

Fragment of a letter from Constantine to the church at Nicomedia (*Dok.* 31)

Reference	Dok. 31; Urk. 27; CPG 2055
Incipit	Τὸν δεσπότην θεὸν δηλαδὴ
Date	late 325
Ancient sources	Athanasius, <i>De decr. Nicenae</i> 41 Theodoret, <i>H.E.</i> 1.20
Modern edition	Opitz, <i>AW</i> 2:43-45

Eusebius of Nicomedia had signed the conciliar creed at Nicaea, but not to the anathemas against the Arian propositions (Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 17) but he remained committed to his own dissident Christology. Following the council he, together with Theognis of Nicaea, continued to agitate against Alexander (§14 below) and the council's position, and Constantine then ordered both into exile (§16), probably in late 325. *Dok.* 31 preserves much of the letter the emperor wrote to the Christians at Nicomedia announcing and explaining his actions. Athanasius included it in his *De decretis Nicaenae*.

The Greek text below is that of Opitz, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* (Berlin, 1935), *AW* 2:43-45. See also Opitz 3.1:58-62. The English translation of sections is that of Aaron West, for § 9b-17 see also J. Steveson, *A New Eusebius*, no. 294. Further T. Barnes, *Eusebius and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 242-243.

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1. Κωνσταντῖνος Σεβαστὸς τῇ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Νικομηδέων.	Constantine Augustus to the catholic church at Nicomedia
Τὸν δεσπότην θεὸν δηλαδὴ καὶ σωτῆρα Χριστὸν ἀκριβῶς ἅπαντες ἴστε, ἀγαπητοὶ ἀδελφοί, πατέρα τε καὶ υἱὸν εἶναι, πατέρα φημι ἄναρχον ἄνευ τέλους γονεὶα τοῦ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ, υἱὸν δέ, τοῦτ' ἔστι τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς βούλησιν, ἧτις οὔτε δι' ἐνθυμήσεώς τινος ἀνείληπται οὔτε πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ τελεσιουργίαν διὰ τινος ἐξεζητημένης οὐσίας κατελήφθη. ὃς γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νοήσει, οὗτος ἔξει πρὸς ἅπαν τιμωρίας γένος ἀκάματον ὑπομονήν.	1. I am quite sure, beloved brothers, that you all know well that God our Master and Christ our Savior are Father and Son. The Father, I say, without beginning and without end, the parent of this age. As for the Son, he is the Father's will, which was not apprehended through any consideration, nor was it claimed after its nature was observed, in view of the perfection of its works. Anyone who believes this to be the case, or who will believe it, will have to untiringly endure every type of punishment.
2. ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ υἱὸς Χριστὸς ὁ τῶν ἀπάντων δημιουργὸς καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας αὐτῆς	2. The Son of God, Christ, the maker of all things, and the supplier of immortality itself,

<p>χορηγὸς ἐγεννήθη, ὅσον πρὸς τὴν πίστιν ἀνῆκεν ἣ πεπιστεύκαμεν, ἐγεννήθη – μᾶλλον δὲ προῆλθεν αὐτὸς ὁ καὶ πάντοτε ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὧν ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ γεγεννημένων διακόσμησιν – ἐγεννήθη τοίνυν ἀμερίστῳ προελεύσει· ἡ γὰρ βούλησις ὁμοῦ καὶ τῷ οἰκητηρίῳ ἐαυτῆς ἐμπέπηγε καὶ ταῦθ’, ἅπερ διαφοροῦ δέεται τημελείας, κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου ποιότητα πράττει τε καὶ διοικεῖ.</p>	<p>was begotten as far as pertains to the faith which we have believed; he was begotten, or rather he who indeed always existed in the Father went forth for the orderly arrangement of the things which came into being through him; he was begotten in a going forth which involved no division, since the will is fixed together with its own dwelling, and both does and manages the things which need different attentions, according to their different qualities.</p>
<p>3. τί οὖν ἐστι μεταξὺ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ; οὐδὲν δηλαδὴ. αὕτη γὰρ ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων συμπλήρωσις αἰσθήσει παρείληφε τὸ τῆς βουλήσεως πρόσταγμα, οὐχὶ δὲ μερισθεῖσαν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας τὴν βούλησιν διέστησεν.</p>	<p>3. And what is there between God the Father and God the Son? Clearly nothing, since the very completion of things accepted by perception the command of the will, but he did not separate or divide the will as if taking a portion from the Father’s being.</p>
<p>4. ὁ δὲ τούτοις ἔπεται· τίς ἐστιν, ὃς τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἐμοῦ δεσπότητος πάθος δι’ αἰδῶ μᾶλλον ἢ μωρίαν δέδιεν; ἄρ’ οὖν πάσχει τὸ θεῖον, ἐπειδὴν ἡ τοῦ σεμνοῦ σώματος οἴκησις πρὸς ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἰδίας ἀγιότητος ὀρμᾶ, ἣ ὑποπίπτει θίξει τὸ τοῦ σώματος ἐκεκχωρισμένον; ἄρ’ οὐχὶ διέστηκε τοῦθ’ ὅπερ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ σώματος ἀφήρηται ταπεινότητος; οὐχὶ δὲ ζῶμεν, κἂν πρὸς θάνατον ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς εὐκλεία τὸ σῶμα προσκαλέσῃται;</p>	<p>4. And so it follows: Who is it, who has feared the suffering of my master Christ out of shame rather than foolishness? Then does the divinity suffer, since the dwelling of the revered body seeks the knowledge of its own holiness? Or was that which was separated from the body subjected to touch? Yet was the most humble which was not distinct from the body deprived of this? Do we not continue living, even if the Glory of life should summon the body to death?</p>
<p>5. τί τοίνυν ἐνταῦθα ἡ ἀβλαβῆς τε καὶ εἰλικρινῆς πίστις ἄξιον ἀμφιβολίας κατείληφεν; ἢ οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι σεμνότατον σῶμα ὁ θεὸς ἐπελέξατο, δι’ οὗ τὰ τῆς πίστεως τεκμήρια καὶ τὰ τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἀρετῆς ὑποδείγματα ἔμελλεν ἐμφανίζειν καὶ τὴν ἤδη συγκεχυμένην ὀλεθρίῳ πλάνῃ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους ἀπώλειαν ἀποσείσασθαι καινὴν τε θρησκείας διδόναι διδασκαλίαν καὶ τῷ τῆς ἀγνεῖας ὑποδείγματι τὰς ἀναξίας τοῦ νοῦ πράξεις καθαίρειν, ἔπειτα δὲ τὴν μὲν τοῦ θανάτου βάσανον ἐκλύειν, τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀθανασίας ἔπαθλα προαναφωνεῖν;</p>	<p>5. Why then is this uninjured and pure faith worthy of being attacked on all sides? Do you not see that God chose a most revered body, through which he was to show the proofs of the faith and the examples of his own virtue, to abolish the destruction which had already confused the human race by a ruinous error, and to give a new religious teaching, and to cleanse the unworthy deeds of the mind with an example of purity, and then to destroy the agony of death, and to proclaim beforehand the reward of immortality?</p>
<p>6. Ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς, οὓς λοιπὸν ἀδελφοὺς ἡ τῆς ἀγάπης κοινωνία εἰκότως ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ προσαγορεύεσθαι ποιεῖ,</p>	<p>6. But you, whom the fellowship of love reasonably makes me address you still as</p>

<p>οὐκ ἀγνοεῖτέ με τὸν ὑμέτερον συνθεράποντα, οὐκ ἀγνοεῖτε [44] τὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας σωτηρίας ὀχύρωμα, οὗ τὴν φροντίδα γνησίως ἐπανήρημαι, καὶ δι' οὗ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἐχθρῶν οὐ μόνον τὰ ὄπλα κατεμαχεσάμεθα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ζῶντας ἔτι τὴν ψυχὴν συνακαθεύξαμεν πρὸς τὸ τὴν τῆς φιλανθρωπίας ἀληθῆ πίστιν ἐκφάναι.</p>	<p>brothers, are not unaware that I am your fellow-servant. You are not unaware of the fortress of your salvation, whose concern I have genuinely taken upon myself, and through whom we have not only subdued the weapons of our enemies, but have also bound them, leaving them alive, in order to reveal the true, compassionate faith.</p>
<p>7. ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς τούτοις διὰ τὴν τῆς οἰκουμένης μάλιστα ἀνανέωσιν ἔχαιρον. καὶ γὰρ θαύματος ἦν ἄξιον ἀληθῶς ἔθνη τσοᾶτα εἰς ὁμόνοιαν ἐπαγαγεῖν, ἃ πρὸ βραχέος ἐλέγετο τὸν θεὸν ἀγνοεῖν. πλὴν τί ἔμελλε γινώσκειν τὰ ἔθνη ταῦτα, ἃ οὐδεμίαν φιλονεικίας ἐπανήρηνται φροντίδα; τί οὖν νοεῖτε, ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπητοί, ὡς ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς αἰτιῶμαι; Χριστιανοὶ ἐσμεν καὶ οἰκτρᾶ διαθέσει διχονοοῦμεν.</p>	<p>7. I rejoice over these fortunate events especially because of the great renewal they have brought to the empire. In fact it was truly worthy of awe that such nations were brought into unanimity, which shortly before were said not to know God. But why were the nations about to learn of these things, who hadn't been at all concerned about this dispute? Why do you think, beloved brothers, that I am accusing you of these things? We are Christians, yet we are divided – a lamentable condition.</p>
<p>8. αὕτη ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ ἡμετέρα πίστις, αὕτη ἡ τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου νόμου διδασκαλία; ἀλλὰ τίς ἐστὶν αἰτία δι' ἣν ὁ τοῦ παρόντος κακοῦ ὄλεθρος ἐξεγήγηρται; ὦ τῆς ἀτοπίας, ὦ μίσους ὑπερβολῆ πάσης ἀγανακτήσεως μέγεθος ὑπερβαίνουσα. τίς ἡ τοῦ ληστηρίου τούτου ἀναπέφανται δεινότης, ἢ τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ υἱὸν ἀρνεῖται ἐξ ἀμερίστου τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας προεληλυθέναι; ἄρ' οὐχὶ πανταχοῦ ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καίτοι γε τοῦτον πάντοτε παρεῖναι ἡμῖν αἰσθανόμεθα; ἄρ' οὐχὶ διὰ τῆς τούτου δυνάμεως ἡ τῶν ὄλων συνέστηκεν εὐκοσμία, καίτοι γε τῆς τοῦ χωρισμοῦ διαστάσεως ἐστέρηται;</p>	<p>8. Is this then our faith? Is this the teaching of the most holy Law? But what is to blame for bringing on the destruction which has risen up from this present evil? Alas, the great absurdity! Alas, such an unsurpassed magnitude of vexation I feel, which goes beyond all hatred! How terrible is this band of robbers which has appeared, which denies that the Son of God has come forth from an undivided essence of the Father! Is not God everywhere, yet do we perceive that he is always present with us? Does not the entire order of the universe hold together because of this power, and yet was it not deprived of order when this separation occurred?</p>
<p>9. Μὴ οὖν ὑμῖν τι πέπρακται; ἀγαπητοὶ ἀδελφοί, καταμάθετε νῦν, ἀξιῶ, τὰς βασάνους τῆς παρούσης ἀλγηδόνης· ὁμολογητὰς ὑμᾶς εἶναι τούτου ἐπηγγέλλεσθε ὃν (θεὸν) εἶναι ἀρνεῖσθε, τοῦθ' ὑμᾶς τοῦ πανώλου διδασκάλου πείθοντος. ἰκετεύω, τίς ἐστὶν ὁ διδάξας ταῦτα οὕτως ἄκακον πλῆθος; Εὐσέβιος δηλαδὴ ὁ τῆς τυραννικῆς ὠμότητος συμμύστης. ὅτι γὰρ πανταχοῦ τοῦ τυράννου γεγένηται πρόσφυξ, πολλαχόθεν ἔστι συνοραῶν.</p>	<p>9. Has he done something to you? Beloved brothers, I think you should now consider the fundamental feature of the present pain. Did you promise to be confessors (you deny that you are) with this man who was persuaded you of his ruinous teaching? I ask you, who is the person who taught this to an honest people? Certainly Eusebius, who participated in the tyrant's savagery. Many circumstances clearly show us</p>

<p>τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ αἱ τῶν ἐπισκόπων σφαγαὶ διαμαρτύρονται, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἀληθῶς ἐπισκόπων, τοῦτο δὲ ἡ χαλεπωτάτη τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐκδίωξις διαρρήδην βοᾷ.</p>	<p>that he was a client of the constant tyranny. The killings of bishops – I mean true bishops – bears witness to this, and the most relentless persecution of Christians proclaims it explicitly.</p>
<p>10. οὐδὲν γὰρ περὶ τῶν εἰς ἐμὲ γεγενημένων ὕβρεων νῦν ἐρῶ, δι’ ὧν, ὅτε μάλιστα αἱ τῶν ἐναντίων μερῶν ἐπραγματεύσαντο συνδρομαί, οὗτος καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς κατασκόπους ὑπέπεμπε κατ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ μόνον οὐκ ἐνόησεν τῷ τυράνῳ συνεισφέρειν ὑπουργίας.</p>	<p>10. I shall now say nothing about his outrageous actions against me. At the moment when the clash of the opposing armies was at hand, he underhandedly sent “eyes” to spy on me, and stopped just short of contributing armed assistance to the tyrant.</p>
<p>11. μὴδ’ ἐμέ τις οἰέσθω εἶναι πρὸς τὴν τούτων ἀπόδειξιν ἀπαράσκευον. ἔλεγχος γάρ ἐστιν ἀκριβής, ὅτι τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς διακόνους τοὺς Εὐσεβίῳ παρεπομένους φανερώς ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ συνειλήφθαι συνέστηκεν. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν παρήμι, ἃ νῦν οὐκ ἀγανακτήσεως ἔνεκεν, ἀλλ’ εἰς ἐκείνων αἰσχύνην ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ προενήνεκται. ἐκεῖνο μόνον δέδια, ἐκεῖνο διαλογίζομαι, ὅτι ὑμᾶς ὁρῶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἐγκλήματος καλεῖσθαι κοινωνίαν. διὰ γὰρ τῆς Εὐσεβίου ἀγωγῆς τε καὶ διαστροφῆς συνείδησιν τῆς ἀληθείας κεχωρισμένην ἀνειλήφατε.</p>	<p>11. Do not imagine that I am not prepared to prove this. There is sure proof, because it is well known that I publicly arrested the priests and deacons who came with Eusebius. But I pass over these incidents, which I have introduced not because of the irritation they caused me, but in order to shame them. This is my only worry, my only concern: I see that you are considered to have participated in this offence. The leadership and crookedness of Eusebius have separated your consciences from the truth.</p>
<p>12. ἀλλ’ ἔστιν οὐ βραδεῖα θεραπεία, εἴ γε ἐπίσκοπον πιστόν τε καὶ ἀκέραιον νῦν γοῦν λαβόντες πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπίδητε, ὅπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστι καὶ πάλαι ἐχρῆν τῆς ὑμετέρας κρίσεως ἡρτῆσθαι, εἰ μὴ ὁ προειρημένος Εὐσέβιος (σὺν) δίνῃ τῶν συναγομένων αὐτῷ ἐνταῦθα ἐληλύθει καὶ τὴν τῆς τάξεως ὀρθότητα ἀναισχύντως συνετετάρχει.</p>	<p>12. But this can be fixed easily enough, if finally you will receive a faithful, undefiled bishop, and turn your gaze back to God. This is now up to you, and your judgment would have bound itself to this, if that man Eusebius had not come to Nicomedia and shamelessly disturbed your upright practices with a turbulent crowd of followers.</p>
<p>13. Ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐσεβίου πρὸς τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀγάπην ὀλίγα προσῆκε φράσαι, μέμνηται ἡ ὑμετέρα ἀνεξικακία ἐπὶ τῆς Νικαέων πόλεως γεγενῆσθαι σύνοδον, ἣ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πρεπόντως τῆ τῆς ἐμῆς συνειδήσεως λατρεία παρήμην, οὐδὲν ἕτερον βουλόμενος ἢ ὁμόνοιαν ἅπασιν ἐργάσασθαι καὶ πρὸ πάντων ἐλέγξει τε καὶ ἀποσεισασθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο, ὃ τὴν μὲν ἀρχὴν εἰλήφει διὰ τῆς Ἀρείου τοῦ Ἀλεξανδρέως ἀπονοίας, ἰσχυροποιεῖτο δὲ παραχρῆμα διὰ τῆς Εὐσεβίου ἀτόπου τε καὶ ὀλεθρίας σπουδῆς.</p>	<p>13. But since it is not necessary to say much to you about Eusebius himself, o loving and patient ones, you will remember that a council took place at the city of Nicaea at which I myself was present, as my conscience demanded. My sole desire was to establish complete unity, and in particular to refute and discard this question which began through the madness of Arius the Alexandrian, but swiftly gained strength through the wicked and destructive advocacy of Eusebius.</p>

<p>14. ἀλλ' αὐτὸς οὗτος Εὐσέβιος, προσφιλέστατοι καὶ τιμιώτατοι, μεθ' ὅσης νομίζετε συνδρομῆς ἄτε δὴ ὑπὸ τῆς συνειδήσεως αὐτῆς ἠττώμενος, μεθ' ὅσης δὲ αἰσχύνῃς τῇ πανταχόθεν ἐληλεγμένη ψευδολογίᾳ συνίστατο, ὑποπέμπων μὲν μοι διαφόρους τοὺς ἀξιούοντας ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ, ἐξαιτούμενος δὲ παρ' ἐμοῦ συμμαχίαν τινά, ὅπως μὴ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτῳ ἐλεγχθῆις πλημμελήματι τῆς ὑπαρχούσης αὐτῷ τιμῆς ἐκβάλλοιτο; μάρτυς ἐστὶ μοι τούτου ὁ θεὸς αὐτός, ὃς ἐμοὶ τε καὶ ὑμῖν φιλαγάθως ἐπιμένει, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐμὲ ἐκεῖνος περιέτρεψε καὶ ἀπρεπῶς ὑφήρπασεν, ὃ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐπιγνώσεσθε. πάντα μὲν γὰρ ἐπράχθη τότε, καθὼς αὐτὸς ἐπόθει πᾶν ὅτιοῦν κακὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ διανοίας ἀποκρυπτόμενος.</p>	<p>14. But dearest and most honored friends, how insistently (for his conscience had convicted him) and how shamelessly did this man Eusebius ally himself to this utterly discredited falsehood! He secretly sent different messengers to solicit me, and he asked for my support in some degree, because he was afraid that if he was detected in such a great a sin, he would be expelled from his honorable office. God, may he continue his goodness to me and to you, is my witness of this, since Eusebius perverted my judgment and got round me in an underhanded way, as you also will come to know. At that time, everything was done as he wanted, and he concealed all his evil intentions in his own mind.</p>
<p>15. Ἀλλὰ πρῶν, ἵνα τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς τούτου σκαιότητος παρῶ, τί μάλιστα μετὰ Θεογνίου, ὃν τῆς ἀνοίας ἔχει κοινωνόν, διεπράξατο, ἀκούσατε, παρακαλῶ. Ἀλεξανδρέας τινὰς τῆς ἡμετέρας πίστεως ἀναχωρήσαντας ἐνταῦθα κεκελεύειν ἀποσταλῆναι, ἐπειδὴ διὰ τῆς τούτων ὑπηρεσίας ὁ τῆς διχονοίας ἠγείρετο πυρσός.</p>	<p>15. But to pass over the rest of his poor conduct, listen now, I ask you, to what he accomplished, together with Theognius, his accomplice in folly. I had ordered certain Alexandrians who had left our faith to be sent to me, because their activity was fanning into flame the fires of disunity.</p>
<p>16. ἀλλ' οὗτοι οἱ καλοὶ τε καὶ ἀγαθοὶ ἐπίσκοποι, οὓς ἅπαξ ἢ τῆς συνόδου ἀλήθεια πρὸς μετόνοιαν τετηρήκει, οὐ μόνον ἐκείνους ὑπεδέξαντο καὶ παρ' ἑαυτοῖς ἠσφαλίσαντο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκοινώνησαν αὐτοῖς τῆς τῶν τρόπων κακοηθείας, διὸ τοῦτο περὶ τοὺς ἀχαρίστους τούτους ἔκρινα πρᾶξιαι·</p>	<p>16. But these good, noble bishops not only received these men and made them welcome, but joined with them in their degenerate ways, even after the truth of the Council had ordered their repentance. So I decided to take action against these ungrateful individuals: I ordered them to be arrested and banished to the most distant region possible.</p>
<p>17. ἀρπαγέντας γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἐκέλευσα ὡς πορρωτάτω ἐξορισθῆναι. νῦν ὑμέτερόν ἐστι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐκείνη τῇ πίστει βλέπειν, ἢ πάντοτε καὶ γεγενῆσθαι [καὶ] συνέστηκε καὶ εἶναι πρέπει, καὶ διαπράξασθαι οὕτως, (ἵνα) ἐπισκόπους ἀγνοῦς τε καὶ ὀρθοδόξους καὶ φιλανθρώπους ἔχοντες χαίρωμεν· εἴ τις δὲ ἢ πρὸς μνήμην τῶν λυμεάνων ἐκείνων ἢ πρὸς ἔπαινον ἀπρονοήτως ἐξαφθῆναι τολμήσει, παραχρῆμα τῆς ἰδίας τόλμης διὰ τῆς τοῦ θεράποντος τοῦ</p>	<p>17. Now it is your responsibility to look to God with that faith which is well known to have always existed, and rightly should exist, and take a course of action in which we may rejoice to see that you have holy, orthodox, and kind-hearted bishops. And if anyone foolishly dares to praise or even to remember fondly those corrupters, he will be restrained from his daring by the action of the servant of God, that is to say, by me.</p>

θεοῦ τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐμοῦ ἐνεργείας ἀνασταλήσεται.

God watch over you, beloved brothers.

Last edited 4/30/2024 by AGC