

Nicaea: Early Primary Sources

1. Outbreak of Debate Between Alexander and Arius (c. A.D. 318)

After Peter, bishop of Alexandria, had suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, Achillas was installed in the episcopal office, whom Alexander succeeded, during the period of peace above referred to. He, in the fearless exercise of his functions for the instruction and government of the Church, attempted one day in the presence of the presbytery and the rest of his clergy, to explain, with perhaps too philosophical minuteness, that great theological mystery—the Unity of the Holy Trinity. A certain one of the presbyters under his jurisdiction, whose name was Arius, possessed of no inconsiderable logical acumen, imagining that the bishop was subtly teaching the same view of this subject as Sabellius the Libyan, from love of controversy took the opposite opinion to that of the Libyan, and as he thought vigorously responded to what was said by the bishop. ‘If,’ said he, ‘the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing.’ (εἰ ὁ πατήρ ἐγέννησεν τὸν υἱόν, ἀρχὴν ὑπάρξεως ἔχει ὁ γεννηθείς· καὶ ἐκ τούτου δηλὸν ὅτι ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ υἱός, ἀκολουθεῖ τε ἐξ τούτου δηλὸν ὅτι ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ υἱός, ἀκολουθεῖ τε ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἔχειν αὐτὸν τὴν ὑπόστασιν.)

Socrates, *Church History* 1.5

2. Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia (c. A.D. 318)

(1.) To that most beloved man of God, the faithful and orthodox Eusebius, from Arius, unjustly persecuted by father Alexander because of the all-conquering truth which you, Eusebius, also are defending!

(2.) Since my father Ammonius is going to Nicomedia, it seemed reasonable and proper to greet you through him, remembering at the same time the innate love and affection which you have for the brothers on account of God and his Christ, because the bishop [Alexander] is severely ravaging and persecuting us and moving against us with every evil. Thus he drives us out of every city like godless men, since we will not agree with his public statements: that there was “always a God, always a Son;” “as soon as the Father, so soon the Son [existed];” “with the Father co-exists the Son unbegotten, ever-begotten, begotten without begetting;” “God neither precedes the Son in aspect or in a moment of time;” “always a God, always a Son, the Son being from God himself.”

(3.) Since Eusebius, your brother in Caesarea, and Theodotus, and Paulinus, and Athanasius, and Gregory, and Aetius and all those in the East say that God pre-exists the Son without a beginning, they have been condemned, except for Philogonius and Hellenicus and Macarius, unlearned heretics some of whom say that the Son was “spewed out”, others that he was an “emanation”, still others that he was “jointly unbegotten.” (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. (5.) Before he was begotten, or created, or defined, or established, he did not exist. For he was not unbegotten. But we are persecuted

because we have said the Son has a beginning but God has no beginning. We are persecuted because of that and for saying he came from non-being. But we said this since he is not a portion of God nor of anything in existence. That is why we are persecuted; you know the rest. I pray that you fare well in the Lord, remembering our tribulations, fellow-Lucianist, truly-called Eusebius [i.e. the pious one].

Theodoret, *Church History* 1.5

3. And Eusebius of Nicomedia in addition wrote thus to Arius:

Since you think properly, pray that everyone will think that way. For it is clear to all that the thing which is made did not exist before it came into being; but rather what came into being has a beginning to its existence.

Athanasius, *On the Synods* 17

4. Fragments of a letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to Euphratius of Balanea (c. A.D. 319–323)

(1.) A letter of Eusebius of Pamphylia to Euphratius, which begins: I confess to my lord by every grace.... And it continues later:

For we do not say that the Son is coexisting with the Father, but instead that the Father existed before the Son. For if they coexisted, how could the Father be a father, and the Son be a son? Or how could one indeed be the first, and the other second? And how could one be unbegotten and the other begotten? For the two, if they are equal, likewise exist mutually and are honored equally, one must conclude that either they are both unbegotten or both begotten, as I have said, but it is clear that neither of these is true. For they are neither both unbegotten nor both begotten. For one is indeed the first and best and leads to/precedes the second, both in order and in honor, so that he is the occasion for the second's existing and for his existing in this particular way.

(2.) For the Son of God himself, who quite clearly knows all things, knows that he is different from, less, and inferior to the Father, and with full piety also teaches us this when he says, "The Father who sent me is greater than me" [John 14:28].

(3.) [And it is also written in the same letter:] But he teaches that that one [the Father] is alone true when he says, "that they may know you, the only true God" [John 17:3], not as if one only is God, but that one is the (only) true God, with the very necessary addition of true. For also he himself is Son of God, but not true, as God is. For there is but one true God, the one before whom nothing existed. But if the Son himself is true, it is simply as an image of the true God, and he is God, for [Scripture says] "and the Word was God" [John 1:1], but not as the only true God.

(4.) For daring to divide the Word of God and to name the Word as another God, differing in essence and power from the Father, he has departed into as great a blasphemy, as is easily discerned from those very terms he uses. The following is an exact quote from his writings:

But surely the image and the one whose image it is are not considered one, but they are two Beings and two Things and two Powers, similarly with other titles [on image of God, see Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4].

(5.) He writes as follows, wishing to show the savior as only a man, as the great unspoken mystery unveiled to us by the apostle:

For more clearly also the divine Apostle transmits to us the unspoken and mystical theology when he calls and cries out, “There is one God;” then after saying one God he continues to describe another, “One mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” [1 Tim 2:5].

Sections 1–3: 2nd Council of Nicaea, Sessions (*Actiones*) 5 and 6
Sections 4–5: Eusebius, *Contra Marcellum* 1.4.40–41; 1.40.57

5. Letter of Alexander of Alexandria to All Bishops (c. A.D. 318–325)

(1.) Alexander, to our beloved and most honored fellow-ministers of the catholic church everywhere. Greetings in the Lord!

(2.) Since the catholic church is one body, and we are commanded in the divine Scriptures to maintain “the bond of unity and peace” [Eph 4:3], it follows that we should write, and mutually acquaint each another with the things that have happened among each of us, so that “if one member suffers or rejoices, we may either sympathize or rejoice with one other” [1 Cor 12:26].

(3.) In our diocese lawless and anti-Christian men have recently arisen, teaching an apostasy which one might reasonably consider and label the forerunner of the Antichrist.

(4.) I wished indeed to treat this matter with silence, that if possible the evil might be confined to its supporters alone, and not spread into other regions and contaminate the ears of innocent people. But Eusebius, now bishop in Nicomedia, thinks that the affairs of the church lay under his control; after abandoning his office at Beirut and coveting the church at Nicomedia without being punished for it, he has now established himself at the head of these apostates, daring even to write letters in all directions in support of them, hoping to drag down some of the ignorant into this shameful and anti-Christian heresy. Thus, since I know what is written in the law, I could no longer keep silent, but I had to inform you of all of these things, (5.) so that you would be made aware of which people have fallen into apostasy and also of the terrible threats caused by their heresy, and pay no attention to anything that Eusebius writes to you. For now wishing to use these events to resurrect his old ill-will, which seemed to have been silenced over time, he pretends to write on their behalf, while the facts show that he does this to promote his own cause.

(6.) These then are those who have become apostates: Arius, Achillas, Aithales, and Carpones, a second Arius, Sarmates, who were all once priests; Euzoïus, Lucius, Julius, Menas, Helladius, and Gaius, who were all once deacons; and with these also Secundus and Theonas, who were once called bishops. (7.) The dogmas which, going beyond Scripture, they have invented and asserted, are the following:

“God was not always the Father, but there was once when God was not the Father. The Word of God was not always in existence, but came into being from nothing, for ‘the God who is’ made ‘him who did not previously exist’ out of nothing. For this reason, there was once when he did not exist; for the Son is a creature (ktisma) and a created being (poiēma). He is neither like the Father in essence (kat’ ousian), nor is he by nature either the Father’s true Word or his true Wisdom, but rather one of the things he made (poiēmatōn) and one of those he begot (genētōn). He is called Word and Wisdom only by analogy, since he himself came into being from the actual (idios) Word of God and the Wisdom which is in God, by which God made all things including him. (8.) His nature is mutable and susceptible of change, as are all rational beings. And thus the Word is alien to, other than, and excluded from the essence (ousia) of God; and the Father is invisible to the Son. For the Word neither knows the Father perfectly and accurately, nor can he see him perfectly. For the Son does not even know his own essence as it exists, (9.) since he was made for our sake, in order that God could create us through him, as through an instrument, and he would never have existed if God had not wanted to create us.”

(10.) Someone asked them whether the Word of God could turn to evil, like the devil has. And they were not afraid to answer, “Yes, he could. Since he is begotten, his nature is able to change.”

(11.) We then, assembled with almost one hundred bishops of Egypt and Libya, have anathematized these things that were said by the group around Arius and those who have shamefully followed along with them. Thus Eusebius’s group has welcomed them and tried to blend falsehood with truth, and impiety with what is sacred. But they will not succeed. For the truth must triumph; and “light has no fellowship with darkness, nor can Christ be harmonized with Belial” [2 Cor 6:14]. (12.) For who ever heard such things? Or who that hears it now is not astonished and does not plug his ears to stop himself from hearing such filthy expressions? Who that hears John saying, “In the beginning was the Word” [John 1:1], does not condemn those who say, “There was a time when the Word did not exist”? Or who, hearing in the Gospel of “the only-begotten Son” [John 3:16, 18], and that “through him all things were made” [John 1:3, see Rom 11:36], will not hate those who proclaim that the Son is one of the things that were made (poiēmata)? How can he be one of the things which were made through himself? Or how can he be the only-begotten, if he is reckoned among such created things? And how could he come into existence from nothing when the Father has said, “My heart has spewed out a good word (logos)” [Ps 44:2 (LXX), 45:2 in English]; and “I begot you from the womb before the morning star” [Ps 109:3 (LXX), 110:3 English]? (13.) Or how can he be unlike the Father in essence (ousia) when he is the perfect image and radiant glory of the Father [Heb 1:3] and says, ‘He that has seen me, has seen the Father’ [John 14:9]? Again how if the Son is the Word and Wisdom of God, could there be a time when he did not exist? That is equivalent to their saying that God was once without the Word and without Wisdom.

(14.) How can one be mutable and susceptible of change who says of himself, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me” [John 10:38; 14:10, 11]; and “I and the Father are one” [John 10:30]; and again through the prophet, “Look at me because I am, and I have not changed” [paraphrase Mal 3:6 (LXX)]? If someone can use this expression of the Father himself, it would be even more fittingly spoken concerning the Word, because he was not changed when he

became man, but as the apostle says, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever” [Heb 13:8]. So who could persuade them to say that he was made on our account, when Paul wrote that “for him and through him all things exist” [Rom 11:38]? **(15.)** One need not wonder at their blasphemous assertion that the Son does not perfectly know the Father. For once they decided to fight against Christ, they reject also his own voice when he says, “As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father” [John 10:15]. But if the Father only partially knows the Son, it is clear that the Son can only partially know the Father. But if it would be improper to say this, and if the Father does perfectly know the Son, it is also clear that just as the Father knows his own Word, so also the Word knows his own Father, whose Word he is.

(16.) By stating these things and explaining the divine Scriptures, we have often refuted these men, but like chameleons, they changed themselves again, obstinately dragging themselves down to that which was written, “When the ungodly man goes into the depths of evil, he becomes contemptuous” [Prov 18:3 (LXX)]. Although many heresies have arisen before these, which going far beyond what ought to be dared fell into complete foolishness, these persons, by attempting in all their discourses to do away with the divinity of the Word, have brought themselves closer to becoming the Antichrist, and have exonerated all former heretics by comparison to themselves. For this reason they have been publicly denounced and anathematized by the church. **(17.)** We are indeed grieved by their destruction, and especially so because they have now turned away from the teachings which they had once learned in the church, although we are not surprised. For Hymenaeus and Philetus fell in the same way, and before them Judas, who had been a follower of the Savior, but later became a betrayer and apostate.

(18.) Nor should we have been ignorant about these men, for the Lord himself said: “Beware that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and ‘the time is at hand,’ and they will deceive many people. Do not follow them” [Luke 21:8, Matt 24:5]. And Paul, having learned these things from the Savior, wrote, “That in the last days some will apostatize from the sound faith, following deceiving spirits, and the teachings of devils, turning away from the truth” [1 Tim 4:1, 2 Tim 4:4] **(19.)** Seeing that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has directed through himself and foretold through the apostle concerning these men, it follows that we, having ourselves heard their impiety, have condemned them, as previously stated, and declared them to be outside the catholic church and faith.

(20.) We have also made it clear to your pious minds, beloved and most honored fellow-servants, that you should not welcome any of these men, if they hurriedly approach you, nor be persuaded to receive any letter in their defense from Eusebius or anyone else. It is proper for us who are Christians, to turn away from all those who speak or reason against Christ, since they are resisting God, and destroyers of souls; nor are we “even to greet such men” so that we never “are made partakers in their sin,” as the blessed John instructed [cf. 2 John 9-11]. Give greetings to the brothers with you. Those with me greet you.

(21.) subscriptions of 17 priests and 24 deacons of Alexandria and 19 priests and 20 deacons of the Mareotis district

Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition* 35

6. Confession of faith from Arius and his followers to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria (c. A.D. 320)

- (1.) The priests and deacons to our blessed father and bishop, Alexander; greetings in the Lord.
- (2.) Our faith from our forefathers, which also we learned from you, blessed father, is this: We acknowledge One God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone without beginning, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign, judge, governor, and provider of all, unalterable and unchangeable, just and good, God of the Law and the Prophets and the New Testament; who begat an only-begotten Son before time and the ages, through whom he made both the ages [Heb 1:2] and all that was made; who begot Him not in appearance, but in reality; and that he made him subsist at his own will, unalterable and unchangeable, the perfect creature (*ktisma*) of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of the other things begotten; (3.) nor as Valentinus pronounced that the offspring of the Father was an emanation (*probolē*); nor as the Manicheans taught that the offspring was a one-in-essence-portion (*meros homoousion*) of the Father; nor as Sabellius, dividing the Monad, speaks of a Son-Father; nor as Hieracas speaks of one torch [lit] from another, or as a lamp divided into two; nor that he who existed before was later generated or created anew into a Son, as you yourself, O blessed father, have often condemned both in church services and in council meetings; but, as we say, he was created at the will of God, before time and before the ages, and came to life and being from the Father, and the glories which coexist in him are from the Father.
- (4.) For when giving to him [the Son] the inheritance of all things [Heb 1:2], the Father did not deprive himself of what he has without beginning in himself; for he is the source of all things. Thus there are three subsisting realities (*hypostaseis*). And God, being the cause of all that happens, is absolutely alone without beginning; but the Son, begotten apart from time by the Father, and created (*ktistheis*) and founded before the ages, was not in existence before his generation, but was begotten apart from time before all things, and he alone came into existence (*hypestē*) from the Father. For he is neither eternal nor co-eternal nor co-unbegotten with the Father, nor does he have his being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two unbegotten beginnings. But God is before all things as monad and beginning of all. Therefore he is also before the Son, as we have learned also from your public preaching in the church.
- (5.) Therefore he thus has his being from God; and glories, and life, and all things have been given over to him; in this way God is his beginning. For he is over him, as his God and being before him. But if the expressions *from him* [Rom. 11:36] and *from the womb* [Ps. 109:3 (LXX), 110:3 English] and *I came from the Father, and I have come* [John 16:28], are understood by some to mean that he is part of him [the Father], one in essence or as an emanation, then the Father is, according to them, compounded and divisible and alterable and material, and, as far as their belief goes, the incorporeal God endures a body.
- (6.) I pray that you fare well in the Lord, blessed father. Arius; the priests Aethales, Achilles, Carpones, Sarmatas and Arius; the deacons Euzeiros, Lucius, Julius, Menas, Helladius, and Gaius; the bishops Secundas of the Pentapolis, Theonas of Libya, and Pistus whom the Arians [later] set up [as bishop] at Alexandria.

Sections 1–5: Athanasius, *On the Synods* 16.2–5

Section 6: Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies* 69.8

7. Fragment of a letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to Alexander of Alexandria (c. A.D. 320)

(1.) Similarly also in his letter to St. Alexander the instructor of the great Athanasius, which begins: I came upon this letter with such anxiety and concern... He clearly is speaking blasphemy when he says the following concerning Arius and his party:

(2.) Your letters have misrepresented them [the Arians] as though they were saying that since the Son came into being from nothing (*ek tou mē ontos*), he must therefore be just like the rest of creation (*‘eis tōn pantōn*). But they have brought forth their own document, which they have written for you, in which they explain their faith, confessing it with these very words: “The God of the Law and of the Prophets and of the New Testament begat an only begotten son before time began (*pro chronōn aiōnōn*), through whom he also made the ages (*aiōnas*) [Heb1:2] and all things, begetting him not in appearance but in reality, causing him to exist by his own will. He is unchanging and unchangeable, God’s perfect creation, but not a creation in the same way like one of God’s other creations.”

And so surely indeed their writings speak the truth, since these opinions are certainly held by you also when they confess that the son of God existed before time began, that God also made the ages through him, that he is unchanging, God’s perfect creation, but not like God’s other creations. (3.) But your letter surely misrepresents them as saying that the son is the same as the other created things. They are not saying this! But they clearly draw a distinction, saying that he is, “not like one of the created things.”

Take care, then, lest immediately again a pretext be found for arresting them and keeping them from moving about as much as they wish. (4.) Again, you accuse them of saying, “He-who-was begat he-who-was-not”? I would be astonished if someone were able to speak differently. For if there is only one who exists [eternally], it is clear that everything which exists has come into being from him, whatever indeed exists after him. If it were not he alone who exists eternally, but the son also exists eternally, how indeed could one who exists beget another who already exists? It would have to follow that there would actually be two who exist eternally.

(5.) [So wrote Eusebius to the famous Alexander. But also other letters of his were taken to that holy man, in which were found other various blasphemies, which those of the Arian party defend]

2nd Council of Nicaea, Session (Actio) 6

8. Letter of Eusebius of Nicomedia to Paulinus of Tyre (c. A.D. 320/21)

To my lord Paulinus, Eusebius sends his greetings in the Lord.

(1.) The zeal of my lord Eusebius [of Caesarea] in the cause of the truth, and likewise your silence concerning it, has not failed to reach our ears. Accordingly, if, on the one hand, we rejoiced on account of the zeal of my lord Eusebius; on the other we are grieved at you, because the mere silence of man like you appears like a defeat of our cause. (2.) Hence, as it is not proper for a wise man to be of a different opinion from others, and to be silent concerning the truth, stir up, I exhort you, within yourself the spirit of wisdom to write, and at length begin what may be profitable to yourself and to others, especially if you consent to write in accordance with Scripture, and tread in the tracks of its words and will.

(3.) We have never heard that there are two unbegotten beings, nor that one has been divided into two, nor have we learned or believed that the unbegotten has ever undergone any change of a corporeal nature. On the contrary, we affirm that the unbegotten is one. One also is that which exists in truth by him, yet was not made out of his substance, and does not at all participate in the nature or substance of the unbegotten, entirely distinct in nature and in power, and made after perfect likeness both of character and power to the maker. We believe that the mode of His beginning not only cannot be expressed by words but even in thought, and is incomprehensible not only to man, but also to all beings superior to man.

(4.) These opinions we advance not as having derived them from our own imagination, but as having deduced them from Scripture, whence we learn that the Son was created, established, and begotten with respect to his essence and his unchanging, inexpressible nature, in the likeness of the one for whom he has been made. The Lord himself tells us this: ‘God created me the beginning of his ways; Before the ages he established me; he begat me before all the hills’ [Prov. 8:22-23,25, LXX] (5.) If the Son had been from him or of him, as a portion of him, or by an emanation of his substance, it could not be said that the Son was created or established; and of this you, my lord, are certainly not ignorant. For that which is from the unbegotten could not be said to have been created or founded, either by him or by another, since it is unbegotten from the beginning. (6.) But if the fact of his being called “the begotten” gives any ground for the belief that, having come into being of the Father’s substance, he also has from the Father likeness of nature, we reply that it is not of the Son alone that the Scriptures have spoken as begotten, but that they also thus speak of those who are entirely dissimilar to God by nature. (7.) For of men it is said, ‘I have begotten and brought up sons, and they have rebelled against me;’ [Is. 1:2]; and in another place, ‘You have forsaken God who begat you’ [Deut. 32:18]; and again it is said, ‘Who begat the drops of dew’ [Job 38:28]? This expression does not imply that the dew partakes of the nature of God, but simply that all things were formed according to his will. There is, indeed, nothing which shares his substance, yet every thing which exists has been called into being by his will. (8.) For there is God on the one hand, and then there are the things towards (pros) his likeness which will be similar to the Word, and these things which have come into being by [his] free will. All things were made by God by means of the Word. All things are from God. When you have received my letter, and have revised it according to the knowledge and grace given you by God, I beg you will write as soon as possible to my lord Alexander. I feel confident that if you would write to him, you would succeed in bringing him over to your opinion. Salute all the brethren in the Lord. May you, my lord, be preserved by the grace of God, and be led to pray for us.

9. Fragments of a letter of Paulinus of Tyre (c. A.D. 320)

(1.) [Paulinus of Tyre wrote these things, without mentioning the gospel's teaching. He confessed some things which they themselves had put forward, and others which they read in the writings of others who spoke in times past, sounding forth this sort of thing. The result is that they furnish certain "proofs" from the words of Origen in a letter of his, rather than being persuaded by the Evangelists and Apostles. These are their words]

It is time now when we are debating about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to set out a few points which were omitted then [in Origen's day]. On the subject of the Father, he is Father as undivided and not imparting himself to the Son, not bringing him forth, as some people think. For if the Son is an issue of the Father and a production from him, as are the productions of animals, then it is necessary that both the producer and the produced shall be a body....

(2.) [Later]...With these words, he who is considered the father of this saying, Paulinus, was not ashamed to speak and to write. Once he said that Christ was a second God, and that he had been begotten as a more human God, and another time he was defining him as a creation....

(3.) ...Then he [Marcellus] slanders the blessed [Paulinus] as though he had said there were many Gods...

(4.) ...And since he has learned this, Paulinus, the father of Asterius, thinks that they are younger Gods...

Section 1: Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.18-20

Section 2: Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.49

Section 3: Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.50

Section 4: Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.51

10. Summary of a letter issued by a council in Palestine (c. A.D. 320)

Since Alexander was not willing to give way in his zeal for the correct understanding of God, Arius sent messengers to Paulinus, bishop of Tyre, to Eusebius Pamphilus, who presided over the church of Cæsarea in Palestine, and to Patrophilus, bishop of Scythopolis. He solicited permission for himself and for his adherents, as they had previously attained the rank of priests, to form the people who were with them into a church. For it was the custom in Alexandria, as it still is in the present day, that all the churches should be under one bishop, but that each priest should have his own church, in which to assemble the people. These three bishops, concurring with the others who were assembled in Palestine, granted Arius' petition.

They permitted him to assemble the people as before, but commanded Arius to submit to Alexander and to continually strive to be restored to peace and fellowship with him.

Sozomen, *Church History* 1.15.11

11. A fragment of a letter of priest George to Alexander of Alexandria (c. A.D. 322)

And George who now is in Laodicea, but was at that time a priest of Alexandria, and was spending time in Antioch, wrote to Bishop Alexander:

Don't find fault with Arius and his followers for saying, "There was a time when the Son of God did not exist." For Isaiah became the son of Amos, and, since Amos existed before Isaiah came to be, Isaiah did not exist prior, but afterwards came into being.

Athanasius, *On the Synods* 17.5

12. Fragment of a letter of Athanasius of Anazarbus I (c. A.D. 320–24)

<The Cilician bishop Athanasius said>

[The Son] is God, the overseer, judge and administrator of all things, who created and framed all things, who made everything out of nothing.

Again the same Athanasius calls the ancients, and bishop Dionysius, to show that the Father existed before the Son was begotten, saying¹:

So the Father indeed is father and not son; because he has not been made, but rather he is; he is not from anything, but subsists in himself. Neither is the Son father; not because he was existing, but because he has been made. He has obtained the dignity of a Son not from himself, but from him who made him.

Later the same Athanasius:

For the Son does not set himself up against the Father, nor does he think that he is equal to God, but he yields to his Father and confesses, teaching everyone that the Father is greater <than himself; greater> however, not in vastness or magnitude, which are attributes of corporeal bodies, but in his eternal and indescribable paternal power and power to beget, because he himself is eternal and in himself has fullness and has life from no one else.

Two manuscripts: Vatican latin 5750 and Milan Ambrose E 147

13. Fragment of a letter of Theognius of Bithynia (c. A.D. 320–24)

Similarly also the Bithynian bishop Theognius to the bishop of Alexandria:

Therefore we say the Son is begotten, and the Son was never able to have been unbegotten. Since we know from the Holy Scriptures that the Father alone is unbegotten, <we worship him alone>; but we venerate the Son, because among us it is certain that this glory of his ascends to the Father.

And a bit further on, the same person writes:

And since he shows that the Father is greater than himself, it is certain that <the Father is God>, not only because of the creation, but because he is unbegotten.

Two manuscripts: Vatican latin 5750 and Milan Ambrose E 147

14. Alexander's Letter to Alexander of Byzantium (c. A.D. 324)

Alexander sends greetings in the Lord to his most honorable and likeminded brother Alexander.

(1.) Among untrustworthy men, the greedy and ambitious ones have always plotted to harm the most important dioceses. Such people attack the religion of the church because of many different excuses. The devil works in them and stirs them up to set aside all godliness for the pleasure they fancy most and to trample on the fear of God's judgment. (2.) I thought it was urgent to explain to your piety what I have suffered in these matters. You need to be on your guard against such people in case one of them would dare to enter your diocese too. These cheats are skilled in deception, so beware lest they use deceitfully designed letters and thus are able to snatch away people whose faith is simple-minded and pure.

(3.) Recently, Arius and Achillas have formed a conspiracy. They imitated the ambition of Colluthus, though they are much worse than he was. He brought charges against them, but at least he found a motive for his own malicious course of action. After they saw him use Christ as a business to profit himself, they refused to remain under the authority of the church. Instead, they built robbers' dens for themselves [cf. Matt. 21:13] and now hold meetings in them constantly, where day and night they slander Christ and his church. (4.) They hate every sacred apostolic doctrine and like the Jews have organized a gang to fight against Christ. They deny the divinity of our Savior; they say that he is on the same level as everybody else. After they have picked out every passage about the plan of salvation and about how he humbled himself for our sake [cf. Phil 2:8], they use those very passages to piece together their own wicked message. At the same time they avoid the passages about his eternal divinity and the indescribable glory he shares with the Father.

(5.) They do whatever they can to maintain the ungodly doctrine about Christ believed by the Greeks and the Jews because they want their approval. They diligently do all of the things that outsiders ridicule about us while they daily incite persecutions and encourage rebellion against us. They accuse us before the courts with the testimony of immoral women whom they have deceived [cf. 1 Timothy 5:11-13] and at the same time they disgrace Christianity by allowing their own young women to wander shamefully on every street. In essence, they have had the audacity to tear apart the seamless garment of Christ, which even the soldiers did not dare to divide [cf. John 19:23-24]. (6.) Because of the way they operate, they were able to keep their ungodly attacks unnoticed for a long time. But when they finally came to our attention, we unanimously drove them out of the church that worships the divine Christ.

(7.) They ran everywhere, forming plots against us. They even addressed our fellow ministers, who believed the same things we did, under the pretense of wanting peace and unity—they were actually trying to sweep some of them into their own disease. They ask them to write a wordy letter so they can read aloud the contents to those who have already been fooled by them. This is how they avoid losing their approval and are rooted in their disrespect of God by acting as if the bishops agree and share their views. (8.) They do not even acknowledge the evil things they have done and practiced. We expelled them for those things, but they just keep passing them on in secret or trying to cover them up with lies or fake writings. (9.) Once they have covered up their destructive teaching with persuasive and down-to-earth explanations, they are able to rope in

people who do not know the truth about them. At the same time they never miss an opportunity to misrepresent every single thing about our religion. Because of this, some agree with their letters and add their signature to show that the church should receive them. That our fellow pastors dare to do this is appalling to me! They not only compromise the apostolic rule but also light the fire of this devilish work against Christ under themselves.

(10.) Because of this, dear friends, I could not help myself—I had to tell you about the unbelief of such people. They say, “There was [a time] when the Son of God did not exist,” and “The one who did not exist in the beginning came into being, and when at some point that one came into being, he became like any other man.”

(11.) “For God created everything out of nothing,” they say, including the Son of God as a creation along with all the other rational and irrational creatures. Of necessity they continue by saying that his nature is changeable, able to do either good or evil. Their claim that he was created out of nothing overthrows the sacred Scriptures that say that he is eternal and that the Word is, by nature, unchangeable. The Scriptures also declare that the Wisdom of the Word, which is Christ, is divine. But these cursed lowlifes say, “We, too, are able to become just like him, sons of God.” **(12.)** For it is written [they say], “I have created and raised children [Isaiah 1:2 (LXX)].” So we bring up the second half of that verse, “and they have rebelled against me,” and point out that this is inconsistent with the unchangeable nature of the Savior. At this point they throw away any respectability they might have had and argue that God chose Christ above all others because he knew beforehand and foresaw that Christ would not rebel against him. **(13.)** They also explain that just because he was chosen does not mean that he was created better than the other sons of God (they say that no man is a son of God by nature or has a special relationship with him). Instead they claim that he was chosen because even though his nature was changeable, he was careful enough and worked hard enough to keep himself from becoming inferior. **(14.)** As if Paul and Peter would have been “sons” at the same level if they had worked as hard! To establish this teaching they butcher the Scriptures by quoting what is said in the Psalms about Christ, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, therefore your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions.” [Ps 45:7, (44:8 LXX), Heb. 1:9].

(15.) John the Evangelist specifically taught that the Son of God was not created out of nothing and that there never was a time when he did not exist. He wrote, “the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.” This divine teacher showed that the Father and the Son cannot be separated from each other when he said, “the Son is in the bosom of the Father” [John 1:18].

(16.) The same John makes sure not to include the Word of God among the things created from nothing. He says, “all things were made through him.” He also shows that he is a unique person when he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made by him, and not a single thing was made without him” [John 1:1-3].

(17.) If everything was made by him, how did everything come into being through him at a time when he did not exist? Could the Word, the creating power, really have the same nature as the things it created? No. He existed in the beginning, and everything was made by him, and he made everything out of nothing. **(18.)** The things created from nothing are nothing like “the one who is”. That section of Scripture shows that there is no separation between the Father and the Son; the thought of separation does not even cross the hearers’ mind. The fact is the world was

created out of nothing. That means that its nature has a later, fresh beginning, and the Father gave it its beginning through the Son.

(19.) The blessed John knew that created beings could not understand the “was” that describes the Word of God. So he did not try to explain the Word’s generation or creation and he resisted putting a name to the Maker and to the created things. Not that the Son of God is unbegotten—only the Father is unbegotten—it is just that the indescribable character of the only-begotten God is beyond even the brightest of the Evangelists’ understanding, maybe even the angels too!. For this reason, I maintain that the people who are trying to reason out this subject are ungodly. They go against the proverb, “Do not seek what is too difficult for you or look into things too high for you” [Sir. 3:21]. **(20.)** The knowledge of many other much less complicated things is still beyond the capacity of the human mind. As Paul said, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him” [1 Cor. 2:9]. God also said to Abraham that he was not able to count the stars. Similarly it is said, “Who shall number the grains of sand by the sea-shore, or the drops of rain?” [Sir. 1:2] **(21.)** So then, how could anyone but a lunatic try to figure out the nature of the Word of God? The Spirit of prophecy addressed this when he said, “Who can speak of his generation?” [Isa. 53:8] And so it was out of kindness for all of those who were pillars in the world that our Savior was eager to free them from trying to grasp this knowledge. He told them that it was beyond their natural comprehension and to leave the knowledge of this divine mystery to the Father. He said, “No man knows the Son but the Father, and no man knows the Father except the Son” [Matt. 11:27]. I think the Father was talking about this when he said, “My mystery is for me” [Isa. 24:16 (a reading in some LXX mss.)].

(22.) But the words “out of nothing” make it clear that it is insane to imagine that the Son of God came into being out of nothing and that he has a certain starting point in time. The foolish are of course unable to see the stupidity of their own sayings. Their phrase, “He was not” must either have reference to time or to some interval in eternity. **(23)** If it is true that everything was made by him, then every age, time, and interval of time—even that time “when he was not”—was made by him. So is it not incredible that they say that there was a time when the one who created time, ages, and seasons (and they are so confused that they include the time when he “was not” in that list) did not exist? It is not only ignorant, but it also goes against all reason, to claim that a person who creates something can come into being after the thing that he created!

(24.) They say that there is an interval of time in which the Son was not yet begotten of the Father. According to them, this interval is the time before the wisdom of God existed, by whom all things were created. But this contradicts the passage that says he is the “firstborn over all creation” [Col. 1:15]. **(25.)** Paul agrees with this with his usual loud voice by saying about him, “whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” [Heb. 1:2], and, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things” [Col 1:16-17]. **(26.)** So their hypothesis that the Son was created “out of nothing” is clearly ungodly. The Father has to always be a Father. He is always the Father of a Son who is there—he is the reason that he is called Father. The Son has to always be present with him so that the Father is always complete and not lacking anything good. That’s why he could not have begotten his only Son in time, or any interval of time, or out of nothing.

(27.) Why is it unholy to say, “There was a time when the wisdom of God did not exist”? That Wisdom itself says, “I was brought up at his side: I was daily his delight [Prov. 8:30]” Would it not be unholy to say that at one time the power of God did not exist, or his Word, or anything else that describes the Son and characterizes the Father at the same time? To say that the brightness of the Father’s glory [cf. Heb 1:3] “once did not exist” destroys the original light too, because the brightness comes from it. If the image of God did not always exist, then it is clear that God, in whose image the Son is, also did not always exist. **(28.)** No, if the full expression of God’s character did not exist, then everything else about him [i.e., the Son] that also characterized God must not exist either. That fact shows that the sonship of our Savior has nothing in common with the sonship of anyone else. **(29.)** It has been shown that the nature of the Son’s existence cannot be explained by any human language. The excellence of his nature is infinitely beyond the nature of everything that he has created. In the same way his sonship, which by nature shares the Father’s divinity, is unspeakably better than the sonship of the people God has chosen to adopt as sons. He is by nature unchangeable, perfect, and does not need anything. On the other hand, humans are able to change and need help from him.

(30.) What can be added to improve the wisdom of God [1 Cor. 1:24-25]? What can Truth personified add to itself? How can God the Word, the Life and the True Light [John 1:4, 9; 14:6], possibly be improved? Is it not unnatural to think that wisdom can be prone to foolishness? That the power of God can be united with weakness? That reason can be dimmed by unreasonableness or that darkness can be mixed with the true light? Does not the apostle address this directly by saying, “What fellowship does light have with darkness? And what harmony does Christ have with Belial?” [2 Cor 6:14-15] Does not Solomon say that “the way of a snake on a rock” [Prov. 30:19] is too wonderful for the human mind to understand—the rock here, according to St. Paul, is Christ [1 Cor. 10:4]. He gave his creations, angels and humans, the blessing to be able to keep working on being virtuous and being obedient to his commands so that they will not sin.

(31.) Because of this our Lord, who is by nature the Son of the Father, is worshiped by all. Some have put off the spirit of slavery [Phil 2:11] and have received the spirit of adoption [Rom 8:15] by bravely working and making progress in virtue. They have become sons by adoption through the kindness of the one who is the Son of God by nature. **(32.)** Paul explained his true, unique, natural, and special sonship, when he said by inspiration “he did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us”, who are by nature not his sons [Rom 8:32]. **(33.)** To distinguish him from those who are not “his own”, God called him “his own son.” It is also written in the Gospel, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” [Matt. 3:17], and in the Psalms the Savior says, “The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son’” [Ps 2:7]. He points out that he is a natural son to show that there are no other natural sons except him. **(34.)** The words, “I begot you from the womb before dawn” [Ps. 109:3 (LXX), 110:3 English] plainly show that his natural sonship and paternal birth is his because of his unique nature. He did not receive it by being particularly diligent or working hard to progress morally. Because of this, the only-begotten Son is not able to lose his sonship. Rational people who are adopted by God are not his natural sons, but have been adopted because of their good character and by the grace of God. These types of sons can fall away. This is written in the passage, “The sons of God saw the daughters of men, and took them as wives” [Gen 6:2-3] etc...In addition, God said through Isaiah, “I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me” [Isa. 1:2].

(35.) Since I have much more to say, my friend, I will stop at this; for I do not want to wear you out by excessively teaching to likeminded brothers. You are “taught by God” [1 Thess. 4:9] and are aware that this recent teaching, which is against the religion of the church, is the same as that of Ebion and Artemas. It rivals the heresy of Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, who was excommunicated by a council of all the bishops. **(36.)** Lucian, his successor, removed himself from fellowship with these three bishops for years. And now, out of nowhere, there are men among us who have sucked up the dregs of this ungodliness. All of them secretly come from the same root: Arius and Achillas and their gang of evildoers. **(37.)** Three bishops of Syria (I do not know how they got appointed) are fanning the flames by agreeing with them. I leave their judgment in your hands. They fill their heads with everything that has anything to do with Christ’s suffering, humiliation, emptying of himself, and so-called poverty [Phil. 2:7-8]. They present those passages to disprove his eternal existence and divinity and at the same time forget all those passages that prove his glory and nobility and presence with the Father, for example, “I and the Father are one” [John 10:30].

(38.) Note what the Lord says. He does not proclaim himself to be the Father or say that the two natures are one. He states that the Son of the Father accurately presents the likeness of the Father. He says that his nature took the exact likeness of his Father in every way, and that his image is indistinguishable from the father’s; he is like an exact stamp of the original. **(39.)** That is why the Lord answered so plainly when Philip asked to see the Father. Phillip said to him, “Show us the Father;” and the Lord replied, “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” [John 14:8-9] as if the Father is seen through him like through a mirror. He is a spotless and living reflection of his Father. **(40.)** The saints say the same thing in the Psalms, “In your light we shall see light” [Ps. 36:9]. Because of this “he who honors the Son, honors the Father” [John 5:23]. Similarly, every ungodly word that people dare to say against the Son is also spoken against the Father [John 15:23].

(41.) Friends, who could be surprised at each of the deceitful reports I’m about to list—reports against me and against our most pious people. They not only set themselves against the divinity of the Son, but they also ungratefully try to insult us. They think that it is beneath them to be compared with anyone who is older; they refuse to appear to be on the same level as teachers that we have associated with since childhood. They will not admit that any of our fellow ministers could have even a little intelligence. They say that they are the only ones who are wise and understanding and the discoverers of doctrines. They say that these truths have been revealed only to them and that these truths have never even crossed the mind of any other person under the sun.

(42.) What wicked arrogance! What immeasurable madness! Such false pride combined with satanic thoughts! These things have hardened their evil hearts. **(43.)** They are not ashamed that they are ignoring the God-inspired clarity of the ancient scriptures. The united piety of each of our fellow ministers does not even make them lose their nerve. Not even a demon puts up with wickedness like this—even they keep from blaspheming against the Son of God.

(44.) So I at least have done the best that I can to ask pointed questions to those who throw uneducated mud on Christ and try to misrepresent what we teach about him. They just make up fairy tales! When we reject their evil and unscriptural blasphemy that Christ came from nothing,

they say that we teach that there are two unbegotten beings. These uneducated people can only think of two options: Either you believe that he came out of nothing, or you believe that there are two unbegotten beings. They are ignorant newcomers when it comes to theology; they do not realize how big the difference is between the unbegotten Father and everything that he created out of nothing, either rational or irrational. **(45.)** They do not understand the only begotten nature of him who is the Word of God. The Father created the universe out of nothing through him, and the Father is the one who begets him. The Lord himself proved this when he said, “Everyone that loves the Father also loves the Son who is begotten of him” [1 John 5:1].

(46.) We believe the same thing that the apostolic church believes: There is one unbegotten Father. Nothing caused him to exist, he is unchanging and unchangeable, his being always stays just the way it is, and he does not get better or worse. He gave the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. He is the Lord of the patriarchs and apostles and of all the saints.

We also believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, not begotten out of nothing, but out of the Father. He is not begotten like things in the world are, like cutting a piece off something or emitting something, as Sabellius and Valentinus taught. He is begotten in an inexpressible and unexplainable way, as we quoted above, “Who can speak of his generation?” [Isa. 53:8] No human mind is able to understand the nature of his substance or the Father’s. Rational people simply do not have the ability to understand in what way he was begotten of the Father. **(47.)** But people led by the Spirit of truth do not need to take these things from me. What the Savior said long ago still echoes in our ears, “No one knows who the Father is but the Son, and no one knows who the Son is but the Father” [Matt 11:27]. We have learned that the Son is unchanging and unchangeable; he lacks nothing and is complete, like the Father except that he is unbegotten. He is the exact image and sculpture of his Father. **(48.)** It is clear that the image is filled with everything that makes up the greater likeness, as the Lord himself taught when he said, “My Father is greater than I” [John 14:28]. In agreement with this we believe that the Son was always “of the Father”. He is the radiance of his glory and the exact stamp of the Father’s substance. But no one should take the word “always” to mean that the Son is unbegotten, as some ignorant people have been led to believe. To say “he was always...”, and “before all ages”, is not the same thing as saying he is unbegotten. **(49.)** As it is, human understanding could never coin a term that explains what it means to be unbegotten; none of these terms represent the unbegotten well (I think you share this opinion, and I am positive that your view is orthodox). **(50.)** All of these terms make it sound like a period of time. They are not able to express the full sense of the divinity and the antiquity of the only begotten Son. They were used by holy men who did what they could to make the mystery clearer. And even they asked for patience from those who listened to them by attaching a reasonable qualification: what they said was limited by their understanding.

(51.) If men expect anything better than that to come from human lips, then they must think that what is “known in part” has already been “done away with” for them [cf. 1 Cor 13:8-12]. It is clear that the “was” and “always” and “before all ages” fall short of that hope. Whatever these words mean, it is not the same as “unbegotten.” **(52.)** At any rate, we have to guard the Father’s unique status as the Unbegotten One because it is never said that anything caused him to exist. It is also necessary to guard the Son’s particular honor, since his generation from the Father has no starting point. We will continue worshiping him as we have been, piously and respectfully

referring to him with the terms “was”, and “ever,” and “before all ages.” We do not reject his divinity but instead credit to him his perfect likeness to his Father in every way. At the same time, we credit to the Father his unique glory: that only he is “the Unbegotten One.” The Savior himself says, “My Father is greater than I am” [John 14:28]. **(53.)** The Sacred Scriptures teach us this pious teaching about the Father and Son. In addition, they teach us and we confess that there is one Holy Ghost who inspired the saints of the Old Testament and the holy teachers of the New Testament. We confess the one and only apostolic Catholic Church which does not decay but lasts forever. Even if the whole world went to war against it, it would still be victorious over all of the wicked attacks of the heterodox. Have courage! Our Master prepared us for this with his words, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [John 16:33].

(54.) Besides this, we acknowledge the resurrection from the dead, of which our Lord Jesus was the first-fruits [1 Cor. 15:20]. He truly had a real body, not just the appearance of a body; he was born of Mary the mother of God; when the time had fully come he lived among humans for the forgiveness of their sins; he was crucified and buried—none of this decreased his divinity in any way; he rose from the dead, was taken up to heaven, and he sat down at the “right hand of the Majesty” [Heb. 9:26].

(55.) In this letter I have only partially mentioned these things. As I said before, it would be tiresome to talk about each point even briefly since you are pious and diligent enough that you know them. These things we teach, these things we preach. These are the doctrines of the apostolic Church—we are ready to die for them and we pay no mind to those who would force us to give them up. We will never turn away from the hope that we have in them, even if they try to force us by torture.

(56.) Both the people who oppose Arius and Achillas and also those who fight against the truth with them have been driven from the church. They have all become hostile to our godly doctrine, just like the blessed Paul said, “If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you have received, let him be cursed (anathema),” even if he pretends to be an angel from heaven [Gal 1:8-9]. **(57.)** So, since they have been condemned (anathematized) by the brothers, no one should receive them or anything that they say or write. They are all lying babblers who are unable to speak the truth. **(58.)** They travel around to different cities, pretending to come in friendship and in the name of peace. They are running around for no other reason than to give and receive fake letters that defend and flatter them. By doing this they deceive a few “weak women who are loaded down with sins” [2 Tim. 3:6].

(59.) My beloved and likeminded brothers, reject these people! They dared to do these things against Christ, they publicly mocked Christianity, and they keep trying to give false information before the courts. During this time of peace, they have tried to stir up persecution against us. They have broken down the inexpressible mystery of how Christ is begotten. Work together and be courageous against their insanity just like our fellow ministers, who are filled with anger and wrote a letter to me against them and also signed our letter condemning them. I have sent these letters to you through my son Apion, the deacon. They have the signatures of everyone in Egypt and Thebaid, Libya, the Pentapolis, Syria, Lycia, Pamphylia, Asia, Cappadocia, and the surrounding areas. I hope you will follow their example when you receive it. **(60.)** I have tried many times to win back those who have been led astray and I have found the best solution is for

us to show that we fellow-ministers are united. If we do this we will quickly bring the lay people who have been deceived back to repentance. So greet each other in the brotherhood that you have. I pray that you will be strengthened in the Lord, my friends, and that I can enjoy the support of your hearts being filled with the love of Christ.

(61.) Here are the names of those who have been condemned as heretics: Among the presbyters, Arius; among the deacons, Achillas, Euzoius, Aethales, Lucius, Sarmatas, Julius, Menas, another Arius, and Helladius.

Theodoret, *Church History* 1.4

15. Documents of the Early Arian Controversy – Emperor Constantine to Alexander of Alexandria and Arius (c. Oct. 324)

The Victor Constantine, the Great Augustus, to Alexander and Arius.

(1.) I call God to witness, as is fitting, who is the helper of my endeavors and the preserver of all men, that I had a twofold reason for undertaking this duty which I have now performed. My design then was first to bring the various beliefs formed by all nations about God to a condition of settled uniformity. Secondly I hoped to restore to health the civil liberties of the empire, then suffering under the malignant power of an angry tyrant. Keeping these objects in view, I sought to accomplish the one by thought, which is hidden from the eye, while the other I tried to rectify by the power of military authority. For I was aware that, if I should succeed in establishing, according to my hopes, a common harmony of sentiment among all the servants of God, the general course of affairs would also experience a change corresponding to the pious desires of all.

(2.) So when I found that an intolerable spirit of mad folly had overcome the whole of Africa, through the influence of those who with heedless frivolity had presumed to divide the religion of the people into diverse sects, I was anxious to stop the course of this disorder. After I had removed the common enemy of mankind [Licinius] who had interposed his lawless sentence which prohibited your holy synods, I could discover no other remedy equal to the occasion, except to send some of you churchmen to aid in restoring mutual harmony among the disputants.

(3.) I naturally believed that you in the East would be the first to promote the salvation of other nations, since the power of Divine light and the law of sacred worship, which proceeded in the first instance through the favor of God, from the bosom, as it were, of the East, have illumined the world by their sacred radiance. So I resolved with all energy of thought and diligence of enquiry to seek your aid. As soon, as I had secured my decisive victory and unquestioned triumph over my enemies, my first enquiry was concerning that object which I felt to be of paramount interest and importance.

(4.) But, O glorious Providence of God! How deep a wound did not my ears only, but my very heart receive when it was reported that divisions existed among yourselves more grievous still than those which continued in that country [Africa, i.e. the Donatist schism]! You, through

whose aid I had hoped to procure a remedy for the errors of others, are in a state which needs healing even more than theirs. And yet, now that I have made a careful enquiry into the origin and foundation of these differences, I have found the cause to be of a truly insignificant character, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention. I feel compelled to address you in this letter, and to appeal at the same time to your unity and discernment. I call on Divine Providence to assist me in the task, while I interrupt your dissension as a minister of peace. (5.) I have hope for success: Even in a great disagreement I might expect with the help of the higher Power, to be able without difficulty, by a judicious appeal to the pious feelings of those who hear me, to recall them to a better spirit. How can I help but to expect a far easier and more speedy resolution of this difference, when the cause which hinders general harmony of sentiment is intrinsically trifling and of little importance?

(6.) I understand that the origin of the present controversy is this. When you, Alexander, demanded of the priests what opinion they each maintained respecting a certain passage in Scripture, or rather, I should say, that you asked them something connected with an unprofitable question. You then, Arius, inconsiderately insisted on what ought never to have been speculated about at all, or if pondered, should have been buried in profound silence. Hence it was that a dissension arose between you, fellowship was withdrawn, and the holy people were rent into diverse factions, no longer preserving the unity of the one body. (7.) And so I now ask you both to show an equal degree of consideration for the other, and to receive the advice which your fellow-servant impartially gives. What then is this advice? It was wrong in the first instance to propose such questions as these, and also wrong to reply to them when they were presented. (8.) For those points of discussion are not commanded by the authority of any law, but are rather the product of an argumentative spirit which is encouraged by the idle useless talk of leisure. Even though they may be intended merely as an intellectual exercise, they ought certainly to be confined to the region of our own thoughts, and not hastily produced in the popular assemblies, nor unadvisedly entrusted to the ears of the general public. For how very few are there able either accurately to comprehend, or adequately to explain subjects so sublime and difficult to comprehend in their nature? Or, granting that one were fully competent for this, how many people will he convince? Or again, who in dealing with questions involving such subtle distinctions as these can be sure he is not dangerously departing from the truth in some point? We ourselves may be unable, through the weakness of our natural abilities, to give a clear explanation of the subject before us, or, on the other hand, our hearers understanding may prevent them from arriving at an accurate understanding of what we say. Lest that be the case, it is our obligation to be sparing with our words, so that neither of these situations will cause the people to be reduced either to blasphemy or to schism.

(9.) Now forgive one another for both the careless question and the ill-considered answer. The cause of your difference has not been any of the leading doctrines or precepts of the Divine law, nor has any new heresy respecting the worship of God arisen among you. You are really of one and the same judgment; and so it is fitting for you to join in communion and fellowship. (10.) As long as you continue to contend about these small and very insignificant questions, it is not fitting that so large a portion of God's people should be under the direction of your judgment, since you are thus divided between yourselves. In my opinion, it is not merely unbecoming, but positively evil, that such should be the case. Let me arouse your minds by the following little illustration. You know that philosophers, though they all adhere to one system, are yet frequently

at issue on certain points, and differ, perhaps, in their degree of knowledge. Yet they are brought back to harmony of opinion by the uniting power of their common teachings. If this be true, is it not far more reasonable that you, who are the ministers of the Supreme God, should be of one mind in the profession of the same religion? Let us still more thoughtfully and with closer attention examine what I have said, and see whether it be right: On the ground of some trifling and foolish verbal difference between ourselves, should brothers assume towards each other the attitude of enemies? Should the honorable synod be torn in two by profane disunion, because of you who wrangle together on points so trivial and altogether unessential? This is vulgar, and more characteristic of childish ignorance, than consistent with the wisdom of priests and sensible men. (11.) Let us withdraw ourselves with a good will from these temptations of the devil. Our great God and our common Savior has granted us all the same light. Permit me, who am his servant, to successfully bring my task to conclusion, under the direction of his providence, that I may be enabled, through my exhortations, diligence, and earnest warning, to recall his people to communion and fellowship. (12.) You have, as I said, only one faith, and one opinion about our religion, and the Divine commandment in all its parts imposes upon us all the duty of maintaining a spirit of peace. Because of this, you should not let the circumstance which has led to a slight difference between you cause any division or schism among you, since it does not affect the validity of the whole. (13.) I say this without in any way desiring to force you to a complete unity of judgment in regard to this truly idle question, whatever its real nature may be. For the dignity of your synod can be preserved, and the communion of your whole body can be maintained unbroken, no matter how wide a difference exists among you about unimportant matters. We are not all like-minded on every subject, nor is there such a thing as one universal disposition and judgment.

(14.) As far, then, as regards Divine Providence, let there be one faith, and one understanding among you, one united judgment concerning God. But as to your subtle disputations on questions of little or no significance, though you may be unable to harmonize in opinion, such differences should be confined to your own private minds and thoughts. And now, let the preciousness of common affection, let faith in the truth, let the honor due to God and to the observance of his law remain immovably among you. Resume your mutual feelings of friendship, love, and respect. Restore to the people their customary embraces; and you yourselves purify your souls, as it were, and once more acknowledge one another. For it often happens that when a reconciliation is effected by the removal of the causes of hostility, friendship becomes even sweeter than it was before.

(15.) Restore me then my quiet days, and untroubled nights, that the joy of undimmed light, the delight of a tranquil life, may be my portion from here on. Otherwise I will be forced to mourn with constant tears, and I will not be able to pass the remainder of my days in peace. While the people of God, whose fellow-servant I am, are so divided among themselves by an unreasonable and wicked spirit of contention, how is it possible that I shall be able to maintain a tranquil mind? And I will give you a proof how great my sorrow has been in this regard. Not long ago I visited Nicomedia, and had intended to proceed immediately from that city to the East. It was while I was hurrying towards you, and had already finished the greater part of the journey, that the news of this matter reversed my plan, so that I would not be forced to see with my own eyes that which I felt myself scarcely able even to hear. So open for me by your unity of judgment that road to the regions of the East which your dissensions have closed to me, and permit me

speedily to see you and all other peoples rejoicing together. Render due acknowledgment to God in the language of praise and thanksgiving for the restoration of general peace and liberty to all.

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2.64–72

16. Letter of the Synod of Antioch (A.D. 325)

(1.) To our holy and likeminded brother, our beloved fellow-minister Alexander. Ossios, Eustathios, Amphion, Bassianos, Zenobios, Pipberios, Salamanes, Gregorios, Magnos, Petros, Longinos, Manikios, Mokimos, Agapios, Macedonios, Maulos, Bassianos, Seleucos, Sopatros, Antiochos, Makarios, Iacobos, Hellanikos, Niketas, Archelaos, Makrinos, Germanos, Anatolios, Zoilos, Cyrillos, Paulinos, Aetios, Moses, Eustathios, Alexander, Eirenaios, Rabboulas, Paulos, Loupos, Nikomachos, Philboxenos, Maximos, Marinos, Euphrantion, Tarkondimantos, Eirenicos, Petros, Pegasios, Eupsychios, Asklepios, Alpheios, Bassos, Gerontios, Esychios, Auidios, and Terentios Greetings in the Lord!

(2.) The catholic church throughout the world resembles the parts of a body, in that it is one body even if it has diversely located places of assembly. It follows naturally that our love for you would lead us to inform you of what I and all our holy brothers with me have done, setting events in motion. This way you may be present with us in a united spirit, and speak together with us as you make rulings according to the common decisions and actions which we have taken according to church law. (3.) When I arrived at the church in Antioch, I saw that it was full of troublesome weeds, sown by the teaching of certain men and their contentious faction. I thought it was important not to try to throw them out and reject them on my own. It seemed necessary for the likeminded fellow-ministers from the surrounding territories to step out of their usual boundaries and help their brothers here in Antioch deal with this most pressing and urgent matter. This included those from Palestine, Arabia, Phoenicia, the Syria, Cilicia, and some from Cappadocia. We met so that, by applying our minds to scrutinizing and reviewing, we would completely establish what was proper for the church. Our city lives in harmony by its many and righteous citizens.

(4.) Once God's grace had brought us all together in Antioch and we were busily engaged in the task of discerning what is common, helpful, and useful for God's Church, we found that there was great confusion, especially because in many places church law has been neglected or even despised, and the decrees which have been passed by other councils have been completely ignored by some worldly men. (5.) Therefore, since synodical meetings of bishops have been prevented from gathering in these areas, we thought that we should set in order that which surpasses all in importance, which I might rather say is the whole of the mystery of the faith found among us. I am referring of course to our common Savior, the Son of the Living God. (6.) This subject has been most pressing, since our brother and fellow-minister, the dearly beloved Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, has expelled certain priests of Arius' party because of the blasphemy which they raised against our Savior. Unfortunately, they were able to deceive others with their ungodly teaching and were even received into fellowship by them. So it seemed best to our holy synod to set this matter in order first, so that once we had clarified the chief point of God's mystery, all the other points could be set in order consecutively. (7.) As we were gathered,

and many brothers were present who were quite learned in the church's faith, which we were taught by the scriptures and received from our fathers, we discussed this matter at length. Alexander of Alexandria's action against Arius and his party was continually on our minds and in our discussion. We decided that if anyone should appear and make themselves a corruptive influence by teaching contrary to these statements, they should be cast out of the church, so that they could not drag down some of the simpler church members by remaining in our midst.

(8.) This faith has been set down by spiritual men; those who ought not be considered as living or reasoning according to the flesh, because they have been trained by the Spirit in the holy Scriptures found in God-breathed books.

Our faith is as follows:

To believe in one God, Father, almighty, incomprehensible, unchangeable and unalterable, administrator and governor of all, just, good, maker of heaven and earth, and all that is in them, the Lord of the Law and the Prophets and the New Testament. **(9.)** And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, begotten not from nothing, but from the Father; not made, but a genuine offspring. He was begotten inexpressibly and unspeakably, because only the Father who begot and the Son who was begotten know it, "for no one knows the Father except the Son, or the Son except the Father" [Matt 11:27]. **(10.)** He always exists and never before did he not exist, for we have been taught from the holy Scriptures that he alone is God's image. He is not unbegotten, for he is clearly begotten of the Father. This status has not been placed upon him; in fact, it would be godless blasphemy to say so. But the scriptures say that he is the real and truly begotten Son, so we believe him to be unchangeable and unalterable. He has not been begotten or come into being merely by the Father's will, nor has this status been placed upon him, which would make him appear to be from nothing. But he was begotten as was fitting for him, not at all according to the impermissible idea that he resembles, is of similar nature to, or is associated with any of the things that came into existence through him. **(11.)** But, because this transcends all thought, conception, and expression, we simply confess that he has been begotten from the unbegotten Father, God the Word, true Light, righteousness, Jesus Christ, Lord of all and Savior. He is the image not of the will or of anything else except the actual being (hypostasis*) of the Father. This one, the Son, God the Word, was also born in the flesh from Mary the Mother of God and was made flesh. After suffering and dying, he rose from the dead and was taken into heaven, and he sits at the right hand of the Majesty of the Most High. He is coming to judge the living and the dead. **(12.)** Just as the holy writings teach us to believe in our Savior, so also they teach us to believe in one Spirit, one catholic church, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment which will pay back to each man according to what he has done in the flesh, whether good or evil. **(13.)** We anathematize those who say or think or proclaim that the Son of God is a creation (ktisma); has come into being (genētos), or was made (poiētos), or was not truly begotten; or that there was a time when he did not exist (for we believe that he was and that he is Light); still also those who think he is unchangeable only by his free will [i.e., not according to his essence], as with those who think he did not exist before he was begotten and that he is not unchanging by his nature as the Father is. He

has been proclaimed as the Father's image in every respect, especially in this respect, that he does not change.

(14.) This faith was put forth, and indeed the entire holy synod consented and confessed that this is the apostolic teaching which alone is able to save. All the fellow-ministers have the same understanding about these issues. Only Theodotus of the Laodicean church, Narcissus of the church in Neronia, and Eusebius from the church in Caesarea of Palestine have appeared together and brought forward ideas contrary to those expressed here, as if they have forgotten the holy Scriptures and the apostolic teachings (though indeed they have attempted to shiftily escape notice and hide their deceptions with false, though persuasive-sounding arguments). In fact, from what they were asked and what they asked in turn, they clearly were proven to agree completely with Arius' party, and to hold opinions contrary to what was established by our synod. For this reason, that their hearts are so hardened, and that they have no regard for the holy synod which rejected and disapproved of their ideas in these matters, we all fellow-ministers in the synod have ruled not to practice fellowship with these men, not to consider them worthy of fellowship, since their faith is something other than that of the catholic church. (15.) So that you might know of this, we write to you, so that you too can be on guard against having fellowship with these men, and that you may not write to them or receive letters of fellowship from them. You should also know this, that on account of our great brotherly love, we of the synod have established a place for them to repent and recognize the truth: the magnificent and sacred synod to be held at Ancyra. So encourage all the like minded brothers to spread this message, so that they also will be able to know the facts about these men, how some have been removed from the church and are not in agreement with her.

Greet all the brothers who are with you and in the surrounding area. The brothers here who are with us greet you in the Lord.

(This is the end of the letter which was written by the synod which was gathered in Antioch, to Alexander the bishop of New Rome, which is Constantinople**)

Original Greek is now lost; 3 Syriac manuscripts survive: Cod. Par. Syr. 62; Vatican Cod. Syr. 148; Mingana Syr. 8