HILARY OF POITIERS' ROLE
IN THE ARIAN STRUGGLE

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ONDER REDACTIE VAN
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door

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*To
Sanet and
my parents*

INTRODUCTION

Every struggle brings great men into prominence, because the slumbering powers inert in them are aroused to action. The truth of this statement is proved in the Arian struggle and among the many great men the figures of Athanasius in the East, and Hilary, the bishop of Poitiers, in the West, rise above their contemporaries.¹ One German scholar called them the two pillars of the Church in the East and the West.² Of the two, Hilary is less known, yet well-known by the epithet which the historian K. Hase gave to him, namely "durch Thaten, Leiden und Schriften der Athanasius des Abendlandes."³

Scholars agree that in words and deeds he did not play such an important part in the history of the Church as Athanasius, although he did occupy an important place among the secondary figures in the Arian dispute, but in "depth of earnestness and massive strength of intellect he is a match for Athanasius himself, and in powers of orderly arrangement decidedly superior."⁴ Smulders maintains that in the formation of doctrine his place is certainly near to that of Athanasius and Basil.⁵ Another scholar holds the view that as a thinker he surpassed the Alexandrian.⁶ Harnack thought that he was "bei aller Abhängigkeit von Athanasius ein eigenthümlicher Denker, der den alexandrinischen Bischof als Theologe übertroffen hat."⁷

Loofs saw in Hilary a true "disciple of the truth," as he called himself in his *Contra Const.* 12, an enemy of all the many false men in the Church

¹ M. Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Litteratur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerke des Kaisers Justinian*, München, 1914², Vol. IV.1, p. 296.

² J. H. Reinkens, *Hilarius von Poitiers*, Schaffhausen, 1864, Vorwort p. viii.

³ K. Hase, *Kirchengeschichte*, Leipzig, 1836², p. 137. As the first edition was not available, it is not known whether Hase referred thus to Hilary in the first edition of his work.

⁴ H. M. Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, Cambridge, 1900², p. 154.

⁵ P. Smulders, *La doctrine trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers*, Rome, 1944, p. 11.

⁶ O. Bardenheuer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1912, Vol. III, p. 366.

⁷ A. von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Tübingen, 1909⁴, Vol. II, p. 252 n.1.

of his day.⁸ He had a powerful personality and where he appeared he dominated those around him.⁹

Many reasons are given for the fact that Hilary is less known and studied than some of the other fathers of the Western Church. He suffered "partly from a certain obscurity in his style of writing, partly from the difficulty of the thoughts which he attempted to convey."¹⁰ Another important reason is that since Hilary was a pioneer in speculative theology in the West, he has been succeeded by greater writers, for example Augustine.¹¹ Hilary was quite overshadowed by this great Church Father¹² and the brilliancy of Augustine as a theologian and religious writer drew away the attention of mediaeval Christendom from the splendid work of this "first of Western theologians."¹³ This is even the case in modern times. The fact is that the publication of Augustine's great work of the same title, only a generation later, caused Hilary's *De Trinitate* almost to be forgotten.

Hilary was one of the few theologians of the fourth century who knew the theology of the East just as well as that of his own West and who tried to combine the two.¹⁴ The role he played as an intermediary between these two, has been accredited as one of his greatest merits.¹⁵ And yet, like many great men, his contemporaries did not value him at his true worth. Watson says that "certainly no firmer purpose or more convinced faith, perhaps no keener intellect has devoted itself to the defence and elucidation of truth than that of Hilary."¹⁶ It is the purpose of this study to determine the part he played in the Arian struggle.

As a writer Hilary has also been praised for his eloquence, forcefulness and beauty of thought, but on the other hand his method of expression has also been censured for its obscurity and complexity. It has been pointed out, quite rightly, that both views have a degree of justifiability and it would be counter to the facts to accept one judgement to the ex-

⁸ F. Loofs, "Hilarius von Poitiers," *RE*, Leipzig, 1900³, Vol. VIII, p. 67.

⁹ Schanz, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

¹⁰ E. W. Watson, "Introduction Ch. I, The life and writings of St. Hilary of Poitiers," *NPNF*, Second Series, Vol. IX, Grand Rapids-Michigan, 1955 (= New York, 1908), p. i.

¹¹ J. E. Emmenegger, *The Functions of Faith and Reason in the Theology of Saint Hilary of Poitiers*, Washington, 1947, pp. 29-30.

¹² P. Galtier, *Saint Hilaire de Poitiers*, Paris, 1960, p. 170.

¹³ T. S. Holmes, *The Origin and Development of the Christian Church in Gaul*, London, 1911, p. 183.

¹⁴ P. Löffler, "Die Trinitätslehre des Bischofs Hilarius von Poitiers zwischen Ost und West," *ZKG*, Vol. 71 (1960), p. 27.

¹⁵ Emmenegger, *op. cit.*, p. 32; Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. lviii.

clusion of the other.¹⁷ Bardenhewer says that he holds the attention by his individuality and originality¹⁸ and it has also been said that Hilary wrote as he fought: as a bishop and pastor of souls.¹⁹

The main source for the study of Hilary's life is from his own works, although it is true that he was too involved and occupied in the struggle, to give us much detail of his life. We have to be content with fragmentary information gleaned from his works. There is an early biography extant on Hilary by Venantius Fortunatus.²⁰

The different sources and biographies of Hilary are enumerated by Reinkens.²¹ Although the study of Hilary has always been neglected it may fortunately be stated that in the last two decades numerous books and articles on diverse aspects of Hilary's life and theology have been published, but it is a sad fact that the best comprehensive biography of the bishop of Poitiers, that of Reinkens, was written more than a century ago.

In this study the Benedictine edition of Hilary's works (PL 9 and 10) is used. Reference is also made to his works which have so far appeared in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, viz. *Tractatus super Psalmos* (CV 22) and *Collectanea Antiariana Parisina* and *Ad Constantium Imperatorem* (CV 65).

¹⁷ Emmenegger, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Bardenhewer, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

¹⁹ Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Hilarii* (PL 88). A. Viehhauser, *Hilarius Pictaviensis geschildert in seinem Kampfe gegen den Arianismus*, Klagenfurt, 1860, pp. 5–9, argued that the first book of this biography had been written by a pupil of Hilary and only the second book by Venantius Fortunatus. According to Viehhauser the first book therefore is of much more value than if it had been written by Venantius Fortunatus, two centuries after Hilary had lived. Viehhauser's view is however rejected by modern scholars.

²¹ Reinkens, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv–xxiv. T. Förster, "Zur Theologie des Hilarius," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, Vol. 61 (1888), p. 651, said that the picture of Hilary painted by Reinkens is very much like the old panegyric biographies. Reading Reinkens' work, especially pp. 100–103, we may agree with Förster to some extent.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AbhB – Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Berlin.
- BKV² – Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, Zweite Reihe.
- CV – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
- DCB – A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature.
- DThC – Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique.
- DACL – Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie.
- GCS – Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte.
- Nachr. Gött. Ges. – Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Phil.-hist. Klasse.
- NPNF – A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.
- PG – J. P. Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca.
- PL – J. P. Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina.
- PWK – Paulys Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft.
- RB – Revue Bénédictine.
- RGG – Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.
- RE – Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche.
- RHE – Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique.
- SbW – Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-hist. Klasse.
- ZkTh – Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie.
- ZKG – Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte.
- Ad Const. (I) – The so-called ad Constantium liber primus.
- Ad Const. (II) – The so-called ad Constantium liber secundus.
- Coll. ant. Par. – Collectanea antiariana Parisina.
- C. Aux. – Liber contra Arianos vel Auxentium Mediolanensem.
- C. Const. – Contra Constantium Imperatorem.

De Syn. – De Synodis.

De Trin. – De Trinitate.

Fragm. – Fragmenta historica.

In Matt. – Commentarius in Matthaeum.

Or. Syn. Sard. – Oratio Synodi Sardicensis ad Constantium Imperatorem.

Text. narr. – Textus narratiuus (= ad Const. (I) 6–8).

Tract. in Ps. – Tractatus in Psalmos.