

Marius Victorinus on the Trinity

by
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Victorinus ... scripsit *Adversus Arium* libros
more dialectico valde obscuros qui nisi ab
eruditis non intelliguntur.

Jerome, *De viris. ill.*,
PL 23, cols. 739ff.

“The accepted statement that Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is the first systematic exposition of its kind is not quite correct: it takes no account of Marius Victorinus.”¹ Indeed sometime between 357 and 363,² roughly half a century before Augustine’s great treatise,³ Caius Marius Victorinus⁴ did compose a series of writings in which he developed at length the doctrine of the Trinity as held by orthodox Christianity. In this paper, I shall examine the thought of Marius Victorinus as it is presented in these writings.

I shall not be greatly concerned here to explore Victorinus’s neo-Platonic sources, or to evaluate the extent of his subsequent influence on Augustine.⁵ Neither shall I concern myself with a detailed discussion of the Arian controversies in the heat of which Victorinus composed these works. Instead, I shall map out the main articulations of Victorinus’s universe (section I) and its application to his doctrine of the Trinity (section

¹ Paul Henry, “The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus: The First Systematic Exposition of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n. s. 1 (1950), p. 43.

² Paul Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus: Traités théologiques sur la Trinité*, pp. 28–60.

³ The *De trinitate* was written 399–419. See Berthold Altaner & Alfred Stuiber, *Patrologie*, p. 426.

⁴ On the name, see Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne*, III, p. 373, n. 2 ; and Charles Gore, “Victorinus,” in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, IV, p. 1129.

⁵ On the latter point, see the brief but useful overview by Henry, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–55.

II), before drawing some conclusions and making some observations on it against the backdrop of Étienne Gilson's assessment (section III).

The details of Victorinus's biography need not long detain us. He was born⁶ a pagan, left his native Africa sometime after 337⁷ and went to Rome. There he opened a school of rhetoric and soon rose to great prominence.⁸ He wrote several works during this period and in particular translated at least part of Plotinus's *Enneads* into Latin.⁹

Around the year 355,¹⁰ Victorinus was converted to Christianity.¹¹ Soon thereafter, he began his literary works in defense of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Of the writings from this Christian period, three deal systematically and at some length with the Trinity:

1. *Liber de generatione divini Verbi* (otherwise known as his letter *Ad Candidum*), a letter from Victorinus to his Arian friend Candidus, in reply to the latter's letter *De generatione divina*.
2. The long work *Adversus Arium*, in four books.
3. A brief summary of book II of the *Adversus Arium*, entitled *De homoousio recipiendo*.¹²

⁶ On the dates of his birth and death, see Albert H. Travis, "Marius Victorinus: A Biographical Note," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 36 (1943), pp. 83–90.

⁷ Monceaux, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 381–95. On the works of this period, see also Hadot, *op. cit.*, pp. 101f.

¹⁰ Monceaux, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

¹¹ See the account in Augustine's *Confessions*, VIII.2.3–5.

¹² See Hadot, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–59, for a discussion of the chronology of and relations among these works, and the circumstances under which they were written. Victorinus's Christian writings also include three hymns on the Trinity (contained in Henry, ed., *Marius Victorinus*, pp. 619–53) and commentaries on three epistles of St. Paul (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians—all in PL 8, 1145–1294). On the latter, see Alexander Souter, *The Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 8–38.

I turn now to some of the principles set out in the *Liber de generatione divini Verbi*. This letter is a reply to one from Candidus to Victorinus. Candidus had set out an Arian position that denied the generation of the divine Word. The argument, in brief, ran as follows: All generation is a kind of change; now God is immutable; therefore, in God there is no generation. That is, he neither is generated nor does he generate anything.¹³

Again, if there are generated things, there is something else that generates them. Therefore, that from which all things are must be ungenerated. Now God is that from which all things are, and therefore God is ungenerated. What is the cause of God's existing? It is God's existing itself. Neither ought one to imagine any sort of duality here, for God is one and single. He is *esse solum*. He is *unalitas simplex et unum simplex*. Now the simple is the principle of the composite. It itself has no principle, since it is the principle. But this is God. Thus, God is without origin, and is therefore ungenerated.¹⁴

¹³ *De generatione divina*, no. 1, Henry ed., *Marius Victorinus*, p. 106, lines 4–10: “Omnis generatio . . . mutatio quaedam est. Inmutabile autem est omne divinum, scilicet deus, deus autem, qui pater est, in omnibus et omnium prima causa. Si igitur deus, inversibile et inmutabile, quod autem inversibile et inmutabile, neque genitum est neque generat aliquid, si igitur hoc sic he habet, ingenitus est deus.” (All subsequent references to Candidus's letter, and to the works of Victorinus, will be to Henry's edition.)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 3, p. 110, lines 7–16: “Si genita, aliud fuit, a quo genita ista. Ingenitum igitur illud, ex quo ista omnia, ex quibus omnia. Quid istud illud est, ex quo omnia? Deus. Ingenitus igitur deus, siquidem causa istorum omnium deus. Quid vero? Esse deum qualis aut quae causa? Hoc ipsum deum esse. Etenim prima causa et sibi causa est, non quae sit altera alterius, sed hoc ipsum, quod ipsum est, ad id, ut sit, causa est. Ipse sibi locus, ipse habitator, ut non imaginatio duorum fiat. Ipse est unum et solum. Est enim esse solum.” See also *ibid.*, lines 21–25: “Simplex autem principium compositorum. Principium autem sine principio. Praecedit enim nullum principium ante se habens, propter quod est principium. Hoc autem est deus. Sine ortu igitur est ingenitus et deus. Deus ergo ingenitus.”

The conclusion of all this is that Jesus Christ, the λόγος, is not generated by God, but rather *made* by him. He is the first and principal work of God, made from nothing.¹⁵

In his reply to Candidus, Victorinus speaks of God (i.e., the Father¹⁶) as above all things, both those that are and those that are not. He is *totum προόν*, generating the Son, the λόγος, Jesus, who is *ipsum hoc totum ὄν*.¹⁷ But what are we to say of God? Even though he is clearly above that which is truly ὄν,¹⁸ yet we cannot say without further ado that he therefore is not.¹⁹ For he is the cause of all things, including those that are. But if is their cause, he is not that which is not.²⁰

Put another way, what are we to call God, ὄν *an* τὸ μὴ ὄν? On the one hand, he is ὄν, since he is the father of everything that is. On the other hand, precisely because he is

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 10, p. 122, lines 1–9: “Quid autem ex istis omnibus cogitur atque colligitur ...? Quoniam dei filius, qui est λόγος *apud deum*, Iesus Christus, *per quem effecta sunt omnia et sine quo nihil factum est*, neque generatione a deo, sed operatione a deo, est primum opus et principale dei ... Effecit autem ex his quae non sunt, quoniam potentia dei, quod non est, adducit, ut sit.”

¹⁶ See Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 32: “... when he [= Victorinus] says God, we must understand God the Father.”

¹⁷ *Ad Candidum*, no. 2, p. 134, lines 18–35: “Quid enim putamus deum esse? Etsi quidem putamus deum esse supra omnia et quae sunt et quae non sunt, attamen id quod sit, non id quod non sit, deum esse credimus. Praestat igitur quod est, et praestat per ineffabilem generationem et praestat existentiam, νοῦν, vitam, non, qui sit ista, sed supra omnia. Si igitur deus, quod non est, non est, est autem quod supra id est quod est vere ὄν, potentia ipsius τοῦ ὄντος, quae, operatione in generationem excitata, ineloquibili motu genuit τὸ ὄν omnimodis perfectum, a toto potentiae totum τὸ ὄν, deus igitur est totum προόν, Iesus autem ipsum hoc totum ὄν, sed iam in existentia et vita et intelligentia, universale omnimodis perfectum ὄν. Hic est filius, hic omnis λόγος, hic qui *apud deum* et *in deo* λόγος, hic Iesus Christus, *ante omnia*, quae sunt et quae vere sunt, prima et omnis existentia, prima et omnis intelligentia, primum et omnimodis perfectum ὄν, ipsum ὄν, primum *nomen ante omnia nomina*; ab isto etenim omnia nomina, sicuti declarabitur.”

¹⁸ See n. 17 above: “... est autem supra id est quod est vere ὄν ...”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: “Etsi quidem putamus ... esse credimus.”

²⁰ *Ad Candidum*, no. 3, p. 134, lines 2–4: “Si enim deus omnium causa est, et eius cui est esse et cui est non esse, causa deus est. Sed si causa, non est id quod non est.”

father, he cannot be τὸ ὄν. For the cause is prior to what it causes, and it is therefore wickedness to call “ὄν” the cause of that which is.²¹

It is apparently at least partially in order to clarify this paradox that Victorinus undertakes to analyze the various ways we may say of something that it is not. *Id quod non est*, he says, is understood and said in four senses²²:

1. according to a negation—i.e., a complete privation of an existent;
2. according as one thing *is not* another;
3. according as future contingents do not yet exist;
4. according to that which is *esse*, above all things that are.

God is thus called “μὴ ὄν” in the sense that he is above ὄν (sense 4), *not* by way of a privation of all that he is (sense 1), but as a *different* ὄν (sense 2), namely, *ipsum quod est* μὴ ὄν.²³ He is also called “τὸ μὴ ὄν” with respect to those things that are about to be (sense 3).²⁴ On the other hand, God is the cause of the generation of those things that are, and is thus called “τὸ ὄν.”²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 4, p. 136, lines 6–11: “Quid igitur dicimus deum, ὄν an τὸ μὴ ὄν? Appellabimus utique omnino ὄν, quoniam eorum quae sunt, pater est. Sed pater eorum quae sunt, non est τὸ ὄν; nondum enim sunt ea quorum pater est, et non licet dicere, nefas est intellegere, eorum quae sunt causam ὄν appellare. Causa enim prior est ab his quorum causa est.”

²² *Ibid.*, lines 1–5: “Definiendum igitur id quod non est. Quod quidem intellegitur et vocatur quattuor modis: iuxta negationem, omnino omnimodis ut privatio sit existentis, iuxta alterius ad aliud naturam, iuxta nondum esse, quod futurum est et potest esse, iuxta quod supra omnia quae sunt, est esse.”

²³ *Ibid.*, lines 11–14: “Supra ὄν igitur deus est et, iuxta quod supra est, μὴ ὄν deus dicitur, non per privationem universi eius quod sit, sed ut aliud ὄν, ipsum quod est μὴ ὄν ...”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, line 14: “... iuxta ea quae futura sunt, τὸ μὴ ὄν, ...”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 15f.: “... iuxta quod causa est ad generationem eorum quae sunt, τὸ ὄν.”

Thus, God (the Father) both transcends ὄν and generates it. It is this that Victorinus seems to have in mind when he speaks of God as *totum προόν*.²⁶

If this is the Father, what is to be said of the Son? He is *ipsum hoc totum ὄν*, before all that is and all that truly is, the first and in every way perfect ὄν, ὄν itself, the first name before every name.²⁷ But, just as there were four senses in which we may say something is not, so too, in order to locate the Son more precisely, Victorinus distinguishes four types of beings. These four are arranged in a definite hierarchical order, as four *levels*: that which truly is, that which is, that which not really is not, and that which is not.²⁸ God (the Father) is above and outside this fourfold hierarchy, as its cause.²⁹ He produces the things that are and the things that are not—i.e., the fourfold hierarchy—either by generation or by “creation” (*effectionem*).³⁰

At the bottom of the hierarchy is that which is not, i.e., matter.³¹ Note however that when Victorinus is speaking of the things that are not (*quae non sunt*), he does not

²⁶ See n. 17 above: “Si igitur deus ... totum προόν.” See also Ernst Benz, *Marius Victorinus und die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik*, p. 42.

²⁷ See n. 17 above: “... Iesus autem ... ante omnia nomina.”

²⁸ *Ad Candidum*, no. 6, p. 138, lines 5–7: “Ipsorum autem quae sunt, alia sunt, vere quae sunt, alia, quae sunt, alia, quae non vere non sunt, alia, quae non sunt.” On the origins of this classification, see Friedrich Wilhelm Kohnke, “Plato’s conception of τὸ οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν,” *Phronesis*, vol. 2, n. 1 (1957), pp. 32–40.

²⁹ *Ad Candidum*, no. 6, p. 138, lines 1–3: “Primo igitur deus et super quae sunt est et super quae non sunt, quippe generator ipsorum et pater, iuxta quod causa est.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 3–5: “Deinde secundum generationem a deo aut secundum effectionem, quae sunt, apparuerunt. Apparuerunt autem et μὴ ὄντα.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 10, pp. 144, 146, lines 7–37: “Cum enim subintellegimus solam inanimam ὄλην—inanimam autem dico, quidquid sine intellectuali anima est—circum lato sensu circa qualitates quasi comprehendit, quae μὴ ὄντα sunt. Versibiles enim qualitates et iuxta hoc μὴ ὄντα. Etenim id ipsum subiectum, quae ὄλη dicitur, indeterminatum est, et ideo sine qualitate dicitur. Si autem determinatur, qualitas dicitur, non qualis ὄλη. ... De his quae non sunt, nunc sic habeto.”

mean that which *truly* is not. For this latter is a pure fiction.³² God is the father of the things that are and the things that are not. But the things that are not, of which he is the father, are not to be thought of as not being, as it were, through a privation of the things that are. For nothing of this sort either is understood or exists.³³ Thus, when Victorinus speaks of that which is not, he is referring to matter, and not to what is the absolute lack or absence of some being.

Above that which is not is that which *not truly* is not. These are the things composed of matter and form, those for which to be is in a certain way to be and not to be.³⁴

Still higher are the things that are. These are the *intellectualia*, and “merely are,” as distinct from the *intellectibilia*, which truly are, on the next and highest level.³⁵ These *intellectualia* are souls.³⁶

³² *Ibid.*, no. 6, p. 138, lines 7–13: “At illa, quae vere non sunt, non recipit esse plenitudo dei. Iuxta enim quod est esse et aliquo modo esse, plenitudo plenitudo est, sola enfasi existente in intellegentia eorum quae vere non sunt, quae iuxta subiectionem, ab his quae non vere quidem sunt, quodam tamen modo sunt incipiens imaginata est circa id quod vere non est.”

³³ *Ibid.*, no. 5, pp. 136, 138, lines 1–6: “Verum est igitur dicere deum patrem esse et iuxta causam esse et eorum quae sunt et eorum quae non sunt. Voluntate igitur dei in generationem veniunt et quae sunt et quae non sunt. Et non aestimes quae non sunt, quasi per privationem eorum quae sunt. Nihil enim istorum neque intellegitur neque existit.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 9, p. 142, lines 15–17: “... et est illis esse quodam modo esse et non esse. Caelum etenim et omnia in eo et universus mundus ex ὕλη, consistens et specie in conmixtione est; ergo non est simplex.”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 7, p. 140, lines 13f.: “ergo intellectibilia ea sunt quae vere sunt, intellectualia, quae sunt tantum.”

³⁶ So, at least, according to Hadot (“Commentaire” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 706). Gilson, on the other hand, seems to put soul in the class of things that not truly are not, while the *intellectualia* are found in human souls (Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, p. 68. The account, however, is not clear.) The problem perhaps turns on the meaning of “in natura” in “Sunt autem ista [i.e., intellectualia] omnia animarum in natura intellectualium nondum intellectum habentium, sed ad intelligentiam accomodata” (*Ad Candidum*, no. 7, p. 140, lines 14–16). Hadot takes “*natura*” in the sense of “class,” and appeals to *Ad Candidum*, no. 9, p. 142, line 19, where the word is used in that sense (Hadot, *loc. cit.*).

(Continued)

Highest in the fourfold hierarchy of beings are those that truly are, the *intellectibilia*.³⁷ This level is divided into three sub-levels. First—i.e., lowest—are all *supercaelestia, ut spiritus, νοῦς, anima, cognoscentia, disciplina, virtutes, λόγοι, opinioniones, perfectio, exsistentia, vita, intellegentia*.³⁸ Above there are *existentialitas, vitalitas,*” and “*intellegentitas*.³⁹

Finally, above all these, and at the very apex of the hierarchy of what is and what is not, stands ὁ *solum istud ipsum quod est unum et solum ὅν*.⁴⁰ But this is Jesus, the Son.⁴¹ Now we have already located the Father *above* all that which is and all that which is not. Here then we locate the Son, at the very *pinnacle* of all that which is and all that which is not.⁴²

II

What does all this come to? What is Victorinus’s purpose in mapping out his universe in such detail? It enables him, at least, to reply to Candidus’s statement that Jesus was not generated but rather made by God out of nothing. For, according to

Gilson’s account of Victorinus (*op. cit.*, pp. 67–69, 587–89 [notes]), twice associates the wrong work with the wrong man. On p. 67, in the second paragraph, he speaks of Candidus’s letter as “*On the Generation of the Divine Word*.” This is rather the title of Victorinus’s reply; Candidus’s letter is entitled “*On Divine Generation*.” On p. 588, n. 4, the opposite error is made: Victorinus’s work is cited as “*Liber de generatione divina*.”

³⁷ See n. 35 above.

³⁸ *Ad Candidum*, no. 7, p. 138, lines 3–5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 5f. On the origins of these two schemata, see Hadot, “Commentaire” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., pp. 705f.

⁴⁰ *Ad Candidum*, no. 7, pp. 138, 140, lines 6f.

⁴¹ See n. 17 above: “*Iesus autem ... ante omnia nomina*.”

⁴² See also Hadot, *loc. cit.*

Victorinus, the Father generates the Son “from himself.”⁴³ Hadot⁴⁴ glosses this passage by pointing out that in a sense Candidus was right. The Son comes from “nothing”—only it is from that $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ that is above all that is or is not, namely from the Father, that the Son comes. He is not made from the nothing that is a privation of being.

This brings us to Victorinus’s properly Trinitarian doctrine. How are we to think of the relation of Father and Son? How is the Son generated? And, for that matter, what about the Holy Spirit? How are the three different and yet consubstantial?

Here we reach one of the basic principles of Victorinus’s Trinitarian theology: *Quod enim supra $\delta\upsilon\nu$ est, absconditum $\delta\upsilon\nu$ est.*⁴⁵ The Son is *hidden* in the Father—or rather, the Son is $\delta\upsilon\nu$ as *manifest*, while the Father is $\delta\upsilon\nu$ as *hidden*. The making manifest of what is hidden in the Father is precisely the *generation* by which the Son is generated.⁴⁶

The Son is therefore *in* the Father. The Son, the $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$,⁴⁷ is *patrica activa quaedam potentia et quae in motu sit et quae se ipsam constituat, ut sit in actu, non in*

⁴³ *Ad Candidum*, no. 14, p. 150, lines 6–11: “Deus, qui supra $\delta\upsilon\nu$ est, ab eo quod ipse est, sicut ipse est, producit an ab alio an a nullo? Ab alio? Et quo alio? Nihil enim ante deum fuit neque ut deo ex altero par. A nullo igitur. Et quomodo? Si enim $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ produxit, verum est dicere, quoniam a semet ipso, qui super $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ est, $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ generavit quam de nihilo.”

⁴⁴ Hadot, “Commentaire” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., pp. 713f.

⁴⁵ *Ad Candidum*, no. 14, p. 150, lines 11f.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 12–27: “Absconditi vero manifestatio generatio est, siquidem et potentia $\delta\upsilon\nu$ operatione $\delta\upsilon\nu$ generat. Nihil enim sine causa in generatione ... Etenim gravida occultum habet quod paritura est. Non enim fetus non est ante partum, sed in occulto est et generatione provenit in manifestationem $\delta\upsilon\nu$ operatione quod fuit $\delta\upsilon\nu$ potentia, et ut, quod verum est, dicam, $\delta\upsilon\nu$ operatione $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$; etenim foris operatio generat. Quid autem generat? Quod fuit intus. Quid igitur fuit intus in deo? Nihil aliud quam $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$, magis autem $\pi\rho\acute{o}\delta\upsilon\nu$, quod est supra generale $\delta\upsilon\nu$ genus, quod supra $\delta\upsilon\nu$ $\delta\upsilon\nu$, $\delta\upsilon\nu$ iam operante potentia. Hic est Iesus Christus. Dixit enim ipsa: si interrogaverit: quis te misit? dicito $\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$. Solum enim illud $\delta\upsilon\nu$ semper $\delta\upsilon\nu$, $\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ est.” Gilson takes this last point as key evidence for the true position of being in Victorinus’s doctrine. (Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 33.)

⁴⁷ *Adversus Arium*, I, 56, 15–18, p. 364: “Verbum igitur et vox filius est, ipse vita, ipse $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, ipse motus, ipse $\nu\acute{o}\delta\varsigma$, ipse sapientia, ipse exsistentia et substantia prima, ipse actio potentialis, ipse $\delta\upsilon\nu$ primum, vere $\delta\upsilon\nu$ ex quo omnia $\delta\upsilon\nu$ et per quem et in quo, ...”

potentia.⁴⁸ Now Victorinus thinks of God as fundamentally active.⁴⁹ Yet *esse* is in some way prior to *operari*. *Esse* is identified here with the Father, while the *operari* of this *esse* is the Son.⁵⁰

Again, using another set of terminology, Victorinus speaks of the Son as the *form* of the *esse* that is the Father.⁵¹ It is through the Son, the form, that the Father is known.⁵² These two, *esse* and *forma*, are always together, the form *is* the *esse* and the *esse* the form. Hence, the Father is *in* the Son and the Son *in* the Father.⁵³

How is the Son generated? The Son is in the Father. Now the Son is form. Therefore, the form is in the Father. But, as in the Father, this form is *indiscreta et infinita*.⁵⁴ How then does the form—the Son—appear? Is it “sent out” (*emissa*) or is it through its *own* movement that it appears?⁵⁵ After rejecting various alternatives,

⁴⁸ *Ad Candidum*, no. 17, p. 154, lines 2–4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 6f.: “Operatur ergo deus per λόγον et semper operatur.” Again, *ibid.* no. 20, p. 158, line 11: “In eo enim quod est esse, inest et operari.”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 19, p. 156, lines 1–6: “Sed quoniam esse ipsum, quod est moveri et intellegere, hoc est agere, primum est potentia et constitutiva potentia primum, inquam, est, necessario igitur ipsum esse praecedit. Ergo et moveri et intellegere et agere ab eo est, quod est esse. Est autem secundum quod est in actu esse, hoc est filium esse.” Again, *ibid.*, no. 20, p. 158, lines 13–18: “Oportet enim esse primum, cui inest operari. Et sunt ista duo; secundum virtutem dico duo, secundum autem intellegentiam simplicitatis unum et solum. Si igitur causa est ipsum esse ad actionem, generator agere ab eo quod est esse. Esse autem pater est, operari ergo filius.”

⁵¹ *Adversus Arium*, II, 4, 18–22, p. 406: “Quod autem formatum est, hoc est esse; forma vero est, quae intellegi facit illud quod est esse. Hoc ergo quod est esse, deo damus, *formam* autem, Christo, quia per filium cognoscitur pater, id est per formam, quod est esse; et hic dictum est: *qui me vidit, vidit et patrem*.”

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, lines 24–29: “Et quia semper simul sunt, et forma esse est, et ipsum esse forma, unde pater in filio et filius in patre. Est enim esse et in patre, quod est potentia, quod prius est ab eo quod est forma. Est item rursus et in filio esse, sed istud quod est esse proprium a patre habet, ut sit illi formam esse. Alter ergo in altero, at ambo unum.” See also Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., pp. 78f.

⁵⁴ *Adversus Arium*, IV, 20, 28, p. 560: “Sed cum illa intus forma indiscreta et infinita sit, ...”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 26f.: “Et utrum ipsa forma, quae intus est, emissa foras est, an se ipsa eiecit?”

Victorinus concludes that this form originates *from itself*.⁵⁶ This is the “autogeneration” of the Son.⁵⁷ In an interesting passage from the *Ad Candidum*, Victorinus speaks of the λόγος as proceeding, by a motion *generated from itself*, from that which is *esse*, the Father, to its *own esse* (as Son). Yet, just as *esse* (the Father) has both *esse* and *agere*, so too does this *agere* (the Son) have *esse*. Thus, these two are one and simple.⁵⁸

Using yet a third term, Victorinus speaks of the Son as the *life* of the *esse* that is the Father. For the form *is* the life, and it is this form-life in which God (the Father) is seen.⁵⁹ Thus, in accordance with the thesis that the Father and the Son are in one another, life is in the Father. There is therefore an inward and an outward life. The Father lives, and so likewise life, the Son, lives.⁶⁰

In the last book of the *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus treats this notion more precisely, distinguishing *vivere* from *vita*. *Vivere* is in some way prior to *vita*, even

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 21, p. 562, lines 6f.: “Num ergo quod reliquum est, dicere audemus? A se orta haec forma est.”

⁵⁷ Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 81.

⁵⁸ *Ad Candidum*, no. 22, p. 160, lines 10–18: “Λόγος ergo, qui est *in deo ipse deus*, qui est ipse et voluntas, ipse intellegentia et actio et vita, ex se genito motu ab eo quod est esse, processit in esse suum proprium, id est, in quod est agere, apparuit ipsum agere, quod quidem effecit omnia. Ipsum vero natum est ab eo quod esse in id quod est agere, habens in eo quod est agere et esse. Sicut illud esse et agere habet et esse, sic hoc agere habet et esse; ipsum autem agere hoc est esse, ut illud esse hoc est quod agere. Unum ergo et simplex haec duo.”

⁵⁹ *Adversus Arium*, I, 53, 13–26, p. 356: “Deus autem ut velatum quiddam est. *Nemo enim videt deum*. Forma igitur filius, in qua videtur deus. Si enim existens deus, potentia, substantia, motus et vita in occulto, deus velut sine forma. Ergo si manifesta vita et manifesta iuxta motus potentiam, vita iuxta motum in occulto, in apparentia, in existente motione intellegitur, pronuntiatur, videtur. Adhuc si, quod est esse, pater, quod autem vita, filius, cum sit impossibile id quod est esse, comprehendere—in occulto enim illud esse—vita autem, iuxta quod vita est, iam et illud est esse, in vita igitur apparet, quod est esse. Forma igitur vita, eius quod est esse. Sed enim pater deus, quod est esse, filius autem vita. Filius ergo, vita patris, *dei forma* est, in qua speculatur potentia patrica.” Therefore, we ought to believe in the Son of God, in order that true and eternal life might be in us. *Ibid.*, lines 26f.: “Credendum igitur in filium dei, ut vita in nobis fiat, quae est et vera et aeterna vita.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 52, 46–51, p. 354: “Rursus vita, secundum quod motio est procedens a patrica motione, et intus et foris est. Sed enim vita motio est. Vita igitur et intus et foris est. Vivit igitur deus, vivit ipsa vita. Vita ergo, et deus est et vita. Unum igitur ista duo et in unoquoque et alterum et idem. In filio igitur pater et in patre filius.”

though in that in which there is *vivere* there is also *vita*. *Vivere* is the *parens* of *vita*. God (the Father) is *vivere*; the Son is *vita*.⁶¹ Once again, Father and Son are in one another; for in that which is *vivere*, there is *vita*, and conversely.⁶²

Here also Victorinus probes more deeply into the way the Son is generated from the Father. We have already see that the Father is *esse* and *vivere*. Victorinus now speaks of him as *intellegere* as well. We shall soon see how this is tied up with the Holy Spirit. Here, however, Victorinus observes once again that the Son is the form of God. Now when God understands (*intellegit*) himself, it is this form that he understands.⁶³ But this form itself must also understand, since it is a living and understanding existence. It must indeed understand itself. When this understanding understands that it is understanding (*intellegentia*), it understood and made itself outwardly,⁶⁴ by its own motion. This is the Son, the *λόγος*.⁶⁵ There are thus two intelligences, one inward because it belongs to *esse*, and the other outward that belongs to “understanding-*esse*” (*quod est illi intellegendo*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 6, 8–21, p. 516: “Prius est igitur vivere quam vita, quamquam in eo quod est vivere, vita sit, sed vivere ut parens vitae est, vita, et proles et quod gignitur, quippe a vivente generata. Deus igitur est vivere, illud primum vivere, a semet ipso vivere, ante omnium vivere, et ante ipsius vitae vivere ... Deus ergo vivere est et principale vivere, vita autem ut genitum. Vivere ergo pater est, vita filius. Numque quod in eo factum est, vita est. Et ipse filius ita dicit: *ego sum via, ego veritas, ego vita*. Haec vita est quae orta est ab eo quod pater vivit.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13, 29–34, p. 538: “Vivere autem deus est, vita Christus, et in eo quod est vivere, vita est, et in eo quod est vita, vivere ... Ergo et pater in filio et filius in patre.”

⁶³ Here again we see the notion of the Son as *revealing* the Father. See n. 51 above. The Father can be known only through his form, the Son. *Adversus Arium*, IV, 28, 6, p. 582: “Nam ipsum [= patrem] *nemo vidit umquam*.” Compare John 1:18.

⁶⁴ The change of tense is in the Latin.

⁶⁵ *Adversus Arium*, IV, 28, 1–16, p. 582: “Verum quoniam imaginem dei filium dicimus dei—genita est enim forma ut, ab eo quod est esse, vivere, intellegere, gigneretur exsistentia, vita, intellegentia; quaedam enim in his forma est per quam, ut per imaginem, intellegatur quid sit esse, vivere et intellegere—necessario per formam intellegitur deus. Nam ipsum *nemo vidit umquam*. Ergo forma dei, cum accipitur in deo, deus est. Cum autem intellegit se deus, per formam se intellegit. Sed et ipsa forma intellegat necesse est. Est enim intellegens ac vivens exsistentia, cum nihil aliud intellegat quam quod ista deus sunt; et haec saepe iam docui. Cum autem ipsa intellegentia intellegit quod sit intellegentia—necessario enim sequitur ut et se intellegat intellegentia—veluti exiens a semet ipsa, se intellexit fecitque se extra, quod foris est, intellegendo se, id est motu suo. Unde est haec foris intellegentia. Et hic est filius, hic est *λόγος* ...”

esse). This latter is the Son,⁶⁶ and since it understands understanding, which is true light, it is a *lumen ex lumine* and a *verum lumen ex vero lumine*. Since also the inward understanding is God, the outward understanding (the Son, which is understanding by understanding itself) is *deus ex deo*.⁶⁷

In touching on understanding and intelligence, one enters, so to speak, the territory of the Holy Spirit. Victorinus devotes most of his writing to the Father and the Son.⁶⁸ Yet he does have a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. While the Father is *esse* and the Son is form or life, the Holy Spirit is knowledge or understanding.⁶⁹ Yet, we have just seen Victorinus speak of the *Son* as understanding, the outward understanding that understands that it is understanding. Now, however, it is the *Holy Spirit* that is understanding. What is one to make of this?

Victorinus distinguishes the Father from the Son as *esse* is distinguished from its form or life, as that which is hidden in the Father is distinguished from that which manifests what is hidden in the Father. This manifestation, this making manifest, is unique. There is but *one* generation, one “movement” in God.⁷⁰ As Hadot points out,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29, 1–3, pp. 582, 584: “Duae igitur intellegentiae, una intus existens, quod est illi esse, alia existens, quod est illi intellegendo esse. Haec foris, haec filius.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 18–23: “Et quia intellegentia est intellegens intellegentiam, cum lumen verum sit intellegentia, existit *lumen ex lumine*, et quia intellegentia utraque, *verum lumen ex vero lumine*. Itemque cum deus sit intus intellegentia, ista intellegendo se intellegentia, *deus ex deo* est.”

⁶⁸ See Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 81.

⁶⁹ *Adversus Arium*, IV, 16, 25f., p. 546: “Unde cum Christus vita sit, spiritus autem sanctus, scientia et intellegentia ...”

⁷⁰ Hadot, *loc. cit.*

“L’idée d’une procession propre à l’Esprit-Saint n’est absolument pas présente chez Victorinus.”⁷¹

Yet Victorinus distinguishes Son and Holy Spirit. For he views the Trinity as a “double-dyad.”⁷² The first dyad consists of the Father and the Son. These two are one. They are distinct in that the Father is *actualis existentia*, while the Son is *actus existentialis*.⁷³ This is the distinction between the *esse* and its act, *esse* and its form or life. Thus far, we have been concerned with this dyad.

The second “dyad” consists of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Victorinus speaks of these two as *in* one, i.e., in one sole movement.⁷⁴ For, he insists, there is but *one* motion involved. This one and the same motion is both λόγος and Holy Spirit: λόγος insofar as it is life, Holy Spirit insofar as it is knowledge and understanding.⁷⁵

We have seen how Victorinus described the generation of the Son in terms of understanding’s understanding itself. We are now in a position to examine the role of the Holy Spirit in this generation. Victorinus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the *mother* of the Son, Jesus, both above (i.e., in the Trinity) and below (i.e., in the Incarnation).⁷⁶ His role

⁷¹ *Ibid.* See also P. Sejourné, “Victorinus Afer,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, xv.2, col. 2925.

⁷² The term is Hadot’s (*loc. cit.* & f.), not, so far as I can find, Victorinus’s.

⁷³ *Adversus Arium*, III, 18, 13–17, p. 496: “Prima, tamen, duo unum, diversa hoc ut sit pater, actualis existentia, id est substantialitas, filius vero, actus existentialis ... Prima autem duo, et duo unum”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 15f.: “Duo autem reliqua, ita duo, ut Christus et spiritus sanctus, in uno duo sint, id est in motu ...” See also *ibid.*, I, 49, 1–3, p. 340: “De deo et λόγῳ, hoc est de patre et filio, dei permissu, sufficienter dictum, quoniam unum quae duo. Dictum et de λόγῳ, hoc est de filio et de sancto spiritu, quod in uno duo.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58, 1–4, p. 368: “Quoniam autem diximus unam motionem et eandem, et λόγον et sanctum spiritum, λόγον in eo quod vita est, sanctum spiritum, quod est esse cognoscentiam et intellegentiam esse, ...”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 11–13: “Non falletur ergo, si quis subintellexerit sanctum spiritum, matrem esse Iesu et supra et deorsum, ...” See Hadot, “Commentaire” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 874.

in the Incarnation does not concern us here,⁷⁷ but his role in the generation of the Son in the Trinity does concern us. Now all knowledge (*cognoscentia*), as such, is outside what it desires to know. In this case then, the knowledge is outside, like an *inspectio*, according as it is the seeing (*videre*) of itself, i.e., the knowing and seeing of the preexistent power of the Father. In this atemporal instant, it goes forth, *from* that *esse* which it was, *to* the seeing (*in inspiciendum*) that which it was.⁷⁸ Now the Holy Spirit is this excogitation of the Father. Thus it is according to this natural way of knowledge, this outwardly effected understanding, that the Son is born, that *life* is made—not from what was *not* life, but because outward life is more truly life (*magis vita*). For life is in motion.⁷⁹

Here, therefore, in an account that goes more deeply than one examined earlier, we see that the generation of the Son from the Father comes about in a manner that involves, if I may use the word, the “intermediation” on the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, to be sure, Victorinus speaks as though it were the other way around. For “all that the Holy

⁷⁷ See *Adversus Arium*, I, 58, 14–36, p. 370.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57, 13–19, p. 366: “Omnis enim cognoscentia, secundum quod cognoscentia est, foris est ab illo quod cupit cognoscere. Foris autem dico, sicut in inspectione, secundum quod est videre semet ipsam, quod est scire vel videre potentiam illam praeexistentiam et patricam. In isto igitur sine intellectu temporis tempore, ab eo quod erat esse veluti egrediens, in inspiciendum ipsum quod erat . . .”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 28–33, p. 368: “Sanctus igitur spiritus, motus primus intus, quae sit excogitatio patrica, hoc est sui ipsius cognoscentia. Praecognoscentiam enim cognoscentia praecedat. Iuxta istum ergo cognoscentiae modum naturalem, foris effectam intellegentiam, natus est filius, vita factus, non quo non fuerit vita, sed quoniam foris vita, magis vita; in moto enim vita.”

⁸⁰ See the interesting comment on this passage by Hadot, “Commentaire” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 873.

Spirit has, he receives from Christ, and Christ from the Father.”⁸¹ In this respect Christ seems to occupy, as it were, the middle position between the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁸²

The Son and the Holy Spirit, then, constitute the second “dyad” in the Trinity, two in one. For there is but one motion, one Son.⁸³ Yet this one motion is both life and cognition. Victorinus explicitly says *cognitio est vita*.⁸⁴ The λόγος is both motion and the Son. Insofar as it is the Son, there is but one Son. Insofar as it is the λόγος, it is double (*geminus*), namely life and cognition,⁸⁵ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Victorinus speaks of the Son as both life and cognition, existing as Jesus by the work that is life, and as Holy Spirit by the work that is cognition, so that there are two “existences,” Christ and the Holy Spirit, in the motion that is the Son.⁸⁶

If Father and Son are distinguished as *esse* from its motion or form, how are life and cognition distinguished? In short, what is the basis for the distinction within the

⁸¹ *Adversus Arium*, IV, 16, 26–28, p. 546: “... omnia tamen spiritus sanctus quae habet, a Christo accepit, Christus a patre ...”

⁸² Nevertheless it is clear that the Holy Spirit is, for Victorinus, the connecting link between Father and Son. See *Hymn* I, 3, p. 620: “Adesto, sancte spiritus, patris et filii copula.” Also, *Hymn* III, 242–47, p. 650:

Tu, spiritus sancte, conexio es; conexio autem est quicquid conectit
duo;
Ita ut conectas omnia, primo conectis duo;
Esque ipsa tertia complexio duorum atque ipsa complexio nihil distans
uno, unum cum facis duo;
O beata trinitas.

See also J. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes*, II, p. 272.

⁸³ *Adversus Arium*, III, 8, 1–5, p. 460: “Ergo motus et unus est motus et a se motus et, cum in patre occultus sit atque inde his motus apparens, a patre motus et, quia a motu motus, ideo a se motus et unus motus, unde unicus filius.”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 25f., p. 462: “Cognitio est vita. Porro autem sive vita, sive cognitio, motus est unus ...”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 28–31: “Λόγος autem motus est et λόγος filius. Filius igitur unicus in eo quod filius. In eo autem quod λόγος, geminus. Ipse enim vita, ipse cognoscentia ...”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 37–42: “Ita dei filius Christus, id est λόγος et filius vita, et, quia idem motus, etiam et cognoscentia filius est, opere quo vita est, Iesus existens, opere autem quo cognoscentia est, spiritus sanctus et ipse existens, ut sint existantiae duae, Christi et spiritus sancti, in uno motu qui filius est.”

second “dyad”? The distinction is, in brief, one of *direction* of motion.⁸⁷ Christ is thought of as life, a progression from the Father. The Holy Spirit is thought of as in some way a *return* to the Father. This is in keeping with the characterization of the Holy Spirit as cognition, i.e., as the knowledge of the “preexistent power of the Father,”⁸⁸ and thus, as it were, a *looking back* to the Father. In his third *Hymn*,⁸⁹ Victorinus is perhaps most explicit on this point. He says, “*Status, Progressio, Regressus, O beata Trinitas.*”⁹⁰

The distinction of persons within the Trinity may thus be summarized as follows: the father is *esse* or power, the Son is life or form, the Holy Spirit is cognition or knowledge. In the concise formulae of the third *Hymn*, Victorinus expresses this triad explicitly several times:

Exsistentia,
 Vita,
 Cognitio,
 O beata Trinitas.

.....
 Omnis potentia,
 Omnis actio,
 Omnis agnitio,
 O beata Trinitas.

.....
 Substantia deus es,
 Forma filius,
 Notio spiritus,
 O beata Trinitas.

.....

⁸⁷ Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., pp. 81f. See also Henry, “The *Adversus Arium ...*,” p. 44.

⁸⁸ See n. 79 above.

⁸⁹ According to the arrangement in Henry’s edition. In Henry’s article “The *Adversus Arium ...*” (*loc. cit.*) he refers to the hymn as number one.

⁹⁰ *Hymn III*, 71–74, p. 638.

Ergo in substantia deus est, in forma λόγος, in notitia
spiritus sanctus;
O beata Trinitas.⁹¹

These three persons, though distinct, are yet one, consubstantial. The Father has (or perhaps more properly, *is*) *esse, vivere, intellegere*. But, *omnia quaecumque habet pater mea sunt*.⁹² Thus the Son also has *esse, vivere, intellegere*. So too does the Holy Spirit.⁹³ The three persons are thus indissolubly bound together—are, in fact, consubstantial.

On what then is their distinction based? It is based on “predominance.” The notion of “predominance” is one of the very foundations of Victorinus’s Trinitarian doctrine. As Hadot says, “Elle joue le rôle de la *relation subsistante* de la théologie ultérieure.”⁹⁴ Victorinus appeals to this notion several times. He says, e.g., that the Father and the Son are consubstantial, the Father insofar as he is *esse* being also *agere*, while the Son, insofar as he is *agere* is also *esse*. Each one has that which he is according to that which he is *most*.⁹⁵

Again, the Father is in the Son and conversely. This is why they are one. They are two, however, because that which each one is *the more* appears as different. The Father is

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, lines 38–41, 80–83, 151–54, 184–86, pp. 636, 638, 644, 646.

⁹² John 16:15.

⁹³ *Adversus Arium*, IV, 18, 10–13, p. 550: “Sic enim subiunxit: *omnia quaecumque habet pater mea sunt; propterea dixi mea sunt quia, quae pater habet, filii sunt*, esse, vivere, intellegere. Haec eadem habet spiritus sanctus. Omnia ergo ὁμοούσια.”

⁹⁴ Hadot, “Introduction” to *Marius Victorinus*, Henry, ed., p. 80.

⁹⁵ *Adversus Arium*, I, 20, 12–15, p. 236: “ὁμοούσιοι pater et filius, patre existente secundum quod est esse, etiam quod est agere, filio autem existente secundum quod est agere, etiam quod est esse, unoquoque habente id quod sit iuxta quod maxime est ...”

predominantly power, the Son action. Therefore, the Son is different, because he is more *actio*, insofar as he is an *outward actio*.⁹⁶

Yet again, speaking this time of all three persons, Victorinus says that God has three powers, namely *esse*, *vivere* and *intellegere*. The three are in each one, and each one is the three. Each one takes the name of that by which it predominates.⁹⁷

Thus the notion of predominance provides Victorinus with the means to ensure at the same both the consubstantiality and the distinction of the three persons of the Trinity. If predominance tells us *how* the persons are distinguished, the triad *esse*, *vivere*, *intellegere* tells us *what* it is that predominates in each case. The notion of the Trinity as a double-dyad—the first dyad being distinguished as power is distinguished from motion or act, the second dyad being distinguished according to the directions of this motion—sheds further light on the intimate interrelations among the three. Finally, the distinctions of the various ways of not being and the various levels of being enable us to locate the persons of the Trinity in Victorinus’s universe.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 3, 39–44, p. 402: “Ergo et pater in filio et filius in patre, sed utrumque in singulis, et idcirco unum; duo autem, quia quod magis est, id alterum apparet; magis autem pater potentia, et actio filius, et idcirco alter, quia magis actio; magis enim actio quia foris actio.”

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 21, 26–29, p. 564: “Τριδύναμος est deus, id est tres potentias habens, esse, vivere, intellegere, ita ut in singulis tria sint sitque ipsum unum quodlibet tria, nomen, qua se praestat, accipiens, ut supra docui et in multis.”

⁹⁸ The Holy Spirit would presumably occupy ontologically the same level as the Son, namely at the summit of all that is and all that is not. For the Son and the Holy Spirit are two *in* one, namely in the one same movement. Victorinus does not, however, explicitly treat the question of the “location” of the Holy Spirit, as he does for the Father and the Son in his *Ad Candidum*.

III

Having outlined the main points of Victorinus's doctrine, let me now make some observations on what he has done. To this end, Étienne Gilson's remarks about Victorinus will serve as a backdrop against which to view my own conclusions.

By and large, Gilson's opinion of Victorinus is not very favorable. He speaks of Victorinus's letter *Ad Candidum* as "as confused as the objections of Candidus were clear."⁹⁹ Again, he says that Victorinus follows Plotinus "with at least the illusion that he is still speaking as a Christian," that "all we can do here is to recommend Victorinus to the indulgence of modern theologians," or again, "to the indulgence of modern exegetes." Yet again, "he is doing about as well as could be done without giving up the supremacy of the One over being," or "theologically speaking, this was a pretty mess."¹⁰⁰

I do not think Victorinus's Trinitarian theology is as bad as all that. As far as I can tell, it is *for the most part* both internally consistent and careful to preserve a balance between the consubstantiality and the distinction of the persons. (This is not to say, of course, that it is clear or lucid.)

There is, however, a serious difficulty regarding the relations of the Son, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Victorinus has spoken of the Son as one *motio*, in which there are two "existences," Christ and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ This seems singularly unsatisfactory, but it is hard to know just how to criticize the notion. Does it separate the Son from Christ? Not exactly. For it is still true to say that Christ is the Son of God. On the other hand,

⁹⁹ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy ...*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ For all these, see Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, pp. 32f.

¹⁰¹ See n. 86 above.

Victorinus's way of speaking makes it also true to say that the Holy Spirit is the Son of God. But this means only that he is *consubstantial* with the Son of God. What then? This perspective makes it hard to see how the relation between Christ and the Son could be any different than that between the Holy Spirit and the Son, namely a relation of "mere" consubstantiality. But the Son is himself consubstantial with the Father. Thus, it seems, there would either be *four* consubstantial persons in the "Trinity"—namely, Father, Son, Christ, and Holy Spirit—or else, apparently, either the Son or Christ would not be a fully constituted "person."

Perhaps we are, in this instance, putting too much weight on a manner of speaking. Yet it remains true that the Holy Spirit occupies a very problematic place in Victorinus's Trinity.

Despite the ambiguities, however, I do not see that Victorinus's doctrine is as confused as Gilson suggests.

Gilson in effect criticizes Victorinus for trying to be too neo-Platonic in his Christian theologizing, and in particular for his placing the Father above and beyond being, as *πρόον*.¹⁰² But while there may be perfectly good philosophical reasons for criticizing Victorinus on just this point, I maintain that Gilson has not properly evaluated the role this view plays in Victorinus's thought.

¹⁰² Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, pp. 31–33.

“Since the difficulty [raised by Candidus] originated,” says Gilson, “in the Platonist identification of being with immutability, Victorinus resorted to the doctrine of Plotinus, according to whom even ‘being’ was inferior to unity.”¹⁰³

But this seems to miss the point. Such a metaphysical step could hardly in itself release Victorinus from the problem raised by Candidus. If Candidus’s difficulties were caused by the fact that the being he called God was immutable, the problem is not going to be solved simply by saying that God is not being, as long as it remains true to say that God is immutable. The difficulty is not that *being* is immutable, but that *God* is immutable, whether he is thought of as being or as above being. Now Victorinus expressly states that the Father has no *otherness* in him,¹⁰⁴ and, since otherness is tied up with change in the Platonic tradition,¹⁰⁵ this apparently means that the Father is immutable. The problem is thus not to be solved by revising our notion of God, putting him above Being, but by analyzing the notion of generation.

This is what Victorinus does. Candidus maintained that the Son was not generated by God, since this would imply a motion or change in God, but was rather *made* by God out of nothing. Victorinus counters by asking, “Is not *making* a motion?” Candidus had solved his problem on one level, only to have it reappear on another. Victorinus

¹⁰³ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy ...*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁴ *Adversus Arium*, I, 49, 9–12, p. 342: “Ante omnia quae vere sunt, unum fuit, sive unalitas, sive ipsum unum, antequam sit ei esse, unum. Illud enim unum oportet dicere et intellegere quod nullam imaginationem alteritatis habet ...”

¹⁰⁵ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 14.

concludes that we must therefore grant that not every motion implies a change. But then Candidus's objection against divine generation falls to the ground.¹⁰⁶

Victorinus's reply to Candidus does not therefore consist, as Gilson would seem to have it, in placing God above being, but in showing that not every motion is a change. But then what role is left to the claim that God is above being? How does this view function in Victorinus's thought?

It is fair to say that Victorinus probably did not import the notion into his thought with any particular purpose in mind. Rather it was part and parcel of the neo-Platonic heritage he brought with him to his theological speculation. Be that as it may, the notion nevertheless serves him well. For it ensures that the Father is in himself unknowable. Being is, for Victorinus, tied up with intelligibility. Since the Father is above being, he is strictly unknowable. The Son, however, as the highest in the hierarchy of *quae sunt*, is indeed knowable. Thus, Victorinus's ontology provides him with a way of making some sense out of the theological notion of the Son as *revealing* the Father, an idea he frequently repeats. It is through the Son (form) that the Father is known, even by the Father.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Ad Candidum*, no. 30, 1–17, pp. 168, 170: “Habes nunc, quod reliquum est, o mi Candide, dicere: si filius Iesus, generatione filius; si autem generatio motus et motus inmutatio, inmutationem autem esse in deo impossibile est intellegere, nefas dicere, necesse est a deo nihil esse generatione gignibile; non igitur Iesus a deo generatione filius. Bono quidem ordine circumduxisti, o amice Candide; sed quem circumduxisti? Forte te? Sed magis te. Dicis enim, quoniam *fecit Iesum deus*. Quid deinde? Facere non est motus? Nihilo minus quam agere. Inmutatio igitur et in faciendo, si motus in agendo. Agere autem facere est et quod facere agere. Ambobus in motu existentibus, necessario consequitur inmutatio, quod incongruum in deo, sicuti declaratum est. Confitendum igitur aut facere non esse motum aut non omnem motum esse inmutationem. Sed enim facere motus est et deus iuxta motum fecit, cui omnino non contingit quomodocumque mutari. Relinquitur ergo non omnem motum inmutationem esse.”

¹⁰⁷ See n. 51 above.

It can be said that Victorinus developed a reasonably coherent doctrine of the Trinity. It is heavily influenced by neo-Platonic inspiration, but nonetheless original and on the whole consistent. It is not without its problems, particularly with respect to the Holy Spirit, but it does not deserve the criticism Gilson raises against it.

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