

The Victor Constantine, the Great Augustus, to Alexander and Arius.

(1.) I call God to witness, as is fitting, who is the helper of my endeavors and the preserver of all men, that I had a twofold reason for undertaking this duty which I have now performed. My design then was first to bring the various beliefs formed by all nations about God to a condition of settled uniformity. Secondly I hoped to restore to health the civil liberties of the empire, then suffering under the malignant power of an angry tyrant. Keeping these objects in view, I sought to accomplish the one by thought, which is hidden from the eye, while the other I tried to rectify by the power of military authority. For I was aware that, if I should succeed in establishing, according to my hopes, a common harmony of sentiment among all the servants of God, the general course of affairs would also experience a change corresponding to the pious desires of all.

(2.) So when I found that an intolerable spirit of mad folly had overcome the whole of Africa, through the influence of those who with heedless frivolity had presumed to divide the religion of the people into diverse sects, I was anxious to stop the course of this disorder. After I had removed the common enemy of mankind [Licinius] who had interposed his lawless sentence which prohibited your holy synods, I could discover no other remedy equal to the occasion, except to send some of you churchmen to aid in restoring mutual harmony among the disputants.

(3.) I naturally believed that you in the East would be the first to promote the salvation of other nations, since the power of Divine light and the law of sacred worship, which proceeded in the first instance through the favor of God, from the bosom, as it were, of the East, have illumined the world by their sacred radiance. So I resolved with all energy of thought and diligence of enquiry to seek your aid. As soon, as I had secured my decisive victory and unquestioned triumph over my enemies, my first enquiry was concerning that object which I felt to be of paramount interest and importance.

(4.) But, O glorious Providence of God! How deep a wound did not my ears only, but my very heart receive when it was reported that divisions existed among yourselves more grievous still than those which continued in that country [Africa, i.e. the Donatist schism]! You, through whose aid I had hoped to procure a remedy for the errors of others, are in a state which needs healing even more than theirs. And yet, now that I have made a careful enquiry into the origin and foundation of these differences, I have

found the cause to be of a truly insignificant character, and quite unworthy of such fierce contention. I feel compelled to address you in this letter, and to appeal at the same time to your unity and discernment. I call on Divine Providence to assist me in the task, while I interrupt your dissension as a minister of peace. (5.) I have hope for success: Even in a great disagreement I might expect with the help of the higher Power, to be able without difficulty, by a judicious appeal to the pious feelings of those who hear me, to recall them to a better spirit. How can I help but to expect a far easier and more speedy resolution of this difference, when the cause which hinders general harmony of sentiment is intrinsically trifling and of little importance?

(6.) I understand that the origin of the present controversy is this. When you, Alexander, demanded of the priests what opinion they each maintained respecting a certain passage in Scripture, or rather, I should say, that you asked them something connected with an unprofitable question. You then, Arius, inconsiderately insisted on what ought never to have been speculated about at all, or if pondered, should have been buried in profound silence. Hence it was that a dissension arose between you, fellowship was withdrawn, and the holy people were rent into diverse factions, no longer preserving the unity of the one body. (7.) And so I now ask you both to show an equal degree of consideration for the other, and to receive the advice which your fellow-servant impartially gives. What then is this advice? It was wrong in the first instance to propose such questions as these, and also wrong to reply to them when they were presented. (8.) For those points of discussion are not commanded by the authority of any law, but are rather the product of an argumentative spirit which is encouraged by the idle useless talk of leisure. Even though they may be intended merely as an intellectual exercise, they ought certainly to be confined to the region of our own thoughts, and not hastily produced in the popular assemblies, nor unadvisedly entrusted to the ears of the general public. For how very few are there able either accurately to comprehend, or adequately to explain subjects so sublime and difficult to comprehend in their nature? Or, granting that one were fully competent for this, how many people will he convince? Or again, who in dealing with questions involving such subtle distinctions as these can be sure he is not dangerously departing from the truth in some point? We ourselves may be unable, through the weakness of our natural abilities, to give a clear explanation of the subject before us, or, on the other hand, our hearers understanding may

prevent them from arriving at an accurate understanding of what we say. Lest that be the case, it is our obligation to be sparing with our words, so that neither of these situations will cause the people to be reduced either to blasphemy or to schism.

(9.) Now forgive one another for both the careless question and the ill-considered answer. The cause of your difference has not been any of the leading doctrines or precepts of the Divine law, nor has any new heresy respecting the worship of God arisen among you. You are really of one and the same judgment; and so it is fitting for you to join in communion and fellowship. (10.) As long as you continue to contend about these small and very insignificant questions, it is not fitting that so large a portion of God's people should be under the direction of your judgment, since you are thus divided between yourselves. In my opinion, it is not merely unbecoming, but positively evil, that such should be the case. Let me arouse your minds by the following little illustration. You know that philosophers, though they all adhere to one system, are yet frequently at issue on certain points, and differ, perhaps, in their degree of knowledge. Yet they are brought back to harmony of opinion by the uniting power of their common teachings. If this be true, is it not far more reasonable that you, who are the ministers of the Supreme God, should be of one mind in the profession of the same religion? Let us still more thoughtfully and with closer attention examine what I have said, and see whether it be right: On the ground of some trifling and foolish verbal difference between ourselves, should brothers assume towards each other the attitude of enemies? Should the honorable synod be torn in two by profane disunion, because of you who wrangle together on points so trivial and altogether unessential? This is vulgar, and more characteristic of childish ignorance, than consistent with the wisdom of priests and sensible men. (11.) Let us withdraw ourselves with a good will from these temptations of the devil. Our great God and our common Savior has granted us all the same light. Permit me, who am his servant, to successfully bring my task to conclusion, under the direction of his providence, that I may be enabled, through my exhortations, diligence, and earnest warning, to recall his people to communion and fellowship. (12.) You have, as I said, only one faith, and one opinion about our religion, and the Divine commandment in all its parts imposes upon us all the duty of maintaining a spirit of peace. Because of this, you should not let the circumstance which has led to a slight difference between you cause any division or schism among you, since it does not affect the validity of

the whole.(13.) I say this without in any way desiring to force you to a complete unity of judgment in regard to this truly idle question, whatever its real nature may be. For the dignity of your synod can be preserved, and the communion of your whole body can be maintained unbroken, no matter how wide a difference exists among you about unimportant matters. We are not all like-minded on every subject, nor is there such a thing as one universal disposition and judgment.

(14.) As far, then, as regards Divine Providence, let there be one faith, and one understanding among you, one united judgment concerning God. But as to your subtle disputations on questions of little or no significance, though you may be unable to harmonize in opinion, such differences should be confined to your own private minds and thoughts. And now, let the preciousness of common affection, let faith in the truth, let the honor due to God and to the observance of his law remain immovably among you. Resume your mutual feelings of friendship, love, and respect. Restore to the people their customary embraces; and you yourselves purify your souls, as it were, and once more acknowledge one another. For it often happens that when a reconciliation is effected by the removal of the causes of hostility, friendship becomes even sweeter than it was before.

(15.) Restore me then my quiet days, and untroubled nights, that the joy of undimmed light, the delight of a tranquil life, may be my portion from here on. Otherwise I will be forced to mourn with constant tears, and I will not be able to pass the remainder of my days in peace. While the people of God, whose fellow-servant I am, are so divided among themselves by an unreasonable and wicked spirit of contention, how is it possible that I shall be able to maintain a tranquil mind? And I will give you a proof how great my sorrow has been in this regard. Not long ago I visited Nicomedia, and had intended to proceed immediately from that city to the East. It was while I was hurrying towards you, and had already finished the greater part of the journey, that the news of this matter reversed my plan, so that I would not be forced to see with my own eyes that which I felt myself scarcely able even to hear. So open for me by your unity of judgment that road to the regions of the East which your dissensions have closed to me, and permit me speedily to see you and all other peoples rejoicing together. Render due acknowledgment to God in the language of praise and thanksgiving for the restoration of general peace and liberty to all.