

A letter of Constantine's to the churches, on the date of Easter (Dok. 30)

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| Reference | <i>Dok. 30; Urk. 26; CPG 8518</i> |
| Incipit | Πεῖραν λαβῶν |
| Date | fall 325 |
| Ancient sources | Eusebius, <i>Life of Constantine</i> 3.17-18 Socrates, <i>Church History</i> 1.9.32-46 Theodoret, <i>Church History</i> 1.9 <i>Anonymous Church History</i> 2.37.10 |
| Modern editions | Eusebius Werke 1.1 ² (GCS 7):89-93 W. Bright, <i>Socrates' ecclesiastical history</i> , 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893) |

One of the subjects discussed at the Council of Nicaea was resolving differences in dating the annual celebration of Easter. The council settled on the dating practiced by Rome and Alexandria. Constantine in this letter commends this decision to the churches for implementation. The letter was probably sent out within a few months of the closing of the council. This letter can also be accessed in Table 6 of our *Ancient Descriptions of the Council of Nicaea* documents.

The Greek text below is that of F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke* 1.1²: *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* (GCS 7, 1991): 89-93. The English translation was adapted by Aaron West from the Socrates translation of Zenos (NPNF² 2:14-16).

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| Κωνσταντῖνος Σεβαστὸς ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. | Constantine Augustus, to the churches. |
| 1. Πεῖραν λαβῶν ἐκ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν εὐπραξίας, ὅση τῆς θείας δυνάμεως πέφυκε χάρις, τοῦτόν γε πρὸ πάντων ἔκρινα εἶναί μοι προσήκειν σκοπόν, ὅπως παρὰ τοῖς μακαριωτάτοις τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας πλήθει πίστις μία καὶ εἰλικρινῆς ἀγάπη ὁμογνώμων τε περὶ τὸν παγκρατῆ θεὸν εὐσέβεια τηρῆται | 1. The great grace of God's power has constantly been increasing, as is evident in the general prosperity of the empire. I therefore decided to make it my aim above all else that one faith, sincere love, and unvarying devotion to Almighty God be maintained among the most blessed assemblies of the catholic church. |
| 2. Ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο οὐχ οἷόν τ' ἦν ἀκλινῆ καὶ βεβαίαν τάξιν λαβεῖν, εἰ μὴ εἰς ταῦτόν πάντων ὁμοῦ ἢ τῶν γούν πλειόνων ἐπισκόπων συνελθόντων, ἐκάστου τῶν προσηκόντων τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ θρησκείᾳ διάκρισις γένοιτο, τούτου ἔνεκεν πλείστων ὄσων συναθροισθέντων (καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ καθάπερ εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐτύγγων συμπαρών· οὐ γὰρ ἀρνησαίμην ἂν, ἐφ' ᾧ μάλιστα | 2. But I perceived that this could only be established firmly and permanently when all of the bishops, or at least the greatest part, were convened in the same place for a council where they could discuss every point of our most holy religion. So we assembled as many as possible, and I myself was also present as one of you; for I will not deny what I especially rejoice in, that I |

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| <p>χαίρω, συνθεράπων ὑμέτερος πεφυκέναι), ἄχρι τοσοῦτου ἅπαντα τῆς προσηκούσης τετύχηκεν ἐξετάσεως, ἄχρις οὗ ἢ τῶ πάντων ἐφόρῳ θεῷ ἀρέσκουσα γνώμη πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἐνότητος συμφωνίαν εἰς φῶς προήχθη, ὡς μηδὲν ἔτι πρὸς διχόνοιαν ἢ πίστεως ἀμφισβήτησιν ὑπολείπεσθαι.</p> | <p>am your fellow-servant. All points were then minutely investigated, until a decision was brought to light which was found acceptable to him who is the inspector of all things, and brought a unified agreement, leaving nothing which could cause dissension or controversy in matters of faith.</p> |
| <p>3. Ἐνθα καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ πάσχα ἀγιοτάτης ἡμέρας γενομένης ζητήσεως ἔδοξε κοινῇ γνώμη καλῶς ἔχειν ἐπὶ μιᾷ ἡμέρας πάντας τοὺς ἀπανταχοῦ ἐπιτελεῖν. τί γὰρ ἡμῖν κάλλιον, τί δὲ σεμνότερον ὑπάρξει δυνήσεται τοῦ τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην, παρ' ἧς τὴν τῆς ἀθανασίας εἰλήφαμεν ἐλπίδα, μιᾷ τάξει καὶ φανερῷ λόγῳ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀδιαπτῶτως φυλάττεσθαι; καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἀνάξιον ἔδοξεν εἶναι τὴν ἀγιοτάτην ἐκείνην ἑορτὴν τῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐπομένους συνηθείᾳ πληροῦν, οἱ τὰς ἑαυτῶν χεῖρας ἀθεμίτῳ πλημμελήματι χράναντες εικότως τὰς ψυχὰς οἱ μισοὶ τυφλώττουσιν. ἔξεστι γὰρ τοῦ ἐκείνων ἔθρους ἀποβληθέντος ἀληθεστέρα τάξει, ἢν ἐκ πρώτης τοῦ πάθους ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ παρόντος ἐφυλάξαμεν, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μέλλοντας αἰῶνας τὴν τῆς ἐπιτηρήσεως ταύτης συμπλήρωσιν ἐκτείνεσθαι.</p> | <p>3. At the council we also considered the issue of our holiest day, Easter, and it was determined by common consent that everyone, everywhere should celebrate it on one and the same day. For what can be more appropriate, or what more solemn, than that this feast from which we have received the hope of immortality, should be kept by all without variation, using the same order and a clear arrangement? And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy for us to keep this most sacred feast following the custom of the Jews, a people who have soiled their hands in a most terrible outrage, and have thus polluted their souls, and are now deservedly blind. Since we have cast aside their way of calculating the date of the festival, we can ensure that future generations can celebrate this observance at the more accurate time which we have kept from the first day of the passion until the present time.</p> |
| <p>4. Μηδὲν τοίνυν ἔστω ὑμῖν κοινὸν μετὰ τοῦ ἐχθίστου τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὄχλου. εἰλήφαμεν γὰρ παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἑτέραν ὁδόν, πρόκειται δρόμος τῇ ἱερωτάτῃ ἡμῶν θρησκείᾳ καὶ νόμιμος καὶ πρέπων. τούτου συμφώνως ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι τῆς αἰσχυρᾶς ἐκείνης ἑαυτοὺς συνειδήσεως ἀποσπάσωμεν, ἀδελφοὶ τιμώτατοι.</p> | <p>4. Therefore have nothing in common with that most hostile people, the Jews. We have received another way from the Savior. In our holy religion we have set before us a course which is both valid and accurate. Let us unanimously pursue this. Let us, most honored brothers, withdraw ourselves from that detestable association.</p> |
| <p>5. ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀποπῶτατον ἐκείνους ἀυχεῖν, ὡς ἄρα παρεκτὸς τῆς αὐτῶν διδασκαλίας ταῦτα φυλάττειν οὐκ εἴημεν ἱκανοί. τί δὲ φρονεῖν ὀρθὸν ἐκείνοι δυνήσονται, οἱ μετὰ τὴν κυριοκτονίαν τε καὶ πατροκτονίαν ἐκείνην ἐκστάντες τῶν φρενῶν ἄγονται οὐ λογισμῶ τι ἀλλ' ὀρμηὶ ἀκατασχέτῳ, ὅπη δ' ἂν αὐτοὺς ἢ ἔμφυτος αὐτῶν ἀπάγη μανία; ἐκεῖθεν τοίνυν κἂν</p> | <p>5. It is truly most absurd for them to boast that we are incapable of rightly observing these things without their instruction. On what subject are they competent to form a correct judgment, who, after that murder of their Lord and patricide lost their senses, and are led not by any rational motive, but by an uncontrollable impulsiveness to wherever their innate fury may drive them? This is why</p> |

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| <p>τούτω τῷ μέρει τὴν ἀλήθειαν οὐχ ὀρῶσιν, ὡς αἰεὶ κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον αὐτοὺς πλανωμένους ἀντὶ τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει δεύτερον τὸ πάσχα ἐπιτελεῖν.</p> | <p>even in this matter they do not perceive the truth, so that they constantly err in the utmost degree, and will celebrate the Feast of Passover a second time in the same year instead of making a suitable correction.</p> |
| <p>6. Τίνος οὖν χάριν τούτοις ἐπόμεθα, οὓς δεινὴν πλάνην νοσεῖν ὠμολόγηται; δεύτερόν γάρ τὸ πάσχα ἐν ἐνὶ ἐνιαυτῷ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ποιεῖν ἀνεξόμεθα. ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ταῦτα μὴ προὔκειτο, τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀγχίνουσαν ἐχρῆν καὶ διὰ σπουδῆς καὶ δι' εὐχῆς ἔχειν πάντοτε ἐν μηδενὸς ὁμοιότητι τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς κοινωνεῖν δοκεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔθεσι παγκάκων.</p> | <p>6. Why then should we follow the example of those who are acknowledged to be infected with serious error? Surely we should never allow Easter to be kept twice in one and the same year! But even if these considerations were not laid before you, you should still be careful, both by diligence and prayer, that your pure souls should have nothing in common, or even seem to do so, with the customs of men so utterly depraved.</p> |
| <p>7. Πρὸς τούτοις κάκεῖνο πάρεστιν συνορᾶν, ὡς ἐν τηλικούτῳ πράγματι καὶ τοιαύτη θρησκείας ἑορτῇ διαφωνίαν ὑπάρχειν ἐστὶν ἀθεώτατον.</p> | <p>7. This should also be considered: In a matter so important and of such religious significance, the slightest disagreement is most irreverent.</p> |
| <p>8. μίαν γὰρ ἡμῖν τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐλευθερίας ἡμέραν, τουτέστιν τὴν τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου πάθους, ὃ ἡμέτερος παρέδωκε σωτήρ, καὶ μίαν εἶναι τὴν καθολικὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν βεβούληται, ἧς εἰ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα εἰς πολλοὺς καὶ διαφοροὺς τόπους τὰ μέρη διήρηται, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐνὶ πνεύματι, τουτέστι τῷ θείῳ βουλήματι, θάλλεται.</p> | <p>8. For our Savior left us only one day to be observed in remembrance of our deliverance, that is the day of his most holy passion. He also wished his catholic church to be one; the members of which are still cared for by one Spirit, that is by the will of God, however much they may be scattered in various places.</p> |
| <p>9. Λογισάσθω δ' ἡ τῆς ὑμετέρας ὀσιότητος ἀγχίνουσα, ὅπως ἐστὶ δεινὸν τε καὶ ἀπρεπὲς κατὰ τὰς αὐτὰς ἡμέρας ἑτέρους μὲν ταῖς νηστείαις σχολάζειν, ἑτέρους δὲ συμπόσια ἐπιτελεῖν, καὶ μετὰ τὰς τοῦ πάσχα ἡμέρας ἄλλους μὲν ἑορταῖς καὶ ἀνέσεσιν ἐξετάζεσθαι, ἄλλους δὲ ταῖς ὠρισμέναις ἐκδεδόσθαι νηστείαις. διὰ τοῦτο γοῦν τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως τυχεῖν καὶ πρὸς μίαν διατύπωσιν ἄγεσθαι τοῦτο ἡ θεία πρόνοια βούλεται, ὡς ἔγωγε ἅπαντας ἠγοῦμαι συνορᾶν.</p> | <p>9. Let the good sense consistent with your sacred character consider how grievous and inappropriate it is, that on the same days some should be observing fasts, while others are celebrating feasts; and after the days of Easter some should celebrate festivities and enjoyments, while others submit to appointed fastings. For this reason Divine Providence directed that we put into effect an appropriate correction and establish uniformity of practice, as I suppose you are all aware.</p> |
| <p>10. ὅθεν ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο οὕτως ἐπανορθοῦσθαι προσῆκεν, ὡς μηδὲν μετὰ τοῦ τῶν πατροκτόνων τε καὶ κυριοκτόνων ἐκείνων ἔνθους εἶναι κοινόν, ἔστι τε τάξις εὐπρεπῆς, ἣν ἅπασαι αἱ τῶν δυτικῶν τε καὶ μεσημβρινῶν καὶ ἀρκτῶν τῆς οἰκουμένης</p> | <p>10. So first, it was desirable to change the situation so that we have nothing in common with that nation of father-killers who slew their Lord. Second, the order which is observed by all the churches of the western, southern, and northern</p> |

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| <p>μερῶν παραφυλάττουσιν ἐκκλησίαι καί τινες τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἑφάν τόπων, οὗ ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος καλῶς ἔχειν ἅπαντες ἠγήσαντο, καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ τῇ ὑμετέρα ἀγγινοία ἀρέσειν ὑπεσχόμην, ἵν' ὅπερ δ' ἂν κατὰ τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων πόλιν Ἰταλίαν τε καὶ Ἀφρικὴν, ἅπασαν Αἴγυπτον, Σπανίας, Γαλλίας, Βρετανίας, Λιβύας, ὅλην Ἑλλάδα, Ἀσιανὴν τε διοίκησιν καὶ Ποντικὴν καὶ Κιλικίαν μᾶ καὶ συμφώνῳ φυλάττεται γνώμη, ἀσμένως τοῦτο καὶ ἡ ὑμετέρα προσδέξεται σύνεσις, λογιζομένη ὡς οὐ μόνον πλείων ἐστὶν ὁ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς προειρημένους τόπους ἐκκλησιῶν ἀριθμὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς τοῦτο μάλιστα κοινῇ πάντας ὀσιώτατόν ἐστι βούλεσθαι, ὅπερ καὶ ὁ ἀκριβῆς λόγος ἀπαιτεῖν δοκεῖ καὶ οὐδεμίαν μετὰ τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἐπιπορκίας ἔχειν κοινωνίαν.</p> | <p>parts, and by some also in the eastern, is quite suitable. Therefore, at the current time, we all thought it was proper that you, intelligent as you are, would also cheerfully accept what is observed with such general unanimity of sentiment in the city of Rome, throughout Italy, Africa, all Egypt, Spain, France, Britain, Libya, the whole of Greece, and the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia. I pledged myself that this solution would satisfy you after you carefully examined it, especially as I considered that not only are the majority of congregations located in the places just mentioned, but also that we all have a most sacred obligation, to unite in desiring whatever common sense seems to demand, and what has no association with the perjury of the Jews.</p> |
| <p>11. Ἴνα δὲ τὸ κεφαλαιωδέστατον συντόμως εἶπω, κοινῇ πάντων ἤρεσε κρίσει τὴν ἀγιωτάτην τοῦ πάσχα ἑορτὴν μᾶ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ συντελεῖσθαι. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρέπει ἐν τοιαύτῃ ἀγιότητι εἶναι τινα διαφορὰν, καὶ κάλλιον ἔπεσθαι τῇ γνώμῃ ταύτῃ, ἐν ἣ οὐδεμία ἔσται ἀλλοτρίας πλάνης καὶ ἀμαρτήματος ἐπιμιξία.</p> | <p>11. But to sum up matters briefly, it was determined by common consent that the most holy festival of Easter should be solemnized on one and the same day; for it is not at all decent that there should be in such a sacred serious matter any difference. It is quite commendable to adopt this option which has nothing to do with any strange errors, nor deviates from what is right.</p> |
| <p>12. Τούτων οὖν οὕτως ἐχόντων, ἀσμένως δέχεσθε τὴν οὐρανίαν χάριν καὶ θείαν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐντολήν· πᾶν γὰρ ὃ τι δ' ἂν ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις τῶν ἐπισκόπων συνεδρίοις πράττεται, τοῦτο πρὸς τὴν θείαν βούλησιν ἔχει τὴν ἀναφορὰν. διὸ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγαπητοῖς ἡμῶν ἀδελφοῖς ἐμφανίσαντες τὰ προγεγραμμένα ἤδη καὶ τὸν προειρημένον λόγον καὶ τὴν παρατήρησιν τῆς ἀγιωτάτης ἡμέρας ὑποδέχεσθαι τε καὶ διατάττειν ὀφείλετε, ἵνα ἐπειδὴν πρὸς τὴν πάλαι μοι ποθουμένην τῆς ὑμετέρας διαθέσεως ὄψιν ἀφίκομαι, ἐν μᾶ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ τὴν ἀγίαν μεθ' ὑμῶν ἑορτὴν ἐπιτελέσαι δυνηθῶ καὶ πάντων ἕνεκεν μεθ' ὑμῶν εὐδοκήσω, συνορῶν τὴν διαβολικὴν ὠμότητα ὑπὸ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως διὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων πράξεων ἀνηρημένην, ἀκμαζούσης πανταχοῦ τῆς ὑμετέρας πίστεως καὶ εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας. ὁ θεὸς ὑμᾶς διαφυλάξοι, ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπητοί.</p> | <p>12. Since these things are consistent, gladly receive this heavenly and truly divine command. For whatever is done in the sacred assemblies of the bishops can be traced to divine will. Therefore, once you have demonstrated the things which have been prescribed to all our beloved brothers, it would be good for you to make public the above written statements and to accept the reasoning which has proved itself to be sound, and to establish this observance of the most holy day. In this way, when I arrive to check on your condition, which I have desired earnestly for some time, I will be able to celebrate the sacred festival with you on one and the same day, and will rejoice with you for all things, as I see that through our efforts divine power is frustrating Satan's cruelty, and that your faith, peace, and</p> |

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| | unity are flourishing everywhere. May God preserve you, beloved brothers. |
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