

# Eusebius of Caesarea's Christology and The Nicene Confession

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**Abstract:** This work explores Eusebius of Caesarea's Christological teaching, situating him in the complex web of interlocking religious and political issues that characterized the fourth-century Trinitarian discourse. It argues that the traditional groupings of bishops into different ecclesiastical alliances around this period did not entail that the personalities grouped therein necessarily held the same doctrinal confession. Such is demonstrated in the case of Eusebius of Caesarea who allied himself with the assembly of the Eusebian bishops—the group that sustained the claim of Arius leading to the 325 Council of Nicea and persecuted the defenders of the Nicene theology, most notably Athanasius, the years following the great council. It expostulates that, notwithstanding his association with the Eusebian party, the theology of the bishop of Caesarea, as specified in his works, both pre- and post-Nicene, is consistent with the view that the Son is fully divine, thus is reconcilable with the theology of Nicea.

**Keywords:** Eusebius of Caesarea, communion, Nicea, homouseans, *ousia*, Arian, anti-Arian, Eusebians, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Asterius the Sophist, Trinity, divinity of the Son of God

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## Introduction

Eusebius of Caesarea was an early supporter of Arius. When Bishop Alexander expelled Arius from Alexandria, the bishop of Caesarea promptly received him into communion,<sup>1</sup> wrote some letters in favor of Arius,<sup>2</sup> and participated in, if not convened, the ecclesiastical council that enjoined Alexander to allow Arius to return and practice clerical ministry.<sup>3</sup> However, he subscribed to the Nicene Creed and accepted the anathemas it pronounced on the doctrine of Arius.<sup>4</sup> There are three possibilities by which one can interpret Eusebius of Caesarea's attitude towards both Arius and the 325 Council of Nicea. Either the bishop of Caesarea was a true believer in the theological vision of Arius, but merely gave in to the pressure of Emperor Constantine to acknowledge the profession of faith produced by Nicea; or, he indeed shared the view of Arius, but later on, was persuaded to uphold the Nicene creed having perceived its orthodoxy; or, he, all the while, sustained the theological vision that was similar to the belief of Nicea which explains his approval of it, but only had been misled into believing a dubious interpretation of the theology of Alexander, the core of which was reflected in Nicea. My position will adopt the third option, and in the course of the discussion, the arguments that support this contention will be laid out.

## Arius and the Eusebians on the Son of God

Before considering the theology of the Son of Eusebius of Caesarea, I deem it necessary to provide a description of the theology of the Eusebians vis-à-vis the thought of Arius. Such will serve as a reference to which we can compare the theology of Eusebius of Caesarea to that of the Eusebians and of Arius. The objective here is to demonstrate the fundamental difference of the Caesarean bishop's position from that of the Eusebians, among which some uncritically and unfairly number the former.

The Eusebians were those ecclesiastics loosely identified as associates of Eusebius of Nicomedia, who defended Arius against Alexander of Alexandria and, after Nicaea, constituted as a party that disputed the confession of Nicaea. Alexander himself was the first to speak about this group, but it was Athanasius who identified the personalities who composed this previously faceless company of bishops. They

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<sup>1</sup> R. Williams, *Arius, Heresy and Tradition*, Revised Edition, Cambridge 2001, 56.

<sup>2</sup> R. Williams mentions of Eusebius' letter to Alexander (*Arius*, 53) and another one sent to Euphratius which he conjectures as a direct response to the *he philarcos* of Alexander (*Arius*, 59, 172).

<sup>3</sup> R.P.C. Hanson (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy 318-381*, Edinburgh 1988, 130) believes that it was Eusebius of Caesarea himself who chaired the council.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *De eccl.theol.* 1,9,6 (GCS 68,8-13); J. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum, Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology*, Washington D.C. 1999, 108.

were Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis, Maris, Narcissus, Theodore, Patrophilus,<sup>5</sup> Macedonius, and the two Balkan bishops, Ursacius and Valens.<sup>6</sup> Another known associate of the Eusebians was the layman Asterius the Sophist. Eusebius of Caesarea worked with them as part of the alliance of bishops which made a condemnatory pronouncement against Athanasius in the 335 Synod of Tyre and 336 Synod of Constantinople.

The discussion of the thought of the Eusebians, to which we shall compare the Christology of the Caesarean pontiff, shall be limited to two personalities only, namely, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Asterius the Sophist. The reason for this is not just because they are the only ones who have ample existing written materials from which to draw their respective theologies, but also their thoughts respectively are a valid representative of the theology that the party stood for. Concerning the bishop of Nicomedia, there are two extant complete letters—his letter to Paulinus of Tyre and the so-called recantation letter he penned with Theognis of Nicaea—and some fragments attributed to him preserved in Athanasius and later sources, notably, Ambrose of Milan and Sozomen. Among these sources, the letter to Paulinus is the most insightful resource for his theology.

Eusebius of Nicomedia, just like Arius, denied the coeternal existence of the Son with the Father. This is evident, for instance, in the fragment of his reply to the letter of Arius, quoted in the *De synodis* of Athanasius: “Since your statements are good, pray that all may adopt them; for it is plain to any one, that what has been made was not before its origination; but what came to be has a beginning of being.”<sup>7</sup> He affirmed that only the Father is unbegotten and eternal. In his mind, there is an exclusive correlation between the attributes eternal and unbegotten. Thus, to posit that the Son is coeternal with the Father would mean securing the belief in two unbegotten beings. Moreover, it would further imply the assumption that the ingenerate nature of the Father has been divided or severed into two. Such is the only process by which an eternal being can proceed from another eternal being for the Nicomedian. It is on account of this why, in his letter to Paulinus of Tyre, he endorsed the opinion that the Son is a creature whose nature is distinct from the Father. If the Son is “created, established, and begotten” as the Scriptures has demonstrated,

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<sup>5</sup> These first six names were mentioned in the Letter of the Egyptian bishops to the bishops assembled at Tyre, accusing them of a conspiracy against Athanasius (*Ap.con.Arian.77*; CPG 2123; NPNF 4,140).

<sup>6</sup> These last three names were listed, together with Theognis, Maris and Theodore, as part of the Mareotis commission that went to recover evidence that would have convicted Athanasius of the alleged crime of disrupting the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist and desecrating a consecrated chalice. Athanasius, *Ap.contra Arian.13* (NPNF 4,107).

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius of Nicomedia, *Ep.ad Ar.* (CPG 2046; Athanasius, *De syn.17*; NPNF 4,459).

wrote Eusebius of Nicomedia, then it means that he has a beginning. If he has a beginning, then he cannot be said to have been begotten out of the *ousia* of the Father or participate in the ingenerate nature of the Father.<sup>8</sup>

Eusebius of Nicomedia found the Nicene depiction that the Son is ὁμοούσιος to the Father objectionable as it implies, according to him, that the Son was uncreated.<sup>9</sup> Instead of ὁμοούσιος he proposed the word “begotten” (γεννητόν) to describe the Son’s relationship to the Father. In his estimation, the latter term unequivocally proclaims the ontological difference between the two. He established this point by saying that it is not only to the Son that the word “begotten” is applied in the Sacred Scriptures but also to other created beings.<sup>10</sup> Although, the metropolitan of Nicomedia did not reduce the status of the Son to the level of the rest of the creatures because he also conceded that the Son is a perfect creature, having been “made after perfect likeness both of character and power of the maker” (πρὸς τελείαν ὁμοιότητα διαθέσεώς τε καὶ δυνάμεως τοῦ πεποιηκóτος γενόμενον).<sup>11</sup> There are two things that the Nicomedian wanted to emphasize here. Namely, first, the Son was not from the Father’s *ousia* because the *ousia* of the Father is incommunicable, and second, the Son is the only perfect creature begotten by God which makes him superior in dignity among the created realities.

Notwithstanding the common belief in the inferior status of the Son, the subtle differences in theological views between the Nicomedian and Arius should not be missed. Even if Eusebius shared the belief that the Son is not coeternal with the Father, he never categorically used the phrase “there was when he was not,” a phrase Arius employed to underscore the precedence of the Father to the Son. Nor did he claim that the Son was mutable by nature as he taught that the Son was “created, established and begotten in the same substance (τῆ οὐσίᾳ) and in the same immutable (τῆ ἀναλλοιώτῳ) and inexpressible nature as the Maker.”<sup>12</sup> He also did not share Arius’ doctrine that the Son was begotten from nothing. Lastly, there was no evidence in the letters, or in the fragmentary works of the Nicomedian pontiff that would give the impression that he sustained the idea of the incomprehensibility of the Father, or the incapacity of the Son to obtain a perfect knowledge of the Father,

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<sup>8</sup> See Eusebius of Nicomedia, *Ep.ad Paul.* (CPG 2045; Theodoret, *HE I,6,3*; GCS NF5,28; NPNF 3,42).

<sup>9</sup> Ambrose, *De fide* III,15,125 (CPL 150; CSEL 78,151).

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius of Nicomedia, *Ep.ad Paul.Tyr.* (CPG 2045; Theodoret, *HE I,6,7*; GCS NF5,29; NPNF 3,42).

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius of Nicomedia, *Ep.ad Paul.Tyr.* (CPG 2045; Theodoret, *HE I,6,3*; GCS NF5,28; NPNF 3,42).

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius of Nicomedia, *Ep.ad Paul.Tyr.* (CPG 2045; Theodoret, *HE I,6,4*; GCS NF5,28; NPNF 3,42).

a point that Arius could not be more emphatic about in his *Thalia*.<sup>13</sup> What is certain is he affirmed the word “unbegotten” as a fitting description of the nature of God. Eusebius of Nicomedia’s close associate and ally, Asterius the Sophist, would also take up such description as a definitive account of God.

Asterius was an educated layman who Eusebius of Nicomedia gave the mandate to travel around the region that he might solicit the support of the other bishops for the cause of Arius. His pre-Nicene theological work, Athanasius called it *Syntagmation*, later became the official text of the Eusebian party. He also penned a treatise written in defense of Eusebius of Nicomedia, whose letter to Paulinus of Tyre became the target of Marcellus’ diatribe. These two works were not preserved in their entirety, but fragments could be found in *Contra Arianos* of Athanasius and *Contra Asterium* of Marcellus. That both Marcellus and Athanasius deemed it necessary to address and refute the writings of Asterius only vindicates the hypothesis that after Nicaea, it was the doctrine of the Sophist, and not that of Arius, which became the concern of the Nicene Fathers.

Asterius shared with both Eusebius of Nicomedia and Arius two basic theological points: the incommunicability of God’s divine substance and the unique status of the Son among the creatures. He maintained the real distinction of the three hypostases in the Trinity: “The Father must truly be Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Spirit similarly.”<sup>14</sup> In his extant work, numbered by G. Bardy as Fragments XXVII, XXVIII, and XXX,<sup>15</sup> he emphasized the separate existences of the Father and the Son, expressing it in such terms as ὑποστάσεις and πρόσωπα. Marcellus’ doctrine of God which denied the distinction of the Trinitarian persons was the target of all these assertions. Moreover, the distinction between the Father and the Son was extended by the Sophist to the essence of the Trinity. Asterius asserted such a fact because he could not accept the alternative idea that the Son was materially generated from the *ousia* of the Father. Like the Nicomedian, he thought that the only way for the Son to be of the same essence with the Father is if the Father’s essence has been severed and shared with the Son.

Concerning this, Asterius articulated two types of power (δύναμις) and wisdom (σοφία) in God: “One is ‘the peculiar’ (ἰδιάν) power and wisdom of God, which is natural and innate unoriginatedly and is that which produces and creates the

<sup>13</sup> Philostorgius (*HE* I,2) declared that the Lucianists, especially mentioning the name of Eusebius of Nicomedia, Leontius and Anthony, and Secundus and Theonas were the only ones who did not fall into the heretical doctrine of Arius that God is “unknowable, incomprehensible, and inconceivable.”

<sup>14</sup> Fragment XX (*Con.Mar.*65; trans. Hanson, *Search*, 35).

<sup>15</sup> I am using here the collection of G. Bardy (*Lucien d'Antioche*, 341-353). Hanson provides in his book *Search* (33-37) an English translation of the fragments.

whole world... The other power and wisdom is manifested by Christ and is visible through the products themselves of his ministerial activity.”<sup>16</sup> It is to dislodge the idea that the Son is the proper power and wisdom of the Father and consequently to resolve the difficulty forwarded by critics that the Eusebians practically teach the notion that there was a time when the Father existed without his power and wisdom, an irrational God at that, since they maintained that the Son is not coeternal with the Father. The Sophist clarified that God has power and wisdom proper to Himself, which is “without beginning and unoriginated” (ἀναρχόν τε καὶ ἀγέννητον), and which eternally abides with Him, different from the Son, who is called power and wisdom by the Scriptures, who, although is the “firstborn and only-begotten” (πρωτότοκος καὶ μονογενής), is one of those many powers and wisdoms created by God.<sup>17</sup> There is only one substantial and incommunicable power and wisdom proper to God and the rest, including the Son, who, although is the uniquely begotten power and Wisdom of God, participates in such only through the Father’s will.<sup>18</sup>

The Son, according to Asterius, is a creature of God, made to exist by the will of the Father.<sup>19</sup> He was uniquely constituted to withstand the glory of the Father directly in view of creation. This is because when the Father decided to create the whole universe, He knew that it would not be able to endure the experience of His unmediated power and so necessitated the presence of the Son, through whom God created the whole of creation. The Son then is uniquely Son of the Father because he alone was directly generated by God while all other creatures were created through the Son. In other words, the Son is the “first of the things which have come into existence (πρώτου γὰρ ἔστι τῶν γειητῶν).”<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Asterius derived the justification for calling the second hypostasis of the Trinity ‘Son’ from His function as a mediator through which other people are made sons of God: “He is called a ‘Son’ for the sake of those who are made sons.”<sup>21</sup> This kind of reasoning has again allowed the Sophist to dissociate the Son from any natural union with God the Father. The only union that he could allow to exist between the Father and the Son is a moral union since the Son is in perfect harmony with the Father’s will and his activities were consistent with the

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<sup>16</sup> Asterius, Fr. I (*De syn.*8; PG XXVI,714; *Ap.con.Arian.I*,32; PG XXVI 77A; trans. R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 33).

<sup>17</sup> Asterius, Fr. IIa (Athanasius, *De syn.*18; *Ap.con.Arian.I*,32; PG XXVI 716A; R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 33).

<sup>18</sup> Asterius, Fr. XI (Athanasius, *Ap.con.Arian.II*,40; PG XXVI, 232A; Hanson, *Search*, 33).

<sup>19</sup> Asterius, Fr. VI (Athanasius, *De syn.*19; PG XXVI, 716C; R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 34).

<sup>20</sup> Asterius, Fr. III (Athanasius, *De syn.*19; PG XXVI, 716B; R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 33).

<sup>21</sup> Asterius, Fr. XI (Athanasius, *Ap.con.Arian.II*,38; PG XXVI, 232A; R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 34). The same is true with his other titles like Logos, Wisdom and Power.

precepts of the Father.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, he justified that God is called Father owing to his innate ability to generate the Son. In this respect, the actual existence of the Son is not required for God to be called Father.<sup>23</sup> There are two points that Asterius would want to achieve by positing this. The first is to demonstrate that God's fatherhood is not something incidental to God's essence. The second is to indicate that God's fatherhood is independent from the Son's existence. Hence, the objection which states that assigning beginning to the Son would involve a change in God is resolved because even before the Son, God was already a Father.

Nevertheless, "there is no reference at all to the Son's knowledge of the Father being limited,"<sup>24</sup> championed by and central in the argument of Arius, in all the existing fragments of the works of Asterius. Arius taught that it is not only the essence of Father, which is incomprehensible to the Son, but also his own. The Alexandrian presbyter argued this to emphasize that the Son has limited knowledge. However, making both the Father's and the Son's essences as beyond comprehension might accommodate the belief in the similarity of their natures given that Alexander taught of the generation of the Son as beyond human understanding as well. Thus, Asterius and Eusebius of Nicomedia refused such agnostic stance of Arius and differentiated precisely the Father's essence as ingenerate from the essence of the Son which is generated.<sup>25</sup> Offering a clear definition of the essence of the Father as ingenerate would exclude their opponents from claiming for the Son any similarity with the Father on the level of essence.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the noted difference in some aspects of the theology of Eusebius of Nicomedia, Asterius and Arius, the fundamental similarity of their respective theologies is significant. The thought that the Son was created, although mitigated by emphasis on the Son's uniqueness from the rest of the created beings, which is the focal point of contention of the Trinitarian controversy, was shared by all of them. Hence, even if Athanasius was unjustified in numbering both Eusebius and Asterius as members of the Arian party, giving priority to Arius and intending to create a false impression that the other two were followers of his doctrine, still lumping the three into one recognizable band of theologians that disparaged the divinity of the Son was fairly defensible. As D. Gwynn's appraisal of their theological positions renders it:

These three men uniformly and consistently subordinate the Son and deny that He is eternal or from the Father's *ousia*. As they each wrote in

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<sup>22</sup> Asterius, Fr. XIII (Athanasius, *Ap.con.Arian*.III.10; PG XXVI, 324A); Fr. XXXII (Eusebius, *Con.Mar*.72; PG XXVI, 772A; R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 34-35, 37).

<sup>23</sup> Asterius, Fr. IV (Athanasius, *De syn*.19; PG XXVI, 716B); R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Search*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> See T. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-arianism*, Vol.1, Cambridge 1979, 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

their letters and now fragmentary works, the Father alone is eternal and unbegotten, and to name the Son coeternal or co-essential with His Father is to teach two unbegotten beings or to impose material division upon the immaterial and indivisible *ousia* of God.<sup>27</sup>

That which justifies their clustering is their tenet on the inferior status of the Son. They anchored this on their doctrine on the incommunicability of the essence of God and their peculiar conception of the generation of the Son which leaves out the notion of identity of nature, as expressed by the formula ‘from nothing’ in Arius, and ‘from the will of God’ in both Eusebius and Asterius. In contrast to the thought of the Eusebians, which solely emphasized the well-defined distinction and consequently separation of the Father from the Son, Eusebius of Caesarea maintained a dialectical discussion which takes into consideration both the distinct individualities of the Father and the Son—as a safeguard to the belief in the transcendence of the Father—, and the likeness of their nature. It shall be demonstrated below that the same deficient view of the Son is not to be found in the treatises of the Caesarean. For this reason, I do not share the view of those who try to add the name of Eusebius of Caesarea to the group of the three ecclesiastical writers mentioned above. From the viewpoint of theology, the Caesarean was remotely distant from both Arius and the Eusebians and, I shall argue, had more affinity with the faith of Nicea.

### **The Theology of the Son in the Works of Eusebius of Caesarea**

Eusebius of Caesarea shared with Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Asterius the hierarchical perspective of reality in which the Son is conceived of as mediating the created reality and the divine realm. It is in contrast to the conception of reality opted for by Alexander and Athanasius which views reality as a binary relation between the created world and the divine reality. Notwithstanding, I maintain that the Caesarean is closer to the Christology of the Nicene supporters, rather than the Christology of the three mentioned ecclesiastical figures with whom he shared the same ontological assumption of reality. While the four of them agreed that the Son acts as the mediator between God and the created world, however, unlike Arius and the Eusebians who pushed the nature of the mediator closer towards the realm of the created beings, the bishop of Caesarea preferred to apprehend the nature of the mediator as inseparably like to the nature of God the Father, whose grace and benevolence He reflected in Himself and imparted to the created beings.

Not many scholars of the fourth century share this assessment that Eusebius of Caesarea viewed the Son as alike in nature with, albeit derivative from, God

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<sup>27</sup> D. Gwynn, *The Eusebians, The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the ‘Arian Controversy,’* Oxford 2007, 121.



the Father. I am, therefore, aware that the unconventional reading of Eusebius' Christology that I am advocating in this present work is a minority interpretation and that a number of well-established scholars of this era have taken the position contrary to mine. For instance, Lewis Ayres in his important work *Nicea and Its Legacy* has constituted Eusebius of Caesarea, his namesake bishop of Nicomedia, and the Eusebians as the group that put importance on the distinction of the Father from the Son. It is found in the context of the said author's discussion of the various theological trajectories in the early part of the fourth century and following therefrom.<sup>28</sup> While I subscribe to the categorization that the mentioned ecclesiastical figures exhibited the same 'theological trajectory,' I am not, however, resolved to accept that Eusebius of Caesarea's Christology is no different substantially from the one advocated by Eusebius of Nicomedia and his colleagues.

Those who advocate that Eusebius of Caesarea, even in the early part of his career, has adhered to a less than divine view of the nature of the Son employ as their proofs the statements of the bishop of Caesarea which accordingly point to the secondary status of the Son in relation to the Father. Accordingly, these statements evince one of these two claims, namely, that the Son does not co-exist with the Father eternally, and that the Son is of different nature from the Father. I am going to refer to some of these passages in the succeeding paragraphs. However, to carry out my objective in this work, I will attempt to provide them an alternative reading that demonstrates my position.

One such text is this description taken from *Demonstratio Evangelica* about the Son of God as a "secondary Being," begotten by the Father for the sake of the created beings:

For though he (Son) was in most certain and closest association with the Father, and equally with Him rejoiced in that which is unspeakable, yet he could not descend with all gentleness, and conform himself in such ways as were possible to those who were far distant from his own height, and who through their weakness crave amelioration and aid from a secondary Being: that they might behold the flashings of the sun falling quietly and gently on them, though they are not able to delight in the fierce might of the sun because of their bodily weakness.<sup>29</sup>

In the above text, the Son is unambiguously stated as a "secondary Being," which explains why some take it to mean that Eusebius advocated the view that the Son is of different nature from, or that the Son bears in himself a lesser nature compared to, the Father. Many assume that the Caesarean followed rigidly the Neoplatonic

<sup>28</sup> See, L. Ayres, *Nicea*, pp. 52-61.

<sup>29</sup> Eusebius, *DE IV.6* (CPG 3487; GCS 23,153; trans. Ferrar, 173-174).

school which accounted within their cosmology the existence of a Primary and Secondary Being or a First God and a Second God, two distinct hierarchically ordered principles of reality. However, it does not necessarily follow that once one adopts particular lexicons from an established philosophical tradition, one also accepts *in toto* the meaning that such a school imputed to the adopted categories. For it is also possible that the author who decides to adopt an old terminology would ascribe it with an adjusted meaning which fits his system. An instance of this case is Marius Victorinus who also employed the Neoplatonic categories to illustrate his doctrine on the Trinity that is faithful to the Nicene teaching on the equality of the Father and the Son.<sup>30</sup> Such, I argue, is also the case with Eusebius of Caesarea in connection with his usage of the concept “secondary Being” as can be proven by analyzing the above quoted paragraph more closely.

Reading it more intently, one will discern that the concern of the paragraph is to argue neither the exclusion of the Son from the transcendence of the Father, nor the assertion of the absolute dependence of the Son on the Father’s will. Notwithstanding the description of the Son as a “secondary Being,” it also speaks of the Son both as unlike the creatures and equal in essence with the Father. With regard to the first, it considers that the Son is far from being like the creature since the Son, even as he functions as the mediator, “could not descend with all gentleness, and conform himself in such ways as were possible to those who were far distant from his own height.”<sup>31</sup> In relation to the second, it affirms that the Son possesses a nature and dignity not unlike that of the Father. This is substantiated by the two clauses, namely, that the Son was “in most certain and closest association with the Father,” and that the Son was “equally with Him (Father) rejoiced in that which is unspeakable.” The “unspeakable” referred to here, in which the Son rejoiced equally with the Father, is the nature of the Godhead itself, which, in the paragraph before the quoted one, has been portrayed as “inexpressible and vast to all” and “the unbegotten and incomprehensible Godhead.”<sup>32</sup>

Another text often employed to argue that Eusebius of Caesarea sustained a deficient view of the Son comes from his mature work *De Ecclesiastica Theologia* which discourses that there is only one God inasmuch as there is only one divine principle who is God the Father, the cause of the being of the Son, whom the former made to participate in his “divinity and life.” The said work speaks about this, thus:

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<sup>30</sup> See, Mary T. Clark, “A Neoplatonic Commentary on the Christian Trinity: Marius Victorinus,” Dominic J. O’Meara, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, New York 1982, 24-33.

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *DE IV.6* (CPG 3487; GCS 23,153; trans. Ferrar, 174).

<sup>32</sup> Eusebius, *DE IV.6* (CPG 3487; GCS 23,153; trans. Ferrar, 173).

Hence, he (Son) is the prince and the head of the Church, and his head is the Father. The Father of the only begotten Son is the only God, and he alone is the head of Christ. How could there be two gods since one alone is the principle and the head? Isn't it that there is just one, the one who has no one above himself or cause of himself? He who possesses as proper to himself, without beginning, the ingenerate divinity of the monarchic power, and has made the Son participate in his divinity and life.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, it discusses an understanding of divinity that is said of the Father: "He is the only God, the Father of the only begotten Son, and he alone is the head of Christ." However, it should be noted that the concept of God which the bishop of Caesarea ascribed to the Father also includes in its understanding the divinity of the Son. Such can be drawn from the rhetorical question which asks how there can be two gods when there is only one principle: "Given that he alone is the principle and the head, how could there be two gods, instead it is just one, the one who has no one above himself or cause of himself?" Herein, Eusebius of Caesarea had an opportunity, if indeed it was his intention, to unequivocally assert a nature of the Son unlike that of the Father as reason why there is only one God, but he did not do so. Instead, he opted stating that there is only one God not because the Son is of a different nature, but because there is only one divinity who is the Father. The Son, as he participates in it, being the only begotten, bears in himself this one divinity of the Father.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is not the denial of the divinity of the Son or his exclusion from the Godhead, as some interpreters of the quoted passage would like to believe, which is insinuated by the above passage from the Caesarean, but rather the effort to preserve the single principle of divinity in the Godhead.

Furthermore, while Eusebius of Caesarea made the Son participate in the Father's divinity and life, he conceived of the participation of the Son not in a passive manner. He did not think that the Son merely accepted the Father's initiative passively. This is clear by pointing out that in the paragraph following the above quoted text, Eusebius told us how the Son participated in the divinity and life of the Father using *pepaideume, nh*, a perfect participle of the middle case of the verb *paideu, w*. It is notable that Eusebius of Caesarea opted to use the middle form of the verb in consideration, which bears a reflexive sense. Thus, for the Caesarean, the Son partakes of the divinity of the Father such that what He partakes of, He also makes His own. It is for this reason that, according to the same bishop, the Son, "having appropriated for himself the things of God (*πεπαλδευμένη ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ*),"<sup>35</sup> that is,

<sup>33</sup> Eusebius, *ET* I, 11, 3-4. My translation.

<sup>34</sup> This point shall be further clarified below, especially the specific sense of the concept 'participation' as understood in the works of Eusebius of Nicomedia.

<sup>35</sup> See, *ET* I, 11, 5; My own translation.

the divinity of the Father, allowing the Son to bear in Himself the divinity and life of the Father properly as His own, should be reckoned as truly God.

The third passage, which we shall analyze, is the basis for the contention that Eusebius of Caesarea conceived of the Son as not possessing eternal existence, a crucial argument for the position that advances the duality of natures of the Father and the Son. The quotation being referred to is provided in the following:

The Father precedes the Son, and has begotten him in existence, inasmuch as he alone is unbegotten. The one, perfect in himself and first in order as Father, and the cause of the Son's existence, receives nothing towards the completeness of his Godhead from the Son. The other, as a Son begotten of him that caused his being, came second to him, whose son he is, receiving from the Father both his being and the character of his being. And, moreover, the ray does not shine forth from the light by its light [the light's] deliberate choice, but because of something which is an inseparable accident of the light's essence; but the Son by contrast, is the image of the Father by the [Father's] intention and deliberate choice.<sup>36</sup>

Why did the bishop of Caesarea insist that the Father must precede the Son? It is not because he wanted to affirm that the Father and the Son are of different essence since the concern that the paragraph wishes to address is to unambiguously establish that there is only one unbegotten God, who is the source of Godhead and “who receives nothing towards the completeness of his Godhead” from no one, including the Son. The reason why the ‘Father precedes the Son,’ and the Father is ‘first in order’ and the Son ‘came second’ is because the Father alone is unbegotten in relation to the Son who is begotten of the Father.

The secondary status of the Son is stressed not in order to demonstrate that the Son is not coeternal with the Father, but rather to preserve the transcendence and monarchy of the Father as the sole ingenerate principle who is the source of the divinity of the Son. The hierarchical structure referred to in the text implies not so much the meaning that the Son is reckoned as having less of the divinity than God the Father because the Caesarean himself affirmed, as shall be shown momentarily, that the Son has “wholly the form” of the Father.<sup>37</sup> It rather stresses the fact that the Father is the principle of divinity of the Son. It is on account of this view that the Son is considered as a secondary God. Commenting on the above passage, M. Simonetti rightly observes that the precedence meant by Eusebius of Nicomedia is not a chronological priority but an ontological one: “In *DE* Eusebio afferma che il Padre

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius, *DE* IV.3 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,153; trans. Ferrar, 167).

<sup>37</sup> Eusebius, *DE* V.I.18-21.

quanto ingenerato, precede (προϋπάρχει) il Figlio: ma egli, pur senza la chiarezza degli alessandrini, pur aver qui pensato più a precedenza ontologica che chronologica, perché in altri contesti presenta il Figlio che, pur generato, coesiste perennemente col Padre (διὰ Παντὸς συνόντα).<sup>38</sup> It follows that the Father being the cause of the divinity of the Son is ontologically prior, but the Son is not necessarily posterior to the Father in time.

Thus far, I have reinterpreted the passages that are often employed as evidence of the thesis that the bishop of Caesarea was part of the group which denied the Son his divinity. I have particularly illustrated that the considered texts do not confirm that Eusebius of Caesarea taught that the Son is of different nature from and subordinated to the Father. Below, I will identify other passages from the Caesarean and will argue an interpretation that proclaims a non-duality of nature of the Father and the Son. I shall demonstrate this by advancing three arguments: That Eusebius taught that the Son shares in the divinity of the Father; That the Son appropriates in Himself the divinity which He receives from the Father wholly and without diminution; And, that the Son co-exists with the Father from eternity. I will do this by surveying both his pre-Nicene and post-Nicene treatises to demonstrate that the theological conviction of Eusebius of Caesarea regarding the Son in relation with the Father did not take a radical turn later on in his career, but simply a refinement as necessitated by the period.<sup>39</sup>

First, regarding the doctrine of the unity of the Father and the Son. I have already alluded to above that even before the Arian crisis, Eusebius of Caesarea was already advocating the similarity of nature of the Son and the Father, even as he understood the divinity of the Son as derivative from the Father who was the unbegotten Being. It can be recalled that in *Demonstratio Evangelica* VI.14ff., he employed the traditional analogy of the sun and its rays to describe the generation of the Son from the Father, contending that the nature of the brilliance that the sun produces which illuminates the earth would also naturally be like the nature of its

<sup>38</sup> M. Simonetti, *Crisi*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> In his mature work in *De Ecclesiastica Theologica*, Eusebius preserve the monotheistic character of Christian belief, with God the Father as the principle of divinity of the Son (cf. Eusebius, *ET* II,7 [CPG 3478; GCS 14,104-106; CTP 144,111-115]). He acknowledged the same concern was also in the mind of both Marcellus and some unnamed ecclesiastics. However, with excessive focus on monotheism both have failed to accord the Son the status due to him as the true Son of God—Marcellus by denying the Son hypostatic existence and the unnamed men, who were obviously the Arians and their supporters, by reducing the Son to a creature (cf. Eusebius, *ET* I,10,4 [CPG 3478; GCS 14,69; CTP 144,58]). These two excesses will prompt the bishop of Caesarea to clarify his position so much so that it would not be seen as denying the individual realities nor the unity of the nature of the Father and the Son.

source.<sup>40</sup> However, he was also cognizant of the fact that such a picture falls short in communicating entirely the truth about the Father and the Son in that, as such, it blurs the distinction between them as the rays coexist with the sun, and apart from the sun, the rays is nothing. And, in like manner, the sun would not be such without the brilliance of its rays. Having realized this, the bishop of Caesarea qualified his stated explanation for the nature of the divinity by indicating categorically that, unlike the sun and its rays, the Father and the Son subsist distinctly from each other, each having existence proper to oneself.<sup>41</sup>

The referred quotation from *Demonstratio Evangelica* is provided below:

Perhaps one might say that the Son originated like a perfume and a ray of light from the Father's unoriginated nature and ineffable substance (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀγεννήτου φύσεως καὶ ἀνεκφράστου οὐσίας) infinite ages ago, or rather before all ages... [The Son] is the image of God, in a way mysterious and incalculable to us the living of the living God and existing in its own right immaterially... but not like an image in our own experience, when the form is distinct from the image, but himself wholly the form, and assimilated in his own reality to the Father (ἀλλ' ὅλον αὐτό, εἶδος ὦν καὶ ἀδουσία τῷ πατρὶ ἀφμοιούμενος), and so he is the most lively perfume of the Father, once again in a way mysterious and incalculable to us.<sup>42</sup>

Eusebius did not just use the metaphors of “perfume” and “ray of light” both of which imply an entity whose being cannot be separated from the reality from which it is sourced, namely, the odor from the perfume and the rays from the light itself. He also linked both metaphors to another phrase which later on would be commonly associated with the Nicene theologians, that of the generation of the Son specified as from “Father's unoriginated nature and ineffable substance” (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀγεννήτου φύσεως καὶ ἀνεκφράστου οὐσίας). The simplified version of which is the formula ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας, employed and given a technical meaning at 325 Nicea.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the last clause seems to define the Son's reality as included in the divinity of the Father, for it continues that the Son is “assimilated in his own reality to the Father.”

Nevertheless, at the time of its writing, the bishop seemed to be circumspect that such statements would not be discerned immediately as teaching the unity of the Father and Son. As such, he followed it through with a declaration of the notion of the Son as the image of God, which, in his understanding, and this is our second point,

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius, *DE IV*,3,3 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,151; LCPM 29,343).

<sup>41</sup> See Eusebius, *DE IV*,3,4-5 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,152-153; LCPM 29,343).

<sup>42</sup> Eusebius, *DE VI*.18-21 (CPG 3487; trans. and quoted from L. Ayres, *Nicea*, 59). Emphases are mine.

<sup>43</sup> See. J. Abogado, “The Anti-Arian Theology of Nicea 325,” in *Angelicum* 94/2 (2017), 255-286.

proclaims that the Son is one with and always united with the Father. The bishop of Caesarea established the non-duality of nature of the Father and the Son through his specific understanding of the Son as the 'image of God' whose essential substrate is no different from the form of the Father. He insisted on this, stating that the Son, unlike the image in human experience, bears "wholly the form" of the Father. In the Son indwells the wholeness of the form of God,<sup>44</sup> which is not unlike the substance of the Father in all its aspects. There is no difference in the nature of the Father and the Son inasmuch as accordingly the Son wholly possesses in himself the divinity of the Father without diminution.

In an important study of M. Decogliano on the sense of the 'image of God' among the Eusebians before 341, one can find support for this reading. Although Decogliano includes Eusebius of Caesarea among the Eusebians, a point which I do not share, still some of his conclusions can be read as supporting my thesis inasmuch as he has an ambivalent position with regard to Caesarean's view on the nature of the Son in relation with the Father—at one time, giving out the observation that for the bishop "the Son as the image of God is the same form as God and wholly the form of God,"<sup>45</sup> and at another, stating that the Son is "of a different essence than the Father."<sup>46</sup> Concerning the former, he writes: "Thus, the existence of the Son as the living image of the living God is constituted by his being wholly the 'form' of God, which guarantees likeness in his own essence to the Father."<sup>47</sup> Also: "According to Eusebius, then, it is because the Son's essence is established as the manifestation of the Father's qualities, activity, essence, form and divinity that he is the image of God and thus bears the utmost accuracy of likeness of the Father in his own essence, not because he participates in these attributes of the Father through grace."<sup>48</sup>

Another point discussed in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, made evident by Decogliano, which sustains the belief in the divinity of the Son, concerns the deliberate effort of the Caesarean to carefully distinguish the nature of the Son from the created reality. One key argument resorted to by the Eusebians to argue for the creaturely status of the Son is their reading of biblical statements about the Son which portray His likeness to the Father from the perspective of the category of 'participation.' According to the Eusebian hermeneutic, the Son is said to have certain perfections because He participates in qualities of the Father who has them properly. Since the Son obtains these divine qualities by merely participating in the

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *ET* I,2.1.

<sup>45</sup> Decogliano, "Eusebian Theologies of the Son as the Image of God before 341," *J ECS* 14/4 (2006), 473-474.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

perfection of the Father without owning them personally, then the Son cannot have them wholly but only in a lesser degree. It is for this reason that the Eusebians regarded the Son as subordinate in essence to the Father. However, as I have already illustrated above, Eusebius of Caesarea did not share this with the Eusebians because unlike them, he taught that the Son owns in Himself (πεπαιδευμένη) the perfection which He receives from the Father without difference in quality or degree, but “wholly” in its perfect integrity.<sup>49</sup>

The ontological difference of the Son from the created natures is not something that just dawned on the Caesarean pontiff as a reaction to his more sophisticated understanding of Arius’ position at the council of Nicaea. The bishop did not revise his position on the Son due to the significant opposition to the Arian teaching because he was all along sustaining the belief in the divinity of the Son, even before the problem of Arius exploded, as could be read in this excerpt from his early work, *Demonstratio Evangelica*:

It is equally perilous to take the opposite road and say thus without qualification that the Son was begotten of things that were not, similarly to the other begotten beings; for the generation of the Son differs from the Creation through the Son.<sup>50</sup>

In his post-Nicene work, *De Ecclesiastica Theologia*, he would reiterate the same conviction in the divinity of the Son by distancing him from the rest of created realities in terms of essence, but this time around he would frame it with the Arian and Eusebian view on the Son in mind. The theology of the Son found in *De Ecclesiastica Theologia* was purposely crafted such that its understanding is preserved from the danger of associating it with the Arian and Eusebian interpretation. Such is found particularly in chapters 8 to 10 of Book I of the said work, wherein the refuted

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<sup>49</sup> Some scholars use the argument based on the ‘notion of participation’ to advance the interpretation that the Son is numbered among the created beings, and therefore is not true God. However, they fail to take into consideration this important aspect of Eusebius’ description of the participation of the Son to the divinity of the Father. That the Son actively participates, taking the attributes of the Father properly in himself—in contrast to the kind of participation of the rest of creatures in God—in the nature of the Father. For this reason, the argument based on participation cannot be used as a criterion for establishing that the Son is a creature. In fact, Athanasius himself similarly used the ‘doctrine of participation’ to demonstrate the Son’s ontological difference from the created reality and his likeness in essence with the Father. K. Anatolius has clarified this point by pointing out that, in contrast to the model of participation of created reality in God through the Son which is external and accidental by nature, the participation of the Son in the divinity of the Father is not something external but takes place in the essence of God. This is particularly termed by Anatolius as “substantialist participation” (K. Anatolius, *Athanasius. The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge 1998), 104-105.). This is the same category of participation in the relation of the Son to the Father that is found in the thought of Eusebius.

<sup>50</sup> Eusebius, *DE V,1,15* (CPG 3487; GCS 23,212; trans. Ferrar, 233).



doctrine on the Son could be identified with the position of Arius and the Eusebians, even though their names were not explicitly mentioned.

In chapter 8 of *De Ecclesiastica Theologia*, Eusebius pointed out the difference of the Son from the rest of the beings that came into existence, declaring that He does not live the same life of the creatures that were created through Him, because He alone is the begotten Son of God.<sup>51</sup> He would further clarify this idea in the succeeding section where he reproached the audacity of those who claimed that the Son is a creature (κτίσμα), that is, created out of nothing (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων) like the rest of the creatures. Such comment is obviously directed against the Arians who used the exact formula (created out of nothing [ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων]) to establish their own position.<sup>52</sup> Having removed the Son from the category of creatures, and clarified that the divinity of the Son should not be reckoned according to the sense of divinity as the Arians thought the Son to be, the Caesarean boldly declared in chapter 10 that the Son is the true Son of God: “Having been born from Him, that is to say, from the Father, [He] would rightly be called both the only begotten (μονογενής) and beloved of the Father; thus He would also be God.”<sup>53</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea was able to reflect in the succeeding sentence the technical sense of the term ‘only-begotten’ (μονογενής) as used in 325 Nicea, that of bearing the meaning of divinity in the full sense of the word,<sup>54</sup> with a rhetorical question: “How can one be called to be ‘only-begotten’ (μονογενής) if he is numbered among the creatures?”<sup>55</sup>

Third, the assertions which affirm the coeternity of the Son with the Father are also not absent in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea notwithstanding the statements which seem to deny the Son such glory. To demonstrate this, it must be shown that very early on in his episcopal career, Eusebius of Caesarea held the belief in the Son who exists eternally with the Father. In his pre-Nicene work, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, he unambiguously articulated that the Father was not chronologically prior in existence to the Son:

Instead they understand that he exists and pre-exists from eternity (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίῳ ὄντα καὶ προόντα), and that he eternally exists as Son with the Father (τῷ πατρὶ ὡς υἱὸν διὰ παντὸς συνόντα); that he is not unbegotten, but begotten by the unbegotten Father; that he is the only begotten, Logos and God from God, not separated from the substance

<sup>51</sup> Eusebius, *ET* I.8.2 (CPG 3478; GCS 14,66; CTP 144,54).

<sup>52</sup> Eusebius, *ET* I.9.1 (CPG 3478; GCS 14,66; CTP 144,55).

<sup>53</sup> Eusebius, *ET* I.10.1 (CPG 3478; GCS 14,68; CTP 144,57).

<sup>54</sup> In my other work, I have argued that the term μονογενής as employed by the drafters of the Creed of Nicea had this sense of “natural son” in mind, in contraposition to its Arian and Eusebian usage, which assigns it the sense of “first of all creation.” See my “The Anti-Arian Theology of the Council of Nicea 325,” in *Angelicum* 94/2 (2017), 255-286.

<sup>55</sup> Eusebius, *ET* I.10.3 (CPG 3478; GCS 14,68; CTP 144,58).

of the Father by distance, interruption, or division, in a mysterious and incomprehensible for our understanding.<sup>56</sup>

The intent of the text to proclaim that the Son is coeternal with the Father is unmistakable. This can be discerned by noticing that the Caesarean did not satisfy himself with the affirmation that the Son ‘exists’ with the Father from eternity (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων ὄντα), but he even followed it up with another clause to drive the point more poignantly, stating that the Son ‘pre-exists’ with the Father from eternity (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων ... προόντα). The affirmations on the existence of Son and the Father placed within the realm of eternity is further emphasized with the meticulous use of the word *sunonta*, which literally means “co-exists.” From this, it can be argued that the Caesarean, not just consciously, but also, as clearly as he could possibly expressed himself, demonstrated that the Son “co-exists” with the Father from eternity.

Furthermore, after ascertaining the coeternal status of the Son with the Father, the bishop immediately added the distinction of the Father and the Son as unbegotten and begotten divinities, short of specifying that the Son is generated by the Father from eternity. It thus implies that the existence of the Son in eternity is not something which is ‘in potency’ as some authors would argue,<sup>57</sup> like a thought in the mind waiting to be spoken. The Son, in the thought of Eusebius of Caesarea, as entailed in the passage analyzed above, actually exists with the Father as the generated Son of God from eternity. In short, the eternal generation of the Son is an essential aspect of his Christology.

In sum, one will find in Eusebius of Caesarea’s thought a dialectic between the stress on the distinction of the Father from the Son and the conscious effort to preserve their essential unity. It has been observed that the statements proclaiming the distinction of the divine beings in terms of the superiority or precedence in existence of the Father over the Son were articulated to safeguard the transcendence of the Father as the unbegotten and the unique principle of divinity. However, they were not developed to exclude the Son from the nature of divinity. Bearing this in mind, the Caesarean’s statements that demonstrate the unity of the Father and the Son sustain the objective of this study. I have demonstrated this by collecting them into three headings. First, that Eusebius of Caesarea advocated that the Son’s nature is not foreign from the Father which consequently denies the position that professes their duality in nature. Second, that he did not subscribe to the subordinate status of

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *DE IV*,3,13 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,154; LCPM 29,345): φαντάζεται υἱὸν γεννητόν, οὐ χρόνις μὲν τισιν οὐκ ὄντα καὶ, ὕστερον δέ ποτε γεγονότα, ἀλλὰ πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων ὄντα καὶ προόντα, καὶ τῷ πατρὶ ὡς υἱὸν διὰ παντὸς συνόντα. Emphases on the original is my addition. The English translation above is mine.

<sup>57</sup> Ayres, *Nicea*, 91.

the Son in respect to the Father inasmuch as he was emphatic in stressing the point that the Son received in Himself properly and wholly the divinity of the Father by reason of which the Son was regarded as the living image of the living God. Third, that he was definite in his pronouncements about the eternal co-existence of the Son to the Father based on the fact that the Son is not separated in substance from the Father.

### **Clarifying Eusebius of Caesarea's support for the Christological proposition of Arius against Alexander of Alexandria and the Post-Nicea Eusebian campaign against Athanasius**

The bishop of Caesarea held the substantial inseparability of the Father and the Son. It explains why he had assented to the Nicene creed which proclaimed the unity of the Father and the Son. However, there were events in the life of the bishop which at face value could be interpreted as not consistent with this interpretation. In the following section, I shall provide a contextual explanation of these events to demonstrate that the bishop of Caesarea did not revise his position of the Son even though he was found, several times in his ecclesiastical career, supporting the agenda of the group which persecuted the bishops who were sympathetic to the theology of 325 Nicea.

The earliest undertaking of Eusebius of Caesarea which extended support to the cause of Arius was when the latter, having been expelled by Alexander from Alexandria, went to Palestine to solicit the support of the Palestinian bishops against what he described as an unfair treatment that he had received from his own bishop. The Palestinians, under the leadership of Eusebius of Caesarea, promptly went to the aid of Arius by convening a synod which decreed among others the reinstatement of Arius to the order of presbyters, but not without enjoining the same to subject himself to the episcopal authority of Alexander. The decision of the Palestinian synod of 318 touched more on the disciplinary issues rather than the doctrinal aspect of the problem. As such, the synodal act of the Palestinians would not constitute a solid proof to assert the doctrinal affinity of the theology of Arius and Eusebius of Caesarea. This is because of the fact that no doctrinal pronouncement, at least basing on the available sources, was issued by the synod which either confirmed the theology of Arius or denounced that of Alexander. Its aim was rather to stabilize the ecclesial order in Alexandria, without touching on the subtlety of the Christological positions of the two leading personalities involved.

If one would look for a proof to the effect of demonstrating that Eusebius of Caesarea adhered to the Arian theological agenda, the earliest evidence that we

know of according to historical records, would be during the synod of Antioch, just before the celebration of the great Council of Nicea, with Ossius of Cordova as president.<sup>58</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea was provisionally condemned in this gathering of about 50 bishops. The council was convened to elect and consecrate its new pastor in the person of Eustathius.<sup>59</sup> However, the assembled bishops did not confine its affair to the selection of the new pastor as it also produced a confession which betrayed the influence of Alexander of Alexandria. Regarding the Son, the synod of Antioch declared that He is “begotten not from that which is not but from the Father, not as made but as properly offspring, but begotten in an ineffable, indescribable manner, because only the Father who begot and the Son who was begotten know, who exists everlastingly and did not, at one time, not exist.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the produced document unequivocally anathematized the Arian view, thus:

And we anathematize those who say or think or preach that the Son of God is a creature or has come into being or has been made and is not truly begotten, or that there was when he was not ... [And] those who suppose that he is immutable by his own act of will, just as those who derive his birth from that which is not, and deny that he is immutable in the way the Father is.<sup>61</sup>

Does the censure of Eusebius of Caesarea by the synod of Antioch which produced a theological statement which evidently contradicted Arius’ view on the Son constitute an unshakable proof that he shared the Arian teaching or, at least, a similar version of it? I do not think it does! I argue that what led the bishop of Caesarea to refuse to subscribe to the confession of faith must have been what he had wrongfully supposed the teaching of the Alexandrian to be. Eusebius of Caesarea had a hazy grasp of the teaching of the Alexandrian bishop, having been mediated to him, disapprovingly by Arius when he came to them for help. At this early stage of the controversy, the Caesarean did not have a clear understanding of the issues involved, specifically of the view of the Son as espoused by Alexander of Alexandria and also of the theology of Arius. However, as has been shown, Eusebius of Caesarea’s initial impression would be clarified later on, as his involvement in the crisis grew deeper.

When Arius came to Palestine to seek the support of its ecclesiastical leaders, he must have disclosed—this is the reason that he provided Eusebius of Nicomedia—that he was expelled from the city because he did not share the view of Alexander of Alexandria encapsulated in the statement “always Father, always Son”

<sup>58</sup> See, H. Chadwick, “Ossius of Cordova and the Presidency of the Council of Antioch, 325,” *JTS* 9 (1958) 292-304.

<sup>59</sup> The authenticity of this synod is validated by the discovery of its account in syriac version retro-translated into Greek by Schwartz in 1905 (*Gessam. Schrift.* 6, 134-55).

<sup>60</sup> *A New Eusebius*, 288; J. Stevenson (ed.), London 1987, 335.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

(ἅμα πατὴρ ἅμα υἱός). In the mind of Arius such doctrine implies the division of the ungenerated God and the introduction of the two ungenerated divine beings. This is for instance evident in the following:

For He is not eternal or coeternal or co-unoriginate with the Father (συναγέννητος τῷ πατρὶ), nor has He His being together with the Father (οὐδὲ ἅμα τῷ πατρὶ), as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings (δύο ἀγεννήτους ἀρχάς).<sup>62</sup>

The referred document is an epistle which Arius addressed to his bishop and written just before his eventual expulsion from Alexandria as a final attempt to explain his position.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it is not without basis to assume that when Arius went to Palestine, he had the above quoted opinion about the thought of the Alexandrian bishop in mind. Most likely, it was what he communicated to the ecclesial leadership of Palestine when they had asked him about his squabble with his bishop.

How Eusebius of Caesarea had perceived the teaching of Alexander of Alexandria, whose version of theology he must have first heard from Arius,<sup>64</sup> definitely contributed to the reasons that allowed him to favor, at least at that particular period of his exposure to the controversy, the position of Arius over his Ordinary. Back then, the Caesarean must have perceived the thought of Alexander exactly as Arius had presented it. The “always God, always Father doctrine” of Alexander would have appeared to him as compromising the divine monarchy which he defended in his work, for this is how Arius would have likely illustrated it to him.<sup>65</sup> The likelihood of this hypothesis gains ground probing Arius’s epistle to Eusebius of Nicomedia, where he outlined what, he thought, was objectionable to the “always God always Father doctrine:”

He has driven us out of the city as atheists, because we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, God always, the Son always; as the Father so the Son; the Son co-exists (συνύπαρχει) unbegotten (ἀγεννήτως) with God; begotten always (ἀειγεννήτης), unoriginately caused (ἀγεννητογενής); neither by thought nor by any interval does

<sup>62</sup> Letter of Arius to Alexander of Alexandria (Theodoret, *EH* I,4; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol. II, 78).

<sup>63</sup> For the critical study of the chronology of events leading to the Arian crisis based on the documents that came from it, see R. Williams, *Arius*, 48-61.

<sup>64</sup> When Arius was expelled from Alexandria by its local synod, he went to Palestine to seek the help of the Palestinian bishops to mediate in his behalf. This commenced the involvement of the other ecclesiastics in the region to the Arian issue.

<sup>65</sup> The teaching of divine monarchy is central in the theology of Eusebius. This he expounded by admitting only one ingenerate principle in the Father who generated a Son who is his exact image. However, being the exact image of the Father the Son did not share in the same unbegotten quality of the Father, for this would only imply material division in the nature of the Father, which is an absurdity. See Eusebius, *DE* V,1,13-14 (CPG 3487; LCPM 29,428-429).

God precede the Son; always God, always Son; he is begotten of the unbegotten: the Son is of God Himself.<sup>66</sup>

Seen from this understanding of the ‘always God, always Father doctrine,’ the Son, as mediated by Arius to the bishop of Nicomedia and, presumably, to the bishop of Caesarea, would be reckoned as another unbegotten being resulting in a two-principle cosmology which the same bishop of Caesarea rejected in his works. For Eusebius of Caesarea, who was a great defender of the doctrine of divine monarchy, positing two ingenerate principles of divinity was unacceptable. He could not admit the view of Alexander about the two ungenerated principles, as he had learned it from Arius, for such would render the ingenerate God corporeal and subject to division. Moreover, this misconceived notion of the teaching of Alexander of Alexandria must have been reinforced in the mind of the Caesarean when it was made known to him, again through the jaded mediation of Arius,<sup>67</sup> that the Alexandrian pontiff used as description for the Son the terms ἀγγελιοτογενής and ἀγγελιοτῶς, as shown in the above quotation.

It was unclear whether Alexander of Alexandria did call the Son ἀγγελιοτογενής for, in his existing works, such a term is not found. Its reference in the abovementioned quotation from Arius could be explained by positing either of the two explanations. Either Alexander employed such expression in the early development of the crisis, but later on realized the misunderstanding that it caused such that he deemed prudent to abandon it altogether; Or Alexander did not teach it at all, but Arius misrepresented his teaching to those ecclesiastics whom he sought for help. Notwithstanding, the two possibilities, the belief that the bishop of Alexandria taught that the Son is ἀγγελιοτογενής reached the theologically sensitive ears of Eusebius of Caesarea. With this in mind, one can understand why Eusebius of Caesarea, during the synod of Antioch, would refuse adherence to its confession of faith, which resulted in his condemnation, albeit provisionally. As pointed out, the confession of faith, which the Caesarean bishop refused to accept, had a marked influence of Alexander of Alexandria, who, in the latter’s mind, at that time, had a questionable view about the Son. He needed to sort out this confusion first before he could make a definitive assessment of its theology.

Eusebius would openly show his appreciation of the theological position of Nicea in the letter that he sent to his congregation in Caesarea. Moreover, in this epistle he also revealed yet another misconception of the view of Alexander of Alexandria, that of seeing the nature of the Father in the materialist way such that the Father was

<sup>66</sup> Arius, *Ep.ad Eus.* (Theodoret, *HE*, I, 5, 1; GCS NFS, 26; NPNF 3; 41).

<sup>67</sup> M. Simonetti argued that Arius himself coined this term. It is likely to be such inasmuch as it could not be found in the extant work of Alexander of Alexandria. See his *Il Cristo*, vol. II, 545.

divided into two<sup>68</sup> in the act of generation of the Son “from the *ousia* of the Father.” The Caesarean clarified to his congregation that he approved of the pronouncement of Nicea because he learned that “consubstantial” (ὁμοούσιος), the term advocated by those who wanted the theology of Arius excluded from official orthodoxy, implies “no bodily condition or change, for the Son did not derive his existence from the Father either by means of division or of abscission, since an immaterial, intellectual and incorporeal nature could not be subject to any bodily condition or change.”<sup>69</sup> It is to be noted that the observation which the Caesarean was abandoning is the same conclusion that is derived from the four different conceptions about the generation of the Son which Arius declared as a heretical theology<sup>70</sup> because it turns the Father “into something that is composite, that can be changed and divided.”<sup>71</sup>

Eusebius of Caesarea found out that in the usage of the *ousia* language to describe the relation of the Son to the Father, Alexander of Alexandria and his colleagues, despite their preference for the use of the analogy of human paternity, excluded any materialist import that compromises the simplicity of the incorporeal God. That the employed human analogy for the divine Father and the divine Son has been applied not without qualification. This was a departure from his initial assessment of the thought of the bishop Alexandria as mediated by Arius who must have indicated that the ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας formula was understood by Alexander in a materialist fashion.<sup>72</sup> The newfound understanding of the theology as championed by Alexander of Alexandria and his Nicene allies consequently resolved for the bishop of Caesarea his reservations on the theology of Nicea. It convinced him to admit the theology of ὁμοούσιος inasmuch as the ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας formula—the sense of the latter expression, in the structure of the ecclesial letter of Eusebius of Caesarea, is determinant for the former—was apprehended in a manner that resonated with the tradition that he had received and was brought up into.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See Arius, *Ep.ad Eus.* (THEODORET, *HE* I,5,3; GCS NF5,26; NPNF 3,41): “The Son is not unbegotten (οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγήνητος), nor in any way part of the unbegotten (οὐδὲ μέρος ἀγεννήτου) and that He does not derive His subsistence from any matter (οὐτε ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τιλός).”

<sup>69</sup> Eusebius, *Ep.ad eccl.Caes.* (CPG 3502; Theodoret, *HE* I,12,9ff; NPNF 3,49).

<sup>70</sup> Arius, *Ep.ad Alex.*

<sup>71</sup> W. Löhr, “Arius Reconsidered, Part 2,” in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 9 (2005), 123.

<sup>72</sup> The preposition ἐκ is reckoned as material ablative signifying the sense of ‘made from the same stuff.’

<sup>73</sup> He clarified this position to his community thus: “And they professed that the phrase ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας was indicative of the Son’s being indeed from the Father, yet without being as if a part of him... On this account, we assented to the meaning ourselves, without declining even the term ὁμοούσιος peace being the aim which we set before us, and fear of deviating from the correct meaning.” *Letter of Eusebius to his Church in Caesarea* (Socrates, *HE* 1,8; Theodoret, *HE* 1,12; J. Stevensons, *A New Eusebius* 1987, 345-346).

Eusebius of Caesarea, it can be argued, was able to resolve in his mind the two abovementioned objectionable elements in the theology of the Son of Alexander, such that he was prompted to subscribe to the Nicene creed and he even approved of the proscription of the presbyter whose theological position he initially had supported.<sup>74</sup> Having thus clarified his reservations, his decision to subscribe to the creed of Nicaea could not be considered as a concession to avoid exile. His realization of the dubious character of the teaching of Arius justified his consent to the anathemas that specifically targeted Arius' doctrine. This proves that he was distancing himself from the acknowledged doctrine of the heresiarch, of which previously he had only an obscure idea. The bishop of Caesarea assented to the proscription of the Arian expression that the Son was generated "out of nothing" not just because it is unscriptural,<sup>75</sup> but also because he never thought of the statement as applicable to the Son, who he differentiated from created natures.<sup>76</sup> He also approved of the anathema pronounced on the statement "there was when he was not"<sup>77</sup> as it was against his fundamental belief. The bishop of Caesarea realized that the theology of 325 Nicaea was rather compatible with his professed faith<sup>78</sup> and that he did not have to swallow hard to accept its doctrine.<sup>79</sup>

Still, the issue of Eusebius of Caesarea with the Nicenes continued to be put into doubt since some years after having professed publicly his adherence to Nicaea

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<sup>74</sup> But not all about the preliminary evaluation of Eusebius of Caesarea regarding the thought of those who opposed Arius and who situated the generation of the Son from the *ousia* of the Father was proved unfounded, as he would come to know of the heretical version of the homousean theology in the doctrine of Marcellus. It would become apparent in the aftermath of the great council when the sense of its produced faith became an issue yet again. Marcellus was then unmasked to teach a rendering of the homousean theology that collapses the distinction between the Father and the Son. The Caesarean, thenceforward, opposed this extreme homousean position that denies the personal distinction of the Father and Son, as found in the theology of Marcellus, but not the orthodox version which states that the Son has his own proper individual existence though "not separate from the substance of the Father." Eusebius, *DE IV*,3,13 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,154; LCPM 29,345).

<sup>75</sup> Eusebius, *Ep.ad eccl.Caes.* (CPG 3508; Theodoret, *HE I*,12,15; GCS NFS,53; NPNF 3,50).

<sup>76</sup> See Eusebius, *DE V*.1.15 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,212; LCPM 29,429): It is equally perilous to take the opposite road, and say thus without qualification that the Son was begotten of things that were not, similarly to the other begotten beings; for the generation of the Son differs from the Creation through the Son.

<sup>77</sup> Commenting on the event that occurred at the 325 Synod of Antioch just before the opening of the Great Council, Robertson thinks, in opposition to this view, that Eusebius' could easily be perceived as holding the infamous Arian statement 'there was when he was not.' As he opines: "While Eusebius never stated that 'there was when he was not' and indeed seems to be unclear as to whether the origination of the Son should be conceived as taking place within time, his thoughts on 'he who is' begetting 'him who is not' could easily have understood in this way" (*Christ as Mediator*, 85). It shall, however, proved before this study ends that the contrary is true.

<sup>78</sup> Eusebius, *Ep.ad eccl.Caes.* (CPG 3502; Socrates, *HE I*,8; NPNF 2,10-12; Theodoret, *HE I*,12; NPNF 3,49-51).

<sup>79</sup> See, Brian Daley, SJ, *God Visible: Patristics Christology Reconsidered*, Oxford 2018, 107.



and its confession, he again collaborated with the Eusebians at the Synod of Tyre 335 and at the Synod of Constantinople 336 against Athanasius, then the considered champion and defender of the Nicene faith. Again, how is this to be explained? Is this an indication that the bishop Caesarea was actually never serious when he publicly had expressed support in favor of the Nicene confession? Or was he merely escaping the penalty of condemnation at that time that he was forced into accepting the Nicene confession, while conveniently hiding his true doctrinal conviction? The answer to these questions is a resounding no for the reasons that shall be detailed below.

The objections raised against Athanasius in the two above-mentioned synods of bishops was never doctrinal in nature as the accusations put forward, which eventually led to his removal from his episcopal see and exile, were centered on his comportment as a bishop while dealing with some personalities under his jurisdictional authority. There were several allegations of transgressions Athanasius was charged with in these two synods. The demonstration of one case would be sufficient to grasp why the bishop-judges validated the supposed behavior of Athanasius as unbecoming of his stature as a bishop. This is with regard to the charge that he ordered a certain Macarius to interfere with the celebration of the Eucharist being presided over by Ischyras, which resulted to the breaking of the consecrated vessels. The defense of Athanasius himself seemed to confirm this. He had never denied the charge or disputed that such was a malicious fabrication by his enemies. Instead, he tried very hard to demonstrate that Ischyras was not validly ordained because his ordaining minister, Colluthus, was a presbyter who made himself a bishop and separated from the Church. According to this defense, Ischyras was never a priest with a faculty to celebrate the Eucharist and consequently the chalice that was broken was not a consecrated one.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, it was not Athanasius' theology of the Son, but rather the perceived misconduct that he allegedly had committed against some people. It could be argued then that when Eusebius of Caesarea associated himself with the Eusebians' campaign against Athanasius, what he objected to was not the latter's theology of the Son, even if one might claim that ultimately it was the overthrowing of his theology which was the underlying agenda of the Eusebians who initiated it. As shown above, there was a basis to the accusations against Athanasius, which means that one could not fault Eusebius of Caesarea for wanting to discipline a bishop whom he felt had failed in living a life befitting the dignity of the chosen pastor of the Church. Moreover, a protest against a perceived misbehavior does not equate with the rejection of the teaching of the denounced individual. Eusebius of Caesarea's association with the Eusebians against Athanasius did not require him to compromise his belief in the

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<sup>80</sup> cf. Athanasius, *Defense against the Arians* 14 (trans. A. Robertson, 107).

divinity of the Son inasmuch as what he objected against the successor of Alexander was not the latter's Christology, but his assumed misdemeanor against some people. Just like the initial involvement of Eusebius of Caesarea with Arius early in the crisis, his association with the Eusebians against Athanasius, the staunch enemy of the theology represented by Arius, could not be used as an argument to substantiate that the Caesarean shared the theological conviction that debases the dignity of the Son as God.

## Conclusion

We have seen that despite the fact that in most of the ecclesiastical councils, except at Nicea, he participated in, Eusebius of Caesarea aligned himself with the group that supported Arius, he never espoused a theology similar to theirs. Examining his dogmatic works, both before and after Nicea, reveals that he held a conception of God that includes a belief in the Son as God.<sup>81</sup> Even before the Arian controversy disturbed the religious peace of the whole Christendom, the Caesarean had already conceived of the nature of the Son as not unlike that of the Father since the Son received wholly in Himself the divinity of the Father. While statements which speak of the secondary status of the Son in relation to the Father are not wanting in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, it has been demonstrated that they were pronounced to stress merely the aspect of the Father as the sole unbegotten God and not to exclude the Son from the category of divinity. In addition, it has been shown that, in his post-Nicene work, Eusebius developed a more nuanced Christology which includes provisions that negate the Arian position which denies the Son his divine status.

Eusebius of Caesarea had never aligned himself theologically to Arius, nor to the Eusebian party whose theology was essentially akin to the Arian view. He did not change his Christological stance even if for a time he was blindsided by the persuasive appeal of Arius to take on his case against Alexander of Alexandria. At Nicea, Eusebius of Caesarea demonstrated a better understanding of the concern of those who opposed Arius' doctrine on the Son such that he gave his assent to the resolutions of the council, including the condemnation of Arius. After the 325 council of Nicea, as the politics of the empire changed with the eventual accession of the sole emperor coming out of the tetrarchy established by Constantine, many more regional ecclesiastical synods were convened. In most of these councils the case of Athanasius was the main focus of discussion, which usually concluded with his condemnation. Eusebius of Caesarea sided with the group of ecclesiastics which advocated the condemnation and exile of the Alexandrian bishop. However, such

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *DE* V,4,12 (CPG 3487; GCS 23,225-226; LCPM 29,447).

act of Eusebius of Caesarea, as I have discussed, is not a proof that he had change his Christological view because the Caesarean agreed to condemn Athanasius on account of his deportment, as unbecoming of his stature as a bishop, and not because of his teaching on the Son.**PS**

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