son received in its fullness by being born into it: “Since in all that glory and nature of Godhead in which the Father ever abides, the Son born of Him also subsists; He derives this also from the Father’s substance that He is unable to change. For in His birth that nature from which He is born is not changed; but the Son has maintained a changeless essence since His origin is in a changeless nature.”⁸³

For the homoeouseans, the reality of the image is derived from the species of the being that it is an image of. The image subsists in the nature of the original species it represents, which makes the image and the original species essentially alike.⁸⁴ Hilary’s interpretation of the thought of the homoeouseans reveals that, “He who is an image if he is truly to be an image, must have in himself his original’s species, nature and essence in virtue of the fact that he is an image.”⁸⁵ The Son, being the image of the Father, possesses the nature of the Father, which is likewise His own. In this respect, the notion ‘image of God’ itself already procures the belief in the natural relationship of the Father and the Son, so that its theological significance might not be overlooked or misconstrued as bearing Arian meaning the quality ‘unvarying’ has been appended to it. With it included, the teaching that the Son is of immutable essence because the same immutable essence of the Father abides in the Son is explicitly affirmed. Definitely, the target of such polemics is the Arian opinion that

⁸¹ More shall be said about this point below.

⁸² Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481C; NPNF 9,13).

⁸³ Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481C; NPNF 9,13).

⁸⁴ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 33 (PL X,481B; NPNF 9,13); Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,10,7 (GCS 31,281; *The Panarion*, 444-445).

⁸⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 13 (PL X,467C; NPNF 9,7).

denies the similarity in essence of the Son to the Father because, accordingly, the Son undergoes change and moral development corresponding to a human creature.

Furthermore, the concept of image was not just employed to combat the Arian view of the Son, but it also guarantees the distinct existence of the Son from the Father, thus avoiding modalism. Indeed, the image is different from the reality it represents, “for no one is himself his own image, but it is necessary that the image should demonstrate him of whom it is an image.”⁸⁶ The conception of the Son as ‘image of God’ then reinforces the denial of the modalist perspective, which considers the names Father and Son as having no personal cause, but only a nomenclature for one and the same personal substance.

Hilary was hoping that his colleagues would accept his offered orthodox reading of the Dedication Creed.⁸⁷ It represents the Catholic faith inasmuch as it both avoids the error of the Arian doctrine since it asserts that the Son is the Only-begotten of the Father whose essence is like His, being the unvarying image of the ‘essence and might and glory of the Godhead’, and rejects the modalist teaching since, according to this perception, the Son being the recipient of all that the Father is cannot be the same person as the one from whom He received His divinity. Hilary employed this same structure of demonstrating that Arian and Sabellian overtones are excluded from the expressed doctrine of the easterners in his account of the other two remaining eastern creeds. He was certainly convinced that the double parameters of avoiding the modalist and the Arian reading of the doctrine of the one God is the only safe road leading towards salvation offered by the one God. The exclusion of these two extreme ideas so that the teaching of the one substance of the Godhead might be substantiated piously is clearly articulated by Hilary: “Therefore the one substance will be asserted piously if it does not abolish the subsistent personality or divide the one substance into two, for their substance by the true character of the Son’s birth and by their natural likeness is so free from difference that it is called one.”⁸⁸

Needless to say, foremost in Hilary’s concern, analyzing the confession of faith of the eastern council of Serdica 343, is to show that the doctrine of God that emerged from it corresponds to the Latin opinion that upholds the substantial unity of the Father and the Son. He has this point emphasized in the statement: “So by the diligent and watchful care of the bishops the creed guards the similarity of the nature begotten and the nature begetting, confirming it by the application of one name.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 13 (PL X,467C; NPNF 9,7).

⁸⁷ M. Weedman, 108.

⁸⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 67 (PL X,501B; NPNF 9,22).

⁸⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 36 (PL X,484C; NPNF 9,14).

Hilary arrived at this conclusion following the eastern bishops' carefully thought deduction, which, accordingly, was provoked by the Arian's denial of the divinity of the Son. First, the eastern bishops proscribed the notion that the Son was created out of nothing. However, the denial of this Arian precept was not enough in that it could also accommodate the opinion that the Son proceeded from the will of the Father, which still warrants the view that the Son is a creature of God. Hence, the next point that the easterners secured, according to Hilary, was to declare that the "source from which [the Son] drew His permanent birth should be understood to be any other substance than that of God."⁹⁰ It takes the form of publicly denouncing as "blasphemers those who said that the Son was born of some other substance and not of God."⁹¹ Having ascertained these assertions, that the Son's existence was not derived out of non-existence and that the Son drew his existence from no other substance but the birthless substance of the Father, Hilary confidently avowed that it was undoubtedly the intent of the eastern synod to determine that the Son was born of the essence of the Father and more significantly that "He was born with those qualities which are God's."⁹²

Since the Son is born of the Father, it was inferred that there is no distinction in essence between the Father and the Son.⁹³ However, so that this unity of the Father and the Son might not be construed as implying that "God is a solitary monad,"⁹⁴ who is called at one time Father another time Son, the bishops, revealed Hilary, distanced their confession from the modalist school by denouncing its teaching. The bishops affirmed that there is only one God and also that the Son is God in the same sense, without any discrepancy in hierarchy, that the Father is God. Although both

⁹⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 35 (PL X,483A; NPNF 9,14).

⁹¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 35 (PL X,483A; NPNF 9,14).

⁹² Hilary, *De syn.* 35 (PL X,483A; NPNF 9,14).

⁹³ There is one important point that has to be emphasized here. The idea of birth that fosters the notion that the begetter and the begotten are equally the same in essence is simply assumed in the text. Unlike in the other two homoeousean documents that we have treated, the idea of the same essence as guaranteed by birth is demonstrated; in the exposition of Hilary it is significantly absent. It is determined only that the Son's birth proceeded from the substance of the Father and then the conclusion came that the Son "was born with those qualities which are God's." The answer is simple. In the produced documents of the homoeouseans, they were confronted with combatting a doctrine which speaks of the Father and the Son as dissimilar in nature. It prompted the homoeouseans to emphasize the birth of the Son from the Father as found in Scriptures, devoting ample pages to explain the notion of the birth of the Son to demonstrate to their adversaries the logicity of the belief that the Son is not alien in essence from the Father. While in this work of Hilary, the target audiences were his colleagues in Gaul and, as has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, it is incumbent among the Latin the belief that the Son by virtue of his birth received from the unbegotten Father all that He is. It is therefore enough to ascertain that the homoeouseans acknowledge that the Son is born and infer that He is not alien in essence from the Father, without explaining how the notion of birth specifies their identical nature, because both have the same idea of how the generation of the Son from the Father functions in theology.

⁹⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 37 (PL X,484A; NPNF 9,14).

are distinct personally from each other. The Father is categorically proclaimed as distinct from the Son in existence, but likewise they are affirmed as one in essence because “in the Father who begets and the Son who comes to birth one God must be declared to exist on account of the substance of their nature being similar in each.”⁹⁵

Hilary followed the same methodology that he has used in his account of the theology of the Ancyran synod of 358, in his evaluation of the confession of Sirmium 351, that of deriving its doctrinal content from its appended anathemas. At the outset, the similarity of natural essence of the Father and the Son is established, reiterating that nothing else can be born in the Son, but all that God is since the Son’s being is derived from no other substance except that of the Father.⁹⁶ The Son did not come from non-existent, but from the very substance of God. The origin of the being of the Son from the essence of the Father is crucial in the understanding of the theology of the Godhead and in the confession of the Son as God. Commenting on anathema twenty-four, Hilary again specified that the Son’s generation cannot be predicated merely on the will of God to emphasize the pre-eminent character of the Son, not only in degree, but in essence, from creatures. He established this point arguing that creatures receive their substance from the will of God through the act of creation, on the other hand, the “perfect birth gave to the Son a nature from a substance that is impassible and itself unborn.”⁹⁷

Since the Son is of the essence of God, then the Son must be confessed as God. In his commentary on the second and the third anathemas, Hilary pointed out the doctrinal imperative to confess only one God and at the same time to assert that the Son is God.⁹⁸ The same injunction is replicated in his comment on the twenty-third anathema in connection with the proper exegetical reading of the declaration of God in the Book of Isaiah: *Beside me there is no God* (Is. 44:6). He explained that such statement does not rob the Son, “who was born of Himself with an essence in no way different from His own nature,”⁹⁹ of his own divinity. What is rather excluded by that proclamation is the impious belief in the false gods.

The explanation of the dogmatic affirmations made above about the belief in one God, and simultaneously in the confession that the Son is also God becomes unarguably clear as Hilary approached the discussion of the stipulation contained in anathema twenty-sixth. The twenty-sixth anathema denounces those who hold the

⁹⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 37 (PL X,484A; NPNF 9,14).

⁹⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 35 (PL X,483A; NPNF 9,14).

⁹⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 58 (PL X,495C; NPNF 9,19).

⁹⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 41 (PL X,489C; NPNF 9,16).

⁹⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 57 (PL X,495B; NPNF 9,19).

view that “the Son is incapable of birth and without beginning.”¹⁰⁰ The very denial of this particular fact about the divine birth, according to Hilary, will destroy the unity of the Godhead inasmuch as it would allow the talk of the existence of two unborn gods. It is therefore demanded by faith that the birth of the Son is confessed, for it is by asserting the birth of God the Son from the essence of God the Father that the unity of Godhead is preserved. This is the thought promoted in the following statement: “Therefore our holy faith rejects the idea that the Son is incapable of birth in order to predicate one God incapable of birth and consequently one God, and in order to embrace the Only-begotten nature, begotten from the unborn essence, in the one name of the Unborn God.”¹⁰¹

Moreover, this doctrine of the unity of the Godhead proclaimed in the 351 synod of Sirmium is distinguished from the modalist view of unity found in the theology of Marcellus and Photinus. Hilary reasoned that the predication of the term God to both the Father and the Son does not conform to the erroneous view that the two are in fact a singular and undifferentiated monad.¹⁰² The modalist heretics derived support for their view from the fact that one and the same name is assigned to both the Father and the Son. However, the “unity of the name” employed in the Catholic tradition to predicate for the reality of the Father and the Son designates “the exact similarity of their natural essence,”¹⁰³ and renounces not the belief in the reality of the hypostatic existence of the begotten Son of God distinct from the existence of the Father. In other words, the predication of the same name ‘God’ to the Father and the Son is avowed in order to emphasize “the exactly similar substance of the undivided nature in each Person,”¹⁰⁴ and not to preach that the two constitute only one person.

The nature of the distinct personal existence of the Son is further clarified in the succeeding anathemas. Marcellus’ teaching stated that before the incarnation, the Word existed in the Father in the mode of the human word internal in man is opposed.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the Photinian view that the Son only came to existence during the incarnation of the Word from the womb of the virgin is demonstrated as incongruous to the teaching of the apostolic faith in the Son co-existing eternally with the Father.¹⁰⁶ Instead, it is affirmed that the Word, who is the Son of God, is already in existence with the Father in the beginning of time as there could be no

¹⁰⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 59 (PL X,496B; NPNF 9,20).

¹⁰¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 60 (PL X,496A; NPNF 9,20).

¹⁰² Hilary, *De syn.* 42 (PL X,489A; NPNF 9,16).

¹⁰³ Hilary, *De syn.* 42 (PL X,489A; NPNF 9,16).

¹⁰⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 42 (PL X,489A; NPNF 9,16).

¹⁰⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 46 (PL X,490A; NPNF 9,17).

¹⁰⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 61 (PL X,497A; NPNF 9,20).

interval of time that could be posted between the Son and the Father. Additionally, it is stressed that the “Son who is perfect God born before time began was the same as He who was afterwards born as Man.”¹⁰⁷

One notable theme contained in the eastern creed of Serdica that the Latins complained about is its acknowledgement of the subordinate role of the Son to the Father. This is detailed in the seventeenth anathema that rejects the belief in two gods with this statement: “For we do not make the Son the equal or peer of the Father, but understand the Son to be subject.”¹⁰⁸

It is crucial to clarify this point because the Latin bishops have seen in the subordinationist teaching of the easterners the dispossession of the Son’s divine status. The Latins have taken notice of the ploy of some easterners who, though they regarded the Son as God, considered His divinity inferior to the Father. Hilary did not shy away from this seemingly theological complication by leaving this issue out of his consideration, rather he bravely took the opportunity to illustrate that this homoeousean doctrine is consistent to the Nicene teaching on the essential unity of the Father and the Son. Such was an astute measure making the impression that the homoeouseans were not engaging in double talk in respect to their theology of God.

Hilary disclosed that the subordination that was upheld by the easterners is merely functional, or what he called, “the subordination of filial love” (*pietatis subjectio*).¹⁰⁹ Being the Son of God the Father, He subjected Himself in obedience to the will of Him who has sent Him. However, this does not mean for the Son a ‘diminution of essence,’ or that his filial dedication to faithfully execute the will of the Father indicates ‘degeneration of nature.’¹¹⁰ On the other hand, it is the equality of dignity that is proclaimed in the affirmation of the filiopietistic submission of the Son to the Father. The exiled bishop of Poitiers was clear about this point when he stated that: “The subordination of His name bears witness to the true character of His natural and exactly similar essence.”¹¹¹

The key to understanding the citation is again the conceptuality of the birth of the Son. By the fact that He is born of the Father, the Son is subjected to render obedience to Him whom he called Father. However, it is also His being Son of the Father to whom He is subjected out of filial charity that defines the true character of

¹⁰⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 45 (PL X,490A; NPNF 9,17).

¹⁰⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 50 (PL X,492B; NPNF 9,18).

¹⁰⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 51 (PL X,492B; NPNF 9,18). Hilary will expound more on this tenet of the subjection of Christ to the Father in the *De Trinitate*. For a systematic presentation of this subject, see G. Pelland, S.J., *La “subjectio” du Christ chez saint Hilaire*, in *Gregorianum* 64 (1983), 423-452.

¹¹⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 51 (PL X,493A; NPNF 9,20).

¹¹¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 51 (PL X,493A; NPNF 9,20).

His nature. The Son is of exactly similar essence with the Father, whose Son He is, because the Father cannot beget a being unlike His essence.

The relationship of the Son to the Father speaks then both of the Son's subjection to the unborn Father who begot Him, and also the Son's excellence, inasmuch as He is Son of the Father whose essence He received in its fullness, without diminution on the part of the Father who freely bequeathed it. Hilary then has clarified that the Latin bishops had nothing to suspect in the easterners' acknowledgement of the subordination of the Son to the Father, because, contrary to their fear that it provides ground for the postulation of the existence of two different deities, it actually proves the Son's equality in dignity and essence with the Father on account of His origin in the Father. The difference that is involved in this type of subordination, as Hilary clarified, "is one of meaning of a name and not of a nature."¹¹² The Father is superior to the Son not on account of substance, but on account of his having begotten the Son. The Son is inferior to the Father because He is born of Him, not because He has a reduced essence compared to the essence of the author of His birth.

In summary, the creeds of the easterners are compatible with the Nicene view of God. The suspicion that the easterner bishops formulated these creeds to displace the faith of Nicaea is proven as unfounded by Hilary. It has been demonstrated that there are some statements taken from these creeds which seemingly promote the doctrine opposed by Nicaea—from the Synod of Antioch 341, the talk of "three in substance, but in agreement one," and from Sirmium 351, the acknowledgement of the subordinate role of the Son to the Father—however, understood in their proper context, as Hilary's exposition has revealed, they, on the contrary, correspond to the concern of Nicaea of advancing the faith in the unity of the Godhead and the dignity of the Son as God. The need for these creeds, Hilary argued, is founded on the nature of God himself, who is "infinite and boundless (*infinitus et immensus*) ... and cannot be made comprehensible by a few words of human speech."¹¹³ Seen in this respect, the Nicene confession of faith functions on the same level as these eastern creeds, affirming an aspect of the reality of divine persons, while directly addressing a particular heretical view of God. It is on account of this that Hilary's justification, at the outset of his treatment of the eastern creeds, that although they are silent about the homousean formula, nonetheless they opposed not the theology that the same formula avows, becomes intelligible.

¹¹² Hilary, *De syn.* 64 (PL X,499A; NPNF 9,21).

¹¹³ Hilary, *De syn.* 62 (PL X,497A; NPNF 9,20).

3. *The meaning of ὁμοούσιος appropriates the meaning of ὁμοούσιος*

What is delineated in this section is how Hilary was able to present the homoeousean doctrine, without departing from its original doctrinal content, reasonably acceptable to the ears of his colleagues in Gaul who were of homousean persuasion. One cannot deny that the starting point of the dogmatic pronouncement about God of the homoeouseans is the distinction of the persons of the Father and the Son. The easterners viewed the essential relationship of the Father and the Son wearing as lens the canon of ‘three hypostases.’ This is understandable because of the indebtedness of the eastern theological tradition to the teaching of Origen. It is only after having preserved the integrity of the individualities of the subsistent Persons that the easterners advanced to explain their relationship in terms of essential likeness. As we have already demonstrated, this theme of likeness is sustained by the homoeouseans through the stress on the birth as implied in their teaching on the natural quality of the names Father and Son.

Hilary has underscored another aspect in the homoeousean’s explanation for the concept of similarity to announce the fusion of its meaning with the doctrine of the one substance (*una substantia*) of the homouseans. The said category is ‘equality’ (*aequalitatis*). The concept of equality does not push to the background the stress given by the homoeouseans to the preservation of the distinction of the divine persons. Hilary was very cautious about this point when he proposed this interpretation for ‘similarity’ in the following statement: “But perhaps the word *similarity* (*similitudo*) may not seem fully appropriate. If so, I ask how I can express the equality of one Person with the other except by such a word? Or is to be like not the same thing as to be equal?”¹¹⁴

This explanation, as alluded above, is not an innovation introduced by Hilary, alien to the doctrine of the easterners, because the homoeousean documents have also spoken of it. Hence, Hilary was simply bringing to the fore what was already there in their theology. It is attested for instance in the synodical letter of Ancyra 358: “The Son, who was Son of God, in the form of God, and is *equal* (ἴσα) to God, possesses the attributes of the Godhead in being by nature incorporeal, and like the Father in divinity, incorporeality and activities.”¹¹⁵ The Son of God is said to be equal to God the Father because the Son embraces all the qualities of the Father’s essence. It is so because “the whole form of His Father’s divinity both in kind and in amount”¹¹⁶ the Son also possessed as His own by virtue of the origin of his essence in the Father.

¹¹⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 72 (PL X,502B; NPNF 9,23).

¹¹⁵ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,9,4 (GCS 31,279; *The Panarion*, 443). Emphasis is mine.

¹¹⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 15 (PL X,468A; NPNF 9,8).

In order to add more credence to this re-reading of ‘similarity’ (*similitudo*) as signifying ‘equality’ (*aequalitatis*), Hilary appealed to the testimony of Scriptures that corroborates the derivation of ‘equality’ from the concept of ‘likeness.’ He first took notice of the statement in the Book of Genesis that records the bringing into life of Seth by Adam, articulated in such manner as, “Adam... begot a son according to his own image and likeness.”¹¹⁷ The affirmation of the likeness of Seth to Adam is due to the fact that he was begotten by the one father whose nature is the same as his. Seth is a man just like Adam. Moreover, no one in his reasonable mind, reasoned Hilary, would claim that the humanity of Seth is deficient compared to, or, different from, the humanity of his father just because he was born of him.¹¹⁸ Rather, the contrary is true. The nature of Seth is exactly the same as that of his father, Adam, or, in the deduction of Hilary, Seth is equal to Adam in nature, because “every son by virtue of his natural birth is equal to his father, in that he has natural likeness to him.”¹¹⁹

Removing the data of “bodily infirmities, ... the first stage of conception, ... birth pangs, and every kind of human need,”¹²⁰ the principle derived from the analogy of human generation in respect to the formation of being in natural likeness to and therefore equal in substance with its parent is applicable to the relationship of God the Father and God the Son. This point takes as its biblical support the pronouncement of the evangelist John, which narrates that the Jews took offense against Jesus not just because He revolutionized the Sabbath law, but more particularly because He declared that “God was His father, making himself equal with God.”¹²¹ There is therefore here a positive affirmation from Scriptures that the Son of God is equal, the applicability of which extends to all things God is, to the Father because He is His natural offspring. The final proof offered by Hilary concerns the pronouncement of Jesus Himself that the Son can do anything that He sees the Father is doing.¹²² Accordingly, this statement signifies that the Son holds a power exactly the same as the Father. Since it is the nature that accords power to act, the implication is that the Father and the Son have equal natures as they have equal powers.

Hilary specified similarity as implying perfect equality.¹²³ This particular detail of the sense of *homoiousios* needs to be stressed because, according to the exiled bishop, there were some, presumably among the ranks of the Nicene bishops, who refused orthodox reading to the theological import of the term *homoiousios* since they

¹¹⁷ Gen. 5,3; Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,503A; NPNF 9,23).

¹¹⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,503A; NPNF 9,23).

¹¹⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,503B; NPNF 9,23).

¹²⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,503A; NPNF 9,23).

¹²¹ Jn. 5,18; Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,503B; NPNF 9,23).

¹²² Hilary, *De syn.* 75 (PL X,504B; NPNF 9,24).

¹²³ Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,502A; NPNF 9,23).

excluded from it the meaning of equality.¹²⁴ According to this opinion, since beings that are reckoned as alike are not equal in all respects, then they are actually unlike in essence one to another. This particular observation is for instance substantiated in the thought of Marius Victorinus who rejected *homoiousios* precisely on account of the reason provided.¹²⁵ It therefore demands, if misunderstandings between the two ecclesiastical groups are to be cast out, that the concept ‘similarity’ should likewise be demonstrated as encompassing the idea of perfect equality. This Hilary argued on account of the homoeouseans’ acceptance of the notion of the natural birth of the Son, a point he has specified in *De synodis*.¹²⁶ The Son is equal to the Father in essence, might, glory, and eternity because the nature from which the Son is begotten is the one essence of the Father. The Son is equal in respect to everything the Father is because the divine essence of the Father is the same divine essence that the Son has in Himself on account of the natural likeness that He received in being born as the true Son of God.

From the concept ‘similar substance’ to being ‘perfectly equal,’ Hilary carried on to establishing that it also proves that both are ‘one substance.’ The Father gave the Son no other substance but his own. The likeness of the Son to the Father is perceived as the sharing of the Father’s own substance, the Father’s one substance, with the Son.¹²⁷ It is according to this reasoning that Hilary made this bold statement, in the form of a rhetorical question: “Can one equal be distinguished from the other?”¹²⁸ The modalist meaning is excepted from this reading because previous to this statement he has avowed that he understood equality with the sense of “similarity (*similitudinis*) rather than singularity (*solitudinis*).”¹²⁹ Moreover, in expressing the one substance of God, Hilary thoughtfully used the neuter form *unum*, reminiscent of Tertullian’s, to avoid any suggestion that he was contemplating singular divinity. Hilary made a succinct summary of his exposition of the sense of similarity, writing:

Likeness (*similitudo*) then is the sharing of what is one’s own (*proprietas*), the sharing of one’s own (*proprietas*) is equality (*aequalitas*), and equality (*aequalitas*) admits of no difference. Those things which do not differ at all are one (*unum*). So the Father and the Son are one (*unum*), not by unity of Person but by equality of nature.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 74 (PL X,503C; NPNF 9,23).

¹²⁵ See J. Abogado, 183-184.

¹²⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 74 (PL X,504A; NPNF 9,24).

¹²⁷ “Therefore if He gave to Him whom He begat without effect upon Himself a nature which was neither another nor a different nature, He cannot give Him any other than His own. Likeness then is a sharing of one’s own.” (Hilary, *De syn.* 74; PL X,504A; NPNF 9,24).

¹²⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 72 (PL X,502C; NPNF 9,23).

¹²⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 72 (PL X,502C; NPNF 9,23).

¹³⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 74 (PL X,504A; NPNF 9,24).

The cited summary of the arguments supplied by Hilary reveals another important concept that offers the ontological basis for his claim that similarity conveys perfect equality.¹³¹ That concept is *proprietas*, in Greek, *idiotes*. The homousean authors—more specifically, but not solely, Athanasius—has employed the notion of ‘what is proper’ to argue for the identity of nature of the Father and the Son and to demonstrate the ontological difference of the Son of God from the created natures. Hilary exhibited here his genius, interpreting the concept *homoiousios* in a more congenial fashion to his readers, using categories that are renowned to them. Lest it be said that Hilary was reconfiguring the thought of the easterners to accommodate the Nicene view, it needs to be asserted that Hilary did not depart from the original thought of the easterners, as he was merely deciphering the given meaning of *homoiousios* using Nicene codes. It is only according to this consideration that Hilary’s declaration, “my belief was always such that I have interpreted ὁμοιούσιον by ὁμοούσιον,”¹³² should be understood.

Finally, while offering a defense for the usage of the term *homoousios*, Hilary uttered what seems to be a condescending remark about the term *homoiousios*. “But you say: “The ambiguity of the word ὁμοούσιον troubles and offends me.” I pray you hear me again and be not offended. I am troubled by the inadequacy of the word ὁμοιούσιον.”¹³³ Hilary made this observation acknowledging the fact that there are things which are said to be similar, like vessels plated with gold, but actually do not reflect the natural likeness of that thing.¹³⁴ However, the bishop of Gaul did not compose this comment in order to disparage the homoeousean theological formula, because he likewise subjected to the same critical analysis the term *homoousios*.¹³⁵ What the bishop was trying to convey is that both theological expressions have the right sense and the wrong sense. While it is acknowledged that the said expressions have been imputed with meanings inappropriate for divine beings, such is not adequate reason for them to be excluded in theological discourse. Rather, what is demanded is that the erroneous meanings should not be imputed to the reality of God, and the positive senses that reveal the truth about God should be affirmed. It is fitting to end this section with this gloss and spring over to Hilary’s treatment of *homoousios* inasmuch as the same critical attitude the bishop of Poitiers dispensed to *homoousios* to purify it from profane interpretation so that the easterners might appraise it favorably.

¹³¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 73 (PL X,502A; NPNF 9,23).

¹³² Hilary, *De syn.* 91 (PL X,518A; NPNF 9,29).

¹³³ Hilary, *De syn.* 89 (PL X,515A; NPNF 9,28).

¹³⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 89 (PL X,515A; NPNF 9,28).

¹³⁵ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 86 (PL X,513B; NPNF 9,27).

Overcoming the East's objection to ὁμοούσιος

Although the *De synodis* is primarily a letter addressed to the bishops of the region of Gaul, still it contains a portion wherein Hilary addressed himself to the easterners, an indication that Hilary also intended that it be circulated for the easterners to read that they might be led to the appreciation of the soundness of the doctrine contained therein, more particularly as regards to its proposed reading of the doctrine confessed by the homouseans. The lone concern raised by Hilary for the easterners to consider was the orthodoxy of the employment of *homoousios*. The pro-Nicene authors of the fourth-century had different attitudes towards the term *homoousios*. One is the uncompromisingly exclusive attitude, maintaining that only the admission of *homoousios* could preserve the orthodox faith. Another attitude took a more sober stance which, while maintaining that *homoousios* is an orthodox term fitting to describe the natural relationship of the Father and the Son and their indivisible nature, is still open to the possibility of the usage of other terminologies as long as the revealed truths of the Catholic faith are adequately rendered by them. Lastly, there is that position which held on to the unity of nature of the Father and the Son without mentioning *homoousios*.

Having said so, it is fitting to ask the question, how did Hilary regard the function of *homoousios* in theological discourse? For Hilary the term *homoousios* is not identical to the confessed faith. It is an instrument that one made use of to uphold the true faith. Hilary outlined this view in the following: “Holy brethren, I understand by *homoousion* 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. I believed this before I knew the word *homoousion* but it greatly helped my belief.”¹³⁶ The distinction between the fundamental truth about God and the theological formula through which the content of faith is expressed, is echoed in this observation of Hilary. Following this line of thought, the affirmation of the term *homoousios* does not consist for Hilary as an indispensable criterion for judging orthodoxy. It is not the be-all of the knowledge of the nature of the Godhead as if true faith would not exist without it. If we are to be allowed to draw the ramification of the above statement of Hilary, another expression, as long as it expresses the right faith can be admitted alongside *homoousios* as a watchword for orthodoxy.

The easterners approved of the Nicene theology except for their usage of *homoousios*. Apparently, Hilary was cognizant of this fact, which explains why his discourse to the eastern bishops is focused on the presentation of the

¹³⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 88 (PL X,514A; NPNF 9,28).

appropriateness of *homoousios* as a term encapsulating the substantial relationship that exists between the Father and His begotten Son. The easterners' expressed reservation to the homousean formula was not at all unfounded because there were several senses of *homoousios* that respect not the unity of the Godhead. Moreover, it seemed that until then the Nicene bishops were insisting on the acceptance of the theology of *homoousios* without making any clarification as regards its proper function in theological discourse. Hilary himself acknowledged this practice among his colleagues with this remark: "Many of us, beloved brethren, declare the substance of the Father and the Son to be one in such a spirit that I consider the statement to be quite as much wrong as right."¹³⁷ It is 'quite as much wrong as right' because without accompanying qualification, *homoousios*, although clear in the thought of its proponents, could become an "opportunity of delusion"¹³⁸ for others who were not familiar with it, because, since its employment in theological discourse, different meanings have been assigned to it.

Moreover, Hilary also conceded to the possibility that some of his colleagues might have been confused about the meaning Nicaea had accorded to *homousios*. In order to clarify the supposed misconception of *homoousios* among his colleagues, if indeed there was any, and consequently to equip them with arguments against its enemies so that they might better defend it, Hilary confronted them with the incorrect senses of *homoousios*, dutifully indicating to them that they would be in error if such would be their understanding of it.¹³⁹ They would be in error if they would "attribute one substance to the Father and the Son to teach that there is a solitary personal existence although denoted by two titles;"¹⁴⁰ if they would attribute one substance to the Father and the Son to teach that the Father is divided because "he cut off a portion of Himself to be His Son;"¹⁴¹ and finally, if they would attribute one substance to the Father and the Son with the understanding that there is a prior single substance from which the Father and the Son have derived their own, possessing them in themselves equally.¹⁴²

The three indicated senses of *homoousios* could not be upheld, Hilary enjoined his colleagues, because they could not account for the revealed names Father and Son. Here we read again Hilary returning to the notions of name and birth. There is only one explanation which could truly account for the existence of the divine beings as Father and Son, and that is through the notion of birth stipulated

¹³⁷ Hilary, *De syn.* 67 (PL X,500A; NPNF 9,22).

¹³⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 67 (PL X,500A; NPNF 9,22).

¹³⁹ M. Weedman, 10.

¹⁴⁰ Hilary, *De syn.* 68 (PL X,500B; NPNF 9,22).

¹⁴¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 68 (PL X,500C; NPNF 9,22).

¹⁴² Hilary, *De syn.* 68 (PL X,501C; NPNF 9,22).

by the name. This is revealed in this statement: “Where then is there room for the Son’s birth? Where is the Father or the Son, if these names are explained not by the birth of the divine nature but a severing or sharing of one anterior substance?”¹⁴³

The names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ have a primary order of significance in the theology of the homoeouseans. All other concepts, which include *homoousios*, employed in theological discourse, are embraced in so far as they give explanation for the reality of the Father and the Son. In this connection, Hilary was espousing that the starting point of any orthodox reflection on the nature of the Godhead should start from the confession of the ‘Father’ and the ‘Son’ and not the canonized theological formulas, which Hilary warned his colleagues to be cautious of in using, as they invite misinterpretation.¹⁴⁴

Turning his attention to the creed of Nicaea, Hilary made a cogent case, still in connection with justifying its usage of the term *homoousios*, that just because some misunderstand ὁμοούσιον, must this prevent others from understanding it?¹⁴⁵ If such attitude would be assumed then, Hilary contended, they would prejudice the cause of orthodoxy, denying existence to doctrines or concepts of theological importance just because other people have corrupted its sense.¹⁴⁶ Hilary supported this opinion with a survey of biblical passages whose sense were misunderstood by known heretics to justify their blasphemous views, but were not stricken out of the canon.¹⁴⁷ To top it all, the bishop of Poitiers argued that, if the specified principle were to stand, then the Christians must be forced to agree that they should not glory in the cross of Christ, because some conceived of it as a stumbling block, neither should they preach the death of the Son of God, lest others think of a weak God who died in the hands of his persecutors.¹⁴⁸

Hilary then carried on giving an account of the history of the creedal usage of *homoousios*, tracing its introduction at the 268 Council of Antioch with Paul of Samosata.¹⁴⁹ The Samosatene used the term *homoousios* improperly, indicating a belief in the singularity of personal existence of the Father and the Son, hence it was

¹⁴³ Hilary, *De syn.* 68 (PL X,501A; NPNF 9,22).

¹⁴⁴ Alluding to the term *homoousios*, Hilary acknowledged the danger of encapsulating the divine reality into a single term. Brevity after all, as he claimed, with regard to God runs the danger of “impiously expressing what is piously meant.” Thus more often than not the attempt to oversimplify the doctrine about God, instead of helping to clarify the faith, breeds heretical teaching (*De syn.* 69; PL X,502A; NPNF 9,22).

¹⁴⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 86 (PL X,512B; NPNF 9,27).

¹⁴⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 85 (PL X,512B; NPNF 9,27).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 85 (PL X,511C-512B; NPNF 9,27).

¹⁴⁸ Hilary, *De syn.* 85 (PL X,512B; NPNF 9,27).

¹⁴⁹ Hilary, *De syn.* 86 (PL X,512B; NPNF 9,27).

disallowed by the eighty bishops who gathered in a synod to evaluate his doctrine. Hilary pointed out that the proscription pronounced on it by the bishops did concern only its wrong usage and not the term *homoousios* itself. At Nicaea more than 300 bishops approved of it, this time around it was employed properly, to exclude a confessed heretic from ecclesial communion. The rejection of *homoousios* by the eighty bishops and its approval by the three hundred involved no contradiction, for both synods upheld the unity of the substance of the Godhead.¹⁵⁰ The former stressed that the unity of God is not construed as solitary monad, and the latter endorsed this unity of substance by opposing the Arians who refused its application to the reality of the Son of God. Hilary clarified that *homoousios* was affirmed not on account of erroneous interpretation, but on account of the proper one as defined by the fathers at Nicaea. This is the point that Hilary underscored addressing himself to the easterners to clarify their reservation concerning the admissibility of the said terminology in the discourse of God.

Hilary likewise addressed the three interpretations of *homoousios* that disturbed the homoeouseans, namely, the Sabellianist reading of *homoousios* espoused by Paul of Samosata, and the view that defines it as implying a prior substance divided into two.¹⁵¹ The third one surprised Hilary because the same objection as that of being unscriptural could also be raised against *homoiousios*.¹⁵² In dealing with this issue, Hilary wished to persuade the easterners that the impious notions of God, on which they anchored their opposition to *homoousios*, were likewise rejected by the Nicenes, and that the Nicene group affirmed the use of *homoousios* for a notion entirely different from the mentioned erroneous interpretations. It was then made known that *homoousios* is not understood as bearing the meaning of solitary person, or that it takes the sense of two beings coming from a prior single substance, or that the Son is cut off from a portion of the substance of the Father.¹⁵³

How did Hilary apprehend the sense of *homoousios* according to the Nicene confession? Two statements from *De synodis*, given below, provide what is, according to Hilary, unmistakably the meaning of the term *homoousios* or *una substantia* in the confession of Nicaea. The first one is an inference derived from the Nicene declaration that “the Son is born of the substance of the Father, not made,” which allowed Hilary to make the following deduction: “For the same reason we have of one substance (*unius substantiae*) ... to teach that ... the Son is born of the

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 86 (PL X,513A; NPNF 9,27).

¹⁵¹ Hilary, *De syn.* 81 (PL X,509B; NPNF 9,25).

¹⁵² Hilary, *De syn.* 81 (PL X,509B; NPNF 9,26).

¹⁵³ Cf. Hilary, *De syn.* 81 (PL X,509; NPNF 9,225-26).

substance of God (*ex substantia Dei natus*) and subsists from no other source, nor in any diversity caused by a difference of substance.”¹⁵⁴

The second statement, taken from Hilary’s response to the protestation that *homoousios* should already be committed to silence because its former proponents—alluding to Ossius of Cordova who participated in the gathering of bishops at Sirmium 357 that issued the controversial homoean manifesto—have chosen to abandon it, reiterates the same point: “I understand by ὁμοούσιον God of God, ... that the Son has a birth which is unique (*unigenitam nativitatem*), born of the substance of the unborn God (*natum et ex innascibilis Dei substantia*), that He is begotten yet co-eternal and wholly like the Father.”¹⁵⁵

The two quotations specify that in the interpretation of Hilary what the Nicene *homoousios* indicates is the notion of the Son born of God the Father, and that He is of one substance with the Father because in birth He has received no other substance except that of the Father. According to this understanding, the term *homoousios* is employed to preach the unique birth of the Son, establishing the generation of the Son as more fundamental article of faith than *homoousios*. Hilary in fact argued that it is imperative to preach first the reality of the natural birth of the Son from the Father before the one substance doctrine is affirmed.¹⁵⁶ It is so because the affirmation of one substance results from the assertion of the unique birth of the Son in the substance of the Father. The correctness of the interpretation of *homoousios* is judged whether it conforms with and does not contradict the profession of the natural birth. This stress on the birth of the Son as provision for justifying the use of the term *homoousios* is not foreign to the Nicene tradition. Hilary then is not introducing new ideas, but simply reiterating what the Nicene fathers have already taught.

By considering the doctrine of *homoousios* from the standpoint of the natural birth of the Son, Hilary followed the same approach he had employed in his exposition of *homoiousios* to his Nicene colleagues, that of using concepts familiar to his audience to clear unwarranted misperceptions imputed to the suspected theology. By employing the notion of birth to explain *homoousios*, Hilary made the Nicene view intelligible to the eastern homoeouseans whose doctrine of likeness in essence is likewise sustained by the belief in the same unique birth of the Son. This doctrine of the birth of the Son would become more prominent in Hilary’s Trinitarian theology in his principal dogmatic work, *De Trinitate*, assuming the significance of a controlling category, from which perspective Hilary viewed the relationship of the

¹⁵⁴ Hilary, *De syn.* 84 (PL X,511B; NPNF 9,26).

¹⁵⁵ Hilary, *De syn.* 88 (PL X,514A; NPNF 9,28).

¹⁵⁶ Hilary, *De syn.* 70 (PL X,502A; NPNF 9,23).

Father and the Son, interpreted the error of the heretics, and bridged the view of the Nicene bishops and the eastern homouseans. But, this is discussed in the second part of this research. For now, it is opportune to bring to a close this analysis of Hilary's *De synodis*.

Conclusion

The term *homoousios* in Nicaea was used to affirm the natural generation of the Son from the substance of the Father. The teaching on the natural birth of the Son was continued in the theology of the defenders of Nicaea. Similarly, the substantial unity of the Father and the Son confirmed by the natural birth of the Son, so that the Son is said to be true God just as the Father is true God, is asserted in the theology of the homoeouseans.

Despite this convergence in doctrine, both the homouseans and the homoeouseans have initially opted to regard each other from the viewpoint of their differences, consuming both their intellectual acumen and energy exhibiting the inadmissibility of the other's theological formula to establish the authority of one's own. The eastern bishops entered into an alliance with the Arian-oriented easterners to oppose the usage the *homoousios*, which they thought was teaching an idea of the solitary God, in the manner presented by Marcellus of Ancyra, without realizing that the belief of their allies was just as irreverent as the view that they have mistakenly supposed the Nicene faith professed. Meanwhile, the pro-Nicene bishops contemplated the Orientals and their *homoiousios* formula according to the teaching of the Arians with whom they made an alliance.

The bishop of Poitiers applied himself to mediate the doctrinal position of the homouseans and the homoeouseans so that together they might affirm the faith in the divinity of the Son and His oneness in nature with the Father who begot Him, and oppose a common enemy in the then newly formed alliance between the homoeans and neo-Arians whose formidable influence, due to the backing of the political authority, made it difficult for the orthodox bishops to openly profess their faith as they were in constant threat of deposition. Hilary did not fold in face of the pressure exacted upon those who defied the religious program of the emperor. He boldly devised his strategy to promote the Catholic faith, the integral part of which is his designed conciliation of the pro-Nicene and the homoeousean theological traditions.

In this work I gave an account of Hilary's conciliatory theology as detailed in *De synodis*. In the said treatise, Hilary tried to show that the sense of *homoousios* and

homoiousios do not actually contradict each other. He demonstrated this employing the concepts of ‘equality’ to mediate their intended meanings. The likeness in essence, asserted Hilary, includes the equality of nature because the Son received in Him, on account of birth, not diminished but the fullness of divinity. The equality of nature of the Son from the Father is further explained as deriving from the one substance of the Father in which the Son subsists, having been begotten by the Father from the same one divine substance. Hilary also elaborated that the homoeousean perspective was never designed to cancel the teaching of Nicaea. He proved this by providing amplifications of the theology of the synodical document that the Orientals produced at the Synod of Ancyra 358, which addressed the homoean and neo-Arian challenge.

In addition, the bishop of Poitiers also clarified that the list of the eastern creeds adopted by the easterners was not assumed in order to replace Nicaea, demonstrating that the meaning applied to it by the homoeouseans was not the interpretation of the same provided by the Arians, who likewise appealed to their authority in support of their view of the Son. Instead, the sense of the eastern confessions preserves rather than negates the divinity of the Son, and his equality in excellence with the Father is what is demonstrated in Hilary’s exposition of the homoeousean’s understanding of the said creeds. Another important realization Hilary reached is that both the terms *homoousios* and *homoiousios* have either orthodox or heretical senses. Despite their respective orthodox readings, either one therefore is a potent source of theological discord. In *De synodis* Hilary opted to dwell on the orthodox sense of the said theological expressions and consequently demonstrated that both senses affirm the same fundamental truth about the divinity of the Son and his proper relation to the one unbegotten God the Father. ■



Fr. Jannel Abogado, O.P. is a member of the Philippine Dominican Province. He is assigned in the Priory of St. Thomas Aquinas. He holds a doctorate degree in Theology and Patristic Sciences from the *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum*, Rome, Italy. He teaches Patrology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila. He can be contacted at jabogop@yahoo.com.