

The Council of Nicaea According to the Ancient Sources

compiled and introduced by Glen L. Thompson

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The Ancient Sources

While minutes or proceedings were most likely recorded at the Council of Nicaea, none survive.¹ However, we do have accounts and reminiscences of three of the participants—Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Athanasius of Alexandria.² In addition, we have accounts of various lengths preserved in the works of seven ancient Christian historians who wrote in the century and a half following the council.³ What follows is an attempt to take those early accounts and weave them into a single coherent narrative of the council.

Ten letters of Constantine survive that involve the events leading up to the council and its aftermath. Of the three letters of Constantine that are most relevant, one calls the bishops to the meeting at Nicaea, and two report on the results of the gathering. The first is preserved only in a Syriac translation. His letter on the date of Easter is preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine* as well as by the church historians Socrates and Theodoret, and by the *Anonymous Church History*. The imperial letter directed to the church in Alexandria is found in Athanasius's *On the Nicene Definition (de Decretis)* as well as in the church histories of Socrates and the *Anonymous Church History*.

Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (in Palestine) was a key participant at the Council of Nicaea, and there he met Constantine for the first time. He had already finished writing his famous *Church History* a decade before the council, so it has nothing to say about Nicaea. However, he soon began work on a eulogistic *Life of Constantine* which included his detailed memories of the council and the emperor's role in it. This work, left unfinished at his death in 339, shows Eusebius's firm conviction that God had raised up the emperor both to bring peace to the persecuted church and to be a unifying secular leader for it, and this has caused scholars to be judicious in evaluating his version of Constantine's participation, acts and sentiments while at the council.

A substantial letter of Eusebius written during the council and addressed to his home congregation of Caesarea also survives, although not directly in his own corpus. Rather, it is quoted by the third participant, Athanasius, in his *On the Nicene Definition*, as well as in the church histories of Gelasius, Socrates, Theodoret and the *Anonymous Church History*. At a council five months before Nicaea, Eusebius had expressed views similar to those of Arius and been provisionally excommunicated. His letter tries to explain his actions at the council. It includes Eusebius's own creed, presented at the council but rejected, and the creed adopted by the council. Although he signed the creed, Eusebius remained somewhat skeptical of the Nicene Christology, and so his subsequent writings rarely mention the council.

The third eyewitness was Athanasius of Alexandria who went to the council as a young member of the delegation of Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. Reminiscences of the council appear in several of his works over the following decades, most notably his tract *On the Decrees of Nicaea (de Decretis)* of c. 350-356, in *On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleucia (de Synodis)* of c. 360, and in his *Letter to the Bishops of Africa (ad Afros)* of c. 369. Since he was an important but controversial figure in the ongoing debate about the divinity of the Logos, many scholars are also skeptical about his account of the council. However, even though our three eyewitnesses are so different from each other—the

¹ About AD 380, St. Jerome wrote "If we read the acts and the names of the bishops of the Council of Nicaea, we find that..." (Dialogue against the Luciferians, 20)

² We also have the brief reminiscence of Eustathius of Antioch at the end of part 13 below.

³ St. Jerome is the earliest non-participant to record some details about the council in his *Dialogue against the Luciferians* (17, 20, 27), but we learn little new from his brief references, so we have not included him in our list.

emperor, the bishop sympathizing somewhat with Arius’s teaching, and the strong proponent of Nicene theology—their accounts of the council for the most part hang together, and this is a strong reason for accepting their general account of the proceedings.

About 390 Gelasius of Caesarea described the council in his *Church History* which was intended to take up the story of the church where Eusebius had left off.⁴ Unfortunately, his history has not survived except in fragments preserved in other later histories. For instance, just a decade after his account was written, Rufinus of Aquileia, when translating Eusebius’s *Church History* into Latin, used Gelasius’s work to extend the story through the council of Nicaea. Rufinus’s history was in turn used a generation later by Philostorgius who, sympathetic to the Arian position, included some information and documents from their point of view. Only fragments of his work survive along with an epitome preserved by the ninth-century scholar and patriarch of Constantinople, Photius.

In the middle third of the fifth century, several other important “continuator” of Eusebius penned histories of the fourth-century church. About 439, Socrates Scholasticus used Gelasius and Rufinus, and then also obtained writings of Athanasius, all of which he incorporated into his account of the council. He then became the primary source for Sozomen’s *Church History*, written only a couple years later. Theodoret in his *Church History*, written in mid-century, “tends to combine different sources into one narrative and to paraphrase, shorten, and embellish these....”⁵ These three histories were read widely throughout the Middle Ages and are still important sources for our understanding of fourth-century church history.

Finally, a quarter century later, an anonymous author, seemingly from Mysia, used the preceding authors as sources but did so with a “penchant for rhetorical elaboration.”⁶ Although writing a full century and a half after the council, his work, known as the *Anonymous Church History* (or sometimes as *Pseudo-Gelasius*), deserves more notice than it has received until recently.

Early Source by Abbreviation

Abbrev.		CPG/CPL	Date
<i>ACH</i>	<i>Anonymous Church History</i> (pseudo-Gelasius)	6034	c.476
<i>Ath. LBA</i>	Athanasius, <i>Letter to the Bishops of Africa (ad Afros)</i>	2133	369
<i>Ath. ND</i>	Athanasius, <i>On the Nicene Definition (de Decretis)</i>	2120	350-356
<i>Ath. Syn</i>	Athanasius, <i>On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleucia (de Synodis)</i>	2128	359-362
<i>Eus. LC</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Life of Constantine</i>	3496	337
<i>Gel. CH</i>	Gelasius of Caesarea, <i>Church History</i>	3521	c.390
<i>Phil. CH</i>	Philostorgius, <i>Church History</i>	6032	425-433
<i>Ruf. CH</i>	Rufinus of Aquileia, <i>Church History</i>	403?	c.403
<i>Soc. CH</i>	Socrates, <i>Church History</i>	6028	c. 439
<i>Soz. CH</i>	Sozomen, <i>Church History</i>	6030	440-443
<i>Theod. CH</i>	Theodoret, <i>Church History</i>	6222	449-450

⁴ The fragments have been collected by M. Wallraff, J. Stutz, and N. Marinides in *Gelasius of Caesaria, Ecclesiastical History: The Extant Fragments With an Appendix containing the Fragments from Dogmatic Writings*. GCS N.F. 25 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

⁵ *Ibid.*, xli. The introduction to this edition of Gelasius’s *CH* (especially pp. xix-l) gives a fine summary of all these early authors and their interconnectedness.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xlviii.

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337-339	Eus. <i>LC</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Life of Constantine</i>	3496
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359-362	Ath. <i>Syn</i>	Athanasius, <i>On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleucia (de Synodis)</i>	2128
369	Ath. <i>LBA</i>	Athanasius, <i>Letter to the Bishops of Africa (ad Afros)</i>	2133
c.390	Gel. <i>CH</i>	Gelasius of Caesarea, <i>Church History</i>	3521
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449-450	Theod. <i>CH</i>	Theodoret, <i>Church History</i>	6222
c.476	<i>ACH</i>	<i>Anonymous Church History (pseudo-Gelasius)</i>	6034

The Council in its Historical Context

Two hundred and fifty years after Pentecost, the Christian church had spread to all the major and minor cities of the Roman Empire, throughout the Middle East, and to India. Christians in most urban areas made up no more than 5% of the population, and probably considerably less in the countryside. In a few areas—Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, for example—the percentage may have been a bit higher. Growth was gradual, but steady. During this period, the church had grown less Jewish in its ethnic make-up and had become predominantly Greek-speaking within the Roman Empire. It had spread into the Middle East in the Syriac language, up the Nile in Coptic, and into North Africa, Gaul, and Italy in Latin. Christian letters and literature existed in all of these languages, and adherents were to be found at all levels of society.

Christians did not take part in civic religious rituals, did not attend the theatre or gladiatorial or wild beast fights, and spent a considerable amount of their free time in each other's company. All this made them the target of many rumors and much speculation. And since the imperial government had early on made it clear that their local groups (*collegia*) were not to be legally recognized, they also became easy scapegoats in their communities. Nero found this a convenient excuse when he rounded up and executed Christians in Italy in AD 64, blaming them for the great fire in Rome. Anyone who became upset by a Christian neighbor could report them to the government, and a trial and execution often followed. But the government as a whole did not go hunting for Christians again until the mid-third century. With the empire reeling from inflation and military setbacks, emperor Decius (249-251) ordered everyone to perform pagan sacrifices "for the safety of the empire." Christian leaders were singled out for compliance, and those that refused were executed. After his brief rule, formal persecution died away until Emperor Valerian (253-260) renewed it in the last years of his reign (257-260)

Despite these setbacks, the church continued to grow. Following these persecutions, imperial edicts confirmed some restitution to Christians whose property had been seized, as well as the restoration of church buildings. This confirms for us the fact that, despite the lack of any official standing as a group, the church had their own church buildings and cemeteries by this period. By the third century the church's organizational structure was also becoming more uniform. The Christians within a city would have a single head called the bishop, priests to oversee worship at a number of worship locations, and deacons who assisted with the church's charitable work in the community. In some rural areas a *chorepiscopus*, i.e. a country bishop, would serve. The bishop of one of the older and

larger cities of a region would serve as a regional leader. By the fourth century the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch in Syria, Rome (and eventually the new eastern capital of Constantinople) would be called patriarchs and would have oversight to varying extents over larger areas. The clergy within a city would meet regularly to discuss their work, and bishops within a region would likewise meet in council. While this originally took place *ad hoc* when special problems arose, these eventually became regularly scheduled meetings, called “councils” in Latin, and “synods” in Greek.

Before becoming a member of the church through baptism, adults were required to undergo study of the church’s beliefs and teachings. This catechetical study varied from place to place, but often involved learning the meaning of short summaries of Christian teaching. These summaries which we now call baptismal creeds were to ensure that new members adhered to the common faith of the community. Already in the second century, however, some teachers and communities began deviating from accepted teaching and left (or were expelled from) the larger church. They set up opposition communities that claimed the priority for their own teaching. The Montanists, Marcionites, and various Gnostic groups were among the groups who separated themselves already in the second century.

The Decian persecution was at the root of another separation from the church, this time in the city of Rome. Some Christians who had caved under the pressure to perform sacrifices later repented and wished to be re-admitted to the church. The leaders of the Roman church discussed the issue with the famous bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, concluding that those who were truly repentant should be welcomed back into the church. When Fabian, the bishop of Rome, was martyred in early 251, a priest name Cornelius was elected to replace him who was known for his acceptance of this policy. This caused a rival priest named Novatian to be elected by his own supporters as a rival, objecting to the policy of leniency towards the lapsed and promising to limit church membership to those who had remained pure (*catharos* in Greek). When the majority supported Cornelius, Novatian and his party formed their own opposition church, calling themselves the Pure Ones (*Cathari*); their opponents called them Novatians after their leader. About this time the members who remained in the larger church began referring to themselves as members of the *catholic* (meaning universal or general) church. Soon small groups of Novatians formed in various parts of the empire.

The third century in general was a time of crisis within the Roman Empire as there was a long succession of incompetent and short-lived emperors, a steady succession of economic crises, and invasions threatening almost all their borders. Finally, a competent man named Diocletian came to power and sought to deal with the problems by a total reorganization of the government. In 294 he divided the rule between two emperors each with the title of Augustus, and each with an assistant called a Caesar. With one Augustus and one Caesar in power in the West, and the other two in the East, the military and economic situation was stabilized. The system was to continue after Diocletian retired from office in 305, but very quickly the harmony of the rulers fell into disarray. When the Augustus in the West, Constantius, died in Britain in 305, his army declared his son Constantine to be his replacement. In the eight years that followed, Constantine fought his way to power over the entire western half of the empire, ending in the capture of Rome itself in late 312.

By that time, Constantine had become a believer in the Christian God and went into battle with a Christian symbol on the banners of his legions. After entering Rome, he met with leaders of the church and donated some imperial property to the bishop. By this time he also had in his retinue the well-known Spanish bishop, Hosius of Cordoba, as his personal chaplain. He soon issued orders for the restoration of Christian property seized during the persecutions as well as other restitution.

Meanwhile a new schism had begun in the church in Carthage, the capital city of northwest Africa. When Caecilian was elected bishop of Carthage in 311, rivals held a council and declared that his

consecration had not been performed in a valid way. Having failed to oust the popular Caecilian, they went into schism, led by the rival claimant Donatus. When Constantine came to control Africa after his victory at the Milvian Bridge in October 312, the schismatics appealed their case to the emperor in April 313, asking that Caecilian be examined for improper conduct. The emperor ordered ten bishops from each side of the dispute to appear in Rome where the Roman bishop together with three bishops from Gaul would hear the case. The Roman bishop Miltiades included ten Italian bishops to take part in the hearing, making into an ecclesiastical council as well. This joint council and judicial hearing exonerated Caecilian.

The latter and his followers, soon to be known as *Donatists*, re-submitted their case to the emperor who then had a second hearing for them in Arles in 314, this time in the emperor's own presence. Again the decision went against the Donatists. Constantine tried several additional times to heal the schism, until finally in frustration he ordered the Donatist churches to be confiscated. As so often happens, repression brought new life and followers to the Donatists. By 336, the Donatists could convene a council with 270 bishops in attendance!

Although in 313 Constantine married his half-sister Constantia to Licinius the eastern Augustus, within a couple years the two were at war. Over the following decade Constantine won territory in a series of battles, each followed by a short-lived ceasefire. In 324 all-out war ended with Licinius's surrender and Constantine became ruler of the entire Roman Empire. Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea and budding author of church history, saw God's hand in all that Constantine did. Constantine for his part also seems to have seen his empire and the Christian church as linked in their destiny. This was one reason he continued to trouble himself in trying to keep the church united and seeking to end the Donatist schism.

While Constantine was conquering the East, however, a further schism was developing in Egypt. There a bishop named Melitius had intervened to ordain clergy while the patriarch, Peter, was in hiding during the last persecution. As with the Novatians in Rome and the Donatists in North Africa, a schismatic Egyptian "Church of the Martyrs" evolved during this period, becoming known as the Melitian church. Besides the issue about if and how lapsed Christians could be re-admitted to the church, the issue of the authority of the bishop of Alexandria as patriarch over the Egyptian church was also involved. The Egyptian situation was further complicated when a priest began challenging the bishop of Alexandria who succeeded Peter, Alexander, on his teachings about the divinity of Christ. Arius taught that it only stood to reason that if Jesus was the Son of God, there was a time when he was not the Son, a time when he had not yet been begotten, and therefore he was neither eternal nor equal to the Father in his divinity. This "logical" approach to Christology found favor with a number of other church leaders and teachers in the eastern Empire, and soon the controversy reached the ears of Constantine. Again Constantine tried to broker a peace, sending a letter to Alexander and Arius calling for unity. When this did not bear fruit, however, he again sought to solve the problem with an examination before church leaders. Perhaps it was at the instigation of his advisor, Bishop Hosius, that he decided that a small gathering of important officials, or even a regional gathering, would not be sufficient to deal with the complex issues. Therefore the idea was born of a "great" or "general" council that would include bishops from across the inhabited world (Greek *oikoumene*).

This was the genesis of the first "ecumenical" council. We begin our narrative from the sources with Constantine's attempt via letter to patch up the growing Arian controversy

The Council of Nicaea According to the Ancient Sources

1. The Calling of the Council

When the emperor, who possessed the most profound wisdom, heard about these things, he tried to stop them at their source. Therefore, he sent off a messenger well-known for his intelligence to Alexandria with letters, attempting to quell the dispute and expecting to reconcile the disputants.⁷ But matters turned out differently from what the emperor had hoped for. The disagreement was too great for reconciliation, and the one who had been sent to make peace returned without accomplishing his mission.⁸

As for the Nicene Council, it was not a common meeting, but convened upon a pressing necessity and for a reasonable object. The Syrians, Cilicians, and Mesopotamians were out of line [with the rest of the church] in celebrating the festival, observing Easter according to the Jewish calendar.⁹ On the other hand, the Arian heresy had risen up against the catholic church, and it had found supporters in Eusebius [of Nicomedia]¹⁰ and his associates who were both passionate for the heresy and led the attack upon the faithful. This provided the impetus for an ecumenical council, so that the festival should be celebrated everywhere on the same day and that the heresy which was springing up might be condemned.¹¹

Then, as if bringing a divine army against this enemy, he convened a general council and invited bishops from all over to attend with haste, sending them letters which expressed the esteem in which he held them.¹²

[*Constantine's letter, now lost, called the council to meet at Ancyra, but a second letter changed the location to Nicaea, a letter that survives only in a Syriac translation:*]

I believe it is obvious to everyone that there is nothing more honorable in my sight than the fear of God. Though it was formerly decided that a council of bishops should meet at Ancyra in Galatia, it seemed to us for many reasons that it would be better for the council to assemble at Nicaea, a city of Bithynia, because the bishops from Italy and the rest of the countries of Europe are coming, because of the excellent temperature of the air, and so that I may be present as a spectator and participant in what will be done. Therefore I affirm for you, my beloved brothers, that you should all promptly assemble at the said city, that is at Nicaea. Let every one of you therefore, as I said before, keep the greater good in mind and hurry to gather without any delay, so that you may be physically present as spectators of those things which will be done.

⁷ Theod. *CH* 1.7.1. The letter addressed to bishop Alexander and to Arius has been preserved in Eus. *LC* 2.64-72 with abbreviated versions in Soc. *CH* 1.7 and *ACH* 2.4. An English translation is at <https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-17/>.

⁸ Soz. *CH* 1.17.

⁹ Ath. *Syn.* 5a1; "This arose because some wanted to keep celebrating the festival more in line with the Jewish custom, while others preferred the way that [other] Christians throughout the world generally celebrated it. This difference, however, did not interrupt their fellowshiping, although their common joy was necessarily lessened." (Soc. *CH* 1.82). Interestingly, none of the sources (all Eastern) mention the purity schisms (Donatists, Novatians, Melitians) as a factor in the summoning of the council.

¹⁰ There are five bishops named Eusebius among the list of subscribers at Nicaea. Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia were the two who played important roles, the former being sympathetic to some Arian ideas and the latter a rabid supporter of them. Here the reference is surely to the bishop of Nicomedia.

¹¹ Ath. *Syn.* 5.

¹² Eus. *LC* 3.6.

May our God protect you, beloved brothers.¹³

It was not just the emperor's command but also his good will which contributed substantially to its successful accomplishment.¹⁴ He pledged his word that the bishops and their companions would be furnished with donkeys, mules, and horses for their journey at public expense. When all those who were able to endure the fatigue of the journey had arrived at Nicaea, he went there himself, both to see the great number of bishops and to fulfill his desire of leading them into unity. At once, he arranged for all their needs to be abundantly provided for.¹⁵

2. The Participants

In the sixth month of the sixteenth year of his reign, ... Constantine assembled the holy council of bishops.¹⁶ Even the place selected for the council, the city of Nicaea in Bithynia which was named after the word meaning *victory*, was appropriate to the occasion. As soon as the imperial order had become well known, everyone hurried eagerly to Nicaea as if competing in a race. They were encouraged to do so by their anticipation of a happy outcome for the conference, their hope for enjoying peace, and their desire to observe the strange new marvel of so admirable an emperor. Now when they had all assembled, it appeared obvious that this proceeding was the work of God, in that men were here brought together who had been so widely separated, not merely in outlook but also personally by their different regions, cities, and ethnicities. Now gathered within the walls of a single city, they formed, as it were, a vast garland of priests, composed of a variety of the loveliest flowers.¹⁷

At this council, the number of bishops exceeded two hundred and fifty, while no one could calculate all their accompanying priests, deacons and many other attendants.¹⁸ Constantine also commanded Arius to come to be judged for his statements and inquiries by the three hundred and eighteen bishops who assembled there.¹⁹

¹³ For a Greek translation of the Syriac see E Schwartz, "Zur Geschichte des Athanasius. VI." [Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse](#) (Göttingen: Luder Horstmann, 1905), p. 289; for the Syriac see F. Schulthess, "Die syrischen Kanones der Synoden von Nicaea bis Chalcedon." [Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse](#) N.F. 10, no. 2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1908) p. 1; English translation from *A New Eusebius*, Ed. J Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1963) no 299, adapted by Glen L. Thompson.

¹⁴ Eus. *LC* 3.6.

¹⁵ Theod. *CH* 1.7.2.

¹⁶ *ACH* 2.37.28.

¹⁷ Eus. *LC* 3.6

¹⁸ Eus. *LC* 3.8.

¹⁹ Ruf. *CH* 10.1. While in his *Life of Constantine* (3.8) Eusebius gives the number of bishops as more than 250, Eustathius of Antioch recalled there being about 270 (Theod. 1.81). Gel. *CH* f.11, Soc. *CH* 1.8.9, and *ACH* 2.5.6 all inflate the number of participants, stating that the number of bishops was "exceeding three hundred while the number of presbyters, deacons, and others who attended them was almost impossible to count;" yet they all then continue to quote about the geographical variety of the bishops from the third book of Eus. *LC*, i.e. from where he gives the smaller number! Rufinus's 318 appears to be echoing Athanasius who used the number in his *Ad Afros* (2) about AD 369. Already a decade earlier (359), Hilary of Poitiers in his *De Synodis* (86) had used this number of the Nicene fathers, musing that he thought it a sacred number "for with such a number Abraham overcame the wicked kings [Gen. 14:14], and was blessed by Him who is a type of the eternal priesthood" (NPNF² 9:27). The number would later receive a spiritual interpretation, because when written in Greek (τμη), it consists of the cross-shaped tau, followed by iota and eta, the first two letters of the name Jesus (so Ambrose, *De Fide* 1, prol. 35). Thus by the end of the century the bishops of Nicaea were being seen as having "rescued" the church from Arius. By then the number 318 was assumed by everyone (Theod. 1.11.1b). However, the sources

So the most eminent of the ministers of God in all the churches which have filled Europe, Africa, and Asia, were brought together. And one house of worship, as it was opened wide by God, contained on the same occasion both Syrians and Cilicians, Phoenicians, Arabs and Palestinians, and in addition to these, Egyptians, Thebans, Libyans, and those who came from Mesopotamia. A Persian bishop was also present at this council, and Scythians were at the assembly as well. Also Pontus, Galatia, Pamphylia, Cappadocia, Asia and Phrygia sent those people who were most distinguished among them. In addition, Thracians and Macedonians, Achaians and Epirotes, and others who lived even further away ... took their seats among the rest.²⁰

The following were the occupants of the apostolic sees who participated in this conference: Macarius of Jerusalem, Eustathius who already presided over the church of Antioch-on-the-Orontes, and Alexander of Alexandria near Lake Mareotis.²¹ Even the highly celebrated Hosius of Spain himself sat in the council with many others, acting, together with the Roman priests Vito and Vincentius, in the place of Bishop Silvester of great Rome,²² who was unable to attend on account of extreme old age.²³ Metrophanes, the bishop of the current capital city [Constantinople], was absent due to his old age, but his priests were present to represent him. One of those priests was Alexander, who became bishop of that city after him.²⁴

Constantine was the only emperor over the centuries to assemble for Christ such a crown for the bond of peace. He dedicated it to his Savior as a thank-offering worthy of God for his victory over his enemies, appointing this gathering among us in imitation of the Apostle's own assembly. For among them, it is said, were gathered "devout men of every nation under heaven; Parthians, Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and proselytes), Cretans and Arabs" [Acts 2:5, 9-11]. That congregation, however, was inferior, because not all of them were ministers of God.²⁵

Some of these ministers of God were notable for their wisdom, some for the strictness of their life and patient endurance [of persecution], and others adorned themselves with all of these distinguished characteristics. Some were venerable because of their advanced age, others were conspicuous for their youth and vigorous minds, and others had only recently entered their ministerial career. For all these the emperor arranged for an abundant supply of daily food to be provided.²⁶ That is Eusebius' account of those who met on this occasion. The emperor, when he had completed the festal celebration of this triumph over Licinius, also came in person to Nicaea.²⁷

Therefore there were also in those times many men who were shining lights in the churches of the Lord, and many of these were at this council.²⁸ Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, as was said before, supported the opinion of Arius, together with Theognis and Maris; of these the former was bishop of

also agree that 17 Arians were present, and ACT then parses the numbers by saying that of the 318 bishops gathered, 300 embraced the sound doctrine and 17 remained in their Arian teaching (2.7.42-43).

²⁰ Eus. *LC* 3.7.a1; this section and the following two from Eusebius are cited verbatim by Gel. *CH* f.11 and Soc. *CH* 1.8.5-12, and in shortened form by *ACH* 2.5.3-8.

²¹ Soz. *CH* 1.17.2.

²² Soc. *CH* 1.13.12, Soz, *CH* 1.17.2 and the lists of subscriptions to the Creed all mention Vito and Vincentius as the Roman priests sent to represent the bishop of Rome, Silvester. Gelasius, followed by *ACH*, includes Hosius as a representative of the Roman bishop. This is repeated when they provide a fuller list the participants (see Gel. *CH* f.14 = *ACH* 2.38.1-14, p. 33 below).

²³ Soz. *CH* 1.17.2 who mistakenly names the Roman bishop as Julius.

²⁴ Gelasius *CH* f.11 = *ACH* 2.5.3-4.

²⁵ Eus. *LC* 3.7.

²⁶ Eus. *LC* 3.9.

²⁷ Soc. *CH* 1.8.12

²⁸ Ruf. *CH* 10.5.

Nicaea, and the latter of Chalcedon in Bithynia. These were powerfully opposed by Athanasius, a deacon of the Alexandrian church, who was highly esteemed by his bishop Alexander. This resulted in jealousy against him, as will be seen later.²⁹ Athanasius was acknowledged by all to have had his share in the choir of those holy men... and was a most excellent helper to him [Alexander].³⁰ Basileus, the bishop of Amaseia, and Melitius, the bishop of Sebastopolis, were present along with the other high priests of God.³¹

During this time many individuals were richly endowed with apostolic gifts, and many, like the holy apostle, bore the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ in their bodies. Jacob, bishop of Antioch, a city of Mygdonia (which is called Nisibis by the Syrians and Assyrians), raised the dead and restored them to life. He also performed many other wonders.... Paul, bishop of Neocaesarea, a fortress situated on the banks of the Euphrates, had suffered from the frantic rage of Licinius. He had been deprived of the use of both hands by the application of a red-hot iron, so that the nerves which allow the muscles to move had been stretched out and deadened.³²

And there was at the synod another man from among the choir of *confessors*³³ by the name of Paphnutius, an Egyptian³⁴, a man of God. He was one of those whose right eyes Maximian the emperor had gouged out and whose left leg he had hamstrung when he committed them to the mines. In him there was so much grace from God that he performed signs in no way inferior to those done of old by the apostles. For by word alone he routed demons, by prayer he healed various ill people, and by petitioning God he granted sight to the blind. He also brought the paralyzed to natural soundness, making their members to function healthily. The emperor held him in great honor and frequently invited him to the palace and would kiss his empty eye socket, so much piety did Constantine have!

Moreover, Spyridon, a certain Cypriot³⁵ who was eminent in the Lord, had placed his experience from youth up as a shepherd in the service of the flock of Christ. He was known for leading a prophetic way of life. In fact, although governing the church, he did not cease tending his own sheep. ... So indeed in those times the church was still adorned by such holy men, many of whom were present at the synod in Nicaea.³⁶

I have heard moreover concerning Eutychian, a devout person who flourished about the same time, who also belonged to the Novatian church, yet was venerated for the performance of similar miracles. I shall unequivocally state my authority for this narrative, nor will I attempt to conceal it, even though I give offense to some parties. It was Auxanon, a very aged priest of the Novatian church, who when quite a youth accompanied Acesius [of Constantinople] to the council at Nicaea and related to me what I have said concerning him. His life extended from that period to the reign of Theodosius the Younger, and when I was a mere youth he recounted to me the acts of Eutychian, extolling the divine grace which was manifested in him..³⁷

In short, the council looked like an assembled army of martyrs. Yet this holy and celebrated gathering was not entirely free of opposition; there were some, though so few they were easy to count, who appeared safe, like dangerous shallows, but who in reality secretly supported the blasphemy of

²⁹ Soc. *CH* 1.8.13.

³⁰ Gel. *CH* f.12.

³¹ Phil. *CH* 1.8.

³² Theod. *CH* 1.7.3-7.

³³ In this period the word *confessor* designated a Christian who had experienced but survived imprisonment, torture, or other severe suffering during the persecutions.

³⁴ Socrates alone says he was a bishop in Upper Thebes (*CH* 1.8.12 and 1.11.1).

³⁵ While the text of Gelasius is somewhat ambiguous, Rufinus (10.5), Socrates (1.12.1) and *ACH* (2.10.1) all state that Spiridon was a bishop, with Socrates specifying his see as the city of Trimitos in Cyprus.

³⁶ Gel. *CH* f.12 = *ACH* 2.9.1-10.1, 11.7.

³⁷ Soc. *CH* 1.13.1-3

Arius.³⁸ Many of the laity who were skilled in the art of reasoning were also present. Each one was eager to advocate the cause of his own party.³⁹

3. Philosophic Debates Preceding the Council

Many of the assembled bishops and the clergy who accompanied them were remarkably skilled in dialectics and trained in the art of rhetoric. They appeared prominent and so attracted the notice of the emperor and the court.⁴⁰ For when the priests of God were convened from across the world by the zeal of the religious emperor, many philosophers and logicians who were held to be very noble heard the news and also gathered.⁴¹ The enemies of truth, having placed their hope in them, as we just said, were fittingly refuted along with their teacher and his blasphemy. So with respect to him and his followers the Holy Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Cursed is everyone who puts his hope in humans and whose heart turns away from the Lord” [Jer. 17:5].⁴² A number of the pagan philosophers desired to take part in the debates. Some wanted to learn more about the doctrine that was being taught. Others, who hated the Christians because of the recent suppression of pagan religions,⁴³ wanted to turn the discussion about doctrine into an argument over words. They sought to introduce dissension among the Christians and make them appear to hold contradictory opinions.⁴⁴

Now a short time before the bishops gathered in one place, the disputants competed in preliminary debates before the crowds.⁴⁵ One of Arius’s mercenary philosophers, admired much more than all the others, fiercely contended for Arius against our bishops for many days. Each day a large audience gathered to hear the war of words. The crowd of those who gathered grew larger as the philosopher poured forth the ungodly blasphemies of Arius against the holy council’s statements.⁴⁶ He said about the Son of God, “He did not always exist,” and, “He is a creature, a product from what did not exist, and of a different essence and substance.” He staunchly supported the abominable doctrine of Arius; his words were like a blizzard as he ranted against the Son of God and derided that company of holy priests, for the enemy of mankind’s salvation was speaking in him and through him. But our bishops, fighting for truth, fearlessly employed proper and fitting arguments for apostolic doctrine against the philosopher. They thus imitated the great prophet and king David, who said, “I was prepared and was not deterred” [Ps. 118:60]; for they destroyed all the philosopher’s crafty premises with God’s Word just as flax is consumed by fire.

Nevertheless, trusting in his devilish skill with words, the philosopher kept shooting his arrows at the truth the bishops proclaimed. He easily addressed all the arguments brought against him very

³⁸ Theod. *CH* 1.7.3-7.

³⁹ Soc. *CH* 1.8.13.

⁴⁰ Soz. *CH* 1.17.7.

⁴¹ Ruf. *CH* 10.3.

⁴² *ACH* 2.12.9

⁴³ Sozomen, writing over a century later, is anachronistic in this statement. There was no suppression of pagan religion until a generation or two after Nicaea. Eusebius (*LC* 2.44-45 and 4.23, 25) does mention Constantine as having instituted laws banning idolatry, divination, and pagan sacrifice. While the emperor clearly showed his pro-Christian bias, most scholars see minimal anti-pagan legislation during his reign and little enforcement of such legislation if it did exist. Cf. e.g., Av. Cameron and S. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*. Clarendon Ancient History Series (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 242-44.

⁴⁴ Soz. *CH* 1.18.1.

⁴⁵ Soc. *CH* 1.8.14.

⁴⁶ The passage indicates that this debate took place before the council’s formal beginning, so it is anachronistic to have the debater attack the council’s statements. He must here mean an attack on the position later adopted by the council.

adequately, so he thought. He vigorously tried to resolve the issues which had been raised. Although he seemed to vindicate himself by these arguments, slipping free like an eel by presenting his superior thoughts, he got caught by his own words and fell with them. Yet he kept arguing against the peaceful council, deluded in his frenzy, in the hope of overcoming the unconquerable power of Christ's invincible Spirit in them.

But God, "who catches the wise in their craftiness" [Job 5:13; 1 Corinthians 3:19], wanted to show that "his rule resides not in word but in power" [1 Corinthians 4:20], so through one of his servants there he not only forcibly silenced the evil demon speaking in the philosopher but also drove it out.⁴⁷ One of the confessors was present with the other bishops who were listening. He was a man of the simplest nature and knowing nothing except "Jesus Christ and him crucified" [1 Cor. 2:2]. When he saw the philosopher insulting us and boasting in his cleverness and skill in disputation, he requested a chance to speak from the audience, for he desired to converse just a little with the philosopher.⁴⁸ The less serious of those who knew the confessor laughed at his expense for what he wished to do; but the more thoughtful were anxious that he would only make a fool of himself by opposing such an eloquent man. Yet his influence was so great and his reputation so high that they could not stop him from engaging in the debate.⁴⁹ Refusing to be deterred, he approached the philosopher and said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ, God the Word, who always exists with the Father, listen to true doctrine, o philosopher!" The philosopher replied, "Speak."⁵⁰

The former then said, "There is one God who created heaven and earth, who also fashioned man out of the earth, who caused both visible and invisible things to subsist by his Word and the Holy Spirit. Recognizing this Word as Son of God, we worship him, believing that he was born of a virgin for our redemption and that through the cross and death he has freed us from eternal condemnation, and that through his resurrection he has prepared eternal life for us. We also expect him to come to be judge of all that we have done. Do you believe this, o philosopher?"⁵¹

And the latter was dumbfounded. It was as if he had never before experienced speeches that involved the raising of objections. As if deaf or dumb, he remained silent, saying to him this only, "These things seem to be so to me also, and I have nothing to add beyond what you have just said." And the old man said to him, "If you believe that these things are so, philosopher, get up and follow me and let us hurry to the church, in which you will receive the sign of this faith." And the philosopher, changing to piety, turned and said to his students and all those who had come together in the audience, "Listen, gentlemen; ever since I took up serious study of discourse, I would set argument against argument, and whatever was proposed I could overturn by my skill in speaking. But when, instead of discourses, a kind of power came forth from the mouth of this debater, my words were unable to fight against that power; for neither is man able to resist God. For this reason, if there are any among you who are able to understand as I myself have come to comprehend, he will believe in Christ, and let him follow this old man through whom God has spoken."⁵²

In this way the philosopher, becoming a Christian, rejoiced at being defeated by the old man.⁵³ He thanked the old man for overcoming him with his argument and he began to teach the same doctrines to others. He encouraged those who still held his former opinions to adopt the view he had now embraced, assuring them on oath that some inexplicable power had compelled him to become a

⁴⁷ *ACH* 2.13.1-6.

⁴⁸ Ruf. *CH* 10.3

⁴⁹ Soz. *CH* 1.18.2-3.

⁵⁰ *ACH* 2.13.9.

⁵¹ Gel. *CH* f.12d = Ruf. *CH* 10.3 = Soz. *CH* 1.18.3b = *ACH* 2.13.9-10.

⁵² Gel. *CH* f.12d = Ruf. *CH* 10.3 = *ACH* 2.13.11-14.

⁵³ Gel. *CH* f.12d.

Christian.⁵⁴ The philosopher was baptized, was accepted into the church of God, and rested and exulted in the mighty works of God, and the council rejoiced.⁵⁵

Before the appointed time arrived, the bishops assembled together and summoned Arius to attend. They began to examine the disputed topics, and each one of them advanced his own opinion. As might have been expected, however, many different questions grew out of the discussion. Some of the bishops spoke against the introduction of novelties contrary to that faith which had been handed down to them from the beginning. Those who had especially adhered to simplicity of doctrine argued that the faith of God ought simply to be accepted. Others, however, contended that ancient opinions ought not to be followed without examination.⁵⁶

4. The Council Opens and Constantine Arrives

This council was convened (as we have discovered from the notation of the date prefixed to the record of the council) during the consulate of Paulinus and Julian, on the 20th of May, in the 636th year from the period of Alexander the Macedonian.⁵⁷

The emperor too, after celebrating the festival of his victory over Licinius, met them in person in Nicaea [June 19].⁵⁸ Now when the appointed day arrived on which the council met to find a final solution to the questions under dispute, each member was present for this in the central building of the palace, which appeared to exceed the rest in magnitude. On each side of the interior the many seats were arranged in order, to be occupied by the invited attendees according to their rank. As soon, then, as the whole assembly sat down in orderly fashion, there arose a general silence in expectation of the emperor's arrival. First three of his immediate family entered one after another. Others then preceded his arrival, not the usual soldiers or guards who would accompany him, but only friends in the faith. And now, all rising at the signal which indicated the emperor's entrance, he himself at last processed through the middle of the assembly, like some heavenly messenger of God, his clothes glittering as if they were rays of light, reflecting the glowing radiance of his purple robe, and adorned with the brilliant splendor of gold and precious stones. Such was the external appearance of his person.

With regard to Constantine's mind, it was evident that he was distinguished by piety and godly fear. This was indicated by his downcast eyes, the blush on his countenance, and his gait. As for the rest of what distinguished him personally, he surpassed all present in the height of his stature and the beauty of his form, as well as in the majestic dignity of his appearance and his invincible strength and vigor. All these united in a graceful demeanor, together with a calmness suitable to his imperial position, proclaimed that the excellence of his mental qualities was beyond all praise. When he had advanced to the upper end of the seats, he remained standing at first. Then, when a low chair made of gold had

⁵⁴ Soz. *CH* 1.18.4.

⁵⁵ *ACH* 2.13.15. *ACH* 2.14-24 has an extremely long debate (about 1/3 of book 2) with the philosopher Phaedo who defended Arius's teaching. See Appendix 6.

⁵⁶ Soz. *CH* 1.17.6. If the opening phrase refers to the time appointed for the council, this section belongs here. It may also refer to the time during the council appointed for voting on the matter.

⁵⁷ Soc. *CH* 1.13.12. May 20, 325. Rather than counting from the death of Alexander, Socrates is actually using the more common Seleucid era designation which counts from 311 BC. The chronology is somewhat confused in the sources. It seems that the bishops began gathering in early May and that is when some of the preliminary philosophical debates took place. An official opening took place on May 20, if Socrates is accurate. The emperor did not arrive until June 19 at which time a second ceremony took place. The creed was adopted on June 19, and the council adjourned officially on August 25.

⁵⁸ Gel. *CH* f.11 = *ACH* 2.6.1.

been set out for him, he still waited until the bishops had signaled to him before he sat down. After him, the entire assembly did the same.⁵⁹

Immediately, before anyone else, the great Eustathius, bishop of Antioch, arose. By the unanimous vote of the bishops, priests, and Christ-loving laity he had been compelled to reluctantly become the successor of the aforementioned Philogonius when the latter passed into the better life. He now crowned the emperor's head with the flowers of panegyric and commended him for how diligently he had paid attention to church affairs.⁶⁰

When he had resumed his seat, silence ensued, and all regarded the emperor with fixed attention. He looked around the assembly calmly and cheerfully, and, having collected his thoughts, in a relaxed and gentle tone spoke the following words.

“It was once my chief desire, dearest friends, to enjoy the spectacle of your united presence. Now that this desire is fulfilled, I feel myself bound to give thanks to God the universal King because, in addition to all his other benefits, he has granted me a blessing higher than all the rest in permitting me to see you not only all assembled together, but all united in a common harmony of sentiment. I pray therefore that no malicious adversary may from this time on interfere to disrupt our happy condition. I pray that, now the impious hostility of the tyrants has been forever removed by the power of God our Savior, that spirit who delights in evil may devise no other means for exposing the divine law to blasphemous slander. For, in my judgment, internal strife within the church of God is far more evil and dangerous than any kind of war or conflict, and these our differences appear to me more grievous than any outward trouble.

Accordingly, when by the will and with the cooperation of God I had been victorious over my enemies, I thought that nothing more remained but to render thanks to him and to join in the joy of those whom he had restored to freedom through me. As soon as I heard that news which I least expected to receive, I mean the news of your dissension, I judged it to be of no secondary importance, but with the earnest desire that I might help find a remedy for this evil, I immediately sent to require your presence. And now I rejoice in beholding your assembly!

But I feel that my desires will be most completely fulfilled only when I can see you all united in one judgment, and with that common spirit of peace and concord prevailing among you all. It is fitting that you who are consecrated to the service of God commend this to others. Delay not, then, dear friend! Delay not, you ministers of God and faithful servants of him who is our common Lord and Savior! Begin from this moment to abandon the causes of that disunion which has existed among you and remove the perplexities of controversy by embracing the principles of peace. For by such conduct you will at the same time be acting both in a manner most pleasing to the supreme God, and you will confer a great favor on me, your fellow servant.⁶¹ For the gospels, the apostolic writings, and the oracles of the ancient prophets clearly teach us what we ought to believe concerning the divine nature. Therefore let all contentious disputation be discarded, and let us seek in the divinely inspired Word the solution of the questions at issue.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Eus. *LC* 3.10.

⁶⁰ Theod. *CH* 1.7.10. Eus. *LC* 3.11 says “The bishop who occupied the chief place in the right division of the assembly” gave this speech. Soz. *CH* 1.19.2 indicates Eusebius himself “rose and delivered a speech in honor of the emperor, giving thanks to God because of him.” It would not have been out of place for there to be two initial panegyric welcome speeches.

⁶¹ Eus. *LC* 3.11-12.

⁶² Theod. *CH* 1.7.12. *ACH* 2.7.1-41 gives a much lengthier speech of Constantine, but it has generally been dismissed as an invention. However, it concludes with the same words preserved by Theodoret. The latter also says that Constantine spoke “these and similar words,” indicating that his own account was shortened.

The wise emperor offered these and similar words to his fathers the priests like a child who loves his father, trying to understand the apostolic beliefs. Most members of the council, won over by his arguments, established concord among themselves and embraced sound doctrine.⁶³

5. Imperial Impartiality

I must mention an amazing deed which the all-victorious emperor performed during the council. When all the bishops gathered, as is the custom, some of the bishops introduced investigations and controversies over quarrels they had with each other. When they filed indictments and brought their charges before the pious emperor, he accepted the indictments, sealed them with his signet ring, and ordered that they be put in safekeeping.⁶⁴

Having observed the shared strife between these bishops, he said that they should all meet on a specific day to sort out these issues. When the appointed day came, the emperor took a seat in the middle, and when everyone had fallen silent, as was fitting for the occasion, he had everyone's indictments brought in. Then he took them and put them on his lap. As he did not want to examine them, he spoke as follows:⁶⁵

“God appointed you priests and gave you power even to judge us, and for that reason we are rightly judged by you. You, however, are not able to be judged by men.⁶⁶ All these accusations will be brought forward in their own time at the great day of judgment, and there they will be judged by the great Judge of all men. It is not right to drag out a hearing like this against each other before me, a man, when the accuser and the accused are both priests. Priests ought to present themselves in a way that never falls under the judgment of others. Imitate, therefore, the divine love and mercy of God, and be reconciled to one another. Withdraw your accusations against each other.⁶⁷

For this reason then, wait for God alone to judge between you and your grievances. Whatever they are, reserve them for that divine examination.⁶⁸ For you stand above all people, according to the Scripture, ‘I said, “You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High”’ [Ps. 82:6].⁶⁹ You, on the other hand, are given to us by God to be like gods, and it is not fitting for a man to judge gods except that one alone about whom it is written, ‘God has taken his place in the congregation of the gods; he gives judgment among the gods [Ps. 82:1].’ Therefore set these things aside and, without any dispute in your hearts, focus yourself on those things which pertain to the faith of God.”⁷⁰

After the emperor had delivered this speech in Latin and it was translated into Greek by an interpreter, he then opened the floor to the leaders of the council to speak.⁷¹ After a reconciliation had been effected, he brought out the indictments and burned them in their presence, at the same time declaring under oath that he had not read a word of them. He said that the crimes of priests ought not to be made known to the public, lest they should cause offense, and lead them to have no fear of sinning.⁷² Such

⁶³ Theod. *CH* 1.7.13 = *ACH* 2.7.1-42.

⁶⁴ Gel. *CH* f.12b = *ACH* 2.8.1.

⁶⁵ Gel. *CH* f.12b = *ACH* 2.8.2.

⁶⁶ Ruf. *CH* 10.2. The parallel accounts make this section confusing, although the subject and general content are common to all. Our reconstruction is tentative.

⁶⁷ Soz. *CH* 1.17.4.

⁶⁸ Ruf. *CH* 10.2.

⁶⁹ Gel. *CH* f.12 = *ACH* 2.8.3.

⁷⁰ Ruf. *CH* 10.2.

⁷¹ Eus. *LC* 3.13.

⁷² Theod. *CH* 1.11.4.

was the emperor's reverence for the priests of God. All who think clearly should admire this reverence.⁷³ The emperor met with the bishops for many days and even years, discussing matters of faith with them and gathering their various opinions.⁷⁴

6. The Council's Debates and the Creed

The council of bishops spent many days considering the question of faith. The council met each day, and did not dare to make any easy or thoughtless decisions.⁷⁵ There were some among its members, as we have said several times, who agreed with the monstrous doctrine of Arius and opposed the majority of holy bishops, the champions of the truth.⁷⁶ There were seventeen of them: Eusebius of Nicomedia, ... Theognis of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Theodore of Heraclea in Thrace, Menophantus of Ephesus, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, Narcissus of Neronias (which is now called Irenopolis) in Cilicia Secunda, Theonas of Marmarica, Secundus of Ptolemais in Egypt, and with them eight others who had mixed themselves in with that company of three hundred holy men, as if they were actually orthodox yet opposing the apostolic doctrine by advocating for Arius.⁷⁷ However, the supporters of Arius had barely begun to speak, when they were condemned, and one differed from another. Then, embarrassed on account of their heresy, they remained silent, and by their silence confessed the disgrace which came upon their false doctrine. In response to this, the other bishops rejected their invented terms. In opposition to them, they set forth the sound and ecclesiastical faith.⁷⁸ The bishops held long consultations, and after summoning Arius before them they made an accurate test of his propositions. They were intently on their guard not to come to a vote on either side.⁷⁹

Our excellent, holy fathers, however, protecting themselves with the weapon of truth, boldly preached the clear, blameless faith. There were also many confessors among them who resisted those who willingly adopted the vile doctrine of Arius.⁸⁰

Although each party put forth many arguments and, at the beginning, the debate grew very violent, the emperor listened to everything with patient attention, quietly and attentively considering whatever was put forth. He partially supported the statements which were made on either side, and gradually softened the severity of those who belligerently opposed each other, placating each side with his mildness and persuasiveness. He addressed them in the Greek language (he was not unacquainted with it). He was at once courteous and endearing, persuading some, winning over others with a plea, and applauding those who spoke well, until at length he reduced them all to oneness of mind and

⁷³ Gel. *CH* f.12b = *AHC* 2.8.4. *AHC* 2.8.5-7 records similar accusations brought by laymen to Constantine which he also burned.

⁷⁴ Gel. *CH* f.12c = *AHC* 2.8.8. Because of the "even years", this may refer to Constantine's previous contacts with various bishops, not his actions during the council.

⁷⁵ Ruf. *CH* 10.2.

⁷⁶ Gel. *CH* f.12c = *AHC* 2.8.8.

⁷⁷ *ACH* 2.7.43. After mentioning Arius himself, Jerome (*Luc* 20) lists among the heretics "Euzoius the deacon, who succeeded Eudoxius as bishop of Antioch, and Achillas, the reader. These three who were clerics of the Church of Alexandria were the originators of the heresy."

⁷⁸ Ath. *Dec.* 3. See Appendix 2 which contains Ath. *Decr.* 19-20, Athanasius's later summary and commentary on the debate about the nature of the Son. Appendix 3 has a shorter account found in *ACH* 2.11.12-12.7 that includes a speech of Hosius of Cordoba.

⁷⁹ Soz. *CH* 1.17.6. If the opening phrase refers to the time appointed for the council, this section belongs here. It may also refer to the time during the council appointed for voting on the matter.

⁸⁰ Gel. *CH* f.12c = *ACH* 2.8.8.

opinion on all the disputed points, so that they all agreed to hold the same faith, and to celebrate the festival of salvation on the same day.⁸¹

The Syrians submitted,⁸² and the fathers pronounced the Arian heresy to be the forerunner of Antichrist, and drew up a suitable formula against it.⁸³ So after the discussion had reached broad agreement, it seemed to everyone that the word *homoousios* must be enshrined as a definition in the church's confession of faith, that is, that the Son should be confessed as also of the same being as the Father.⁸⁴ This was proclaimed most strongly by all consenting to it.⁸⁵ Eusebius [of Caesarea] clearly testifies that the aforesaid term *homoousios* is not a new one, nor the invention of the fathers assembled at the council, but that, from the very first it has been handed down from father to son. He states that all those then assembled unanimously received the creed then published.⁸⁶ All the holy bishops assembled at Nicaea affirmed this faith. The assembled holy priests and confessors, the praiseworthy, God-loving emperor, and the whole multitude of believers who were gathered there gladly accepted the confession of faith.⁸⁷

All the bishops unanimously summarized the content of the orthodox faith briefly to accommodate the simplicity of the multitude of faithful people. They formulated the symbol of the catholic faith in writing as follows:

The exposition of the catholic apostolic faith, presented by the council of Nicaea under the God-loving Emperor Constantine, during the consulate of the illustrious men Paulinus and Julian, in the year 636 after Alexander [the Great], on the 19th of June, 13 days before the Kalends of July, in Nicaea, capital of Bithynia:⁸⁸

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is of the substance of the Father; God from God and Light from Light; true God from true God; begotten, not made, *homoousios* with the Father; by whom all things were made, both those in heaven and on earth; who for the sake of us men, and on account of our salvation, descended, became incarnate, and was made man; suffered, arose again the third day, and ascended into the heavens and will come again to judge the living and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit. The holy catholic and apostolic church anathematizes those who say, ‘There was a time when he was not,’ and ‘He was not before he was begotten’ and ‘He was made from that which did not exist,’ and those who assert that he is of a different substance or essence than the Father, or that the Son of God was created, or is susceptible to change.”⁸⁹

⁸¹ Eus. *LC* 3.13b. Here is a good example of Eusebius's hyperbolic and hagiographical descriptions of Constantine and his role at the council.

⁸² Although Arius was himself from Egypt, many of his supporters were from northern Palestine and Syria.

⁸³ Ath. *Syn.* 5.

⁸⁴ Gel. *CH* f.12f = *ACH* 2.25.3.

⁸⁵ Ruf. *CH* 10.5.

⁸⁶ Theod. *CH* 1.13. Eusebius of Caesarea mentions the previous use of *homoousios* towards the end of his letter to his home church (see part 7).

⁸⁷ *ACH* 2.25.4.

⁸⁸ *ACH* 2.26.4.

⁸⁹ Soc. *CH* 1.8.29-30 = Ruf. *CH* 10.6 = Ath. *Decr.* 37b = *ACH* 2.27.2-6. Interestingly, Sozomen (*CH* 1.20.3) opts not to print the text of the Creed saying that “some pious friends, who understood such matters, recommended that these truths ought to be spoken of and heard by the initiated and their initiators only; I agreed with their advice. It is not unlikely that some of the uninitiated may read this book. While I have concealed the portion of material that I ought to keep silent about, I have not altogether left the reader ignorant of the opinions held by the council.” Many in the early church limited access to Holy Scripture and other catechetical documents as they did not want them to be misused by the ignorant, used by opponents, or scorned by pagans.

This creed was recognized and affirmed by the three hundred and eighteen [bishops]; and because they were, as Eusebius says, unanimous in expression and sentiment, they signed it.⁹⁰ Those points also which were agreed to by all of them were committed to writing and received the signature of each member.⁹¹

7. Eusebius of Caesarea's Creed and Letter

At this time, while the council was still in session, Eusebius, surnamed Pamphilus, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, after listening attentively for a short time and carefully considering whether he ought to receive this definition of the faith, finally consented to it and subscribed to it with all the rest. He also sent to the people under his oversight [in Caesarea] a copy of the Creed, with an explanation of the word *homoousios*, so that no one would suspect his motives on account of his previous hesitation. Here is what was written by Eusebius in his own words:⁹²

Beloved, since rumors usually travel faster than accurate information, you have probably learned from other sources what happened concerning the church's faith at the general⁹³ council assembled at Nicaea. As we do not want the facts to be misrepresented by such reports, we have been obliged to transmit to you, first, the formula of faith which we ourselves [i.e. Eusebius] presented, and next, a second one which the assembled fathers put forth with some additions to our words. Our own letter, which was read in the presence of our most pious emperor and declared to be good and free from objectionable statements, reads as follows:

We now repeat for you our faith, which we have received from the bishops who preceded us when we were first instructed and received the washing [of baptism], which we have also come to know from the divine Scriptures; as we believed and taught it in the priesthood, and in the episcopate itself, and as we also believe at the present time:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Only-begotten Son, first-born of every creature, begotten from the Father before all the ages, by whom also all things were made; who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And we believe also in one Holy Spirit.

“We believe each of these to be and to exist—the Father truly Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Spirit truly Holy Spirit—as also our Lord said when he sent forth his disciples to preach, ‘Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

This seems an odd decision, however, as Sozomen is writing 115 years after the council, by which time the Creed had been expanded by the council of 381 and read into the minutes of the council of 431.

⁹⁰ Soc. *CH* 1.8.31. Numerous manuscripts (in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic and Armenian!) have preserved lists of the signatories at Nicaea. See Appendix 4. The lists have c. 225-230 bishops listed. The number 318 became the “official” tradition soon afterwards, perhaps based on the 318 men in Gen. 14:14 whom Abraham took to rescue Lot from captivity, a story that may have been applied metaphorically to the council's rescue of the church from Arianism.

⁹¹ Eus. *LC* 3.13. For the list of subscriptions, see Appendix 4.

⁹² Soc. *CH* 1.8.34.

⁹³ The sources repeatedly describe the Nicene meeting as the “great” (μεγάλη) council. While this certainly refers to the large number of participants, it also seems to be emphasizing that this was not a local or provincial council, but one that tried to include participants from the entire church. Therefore we have consistently translated this as “general” council.

the Holy Spirit' [Matt. 28:19]. Concerning which things, we confidently affirm that this is what we maintain, how we think, and what we have held up to present, and that we will maintain this faith unto death, anathematizing every ungodly heresy. We testify that we have ever thought these things from our hearts and souls, from earliest memory, and now think and confess the truth before God Almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ. We are able to provide evidence that will assure you that even in times past we have believed and preached this same faith."

There was nothing to contradict in this statement of faith which we put forward. In fact, our most pious emperor, before anyone else, testified that it was comprised of most orthodox statements. He even confessed that such were his own sentiments, and he advised all present to agree to it, and to subscribe and agree with its articles, with the insertion of the single word *homoousios*. He [Constantine] gave his interpretation of this word, saying that "the Son was not *homoousios* according to what we experience in our bodies, as if the Son had come to be by a dividing or breaking off from the Father. For his nature could not be subjected to any bodily experiences, as it does not consist of matter, but exists in a spiritual realm and has no body. Therefore such things must be thought of in divine, unspeakable concepts." Such were the theological remarks of our most wise and most pious emperor. But they [the council] were intent on adding the word *homoousios* and so drew up the following statement:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Only-begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *homoousios* with the Father, by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead; and [we believe] in the Holy Spirit. But those who say, "Once he did not exist," and "He did not exist before he was begotten," and "He came to be from nothing," or those who pretend that the Son of God is "of another subsistence or being," or "created," or "alterable," or "changeable," these the catholic church anathematizes.

As this formula was being debated, we made sure to inquire in what sense they introduced "from the essence of the Father," and "*homoousios* with the Father." Through intense questioning and explaining, the meaning of the words was examined closely. They explained that the phrase "of the same being as" indicated that the Son is truly from the Father but not a part of him. We felt we could agree to this word when used in this sense, to teach, as it did, that the Son was from the Father but not a part of his essence. On this account we agreed to the sense ourselves, without even denying the term *homoousios* since maintaining peace was our goal, provided we did not depart from the orthodox understanding.

In the same way we also accepted the phrase "begotten, not made," since the council asserted that "made" was a term used to designate other creatures which came to be through the Son, to whom the Son had no similarity. So according to their reasoning, he was not something made that resembled the things which came to exist through him, but was of an essence which is too high to be put on the same level as anything which was made. The divine sayings teach us that his essence was begotten from the Father, and that the mode of his being begotten is inexpressible and unable to be conceived by any nature which has had a beginning of its existence.

So when we considered it, we found that there are grounds for saying that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father; not like human bodies, nor like mortal beings, for he is not "of the same being as" by dividing his essence, or by cutting something off, or by having something done to him, or

being altered, or by changing the Father's essence and power (since the Father's nature has no beginning to its existence, and therefore none of those descriptions apply to it). "*Homoousios* with the Father" suggests that the Son of God bears no resemblance to the creatures who came into being, but that he is in every way similar to his Father alone who begat him, and that he is not of any other subsistence and essence, but from the Father.

It also seemed good for us to agree to this term, since we were aware that even among the ancients, some learned and eminent bishops and writers have used the term *homoousios* in their theological teaching concerning the Father and Son.

So much then for the Creed which was composed at the council. All of us agreed to it, not without some questioning, but according to a specific sense brought up in the presence of the most pious emperor himself and qualified by the considerations mentioned above. As far as the condemnation they attached to the end of the Creed, it did not cause us pain because it forbid the use of words not found in Scripture, from which almost all the confusion and disorder in the church have come. Since no divinely inspired Scripture has used the phrases, "out of nothing," and "once he was not," and the rest which follow, there appeared no ground for using or teaching them. We think that this was a good decision, since it has never been our custom to use these terms.⁹⁴

Additionally, it did not seem out of place to condemn the statement "Before he was begotten he did not exist," because everyone confesses that the Son of God existed before he was begotten according to the flesh. At this point in the discussion, our most pious emperor maintained that the Son existed before all ages even according to his divinely inspired begetting, since even before the act of begetting was performed, in potentiality he was with the Father, even before he was begotten by him, since the Father is always Father, just as he is always King and always Savior; he has the potentiality to be all things, and remains exactly the same forever.⁹⁵

We deemed it necessary for us, beloved, to inform you of the care which has characterized both our examination of and unanimity in these things, that on justifiable grounds we resisted to the last moment the introduction of certain objectionable expressions as long as these were not acceptable. We received them without dispute, when, on mature deliberation as we examined the sense of the words, they appeared to agree with what we had originally proposed as a sound confession of faith.⁹⁶

Such was the letter addressed by Eusebius Pamphilus to the Christians at Caesarea in Palestine.⁹⁷

8. Condemnations for Those Who did not Subscribe

The emperor deferred to this ruling. He regarded the unanimity of the conference to be a divine approval and he declared that anyone who rebelled against it would be immediately sent into banishment as guilty of trying to overthrow the divine definitions.⁹⁸ And everyone confirmed it wholeheartedly, except for some seventeen in number⁹⁹ who apostatized together with Arius in saying

⁹⁴ Soc. *CH* 1.8.35-53 = Theod. *CH* 1.12.1-15 = Gel. f.13c = *ACH* 2.35.1-16 = Ath. *Dec.* 33.1-15.

⁹⁵ Gel. f.13c = Theod. *CH* 1.12.16-17 = *ACH* 2.35.16-17 = Ath. *Dec.* 33.16. For some reason Socrates omits this paragraph.

⁹⁶ Soc. *CH* 1.8.54 = Theod. *CH* 1.12.18 = Gel. f.13c = *ACH* 2.35.18 = Ath. *Dec.* 33.17.

⁹⁷ Soc. *CH* 1.8.55.

⁹⁸ Soz. *CH* 1.20.2.

⁹⁹For the names, see above page 16.

that the Son had been created externally by God from some non-existent substances and that he was not born from the divinity itself.¹⁰⁰ Yet eleven of these feared that the God-loving emperor and the multitude of bishops of the council would banish them. So they subscribed with their hand to the *homoousios*, hypocritically and not out of conviction. The leader of this deceit was Eusebius of Nicomedia, who showed support for both opinions until his death, just as Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius Pamphili [of Caesarea], Athanasius the Great, and all writers who report the events of the council and describe that in his hypocrisy he seemed to favor our opinion but actually fought for the opponents' faction.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, at the urging of Constantine's sister Constantina,¹⁰² they agreed to the synodical resolutions.¹⁰³ They subscribed, and after this change of mind they kept quiet and retired.¹⁰⁴

Only five would not accept the Creed, objecting to the term *homoousios*: these were Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Theonas of Marmarica, and Secundus of Ptolemaïs. "For," they said, "something that is *homoousios* comes from something else either by partition, derivation or germination (by germination, as a shoot from roots; by derivation as children from their parents; by division, as two or three pieces of gold from a mass), and the Son is from the Father by none of these modes." Therefore, they declared themselves unable to assent to this creed. Those, then, who scoffed at the term *homoousios* would also not subscribe to the deposition of Arius.

The council excommunicated Arius and his adherents and prohibited his entering Alexandria. The words in which his opinions were couched were likewise condemned, and also a work he had written on the subject and entitled *Thalia*.¹⁰⁵ The emperor punished Arius with exile and dispatched edicts to the bishops and people of every country, denouncing him and his adherents as ungodly and commanding that their books should be destroyed, in order that no remembrance of him or of the doctrine which he had taught might remain. Whoever was found hiding his writings and who did not burn them immediately on the accusation would undergo the penalty of death and suffer capital punishment. The emperor wrote letters to every city against Arius and those who had received his doctrines. He further commanded Eusebius [of Nicomedia] and Theognis to leave the cities in which they were bishops. He addressed himself in particular to the church of Nicomedia, urging it to adhere to the faith which had been set forth by the council, to elect orthodox bishops, to obey them, and to let the past fall into oblivion. He threatened with punishment those who should venture to speak well of the exiled bishops or to adopt their sentiments. In these and in other letters, he made clear his resentment against Eusebius, because he had previously adopted the opinions of the tyrant and had engaged in his plots. In accord with the imperial edicts, Eusebius and Theognis were expelled from the churches which they held, and Amphion received that of Nicomedia, and Chrestus that of Nicaea.¹⁰⁶ Eusebius and Theognis, however, a short time after their banishment, delivered a written declaration that they had changed their opinion and agreed with the faith about the Son's *homoousios* with the Father.¹⁰⁷ Once again resorting to their usual tricks, Eusebius and Theognis found in the emperor's kindness an opportunity for deception, so they kept trying to reverse the decision and regain their former power.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Gel. *CH* f.12f = *ACH* 2.25.5.

¹⁰¹ *ACH* 2.27.12-13.

¹⁰² More accurately *Constantia*; Philostorgius misspells it as Constantina; this was the name of the daughter of Constantine.

¹⁰³ Phil. *CH* 1.9.

¹⁰⁴ Ath. *Decr.* 18.1.

¹⁰⁵ Soz. *CH* 1.21.3.

¹⁰⁶ Soz. *CH* 1.21.4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Soc. *CH* 1.8.31-33.

¹⁰⁸ *ACH* 2.33.6.

9. Other Work of the Council: The Canons

There was not only unity in the confession of faith, but also a general agreement as to the time for the celebration of the feast of salvation [i.e. Easter].¹⁰⁹ For before this time another very dangerous disorder had existed and long afflicted the church, i.e. the difference in respect to the festival of Easter. For while one party asserted that they ought to adhere to the Jewish custom, the other affirmed that they should observe the exact date of the event, without following the authority of those who were in error and strangers to gospel grace [i.e. the Jews]. Accordingly, the people in different areas were divided over this, and the sacred observances of religion were confused for a long period. It went so far that the diversity of opinion concerning the time for celebrating one and the same festival caused the greatest disagreement between those who kept it. Some troubled themselves with fasting and austerities, while others devoted their time to festive relaxation. No one seemed to be capable of devising a remedy for this bad situation, for the two sides of the controversy continued to be equally balanced. Healing these differences was an easy task to God Almighty alone, and Constantine appeared to be the only one on earth capable of being his agent in achieving this. For as soon as he was made acquainted with the facts which I have described and perceived that his letter to the Alexandrian Christians had failed to produce its due effect, he at once put his mind to work and declared that he must forcefully prosecute this war also against the secret adversary who was disturbing the peace of the church.¹¹⁰

The emperor's diligence induces me to mention another circumstance that expresses his mind and serves to show how much he desired peace. For aiming at ecclesiastical harmony, he summoned to the council Acesius also, a bishop of the sect of Novatians. Now, when the declaration of faith had been written out and subscribed by the council, the emperor asked Acesius whether he would also agree to this creed and to the settlement concerning the day on which Easter should be observed. He replied, "The council has determined nothing new, my prince: for now, and even from the beginning, yes from the times of the apostles, I received by tradition the definition of the faith and the time of the celebration of Easter."

Thereupon the emperor further asked him, "Why then are you separating yourself from fellowship with the rest of the church?" He then related what had taken place during the persecution under Decius, and referred to the rigidity of that harsh canon which declares that it is not right for people who after baptism have committed a sin which the sacred Scriptures call "a sin unto death" to be considered worthy of participation in the sacraments; that they should indeed be exhorted to repentance, but were not to expect remission from the priest, but from God, who is able and has authority to forgive sins. When Acesius had said this, the emperor replied to him, "Take a ladder, Acesius, and climb alone into heaven." Neither Eusebius Pamphilus nor any other has ever mentioned these things, but I heard them from a very old man who was in no way by no means inclined to lies and who simply stated in the course of his account what had taken place in the council.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Soc. *CH* 1.8.23.

¹¹⁰ Eus. *LC* 3.5

¹¹¹ Soc. *CH* 1.10.1-5. Socrates states that he did not find this story in Eusebius or other accounts of the council, but somewhat shorter forms appear in Soz. *CH* 1.22.1-3 and *ACH* 2.30.1-5.

Zealous of reforming the life of those who were involved with the work of the church, the council enacted laws which were called ‘canons.’¹¹² They composed twenty canons for the church at that same council of Nicaea, which I also saw fit to include in this book¹¹³:

1. On those who made themselves eunuchs or were made so by others: If anyone has been castrated either surgically due to illness or by barbarians¹¹⁴, he is allowed to remain among the clergy. But if anyone on the list of clergy has castrated himself when in perfect health, it is good for him to leave the ministry. From now on, no such person should be elevated to the clergy. But since this applies only to those who willfully castrate themselves, if anyone has been made a eunuch by barbarians or by his master, and is otherwise fit for office, church law allows him to enter the clergy.

2. On those ordained immediately after baptism: It has happened that men recently converted to the faith from heathenism, after a short period of instruction, have been immediately brought to the spiritual bath [baptism] and then promoted to the priesthood or even a bishopric as soon as they have been baptized. Whether this has been done because of a lack of ministers or simply from impatience, it is contrary to church law. Therefore we have determined that this should not be done in the future. A catechumen needs more time for a longer trial after baptism. The apostolic saying is clear, “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become blinded and fall into judgment and the Devil’s snare” [1 Tim 3:6]. If as time goes on the man is discovered to have committed some sensual sin and is convicted by two or three witnesses, he must leave the clergy. Anyone who violates these enactments will imperil his own position among the clergy, as a person who presumes to disobey the general council.

3. On women living with clergy: The general council has stringently forbidden any bishop, priest, deacon, or any of the clergy to have a woman living with him, except a mother, sister, aunt, or some such person who is beyond all suspicion.

4. On the number of bishops required for a bishop’s ordination: The most proper thing is for a bishop to be consecrated by all the bishops in his particular province. If this proves impossible, either because there is not enough time or the distance to be traveled is too great, at least three bishops should meet together, and the absent bishops communicate their approval in writing. Only then should the consecration take place. But in every province the ratification of the consecration should be left to the metropolitan bishop.

5. That the excommunicated are not to be received by others, and on twice-a-year councils: As for the clergy and laity in the various provinces who have been excommunicated, the bishops should observe the provision of the canon which states that someone excommunicated by one bishop is not to be readmitted by another. Nevertheless, he should investigate to see if the excommunication has come about from excessive strictness, contentiousness, or any other ungracious attitude on the part of the excommunicating bishop.

So that these matters may be duly investigated, we decree that in every province councils shall be held twice a year, so that when all the bishops of the province are assembled together, all such questions

¹¹² Soz. *CH* 1.23.1. The canons are found in full form in *ACH* 2.32.1-20 and in abbreviated form in Ruf. *CH* 10.6. In addition they are found in numerous other Greek and Latin manuscripts of the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), etc. We give a translation from the standard critical edition of the conciliar canons by J. Alberigo et al., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (Basel: Herder, 1962), 5-15. See also the study of the various Latin translations by C.H. Turner, ed. *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*. Tome 1. Fascicle 1, Part 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), pp. 103-280.

¹¹³ *ACH* 2.31.10.

¹¹⁴ *Barbarian* was the term used of peoples who did not speak Greek or Latin, here probably referring to the Gothic and Germanic tribes making incursions into Roman territory.

may be thoroughly examined by them. In this way, everyone can mutually agree that those who have offended their bishop have been excommunicated justly, unless it seems proper to the general assembly of bishops to pronounce a milder sentence on them. The first of these councils should be held before Lent, (that the pure gift may be offered to God after all bitterness has been put away), and the second in the autumn.

6. On cities of the first rank, and those consecrated bishop without the consent of the metropolitan: Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis continue to be practiced, i.e., that the bishop of Alexandria has jurisdiction over them all, since a similar arrangement is the custom for the bishop of Rome. Likewise let the churches in Antioch and the other provinces retain their privileges. It should be understood everywhere that if anyone is consecrated as bishop without the consent of the metropolitan bishop, this general council has declared he should not remain a bishop. Also, if two or three bishops are inclined to be contentious and oppose a consecration that was duly approved by the majority in accord with church law, then let the choice of the majority prevail.

7. On the bishop of Aelia: Since custom and ancient tradition have directed that the bishop of Jerusalem should be honored, let him, after giving due dignity to the metropolitan, have the second place of honor.¹¹⁵

8. On those who call themselves *Cathars*: As for the so-called *Cathars*,¹¹⁶ if they return to the catholic and apostolic church, the general and holy council decrees that any of them who are ordained may remain among the clergy. But it will first be necessary for them to acknowledge in writing that they will observe and follow the teachings of the catholic and apostolic church. In particular they must commune with those who have been married twice, and with those who have lapsed in persecution but have had a period of penance arranged for them and a date of restoration determined, so that in all things they will follow the teachings of the catholic church. In any region where all the clergy are of this type, whether in villages or in cities, they should maintain their current rank. But if they are reinstated in the catholic church in an area where there is already a catholic bishop or priest, it is obvious that the existing bishop of the church must continue to hold the rank of bishop, and the one who was named bishop by the so-called *Cathars* must take the rank of priest (unless the bishop agrees to allow him to share in the honor of the title of bishop). Or, if this does not prove satisfactory, then the bishop may provide for him a place as country bishop (*chorepiscopus*) or priest. This way he can remain a member of the clergy without there being two bishops in the city.

9. On those ordained as priests without proper examination: If any priests have been promoted without a proper examination, or if during their examination they confessed crimes but were nevertheless ordained notwithstanding their confession, church law does not allow for such things, for the catholic church requires that which is blameless.

10. On those who denied the faith in persecution yet were appointed clergy: If some have lapsed, but then have been ordained through the ignorance of the bishops who ordained them (or even with

¹¹⁵ Caesarea (Maritima), the bishopric where Eusebius held office, was the metropolitan diocese in Palestine. Jerusalem, although so famous in biblical history, had never recovered in size from its destruction by the Romans, and so its importance was only honorary, as this canon indicates.

¹¹⁶ *Cathari*, “the pure ones”, was a name used by the sect that developed from the schism in the Roman church by Novatian in 251. Novatian disagreed with allowing lapsed Christians back into the fellowship of the church. His followers maintained separate congregations in Rome and elsewhere for several centuries. Their strict teachings also did not allow for a second marriage. The Novatian schism which started at Rome was similar to the Donatist schism in North Africa and the Melitian schism in Egypt. The latter was discussed at length at the Council of Nicaea (see section 10 below), but since there were so few western bishops present at the council, it is puzzling that the only canon to deal with these schisms mentions the Novatian “Cathars”.

their previous knowledge), it must not influence the decision of the church. When such men are discovered, they must be deposed.

11. On those among the laity who denied the faith without compulsion: As for those who transgressed without being compelled to do so—without the seizure of their property, without danger, or the like, such as happened during the tyranny of Licinius—the council declares that they should be dealt with mercifully, though they in no way deserve it. If they truly repent, they will spend three years among the hearers, seven years as prostrators, and then for an additional two years they should join with the congregation in prayers, but without receiving the eucharist.

12. On those who renounced the world and then returned to it: As for those who were called by grace and at first enthusiastically threw away their military uniforms, but then later returned like dogs to their own vomit (so that some regained their military positions through bribes and gifts), let these spend three years as hearers and ten years as prostrators. But in all such cases it is necessary to carefully examine their intentions and their repentance. If they give evidence of their conversions by their actions (and not mere pretense), with fear, tears, perseverance, and good works, then they may properly join the assembly in prayers once they have fulfilled their appointed time as hearers. Beyond that, the bishop may make an even more lenient (*philanthropion*) decision concerning them. But those must fulfill the entire time period who take the matter with indifference and who think the prescribed form of entering the church is sufficient for their readmission.

13. On those who seek the sacrament when dying: As for those who are dying, the ancient church law is still to be maintained, namely that any man who is at the point of death must not be deprived of the most indispensable final eucharist. But if anyone is restored to health again after receiving communion when his death was thought imminent, let him remain among those who commune in prayers only. But in general, and in the case of any dying person, let the bishop, after making examination, give the eucharist to whoever asks to receive it.

14. On lapsed catechumens: Concerning catechumens who have lapsed, the holy and general council has decreed that, after they have passed just three years as hearers, they shall again pray with the catechumens.

15. On clergy who move from one city to another: Because of the great disturbances and disagreements that have occurred of late, we decree that the custom which prevails in certain places must be totally done away with: neither bishop, priest, nor deacon shall move from city to city. And if anyone, after this decree of the holy council, shall attempt such a thing or continue in any such course of action, his actions shall be utterly void and he must return to the church where he was consecrated bishop or priest.

16. Of those clergy who do not remain in the churches to which they were assigned: Churches ought not to receive priests, deacons, or other clergy who without the fear of God and in disregard for church law recklessly abandon their own churches. Such men should be encouraged by all available means to re-join their own parishes. If they will not return, they must be excommunicated. The ordination will be void if anyone dares to secretly ordain a man who belongs to another church without the consent of his bishop whose jurisdiction the latter has left, even if he had previously been enrolled on the list of clergy.

17. On clergy lending money with interest: Many clergymen, being covetousness and desirous for gain, have forgotten the divine Scripture which says, “He does not lend to them at interest” (Ezek. 18:8), and when lending money ask for one percent of the total as monthly interest. The holy and general council thinks it just that if, after this decree, anyone is found to receive usury, secretly or otherwise, such as by demanding repayment of 150% [of the original amount], or by using any other

scheme at all for the sake of dirty profit, he shall be deposed from the clergy and his name stricken from the list.

18. That deacons not give the eucharist to bishops nor be seated ahead of them: It has come to the knowledge of the holy and general council that in some districts and cities, deacons are administering the eucharist to the priests, even though neither church law nor custom permits that those who have no right to offer it should give the body of Christ to those who can offer it. It has also become known to us that certain deacons now handle the eucharist even before the bishops. Let all such practices be abolished, and let the deacons remain within their own boundaries, knowing that they are the servants of the bishop and at a lower rank than the priests. Let them receive the eucharist according to their rank, after the priests, and let either the bishop or the priest administer it to them. Furthermore, do not let the deacons sit among the priests, for that is contrary to canon and order. And if, after this decree, anyone shall refuse to obey, let him be deposed from the diaconate.

19. On the followers of Paul of Samosata: Concerning the followers of Paul of Samosata who have sought refuge in the catholic church, it has been decreed that they must by all means be rebaptized. If any of them in past time were on the list of their clergy and are found blameless and without reproach, let them be rebaptized and ordained by the bishop of the catholic church. But if the examination should show that they are unfit, they ought to be deposed. Similar treatment should be given in the case of their deaconesses, and generally in the case of those who have been enrolled among their clergy. We mean by *deaconesses* those who have assumed the habit but who, since they have not had hands laid upon them, are to be numbered only among the laity.

20. On not kneeling on the Lord's Day and the days of Pentecost: There are certain persons who kneel for prayer on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost.¹¹⁷ But so that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere, it seems good to the holy council that prayers should be made to God while standing during those times.

The same holy assembly wrote these twenty laws regulating church government in the presence of the God-loving, praiseworthy Emperor Constantine.¹¹⁸

10. The Council Deals with the Melitians and Other Matters.

After an investigation had been made into the conduct of Melitius when in Egypt, the council sentenced him to reside in Lycus and to remain a bishop in name only, and prohibited him from ordaining any one either in a city or a village. This ruling permitted those who had previously been ordained by him to remain in communion and in their ministry but were to be viewed as secondary in regard to the honor shown to the clergy in church and parish. When a position became vacant by death, they were allowed to succeed to it, if by the vote of the laity they were deemed worthy. In such a case, however, they were to be ordained by the bishop of the church of Alexandria, for they were prohibited from exercising any power or influence in elections. This regulation appeared just to the council, for Melitius and his followers had demonstrated great impulsiveness and boldness in administering ordination. This ruling also nullified all types of ordinations which differed from those of Peter [the former bishop of Alexandria]. While he was leading the Alexandrian church, he fled because of the persecution then raging, but afterward suffered martyrdom.¹¹⁹ The council jointly wrote

¹¹⁷ The Lord's Day is Sunday. The days of Pentecost are the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost.

¹¹⁸ *ACH* 2.32.21.

¹¹⁹ Soz. *CH* 1.24.1-3.

to the church of Alexandria, describing what they had decided about Melitius's new-fangled practices.¹²⁰

To the church of Alexandria, by God's grace holy and great, and to the dear brothers in Egypt, the Pentapolis, Libya, and everywhere under heaven, both the orthodox clergy and laity, from the bishops gathered at Nicaea, forming the holy general council. Greeting in the Lord.

After God's grace and our God-loving Emperor Constantine summoned us from various provinces and cities, the holy general council which gathered at Nicaea handled questions about the church's faith. Therefore we thought it necessary to send you letters so that you would know what questions we raised and reviewed and what we decided and confirmed.

First, we reviewed the ungodliness and lawlessness of Arius and his followers before our God-loving Emperor Constantine. We unanimously decided to anathematize Arius, his ungodly opinion, and the blasphemous words and thoughts with which he blasphemed the Son of God by saying that he is from things which did not exist, that he did not exist before he was begotten, that he did not always exist, and that the Son of God is capable of evil or good by his own free will, and by calling him a creature and something made. All this the holy council anathematized, not even bothering to listen to his ungodly opinion, his insane talk, and his blasphemous words. You have certainly heard or will hear about what happened, lest we seem to trample a man who has already received the punishment he deserves for his sin. His ungodliness was so strong that it even destroyed Theonas of Marmarica and Secundus of Ptolemais, for the outcome for these two and the others was the same.

Moreover, although God's grace freed Egypt from those blasphemous heretics who dared to sow disagreement and division among a people who had always lived in peace, the rash actions of Melitius and of those he ordained were still unresolved. We are reporting to you what the council decided on this matter as well, dear brothers. Although Melitius, strictly speaking, did not deserve pardon, the council graciously decided that he could remain in his city but may not ordain, appoint, or lay hands on anyone nor appear in the country or another city for this purpose but could only possess the honorific title. Those whom he appointed, however, are to be accepted after they have been confirmed by a more legitimate ordination, with the following conditions. They shall keep their position of honor and shall perform liturgical duties but shall in any case be ranked second to the members of the clergy in every parish and church, below those who were appointed by our honorable fellow-minister Alexander. Thus they may not appoint those whom they please, make nominations, or do anything at all without the consent of a bishop of the catholic apostolic church under the authority of our pious fellow-minister Alexander.

However, those who by the grace of God and by your prayers prove not to have been involved in schism but are blameless within the catholic apostolic church, they may make appointments, nominate those who are worthy to be clergy, and generally do everything according to church law and custom. If such a member of the clergy within the church happens to find eternal rest, then those who have recently been re-admitted shall ascend to the honorable position of the deceased, provided that they are worthy and the people choose them, with the bishop of Alexandria approving and ratifying the election. We made this concession for all the others but did not find the same concession appropriate in the case of Melitius himself because of his earlier lack of discipline and his rash and arrogant attitude. We do not want him to receive any power or authority, for he could cause the same disorderly behavior again. These are the specific resolutions pertaining to Egypt and the holy church of Alexandria. If any other church law or doctrine was defined in the presence of our honorable fellow-minister and brother, lord Alexander,

¹²⁰ Theod. *CH* 1.9.1 = *ACH* 2.34.1.

he will report it to you more precisely when he returns, for he was an influential participant in our actions.

We also bring you good news of the agreement on holy Easter. Your prayers have succeeded in this matter. So all the brothers in the East who previously celebrated it at the same time as the Jews celebrate Passover—they will from now on celebrate the holy festival of Easter in harmony with the Romans, with you, and with all of us who have been observing Easter with you since ancient times.

In joy at these victories, at the shared peace and harmony, and at the eradication of all heresy, therefore, welcome back our fellow minister, your Bishop Alexander, with great honor and much love. He has gladdened us with his presence and has exerted great effort in his old age in order that you and everyone might have peace. Pray for all of us so that these decisions which we found appropriate might remain steadfast, for we are confident that they have come about through the goodwill of Almighty God, his only begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Holy Spirit, to whom be glory forever. Amen.¹²¹

The holy fathers and the most pious emperor himself by a unanimous decision ordered that this synodical letter and the emperor's constitution against Arius, as well as his epistle to the Alexandrians, be sent to the entire civilized world, along with the holy orthodox creed that was set forth by the holy fathers, so that all of laity and clergy would be accurately informed.¹²²

Some bishops thought it proper to introduce a new law into the church, namely, that those had married while laymen but were later ordained to serve as bishops, priests, deacons, and subdeacons should no longer have sexual relations with their wives. While they were discussing this matter, Paphnutius rose in the middle of the assembled bishops and pleaded earnestly with them not to impose such a heavy burden on these men of the church. "Marriage is in and of itself honorable," he asserted, "and the marriage bed is pure" [Heb. 13:4]. And so he urged them before God not to harm the church by imposing restrictions that were too stringent. "For not every man," he said, "can endure a life of total abstinence, nor might the wives always preserve their chastity either." He defined intercourse between a man and his lawful wife as chastity.

It would be enough, he thought, if those men who were celibate when they entered the ministry remained unmarried, as was the ancient tradition of the church. Yet men should not be separated from wives whom they had married while still laymen. And he expressed these sentiments although he himself had no experience with marriage, and, to speak frankly, had no knowledge of women. For from boyhood he had been brought up in a monastery and was especially famous for his chastity. All the assembled clergy agreed with Paphnutius's reasoning and silenced all further debate on this issue, allowing married clergy to remain abstinent at their own discretion. So much on Paphnutius.¹²³

11. The Council is Officially Closed

Then, believing that he had thus obtained a second victory over the adversary of the church,¹²⁴ the emperor proceeded to celebrate a triumphal festival in honor of God.¹²⁵ About this time Constantine

¹²¹ Gel. *CH* f.13a = *ACH* 2.34.2b-13 = Socrates *CH* 1.9.1-14 = Theod. *CH* 1.9.2-13.

¹²² Gel. *CH* f.13b.

¹²³ Soc. *CH* 1.11.3-7 = Soz. *CH*. 1.23.2-5 = *ACH* 2.32.22-33.4.

¹²⁴ The first being his defeat of the pagan tetrarchs and the legalization of the church after the great persecution.

¹²⁵ Eus. *LC* 3.13. Constantine celebrated his vicennalia beginning July 25, 325.

completed the twentieth year of his reign. On this occasion public festivals were celebrated by the people of the provinces generally, but the emperor himself invited and feasted with those ministers of God whom he had reconciled, and thus offered through them, as it were, a suitable sacrifice to God. No bishop lacked anything at the imperial banquet, the circumstances of which were splendid beyond description. Detachments of the bodyguard and other troops with drawn swords surrounded the entrance of the palace [at Nicaea], and through the midst of these the men of God proceeded without fear into the innermost of the imperial apartments. Some were the emperor's own companions at table, while others reclined on couches arranged on either side. One might have thought that a picture of Christ's kingdom was thus foreshadowed, and a dream rather than reality. After the celebration of this brilliant festival, the emperor courteously received all his guests and generously added to the favors he had already bestowed by personally presenting gifts to each of them according to his rank.¹²⁶

Full of joy at this success, the emperor presented, as it were, pleasant fruits in the way of letters to those who had not been present at the council. He commanded also that ample gifts of money should be bestowed on all the people, both in the country and the cities, in honor of the festive occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his reign.

And now, when all else was at peace, among the Egyptians [Melitians] alone a relentless conflict still raged, so as once more to disturb the emperor's tranquility, though not to excite his anger. For indeed he treated the contending parties with all respect, as fathers, no rather, as prophets of God! Again he summoned them to his presence and again patiently acted as mediator between them, honored them with gifts, and communicated also the result of his arbitration by letter. He confirmed and sanctioned the decrees of the council and called on them to strive earnestly for peace and not to distract and rend the church but to keep in mind God's judgment. And these instructions the emperor sent by a letter written with his own hand.

Besides these, his writings on similar subjects are very numerous, and he was the author of many letters, some to the bishops, in which he laid instructions in regard to tending to the advantage of the churches of God; and sometimes the thrice-blessed emperor addressed the people of the churches generally, calling them his own brothers and fellow-servants.¹²⁷

When the council was on the point of being finally dissolved, he summoned all the bishops to meet him on an appointed day and on their arrival addressed them in a farewell speech, in which he admonished them¹²⁸ to be diligent in the maintenance of peace, to avoid contentious disputations amongst themselves, and not to be jealous if any one of their number should appear preeminent for wisdom and eloquence. Rather he exhorted them to esteem the excellence of one as a blessing common to all. On the other hand, he reminded them that the more gifted should refrain from exalting themselves unfairly in relation to their humbler brothers since it is God's prerogative to judge real superiority. Rather should they considerately condescend to the weaker, remembering that absolute perfection in any case is a rare quality indeed. Each then should be willing to tolerate slight offenses from another, to regard charitably and pass over mere human weaknesses, holding mutual harmony in the highest honor. In this way their dissensions might never give a reason for mockery to those who are ever ready to blaspheme the word of God, whom indeed we should do all in our power to save, something that will not happen unless our conduct seems to them attractive. But you are well aware of the fact that intellectual ideas by no means bring blessing to everyone; for some who hear are focused merely on attaining bodily necessities, while others court the patronage of their superiors; some fix their affection on those who treat them with hospitable kindness, others again, being honored with

¹²⁶ Eus. *LC* 3.15-16.

¹²⁷ Eus. *LC* 3.22-24.

¹²⁸ From this point on the rest of the long paragraph seems to be recording in indirect discourse part of Constantine's parting speech to the bishops. See the last sentence of the paragraph.

presents, love their benefactors in return. But few are they who really desire words of truth, and it is rare indeed to find a friend of truth. Hence one must try to meet everyone's situation, and, like a physician, to administer to each that which brings health to his soul, with the hope that all may honor the teaching of salvation. Such was the former part of his exhortation. In conclusion he instructed them to offer diligent prayers to God on his behalf.

Having thus taken leave of them, he gave them all permission to return to their respective countries, and this they did with joy, and from then on that unity of judgment at which they had arrived in the emperor's presence continued to prevail, and those who had long been divided were bound together as members of the same body.¹²⁹

12. Constantine Spreads the Decisions of the Council.

Constantine wrote to the churches in every city in order that he might make plain to those who had not been present what had been set right by the council.¹³⁰ Moreover, writing to the Nicomedians against Eusebius and Theognis, he censured the misconduct of Eusebius not only on account of his Arianism but because formerly he was well-inclined to the tyrant [Licinius], with whom he had traitorously conspired against his affairs. He then exhorted them to elect another bishop instead of him.¹³¹ He sent the following address to the church of the Alexandrians:

To the catholic church of the Alexandrians, from Constantinus Maximus Augustus:

Greetings, dear brothers. We have received perfect grace by God's providence. Freed from all error, we now approve the exact same faith. No longer can the devil do anything against us. Every wicked scheme he has attempted has been razed to the ground. By God's command, brilliant truth has conquered quarrels, divisions, confusions, and the deadly poison of discord, as I would call it.

So then, we all both worship one God by name and believe that he exists. That this might come to pass, I (by God's instigation) summoned very many bishops to Nicaea, with whom I undertook an examination of the truth, though I, like any of you, rejoice exceedingly to be your fellow servant. We tested and carefully examined everything which seemed to give cause for doubt and disagreement. Let God's Majesty have mercy on those who spoke so many awful indecent blasphemies about the mighty Savior, about our hope and life, as they proclaimed what is contrary to inspired Scripture and to the holy faith and confessed that they believed such things. More than three hundred bishops, admirable for their wisdom and discernment, confirmed the exact same faith, which is, in truth, the very faith of God's law. Only Arius, giving way to the work of the devil, was detected in this evil teaching, among you first, and then among others.

Let us therefore accept the verdict that Almighty God has given us. Let us return to our dear brothers, from whom the devil's shameless servant has separated us. Let us go with all zeal to the body of our true members. This befits your wisdom, faith, and piety: now that the error of him who continues to be an enemy of truth has been refuted, return to God's grace. For the resolution of the three hundred holy bishops is nothing other than the judgment of God, especially since the Holy Spirit has cast light on the will of God by dwelling in the thoughts of these great men. For this reason, no one should doubt nor hesitate. Instead, you should all eagerly return to the true

¹²⁹ Eus. *LC* 3.21.

¹³⁰ Soz. *CH* 1.25.4.

¹³¹ Soc. *CH* 1.9.65.

path so that when I come to you soon, I may with you express due thanks to God, who oversees everything, because he has restored to us the love which we prayed for by showing the pure faith.

May God protect you, beloved brothers.¹³²

Thus wrote the emperor to the Christians of Alexandria, assuring them that the exposition of the faith was made neither rashly nor at random but that it was composed after much examination and rigorous investigation. He also assured them that some things were not discussed while others were suppressed in silence. Whatever could be fittingly advanced in support of any opinion was fully stated. Nothing indeed was pre-determined; everything was first discussed with minute accuracy so that every point which seemed to provide an opportunity for ambiguity of meaning or difference of opinion was thoroughly sifted and its difficulties removed. In short, he describes the thought of all those who were assembled there as the thought of God and does not doubt that the unanimity of so many eminent bishops came about by the Holy Spirit.

Sabinus, however, the chief of the heresy of the Macedonians,¹³³ willfully rejects these authorities and calls those who were gathered there ignorant and illiterate people; no, he almost accuses Eusebius of Caesarea himself of ignorance. He does not consider that even if those who constituted that council had been laymen, yet because they were enlightened by God and the grace of the Holy Spirit, they were utterly unable to err from the truth.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, hear what the emperor further decreed in another letter both against Arius and those who held his opinions, sending it out in all directions to the bishops and people:¹³⁵

Victor Constantinus Maximus Augustus, to the bishops and laity.

Since Arius imitates evil and ungodly people, he deserves the same dishonor they do. Porphyry, an enemy of godliness who wrote certain illegal treatises against religion, received the reward he deserved—he was disgraced from then on, his reputation was ruined, and his ungodly treatises were destroyed. Thus it now seemed right to call Arius also and those who agree with him “Porphyryians”¹³⁶ so that they would have the same name as those they have imitated. In addition, anything written by Arius should be burned. In this way his evil teaching will be obliterated and absolutely no memory of him will survive. Moreover, I declare that anyone caught hiding a work written by Arius rather than immediately handing it over to be burned shall incur the death penalty. Those convicted on this charge will face immediate capital punishment.

May God watch over you.¹³⁷

The great emperor also wrote an account of the proceedings of the council to those bishops who were unable to attend. And I consider it worthwhile to insert this letter in my work, as it shows clearly the piety of the writer:¹³⁸

Constantinus Victor Maximus Augustus to the churches.

¹³² Soc. CH 1.9.16-25 = ACH 2.37.1-9.

¹³³ Writing about 425, Sabinus of Heraclea in Thrace composed a work on the early councils. He was a leader in the Macedonian sect which denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Socrates consulted his work on the councils while condemning its accuracy and partiality.

¹³⁴ Soc. CH 1.9.26-28.

¹³⁵ Soc. CH 1.9.29

¹³⁶ The Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry (c. AD 235-305) wrote a book *Against the Christians*, perhaps the reason Constantine chooses to compare Arius with him here.

¹³⁷ Soc. CH 1.9.30-31 = ACH 2.36.1-2.

¹³⁸ Theod. CH 1.9.14.

From the prosperity of the state I have learned the extent of God's powerful grace. I therefore decided that the most fitting goal for me would be the preservation of the one faith, of pure love, and of a piety toward Almighty God shared by all among the blessed multitudes of the catholic church. But this could not be established and remain secure unless all or most of the bishops would gather in the same place and make a decision on every matter pertaining to holy religion. For this reason, very many assembled—including myself, for I happened to be there just like one of you, and I confess that I am thrilled to be your fellow servant. They carefully examined every pertinent matter until the opinion of God, who oversees all things, came to light, resulting in harmonious unity and leaving nothing which could cause division or religious controversy.

When a debate arose here about the holy day of Easter, we unanimously thought it appropriate that all Christians everywhere celebrate the saving festival of holy Easter on one day. For what could be more appropriate and more sacred for us all than, with uniform order and by a clear principle, to unerringly observe this festival from which we have received hope of immortality? Above all, it seemed inappropriate to follow the custom of the Jews in observing the holy festival. They defile their hands with unlawful sin and are spiritually blind, unclean as they are.

Now that we have rejected their custom, we can establish the celebration of this festival, which we have observed from the first day of the passion up to the present, in more legitimate order for ages to come. Let us therefore have nothing in common with the hostile Jewish people. We have received another way from the Savior; the lawful and proper path for our holy religion lies ahead. Let us with one accord cling to it and tear ourselves away from that shameful complicity, honorable brothers. It is truly most absurd for them to boast that we are incapable of rightly observing these things without their instruction. It is indeed horrendous that they boast about us, as if we would be incapable of observing this festival were it not for their instruction. What could they rightly comprehend now that they have lost their minds after killing the Lord and committing parricide? They are not led by rational thought any longer, but rather by uncontrollable impulses, wherever their inborn madness carries them.

Thus they fail to see the truth even in this matter so that they err severely indeed and celebrate the Passover twice in the same year instead of making a proper improvement. Why then do we follow these people who are admittedly sick with terrible error? We would never allow two celebrations of Easter in one year. But even if this were not prescribed, you by your intellect ought to be able through effort and prayer to always keep your pure souls from seeming to share in the custom of those utterly evil people.

Furthermore, it is obvious that disagreement is unlawful in so great a matter as this festival of our great religion. Our Savior granted to us a singular day of freedom, the day of his holy suffering. He has willed that his catholic church be one. Although its parts are distributed in many different places, one Spirit nevertheless comforts it, namely, the will of God. Now let your pious wisdom consider how terrible and improper it is that on the same days some devote themselves to fasting while others celebrate feasts and that after Easter some are found feasting and relaxing while others surrender themselves to the appointed fasts. This is why God's providence wants us to make appropriate improvement and establish a uniform regulation, as I think everyone sees.

It was therefore proper to improve this in such a way that we would have nothing in common with the nation of those parricides and dominicides. There is a proper arrangement which all the churches in the western, southern, and northern parts of the world observe, as well as some in the eastern regions. All therefore now found it good (and I myself maintained that it would be satisfactory to your wisdom) that you also, wise as you are, should gladly accept what is observed in Rome, Italy, all Africa, Egypt, the Spains, the Gauls, the Britains, both Libyas, all Greece, the

dioceses¹³⁹ of Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia with one entirely harmonious mind, recognizing not only that the majority of churches are in the aforementioned regions, but also that it is most pious that all wish by common consent not to share in the perjury of the Jews, as careful reasoning also seems to demand. To briefly summarize the most important point: It pleased the common judgment of all to celebrate the holy festival of Easter on the same day. Disagreement is not proper in such a holy matter, and it is better to follow the opinion in which foreign deceit and sin are not mingled.

Since this is the case, gladly accept heavenly grace and the genuine command of God. Everything which the holy meetings of bishops decided, they decided with God's will as their standard. You should therefore announce what was written above to all our dear brothers. Then you should also take up the previously mentioned statement and the observance of the holy day and make the necessary arrangements. I will come to check on your condition, as I have long desired. Then I can celebrate the holy festival with you on the same day and will rejoice with you in every respect, seeing that God's power has destroyed the devil's cruelty through our deeds because our faith, peace, and harmony flourish everywhere.

May God watch over you, dear brothers.¹⁴⁰

The emperor transmitted a faithful copy of this letter to every province so that those who read it might discern, as if in a mirror, the pure sincerity of his thoughts and his piety toward God.¹⁴¹

He then wrote to the governors of the provinces, directing that money should be given in every city to provide for virgins and widows and to those who were consecrated to the divine service. He measured the amount of their annual allowance more by the impulse of his own generosity than by their need. One third of the amount is distributed to this day.¹⁴² [Emperor] Julian impiously withheld the entire amount. His successor conferred the sum which is now dispensed because the famine which then prevailed had lessened the resources of the state. If the pensions were formerly triple the present amount, Constantine's generosity can be easily seen by this fact.¹⁴³

Eusebius Pamphilus also treats of this: "The praiseworthy faithful Emperor Constantine thus refreshed the holy bishops with great reverence. He bid them farewell and dismissed them all to return home, which they did with much joy. One unanimous mindset finally prevailed before the emperor himself when those long divided joined together like one body. Because the emperor rejoiced at his success, through letters he shared this abundant fruit with the bishops not present at the council, and he had bountiful quantities of goods distributed to all the people in the countryside and around the cities. Thus he festively celebrated the twentieth year of his reign."¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ At the end of the third century, the provinces of the Roman empire were reorganized in groups called *dioceses*, a term later adopted by the church.

¹⁴⁰ Eus. *LC* 3.17-20 = Soc. *CH* 1.9.32-46 = Theod. *CH* 1.10.1-12 = *ACH* 2.37.10-22.

¹⁴¹ Eus. *LC* 3.20.

¹⁴² Theodoret is writing over a century after the council.

¹⁴³ Theod. *CH* 1.11.2-3.

¹⁴⁴ *ACH* 2.37.26-27.

13. Aftermath and Contemporary Reflections on the Council

In Constantine's twentieth year the council meeting was dissolved, and each returned to his own parish, as we said before.

I must add here only the following, which in my mind is not merely incidental but really quite relevant: the names of the bishops whom all the bishops jointly dispatched to the provinces throughout the world, who sent out letters from the council and the praiseworthy emperor to all the holy churches of God under heaven detailing the decisions of the council, to the glory of God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.¹⁴⁵

Hosius, bishop of Cordova, for the holy churches of God in Rome, Spain, all Italy, and the other provinces beyond me [to the west]¹⁴⁶ as far as the ocean, through the Roman priests Vito and Vincentius accompanying him. Alexander of Alexandria, with Athanasius, then archdeacon, for the churches in all Egypt, Libya, the Pentapolis, and the neighboring regions up to the provinces of India. Macarius of Jerusalem, with Eusebius Pamphilus, bishop of Caesarea, for the churches in Palestine, Arabia, and Phoenicia. Eustathius of great Antioch, for the churches in Coele-Syria, all Mesopotamia, and both Cilicias. John the Persian, for the churches in all Persia and Greater India. Leontius of Caesarea in Cappadocia, which is the ornament of our Lord's church, for the churches in Cappadocia itself, Galatia, Diopontus, Paphlagonia, Pontus Polemoniacus, and Lesser and Greater Armenia. Theonas of Cyzicus, for the churches in Asia, the Hellespont, Lydia, and Caria, through his subordinate bishops Eutychius of Smyrna and Marinus of Troas. Alexander of Thessalonica, through his subordinates, for the churches in Macedonia Prima and Secunda along with Greece, all of Europe, both Scythias, and all the churches in Illyricum, Thessaly, and Achaea. Nunechius of Laodicea, for the churches in Phrygia Prima and Secunda. Protogenes, the admirable bishop of Sardica, for the churches in Dacia, Calabria, Dardania, and the neighboring regions. Caecilian of Carthage, for the holy churches of God in all the provinces of Africa, Numidia, and both Mauritania. Pistus of Marcianopolis, for the churches in Mysia, the provinces of Athens and Gaul, and their neighboring cities. Alexander of Constantinople, then still a priest but later granted the bishopric of the local church, together with Paul, then still a lector, Alexander's secretary, for the churches on all the islands of the Cyclades.

All these holy apostolic men delivered the decisions of the holy, general, ecumenical council of Nicaea to all the holy churches of God under heaven and brought them to all parts of the world, as this book has just shown.¹⁴⁷

Athanasius, his fellow combatant, the champion of the truth, who succeeded the celebrated Alexander in the episcopate, added the following [much later] in a letter addressed to the Africans.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *ACH* 2.37.31.

¹⁴⁶ The phrase "beyond me", referring in the context to the western half of the Roman Empire, may have been added by the writer of the *ACH* who appears to have been from Asia Minor, making the comment more appropriate than if it came from Gelasius writing in Palestine.

¹⁴⁷ Gel. *CH* f.14 = *ACH* 2.38.1-14.

¹⁴⁸ Theodoret cites only a portion of the letter. The entire letter survives in the corpus of Athanasius's writings as *Letter to the Bishops of Africa (LBA)*. The mention of Damasus and his council allows us to date the letter between his accession in 366 and before Athanasius's death in 369. It is usually dated to 369, i.e. 44 years after the council. Athanasius's authorship has also been questioned by D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of*

The letters are sufficient which were written by our beloved fellow minister Damasus, bishop of Great Rome, and the large number of bishops who assembled along with him. Equally so are those of the other councils which were held, both in Gaul and in Italy, concerning the sound faith which Christ gave us, the apostles preached, and the fathers have handed down, those who met at Nicaea from all this world of ours. For a great stir was made at that time about the Arian heresy, in order that those who had fallen into it might be reclaimed, while its inventors might be clearly identified. The whole world has long ago agreed to [the decisions of] that council, and now, after many other councils have been held, all men have accordingly been put in mind of it, both in Dalmatia and Dardania, Macedonia, Epirus and Greece, Crete and the other islands, Sicily, Cyprus, Pamphylia, Lycia and Isauria, all Egypt and the Libyas, and most of the Arabians—they have all come to know it and marveled at those who signed it, inasmuch as even if there were left among them any bitterness springing up from the root of the Arians (we mean Auxentius, Ursacius, Valens and their fellows), by these letters they have been cut off and isolated. The confession agreed upon at Nicaea was, we say once more, sufficient and enough by itself for the subversion of all irreligious heresy and for the security and furtherance of the doctrine of the church. But since we have heard that certain people who wish to oppose it are now attempting to cite a council supposedly held at Ariminum and are eagerly striving that it should prevail rather than the other [Nicaea], we think it worthwhile to write and remind you not to endure anything of the sort; this is nothing else but a second growth of the Arian heresy. For what else are they wishing for, those who reject the council held against that heresy (namely the one at Nicaea), if not that the cause of Arius should win out? What then do such men deserve but to be called Arians and to share the punishment of the Arians? For they were not afraid of God who says, “Do not remove the eternal boundaries which your fathers placed” [Prov. 22:28], and “He that speaks against father or mother, let him be put to death” [Exod. 21:17]. They were not standing in awe of their fathers who declared that those who held the opposite of their [Arian] confession should be anathema.

For this was why an ecumenical council was held at Nicaea, 318 bishops assembling to discuss the faith on account of the Arian heresy. This was done so that local councils would no more be held on the subject of the faith, but that, even if held, they should not remain in force. For what does that [Nicene] council lack, that anyone should seek to improve on it? Dear friends, it is full of piety and has filled the whole world with it. Indians have acknowledged it, and all Christians of other barbarous nations.¹⁴⁹ Those who often have made attempts against it have labored in vain. For already the men we refer to have held ten or more councils, changing their position at each one—taking away some things from earlier decisions and making changes and additions in later ones. And so far they have gained nothing by writing, erasing, and using force, not knowing that “every plant that the Heavenly Father has not planted shall be plucked up” [Matt. 15:13]. But “the word of the Lord,” which came through the ecumenical council at Nicaea, “abides forever” [1 Pet. 1:25]. For if one compares number with number, those who met at Nicaea are more than those at local councils, inasmuch as the whole is greater than the part. But if a man wishes to discern the reason for the council at Nicaea, and that of the large number subsequently held by these men, he will find that while there was a reasonable cause for the former, the others were convened by force, by reason of hatred and contention. For the former [Nicene] council was summoned because of the Arian heresy, and because of Easter (i.e. because those in Syria, Cilicia and Mesopotamia differed from us and kept the festival at the same season as the Jews). But thanks to the Lord, harmony has resulted not only in regard to the faith, but also in regard to that sacred

Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the ‘Arian Controversy’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.15, n.12. Theodoret, writing c. 450, certainly believed Athanasius was the author.

¹⁴⁹ *Barbarian* was the term used to refer to peoples who did not speak Greek or Latin.

festival. And that was the reason for the council at Nicaea. But the subsequent ones were without number and were all planned in opposition to the ecumenical council.

When this is pointed out, who will accept those men who cite the council of Ariminum or any other against the Nicene council? [The majority of the bishops called to meet at Ariminum said it was not necessary and that] no one should seek anything beyond what had been agreed upon by the fathers at Nicaea, nor cite any council save that one. This they [the Arians] suppress, but they make much of what was done by violence in Thrace, thus showing that they are dissemblers of the Arian heresy and not citizens of the sound faith. And again, if a man were to examine and compare the general council itself and those held by these people, he would discover the piety of the one and the folly of the others. The men who assembled at Nicaea did so not after being deposed, and they confessed that the Son was of the essence of the Father. But these others, after being deposed again and again, and deposed once more at Ariminum itself, ventured to write that it ought not be said that the Son had the same essence or subsistence. This enables us to see, brothers, that the men of Nicaea breathe the spirit of Scripture, in that God says in Exodus, "I am that I am" [Exod. 3:14], and through Jeremiah, "Who is in his substance and has seen his word" [Jer. 23:18], and just below, "if they had stood in my subsistence and heard my words" [Jer. 23:22]. Now subsistence is essence, and means nothing else but very being, which Jeremiah calls existence, in the words, "and they heard not the voice of existence" [LXX Jer. 9:9]. For subsistence, and essence, is existence; for it *is*, or in other words *exists*. Perceiving this, Paul also wrote to the Hebrews, "who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his subsistence" [Heb. 1:3]. But the others, who think they know the Scriptures and call themselves wise, and do not choose to speak of subsistence in God (for thus they wrote at Ariminum and at other councils of theirs), were surely deposed justly, saying as they did, like the fool did in his heart, "God is not" [Ps. 14:1]. And again the fathers taught at Nicaea that the Son and Word is not a creature, nor made, having read "all things were made through him" [John 1:3], and "in him were all things created" and "come together" [Col. 1:16-17]. Meanwhile these men, Arians rather than Christians, in their other councils have ventured to call him a creature, and one of the things that are made, things of which he himself is the creator and maker. For if "through him all things were made" and he too is a creature, he would be the creator of himself. And how can what is being created create, or he that is creating be created?

The bishops convened in [the Nicene] council to refute the unholy assertions invented by the Arians, that the Son was created out of what was nonexistent, that he is a creature and created being, that there was a period in which he was not, and that he is changeable by nature. In accordance with the holy Scriptures, they agreed to write that the Son is by nature only-begotten of God, Word, Power, and sole Wisdom of the Father; that he is, as John said, "the true God" [John 17:3], and, as Paul has written, "the brightness of the glory, and the express image of the person of the Father" [Heb. 1:3]. The followers of Eusebius [of Nicomedia], drawn in by their own vile doctrine, then began to say to each another, "Let us agree, because we are also of God. 'There is but one God, by whom are all things,' and 'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new, and all things are of God.'" They also gave particular attention to what is contained in *The Shepherd*: "Believe above all that there is one God, who created and fashioned all things, and made them to be out of that which is not."¹⁵⁰

But the bishops saw through their evil design and unholy fraud and gave a clearer explanation to the words "of God," writing that the Son is "of the substance of God." While the creatures, which do not in any way derive their existence of or from themselves, are said to be "of God," only the Son is said to be "of the substance of the Father." This is unique to the only-begotten Son, the true

¹⁵⁰ *Shepherd of Hermas*, 26.1

Word of the Father. This is the reason why the bishops wrote that he is “of the substance of the Father.” So the Arians, who seemed few in number, were again interrogated by the bishops to see if they confessed that the Son is not a creature, but Power, and sole Wisdom, and the eternal unchangeable image of the Father, and that he is very God. But the Eusebians were noticed nodding to each other, saying, “These things apply to us as well. For it is said that we are ‘the image and glory of God,’ [1 Cor. 11:7] and ‘We are always alive’ [2 Cor. 4:11].” There are also many powers, they said, “for it is written, ‘All the power of God went out of the land of Egypt’ [Exod. 12:41]. The worm and the locust are said to be ‘a great power’ [Joel 2:25]. And elsewhere it is written, ‘The God of powers is with us, the God of Jacob is our helper’ [Ps. 46:7]. To which may be added that we are God’s own not naturally, but because the Son called us ‘brothers.’ The declaration that Christ is ‘the true God’ does not distress us, for the one who came into being is true.” This was the corrupt opinion of the Arians.

But at that time the bishops, when they discovered the deceitfulness of these men, collected from Scripture those passages which say of Christ that he is the glory, the fountain, the stream, and the express image of the person, and they quoted the following words: “In your light we shall see light” [Ps. 36:9], and likewise, “I and the Father are one” [John 10:30]. Then, with still greater clearness, they briefly declared that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father; for this, indeed, is the meaning of the passages which have been quoted. The complaint of the Arians, that these precise words are not to be found in Scripture, is proved groundless by their own practice, for their own unholy assertions are not taken from Scripture either (for it is not written that the Son comes from what was not, and that there was a time when he was not); yet they complain about being condemned by expressions which, though not actually in Scripture, are in accordance with true religion.

They themselves, on the other hand, as though they had found their words on a dunghill, uttered things that truly came from worldly thinking. The bishops, on the other hand, did not find their expressions for themselves, but received their testimony from the fathers and wrote accordingly. Indeed, there were bishops of old, nearly one hundred and thirty years ago, both of the great city of Rome and of our own city, who condemned those who asserted that the Son is a creature and that he is not *homoousios* with the Father. Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, was acquainted with these facts. He at one time favored the Arian heresy, but later signed the confession of faith of the Council of Nicaea. He wrote to the people of his diocese, maintaining that the word *homoousios* was used by illustrious bishops and learned writers as a term for expressing the divinity of the Father and of the Son. ...

... For this Council of Nicaea is in truth a proscription of every heresy. It also upsets those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit and call him a creature. For the fathers, after speaking of faith in the Son, immediately added, “And we believe in the Holy Spirit,” in order that by perfectly and fully confessing faith in the Holy Trinity they might make known the exact form of the faith of Christ and the teaching of the catholic church. For it is made clear both among you and among all, and no Christian can doubt this point, that our faith is not in the creature but in one God, Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ his only-begotten Son, and in one Holy Spirit, one God, known in the holy and perfect Trinity. Because we are baptized into the Trinity and united in this deity, we believe that we have also inherited the kingdom of heaven in Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom be glory and power to the Father for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Ath. *LBA* 1-2, 4-6, 11. A shortened version is found in Theod. *CH* 1.8.7-18.

Eustathius, the famous bishop of Antioch (who has already been mentioned) when explaining the text in Proverbs, “The Lord created me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old” [Prov. 8:22], wrote against them [the Arians], and refuted their blasphemy:

I will now walk through in further detail how these different events occurred. What happened then? When the largest council was summoned at Nicaea, about two hundred and seventy bishops were convened. There were, however, so many assembled that I cannot state their exact number, nor have I taken any great trouble to find out. When they began to investigate the nature of the faith, the formulation of Eusebius [of Nicomedia] was brought forward. It contained undisguised evidence of his blasphemy. Its public reading caused the audience great grief because it departed from the faith while bringing permanent shame on its author.

After the Eusebian gang had been clearly convicted and their unholy writing had been torn up in the presence of everyone, some of them, under the pretense of preserving peace, joined in silencing all the ablest speakers. The Ariomaniacs,¹⁵² afraid that they would be ejected from the church by a council of so many bishops, sprang forward to anathematize and condemn the doctrines which had been condemned, and they unanimously signed the confession of faith.

Thus they retained possession of their episcopal seats through the most shameful deception, even though they should have been dismissed. They continue, sometimes secretly, and sometimes openly, to patronize the condemned doctrines, plotting against the truth with various arguments. Wholly committed to sowing these wicked weeds, they shrink from the scrutiny of the intelligent, avoid the observant, and attack the preachers of godliness. But we do not believe that these atheists can in this way ever overcome the Deity. For though they “gird themselves” they “shall be broken in pieces” [Isaiah 8:9], in accordance with the solemn prophecy of Isaiah.

These are the words of the great Eustathius.¹⁵³

If anyone condemns the faith confessed at this council of Nicaea as false, we will be unaffected by it and not believe Sabinus the Macedonian, who calls all those who came together there ignoramuses and simpletons.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² This derogatory term was used to describe Eusebius of Nicomedia and others considered to be supporters of ideas similar to those of Arius in the decades that followed. It is commonly thought to have been coined by Athanasius who uses it some 60 times in his writings. If, however, this writing of Eustathius was penned before he was deposed by a council in 330, as it appears to be, this would be the earliest surviving use of that term.

¹⁵³ Theod. *CH* 1.7.18-8.6.

¹⁵⁴ Soc. *CH* 1.8.24.

Appendix 1. Sources Used

The following is a list of the most up-to-date editions of the Greek and Latin texts of our sources. For each, reference is also given to English translations.

AW = *Athanasius Werke*

CPG = *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*

CPL = *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*

FCC = *Fourth-Century Christianity* (www.fourthcentury.com)

GCS = *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*

NPNF = *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*

PL = *Patrologia Latina* (Migne)

ACH = *Anonymous Church History* (pseudo-Gelasius) (CPG 6034) Greek text: *Anonyme Kirchengeschichte* (Gelasius Cyzicenus, CPG 6034), ed. Günther Christian Hansen. GCS N.F. 9 (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2002). English translation by FCC.

Ath. LBA = Athanasius, *Letter to the Bishops of Africa* (CPG 2133) Greek text: *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 2.8, ed. H.C. Brennecke et al. (Berlin, 2000). English translation by A. Robertson (NPNF2 4:488-494), updated by FCC.

Ath. ND = *On the Nicene Definition (de Decretis)* (CPG 2120) Greek text: *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 2.1-2:1-45, ed. H.-G. Opitz (Berlin, 1935). English translation by J. H. Newman and A. Robertson (NPNF2 4:149-172), updated by FCC.

Ath. Syn = *On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleucia (de Synodis)* (CPG 2128) Greek text: *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 2.6-7, ed. H.-G. Opitz (Berlin, 1940). English translation by J. H. Newman and A. Robertson (NPNF2 4:48-480), updated by FCC.

Eus. LC = Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* (CPG 3496) Greek text: *Eusebius Werke 2. Die Kirchengeschichte*, ed. E. Schwartz. GCS 9.1 (Leipzig, 1903). English translation by A.C. McGiffert (NPNF2 1:73-404), updated by FCC.

Gel. CH = Gelasius of Caesarea, *Church History* (CPG 3521) Greek Text and English translation: *Ecclesiastical History: The Extant Fragments With an Appendix containing the Fragments from Dogmatic Writings*. GCS N.F. 25, ed. M. Wallraff, J. Stutz, and N. Marinides. Translated by N. Marinides. (De Gruyter, 2018).

Jer. Luc. = Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians* (CPL 608) Latin Text: *Patrologia Latina* vol. 23, coll. 153-182B. ed. J.P. Migne, (Paris, 1883). English translation by W.H. Fremantle (NPNF2 , 6:319-34), updated by FCC.

Phil. CH = Philostorgius, *Church History* (CPG 6032) Greek Text: *Philostorgius Kirchengeschichte.*, ed. J. Bidez. GCS 21 (Leipzig, 1913). English translation by FCC.

Ruf. CH = Rufinus of Aquileia, *Church History*. Latin text: *Eusebius Werke 2.2. Die Kirchengeschichte*, ed. E. Schwartz and T. Mommsen (Leipzig, 1908). English translation by FCC.

Soc. CH = Socrates, *Church History* (CPG 6028). Greek Text: ed. G.C. Hansen. GCS N.F. 1, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1995. English translation by A.C. Zenos (NPNF2 2:1-178), updated by FCC.

Soz. CH = Sozomen, *Church History* (CPG 6030) Greek Text: G.C. Hansen, *Sozomenus Kirchengeschichte*, 2nd ed., GCS N.F. 4. (Berlin 1995) English translation by C. Hartranft (NPNF2 2:179-427), updated by FCC.

Theod. *CH.* = Theodoret, *Church History* (CPG 6222) Greek Text: *Theodoret: Kirchengeschichte.* ed. Parmentier, Léon, GCS N.F. 5. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1998. English translation by B. Jackson (NPNF2 3:33-159), updated by FCC.

Appendix 2. Athanasius's commentary on the debate at Nicaea concerning the nature of the Son

In his *De Decretis 19-20*, Athanasius recalls the debate over the nature of the Son. However, since he intersperses his own commentary, it is difficult to extract the give and take of the debate itself. Therefore we have included this in an appendix rather than in the text above.

Athanasius, *Decr.* 19-20

19. The council wished to do away with the irreligious phrases of the Arians and to use instead the acknowledged words of the Scriptures, that the Son is not from nothing but “from God,” and is “Word” and “Wisdom,” and not creature or work, but a proper offspring from the Father. But Eusebius and his fellows, led by their inveterate heterodoxy, understood the phrase “from God” as belonging to us, as if in respect to it the Word of God did not differ from us in any way because it is written, “There is one God, from whom are all things” [1 Cor. 8:6] and again, “Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new, and all things are from God” [2 Cor. 5:17]. But the Fathers, perceiving their craft and the cunning of their irreligion, were forced to express more distinctly the sense of the words “from God.” Accordingly, they wrote “from the essence of God,” in order that “from God” might not be considered common and equal in the Son and in things originate, but that all others might be acknowledged as creatures, and the Word alone as from the Father. For though all things be said to be from God, yet this is not the sense in which the Son is from him. As to the creatures, “of God” is said of them on this account, in that they exist not at random or spontaneously, nor come to be by chance, according to those philosophers who refer them to the combination of atoms, and to elements of similar structure—nor as certain heretics speak of a distinct Framer—nor as others again say that the constitution of all things is from certain angels—but in that (whereas God is) it was by him that all things were brought into being through his Word, not existing before.

But as to the Word, since he is not a creature, he alone is both called and is “from the Father.” It is significant in this sense to say that the Son is “from the essence of the Father,” for to nothing originate does this attach. In truth, when Paul says that “all things are from God,” he immediately adds, “and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things,” in order to show all men that the Son is other than all these things which came to be from God (for the things which came to be from God, came to be through his Son); and that he had used his foregoing words with reference to the world as framed by God, and not as if all things were from the Father as the Son is. For other things are not like the Son, nor is the Word one among others. He is Lord and Framer of all. On account of this did the holy council declare expressly that he was of the essence of the Father, that we might believe the Word to be other than the nature of things originate, being alone truly from God; and that no subterfuge should be left open to the irreligious. This then was the reason why the council wrote “of the essence.”

20. Eusebius and his companions were put to shame by the arguments against them and did not dare to contradict when the bishops said that the Word must be described as the true power and image of

the Father, in all things exact and like the Father, and as unalterable, and as always, and as in him without division (for never was the Word not, but he was always, existing everlastingly with the Father, as the radiance of light). Nevertheless, they were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes, that “like,” and “always,” and “power,” and “in him,” were, as before, common to us and the Son, and that it was no difficulty to agree to these. As to “like,” they said that it is written of us, “Man is the image and glory of God” [1 Cor. 11:7]; “always,” that it was written, “For we who live are always” [2 Cor. 4:11]; “in him,” “In him we live and move and have our being” [Acts 17:28]; “unalterable,” that it is written, “Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ” [Rom. 8:35]; as to “power,” that the caterpillar and the locust are called “power” and “great power,” and that it is often said of the people, for instance, “All the power of the Lord came out of the land of Egypt” [Exod. 12:41]; and there are others also, heavenly ones, for Scripture says, “The Lord of powers is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge” [Ps. 46:7].

Indeed Asterius, by title the sophist, had said the like in writing, having learned it from them, and before him Arius having learned it also, as has been said. But the bishops discerning in this too their dissimulation, and whereas it is written, “Deceit is in the heart of the irreligious who imagine evil,” were again compelled on their part to collect the sense of the Scriptures, and to re-say and re-write what they had said before, more distinctly still, namely, that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father. This was to signify that the Son was from the Father, and not merely like, but the same in likeness, and to show that the Son’s likeness and unalterableness was different from that which is ascribed to us, which we acquire from virtue on the ground of observance of the commandments. For bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relatively to their parents (as it is written concerning Adam and Seth, who was begotten of him like him “after his own pattern”). But the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but also inseparable from the essence of the Father. He and the Father are one, as he himself has said, and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance stands towards the light (as this the phrase itself indicates). Therefore the council, understanding this, suitably wrote *homoousios* that they might both defeat the perverseness of the heretics, and show that the Word was other than created things. For, after thus writing, they at once added, “But they who say that the Son of God is from nothing, or created, or alterable, or a work, or from other essence, these the holy catholic church anathematizes.” And by saying this, they showed clearly that “of the essence” and *homoousios* are destructive of those catchwords of irreligion, such as “created,” and “work,” and “originated,” and “alterable,” and “he was not before his generation.” And he who holds these contradicts the council; but he who does not hold with Arius must hold and intend the decisions of the council, suitably regarding them to signify the relation of the radiance to the light, and from there gaining the illustration of the truth.

Appendix 3. Another account of the council’s debate on the nature of the Son

The *Anonymous Church History* 2.11.12-12.7 gives the following account of the debate, including a speech by Hosius of Cordoba,

Our bishops opposed their assertion that the Son of God is “not from God” by saying that he is “God from God.” They opposed their assertion that he is “not true God” by writing that he is “true God from true God.” They opposed their assertion that he is a “created being” by defining that he is “begotten, not made.” They opposed their assertion that he is “of a different essence” by saying that “the Son is *homoousios* with the Father, that is, begotten from the being of the Father.” They declared that he is creator and craftsman of the visible and the invisible in keeping with the apostolic faith entrusted to the church from the beginning after they had provided evidence from Scripture, as this account will show.

Rendering the deadly poisons ineffective with this antidote, they proceeded to write down the apostolic faith they had agreed upon even more clearly. The holy, general, ecumenical council of our holy fathers gathered at Nicaea spoke through the blessed, holy Bishop Hosius of Cordova in Spain, who was also representing the bishop of Rome along with the previously named priests from his see. Through an interpreter, he said:

“The deity is not one person as the Jews think, but three persons in true substance, not merely in name. Both the Old and New Testament proclaim this in many passages. The Old Testament, speaking rather physically, treats the Word as a spoken word. The New Testament, however, shows that the Word is God: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ [John 1:1]. It also shows that he is a perfect person from what is perfect, for the Son is not partially God, but wholly God, just like the Father is, for he is of the same essence as the Father, who begot him in an inexpressible way. In the same way, the Holy Spirit coexists with the Father and the Son, for he is of the same essence and the same substance as the Father and the Son

Therefore, we must confess that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have one will, one reign, one authority, one lordship over all created beings, both perceivable and only conceivable, one divine nature, and one essence. We must not mix or divide the indescribable, blessed Trinity. Rather, we must proclaim the Father, who always truly exists and subsists as Father of the true Son; the Son, who always truly exists and subsists as Son of the true Father; and the Holy Spirit, who always truly exists and subsists as Holy Spirit—an inseparable, indescribable, truly incomprehensible, inexpressible Trinity—with the conviction that there is one deity which has one divine essence. We confess this deity in accordance with the true accurate doctrine of the faith, which the Lord entrusted to us from the beginning through his holy apostles and our holy fathers of old who faultlessly guarded the holy faith. We are ready, with the Holy Spirit’s goodwill, to prove this with many passages from the Holy Scriptures.”

Appendix 4. The Subscribers to the Nicene Creed and Canons

Lists of those participants at the council who subscribed to the creed have survived in Latin, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic. A comprehensive study of all the lists was published by H. Gelzer at the end of the nineteenth century, and a thorough study of the Latin lists appeared several decades later by C.H. Turner.¹⁵⁵ While the original list must have been in Greek, the oldest of the surviving lists are those in Latin. All the lists also suffer from the garbling of place names unknown to later copyists. With the help of the Pleiades database of ancient place names (pleiades.stoa.org), some improvements can be made on the work of Turner and Gelzer. The list below also benefits from the unpublished studies of bishop lists and dioceses shared by David Wilmshurst.. In general, we have retained the spelling of place names used by Pleiades and have not attempted to standardize them in either a Latin or Greek transliteration. More familiar place designations are provided in the brackets.

Hosius of Cordoba
Victor and Vincentius, priests of Rome

Egypt (13)

Alexander of Alexandria Magna
Harpocraton of Naucratis
Paphnutius of Egypt
Adamantius of Kynopolis
Arbaethion of Pharbaithos
Philipp of Panephysis
Potamon of Herakleous
Secundus of Ptolemais
Dorotheus of Pelusium
Gaius of Thmuis
Antiochus of Memphis
Tiberius of Tanis
Athas of Schedia [Chaireon]

Thebes (2)

Tyrannus of Antinoe
Volusianus of Lykopolis [Siout]

Upper Libya (4)

Daces of Berenike [Benghazi]
Zophirus of Barkes [Limen; Ptolemais]
Serapion of Antipyrgus

Secundus of Taucheira [Arsinoe]

Lower Libya (1)

Titus of Paraetionium [Ammonia]

Palestine (19)

Macharius of Jerusalem
Germanus of Neapolis [Nablus]
Marinus of Sebastene
Gaianus of Sebaste [Samaria]
Eusebius of Caesarea [Maritima]
Sabinus of Gadara
Longinus of Askelon/Ascalon
Peter of Nicopolis [Emmaus]
Macrinus of Iamneia [Jamnia/Yavneh]
Maximus of Eleutheropolis [Beth Govrin]
Paul of Maximianopolis [Legio/Caporcotani]
Januarius of Jericho
Heliodoros of Zabulon
Aetius of Lydda [Diospolis]
Silvanus of Azotos [Paralios]
Patrophilus of Scythopolis [Beth She'an/Nysa]
Asclepius of Gaza
Peter of Aila [Aelana/Elat]
Antiochus of Kapitoliass [Beit Ras]

¹⁵⁵ Heinrich Gelzer, H. Hilgenfeld, and O. Cuntz, *Patrum Nicaenorum Nomina Latine Graece Coptice Syriace Arabice Armeniace*. Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. Leipzig: Teubner. 1898. C. H. Turner, *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*. vol. 1, fascicle 1, parts 1-2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899-1904), 35-102. Gelzer gives his reconstructed list in Greek on pp. LX-LXIV.

Phoenicia (10)

Zeno of Tyrus
 Aeneas of Ptolemais [Ake/Acco]
 Magnus of Damascus
 Theodore of Sidon
 Hellanicus of Tripolis [Phoinikon]
 Philocalus of Paneas [Caesarea Philippi]
 Gregory of Beirut [Berytus]
 Martin of Palmyra
 Thalassius of Alala
 Antony of Emesa [Hemesa]

Coele-Syria (22)

Eustathius of Antioch
 Zenobius of Seleukeia (in Pieria?)
 Theodore of Laodicea [Latakia]
 Alpheus of Apamea [Pella]
 Philotimus of Hierapolis [Bambyke]
 Solomon of Germanikeia
 Piperius of Samosata
 Archelaus of Doliche
 Euphration of Balanea [Leukas]
 Paladius chorepiscopus
 Zoilus of Gabala
 Bassus of Zeugma
 Gerontius of Larisa
 Mauricius of Epiphania [Oeniandos]
 Eustathius of Areth(o)usa
 Paul of Neocaesarea [Athis]
 Siricius of Cyrrhus [Hagioupolis]
 Seleucus chorepiscopus
 Peter of Gindarus
 Pegasius of Arbocadami
 Bassianus of Gabboula
 Bassianus of Raphaneai

Arabia (6)

Nicomachus of Bostra
 Cyrion of Philadelpheia [Amman]
 Gennadius of Esbous
 Severus of Soada
 Sopatrus of Beretanis
 Severus of Dionysias [Soada]

Mesopotamia (4)

Aethilas of Edessa
 Jacob of Nisibis
 Antiochus of Resaina

Mareas of Macedonopolis

Persia (1)

John of Persia

Cilicia (10)

Theodore of Tarsus
 Amphion of Epiphaneia [Oeniandos]
 Narcissus of Neronias
 Moses of Kastabala [Hierapolis]
 Nicetas of Flavias
 Eudaemon chorepiscopus
 Paulinus of Adana
 Macedonius of Mopsuestia
 Tarcodimantus of Aigeae [Aigai(ai)]
 Hesychius of Alexandria Minor
 Narcissus of Eirenopolis

Cappadocia (10)

Leontius of Caesarea
 Euppsychius of Tyana
 Euphrasius of Koloneia [Garsaura]
 Timothy of Cybistra
 Elpidius of Comana [Hierapolis/Chryse]
 Gregory chorepiscopus
 Stephanus chorepiscopus
 Euphronius chorepiscopus
 Rhodon chorepiscopus
 Theophanes chorepiscopus

Armenia Minor (4)

Eulogius of Sebastia
 Euethius of Satala
 Eudromius chorepiscopus
 Theophanes chorepiscopus

Armenia Maior (5)

Arsaphius of Sophene
 Acrites of Diospontus
 Eutyechianus of Amasia
 Elpidius of Comana [Pontica]
 Heraclius of Zela

Pontus Polemoniaca (3)

Longinus of Neocaesarea
 Domnus of Trapezus
 Stratophilus of Pityussa

Paphlagonia (3)

Philadelphus of Pompeiopolis
 Petronius of Ionopolis
 Eupsychius of Amastris

Galatia (5)

Marcellus of Ancyra
 Diciasius of Tabia [Tavium]
 Erechtheus of Gdanmaa [Egdava]
 Gorgonius of Kinna
 Philadelphius of Juliopolis

Asia (7)

Theonas of Cyzicus
 Menophantus of Ephesus
 Orion of Ilium
 Eutychius of Smyrna
 Mithres of Hypaipa
 Marcrinus of Ilium Hellespontos
 Paul of Anaia

Lydia (9)

Artemidorus of Sardis
 Sozon of Thyatira
 Hetaemasius of Philadelphia
 Pollio of Perperene
 Agogius of Tripolis
 Florentius of Ancyra Sidera
 Antiochus of Aureliopolis/Tmolos
 Mark of Silandus
 Antiochus of Hierokaisareia/Hierakome

Phrygia (8)

Nunechius of Laodicea [ad Lycum]
 Flaccus of Sanaos
 Procopius of Synnada
 Pisticus of Aezanoi
 Athenodorus of Dorylaeon
 Paul of Apamea [Kelainai/Kibotos]
 Eugenius of Eukarpia
 Flaccus of Hierapolis [Koçhisar]

Pisidia (12)

Eulalius of Iconium
 Telemachus of Hadrianopolis
 Hesychius of Neapolis

Eutychius of Seleucia [Sidera]
 Uranion of Selge ??
 Apagamus of Limenai
 T(h)arsicius of Apamea [Cibotus]
 Patricius of Amblada
 Polycarp of Metropolis
 Academius of Pappa [Tiberiopolis]
 Heraclius of Baris [Isparta]
 Theodore of Ouasada

Lycia (1)

Eudemus of Patara

Pamphilia (7)

Callinicus of Perge
 Euresius of Termessus
 Zeuxius of Lyrbe
 Domnus of Aspendus
 Quintianus of Seleucia
 Patricius of Maximianoupolis [Klimax]
 Aphrodisias of Magydos

Islands (4)

Euphrosynus of Rhodes
 Meliphron of Kos
 Stategius of Lemnos
 Apollodorus of Kerkyra [Corcyra]

Caria (5)

Eusebius of Antioch [ad Maeandrum]
 Ammonius of Aphrodisias
 Eugenius of Apollonia
 Leontius of Cibyra
 Eusebius of Miletus

Isauria (18)

Stephanus of Baratta
 Athenaeus of Koropissos
 Aetherius of Claudiopolis [Ninica]
 Agapetus of Seleucia [ad Calycadnum]
 Silvanus of Metropolis
 Faustus of Panemotichus
 Antoninus of Antiochia [ad Cragum?]
 Nestor of Syedra [Syagra]
 Hesychius chorepiscopus
 Cyril of the Homonadeis
 Theodore of Ouasada
 Theodore chorepiscopus

Anatolius chorepiscopus
Paul of Laranda
Quintus chorepiscopus
Tiberius of Lystra
Aquila chorepiscopus
Eusebius of the Diocese of Paroikia [of]
Isauria

Cyprus (2)

Cyril of Paphos [Nea?]
Gelasius of Salamis

Bithynia (11)

Eusebius of Nicomedia
Theognis of Nicaea
Maris of Chalcedon
Cyril of Kios [Cius] [Prusias ad Mare]
Hesychius of Prusa
Gorgonius of Apollonia [ad Ryndacum]
George of Prusias [ad Hypium]
Euethius of Hadrianeia
Theophanes chorepiscopus
Rufus of Kaisareia
Eulalius chorepiscopus

Europe (1)

Phaedrius of Heraclea [Perinthus]

Dacia (1)

Protophenes of Serdica

Calabria (2)

Mark of Calabria

Moesia (3)

Pistus of Marcianopolis

Africa (4)

Caecilian of Carthage

Macedonia (2)

Alexander of Thessalonica
Budion of Stobi/Thebes?

Dardania (1)

Dacus of Macedonia

Achaia (3)

Pistus of Athens
Festus of Stategis
Marcus of Boia [Boiai]

Thessaly (2)

Claudian of Thessalia
Chionius of Thebes

Dalmatia (1)

Budius of Stobi

Pannonia (1)

Domnus of Strido [Stridon]

The Gauls (1)

Nicasius of Dinia [Digne]

The Goths (1)

Philotheus of the Goths

Bosporus (1)

Cadmus of Bosporus

Appendix 5. Other possible conciliar rulings

The *Anonymous Church History* (2.30.6-31.10) gives a brief description of some other miscellaneous rulings of the council. Since these are unsupported in other accounts of the council we have listed them here only for the sake of completeness.

After this, all the bishops set forth various ecclesiastical rulings:

“Let us dwell in the light, that is, Christ, for we are near to him. Let us employ prayers of sanctification as if we see him, for our prayers sanctify us if we pray with the Word of God, and the Word of God is present where one preserves a pure heart and life in humility. Israel strove to offer the sacrifices. The prophets cried out to God, ‘Send out your light and your truth’ [Ps. 43:3]. They cried out, and we received them. As the Lord said, ‘Others have labored’ [John 4:38], and we have reaped the benefits. The Lord himself came to us, saying, ‘I am the light’ [John 8:12] and ‘I am the truth’ [John 14:6]. We have received grace without effort, but we must guard grace with effort.

Of those who say Christians need not work: Since some who wish not to work but to be busybodies misunderstand the Lord’s holy words, ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat’ [Matt. 6:25], to mean that Christians who follow this order need not work the ground, we must show that this is not what the Lord meant. We can work without worrying. We know and believe that the Lord himself causes our work to grow and bear fruit, for he said, ‘The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters his seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how’ [Mark 4:26-27].

Of the ordained: The ordained should serve as types and images of heavenly beings. The bishop should occupy the throne of the Lord himself as head, second to the Lord, of the church he has received; the priest that of the seraph; the deacon that of the cherub. The attendant must assist them.

That the laity may not go up into the ambo: The laity may not go up into the ambo, except those appointed to read or sing from the parchment books.

Of Holy Baptism: Our baptism is not to be considered with physical eyes but with spiritual eyes. When you see water, recognize the power of God which is hidden in the water. Holy Scripture teaches that we are baptized ‘with the Holy Spirit and fire’ [Matt. 3:11]. Recognize that by the faith of the baptizer and the faith of the person being baptized, through sacred invocation, the water is full of the Spirit’s sanctification and divine fire, for it says, ‘He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ So the person being baptized descends guilty of his sins and subject to ‘the slavery of decay’ [Rom. 8:21], but he ascends free from such slavery and from sin. By God’s grace he has become God’s son and heir, and co-heir with Christ, having clothed himself with Christ, as is written: ‘All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ’ [Gal. 3:27].

Of the table of God and the mystery of the body and blood of Christ, which occurs on it: Likewise, we should not scorn the bread and cup placed on the table of God but should lift up our minds to understand by faith that on that holy table is ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ [John 1:29], a bloodless sacrifice by the priests. Since we truly receive his precious body and blood, we believe they guarantee our resurrection. We do not receive much, but little, so that we realize its purpose is not to satisfy our hunger but to sanctify us.

Of the resurrection of the dead: The Lord did not merely give his flesh over to suffering and death for us. His goal was to procure our salvation despite being free from death (as the explanation above has demonstrated). The Lord also predicts through the prophet the coming mystery of his incarnation in flesh: 'I became like a helpless person, free among the dead' [Ps. 88:4-5]. But who is free from death besides God? According to the passages cited above, he became flesh due to his love for mankind and became 'like a helpless person,' humbling his flesh 'to the point of death, even death on a cross' [Philip. 2:8]. It also proclaims that his flesh arose so that, by making us immortal, he might obtain for us forsaken humans hope for our own resurrection through our first fruits. Thus we are no longer slaves to eternal death, but free like Christ, our first fruits, as the blessed apostle Paul says: 'Christ, the first fruits, then, when he comes, those who belong to him' [1 Cor. 15:23]. He also testifies that we expect this very Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God the Father, to come from heaven to raise our bodies from their graves: 'Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body' [Philip. 3:20-21]. Thus must the Lord glorify our bodies like his, no longer subject to wickedness nor any sufferings which presently exist, free from death and sin, and holy, so that we can live a new life with him in heavenly light, reigning forever with Christ himself. In this hope we have received holy baptism and receive saving communion with his holy members. This is the doctrine of the catholic church.

That there is one church of God: There is one church in heaven. The same church is also on earth. The Holy Spirit rests on it. The heresies outside of it, to which people adhere, are not the teachings of our Savior nor of the apostles but of Satan, their father the devil. They teach the heresies of Jews and Greeks in a different form to take away true life from people.

Of God's foreknowledge and the world: The world became lesser because of foreknowledge. God foreknew that humans would sin. Therefore we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, according to the Holy Scriptures, when the appearance and reign 'of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ' [Tit. 2:13], will be revealed to us. At that time, as Daniel says, 'saints of the Most High will receive dominion' [Dan. 7:18]. The earth will be pure and holy, a land of the living and not of the dead, which David foresaw with the eye of faith: 'I am confident that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living' [Ps. 27:13], the land of the meek and humble, for it says, 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' [Matt. 5:5]. The prophet says, 'The feet of the meek and humble will walk on it'" [Is. 26:6].

We have compiled this small selection of the many ecclesiastical rulings our holy fathers set forth.