



«Fides intellegentiam sibi adsumit»
Some reflections on faith and reason
from Hilary of Potiers' De Trinitate

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«Nam id quod ultra humani sensus intellegentiam Dominus de se professus est, quantis potest potentiae exemplis ad intellegentiae fidem coaptat dicens: "Ego in Patre et Pater in me" [Io. 14,10]: ut quod ab homine per naturam haebetem non capitur, id fides iam rationabilis scientiae consequatur: quia neque non credendum de se Deo est, neque opinandum est extra rationem fidei esse intellegentiam potestatis»¹.

The present study does not intend to examine the concept of faith in Hilary's writings and its different ramifications². The various aspects of the personal and salvific dimensions of faith will not be considered³. My research is restricted to the relationship between faith, its own proper knowledge-content and the believer's reasonable or rational knowledge of that same faith as it appears in Hilary of Poitiers' De Trinitate. I ask, in other words, according to Hilary of Poitiers, in what sense and under what conditions may human reason appropriate and

¹ De Trin. I.22,3-10 (20-21). The reference points to Hilary's De Trinitate, book I, chapter 22, verses 3 to 10 and is to be found on pages 20-21 of the CCL text edited by P. Smulders.

² For a study on *fides* in Hilary see: A. PEÑAMARÍA DE LLANO, *La salvación por la fe en Hilario de Poitiers I-II*, Palencia 1973. See also J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions of Faith and Reason in the Theology of Saint Hilary of Poitiers*, Washington 1947, specially pages 131-228.

³ The doctrinal or cognitive aspect of faith is never far from Hilary's mind even when he speaks of other features, thus the expression: *salutaris cognitionis fides* in De Trin. I.11, 10-11 (11). See also *hoc salutaris fidei sacramentum* in De Trin. VII.27,7-9 (293-294) and De Trin. VII.23,20 (287) and similar terms in: De Trin. V.35,1-7 (188-189); De Trin. VI.47,1-3 (252); De Trin. VII.17,24-25 (278); De Trin. VIII.34,29-41 (347-348); De Trin. XII.36,1-8 (606).

explore the knowledge-content given in faith?⁴ The subject matter of immediate interest may be approached from different perspectives. Hilary offers three such perspectives in his *De Trinitate* which I have indicated in the following three expressions: *fides cognitionis*, *fides intellegentiam adsumit*, and *fides rationabilis scientiae*. By looking at the way Hilary understands and employs these different expressions I hope to form a comprehensive picture of what he means by our human understanding of the faith.

The first question that arises in this context deals with the precise relationship between faith and its own proper knowledge-content as understood by Hilary. I ask: in what sense does he consider faith to be knowledge or, in what sense does faith give knowledge? What is the relationship between faith and its own proper knowledge-content? In other words, in what sense is *fides* also *scientia*? To this opening section I have given the title *fides cognitionis*. This theme will be developed in Section 1. The faith Hilary speaks of may not be dissociated from its own knowledge-content. Much less—he argues—may our rational understanding of faith be separated from the same. A second step, section 2., of the present article, under the title *fides intellegentiam adsumit*, focuses on Hilary's view of human reason's subordinated but active role in its examination of the knowledge-content of faith. This section examines the central issue of this article, namely, how and under what conditions can human reason appropriate and reflect upon the knowledge-content of faith. Section 3., called *fides rationabilis scientiae*, will look into the particular reasonableness or rationality of faith and its knowledge-content. This particular kind of rationality imposes a series of constraints on the human reason that would explore it. This is an important point which is ever present in Hilary's criticism of heretical explanations of the divine mysteries.

Having answered the questions posed in these three sections, we hope to be in possession of a clear explanation of Hilary's idea of *fidei intellegentia* which in turn should offer some basic and essential elements for a good comprehension of his understanding of the believer's activity which is called «theology» today.

⁴ The present article is a slightly modified version of chapter 4 of the author's doctoral dissertation published under the title «*Ministerium Rationis Reddendae*». *An approximation to Hilary of Poitiers's Understanding of Theology*, Editrice Pontifica Università Gregoriana, Roma 2002.

1. «Fides cognitionis», a faith full of knowledge

Hilary speaks with clarity of the specific knowledge proper to faith. So close and intimate is the relationship between the faith of the Church and its own proper knowledge-content, that the faith is portrayed rhetorically as a living and knowing subject. «Faith»⁵—Hilary tells us «knows» or «ignores»⁶. Faith «confesses»⁷, «rejects»⁸ and «condemns»⁹. The following text from Book II of *De Trinitate*, is important from different points of view. For the present it is brought forward as a good example of Hilary's presentation of faith in the guise of a living and knowing subject:

Haec de natura diuinitatis adtingimus, non summam intellegentiae conpraehendentes, sed intellegentes esse inconpraehensibilia quae loquamur. «Nullum ergo, dicis, officium fidei est, si nihil poterit conpraehendi». Immo hoc officium fides profiteatur, id unde quaeretur inconpraehensibile sibi esse se scire¹⁰.

Faith is described as a conscious knowing subject. Faith «knows». Similar expressions are: «faith speaks»¹¹, «faith is instructed»¹². These

⁵ Perhaps we should say more specifically, as Hilary seems to say, the faith, the apostolic faith, the Gospel faith, the faith of the Church; and not simply faith.

⁶ Cf. *De Trin.* VI.9,13-19 (204); *De Trin.* VI.10,23-29 (206-207); Similarly in *De Trin.* VI.36,24-26 (240): «Nam tametsi in corpore manens Dei se Filium esset professus, tamen apostolica fides nunc primum naturam in eo diuinitatis agnouit». Cf. *De Trin.* IX.3,6-7 (373); *De Trin.* X.52,1-3 (505); *De Trin.* XII.34,25-29 (605); *De Trin.* XII.51,1-3 (621).

⁷ *De Trin.* VII.12,5-8 (272): «Et quomodo apostolica fides principalis inmemor est facta mandati, ut Deum Christum confiteretur, cum in unius Dei esset confessione uiuendum?» Cf. *De Trin.* IX.57,8-9 (436).

⁸ *De Trin.* I.13,17 (13). «Respuit captiosas et inutiles filosofiae quaestiones fides constans».

⁹ Cf. *De Trin.* V.31,5-7 (185); *De Trin.* VI.10,22-23 (206). Likewise in *De Trin.* VII.4,29-33 (264) «Victoria enim eorum ecclesiae triumphus ex omnibus est, dum eo heresis contra alteram pugnat, quod in heresi altera ecclesiae fides damnat nihil enim est quod hereticis commune est, et inter haec fidem nostram, dum sibi aduersantur, adfirmant». Cf. *De Trin.* IV.28,6-8 (132); *De Trin.* IX.15,6-9 (386); *De Trin.* IX.36,1-8 (409-410); *De Trin.* IX.42,1-4 (418); *De Trin.* IX.57,8-11 (436); *De Trin.* XI.2,1-4 (530).

¹⁰ *De Trin.* II.11,14-19 (49).

¹¹ *De Trin.* IX.42,3-4 (418): «fides potius nostra loquitur quod docetur, quam inreligiosa peruersitas impietatis suae defendit errorem». Cf. *De Trin.* XII.28,1-7 (601).

¹² *De Trin.* III.14,11-16 (85-86): «Cum ergo dicitur: “ut cognoscant te solum uerum Deum et quem misisti Iesum Christum” [Io. 17,3], sub hac significatione, id est mittentis et missi, non Patris et Fili ueritas et diuinitas sub aliqua aut significationis aut dilationis diuersitate discernitur, sed ad gignentis et geniti confessionem fides religionis instruitur».

different expressions reveal Hilary's tendency to express the position of the faith of the Church in terms of a living and active subject. In the following considerations attention will be paid to this characteristic form of expression. The particular point which will be stressed is that they are not merely metaphorical, but that they convey an insight into the nature of our faith and into the particular relationship between the faith of the Church and the knowledge of faith in individual believers.

Perhaps the first immediate impression one receives, consistent with this particular usage, is one of the sovereign independence of faith. The cognitive content of faith is clearly prior to our personal act of faith and to our intellectual examination of the same¹³. Faith has, as it were, a life of its own. It lives in the Church¹⁴. It exists before individual believers come to be, and it outlives them. This is important for the understanding of *fidei intellegentia*, and must be kept constantly in mind. Other characteristics are also proper to the reality of faith, to which we now direct our attention.

Beside its sovereign independence, faith—portrayed or presented as a permanent living subject—suggests a permanent possession of its own knowledge¹⁵. It is a faith which is full of knowledge. This consideration in its turn seems to suggest other important characteristics such as its authority, its unchangeable character, its clarity, characteristics that we must make explicit. By doing so we come to understand some fundamental attitudes towards the faith of the Church which are present in Hilary's writings, which obviously condition powerfully his understanding of the relationship between «the faith» and the believer's reasoned understanding of faith.

¹³ De Trin. IV.6,16-21 (105): «Confitetur et Fili originem ab aeterno: non ipsum ab initio, sed ab ininitiabili; non per seipsum, sed ab eo qui a nemine semper est; natum ab aeterno, natiuitatem uidelicet ex paterna aeternitate sumentem. Caret ergo fides nostra hereticae prauitatis opinione».

¹⁴ The Church is similarly portrayed as a subject speaking and teaching like faith itself in De Trin. I.26,17-23 (24): «Hebion autem ab utroque ita uincitur, ut hic ante saecula subsistentem, hic Deum uerum conuincat operatum. omnes que se inuicem uincendo uincuntur, quia ecclesia et contra Sabellium et contra creaturae praedicatorum et contra Hebionem Deum uerum ex Deo uero Dominum Iesum Christum et ante saecula natum et post ea hominem genitum esse testetur». Cf. De Trin. IV.6,2-4 (104-105); De Trin. V.34,7-10 (188).

¹⁵ De Trin. I.16,3-5 (16): «quidam ita euangelicae fidei corrumpunt sacramentum, ut sub unius Dei pia tantum professione natiuitatem unigeniti Dei abnegent» (Heretics who deny the truths of faith are depicted as corrupting the mystery of faith, such is the close relationship between the knowledge-content of faith and value of faith itself).

1.1. Faith contains its own knowledge and understanding

«Faith knows» means in the first place that faith contains knowledge. Faith is the source of knowledge for the believer. Faith is full of knowledge. It is a *fides rationabilis scientiae*¹⁶. To believe means not just to have an attitude of trust in God, a feeling of dependency on God or of his presence and action. It means accepting from God knowledge and understanding. Faith has a knowledge-content which is inseparable from it. Hilary qualifies faith as *cognitionis fides*¹⁷. The cognitive aspect of faith is underlined in De Trinitate above all in relation to the denials of heresy. The knowledge-content of what we profess affects directly the value of our faith. Faith offers us an intellectual content which is in itself a certain form of knowledge or understanding¹⁸. By professing our faith we adhere to the realities it offers us¹⁹. Nothing unknown to contemporary Christians is said here, but nevertheless the clarity and frequency of the expressions reveal, it would seem, a clear and explicit awareness that the author feels it is important to keep in mind²⁰.

¹⁶ De Trin. I.22,6-8 (21): «quod ab homine per naturam haebetem non capitur, id fides iam rationabilis scientiae consequatur». (This aspect of the rational structure of the knowledge given in faith will be dealt with explicitly in section 4.3., of the present article).

¹⁷ De Trin. VII.22,13-17 (285): «si de Deo sola ista docuerunt, cur non ita credimus ut docemur? Quodsi ex his tantum sumpta cognitio est, cur non exinde fides sit, unde cognitio? Sed cum fides cognitioni esse aduersa detegitur, iam non cognitionis fides illa sed criminis est».

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Hilary considers the faith of Abraham, who trusts in God's promise, not so much from the point of view of trust. He underlines not the attitude, but the content of faith, as faith in the omnipotent power of God. De Trin. X.68,19-28 (523-524): «De omnipotentia enim Dei fides religiosa non ambigens, humanae infirmitatis non est detenta naturis. Sed id quod in se erat caducum terrenumque despiciens, diuinae sponsonis fidem ultra modum corporeae constitutionis exceptit: quia nequaquam Dei uirtutes lex possit humana moderari, tantum in efficiendo liberalitatis Deo promente, quantum in spondendo ostenderet uoluntatis. Nihil igitur iustius fide est quia, cum aequitas adque moderatio terrenorum actuum sit probabilis, nihil tamen iustius homini sit, quam omnipotentiam Dei indefinitae potestatis intellegentia credidisse».

¹⁹ According to the pregnant expression our «faith rises in Christ», De Trin. IX.9,16-17 (380): «Credendus ergo Deus est, cuius operatione Christus excitatus a mortuis est, quia fides ista conresurgit in Christo».

²⁰ Hilary does not dwell in a reflexive way on the distinction between what will be called in later theological developments *fides quae* and *fides qua*, between faith as content and faith as individual virtue or act. Hilary dwells specially on the relationship between the faith of the church and the individual's faith-content, between the *fides* and the individual *fidei conscientia*.

An important corollary to this statement must be drawn out. Faith is not an imposition on the believer of ready-made conclusions in the form of propositions or statements. It is not a transmission of pieces of information, but a communication of truth, of knowledge. In the knowledge given with faith Hilary knows that he can look for understanding, for reasons; that he can distinguish clearly between cause and consequence, image and fulfilment. If he does so, it is because he understands that faith has been given, not just to be accepted, but to be known and understood²¹. Faith contains «reasons» and, in this sense, gives a reasonable knowledge. It is a *fides intellegentiae*²² and as such the knowledge it gives can be called a *rationabilis scientia*²³, a reasonable knowledge²⁴. This reasonable knowledge is placed however, not within the range of spontaneous human understanding, but at the level of what he calls *diuinae ueritatis ratio*²⁵.

1.2 The authority of the knowledge given in faith

Revealed knowledge comes to us with divine authority. Hilary, arguing against heretics, points to the authority of the words of Christ. Revealed knowledge of the mystery of God given to us in the Gospels comes above all from the Son. No greater guarantee could we desire. He is the *testis fidelis*²⁶, the trustworthy witness of the truth of God²⁷. In a striking text taken from Book VIII of his *De Trinitate*, Hilary upholds his acceptance of the Gospel-given words of Jesus, based on the divine prerogatives of Christ:

²¹ Cf. *De Trin.* III.1,13-19 (73).

²² Cf. *De Trin.* I.22,5 (20).

²³ Cf. *De Trin.* I.22,7 (21). If we were to express Hilary's view from a more recent perspective we may venture to say that Hilary presents us with an epistemological view of theology which is thoroughly realistic. If I understand Hilary correctly, he seems to say that our understanding of the faith is not simply our own intellectual construction, a human conceptual model which helps us somehow or other to understand faith. It is rather our appropriation of, or our approximation to, the pre-existing and (superhuman) rationality present in faith.

²⁴ J. Emmenegger speaks of a «rightful expectation of reasonable and credible teaching from God». Cf. J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 69.

²⁵ Cf. *De Trin.* III.1,17-19 (73).

²⁶ Cf. *Rev.* 1,5.

²⁷ *De Trin.* II.6,24-31 (43): «Ipse ingenitus aeternus, habens in se semper ut semper sit. Soli Filio notus, quia "Patrem nemo nouit nisi Filius et cui uoluerit Filius reuelare, neque Filium nisi Pater" [Mt. 11,27]. Illis scientia mutua est, illis uicissim cognitio perfecta. Et quia Patrem nemo nouit nisi Filius, de Patre una cum reuelante Filio qui solus "testis fidelis" [Apoc. 1,5] est sentiamus».

Aut forte qui uerbum est significationem uerbi ignorauit? Et qui ueritas est loqui uera nesciuit? Et qui sapientia est in stultiloquio errauit? Et qui uirtus est in ea fuit infirmitate, ne posset eloqui quae uellet intellegi? Locutus plane ille est uera et sincera fidei euangelicae sacramenta. Neque solum locutus est ad significationem, sed etiam ad fidem docuit, ita dicens: «Vt omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me et ego in te, ut et ipsi sint in nobis». [Io. 17,21] Pro his primum praecatio est, de quibus dicitur: «ut omnes unum sint»²⁸.

Precisely because the Son has spoken and spoken clearly, not only to our intelligence but to our faith, we must be faithful to what he has said. Our faith is established on the guarantees that he offers²⁹. He in fact is the Word, the Truth, the Wisdom and the Power of God³⁰. In the following text, taken from Book VI of *De Trinitate*, Hilary maintains the authority of the Church's faith but at the same time points clearly to its ultimate ground. The faith of the Church speaks for itself, but ultimately, with the authority that comes from the Lord:

Manicheum secundum hereticae insaniae praedicatores pia ecclesiae fides damnat. Nescit enim in Filio portionem, sed scit Deum totum ex Deo toto. Scit ex uno unum, non desectum, sed natum. Scit natiuitatem Dei nec deminutionem esse gignentis, nec infirmitatem esse nascentis. Si ex se scit, infers calumniam temerate usurpatae scientiae; si uero de Domino suo didicit, natiuitatis suae scientiam permittit nascenti. Haec enim ita ei a Deo unigenito conperta sunt, quod Pater et Filius unum sunt, quod plenitudo deitatis in Filio est³¹.

The authority and consequent immutability of the content of faith comes directly from the fact that it is God-given. It is not produced by the church (*ex se*) but is given by Christ (*de Domino didicit*). Our steadfast and unailing acceptance of this knowledge is based on its

²⁸ De Trin. VIII.11,10-19 (322-323).

²⁹ De Trin. VI.35,12-14 (239): «Et natiuitatis huius conscientia, licet non subiecta uerbis sit, cum inenarrabilis sit, habet tamen in doctrina Fili fidei securitatem a Deo se manifestantis exisse».

³⁰ Card. Ratzinger speaks of faith in opposition to irrationality, since it is established on truth and is a movement towards truth and *ratio*, an answer to the word. Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco 1990, 44-47.

³¹ De Trin. VI,10.27-31 (206-207).

divine and therefore eternal character³². Revelation is divine truth. Faith has a divine origin. Different expressions give body to this conviction. Hilary speaks of faith and of its content as: *Christi fides*³³, *fides dominica*³⁴, *doctrina Dei*³⁵, *Dei sermo et uerae sapientiae doctrina*³⁶, *diuinae cognitionis scientia*³⁷, *diuina doctrina*³⁸, *diuinarum scripturarum doctrina*³⁹, *tanti sacramenti doctrina*⁴⁰. What God declares in Scripture, what Christ or the Apostles reveal, is according to Hilary, a *caelestis sermo*⁴¹. Our faith introduces us into this realm⁴². As a gift it has been given to us so as to simplify our search. Our weak mind and our ignorance are overcome by the clear simplicity of faith. This is Hilary's basic reasoning, of which another example is given in the following passage:

In simplicitate itaque fides est, in fide iustitia est, in confessione pietas est. Non per difficiles nos Deus ad beatam uitam quaestiones uocat, nec multiplici eloquentis facundiae genere sollicitat. In absoluto nobis ac facili est aeternitas, Iesum et suscitatum a mortuis per Deum credere, et ipsum esse Dominum confiteri. Nemo itaque ea quae ob ignoracionem nostram dicta sunt, ad occasionem inreligiositatis usurpet. Cognoscendus enim Iesus Christus mortuus erat, ut in eo uiueremus⁴³.

Hilary states that what is given to us in faith is clear and simple. Our reflections may proceed from our ignorance or other failings. God

³² De Trin. VI.37,23-24 (242): «Haec reuelatio Patris est, hoc ecclesiae fundamentum est, haec securitas aeternitatis est».

³³ Cf. In Matt. (SC 258) 33.1,4 (240).

³⁴ Cf. De Trin. V.2,2 (152).

³⁵ Cf. De Trin. IV.6,30 (106).

³⁶ Cf. De Trin. XII.39,1 (608).

³⁷ Cf. De Trin. VIII.30,18 (342).

³⁸ Cf. De Trin. IX.70,5 (450).

³⁹ Cf. De Trin. III.2,3 (74).

⁴⁰ Cf. De Trin. VII.33,1-2 (300).

⁴¹ De Trin. VII.19,32 (281). See also *sermo Dei* in De Trin. I.6,11-12 (6); De Trin. II.1,1 (38); De Trin. IV.30,8 (135); De Trin. V.22,11 (173); it is called *indissolubilis Dei sermo* (De Trin. VII.24,30 (289)); Cf. De Trin. VII.26,2 (291); De Trin. VII.38,7 (305); De Trin. X.4,5 (461); De Trin. XII.39,1 (608), and *sermo diuinus* in De Trin. IV.27,1-2 (130); De Trin. V.9,11 (159), and De Trin. XII.38,1 (608).

⁴² De Trin. VI.47,13 (252): «Confessio haec aeternitas est et fides ista non moritur».

⁴³ De Trin. X.70,26-34 (526).

is not subject to such deficiencies even though he adapts his words to ours. In faith we receive a God-given reality which imposes its corresponding obligations.

1.3 The immutable condition of the knowledge given in faith

Because it is not the product of the human mind but it is given to us, Hilary sees faith as one, and therefore may not be changed according to preferences or different tastes⁴⁴. In its content it is not subject to human will or to human preferences⁴⁵. In the reign of faith, precisely because it is the acceptance of a God-given and predetermined knowledge, there is no «intellectual freedom» to modify or change as pleases. We must not change this knowledge because our salvation depends upon it. Revealed knowledge, Hilary tells us, is the source of our hope, if we hold to it in faith⁴⁶. Heresy looses this treasure because it has changed the knowledge-content of faith⁴⁷. The following text is an example of Hilary's adamant convictions in this respect:

Non enim ambiguus nos et erraticis indefinitae doctrinae studiis dereliquit, uel incertis opinionibus ingenia humana permittit, statutis per se et oppositis obicibus libertatem intellegentiae uoluntatisque concludens: ut sapere nos, nisi ad id tantum quod praedicatum a se fuerat, non sineret, cum per definitam fidei indefinitam constitutionem credi aliter adque aliter non liceret⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ De Trin. XI.2,1-4 (530): «Fides autem una iam non est, si non unum Dominum et unum Deum Patrem in conscientiae professione retinebit. Vnum uero Dominum et unum Deum Patrem quomodo fides quae non una est confitetur?».

⁴⁵ De Trin. X.1,11-15 (458): «Inmoderata enim est omnis susceptarum uoluntatum pertinacia, et inflexo motu aduersandi studium persistit, ubi non rationi uoluntas subicitur nec studium doctrinae impenditur, sed his quae uolumus rationem conquirimus et his quae studemus doctrinam coaptamus».

⁴⁶ Cf. De Trin. VIII.10,13-19 (322). Cf. also De Trin. VIII.30,26-31 (342).

⁴⁷ De Trin. IX.35,12-19 (409): «Cum in fide et confessione ueri Dei Patris Christus unicus est, rogo, qua fide uerus Deus negatus creatura esse dicatur, cum fides nulla sit in solum uerum Deum credidisse sine Christo? Sed angustum te, heretice, et diuini Spiritus incapacem caelestium dictorum non adit sensus. Et uipereo inspiratus errore, Christum uerum Deum nescis in fide solius ueri Dei ad uitae aeternitatem confitendum».

⁴⁸ De Trin. XI.1,6-13 (529).

One may not change what has been constituted as definitive and unalterable. In other words, seen from a different perspective, our faith must be constant and faithful to its original inspiration precisely because of its divine origin. As individual believers, the subjective quality of our faith must be like the faith of the Church. The pre-existing knowledge-content of faith points to its stable and immutable character. We must be faithful to what has been professed by the Church⁴⁹. Following St Paul's lead⁵⁰, Hilary, introduces another expression of this same principle. There must be a strict relationship between belief in the heart and the external profession of faith.

Non tardo opus est petito que longe uerbo confessionis, nec interuallo aliquo inter cor adque os relicto, ut quod ad protestationem religionis loquendum sit, per infidelem ambiguitatem cogitetur. Sed et iuxta nos esse oportet et in nobis: ne aliqua inter regionem cordis adque oris mora, fides forte nostra non ita in sensu sit ut in uerbis, sed conexas ori adque cordi incunctantem habeat et sentienti et loquendi religionem⁵¹.

What the exhortation demands according to Hilary, is that the meaning given to the words we profess, must be the meaning that they hold in themselves before our appropriation of them. In synthesis Hilary says: what we think and understand of our faith should coincide with the objective meaning of the consecrated expressions of our faith. It should, but it does not necessarily, as the varied and abundant history of heresy demonstrates.

1.4 The clarity of the knowledge given in faith

Clarity is another quality of revealed knowledge, accepted in faith, that Hilary likes to bring forward. God, who knows our weakness, has not given us a doubtful or uncertain knowledge:

⁴⁹ Peter's faith is the foundation of the faith of the Church, as such it gives the certainty of eternity and glory in opposition to our feeble human judgements: De Trin. VI.37,19-24 (242): «Ille confessus est Christum Filium Dei, ad mihi hodie, noui apostolatus mendax sacerdotium, ingeris Christum ex nihilo creaturam. Quam uim adfers dictis gloriosis? Filium Dei confessus, ob hoc beatus est. Haec reuelatio Patris est, hoc ecclesiae fundamentum est, haec securitas aeternitatis est».

⁵⁰ Cf. Rom. 10:8-10.

⁵¹ De Trin. X.70,3-9 (525).

Non relictus est hominum eloquiis de Dei rebus alius praeterquam Dei sermo. Omnia reliqua et arta et conclusa et inpedita sunt et obscura. Si quis aliis uerbis demonstrare hoc quam quibus a Deo dictum est uolet, aut ipse non intellegit, aut legentibus non intellegendum relinquit⁵².

Human opinions are fragile, but we can be absolutely sure of what is God-given. Our faith as taught by the Lord⁵³ and the Apostles⁵⁴ is sure and clear⁵⁵. Hilary will stress this point against heretics whom he accuses of not taking the obvious understanding of the words of God but by their own artful reasoning of confusing the clear message of revelation⁵⁶. Faith is given descriptive terms that leave no doubt as to how Hilary sees it. It is called *absolutissima fides*⁵⁷ or *absoluta sermonis ecclesiastici fides*⁵⁸, *absoluta professio*⁵⁹ and it offers *huius sacramenti ratio absoluta*⁶⁰. What is given in faith is *fidei ueritas*⁶¹. This quality of faith must be remembered above all when the mystery is beyond the grasp of our human reason⁶², or the reflections of human

⁵² De Trin. VII.38,6-8 (305). The same thought is present in other texts, for example: De Trin. VII.35,27-28 (303): «quia per Domini professionem auctoritas esset non incerta credendi».

⁵³ De Trin. VIII.52,1-2 (364): «Consulens itaque humanae infirmitati Deus non incerta uerborum nuditate fidem docuit».

⁵⁴ De Trin. VI.44,24-26 (249-250): «Non incerta et infirma ille qui electionis est uas locutus est, nec magister gentium et apostolus Christi ambiguae doctrinae suae errorem reliquit».

⁵⁵ De Trin. VIII.13,1-3 (325): «Sed Dominus nihil fidelium conscientiae incertum relinquens, ipsum illum naturalis efficientiae docuit effectum». See also De Trin. VIII.30,1-4 (341); De Trin. VIII.49,1-2 (361); De Trin. IX.1,32-36 (371).

⁵⁶ De Synodis, (PL 10) 20 (496 A): «Confusis permixtisue uerbis ueritatem frequentissime haeretici eludunt, et incautorum aures communium uocabulorum sono capiunt».

⁵⁷ De Trin. I.13,2 (12).

⁵⁸ Cf. De Trin. V.30,8 (182).

⁵⁹ Cf. De Trin. IV.38,1-2 (141); De Trin. VII.31,8 (298).

⁶⁰ Cf. De Trin. XI.36,1 (564).

⁶¹ De Trin. III.9,18-22 (80): «Verbis breuibus et paucis omne opus officii sui et dispensationis exposuit, nihilominus fidei ueritatem aduersus omnem inspirationem diabolicae fraudulentiae communiens. Curramus ergo per singulas sermonis sui uirtutes».

⁶² De Trin. III.5,1-3 (76): «Sunt istiusmodi in Deo potestates, quarum cum ratio intellegentiae nostrae inconpraehensibilis est, fides tamen per ueritatem efficientiae in absoluto est».

philosophy⁶³. The eyes of faith bring us to see what is not humanly visible or clear⁶⁴.

1.5 The knowledge proper to faith is not individual knowledge

The metaphor which presents faith as a knowing and understanding subject serves to underline the privileged position of the knowledge-content of faith, placed above and beyond the individual mind of the believer. Faith can only be known and discovered as a pre-existing independent knowledge. It has been given. Hilary's advice given in Book IV of his *De Trinitate* bears witness to this binding condition when he says: «Inmorare Dei uerbis, confitere Dei uocibus, et fuge confusionis denuntiationem»⁶⁵.

In his exhortation to the believer who would understand his faith, Hilary says: «stay within the words of God and confess with the sayings of God». Faith has its origin in the divine and eternal words. It precedes us in time. It is the apostolic faith, the faith of the Church. It is the living and constant faith. This view underlines the fact that the knowledge-content of faith is not a product of our mind nor can it be manipulated according to our desires. Faith does not come from the experience of the believers. It does not belong, properly speaking, to the individual believer. The genuine believer is obedient to what is given⁶⁶. It is a revealed knowledge, a God-given knowledge that is not in our power to change⁶⁷.

The faith stands before us as something different from our own expressions or thoughts on faith, or our personal understanding of our faith, or our personal experience of the life of faith. The clearest and

⁶³ De Trin. IX.8,1-3 (378): «Huius igitur sacramenti apostolus conscius et per Dominum ipsum fidei scientiam adeptus, cum non ignoraret incapacem eius esse et mundum et homines et filosofiam, ait»

⁶⁴ Hilary uses the expression *fidei oculi* in De Trin. IV.25,1-7 (128): «Scribura et per Abraham Deum esse qui loqueretur ostendit. Abrahæ quoque Isac filius promittitur. Dehinc postea adsistunt uiri tres. Abraham conspectis tribus unum adorat et Dominum confitetur. Scribura adstittisse uiros tres edidit, sed patriarcha non ignorat qui et adorandus sit et confitendus. Indiscreta adsistentium species est, sed ille Dominum suum fidei oculis et uisu mentis agnouit».

⁶⁵ De Trin. IV.41,23-24 (146).

⁶⁶ Cf. De Trin. I.37,23-24 (36); De Trin. I.15,6 (16).

⁶⁷ De Trin. VII.33,27-28 (301): «Non enim fides ex arbitrio nostro, sed ex dictorum est ineunda uirtutibus».

most tragic example of the distinction between faith and our thoughts on faith is to be had in the case of heresy as the following text puts forward:

Nam ut de ceteris hereticorum stultissimis studiis sileam, de quibus tamen sicubi occasionem sermonis ratio praebebit non tacebimus, quidam ita euangelicae fidei corrumpunt sacramentum, ut sub unius Dei pia tantum professione natiuitatem unigeniti Dei abnegent⁶⁸.

Heretics by their words and thoughts, by their false reasoning, corrupt the mystery of the evangelical faith. Hilary uses the expression *fidei conscientia*⁶⁹ which means one's personal faith, or more precisely, the knowledge, awareness or recognition of one's faith, which can be lost or altered or perverted in relation to the true and genuine faith. He speaks of the difficulty of giving expression to one's faith, of being true in speech to the faith of the heart. These different sayings show up the independence and constancy of the knowledge-content of faith vis-à-vis our professions of the same. Thus for Hilary, the fundamental test of all reflections and conclusions on the truths of faith (which may be called theological reasoning) will be the conformity, or lack of conformity, of its conclusions with the original knowledge given in the original expressions of faith.

2. «Fides intellegentiam adsumit»

The second section of this article looks directly at the understanding of faith. The believer's intelligence, we have seen, must go beyond its own human reasoning and logic, if it is to be capable of understanding divine truths. «Going beyond» the limits of unaided human reasoning by means of faith is nevertheless perfectly reasonable. Hilary states the following general principle in relation to our understanding of the mysteries of faith:

⁶⁸ De Trin. I.16,1-5 (16).

⁶⁹ Cf. De Trin. VII.41,15 (309).

Dei autem uirtutes secundum magnificentiam aeternae potestatis non sensu sed fidei infinitate pendebat: ut Deum in principio apud Deum esse et uerbum carnem factum habitasse in nobis non idcirco non crederet, quia non intellexeret, sed idcirco se meminisset intellegere posse, si crederet⁷⁰.

This quote gives expression to a fundamental point in Hilary's view of the understanding of faith. If our mind accepts the mysteries of faith, it knows that it can come to a certain understanding of them. What we call theological reflection and knowledge are certainly the work of the human mind. Hilary sees clearly that the mind faced with the content of faith cannot explain of itself and from itself such sublime truths; but if it accepts them in faith, then it can understand them. Understanding the infinite does not arise from natural reasoning, it begins with and comes from belief. The order in which these two human activities come is important; first belief, then understanding. Belief opens the way to understanding (*sed idcirco se meminisset intellegere posse, si crederet*).

According to Hilary the activities by which human reason attempts to understand the truths of faith will be successful only if they are the work of reason introduced by faith into the domain of revealed truth. The mind must first believe so as to understand. This is so since Hilary sees *Fidei intellegentia* as the understanding of the mysteries of faith done by what we may call the *believing mind*⁷¹. The believing mind requires certain qualities which Hilary enumerates in the following text from Book I, chapter 37 of his *De Trinitate*:

Torpemus enim quodam naturae nostrae pigro stupore, et ad res tuas intellegendas intra ignorantiae necessitatem ingenii nostri inbecillitate cohibemur; sed doctrinae tuae studia ad sensum nos diuinae cognitionis instituunt, et ultra naturalem opinionem fidei oboedientia prouehit⁷².

⁷⁰ De Trin. I.12,11-16 (12).

⁷¹ The believing mind holds fast to what it has learned in faith: De Trin. VI.20,2-3 (218): «Haec enim ego ita didici, ita credidi et ita confirmatae mentis fide teneo, ne aut possim credere aliter aut uelim». He speaks of heretics who lack a tenacious faith: De Trin. XI.6,4 (534): «Qui si apostolicae fidei tenaces essent, intellegerent».

⁷² De Trin. I.37,18-24 (36).

The passage calls for strength of faith in its obedience to God the giver of truth. It invokes a strong desire for understanding and a familiarity with the knowledge given in faith. These qualities are necessary if our feeble minds are to be led to understanding of things divine that are beyond our human comprehension.

For an interesting synthesis of Hilary's view in relation to faith as a source of knowledge I come to an important passage from Book I, chapter 8 already mentioned. We read that faith can become a source of knowledge for us if our human mind admits it as such. In other words faith gives genuine knowledge to reason, if reason is prepared to recognise and to submit itself to faith which brings with it a higher knowledge:

His itaque piae opinionis adque doctrinae studiis animus inbutus in secessu quodam ac specula pulcherrimae huius sententiae requiescebat, non sibi relictum quidquam aliud a natura sua intellegens, in quo maius officium praestare conditori suo munusue posset, quam ut tantum eum esse intellegeret, quantus et intellegi non potest et potest credi: dum intellegentiam et fides sibi necessariae religionis adsumit, et infinitas aeternae potestatis excedit⁷³.

This text calls for a closer analysis. The awareness of God's transcendence opens the way, in Hilary's opinion, to knowledge through faith. Human reasoning leads to God. Yet God in his greatness appears as transcendent. God cannot be grasped by human intelligence. And yet the human mind can understand that precisely because of his transcendence and greatness, God is worthy of our faith. Faith, in other words, as a movement of the mind includes the openness to, and justified acceptance of, a superior, God-given knowledge.

Even this understanding which is associated to our religious acceptance, and which is therefore raised to the higher plane of our faith (*intellegentiam [...] fides sibi necessariae religionis adsumit*), we are reminded by Hilary, is surpassed by the limitless power of God. Faith raises the human mind, in a sense, to its own level of understanding. Faith calls the mind to open itself to a share in its own divine realm, to think according to its own proper logic which is beyond the reach of unaided human reason⁷⁴.

⁷³ De Trin. I.8,1-8 (8-9).

⁷⁴ De Trin. I.37,18-23 (36).

Hilary speaks in the opening pages of his *De Trinitate* of a personal transition from a knowledge gained by reason to a knowledge received from God in faith. By acceptance of the Gospel message, the mind advances decidedly beyond the grasp of natural intelligence *ultra naturalis sensus intellegentiam*⁷⁵. What it now knows through faith is called specifically *Divini sacramenti doctrinam*⁷⁶. The sublime mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption and glorification of mankind are communicated through faith. This access to superior knowledge is, in a sense, a humiliation for reason which must recognise its ignorance and offer its obedience to God⁷⁷, but it should be seen above all, as its exaltation⁷⁸.

Faith elevates reason to a new knowledge beyond its own capabilities *Intellegentiam [...] fides sibi [...] adsumit*⁷⁹. The mind of the genuine believer rejoices at the new sublime knowledge that it receives: *Hanc itaque diuini sacramenti doctrinam mens laeta suscepit*⁸⁰. It is not without tensions that this acceptance comes about. This tense relationship between faith and human reason is stated clearly. The following text shows Hilary's fine grasp of human reason's spontaneous pretensions:

Hanc itaque diuini sacramenti doctrinam mens laeta suscepit, in Deum proficiens per carnem, et in nouam natiuitatem per fidem uocata, et ad caelestem regenerationem obtinendam potestati suae permissa; curam in se parentis sui creatorisque cognoscens non in nihilum redigendam se per eum existimans, per quem in hoc ipsum quod est ex nihilo substitisset; et haec omnia ultra intellegentiae humanae metiens sensum, quia ratio communium opinionum consilii caelestis incapax hoc solum putet in natura rerum esse quod aut intra se intellegat aut praestare possit ex sese⁸¹.

⁷⁵ De Trin. I.10,23 (10).

⁷⁶ De Trin. I.12,1 (12).

⁷⁷ Cf. De Trin. I.15,1-8 (15-16).

⁷⁸ Cf. De Trin. II.10,11-16 (48). Cf. J.E. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 72-74.

⁷⁹ De Trin. I.8,7-8 (9).

⁸⁰ De Trin. I.12,1-2 (12).

⁸¹ De Trin. I.12,7-11 (12).

The principle contained in the last lines of the passage quoted can be stated as follows: spontaneous reason does not accept the sublime mysteries of God and his ways because they are beyond the measure of its understanding. They cannot be reached or produced by human reason as such⁸². In other words, human reason cannot generate from within itself the knowledge capable of justifying them. This is a sharp presentation *ante litteram* of the logic of rationalism. Hilary sees it as a natural tendency, but he also maintains that human reason must be taught to accept reasonable or rational knowledge based on faith. Human reason that refuses to go beyond its own restricted view is limiting its capabilities of truth. A complementary formulation of the same principle can be found in chapter 24 of book III:

Non est autem in tantum confidendum prudentia humana, ut perfectum se putet sapere quod sapiat, et in eo arbitretur absolutae rationis summam contineri, quod ipsa mente pertractans aequabili undique apud se existimet ueritatis opinione constare⁸³.

Hilary takes note of the fact that human knowledge tends to consider its own grasp or expression of truth as perfect knowledge. Human reason tends to see the product of its own activity as an expression of supreme and comprehensive truth (*in eo arbitretur absolutae rationis summam contineri*).

The divine mysteries are not generated by our human thinking. It is not surprising that they are excluded or misinterpreted by a mind that, in its foolish presumption⁸⁴, considers its own power of reasoning as supreme and capable of all truth. In another text, taken from book I, Hilary states clearly the fundamental reason why the divine mysteries are not deductible from our natural knowledge:

Haec itaque ultra naturae humanae intellegentiam a Deo gesta non succumbunt rursum naturalibus mentium sensibus, quia infinitae aeternitatis operatio infinitam metiendi exigat opinionem: ut cum Deus homo, cum immortalis mortuus, cum aeternus sepultus est, non sit intellegentiae ratio sed potestatis exceptio, ita rursum ex contrario non sensus sed uirtutis modus sit, ut Deus ex homine, ut immortalis ex mortuo, ut aeternus sit ex sepulto⁸⁵.

⁸² Cf. E.J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 81.

⁸³ De Trin. III.24,1-5 (96).

⁸⁴ Cf. E.J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 90.

⁸⁵ De Trin. I.13,44-51 (15).

Here Hilary speaks of *naturae humanae intellegentiam* and how the mysteries of revelation are beyond its grasp. Two important considerations give rise to his awareness. The mysteries of divine nature and divine power are not to be understood as if they were in fact in the region (epistemologically speaking) of spontaneous understanding *naturalibus mentium sensibus*. Secondly and consequently, they are not to be explained from the natural logic of the human mind⁸⁶. The text refers directly to the feats of the History of Salvation. They must be considered as extraordinary feats proper to divine power; (*non sit intellegentiae ratio sed potestatis exceptio*, or again *non sensus sed uirtutis*). In a sense, an analogous sense, they do not belong to the reign of *natura* but *dispensatio*, (always keeping in mind that even what is *natura* in God is beyond the grasp of human intelligence)⁸⁷.

There is however a possible *intellegentia*, precisely that which faith offers by drawing human understanding up into its own domain *Intellegentiam fides sibi adsumit*⁸⁸. Heresy on the contrary would seem to be the product of unbelieving reason drawing, and consequently corrupting, the content of faith down into its own domain. Indeed Hilary is aware of the fact that the specific *fidei intellegentia* proper to a genuine understanding of faith lives, as the presence of heresy shows, in a constant tension with the temptation to relapse into an unbelieving use of reason⁸⁹.

Hilary's view of *Fidei intellegentia* therefore is not simply an earnest reflection done by the believer's mind in the field of truth opened up to it by faith. The proper understanding of faith that Hilary propose is the following. The understanding mind must accept what is given in faith. It must operate in such a way that it is sustained continually by faith. In other words, reason must be maintained in a believing mode and not allowed to fall back into its spontaneous autonomous mode. Hilary understands in this sense the advice given by St. Paul:

⁸⁶ Cf. E.J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 85-88.

⁸⁷ For an understanding of Hilary's use of *dispensatio* and related terms, see: L. LADARIA, «"Dispensatio" en S. Hilario de Poitiers», *Gregorianum* 66 (1985) 429-455.

⁸⁸ Cf. De Trin. I.8,7-8 (9).

⁸⁹ His prayer is clear: De Trin. XII.57,1-5 (627): «Conserua, oro, hanc fidei meae incontaminatam religionem, et usque ad excessum spiritus mei dona mihi hanc conscientiae meae uocem: ut quod in regenerationis meae symbolo baptizatus in Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto professus sum, semper obtineam»

Ac ne in aliquo saecularis prudentiae tardaretur errore, ad piae confessionis huius absolutissimam fidem ita insuper per apostolum dictis diuinis edocetur: «Videte ne quis uos spoliet per filosofiam et inanem deceptionem secundum traditionem hominum secundum elementa mundi et non secundum Christum» [Col. 2,8]⁹⁰.

Heresy is rooted precisely in this inconsistency between professing faith on the one hand but then allowing the mind to reason, not from the sublime understanding given in faith, but according to its own limited spontaneous capacity. The reflections of human philosophy which ignore the mysteries of God and the power of God should not lead the mind astray. Reason must remember that the truths given to it in the knowledge of faith are founded on the power and infinity of God and not on its own limited capacity of explanation⁹¹. Human reason is not the measure of the infinite nature of God⁹².

If one refers back to the metaphor of faith as a living subject one may venture to express his position with a rhetorical view not untypical of Hilary himself. The genuine understanding of faith for Hilary of Poitiers is not so much reason thinking on faith, as faith thinking through reason. Keeping in mind the clear distinction between faith and reason one may venture to say in our expressions of today: Theology for Hilary is part of the history of faith. The faith of the Church, precisely through the reasoning process of individual believers, becomes more explicitly aware of itself. In this sense Hilary could subscribe to Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*⁹³. It is clear that for Hilary faith is full of understanding. Strictly speaking, it is the believer, not faith, that seeks understanding. The apostolic faith, the faith of the Church, already knows clearly and surely the truth. Nevertheless faith in the life of the Church is aided by human understanding, if human understanding is done from faith and subordinated to the truth of faith.

⁹⁰ De Trin. I.13,1-6 (12-13).

⁹¹ «Sunt istiusmodi in Deo potestates, quarum cum ratio intellegentiae nostrae inconpraehensibilis est, fides tamen per ueritatem efficientiae in absoluto est». De Trin. III.5,1-3 (76).

⁹² Cf. E.J. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 94.

⁹³ Cf. ANSELM *Proslogion*, 1. Opera Omnia (ed. F.S. Schmitt) Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt, 1984,(I,100, 18-19).

3. «Fides rationabilis scientiae»⁹⁴

The third section of this article, based on the expression *fides rationabilis scientiae*, which may be translated as «faith of reasonable or rational knowledge»⁹⁵, points the way to another perspective in Hilary's view of the genuine understanding of faith. Hilary speaks of the difference between faith as such and an enlightened understanding or explanation of faith. In other words, Hilary considers that simple faith is a virtue, provided it is not too simple⁹⁶. The true believer must have an understanding, preferably a reasoned understanding, of his faith⁹⁷. Now this is possible, according to Hilary, because faith contains «reasons». Faith is meaningful. Hilary is aware of the fact that he must steer a balanced course between extremes in this theme. Several texts underline this awareness. For example in book VIII he writes:

⁹⁴ Cf. De Trin. I.22,7 (21).

⁹⁵ It could be argued that *rationabilis scientiae* here refers to «spiritual» and not simply rational knowledge. I have given this some consideration since «spiritual» is obviously the correct translation or *rationabile* in Rom. 12,1 and 1 Peter 2,2, a sense which is certainly present in Hilary's Treatise on the psalms LXVII. 30,11-12 (Cf. CCL 61, 286). I have preferred «rational or reasonable» since this is the classic Latin meaning of the term (Cf. Ch. T. LEWIS, ed., *A Latin Dictionary. Lewis and Short*, Oxford 1993, 1527) and it corresponds both to the immediate context and to the rational tenor of Hilary's reflections in his De Trinitate. Translators of Hilary's De Trinitate agree on the «rational» sense of the expression in De Trin I.22,7. See for example: L. LADARIA, *San Hilario de Poitiers. La Trinidad*, Madrid 1986, 52; G.-M. DE DURAND, CH. MOREL, G. PELLAND, *Hilaire de Poitiers, La Trinité tome III*, SC 462, Paris 2001, 245; E.W. WATSON -al., *St. Hilary of Poitiers. Select Works*, New York 1899, Peabody 1995, 46; S.McKENNA, *Saint Hilary of Poitiers. The Trinity*, Washington 1968, 20. For the spiritual sense of *rationabilis* in early Christian Latin see: B. BOTTE - CH. MOHRMANN, *L'Ordinaire de la Messe, texte critique, traduction et études*, Paris 1953, 117-122.

⁹⁶ Hilary sees the simple or ignorant in great danger from the artful words of heresy: De Trin. VII.1,6-14 (259): «A quo quamuis consciae infirmitatis nostrae trepidatione reuocemur, tamen fidei aestu incitati et hereticorum furore commoti et periculo ignorantium perturbati, quae loqui non audemus, silere non possumus: utriusque discriminis metu subditi, ne destitutae ueritatis rea in nobis sit aut taciturnitas aut praedicatio. Incredibilibus etenim se corrupti ingenii artibus heretica subtilitas circumegit, primum ut fingeret religionem, deinde ut omnium simplicium aurium securitatem uerbis falleret». Doignon notes that the term *simplicitas* in Hilary refers to the beginnings of faith and is closely associated to an open acceptance of the meaning of the words of faith: «Le propre de la "foi simple" est l'adhésion à l'évidence des mots qui enseignent la foi, sous la motion de l'Espirt Saint». See also: J. DONGON. «Hilaire sur Matth. 18,3: La simplicité des enfants ou un programme fragile pour croyants», RevSR 70(3) 1996, 309.

⁹⁷ Hilary distinguishes between faith as such, which is sufficient for salvation, and faith which is strengthened by doctrinal instruction, which is necessary so as to resist and refute error. Cf. De Trin. XII.20,15-27 (594): «Oportet eos qui Christum praedicant mundo, inreligiosis mundi imperfectisque doctrinis per scientiam sapientis omnipotentiae contraire, secundum illud beati apostoli dictum: "nostra enim arma non sunt carnalia sed potentia Deo ad destructionem munitionum, rationes destruentia et omnem altitudinem eleuatam aduersum

Extra euangelica promissa est, quisquis extra fidem eorum est, et inopia intellegentiae crimen spem simplicem perdidit. Habet enim non tam ueniam quam praemium, ignorare quod credas: quia maximum stipendium fidei est, sperare quae nescias. Aduero ultimae impietatis furor est, aut intellecta non credere, aut intellegentiam corrupisse credendi⁹⁸.

Here the genuine faith is described as «ignorant» or not knowledgeable. This must be understood according to its context. Faith is received. It does not come from our knowledge nor does it rest on our knowledge. We believe, not because we «see» or know directly, but because we trust in God. We receive from God a knowledge that we, from ourselves, ignore. But if with faith comes knowledge, then we must not neglect that knowledge, much less corrupt it. But since clear knowledge comes with faith, this corruption will always be evident: «Sed licet ipsum intellegentiae suae sensum impietas demutet, non tamen potest intellegentia non extare dictorum»⁹⁹.

If some, Hilary says in the text just quoted, in their lack of piety corrupt the sense of the words of faith, even then they cannot hide the evident meaning which derives directly from the words that are there for all to see and understand. From this perspective we may come to understand the role that Hilary sets for himself as his duty. One specific formulation of what he proposes to do in his *De Trinitate* is precisely to «expose» the true meaning of the words of the true profession of faith. This meaning is appropriately called, as in the following passage taken from Book IV, *ratio professionis*:

Confitetur Patrem aeternum et ab origine liberum. Confitetur et Fili originem ab aeterno: non ipsum ab initio, sed ab ininitiabili; non per seipsum, sed ab eo qui a nemine semper est; natum ab aeterno, natiuitatem uidelicet ex paterna aeternitate sumentem. Caret ergo fides nostra hereticae prauitatis opinione. Edita namque est sensus nostri professio, licet nondum sit ratio professionis exposita¹⁰⁰.

cognitionem Dei” [2 cor.10,4-5]. Fidem non nudam apostolus adque inopem rationis reliquit: quae quamuis potissima ad salutem sit, tamen nisi per doctrinam instruat, habebit quidem inter aduersa tutum defugiendi recessum, non etiam retinebit constantem obtinendi securitatem, eritque ut infirmibus sunt post fugam castra, non etiam ut castra habentibus adest interrita fortitudo». This is Hilary’s main perspective in his *De Trinitate*.

⁹⁸ De Trin. VIII.10,13-19 (322).

⁹⁹ De Trin. VIII.11,1-3 (322).

¹⁰⁰ De Trin. IV.6,21-23 (105).

In the above passage Hilary defends the eternal birth of the Son. He makes a distinction between the statement or profession of faith as understood by him, *sensus nostri professio* and his exposition or explanation or «reasoning» of the same faith. In this way *ratio professionis exposita* refers to the reasoned exposition of the same understanding or meaning, of faith. Without drawing general conclusions in relation to the specific terms involved, in this particular case we seem to have a shade of difference between *sensus* and *ratio*. This particular context differentiates between two terms for the meaning or understanding of faith. It is called *sensus*, it would seem, when it refers to how faith is understood personally by the believer according to the words used. It is *ratio* however, when the same understanding refers to the objective meaning or content of faith as exposed or explained or reasoned, *ratio professionis*¹⁰¹. In this sense we may say that Hilary propose to raise his readers' understanding of faith to a reasoned understanding. He pretends to offer «reasons» in favour of their faith and so to give them a reasoned understanding of their profession of faith.

Faith and understanding are closely interwoven. What God reveals, he reveals for us to accept in faith and understand in faith. We have presented the expression *ratio professionis* (in the place of *intellegentia* or *sensus*) as having to do with the reasoned meaning of faith. This interpretation does not stem solely from the use of *ratio*¹⁰². The idea is present under different forms in Hilary's work. Hilary reasons on faith. Faith, in his eyes, is capable of being reasoned. Indeed Faith must be reasoned. It is not sufficient to accept it on authority alone as the following text clearly states:

¹⁰¹ A similar passage which describes what may be called his theological intent is to be found in De Trin. XI.22,1-4 (551-552): «Congruum itaque est omnem super his apostolici sermonis sensum retractare, ut singulorum quorumque dictorum ratione exposita adque edita, sacramenti totius capaces per uniuersitatis intellegentiam praebeamur».

¹⁰² *Ratio* generally means objective «meaning», «reason» or «content» of a word or saying in De Trinitate, as in the following example: De Trin. III.1,1-3 (73): «Adfert plerisque obscuritatem sermo Domini, cum dicit: "Ego in Patre et Pater in me" [Io. 14,10]. Et non immerito. Natura enim intellegentiae humanae rationem dicti istius non capit». Emmenegger, from a different perspective considers *ratio* as the reasoning faculty and notes that Hilary uses many expressions other than *ratio* to express such a faculty. Cf. J.E. EMMENEGGER, *The Functions*, 38-39.

Haec quidem sensus hominum non consequetur, nec exemplum aliquod rebus diuinis comparatio humana praestabit. Sed quod intellegibile est homini, Deo esse possibile est. Hoc non ita a me dictum sit, ut ad rationem dicti ea tantum sufficiat auctoritas, quod a Deo dictum sit. Cognoscendum itaque adque intellegendum est quid sit illud: «Ego in Patre et Pater in me» [Io 14,10], si tamen conpraehendere hoc ita ut est ualebimus: ut quod natura rerum pati non posse existimatur, id diuinae ueritatis ratio consequatur¹⁰³.

Here Hilary as a believer knows that the acceptance of Revelation is grounded on the authority of God who reveals. Nevertheless it is just and lawful for our reason not to stop there, but to look for understanding of what has been said. (*Cognoscendum itaque adque intellegendum est quid sit*) What is not understood from a natural point of view can be understood from the reasoned knowledge of divine truth¹⁰⁴. Reason, looking for understanding, by apprehending divine truth, *diuinae ueritatis ratio*, can find meaning where unaided reason is left empty.

A similar thrust is behind the following text taken from Book II, where what is the object of intellectual inquiry related to the words of Scripture is called *dicti ratio*.

Sed id quod in euangeliis legitur: «Quia Deus Spiritus est» [Io. 4,24], diligenter est contuendum quomodo et qua ratione sit dictum. Omne enim dictum ut dicatur ex causa est, et dicti ratio ex sensu erit intellegenda dicendi: ne quia responsum a Domino est: «Spiritus Deus est», idcirco cum sancti Spiritus nomine et usus negetur et donum¹⁰⁵.

Here *ratio* and *causa* are closely related. The meaning of what has been said, Hilary states, must be derived from the cause (or «intent») and reason (or «objective meaning»). Thus when Hilary speaks of faith

¹⁰³ De Trin. III.1,11-19 (73).

¹⁰⁴ Hilary criticises the heretics who look not for objective truth but their own preference: De Trin. X.1,11-19 (458): «Inmoderata enim est omnis susceptarum uoluntatum pertinacia, et inflexo motu aduersandi studium persistit, ubi non rationi uoluntas subicitur nec studium doctrinae inpenditur, sed his quae uolumus rationem conquirimus et his quae studemus doctrinam coaptamus. iam quae nominis potius quam naturae erit doctrina quae fingitur, et non iam ueri manebit ratio sed placiti, quam sibi uoluntas magis ad defensionem placentium coaptauerit, non quae uoluntatis instinctum per intellegentiam ueri rationabilis incitabit». This particular perspective on heresy will be studied in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁵ De Trin. II.31,1-6 (65-66).

as a *fides rationabilis scientiae* what is meant is that faith is full of light, full of knowledge, full of truth, full of reasons. The knowledge that comes with faith is in itself «reasonable», rational and logic. Hilary of course does not allow us to forget that the reasonableness in question is precisely the reasonableness proper to faith¹⁰⁶.

In the following text this difference between two types of reasonableness or rationality is sharply portrayed in the different possibilities or levels of rationality. Our human mind has its own level of rationality but it must transcend this level if it would aspire to understand miracles of divine power:

Nihil igitur in diuinis effectibus humanae mentis opinione tractandum est, neque de creatore suo opificii ipsius materia decernat. Adsumenda autem nobis est stultitia, ut sapientiam sumamus, non inprudenciae sensu sed naturae nostrae conscientia: ut quod cogitationis terrena ratio non concipit, id nobis rursus ratio diuinae uirtutis insinuet¹⁰⁷.

We must use our mind with a proper awareness of its feeble nature in relation to divine possibilities and power. The expressions used in the passage, *cogitationis terrena ratio* and *ratio diuinae uirtutis*, indicate clearly the contrast between human limitations and divine infinity. Human explanations and the reduced measure of human reasonableness therefore must not be used to limit the possibilities of things divine. This does not mean that there may be no «critical» use of reason in the domain of faith. What it means is that the use of critical reason be restricted to its legitimate use, such as the understanding of explanations of the words of a text or of the internal logic of truths, or in relation to our own arguments, interpretations or explanations which we place at the service of faith¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁶ De Trin. I.34,17-20 (33): «ut in quantum ad aeternae natiuitatis complectendam intelligentiam humana mens communis sensu opinione deficitur, in tantum studiis diuinis ad sentienda ea quae ultra naturae nostrae opinionem sunt niterentur».

¹⁰⁷ De Trin. III.26,1-7 (99).

¹⁰⁸ De Trin. I.29,1-6 (26): «Parum autem est in rebus ad salutem maxime necessariis sola ea ad satisfactionem fidei adferre, quae propria sunt: quia plerumque blandiente sensu fallant dictorum nostrorum inexploratae adsertiones, nisi etiam propositionum aduersarum demonstratae inanitates fidem nostram in eo ipso quod ipsae ridiculae esse arguantur adfirmant». Our human input is where error may be present. Cf. De Trin. II.3,4-5 (39).

Perhaps the clearest expression of Hilary's point of view in relation to our rational understanding of faith, as I understand it, is to be had in the following text taken from Book I. It speaks of rationality or reasonableness, both of the reasonableness of our act of faith and of the rationality of the knowledge-content of faith. In synthesis the thought runs as follows: because there is a rationality proper to faith, therefore there is a legitimate role for reason functioning within faith:

Post hunc itaque lenem ac breuem demonstratae trinitatis sermonem tertius liber, etsi sensim, tamen iam proficenter incedit. Nam id quod ultra humani sensus intellegentiam Dominus de se professus est, quantis potest potentiae exemplis ad intellegentiae fidem coaptat dicens: «Ego in Patre et Pater in me» [Io 14,10]: ut quod ab homine per naturam haebetem non capitur, id fides iam rationabilis scientiae consequatur: quia neque non credendum de se Deo est, neque opinandum est extra rationem fidei esse intellegentiam potestatis¹⁰⁹.

The texts presents the knowledge we receive in divine revelation. It comes to us from God and therefore from beyond the reach of our spontaneous understanding. It is revealed in words adapted to our human capacity of belief and also—and this is an important point—of understanding (*ad intellegentiae fidem coaptat*). We are told that where the weakness of the mind cannot penetrate, where unaided reason cannot reach, there faith provides us with a «reasonable» or «rational» knowledge (*id fides iam rationabilis scientiae consequatur*).

A brief analysis of this affirmation in its proper context should help us to understand fully the meaning of the expression *fides rationabilis scientiae* which is at the centre of our present reflections. It gives us the following points which can be seen in a sense as conclusive in relation to the present article:

4. Conclusions

Faith includes knowledge and understanding. It is a sure, constant, authoritative, divine knowledge. This is Hilary's constant persuasion. It is a *cognitionis fides* and a *fides intellegentiae*. It is faith of the mind and in the mind in the sense that it is a faith which informs the mind of

¹⁰⁹ De Trin. I.22,1-10 (20-21).

the believer with the knowledge of God¹¹⁰. To this end, God adapts his revelation to our understanding (*ad intellegentiae fidem coaptat*). To this end the Holy Spirit's gift of knowledge is given.

Faith is reasonable. There can be no doubt that it is «reasonable» to accept from God, who is trustworthy, the knowledge given to us in faith (*quia neque non credendum de se Deo est*).

Even more directly, the terms *scientia rationabilis* and *rationem fidei* would seem to suggest that Hilary considers the content of our faith to be «reasonable» or rational in itself. In other words, what we receive in faith is a field of reasonable knowledge. It is a field in which reason can move according to its own nature and rules and find understanding. Faith is not just a series of truths imposed on the believing mind as ready-made conclusions. The knowledge given in faith has a rational structure. The role of the mind as reason is to explore and expose such a structure. In synthesis: faith is «reasonable» because the knowledge it gives is an interwoven structure of truth. Reason is capable of understanding and exploring faith, provided, let it not be forgotten, that it do so as a «believing» reason. The rationality it uses must be consistent with the knowledge-content given in faith.

The text we have been examining (De Trin. I.22,1-10), refers to a particular mystery of faith. It maintains that precisely because what God reveals to us must be believed as knowledge of him and his power, therefore we know for certain that the understanding—at least a certain understanding—of his power is not beyond the realm of faith. With faith comes understanding, because our reason is informed by faith (*neque [...] extra rationem fidei esse intellegentiam potestatis*).

This particular case is an example of how Hilary sees reason related to faith in the mind of the believer. In the field of faith, the believing reason is confident that it can achieve some understanding because faith has been given as a meaningful knowledge, a «reasonable knowledge». Such is the force of the reasonableness of faith that Hilary is convinced that even outsiders may grasp the truth of his position, the position of the Church, against heretics, based precisely on the reasonableness of the words in which faith has been expressed:

¹¹⁰ «Rarissimam deinde huius salutaris cognitionis fidem esse», cf. De Trin. I.11,9-10 (11).

Sed eam, ut spero, ecclesia doctrinae suae lucem etiam inprudenti-
ae saeculi inuehit, ut licet fidei sacramentum non suscipiat, tamen
aduersum hereticos ueritatem sacramenti a nobis intellegat praedi-
cari. Magna enim uis est ueritatis, quae cum per se intellegi possit,
per ea tamen ipsa quae ei aduersantur elucet: ut in natura sua immo-
bilis manens firmitatem naturae suae cottidie dum adtemptatur
adquirat¹¹¹.

All human beings are reasonable. They may not come to belief,
but if they attend to the reasoning, they should give credit to the teach-
ing of the Church because such is the strength of truth (*magna enim uis
est ueritas*). The lines that continue in the quoted passage are a hom-
age to truth, described by Hilary as firm in itself and immovable. Truth
becomes stronger in adversity and enlightens whatever attacks it.

Hilary uses a fortunate expression in Book VI, which sums up his
positive theological thrust in defence of the true faith against heretical
arguments. He relates his theological treatise to his pastoral intent and
calls his efforts a *ministerium* which he explains in the following
terms:

Sed cesset sermo temerarius et ex his, in quae demonstrandae stul-
titiæ hereticae necessitate proruperat, in reddendae potius rationis
ministerium decedat, ut si qui adhuc salui esse ad fidem possunt,
teneant euangelicae doctrinae adque apostolicae iter ac uerum Dei
Filium non ex adoptione, sed ex natura intellegant¹¹².

He considers his efforts to be a *reddendae rationis ministerium*. In
the passage he uses three correlated expressions. One has to do with
leading heretics to faith and salvation (*ut si qui adhuc salui esse ad
fidem possunt*) which would hopefully be the ultimate goal. Another
speaks of keeping faithfully to the way indicated by the gospel and the
apostles (*teneant euangelicae doctrinae adque apostolicae iter*) which
is the essential condition. Finally he speaks of winning them over by
bringing them to understand the divine nature of Christ (*ac uerum Dei
Filium non ex adoptione, sed ex natura intellegant*), which is the task
of his book. This text gives us the meaning and the full context of the
expression *reddendae rationis ministerium* as used in one particular

¹¹¹ De Trin. VII.4,1-8 (262-263).

¹¹² De Trin. VI.22,1-6 (220-221).

instance. If one were to look for an expression that could describe the task of the theologian as one who explains the faith by exploring, drawing-out, arguing and making explicit the content of the same, a better expression could hardly be found.

Sommario: *Il presente articolo studia il tema del pensiero di Sant'Ilario di Poitiers – così come si è espresso nella sua opera principale De Trinitate – sul rapporto giusto tra fede e la nostra intelligenza della fede. Si domanda, in altre parole, in quali condizioni può la ragione umana appropriarsi ed esplorare il contenuto della fede. L'articolo presenta e studia tre concetti chiave del pensiero di Ilario: «fides cognitionis», «fides intellegantiam adsumit» e «fides rationabilis scientiae». L'analisi di questi tre concetti chiave ci aiuta a percepire el modo come intende Ilario nel uso De Trinitate la nostra intelligenza della fede.*

Parole chiave: *Teologia, Ilario di Poitiers, Padri della Chiesa, teologia del IV secolo, fede e ragione, storia della teologia, riflessione teologica.*

Keywords: *Theology, Hilary of Poitiers, Fathers of the Church, 4th century theology, faith and reason, history of theology, theological reflection.*