



Publié sur *La Vie des Classiques* (<https://96.ip-213-32-20.eu>)

[Accueil](#) > Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia: the Son is “fully God”

---

## ARIUS TO EUSEBIUS OF NICOMEDIA: THE SON IS “FULLY GOD”

The Da Vinci Code has spawned a host of people who believe that the First Council of Nicaea voted on whether Jesus was God. I tend to correct such people by pointing out that Arius himself calls the Son, “fully God”, in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia (321 AD). I usually include a paragraph from the translation of Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 1947, p.55 (online [here](#)), as a particularly clear statement of this:

Eusebius, your brother, Bishop of Caesarea, Theodotus, Paulinus, Athanasius, Gregory, Aetius, and all the other bishops of the East, have been condemned for saying that God existed, without beginning, before the Son; except Philogonius, Hellanicus and Macarius, men who are heretics and unlearned in the faith; some of whom say that the Son is an effluence, others a projection, others that he is co-unbegotten.

To these impieties we cannot even listen, even though the heretics threaten us with a thousand deaths. But what we say and think we both have taught and continue to teach; that the Son is not unbegotten, nor part of the unbegotten in any way, nor is he derived from any substance; but that by his own will and counsel he existed before times and ages **fully God**, only-begotten, unchangeable.

Eusebius, your brother, Bishop of Caesarea, Theodotus, Paulinus, Athanasius, Gregory, Aetius, and all the other bishops of the East, have been condemned for saying that God existed, without beginning, before the Son; except Philogonius, Hellanicus and Macarius, men who are heretics and unlearned in the faith; some of whom say that the Son is an effluence, others a projection, others that he is co-unbegotten.

To these impieties we cannot even listen, even though the heretics threaten us with a thousand deaths. But what we say and think we both have taught and continue to teach; that the Son is not unbegotten, nor part of the unbegotten in any way, nor is he derived from any substance; but that by his own will and counsel he existed before times and ages **fully God**, only-begotten, unchangeable.

This evening I noticed that not every translation of this letter reads this way. So I wondered just what the Greek said.

The letter is transmitted to us by Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 1, chapter 5 (although in the NPNF version it is mysteriously [chapter 4](#)). The text is edited in the GCS series, and the key passage appears on p.26-27. In fact the key words are the very first two words on p.27. And there are no variants! Here's the text:

>οἱ μὲν ἐρυγὴν, οἱ δὲ προβολήν, οἱ δὲ συναγέννητον. καὶ τούτων 3  
 >τῶν ἀσεβειῶν οὐδὲ ἀκοῦσαι δυνάμεθα, ἐὰν μυρίους θανάτους ἡμῖν  
 >ἐπαπειλῶσιν οἱ αἵρετικοί. Ἡμεῖς δὲ τί λέγομεν καὶ φρονοῦμεν καὶ  
 >ἐδιδάξαμεν καὶ διδάσκομεν; ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγέννητος οὐδὲ  
 20 >μέρος ἀγεννήτου κατ' οὐδένα τρόπον, οὔτε ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινός,  
 >ἀλλ' ὅτι θελήματι καὶ βουλῇ ὑπέστη πρὸ χρόνων καὶ πρὸ αἰώνων

>πλήρης θεός, μονογενής, ἀναλλοίωτος· καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῇ ἦτοι κτισθῇ-4  
 >ἢ ὀρισθῇ ἢ θεμελιωθῇ, οὐκ ἦν· ἀγέννητος γὰρ οὐκ ἦν. διωκόμεθα ὅτι  
 >εἶπαμεν· >ἀρχὴν ἔχει ὁ υἱός, ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἀναρχός ἐστιν· διὰ τοῦτο διωκό-  
 >μεθα, καὶ ὅτι εἶπαμεν ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐστίν· οὕτως δὲ εἶπαμεν, καθότι  
 >οὐδὲ μέρος θεοῦ ἐστίν οὐδὲ ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινός. ῥιὰ τοῦτο διωκό-  
 >μεθα· λοιπὸν σὺ οἶδας. ἐρρωσθαί σε ἐν κυρίῳ εὐχομαι, μεμνημένον  
 >τῶν θλίψεων ἡμῶν, συλλουκιανιστὰ ἀληθῶς Εὐσέβιε·

And there it is: **πλήρης θεός** – pleres theos, fully God. Pleres indeed can mean complete as well as full, as [we see in LSJ](#). But the idea is pretty clear.

I did wonder if there was a variant. After all, everybody knows that Arius did not think that the Son was God in the same way as the Father. I fully expected to see someone “correct” the text to fix what it said, to bring it into accordance with the known views of Arius. But the GCS does not list one.

The NPNF translator rendered it as “perfect God”, doubtless thinking of the Latin “perfectus”, completed. The excellent Fourth Century site has [its own translation](#) – something weird:

(4.) We are not able to listen to these kinds of impieties, even if the heretics threaten us with ten thousand deaths. But what do we say and think and what have we previously taught and do we presently teach? — that the Son is not unbegotten, nor a part of an unbegotten entity in any way, nor from anything in existence, but that he is subsisting in will and intention before time and before the ages, **full <of grace and truth,> God**, the only-begotten, unchangeable.

They refer for a translation to R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 1988, who on page 6 wrote:

works. The earliest letter of Arius is that written not long after 318 to Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, an old friend of his, complaining of the injustice done to him in that Alexander of Alexandria has excommunicated him for heresy.<sup>16</sup> He spends more time presenting or parodying his opponents' views (with which we shall be concerned later) than giving his own. He claims as his episcopal supporters not only his correspondent, Eusebius of Nicomedia, but also Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodotus of Laodicea, Paulinus (of Tyre), Athanasius (of Anazarbus), Gregory, Aetius (of Lydda) and generally all the bishops in the east (except Philogonius (of Antioch) and Hellanicus and Macarius); all these believe with Arius *ὅτι προὔπαρχει ὁ θεὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ ἀνάρχως*.<sup>17</sup> Arius next sets out his own doctrine more fully:

'That the Son is not unbegotten (*ἀγέννητος*) nor in any way a part of an Unbegotten, nor derived from some (alien) substratum (*ὑποκειμένου τινος*), but that he exists by will and counsel before times and before ages, full of truth, and grace, God, Only-begotten, unaltering (*ἀναλλοίωτος*). And before he was begotten, or created or determined or established, he did not exist. For he was not unbegotten (or unoriginated).'

He goes on to say that he is being persecuted because he teaches that 'the Son has an origin, but God is unoriginated' (*ἀναρχος*), and also

Maybe Hanson also felt that Arius should not have said "fully God"? Hanson gives no footnote for his correction, but a search on "grace" in his book reveals the suggestion that the Son became who he was by grace. Perhaps Hanson back-projected this into the text. But as we have seen, "full of truth, and grace" is not in the text of Theodoret.

I suspect the Fourth Century translator was trying to square the circle here. Understandably he based himself on Hanson but placed in brackets the bit not found in the Greek. Since he referenced the versions, we can work out what happened.

All the same, we have to work with what Theodoret records, and what Arius wrote. The old heretic definitely wrote "fully God". What he actually meant by this, of course, was the subject of the Arian disputes. But he did not believe that the Son was not God.

---