

The Concept of the Generation of the Son of God in St. Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentary* on the *Gospel of St. Matthew*



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ST. HILARY OF POITIERS (ca. 315–367) is one of the more significant of the Latin Church Fathers. Like St. Athanasios the Great in the East, he devoted all of his efforts to a defense of the Christian Faith against Arianism. His career can be divided into two periods, the crucial year of 356, when he was exiled to Phrygia in Asia Minor by Emperor Con-



stantios, being the dividing line between them. During his time in Phrygia, St. Hilary had a unique opportunity to study Greek theology in depth and, at the same time, to become better acquainted with the teaching of the Arians. In this brief essay, we will deal with St. Hilary's famed *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*¹ (hereafter, *Commentary*), which falls within the first period of his career. This work provides very important evidence about the condition and character of ancient Latin theology,

just prior to the rise of the Arian controversy in the West and before Latin tradition had thoroughly interacted with the Greek tradition. Our aim is to clarify a problematic aspect of the Christological teaching of St. Hilary encountered in his *Commentary*—an aspect that is a cause of great difficulty for many scholars. That aspect involves St. Hilary's treatment of the Generation of the Son of God.

¹ In quotations from the *Commentary on St. Matthew* and *De Trinitate*, we will refer to the critical edition of St. Hilary's work in *Sources chrétiennes* (SC), citing the volume number, page(s), and line(s) of this edition. For the convenience of the reader, we will also cite the text in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (PL).

A pivotal subject appearing in many passages of the *Commentary* is the Divinity of Christ. In *Commentary* 16.4, St. Hilary comments on the event in Cæsarea Philippi, in which the Lord Jesus Christ asks His disciples what people think about the Son of Man: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?’” (St. Matthew 16:13). According to the explanation of St. Hilary, at Cæsarea Philippi, Christ provided His disciples with “quamdā intelligendi se formam rationemque.”² [An English translation of this and all subsequent foreign-language phrases and passages will be found either in brackets within the text or parenthetically attached to footnote citations—*Ed.*] We present, here, only the first part of this Christological teaching of St. Hilary:

Est autem hæc vera et inviolabilis fides, ex Deo æternitatis (cui ob id quod semper filius fuerit, semper et jus patris et nomen sit; ne si non semper filius, non semper et pater sit) Deum filium profectum fuisse, cui sit ex æternitate parentis æternitas. Nasci autem eum voluntas ejus fuit, cujus in virtute ac potestate inerat ut nasceretur. Est ergo filius Dei ex Deo Deus, unus in utroque: theotetam enim, quam deitatem Latini nuncupant, æterni ejus parentis, ex quo nascendo est profectus, accepit. Accepit autem hoc quod erat: et natum est Verbum quod fuit semper in Patre. Atque ita Filius et æternus et natus est: quia non aliud in eo natum est, quam quod æternum est.³

We see that, on the one hand, St. Hilary clearly formulates the Eternity of the Son in this passage, which, in his terminology, is equivalent to speaking of the Son’s Divinity; on the other hand, however, in treating with the generation of the Eternal Son from the Father, he says nothing about the Eternal Generation itself. On the contrary, he states that the Son, through the act of generation, assumed what He was, and that the Word, always being in the Father, was born. Instead of the con-

² St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentarium in Matheum*, 16.4, *SC*, Vol. CCLVIII, p. 52, ll. 5–17; *PL*, Vol. IX, col. 1008C. (“A form and framework for understanding Him.”)

³ *Ibid.*, cols. 1008C–1009A. (“However, this is the true and inviolable faith, that God the Son came forth from eternal God and that the eternity of His Begetter belongs to Him from eternity. The Father, on account of the fact that the Son always existed, had both the title and the name of Father, for if the Son had not always existed, He would not always have been the Father. Now, that the Son be born was the will of Him by Whose virtue and power it was that He be born. The Son of God, therefore, is God from God, one in both; for He received the Divinity [*theotetam*], which the Latins call *deitas*, of His eternal Begetter, from Whom He came forth in the process of birth. But He received that which He was; and the *Logos*, Who was always in the Father, was born. And thus, the Son is both eternal and born, because nothing else was born in Him than that which is eternal.”)

cept of the Eternal Generation, which would be a natural consequence of the Eternity of the Son, St. Hilary introduces a temporal element into the concept of the Son's generation. This is also quite obvious from a passage later on in his *Commentary*:

Quod si per fidem vitæque probitatem capaces Evangeliorum esse potuissent, scirent Verbum in principio Deum, et hoc a principio apud Deum, et natum esse ex eo qui erat, et hoc in eo esse qui natus est, quod is ipse est penes quem erat ante quam nasceretur.⁴

Here, St. Hilary excludes, without any doubt, the possibility of the Son's Eternal Generation. Moreover, he posits two stages in the existence of the Son and Word of God: In the first stage, the Son exists eternally in the Father; in the second stage, His existence proceeds through the act of generation.

Our goal, then, is to address a perplexity that must necessarily emerge in the minds of readers of St. Hilary's *Commentary*. How is it possible to speak of the Eternal Son without a concept of His Eternal Generation? Or to speak of the Eternal Paternity of the Father before the Generation of the Son? Or to speak of the Son's Divinity and, at the same time, to introduce sequential stages in His existence? Or do we have here, as many have interpreted the case to be, a latent remnant of Subordinationism from the theology of the Apologists, which later became a starting-point and a basis for Arianism?

We will divide our essay into two parts. The first part will deal with the concept of generation in the theology of the Early Church and in the theology of St. Hilary and will address the questions just posed; the second part will examine the treatment of this issue by modern scholars who have focused on St. Hilary's theology.

In order to grasp the theological significance of the concept of the Son's generation in the *Commentary*, it is necessary to outline briefly the history of the earliest Christian theology, which will allow us to gain a clearer notion regarding the usage of this concept by the ancient Church, in general, and, in particular, by St. Hilary's teachers. Scholarship dealing with St. Hilary's work has consistently overlooked an utterly essential point, and this oversight has hindered a proper understanding of his

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3I.3, *SC*, Vol. CCLVIII, p. 228, ll. 11-15; *PL*, Vol. IX, col. 1067A. ("But if through faith and uprightness of life they were capable of understanding the Gospels, they would know that the *Logos* was God in the beginning, that He was from the beginning with God, that He was born from Him Who is, and that in Him Who was born is the very essence of Him with Whom He existed before He was born.")

theology in the context of the period when he wrote his *Commentary*, namely, that there was a very fundamental reversal in what was meant by the concept of the generation of the Son of God in the period *before* and in the period *after* the First Synod of Nicæa (325). Scholars have failed to notice that this change in usage is reflected in the two periods of St. Hilary's career. In the first period (during which, once again, he wrote the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*), St. Hilary's work is steeped in the Latin tradition, which, lagging behind theological developments in the East, still relied heavily on the Ante-Nicene Fathers; but in the second period, with his immersion in contemporary Greek tradition and his in-depth exposure to Arian thought, St. Hilary's work conforms to Nicene theology.

Father John Romanides, in his *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* (*The Dogmatic and Creedal Theology of the Orthodox Catholic Church*), summarizes the Ante-Nicene Fathers' handling of the concept of the generation of the Son of God as follows [quoted as is in monotonic Greek—Editors]:

Ομάς αρχαίων ορθοδόξων θεολόγων και Πατέρων επρέσβευον εν γενικαίς γραμμαίς ότι εν αρχή προ της κτίσεως του κόσμου υπήρχεν ο Θεός με τον ενδιάθετον Αυτού Λόγον. Προς δημιουργίαν του κόσμου ο Θεός εγέννησε τον ενδιάθετον Αυτόν Λόγον, Ὅστις έγινε ούτω προφορικός. Ούτως ο Θεός έγινε Πατήρ και ο Λόγος Υἱός μονογενής. Ο ενδιάθετος και ο προφορικός Λόγος είναι ο Εἷς και ο Αυτός Λόγος. Ο Θεός και ο Πατήρ είναι Εἷς και ο Αυτός. Ο Λόγος και ο Υἱός του Θεού ο Μονογενής είναι επίσης Εἷς και ο Αυτός. Ο Προφορικός Λόγος Υἱός του Θεού Μονογενής είναι αεί εκ του Θεού. Πάντοτε υπήρχεν εν τῷ Θεῷ και ο Θεός εν Αυτῷ και δι' Αυτού ο Θεός εδημιούργησε τον κόσμον, κ.τ.λ. Ο Λόγος ούτος σάρξ εγένετο και ως εκ τούτου λέγεται Χριστός. Πάντως ουδόλως πρόκειται περί υποστατοποιήσεως του Λόγου δια της υπό του Θεού γεννήσεως

Αυτού. Εν τοιαύτη περιπτώσει θα είχωμεν υποστατοποίησιν του Θεού γενομένου Πατρός. Εις την ορολογίαν των θεολόγων και Πατέρων τούτων οι όροι προφορικός Λόγος, Πατήρ και Υιός Μονογενής του Θεού δηλώνουν την προς τον κόσμον σχέσιν του Θεού.⁵

Another passage from the dogmatic theology of Father Romanides relates to our subject as well:

Ίσως υπάρχει και κάποια δάσις να αποδεχθή τις ότι απολύτως Ορθόδοξοι ήσαν οι Πατέρες οι διδάσκοντες ότι τα ονόματα Πατήρ και Υιός αναφέρονται εις την γέννησιν του ήδη εκ του Θεού αιδίου και φύσει υπάρχοντος υποστατικού Λόγου δια την δημιουργίαν και ενσάρκωσιν.... Τη δε μία βουλήσει της Αγίας Τριάδος ο Λόγος ο ενδιάθετος προφέρεται, δηλαδή γεννάται και ούτως ο Θεός γίνεται Πατήρ και ο Λόγος Υιός, δια την δημιουργίαν, την ενσάρκωσιν και την υιοθεσίαν των ανθρώπων.⁶

The first Greek theologians to develop the concepts of the generation of the Son and of the two stages in the *Logos*' existence were St. Justin the Philosopher and St. Theophilus of Antioch. St. Justin writes in Chapter 61 of his *Dialogue with Trypho*:

“Οτι ἀρχὴν πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων ὁ θεὸς γεγέννηκε δυνάμιν τινα ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ λογικὴν, ἣτις καὶ δόξα κυρίου ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου καλεῖται, ποτὲ δὲ υἱός, ποτὲ δὲ σοφία, ποτὲ δὲ ἄγγελος, ποτὲ δὲ θεός, ποτὲ δὲ κύριος καὶ λόγος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀρχιστράτηγον ἑαυτὸν λέγει, ἐν ἀνθρώπου μορφῇ φανέντα τῷ τοῦ Ναυῆ Ἰησοῦ· ἔχει γὰρ

⁵ See this on the Internet at http://romanity.org/html/rom.e.03.dogmatik_kai_symboliki_theologia.htm. (“A group of early Orthodox theologians and Fathers professed, in general terms, that in the beginning, prior to the creation of the world, God existed with His immanent *Logos*. For the purpose of creating the world, God begat His immanent *Logos*, Who thus became expressed. In this way, God became Father and the *Logos* the Only-Begotten Son. The immanent and expressed *Logos* is one and the same *Logos*. God and the Father are one and the same. The *Logos* and the Only-Begotten Son of God are also one and the same. The immanent *Logos*, the Only-Begotten Son of God, always exists from God. He always existed in God and God in Him, and through Him God created the world, etc. This *Logos* became flesh and is for this reason called ‘Christ.’ There is absolutely no question of any hypostatization of the *Logos* through His generation from God. In such an instance, we would have a hypostatization of God become a Father. In the terminology of these theologians and Fathers, the terms ‘immanent *Logos*,’ ‘Father,’ and ‘Only-Begotten Son of God’ [simply] refer to God’s relationship to the world.”)

⁶ *Ibid.* (“There is perhaps some basis for accepting the absolute Orthodoxy of those Fathers who taught that the names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ pertain to the generation of the Hypostatic *Logos*, Who already existed from God eternally and by nature, for the purpose of the creation and Incarnation.... The immanent *Logos* is expressed by the single Will of the Holy Trinity, that is, He is generated, and in this way God becomes Father and the *Logos* Son, for the purpose of the creation, the Incarnation, and the adoption of men into sonship.”)

πάντα προσονομάζεσθαι ἔκ τε τοῦ ὑπηρετεῖν τῷ πατρικῷ βουλήματι καὶ ἔκ τοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς θελήσει γεγεννησθαι.⁷

The conceptualization in this passage closely resembles that of St. Hilary. Firstly, the *Logos* exists in God, and, secondly, God, from Himself and prior to the creation of the world, begets the *Logos*, Who then serves the Father's will in the œconomy of salvation. St. Justin juxtaposes these two stages in the existence of the *Logos* in Chapter 6 of *The Second Apology*: “Ὁ δὲ νῖός ἐκείνου, ὁ μόνος λεγόμενος κυρίως νῖός, ὁ λόγος πρὸ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ συνῶν καὶ γεννώμενος...”⁸ We must emphasize that the words “συνῶν καὶ γεννώμενος” (“[was] with Him [God] and [was] begotten”) in St. Justin's *Second Apology* and the words “*et æternus et natus*” (“both eternal and born”) in St. Hilary's *Commentary* 16.4, both indicating the Son, express the same basic meaning.

In a similar way, St. Theophilus of Antioch also distinguishes two stages in the existence of the *Logos*. In Chapter 22 of the second book of *Ad Autolyicum*, he writes:

Ἐρεῖς οὖν μοι. “Σὺ φῆς τὸν θεὸν ἐν τόπῳ μὴ δεῖν χωρεῖσθαι, καὶ πῶς νῦν λέγεις αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ περιπατεῖν;” Ἄκουε ὁ φημι. ὁ μὲν θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων ἀχώρητός ἐστιν καὶ ἐν τόπῳ οὐχ εὐρίσκεται “οὐ γάρ ἐστιν τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεως αὐτοῦ.” ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτοῦ, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα πεποίηκεν, “δύναμις” ὣν “καὶ σοφία” αὐτοῦ... τὸν λόγον τὸν ὄντα διὰ παντὸς ἐνδιάθετον ἐν καρδίᾳ θεοῦ. πρὸ γάρ τι γίνεσθαι τοῦτον εἶχεν σύμβουλον, ἑαυτοῦ οὖν καὶ φρόνησιν ὄντα. ὁπότε δὲ ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς ποιῆσαι ὅσα ἐβουλεύσατο, τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἐγέννησεν προφορικόν, πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως... θεὸς οὖν ὣν ὁ λόγος καὶ ἔκ θεοῦ πεφυκώς, ὁπότεν βούληται ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων, πέμπει αὐτὸν εἰς τινα τόπον, ὃς παραγινόμενος καὶ ἀκούεται καὶ ὁρᾶται, πεμπόμενος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τόπῳ εὐρίσκεται.⁹

⁷ St. Justin the Philosopher, “Dialogue with Trypho,” 61, *Patrologia Græca (PG)*, Vol. VI, col. 613C. (“God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and *Logos*; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all these names, since He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will” [*The Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF)*, Vol. I, p. 227b].)

⁸ *Idem*, “The Second Apology,” 6, *PG*, Vol. VI, col. 453A. (“And His Son, Who alone is properly called Son, the Word Who also was with Him and was begotten before the [world was created]...” [*ANF*, Vol. I, p. 190a].)

⁹ St. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, II.22, *PG*, Vol. VI, cols. 1088A–C. (“You will say, then, to me: ‘You said that God ought not to be contained in a place, and how do you now say that He walked in Paradise?’ Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all can-

According to St. Theophilus, the *Logos* exists eternally in God and, in this first aspect of His existence, is called “λόγος ἐνδιάθετος” (“immanent *Logos*”). Then, before God creates the world, He begets this same *Logos* from Himself, and, in this second aspect of His existence, the *λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* thusly becomes also the “λόγος προφορικός” (“expressed *Logos*”), Who reveals God in the œconomy of salvation.

In the primitive Latin theological tradition, we find this concept of the generation of the Son and His twofold existence in both of St. Hilary’s authorities, Tertullian and Novatian. In chapter 5 of his *Adversus Praxean*, Tertullian writes that God was *solus* (“alone”) before all creatures and that nothing beside Him existed from eternity; yet, Tertullian proceeds to say that, in fact, God was not *solus* insofar as there existed that which He had within Himself, that is, His *ratio* (“Reason”). This *ratio* is older than *sermo* (“Word”) and has Its Own substance. Before God sent forth His *sermo*, He kept this to Himself within His *ratio*, silently devising therein what He intended to say through the *sermo*. In Chapter 6, Tertullian continues:

Nam ut primum Deus voluit ea quæ cum sophiæ ratione et sermone disposuerat intra se, in substantias et species suas edere, ipsum primum protulit sermonem, habentem in se individuas suas, Rationem et Sophiam ; ut per ipsum fierent universa, per quem erant cogitata atque disposita....¹⁰

Finally, he says in Chapter 7:

Tunc igitur etiam ipse sermo speciem et ornatum suum sumit, sonum et vocem, cum dicit Deus: Fiat lux. Hæc est nativitas perfecta sermonis, dum ex Deo procedit: conditus ab eo primum ad cogitatum in nomine

not be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word [*Logos*], through whom He made all things, being His power and His wisdom...., the Word [*Logos*] that always exists, residing [immanent] within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word [*Logos*], uttered [expressed], the first-born of all creation.... The Word [*Logos*], then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place” [ANF, Vol. II, p. 103ab].)

¹⁰ Tertullian, “*Adversus Praxean*,” 6, *PL*, Vol. II, col. 161B. (“Now, as soon as it pleased God to put forth into their respective substances and forms the things which He had planned and ordered within Himself, in conjunction with His Wisdom’s Reason and Word, He first put forth the Word Himself, having within Him His own inseparable Reason and Wisdom, in order that all things might be made through Him through whom they had been planned and disposed...” [ANF, Vol. III, p. 601b].)

Sophiæ: Dominus condidit me initium viarum. Dehinc generatus ad effectum: Cum pararet coelum, aderam illi simul. Exinde eum parem sibi faciens, de quo procedendo Filius factus est, primogenitus....¹¹

In Tertullian's distinction between *ratio* and *sermo*, we see a parallel to St. Theophilus's *λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* and *λόγος προφορικός*. "Ratio" is used here as a translation of the Greek term "λόγος." (Note, however, that "λόγος" simultaneously means "reason" and "word.") Regarding the mutual relation between *ratio* and *sermo*, Tertullian maintains that, from a certain point of view, it would be correct to regard *ratio* as pre-dating *sermo*, and that *sermo* itself consists of *ratio*. Until God sent forth His *sermo*—that is, until God, through the utterance of His Word, created the world—, *sermo* silently inheres in *ratio*. Although Tertullian distinguishes two phases in the existence of the *Logos* in this way, he nonetheless states, "Tamen et sic, nihil interest."¹²

Turning to Novatian, we see in Chapter 31 of his *De Trinitate* that he states that only God the Father is without a beginning, and he continues:

Ex quo, quando ipse voluit, Sermo Filius natus est: ...Hic ergo, cum sit genitus a Patre, semper est in Patre. Semper autem sic dico, ut non innatum, sed natum probem. Sed qui ante omne tempus est, semper in Patre fuisse dicendus est: nec enim tempus illi assignari potest, qui ante tempus est. Semper enim in Patre; ne Pater non semper sit Pater: quin et Pater illum etiam (quadam ratione) præcedit, quod necesse est (quodammodo) prior sit qua Pater sit.... Hic ergo quando Pater voluit, processit ex Patre: ...substantia scilicet illa divina, cujus nomen est Verbum, per quod facta sunt omnia, et sine quo factum est nihil.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7, *PL*, Vol. II, col. 161B–C. ("Then, therefore, does the Word also Himself assume His own form and glorious garb, *His own* sound and vocal utterance, when God says, 'Let there be light.' This is the perfect nativity of the Word, when He proceeds forth from God—formed by Him first to devise and think out *all things* under the name of Wisdom—'The Lord created or formed me as the beginning of His ways;' then afterward begotten, to carry all into effect—'When He prepared the heaven, I was present with Him.' Thus does He make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His first-begotten Son...' [*ibid.*].)

¹² *Ibid.*, 5, *PL*, Vol. II, col. 160B. ("Not that this distinction is of any practical moment" [*ibid.*, p. 600b].)

¹³ Novatian, *De Trinitate*, 31, *PL*, Vol. III, cols. 949B–950A. ("...of whom, when He willed it, the Son, the Word, was born.... He then, since He was begotten of the Father, is always in the Father. And I thus say always, that I may show Him not to be unborn, but born. But He who is before all time must be said to have been always in the Father; for no time can be assigned to Him who is before all time. And He is always in the Father, unless the Father be not always Father, only that the Father also precedes Him,—in a certain sense,—since it is necessary—in some degree—that He should *be* before He is Father. ...He, then, when the Father

Carefully reading the texts of these ancient writers, we notice that, in the extracts cited, there are three elements common to their treatment of the concept of the generation of the Son of God. These three elements were fundamental to early Christian theology before the First Œcumenical Synod. In the first place, the generation of the Son from the Father presupposes the Son's eternal existence within the Father. By none of the writers mentioned was the Son's generation understood as a beginning of a hitherto nonexistent hypostasis. Secondly, the Son's generation is intimately linked to the creation in all of the quoted passages, so that the begetting of the Son is presented as the initiation of God's activity *ad extra*. And finally, in all of the accounts, the cause of the *Logos*' generation is traced to the Will of God. It is precisely within the framework of this primitive, Ante-Nicene theological tradition that St. Hilary constructs his Christological propositions in the *Commentary*. From 16.4 and 31.3, cited at the beginning of this essay, it is obvious that, according to St. Hilary, the Son dwelled eternally within the Father, before proceeding forth from Him through the act of begetting, and that the Divine Will is the source of the generation of the Son.

We now have enough material to sum up the theological content of the concept of the generation of the Son of God in St. Hilary's *Commentary*. Consistent with the majority of the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Origen and St. Irenæus of Lyons being the exceptions), St. Hilary never means by the generation of the Son that the Hypostasis of the Son received an origin of existence through His begetting by the Father. He does not place the generation of the Son within the context of the inner, eternal relations among the Persons of the Holy Trinity—the realm of theology strictly speaking—but rather, on the contrary, the proper context for the Son's begottenness is, for him and his Ante-Nicene forebears, the *ad extra* activity of the Holy Trinity—the realm of œconomy. Thus, the creation and salvation of the world stem from the Will of God the Father, Who, when He so desires, begets His pre-eternal Son, precisely so that through Him, the *Logos* of God, the Father can first fashion and then redeem the universe.

willed it, proceeded from the Father. . .—that is to say, that divine substance whose name is the Word, whereby all things were made, and without whom nothing was made" [ANF, Vol. V, p. 643ab].)

Bearing in mind this proper context in which the concept of the generation was understood in primitive theology, it becomes perfectly comprehensible how St. Hilary can speak of the Eternal Son without, however, mentioning His Eternal Generation. The universe is not coeval with God; it is a creation of the Deity. Therefore, the Generation of the Son—which, because it directly corresponds with the Divine activity in the creation of the world, has its origin in God’s Will—also cannot be eternal. We have, then, no hint here of Subordinationism, an accusation often levelled against St. Hilary and the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Such an accusation, based as it is on the standards of the Synod of Nicæa, is obviously anachronistic in relation to the Ante-Nicene writers and wholly unfair with regard to St. Hilary, who discoursed in the earlier part of his career in Ante-Nicene terminology. It was the Arians who, opportunistically abusing Ante-Nicene terminology for the advancement of their own theological ends, used the concept of the generation of the Son as a validation of blatantly Subordinationist ideas. The Arian debasement of the vocabulary of the Early Church led the Holy Fathers of the First Œcumenical Synod to abandon Ante-Nicene usage in favor of a tighter, more refined articulation of the Generation of the Divine *Logos*.

The primitive theology of the Early Church thus provided the basic groundwork for the Arian formulation of their own theology. As did the Ante-Nicene Fathers, the Arians spoke of the Generation of the Son from the Father. Likewise, they regarded the Father’s Will as the origin of the Son’s generation, which generation they too accepted as having taken place before all ages. As well, God, according to the Arians, begot His *Logos* for the sake of the creation of the universe, appointing Him as a mediator through Whom God acts in the world. However, there is a crucial difference between the thought of the Ante-Nicene Fathers and the thought of the Arians: According to Arian teaching, *the generation of the Logos does not presuppose His pre-eternal existence*. This divergent understanding arose when the Arians began to apply the concept of generation in a context other than that in which it had been situated by St. Justin, St. Theophilus, Tertullian, Novatian, and other early writers. In Arianism, the concept of generation was no longer limited to expressing the relationship of the Deity to the world, but came also to be used for defining the origin of the Hypostasis of the Son of God. In other words, Arianism abolished the twofold distinction in the existence of the *Logos*, such that the Generation of the Son and the creation of the

world were seen as being equivalent; this meant that the Arians understood the begetting of the *Logos* as *literally* His beginning, as the birth of a previously nonexistent Son of God.

Once the Nicene Fathers recognized this conceptual abuse of Arian teaching, they began to avoid associating the generation of the *Logos* with the creation of the world, as had been done formerly, to forestall any further misunderstanding. Thus, following the First Synod of Nicæa, the concept of the generation shifted its *Sitz im Leben* from the field of œconomic theology to the field of Trinitarian theology, and the Church Fathers ceased speaking of the begetting of the *Logos* as a means whereby the Deity interfaced with creation. Henceforth, Patristic thought restricted the concept of generation to explaining the internal bond between the First and the Second Persons of the Trinity: the Father, Who is Hypostatically identified by His Ungeneratedness, is the Begetter of the Son, and the Son, Who is Hypostatically identified by His Generatedness, is the Begotten of the Father. Anyone who balked at speaking of the Eternal Generation in this redefined manner would betray himself as an Arian.

Precisely this contextual change is illustrated in the course of St. Hilary's career. Before his banishment to Phrygia, at the time of his writing of the *Commentary*, St. Hilary had not yet fully encountered Arian teaching; he therefore dutifully employed, with no problems, the concept of the generation in the manner he had learned it from his authorities, Tertullian and Novatian. But during his exile in the East, when he was directly confronted by Arianism, St. Hilary substantially altered his usage of the term "generation." Like the other ancient Church Fathers, St. Hilary, throughout the whole of his work, makes a distinction between the Nature of God and the Power of God (St. Hilary generally uses "*virtus*" for the latter). This is exactly the distinction so famously and so effectively elaborated centuries later by St. Gregory Palamas in his writings on the Divine Essence and the Divine Energies. In his *Commentary*, St. Hilary characterizes the relationship of the Father and the Son as being grounded in the Nature of Divinity. Only the Son has *communio paternæ substantiæ* [communion in the Substance of the Father]; the created realm, by contrast, can only relate to God through His Will.

This participation of the Son in the Essence of the Godhead is, for St. Hilary, both the root and the proof of the Son's Divinity. The creation of the universe, on the other hand, falls within the œconomy of God, which, according to the Saint, is effected, not by the Divine Essence, but by the Power and Will of God. Therefore, the generation spoken of in the *Commentary*—in contrast to the Generation spoken of in *De Trinitate*—deals with Divine activity *vis-à-vis* the world, which, since it is produced by a movement of God's Will, is not an eternal generation.

After gaining detailed knowledge of Arian doctrine during his stay in Asia Minor, the period in which he wrote his *magnum opus*, *De Trinitate*, St. Hilary revised his definition of the Divine Generation. In book 4 of *De Trinitate*, he quotes Arius' letter to St. Alexander of Alexandria, in which Arius claims that the generation of the Son arises as a consequence of the Will of God: "Hunc Deum genuisse Filium unigenitum ante omnia sæcula, per quem et sæculum et omnia fecit; natum autem non putative sed vere, obsecutum voluntati suæ. . ."¹⁴ In the Ante-Nicene period, such a statement would have been perfectly Orthodox, for within the context of primitive theology, as we have noted above, it was legitimate to say that God begat the Son through His Will, for the sake of the creation. However, Arius does *not* say that the Son dwells within the Godhead eternally, prior to His Divine generation, but instead, narrowly focusing on the temporal dimension of the Son's generation, exaggerates the idea of it happening *ante omnia sæcula* [before all ages]. Detaching the concept of the generation from its proper context, Arius and his followers misconstrued the ancient writers to whom they referred as their authorities. Whereas Ante-Nicene theology employed the concept of generation to describe God's relationship to the world through the agency of His *Logos*, Who nonetheless dwelled Hypostatically from before eternity within the bosom of the Father, Arian theology posited that *both* the generation of the *Logos* and the creation of the universe were temporally effected *ex nihilo* by the Father's Will. *De Trinitate* is intended as a thorough refutation of this Arian doctrine, for which reason it is understandable that St. Hilary strives for an unmistakable clarity of terminology. In what was a serious conflict, his aim was to

¹⁴ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, IV.12, *SC*, Vol. CDXLVIII, p. 34, ll. 5–8; *PL*, Vol. X, col. 105A. ("We believe that this God gave birth to the Only-begotten Son before all worlds, through Whom He made the world and all things; that He gave birth to Him not in semblance, but in truth, following His own Will. . ." [*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*, 2nd Ser., Vol. IX, p. 74b].)

prevent terminological ambiguity from providing a justification for heretical misinterpretations of the Christian Faith. It should be understood that during the Arian controversy, especially in the East, the universe of discourse had been thrown into chaos. It was precisely because of the obscurity or the vagueness of certain key terms that the Arians were able to gain such broad and persistent support.

We have already mentioned that St. Hilary distinguishes between the Nature of the Deity and His Will. As long as the generation in the *Commentary* was related to the œconomy of salvation, to God's acting in the world, it had as its source the Divine Will. But in *De Trinitate*, St. Hilary uses the concept of generation in the way it was used by the Arians: as a description of the origin of the Hypostasis of the *Logos*. In this case, it is no longer possible for the Son's Generation to be attributed to the Power and Will of God; rather, it is a Hypostatic distinction inherent in the Divine Nature. This is the reason that, in *De Trinitate*, St. Hilary connects the Generation of the Son to the Substance of God, and not to His Will. In this later work of his, St. Hilary defines the Generation as "*naturalis nativitas*" [natural birth], as the following passage from the ninth book demonstrates:

Non enim unigenito Deo naturæ demutationem naturalis nativitas intulit. Nec qui ex subsistente Deo secundum divinæ generationis naturam Deus subsistit, ab eo, qui solus verus Deus est, separabilis est veritate naturæ. Tenuit autem natura veritatis suæ ordinem, ut nativitatis veritatem veritas naturalis inveheret, nec alterius ex se generis Deum Deus unus efferret.¹⁵

We see, here, that, according to St. Hilary, the Divine Nature at the Son's Generation keeps its order: "Tenuit autem natura veritatis suæ ordinem." Similarly, in the fifth book of *De Trinitate*, he says that in the Generation of the Son, the Deity follows His Nature, the incorporeal and immutable God naturally Begetting the incorporeal and immutable God: "In generatione Filii et naturam suam sequitur incorporalis atque indemutabilis Deus, incorporalem atque indemutabilem Deum gignens."¹⁶ The Son's

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IX.36, SC, Vol. CDLXII, p. 86, ll. 10–16; PL, Vol. X, col. 308A. ("The Only-begotten God suffered no change of nature by His natural birth: and He Who, according to the nature of His divine origin was born God from the living God, is, by the truth of that nature, inalienable from the only true God. Thus there follows from the true divine nature its necessary result, that the outcome of true divinity must be a true birth, and that the one God could not produce from Himself a God of a second kind" [*ibid.*, p. 167a].)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, V.37, PL, Vol. X, col. 155B. ("[I]n the generation of the Son, the incorporeal and unchangeable God begets, in accordance with His own nature, God incorporeal and unchange-

Generation is no longer, as it was in the *Commentary*, a result of God freely enacting His Will; instead, His Generation is a natural expression of God's Essence itself.

In the *Commentary*, the generation of the *Logos*, defined as an œconomic act of the Divine Will, is a temporal phenomenon. Thus, in the twofold existence of the *Logos*, the generation is a transition from one stage to another: The Son of God nestles, from before eternity, within the bosom of the Father. He then comes forth from the Father by generation, within time, to inaugurate and to fulfill the œconomy of salvation willed by God through the utterance of His *Logos*. By contrast, the Generation spoken of in the altered setting of *De Trinitate* is necessarily an eternal phenomenon. In chapters 18 through 36 of the twelfth book, St. Hilary forcefully argues against Arius' contention that "Non fuit antequam nasceretur,"¹⁷ decisively formulating the concept of the Eternal Generation of the Son with such terms as "*nativitatis æternitas*" [Eternal Birth] and "*natum semper esse*" ("was Ever-Born" or "always Born").

We have thus explained—we hope conclusively—why St. Hilary passes over in silence the Eternal Generation of the Son of God in his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*. Next, in the second part of our essay, we will examine how this question has been handled by certain contemporary scholars.

We will now focus our attention on the treatment of the concept of the generation of the Son of God in St. Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew* by contemporary scholars. Let us begin with the renowned Jesuit scholar Pieter Smulders, who addresses the teachings of the *Commentary* in the first chapter of his historical and dogmatic work, *La doctrine trinitaire de Saint Hilaire de Poitiers*.¹⁸ In this work, Smulders states that, even if St. Hilary deliberately speaks of the Son's Eternity, he nonetheless introduces a temporal element into the relationship between the Father and the Son. Smulders interprets *Commentary* 16.4, which we have quoted previously, as follows: "Par ce text, Hilaire affirme d'abord que le Fils doit être éternel comme le Père.

able" [*ibid.*, p. 96b].)

¹⁷ ("He was not before He was born" [*ibid.*, p. 222b].)

¹⁸ Pieter Smulders, S.J., *La doctrine trinitaire de Saint Hilaire de Poitiers (The Trinitarian Doctrine of St. Hilary of Poitiers)* (Rome: 1944), p. 77.

Cependant sa naissance et sa procession du Père ne sont pas éternelles; elles sont fixées par la volonté et la puissance du Père.”¹⁹

In an effort to explain how the Son can be eternal without the Eternal Generation, Smulders offers a solution; it is our contention, however, that this solution cannot be supported and defended on the basis of St. Hilary’s theology:

Hilaire semble concevoir la génération divine de telle sorte que le Fils, avant de naître, soit dans le Père non seulement en tant que Verbe, mais aussi en tant que Fils. Cette existence du Fils dans le Père n’est point personnelle et distincte tant que le Père n’a pas transmis au Fils de la plénitude de sa propre nature et ne l’a pas fait procéder. Celui qui, précédemment, était caché dans le Père, est apparu comme une personne distincte à sa naissance. Le Fils est éternel, non pas à raison de l’éternité de sa génération, mais parce qu’il a reçu en naissant la nature divine qui est éternelle.²⁰

According to Smulders, the passage of Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxean* and the passage of Novatian’s *De Trinitate* that we cited in the first part of our essay must be interpreted in this same manner. But Smulders commits an error that hinders his grasp of St. Hilary’s concept of generation: He equates the concept of the generation of the Son presented in the *Commentary* with the concept of the generation of the Son presented in *De Trinitate*; viz., he interprets *both* as pertaining to the origin of the Son’s Hypostasis from God the Father (“...est apparu comme une personne distincte à sa naissance”). Smulders wrongly assumes that, because the terminology of the two works is the same, so are their conceptual referents. He thus fails to realize that—as we have already demonstrated—St. Hilary, in his *Commentary* and in his *De Trinitate*, is speaking of the Son’s generation in two different contexts and, thus, in two different ways:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. (“In this text, Hilary affirms, first, that the Son must be eternal, like the Father. However, His birth and His procession from the Father are not eternal; they are determined by the will and power of the Father.”)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79. (“Hilary seems to conceive the Divine Generation to be of such a kind that the Son, before birth, was in the Father not only as *Logos*, but also as Son. This existence of the Son in the Father is not personal or distinct, since the Father did not transmit to the Son the fullness of His Own Nature and did not cause Him to proceed. He Who was previously hidden in the Father appeared as a distinct Person at His birth. The Son is eternal, not by virtue of the eternity of His generation, but because He took on, at his Birth, the Divine Nature, which is eternal.”)

L'unique différence entre cet écrit et les livres postérieurs réside en ce qu' Hilaire affirme bien maintenant l'éternité de la génération divine et l'éternité du Fils lui-même, mais qu'il semble en même temps concevoir cette génération comme se perfectionnant et donc non pas strictement éternelle. Dans la suite il emploiera ce concept de la génération éternelle avec plus de clarté et de logique.²¹

We cannot agree with such a conclusion. As we have previously established, at the time of writing the *Commentary*, St. Hilary did not refer to the Eternal Generation at all, because, in that work, his conceptualization of the Son's generation bore no relationship to the question of the origin of the Hypostasis of the Son from the Father, and, therefore, it also bore no relationship to the Eternity of the Son. Again, in his *Commentary*, St. Hilary relates the generation of the Son to the activity of God in the world, to the œconomy of salvation. But during the time of his exile, he became better acquainted with the controversy between the Orthodox and the Arians and with the content of the terminology used by the two parties; thereafter, St. Hilary employed the concept of the Son's generation in its Nicene formulation, as a definition of the origin of the Hypostasis of the Son, in which formulation the generation is of necessity Eternal. His earlier concept of the generation of the Son, which described the two stages in the existence of the *Logos*, conformed to Ante-Nicene terminological convention, and was, therefore, fully Orthodox and free of any trace of Subordinationism.

Smulders also assumes that, according to St. Hilary, there was a time when the existence of the Son in the Father was neither personal nor distinct; consequently, the eternal existence of the Son could not have preceded His generation from the Father. If this were the case, St. Hilary's *Commentary* would advocate the principle of the dynamic Monarchianism of Paul of Samosata, or ideas similar to those put forth in the East, in that period, by Markellos of Ankyra and developed by his disciple, Photinos. In the thought of Paul of Samosata and Photinos, the *Logos* exists in the Father from the beginning, not as an Hypostasis, but as the Father's *Dynamis* (Power). Hence, his advocacy of such ideas would imply that St. Hilary either did not believe in the full Divinity of the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83. ("The only difference between this writing and the later books consists in the fact that, while Hilary indeed affirms the eternity of the Divine generation and the eternity of the Son Himself, he seems, at the same time, to conceive of this generation as undergoing perfection and therefore not as strictly eternal. Subsequently, he employs this concept of eternal generation with greater clarity and logic.")

Son—a conclusion that other passages of the *Commentary* exclude—or that he did not grasp that it was impossible to speak of the eternal Son without the Eternal Generation. Smulders opts for the second choice, fully aware that his interpretation conflicts with other passages of the *Commentary*:

Si telle est bien la pensée d’Hilaire, il faudra reconnaître que son système comporte des éléments contradictoires. Il parle en effet de l’éternité du Fils, mais comment celui-ci peut-il exister de toute éternité s’il n’est pas éternellement né? Et comment le Père peut-il être Père avant la naissance de son Fils? Enfin il insiste tellement sur l’immuabilité du Fils (*supra*, p. 75) que l’on ne comprend pas comment elle se concilie avec sa naissance progressive telle que nous avons cru la découvrir dans les textes cités.²²

Smulders believes that these seeming contradictions arise from the inconsistency of St. Hilary’s thought:

Ainsi donc même si l’on doit admettre qu’Hilaire a distingué deux états du Verbe, ces deux états ne sont pas absolument distincts puisque, même après la naissance du Fils, son union avec le Père subsiste. Il paraît donc pencher simultanément pour plusieurs concepts différents qui, à la vérité, sont à peine compatibles, à savoir celui de la vraie divinité et donc de l’éternité du Fils, qu’il tenait de la foi traditionnelle, et les phases progressives d’une certaine naissance qu’il avait puisées dans la théologie antérieure.²³

Yet, again, we must emphasize that St. Hilary in no way combines what is incompatible. The problem, here, is that Smulders fails to understand that there is another interpretation of the concept of generation that is not in conflict with St. Hilary’s thought.

Another Jesuit scholar who has dealt with St. Hilary’s work is Paul

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80. (“If such is indeed the thought of Hilary, one would have to acknowledge that his system is comprised of contradictory elements. He speaks, in effect, of the eternity of the Son; but how is it that He can exist from all Eternity if He is not eternally Born? And how can the Father be the Father before the Birth of His Son? Ultimately, he insists so much on the immutability of the Son [*supra*, p. 75], that one cannot understand how that immutability can be reconciled with His progressive birth, such as we believe that we have discovered in the texts cited.”)

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 80. (“Thus, although it must be admitted that Hilary distinguished between two states of the Word, these states are not absolutely distinct, since even after the birth of the Son, His union with the Father abides. Thus, he appears to incline simultaneously towards several different concepts which, in truth, are scarcely compatible; that is, that of the true Divinity, and therefore Eternity, of the Son, which he holds on the basis of the traditional Faith, and the progressive phases of a certain kind of birth, which he has drawn from earlier theology.”)

Galtier, an expert in Latin Patrology. The results of his research were presented in the treatise *Saint Hilaire de Poitiers: Le premier docteur de l'église latine*. His interpretation of the *Commentary* is determined by his assumption that it was written as a refutation of Arian teaching. He writes: "En réalité cependant, c'est bien l'erreur d'Arius qu'il a surtout en vue lorsque, dans son *Commentaire*, il parle d'hérésie ou d'hérétiques et qu'il oppose la doctrine vraie sur les rapports mutuels du Père et du Fils."²⁴ Galtier believes that, in the *Commentary*, St. Hilary is faced with "...ceux qui nient sa génération éternelle et sa participation a la substance infine du Père, le disent fait de rien par celui qui a tout créé."²⁵ It is essential to consider the extent of St. Hilary's knowledge of Arian teaching, with its misinterpretation of the primitive concept of generation, at the time that he wrote his *Commentary*. We are of the opinion that, on the basis of the available data,²⁶ it is not possible to provide an answer to this query with absolute certainty. Accordingly, there is a divergence of views among scholars. It is symptomatic that all sorts of opinions can be found in studies of St. Hilary's work, ranging from the notion that St. Hilary had no detailed information about Arianism, at the time of writing his *Commentary*, to Galtier's aforementioned supposition.²⁷

Now, if Galtier assumes with such certainty that the *Commentary* was conceived to disprove Arian teaching and its struggle against the concept of the Eternal Generation, he faces a difficult problem: How does one explain the fact that, in the *Commentary*, St. Hilary does not

²⁴ Paul Galtier, S.J., *Saint Hilaire de Poitiers: Le premier docteur de l'église latine (St. Hilary of Poitiers: The First Doctor of the Latin Church)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960), p. 22. ("In reality, however, it is definitely, above all, the error of Arius that he has in view when, in his *Commentary*, he speaks about heresy or heretics and confronts them with the true doctrine of the mutual relations of the Father and the Son.")

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27. ("...those who, denying His Eternal Generation and His participation in the infinite substance of the Father, say that He was created out of nothing by Him Who created everything.")

²⁶ There are five basic facts that can be reckoned as certain: firstly, Arius' name is not mentioned anywhere in the *Commentary*; secondly, St. Hilary wrote the *Commentary* before his exile in the East; thirdly, in chapter 91 of *De Synodis*, St. Hilary says that he heard about the Nicene Faith for the first time when in exile; fourthly, he does not employ the concept of Eternal Generation in the *Commentary*; and fifthly, it must be admitted that in the *Commentary* there are several passages in which St. Hilary refutes ideas that formed part of the Arian theology.

²⁷ For a summary of that discussion, see Paul C. Burns, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1981), pp. 16–22.

speak of the Eternal Generation and even, contrary to *De Trinitate*, speaks of a twofold distinction in the existence of the *Logos*? At the same time, Galtier is perfectly aware just how crucial the concept of the Son's generation was to the Arian controversy, and that the Arians attempted strenuously to prove the non-Eternity of that generation:

Tout ce mystère se ramène et, au cours de la controverse arienne, on l'a ramené à la question de l'éternelle génération du Verbe. Aussi, pas plus que ne l'a fait saint Athanase, et qu'il ne le fera lui-même dans son *De Trinitate*, saint Hilaire, dans son *Commentaire*, ne se lasse d'en revenir là.²⁸

Galtier solves this problem by presupposing that St. Hilary, both in the *Commentary* and later in *De Trinitate*, as well, argues against the Arian teaching by means of the concept of the Eternal Generation of the Word. However, he does not offer any clear and convincing arguments for such a solution. His entire reasoning is rooted in the fact that the concept of the Eternal Generation of the Son naturally ensues from the fact of the Son's eternal existence. According to St. Hilary, the Son is of the same substance (*eadem substantia*) as the Father, and, in *Commentary* 16.4, he speaks of the Eternity of the Son and of the Father. From these facts Galtier concludes, "Ils [les Ariens] sauraient en un mot que l'éternité est la même pour le Père et pour le Fils. Affirmation dernière qui, à elle seule, exclut l'idée, pour le Fils, d'une antériorité quelconque à sa naissance."²⁹ His exposition ends as follows:

Saint Hilaire, par conséquent, exclut, pour le Fils, l'idée de deux instants distincts et successifs, entre lesquels se placerait sa génération proprement dite. Cette conception qui avait été celle de Novatian, lui est totalement étrangère.³⁰

In line with our explanation, in the first part of this essay, of the con-

²⁸ *Saint Hilaire de Poitiers*, p. 28. ("This whole mystery comes down to, and, in the course of the Arian controversy, was brought down to, the question of the Eternal Generation of the Word. As well, no more than did St. Athanasios, and no more than he himself will in his *De Trinitate*, does St. Hilary, in his *Commentary*, allow himself to lay it aside.")

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31. ("In short, they [the Arians] would have known that Eternity is the same for the Father and for the Son. This last affirmation, in and of itself, excludes the idea that, for the Son, there is anything anterior to His Birth.")

³⁰ *Ibid.* ("Consequently, St. Hilary excludes, for the Son, the idea of two distinct and successive instants, between which His generation, properly so called, would be inserted. This conception, which was that of Novatian, is totally foreign to him.")

cept of generation in the *Commentary*, it is obvious that we cannot agree with Galtier's interpretation. On the contrary, as we have concluded, St. Hilary employs the concept of generation in the *Commentary* in the same manner as his predecessors, Tertullian and Novatian. It is also not possible to agree fully with the proposition that the *Commentary* was written as a refutation of Arian teaching. The absence of the concept of Eternal Generation in the *Commentary* (a fact taken for granted by all of the scholars mentioned herein) is one of reasons we may conclude that St. Hilary's acquaintance with Arian teaching, when he was writing the *Commentary*, was limited. Galtier also fails to acknowledge that the concept of two stages in the existence of the Son and Word of God was standard in primitive theology; had he done so, he would have had to conclude that St. Hilary, like the majority of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, spoke of a non-eternal (i.e., non-Hypostatic) generation with reference to the Eternal Son.

We now turn our attention to another expert in Latin Patrology—also a Jesuit scholar—, Joseph Moingt, focusing especially on his lecture, “La théologie trinitaire de s. Hilaire,” given at a Conference organized on the sixteen-hundredth anniversary of St. Hilary's death. In the second part of his lecture, Moingt presents certain aspects of St. Hilary's Trinitarian theology and deals, among other things, with the question of the Son's generation, attempting to answer the question posed at the beginning of our essay, “Comment le Fils peut-il être éternel, s'il n'est pas éternellement né?”³¹ According to Moingt, it is necessary to seek an answer in the historical development of this question. We will outline only the main ideas of his presentation: In the second century and at the beginning of the third century, the Eternity of the Son is not mentioned, even though there is some notion of the Son's existence in God before the beginning of the universe. During this period, the Son's generation is conceived thusly: In the beginning, the Son proceeds from the Father, in order to create all things. In the third century, the Eternity of the Son is explicitly treated by Origen and Novatian, but the concept of *Nativitas* is not developed. According to Moingt, the *Commentary*, in which

³¹ Joseph Moingt, S.J., “La théologie trinitaire de s. Hilaire” (“The Trinitarian Theology of St. Hilary”) in *Hilaire et son temps: actes du colloque de Poitiers, 29 septembre–3 octobre 1968, à l'occasion du XVIe centenaire de la mort de saint Hilaire (Hilary and His Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Poitiers, September 29–October 3, 1968, on the Occasion of the Sixteenth Centenary of the Death of St. Hilary)* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1969), p. 162. (“How can the Son be Eternal if He was not Eternally Born?”)

the Eternity of the Son is mentioned without the mention of Eternal Generation, bears witness to this development, which he summarizes as follows: “Il y avait donc inadéquation entre cette conception de la naissance et l’affirmation de l’éternité du Fils. Arius dénonça cette contradiction: l’engendré ne peut pas être co-éternel a son principe.”³² The development of the concept of the Eternal Generation of the Son is completed, according to Moingt, when St. Hilary writes Books VIII through XII of his *De Trinitate*: “Ainsi était définitivement fondé le concept de l’origine éternelle du Fils.”³³

Moingt obviously repeats the mistake of Smulders, interpreting the concept of the generation of the Son in the *Commentary* through the prism of post-Nicene theology and presupposing that there was a single concept of generation that was gradually developed. He *likewise* does not realize that we have two *different* concepts of generation in the works of St. Hilary: the first one, set forth in his *Commentary*, is *not* eternal, since it relates to the œconomy of salvation wrought through the Divine Will; the second one, formulated by St. Hilary in *De Trinitate*, is eternal, because it relates to the origin of the Son’s Hypostasis in the Divine Nature. As we pointed out in the first part of our essay, in the *Commentary*, St. Hilary uses the concept of generation in the context of God’s activity *ad extra* in the œconomy of salvation, in which case the generation is a matter of will; in *De Trinitate*, however, St. Hilary shifts the context in which the concept of generation is used to that of the Eternal relationship between the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity, in which case the generation is a matter of Nature.

We have already demonstrated that the correct understanding of the generation of the Son in Ante-Nicene theology was not at odds with the assertion of His Eternity. There was, therefore, no contradiction for Ario[u]s to expose. The Arians deliberately suppressed the context in which the concept of the generation of the Son was employed by most of the Ante-Nicene Fathers; and then, employing the same terminology, they began to speak not only of how God interfaced with the world, but also of the origin of the Son’s Hypostasis from the Father. Yet, as we have also already demonstrated, the basis of Arian theology lay not in an

³² *Ibid.*, p. 163. (“Thus, there was a disparity between this conception of the birth of the Son and the affirmation of His Eternity. Arius, therefore, denounced this contradiction; what is generated cannot be coëternal with its principle.”)

³³ *Ibid.* (“Thus was the concept of the Eternal Origin of the Son definitively established.”)

inconsistency in the thought of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, who knew of no antithesis between the Eternity of the Son and His generation, since they did not apply generation to the Hypostatic origin of the Son; rather, the basis of Arian theology lay in its exploitation of the traditional terminology of primitive theology for the purpose of expressing their novel teaching.

By way of conclusion, we will examine the treatise, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew*, by Paul C. Burns, who deals with the problem of the concept of generation in the *Commentary* in chapter 2, entitled "Christological Implications of Trinitarian Theology." There, Burns states that, in the *Commentary*, the relation between the Father and the Son is described "in the traditional language of 'generation.'"³⁴ He sees an evident development from Tertullian to Novatian in the usage of that terminology. In spite of his awareness that "Tertullian related the full generation of the Son to the creation of the world," nonetheless, according to Burns, "Tertullian is influenced by an elemental subordinationism which he inherited from the Logos theology of the apologists."³⁵ He detects the cause of this "elemental subordinationism" in the fact that Tertullian, in chapter 3 of *Adversus Hermogenem*, asserts that there was a time when the Son was not,³⁶ and also in the fact that he presents "the generation in two stages."³⁷ With reference to the passage from the third chapter of Novatian's *De Trinitate*, which we quoted previously, Burns says of Novatian that he "makes a great contribution by freeing the idea of generation from the time of creation."³⁸ This conclusion is insupportable, however, for, as we have seen, in Novatian's work, generation is also clearly related to the Will of God and to His creation of the world. For example, recall this quotation from Novatian's *De Trinitate*: "He, then, when the Father willed it,

³⁴ Paul C. Burns, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew*, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁶ See *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. II, col. 200A. St. Dionysios of Alexandria also made this assertion in a similar context, during a discussion with Monarchians, but he was pressed by St. Dionysios of Rome to clarify his terminology. St. Dionysios of Alexandria defended himself as follows: "There certainly was not a time when God was not the Father. . . . For where there is the begetter, there is also the offspring. And if there is no offspring, how and of what can He be the begetter? But both are, and always are" ("Epistle to Dionysius Bishop of Rome ['Refutation and Apology']," Book I, *ANF*, Vol. VI, p. 92a).

³⁷ *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew*, p. 75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

proceeded from the Father. . . , that is to say, that divine substance whose name is the Word, whereby all things were made, and without whom nothing was made.”³⁹

Yet in his analysis of the concept of generation in the *Commentary*, Burns opines that, “Hilary has taken over Novatian’s view of the generation of the Son from the Father. It is used by Hilary to maintain the full equality of the Son with the Father against radical subordinationism.”⁴⁰ The assertion that St. Hilary uses the concept of generation “to maintain the full equality of the Son with the Father” is fundamentally incorrect. In his *Commentary*, St. Hilary draws a distinction between the relation of God the Father to creation and the relation of God the Father to His Son. Only the Son has *communio paternæ substantiæ*, meaning that the Father relates to Him on the basis of Divine Nature. St. Hilary’s main argument in support of the Son’s Divinity, in his *Commentary*, is based on the fact that the Son is of *eadem substantia* as the Father. In contradistinction to the Father’s natural relationship with the Son, His relationship to the world is volitional. Once again, St. Hilary’s *Commentary* speaks of the Father’s Will as the cause of the generation of the Son, since he categorizes the Son’s generation, together with the Incarnation and the Passion, as phenomena pertaining to the whole œconomy of salvation. Given St. Hilary’s volitional formulation of the Son’s generation, his *Commentary* could not possibly have been used as a tool against radical Subordinationism, as Burns supposes; rather, it would have been misappropriated by Subordinationists as entirely confirming their contention that the Father relates to His Son in exactly the same way that He relates to His creation.

Let us not forget that this is precisely how the Arians employed the concept of the generation of the Son of God, wanting to prove that the Son was a creature and not essentially Divine. Arianism equates the Begetting of the Son to the creation of the world, placing the Divine Generation in the same category as the latter. However, Burns admits, at the same time, that whenever St. Hilary treats with the Eternity of the Son, in the *Commentary*, he does not at all mention Eternal Generation. Burns considers this an inadequacy ascribable to a “lack of precision in Hilary’s expression.”⁴¹ Burns further ascribes this supposed

³⁹ *De Trinitate*, 31, *PL*, Vol. III, col. 950A. [ANF, Vol. V, p. 643b.]

⁴⁰ *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers’ Commentary on Matthew*, p. 76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

inadequacy to the influence of the *Logos* theology of the Apologists, and to the fact that, as he contends, St. Hilary “has not fully incorporated Novatian’s achievement into his own thought.”⁴² But as we have demonstrated, there is no inaccuracy in St. Hilary’s expression; rather, the problem is that Burns is ignorant of the meaning of generation in primitive, Ante-Nicene theology. Like the writings of Tertullian and Novatian, St. Hilary’s *Commentary* does not apply the concept of generation to the Son’s Eternity or employ it to prove His equality with the Father; on the contrary, these theological writings utilize the concept of generation to describe God’s activity *ad extra*—His interaction with the world within the framework of the œconomy of salvation. We, therefore, cannot agree that St. Hilary misused the concept of generation in his *Commentary*, only later to understand it properly and correct himself. Instead, we can only conclude that once St. Hilary had become fully cognizant of the misuse to which Arianism had subjected the term “generation,” he abandoned his conceptualization of the two stages in the *Logos*’ existence—which is how he employed “generation” in his *Commentary*—and adopted, in its place, the Nicene concept of the Eternal Generation of the Son of God.



⁴²

Ibid.