Constantine's Letter concerning the date of Easter

Greek text: Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke, Band 1.1: Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* [*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2008]: 89-93.
English translation adapted from NPNF[2] vol. 2, p. 14-16 by AJW9 (translation was originally from Socrates' quotation of Eusebius)

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One of the main determinations of the Council of Nicaea was to set a uniform date for the celebration of Easter. It eventually settled on the dating practiced by Rome and Alexandria. Constantine in this letter declares the decision of the council to the churches throughout the world and urges them all to observe the uniform date of celebration. This letter can also be accessed in Table 6 of our *Ancient Descriptions of the Council of Nicaea* documents.

Greek	English
Κωνσταντῖνος Σεβαστὸς ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.	Constantine Augustus, to the churches.
1. Πεῖραν λαβὼν ἐκ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν εὐπραξίας, ὅση τῆς θείας δυνάμεως πέφυκε χάρις, τοῦτόν γε πρὸ πάντων ἔκρινα εἶναί μοι προσήκειν σκοπόν, ὅπως παρὰ τοῖς μακαριωτάτοις τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας πλήθεσι πίστις μία καὶ εἰλικρινὴς ἀγάπη ὁμογνώμων τε περὶ τὸν παγκρατῆ θεὸν εὐσέβεια τηρῆται.	1. The great grace of God's power has constantly been increasing, as is evident in the general prosperity of the empire. I therefore decided to make it my aim above all else that one faith, sincere love, and unvarying devotion to Almighty God be maintained among the most blessed assemblies of the catholic church.
2. Ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο οὐχ οἷόν τ' ἦν ἀκλινῆ καὶ βεβαίαν τάξιν λαβεῖν, εἰ μὴ εἰς ταὐτὸν πάντων ὁμοῦ ἢ τῶν γοῦν πλειόνων ἐπισκόπων συνελθόντων, ἑκάστου τῶν προσηκόντων τῇ ἁγιωτάτῃ θρησκείᾳ διάκρισις γένοιτο, τούτου ἕνεκεν πλείστων ὅσων συναθροισθέντων (καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ καθάπερ εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐτύγχανον συμπαρών· οὐ γὰρ ἀρνησαίμην ἄν, ἐφ' ᾧ μάλιστα χαίρω, συνθεράπων ὑμέτερος πεφυκέναι), ἄχρι τοσούτου ἅπαντα τῆς προσηκούσης τετύχηκεν ἐξετάσεως, ἄχρις οὗ ἡ τῷ πάντων ἐφόρῳ θεῷ ἀρέσκουσα γνώμη πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἑνότητος συμφωνίαν εἰς φῶς προήχθη, ὡς μηδὲν ἔτι πρὸς διχόνοιαν ἢ πίστεως ἀμφισβήτησιν ὑπολείπεσθαι.	2. But I perceived that this could only be established firmly and permanently when all of the bishops, or at least the greatest part, were convened in the same place for a council where they could discuss every point of our most holy religion. So we assembled as many as possible, and I myself was also present as one of you; for I will not deny what I especially rejoice in, that I am your fellow-servant. All points were then minutely investigated, until a decision was brought to light which was found acceptable to him who is the inspector of all things, and brought a unified agreement, leaving nothing which could cause dissension or controversy in matters of faith.

3. Ἔνθα καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ πάσχα ἁγιωτάτης ἡμέρας γενομένης ζητήσεως ἔδοξε κοινῇ γνώμῃ καλῶς ἔχειν ἐπὶ μιᾶς ἡμέρας πάντας τοὺς ἁπανταχοῦ ἐπιτελεῖν. τί γὰρ ἡμῖν κάλλιον, τί δὲ σεμνότερον ὑπάρξαι δυνήσεται τοῦ τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην, παρ᾽ ἧς τὴν τῆς ἀθανασίας εἰλήφαμεν ἐλπίδα, μιᾷ τάξει καὶ φανερῷ λόγῳ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀδιαπτώτως φυλάττεσθαι; καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἀνάξιον ἔδοξεν εἶναι τὴν ἁγιωτάτην ἐκείνην ἑορτὴν τῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἑπομένους συνηθείᾳ πληροῦν, οἳ τὰς ἑαυτῶν χεῖρας ἀθεμίτῳ πλημμελήματι χράναντες εἰκότως τὰς ψυχὰς οἱ μιαροὶ τυφλώττουσιν. ἔξεστι γὰρ τοῦ ἐκείνων ἔθνους ἀποβληθέντος ἀληθεστέρᾳ τάξει, ἣν ἐκ πρώτης τοῦ πάθους ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ παρόντος ἐφυλάξαμεν, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μέλλοντας αἰῶνας τὴν τῆς ἐπιτηρήσεως ταύτης συμπλήρωσιν ἐκτείνεσθαι.	3. At the council we also considered the issue of our holiest day, Easter, and it was determined by common consent that everyone, everywhere should celebrate it on one and the same day. For what can be more appropriate, or what more solemn, than that this feast from which we have received the hope of immortality, should be kept by all without variation, using the same order and a clear arrangement? And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy for us to keep this most sacred feast following the custom of the Jews, a people who have soiled their hands in a most terrible outrage, and have thus polluted their souls, and are now deservedly blind. Since we have cast aside their way of calculating the date of the festival, we can ensure that future generations can celebrate this observance at the more accurate time which we have kept from the first day of the passion until the present time.
4. Μηδὲν τοίνυν ἔστω ὑμῖν κοινὸν μετὰ τοῦ ἐχθίστου τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὄχλου. εἰλήφαμεν γὰρ παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἑτέραν ὁδόν, πρόκειται δρόμος τῇ ἱερωτάτῃ ἡμῶν θρησκείᾳ καὶ νόμιμος καὶ πρέπων. τούτου συμφώνως ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι τῆς αἰσχρᾶς ἐκείνης ἑαυτοὺς συνειδήσεως ἀποσπάσωμεν, ἀδελφοὶ τιμιώτατοι.	4. Therefore have nothing in common with that most hostile people, the Jews. We have received another way from the Savior. In our holy religion we have set before us a course which is both valid and accurate. Let us unanimously pursue this. Let us, most honored brothers, withdraw ourselves from that detestable association.
5. ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀτοπώτατον ἐκείνους αὐχεῖν, ὡς ἄρα παρεκτὸς τῆς αὐτῶν διδασκαλίας ταῦτα φυλάττειν οὐκ εἴημεν ἱκανοί. τί δὲ φρονεῖν ὀρθὸν ἐκεῖνοι δυνήσονται, οἳ μετὰ τὴν κυριοκτονίαν τε καὶ πατροκτονίαν ἐκείνην ἐκστάντες τῶν φρενῶν ἄγονται οὐ λογισμῷ τινι ἀλλ᾽ ὁρμῇ ἀκατασχέτῳ, ὅπῃ δ᾽ ἂν αὐτοὺς ἡ ἔμφυτος αὐτῶν ἀπάγῃ μανία; ἐκεῖθεν τοίνυν κἀν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει τὴν ἀλήθειαν οὐχ ὁρῶσιν, ὡς ἀεὶ κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον αὐτοὺς πλανωμένους ἀντὶ τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει δεύτερον τὸ πάσχα ἐπιτελεῖν.	5. It is truly most absurd for them to boast that we are incapable of rightly observing these things without their instruction. On what subject are they competent to form a correct judgment, who, after that murder of their Lord and patricide lost their senses, and are led not by any rational motive, but by an uncontrollable impulsiveness to wherever their innate fury may drive them? This is why even in this matter they do not perceive the truth, so that they constantly err in the utmost degree, and will celebrate the Feast of Passover a second time in the same year instead of making a suitable correction.
6. Τίνος οὖν χάριν τούτοις ἑπόμεθα, οὓς δεινὴν πλάνην νοσεῖν ὡμολόγηνται; δεύτερόν γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἐν ἑνὶ ἐνιαυτῷ οὐκ ἄν ποτε ποιεῖν ἀνεξόμεθα. ἀλλ᾽ εἰ καὶ ταῦτα μὴ προὔκειτο, τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀγχίνοιαν ἐχρῆν καὶ διὰ σπουδῆς καὶ δι᾽ εὐχῆς ἔχειν πάντοτε ἐν	6. Why then should we follow the example of those who are acknowledged to be infected with serious error? Surely we should never allow Easter to be kept twice in one and the same year! But even if these considerations were not laid before you, you should still be careful, both by diligence and prayer, that your pure souls should have

μηδενὸς ὁμοιότητι τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς κοινωνεῖν δοκεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔθεσι παγκάκων.	nothing in common, or even seem to do so, with the customs of men so utterly depraved.
7. Πρὸς τούτοις κἀκεῖνο πάρεστιν συνορᾶν, ὡς ἐν τηλικούτῳ πράγματι καὶ τοιαύτῃ θρησκείας ἑορτῇ διαφωνίαν ὑπάρχειν ἐστὶν ἀθεώτατον.	7. This should also be considered: In a matter so important and of such religious significance, the slightest disagreement is most irreverent.
8. μίαν γὰρ ἡμῖν τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐλευθερίας ἡμέραν, τουτέστιν τὴν τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου πάθους, ὁ ἡμέτερος παρέδωκε σωτήρ, καὶ μίαν εἶναι τὴν καθολικὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν βεβούληται, ἧς εἰ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα εἰς πολλούς καὶ διαφόρους τόπους τὰ μέρη διῄρηται, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἑνὶ πνεύματι, τουτέστι τῷ θείῳ βουλήματι, θάλπεται.	8. For our Savior left us only one day to be observed in remembrance of our deliverance, that is the day of his most holy passion. He also wished his catholic church to be one; the members of which are still cared for by one Spirit, that is by the will of God, however much they may be scattered in various places.
9. Λογισάσθω δ' ἡ τῆς ὑμετέρας ὁσιότητος ἀγχίνοια, ὅπως ἐστὶ δεινόν τε καὶ ἀπρεπὲς κατὰ τὰς αὐτὰς ἡμέρας ἑτέρους μὲν ταῖς νηστείαις σχολάζειν, ἑτέρους δὲ συμπόσια ἐπιτελεῖν, καὶ μετὰ τὰς τοῦ πάσχα ἡμέρας ἄλλους μὲν <ἐν> ἑορταῖς καὶ ἀνέσεσιν ἐξετάζεσθαι, ἄλλους δὲ ταῖς ὡρισμέναις ἐκδεδόσθαι νηστείαις. διὰ τοῦτο γοῦν τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπανορθώσεως τυχεῖν καὶ πρὸς μίαν διατύπωσιν ἄγεσθαι τοῦτο ἡ θεία πρόνοια βούλεται, ὡς ἔγωγε ἅπαντας ἡγοῦμαι συνορᾶν.	9. Let the good sense consistent with your sacred character consider how grievous and inappropriate it is, that on the same days some should be observing fasts, while others are celebrating feasts; and after the days of Easter some should celebrate festivities and enjoyments, while others submit to appointed fastings. For this reason Divine Providence directed that we put into effect an appropriate correction and establish uniformity of practice, as I suppose you are all aware.
10. ὅθεν ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο οὕτως ἐπανορθοῦσθαι προσῆκεν, ὡς μηδὲν μετὰ τοῦ τῶν πατροκτόνων τε καὶ κυριοκτόνων ἐκείνων ἔνθους εἶναι κοινόν, ἔστι τε τάξις εὐπρεπής, ἣν ἅπασαι αἱ τῶν δυτικῶν τε καὶ μεσημβρινῶν καὶ ἀρκτῴων τῆς οἰκουμένης μερῶν παραφυλάττουσιν ἐκκλησίαι καί τινες τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἑῴαν τόπων, οὗ ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος καλῶς ἔχειν ἅπαντες ἡγήσαντο, καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ ἀγχινοίᾳ ἀρέσειν ὑπεσχόμην, ἵν' ὅπερ δ' ἂν κατὰ τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων πόλιν Ἰταλίαν τε καὶ Ἀφρικήν, ἅπασαν Αἴγυπτον, Σπανίας, Γαλλίας, Βρεττανίας, Λιβύας, ὅλην Ἑλλάδα, Ἀσιανήν τε διοίκησιν καὶ Ποντικὴν καὶ Κιλικίαν μιᾷ καὶ συμφώνῳ φυλάττεται γνώμῃ, ἀσμένως τοῦτο καὶ ἡ ὑμετέρα προσδέξηται σύνεσις, λογιζομένη ὡς οὐ μόνον πλείων ἐστὶν ὁ τῶν κατὰ τοὺς προειρημένους τόπους ἐκκλησιῶν ἀριθμός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς τοῦτο μάλιστα κοινῇ πάντας ὁσιώτατόν ἐστι βούλεσθαι, ὅπερ καὶ ὁ ἀκριβὴς λόγος ἀπαιτεῖν δοκεῖ καὶ οὐδεμίαν μετὰ τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἐπιορκίας ἔχειν κοινωνίαν.	10. So first, it was desirable to change the situation so that we have nothing in common with that nation of father-killers who slew their Lord. Second, the order which is observed by all the churches of the western, southern, and northern parts, and by some also in the eastern is quite suitable. Therefore, at the current time, we all thought it was proper that you, intelligent as you are, would also cheerfully accept what is observed with such general unanimity of sentiment in the city of Rome, throughout Italy, Africa, all Egypt, Spain, France, Britain, Libya, the whole of Greece, and the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia. I pledged myself that this solution would satisfy you after you carefully examined it, especially as I considered that not only are the majority of congregations located in the places just mentioned, but also that we all have a most sacred obligation, to unite in desiring whatever common sense seems to demand, and what has no association with the perjury of the Jews.

11. Ἵνα δὲ τὸ κεφαλαιωδέστατον συντόμως εἴπω, κοινῇ πάντων ἤρεσε κρίσει τὴν ἁγιωτάτην τοῦ πάσχα ἑορτὴν μιᾷ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ συντελεῖσθαι. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρέπει ἐν τοιαύτῃ ἁγιότητι εἶναί τινα διαφοράν, καὶ κάλλιον ἕπεσθαι τῇ γνώμῃ ταύτῃ, ἐν ᾗ οὐδεμία ἔσται ἀλλοτρίας πλάνης καὶ ἁμαρτήματος ἐπιμιξία.	11. But to sum up matters briefly, it was determined by common consent that the most holy festival of Easter should be solemnized on one and the same day; for it is not at all decent that there should be in such a sacred serious matter any difference. It is quite commendable to adopt this option which has nothing to do with any strange errors, nor deviates from what is right.
12. Τούτων οὖν οὕτως ἐχόντων, ἀσμένως δέχεσθε τὴν οὐρανίαν χάριν καὶ θείαν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐντολήν· πᾶν γὰρ ὅ τι δ' ἂν ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις τῶν ἐπισκόπων συνεδρίοις πράττηται, τοῦτο πρὸς τὴν θείαν βούλησιν ἔχει τὴν ἀναφοράν. διὸ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγαπητοῖς ἡμῶν ἀδελφοῖς ἐμφανίσαντες τὰ προγεγραμμένα ἤδη καὶ τὸν προειρημένον λόγον καὶ τὴν παρατήρησιν τῆς ἁγιωτάτης ἡμέρας ὑποδέχεσθαί τε καὶ διατάττειν ὀφείλετε, ἵνα ἐπειδὰν πρὸς τὴν πάλαι μοι ποθουμένην τῆς ὑμετέρας διαθέσεως ὄψιν ἀφίκωμαι, ἐν μιᾷ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ τὴν ἁγίαν μεθ' ὑμῶν ἑορτὴν ἐπιτελέσαι δυνηθῶ καὶ πάντων ἕνεκεν μεθ' ὑμῶν εὐδοκήσω, συνορῶν τὴν διαβολικὴν ὠμότητα ὑπὸ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως διὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων πράξεων ἀνῃρημένην, ἀκμαζούσης πανταχοῦ τῆς ἡμετέρας πίστεως καὶ εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας. ὁ θεὸς ὑμᾶς διαφυλάξοι, ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπητοί.	12. Since these things are consistent, gladly receive this heavenly and truly divine command. For whatever is done in the sacred assemblies of the bishops can be traced to divine will. Therefore, once you have demonstrated the things which have been prescribed to all our beloved brothers, it would be good for you to make public the above written statements and to accept the reasoning which has proved itself to be sound, and to establish this observance of the most holy day. In this way, when I arrive to check on your condition, which I have desired earnestly for some time, I will be able to celebrate the sacred festival with you on one and the same day, and will rejoice with you for all things, as I see that through our efforts divine power is frustrating Satan's cruelty, and that your faith, peace, and unity are flourishing everywhere. May God preserve you, beloved brothers.

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