Shorter writings

Council of Nicaea (AD 325) (AD 325)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

Contents

Addenda **1**

On the Keeping of Easter **2**

The Canons **4**

The Creed **6**

The Nicene Creed **7**

The Ratification **8**

The Synodal Letter **9**

Addenda

As Authorized at Constantinople, a.d. 381.
(a) Of heaven and earth. (b) Begotten of the Father before all worlds. (c) By the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. (d) Was crucified also for us, under Pontius Pilate, (e) And was buried. (f) Sitteth on the right hand of the Father, (g) Whose kingdom shall have no end. (h) The Lord, the Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the prophets: In one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come. Amen. This Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed was solemnly ratified by the Council of Ephesus (a.d. 431) with the decree that ”No one shall be permitted to introduce, write, or compose any other faith, besides that which was defined by the holy Fathers assembled in the city of Nice, with the presence of the Holy Ghost.”

On the Keeping of Easter

From the Letter of the Emperor to all those not present at the Council. (Found in Eusebius, Vita Const., Lib. iii., 18-20.)

When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be convenient that all should keep the feast on one day; for what could be more beautiful and more desirable, than to see this festival, through which we receive the hope of immortality, celebrated by all with one accord, and in the same manner? It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom [the calculation] of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded. In rejecting their custom, we may transmit to our descendants the legitimate mode of celebrating Easter, which we have observed from the time of the Saviour's Passion to the present day [according to the day of the week]. We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Saviour has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course (the order of the days of the week); and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast. How can they be in the right, they who, after the death of the Saviour, have no longer been led by reason but by wild violence, as their delusion may urge them?

They do not possess the truth in this Easter question; for, in their blindness and repugnance to all improvements, they frequently celebrate two passovers in the same year. We could not imitate those who are openly in error. How, then, could we follow these Jews, who are most certainly blinded by error? for to celebrate the passover twice in one year is totally inadmissible. But even if this were not so, it would still be your duty not to tarnish your soul by communications with such wicked people [the Jews]. Besides, consider well, that in such an important matter, and on a subject of such great solemnity, there ought not to be any division. Our Saviour has left us only one festal day of our redemption, that is to say, of his holy passion, and he desired [to establish] only one Catholic Church. Think, then, how unseemly it is, that on the same day some should be fasting whilstothers are seated at a banquet; and that after Easter, some should be rejoicing at feasts, whilst others are still observing a strict fast. For this reason, a Divine Providence wills that this custom should

be rectified and regulated in a uniform way; and everyone, I hope, will agree upon this point. As, on the one hand, it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord;

and as, on the other, the custom now followed by the Churches of the West, of the South, and of the North, and by some of those of the East, is the most acceptable, it has appeared good to all; and I have been guarantee for your consent, that you would accept it with joy, as it is followed at Rome, in Africa, in all Italy, Egypt, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Libya, in all Achaia, and in the dioceses of Asia, of Pontus, and Cilicia. You should consider not only that the number of churches in these provinces make a majority, but also that it is right to demand what our reason approves, and that we should have nothing in common with the Jews. To sum up in few words: By the unanimous judgment of all, it has been decided that the most holy festival of Easter should be everywhere celebrated on one and the same day, and it is not seemly that in so holy a thing there should be any division. As this is the state of the case, accept joyfully the divine favour, and this truly divine command; for all which takes place in assemblies of the bishops ought to be regarded as proceedingfrom the will of God. Make known to your brethren what has been decreed, keep this most holy day according to the prescribed mode; we can thus celebrate this holy Easter day at the same time, if it is granted me, as I desire, to unite myself with you;

we canrejoice together, seeing that the divine power has made use of our instrumentality for destroying the evil designs of the devil, and thus causing faith, peace, and unity to flourish amongst us. May God graciously protect you, my beloved brethren.

The Canons

Canon I.
If any one in sickness has been subjected by physicians to a surgical operation, or if he has been castrated by barbarians, let him remain among the clergy; but, if any one in sound health has castrated himself, it behoves that such an one, if [already] enrolled among the clergy, should cease [from his ministry], and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who wilfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians, or by their masters, and should otherwise be found worthy, such men the Canon admits to the clergy.

Notes.
Ancient Epitome Of Canon I. Eunuchs may be received into the number of the clergy, but those who castrate themselves shall not be received. Balsamon. The divine Apostolic Canons xxi., xxii., xxiii., and xxiv., have taught us sufficiently what ought to be done with those who castrate themselves, this canon provides as to what is to be done to these as well as to those who deliver themselves over to others to be emasculated by them, viz., that they are not to be admitted among the clergy nor advanced to the priesthood. Daniel Butler. (Smith & Cheetham, Dict. Christ. Ant.) The feeling that one devoted to the sacred ministry should be unmutilated was strong in the Ancient Church .... This canon of Nice, and those in the Apostolic Canons and a later one in the Second Council of Arles (canon vii.) were aimed against that perverted notion of piety, originating in the misinterpretation of our Lord's saying (Matt. xix. 12) by which Origen, among others, was misled, and their observance was so carefully enforced in later times that not more than one or two instances of the practice which they condemn are noticed by the historian. The case was different if a man was born an eunuch or had suffered mutilation at the hands of persecutors; an instance of the former, Dorotheus, presbyter of Antioch, is mentioned by Eusebius (H. E. vii., c. 32); of the latter, Tigris, presbyter of Constantinople, is referred to both by Socrates (H. E. vi. 16) and Sozomen (H. E. vi. 24) as the victim of a barbarian master.

Hefele. We know, by the first apology of St. Justin (Apol. c. 29) that a century before Origen, a young man had desired to be mutilated by physicians, for the purpose of completely refuting the charge of vice which the heathen brought against the worship of Christians. St.

Justin neither praises nor blames this young man: he only relates that he could not obtain the permission of the civil authorities for his project, that he renounced his intention, but nevertheless remained virgo all his life. It is very probable that the Council of Nice was induced by some fresh similar cases to renew the old injunctions; it was perhaps the Arian bishop, Leontius, who was the principal cause of it. Lambert. Constantine forbade by a law the practice condemned in this canon. "If anyone shall anywhere in the Roman Empire after this decree make eunuchs, he shall be punished with death. If the owner of the place where the deed was perpetrated was aware of it and hid the fact, his goods shall be confiscated." (Const. M. 0pera. Migne Patrol. vol. viii., 396.)

Beveridge. The Nicene fathers in this canon make no new enactment but only confirm by the authority of an Ecumenical synod the Apostolic Canons, and this is evident from the wording of this canon. For there can be no doubt that they had in mind some earlier canon when they said, "such men the canon admits to the clergy." Not, ou[toj o9 kanw\n, but o9 kanw\n, as if they had said "the formerly set forth and well-known canon" admits such to the clergy. But no other canon then existed in which this provision occurred except apostolical canon xxi. which therefore we are of opinion is here cited. [In this conclusion Hefele also agrees.] This law was frequently enacted by subsequent synods and is inserted in the Corpus Juris Canonici, Decretum Gratiani. Pars. I. Distinctio LV., C vij.

The Creed

As Set Forth at Nicoea, a.d. 325.

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, of the substance of the Father; God of God; Light of light; very God of very God; begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things in earth: Who for us men and for our salvation came down, and was incarnate, and was made man: He suffered, and rose again the third day: And ascended into heaven: And shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, etc.

The Nicene Creed

(Found in the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, in the Epistle of Eusebius of Caesarea to his own Church, in the Epistle of St. Athanasius Ad Jovianum Imp., in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Theodoret and Socrates, and elsewhere, The variations in the text are absolutely without importance.) The Synod at Nice set forth this Creed. The Ecthesis of the Synod at Nice. 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 his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten (gennhqe/nta), not made, being of one substance (o9moou/sion, consubstantialem) with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not (h!n pote o\#te ou0k h\n), or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion -all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.

Notes

The Creed of Eusebius of Caesarea, which he presented to the council, and which some suppose to have suggested the creed finally adopted. (Found in his Epistle to his diocese; vide: St. Athanasius and Theodoret.) We believe in one only God, Father Almighty, Creator of things visible and invisible; and in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, life of life, his only Son, the first-born of all creatures, begotten of the Father before all time, by whom also everything was created, who became flesh for our redemption, who lived and suffered amongst men, rose again the third day, returned to the Father, and will come again one day in his glory to judge the quick and the dead. We believe also in the Holy Ghost We believe that each of these three is and subsists; the Father truly as Father, the Son truly as Son, the Holy Ghost truly as Holy Ghost; as our Lord also said, when he sent his disciples to preach: Go and teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Ratification

And those who say There was a time when He was not, or that Before He was begotten He was not, or that He was made out of nothing; or who say that The Son of God is of any other substance, or that He is changeable or unstable,-these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

The Synodal Letter

(Found in Gelasius, Historia Concilii Nicaeni, Lib. II, cap. xxxiii. ; Socr., H. E., Lib. I., cap. 6; Theodor., H. E., Lib. I., cap. 9.) To the Church of Alexandria, by the grace of God, holy and great; and to our well-beloved brethren, the orthodox clergy and laity throughout Egypt, and Pentapolis, and Lybia, and every nation under heaven, the holy and great synod, the bishops assembled at Nicea, wish health in the Lord. Forasmuch as the great and holy Synod, which was assembled at Niece through the grace of Christ and our most religious Sovereign Constantine, who brought us together from our several provinces and cities, has considered matters which concern the faith of the Church, it seemed to us to be necessary that certain things should be communicated from us to you in writing, so that you might have the means of knowing what has been mooted and investigated, and also what has been decreed and confirmed.

First of all, then, in the presence of our most religious Sovereign Constantine, investigation was made of matters concerning the impiety and transgression of Arias and his adherents; and it was unanimously decreed that he and his impious opinion should be anathematized, together with the blasphemous words and speculations in which he indulged, blaspheming the Son of God, and saying that he is from things that are not, and that before he was begotten he was not, and that there was a time when he was not, and that the Son of God is by his free will capable of vice and virtue; saying also that he is a creature. All these things the holy Synod has anathematized, not even enduring to hear his impious doctrine and madness and blasphemous words. And of the charges against him and of the results they had, ye have either already heard or will hear the particulars, lest we should seem to be oppressing a man who has in fact received a fitting recompense for his own sin. So far indeed has his impiety prevailed, that he has even destroyed Theonas of Marmorica and Secundes of Ptolemais; for they also have received the same sentence as the rest.

But when the grace of God had delivered Egypt from that heresy and blasphemy, and from the persons who have dared to make disturbance and division among a people heretofore at peace, there remained the matter of the insolence of Meletius and those who have been ordained by him; and concerning this part of our work we now, beloved brethren, proceed to inform you of the decrees of the Synod. The Synod, then, being disposed to deal gently with Meletius (for in strict justice he deserved no leniency), decreed that he should remain

in his own city, but have no authority either to ordain, or to administer affairs, or to make appointments; and that he should not appear in the country or in any other city for this purpose, but should enjoy the bare title of his rank; but that those who have been placed by him, after they have been confirmed by a more sacred laying on of hands, shall on these conditions be admitted to communion: that they shall both have their rank and the right to officiate, but that they shall be altogether the inferiors of all those who are enrolled in any church or parish, and have been appointed by our most honourable colleague Alexander. So that these men are to have no authority to make appointments of persons who may be pleasing to them, nor to suggest names, nor to do anything whatever, withoutthe consent of the bishops of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, who are serving under our most holy colleague Alexander;

while those who, by the grace of God and through your prayers, have been found in no schism, but on the contrary are without spot in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, are to have authority to make appointments and nominations of worthy persons among the clergy, and in short to do all things according to the law and ordinance of the Church. But, if it happen that any of the clergy who are now in the Church should die, then those who have been lately received are to succeed to the office of the deceased; always provided that they shall appear to be worthy, and that the people elect them, and that the bishop of Alexandria shall concur in the election and ratify it. This concession has been made to all the rest; but, on account of his disorderly conduct from the first, and the rashness and precipitation of his character, the same decree was not made concerning Meletius himself, but that, inasmuch as he is a man capable of committing again the same disorders, no authority nor privilege should be conceded to him.

These are the particulars, which are of special interest to Egypt and to the most holy Church of Alexandria; but if in the presence of our most honoured lord, our colleague and brother Alexander, anything else has been enacted by canon or other decree, he will himself convey it to you in greater detail, he having been both a guide and fellow-worker in what has been done. We further proclaim to you the good news of the agreement concerning the holy Easter, that this particular also has through your prayers been rightly settled; so that all our brethren in the East who formerly followed the custom of the Jews are henceforth to celebrate the said most sacred feast of Easter at the same time with the Romans and yourselves and all those who have observed Easter from the beginning. Wherefore, rejoicing in these wholesome results, and in our common peace and harmony, and in the cutting off of every heresy, receive ye with the greater honour and with increased love, our colleague your Bishop Alexander, who has gladdened us by his presence, and who at so great an age has undergone so great fatigue that peace might be established among you and all of us. Pray ye also for us all, that the things which have been deemed advisable may stand fast; for they have been done, as we believe, to the well-pleasing of Almighty God and of his only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.