

Council of Nicaea Documents (English) – Part 4

Sources Used

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Click [here](#) for a key to the FCC (fourthcentury.com) translators.

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Anonymous Church History (pseudo-Gelasius) (CPG 6034)

Greek text: *Anonyme Kirchengeschichte (Galezius Cyzicenus, CPG 6034)*, ed.

Günther Christian Hansen. GCS N.F. 9 (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2002).

English translation by FCC (NJ and RR).

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 (AGC).

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 (AGC).

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 (AGC).

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 (AGC).

Gelasius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History (CPG 3521)

Greek Text and English translation: *Ecclesiastical History: The Extant Fragments*

With an Appendix containing the Fragments from Dogmatic Writings. GCS, ed. M.

Wallraff, J. Stutz, and N. Marinides. Translated by N. Marinides. (De Gruyter, 2018).

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 (AGC).

Philostorgius, Ecclesiastical History (CPG 6032)

Greek Text: *Philostorgius Kirchengeschichte.*, ed. J. Bidez. GCS 21 (Leipzig, 1913).

English translation by FCC (AGC).

Rufinus of Aquileia, Ecclesiastical History

Latin text: *Eusebius Werke 2.2. Die Kirchengeschichte*, ed. E. Schwartz and T.

Mommsen (Leipzig, 1908).

English translation by FCC (AGC).

Socrates, Ecclesiastical 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).

Sozomen, Ecclesiastical 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).

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical 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).

The Council condemns Arius’ <i>Thalia</i>		
Socrates	Sozomen	
1.9.16a It should also be observed that Arius had written a treatise on his own opinion which he entitled <i>Thalia</i> , but the character of the book is loose and degenerate, similar in its style and meters to the songs of Sotades. This production also the council condemned at the same time.	1.21.3 The words in which his opinions were couched were likewise condemned, and also a work entitled <i>Thalia</i> , which he had written on the subject. I have not read this book, but I understand that it is of a loose character, resembling Sotades in licentiousness.	
The Council’s decision regarding the celebration of Easter		
Eusebius	Socrates	Sozomen
3.5. But before this time another very dangerous disorder had existed and long afflicted the church. I mean the difference in respect to the feast 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. Accordingly, the people were in every place divided over this, and the sacred observances of religion were confounded for a long period. It went so far that the diversity of opinion concerning the time for celebrating one and the same feast caused the greatest disagreement between those who kept it. Some afflicted themselves with fastings and austerities, while others devoted their time to festive relaxation. No one seemed to be capable of devising a remedy for the evil because the controversy continued equally balanced between both parties. To God Almighty alone was the healing of these differences an easy task, and Constantine appeared to be the only one on earth capable of being his minister to achieve 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.	1.8.23 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 Easter. ¹	1.21.6 When this doctrinal controversy had been resolved, the council decided that the feast of Easter should be celebrated at the same time in every place.
Constantine rebukes Acesius over his refusal to readmit the lapsed to communion		
Socrates	Sozomen	Anonymous Church History
1.10.1 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. 1.10.2 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 of the day on which Easter should be observed. He replied, “The	1.22.1 It is related that the emperor, under the impulse of an ardent desire to see harmony re-established among Christians, summoned Acesius, bishop of the church of the Novatians, to the council, placed before him the definition of the faith and of the feast, which had already been confirmed by the signatures of the bishops, and asked whether he could agree to it. Acesius answered that	2.30.1 The emperor’s faith leads us to mention another event as well. He was diligently taking precautions for the peace of the church without neglecting any detail. He had invited even the Novatian bishop Acesius and his companions to the council, for they believed in the <i>homoousios</i> and in the Trinity.

¹ For consistency we have used ‘Easter’ across these ancient sources. The Greek more literally says ‘Feast of Salvation’ or ‘Paschal Feast.’

<p>council has determined nothing new, my prince: for now, and even from the beginning, from the times of the apostles, I traditionally received the definition of the faith, and the time of the celebration of Easter.”</p> <p>1.10.3 When, therefore, the emperor further asked him, “For what reason then do you separate yourself from communion with the rest of the church?” he related what had taken place during the persecution under Decius and referred to the rigidness of that austere 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.</p> <p>1.10.4 When Acesius had thus spoken, the emperor said to him, “Take a ladder, Acesius, and climb alone into heaven.”</p> <p>1.10.5 Neither Eusebius Pamphilus nor any other has ever mentioned these things, but I heard them from a man by no means prone to falsehood, who was very old and simply stated what had taken place in the council in the course of a narrative. From this I conjecture that those who have passed by this occurrence in silence were driven by motives which have influenced many other historians, for they frequently suppress important facts, either from prejudice against some, or partiality towards others. So far concerning Acesius.</p>	<p>their exposition defined no new doctrine and that he agreed in opinion with the council and that he had from the beginning held these sentiments with respect both to the faith and to the feast.</p> <p>1.22.2 “Why, then,” said the emperor, “do you keep aloof from communion with others, if you are of one mind with them?” He replied that the dissension first broke out under Decius, between Novatius and Cornelius, and that he considered such people unworthy of communion who, after baptism, had fallen into those sins which the Scriptures declare to be unto death, for the remission of those sins, he thought, depended on the authority of God only, and not on the priests. The emperor replied by saying, “O Acesius, take a ladder and ascend alone to heaven.”</p> <p>1.22.3 By this speech I do not imagine the emperor intended to praise Acesius, but rather to convict him, because, being but a man, he fancied himself exempt from sin.</p>	<p>2.30.2 After the council and the emperor had composed and signed the standard of faith, Emperor Constantine asked Acesius whether he agreed with the faith and with his establishment of the festival of Easter.</p> <p>2.30.3 Acesius replied, “The council has defined no new doctrine, emperor; we all received this standard of faith and the date of the festival of Easter from the beginning, even from the time of the apostles.”</p> <p>2.30.4 Then the emperor asked, “Why, then, do you separate yourself from our fellowship?” Acesius described how during the Decian persecution some could not contend to the point of martyrdom but rather refused it. He presented their rigorously strict rule, namely, that the church should not accept those who have sinned after baptism, even if they repent, nor consider them worthy of fellowship in the mysteries in the future.</p> <p>2.30.5 After Acesius said this, the emperor replied, “Acesius, put up a ladder for yourself and climb up to heaven.”</p>
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The Canons of the Council of Nicaea

Rufinus	Sozomen	Anonymous Church History
<p>10.6 In addition, they determined that the following ought to be the custom in all the churches:</p>	<p>1.23.1 Zealous of reforming the life of those who were involved with the work of the church, the council enacted laws which were called ‘canons.’</p>	<p>2.31.10b They also composed twenty canons for the church at that same council of Nicaea, which I also saw fit to include in this book:</p>
Rufinus	Anonymous Church History	
<p>I. Nobody who castrates himself because he is unable to control his lusting should become a member of the clergy.</p>	<p>2.32.1 Of eunuchs who castrated themselves: If someone underwent surgical operation because of disease or was castrated by barbarians, he may remain in the clergy. But if someone belonging to the clergy castrated himself while healthy, he must resign, and from now on no such person should be admitted. Because this obviously applies only to those who deliberately castrate themselves in their audacity, church law admits to the clergy those who were made eunuchs by barbarians or slave owners but otherwise prove worthy.</p>	

<p>II. Nobody who has been recently received from a heathen life and lifestyle, who has been accepted into baptism, should join the clergy before he has been cautiously examined.</p>	<p>2.32.2 Of those admitted to ordination from paganism: Whether by necessity or because people were in a hurry, it has often happened that men who had just come to faith from pagan life, having been briefly catechized, immediately received the spiritual bath and were promoted to bishop or priest as soon as they were baptized, contrary to the law of the church. We therefore thought it appropriate that nothing like this should occur in the future, for the catechumen needs time and further examination after baptism. The apostle’s rule is clear: ‘He must not be a recent convert, lest he become conceited and fall into judgment and the devil’s trap’ [1 Tim. 3:6-7]. If in the course of time a spiritual deficiency is discovered in a person and proven by two or three witnesses, this person should leave the clergy. Anyone who boldly violates this ruling of the great council will endanger his position in the clergy.</p>
<p>III. Nobody who is a bishop or any other cleric should live with any woman who is not his mother, sister, aunt, or another similar relation to him.</p>	<p>2.32.3 Of clergy who have housekeepers: As regards housekeepers, the great council generally decided not to allow bishops, priests, deacons, or anyone else in the clergy to have a housekeeper except for a mother, a sister, an aunt, or other such persons who are beyond all suspicion. Anyone who violates this ruling will endanger his reputation.</p>
<p>IV. A bishop ought to be ordained, in so far as it is possible, by the bishops of the whole province. If that is difficult, then certainly not by fewer than three. However, it must be in such a way that it has the presence or the authority of a metropolitan bishop. In his absence, the ordination ought to be considered void.</p>	<p>2.32.4 Of the ordination of bishops: It is most proper for a bishop to be ordained by all the bishops in his province. If this causes difficulty because of urgent necessity or because of long distances, at least three should meet, with the absent bishops also participating in the election and agreeing in writing. Then they should carry out the ordination. The metropolitan bishop should confirm the ordinations which occur in his province.</p>
<p>V. If someone has been expelled from the church by a bishop, whether he be a cleric or lay person, another bishop should not receive him. But to provide the opportunity for remedy in the case of something done unjustly, as often happens, whether through some irritation or contention, they determined that a council ought to be called twice a year in each province by the provincial bishops to judge such matters. In this way anything done by someone accidentally or unwillingly may be corrected by the others, and something done correctly affirmed by all.</p>	<p>2.32.5 Of the excommunicated: As regards the clergy and laity who are excommunicated by the bishops responsible for each province, church law shall apply the principle that those rejected by one bishop should not be admitted by another. He should, however, investigate to ensure they were not excommunicated out of pettiness, contentiousness, or some such hostility on the part of the bishop. To properly investigate this, we thought it appropriate to hold councils twice a year in each province so that all the bishops of the province might meet to review such questions together. In this way, those who by common consent have given offense to their bishop should accordingly be excommunicated by all until the community or their bishop sees fit to pass a milder sentence on them. The first council should occur before Lent so that a pure gift may be offered to God after every petty matter has been cleared up, and the second around autumn.</p>
<p>VI. The historical custom is to be retained in Alexandria and in the city of Rome, namely that the former governs the affairs of Egypt and the latter the churches situated near Rome.</p>	<p>2.32.6a Of the special honorary rights granted under church law to those who govern greater dioceses: The ancient custom in Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis which grants the bishop of Alexandria authority over all of them shall remain in force, for this is also the custom for the bishop of Rome. The church in Antioch and the churches in the other provinces shall likewise retain their privileges. It is generally evident that if anyone has become bishop without the consent of the metropolitan, the great council has determined that he may not be bishop.</p>

<p>VII. If two or three disagree about the ordination of a bishop for whatever reason, the authority of the rest of them, and especially of the metropolitan bishop with the others, bears the most weight.</p>	<p>2.32.6b If, however, two or three due to their belligerence oppose an ordination which has been duly approved by common vote in accord with the law of the church, the decision of the majority should stand.</p>
<p>VIII. The ancient position of honor which has been handed down to the bishop of Jerusalem is upheld. Nevertheless, the standing of the metropolitan bishop of that province is also maintained.</p>	<p>2.32.7 Of the bishop of Aelia: Since custom and ancient tradition have established that the bishop of Aelia deserves honor, he shall have the next place of honor after the metropolitan, whose place of honor shall be preserved.</p>
<p>IX. In regard to the Cathars (whom we refer to as Novatians), the clerics ought to be received in their offices if they sincerely repent and turn back to the church confessing ecclesiastical doctrines, but an ordination must take place. If one of their bishops should come to one of our bishops, he ought to seat him in the position of presbyter. The title of bishop should remain only on the one who has always held to the catholic faith, unless the bishop desires by his own will to honor him with that title, or if it pleases him to seek a vacant bishopric for him. Such a decision is within his power. X. There should not be two bishops in one city.</p>	<p>2.32.8 Of those who call themselves Cathars: Of those who once called themselves Cathars but are now joining the holy catholic apostolic church, the holy great council thought it appropriate that they remain in the clergy after being ordained. Before all this, however, they must confess in writing that they agree with and follow the doctrine of the catholic apostolic church, namely, that they will commune with those who have remarried and those who have apostatized under persecution, for whom a time and a season has been established to follow the doctrine of the catholic church in everything. Wherever all the ordained are of this faction, be it in a village or a city, they shall retain their rank in the clergy. But if they join where there is already a bishop or priest of the catholic church, it is evident that the bishop of the church shall retain the rank of bishop while the one named bishop by the Cathars shall have the rank of priest, unless the bishop is willing to share the honor of his title. But if he is unwilling, he shall create a position as either country-bishop or priest so that the one named bishop by the Cathars may remain in the clergy, lest there be two bishops in the city.</p>
<p>XI. Anyone who has been quickly and carelessly advanced to the priesthood but afterwards confesses that he has committed some sort of shameful deed or is reproved by others is to be removed from office. If he is one of those who lapsed and was ordained through hasty ignorance, and he is recognized as such, he too should be removed.</p>	<p>2.32.9 Of the ordination of priests: If any priests were promoted without examination or confessed their sins when questioned, yet people, contrary to church law, ordained them despite their confession, church law does not admit such men. The catholic church demands irreproachable behavior. 2.32.10 Of apostates who were ordained in ignorance: Whether apostates were ordained in ignorance or with the knowledge of those who ordained them makes no difference in the law of the church. When they are convicted, they will be deposed.</p>
<p>XII. If someone lapsed during persecution even though he was not tortured, and he makes penance from the heart, he must become a catechumen for five years, and after this must join in prayer alone with the faithful for two years, and after that he may be received.</p>	<p>2.32.11 Of those who sinned without compulsion: Of those who sin without compulsion, removal of possessions, danger, or the like, which happened under the tyrant Licinius, the council decided to show mercy to them even though they were unworthy of mercy. Those who sincerely repent shall spend three years as hearers and seven as prostrators, then may join the congregation in prayer for two years without receiving the Eucharist.</p>
<p>XIII. Those who leave military service on account of their confession and then return are to do penance for thirteen years and afterwards may be received, as long as they bring forth penance from the heart. Nevertheless, it is within the power of the bishop to modify the</p>	<p>2.32.12 Of those who had renounced worldly life but returned to the world: Those called by grace who showed their first zeal by resigning from military service but then returned to their vomit by paying bribe money to regain their military rank shall spend three years as hearers and ten as prostrators. With all of them one must examine their conduct and the manner of their repentance. Those who demonstrate repentance with genuine fear, tears, perseverance, and good works, not just a show of them, shall complete the set time as hearers, then</p>

conditions if he sees that they are fruitful and attentive in their penance.	may participate in the prayers. At that point the bishop may make a milder decision in their case. But those who indifferently accept the penance and think the prescribed manner of entering the church is enough for their repentance should in any case complete the whole time.
XIV. Concerning those who are about to depart from this life while in the process of penance, they decree that no time ought to be wasted. If someone survives after receiving communion, he ought to complete the determined time or at least do whatever the bishop wishes to arrange.	2.32.13 Of the dying who request communion: Of the dying, we must even now keep the ancient law of the church that the Lord's provisions must not be withheld from anyone who is dying. But if hope of his recovery has been lost and he has received communion and partaken of the sacrifice, yet he survives, his place shall be with those who participate in prayer only. In general, the bishop should, with examination, distribute the sacrifice to any dying person who asks to partake of the Eucharist.
XV. Concerning catechumens who have lapsed, the council determined that they should be kept separate from the prayer of the catechumens for three years, after which they ought to be received.	2.32.14 Of apostate catechumens: Of catechumens who apostatize during the catechumenate, the holy great council thought it appropriate that they spend three years as hearers and after this may again pray with the catechumens.
XVI. Nobody ought to seek to move from a smaller city to a larger church, whether he be a bishop or even another kind of cleric.	2.32.15 That clergy must not transfer from one city to another: Because of great tumult and quarrels which have arisen, we thought it appropriate to completely abolish the custom practiced in some regions contrary to church law. Consequently, neither bishop nor priest nor deacon may move from one city to another. In any case, if anyone tries any such thing after this ruling of the holy council or undertakes such an endeavor, the arrangement will be canceled, and he must return to the church of which he was ordained bishop or priest or deacon.
XVII. No cleric should be received into communion who abandons his church without an apparently good reason and wanders and roams through other churches.	2.32.16a Of those who do not remain in the churches where they were promoted: Those who neither fear God nor know the law of the church and so recklessly leave their church, be they priests, deacons, or anyone at all who belongs to the clergy, may not by any means be received into another church. Rather, they must certainly return to their parishes. If they remain, they must be excommunicated.
XVIII. Nobody who steals away to his own church someone who belongs to another may ordain him a cleric without the consent of the one to whom he belonged.	2.32.16b If someone dares to snatch one who belongs to another and ordain him in his church without the consent of the bishop whom the clergy member has left, the ordination shall be invalid.
XIX. No cleric should accept interest or the increase of grain or wine. In recent times it is customary to receive one and a half times or even double what was given. If he does that, he should be removed as if he committed a deed of foul greed.	2.32.17 Of clergy members lending for interest: Since many clergy members, pursuing greed and vile profit, have forgotten the Scripture which says, 'He does not lend his money for interest' [Ps. 15:5], so that they demand percentages when they lend, the holy great council found it right that anyone discovered taking interest after this ruling, seeking it from business or otherwise, demanding half as much again, or contriving something else for vile profit, shall surely be removed from the clergy.
XX. Deacons should not come before presbyters, nor should they sit in the assembly of the presbyters or distribute the Eucharist when they are present. But they should only attend them while the latter do the	2.32.18 Of priests receiving the Eucharist from deacons: It has come to the attention of the holy great council that in certain regions or cities deacons give the Eucharist to priests, though neither church law nor custom has taught that those without authority to sacrifice may give the body of Christ to those who do sacrifice. We also learned that some deacons touch the Eucharist before even the bishops. This

<p>work. If there is no presbyter present, then he is permitted to distribute it. The council commands that those doing otherwise be removed.</p>	<p>must be completely abolished. Deacons should remain within their proper sphere, knowing that they are servants of the bishop and inferior to priests. They should receive the Eucharist after priests, in accord with their rank, from either the bishop or a priest. Moreover, deacons must not be allowed to sit amidst priests, for this is contrary to church law and contrary to order. If anyone refuses to obey even after these rulings, he shall be removed from the office of deacon.</p>
<p>XXI. The Paulianists, who are called Photinians, should be rebaptized.</p> <p>XXII. Deaconesses, because they do not in fact receive the laying on of hands, also ought to be considered amongst the laity.</p>	<p>2.32.19 Of those who have joined or are joining the catholic church from the faction of Paul of Samosata: Of the former Paulianists who then converted to the catholic church, we have ruled that they should in any case be baptized again. As for any who formerly belonged to the clergy, if they appear blameless and irreproachable, the bishop of the church should ordain them after they are baptized again. But if they prove unfit under examination, they should be removed. The same procedure should likewise be observed with deacons and members of the clergy in general. As for the deaconesses who belong to this rank with them, we mentioned that they in any case belong to the laity because they have not been ordained.</p>
	<p>2.32.20 Of those who kneel on Sunday: Seeing as some kneel on Sunday and the days of Pentecost, the holy council thought it appropriate that people stand while offering prayers to the Lord so that everything may unanimously be observed in the same way in every parish.”</p>
	<p>2.32.21 The same holy assembly wrote these twenty laws regulating church government in the presence of the God-loving praiseworthy Emperor Constantine.</p>