

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

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

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

The Greek text below is that of F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke* 1.1²: *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* (GCS 7, 1991): 89-93. The English translation was adapted from that of McGiffert (NPNF² 1:524-525) and Zenos (NPNF² 2:14-16) by Aaron West, Austin Clafin, and Glen Thompson.

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3.17.1 Κωνσταντῖνος Νικητῆς Μέγιστος Σεβαστὸς ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.	3.17.1 Constantine Augustus, to the churches.
Πεῖραν λαβῶν ἐκ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν εὐπραξίας, ὅση τῆς θείας δυνάμεως πέφυκε χάρις, τοῦτόν πρό γε πάντων ἔκρινα εἶναί μοι προσήκειν σκοπόν, ὅπως παρὰ τοῖς μακαριωτάτοις τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας πλήθει πίστις μία καὶ εἰλικρινῆς ἀγάπη ὁμογνώμων τε περὶ τὸν παγκρατῆ θεὸν εὐσέβεια τηρῆται.	Having had full proof, in the general prosperity of the empire, how great the favor of God has been towards us, I have judged that it ought to be the first of my endeavors that unity of faith, sincerity of love, and community of feeling in regard to the worship of Almighty God, might be preserved among the highly favored multitude who compose the catholic church.
3.17.2 ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο οὐχ οἷόν τ' ἦν ἀκλινῆ καὶ βεβαίαν τάξιν λαβεῖν, εἰ μὴ, εἰς ταῦτόν πάντων ὁμοῦ ἢ τῶν γούν πλειόνων ἐπισκόπων συνελθόντων, ἐκάστου τῶν προσηκόντων τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ θρησκείᾳ διάκρισις γένοιτο, τούτου ἔνεκεν πλείστων ὅσων συναθροισθέντων (καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ καθάπερ εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐτύγγανον συμπαρών· οὐ γὰρ ἀρνησαίμην ἄν, ἐφ' ᾧ μάλιστα	3.17.2 Since this could not be effectively and absolutely ensured, unless all, or at least the greater number of the bishops were to meet together, and a discussion of all issues relating to our most holy religion to take place; for this reason as numerous an assembly as possible has been convened, at which I myself was present among you. And far be it from me to deny that

<p>χαίρω, συνθεράπων ὑμέτερος πεφυκέναι), ἄχρι τοσοῦτου ἅπαντα τῆς προσηκούσης τετύχηκεν ἐξετάσεως, ἄχρις οὗ ἢ τῷ πάντων ἐφόρῳ θεῷ ἀρέσκουσα γνώμη πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἐνότητος συμφωνίαν εἰς φῶς προήχθη, ὡς μηδὲν ἔτι πρὸς διχόνοιαν ἢ πίστεως ἀμφισβήτησιν ὑπολείπεσθαι.</p>	<p>which is my greatest joy, that I am your fellow-servant! Every question received due and full examination, until that judgment which God, who sees all things, could approve, and which tended to unity and concord, was brought to light, so that no room was left for further discussion or controversy in relation to the faith.</p>
<p>3.18.1 Ἐνθα καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ πάσχα ἀγιωτάτης ἡμέρας γενομένης ζητήσεως, ἔδοξε κοινῇ γνώμῃ καλῶς ἔχειν ἐπὶ μιᾷ ἡμέρας πάντας τοὺς ἀπανταχοῦ ἐπιτελεῖν. τί γὰρ ἡμῖν κάλλιον, τί δὲ σεμνότερον ὑπάρξει δυνήσεται τοῦ τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην, παρ' ἧς τὴν τῆς ἀθανασίας εἰλήφαμεν ἐλπίδα, μιᾷ τάξει καὶ φανερῷ λόγῳ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀδιαπτῶτως φυλάττεσθαι;</p>	<p>3.18.1 At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, that this feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day. For what can be more suitable or honorable to us than that this feast from which we date our hopes of immortality should be observed unfailingly by all alike, according to one determined order and arrangement?</p>
<p>3.18.2 καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἀνάξιον ἔδοξεν εἶναι τὴν ἀγιωτάτην ἐκείνην ἑορτὴν τῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐπομένους συνηθείᾳ πληροῦν, οἱ τὰς ἑαυτῶν χεῖρας ἀθεμίτῳ πλημμελήματι χράναντες εἰκότως τὰς ψυχὰς οἱ μαροὶ τυφλώττουσιν. ἔξεστι γὰρ τοῦ ἐκείνων ἔθνοῦς ἀποβληθέντος ἀληθεστέρᾳ τάξει, ἢν ἐκ πρώτης τοῦ πάθους ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ παρόντος ἐφυλάξαμεν, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μέλλοντας αἰῶνας τὴν τῆς ἐπιτηρήσεως ταύτης συμπλήρωσιν ἐκτείνεσθαι. μηδὲν τοίνυν ἔστω ἡμῖν κοινὸν μετὰ τοῦ ἐχθίστου τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὄχλου.</p>	<p>3.18.2 First of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this rule to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd;</p>
<p>3.18.3 εἰλήφαμεν γὰρ παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἑτέραν ὁδόν, πρόκειται δρόμος τῇ ἱερωτάτῃ ἡμῶν θρησκείᾳ καὶ νόμιμος καὶ πρέπων. τούτου συμφώνως ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι τῆς αἰσχρᾶς ἐκείνης ἑαυτοὺς συνειδήσεως ἀποσπᾶσωμεν, ἀδελφοὶ τιμιώτατοι. ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀτοπώτατον ἐκείνους ἀυχεῖν, ὡς ἄρα παρεκτὸς τῆς αὐτῶν διδασκαλίας ταῦτα φυλάττειν οὐκ ἡμεῖς ἰκανοί.</p>	<p>3.18.3 for we have received from our Savior a different way. A course at once legitimate and honorable lies open to our most holy religion. Beloved brethren, let us with one mind adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their wickedness. For their boast is absurd indeed, that it is not in our power without instruction from them to observe these things.</p>
<p>3.18.4 τί δὲ φρονεῖν ὀρθὸν ἐκεῖνοι δυνήσονται, οἱ μετὰ τὴν κυριοκτονίαν τε καὶ πατροκτονίαν ἐκείνην ἐκστάντες τῶν φρενῶν ἄγονται οὐ λογισμῷ τινι ἀλλ' ὀρμῇ ἀκατασχέτῳ, ὅπη δᾶν αὐτοὺς ἢ ἔμφυτος αὐτῶν ἀγάγη μανία; ἐκεῖθεν τοίνυν κἂν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει τὴν ἀλήθειαν οὐχ</p>	<p>3.18.4 For how should they be capable of forming a sound judgment, who, since their parricidal guilt in slaying their Lord, have been subject to the direction, not of reason, but of ungoverned passion, and are swayed by every impulse of the mad spirit that is in them?</p>

<p>ὀρῶσιν. ὡς δὴ κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον αὐτοὺς πλανωμένους ἀντὶ τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει δεύτερον τὸ πάσχα ἐπιτελεῖν. τίνος οὖν χάριν τούτοις ἐπόμεθα, οὐς δεινὴν πλάνην νοσεῖν ὠμολόγηται; δεύτερον γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἐν ἐνὶ ἐνιαυτῷ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ποιεῖν ἀνεξόμεθα. ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ταῦτα μὴ προὔκειτο, τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀγχίνοιαν ἐχρῆν καὶ διὰ σπουδῆς καὶ δι' εὐχῆς ἔχειν πάντοτε, ἐν μηδενὸς ὁμοιότητι τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς ὑμετέρας ψυχῆς κοινωνεῖν δοκεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔθεσι παγκάκων.</p>	<p>Therefore they have no perception of the truth on this point or any other, so that, being altogether ignorant of the true adjustment of this issue, they sometimes celebrate Easter twice in the same year. Why then should we follow those who are confessedly in grievous error? Surely we should never consent to keep this feast a second time in the same year. But supposing these reasons were not sufficient, still it would be incumbent on your good judgment to strive and pray continually that the purity of your souls may not seem in anything to be tarnished by fellowship with the customs of these most wicked men.</p>
<p>3.18.5 πρὸς τούτοις κάκεινο πάρεστι συνορᾶν, ὡς ἐν τηλικούτῳ πράγματι καὶ τοιαύτης θρησκείας ἑορτῇ διαφωνίαν ὑπάρχειν ἐστὶν ἀθέμιτον. μίαν γὰρ ἡμῖν τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐλευθερίας ἡμέραν, τουτέστιν τὴν τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου πάθους, ὃ ἡμέτερος παρέδωκε σωτήρ, μίαν εἶναι τὴν καθολικὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν βεβούληται, ἥς εἰ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα εἰς πολλοὺς τε καὶ διαφόρους τόπους τὰ μέρη διήρηται, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐνὶ πνεύματι, τουτέστι τῷ θεῷ βουλήματι, θάλπεται.</p>	<p>3.18.5 We must consider, too, that a conflicting judgment in a case of such an important issue concerning a religious festival is wrong. For our Savior has left us one feast in commemoration of the day of our deliverance, I mean the day of his most holy passion. And he has willed that his catholic church should be one, the members of which, however scattered in many and diverse places, are yet cherished by one pervading spirit, that is, by the will of God.</p>
<p>3.18.6 λογισάσθω δ' ἡ τῆς ὑμετέρας ὀσιότητος ἀγχίνοια, ὅπως ἐστὶ δεινόν τε καὶ ἀπρεπὲς κατὰ τὰς αὐτὰς ἡμέρας ἐτέρους μὲν ταῖς νηστείαις σχολάζειν, ἐτέρους δὲ συμπόσια συντελεῖν, καὶ μετὰ τὰς τοῦ πάσχα ἡμέρας ἄλλους μὲν ἐν ἑορταῖς καὶ ἀνέσεις ἐξετάζεσθαι, ἄλλους δὲ ταῖς ὠρισμέναις ἐκδεδόσθαι νηστείαις. διὰ τοῦτο γοῦν τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως τυχεῖν καὶ πρὸς μίαν διατύπωσιν ἄγεσθαι τοῦτο ἡ θεία πρόνοια βούλεται, ὡς ἔγωγε ἅπαντας ἡγοῦμαι συνορᾶν.</p>	<p>3.18.6 And let your Holinesses' wisdom reflect how grievous and scandalous it is that on the same days some should be engaged in fasting, others in festive enjoyment; and again, that after the days of Easter some should be present at banquets and amusements, while others are fulfilling the appointed fasts. It is, then, plainly the will of Divine Providence (as I suppose you all clearly see), that this usage should receive fitting correction, and be reduced to one uniform rule.</p>
<p>3.19.1 Ὅθεν ἐπειδὴ τοῦθ' οὕτως ἐπανορθοῦσθαι προσῆκεν, ὡς μηδὲν μετὰ τοῦ τῶν πατροκτόνων τε καὶ κυριοκτόνων ἐκείνων ἔθνους εἶναι κοινόν, ἔστι δὲ τάξις εὐπρεπῆς, ἣν πᾶσαι αἱ τῶν δυτικῶν τε καὶ μεσημβρινῶν καὶ ἀρκτῶν τῆς οἰκουμένης</p>	<p>3.19.1 Therefore, since this matter needed to be rectified, so that we might have nothing in common with that nation of parricides who slew their Lord, and since that arrangement is consistent with propriety which is observed by all the churches of the western, southern, and northern parts of the world, and by some of the</p>

<p>μερῶν παραφυλάττουσιν ἐκκλησίαι καὶ τινες τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἑῴαν τόπων, οὗ ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος καλῶς ἔχειν ἅπαντες ἠγήσαντο, καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ τῇ ὑμετέρα ἀγχινοία ἀρέσειν ὑπεσχόμεν, ἵν' ὅπερ δᾶν κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμαίων πόλιν Ἰταλίαν τε καὶ Ἀφρικὴν ἅπασαν, Αἴγυπτον, Σπανίας, Γαλλίας, Βρεττανίας, Λιβύας, ὅλην Ἑλλάδα, Ἀσιανὴν τε διοίκησιν καὶ Ποντικὴν καὶ Κιλικίαν μᾶ καὶ συμφώνω φυλάττηται γνώμη, ἀσμένως τοῦτο καὶ ἡ ὑμετέρα προσδέξεται σύνεσις, λογιζομένη ὡς οὐ μόνον πλείων ἐστὶν ὁ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς προειρημένους τόπους ἐκκλησιῶν ἀριθμὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς τοῦτο μάλιστα κοινῇ πάντας ὀσιώτατόν ἐστι βούλεσθαι, ὅπερ καὶ ὁ ἀκριβὴς λόγος ἀπαιτεῖν δοκεῖ καὶ οὐδεμίαν μετὰ τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἐπιπορκίας ἔχει κοινωνίαν·</p>	<p>eastern also; for these reasons all are unanimous on this present occasion in thinking it worthy of adoption. And I myself have undertaken that this decision should meet with the approval of your good judgment, in the hope that all you wise men will gladly admit that practice which is observed in the city of Rome, and in Africa, throughout Italy, Egypt, Spain, the Gauls, Britain, Libya, and the whole of Greece, in the dioceses of Asia and Pontus, and in Cilicia, with entire unity of judgment. And you will consider not only that the number of churches is far greater in the regions I have enumerated than in any other, but also that it is most fitting that all should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, and in avoiding all participation in the wicked conduct of the Jews.</p>
<p>3.19.2 ἵνα δὴ τὸ κεφαλιωδέστατον συντόμως εἶπω, κοινῇ πάντων ἤρεσε κρίσει τὴν ἀγιωτάτην τοῦ πάσχα ἑορτὴν μᾶ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ συντελεῖσθαι. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρέπει ἐν τοσαύτῃ ἀγιότητι εἶναι τινα διαφορὰν, καὶ κάλλιον ἔπεσθαι τῇ γνώμῃ ταύτῃ, ἐν ἧ οὐδεμία ἔσται ἄλλοτρίας πλάνης καὶ ἀμαρτήματος ἐπιμιξία.</p>	<p>3.19.2 To express my meaning in as few words as possible, it has been determined by the common judgment of all that the most holy feast of Easter should be kept on one and the same day. For on the one hand a discrepancy of opinion on so sacred a question is not proper, and on the other it is surely best to act on a decision which is free from strange folly and error.</p>
<p>3.20.1 Τούτων οὖν οὕτως ἐχόντων, ἀσμένως δέχεσθε τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ χάριν καὶ θεῖαν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐντολήν· πᾶν γὰρ ὅτι δᾶν ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις τῶν ἐπισκόπων συνεδρίοις πράττηται, τοῦτο πρὸς τὴν θεῖαν βούλησιν ἔχει τὴν ἀναφορὰν.</p>	<p>3.20.1 Therefore receive with all willingness this truly divine command, and truly regard it as a gift of God. For whatever is determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops is to be regarded as indicative of the divine will.</p>
<p>3.20.2 διὸ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀπαγητοῖς ἡμῶν ἀδελφοῖς ἐμφανίσαντες τὰ προγεγραμμένα, ἤδη καὶ τὸν προειρημένον λόγον καὶ τὴν παρατήρησιν τῆς ἀγιωτάτης ἡμέρας ὑποδέχεσθαί τε καὶ διατάττειν ὀφείλετε, ἵνα ἐπειδὴν πρὸς τὴν πάλαι μοι ποθουμένην τῆς ὑμετέρας διαθέσεως ὄψιν ἀφίκωμαι, ἐν μᾶ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ τὴν ἀγίαν μεθ' ὑμῶν ἑορτὴν ἐπιτελέσαι δυνηθῶ καὶ πάντων ἕνεκεν</p>	<p>3.20.2 Therefore as soon as you have communicated these proceedings to all our beloved brethren, you are bound from that time forward to adopt them for yourselves and to lead others to adopt the arrangement mentioned above, and the due observance of this most sacred day, so that whenever I come into the presence of your love, which I have long desired, I may have it in my power to celebrate the holy feast with you on the same day, and may rejoice with you on all</p>

μεθ' ὑμῶν εὐδοκήσω, συνορῶν τὴν διαβολικὴν ὠμότητα ὑπὸ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως διὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων πράξεων ἀνηρημένην, ἀκμαζούσης πανταχοῦ τῆς ὑμετέρας πίστεως καὶ εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας.	accounts, when I behold the cruel power of Satan removed by divine aid through our work, while your faith, and peace, and concord everywhere flourish.
ὁ θεὸς ὑμᾶς διαφυλάξει, ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπητοί.	God preserve you, beloved brothers!

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