

# The will of him who sent me: An exploration of responsive intra-trinitarian willing.

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*A thesis submitted to the  
Australian College of Theology in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the award of  
Doctor of Theology*

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*Ridley Melbourne, 2011*

# Abstract

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Questions surrounding the operations of the divine will with regard to the Trinitarian life of God *ad extra* and *ad intra* feature in a range of contemporary discussions. This thesis presents the case for one possible model wherein divine willing is viewed as occurring according to the causal taxis of the divine persons, and where God's contingent action becomes the context for a real intra-trinitarian response from the Son to the Father. The Father, the Son and the Spirit have one will; but this will is 'the Father's will', which the Son receives and expresses as Son. This thesis focuses on the responsive intra-trinitarian willing of the Son.

In the first half of the thesis, this concept of responsive intra-trinitarian willing is defended as having a legitimate claim to orthodoxy. Its volitional and causal taxis is held to be consistent with pro-Nicene orthodoxy. Its depiction of the persons as distinct willing agents is tested against the dyothelitic theology of Maximus the Confessor. Its assumption of a special affinity between the Logos and creation (which gives rise to the incarnation) is shown to have precedent in the theology of key Western theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure.

In the second half, post-Reformation examples are supplied of a more strongly responsive intra-trinitarian willing which depicts the Son as accepting the free decisions of the Father, with (in some versions) the Father planning contingent reality for the glory of his Son. It is argued that this pattern can be seen to fit well with the themes of the Bible and is able to provide a rich and suggestive means of integrating anthropology, soteriology and trinitarian theology. Finally the proposed synthesis is used as a point of entry into three contemporary discussions on the Trinity: Hegelian, participationist and evangelical.

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# Abbreviations & Conventions

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## Abbreviations

Amb.	<i>Ambiguum/Ambigua</i>
ANF	A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe, <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325</i> ed. Schaff, Philip (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989)
ASV	American Standard Version
CA	<i>Contra Arianos</i>
CD	K. Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> , trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance, 4 volumes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1969)
CE	<i>Contra Eunomium</i>
CGent.	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
CMax.	<i>Contra Maximinum</i>
CQLS	<i>Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum</i>
DeFid.	<i>De Fide ad Gratianum</i>
DeRud.	<i>De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam</i>
DeTrin.	<i>De Trinitate</i>
DeInc.	<i>De Incarnatione</i>
DeSpir.	<i>De Spiritu Sancto</i>
DeSyn.	<i>De Synodis</i>
DisEnd.	<i>Dissertation Concerning the End</i>
FV	filial volition
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>

<i>Institutes</i>	J. Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill, 2 volumes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>Misc.</i>	<i>Miscellanies</i>
NCC	Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed
NIGCT	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NPNF	P. Schaff (ed), <i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. two series</i> , 28 volumes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Oratio</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion</i>
PG	J. P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae Graeca</i> , 162 volumes (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866)
PL	J. P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae Latina</i> , 217 volumes (Paris: Migne, 1844-1855)
RITW	responsive intra-trinitarian willing
RO	Radical Orthodox
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SQL</i>	<i>Sententiarum Quatuor Libri</i>
ST	social trinitarianism

- Summa*    *Summa Theologiae* (nb. Latin quotations from *Corpus Thomisticum*, (Navarre: Fundación Tomás de Aquino Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis, 2006) <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org>, (accessed September, 2009); English as cited)
- WJE        Works of Jonathan Edwards

## Miscellaneous Conventions

1. Unless otherwise noted all English Bible references are taken from the NRSV
2. Typically Greek words are not transliterated, though exceptions are made when the word is a technical term that is used frequently in modern theological discussion in transliterated form, for example: *arché*, *homoousios/homoiousios*, *hypostasis logoi/Logos*, *ousia*, *monarchy*, *perichoresis*, *tropos*. In general the rule here is that the terms are transliterated when discussed in abstraction but written in Greek when spoken of in the context of a particular Father's use of the term.
3. Transliterated Greek terms are generally italicised but not when they are adapted to English word forms: for example "*hypostasis*" is italicised but "hypostatic" is not.
4. Abbreviations for patristic works generally follow contemporary practice of removing words and indicating the break by a capital letter: thus *De Trinitate* becomes *DeTrin.*; *Contra Maximinum* is designated by *CMax.*.
5. All writers, dead or living, are spoken of in the present tense as regards their writing hence: Athanasius contends; Peter Lombard argues.

# Acknowledgements

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The thinking behind this project has been a work of decades: from a church Bible-study in the mid 1980s; to a series of essays, debates and online interactions during the first decade of the new millennium. Along the way many people have helped (and often forced!) me to think hard about the issues explored here: my former lecturer Dr Kevin Giles—whose energy and scholarship on this issue did much to compel me take up post-graduate study; conversation-partners Matthew Paulson and Mark Baddeley (currently at Berkeley and Oxford respectively) who greatly aided my attempts to explore the nature of orthodox trinitarianism in the early years of my research; long-time friends Andrew Prideaux and David Walter whose insights and encouragements provided catalysis and energy at crucial points along the way; Dr Jean Williams who provided invaluable feedback and proof reading in the final stages; and, of course, my ever-wise and patient supervisor, Dr Peter Adam of Ridley Melbourne—without whom I would never have reached this point. Thanks is especially due to my family. I remain thankful to my parents and siblings for their heritage of Christian thought and devotion to the Lord Jesus. I am grateful to my dear children, Emma and Jack, who offered many prayers for this project on my behalf and who were so generous in allowing me the time to study. Finally, beyond all telling, I am indebted to my beautiful Jenny; my strength, help and love. She has been God's greatest earthly gift to me through all this—and our marriage a sweet echo of the true wedding still to come.

*Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.*

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum.*



*I yearned to know just how our image merges  
into that circle, and how it there finds place;*

*but mine were not the wings for such a flight.  
Yet, as I wished, the truth I wished for came  
cleaving my mind in a great flash of light.*

*Here my powers rest from their high fantasy,  
but already I could feel my being turned—  
instinct and intellect balanced equally*

*as in a wheel whose motion nothing jars—  
by the Love that moves the sun and other stars.*

Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* 33.136-145<sup>1</sup>

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1 Dante Alighieri, *The Paradiso*, trans. J. Ciardi. *Signet Classics Series* (New York: Signet Classics, 2001).

# Introduction

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In the widely heralded rebirth of trinitarian theology since the second half of the twentieth century, the matter of how the divine persons relate in eternity has been a recurring issue. How does the Trinity, as it is revealed in the context of the human Jesus, connect with divine life outside creation? How “social” are the relationships within the Godhead? To what extent can the Trinity be used as a template for human social relationships?

These questions have generated important debates and seminal contributions in a number of different disciplines. In systematic studies, enquiries concerning the status of the immanent Trinity have generated a range of quite different theories of how God relates to the world.<sup>2</sup> In analytic philosophy the question of “social trinitarianism” has been related to the more fundamental problem of how the persons are one and three.<sup>3</sup> And, in Christian ethics and ecclesiology, the pattern of Christ’s obedience—and how it correlates to the life of God *ad intra*—has figured

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2 Some of these diverse viewpoints include the Hegelian idea that God’s own trinitarian life is in some way determined by salvation history or that God’s triunity is a correlate of his choosing to be God for us. Varieties of this approach occur in the works of Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson and (possibly) Karl Barth; see more on this in Chapter 7. Another broad trend in modern theology here is the return of Neoplatonism or exemplarism as espoused by Hans Urs von Balthasar—see, P. J. Casarella “The Expression and Form of the Word: Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Sacramentality of Language in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology” in *Glory, Grace, and Culture: The Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. E. Block (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2005), 37-65—or, more recently: D. B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); K. Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*. *Scottish Journal of Theology, Current Issues in Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

3 Able representations of both sides of this debate can be found in C. Plantinga “Social Trinity and Tritheism” in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. R. J. Feenstra & C. Plantinga (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) and K. Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity”, *New Blackfriars* 81.957 (November 2000): 432-445.

prominently (and contentiously) as a model for human relationships, within marriage, church, and society.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of divine will and willing has become an important sub-theme in each of these discussions. In systematic theology the problem is often posed in terms of whether God is free as regards the world.<sup>5</sup> In the philosophical realm, attention has been drawn to the threat to divine unity posed by the idea that the persons might be separate centres of volition (and conversely the spectre of modalism that might arise where volitional distinction is rejected).<sup>6</sup> And for those interested in the social implications of trinitarian theology, attention has focussed on whether the individual persons relate in a hierarchical fashion, and what such a taxis might say about the equality of those occupying the “subordinate” position (ie. the Son and Spirit).<sup>7</sup>

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4 Various applications of this approach occur across the major Christian traditions, with different trinitarian models being invoked to support hierarchy or equality in society, church or marriage. One important example in the context of ecclesiology is the disagreement between Miroslav Volf and Joseph Ratzinger; M. Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 67-72. A parallel discussion occurs within evangelicalism where the analogy between the Trinity and gender relations. For initial overviews see R. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), 479-496; M. J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity?: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009) and F. Sanders, *The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology*, trans. Nov. 18, 2004), 13-16.

5 For helpful surveys (for and against, respectively) see: T. Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*, 1st edition (Louisville: Westminster, 1993), and P. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

6 Fairly pronounced examples of each tendency might be seen in Richard Swinburne's somewhat theogonist characterisation of the three persons as “Gods”—R. Swinburne, “Could There Be More Than One God?”, *Faith and Philosophy* 5.3 (1988): 225–241, 232-233—and Brian Leftow's insistence that the triune persons represent a single “trope”; B. Leftow “Anti Social Trinitarianism” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall & G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204.

7 The most notable prosecution of this case from an egalitarian perspective can be found in the work of Anglican clergyman, Kevin Giles. See his two major volumes on the topic: K. Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 2002-09) and K. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

Against the backdrop of these discussions there is, I believe, a need to subject the topic of trinitarian willing to greater scrutiny in historical, biblical and systematic perspectives. Certainly there have been isolated historical studies that attend to the question of divine will in various theologians.<sup>8</sup> And indeed divine filiality (including filial “obedience” or responsiveness) has played a significant part in modern exemplarist/Neoplatonist theology.<sup>9</sup> Yet these are generally not brought into contact with the disputes listed above. Nor do they directly address the modern shibboleths of the contemporary theological scene which are likely to render them as beside the point.<sup>10</sup>

I will suggest too in this thesis that there are traditional resources in this debate that have not been properly brought to bear in modern discussion: first because they have not been properly understood by some modern theologians—I am thinking here of the basic structure of pro-Nicene trinitarianism; and, second, because the proposals or insights might be overlooked as obscure or overly speculative—thus, for example, the Medieval doctrine of *rationes*, or the Reformed covenant of

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8 For example: E. P. Meijering “The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus” in *God Being History: Studies in Patristic Philosophy*, (New York: American Elsevier Pub. Co, 1975); G. Pelland, “La “Subjectio” du Christ Chez Saint Hilaire”, *Gregorianum Roma* 64.3 (1983): 423-452; I. A. McFarland, “Willing is not Choosing: Some Anthropological Implications of Dyothelite Christology”, *IJST* 9.1 (2007): 3-23; D. Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

9 Although I will explain these terms more fully in Chapters 2 & 3 the key idea is that the Son’s natural derivation from the Father (as Image or Logos) becomes the template and or form of creation’s contingent birth. The preeminent exponent of this ancient tradition in modern era is Hans Urs von Balthasar, though the general pattern finds diverse forms (see Chapter 6).

10 And in some cases such expositions of intra-trinitarian willing have themselves been subject to sharp criticism. The modern critique of the Reformed covenant of redemption (see Chapter 5) or the hostile reception of von Balthasar by the likes of Alyssa Lyra Pitstick—see A. L. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 299-308 and John Milbank—eg. J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005) 77.

redemption. There remains a need to correct the record in the case of the first, and to bring the second into the conversation.

This thesis represents an attempt to meet these needs. My overall strategy is to defend and flesh out a carefully circumscribed model for divine willing and inter-personal contingent action. But initially, my question is simply whether it is legitimate for orthodoxy to posit any kind of volitional distinction of taxis to the divine persons. To this end I will conduct some soundings in historical theology to clear away some modern misconceptions and more closely outline what might or might not be permissible for an orthodox theory of intra-trinitarian willing. The structure of my argument in the first half of the thesis is as follows:

*Chapter 1.* I will examine the matter of the Father's monarchy (ie. his causal priority as regards the Son and Spirit) and challenge contemporary attempts to downplay it. I will argue that pro-Nicene<sup>11</sup> theology cannot be understood apart from a strong and literal sense of paternity<sup>12</sup> and, furthermore, that this structure was an important ground for the orthodox Fathers' understanding of how the Father and the Son could have "one will". Just as the Son is God by virtue of his filiality, so he has the Father's will by virtue of that same relationship: his will is *filial volition* (FV).

*Chapter 2.* Through an examination of the dyothelitic theology of Maximus the Confessor, I will attempt to forestall the idea that orthodoxy

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11 I will discuss the meaning of this term in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that it signifies the general orthodox consensus arising out of the trinitarian debates of the fourth century.

12 This reference to "literal" begetting should not be taken as anthropomorphic. As we shall see in the next chapter, the orthodox Fathers take the pattern in either an analogical (human fathering is a copy of divine) or univocal sense (there is a common essence to both divine and creaturely begetting) but hedge both around with negation and clarification.

is inimical to any inter-personal willing between the divine persons who share the one will. I will press the point that the concept of “natural will” should not be taken to *exclude* personal responsiveness on the part of the Son and, furthermore, that the Maximian concept of *logoi* (eternal forms) implies a theory of divine decision which might be cast in terms of paternal initiative and filial response.

*Chapter 3.* Here I will trace out some of the themes emerging from Medieval European theology to qualify some misconceptions concerning the nature of “Western” trinitarianism. I will supply evidence of the enduring vitality of pro-Nicene patriarchy in the Western despite the unipersonalist heritage of Augustine. I will also show how one major theme in the scholastic milieu makes intra-trinitarian taxis *the* structuring principle for the creation and incarnation. I will also take a close look at how key doctors understand contingent willing as regards the divine persons.

*Chapter 4.* Next my attention will switch to more positive matters. Drawing on Post-Reformation sources (and one Counter-Reformation source), I will present a positive case for intra-trinitarian willing that is responsive as well as filial. The theory I will commend proposes that, in relation to contingent action, divine decisions might be seen to begin with the Father and be embraced by the Son in line with the order of subsistence. I will contend that the kind of responsive intra-trinitarian willing (RITW) imagined by John of the Cross or Jonathan Edwards is an orthodox speculation that enables a rich and attractive vision of salvation history.

*Chapter 5.* Having thus laid out the completed form of my proposal and defended it as a possible expression of orthodox theology, I show how the

model aligns with the themes of the Bible. I argue that the pro-Nicene taxis of divine persons accords well with the picture that emerges from the Fourth Gospel and the letters of Paul. Probing deeper, I will argue that the interlocking themes and typologies that inform New Testament anthropology and soteriology also fit with the patriarchal/filiocentric vision of salvation history outlined in Chapter 5. I will make the case that a carefully drawn theory of RITW can be powerfully integrative and can avoid the charges that might be brought against it.

*Chapter 6.* Against objections that the *filioque* and sending of the Spirit by the Son disrupt paternal priority and show alterations to intra-trinitarian relations, I conduct a brief survey of alternative pneumatological models. I suggest that there are good biblical and historical reasons to view the second and third persons as co-processional (at the *ad intra* level), and that this can help us understand how the Spirit and Christ operate during Christ's earthly sojourn. I will also demonstrate that a radicalised Spirit Christology can enrich our understanding of the church's standing.

*Chapter 7.* I conclude by showing how RITW can throw light on a number of contemporary discussions. I compare my own model of divine "history" with other modern Hegel-influenced models, and also make some general observations concerning the recent renewal of interest in the concept of Neoplatonist participation. I reflect on the state of the current Evangelical debate over filial obedience; and discuss the contemporary practice of using trinitarian relations as a template for human relationships.

## ***Some Preliminary Statements***

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The daunting reality for anyone seeking to explore the question of how the eternal Son relates to the Father is that it very soon becomes apparent that this problem is inextricably linked to many others. What bearing does the Son's filiality have on *this* matter—and what is that filiality anyway? How does it relate to Christ's human nature and relationship with God? My argument in this thesis is that filiality is the Son's way or "mode" of being divine,<sup>13</sup> and that both the Bible and important voices in church history testify, not only to the *fact* of God's unity and plurality, but that this unity and plurality hold together in the patriarchy of God the Father. As Augustine writes in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1:

In the Father there is unity (*unitas*), in the Son equality (*aequalitas*), and in the Holy Spirit, a harmony of unity and equality (*unitatis aequalitatisque concordia*). And the three are all one because of the Father, all equal because of the Son, and in harmony because of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

In the next chapter I will contend that the patriarchy, equality and unity implicit in this statement are the essence of the pro-Nicene consensus of

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13 I do not mean by this that he is only a mode or mask of the one person "God" as *per* Sabellianism, simply that there are different ways the Father and Son have their common divinity (ie. "are God"). "mode of subsistence", which I will employ in this sense now and again, is a translation of *τροπος ὑπαρξεως*—that phrase associated with (but not much used by) the Cappadocians: cf. J. Farrelly, *The Trinity: Rediscovering the Central Christian Mystery* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 87 and R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 692. In later theology we find Jonathan Edwards and using "manner of subsisting" —J. Edwards, *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html>, (accessed March, 2008) (see below)—and Karl Rahner speaking similarly of "distinct manners of subsisting" (*distinkten Subsistenzweisen*); K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (London: William Clowes & Son, 1970), 109-117. Karl Barth similarly speaks of "*Weisen*" of being/existence for which Bromiley and Torrance render "mode"; CD 1/1:360.

14 Latin and English Translation from Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. R. P. H. Green. *Oxford Early Christian texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 16-17.

the fourth century:<sup>15</sup> God is one, because the Father is God; three, because the Son and Spirit are exactly like him and have all he has; and undivided, because this equality is neither coordinate nor partitive but derivative, continuous and unbroken. And everything we might say about God is true in this way. The divine power is first *the Father's power*, which is also possessed personally (hypostatically) by the Son without this signifying two powers (two *ousias*). The divine wisdom is from the Father, occurring again in the Son in an unbroken unity of knowing. And the divine will is that set of desires which is first in the Father, and reiterated in the Son via his eternal “birth” (begetting)—possessed in perfect unity and harmony.<sup>16</sup>

It is this last point that is most significant for this thesis. If there is a modality wherein the Son possesses a will that is the Father's but also his own (I will call this *filial volition*—FV), then there is also some congruence between that modality and the conformity of will we see in the life of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> To establish this, I will refer to a persistent theological tradition

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15 Readers may legitimately protest that the synthetic role played by the Spirit in this (apparently proto-Hegelian) dialectic is an Augustinian (filioquist!) innovation and seems to serve the same purpose as the essence in pro-Nicene theology—see H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-logic: The Spirit of Truth*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 54. My intent here, however, is not to address pneumatological issues nor to explain exactly what the unifying element *is* (Essence or Spirit) but simply to provide a neat exemplification of what I see as the pro-Nicene tension: monarchy, equality, unity.

16 This raises questions about whether the “divine will” should not also be held to include the volitional centre—the existential experience of wanting. I have perhaps made it sound here like the Father and Son like two individuals who like the same thing by virtue of their common nature (like two humans having the same attitude to fresh air). Is this correct? We will examine the matter more closely in Chapter 2.

17 For example Anne Hunt summarises Paschal-oriented theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, François Durwell and Ghislain Lafont thus:

His obedience is grounded in his divine personhood ... [his] mission, which he fulfills by his obedience, is properly his own. It is not given to the Son accidentally but as a modality of his eternal personal being and as the extension into creation of his procession from the Father.

A. Hunt “Trinity and Paschal Mystery: Divine Communion and Human Conversation” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. J. Haers & P. d. Mey.

that regards the Son's filiality as in some way archetypal of his incarnation (and creation in general). I will also indicate specific cases where the "obedience" of Jesus has been applied in an analogical sense to the relationship between the Father and the Son in eternity.<sup>18</sup>

I also intend to present a more difficult case here. I will argue that it is legitimate also to speak of the Son as not simply possessing the Father's will in reiterative unity but *actively receiving* it; both in his incarnate life, and in his life as Son. In other words, there is an ordered and *responsive intra-trinitarian willing* (RITW) that might also be seen as an expression of FV and which itself gives rise to the obedience of Christ on earth.<sup>19</sup> RITW means that the Son is not simply begotten with the Father's preferences in eternity, he also—in a limited way—takes them on himself as coming from another *hypostasis* as an adjunct to the unbroken unity of the *ousia*.

These brief statements encapsulate the objective of the first half of this thesis. The points I plan to defend are these:

1. That the divinity of the second person of the Trinity derives from his relation to the Father according to a pattern of filiality, equality and unity.
2. That this pattern also applies to, and defines, filial volition (FV).
3. That, in addition to this filial volition, there is also a responsive intra-trinitarian willing (RITW) that arises out of FV and becomes "obedience" in the context of the incarnation.

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*Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 80.

<sup>18</sup> To summarise the general point: the Son is to Christ as FV is to Christ's obedience.

<sup>19</sup> So Smail: "If purposeful initiation is the *proprium*, the defining hypostatic characteristic of the Father, *willing responsiveness* is the *proprium* of the Son"; T. A. Smail, "In the Image of the Triune God", *IJST* 5.1 (2003): 22-32, 29.

## ***Limitations***

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To cope with the difficult material and ambitious scope of this thesis it has been necessary to omit a number of areas of discussion that might have been included. Most conspicuous by its absence is any thoroughgoing treatment of the Holy Spirit: apart from a brief discussion in Chapter 6, I have confined my investigations to relations between the first two persons of the Godhead. This is primarily because the Bible simply does not treat the intra-trinitarian relationships between the Spirit and the other persons as an object of revelation in the same way it does the Father/Son bond. But also because it is the Son—and not the Spirit—who consistently depicted as recipient and respondent with regard to the Father.

Other omissions have been made in the areas of historical research; there is little attention given to pre-Nicene trinitarianism or to the protracted Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. These too are regrettable but considered decisions. In the first case, the reasoning is that post-Nicene trinitarianism is generally held to be more consistently anti-subordinationist and more authoritative than earlier theology, so that a case for RITW gains little from claiming precedent before Nicaea but achieves much more if it can find support from the Nicene Fathers themselves. In the case of the Christological debates, my hope has been that the monothelite issue can function as a way of addressing those aspects of the Antiochene/Alexandrian dipole which have closest bearing on the matter at hand.

Finally, evangelical readers may be dismayed to be dragged through such deep thickets of historical and systematic discussion before reaching the chapter on biblical theology. In that case, I would plead their

indulgence and assure them that this does not mean that my biblical theology is a post-justification of ideas gleaned from other sources. Although I believe there are many helpful things to learn from our antecedents in this discussion, it is also true that the structure of this thesis is less reflective of the way in which I came to my conclusions, than the objections I anticipate to them. If the biblical theology I advance is to avoid a *prima facie* condemnation as heterodox it will be necessary to first demonstrate what trinitarian orthodoxy actually is; and what it might or might not allow.

### **A Broad Synthesis**

Against the trend in much contemporary doctoral research, this thesis presents an argument that is synthetic rather than narrowly analytic. In line with the traditional conception of systematic theology, the aim is to explore and test a theological model in a number of different contexts—historical, biblical and rational<sup>20</sup>—rather than achieve total mastery in one precise area. This generalism is, of course both a weakness and a strength. If the reader is under the impression that what follows is anything like the last word on patristic or scholastic models for divine fathering; covenant theology; biblical anthropology, Neoplatonism or Hegelian trinitarianism then he or she will certainly be disappointed! But if it is recognised that this is a wide-angle work that seeks to show connections and commonalities between traditions and theological structures then the explanatory appeal of the overall system might be appreciable. The yardstick by which the thesis should be judged, is the degree to which it coheres and produces a credible *whole*; are the diverse

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20 In other words, the first three legs of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral. It is my hope that the last element, pertaining to existential experience should emerge in doxology as we observe the whole picture: its theocentrism, Christocentrism, and its rich anthropology.

studies that buttress the main argument convincing *enough* to constitute strong collective support?

I do not delude myself that my arguments at each point will persuade every reader. Nor, in many cases, would I contend that mine is the only legitimate way to understand God and the world—that would be to overstate my intent. What I am attempting here is, not to prove that RITW is “the one true version of orthodox theology”, but to set it forth as a possible scheme that is *at least* coherent, and demonstrably orthodox. If the overall model exercises a greater attraction to the mind of the reader then that is a welcome outcome, but not the standard by which the work should stand or fall.

# 1. Is the Priority of Paternal Will compatible with Pro-Nicene Orthodoxy?

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*It is no inconsistency, therefore, that the Father alone is the source and origin of the divine will, while nevertheless the Son himself personally wills the same. The Arians' proof for the Son's subordination, his obedient work, itself becomes now the mystery of oneness of will ... the Son in his entire filial existence absorbs the entire will of the Father.*

—Christoph von Schönborn<sup>21</sup>

## ***Introduction***

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If the concept of divine filiality and filial volition on which I am basing my thesis is to be considered orthodox, it will have to be tested against the conclusions of the fourth century Fathers. They, more than any who went before or after them, were forced to face squarely the question of the Son's subordination. And it is they, through their labours and their production of the great creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople, who retain the right to be treated as expert witnesses.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, I also believe that fourth century theology is the most promising place to begin a defence of RITW. The orthodox Fathers moved toward a general consensus, finally formalised

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21 C. von Schönborn, *God's Human Face: the Christ-Icon* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 38.

at Constantinople in 381 [a consensus I will call “pro-Nicene”<sup>22</sup>], which involved the idea that the Son receives the divine nature from his Father. In this chapter I will show that this causal or derivational relationship was also seen by the Fathers to include the divine will; the result being that the Son can truly be said to “do the Father’s will” in every action he performs. This by itself is not full-blown RITW—the “R” (responsiveness) in the acronym implies something more active on the part of the Son—but it is certainly FV and might prepare the way for RITW.

## ***Father as Principium in Ancient and Modern Theology***

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But already this is moving too quickly. To suggest that pro-Nicene theology was in some way *built* on the concept of the Father as source or cause is far too strong a statement for many modern theologians. In both popular writing and systematic theology it is commonplace to read that Nicene theology eliminated “all forms of subordination”;<sup>23</sup> or that Nicaea and Constantinople *almost* succeeded in establishing the equality of the persons but that a root of subordinationism remained in the orthodox

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22 I am using a term that has been recently been given a particular scope in the writings of Michel René Barnes and Lewis Ayres—see for example M. R. Barnes “The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. L. Ayres & G. Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 47-67, and L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 236ff—to mean that shape of theology which crystallised out of the post-Nicaea skirmishes of the 360s-380s, rather than just that which informs Nicaea itself. I think this is a generally helpful way of approaching the fourth century disputes (see below) though I also believe there is a common thread (namely the connection of the *homouosion* to fatherhood) that runs through all the orthodox theology from Alexander to Constantinople.

23 So D. S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian theology. Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 112; D. G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love. Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 174 (Bloesch also suggests that subordinationism persists in Athanasius and that there is an orthodox form); Barth CD 1/1.382.

tradition in the doctrine of divine begetting;<sup>24</sup> or that Athanasius succeeded in promulgating a genuine equality between the persons in contrast to the Cappadocian Fathers who undermined the principle with their insistence on the Father's monarchy;<sup>25</sup> or that the Cappadocians succeeded where Athanasius fell short.<sup>26</sup> The fact that these claims tend to refute one another merely serves to highlight the fact that the modern temper is very much against *any* prioritising of the Father over the Son and Spirit and that many contemporary theologians are convinced that any such causal or derivational order should be thought of as mere historical detritus.

As one might expect, things are a little more complicated with regard to academic literature which focuses more closely on the fourth century. Yet here, too, there is a tendency to minimise the idea that the equality of the Son is founded on his derivation from the Father. Preferred readings of fourth century orthodoxy depict a view in which the divine essence *itself* gives rise to the Son; or in which the begetting of the Son by the Father takes place *within* the logically prior essence such that the begetting itself is not the basis of the consubstantiality.<sup>27</sup>

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24 For example P. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51-52; M. J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 299, 309; E. A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 194-197; L. Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity. The Croall Lectures 1942-1943* (London: Nisbet, 1944), 102.

25 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 182-183; W. J. La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 90; W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 3 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1.279-280.

26 For example R. E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 172-173. Olson writes; "Athanasius held on to a relic of subordinationism by affirming the 'monarchy of the Father' ... he laid the foundation and others—namely the Cappadocian Fathers—built on it". See also A. Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 98-101.

27 An alternative form occurs in N. G. Awad, "Between Subordination and Koinonia: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology", *Modern Theology* 23.2 (April 2007): 181-204, 190,

## Dividing the Persons in Modern Patristics

A key instigator of this line of interpretation is E. Meijering. In research published in the late 1960s and '70s analysing the theology of Athanasius (c.295-373) and Gregory Nazianzen (329-390), Meijering seeks to demonstrate the points of contact and divergence between the theology of these Fathers and Platonic philosophy. In an early monograph,<sup>28</sup> he observes that Athanasius uses Platonic forms of language and arguments to show the connections between the created order and the divine Image and Logos/Reason from whom that creation is derived.<sup>29</sup> Yet, he adds, Athanasius also completely overturns Greek philosophy by making the divine Sonship an immutable aspect of God's essence<sup>30</sup>—thereby negating the inherent hierarchical subordinationism found in the teaching of both Platonism and Origen.<sup>31</sup>

In a later essay Meijering returns to similar territory,<sup>32</sup> wondering about the apparent inconsistency in Athanasius' Origenistic (so Meijering argues<sup>33</sup>) depiction of the Father as the ἀρχή (*arché*) and ἀιτία of the Son

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193. Awad argues that the persons constitute the Godhead/essence by their *koinonia*. This construal of relationship-as-being has strong affinities with the views of John Zizioulas (see for example J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and The Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985) 39-41), although Awad is at pains to disprove Zizioulas' version of Cappadocian theology in which the Father is the source of divine equality in the Son and Spirit. We will return to Awad below.

28 E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius. Synthesis or Antithesis*, corrected reprint edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974). This is a corrected version of the same work released in 1968.

29 Ibid., 118-119.

30 Ibid., 124-126.

31 Ibid., 129-131.

32 E. P. Meijering "Athanasius on the Father as Origin of the Son" in *God Being History: Studies in Patristic Philosophy*, (New York: American Elsevier Pub. Co, 1975), 89-102.

33 Examination of the context of those passages where Meijering sees the rejection of ἀιτία (CA 2.53, 54, 62) indicates that he has missed the sense of Athanasius' argument. In both cases the issue is not the causal relationship between Father and Son but the "reason" (as Newman correctly translates it in NPNF), for the Son being called "Son" or "Word" or "Radiance". In contrast to the words of Hebrews 2 or Proverbs 8, which speak of those titles as being *achieved* in salvation history (τὴν εἰς ἡμᾶς αὐτοῦ κατ' εὐρεγεσίαν γενομένην ἀνανέωσιν)—CA 2.53.1, 1 in Athanasius, *Athanasius: Werke*, ed. H.-G. Opitz & M. Tetz (de Gruyter, 2001)—

and his occasional *rejection* of the same terminology.<sup>34</sup> Having pointed out that Athanasius' varied attitude to ἀρχή can be explained by the fact that the word can mean both "eternal origin" (which Athanasius accepts) and "temporal beginning" (which he rejects); Meijering then puzzles over the apparent variation in the use of αἰτία and the logical problem its occasional affirmation seems to present. He writes:

How can it then be explained that Athanasius, knowing that causality implies superiority and inferiority, calls the Father the cause of the Son and nevertheless rejects any inferiority of the Son to the Father?<sup>35</sup>

Meijering's suggested answer is that Athanasius uses causation and origination between the Father and Son to provide a means of ontologically unifying the persons.<sup>36</sup> Because "the Son is the offspring of the Father's οὐσία ... there is only one divine οὐσία and one divine ἀρχή is the origin of the son". The Trinity is the ἀρχή and simultaneously "within this ἀρχή" the Father is the ἀρχή of the Son,<sup>37</sup> thus excluding "any divine hierarchy".<sup>38</sup>

To Meijering this drawing together of intra-trinitarian causality and equality is an unexpected Hegelian synthesis of irreconcilables.<sup>39</sup> And he contrasts this with what he regards as a less impressive achievement

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these other terms (ἀπαύγασμα—CA 2.53, 20ff; Λόγος—CA 2.54, 10; μονογενὴς Υἱός—CA 2.62, 23) are spoken μένης αἰτίας, ἀλλὰ ἀπολελυμενος (CA 2.62, 23). In other words, there is no additional αἰτία required for him to be so called because these are simply what he is.

34 Meijering, *Father as Origin*, 95-100.

35 Ibid., 95.

36 Ibid., 99.

37 Ibid., 96.

38 Ibid., 99.

39 Ibid., 100.

from Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>40</sup> Emphasising the differences between Athanasius and Gregory's views on the relationship between the Father's will and the Son's begetting,<sup>41</sup> and picking up those passages where Gregory writes that the Father is "greater" on account of being the cause of the Son,<sup>42</sup> Meijering concludes that Gregory is here influenced by Platonism and has been forced into a "logically untenable" position by "maintaining that the Father is the cause ... and in this respect 'greater' than the Son while at the same time stressing that the Son is not only co-eternal but also *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father".<sup>43</sup> Gregory's repeated pronouncements that the Son is *naturally* equal with the Father who begets him do not secure him the same respect that Meijering accords Athanasius, but merely compound the contradiction.<sup>44</sup>

Meijering's belief that the Fathers might be sorted according to sound and unsound theories of paternal causation persists amongst subsequent scholars, albeit with rather different conclusions. T.F. Torrance, for example, sees Gregory in the same terms as Athanasius, judging his theology to be a decided advance on that of Basil of Caesarea (330-379).<sup>45</sup>

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40 Meijering, *Doctrine of the Will*, 229ff.

41 Ibid., 227-228, 232.

42 Ibid., 229-230.

43 Ibid., 232-233.

44 It is worth noting that Meijering regards Hilary of Poitiers in a similar light, though his treatment is much less hostile. In his later work E. P. Meijering & J. C. M. van Winden, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: De Trinitate 1, 1-19, 2, 3*. vol. 6. *Philosophia Patrum* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 184, Meijering writes of the "striking similarity" between Hilary's Tertullian-influenced subordinationism and the Cappadocian mixing of "Athanasian orthodoxy with the subordinationist views of Origen".

45 See T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West*, American edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 32-40; Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, 178ff. For a more recent presentation of arguments similar to Torrance's see Awad, "Subordination and *Koinonia*", 190, 193. Awad suggests that, in contradistinction to Basil, Gregory might be seen to be offering a *koinonial* model wherein the three persons together "constitute" the *ousia*.

While Basil (and Gregory of Nyssa—c.335-394)<sup>46</sup> imply an unacceptable hierarchy of deity by making the Father's *hypostasis* the ἀρχή and αἰτία of the *ousia*, Son and Spirit, Gregory follows Athanasius, who regarded such views as bolstering the “Arian deviation”.<sup>47</sup> Instead of the *monarchy* of the Father,<sup>48</sup> Torrance claims to find in both Gregory and Athanasius a nascent *perichoretic* conception of the *ousia* as “being in its internal relations”;<sup>49</sup> the persons “mutually containing and interpenetrating one another ... [to] constitute a perfectly homogenous communion”.<sup>50</sup> Thus he writes that:

... the inner trinitarian order [of Father, Son, Spirit] does not apply to the Deity or the Being of the divine persons which individually and all together have absolutely in common, but only to the mysterious economy which they have among themselves as persons within the unity of the Godhead. ... [Gregory Nazianzen] did not share the view of St Basil or his brother Gregory [of Nyssa] that the unity of God is ensured by tracing it back to the Father as the one underived Person, but insisted that the whole Trinity ... is the Principle (Ἀρχή) of the Oneness of the Godhead.<sup>51</sup>

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46 Torrance seems to regard Gregory of Nyssa in a more positive light in earlier writing—eg. T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 240—but later brackets him with his brother as promoting a “causal series” model of the Trinity; Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, 178.

47 Ibid., 181.

48 I will use this expression to signify the idea that the Father is the sole source (ἀρχή or *principium*) of divine life, not to signify that he is “king” of the Godhead.

49 Ibid., 182.

50 Torrance, *Reconciliation*, 33.

51 T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 136-138. Interestingly, Torrance here seems to have supplied us with *two different grounds* for divine unity: a monistically conceived “Deity” or “Being” which is “absolutely in common” beneath or behind the persons; and an economic *perichoresis* which arises out of their interactions. But as Colin Gunton asks, what are we to make of these formulations? If Torrance does not intend modalism—and Gunton is sure he doesn't—why deploy this

Whether this is an accurate characterization of either Athanasius or Gregory is a question to which must return below.

Beyond Torrance, two of the most influential patristic scholars of the last decade, Michel René Barnes and Lewis Ayres also divide the Nicene Fathers according to their theories of causation, though their divisions do not correspond with those of Meijering or Torrance.

For Barnes and Ayres the traditional description of the Arian controversy is over-simplistic and too reliant on the partisan accounts of Athanasius.<sup>52</sup> Rejecting the notion that Arianism was an “alien theology” which appeared, conspired, was briefly triumphant and then dispatched, Barnes and Ayres attempt to contextualise the controversy as a collision between theological trajectories that had been present within both the Eastern and Western halves of the empire for centuries.<sup>53</sup> Thus, instead of a clash between *heresy* and *orthodoxy*, they prefer to contrast those who emphasise the unity of God with those who stress the diversity,<sup>54</sup> or those who want to talk more about the difference between the Logos and God with those who emphasise their similarity.<sup>55</sup>

From within this modern historiographical framework Barnes and Ayres analyse the Nicene debates in terms of new developments and

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distinction between “unified being” and the persons which suggests it? See C. E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Essays Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 48.

For a more recent contributor to this tradition of Torrance see J. R. Meyer, “God’s Trinitarian Substance in Athanasian Theology”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59.1 (2006): 81-97.

52 Barnes, *Trinitarian Canon*, 53.

53 Ibid., 47. See a more detailed delineation of these strands in Ayres, *Nicaea*, 41ff, 78ff.

54 Barnes, *Trinitarian Canon*, 50-51.

55 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 41-42. This is not, of course, to deny that there are differences between Ayres and Barnes—though they are certainly very similar in their approach. For a comparison of their differences see M. R. Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 239-240, cf. *ibid.*, 169-172.

broad movements rather than a *return* to orthodoxy championed by individual theologians. Athanasius is thus regarded as less significant than those who come after him, and pro-Nicene theology is viewed as something that emerges after Nicaea.

But here too, questions of intra-trinitarian causality remain central. Barnes writes that Cappadocian theology—in particular that of Gregory of Nyssa—differs from that of Athanasius by not using

... ‘generation’ to ground a doctrine of ‘common nature’ or ‘one essence’ in the Trinity. Whereas Athanasius and his contemporaries use the doctrine of divine generation to prove that the Father and Son have the same nature or essence, Gregory uses generation as the basis for distinguishing the persons.<sup>56</sup>

Thus whilst those who supported Nicaea in the late 350s “argued that the language of Father and Son referred to a relationship in which the offspring has the same nature as the source”, Gregory retains the concept of causation, but simply as a way of guaranteeing that there is some difference between the hypostases.<sup>57</sup>

56 M. R. Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context”, *Modern Theology* 18.4 (2004): 475-496, 483. Of course one might protest that *both* the paradigms mentioned here serve to distinguish the persons.

57 Ibid., 483-484. Oddly, Barnes argues that the grounding of essential continuity in the filial relationship is a post-Nicene development. Nicaea, he argues, makes the “essence language” itself carry the burden of continuity, and makes it seem as if “Father” and “Son” refer only to the incarnation. No doubt there were some, such as Marcellus of Ancyra, who might have been inclined to take it this way, just as there were others such as Eusebius of Caesarea who were happy to misconstrue γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς and ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς as signifying only that God *himself* had created the Son. But it is rather difficult to believe that the majority of the 318 present could really have imagined that the essence language was *not* meant to be understood in terms of fatherhood and causation with words and phrases such as γεννηθέντα and μονογενῆ and θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός featuring so prominently. This is not simply “essence language”, it is a *conception* of continuity (or at least equality) based on a causal relationship. Yet Gwatkin may be correct in his suggestion that the ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας part of the creed was included to counter the Sabellian connotations of the

Ayres makes similar judgments both about Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and the drift of fourth century theology; arguing against those who would see the conflicts of the fourth century resolved by a restatement of “original Nicene” (principally Athanasian) theology.<sup>58</sup> Ayres produces three central tenets by which pro-Nicene theology might be characterised: (1) “the principle that whatever is predicated of the divine nature is predicated of the three persons equally and understood to be one”; (2) “clear expression that the eternal generation of the Son occurs within the unitary and incomprehensible divine being”; (3) “clear expression of the doctrine that the persons work inseparably”.<sup>59</sup> Following Barnes, Ayres insists that in “fully pro-Nicene usage ... the Father/Son relationship is used only to show that the persons are distinct because now the eternal generation occurs *a priori* within the unitary and simple Godhead”.<sup>60</sup>

### Historical Eisegesis?

Now, in responding to these various readings of fourth century theology, it is worth observing initially that there is something suspicious in the way these scholars all agree on the undesirable character of the paternal *monarchy* (at least in connection with the divine essence) while being at odds on *which* fourth century theologians are responsible for its mitigation. Given this peculiarity, we might permit ourselves to wonder if there is a little eisegesis going on here; the modern theologian *knows in*

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ὁμοούσιον, and that this phrase was removed in 381 because it was no longer needed; see H. M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, 2nd edition (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 39.

58 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 236-237. Ayres makes his argument here in conscious rejection of the theses that the Cappadocians simply burnished and refined Athanasius’ theology or that Cappadocian trinitarianism represents a decay of Nicene/Athanasian theology (as per Loofs, Harnack).

59 Ibid., 236.

60 Ibid., 236.

advance what a consistent trinitarian theology looks like and sets out to find it.

Our suspicions might be aroused still further when we observe that what is presented as *fully developed* or *consistent* trinitarianism turns out to look very much like the theology of Augustine<sup>61</sup>—or at least theology that might be labelled “Western”.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting that this characterisation of pro-Nicene theology involving the persons as subsisting “within” or “from” a single being has been promoted almost exclusively by modern (often postliberal)<sup>63</sup> Westerners and has received a much less enthusiastic reception amongst the Orthodox.<sup>64</sup> We might ask,

61 It is surely no coincidence that Ayres makes Augustine the quintessential pro-Nicene theologian; *ibid.*, 365.

62 This is not an attempt to defend the claim (typically associated with Théodore de Régnon) that the East begins with the persons (in some kind of social trinitarian scheme) while the West begins with the essence. As has been made clear in recent research, both the paradigm and its connection to de Régnon is problematic—see D. B. Hart “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the Vestigia Trinitatis” in *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. S. Coakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) and K. Hennesey, “An Answer to de Regnon’s Accusers: Why we should not speak of “his” paradigm”, *Harvard Theological Review* 100.2 (2007): 179-197. Yet, as we shall see in Chapter 3, there surely remains a strong kernel of truth in the observation that from Augustine on, there really is a tendency in the West to make the triune being the “God” to whom we pray and who might be called a “he” in some metapersonal sense.

Moreover the irony here is that those who have been most prominent in their criticism of the “de Régnon” thesis—Barnes and Ayres—are championing the very same division in different contexts. For them “East” becomes the earlier theology of Athanasius and Nicaea; “West” is true pro-Nicene theology as it is said to appear in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. A logical question to ask at this point is whether we might not expect these differences between Athanasius and Augustine to be reflected in the Greek and Latin traditions that cherish them? Unless we imagine that the East is ready to give Augustine the last word on Nicene theology over Athanasius (or happy to set Athanasius *against* Gregory of Nyssa) then it would be remarkable if the division observed by Barnes and Ayres did *not* give rise to an East/West division. In short, if they are right about pro-Nicene theology, we should expect them to be wrong about de Régnon.

63 See Hankey’s critical comments on postmodern Augustinianism (a bracket which he extends around Ayres); W. J. Hankey, *Re-Christianizing Augustine Postmodern Style: Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and John Milbank*, [http://www.mun.ca/animus/1997vol2/hankey1.htm#N\\_81\\_](http://www.mun.ca/animus/1997vol2/hankey1.htm#N_81_), (accessed February, 2010).

64 This is a generalization, of course, and is immediately challenged by Orthodox theologians such as David Bentley Hart and Nonna Verna Harrison who come close to this position. Yet here we might give heed to Alan Brown’s lament that sectors of (especially anglophone) Orthodox theology have been colonised by postliberal Anglicans who purport to find their own brand of Augustinian Thomism in the Fathers; A. Brown “On the Criticism of Being as

with John Behr, whether what we are seeing here “constitutes an appropriation of what [the Fathers] were doing by an Augustinian tradition of theology mediated through the categories of modern systematics”.<sup>65</sup>

Ironically, the diversity we have seen above means that the case in favour of a strong and (near) universal fourth century endorsement of the Father’s monarchy as the means of the Son’s equality with the Father is already half made. I agree with Barnes and Ayres that Athanasius and the Nicene creed both rely on the concept; *and* with Meijering that Athanasius also manages to deploy it without compromising the Son’s ontological equality. I also agree with Meijering that a similar commitment to the monarchy of the Father also appears in Gregory Nazianzen; *and* I agree with Torrance that Basil and Gregory of Nyssa are united in the same commitment.

## ***Questioning the Modern Trend***

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Before I develop my case further, however, I need to state as clearly as I can that what I am *not* trying to do is to put forward (or return to) a neat

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Communion in Anglophone Orthodox Theology” in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. D. H. Knight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). John Behr, despite himself being critical of the East/West cliché –J. Behr, *The Nicene Faith*. vol. 2. *Formation of Christian theology* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 414n27—protests that in Ayres’ hands “the de Régnon paradigm has been removed, not in order to allow these diverse writers to appear in their distinctiveness ... but rather to subsume their distinct voices within a particular (and particularly totalizing) discourse;” J. Behr, “Response to Ayres: The Legacies of Nicaea, East and West”, *Harvard Theological Review* 100.2 (2007): 145-152. See also Morwenna Ludlow here on the influence that ecumenical impulses might have on correct understandings of the Cappadocians; M. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 270.

<sup>65</sup> See Behr, “Response”, 145-146. In the same article he challenges Ayres’ nomenclature for the “triune God”, and restates the Eastern objection that such language sounds “distinctly modalist”; *ibid.*, 148.

unified terminology or conceptual rendition of the fourth century orthodoxy. Pro-Nicene theology *necessarily* holds in tension a number of different perspectives and modes of speech—some of which sound quite like those held up by Torrance or Barnes as “final”. As I averred briefly in my introduction, pro-Nicene theology is a tension of (paternal) monarchy, equality and unity. Whenever we express the *unity* aspect of this trialectic it will sound something like the kind of trinitarianism imagined (and seen as pro-Nicene) by the scholars just listed; the Father and Son occurring as relations within, or expressions of, the one undivided *being*.

And yet there are nonetheless problems with this form of expression. The idea that the Father Son and Spirit are relations *within a conceptually prior essence* and that the essence itself is not implicated in the processions suggests a framework that is rather alien to the pro-Nicene Fathers (at least before Augustine).<sup>66</sup> Rather we tend to find the reverse—that there is one essence/nature/godhead *in three persons*.<sup>67</sup>

### **Equality in the Father**

More typically, however, it is the Father who perichoretically serves this enclosing function in Athanasius and the Cappadocians. The Son is *in* the Father and is thus never severed from the Father’s nature; yet the Son is not simply *one* with the Father but *equal*, and in this sense has the

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66 Gregory Nazianzen comes closest to this unitary mode of speech (*Or.* 38.16; *Or.* 31.9, 15) under the terms of “godhead” (θεότης) or “nature” (φύσις), but not to the exclusion of paternal monarchy—as we will see below.

67 Athanasius (*CA* 1.18, 3.15); Gregory Nazianzen (*Or.* 28.31; *Or.* 33.16; *Or.* 34.9). As Harnack—A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. N. Buchanan (London: Williams & Norgate, 1905), 4.118—puts in relation to the Cappadocians; “We are to believe in one God, because we are to believe in one divine substance or essence ... in three distinct subjects or persons”.

Father('s nature) "in him". As Athanasius writes at length in *Contra Arianos* 3.1-6:

[The statement "I in the Father and the Father in Me"] is proper and suitable to a Son only, who is Word and Wisdom and Image of the Father's Essence (εἰκόνι τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας) ... For the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to him, as in the radiance the sun, and in the word the thought, and in the stream the fountain ... Accordingly when the Father is called the only God, and we read that there is one God, and "I am", and "beside me there is no God", and "I the first and I the last", this has a fit meaning. For God is One and Only and first; but this is not said to the denial of the Son, perish the thought; for he is in that one, and first and only, as being of that one and only and first the only Word and Wisdom and Radiance. And he too is the first, as the fullness of the Godhead of the first and only (τοῦ πρώτου και μόνου Θεότητος), being whole and full God.<sup>68</sup>

What should be immediately apparent from this is that Athanasius' version of trinitarian *perichoresis* does not mitigate the Father's monarchy but confirms it.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to modern egalitarian renditions of

68 Excerpts from 3.2, 3, 6 (NPNF 2.4.394-397; PG 26.325A-333C). Torrance strangely takes 3.3 as a denial that the "Son's Deity is originated by the Father" (Torrance, *Perspectives*, 63). Of course this is obviously right if we are talking about "two deities", but it is completely contrary to the meaning of the passage to turn this into the idea that "Father and Son together must be thought of as *principium*" with regard to the divine equality of the Son. Torrance indeed does have a point when he suggests that Gregory Nazianzen shows a greater willingness to reify and personify the triune being (see below). But to take this as a *denial* that the Son derives his essential equality from the Father is to read Calvin's idiosyncratic doctrine of *autotheos* back over Gregory (see Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 28-29 and, on Calvin, Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 252-268).

69 It is worth noting in passing that the same orderliness is intrinsic to the later theology of John of Damascus (676-749) who presents a *locus classicus* of perichoretic doctrine:

For we recognise one God: but only in the attributes of Fatherhood, Sonship, and Procession, both in respect of cause and effect and perfection of subsistence, that is,

*perichoresis*,<sup>70</sup> here there is a *direction* and an *asymmetry* informed by the principle that the Father is the source of all that the Son is, as well as an insistence on unity and equality because of the Father being fully *in* the Son.

Athanasius is not alone here. Basil writes to his brother of how the Son, existing in the Father eternally (ἀεὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὧν), can never be severed from the Father, adding that the Father is in the Son as a perfect form (μορφή) is beheld in a polished mirror.<sup>71</sup> Gregory in turn also agrees that the Father and Son are in the other in different senses (κατ' ἄλλην...ἔνοιαν). The Son is in the Father as the beauty of an image (εἰκόνας) partakes of its archetype (τῇ ἀρχετυπῶ μορφῇ); the Father is in the Son as the original beauty itself (πρωτότυπον κάλλος).<sup>72</sup> Later in the same work he argues that the very order (τάξις) of the Johannine (perichoretic) phraseology provides the interpretive key to orthodox dogma (εὐσεβὲς ἐρμηνεύει τοῦ δόγματος).<sup>73</sup> “I am in the Father” occurs first because the Father is not of the Son but the Son is of the Father; “the

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manner of existence, do we perceive difference ... the Son and Spirit being referred to one cause (εἰς ἓν αἷτιον), and not compounded or coalesced according to the synaeresis of Sabellius. For, as we said, they are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other (καὶ τὴν ἐν ἀλλήλαις περιχώρησιν) without any coalescence or commingling.

*De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.8; NPNF 2.9.11.

70 See for example L. Boff & P. Burns, *Trinity and Society. Theology and Liberation Series* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 137; C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st edition (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 270-271. Interestingly the modern version of *perichoresis* sounds very much like an idea that Athanasius condemns as irreligious: the idea that the persons are “discharged into Each Other, filling the One the Other, as in the case of empty vessels, so that the Son fills the emptiness of the Father and the Father that of the Son”; cf. CA 3.1.

71 *Epistolae* 38.4, 8 (PG 32.328C, 340C).

72 CE 1 (PG 45.445D, 447A).

73 CE 9 (PG 45.821A cf. NPNF 2.5.218).

Father is in me” is added to show the true and exclusive connection between the two.<sup>74</sup>

Hilary of Poitiers (c.310-368) returns to the language of John 17 more than any other of the Fathers, connecting it to the priority of the Father and the perfect equality (and “indistinguishable unity”)<sup>75</sup> of the Son in his sonship.<sup>76</sup> The “Father is in the Son” because the Son has nothing in himself (*nihil in se*) unlike the Father”; but the Son is in the Father because the Son is not from any other (*non est aliunde*): they “are” one but not “is” one through their similar and indifferentiable nature (*unum sunt ... per indissimilis naturae indifferentum ... ne unus sit*).<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere he develops the same theme in terms which Meijering would associate with subordinationism,<sup>78</sup> stressing the greatness of the Father *as Father* and the equality of the Son *as Son*:

The one is from the other, and the two are a unity; not two made one, yet one in the other, for that which is in both is the same ... not to dispute the Father’s powers or to depreciate the Son, but to reverence the mystery and majesty of his birth; to set the unbegotten Father above all rivalry (*nihil comparare*), and count the

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74 Ibid.

75 *Naturae indifferentis*; *DeTrin.* 7.22 (PL 10.218C).

76 *DeTrin.* 2.8, 10; 3.4; 7.24, 26-27.

77 *De Syn* 64, PL 10.524A. The Father is greater (*maiores esse*) because he is father, but the Son is not less because he is son. Although there is no superiority as to *genere substantiae*, nevertheless the Son is subject (*subjectum*), being born of the other’s nature (*nativitate naturae*). See also *DeTrin.* 7.31.

78 Meijering & van Winden, *Hilary*, 184. Meijering sees connections between Hilary and Tertullian here and notes similarities to the Cappadocians who “combine Athanasian orthodoxy with the subordinationist views of Origen”.

only-begotten Son as his equal in eternity and might, confessing concerning God the Son that he is from God.<sup>79</sup>

Of course Hilary does *not* mean to say here that the Father's incomparable supremacy excludes the Son. Rather, the first person is the greatness and supremacy which the Son *also possesses as son*. Hilary is thus using the same conceptual framework as Athanasius who, as we saw above, calls the Father the "one God" but immediately adds that this is not said to the "denial of the Son".<sup>80</sup>

This way of prioritising the Father yet including the Son *in* the Father should warn us to be careful about the way we read the patristic comments on the monarchy. Statements that make the whole Godhead one monarchy should not be set against the idea that the Father is also the *arché*. The logic of indwelling would imply that both can be true: the paternal monarchy—begetting and procession—gives rise to a united monarchy *vis á vis* creation. As Torrance correctly states, "the monarchy of the Father within the Trinity is not exclusive of the monarchy of the whole undivided Trinity in relation to the whole of creation".<sup>81</sup> Or, in the words of Basil:

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79 *DeTrin.* 3.4 (NPNF 2.9.63; PL 10.78A). Torrance manages to miss these parts of Hilary's text which explicate the verse he does cite (3.1): "One permanently envelopes, and is permanently enveloped by, the Other whom he yet envelopes"; Torrance, *Perspectives*, 120. Hilary's meaning certainly does not connote the kind of symmetry and mutuality that Torrance imagines.

80 And, of course, this is exactly how the creed of Nicaea is also structured. "We believe in one God, *the Father*" is followed immediately by the inclusion of the Son, the Lord, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί, "through whom" the world was created.

81 *Ibid.*, 120. The difficult question here is what exactly Torrance means by "Father". It is clear elsewhere that Torrance (like other Westerners) applies the designation "Father" to two different things; first the person who "considered relatively to the Son" and second to the "personal Being" of the one (triune) God "in himself" (see Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, 131). Torrance seems to think that it is only in the *second* sense that the Father can be called Ἀρχή or Μοναρχία. Although the person of the Father is considered "Father of the Son", this designation does not mean "that the Son is to be thought of as proceeding from the *person* of the Father" (see *ibid.*, 140-141). This is a little bizarre. Torrance's framework also means that

Worshipping as we do God of God, we both confess the distinction of the persons (ὑποστάσεων), and at the same time [stand fast] by the monarchy (μένομεν ἐπὶ τῆς μοναρχίας). We do not fritter away the theology (θεολογίαν—here connoting the *res ad intra*) in a divided plurality, because one form (μορφὴν), so to say, united in the invariableness of the Godhead, is beheld in God the Father, and in God the only begotten. *For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; since such as is the latter, such is the former, and such as is the former, such is the latter; and herein is the unity.* So that according to the distinction of persons (προσώπων), both are one and one, and according to the community of nature (κοιὸν τῆς φύσεως), one. How, then, if one and one, are there not two Gods? Because we speak of a king, and of the king's image, and not of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one; because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype.<sup>82</sup>

Exactly the same reasoning can be found in Athanasius' CA 4.1:

For the Word, being Son of the one God, is referred back to him of whom also he is (εἰς αὐτὸν, οὗ καὶ ἔστιν, ἀναφέρεται)<sup>83</sup>; so that

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it is just as true to say that the Son is his own Ἀρχή; or that the Spirit is the Ἀρχή of the Son; or the Son is the Ἀρχή of the Father. Since each of the persons can be considered "absolutely" as the one essence he can thus be designated "Father" (as the term refers to the divine being, cf. *ibid.*, 145) and can be referred to as the cause of any personal subsistence. It was to avoid just such absurdities as these that Medieval scholasticism prohibited the use of undifferentiated *essentia* language to speak of the processions: see Peter Lombard, *SQL* 1.5.1; Thomas Aquinas *Summa* 1a.39.5; Duns Scotus *Lectura* 1.5.2. (commentary on *SQL*)—thanks to Oxford research student J. T. Paasch for pointing this out in private correspondence.

82 *De Spiritu Sancto* 45 (NPNF 2.8.28; PG 32.149B). Emphasis added.

83 The last word here would seem to signify more than NPNF's "referred", having the connotation of being supported

Father and Son are two, yet the monad of the Godhead is indivisible and inseparable. And thus too we preserve one Beginning of Godhead and not two beginnings, whence there is strictly a monarchy.<sup>84</sup>

### **Beyond the Paternal Monarchy? The Case of Gregory Nazianzen.**

To challenge this we should thus need not only to find the words μοναρχία or ἀρχή applied inclusively to the Son and Spirit (which is easy enough for the reasons just given), but to adduce patristic texts which indicate something other than the Father (eg. the essence or Trinity) acting as source or cause as regards the *hypostases* themselves, or to find explicit denials that the Father is the *arché*.

As to denials of the Father as *arché* there are, as far as I can tell, simply none in fourth century pro-Nicene theology. There are certainly statements that the Son is ἀνάρχου in terms of not having a *beginning in time* or a “new” essence different from the Father’s, thus rejecting the possibility that he might be a contingent addition to the Father.<sup>85</sup> But this

84 NPNF 2.4.433 (altered), cf. PG 26.468B. We will see the same idea emerging in Gregory Nazianzen’s Or. 29.2 below.

85 Two recently cited examples should be noted here. In CA 2.57 Athanasius argues that the Son has no beginning (οὐχ ἔχων ἀρχὴν τοῦ εἶναι) but exists without beginning (ἀναρχῶς ὑπάρχει) in the Father—as the Father himself exists without ἀρχή (PG 26.269A, B). Kevin Giles—Giles, *Jesus*, 138—argues that this denial that the “Son has an *arche*” arises out of Athanasius’ rejection of hierarchy within the Godhead. On this reading, however, Athanasius is simply incoherent for, as Giles notes, this same text also states that the Son has no other ἀρχή than the Father. The reconciliation is provided in the next verse (2.58) which states that the Son exists as γέννημα Υἱόν, οὐχ τινοῦ ἀρχῆς ἀρξάμενον, ἀλλ’ αἰδίον (my emphasis); he is caused with regard to the Father but ἀναρχή in with regard to time. See Meijering on the distinction between these two uses ἀρχή in Athanasius; Meijering, *Father as Origin*, 96.

Another challenge is provided by John Meyer (Meyer, “Substance”, 91) who cites Gregory Nazianzen’s concern that using the word τὴν ἀρχὴν might make him source of those who receive less (ἐλαττόνων) (Or. 40.43; PG 36.420B). Yet here again the context solves the problem. Gregory’s intention is certainly not to deny causal relations between the persons. He names the Father as the one from whom the equality of being derives (ἐξ οὗ ἴσοις εἶναι) and insists that this is universally accepted (πάντων δοθήσεται). Yet he is concerned that an

is not a denial that the Father has always been the source of the eternal Son.<sup>86</sup>

However, with regard to an alternative *arché* for the persons, there is one passage, often cited,<sup>87</sup> that might indicate this in Gregory Nazianzen. In his fifth theological oration (*Oratio* 31) Gregory parries the charge of tritheism by protesting that:

To us there is one God, for there is one Godhead (Θεότης), and all that is from him (τά ἐξ αὐτοῦ) has one ground (ἐν...ἀναφορὰν ἔχει), though we believe in three. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one first and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separation (ἀμέριστος ἐν μεμερισμένοις); and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other. When then we look at the Godhead, or the first cause (πρώτην αἰτίαν), and the monarchy, that which we picture in our minds (φανταζόμενον) is

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opportunistic hearer will seize on this word (see also *Or.* 39.12) to divide the nature (διχοτομήσης τὴν φύσιν). Consequently he stresses that greatness (μεῖζον) applies not to the nature (φύσιν), as if there were more than one, but only to cause (τὴν αἰτίαν), which is the Father. It is ironic that Meyer in his essay follows the very logic that Gregory is trying to guard against: assuming that if the Father is cause then there must be two essences resulting in either ontological subordination or tritheism (cf. *ibid.*, 89, 92, 96).

See the fuller discussion of this text and some similar verses in J. P. Egan "ἄρτιος/'Author', αἰτία/'Cause' and ἀρχή/'Origin': Synonyms in Selected Texts of Gregory Nazianzen" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXXII, *Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1997).

86 See for example *De Se Ipso* PG 37.1248.40 where the Father's status as root and source (ῥίζα καὶ πηγὴ) is followed by reference to the Son as eternal seal (σφραγισμα ἀναρχου).

87 For surveys of recent writing on the passage see C. Beeley, "Divine Causality and the Monarchy of the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus", *Harvard Theological Review* 100.2 (2007): 199-214 and J. P. Egan "Primal Cause and Trinitarian Perichoresis in Gregory Nazianzen's Oration 31.14" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXVII, *Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1991*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1993).

one; but when we look at those in whom the Godhead dwells, and at the ones who timelessly have their being from the first cause (τά ἐκ τῆς πρώτης αἰτίας ἀχρόνως ἐκεῖθεν ὄντα) with equal glory—there are three whom we worship.<sup>88</sup>

In this passage we apparently *do* see something much closer to the position held up by the likes of Ayres, Barnes and Torrance. In the first line, Gregory appears to begin by describing the Godhead itself as “God”—designated with a masculine singular pronoun.<sup>89</sup> In the last sentence it seems that *all three* derive their subsistence from this πρώτης αἰτίας—signifying a coordinate, rather than derived, equality for the Son and Spirit. In the same oration (31.9) he elsewhere speaks of three persons in one nature (τριῶν ὑποστάσεων ἐν τῇ μιᾷ φύσει)<sup>90</sup>—apparently signifying the model championed by modern patrology (that the persons occur within the essence).

But it is not *quite* the same. In verses 9-11 of the same work Gregory deals with the argument that either the Spirit is *another son* or he must be a second God—the implicit premise being that sonship is the only non-divisive type of consubstantiality. Gregory denies this premise, pointing out that even in the created world there is more than one mode of generation. He enumerates heterogenesis (where like begets unlike),

88 Or. 31.14; PG 36.147D, 149A. The translation is partly mine and partly from NPNF 2.7.322.

89 Beeley argues that consistency suggests that the τά ἐξ αὐτοῦ in the first line refers not to the essence but to God the Father; *he* is the “God” referred to in the first instance and the Godhead that begins with him but includes the other two: Beeley, “Divine Causality”, 210-211. This is certainly a possible reading of Or. 31.14 but it is less likely in the light of subsequent verses (28, 33) where Gregory does seem to personify the Godhead (not the essence) itself as an entity of worship. In the very final line he speaks of his desire to call others to worship “Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the one Godhead and Power. To him belongs all glory (αὐτῷ πᾶσα δοξα) and honour and might for ever and ever (31.33; NPNF 2.7.328, cf. PG 36.172B).

90 PG 36.144A.

metamorphosis (where a creature changes nature) and autogenesis (as seen in the phoenix), and then speaks of another case,<sup>91</sup> of which part is generated and part not, without any loss of consubstantiality (οὐ γέννημα, τὸ δὲ γέννημα, πλήν ὁμοούσια). This example, he notes, is most fitting (προσέοικεν) for the issue at hand. To take this to a final step, Gregory next (31.11) introduces the contrasting examples of Eve and Seth, who are shown to be consubstantial with Adam by different means. Eve shares in Adam as a piece (τμήμα) of him, and Seth shares by begetting; yet they are certainly all ὁμοούσια with each other and with the creature (πλάσμα) that is Adam. They are the same thing together (ἀμφότεροι ταυτὸν ἀλλήλοις) for they are all humans (ἄνθρωποι γάρ).<sup>92</sup>

Almost every one of these examples—and especially those Gregory emphasises as most useful—associates the idea of sharing of essence with origination. Seth and Eve share in the same nature as Adam because they are *from him*; in a similar way the Son and Spirit share in the Father's nature because they issue from him, one by begetting and the other by procession.<sup>93</sup> While causation does *not* apply to essence as if there were different essences generated by filiation and spiration, yet the essence is

91 31.10; PG 36.144C The object implied by τοῦ αὐτοῦ presumably means another “species” rather than individual substance as per autogenesis or metamorphosis.

92 A similar point is made by Ambrose who deconstructs the Arian use of 1 Cor 11.3 to argue that if the Son and Father are related as man and woman (though he himself makes the statement apply only to Christ's humanity) then they must be consubstantial; *DeFid.* 4.3.28.

93 We should note that Gregory uses a similar argument in the contemporaneous *Or.* 30.10 (380AD, see Gallay's dating in J. A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) x). Here the Son is called “Son” because he is identical according to essence (ταυτὸν...κατ' οὐσίαν) and because he is from that essence (ἐκκεῖθεν). Lest we think this corresponds to the theory that the Father's person is thus uninvolved, this is followed up by arguments concerning what it means for the Son to be the Father's Word and impress and offspring. Gregory writes that he is of the Father and the Father not of him (τοῦτο ἐκείθεν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκ τούτο Πατὴρ) and that the Son and Father correspond to type and archetype (living reproduction and Living One —ζῶτος και ζῶσα) and this in a way more precise or indistinguishable (ἀπαράλλακτον) than applies between Adam and Seth or any son to father (NPNF 2.7.316-317; PG 36.127A-129B).

associated with these causal relationships, for the commonality of essence is what arises from the begetting and proceeding.<sup>94</sup>

Given all this, it is just too neat to flag *Oratio* 31.14 as Gregory's departure from the views of Athanasius and the other Cappadocians. While Gregory does certainly evince a tendency to speak of the triune Godhead *itself* as an object of worship,<sup>95</sup> and may sometimes indicate that the divine Nature is even in some sense ontologically foundational to the persons,<sup>96</sup> he does not see this as incompatible with the causal priority of the Father in the way that many modern theologians do. Rather his thinking hovers between a generic view of the persons *and* a realist view of the essence.<sup>97</sup> If the first is in focus then the persons are equal—like

94 Beeley traces the theme through a swathe of Gregory's *Orationes* (including 41.9; 29.3; 30.16; 31.14, 30; 38.15; 42.15), justifying his claims that "Gregory's doctrine of divine causality is ... clear and consistent" and that the Father's monarchy is the "foundational principle of trinitarian logic" for Gregory (see Beeley, "Divine Causality", 204, 207-209).

95 "The one is praiseworthy (τὸ ἕν ἐπαινετὸν) if rightly understood; and the Three when rightly divided, when the division is of persons, not of Godhead (προσωπων...μὴ θεότητος)". (*Or.* 37.22; NPNF 2.7.344; PG 36.308B). See also *Or.* 31.33.

96 Hence Gregory's willingness to oppose the "one" (nature) with the "three" (persons) rather than simply the "one" (Father) and the other "two" derived from him (though he certainly speaks in the latter terms too). For Gregory the Father too is a subsistence as well as a source of the Son and Spirit's subsistences. In light of this I prefer Richard Cross' reading of *Or.* 31.14 which exemplifies a Neoplatonic depiction of universals as cause of particulars over against the view of Beeley who takes "the ones who timelessly have their being from the first cause" as referring only to the Son and Spirit (with the Father himself as the "first cause"); R. Cross, "Divine Monarchy in Gregory of Nazianzus", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14.1 (2006): 105-116, 105-116.

97 So he writes famously:

Each [is] God because consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia (ἐκεῖνο διὰ τὴν ὁμοουσιότητα, τοῦτο διὰ τὴν μοναρχίαν). No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the Whole (τοῦτο νομίζω τό πᾶν), and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me.

*Or.* 40.41; NPNF 2.7; PG 36.417B, C. See too *Or.* 39.12; 40.41.

T.A. Noble's discussion of paradox in Cappadocian theology (derived in part from F. Dinsien) is pertinent here. See T. A. Noble "Paradox in Gregory Nazianzen's Doctrine of the Trinity" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXVII, *Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1991*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 97.

three suns together; Adam and Seth—with the Father as source of the other two: “[T]he Son is a concise demonstration of the Father’s nature (τοῦ Πατρὸς φύσεως) ... a complete resemblance rather than like (ταυτόν μᾶλλον, ἢ ἀφομοία).”<sup>98</sup> If the second is in view then the divine nature itself is the common and simple element, manifesting itself first as Father then (through generation) as Son and Spirit without any discontinuity or division.<sup>99</sup> Finally, when the two ideas come together the Father is both the first instantiation of the common essence and the one from whom the other two instantiations derive their equality (ἐξ οὗ ἴσοις εἶναι—cf. *Oratio* 40.43) without schism.<sup>100</sup> As he writes in *Oratio* 42.15:

“That which is without beginning [later identified as the Father], and is the beginning [the Son], and is with the beginning [the Spirit], is one God. ... For the one’s nature does not consist in the beginning (οὐ ... φύσις αὐτῷ ἢ ἀρχή), just as the other’s does not consist in his being without cause (ἄναρχον). For these are the circumstances of the nature (περί ... τήν φύσιν), not the nature itself. ... And the unifier (ἕνωσις) is the Father from whom and to whom is found the story of those who are ordered (ὃν ἀνάγεται τὰ ἐξῆς).”<sup>101</sup>

98 *Or.* 30.20 (NPNF 2.7.317-318; PG 36.129A, B).

99 Gregory here seems happy to work with a model similar to that of Gregory of Nyssa who maintains that a generic view of, say, humans does not necessarily connote separation: for strictly speaking there is only *one* humanity (or “gold” or “type of tree”) which occurs according to diverse “ways of existing” (ὅπως...αὐτὸν εἶναι); see *On Not Three Gods* (*Ad Ablabius*) cf. PG 45.133D.

100 We should note here that we are not talking about a simply generic view of divine unity. As McGuckin notes, the divine being *is the Father’s own being* McGuckin, *Gregory*, 294n.352. But McGuckin perhaps misses the implication that, at least sometimes, Gregory seems to regard the Father as the first instance of his own nature.

101 This translation is partly from NPNF 2.7.390, cf. PG 36.476A, B. It is difficult to see how the Father’s monarchy as it is set out in this late *Oratio* (381AD cf. *ibid.*, x) can be reconciled with Torrance’s claim that Gregory experienced a late change of heart after formerly following the

Or again, in terminology that is familiar to us now:

... monarchy is that which we hold in honour. It is, however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person, for it is possible for unity if at variance with itself to come into a condition of plurality; but one which is made of an equal nobility of nature (φύσεως ὁμοτιμία) and a concurrence of mind (γνώμης συμπνοία), and an identity of motion, and a convergence of its elements to unity—a thing which is impossible to the created nature—so that though numerically distinct there is no severance of essence (τῇ γε οὐσίᾳ μὴ τέμνεσθαι). *Therefore this one (μονὰς) having from all eternity arrived by motion at Duality, stood ultimately at Trinity. This is what we mean by Father and Son and Holy Ghost. The Father is the Begetter and the Emitter (γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεὺς); without passion of course, and without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. The Son is the Begotten, and the Holy Ghost the Emission.*<sup>102</sup>

### **Real Fatherhood as the Core of Pro-Nicene Theology.**<sup>103</sup>

Gregory's recourse to the analogy of Adam and Seth in understanding the Trinity takes us to what is perhaps the most serious deficiency in the modern attempt to sideline the Father's monarchy—that is, its tendency to downplay the concept of fatherhood itself. My contention here is that

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same line as Basil and Gregory of Nyssa (Torrance, *Perspectives*, 29-30), Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 322.

102 Or. 29.2; NPNF 2.7.301 (emphasis added; altered—I am grateful for Dr Ray Laird's help with the translation here); PG 36.76B. It is important to note how Gregory highlights the paradox of oneness and threeness here. The equal value of nature (φύσεως ὁμοτιμία) or agreement of mind (γνώμης συμπνοία) would seem to indicate plurality, yet the genitive nouns are singular—one nature equal with itself; one mind in agreement with itself. Or, as he writes, numerically three without severance of essence. We will return to what this means for the concept of "obedience" between the Father and Son below.

103 I would like to acknowledge my debt here to my long-time friend David Walter who helped crystallize my understanding of the significance of divine fatherhood with some well-chosen analogies and observations.

this is a central and defining principle of pro-Nicene theology. Whereas Arianism or Eusebianism see divine fatherhood in merely functional terms so that the Logos is a son in the same sense that the angels or the king of Israel might be described as “sons of God”, and Marcellinist theology might regard “Son of God” as applicable only after the incarnation,<sup>104</sup> the orthodox distinctive is the proposition that the Father is the *true* or *literal* father of the Son.<sup>105</sup>

Is this too bald? For some it would certainly seem so. T.F. Torrance associates the attempt to “speak of divine Fatherhood and Sonship on the analogy of human fatherhood and sonship” with Arianism: whatever legitimate “figurative or metaphorical element” might be in the human terms, they “point utterly beyond” human reality when applied to God. Torrance argues that we must “set aside all analogies drawn from the visible world ... [not] think of the Father as begetting the Son or of the Son as begotten after the analogy of generation of giving birth with which we are familiar among creaturely beings”.<sup>106</sup>

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104 See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 276.; S. Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy 325-345*. *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130-131.

105 James Dunn asserts that in the fourth and fifth centuries it was “the understanding of Christ as Son of God which provided *the absolutely crucial category in defining the nature of Christ’s pre-existent deity*”; J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edition (London: SCM Press, 1989), 12 (my emphasis).

106 Torrance, *Doctrine of God*, 157-158. Torrance does allow some qualified analogical connection between human and divine fatherhood provided that the order of revelation is conceived of in the right direction (cf. *ibid.*, 100-105). Rightly conceived, the concepts “do not build some kind of image of God with a point to point correspondance”, but constitute a “divinely forged lens through which we may discern God’s personal self-revelation as it shines into our minds; *ibid.*, 105. This “theomorphist” (*ibid.*, 106) version of the *analogia entis* seems absolutely correct to my mind, but the way he puts it is falsely antithetical (and suspiciously Barthian). No orthodox ancient or modern theologian would ever argue for a “point for point” correspondance. As always, the points of connection and disconnection must be read through in the light of the scriptural *analogia fidei*.

Hanson makes a similar (though subtly different) observation on the question of analogy in regard to the orthodox and Arians. In his eyes

What the Arians were insisting was that the Bible does not speak analogously nor symbolically about God, but directly. When it described God as the Father and Christ as his Son, it could only mean that, like all [human fathering] ... Christ at one point must have been non-existent before he was begotten by his Father. The pro-Nicene theologians gradually realised that this could not be true, that if it was true it made nonsense of the biblical doctrine of God, and that the Bible speaks of God in language which is analogous, symbolical, but nevertheless true.<sup>107</sup>

Again, there is a basic truth here. It is certainly correct, and easily demonstrated, that Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers were at pains to distinguish human modes of existence and begetting from God. The Nicenes certainly did not imagine that God was a “like humans” or believe that one could “read off” a simple correspondence between divine and creaturely filiation. Qualifications abound: divine begetting carries no association of contingency or temporality; nor does it imply passion or abscission or corporeality or intercourse or maternity or mutability; nor does the perfect likeness between Father and Son (another distinction) imply that the Son must also be a father.<sup>108</sup> And it is also true that the orthodox criticize their subordinationist opponents for imputing such creaturely aspects of fatherhood to God.

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107 R. P. C. Hanson “Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd, C. F. Evans, G. W. H. Lampe & S. L. Greenslade, 1st paperback edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 447.

108 For distinction between human and divine fatherhood and sonship see: Athanasius—*De Decretis* 20-26; *CA* 1.26-28, 2.35, *DeSyn.* 41-42, 51; Basil—*De Spiritu Sanctu* 14; Gregory of Nyssa—*CE* 1.39, 2.7, 9, 3.3, 4.1, 9, 8.4; *On Not Three Gods (Ad Ablabius)*; Hilary of Poitiers—*DeSyn.* 33; *DeTrin.* 3.2-3, 4.2, 6.9, 35, 7.28.

## True vs. Adoptive Fatherhood in Nicene Dispute

But the deficiency of this way of reading the controversy is that from another—and I would suggest more significant—perspective, precisely the opposite is *also* true.<sup>109</sup> As Athanasius observes in *De Decretis* 6–10, the Arian contention is that the Logos is *not* a “true son” or literal offspring (he uses the example of Abraham and Isaac)—that he is only a creature who receives this title by grace and contingency as *per* angels or the kings of Israel or we ourselves. Whatever superior honour the Arians claim for this “Son” is beside the point. The difference for them is simply one of honour not nature (τιμῇ καὶ μὴ φύσει; v.9)<sup>110</sup>, and describes something other than a true Son of God (ἀληθινὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ Υἱόν; v.10)<sup>111</sup>. They have failed to distinguish the two distinct ideas (διπλῆν...διάνοιαν; v.6)<sup>112</sup> connoted in Scripture by the word “son”.<sup>113</sup>

For his own part, however, Athanasius is very clear what the word means in the case of the divine Son. “Let it be repeated”, he writes, “a work is external to the nature, but a son is a the proper offspring of the essence”.<sup>114</sup> “[W]ho hears of a son but conceives of that which is proper to the Father’s essence”?<sup>115</sup> “For a son, which is by nature, is one with him

109 For a helpful and nuanced treatment of this question see Catherine Osborne’s rhetorical analysis of the Arian controversy in C. Osborne “Literal or Metaphorical? Some Issues of Language in the Arian Controversy” in *Christian faith and Greek philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead. In Celebration of his Eightieth Birthday, 9th April 1993*, ed. L. R. H. Wickham, C. P. Bammel, E. C. D. Hunter & C. Stead. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

110 PG 25.429D.

111 PG 25.433A.

112 PG 25.433A.

113 See Simonetti’s discussion of Athanasius’ concept of (and emphasis on) natural fatherhood in M. Simonetti, *La Crisi Ariana Nel IV Secolo*. vol. 11. *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1975), 271.

114 CA 1.29; NPNF 2.4.323.

115 CA 2.34; NPNF 2.4.366.

who begat him”.<sup>116</sup> Athanasius is convinced that the reason *why* the Son is coessential with the Father is *because* he is the Father’s son just as human offspring necessarily share in their parents’ natures.

But what is that which is proper to and identical with the essence of God and an offspring from it by nature, if not by this very fact coessential with him that begat it? For this is the distinctive relation of a Son to a Father, and he who denies this, does not hold that the Word is Son in nature and in truth.<sup>117</sup>

If there are differences between human and divine paternity (and there are) it is not because God is not a true father and the Son not a true son but rather because *we aren’t* true fathers and sons:<sup>118</sup>

... it belongs to the Godhead alone, that the Father is properly father (κυρίως πατήρ) and the Son properly son (κυρίως υἱός), for in them, and them only, does it ever hold that the Father is ever the father and the Son is ever son.<sup>119</sup> ... For God does not make man his pattern; but rather we men—for that God is properly and truly, Father of his own Son (πατέρες...τῶν ἰδίων τέκνων)—are also called fathers of

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<sup>116</sup> CA 4.5; NPNF 2.4.435.

<sup>117</sup> *Ad Afros Epistola Synodica* 8; NPNF 2.4.493. I am not convinced by Kannengiesser’s argument that this letter is pseudonymous—C. Kannengiesser “(Ps. -) Athanasius, *Ad Afros Examined*” in *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993*, ed. L. Abramowski, H. C. Brennecke, E. L. Grasmück & C. Marksches. *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993)—given that a central platform of his argument rests on the notion that true Athanasian works (which he allows include CA 1-2) do not deliberate on *how* the Father and Son are coessential. As we have just observed above, the connection between natural sonship and essence is quite plain in CA 1-2 too.

See also references to the Son as genuine son in *DeSyn.* 41, 47, 54.

<sup>118</sup> Though we must note that Athanasius *does* seem to see some overlap in the dependence of the Son *qua* son and the Son as incarnate man. See Simonetti on Athanasius’ reading of Proverbs 8; Simonetti, *Crisi*, 278.

<sup>119</sup> CA 1.21; NPNF 2.4.318; PG 26.57A.

our own children; for of him is “every fatherhood in heaven and earth named”.<sup>120</sup>

Once again, these ideas are not unique to Athanasius. The identification of true or literal sonship as a major difference between the orthodox and Arian parties goes back to the earliest days of the Arian crisis (if not further)<sup>121</sup>. As Arius makes clear in his joint confession statement to Alexander (c.318-321),<sup>122</sup> though he might declare the Son *uniquely* begotten (γέννημα, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡς ἐν τῶν γεγεννημένων) he will not allow the Logos to be a Son in any literal sense:<sup>123</sup> he is the *immutable perfect* creation (ἀναλλοίωτον κτίσμα...τέλειον) but *creation* he remains nonetheless.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Eusebius of Nicomedia protests against any natural conception of begetting which would signify, so he argues, “two unbegotten beings” or a “change of a corporeal nature” being attributed to God. He rejects explicitly the possibility that the Son could be “from

120 CA 1.23; NPNF 2.4.320; PG 26.59C. Athanasius’ use of Ephesians 3 serves as a check on Catherine Osborne’s suggestion that his reasoning has a “plainly Platonic origin” (see Osborne, *Literal*, 159).

121 Widdicombe attributes both Alexander’s and Athanasius’ understanding of sonship to their Alexandrian forebear Origen. See P. Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. *Oxford Theological Monographs*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 136.

122 Unless stated otherwise the date ranges here draw on the proposed timelines taken from Athanasius, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites, 318-328*, ed. H. G. Opitz. vol. 3. *Athanasius Werke* (Berlin: Berlin Academy, 1934); R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) and Athanasius, *Athanasius Werke: Band III/Teil 1: Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites 318-328: Lieferung 3: Bis zur Ekthesis Makrostichos (Lieferung)*, ed. H. C. Brennecke, U. Heil, A. Von Stockhausen & A. Wintjes (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007). See comparative chart in A. West, *Documents of the Early Arian Controversy (Fourth Century Christianity)*, <http://www.fourthcentury.com/index.php/urkunde-chart-opitz>, (accessed Oct, 2008).

123 See Athanasius, *DeSyn.* 16. Kelly calls Arius’ conception of begetting as “purely figurative”; see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edition (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 227-228. Osborne, pursuing greater precision, speaks of Arius using the terminology of sonship in a “much reduced sense”. Osborne, *Literal*, 157.

124 *DeSyn.* 16; PG 26.709A. This sticking point remains for Arius’ ideological descendent Eunomius. See his comments in *Liber Apologeticus* 16-18—Eunomius, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, ed. R. P. Vaggione. *Oxford Early Christian Texts* ed. H. Chadwick (New York: Clarendon Press, 1987), 53-59.

him [God] or of him, as a portion of him, or by an emanation of his substance” and opines that he is no more a participant in the substance of the Father than other “begotten” creatures such as the Israelites (cf. Isa 1:2) or the dew (cf. Job 38:28).<sup>125</sup>

In stark contrast, Arius’ bishop (and Athanasius’ mentor) Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328) writes to his namesake in Constantinople of a *real* sonship. While Alexander does not use the *homoousios* terminology that would ultimately become the test of pro-Nicene theology, he nonetheless elucidates something similar using the language of natural filiality. Divine filiality, in Alexander’s reckoning, has nothing at all in common with the adoptive sonship of men but represents a “true, peculiar, natural and special sonship (γνησίαν ... ιδιότροπον φυσικὴν ... κατερξαίτερον υἰότητα) ... of the paternal birth”.<sup>126</sup>

On the basis of evidence such as this Christopher Stead regards the issue of sonship as a decisive determinant of the meaning of the *ousia* language of Nicaea. When read against the background of the disagreements just mentioned and in the context of *μονογενες*, the phrase ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας πατρός was included to show that the Son “derives from the father by a process comparable to natural generation as opposed to some process of ‘making’, like that of God’s created works ... he is equal to, and

125 See his letter to Paulinus of Tyre, preserved in Theodoret’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6 (NPNF 2.3.42). Similar protests can be found in the more famous Eusebius of Caesarea who also associates a nativity of “nature from nature” with passibility and schism; cf. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J. S. Bowden. vol. 1. *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2nd edition (London: Mowbray, 1975), 174.

126 *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.4 (NPNF 2.3.38; PG 82.900B). Kelly also sees an implied sharing of nature (Alexander does not explicitly use the language of ὁμοούσιος or μία φύσις) in Alexander’s use of Ps. 110:3; Kelly, *Doctrines*, 224-225.

one with, his Father as a true natural son, and not just a creature adopted or dignified with the name of Son”.<sup>127</sup>

Thus the emphasis on literal sonship does not begin with Athanasius. Neither does it end with him. Both Eastern and Western parties produced official statements that explicitly insist on the idea. The Western-dominated council of Sardica c.344 issued a synodical statement which includes an affirmation that the Son is “truly the Son” explaining that this means a “being of one essence”—in contrast to those who are so called by merit or adoption. The Second (or “Lucianic”) Confession produced at a similar time in Antioch also speaks of a Son who is the unchangeable image of the essence (ἀναλλοίωτον ...οὐσίας ...ἀπαράλλακτον εἰκόνα)—a true Son (ἀληθῶς Υἱοῦ) of a Father who is truly Father.<sup>128</sup> This proto-homoiousian creed served as a touchstone for moderate Eastern theology into the next decade,<sup>129</sup> being invoked both by the 358 synod of Ancyra (convened by Basil of Ancyra in response to the notorious Second Creed

127 C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 233. Stead’s argument receives additional support from Ambrose who recounts an incident at Nicaea (possibly also mentioned by Theodore; *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8, cf. Kelly, *Creeds*, 249-250) where a letter of Eusebius of Nicomedia is read out in which he protests that if we say “the Son is the true Son of God and uncreate, then we are in the way to confess him to be of one substance ὁμοούσιος with the Father”. Ambrose produces this as proof that the real Arian agenda is denial of the fact that the Word is a true son of God (*verum Dei Filium*), and sees it as an occasioning factor for the Fathers to include the word ὁμοούσιος in the creed. See *De Fid.* 3.15; PL 16.614A, B.

128 Recorded in Athanasius *De Syn.* 23; PG 26.721C, 724A. Despite Athanasius’ ungenerous characterization, the creed contains little that would mark it as such and contains numerous statements that a true Arian would have found very difficult to accept; see *ibid.*, 270-271. David M. Gwynn seems right to observe the inconsistency of Athanasius’ toleration of the homoiousian party as basically orthodox while calling the creed on which they relied “Arian”; D. M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 225.

129 See Hanson’s assessment of the significance of the creed for understanding the broad character of the East at this time (and its contrast with the more radically Arian First Creed) in Hanson, *Search*, 290-291.

of Sirmium)<sup>130</sup> and by a *homoiousian* dominated conclave which met at Seleucia the following year.<sup>131</sup>

In this latter context, Basil and another leading *homoiousian*, George of Laodicea, both reveal their united commitment to a notion of *real essential* sonship. Basil, in the synodical statement just mentioned, prevaricates slightly on whether “son” is quite the correct word given its association with physicality.<sup>132</sup> But once these creaturely aspects are stripped away—leaving “the generation of another living being of like essence” (ὁμοίου καὶ κατ’ οὐσίαν ζώου γενεσιουργία)<sup>133</sup>—then Basil is insistent:

And if anyone ... does not take “begets me” literally (ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ) and as a reference to essence but says that “He begets me” means the same as “he created me”, ... confessing that he is a mere creature and not a son ... let him be anathema.<sup>134</sup>

George’s letter, written around the same time,<sup>135</sup> operates on the same logic. Revealing standard Eastern sensitivities he complains first against Marcellus, who denies that the Son is a υἱὸν ἀληθῶς with self-existence (καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ... ὑπάρχοντος)<sup>136</sup> and thus reduces him to a *mere* word. Next, and at greater length, he decries the *Anomoians*: the “current faction [who declare] that the Son is like the Father in will and activity but unlike the Father in being”. He argues that both deny the Son is begotten, for to

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130 The text is preserved in Epiphanius *Pan.* 73.2-11; cf. Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, trans. F. Williams. vol. 35-36. *Nag Hammadi studies Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies* ed. J. R. Robinson & H. J. Klimkeit (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

131 See Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.39.

132 Epiphanius *Pan.* 73.3.

133 *Pan.* 73.4; PG 42.409A. “For every father (πᾶς πατήρ) is understood to beget an essence like his”; *Ibid.*

134 *Pan.* 73.11; *ibid.* p.445; PG 42.421D.

135 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 158n.78.

136 *Pan.* 73.12; PG 42.428A, B.

them he is merely a creation (μὴ εἶναι ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ γεγεννημένον ... ἀλλὰ μόνον κτίσμα εἶναι).<sup>137</sup> For George the matter is clear; the Son's is a *true* begetting (γνησίως γεγεννημένος) and he is perfectly like his Father as a son from a father (ὡς υἱὸς πατρί).<sup>138</sup> In that this relationship is held to be eternal,<sup>139</sup> essential<sup>140</sup> and mutually defining,<sup>141</sup> George's argument is very close to that of Athanasius.<sup>142</sup>

Similar arguments can also be found among the Cappadocians, as we have already seen in the case of Gregory Nazianzen. Basil defends those who hesitate over the *homoousion* by clarifying that the word is not to be understood in the sense that the Father and Son *both* derive coordinately as brothers from a common essence—an idea he regards as Sabellian.<sup>143</sup> Rather, a thing is *homoousios* with *another thing* (ἐτέρῳ)<sup>144</sup>—in this case the Son with the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας πατρός) from whom he is ineffably begotten.<sup>145</sup> We must retain the idea of divine generation (θείαν γέννησιν) without slipping into simply corporeal notions.<sup>146</sup>

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137 Pan. 73.13; PG 42.429A.

138 Pan. 73.18; PG 42.436D, 437B. The word γνήσιως also has connotations of proper familial or genetic connection.

139 Pan. 73.14.

140 Pan. 73.22.

141 Pan. 73.19.

142 This is not to suggest that Athanasius is the source of this conception of filiality—see Barnes' warning along these lines in his response to Widdicombe; M. R. Barnes, review of *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* by P. Widdicombe, *Theological Studies* 56.3, (1995): 574—simply that this is a widespread and basic element in pro-Nicene theology.

143 *Epistolae* 52; NPNF 2.8.155-156, cf. PG 32.393D, 396A.

144 *Ibid.*; PG 32.393C.

145 Of course this idea is also implicit in Athanasius; see Stead, *Substance*, 260.

146 See *Epistolae* 52.2-3; PG 32.393D, 396A. See Behr's brief discussion of the relation of this passage to Basil's conception of monarchy in J. Behr, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Basil of Caesarea*, (1999) <http://www.allsaints-stl.org/Trinitarian%20Theology%20of%20St.%20Basil%20of%20Caesarea%20-%20Web%20Version%202008.pdf>, (accessed November, 2008), 4.

Gregory of Nyssa returns to the idea of fatherhood repeatedly—far more in fact than either his brother or Gregory Nazianzen. Like Athanasius, he distinguishes between the two senses of sonship, insisting that the relation of the eternal Son to the Father must be seen as true or natural.<sup>147</sup> Like Gregory Nazianzen, he draws specific connections between the example of Seth and the Son, indicating the continuity of essence in both cases.<sup>148</sup> And there is a particular emphasis here. While other pro-Nicenes might observe an apophatic distinction between divine begetting and the “separateness” associated with human fatherhood, Gregory argues that there is no real abscission in human fathering either: “a man in begetting a man from himself does not divide his nature” or mutilate himself, nor is the nature “split off and transferred ... to the other”, but it remains entirely in the progenitor as well as “discoverable in its entirety in the latter”.<sup>149</sup>

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147 CE 1 (cf. NPNF 2.5.83-84), 2, 3, 4, 6. In CE 1 (NPNF 2.5.58) he accuses Eunomius of turning the Son into a “bastard” who “creeps ... into relationship with the Father, and is to be honoured in name only as a Son”.

148 CE 2 (cf. NPNF 2.5.123).

149 CE 2 (cf. NPNF 2.5.109). The same idea is also found—albeit with less emphasis on fatherhood *per se*—in Gregory’s letter to Ablabius where he adds that a basic response to the question of whether the Trinity is divided like three humans is to insist that humans are not really divided either, for there is only one humanity. See *On Not Three Gods (Ad Ablabius)* (cf. NPNF 2.5.332ff). Stead (rightly, I believe) argues that this *kind* of argument influences Kelly and Prestige in their assessment that the Cappadocians had a “concrete” view of the essence. See C. Stead “Why Not Three Gods? The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Doctrine” in *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und Der Christlichen Spätantike*, ed. H. R. Drobner & C. Klock. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 157-158. For Stead, however, this observation comes in the context of a wider and general complaint that Gregory is simply illogical in his argumentation, confusing the Platonic form of humanity with humanity itself. But Gregory never mentions Plato as the basis of these arguments but rather seems more interested in the analogy of Adam and Seth. It is possible therefore that the concrete universal “humanity” Gregory has in mind is the same as that which sees humans included in Adam (eg. Rom 5:12-19).

## Divine Fathering and the Pro-Nicene Rapprochement

Finally, it is crucial to observe the prominence given to the concept of natural fatherhood in the writings of both Hilary and Athanasius as *they seek rapprochement* with elements of the *homoiousion* party. Both theologians seem to believe that where there is a real commitment to this creation-mediated paradigm there can also be agreement *despite* differences in terminology; as if the heart of pro-Nicene theology *itself* were to be found in the idea of literal divine paternity. As Athanasius writes in a passage that names Basil of Ancyra specifically, those who disagree about the homoousion but still see the Son as a genuine and natural offspring (γνήσιον καὶ φύσει γέννημα) are not Arian lunatics (Ἀρειομανίτας) but rather brothers with whom there can be brotherly discussion.<sup>150</sup>

Hilary also dwells on the logic of natural fathering in his own discussion of the Faith of the Easterns, both because the creeds he is discussing use this language, and because his own understanding of the concept of essence demands it.<sup>151</sup> Having transcribed the odious Second Creed of Sirmium, Hilary then cites and explains the 358 Ancyran response mentioned above. In his commentary on the first declaration of the true sonship (*vere filium* in his translation), Hilary explains that the Son is an image who shares in his progenitor's "species" (*speciem*).<sup>152</sup> To the third anathema, which again mentions true sonship, Hilary argues

150 *DeSyn.* 41; PG 26.764D, 765A. Reference to true sonship (Υἱός τε ὧν ἀληθῶς...) also occurs—admittedly somewhat passingly—in *Tomus ad Antiochenos* 7 (cf. PG 26.804C).

151 See Gerald O'Collins' observations concerning the centrality of God's (he means the first person's) fatherhood for Hilary in G. O'Collins "The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall & G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15. Ayres ascribes this emphasis to Hilary's indebtedness to "earlier Latin theology", specifically Tertullian and Novation; Ayres, *Nicaea*, 179-181. This may be correct and, if so, simply further reminds us of the ubiquity of the concept.

152 *DeSyn.* 12-13; PL 10.490B.

that there can be no difference between Father and Son as regards nature and genus (*generis indifferētis*) “since the Son is the image of the Father in species, and ... a son begotten of the substance of his father does not admit of any diversity of substance”.<sup>153</sup> There can be no inferiority either in kind or amount (*qualis et ... quanta*) for “this is the essence of true sonship (*hoc vere est esse filium*)”.<sup>154</sup>

Recourse to the logic of true sonship and fatherhood occurs so frequently in Hilary as to appear to be a *central element* of his theological system.<sup>155</sup> And it is to this commonality of understanding that Ayres looks to explain the theological alliance that develops between Hilary and his Eastern friends. In that the “character of a perfect birth” is the key to understanding the divine unity and diversity,

... common cause could emerge between Hilary and his Eastern counterparts ... [in whom] we find a similar focus on the significance of the Son’s generation from the perfect Father.<sup>156</sup>

Ayres acknowledges that, while we cannot know how much contact Hilary had with Athanasius, their attitude to rapprochement is similar.<sup>157</sup>

To note the strength of this thematic connection is not to suggest that a reference to “true son”—without explicit reference to essence or

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153 *DeSyn.* 15; NPNF 2.9.7 (altered) cf. PL 10.492A.

154 *Ibid.*

155 See for example, *DeTrin.* 1.27; 2.5, 8; 3.11; 6.5-52; 7.2, 5, 7-8, 10-15, 17, 21, 23, 26-27, 29-31, 36, 41, 60-61; 12.2, 12-17. But many of the verses between those just cited could also be included. In the light of this it is very puzzling to read Carl Beckwith’s observation that Hilary uses father/son imagery “only sparingly”, in contrast to Basil of Ancyra’s “strained analogies”; see C. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: From De Fide to De Trinitate*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), 101.

156 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 184.

157 *Ibid.* Ayres could have made his case even stronger by adding that Hilary and Athanasius both see the same *grounds* for agreement too.

general “natural” fathering—can infallibly indicate a common pro-Nicene theology,<sup>158</sup> nor is it to deny that there are important *differences* between the homoousian and homoiousian conception of divine sonship (we will come to these shortly).<sup>159</sup> But the recurrence of this concept of natural or essential fatherhood across the various theological strands—its significance in the final rapprochement between the *homoousian* and *homoiousian*, and its persistence—must cast a shadow of doubt over theories which see fourth century theology as moving away from intra-trinitarian causality models. If fatherhood is a central idea, then the commonality of essence would seem to be *all about* one individual coming from another and *thereby* being essentially the same.

The modern attitude to causation or origination in fourth century theology risks being both historically mistaken and logically problematic. The idea that the monarchy of the Father connotes his ontological superiority would have been strongly contested by those Fathers who are often enlisted as witnesses. In their understanding, the causality of true fatherhood means that the Son must be *equally* divine because *all sons*

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158 Fathering language is also used by Eusebius of Caesarea (see Athanasius *Epistola Eusebii* 3) in his letter to his flock, by Asterius the Sophist in *fragment* 20 (see *ibid.*, 119) and also by the complex *homoian* Germinius of Sirmium—see D. H. Williams, “Another Exception to Later Fourth-Century ‘Arian’ Typologies: The Case of Germinius of Sirmium”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4.3 335-357, 346. Yet in none of these cases do we find a sonship that involves any sharing in the Father’s essence. See Gwynn’s discussion of Eusebius (Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, p.214) and, on Asterius, K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought. Routledge Early Church Monographs* (London: Routledge, 1998), 18-19 and W. Kinzig, *In Search of Asterius: Studies on the Homilies on the Psalms*. vol. 47. *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 127-132.

159 As Hilary (*DeSyn.* 89) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 73.36) rightly observe, there is a dangerous ambiguity with *homoiousion*. If pushed to its logical conclusion then it could easily (as George realizes; see his discussion of subsistent persons—προσώπων ὑφεστώτων—in *Pan.* 73.16) lead to a genuine genericism that would render the Son as *another God*. At worst, its ambiguity could also provided comfort and cover to *real* Arian/Eunomian subordinationism where the Son is also seen as a new and *created* being. As long as the concept of *ousia* was doing the work of showing *both* the connection and distinction between the persons, homoiousionism could only ever be the last stop before a real division between Arians and pro-Nicene theology.

fully share in their father's natures.<sup>160</sup> As Hilary puts it, "every son, by virtue of his natural birth is the equal of his Father, in that he has a natural likeness to him".<sup>161</sup>

## ***The Question of Will***

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Hopefully these demonstrations of the importance of paternal causality in the Trinity have removed the objection that the idea of filial volition (wherein the Son's will *derives* from the Father's) should be regarded as sub-orthodox *simply because of its regard for paternal (causal) priority*. Paternal monarchy is the unifying principal in virtually every pro-Nicene affirmation of trinitarian equality and unity. But this scarcely gets us beyond general principles. We must now attempt to identify (if there was one) the pro-Nicene conception of the relationship between will and essence and determine whether the pro-Nicene Fathers would permit *any* sense in which the Father and Son have their own wills.

### **Will and Willing in Athanasius**

For those on the Arian wing who reject the notion of a genuine sonship the question of will is plain enough: no *ontological* unity between Father and Son means that their relationship can *only* be one of will, for the Son is brought forth by the Father's will and *knows* the Father's will by (post-

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160 The same response applies to those modern theologians such as: B. B. Warfield—B. B. Warfield, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity*, <http://www.apuritansmind.com/ChristianWalk/WarfieldBBTrinity.htm>, (accessed May, 2008); or Leonard Hodgson—eg. Hodgson, *Trinity*, 222; or Millard Erickson—Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 309. By refusing to recognise the difference between paternity and divinity, and by seeking to eliminate all subordinationism associated with the Father's status as *principium*, such authors make common cause with historic Arianism (consciously, in the case Hodgson and Erickson).

161 *DeSyn.* 73; NPNF 2.9.23. The argument comes in the familiar context of an Adam/Seth exemplar.

*facto*) participation and communication.<sup>162</sup> This was obviously unacceptable to the pro-Nicene party. As Athanasius is at great pains to point out in *Contra Arianos* 3.59-67, if the Son comes about as an act of the Father's will then he is son in the same sense as all other created "sons"—external to the maker (ἐξωθέν ... τοῦ ποιούντος).<sup>163</sup> In response to the Arian dilemma that the Son must be either begotten by will or necessity, Athanasius answers that begetting is neither by will (βουλήσει) nor by necessity (ἀνάγκη) but by nature (κατὰ φύσιν), which transcends will: the Father is father in the same way that he is good.<sup>164</sup> Moreover the Logos cannot be a product of will because, as Athanasius argues from Proverbs 8:14 and 1 Corinthians 1:24, he is the Father's own *living will* (βουλὴ ζῶσα)<sup>165</sup> just as he is the Father's wisdom, strength and power.

Here some clarification is immediately in order. That the Son is the Father's will sounds like a partitive or psychological model<sup>166</sup>—as if the Son were the Father's *faculty* for volition or wisdom.<sup>167</sup> But as he makes clear elsewhere,<sup>168</sup> this is not what Athanasius means, nor do either of the

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<sup>162</sup> See Hanson, *Search*, 14-15, 565.

<sup>163</sup> CA 3.62; PG 26.453B.

<sup>164</sup> CA 3.66.

<sup>165</sup> CA 3.63; PG 26.457A. The expression also occurs (with words reversed) in CA 2.2.

<sup>166</sup> Not, I hasten to add, the "psychological model" associated with Augustine. Indeed Augustine protests against the idea that the "absurdity" Son should be so defined that the Father has "not in his own substance either counsel or will" or that "the Son makes the Father wise or willing". Rather, a better expression would be that the Son is will of will (*voluntas se voluntate*); *De Trin.* 20.38, cf. PL 42.1087.

<sup>167</sup> Again, Marcellus of Ancyra seems to be the chief exemplar of such a theory. Sara Parvis observes that "Marcellus hated this theology of two wills of the father and Son in perfect harmony: he would have said the Logos is the Father's will just as he is the Father's wisdom and the Father's δύναμις, and that it is Christ who has a second will, qua human being"; Parvis, *Marcellus*, 170. See also Ayres, *Nicaea*, 62ff and 106. Also Grillmeier's astute comparison between the monotheistic strategies of Eusebius of Caesarea (subordinationism) and Marcellus (partitive impersonalism); Grillmeier, *Christ* (vol. 1), 180-181.

<sup>168</sup> See CA 1.28 and 4.2.

words he uses here (βουλή and θέλημα) have such a connotation.<sup>169</sup> Rather, the Son is cast here as the fundamental object of the Father's will—that which he *wants* (and has) by nature, or, as Athanasius explains in *Contra Arianos* 3.65, “This is the Son by nature; ‘in him is stored those things seeming desirous (βούλησις) to me’”.<sup>170</sup>

Now another model presents itself. To say that the Father *qua* Father loves and desires the Son sounds like a Trinity of distinct volitional agency—and to a real degree this seems to be what Athanasius has in mind. Despite wanting to disassociate the begetting of the Son from a free contingent act of willing, he still maintains that this natural and defining act is *accompanied* by willing. The Father wants to beget the Son and the Son wants the Father who begets him, just as the Father desires his own subsistence (ιδιάς υποστάσεώς ἐστι θελητής).<sup>171</sup> “The Son is also wanted by the Father (καί θελούμενός ἐστιν ὁ Υἱὸς παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς)”, he writes at the start of CA 3.66,<sup>172</sup> before immediately adding a reference to John 5:20 that the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

This distinct volitional agency does not simply accompany the begetting, it also seems to *follow* the same pattern. In the same verse just cited Athanasius writes that “by the will with which the Son is willed (τῇ θελέσει ἣν θέλεται), he also loves, wills and honours (ἀγαπᾷ...θέλει...τιμᾷ)

169 Prestige observes here that θέλημα is used rather than θέλησις—the former having less connotation of faculty and more to do with *acts* of will; G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, vol. 7. SPCK large paperbacks (London: SPCK, 1977), 256-257.

For the range of meanings expected from the Βουλ... group of words in general use and in Athanasius see Christopher Stead in C. Stead “The Freedom of the Will and the Arian Controversy” in *Substance and illusion in the Christian Fathers*, ed. C. Stead. *Collected studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 255-256.

170 PG 26.461B.

171 PG 26.561C.

172 PG 26.461C.

the Father”. Here *θέλεις* *does* occur—apparently indicating that the volitional faculty is common to the Father and Son. But is this commonality generic or concrete? That is to say, is Athanasius suggesting that the Son has the same *type* of will as the Father in the sense that Seth has the same nature as Adam, or that the same volitional centre is simultaneously deployed by both of them? This is not an easy question to answer, but Athanasius’ comments a few sentences further on seem to suggest that somehow both are true.<sup>173</sup> Explaining what it means for the Father and Son to desire (*θέλει*) one another, he writes that this is not to be understood as a shaping of nature by will, but rather:

... a true/legitimate (*γνησιότητα*) nature and an individual similar expression of essence (*οὐσίας ιδιότητα...ὁμοίωσιν*). For as with radiance and light one might say, that there is no foregoing will (*βούλησιν*) in the light, but it is its natural offspring, being willed (*θελόμενον*) of the light which begat it; not by considered planning (*ἐν σκέψει βουλήσεως*), but in nature and truth. So regarding Father and the Son, one might rightly say, that Father loves (*ἀγαπᾷ*) and desires (*θέλει*) the Son, and the Son loves (*ἀγαπᾷ*) and desires (*θέλει*) the Father.<sup>174</sup>

As we might expect, this is impossible for us to hold in our minds. Yet the themes are familiar enough for us to see that Athanasius’ concept of will is follows his concept of essence.<sup>175</sup> The Father and Son belong together and mutually define each other as a single “system”; yet, at the same time,

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173 If so it would mean that Athanasius is operating with the same realist/generic dialectic that we saw in the case of Gregory Nazianzen above. Here it is will (rather than divinity) that seems to flow unbroken between the persons, though each of them is simultaneously a true willer.

174 PG 26.464B, C.

175 See Prestige, *Patristic Thought*, 256.

the Son is *another* like the Father.<sup>176</sup> In will, as in essence, they are unified and equal; *homoousious* and *homoiousios*; one *ousia* and two *hypostases*. At least for Athanasius my opening suggestion concerning filial volition is vindicated. The Son expresses and does the Father's will simply because the only will he *has* is that which is that which comes perfectly, and naturally and eternally from the Father.

### A Parting Question on Contingent Decisions

Before we leave Athanasius there is a final question to ask about the difference between the natural willing associated with the generation of the Son and the contingent willing associated with creation. Athanasius has made clear that there are no "might have beens" or prevenient choices as regards the Son, but this would not appear to be the case with regard to creation.<sup>177</sup> In *De incarnatione* 3.1 Athanasius makes it clear that the world was not created spontaneously (*αὐτομάτως*) because there was forethought involved (*μὴ ἀπρονόητα*).<sup>178</sup> In CA 2.77 he supplies the image

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176 We can find Basil speaking in very similar terms in *De Spir* 16.38 where he balances the individual equality of the three persons against a dynamic picture of the Father as the willer who wills solely through his Son; "the Father who creates all by will alone doesn't need the Son but at the same time wills through the Son" (Οὕτω γὰρ ἂν οὔτε Πατήρ προσδεηθείη Υἱοῦ, μόνω τῷ θέλειν δημιουργῶν) the participle he uses here for the Father's action is cognate of the word he uses for the Son's agency in the previous sentence—ἀλλ' ὅμως θέλει διὰ Υἱοῦ); PG 32.136C. The result is that a diverse unity: "the Lord [here, the Father] who commands (*προστάσσοντα* Κύριον); the Word who effects (*δημιουργοῦντα* Λόγον); the Spirit who makes it all firm"; *ibid*.

177 John Zizioulas puts it well:

The one divine will shared equally by all three persons and lying behind the creation of the world, in accordance with Athanasius and Nicaea, does not emerge automatically and spontaneously as it were out of itself, but is initiated by a person, namely the Father as "the willing one".

J. D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. P. McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 121.

178 PG 25.101A.

of a wise architect, proposing (προθέμενος), deliberating (βουλεύεται) and preparing his plans (βουλὴ ... ἡτοιμάσθη).<sup>179</sup>

But if God's will for the world is not "natural" (as it is in the case of the Son)—that is, if it is *free*—how are the contingent determinations present in both the Father and the Son? The *original* natural connection will surely not suffice; that will simply provide the parameters of the things that God *might* do. Here again it is difficult to get a completely clear answer, but one section of *Contra Arianos* takes us tantalizingly close. In CA 2.31, Athanasius contrasts God's relationship to his under-workers (ἀνθρώπων ὑπουργάς—angels, prophets etc.) to that which he has with his Word. In the case of the former, he writes, there is a transmission of information—a hearing, questioning and answering that follows the deliberation of God—for created agents are dependent on the mediating Word himself. But the Word himself is subject to no such mediation or intervening communication, "for that which he ["he" appears to mean "Father"] imagined (δόξαν) and determined (βουληθέν), the Word immediately (εὐθύς) brought into being and finished off (ἀπηρτιζετο)".<sup>180</sup> A few lines on, Athanasius once again draws the comparison between the agency of creatures and that of the Word, observing that:

... when the Word himself works and creates, then there is no questioning and separation (ἀπόκρισις), for the Father is in him and the Word in the Father; but it suffices (ἀρκεῖ) to make a decision (τὸ

179 PG 26.309C. See Stead's comments here; Stead, *Freedom*, 256-257. Stead seems inexplicably critical of Athanasius, regarding his distinction between accompanying desire and contingent willing (as regards the Son) as "bizarre", and finding his views on God's free-will as simply inconsistent. I cannot see the logical problem in either case, though Stead's highlighting of these two aspects of divine will in Athanasius is nonetheless fruitful.

180 PG 26.213A.

βούλεσθαι),<sup>181</sup> and the work is done; so that the word ‘he said’ is a token of the intention (βουλήματος) for our sake, and ‘It was so,’ denotes the work which is done through the Word and the wisdom, in which wisdom also is the Father’s act of willing (βούλησις).<sup>182</sup>

Once again, this is extremely difficult to penetrate and draws together the same dynamic tension we have observed in the case of the Word’s own status as will. In the first place there seems to be a sense in which the Father decides something, *immediately communicates it to the Word*,<sup>183</sup> who, in turn, immediately effects it; yet in the second case there is the more difficult idea that the Word/Wisdom/Willing seems to somehow *be* the Father’s act of “going out” from himself in contingent decision making—much as the Son is already in his *nature* the *radiance* of the Father.<sup>184</sup>

Both these images belong together; the first preserves the Son’s genuine agency and ensures that his inherited divinity is really *his*; the second guards against ditheism or subordinationism—as if the Son were exterior to the Father’s inner life after all. And both also have bearing on our discussion of RITW. The second, dynamic model shows us that the

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181 Stead points out that this form has “marked tendency to represent a process in which one or more alternatives are considered”; *ibid.*, 256.

182 CA 2.31; NPNF 2.4.365 (altered) cf. PG 26.213B.

183 The idea that the Father’s will is “in” the Son comes out implicitly in CA 3.31 and explicitly in CA 3.76. Meanwhile Mark Baddeley points out a stronger example of the interpersonal motif in *Contra Gentes* 46 where Athanasius repeatedly uses the language of command (προτάσσω) to describe the “let us” statements of Genesis 1—God speaking to his Word; M. Baddeley, *Complementarianism and Egalitarianism (part 3): The Coming Divide (iii)*, (The Sola Panel) [http://solapanel.org/article/complementarianism\\_and\\_egalitarianism\\_part\\_31/#5772](http://solapanel.org/article/complementarianism_and_egalitarianism_part_31/#5772), (accessed November, 2011).

184 Richard Hanson notes Origen’s preference for “will proceeding from the mind and of light proceeding from the sun as the best model for the production of the Son”; Hanson, *Search*, 65–66. The same dynamism is present here; although Athanasius is at pains to say that the begetting also transcends any act of will, he also sees the Son *in* every act of contingent willing.

Son's going-forth from the Father is not simply an eternally complete historical fact but that it is also retranscribed in every free act of God toward all that is *not* God. Meanwhile the first by itself simply is RITW; the Father wills and the Son simultaneously does the Father's will.

## ***Divine Willing Beyond Athanasius***

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The themes that emerge from this brief study of Athanasius can also be detected to varying degrees in other key pro-Nicenes of the later fourth century.<sup>185</sup> The highlighting and rejection of subordinationist attempts to reduce divine relations to a matter of will is commonplace.<sup>186</sup> So too, however, is the acknowledgement amongst the orthodox that the begetting of the Son is *also* willed as well as eternal.<sup>187</sup> Beyond this, three general observations might be made: (1) the pattern of causal relationships between the persons of the Trinity is commonly held to include will and gives rise to a community of will; (2) this causality extends to the *opera ad extra* and may sometimes be seen to align with the humanity of Christ; (3) there is a degree of flexibility in the language and emphasis as regards the order of willing from Father to Son.

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185 This is not to deny that there are also some subtle differences too. For example, as Meijering observes (Meijering, *Doctrine of the Will*, 227-230), Athanasius and Gregory connect will and begetting in different ways. While Athanasius stresses the fact that begetting is natural and willed, Gregory makes the begetting itself an *eternal act of will*. Here Gregory, influenced it would seem by the sensitivities of his homoiousian background, places a greater emphasis on the individuality and equality of the persons, while Athanasius in turn wants to retain a stronger stress on dynamic continuity.

186 So for example: Gregory of Nyssa—CE 1.34 (cf. NPNF 2.5.81), 4.6 (NPNF 2.5.165) 12 (*pars altera*) (NPNF 2.5.255); Ambrose—*De Fid.* 4.103-105; Epiphanius—*Pan.* 26.5-6; Hilary—*De Trin.* 1.28, 8.3, 8.5, 8.17, 9.1, 9.70; Socrates—*Ecclesiastica Historia* 2.40.

187 Examples include: Gregory of Nyssa—CE 8.2 (cf. NPNF 2.5.202); Hilary—*De Syn.* 59; Epiphanius—*Pan.* 26.6; Gregory Nazianzen—*Or.* 29.6-8.

### 1. The pattern of causal relationships between the persons of the Trinity is commonly held to include will.

Once again of course, this is the FV option—the Son expresses and does the Father’s will because as Son he receives everything that is the Father’s including his will. The priority of the Father here guards against polytheism. At the same time, the fact that the Father is *father*—that he has a Son perfectly like him—means that there are two distinct *willers* (volitional centres) who necessarily want the same thing because they have the same *will* (or naturally determined set of desires or inclination—see next quote). As Gregory of Nyssa (from whom I have taken the expression “community of will”)<sup>188</sup> writes in his response to Eunomius, there is:

... no divergence of will (διαφορὰ ... ἐν θελήματι) between the Father and the Son, but the image of goodness is after the archetype of all goodness and beauty, and as, if a man should look at himself in a glass ... the copy will in all respects be conformed to the original, the shape of the man who is reflected being the cause of the shape on the glass, and the reflection making no spontaneous movement (κινείσθαι) or inclination (ἐπικλίνεσθαι) unless that movement and inclination is begun (ἄρξαντος) by the original, but, if it move, moving along with it—in like manner we maintain that our Lord, the image of the invisible God, is immediately and inseparably (ἀμέσως) one with the Father in every movement of his will. If the Father will anything, the Son who is in the Father knows the Father’s will, or rather he is himself the Father’s will. For, if he has in himself all that is the Father’s will ... he needs not, therefore, to

188 “κοινωνία τοῦ θελήματος” cf. CE 1.34 (NPNF 2.5.81), 2.15 (NPNF 2.5.132).

know the Father's will by word, being himself the Word of the Father, in the highest acceptance of the term.<sup>189</sup>

Gregory parallels much of what we have already seen from Athanasius here: the explicit connecting of the Father's *arché* with will; the rejection of any intervening "word" between the Father and Son and the insistence on the immediacy of the "communication" between them;<sup>190</sup> the balance of individual equality—"the Son ... knows the Father's will"—with dynamic continuity—"the Son ... is the Father's [will/Word]". But there also seems to be a particular stress on the *ongoing* joint willing of the Father and Son. The Son('s will) is from the Father as Son (both naturally and contingently), not simply in some frozen eternity, but in "every movement" (πᾶσαν θελήματος κίνησιν) of the Father's activity.

More of this is to be found in the other Cappadocians and beyond. Basil distinguishes the "transmission of will" from a process like verbal command, comparing it rather to "the reflection of an object in a mirror, passing without note of time from Father to Son".<sup>191</sup> He insists that the will is "concurrent with the essence" such that the Image of the Father is "like and equal, or rather the same" in this matter too.<sup>192</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, emphasising the simplicity of the divine nature and the priority of the Father, includes will in the list of qualities which "tell forth" (ὅν ἀνάγεται) the ordered persons (τὰ ἐξῆς) from the Father.<sup>193</sup>

189 CE 12 (*pars altera*) (cf. NPNF 2.5.272 altered cf. PG 45.981D-984A).

190 See also on this *DeSpir.* (NPNF 2.5.320).

191 *DeSpir.* 20 (NPNF 2.8.14).

192 *DeSpir.* 21 (NPNF 2.8.13). Note the unity/equality tension.

193 *Or.* 42.15, PG 36.476B.

## **2. This causality extends to the *opera ad extra* and may sometimes be seen to align with the humanity of Christ.**

In modern trinitarian discussions it is commonplace to find invocations of the doctrine that all works of the Godhead are undivided (*omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). The maxim is sometimes ascribed to Augustine, but the principle itself precedes him. Those of the pro-Nicene generation that went before him were very clear that the persons of the Trinity worked as one, but they were equally clear that the way the divine persons work together is determined by the taxonomy of their subsistence. As Gregory of Nyssa writes in *On Not Three Gods* (*Ad Ablabius*), responding to the challenge that his theology represents tritheism;

... in the case of the divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; ... there exists one motion and disposition of the good will (μία τις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κίνησις τε καὶ διακόσμησις) which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. ... [For example] when we learn concerning the God of the universe, from the words of Scripture, that he judges all the earth, we say that he is the judge of all things through the Son: and again, when we hear that the Father judgeth no man, we do not think that the Scripture is at variance with itself—for he who judges all the earth does this by his Son to whom he has committed all judgment; and everything which is done by the only-begotten has its reference to the Father, so that he himself is at once the judge of all things and judges no man, by reason of his having, as we said, committed all judgment to the Son, while all the judgment of the

Son is conformable to the will of the Father; and one could not properly say either that they are two judges, or that one of them is excluded from the authority and power implied in judgment. ... We find that the power which we conceive as preceding this motion, which is the only-begotten God, is the maker of all things; without him no existent thing attains to the beginning of its being; and, again, this same source of good has its beginning from the will of the Father (ἐκ τοῦ πατρικοῦ Βουλήματος ἀφορμᾶται).<sup>194</sup>

For Gregory here the Father's monarchy operates through the *opera ad extra* exactly as in the immanent Trinity; not to exclude the Son and Spirit from equal honour, but to ensure that each of the three persons is seen to be fully involved in the works of the Godhead without multiplying sources of divine power or action. As Athanasius balances the dynamic model of the Son as the Father's "going out" in contingent willing against the interpersonal model of the Son receiving and executing the Father's will (such that the Father is retained as the author and Son is *also* seen as a real agent worthy of praise), so Gregory rings the same dynamic tension into his own conception of salvation history. The result, as the Nyssen writes elsewhere, is that for:

... those who with simplicity of heart receive the preaching of the cross and the resurrection, the same grace should be a cause of the same thankfulness (Ἰσης εὐχαριστίας) to the Son and to the Father, and now that the Son has accomplished the Father's will (τὸ πατρικὸν θελημα τοῦ Υἱοῦ τελειώσαντος) ... inasmuch as our salvation would not have been wrought, had not the good will of the Father proceeded to actual operation for us through his own power.

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194 NPNF 2.5.334-335 cf PG 45.126-129.

And we have learnt from the Scripture that the Son is the power of the Father.<sup>195</sup>

This pattern is also seen through the lens of the incarnation. We have seen that there is a fundamental difference for pro-Nicenes between the Father's unity of will with his Son and that which exists in the case of *created* agents; yet this does not mean that the relationship that Jesus *the man* enjoys with the Father is to be thought of as completely alien to (or obscuring) of his divine filiality. In *De Spiritu Sancto* 19, Basil elides the agency of the Son in creation and incarnation—treating the words of Jesus as fair exegesis of the Logos.

He shepherds; he enlightens; he nourishes; he heals; he guides; he raises up; he calls into being things that were not; he upholds what has been created. Thus the good things that come from God reach us “through the Son”, who works in each case with greater speed than speech can utter. ...On the other hand, and lest we should ever be drawn away by the greatness of the works wrought to imagine that the Lord is without beginning, what saith the Self-Existent (αὐτοζωή)? “I live through the Father, “and the power of God? “The Son has power to do nothing of himself”. And the self-complete (αὐτοτελής) wisdom? “I received a commandment what I should say and what I should speak.<sup>196</sup>

There is more to come. In the next verse (20)—citing a catena of verses from the Farewell Discourse (John 12:49, 50, 14:24) which might point to a subordinate status or deficiency in that the Son must obey the Father and speak his words—Basil chooses not to write these off as expressions of

<sup>195</sup> CE 12.3 (NPNF 2.5.245, cf. PG 45.900-901).

<sup>196</sup> *DeSpir.* 19; NPNF 2.8.12—altered cf. PG 32.101C.

Jesus' humanity, but again interprets them as manifestations of the divine life itself:

[I]t is not because he lacks the ability to choose (οὐκ ἀπροαιρετος) or that he is mindless (ἀνόητος),<sup>197</sup> nor yet because he has to wait for a signal (συνθημάτων), that he employs language of this kind. His object is to make it plain that his own mind (οικείαν γνώμην) has a continuous (ἀδιαστάτως) unity (ἡνωμένως) with the Father. Do not then let us understand by what is called a "commandment" a peremptory mandate (λόγον προστακτικόν) made known by organs of speech, and giving orders to the Son, laying down the law (νομοθετοῦντα) concerning what he ought to do as if he were an obedient subordinate (ὡς ὑπακόω). Let us rather, in a sense befitting the Godhead, perceive a transmission of will (θελήματος διάδοσιν). ... Thus on all sides is demonstrated the true doctrine that the fact that the Father creates through the Son neither constitutes the creation of the Father imperfect nor exhibits the active energy of the Son as feeble, but indicates the unity of the will; so the expression "through whom" contains a confession of an antecedent cause, and is not adopted in objection to the efficient cause.<sup>198</sup>

Gregory Nazianzen also derives truth about the Logos from the words of Jesus—albeit with a much stronger inclination to *distinguish* those passages referring to the divine nature from those that bespeak his humanity. In his fourth theological oration (*Oratio 30*) he deals with the subjections of the incarnate Christ, presenting the case that his sufferings and ongoing obedience are part of his function as our representative

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<sup>197</sup> Migne has ἀνόμητος.

<sup>198</sup> NPNF 2.8.13—altered cf. PG 32.103B, C.

(vv. 4-6). Gregory clarifies that the learning of obedience and tears belong to the Christ; *not the Word*, who cannot die, nor be described as obedient:

... in his character of the Word he was neither obedient nor disobedient [as] such expressions belong to servants, and inferiors, and the one applies to the better sort of them, while the other belongs to those who deserve punishment. But, in the character of the form of a servant, he condescends to his fellow servants, nay, to his servants, and takes upon him a strange form, bearing all me and mine in himself, that in himself he may exhaust the bad.<sup>199</sup>

But, like Basil, Gregory interprets other scriptural verses concerning Jesus as pointing to his (divine) filiality. As we have already touched on above, Gregory interprets John 14:28 to refer to the Father's priority *as cause* (Or. 30.7). Two verses later he makes a similar assessment of the Son's receiving inheritance, judgment, power or glory etc: such things certainly belong to the humanity but also to God (τῷ Θεῷ) in the sense that these things are with him (συνυπάρχοντα) from the source (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) and by reason of nature (λογῷ φύσεως).<sup>200</sup> In verse 11, John 6:57 is exegeted in the same way: "For their being itself is common and equal, even though the Son receive it from the Father. It is in respect of this that it is said I live by the Father".<sup>201</sup> In the *opera ad extra* (as demanded by the John 5 context) this means that the Father and Son work in perfect unity: "the Father impresses (ἐνσημαίνεται)<sup>202</sup> the form of these actions (αὐτῶν πραγμάτων τοὺς τύπους) and the Word brings them to completion

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199 NPNF 2.7.311.

200 PG 36.113C.

201 NPNF 2.7.313.

202 In Or. 33.33 the word is contrasted with a merely outward re-colouring, signifying the total conformity expected of those baptized.

(ἐπιτελεῖ)—working not as a slave nor as unlearned but as knowledgeable (ἐπιστημονικῶς) and as a master (δεσποτικῶς)—that is to say, like the Father (πατρικῶς).<sup>203</sup> Gregory says that this pattern explains the way the Godhead works to found and preserve the world in John 5:17, Psalm 104:4-5 and Amos 4:13: the Father and Son thus have a “sameness of authority and honour” (τῆς ἐξουσίας ὁμοιότητα).

### **3. There is room for a variety of expression concerning the way the Father and Son work together.**

What should be apparent from the above excerpts and discussion is that much orthodox fourth-century trinitarianism is built on a series of dialectical tensions. The Father must be seen as the ultimate source of the Son’s actions *yet* the Son must also be seen as a sufficient source of his own actions. The Father communicates his will to the Son *yet* that communication must be purged of any verbal or temporal connotations. The Son receives and does the Father’s will *yet* the receipt of that will is *eternally complete* such that it is also his own. The Son is inextricably connected to the Father as his radiance and will-in-action *yet* the Son *qua* son is also a reiteration of the Father.

And it should be also clear here that there is room for some variation here within these polarities. A theologian who emphasizes the eternally-complete aspect of the Father/Son relationship will produce a differently hued trinitarianism from another who is more inclined to portray the filial bond as dynamic and ongoing: the first might sound more tritheist, the second more “subordinationist”. A theology that emphasizes the *differences* between the Father-to-Son communication and creaturely forms will sound different from one that wants to stress that what

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203 PG 36.117A, B.

transpires between the divine persons is some type of communication: in modern terminology, the second will sound more “social”.<sup>204</sup>

Useful examples can be seen if we compare and contrast the writings of Hilary of Poitiers and his fellow Westerner Ambrose of Milan (c.340-397). For Hilary, it is important to stress that the unity of will that comes from true natural birth connotes a free agency for the Son (in his own right) *and* that his will is one with the Father. As he writes in book 9 of *De Trinitate* in a lengthy treatment that traces the knots of the paradox:

Their nature is such, that the several action of each implies the conjoint action of both, and their joint activity a several activity of each. Conceive the Son acting, and the Father acting through him. He acts not of himself, for we have to explain how the Father abides in him. ... But he would not be in the unity of the divine nature, if the deeds which he does, and wherein he pleases, were not his own, and he were merely prompted to action by the Father abiding in him. The Father then in abiding in him, teaches him, and the Son in acting, acts not of himself; while, on the other hand, the Son, though not acting of himself, acts himself, for what he does is pleasing. Thus is the unity of their nature retained in their action, for the one, though he acts himself, does not act of himself, while the other, who has abstained from action, is yet active.<sup>205</sup>

In the next verse Hilary deploys this same dialectical machinery against the opportunism of those who would wield John 6:37 against the Son. “Perhaps you say, the Son has no freedom of will (*voluntatis libirate*).”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See the definition at the start of the next chapter.

<sup>205</sup> *De Trin.* 9.48; NPNF 2.9.172.

<sup>206</sup> PL 10.320A.

But Hilary will not allow this. The Son is free to do what *he* will but the character of what he wants comes from the Father “under the aspect of one indistinguishable nature”. As he puts it in verse 50, “the Son plainly wills all that the Father wills, for wills of the same nature cannot dissent from one another”.<sup>207</sup>

Significantly, although Hilary here casts the oneness of will in terms of nature, he derives the *evidence* for it (or expression of it) from the words of the human Jesus,<sup>208</sup> and the result of this is that the bishop’s theology begins to sound like a sort of social trinitarianism. On the one hand, he maintains that “obedience to death” has nothing to do with the “form of God” (*Dei forma*) (v.14, cf. vv.38-38), and that the conformity of will of the Son is *different* from obedience.

His conformity to the Father’s will is ... more than to obey a will: the latter would imply external necessity, while to do another’s will requires unity with him, being an act of volition. In doing the will of the Father the Son teaches that through the identity of their nature his will is the same in nature with the Father’s, since all that he does is the Father’s will.<sup>209</sup>

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207 At the end of verse 52 this is expressed in language reminiscent of the *homoiousion/homoousion* dichotomy—the Son has a nature *like* the Father’s that we “might know that in Father and Son there is no distinction of nature”. (NPNF 2.9.173).

208 The relationship between the two natures of Christ is a major sub-theme in book 9 (see 5.3ff). Hilary distinguishes three phases of the scriptural testimony concerning the Word: before, after and during his earthly sojourn (v.6). Yet although he stresses that in the case of the earthly Jesus we must distinguish between those expressions which testify to his humanity and those which indicate his divinity (cf. vv.5-6, 14), Hilary is also concerned to press the unity of the person of Christ (“he took a new form but remained what he was. 5.14) and the coincidence of the human and divine in the deification achieved by the incarnation:

[T]he whole Son, that is, His manhood as well as his divinity, was permitted by the Father’s gracious favour to continue in the unity of the Father’s nature, and retained not only the powers of the divine nature, but also that nature’s self. For the object to be gained was that man might become God (v.38; NPNF 2.9.167).

209 Verse 50; NPNF 2.9.172.

Yet, on the other hand, Hilary tends to hold together the priority of the Father in relation to the Son with the contingency of the human servant. In verse 53, for example, he exegetes John 14.28 as relating the “mystery of [the Word] taking the servant’s form”, yet immediately switches to speaking of *divine filiality*: asking whether “it is an indignity to the only-begotten God, that the unbegotten God is his Father ... [and] gives him the only-begotten nature”? He insists that it is not, for the Son is neither self-generated nor born from nothing but comes as a living nature from living nature (*Non enim suae originis est Filius, neque nativitatem sibi non exstans ipse conquisivit ex nullo: sed ex vivente natura vivens natura exstans*).<sup>210</sup> At this point Hilary seems suddenly to run together the obedience of the Son’s incarnate humility with the relationship arising from his birth, speaking of the Son testifying in honour to the grace of his birth (*honorem testetur, et gratiam sumptae nativitatis in honore*) and rendering a debt to the Father who sent him (*quidem Patri debitum reddens, ut obedientiam suam mittentis deputet voluntati*).<sup>211</sup> As in vv. 21 and 74 it thus seems that the Father’s “sending”—and perhaps even the Son’s obedience—is connected to the Father’s paternal priority. By the end of book 9 the it is clear that Hilary’s vision of the Son that looks to an “overlap” (as well as a difference) between the second person’s relationship with the Father as Son and as man:

What the Father knows, the Son does not learn by question and answer; what the Father wills, the Son does not will by command. Since all that the Father has, is his, it is the property of his nature to will and know, exactly as the Father wills and knows. But to prove his birth he often expounds the doctrine of his person, as when he

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210 *DeTrin.* 9.53; PL 10.324A.

211 *Ibid.*

says, I came not to do mine own will, but, the will of him that sent me. ... His will is, therefore, the same in nature as the Father's will, though to make plain the fact of the birth it is distinguished from the Father's.<sup>212</sup>

Things are slightly different with Ambrose of Milan (c.340-397). In *De Fide Ad Gratianum* (written c.378-380)<sup>213</sup> and *De Spiritu Sanctu* (381) Ambrose reveals a trinitarian scheme that strives to play down parallels between the human subordination of Jesus Christ and the filial dependency of the eternal Son. While Ambrose certainly insists on the same paradigm of real sonship to explain how Father and Son share the same essence<sup>214</sup> (and sometimes deploys the same dynamic image of light and radiance so commonly found amongst his Eastern brethren<sup>215</sup>) begetting, to him, is for all intents and purposes purely historical.<sup>216</sup> Ambrose has very little interest in the *relational* dynamism that Hilary explores and, rather, draws strict lines of demarcation between the human and the eternal Son. It is only as man that the Son suffers,<sup>217</sup> it is only as man that he submits his will to the Father's, or calls the Father "greater"<sup>218</sup> or "God",<sup>219</sup>

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212 *DeTrin.* 9.74 (NPNF 2.9.181).

213 Dating from B. Ramsey, *Ambrose. Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1997) 61-62.

214 "[I]f we seek to know his natural rank and dignity, he is so truly the very Son of God, that he is indeed God's own Son (*usque Filius Dei verus ... et proprius*). ... To deny that the Son of God is begotten [of God] is to deny that he is God's own Son, and to deny Christ to be God's own Son is to class him with the rest of mankind, as no more a Son than any of the rest"; *DeFid.* 1.17.108, 110 (NPNF 2.10.219, cf. PL 16.553C). See extended discussion of the differences between human and divine generation in *DeFid.* 1.11-12. See prosecution of Arians on the reality of the Son's begetting in *DeFid.* 3.15.124ff.

215 *DeFid.* 1.13.79; "[The Son is] the brightness of eternal light, for brightness takes effect in the instant of its coming into existence ... Think not, then, that there was ever a moment of time when God was without wisdom, any more than that there was ever a time when light was without radiance", (NPNF 2.10.214).

216 *DeFid.* 1.11.72; 4.9.111. Not that it ever happened in time, of course.

217 *DeFid.* 2.7.52-53.

218 *DeFid.* 2.8.61; 4.12.169. There is a tantalizing hint, however, that Ambrose is prepared to allow more than he will admit (for tactical reasons). In 2.8.66 he asks whether his opponents think

or is sent,<sup>220</sup> or has the Father as head,<sup>221</sup> or prays,<sup>222</sup> or speaks God's words.<sup>223</sup> In direct contrast to Gregory Nazianzen or Hilary, who make apparently subordinationist passages such as John 5:26 or 14:28 or 1 Corinthians 8:6 etc. refer to both the contingency of the man Jesus *and* the dependence of the eternal Son on the Father,<sup>224</sup> Ambrose generally interprets them all as referring to the human nature. Although Ambrose acknowledges that "many learned men (*pleri ... doctores*)<sup>225</sup> allow that the Son hears, and that the Father speaks to the Son through the unity of their Nature",<sup>226</sup> this is more apparent than real: the Son only *seems* to have heard (*videtur audisse*)<sup>227</sup>, and what is really described is the inseparable cooperation (*indissociabile cooperationis*)<sup>228</sup>—that is, the "unity of will and of power (*voluntatis atque virtutis*)<sup>229</sup> which exists both in the

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of the Father as greater because he is Father. His answer, without absolutely denying the assertion, is that the word "Father" cannot mean a difference in age, nor does duty (*pietas*—the word frequently has connotations of familial obligation) detract from natural equality (*non ... naturae detrimentum*) (PL 16.573C). There are other glancing connections between divine filiality and humanity in *DeFid.* 2.11.99 and 4.10.122. Daniel Williams may be correct here that Ambrose's interests here are captive to his polemical strategy, the "sole task [of defending and substantiating] the absolute essential unity of the Father and Son"; (D. H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts. Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 145).

219 *DeFid.* 1.15.91-92.

220 *DeFid.* 2.9.74-79.

221 *DeFid.* 4.3.41ff.

222 *DeFid.* 4.5.56-57.

223 *DeFid.* 2.9.79-80. "[T]hat which he speaks cannot be solely from him, for in him all that is, is naturally derived from the Father"; (NPNF 2.10.234).

224 For Hilary's treatment of such verses, see for example: *DeTrin.* 2.10-11; 11.12; *DeSyn.* 75.

225 PL 16.675C.

226 *DeFid.* 5.11.132; NPNF 2.10.301.

227 PL 16.675D.

228 *Ibid.*

229 *Ibid.* See Williams' comments on Ambrose's peculiar use of this term in connection the Trinity; Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, 144.

Father and in the Son ... for there is one opinion and one operation in the Trinity (*una sententia et operatio Trinitatis*)".<sup>230</sup>

Ambrose's (by-and-large) segregation of causal order<sup>231</sup> from the *opera ad extra* raises questions of how the works of the three can be unified.<sup>232</sup> How are the Son and Father one God if their unity is a *finished* historical act (of begetting) in eternity<sup>233</sup>? He needs to supply an alternative balancing element to keep the equality of the persons signifying a coordinate divinity (or tritheism), and this he does by referring to the substance (*substantia*) of God itself. The *substantia* itself is one and undivided; its power and will is undivided; and therefore (as he never tires of reiterating) the works of the Trinity are undivided.<sup>234</sup> In *De Spiritu Sancti* (2.9.100) he disagrees with those who would use 1 Corinthians 8:6 to justify a "from the Father" and "through the Son" pattern of ontology and operation:

230 *DeFid.* 5.11.133 (NPNF 2.10.301—altered cf. PL 675D-676A). We can see a similar pattern of argument in Ambrose's treatment of dependency passages such as John 6.58 (*DeFid.* 4.10.118ff). For the largest part such passages are taken to apply to the contingency of the incarnation, yet there is also a passing concession (4.10.133) that the "the Son lives by the Father, because he is the Son begotten of the Father ... because he came forth from the Father, because he is begotten of the bowels of the Father, because the Father is the Fountain and Root of the Son's being"; (NPNF 2.10.279).

231 In several places he stresses Scripture's occasional variation from the traditional order of Father–Son–Spirit; eg. *De Spiritu Sancti* 3.16.117 or 4.11.136 or 5.9.115-117; the last reading: "the order of the words is often changed; and therefore thou oughtest not to question about order or degree, in the case of God the Father and his Son, for there is no severance of unity in the Godhead"; (NPNF 2.10.299).

232 This was indeed the major Arian accusation of Ambrose according to Williams; *ibid.*, 144.

233 This is less of a problem in schemes which imagine the processions as both complete and ongoing (eg. solar radiance, or fluvial effluence). For a very helpful discussion of the different conceptions of eternal generation and their significance see J. S. Rhee, *A History of the Doctrine of Eternal Generation of the Son and its Significance in Trinitarianism*, <http://www.jsrhee.com/QA/thesis1.htm>, (accessed January, 2010).

234 And often unordered; *Non ergo alicui prior vel secundus est actus, sed idem unius operationis effectus*; *De Spiritu Sancti* 2.12.136 (PL 16.772A).

... these expressions suit either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, ... no distinction of the divine power can arise from particles of this kind, there is no doubt but that all things are of him through whom all things are; and that all things are through him through whom all are; and that we must understand that all things are through him or of him in Whom all are. For every creature exists both of the will, and through the operation and in the power of the Trinity, as it is written: “Let us make man after our image and likeness.”<sup>235</sup>

Ambrose here represents the beginning of what might now be described as the Western or “Latin” paradigm—beginning with the one being instead of the one Father. Yet, complicating this, it is important to see that there is still much here that could be stereotypically described as “Eastern”. As already noted, Ambrose strongly retains the view that the causal relationship between the Father and Son is the way both can be seen as consubstantial: his reification of the *substantia* or Trinity itself exists alongside (I would suggest somewhat uncomfortably) the pro-Nicene ordered model.

## **Conclusion**

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We are now in a position to itemise some general observations about what light the fourth century trinitarian debates might cast on our contemporary discussion concerning the ordered relationship between the Son and the Father. Here is a brief summary of where the argument stands:

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<sup>235</sup> NPNF 2.10.127. See the similar argument in *DeFid.* 4.11.139-157.

1. The pro-Nicene position retains the concept of real sonship as an important correlate of the *homoousios* doctrine. This perfect and eternal derivation of the Son from the Father differentiates heretical subordinationism from the orthodox position and undergirds the language of essence or nature.
2. The notion that the Son *qua* Son is perfectly *like* the Father—or alternately, wholly *shares* in what the Father is—extends to every aspect of the divine nature including power, knowledge and will.
3. This means that the Son inevitably wants what his Father wants, for his begetting means that he shares the same natural will and is thereby in perfect agreement with the Father. The statement “he does his Father’s will” is therefore just as true as “he does his own will”. The first acknowledges the derivational relationship that exists between Father and Son; the second emphasizes the state of affairs that results from that begetting.
4. The fact that the Son’s will is from the Father might be imagined as either a purely past-complete historical reality, or both complete and dynamically continuous. The second conception sounds more relational and may be seen to fit with the active conformity of the human Jesus. The first model is inclined to treat any such historicising as a threat to the Son’s full eternal equality.
5. With regard to the will of God, the pro-Nicene position excludes:
  - Arian subordinationism, with the implication that the eternal Son needs to be told the Father’s wishes as if he did not already possess the Father’s character (and thus will) by begetting.

- Modalist or Marcellanist conceptions of the Son which either reduce him to a faculty, part or impersonal projection of the Father.
  - Tritheistic depictions of the Father and Son as two distinct aseities without an accompanying declaration of unity.
6. The pro-Nicene position less clearly addresses these questions:
- Is the triune God to be envisaged as a thing or entity in its own right, such that “he” is the basis on which Father and Son are one as well as three?
  - How does the human nature of Christ relate to the filiality of the Son in terms of his relationship to the Father?
  - How do Father and Son make contingent decisions about issues where their natural will allows them more than one option?

These three questions will direct our enquiries from this point on.

**End of Sample**

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