

**0325-0325 – Concilium Nicaenum I – The Synodal Letter**

**The Synodal Letter**

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should not be so subsequently. Moreover, if it may be said that Socrates had a partial sympathy with the Novatians, he certainly cannot be considered as belonging to them, still less can he be accused of falsifying history in their favour. He may sometimes have propounded erroneous opinions, but there is a great difference between that and the invention of a whole story. Valesius especially makes use of the argument *ex silentio* against Socrates. (a) Rufinus, he says, gives many particulars about Paphnutius in his *History of the Church*; he mentions his martyrdom, his miracles, and the Emperor's reverence for him, but not a single word of the business about celibacy. (b) The name of Paphnutius is wanting in the list of Egyptian bishops present at the Synod. These two arguments of Valesius are weak; the second has the authority of Rufinus himself against it, who expressly says that Bishop Paphnutius was present at the Council of Nicæa. If Valesius means by lists only the signatures at the end of the acts of the Council, this proves nothing; for these lists are very imperfect, and it is well known that many bishops whose names are not among these signatures were present at Nicæa. This argument *ex silentio* is evidently insufficient to prove that the anecdote about Paphnutius must be rejected as false, seeing that it is in perfect harmony with the practice of the ancient Church, and especially of the Greek Church, on the subject of clerical marriages. On the other hand, Thomassin pretends that there was no such practice, and endeavours to prove by quotations from St. Epiphanius, St. Jerome, Eusebius, and St. John Chrysostom, that even in the East priests who were married at the time of their ordination were prohibited from continuing to live with their wives. The texts quoted by Thomassin prove only that the Greeks gave especial honour to priests living in perfect continency, but they do not prove that this continence was a duty incumbent upon all priests; and so much the less, as the fifth and twenty-fifth Apostolic canons, the fourth canon of Gangra, and the thirteenth of the Trullan Synod, demonstrate clearly enough what was the universal custom of the Greek Church on this point. Lupus and Phillips explained the words of Paphnutius in another sense. According to them, the Egyptian bishop was not speaking in a general way; he simply desired that the contemplated law should not include the subdeacons. But this explanation does not agree with the extracts quoted from Socrates, Sozomen, and Gelasius, who believe Paphnutius intended deacons and priests as well.



### The Synodal Letter.

(Found in Gelasius, *Historia Concilii Nicæni*, 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 Nicee 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 Arius 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, without the 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.

### 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,<sup>113</sup> 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

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<sup>113</sup> We must read ἔθους, not ἔθνους, as the Mayence impression of the edition of Valerius has it.