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— Neil Godfrey - November 2023

- Turmel, Joseph (1859-1943) Auteur du texte. *Histoire Du Dogme De La Papauté. I, Des Origines À La Fin Du IVe Siècle*. Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1908.

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CHAPTER SIX

Constantine and the Papacy before Nicaea

At the point where we have arrived, half a century still separates us from the victory of the Milvian Bridge and the Edict of Milan. But, from now on, our eyes are turned towards the great emperor who, by opening a new era to the Church, so profoundly modified the conditions of its existence. Let us see in what state Constantine found the papacy and in what state he left it.

What is most striking, when we consider the organization of Catholicity at the end of the third century, is the group work that continued to occur within Christian communities. Some churches emerged above others, dominated them, pulled them into their orbit. Centers of attraction have been established. The bishops who, during the Easter quarrel, gathered at Polycrates, considered him their representative and spokesperson. It is the same with those prelates whom we have seen, on different occasions, come, not only from the Proconsular, but from Mauretania and Numidia, to deliberate with Saint Cyprian. Asia Minor revolves around Ephesus; Africa around Carthage¹. We could also say, to a certain extent, that the churches of the two cities of Caesarea dominate, one over Cappadocia, the other over Palestine, and that the bishops who begin to establish themselves in the south of Gaul, huddle around the bishop of Lyon. But these last two groupings, and a few others of the same kind, are devoid of precision as well as importance. Carthage and Ephesus themselves have only a subordinate role. It is above all Alexandria, Antioch and Rome which should attract our attention.

1. Let us also note that certain bishops acquired, through their personal value, an authority which disappeared with them. Such as Dionysius of Corinth, of whom Eusebius says (iv, 23, 1) that he wrote Catholic letters to the churches (ὑπετυποῦτο καθολικῶς πρὸς τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἐπιστολαίς), and of which he mentions the letters addressed to the churches of Lacedaemon, Athens, Nicomedia, Gortyn, Crete, Amastris, Pontus, Knosos and finally Rome.

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The bishop of Alexandria, Denys, sends encyclicals to his colleagues in Egypt and tells them the day on which they must celebrate the Head of Easter 2. He travels to the diocese of Arsinoe, to combat the millenarian doctrine which flourishes there 3. Is Pentapolis infested by the Sabellian heresy? It is to Denys that we turn to stop the progress of error 1. He is, by right, the protector of religion and the guardian of discipline throughout Egypt. He even exercises this role outside Egypt. When Helenus of Tarsus, Firmilian of Cappadocia and Theoctist of Palestine wanted to convene a council in Antioch to resolve the Novatian question, they asked Dionysius to come and lend them support. 2 And, when the episcopate of the East was preparing to condemn the heretic Paul of Samosata in Antioch, they again appealed to the enlightenment of Dionysius who, on the point of death, was reduced to sending a letter 3. To At the beginning of the 4th century, the bishop of Alexandria was given the right to provide for the needs of all the churches of Egypt through ordinations. This we know from the letter of the bishop of Thmuis, Phileas, to Meletius of Lycopolis. During the persecution of Diocletian (around 306), Meletius had made ordinations in churches whose bishops were in captivity; he had even given successors to these bishops who were thought to be dead. In his own name and in the name of his wronged colleagues like himself, Phileas addresses strong protests to Meletius. He accuses him of having violated ecclesiastical rules, and, in any event, of having usurped a right which belonged only to the bishop of Alexandria. "You had no regard," he said to him, "for the great bishop our father, Peter (of Alexandria) on whom we all depend... Will you say that you were made to believe that we were dead? , you could however have been informed by the messengers whose comings and goings were not unknown to you. You had to at least wait for the decision and authorization of the father who is superior to us (the bishop of Alexandria).1 "

These formulas, in particular the expression "ex quo cuncti pendemus", suggest that the bishop of Alexandria ordained bishops throughout Egypt. Moreover, this state of affairs is still attested to us by the letter from the Council of Nicec to the churches of Egypt where we read that the ecclesiastics, bishops, priests, deacons, ordained by Meletius, must, before being reinstated in the frameworks , receive a new ordination, and that, even then, in whatever church they may be, the ecclesiastics appointed by our very honored colleague Alexander" (the bishop of Alexandria) must come. From which it follows that before the Council of Nicaea - this council in fact notes an existing state of affairs - there were found throughout Egypt bishops, priests and deacons ordained - this is the meaning of the word "appointed" - by the bishop of Alexandria. Let us add that the Fathers of the Council, to sanction this usage, decided that Meleciian bishops could not be admitted to succeed legitimate bishops who had died before having received ordination from the Bishop of Alexandria 2.

2. Eusebius, Hist. eccl. % seen, 20.
3. Eusebius, vi, 46.

1. Eusebius, seen, 6.
2. Eusebius. vi, 46.
- 3 Eusebius, seen. 30.

1. Epistola ad Meletium, P. G., x, 1565.
2. Socrates, i, 9; see Sohm, Kirchenrecht, p. 402. Note also that the bishop of Alexandria, Alexander, assembled, in 320, in his episcopal city, a council in which the bishops of the various provinces of Egypt took part and which deposed two Arian bishops (Socrates, i, 6). According to Athanasius (Contra arianos, 59), bishop Peter assembled, around 306, a great council in Alexandria where Melecius was deposed.

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If from Egypt we move to the East, we see the church of Rhossos in Cilicia, which takes seriously the reveries of the Docets, called to order by the bishop of Antioch, Serapion 1. The same Serapion consecrates the bishop 'Edessa, Palout2. Without dominating the churches of the East to the full extent that the Bishop of Alexandria dominates Egypt3, the Bishop of Antioch nevertheless exercises considerable influence around him. As for the Bishop of Rome, we saw him in the exercise of his authority. He institutes and deposes the bishops of Italy; he brings them together in councils; he can launch an excommunication against a bishop of Gaul which results in deposition; he even imposes his orders on Africa, Asia Minor, Cappadocia; and, when these orders are ignored, he does not hesitate to sanction them with excommunication.

The three sees of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, apart from the superior right claimed by the successors of Saint Peter, therefore in some way summarize, in themselves,. the whole Church.

1. Eusebius, vi, 12.
2. Tixeroni, The origins of the church of Edessa, p. 140.
3. Sohm, Kirchenrecht, p. 405.

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This centralization simplifies and facilitates communications. We remember that, in his Letter to Stephen regarding the Bishop of Arles, Saint Cyprian asks the Pope to let him know the name of the successor that the bishops of Gaul will give to Marcian. Rome is therefore the intermediary between the different provinces of the West. She receives the information and transmits it. It is through it that the name of the bishop of Arles will reach Carthage, from where it will penetrate all the bishoprics of Africa. Alexandria and Antioch fulfill the same function with respect to Egypt and the East respectively. Also, when Novatian strives to collect Fabian's succession, he takes care to write to Alexandria and Antioch to win them over to his cause. Cornelius does the same; and Eusebius has preserved for us a long fragment of one of the

letters that this pope wrote to Fabius of Antioch, to shed light on Novatian's account. Cornelius' successor, Stephen, informed Dionysius of Alexandria of the excommunication he had brought against the bishops of Cilicia and Cappadocia. 1 For their part, the bishops gathered at Antioch in council to condemn and depose Paul of Samosata wrote as follows: the subscription of their synodal letter: "To Denys (of Rome) and to Maximus (of Alexandria) and to all our colleagues in the universe, bishops, priests and deacons, as well as to the entire Catholic Church, Hellenus and Hymeneus... greetings to our dearest brothers in the Lord" 1. The letter is addressed to the entire Church, but only the bishops of Rome and Alexandria are named.

1. Eusebius, vii. 5.

1. Eusebius, vii, 30.

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The bishops of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch monitor their subordinates and call them to order. They also monitor each other. If one of them makes a wrong move, the others warn him; if he finds himself in a difficult situation, we come to his aid. Fabius of Antioch appears to favor the excessive severity of Novatian and to oppose the reconciliation of sinners. His two colleagues endeavor to enlighten him. Cornelius puts before his eyes the decisions of the councils of Rome and Carthage, which condemned the Novatian doctrine, and he shows him that the entire West has declared itself in favor of the reconciliation of penitent sinners. 2 Dionysius sends him a long dissertation in the same direction 3. He proves in particular that heaven itself condemned Novatian by the story of the old man Serapion, who, being dangerously ill, sent for a priest to obtain reconciliation following a sin of apostasy, and whose life was miraculously prolonged until the moment when a child came, on behalf of the priest, to bring him the Eucharist. "The priest," he said, "was ill. But I had given orders to grant forgiveness to the dying, especially to those who had asked for it before they were dangerously ill, so that they could leave this life full of hope. The priest gave the child a small piece of the Eucharist, recommending that he dip it in water and then introduce it into the mouth of the old man. The child returned with the plot. Before his arrival, the old man regained consciousness: "Here you are," he said, "my son. The priest could not come, but do what he told you." The child soaked the parcel and let it flow into the mouth of the old man who, immediately after swallowing it, gave up the ghost. . Is it not obvious that this old man received a prolongation of life, precisely to be able to obtain his reconciliation, to erase his sin and to be received by Christ because of the good works he had done? had accomplished? » A few years later, another bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata, dared to lower Christ to the level of a man. At this news, the whole East is moved; a large number of bishops rushed to Antioch and deposed the heretic after having condemned him.

2. Fragment in Eusebius, vi. 43. According to Eusebius, the council of Rome, whose decisions Cornelius communicated to Fabius, included sixty bishops and a more considerable number of priests and deacons.

3. Eusebius, vi, 44.

The churches of Alexandria and Rome offer us nothing like what happened in Antioch, in the time of Paul of Samosata. However, the warnings are not useless to them. In his efforts to refute Sabellianism, Dionysius of Alexandria appears to go beyond measure and uses formulas which endanger the unity of the divine Triad. It is, for this fact, denounced to Rome, and Rome, after examining his doctrine in a council, asks him for explanations which he provides, moreover, with good grace. Rome, here, takes its revenge on Dionysius who, a few years earlier, lectured him. He intervened, as we know, in the baptismal quarrel. He tried, moreover unnecessarily, to inspire in Stephen feelings of liberalism with regard to the customs in force in Africa and the East. He renewed his attempt with Sixtus and Dionysius. Rome ended up agreeing with him; but, in turn, she teaches him that his prudence is not without fault and that he has not been able to avoid all the pitfalls.

1. In *Atlianase, Deisentia Dionysii*, 13 et seq. ; of decree. *Nicæen. synodi*, 25. See *Mignc, Pat. lat.*, v, 118 et seq.

The state of affairs that we have sought to expose is formulated in a famous decree. The sixth canon of Nicaea would not be in its place here if it instituted new legislation. But we agree to recognize that it does not establish anything, that it is limited to establishing an established situation, that it is a simple witness to the practices in force for a fairly long time. So we can question him. Here is what he says^{1 2}: "The ancient customs which exist in Egypt, Libya, the Pentapolis, must be observed, and the bishop of Alexandria must exercise his authority over all these countries, since such is the custom of the bishop of Rome. Likewise the privileges of the church of Antioch and the churches of the other provinces must be respected. »Canons IV and V organized the ecclesiastical province and established the respective rights of the metropolitan and the provincial council. Canon VI brings a complement and a corrective to these canons. The Fathers of the Council of Nicaea approved and sanctioned the custom by virtue of which the Bishop of Alexandria ordained the bishops of Egypt, gathered them into councils, and exercised, in a word, in several provinces, much greater rights than those that the Fourth Canon grants, in each province, to the metropolitan. In this regard, they recognize the bishop of Antioch and some other bishops, for example the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, with rights similar to those exercised by the bishop of Alexandria. Finally they justify their decision by invoking the example given by Rome. They say: Since the bishop of Rome ordains the bishops of Italy, brings them together in councils, institutes them, deposes them, is, in a way, the bishop of the entire peninsula, the bishop of Alexandria can continue to lary act of jurisdiction throughout Egypt; the bishop of Antioch will be able to act in the same way in the East; all those who, anywhere, are authorized by custom to ordain the bishops of their province, to gather them in councils, to depose them, will be able to exercise the same powers in the future. This is what the Fathers of the Council say. They note that there are patriarchates in the Church – the word was still unknown but the thing existed – exercising rights superior to those with which they have just invested the metropolitans and the provincial councils (canons IV and Y). They

approve of these patriarchates and they make a derogation in their favor from the legislation promulgated by the two previous canons 1

2. Τά αρχαία εθῆ κρατεῖτο» τὰ ἐν Αἴγυπτο» καὶ Λιβύῃ καὶ Πεντα- πόλει, ὥστε τὸν Ἀλεξάνδρειάς ἐπίσκοπον πάντων εἶναι τὴν ἐξουσίαν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τῷ ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐπισκοπῶ τοῦτο σύνηθές ἐστιν... The translation given by Ruïn is , in reality, an interpretation, which we will talk about later.

1. See Hefelo, History of the councils (tr. Farnb.) t. 552- 569: Loening Kirchenrecht, i, 430-440: Hiuschius, Kirchenrecht, IV, '74 ("jui corrects i. 538): Solim, Kirchenrecht. 396-408. Hefele and Loening believe that there were, from their time, ecclesiastical metropolises in Egypt; Solini denies it. In any case. all agree in recognizing that ecclesiastical metropolises did not yet exist in Italy. Sohm starts from there to conclude that there would be a historical contradiction in speaking of patriarchates at the time of Nicaea, since a patriarch is, by definition, a prelate below whom are superior metropolitans who are themselves superior to the simple ones. bishops. We can criticize him for confusing the idea of patriarchy with one of its modalities. At the time of the Council of Nicaea, the metropolitans that we meet at the end of the 4th century perhaps did not exist anywhere; but the bishops of Rome, Alexandria and. to a weakened extent, Antioch, if they did not have metropolitans under their command, exercised rights which did not need to be developed, which rather had to be restricted when the metropolitans made their appearance (they did not (he ordained more than the metropolitans, while previously they ordained all the bishops of several provinces) In this alone we can say that they were already patriarchs.

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Such was the organization of the Church at the end of the third century. Such were, at that time, the rights of the papacy considered, not in their intimate reality which only theology can make known to us, but in their historical exercise. Did Constantine respect these rights? Did he even work to ensure a more complete manifestation for them? Or should we say that it has at least stopped its flourishing? And, since theology teaches us that there is a progress of dogmas, did the first Christian emperor favor the development of the dogma of the papacy? Would he, on the contrary, have dealt him some blow? This is what we have to look for.

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We would vainly ask for a solution to this problem from the measures of proscription with which Constantine imposed the idolatrous cults, from the privileges which he granted to the Christian clergy. 1 These edicts had a considerable influence on the expansion of the Church and on its prosperity: their action on the papacy was null. But the emperor, who signed the Edict of Milan, is the same one who presided over the beginnings of the Donatist controversy as well as the Arian controversy, and who founded Constantinople. Let us see if, in these various circumstances, his actions were favorable or harmful to the ecclesiastical monarchy.

1. See de Broglie, *I. Church and the Roman Empire in the 4th century*, i, ch. 2 and 3; Duruy, *History of the Romans*, seen, 147; Boissier, *The end of paganism*, r, 65; Schultze, *Geschichte des Untergangs des griechisch-romischen Heidenthums*, I, 28, sq. ; Id., *Realencyclopædie für protestantische Theologie*, x, 766; and especially Tillemonet, *History of the Emperors*, iv, Constantine, liv et seq.

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It was the month of April 313. Constantine was staying in Gaul and had just driven back some Frankish tribes beyond the Rhine, when he received the following note from Africa: "We are addressing you, excellent emperor, because you are of a just race and that your father did not, like the other emperors, persecute Christians. A dispute arose in the country of Africa between us and the other bishops (concerning the tradition of the sacred books). As this crime was not committed in Gaul, we ask your piety to give us judges in Gaul. Written by Lucianus, Dignus, Nassutius, Capito, Fidencius and the other bishops of Donatus' party. 1. The signatories of this note were seventy Numidian bishops attached to Majorinus. We do not have to recount the origin of Donatism here; what interests us at the moment in this case is the procedure and not the merits. Let us simply say that the Donatists criticized the bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, for having been ordained by a traditional bishop and refused, for this reason, to recognize him as one of their colleagues.

1. *Libellus datus ab episcopis parti Majorini*, in Optat, *De schismate donatistarum*, i, 22. Or find this piece, as well as those which follow, in the *Monumenta vetera ad donatistarum historiam pertinentia*, which Dupin collected in his edition of the book d'Optat, p. 279 et seq. ; Migne inserted these *Monumenta* in volume VIII of his Latin patrology. See the wording, p. 747. — For the questions of authenticity and date that arise here, see Duchesne, *The Donatism File*, in *Mixtures of Archeology and History*, x (1890), p. 589. See in particular on p. 609 the explanation of the presence of Donat in the libellus.

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The request of the Numidian bishops caused Constantine a painful impression. Obviously the Nouveau protector of the Christian religion expected to find more unity in the episcopal body. But, since the evil that he would have thought impossible existed, he worked to make it disappear. To grant the request of the plaintiffs who wanted Gallic judges, the emperor chose Maternus, bishop of Cologne, Rheticus of Autun, Marinus of Arles, and he invited these prelates to go to Rome to decide, in concert with Pope Miltiades, the dispute of the bishops of Africa. Here is the letter he wrote to Pope 1:

1. P. L., viii, 477

"Constantine Augustus to Miltiades, bishop of the Romans and to Mark.

“The attached letters were transmitted to me by the very illustrious proconsul of Africa Anulinus. They contain various accusations directed against Cécilian, bishop of the Carthaginians, by some of his colleagues from Africa. It is very painful for me to see that, in these provinces whose government Divine Providence has entrusted to me and which are so populated, the people are drawn into disastrous divisions, and that the bishops themselves are in disagreement. I decided that the aforementioned Cecilian, accompanied by ten accusing bishops and ten others taken by him for his defense, would travel to Rome. There you and your colleagues, Rheticius, Maternus and Marinus, to whom I have ordered to go to Rome, will hear it in accordance with divine law. So that you can judge the matter with full knowledge of the facts, I have transmitted to your colleagues, with my letters, copies of the documents which were communicated to me by Anulinus. When you have learned about it, your gravity will advise how to end this quarrel according to the requirements of fairness. You are, in fact, aware of the respect I have for the Holy Catholic Church. You know that I would like to see no schism, no division in your ranks. May the divinity of the great God grant you many years, venerable men. »

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A somewhat large premises was required to accommodate the opposing parties. Constantine put the Lateran Palace at Miltiades' disposal, home of the Empress Fausta who was then absent. Fifteen bishops of Italy were asked to join the three prelates of Gaul 1. It was a real council of nineteen prelates which met in Rome on Friday October 2, 313 to hear the trial of Caecilian. The matter was quickly clarified. At the first shock, the indictment hatched by the Donatists fell like a house of cards and the bishop of Carthage was found innocent of all the charges that his enemies placed on him. Each of the judges pronounced a sentence of acquittal. The Pope formulated his own in these terms: "Given that Donat's men clearly did not accuse Cecilian, as they declared, and that Donat himself did not convince him on any point, I believe that we must maintain him in the communion of the Church and in the rights of his dignity" 1. A copy of the decision, accompanied by the minutes of the discussion, was sent to the Emperor 2 who congratulated himself on having brought peace to the African church.

1. The fifteen bishops of Italy are only mentioned by Optat (i, 23). Constantine, in his letters to Ælalius and Chrestus (P. L., vin. 483, 485), although subsequent to the Council of Rome, limits himself to speaking of the bishops of Gaul.

1. In Optât, i, 24.

2. Letter to Ælalius, P. L., vin, 483: "Qui quidem ea quæcumque in præsentia eorum fuerunt gesta, cuncta ad scientiam meam etiam actis habilis retulerunt".

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His joy was short-lived. Instead of accepting the failure they had just suffered, the Donatists only thought of revenge. They again bothered Constantine with their grievances, claimed that their case had not been sufficiently heard in Rome, and demanded new judges. Constantine first

hoped to calm them by charging the proconsul of Africa to carry out civil information; but this expedient gave him no results. He then decided to convene a new council whose seat he fixed at Arles in the south of Gaul. He wanted this council to be numerous in order, this time, to remove from the Donatists any pretext for recriminations. He therefore informed the bishops of the West to go to Arles by August 1, 314; at the same time, he ordered the governors of the provinces to place public carriages at the disposal of the prelates, to provide them with servants and to pay for everything on the road.

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One of the letters he had written on this occasion has reached us: it is written to Chrestus, bishop of Syracuse ¹. It reads:

1. P. L., viii, 485.

“Some time ago, learning that certain men, under the influence of perverse feelings, were creating divisions in the worship of the celestial divinity and in the Catholic faith, I resolved to put an end to this state of things. For this purpose, I brought to Rome some bishops from Gaul, I ordered the opposing parties to come from Africa to the same city, and contradictory debates took place in the presence of the bishop of Rome. But, as almost always happens, many, without worrying about their salvation and the respect due to the most holy faith, continue to engage in recriminations in their own name. They refuse to bow to the judgment rendered. They claim that the bishops were too few in number and that moreover these bishops proceeded with haste while neglecting to enlighten themselves. As this quarrel continued despite the judgment which should have ended it, I had to, to put an end to it, involve a larger number of judges. I therefore ordered many bishops belonging to various countries to go to Arles for the August calends, I finally decided to write to you yourself. You will ask for the public car from the illustrious Latronianus who is the corrector of Sicily ¹. You will take with you two second-rate ministers of your choice. You will also take three slaves for your service, and you will go to the aforementioned city for the appointed day... May the Almighty God preserve you for many years!
»

1. The correctores were for Italy and Sicily what the governors were for the provinces. The institution of these magistrates probably dates back to Aurélien. See Vigneaux, *Essai de l'histoire sur la Praefectura Urbis à Rome* Paris, 1896, p. 152.

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Things happened according to the imperial program. From Gaul, Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Africa, Spain and even present-day England, the bishops gathered in Arles on August 1, 314 ². They again proclaimed the Céilien's innocence already recognized by the Council of Rome. They then took advantage of the circumstance which brought them together to jointly resolve various obscure points of dogma or discipline. Pope Silvestre was unable to leave Rome and he sent

two priests accompanied by two deacons to represent him. The Fathers of the Council of Arles brought their decisions to his attention by the following letter 1:

2. The letter from the council to Silvestre is signed by thirty-three bishops. See Tillemont, vi, notes 16 and 17 on the Donatists j Mgr Duchesne, *Fastes episcopal de Vannenne Gaule*, 12, 46; id. *ancient history of the Church*, I, 115.

1. P. Lviii, 818; see also Hardouiu, i, 261.

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“United by the bonds of charity and attached to our common mother the Catholic Church, we gathered in the city of Arles by the will of the most pious emperor. It is from there that we send you the respectful greeting to which you are entitled, most glorious Pope 2... God the sovereign Ju[^]e and our mother the Church, who knows and discerns her children, have condemned or rejected (the Donatists). Would to God, beloved brother, that you had deigned to witness this imposing spectacle. 3 Surely the verdict would have been more severe and our assembly would have been happy to see you judge with us. But you have not been able to leave the place where the apostles sit and where they continually bear witness with their blood to the glory of the Lord. However, dearest brother, we did not believe it necessary to confine ourselves to the matter for which we had been summoned. We saw fit to consult on our own affairs. And, as we came from various provinces, we discussed various problems. We were also pleased to entrust you with transmitting our decisions, since you represent larger dioceses 1. The document annexed to the letter of our mediocrity will make you aware of these decisions (follows a list of decrees). The annoyed emperor then ordered us to return to our churches. Amen » 1.

2. “Ad Arelatensium civitatem piissimi imperatoris voluntate adducti, inde te gloriosissime papa, commerita reverentia salutamus. » On the use of the word dad, see above, p. 133,

3. “Et utinam, frater dilectissime, ad hoc tantum spectaculum interesse tanti fecisses! »

1. “Placuit etiam a te qui majores diæceses tenes, per te .potissimum omnibus insinuari”. Later the bishops of the Council of Sardica will say to the Pope: € Your excellent prudence must ensure that our brothers of Sicily, of Sardinia, of Italy be informed by your letters of our actions.’ We saw above Saint Cyprian asking Pope Stephen to let him know the name of the bishop $\phi\iota\beta$ the church of Arles will choose to succeed Marcian. The Pope was the intermediary of the churches. He received the information and communicated it. The bishops of the Council of Arles conform to custom. They bring their decisions to the attention of the pope and they ask him to bring them to the attention of the other bishops The general idea of the text is therefore clear, but the word for word is very obscure. We sometimes read: c placuit etiam antequam a te* or “ante ad te”. The first lesson does not give any meaning; the second gives one if we imply the verb scribere. The expression “majores diaecesos” is strange. Nolte (Tkeolog. Quartalschrift, 1867, p. 54) proposed to read: “qui majoris dioce-eeseos gubernacula tenes”. This correction is arbitrary; moreover it does not give a satisfactory meaning; because we do

not clearly see the link that exists between the direction of a large diocese and the function entrusted to it by the council. Loening (*Kirchenrecht*, I, 428) paraphrases the text of the council as follows: "you to whom are subject the bishoprics of the diocese of the vicar of Italy and the bishoprics of the diocese of the vicar of Rome". It can be objected that the Vicariate of Italy and the Vicariate of Home did not constitute two dioceses, but were subdivisions of the Diocese of Italy. — If we assume, as is natural to do, that the council designates by the word "dioceses" the civil dioceses between which the great prefectures were subdivided, we will give the following paraphrase of its text: We, bishops united at Arles, we almost all belong to the prefecture of Gaul which includes the dioceses of Gaul, Brittany (south) and Spain (west). You represent the prefecture of Italy which includes the dioceses of Italy (with its two vicariates), Africa and Western Illyria. The dioceses that you occupy and of which Rome is the personification are larger than the dioceses of the prefecture of Gaul to which most of us belong. It is therefore appropriate that we transmit our decisions to you, so that you can communicate them to all the bishops."

1. "Tunc tædians jussit omnes ad suas sedes redire. » Duchesne, *Mixtures of archeology and history*, x, p. 594, notes that this sentence does not belong to the epistolary style. He sees there the remains of a story annexed to the letter which disappeared.

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Let us note the enigmatic sentence which ends this letter. It means that the sentence of the Council of Arles was useless, as that of the Council of Rome had been, and that the trial of the Donatists, instead of being finished, only entered a new phase. While the Fathers of Arles, convinced of having put an end to the troubles which were desolating Christian Africa, were drawing up a code of ecclesiastical legislation, the irreducible adversaries of Cécilian went, in all haste, to the emperor, and appealed to his judgment. Constantine was indignant at their obstinacy and at the request they dared to address to him. "They demand," he cried, "my judgment, when I myself await the judgment of Christ. I declare in all truth, the judgment of the priests must be considered as the judgment of Christ himself. Their audacity goes to the point of madness. They appeal just as pagans do!... Go, return to your respective seats and remember me, so that the Lord may have mercy on me" 1. At the time he was writing this letter to the bishops of the council, the Emperor was, it seems, decided to reject the Donatists' appeal. But they ended up overcoming his resistance and imperial authority was granted to them. What it was, the multiple incidents which complicated and prolonged it, we do not have to say here. Let's go straight to the conclusion. After hearing the pleas of the opposing parties, the emperor pronounced the final verdict in Milan (November 10, 316), and this verdict was consistent with the two previous ones. Cécilian's innocence was recognized and rigorous measures were enacted against the Donatists 1.

1. Letter *Æterna, religiosa* written by Constantine at the Council of Arles (P. L., vin, 487; Tillemont, *Hist. eccl.*, vi, Dote 19 on the Donatists; Duchesne, loc. cit., p. 617). See letter

Ante paucos from Constantine to the Donatistic bishops (P. L. y vin, 489). Note also the text of Saint Augustine (ep. XLin, 20): a ... eis ipse cessit, ut de illa causa post episcopos judicaret, a sanctis antistitibus postea veniam petiturus”.

1. Tillemont, vi, 57 et seq.

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Seven years later, Constantine, conqueror of his colleague Licinius, was master of the entire empire. His thoughts then turned to the unfortunate church of Africa which internal divisions continued to tear apart. Now that he had the bishops of the East at hand, why would he not resort to their good offices? No doubt the spy” copat of the West had failed in the peacemaking mission with which he had charged him. But perhaps the episcopate of the East would be happier. Perhaps he would be able to bring a little calm and reason into the minds of the rebels. Such was the project to which the conqueror of Licinius abandoned himself on entering Nicomedia. The brutality of events did not take long to wake him from his dream. These Eastern bishops whom he liked to represent as “the guides of peoples on the path to salvation” were themselves busy fighting and tearing each other apart. The subject of the quarrel was a priest from Alexandria named Arius, who had begun to expound on the generation of the Word. Condemned to Alexandria by the prelates of Egypt (320), Arius found protectors in Palestine, Syria and Bithynia. And, while the Council of Alexandria excommunicated him, other episcopal assemblies loudly defended him. This is what Constantine, on entering Niconia, learned from the very bishop of that city, Usebius, one of the warmest supporters of Arius 1.

1. Tillemont, Hist, of the emperors, iv. Constantine, Iviii iàt)Hist. eccl., vi, the Arians, ni and seq. Tillemont is inclined to put the date of the Council of Alexandria in 319, today we prefer 320; see Hefele (trans. Farnb.) i, 373. For synods favorable to Arius see Hefele (trans. Farnb. I, 378, sq.

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Faced with this spectacle, we should no longer think of asking the East to heal the wounds of Africa. The Eastern Church was itself naiad. She herself needed a doctor to come to her aid immediately. Who would this doctor be? Constantine estimated that an imperial warning, skillfully mixed with severity and benevolence, and above all promptly administered, would be enough to stifle the evil at its core. He therefore took up his pen and wrote the following letter addressed to the bishop of Alexandria, Alexander, and Arius 2:

2. In Eusebius, Life of Constantine, II, 64; P.L., viii, 494.

“The God who assists me in my undertakings and who preserves all things is my witness that a double thought has inspired my work. I wanted first of all to bring all peoples to conceive of divinity on one and the same type. I proposed, moreover, to restore its former vigor to the ailing empire... I was convinced that, if I managed to get men to agree on the cult of the divinity, the

piety of individuals would have on the course of public affairs a happy counter-blow. Also, noting that a wind of madness was blowing across Africa and that certain lighthearted and reckless spirits dared to introduce divisions into public worship, I wanted to remedy this evil. To achieve this goal, I saw no other means - it is true that, before using it, I had to get rid of the evil man who opposed the holding of your synods - I have seen, I say, any other way than to send some of you there, to re-establish harmony there. Indeed, since the light, I mean the rule of holy religion, has come out from the bosom of the East to enlighten the whole world, I rightly believed that you must be the guides of the peoples in the way of salvation, and my eyes are fixed on you. As soon as my triumph over my enemies was assured, my first thought was for the project which seemed to me to have the most importance. But, goodness! what news has struck my ears or rather hurt my heart 1 I have learned that the divisions which persist in Africa are far from reaching in severity those which reign among you! From which it follows that your country, from which I intended to ask for the remedy, is itself more ill. The information given to me about the beginnings of your quarrel allows me to affirm that it has frivolous motives unworthy of serious minds... The origin of this argument comes, I know, from the fact that you, Alexander, asked your priests their opinion on one of the things written in the law or rather on a trivial question; and that you, Arius, gave a solution that you should not have stopped at or, at least, that you should have kept to yourself. Hence came the discord between you; hence, the breakdown of communion; hence, finally, this division which tears apart the holy people and which shatters the unity of the body. Therefore forgive one another, and accept the counsel of him who is, like you, the servant of God. What is this advice? It is to no longer raise problems that should never have been raised and to leave unanswered any request for a solution... Who can pride themselves on seeing clearly in these. such abstract speculations? And, even if we were to become masters of these abstractions, what hope could we have of putting them within the reach of the people?... Is it right to disturb the union with subtle problems, which nothing forces you to raise?... Grant me the satisfaction, the servant of God, of bringing to a successful conclusion the work that I have undertaken to revive unity in the Christian people. Since you have the same faith, since you accept the same dogmas... there is no point in quarreling over a question that does not touch on the essence of religion. Not that I'm asking you to have the same opinion on this problem that I call ridiculous, whatever name you give it. You can remain united while differing in feelings on insignificant points..."

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Having received this letter, Alexander and Arius could not have enough disdain for the presumption of the emperor who claimed to decide on one of which he did not recognize the first word. But if Constantine's letter was condemned to remain without result, the man responsible for carrying it must have exercised considerable influence on the course of events. This man was the bishop of Cordoba, Hositis, whom the emperor had brought with him to the East. 1 Arriving in Alexandria, Hosius, according to Eusebius, worked ardently to calm the spirits and restore harmony. The evil was too widespread. Hosius returned to Nicomedia, leaving the whole of Egypt torn by religious passions. 2 But his mission, which seemed finished, was only just beginning. During his stay in the capital of Egypt, he had become friends with Bishop Alexander, and both had acted in concert against Arius. Returning to Nicomedia, he returned

the spirit of the emperor. In the letter we have just read, Constantine also proved Alexander and Arius wrong. Hosius explained to him that the right was on the side of the bishop, that the priest was in all the wrongs and that he was the enemy to be fought. Fully convinced, the emperor immediately wrote a theological dissertation in which he overwhelmed Arius with his sarcasm and insults. 3 However, the evil grew constantly; the controversies degenerated into brawls and riots. Hosius had no other remedy for the situation than in a council, and he expressed his feelings to the emperor. 1 Constantine followed the advice of the Spanish bishop. 315 years ago he had ordered the bishops of the West to gather in Arles. This time, master of the entire empire, he wrote to the bishops of what was then called the whole world. He arranged to meet them at Nicaea, a town neighboring Nicomedia and easily accessible, and he put public carriages at their disposal. Here is the letter he wrote on this subject 2:

1. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, n, 63 and 73; Hosius is designated without being named. Socrates, i, 7.
2. Socrates, i, 8. See Tillemont, vi: Saint Alexander, x.
3. This letter has been preserved for us by Gelasius of Cyzicus *tSyntagnia*, ni, 1; in Hardouin, i, 452; see also P. L. viii, 510. Socrates (i. 9 end) places this letter after the Council of Nicaea. We must, with Saint Epiphanius, *User.* lxxix, 9, put it before (see Tillemont, vi, note 5 on the Arians). Duruy, *seen*, 180, wrongly rejects it.

1. Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* i, 1, says that Constantine assembled a council at Nicaea: *c ex sacerdotum sententia*". These "sacerdotes" were the bishops then residing in Nicomedia, first of all Hosius who was the confidant of the emperor. Hence it is that Sulpicius Severus, n. 40, says when speaking of Hosius *t Nicæna synodus auctore illo confecta habebatur*". Saint Epiphanius, *Rær.*, i. xviii, 4, also attributes an important role to Alexander of Alexandria. Gwatkin, who attributes the convocation of the council to the personal idea of Constantine (p. 38) should have, at least, discussed the texts of Rufinus and Sulpicius Severus.
2. Hefele (trans., from Farnborough, i, 403) says that "the letters of invitation to the Council of Nicaea, addressed by the Emperor Constantine the Great to the bishops, unfortunately no longer exist". He is wrong. These letters were preserved for us in Syriac by Bishop Marouta (see Martin, *Analecta sacra de Pitra*, iv, 224 and 452) The translation we read here is taken from Hefele, i, 403, note by the Farnborough translator.

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"Letter from the Emperor Constantine to the three hundred and eighteen bishops. »

"I think everyone knows that nothing is more dear to my heart than piety towards God. It had previously seemed good to me to convene an assembly of bishops in the city of Ancyra in Galatia; today, for many reasons, it seemed useful to me to bring together this assembly in the city of Nicaea of Bithynia, both in order to make it easier for the bishops of Italy and Europe to access it and for because of the healthiness of the climate and the possibility where I will be present and take part in this assembly. This is why, dearest brothers, I inform you of my wish

which is that you go without delay to the aforementioned city of Nioea. Each of you, concerned about what is more serious, will hasten, avoiding any delay, in order to actually attend the deliberations in person.

God bless you, dear brothers. »