

**THE DATE OF EASTER:
CLASSICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

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Thesis submitted to Saint Paul University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctorate of Philosophy in Canon Law

Faculty of Canon Law
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Abstract

This doctoral project aims to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted analysis of the question of the date of the celebration of Easter and its relationship to the endeavor of unity among Christian churches. Ecclesiastical legislation concerning this matter over the past twenty centuries in the Eastern and Western churches will be analyzed and discussed in order to provide a historical context for the present-day ecumenical discussion. Ancillary questions pertaining to the calculation of the Easter date, such as the calendar, will be considered as is relevant to this discussion, specifically concerning proposals within the medieval era for the revision of the Julian calendar and their impact upon ecclesiastical legislation in this area.

Chapter 1 will focus upon a historical discussion of this problematic, from the early days of Christianity to the practice of the Church in the medieval period. Chapter 2 will discuss proposals of reform through the medieval period. Chapter 3 will discuss the Easter date controversy within the various Orthodox churches, and Chapter 4 will examine the ecumenical import of this debate as it has been carried out over the past century in relation to comparative ecclesiastical law. This chapter will also include and evaluate proposals for reform on the basis of these principles, and proposals for revision of existing ecclesiastical legislation in this matter will be proffered.

Ce projet de doctorat propose à fournir une analyse complète et multidimensionnelle de la question de la date de la célébration de Pâques et de sa relation avec l'effort d'unité entre les églises chrétiennes. La législation ecclésiastique concernant cette question au cours des vingt derniers siècles dans les églises orientales et occidentales sera analysée et discutée afin de fournir un contexte historique au débat œcuménique

contemporain. Les questions annexes relatives au calcul de la date de Pâques, telles que le calendrier, seront considérées comme pertinentes pour cette discussion, en particulier concernant les propositions de révision du calendrier julien à l'époque médiévale et leur impact sur la législation ecclésiastique dans ce domaine.

Le chapitre 1 se concentrera sur une discussion historique de cette problématique, des premiers jours du christianisme à la pratique de l'Église à l'époque médiévale. Le chapitre 2 discutera des propositions de réforme à travers la période médiévale. Le chapitre 3 traitera de la controverse sur la date de Pâques au sein des différentes églises orthodoxes, et le chapitre 4 examinera l'importance œcuménique de ce débat tel qu'il a été mené au cours du siècle dernier en relation avec le droit ecclésiastique comparé. Ce chapitre comprendra et évaluera également des propositions de réforme sur la base de ces principes, et des propositions de révision de la législation ecclésiastique actuelle seront proposées.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank sincerely the following for their kindness and support throughout this doctoral project:

- To Prof. Chad Glendinning, Dean of the Faculty of Canon Law at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, who graciously and competently supervised this project. Indeed, this thanks is extended to all members of the same Faculty of Canon Law for their kindness and support.
- To my bishop, Most Rev. Richard G. Henning, D.D., S.T.D., for his paternal support and encouragement during my studies at Saint Paul University.
- To Prof. Basilius Groen, for his insightful and helpful comments on this project during its early stages.
- To Ms. Donna Miller, J.C.L. of the Canon Law Society of America, for her cordial, speedy and competent help in arranging for a webinar on this research in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.
- To Rev. Anthony J. Carbone, J.C.L. and Dr. C. Philipp E. Nothaft, Ph.D. (Oxon.) for their collaboration in the sharing of texts which have gone into the preparation of this project.
- To Ms. Rebecca Ruesch, J.C.L., and Mr. Calder E. Claydon for their assistance in formatting, editing, and layout.
- To my family, especially my mother Norma, my late grandmother Marie-Bernadette and grandfather Norman, and brother Mark, sister-in-law Madeline, and nephew John Bennett, whom I love dearly, and without whose support and love this project would not be possible.
- *Laus Deo Virginiq̄ue Matri!*

List of Abbreviations

- Aleppo* WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, “Towards a Common Date for Easter.” Aleppo, World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, 1997, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/towards-a-common-date-for-easter/index#table>
- CCEO* Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches
- CIC* Code of Canon Law
- DAEP* “*De anno et eius partibus*,” in *Breviarium Romanum*, editio typica, Rome, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1961, 49*-55*.
- DECO* J. ERRICKSON, “The Date of Easter: A Canonist’s Observations”
- DTC* *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*
- EH* Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*
- HCMA* E. TSAKADZE, “Historical, Canonical, Mathematical and Astronomical Aspects of the Paschalion Question,” in *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2017), 106-145.
- HE* *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*
- IG* GREGORY XIII, bull *Inter gravissimas*
- PG* *Patrologia Graeca*
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*
- SCCSO* J. HEILBRON, *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- SE* NOTHAFT, C.P.E., *Scandalous Error: Calendar Reform and Calendrical Astronomy in Medieval Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Studien-84* B. KRUSCH, *Studien zur Christen-Mittelalterlichen Chronologie, Der 84-Jährige Ostercyclus und seine Quellen*, Berlin, Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1880.
- Synodica* SECRÉTARIAT POUR LA PRÉPARATION DU SAINT ET GRAND CONCILE DE

L'ÉGLISE ORTHODOXE, *Synodica V*, Chambésy-Genève, Les Éditions du Centre Orthodoxe, 1981.

TANNER2 N. TANNER (ed.), *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990.

WCC World Council of Churches

General Introduction

1. Topic Choice

In the course of researching a 2015 thesis for the Master in Society, Law and Religion at KU Leuven on the topic of the computation of time in the 1983 *CIC*, many questions surfaced in the course of this study about the background for the Church's interest in the computation of time, thereby leading me to briefly discuss in the course of said thesis the principles for the reckoning of Easter. In this thesis, I discussed the computation of time in canon law, and a portion of my thesis situated these canons contextually in relation to the Church's interest in the date of Easter.

In the course of this investigation, it became apparent that the date of Easter has always been a focal point for the Church's regulation of the calendar and of time computation in general, which took on canonical force through the Gregorian reform of the calendar. The date of Easter in the Latin Church, as well as the calendar itself, remains juridically regulated by the bull of Gregory XIII, *Inter gravissimas*.

It is this author's opinion that any future reform of the date of Easter (or of the calendar itself) will necessitate canonical legislation in this area, as such reforms directly impact the over four centuries old papal legislation provided by these documents (which ultimately was given civil recognition now nearly worldwide). Reaching consensus on this matter will require the collaboration of the highest ecclesiastical officials in various

Christian churches and ecclesial communities. Within the Catholic Church, canon and liturgical law will be impacted by any future agreements in this matter.

This doctoral project therefore considers the question of the Easter date in its profundity, considering in detail the ecclesiological implications (both *ad intra* and *ad extra*) of the Second Vatican Council's declaration in *Sacrosanctum concilium* on the date of Easter in light of contemporary ecumenical discussion on this issue. It further intends to provide a comprehensive legal and historical analysis of the question of the date of the celebration of Easter, with the goals of evaluating the legislation underpinning this important element in the Christian churches, and formulating recommendations to the Roman Catholic Church and the ecumenical dialogue between churches on the Easter date as a point of ecumenical convergence.

2. Status quaestionis

An overview of the Church's legislation relative to the Easter celebration will be helpful to situate this work in a canonical context. The date of Easter has always been a focal point for the Church's regulation of the calendar and of time computation in general – which, *in radice*, took on canonical force through the Gregorian reform of the calendar in *Inter gravissimas* and as explicated in the text *De anno et eius partibus*.¹ This text was commonly found within the *praenotanda* of Roman rite liturgical books prior to the Second

¹ “De anno et eius partibus,” in *Breviarium Romanum*, editio typica, Romae, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1961 (=DAEP), 49*-55*.

Vatican Council. It will be taken as axiomatic in this study that the Easter date in the Roman Church and the use of the Gregorian calendar are still legally reckoned on the basis of these two foundational legal texts.

Legal regulation of movable feasts has a basis in the Church's current legislation, notably in canon 1244, §1 of the 1983 *CIC* which affirms that "it is only for the supreme ecclesiastical authority to establish, transfer, and suppress feast days and days of penance common to the universal Church, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 1246, §2." This is likewise echoed in canon 880 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. José Antonio Abad affirms that this canon applies the teaching of *Sacrosanctum concilium* 22 that "the proper authority in liturgical matters is the Apostolic See, and, as far as the law provides, of the local assemblies of bishops."² Diocesan bishops and eparchs have, indeed, made provision under current canon and liturgical law for moving the Easter celebration to facilitate celebrations particularly with the Orthodox churches.

The paschal computus, or the mathematical formula for calculating the date of Easter, embraces all aspects of the Church's legislative interest in the computation of time, and has formed the basis of the Gregorian calendar used virtually worldwide. There is ample evidence in the Church's canonical tradition for an ecclesiastical interest in the calendar and time computation, which include canons 200-203 of the *CIC*, with special

² J. A. ABAD, "Sacred Places and Times," in A. MARZOA, J. MIRAS, R. RODRÍGUEZ-OCAÑA (eds.) and E. CAPARROS (gen. ed. of English translation), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur, 2004, 1895.

mention being given to canon 202, which makes express mention of the use of the calendar in the clause “*prout sunt in calendario.*” Notably, in recent times, on 4 December 1963, the Second Vatican Council spoke encouragingly about reform of the calendar in an appendix to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*.

There is a central relationship of the Easter date to ecclesial structure, as the Church lives as a *communio*, drawing its life from the celebration of the Lord’s Day and the central mystery of the Resurrection. The witness of divided churches and divided celebrations of Easter/Pascha clearly runs counter to this essential reality. To ensure order within the Christian churches, a legal structure and apparatus is required to regulate the celebration of such feasts, as indicated above. Such is a self-understanding expressed in 1983 *CIC* and the ecclesiology it embodies. There exist certain points of contact between liturgical and canon law in this matter,³ as well as points of contact between Roman Catholic canon law and the laws of other separated churches and ecclesial communities.

Legislation within the Orthodox churches on the matter was also specially noted, such as that proposed in the Pan-Orthodox Council of 1923. In the Anglican Communion, there exist even points of contact between their own canon law and civil law, such as the UK Easter Act. Furthermore, the documents of the Second Vatican Council and WCC which govern contemporary ecumenical dialogues remain an important point of reference in this discussion.

³ See canon 708 of the *CCEO*.

The main documents in canon law governing the date of Easter in the modern period (that is, subsequent to the decrees of the Council of Nicaea) would be:

1. The bull *Inter gravissimas* of Pope Gregory XIII, dated 24 February 1582;
2. The document *De anno et eius partibus*, found in the *praenotanda* of the *Breviarium Romanum* and *Missale Romanum* published from 1582 until 1964;
3. The decree of the Second Vatican Council *Sacrosanctum concilium* on the sacred liturgy promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 4 December 1963, appendix;
4. The decree of the Second Vatican Council *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on the Eastern Churches, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964, section 20.

The legal texts defining the date of Easter within other Christian churches or ecclesial communities (e.g. the Calendar Act 1750 or the Easter Act 1928 governing the date within the Anglican Communion) will be considered as well in this study.

The interest in harmonizing the Easter date amongst Christians has evolved over the centuries, culminating recently, within the Catholic tradition, at the Second Vatican Council, which addressed the common Christian goal of a unified date of Easter in the aforementioned 21 November 1964 Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

The most recent substantive development within the larger ecumenical dialogue in the 1997 Aleppo Statement of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC⁴ and the L'viv Statements of 2008-2009, which remain the most recent declarations on the subject issued by the worldwide ecumenical community.

Pope Francis has once again brought this issue to the forefront in June 2015, responding to a May 2014 letter from Coptic Pope Tawadros II, as has Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in January 2016. As recently as September 2024, in an address to the *Pasqua Together 2025 Initiative*, Pope Francis invited Christians to “make every effort in the search for a shared agreement” and “not close ourselves within our own ideas, plans, calendars, or ‘our’ Easter.”⁵ The *Pasqua Together 2025 Initiative* was founded in a December 2022 meeting in Kolybari, on the island of Crete, Greece, to highlight this ecumenical endeavor and recognize the importance of the year 2025 as the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and the coincidence of the Julian and Gregorian Easters on the 20th of April, 2025.⁶

⁴ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, “Towards a Common Date of Easter”, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071213064102/http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?id=2677> (10 January 2024).

⁵ FRANCIS, “Address of the Holy Father to the Delegation of the Group ‘Pasqua Together 2025’,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/september/documents/20240919-pasqua-together.html> (25 November 2024).

⁶ See M. HOEGGER, “Pasqua Together 2025: An Invitation to Unify the Date of Easter at the Source of the Christian Faith,” https://www.jc2033.world/images/PASQUA_Together_2025-Kolybari_meeting.pdf (25 November 2024).

Proposals for a common agreement on the date of Easter range from a fixed date (as, for instance, Welby proposes) to a recalculation of the date based upon astronomical means, as the Aleppo statement suggests.

Two popular works which have been written in the recent past on this topic would be the writings of D.E. Duncan⁷ and E.G. Richards⁸. While both of these works are popularizations, both offer a comprehensive analysis of the nature of the calendar and the related question of the date of Easter. Similarly, J. Heilbron's study of cathedrals as solar observatories⁹ offers some historical perspective on the interest of the Church in astronomical observations, which would serve its larger purpose of accurate reckoning of the year, the calendar, and ultimately, the Easter date.

From the Roman Catholic scholarly perspective, recent scholarship in this area has been limited to the work of Basilius "Bert" Groen of the University of Graz¹⁰; this project will attempt to build upon Groen's scholarship, but analyzing the question from the perspective of the history of ecclesiastical legislation on this matter. Groen takes the position that the Roman Church should consider adopting the Julian calendar position

⁷ D.E. DUNCAN, *Calendar*, New York, HarperCollins, 1998.

⁸ E.G. RICHARDS, *Mapping Time*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁹ J. HEILBRON, *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999 (=SCCSO).

¹⁰ B. GROEN, "*How Long It Was and How Far:*" *A Catholic and Ecumenical View on the Arduous Way to a Common Easter Date*, Graz, Grazer Universitätsverlag, 2013.

“provisionally” if the Aleppo statement cannot be implemented.¹¹ The only other notable contribution to scholarship in this area has been the proceedings of the 1982 Vatican conference on the Gregorian reform of the calendar, which, nearly thirty-five years later, must be updated to address the challenges of the ecumenical movement in regard to a common Easter date. A recent colloquium on the topic did take place in 2022, entitled “*Orientalis Lumen XXVI Virtual Conference*” whose proceedings have recently been published by Eastern Christian Publications.¹²

Regarding the efforts toward reform of the date of Easter in the Middle Ages, a recent (2014) translation has appeared of a classic German text by Ernst Zinner,¹³ cataloguing the work of Johannes Regiomontanus on the occasion of his 500th anniversary, which promises to be fruitful in documenting this tentative proposal toward reform during the Middle Ages. Likewise, the *Opus Majus* of Roger Bacon (dating from 1267) as well as a recent biography of his by Clegg¹⁴ will provide some background on these medieval proposals, in conjunction with a study by S. McCluskey entitled *Astronomies and Cultures*

¹¹ “A Common Date of Easter: Bert Groen in Interview,” <http://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2015/07/25/a-common-date-for-easter-bert-groen-in-interview/> (10 January 2024). In the opinion of this author, the provisional adoption of the old Julian calendar seems to be an untenable solution, for reasons which will be fully discussed within the study itself.

¹² J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022.

¹³ E. ZINNER, *Regiomontanus: His Life and Work*, trans. E. BROWN, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2014.

¹⁴ B. CLEGG, *Roger Bacon: The First Scientist*, London, Constable and Robinson Ltd., 2003.

in *Early Medieval Europe*.¹⁵ A basic overview can be found in an article on computus from Lynn Thorndike, dating from 1954.¹⁶ Grosseteste's documents on the calendar (the *Computus I*, the *Kalendarium*, the *Compotus correctorius*¹⁷, and the *Compotus minor*) along with a volume of recent studies¹⁸ will form the background of the discussion on these proposals. Recent studies by Olivier de Solan in the past few years on the councils of Constance and Basel, and C. Philipp E. Nothaft relative to medieval reform proposals concerning the calendar in general, have been incredibly helpful in the research of the medieval correlations between calendar reform and Church law, particularly in these scholars' studies of various manuscripts which would impact the deliberations of various councils and Roman Pontiffs.

In considering the patristic and early-medieval eras, much of this research has been guided by the *Patrologia Latina* and *Græca* of J. P. Migne, as well as studies of the early Easter date controversies by Bruno Krusch, who has provided a critical edition of many of these important documents.¹⁹ Likewise, Venance Grumel's studies of the date of Easter controversies in the 3rd and 4th centuries have been enlightening. More recently, Alden

¹⁵ S. McCLUSKEY, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁶ L. THORNDIKE, "Computus," in *Speculum*, vol. 29, no. 2, part 1 (April 1954), 223-238.

¹⁷ The term "compotus" appears to be a medieval orthographical variant of "computus."

¹⁸ E. MACKIE and J. GOERING (eds.) *Editing Robert Grosseteste: Papers Given at the Thirty-Sixth Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, 3-4 November 2000*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

¹⁹ B. KRUSCH, *Studien zur Christen-Mittelalterlichen Chronologie*, Berlin, Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1938.

Mosshammer has also studied these early controversies and provided valuable texts on early algorithms for the calculation of the Easter date.²⁰

There do exist some scholarly works concerning the proposals of the Pan-Orthodox Congress of 1923 concerning the Easter date, such as the recent (2008) paper of Veselka Trajkovska and Slobodan Ninkovic concerning the calendar reform proposed at this gathering.²¹ An interesting article has been found even in a 1924 edition of *Popular Astronomy* by M. N. Shields concerning the Milanković proposal made at this congress.²² Other sources include the documents of the Aleppo conference of 1997 (mentioned above).

Within the Russian Orthodox Church, owing to the experience of the Russian revolution of 1917, there existed conflicting practices due to the laws enacted during this time of political and social upheaval. John Sanidopoulos, who, in an article on the date of Easter in Finland and Estonia, lists these laws as “the locking up of the churches and confiscation of Church property (Decree of January 23, 1918); the desecration of the Christian graves and the destruction of the relics of the saints (Encyclical Order of March

²⁰ A. MOSSHAMMER, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008 (=Easter Computus).

²¹ V. TRAJKOVSKA, and S. NINKOVIC, “On a Resolution Concept concerning the Calendar Reform Submitted to the Pan-Orthodox Congress in Constantinople in 1923,” in *Publications of the Astronomical Observatory of Belgrade*, vol. 85, 2008, 189-194.

²² M.N. SHIELDS, “The New Calendar of the Eastern Churches,” in *Popular Astronomy*, vol. 32, August 1924, 407-11.

1, 1919); the famine of 1921; localization of Patriarch Tikhon (May 10, 1922), and the appearance of the ‘Living Church’ and the schismatic movement (beginning of 1923).”²³

A translation has been made of the documents relating to the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress by Viscuso which will prove to be useful in analyzing the legislation of the various Orthodox churches on the issue of the calendar, which was one of the main points of discussion in this Congress.²⁴

Various perspectives within Orthodoxy itself exist on the question of Easter and the calendar, such as the Old Calendarist movement. Bishop Photius of Triaditsa represents one such perspective, and has written an article to this effect discussing the repercussions of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress.²⁵ This latter references a 1968 work on the Church calendar by T. Sibiff (or Sibiv), entitled *The Church Calendar Question*, but it is noted that it is only available in Bulgarian.

The Orthodox Church of Finland, representing a small minority church, issued a statement in 2001 written by Metropolitan Ambrosius of Oulu (Finland) representing a desire for a common calendar as well.²⁶ The Greek Orthodox Church in America has

²³ J. SANIDOPOULOS, “The Date of Easter in Finland and Estonia,” <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2013/06/the-date-of-orthodox-easter-in-finland.html> (10 January 2024).

²⁴ P. VISCUSO, *A Quest for Reform of the Orthodox Church: The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, An Analysis and Translation of Its Acts and Decisions*, Berkeley, CA, Inter-Orthodox Press, 2007.

²⁵ PHOTIUS OF TRIADITSA, “The 70th Anniversary of the Pan-Orthodox Congress: A Major Step on the Path Towards Apostasy,” in two parts, http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/photii_1.aspx (10 January 2024).

²⁶ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, “The Gift of a Common Calendar: Vital to Mission and Witness in Secular Society,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i->

published an article concerning the nature of their calendar and representing the differences amongst the various Orthodox churches.²⁷

The Coptic calendar remains somewhat unique amongst the Orthodox churches, as it utilizes a specialized calendar based upon the Egyptian tradition. A study of this has been made by Dawood entitled “The Coptic Calendar” which compares it to the other various methods used by other Christian churches.²⁸

Within the Reformed tradition, the Anglican Communion’s calendar and reckoning of Easter are based upon the aforementioned laws of England as well as the norms found in the *Book of Common Prayer*.²⁹ Likewise, within the Lutheran tradition, the *Lutheran Book of Worship* remains normative for the governing of their calendar.³⁰ Since the introduction of the Common Lectionary in recent decades (following the liturgical revisions subsequent to Vatican II within the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church), some alterations have been considered necessary as well within the calendars of these churches, more from an ecumenical perspective than from a strictly juridical one. A helpful

[unity-the-church-and-its-mission/towards-a-common-date-for-easter/the-gift-of-a-common-calendar-vital-to-mission-and-witness-in-secular-society](#) (10 January 2024).

²⁷ L. PATSAVOS, “The Calendar of the Orthodox Church,” <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-calendar-of-the-orthodox-church> (10 January 2024).

²⁸ B. DAWOOD, “The Coptic Calendar,” https://web.archive.org/web/20060928041231/http://www.copticheritage.org/parameters/copticheritage/calendar/The_Coptic_Calendar.pdf (25 September 2017).

²⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, New York, Church Publishing, Inc., 2007.

³⁰ *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress, 1978.

commentary on the Christian calendar from both an Anglican and Roman Catholic perspective is provided within the *Oxford Companion to the Year*.³¹

The Codes of Canon Law (1917 and 1983) as well as the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches will be used for purposes of contextualizing this study within the framework of the current legal norms of the Catholic Church.

Finally, the viewpoints of scholars such as Conrad Morin, Ovidiu Vaduvescu, Yury Grabovsky, and Leofranc Holford-Strevens will be discussed as pertaining to the reforms of the Gregorian calendar, which could potentially be a point of departure for any further legislation impacting the ecumenical alliances between the Eastern and Western churches, including a discussion on the reform of the calendar and its potential effects upon the date of Easter, such as the fixed-date proposal. This latter proposal, although lauded for its convenience, would cast odium upon the traditional understanding of the Easter date as related to the cycles of nature.

With all of the above-mentioned research and studies in mind, this thesis will aim to address the following general research question: From a perspective of comparative ecclesiastical law, what is the relationship between the unity between various Christian churches/ecclesial communities and a common Easter date? As they pertain to this over-

³¹ B. BLACKBURN, and L. HOLFORD-STREVENES, *Oxford Companion to the Year*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

arching question, the work will also address the following sub-research questions or objectives:

- 1) What is the historical background of the legislation underlying the Easter date?
- 2) What proposals existed prior to the Tridentine reforms to reform the Easter date?
- 3) What laws of the various Orthodox churches and other ecclesial communities regulate this matter? What are their similarities and differences?
- 4) How has the modern ecumenical movement fostered a movement toward unity in this matter? Is there a potential way forward that would serve the needs of unity amongst churches as well as safeguard the autonomy of different Christian groups to legislate on this subject?

3. Methodology

In general, this study, using the doctrinal method proper to canon law research, will take a historical and juridical-exegetical approach. Thus, the methodology which will be used by this study will be juridical, but principally descriptive and comparative.

Hermeneutically, this study will be guided by an attempt to harmonize the laws concerning this subject of the Easter date with a view toward convergence amongst various Christian bodies, as is the aim of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, as well as the Orthodox Churches.

Source material will be drawn principally from the legislation of the Catholic Church, the various Orthodox churches, as well as Protestant ecclesial communities such as the Anglican Communion and various other Reformed bodies.

The first chapter will employ an historical analysis of the legislation concerning the Easter date from the Early Church up to the medieval period. Using this historical data, this chapter will attempt to portray the canonical aspects of these controversies between Popes, bishops and councils during this time.

In the second chapter, a historical-descriptive methodology will be employed to discuss the medieval academic development and discussions concerning the date of Easter, which would later lead to the Gregorian reforms, which will be analyzed for their juridical import. Included in this chapter will be a study of papal and conciliar legislation on the calendar, based upon the principles of canon law.

In the third chapter, a descriptive and comparative legal methodology will be used to discuss the laws underpinning the date of Easter in various Christian churches and ecclesial communities based upon papal, episcopal, conciliar, and synodal legislation. This chapter will reflect the dimensions of the churches which utilize the varying calendars and distinct methods for calculating Easter/Pascha.

Within the fourth chapter, the modern ecumenical approaches used by both the Eastern and Western churches and ecclesial communities will be described in detail and compared with one another. The ecumenical concerns of these various churches and ecclesiastical communities involved in the current discussion of this topic will be critically

assessed and analyzed in light of their historical and canonical-legislative value. Four recent proposals for the reform of the Gregorian calendar and fixed-date of Easter which have surfaced in past decades (namely, those of Vaduvescu, Grabovsky, a fixed-date proposal, and the Aleppo astronomical proposal) will be discussed, evaluated, and considered from a juridical, religious, and ecumenical standpoint. Finally, a proposal for revision of the classical document *De anno et eius partibus*, touching upon the date of Easter itself and its calculation by the Gregorian calendar will be suggested.

An appendix will provide an overview of the differing methods used to calculate Easter/Pascha amongst the various churches and ecclesial communities, and another will offer a discussion of the mathematical structure of the calendar and the paschal computus in terms of the differing methodologies for computing Easter in the Eastern Orthodox churches, in contradistinction to those used in the Catholic Church and other Western ecclesial communities (Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, etc.).

4. Limitations

The topic of the date of Easter is a subject which can be considered under numerous different aspects: the mathematical, the astronomical, the theological, the liturgical, the canonical, etc.

As this topic is being discussed in the field of canon law, the focus will be clearly on the ecclesiastical legislation on this topic within both the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Therefore, papal, conciliar, and ecclesiastical legislation on the date of Easter (and,

correspondingly, the calendar) from the earliest centuries of Christianity (both conciliar and papal) will provide the structure and boundaries for this research project, as well as form a basis for a proposal for reforms.

As this author has previously written on the field of the date of Easter in a cursory way in the context of a study of the canons on the computation of time, the author's own article on this topic in *Studia canonica*³² will provide a bibliographic resource, but also an impetus for further research in this present study.

The ecumenical aspects of the Easter date will be discussed insofar as they are manifested in the legalities of each particular Christian ecclesial tradition (Orthodox, Anglican, etc.) and insofar as they are the subject of the ongoing discussions taking place in bodies such as the WCC.

Since this research involves a comparative study with the various Orthodox churches and communities, there may be limitations as to texts being available in Western languages from these bodies. There will also be references made to texts in the field of secular law, such as those within English law pertaining to the Church of England or the Anglican Communion (such as the Easter Act 1928).

In researching this project, there existed a clear necessity of maintaining a properly canon law focus on the topic. Discussion of the mathematical and scientific aspects of the

³² A. MARCELLO, "The Computation of Time," in *Studia canonica*, 51 (2017), 207-250.

date of Easter will be a necessary addendum to this project; therefore, consideration of these aspects of the Easter date will be included in an appendix to supplement the discussion of the various proposals concerning the Easter date.

The ultimate barrier comes ultimately at the conclusion of this project and is directly correlated to its relevance. There is no clear-cut answer to the question of a common celebration of Easter/Pascha, which has had diverse practice since the earliest days of the Christian experience, despite the desires of Gratian's *De consecratione* that Easter be observed on the same date in all the churches. It would be virtually impossible to find a solution at this juncture which could satisfy every need, and correctly respond to every aspect of this problematic.

5. Relevance

The relevance of this project is that it is a direct response to the Catholic and ecumenical challenge of Pope Francis and other leaders of Christian communities, including the ecumenical movement, to seek solutions to the conundrum of divergent celebrations of the central liturgical celebration of all Christians – that of the Resurrection of Christ, and how this could potentially relate to a deeper understanding of the concept of ecclesiastical unity from a juridical perspective. This takes on even greater significance with the approaching 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025, which will also be a year in which Easter will coincide in both Julian and Gregorian reckonings.

Responding to the June 2015 request of Pope Francis for progress in this field, *L'Osservatore Romano* stated that:

The Pope is offering this initiative to change the date of Easter 'as a gift of unity with the other Christian churches.' A common date for Easter, [historian Lucetta Scaraffia] said, would encourage "reconciliation between the Christian churches and ... a sort of making sense out of the calendar." She noted that the proposal could help reinforce the identity of persecuted Christians, particularly those in the Eastern churches that are at risk of disappearing. Scaraffia wrote that the simultaneous celebration of the Resurrection by all Christians "would increase the importance of the central feast of the faith in a moment when changes seem to be suddenly coming throughout the world."³³

As previously noted, there has been very little research provided on this topic within the Catholic community since the 1982 Vatican conference on the Gregorian calendar reform. A licentiate thesis on this topic was prepared at Catholic University of America in 2002 by a colleague, Fr. Anthony Carbone. Recent research, as indicated above by scholars such as de Solan and Nothaft, offers a fresh perspective on medieval debates on this question within the canonical sphere, and should be incorporated into the contemporary discussion as part of a holistic approach. In 2022, the *Oriente Lumen XXVI* Virtual Conference addressed the topic of the ecumenical implications of a common Easter date, which has been included in this research for discussion and consideration.³⁴

It is hoped that this project will benefit the ongoing ecumenical dialogue on this

³³ "Will the Pope change the date of Easter?" in *Catholic News Service*, 19 June 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150621032225/http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/will-pope-francis-change-the-date-of-easter-87684/> (13 September 2017).

³⁴ J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022.

topic involving the Catholic Church and the WCC, as well as the individual Orthodox churches and Protestant ecclesial communities, and provide a response to Pope Francis's appeal to solve the Christian conundrum of the multiple celebrations of Easter, so as to provide a unified Christian witness.

The canon law relevance of this particular project merits discussion. It has been the goal of this project to demonstrate that the problematic of the Easter date has always been rooted in the legislation of the various churches, even from the original papal pronouncements of St. Anicetus, through the local and ecumenical councils of the first millennium, through the scholarly work of the medieval universities which advised both popes and councils, the revisionary work which took place at the behest of the Council of Trent, as well as the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council on the matter. Indeed, various texts of the *Corpus iuris canonici* also attest to canonical legislation on the Easter date. The subject matter of this research project is ultimately one of canon law, but of necessity imbued with larger issues of ecclesiastical unity, liturgical theology, ecumenical theology and practice, and to a lesser extent, questions of mathematical science.

The particular relevance of this project, as distinguished from others in the relevant literature, is an inter-disciplinary approach to bring together the available history of canon law on this topic with the most recent historical and scientific scholarship, connecting these points to certain broader questions of liturgical and ecumenical theology. The time appeared opportune to integrate the findings of the latest developments on the matter within the ambit of canon law without loss of this key focus.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the current discipline in a unique way by providing an approach which will be colored by a rigorous understanding of the Catholic Church's conception of the computation of time. One can find ample scientific and astronomical data and analyses concerning the calendar and the reckoning of the date of Easter; however, there has been little work done from the standpoint of canon law in bringing this approach into the field of canon law. This study will then analyze, in the light of most recent historical research, the laws governing this topic, as well as clarify the legal distinction between the computation of time and the Easter date. In a sense then, this approach to the topic humbly intends to follow in the footsteps of the great ecclesiastical scholars who were involved in calendar reforms in previous times.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DATE OF EASTER IN THE EARLY COUNCILS

Introduction

This chapter will employ an historical analysis of the legislation concerning the Easter date from the Early Church up to the medieval period. Using this historical data, this chapter will attempt to portray the canonical aspects of these controversies between popes, bishops and councils during this time in light of the most recent historical research on this question.

1.1 The Early Church

Interestingly, the various observances of the paschalion are cited as being of apostolic origin. The Roman tradition is argued as stemming from the apostles Sts. Peter and Paul, whereas the Quartodeciman observance (i.e. the celebration of the Paschal feast on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan) is argued as originating from St. John the Evangelist via St. Polycarp of Smyrna, as will be discussed below. Eusebius also argues that the Egyptian and Palestinian observance on a Sunday is also of apostolic origin. The problematic of the variety of Easter dates, then, truly does date from the earliest days of Christianity. It would indeed be a promethean task to imagine that there could be a simple, straightforward solution. Rather, as will be demonstrated, coming to some degree of broad consensus and a serene, “unity-in-diversity” solution, as practiced by the early Church synods and councils, would have great merit in this matter.

1.1.1 Pope St. Anicetus

While the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ date from Scriptural and Apostolic times, it was in the first two centuries of the Christian era that controversies began to surface regarding the fixation of the date of Easter for the annual celebration of the Lord's resurrection. Differences in the celebration of the Easter date are referred to as surfacing in the time of Pope St. Sixtus (circa 120 AD).³⁵

The Roman Pontiff St. Anicetus, who ruled from 157-168 AD, was visited by St. Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of St. John the Evangelist. He asserted that the Church of Smyrna celebrated Easter on the fourteenth (14th) day of the Jewish month of Nisan, that is to say, the Jewish Passover, regardless of the day of the week on which this occasion fell. The Church of Rome, however, was wont to observe this solemnity on a Sunday, the day of the week correlating with the Lord's resurrection. This is attested to as well in the writings of St. Irenaeus of Lyon.³⁶ Anicetus took a very irenic approach, granting the Smyrnan Church the ability to retain this Quartodeciman date.³⁷

³⁵ H. THURSTON, "Easter Controversy," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Robert Appleton Co., 1909, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05228a.htm> (10 January 2024).

³⁶ Cf. IRENAEUS OF LYON, "Fragm. 3 (ex. Epist. Ad Victorem P.)," in J. ROUËT DE JOURNAL (ed.), *Enchiridion Patristicum*, 22nd ed., Barcelona, Herder, 1962, no. 265.

³⁷ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Ecclesiastical History*, book V, xxiv, trans. A. C. MCGIFFERT, from P. SCHAFF, and H. WACE, (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1, Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890, revised and edited for *New Advent* by K. KNIGHT, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2501.htm> (10 January 2024) (=EH). Cf. also J.B. MIGNE, *Patrologia Graeca*, <http://patristica.net/graeca/> (10 January 2024) (=PG), vol. XX, col. 50ff.

1.1.2 The Quartodeciman Controversy

The Quartodeciman calculation for the Paschal feast was seen very much to be an obstacle to uniformity in practice and unity amongst the early Christian churches. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, documents St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in Gaul, attesting to the fact of this very early division amongst the Christian churches of the East and the West regarding the Paschal observance. The canonical structure for resolving this debate was very much in the synodal format. Eusebius would go on to say, “Synods and conferences of bishops were convened, and drew up a decree of the Church, in the form of letters addressed to Christians everywhere, that never on any day other than the Lord's Day should the mystery of the Lord's resurrection from the dead be celebrated, and on that day alone we should observe the end of the Paschal fast.”³⁸

In Eusebius, the following argumentation is found:

Now there was stirred up at that time a dispute of no small moment, for all the residents of Asia, for whom this was an ancient tradition, held it necessary to keep the feast of the Pascha of the Savior on the fourteenth day of the moon, when the Jews are commanded to sacrifice the sheep. They held it required at all costs to put an end to their fasting on that day, regardless of what day of the week it was. This was not in accordance with the custom and manner of all the churches in the rest of the world, who, according to apostolic tradition maintained the custom which had come to them that they should not conclude the fast except on the day of the resurrection of our Savior. Synods and gatherings of bishops were convened on this matter and all with one mind drew up the church's opinion for universal dissemination. They decreed that the mystery should not be celebrated except on the Sunday on which the Lord rose from the dead, and that on that day alone should the paschal fast be concluded. The writing which came from those who were gathered in Palestine, who were brought together under Theophilus, bishop of the community of Caesarea and Narcissus, of the community in Jerusalem, is extant to this day. The same is true of another communication from Rome concerning the same dispute, which shows that

³⁸ *EH*, V, 23. These conferences of bishops should not be confused with the modern canonical institution of episcopal conferences as found within the 1983 Code in canons 447-459.

Victor was the bishop. There is another from the bishops in Pontus, over whom Palmas, as the oldest, presided, and from the communities of Gaul which Irenaeus governed. And there is yet another from Osrhoene, and the cities there. And similarly from Bacchyllus, the bishop of the church of the Corinthians, and a host of others, who expressed one and the same opinion, and gave the same judgement. And so there was one decree, as we have shown.³⁹

Interestingly, a gloss from the *Editio Romana* of the Decree of Gratian affirms this assertion of Eusebius, as there were certain groups who would celebrate on Thursday rather than on Sunday.⁴⁰

The term “quartodeciman” refers to the “fourteenth” day of the month of Nisan, when the Passover was traditionally celebrated by the Jews. Eusebius affirms that the Asian dioceses would celebrate the Pasch on 14 Nisan of the Hebrew lunar calendar, whereas other churches celebrated on the subsequent Sunday, in commemoration of Sunday as the day of the Resurrection.⁴¹ Indeed, Eusebius connects the feast of the Resurrection of Christ with the cycles of nature in a very close way, as he states: “What is left is spring, the radiant season that takes the lead as head of the year, like the head of the body, when the sun is just now traversing the first section [of the Zodiac], and the moon likewise, with its light full, is shifting its nightly course into bright day.”⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

⁴⁰ See GRATIAN, *Decretum Gratiani emendatum et notationibus illustratum una cum glossis*, Rome, in aedibus Populi Romani, 1582, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0014rx6c?cv=1352> (24 April 2024).

⁴¹ Ibid., 23.

⁴² EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *De Sollemnitae Paschali*, trans. R. PEARSE, <https://archive.org/details/EusebiusOnTheCelebrationOfEaster> (11 May 2015), cap. 2.

St. Polycarp is cited by St. Irenaeus as affirming that the tradition which he claimed to have for the quartodeciman observance derived from St. John the Apostle. While St. Polycarp arrived in Rome about 150 AD in regard to this very question, he could not be persuaded by Pope St. Anicetus to change this Quartodeciman observance to accommodate the Roman method.⁴³ However, per Irenaeus, Pope St. Anicetus was able to permit the celebration of Easter in the Church of Smyrna. Melito of Sardis⁴⁴, writing in the *De Pascha* around 190 AD, is likewise attested to having celebrated Easter according to the Quartodeciman observance, with Eusebius noting that such was the observance in the church of Laodicea.

Apollinarius of Hierapolis, in the *Chronicon Pascale*, also argues that the 14th of Nisan is the true Passover of the Lord.⁴⁵ He remarks that Christians in Asia Minor and Palestine celebrated this feast during the night from the 14th to the 15th of Nisan, i.e. when the Jews celebrated the Passover, this with no regard for the day of the week, not even Sunday, and as such were regarded as Quartodecimans, i.e. celebrating the paschal feast on the 14th day of the lunar Hebrew calendar. In Alexandria, however, the Christian community celebrated the Easter on the Sunday subsequent to this lunation, that is to say between the 15th – 21st of the month of Nisan. The Christians in Syria used a similar technique, but used a different computation from the Alexandrian school, which caused a

⁴³ THURSTON, “Easter Controversy.”

⁴⁴ MELITO OF SARDIS, *De Pascha*, trans. A. STEWART-SYKES, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001. Cf. also *EH*, IV, 26.

⁴⁵ See *PG*, t. XCII, col. 80.

great difference in the paschal date, causing up to a month or five weeks divergence. Contrary to the Alexandrian technique, the Syrian calculation was more closely allied to the Jewish calculation, which in some years resulted in paschal celebrations prior to the vernal equinox. Tzakadze remarks that the bishops in Rome did not allow the celebration of the Easter feast after April 21st, the festive day of the Foundation of Rome (“Parilia” or “Palilia” feast).⁴⁶ By doing so, the bishops did not want the Passion Week to coincide with the Roman festive day. He goes on to note that the Roman Christians were determining the spring full moon too, but the accuracy of their method diverged from the Alexandrian one.⁴⁷

These differences in the Easter observance were not without ecclesiological and liturgical repercussions. The excommunication of the Quartodecimans by Pope Victor I (c. 190 AD) had its repercussions in local synods, to which Eusebius attests in the *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius quotes the letter of Polycrates, defending the position of the Oriental churches in keeping the Quartodeciman observance as stemming from the Johannine ecclesiastical tradition. Indeed, Polycrates states:

For we keep the day without interference, neither adding nor subtracting. And there are in Asia great lights who have died, and will rise again on the day of the coming of the Lord, when he comes with glory from the heavens and shall raise all the saints: Philip of the twelve apostles, who lies in Hierapolis, and two of his daughters who grew old in virginity. And there is another daughter of his who rests, having served the church in the Holy Spirit. And there is indeed John who lay on the breast of the Lord, who was a priest wearing the breastplate, and who was a martyr and a teacher. He lies at Ephesus. And indeed there is Polycarp in Smyrna, both bishop and martyr,

⁴⁶ See E. TSAKADZE, “Historical, Canonical, Mathematical and Astronomical Aspects of the Paschalion Question,” in *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 8:1 (2017) (=HCMA), 110.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

and Thraseas from Eumeneia, who lies at Smyrna. And is it necessary to speak of Sagaris, bishop and martyr, who lies at Laodicea? And there is Papius the blessed, and Melito the eunuch, who governed all things in the Holy Spirit, and who lies at Sardis awaiting the visitation from the heavens when he shall be raised from the dead. All of these kept the fourteenth day as the Pascha in accordance with the Gospel, not deviating from the rule of faith but maintaining it. And then there is myself, Polycrates, the least of all; I have kept to the tradition of my race, some of whom I have followed. For seven of my race were bishops, and I am the eighth. And my race always kept the day when the people put away the leaven. I therefore, brothers, sixty five years in the Lord and having had commerce with brothers from the whole world and having spanned the whole of holy scripture, am not frightened by threats. For those better than I have said: we should obey God rather than people.⁴⁸

Irenaeus exhibited a tolerant approach – irenic, if the term might be used.

The witness of the pre-conciliar Roman Breviary, in its second nocturn of Matins for the feast of St. Irenaeus, situates and summarizes the situation well:

A dispute had arisen concerning the date of the celebration of Easter. As the bishops of Asia were disagreeing with nearly all their fellow-bishops, the Roman Pontiff Victor had cut them off from the communion of the faithful. Irenaeus, however, who was zealous for peace, admonished him in a becoming manner, and urged, by examples of the practice of previous Pontiffs, that he should not suffer so many Churches to be cut off from Catholic unity, on account of a rite which they said they had received from their ancestors.⁴⁹

This *modus operandi* of St. Irenaeus merits some amount of reflection, especially given the variegated picture of observances concerning the Paschal date in these times.

Irenaeus himself observes, in his own letter to Pope Victor as quoted by Eusebius:

For the controversy is not only about the day, but also concerning the very form of the fast. For there are those who hold that one should fast a single day, others two, and others more. Some count ‘the day’ as forty continuous hours of day and night. And the great variety of observance did not come about in our day, but came from much earlier, from those who went before us, who held closely to their customary ways, perhaps in their simplicity, and so things have been done until our time. But nonetheless all of these were at peace, and we likewise live in peace with one another. Indeed, the distinction in fasting emphasizes the harmony of our faith. Among them

⁴⁸ “Letter of Polycrates, the Leader of the Bishops in Asia, to Pope Victor,” in *EH*, V, xxiv and *PG*, t. XX, col. 493ff.

⁴⁹ *Roman Breviary in English*, vol. 3 (Summer), New York, Benziger, 1950, 590-591.

were the elders before Soter, who presided over the church which you now lead. We mean Anicetus and Pius, Hyginus and Telesphorus and Sixtus. None of them observed, nor did any of those who were with them. And yet those who did not observe kept peace with those from the communities in which the observance was kept, and they engaged with one another. And the custom of observance was all the more difficult to those who did not observe at all. And never was anyone cast out over this affair, but those elders before you who did not observe nonetheless sent the eucharist to those from the communities who observed. And when the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicetus, although there were many other matters on which they had differences, they maintained peace with one another, not wanting to fall out with one another over this matter. Anicetus was not able to persuade Polycarp not to observe, as he had with John the disciple of our Lord and the other disciples with whom he had associated, and as he had always observed. Nor moreover did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe, for he said that he should be faithful to the custom of the elders before him. And although matters stood thus, nonetheless Anicetus yielded presidency of the eucharist to Polycarp in the church, clearly out of respect for him. And they parted from one another in peace, as indeed the entire church had peace between those who observed and those who did not observe.⁵⁰

Robert Grant has described this passage as “conciliatory, but firm.”⁵¹ In terms of liturgical history and ecclesiology, the approach of Irenaeus has been cited not only as a reminder of the apostolic origin of the Lenten fast,⁵² but also of a serene way of resolving such a controversy.

Indeed, the unity amongst churches, and even the Eucharistic celebration from which stems ecclesiastical unity, could be realized even through diverse and ostensibly divergent approaches to the question of the paschal date. While the Quartodeciman observance was condemned for usage by the Roman faithful, it has been noted that the Eucharist was then given to those Christians of this observance who were staying in

⁵⁰ *EH*, V, 24.

⁵¹ R. GRANT, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, London & New York, Routledge, 1997, 9.

⁵² V. STALEY, *Liturgical Studies*, London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907, 110.

Rome.⁵³ However, because on the one hand, there was this condemnation, and on the other, those in Rome received the Eucharist, Pope Soter stopped sending the Quartodeciman Christians the *fermentum*, that participation in the Eucharist from the pontifical celebration.⁵⁴

Venance Grumel, who has studied the Patristic controversies of the Easter date, observes that “at a time which it is rather difficult to specify, but probably at the end of the second century AD, or at the beginning of the third century, the Jews instituted a new calculation to determine the date of the Passover.”⁵⁵ Grumel specifies that this new calculation was at the origin of many of the paschal disputes of this time. Campbell also attests to this in arguing that

two fourth century documents testify to the presence and significance of this interaction between the old and new chronologies of Passover. First, in a homily attributed to St. John Chrysostom, dated by internal evidence to 387, we read: ‘Since we keep the first of times [spring], and the equinox, and after this the fourteenth of the moon, and together with these the three days Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; lacking any of these at one time it is impossible to fulfill the Pascha.’ A traditional Paschalion of three elements is here set forth. Its actual operation is clarified by the following passage from a letter attributed to St. Ambrose, probably dating from the year 386: ‘We must keep the law regarding Easter in such a way that we do not observe the fourteenth as the day of the Resurrection; that day or one very close to it is the day of the passion...[and] it is evident that the day of the Resurrection should

⁵³ See G. FRITZ, “Pâques. Les Controverses Pascales,” in A. VACANT, E. MANGENOT, et É. AMANN (eds.), *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 11b, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1923-1950 (=FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b), col. 1950.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ «A une époque qu'il est assez difficile de préciser, mais probablement à la fin du IIe siècle après J.-C, ou au commencement du IIIe, les Juifs instituèrent pour déterminer la date de la Pâque un calcul nouveau. » V. GRUMEL. “Le problème de la date pascale aux IIIe et IVe siècles. » in *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 18 (1960), 163.

be kept after the day of the Passion, [so] the former should not be on the fourteenth of the [lunar] month, but later.’⁵⁶

Around the time of the second century, various churches employed different means of establishing the fourteenth day of the paschal moon. For instance, the church of Alexandria began the use of a 19-year Metonic cycle. Hippolytus of Rome (c. 222) devised a 112-year cycle based upon a system of epacts spanning sixteen years⁵⁷, as found in the *Refutation of All Heresies*.⁵⁸ An anonymous solution, noting the glaring deficiencies in the Hippolytan computus as regards the difference between the Julian and lunar years, came to light in the year 243 AD. Augustalis of Carthage devised an 84-year Paschal cycle, a square table called the *laterculus*. While studies have been made on this Roman calculation by Krusch and Mosshammer, it remains difficult to reconstruct.⁵⁹

A further calculation, called the *Supputatio Romana vetus*, differed from that of Augustalis in that the *saltus lunae* came every 12 rather than 14 years.⁶⁰ There remains also evidence of a 16 year cycle established by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, although nothing further is known thereof.⁶¹ Toward the end of the third century, Anatole, bishop of

⁵⁶ J.R. CAMPBELL, “The Paschalion,” http://www.academia.edu/8246608/The_Paschalion_An_Icon_of_Time (10 January 2024).

⁵⁷ A. MOSSHAMMER, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 122.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-121; discussion of the historical criticism of the writing.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 225-226. Cf. also B. KRUSCH, *Studien zur Christen-Mittelalterlichen Chronologie, Der 84-Jährige Ostercyclus Und Seine Quellen*, Berlin, Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1880 (= *Studien-84*), 281.

⁶⁰ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1952-54; KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 227-244.

⁶¹ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1953-54; *EH*, VII, 32.

Laodicea, Syria, established the usage of the Metonic cycle of 235 lunar months in 19 years.⁶² It was likewise around this time, at the beginning of the fourth century, that Peter, bishop of Alexandria, issued a refutation of Tricentius concerning the Jewish observance of Passover, which has erroneously celebrated this feast before the vernal equinox, in opposition to the Mosaic law.⁶³

Not long before the Council of Nicaea as well, St. Epiphanius of Salamis, in the *Panarion*, also provides some indication of the ecclesiological implications of celebrating Easter simultaneously, while also attributing the Quartodeciman practice to the Montanist heresy.⁶⁴ He remarks:

For the fixing of the date of the Paschal Feast is determined by three factors: from the course of the sun; because of the Lord's Day; and because of the lunar month which is found in the Law, so that the Passover may be slain on the fourteenth of the month as the Law says. Thus it cannot be celebrated unless the day of the equinox is past, although the Jews do not observe this or care to keep so important a matter precise; with them, everything is worthless and erroneous. Still, even though such precision is required in so important a question, the apostles' declaration was not made for the sake of this question and for precision, but in the interest of concord. And if, as the Audians insist, the apostles' ordinance was that we celebrate with the enemies of Christ, how much more must we celebrate with the church for the sake of concord, so as not to mar the harmony of the church?⁶⁵

The main precedent of the Nicaean synod, the Council of Arles in the year 314, decreed in its first canon that the “the Pascha of the Lord shall be observed by us on the

⁶² *EH*, VII, 32. Cf. also *PG*, vol. xx, col. 728.

⁶³ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1954.

⁶⁴ MELITO OF SARDIS, *De Pascha*, trans. A. STEWART-SYKES, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001, 92.

⁶⁵ EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS, *The Panarion, Books II and III: De Fide*, Second revised edition, trans. F. WILLIAMS, Leiden & Boston, Pallas, 2013, 3.11.1.

same day at the same time all over the world.”⁶⁶ However, the decisions of this synod were not received by the Oriental churches, and the problem remained unsolved until the deliberations of Nicaea.⁶⁷ Carl I. Hammer has evaluated the Council of Arles as a success for Constantine, in that it was an attempt to solve internal ecclesiastical problems, in spite of the absence of the Oriental churches at this gathering, and yet set a precedent for caesaropapist authority within the Church.⁶⁸

1.2 The Council of Nicaea

The origins of the paschal question at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea were asserted as a dispute between the Christians of Asia Minor and those of Rome, in which the former would celebrate on the Quartodeciman observance of 14 Nisan – that is to say, alongside the Jewish Passover, whereas the Roman observance was to celebrate on the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox. It was argued that “what must have been in the mind of the holy legislators of the 1st General Council was the desire to

⁶⁶ G. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Venice, Zatta, 1759, vol. II, col. 463, <http://patristica.net/mansi> (26 November 2024).

⁶⁷ O. PEDERSEN, “The Ecclesiastical Calendar and the Life of the Church,” in G. COYNE, M. HOSKIN, and O. PEDERSEN (eds.), *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar: Proceedings of the Vatican Conference to Commemorate its 400th Anniversary 1582-1982*, Vatican City, Pontificia Academia Scientiarum, Specola Vaticana, 1983 (=GRC), 41. Cf. also E. BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Breve étude historique et canonique du problème » in SECRÉTARIAT POUR LA PRÉPARATION DU SAINT ET GRAND CONCILE DE L'ÉGLISE ORTHODOXE. *Synodica V*, Chambésy-Genève, Les Éditions du Centre Orthodoxe, 1981 (=Synodica), 16, which notes « Le Synode d'Arles (314) se fondait sur ce principe (1er canon), que Nicée ne pouvait transgresser en aucun façon. » Also C. HEFELE, *A History of the Councils of the Church: from the Original Documents*, trans. W.R. CLARK, Edinburgh, Clark, 1871, <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/councils/untitled-66.shtml> (10 January 2024) vol. 1, sec. 15.

⁶⁸ See C. HAMMER, “1700 Years of Easter Legislation: The Date Reconsidered,” in *Sewanee Theological Review* 57:4 (Michaelmas), 2014, 509-514.

establish an Easter date as close to the original event as possible. And, naturally, it was thought that a celebration of the Resurrection before the Passover would be wrong in terms of time.”⁶⁹ Some Christians, therefore, would be observing the fasts, whereas others would be celebrating the Paschal feast. *The Scientific Examination of the Orthodox Calendar* argues that

to prevent any unwanted consequences that such liturgical discord might entail and, furthermore, to separate entirely the Christian celebration of Pascha from the Jewish Passover, as the Evangelical order requires, the Nicene Synod decreed that the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ must be celebrated universally on the same day-viz., the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox. This, then, was the origin of the Paschal cycle of the Great Indiction, which determines the celebration of Pascha for each year.⁷⁰

It has been stated that the overriding concern was how to fulfill canonical requirements in establishing the regulations for the paschal calculation, having as a goal the harmonization of the rhythms of the lunar and solar cycles in a precise manner.⁷¹

Eleven years after Arles, the Council of Nicaea was held, which, amongst other important considerations such as the resolution of the Arian heresy, also established canons concerning the Paschal date. A study by Louis Duchesne in 1880 argues that the resolution of the Quartodeciman controversy was not the subject of the council of Nicaea, but rather

⁶⁹ N. PATRINAKOS, “The Date of Easter and Orthodoxy in English-Speaking Countries Overseas: A Presentation of Socio-Cultural Ramifications,” in *Synodica* (“Date of Easter and Orthodoxy”), 88-89.

⁷⁰ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *A Scientific Examination of the Orthodox Church Calendar*, ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS OF ETNA and HIEROMONK GREGORY (eds.), Etna, CA, Centre for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998 (= *Scientific Examination*), 92.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

an effect thereof.⁷² The importance of the Nicaean council cannot be overstated in the question of the paschal date and the surrounding controversies. In 1977, at the Orthodox conference on the paschal date, Prof. John Errickson, himself a canonist, argues that “the role of the canonist's observations is in large part a negative one: To sweep away the many misconceptions and faulty interpretations which over the centuries have obscured what the canonical tradition is in fact saying. The focal point of such misconceptions, and hence for the canonist's inquiry, is the Council of Nicaea.”⁷³ Indeed, the same 1977 Orthodox conference also argues that “the Fathers of the 1st General Council were conscious of the need for accuracy in terms of time but no less were they conscious of the need for reconciling opposing views and practices between the churches of East and West.”⁷⁴

Faith Wallis, who has herself studied the question of the dating of Easter from the perspective of Venerable Bede, spoke of the rejection of quartodecimanism at the Council of Nicaea:

Rejecting Quartodecimanism raised two fresh difficulties. Was it never permissible to celebrate on 14 Nisan, even if it fell on a Sunday? At least from the beginning of the third century, the Roman Church was clear that it was not ... But other Christian communities were not so certain. The second difficulty concerned the determination of Nisan itself. The issue was, to be sure, highly political ... Since the equinox determined the beginning of the year in which Nisan was supposed to be the first

⁷² See L. DUCHESNE, “La question de la Pâque au Concile de Nicée” in *Revue Des Questions Historiques*, Paris: Victor Palmé, 1880, 5-42.

⁷³ J. ERRICKSON, “The Date of Easter: A Canonist’s Observations” in *Synodica (=DECO)*, 49.

⁷⁴ PATRINAKOS, “Date of Easter and Orthodoxy,” 87.

month, the Jewish computus was in error. Christians therefore ought to develop their own computus, based on the equinox.⁷⁵

The purpose of this legislation at the Nicaean council was quite clear. Archimandrite Nikon Patrinos, at the 1977 Orthodox conference on this question, notes that

the preamble of the Nicene canon regarding the celebration of Easter, as it has been handed down to us by subsequent authorities, refers to a unified celebration of Easter among all Churches of the East and West as the sole reason for enacting the well-known formula. This means that one thousand six hundred and fifty-two years after the Nicene enactment we are still at work trying to establish a common celebration of the central event of our faith, the Resurrection of our Lord.⁷⁶

Clearly, the goals of Nicaea, which had not yet been put into practice in the subsequent years of this council, have still to reach total fruition. Such a necessity underscores the importance of continued research on the question of the date of the Easter celebration, particularly as relating to the unity of churches.

Regrettably, little has been preserved about the Council of Nicaea's deliberations on this matter, not even in the Constantinopolitan archives. It has been noted that "the only preserved document on this issue is the Emperor's letter to those bishops who were not able to attend the Council. The letter stated that the Council did not see fit to calculate Easter according to the Hebrew reckoning,

'because according to Jewish calculations they celebrate Passover twice in certain years'. In other words, it meant not to use the Jewish calculations, which led some Christian groups to celebrate the Easter after vernal equinox in one year and before next vernal equinox in the following year. Since the vernal equinox was used as a

⁷⁵ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. F. WALLIS, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1999/2004, xxxvi.

⁷⁶ PATRINAKOS, "Date of Easter and Orthodoxy", 85.

kind of division between the years, then one could run into anomaly – celebration of the Easter twice in one year.⁷⁷

At the Council itself, the text was quite clear: “The Seventh Apostolic Canon proclaims: ‘A Bishop, a Presbyter, or a Deacon who celebrates the Holy Day of Pascha before the vernal equinox, together with the Jews, shall be deposed from his sacred rank.’ This strict rule is the fundamental criterion of the Christian Paschalion. It stipulates that Pascha be celebrated after the Jewish Passover and after the vernal equinox.”⁷⁸ However, reference is always made to this decree by both those who wish to innovate and those who wish to remain firm to the Nicæan decree. It is noted that the fact that “such mutually contradictory positions exist is in part explained by the fact that no text of a Nicene decree on this matter has come down to us.”⁷⁹

Full independence from the Jewish dating system was critical for the Council.

Erickson goes on to argue that

it is contended that the council [of Nicaea] authorized the Church of Alexandria to ascertain, year by year, the date of Easter, and thus sanctioned, albeit indirectly, that church's 19-year cycle and its placement of the equinox on March 21st. Yet, such a contention, though it may be supported by certain passages in the correspondence of St. Cyril of Alexandria and of St. Leo the Great, is not borne out by the subsequent history of paschal disputes ... In fact, Rome and Alexandria continued to differ both in theory and in practice on the dating of Easter, despite efforts towards agreement at the Council of Sardica.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ TSAKADZE, *HCMA*, 114.

⁷⁸ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 22.

⁷⁹ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

He goes on to argue that Nicaea must be read in perspective; namely that it should not be inferred that Nicaea intended to legislate more than that Pascha/Easter be celebrated “with the Jews” prior to the vernal equinox.⁸¹ There is, however, to be sure, an intimate nexus between the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter. Socrates distinguishes the Jewish custom from the Quartodeciman custom, which does not take into account the vernal equinox, i.e. the entrance of the Sun into the sign of Aries.⁸² Erekle Tzakadze comments that “the intention was not to move the Easter celebration to the next Sunday in cases when the Easter Sunday coincided with the Jewish Passover. These coincidences happened many times in the early Church until the VIII century, but the Easter celebration was never moved to the next Sunday. Accidental coincidences did not matter at all, but what mattered was full independence from the Jewish calculations.”⁸³ Indeed, during the fourth century, even after Nicaea, the Jewish Passover and Christian Easter did coincide on a number of occasions.⁸⁴

This, too, is noted in the 1977 intra-Orthodox discussion of the question, where it is stated that

neither in the canons nor in other documents contemporary to the Council of Nicaea and which interpret its definition is there any mention that one must exclude the possibility of coincidental concurrences of the Christian Pascha with the Jewish, i.e. the possibility of celebrating it in several instances *on the same day* as the Jews. Also,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *EH*, V, 22 and *PG*, t. LXVII, col. 629.

⁸³ TSAKADZE, *HCMA*, 141.

⁸⁴ «Au cours du quatrième siècle, après Nicée, les pâques juive et chrétienne coïncidèrent plusieurs fois. » E. BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Breve étude historique et canonique du problème » in *Synodica*, 42.

nowhere is there a prohibition against Christians celebrating Pascha *earlier* than the Jews. Such a prohibition would indicate a dependence of the date of the Christian Pascha on the date of the Jewish Passover.⁸⁵

While it has been argued that Nicaea rejected dependence on the Jewish reckoning, but not the idea that there was some necessary connection between the two observances.⁸⁶

This same intra-Orthodox consideration of Nicaea offers the following assessment of the ecclesiological import of the Nicæan decision:

It seems that the fathers of the 1st General Council were conscious of the need of accuracy in terms of time but no less were they conscious of the need for reconciling opposing views and practices between the Churches of East and West. They ended up with the best compromise contemporary astronomical knowledge could provide as regards the spring equinox together with the Jewish calculations in celebrating Passover. This last they set as the ultimate criterion in celebrating the Christian Easter. But their formula contained in both of its parts the astronomical and the Passover calculation, the seeds of future errors and dissension. The calculation of the spring equinox by the Julian calendar became erroneous as time went on The second part of the formula relating to the Passover celebration has perhaps caused more departures from the actual time of the Resurrection than all other calendar inaccuracies. The formula requires that the Passover must have already been celebrated. If not, Easter is celebrated on a subsequent Sunday.⁸⁷

There clearly will always remain a need for compromise, but one based upon accurate scientific knowledge, for consensus to be reached on the question of the paschal date.

⁸⁵ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 50-51.

⁸⁶ “The council [of Nicaea] was extremely 'traditional' in its approach to the problem. It did reject dependence on contemporary Jewish reckoning ... Yet, the council did not thereby reject the idea that there is a necessary internal connection between the Passover of the Old Testament and the Christian celebration of 'Christ, our paschal lamb' (1 Cor 5:7), nor did it claim any authority to disregard this connection and to fix the date for Pascha arbitrarily, according to its own convenience or passing fancy. Rather, it affirmed that the Church, as the true Israel of God, is obliged to calculate the time of the true Passover correctly.” *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁸⁷ PATRINAKOS, “Date of Easter and Orthodoxy”, 87.

According to St. Athanasius, the supporters of the Easter date according to Nicaea were those of Cilicia, Syria, and Mesopotamia⁸⁸, and the recalcitrant churches were “persuaded” (per Errickson) to accept the approach which would become normative for the reckoning of the paschal date. Therefore, those who followed the reprobated practice were primarily the Oriental Christians, which is attested also by Eusebius.⁸⁹ Errickson likewise states that Nicaea itself wished to “advance the concrete unity of the churches.”⁹⁰ He goes on to argue that “from all accounts – the letters of St. Athanasius, for example, or that of Constantine – it saw the common celebration of Pascha by all the churches as a desideratum, even though it did not elaborate technical provisions for attaining this goal.”⁹¹

1.3 The Practices and Controversies after Nicaea

Subsequent to the Council of Nicaea, Constantine, in a letter to the bishops who were not present therein, proclaimed that the observance of Easter would be observed everywhere and on the same day, so to “... cheerfully accept what is observed with such

⁸⁸ ATHANASIUS, *Ad Afros Epistula Synodica*, c. ii. trans. A. ROBERTSON, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 4, eds. P. SCHAFF AND H. WACE, Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892, revised and edited for *New Advent* by K. KNIGHT, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2819.htm> (10 January 2024). It has also been noted: « Il ressort de ces textes que l'accord réalisé à Nicée touchant la question pascale, consista en ce que les évêques des Églises du diocèse d'Orient, qui jusque-là célébraient Pâques le dimanche suivant la Pâque juive, s'engagèrent à se libérer de cette coutume et à célébrer la grande fête chrétienne le même jour que toutes les autres Églises, après l'équinoxe, comme c'était l'usage à Rome et à Alexandrie. » FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1956-1957.

⁸⁹ « Eusèbe et la synodique du concile se sont donc servis d'une locution suffisamment précise et administrativement exacte, en écrivant que les tenants de l'usage réprouvé étaient des Orientaux, ou les frères des Églises d'Orient. » FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1956.

⁹⁰ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 52.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

general unanimity of sentiment in the city of Rome, throughout Italy, Africa, all Egypt, Spain, France, Britain, Libya, the whole of Greece, and the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Cilicia.”⁹² He concludes by affirming that the Jewish computation of this festival was rejected so as not to observe Easter twice in the same solar year.⁹³

Approximately a decade after Nicaea, the 1st Canon of the Synod of Antioch *in Encaeniis* declared:

Whosoever shall presume to set aside the decree of the Holy and Great Synod which was assembled at Nicaea in the presence of the pious Emperor Constantine, beloved of God, concerning the Holy and salutary Feast of Pascha; if they shall obstinately persist in opposing what was then rightly ordained, let them be excommunicated and cast out of the Church; this is said concerning the laity. But if anyone of those who preside in the Church, whether he be Bishop, Presbyter, or Deacon, shall presume, after this decree, to exercise his own private judgment to the subversion of the people and to the disturbance of the Churches, by observing Pascha together with the Jews, the Holy Synod decrees that he shall thenceforth be an alien from the Church, as one who not only heaps sins upon himself, but who is also the cause of destruction and subversion to many; and it deposes not only such persons themselves from their ministry, but those also who after their deposition shall presume to communicate with them. And the deposed shall be deprived even of that external honor, of which the Holy Canon and God's priesthood partake.⁹⁴

This Synod is known to have ratified the decisions of Nicaea, and, as indicated in this text, reflects a desire for ecclesiastical unity through a common celebration of the paschal feast.

The various saints have likewise evaluated the Nicæan ordinance. Eusebius of Caesarea affirms, in his *Life of Constantine*:

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

⁹² “Paschalion” in *OrthodoxWiki*, <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschalion> (10 January 2024).

⁹³ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1956.

⁹⁴ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 93. Cf. also G. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Venice, Zatta, 1759, vol. II, col. 1307, <http://patristica.net/mansi> (1 July 2020).

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 of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded. In rejecting their custom, 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 to the day of the week]. We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Saviour has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course (the order of the days of the week) Besides, consider well, that in such an important matter, and on a subject of such great solemnity, there ought not to be any division. Our Saviour has left us only one festal day of our redemption, that is to say, of his holy passion, and he desired [to establish] only one Catholic Church. Think, then, how unseemly it is, that on the same day some should be fasting whilst others are seated at a banquet; and that after Easter, some should be rejoicing at feasts, whilst others are still observing a strict fast. For this reason, a Divine Providence wills that this custom should be rectified and regulated in a uniform way; and everyone, I hope, will agree upon this point And as, on the other, the custom now followed by the Churches of the West, of the South, and of the North, and by some of those of the East, is the most acceptable, it has appeared good to all; and I have been guarantee for your consent, that you would accept it with joy, as it is followed at Rome, in Africa, in all Italy, Egypt, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Libya, in all Achaia, and in the dioceses of Asia, of Pontus, and Cilicia. You should consider not only that the number of churches in these provinces make a majority To sum up in few words: By the unanimous judgment of all, it has been decided that the most holy festival of Easter should be everywhere celebrated on one and the same day, and it is not seemly that in so holy a thing there should be any division. As this is the state of the case, accept joyfully the divine favour, and this truly divine command; for all which takes place in assemblies of the bishops ought to be regarded as proceeding from the will of God. Make known to your brethren what has been decreed, keep this most holy day according to the prescribed mode; we can thus celebrate this holy Easter day at the same time, if it is granted me, as I desire, to unite myself with you; we can rejoice together, seeing that the divine power has made use of our instrumentality for destroying the evil designs of the devil, and thus causing faith, peace, and unity to flourish amongst us. May God graciously protect you, my beloved brethren.⁹⁵

Many of these concerns, particularly the notion that some would be fasting while others seated at a banquet, are very apposite in the current reality of varying celebrations amongst the different Christian churches and ecclesial communities. It is evident from this

⁹⁵ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Life of Saint Constantine*, Bk. III, ch. 17-18, 20.

text that unity of worship is seen as being correlative with unity of belief and, it must be said, unity amongst the churches themselves.

St. Ambrose, in the Letter XXIII to the Bishops of Emilia on the Celebration of Easter, dating to 386 AD, also makes comparisons to the practices in the Egyptian calendar, and reprobates such practices.⁹⁶ It should be noted as well that the Council of Nicaea did not canonize the 19-year Metonic cycle as it was used in Alexandria, although St. Ambrose would have thought so and which would also have been repeated by Dionysius Exiguus.⁹⁷

The problems with establishing the paschal date did not disappear after the Council of Nicaea. Indeed, the Church of Rome continued to use the 84-year paschal cycle, whereas Alexandria utilized its own calculations – namely that of Anatole of Laodicea, using the 19-year paschal cycle. Vergheese argues that the beginning of the solar year, the Roman calculation of the full moon (as noted above), the differential in the fixed date of the equinox, and the consideration if the first full moon after the vernal equinox took place on a Saturday, the Romans would not celebrate Easter on the next day.⁹⁸ Hefele notes that the Alexandrians calculated from the epact, and that the Roman Church was known to place the full moon too early, while the Alexandrians calculated it too late. There also existed

⁹⁶ AMBROSE, “Letter XXIII to the Bishops of Emilia” in *Letters of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan*. Oxford, J. PARKER, 1881, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/58783/58783-h/58783-h.htm#b166> (10 January 2024).

⁹⁷ DIONYSIUS EXIGUUS, *On Easter, or, the Paschal Cycle*, trans. R. PEARSE, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/dionysius_exiguus_easter_01.htm (1 July 2022).

⁹⁸ See T. P. VERGHEESE, *The Date of Easter and Calendar Revision in the Orthodox Churches*, Addis Ababa, The Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, 1968, 36-37.

differences with the equinoxes, with Rome's being observed on March 18 and Alexandria's on March 21. This resulted in a variation of Easter dates in no less than 6 years subsequent to Nicaea.

The Synod of Sardica likewise discussed this question in order to reconcile the practice of these particular churches over the subsequent fifty years. The Emperor Theodosius in 387 then asked Theophilus of Alexandria to devise paschal tables, of which St. Ambrose refers above. With these tables, St. Ambrose finds himself in agreement.⁹⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, the nephew of Theophilus, would also determine another paschal table, and would also demonstrate errata in the Latin calculation. This demonstration, as Hefele notes, was reviewed by Paschasinus of Lilybaeum and Proterius of Alexandria. Because of this, Pope Leo would prefer the Alexandrian computation. In the *Prologus Paschalis*, Cyril claims that Nicaea asked the bishop of Alexandria to announce every year the exact date of Easter according to the Roman Church.¹⁰⁰ Such a determination was later found to be false and based on a letter of St. Leo to emperor Marcion: "Indeed, certain of the Holy Fathers endeavored to remove the occasion of this error by delegating the care of it to the Bishop of Alexandria, by whom every year the day of the aforementioned

⁹⁹ C. HEFELE, *History of the Councils*, vol. 1, 328ff, quoted in "Excursus On The Subsequent History Of The Easter Question" in *Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/const1-easter.asp> (10 January 2024).

¹⁰⁰ KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 338.

solemnity should be indicated, and by whose writings the general indication thereof should go out to the more distant churches.”¹⁰¹

Throughout the subsequent century, various controversies over the observance of Easter would ensue. Variant practices eventually disappeared alongside the intervention of civil law. Laws of Emperor Honorius dating from 21 March 413 and 8 June 423 punished with exile anyone who dared to celebrate Easter on a date different from the Catholic Church.¹⁰² The Theodosian Code enshrined the following text as law: “And it is found by a thorough examination, that whoever has come together on the day of Easter who does not follow the religious practice should undoubtedly be regarded as having been condemned by this law.”¹⁰³

Dissenting practices based upon heretical observances were also to be reprobated in the same Code, which stated:

This also, which has been concealed from behind the princes, and is being stirred up to the injury of the sacred law by men who blaspheme, and especially by those who, being deserters and refugees from the company of the Novatians, contend that they are the authors of the above-mentioned sect, to whom it is a crime, when they are called Protopaschites, we do not suffer their insults. But if the Novatians should preach that Easter should be celebrated on another day, than that on which the

¹⁰¹ “Studuerunt quidem sancti Patres occasionem huius erroris auferre, omnem hanc curam Alexandrino antistiti delegantes... per quem quotannis dies praedictae solemnitate Sedi apostolicae indicaretur, cuius scriptis ad longinquiores Ecclesias indicium generale percurreret.” FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1956. All translations by this author unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰² « Avec le temps, la pratique protopaschite finit par disparaître. D'ailleurs la législation civile y veillait: Une loi du 21 mars 413 punissait d'exil quiconque célébrait la pâque a une autre date que l'Eglise catholique. Cette stipulation fût réprisé dans une autre loi du 8 juin 423. Leur insertion dans le codex théodosianus en assurait la pérennité. » BRANISTE, in *Synodica*, 41.

¹⁰³ “Ac summa exploratione rimetur, ut, quicumque in unum paschae die non obsequenti religione convenerint, tales indubitanter, quales hac lege damnavimus, habeantur.” T. MOMMSEN and P. MEYER (eds.), *Theodosiani Libri XVI Cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, vol. II, Berlin, Weidmann, 1905, 16.5.9.

orthodox bishops led them to proclaim and celebrate the day of Easter as has been celebrated from time immemorial, the authors of that practice should be deported as well as proscribed, against whom even more severe punishment should be promulgated, if indeed for this offense the heretics also survive the vexation, who at any other time than whereby the orthodox, observing the festival of the Pasch, venerate almost another son of God, not the one whom we worship.¹⁰⁴

This prohibition in the Code was also extended to the Manichaeian sect and all of those who are of “worse” heretical persuasion:

and those Manichaeians, whom they call Popyzites, and those who are worse than all heretics in this one conviction, that on the venerable day of Easter they disagree with all, if they persist in the same madness, we punish them with the same punishment, by proscription and exile.¹⁰⁵

In the year 444, Rome would observe the paschal observance on 26 March and Alexandria on 23 April. There exists correspondence between Sts. Leo the Great and Cyril of Alexandria. While the documents were lost and there existed some forgeries, the contents are available due to Paschasinus of Lilybaeum, an Alexandrian supporter.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently, in the year 453, there existed a similar divergence in date between the same St. Leo the Great and Proterius of Alexandria. While the letter was lost, Proterius’ response is extant, in which he argues that the Pope tolerated the celebration on 23 April 444 but not

¹⁰⁴ “Illud etiam, quod a retro principibus dissimulatum est et in iniuriam sacrae legis ab exsecrandis hominibus agitur et ab his potissimum, qui, novatianorum collegio desertores ac refugae, auctores se quam potiores memoratae sectae haberi contendunt, quibus ex crimine nomen est, cum se protopaschitas appellari desiderant, inultum esse non patimur. Sed si alio die novatiani, quam quo orthodoxorum antistites, praedicandum ac memorabilem saeculis diem paschae duxerint celebrandum, auctores illius conventionis deportatio pariter ac proscription subsequatur, contra quos acrior etiam poena fuerat promulganda, si quidem hoc delicto etiam haereticorum vesaniam superent, qui alio tempore quam quo orthodoxi paschae festivitatem observantes alium paene dei filium, non quem colimus venerantur.” Ibid., 16.6.6.

¹⁰⁵ “manichaeos illosque, quos pepyzitas vocant, nec non et eos, qui omnibus haereticis hac una sunt persuasione peiores, quod in venerabili die paschae ab omnibus dissentiunt, si in eadem amentia perseverant, eadem poena multamus, bonorum proscriptione atque exilio.” Ibid., 16.10.24.

¹⁰⁶ MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus Series Latina* (=PL), vol. 54, col. 606; cf. also KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 247.

24 April 453.¹⁰⁷ A further response, in a letter of 11 June 453, defends the Alexandrine computation.¹⁰⁸ Pope Leo accepted this computation to keep the peace in a letter to Emperor Marcion on 29 May 454.¹⁰⁹ In this same year, the bishop Julian of Cos was urged to follow Emperor Marcion's instructions by the Pope.¹¹⁰

In 457, Victor of Aquitaine, by order of the Roman Archdeacon Hilary, attempted a reconciliation between the Roman and Alexandrian computations, and only two dates in his tables were not in accordance with the Alexandrian computations.¹¹¹ However, after the introduction of the cycles of Victor of Aquitaine, the majority of Gaul and Italy utilized these same tables (without the official acceptance of the Roman Church), which combined the Alexandrian 19-year lunar cycle with the solar cycle of 28 years, which when taken together, established a 532-year paschal cycle. It was only in 541 did the 4th Council of Orleans prescribe that Easter should be celebrated according to these tables.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ See *PL*, vol. LIV, col. 1055, KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 257. Cf. also MOSSHAMMER, *Easter Computus*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ See *PL*, vol. LIV, col. 1084 and KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 269.

¹⁰⁹ See *PL*, vol. LIV, col. 1100; KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 264.

¹¹⁰ See *PL*, vol. LIV, col. 1056 and 1072; KRUSCH, *Studien-84*, 261. The letter to Marcion can be found in *PL*, vol. LIV, col. 1095.

¹¹¹ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1961.

¹¹² Ibid. Cf. P. LABBÉ and G. COSSART, *Sacrosancta Concilia ad Regiam editionem exacta*, 21 vols. Venice, Coletti-Albrizzi, 1728-1733, vol. V, p. 381. "Placuit, ut sanctum Pascha secundum laterculum Victorii ab omnibus sacerdotibus uno tempore celebretur. Quae festivitas annis singulis ab episcopo Epiphaniorum die in ecclesia populis denuntietur. De qua sollemnitate quoties aliquid dubitatur, inquisita vel agnita per metropolitanos a sede apostolica sacra constitutio teneatur."

It has been conjectured by Hefele that subsequently Hilary, when he later became pope, brought Victor's calculation into use officially, in 456, which was the time when the cycle of eighty-four years came to an end. In cases when the paschal moon fell on a Saturday, Victor indicates both possibilities of paschal dates, and left it to the Roman Pontiff to decide when Easter be celebrated.¹¹³ Hefele argues that in 729, the majority of the ancient British Isles Churches would then accept the new paschal cycle. It had likewise been introduced into Spain after the conversion of Reccared from Arianism.¹¹⁴

Pope Symmachus, at the beginning of the 6th century, addressed the Laurentian Schism, which began from a paschal controversy. Symmachus indicated the celebration of Easter on 25 March, while Lawrence's supporters received (at the time of King Theodoric) Peter, the bishop of Altinum, who would proceed to celebrate Easter a second time on April 22. One of the supporters of Symmachus drew up the false *Constitutum Silvestri*, concocted from a supposed Roman synod allegedly held in 324 at the Baths of Trajan, condemning Victorinus with his paschal cycles. It was later that Duchesne found that they could only have originated from this paschal conflict of 501.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ C. HEFELE, *History of the Councils*, vol. 1, 328ff, quoted in "Excursus On The Subsequent History Of The Easter Question" in *Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/const1-easter.asp> (10 January 2024). Cf. also COUNCIL OF NICAEA, "Epistula nicaeni concilii ad Aegyptios," in N. TANNER, (ed.), *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. 2 vols. Washington, Georgetown University Press, 1990, vol. 1, 19.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Recent research has indicated that Reccared's conversion from Arianism could have influenced the adoption of the Roman calculation. See Á. KOVÁCS, "The Principles Behind the Unusual: Easter Date in Spain on 21 March 577," <https://www.glossa.fi/mirator/pdf/easterdate.pdf> (20 November 2024).

¹¹⁵ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1962.

St. John Chrysostom offered the following summation, pressing for obedience and docility: “More than three hundred Fathers decreed concerning the celebration of the Christian Pascha...that Christians should celebrate it together with unanimity.... Could these men, who have not changed the Faith in these times of difficulty, dissemble when setting the days of the Fast and of Pascha...?” The same saint exhorts the faithful to a pressing concern for unanimity by arguing that “if Christ is present in the midst of two or three men, how much more was He in that place where there were more than three hundred, determining all things and making known all things? For this reason, the one who wants to be a true son of the Orthodox Church: let him subdue the indocility of his mind towards the Church's laws and, in any event, obey his Mother, the Church.”¹¹⁶

In the year 525 AD, Pope John I asked that the question be studied by Boniface and Bonus, who did so in light of Dionysius’ work and recommended to keep the 19-year paschal cycle.¹¹⁷ In 550 AD, Bishop Victor of Capua wrote *De Pascha* against the cycle of Victorinus in defense, rather, of the recent progress of Dionysius Exiguus, as will be discussed below. Regulation of Easter date can also be found in Isidore of Seville.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 122.

¹¹⁷ See P. ANTSAKLIS, *The Dates of Easter Sunday*, Notre Dame, IN, unpublished manuscript, 8.

¹¹⁸ ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *De officiis ecclesiasticis*, trans. T. KNOEBEL, Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2008, vol. I, c. xxxii; cf. also *PL*, t. LXXXIII, col. 768.

1.4 The Early Medieval Practice

While Vaduvescu argues that the origin of the first paschal algorithms would be that of Victorius of Aquitaine, it is clear from the aforementioned analysis that there were basic lunar cycles used even from the 3rd century.¹¹⁹

The Scythian monk, Dionysius Exiguus, at the request of Bishop Petronius, established a 95-year table of the full moons indicating the Easter observance, as well as the Easter Sundays, which would cover the years 532 through 626 A.D. His work importantly incorporates the findings of Alexandrian science into the question of the calculation of the Easter date and influenced later the calculation found in Venerable Bede. A critical edition of the table and its appendices was prepared by Bruno Krusch in 1938; a calendar etched in stone, currently found in the Archiepiscopal Museum of Ravenna and speculated to date from the sixth century, reflects this Paschal cycle.¹²⁰ Alden Mosshammer further comments that “to the 95-year table Dionysius appended a set of rules (*argumenta*) for calendrical calculations that he says he adapted from ‘Egyptian science’.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ “It is very difficult to establish the origin of the first algorithms used to calculate the Easter date. It is supposed that The Holy Father Chiril, bishop of Alexandria, was the first who approached this problem between 430-440 A.D. The first systematic algorithm dates from the year 456 A.D. and might be assigned to Victorius d'Aquitania.” O. VADUVESCU, “An Astronomical Viewpoint on the Easter Date,” <https://arxiv.org/pdf/math/0404109.pdf> (10 January 2024).

¹²⁰ See E. DETOMA, “An Easter Date Calendar in Ravenna,” in *Memorie della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, Serie V, vol. 42/1 (2018), 3-74.

¹²¹ MOSSHAMMER, *Easter Computus*, 59.

Within this letter, Dionysius discusses these regulations in light of their apostolic origin and their authority on the basis of the canons of Nicaea. Mosshammer indicates that

Dionysius devotes the remainder of the letter to further defence of the divine origin and Nicene authority of these rules. He quotes from his own collection of Canon Law what he calls the 79th canon and the Wrst [sic] of Antioch, which excommunicates anyone, whether clergy or layman, who violates the Nicene decision regarding the Paschal observance and observes it at the same time as the Jews. He adds a quotation from Leo, in which ‘that venerable Pope of the Apostolic See’ condemns anyone who departs from any Nicene statute.¹²²

Within his work, Dionysius includes the aforementioned letter of Proterius to Leo on the question of Easter, which Dionysius states he himself had translated from the Greek. In the *argumenta* described above, he would determine the Easter date from the indiction, the years from the incarnation, and the 19-year lunar cycle.¹²³ These tables which were begun by Dionysius were later continued on by Felix Gillitanus and later by Venerable Bede.

1.5 The Paschal Practice of the British Isles

Per St. Columban, the British Isles had consistently been using the *Supputatio Romana vetus* as prescribed in 314 AD at the Council of Arles. As a consequence, the bishops of Burgundy were convinced he was a Quartodeciman and condemned him, in a letter written to Pope St. Gregory the Great, reproaching the canon of Victorius for celebrating Easter sometimes before the vernal equinox and requests from the Pope to teach

¹²² Ibid., 70.

¹²³ Ibid., 71.

him the truth on the Easter question. No response to this letter is extant.¹²⁴ A new conflict arose in 603 with St. Columban, who wrote to the Burgundian bishops (with whom he was engaged in various quarrels and who later brought canonical action against him) again saying that the Western churches did not celebrate before the vernal equinox, nor after the 20th day of the moon, and says he preferred the Anatolian cycle to that of Victorius.¹²⁵ Since the decision was likely unfavorable, he again appealed to the Pope.¹²⁶ After Columban, the cycles of Victorius were used unopposed until the introduction of the Dionysian cycle in the 8th century.¹²⁷ It was also during this time, around 615 AD as the Venerable Bede indicates, that Lawrence of Canterbury attempted to convince southern Ireland to abandon their old Easter computus.¹²⁸

This entreaty also has some ramifications in terms of the unity of churches. Bede states:

For when [Laurentius] understood that the life and profession of the Scots in their aforesaid country, as well as of the Britons in Britain, was not truly in accordance with the practice of the Church in many matters, especially that they did not celebrate the festival of Easter at the due time, but thought that the day of the Resurrection of our Lord ought, as has been said above, to be observed between the 14th and 20th of the moon; he wrote, jointly with his fellow bishops, a hortatory epistle, entreating and conjuring them to keep the unity of peace and Catholic observance with the Church of Christ spread throughout the world.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1965.

¹²⁵ See *PL*, vol. LXXX, col. 264.

¹²⁶ See *ibid.*, col. 268.

¹²⁷ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1966.

¹²⁸ See BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. A. M. SELLAR, London, George Bell and Sons, 1907 (=HE), book II, ch. 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

It therefore remains evident that the elements of “unity of peace” and “Catholic observance” with the Church universal should remain hallmarks of the paschal observance, which will also be remarked upon even in the *de Consecratione* of Gratian.¹³⁰

In the middle of the 7th century, Aidan of Lindisfarne was under the protection of Oswald and introduced the ancient Roman 84-year cycle paschal computus into his diocese. His successor Ronan, who studied in Gaul and Rome, agitated for the Roman computation. King Oswy of Northumbria was unshakable in his attachment to the Irish in opposition to the Roman computation. It was in 664 AD at the Synod of Whitby, in which Oswy presided, which featured a disputation between Wilfred (representing the Roman calculation), and Colman (representing the Irish computus) assisting. Wilfrid argued for the universality of the Roman usage and especially as part of the fidelity to St. Peter and his successors; Oswy was convinced that Columban was not given the same Petrine authority, even though Colman was arguing for the *vetus supputatio Romana*.¹³¹

Subsequent to the Synod of Whitby ruling in favor of the Roman practice, the remaining Irish computists were combatted by Theodore of Canterbury (668-693). Thereafter, the Council of Hertford, being the first general council of the Anglo-Saxon church, confirmed the decisions of Whitby. The 1st chapter of the council of Hertford prescribed to celebrate Easter the Sunday following the 14th day of the moon of the first

¹³⁰ See section 2.1.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 25-26. See also C. JONES, “The Victorian and Dionysiac Paschal Tables in the West,” in *Speculum*, vol. 9, no. 4 (October 1934), 408-421.

month of the year, using the Roman calculations.¹³² Iona transferred to the Roman use in 716 at the urging of the English priest Egbert, as did the Britons and those of Cornwall in the 8th century at the insistence of the abbot of Malmesbury, Aldhelm.¹³³ During the second half of the 8th century, the efforts of Elbod, Bishop of Bangor, ended the resistance of the Welsh who accepted the Roman computus.¹³⁴

St. Bede the Venerable was also remarkable for his interest in the calendar and paschal computus, this being based upon his work *De temporum ratione*. Leofranc Holford-Strevens argues this text to be based upon southern Irish materials acquired by Wilfrid, including a 532-year Easter table constructed on Dionysius' principles. Holford-Strevens affirms that this "secured their triumph over Victorious' tables throughout the Western Church."¹³⁵ In this way, then, Bede "sought to establish [the Alexandrian cycle's] credibility by making it the basis of a comprehensive manual of time-keeping."¹³⁶

¹³² See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1969.

¹³³ See BEDE, *HE*, V, 18 and "Letter of Adhelm to the British king Geruntius," in *PL*, vol. LXXXIX, col. 87. See also G. MÁRKUS, "Adomnán, two saints, and the paschal controversy," in *The Innes Review*, 68 (2017), 1-18.

¹³⁴ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1970. Reflecting upon the practices put into place in the British Isles by the decisions of Whitby, the BBC recently offered the following comment: "The Synod of Whitby made sure that the English Church observed the mainstream continental practice. It meant that the English Church was unified in its observation of the most important festival of the Christian calendar, the day of Christ's resurrection, and that England was tied to the continent. And it was something that persisted in England, a thread of continuity, until the English Reformation, when England was broken off from the religious and cultural mainstream of Europe." C. WYATT, "Why Can't The Date of Easter be Fixed?" in *BBC News Magazine*, 25 March 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35880795> (10 January 2024).

¹³⁵ B. BLACKBURN, and L. HOLFORD-STREVENES, *Oxford Companion to the Year*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, 796. Cf. also *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. F. WALLIS, Liverpool, Liverpool Univ. Pr., 1999/2004 (= *Bede-Reckoning*).

¹³⁶ WALLIS, *Bede-Reckoning*, xvii.

As Faith Wallis goes on to argue, this work “assumes that there are two paschal systems which require refutation: the old 84-year cycle, still used by most of the British, and the Victorian cycle, now favoured by some of the Irish ... After the southern Irish had converted to the Alexandrian reckoning, they evidently wrote to Pope Severinus explaining that their northern confrères had refused to follow suit. A response came from Severinus’ successor, the Pope-elect John IV, who roundly condemned the recalcitrant Irish as Quartodecimans.”¹³⁷

It has been noted that in Ireland, about 629 AD, Pope Honorius I wrote to the Irish people, urging them to celebrate Easter in accord with the paschal computus and synodal decrees of the world’s bishops. The Irish bishops in response, instigated by Cummian, at the Synod of Mag Léne (whose synodal proceedings are no longer extant), witnessed Laserian speaking in favor of the Roman Easter observance. This was in opposition to the abbot Munnu who spoke in favor of the ancient Celtic observance, and suggested a trial by ordeal.¹³⁸ Munnu would later appeal to Rome and finally become a supporter of the Roman observance:

A speaker, whom Cummian described as a 'whited wall pretending to preserve the tradition of our elders', disturbed the consensus. The synod dispatched a delegation to Rome, 'the chief of cities,' to resolve the issue. The Irish delegation found their Easter reckoning to be inconsistent with the date celebrated at Rome by the Greeks, Hebrews, Scythians, and Egyptians. Upon the return of the delegation, the monk Cummian wrote a letter summarizing the events and defending a 532-year cycle against the recalcitrants in the north of Ireland who maintained the 84-year cycle. Less than a decade later the issue arose again, this time through a papal letter to the Irish bishops spelling out the theological implications of unorthodox Easter dates.

¹³⁷ Ibid., lx-lxi.

¹³⁸ See FRITZ, *DTC*, 11b, col. 1967. Cf. also BEDE, *HE*, II, 19.

The northern Irish celebrated Easter on 14 Nisan, the day of the Crucifixion, while the Resurrection was the sign of redemption.¹³⁹

By 650 AD the south of Ireland adapted to the Roman observance, taking place by the end of the 7th century, at the urging of Adamnan of Iona.¹⁴⁰

During the pre-Carolingian era, “diocesan synods were admonished to ensure that the clergy knew chant and computus The memorandum *Quae a presbyteris discenda sint* (“What priests should learn”) stipulates that they should know computus and they were expected to at least own a calendar. The study of computus was enjoined at the council of Aachen in 789.”¹⁴¹ According to Mary Alberi, a quarrel lasted between 797 and 799 between Alcuin, scholar of Charlemagne, and other court scholars, whom Alcuin termed the *pueri palatini*. In his Epistola 145, dating from March 798, Alcuin defends the calculation of the paschal cycle based upon January 1 as the starting date (following the Roman custom), rather than September 1 according to the Alexandrian practice proposed by these aforementioned court scholars.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ S. MCCLUSKEY, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2000, 89. Cf. D. CRÓINÍN, “A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus” in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, vol. 82C (1982), 405-430.

¹⁴⁰ See BEDE, *HE*, V, 15.

¹⁴¹ WALLIS (trans.), *Bede-Reckoning*, lxxxix.

¹⁴² See M. ALBERI, “Jerome, Alcuin and Vergil’s ‘Old Entellus’,” in *Journal of Medieval History*, 17 (1991), 103-113.

Conclusion

Overall, the disputes over the date of Easter in the first millennium generally revolved around both orthodox and heretical interpretations of Christian doctrine, and the regulation thereof included support from Roman civil legislation. Despite efforts to establish a uniform date for Easter, particularly in the Council of Nicaea – which has been described as the “canonist’s focal point,” variations persisted between different regions of the Roman Empire and Asia Minor. While the Council of Nicaea attempted to standardize the date of Easter uniformly, it established that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday following the full moon that occurs on or after the spring equinox. This formula was intended to ensure that Easter would not coincide with the Jewish Passover and would be celebrated uniformly.

Nevertheless, variations did persist, as attested from the differing approved calculations. It has been noted that the origin of these practices (the Quartodeciman stemming from the churches claiming origin from St. John the Apostle and the Sunday reckoning being based in those claiming other apostolic origins) is tied to the earliest days of the Christian experience. One could thereby posit any of these practices as originating in divine revelation. It was the role of the supreme authority of the Church to seek a solution amenable to all parties.

The growth of scientific and mathematical understanding regarding the astronomical cycles underpinning the reckoning of the paschal date led to differing practices, with some local churches using older forms of calculation and others using the

newer and more accurate formulations. This process of scientific formulation will continue and grow throughout the medieval period, and will influence the allied question of the reform of the Julian calendar, to which the historical record bears evidence.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DATE OF EASTER IN THE MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PERIODS

Introduction

In this chapter, an historical-descriptive methodology will be employed to discuss the medieval academic development and discussions concerning the date of Easter, which would later lead to and directly influence the Gregorian reforms. This development and discussion will be analyzed for their singular juridical import upon the papal reform of the calendar and paschal cycle. The repercussions of this reform, from both a civil, canonical and ecumenical standpoint, will be discussed as they especially relate to the Church's interest in the calculation of time.

The *Tertia Pars* of Gratian's decree, D. 3 *de consecr.*, c. 21 offers the following concerning the Easter date:

Holy Pasch is not to be celebrated except on Sunday. Likewise from Pope Pius, ninth from Peter the Apostle, in the first of his decretals. We wish you to know that the Pasch of the Lord is to be celebrated on Sunday during these times of the year. Hermas, the teacher of the faith and the Scriptures show this forth among us. And it is permitted to us that we might celebrate Pasch on this aforementioned day. Yet because there are certain ones, who thence were doubting, so as to reinforce the souls of these, the angel of the Lord to the same Hermas appeared in the clothing of a shepherd, and instructed him, that the Pasch of the Lord be celebrated by all on Sunday. For this reason, we establish on Our Apostolic Authority, all must observe this, just as we also observe this same thing, nor should anyone depart from the Head in any way [in this matter].¹⁴³

¹⁴³ “Nosse uos uolumus, quod Pasca Domini die dominico annuis temporibus sit celebrandum. Istit enim temporibus Hermes doctor fidei et scripturae inter nos effulsit. Et licet nos idem Pasca predicto die celebraremus, tamen quia quidam, inde dubitabant, ad corroborandas animas eorum eidem Hermae angelus

This text, referring to the *Pastor Hermae* of the 1st century, argues for the great antiquity of the Easter celebration on a Sunday. The text itself is sourced from one of the Pseudo-Isidorean decretals, and is also found in Ivo of Chartres,¹⁴⁴ as well as the Editio Romana, cols. 2581-2582.¹⁴⁵

The subsequent canon, 22, states that “from the 14th day of the moon of the first month until the 21st day of the same month, the same feast is celebrated.”¹⁴⁶ The *Summa* of Paucapalea does not shed much additional light on c. 21, but remarks that: “In the third distinction is discussed holidays, that is to say, so that Sundays and solemnities and Rogation days and general fasts should be celebrated and venerated by all.”¹⁴⁷ Likewise,

Domini in habitu pastoris apparuit, et precepit ei, ut Pasca Domini die dominico ab omnibus celebraretur. Unde et nos apostolica auctoritate instituumus, omnes eadem seruare debere, quia et nos eadem seruamus, nec debetis a capite quoquo modo discedere.” The following references to Easter are also found in the *Corpus iuris canonici*: “Uno die et tempore per omnem orbem observetur D.3 c.23,26 de cons.; nonnisi Dominico celebretur D.3 c.21,22 de cons.; dies Pascha omnibus intimetur D,3 a. 24 de cons.; cum in concilio omnia statuta fuerint, venturum Pascha annuntietur D.3 c.25 de cons.; die Nativitatis Domini Pascha annuntietur in universis ecclesiis D.3 c.25 (283) de cons.” Cf. F. GERMOVNIK, *Indices ad Corpus iuris canonici*, M. THÉRIAULT (ed.), editio altera, Ottawa, St. Paul’s University, 2000, 118.

¹⁴⁴ See P. HINSCHIUS (ed.), *Decretales Pseudo-Isidorianae et Capitula Angilramni*, Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1963, p. 116 and IVO CARNUTENSIS, *Decretum D. Ivonis Episcopi Carnutensis Septem ac Decem Tomis Sive Partibus Constans*, Louvain, Bartholomaeus Grauius, 1561, IV, 3, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb11198588?page=244> (24 April 2024).

¹⁴⁵ GRATIAN, *Decretum Gratiani emendatum et notationibus illustratum una cum glossis*, Rome, in aedibus Populi Romani, 1582, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0014rx6c?cv=1352> (24 April 2024).

¹⁴⁶ “A XIV vero luna primi mensis usque ad XXI diem eiusdem mensis eadem celebretur festiuitas.” GRATIAN, D. 3 de cons., c.22.

¹⁴⁷ “In tertia distinctione de temporibus feriandi agitur, scil. ut dies dominici et solemnes diesque rogationum ac generalium ieiuniorum ab omnibus celebrentur atque venereuntur [sic].” PAUCAPALEA, “De consecratione,” in J. F. VON SCHULTE (ed.), *Die Summa des Paucapalea über das decretum Gratiani*, Giessen, E. Roth, 1890, 145.

the *Summa Decretorum* of Rufinus comments on this canon: “This has changed completely today; for the Pascha must never be celebrated except after the quarter of the twelfth moon and after the vernal equinox. Hence it happens that sometimes on the 16th day, or even a later moon, [Pascha] is celebrated.”¹⁴⁸

The following canons 23 and 26, citing the Fourth Council of Carthage and the council of Arles (respectively), assert that the Easter solemnity should be celebrated on one day and time, and that this should be the case for the entire world, in such a way to preclude that one church might celebrate on one day, and another on another day. On c. 23, Rufinus goes on to note: “Easter on one day, that is to say, Sunday. At the time, that is, after the vernal equinox. Or it is referred to those who observe it on one day and time, so that on one day and time all churches celebrate the feast, but not on another day or time such that one church does on one day and the other on another.”¹⁴⁹

2.1 Medieval Reform Proposals

In the past decade, important research has been done by Philipp Nothaft, which has been invaluable in this research of investigating the medieval disputes over the question,

¹⁴⁸ “Hoc hodie penitus immutatum est; numquam enim nisi post quartam decimam lunam et post equinoctium vernale debet pasca celebrari. Unde fit, ut aliquando in XVI. vel etiam ulteriori luna celebretur pasca.” MAGISTER RUFINUS, *Summa Decretorum*, in H. SINGER (ed.), *Die Summa Decretorum des Magister Rufinus*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 1902, 561.

¹⁴⁹ “Pasce uno die, scil, dominico. Tempore, videlicet post equinoctium vernale. Vel uno die et tempore ad ipsos observantes referatur, ut uno die et tempore omnes ecclesie celebrent pasca, sed non alio die vel tempore una ecclesia, alioque altera.” Ibid.

closely allied to the date of Easter, of the reform of the calendar, and of its significance in canon law. Nothaft's research has brought out many aspects of the papal and conciliar role in calendar reform in the medieval era, as well as the reliance upon scholarly and scientific research in shaping these decrees – a practice which reached its apogee in the post-Tridentine reforms of the calendar.

The resolution of these debates took place, as Nothaft indicates in his research, within the context of the major ecclesiastical questions of these times, namely within the context of conciliarism, and later reached a definitive judgment in the reforms enacted at the time of the Council of Trent. Further study of the history of the Orthodox churches has also brought into relief the movement for reform within medieval Orthodoxy, which took place almost simultaneous to that taking place in the Latin church. As a matter relating to canon law, Matthew Champion states that “ecclesiastical law’s enduring power meant that time measurement could not change without ecclesiastical imprimatur”¹⁵⁰.

2.1.1 Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon

To Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, are attributed several texts on the subject of the computus, including the *Kalendarium*, the *Compotus I*, the *Compotus Correctorius* and the *Compotus minor*, of which the authenticity of all but the *Compotus Correctorius*

¹⁵⁰ M. CHAMPION, *The Fullness of Time: Temporalities of the Fifteenth-Century Low Countries*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2017, 156.

are challenged.¹⁵¹ Nothaft argues that “of all the texts on calendar reform and improvement written during the Middle Ages, Robert Grosseteste’s *Computus* was the first to exert a truly lasting and profound influence on the debates that were to follow until the Gregorian Reform of 1582.”¹⁵² This, however, should be understood in terms of his influence upon the university discussions concerning the calendar and the paschal date.

Jennifer Moreton has written on Grosseteste and his impact upon the reform of the paschal date and calendar. As previously mentioned, the *Computus Correctorius* is considered to be certainly authentic¹⁵³ and indeed would influence the work of Roger Bacon in this regard. While accepting the 19-year Paschal lunar cycle, he also augmented it with multiples thereof, while harmonizing it with the length of the solar year to calculate the Easter date accordingly.¹⁵⁴ It is significant to mention Grosseteste as a landmark in the history of this discussion of the Easter date, as his work served to introduce the many Arabic scientific discoveries of this era into the scholastic, university discussion of the question, which would later grow to influence the canonical discussion in subsequent

¹⁵¹ See M. DOWD, *Astronomy and Computus at Oxford University in the Early Thirteenth Century: The Works of Robert Grosseteste*, doctoral thesis, South Bend, IN, University of Notre Dame, 2003, 200.

¹⁵² C. P. E. NOTHAFT, *Scandalous Error: Calendar Reform and Calendrical Astronomy in Medieval Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018 (=SE), 134.

¹⁵³ J. MORETON, “On Not Editing Grosseteste” in E. MACKIE, and J. GOERING (eds.) *Editing Robert Grosseteste: Papers Given at the Thirty-Sixth Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, 3-4 November 2000*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, 172. Further discussion may be found in R. DALES, “The Computistical Works Ascribed to Robert Grosseteste,” in *Isis*, vol. 80, n. 1 (March 1989), 74-79.

¹⁵⁴ A.C. CROMBIE, “Robert Grosseteste,” Encyclopedia.com Article from *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, <http://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/DSB/Grosseteste.pdf> (10 January 2024).

centuries. Also, it is helpful to bear in mind Grosseteste's ecclesiological views, which were of a reforming nature, and while also being legitimately critical of the papacy, likewise appealed to it for support against secular interference.¹⁵⁵ This having been said, Pierre d'Ailly would indeed utilize the argumentation of Grosseteste in his own work in preparing for the abortive calendar reforms of the Council of Constance.¹⁵⁶

Roger Bacon, the medieval Franciscan scholar and the author of the *Opus Majus*,¹⁵⁷ “guarded himself against accusations of disagreeing with a major council of the Church, saying, ‘Without impairing the full authority of the Council of Nicaea, this cycle can be changed, because at that time there was no error.’ In other words, they got it right at the time, and they didn’t predict the need for change ‘for the early Church did not have the advantage of astronomy’.”¹⁵⁸

In the same *Opus Majus*, Bacon argues to the Roman Pontiff that he “has the power to command it, and you will find men who will apply excellent remedies in this particular, and not only in the aforesaid defects, but in those of the whole calendar . . . If then this glorious work should be performed in Your Holiness’s time, one of the greatest, best, and

¹⁵⁵ J.D. NORTH, “The Western Calendar: ‘Intolerabilis, Horribilis et Derisibilis’. Four Centuries of Discontent,” in *GRC* (=“Western Calendar”), 107.

¹⁵⁶ *SE*, 240

¹⁵⁷ ROGER BACON, *The ‘Opus Majus’ of Roger Bacon*, ed. J. H. BRIDGES, in 2 vols., London, Williams and Norgate, 1900.

¹⁵⁸ B. CLEGG, *Roger Bacon: The First Scientist*, London, Constable and Robinson Ltd., 2003, 59-60.

finest things ever attempted in the Church of God would be consummated.”¹⁵⁹ Bacon suggested to Clement IV that tables and lists to find the vernal equinox “be disseminated throughout Latin Christendom and placed alongside all conventional calendars.”¹⁶⁰ He opined that “the calendar’s ailments were best overcome by having the Pope command a cure,”¹⁶¹ since it is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to “deign to administer the remedy for the mentioned errors of the calendar, lest the nations of unbelievers perhaps take this as an opportunity to suspect that some deformity appears on the face of Christ’s bride and dare rashly to abuse the customs of Christians and of the holy Church of God with their perverted mockery.”¹⁶²

There exists a further anonymous document, the *Assignacio errorum kalendarii et eorundem correctio* dating from 1276, which remains extant in one manuscript in northern Italy, and which Nothaft describes as sharing Bacon’s sentiment that the Roman Pontiff should be the one to command a cure to this situation. The proposal as well, to utilize astronomical data rather than cycles for the calculation of the Paschal date, would also stem from Grosseteste and Bacon – and would be suggested later in the discussions of Aleppo in 1997.¹⁶³ To this point, the Alfonsine Tables were created in honor of King Alfonso X

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶⁰ *SE*, 149.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 150.

¹⁶² Ibid., 152.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 242.

of Castile, who sponsored their development in the midst of the 13th century. Their usage lasted even until the 16th century, influencing even Copernicus.¹⁶⁴ These ephemerides, predecessors of modern-day almanacs, were standardized throughout the universities of Europe and would serve as the scientific basis for much of the reform movement of these centuries.¹⁶⁵

2.1.2 Pierre Vidal

Subsequent to Bacon's appeal to Clement IV, Nothaft argues that in 1318, a further appeal to the Roman Pontiff (at the time resident in Avignon) was made to correct the calendar, and thus the date of Easter. From the Dominicans, Pierre Vidal "presented his astronomically enhanced kalendarium for the coordinates of Montpellier to Pope John XXII."¹⁶⁶ Recognizing the inaccuracies of the Easter calculation, Vidal appealed to the Pontiff to remedy the situation, as the observance of the Easter date at that time brought

¹⁶⁴ S. KUSUKAWA, "Astronomical Tables," <http://www.sites.hps.cam.ac.uk/starry/tables.html> (10 January 2024).

¹⁶⁵ For an introduction to these manuscripts and to an ongoing research project on the Alfonsine tables, see R. KREMER, M. HUSSON, and J. CHABÁS, "Alfonsine Astronomy: The Written Record. Introduction," in *Alfonsine Astronomy: The Written Record (Alfonsine Astronomy: Studies and Sources, 1)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2022, 7-17, and C.P.E. NOTHAFT, "A New Series on Alfonsine Astronomy," in *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, vol. 54, issue 1, 2023, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00218286221150437> (10 January 2024). A directory of such manuscripts may be found in J. CHABÁS, *Computational Astronomy in the Middle Ages: Sets of Astronomical Tables in Latin*, 1st ed., Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2019.

¹⁶⁶ *SE*, 205. Cf. also C. P. E. NOTHAFT, "Medieval Astronomy in Catalonia and the South of France: The 'Improved' Lunar Kalendarium of Friar Raymond (Ramon) Bancal (ca. 1311) and its Predecessors," in *LLULL*, vol. 38, no. 81, 108-109.

ridicule to the Church in celebrating Easter nearly a month after the paschal full moon.¹⁶⁷ Nothaft claims that “no documentation has come to light that would tell us whether John XXII, who had confirmed his predecessor Clement V’s decision to move the papal curia to Avignon, ever considered such a remedy or viewed Pierre Vidal’s intervention with any kind of appreciation.”¹⁶⁸ From the highest authority in the Church, no decree was forthcoming on this matter for a notable period of time. This perdured until the accession of Pierre Roger to the papacy as Clement VI, who reigned from 1342-1352. Roger, of the Order of St. Benedict, was also trained as a canonist.¹⁶⁹ Not long after the inauguration of his reign, late in 1344, the papal chancery in Avignon dispatched letters to two French members of the clergy, Jean des Murs and Firmin de Beauval, who were known for their knowledge of computus and astronomical knowledge.¹⁷⁰ There exists a papal mandate to this effect dated 25 September 1344 summoning these two clerics to Avignon.¹⁷¹ This remains clearly significant for purposes of this study, since as Nothaft describes, “for the first time in the annals of the Latin Church, the calendar’s correction was no longer an issue

¹⁶⁷ NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 84. He goes on to argue that these complaints were common and that such provided a sort of indirect ecumenical stimulus to calendar reform.

¹⁶⁸ *SE*, 207.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ For a mathematical analysis of these tables, see R. KREMER, “Cracking the Tabulae permanentes of John of Murs and Firmin of Beauval with Exploratory Data Analysis,” in M. HUSSON, C. MONTELLE, and B. VAN DALEN (eds.), *Editing and Analysing Numerical Tables: Towards a Digital Information System for the History of Astral Sciences*, PALS 2, Turnhout, Brepols, 2021, 363–422.

¹⁷¹ NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 84-85.

that occupied only scholars, but one that had officially entered the arena of ecclesiastical politics. With Clement VI, the one person in Western Christendom with the authority and leverage necessary to change the calendrical order had decided to take action.”¹⁷²

In his research on this question, Nothaft has discovered an interesting new manuscript in the Vatican libraries, the *Expositio kalendarii novi et correctio veteris edita Anno Domini 1340*, which he identifies as likely being the work of a Johannes de Termis, who would later present a *Tractatus de tempore celebrationis paschalis* to Pope Innocent VI in 1354.¹⁷³ Nothaft affirms that this latter work remains unpublished, and argues that this document is enlightening in regard to the work being done at the Avignon papal court under Clement VI to reform the calendar and the Easter date. For purposes of this study in relationship to the later reforms issued by *Inter gravissimas*, it is argued that “the anonymous *Expositio* is a text replete with original, or at any rate rather unusual, ideas pertaining to calendar improvement and its astronomical underpinnings. Of the various opinions expressed in it, however, none was as potentially controversial as the author’s insistence on omitting 11 days from the Julian calendar in order to restore the mean equinoxes and solstices to the positions they had occupied in the year of Christ’s incarnation,”¹⁷⁴ in this sense being quite similar to the reforms of 1582. However, this

¹⁷² *SE*, 208.

¹⁷³ C.P.E. NOTHAFT, “Astronomy and Calendar Reform at the Curia of Pope Clement VI: A New Source,” in *Annals of Science*, 74:1, 1-24 2 & 16. Cf. also C.P.E. NOTHAFT, “Science at the Papal Palace: Clement VI and the Calendar Reform Project of 1344/45,” in *Viator*, 46, no. 2 (2015), 277–302.

¹⁷⁴ NOTHAFT, “Astronomy and Calendar Reform”, 16.

proposal was not without controversy and conflict, prompting an anonymous treatise, written in the style of scholastic disputation, on the issue of the correction of the calendar. This treatise, beginning with the words *Ad correctionem calendarii* exists, as Nothaft describes, only in two sixteenth-century copies in Vienna. The texts contained therein are: “(1) *Autores calendarii* ... written in 1317 and attributed in both manuscripts to Jean des Murs. (2) *Ad correctionem calendarii*. (3) Jean des Murs and Firmin de Beauval, *Epistola super reformatio antiqui calendarii*, presented in 1345 to Pope Clement VI. (4) Johannes de T(h)ermis, *Tractatus de tempore celebrationis paschalis*, presented in 1354 to Pope Innocent VI.”¹⁷⁵

2.1.3 Medieval Byzantine Proposals

Recent studies by Fabio Acerbi have brought to light a number of texts and manuscripts of Byzantine computistical texts from the medieval era, with the earliest dating from 892. An in-depth discussion of this fairly abundant philological research would be well beyond the scope of this current project.¹⁷⁶

The Constantinopolitan theologian John Zonaras, writing in the midst of the 11th century, commented on the Apostolic Canons regarding the date of Easter, in particular

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ See F. ACERBI, *Byzantine Easter Computi*, in *Studi e Testi*, 562, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2024.

canon 7.¹⁷⁷ Zonaras, commenting on this Canon, interprets the legislation concerning the Easter date as such:

Some say the Spring equinox is the 25th day of March; others, the 25th day of April. I deem that the canon refers to neither the one nor the other. For Pascha is often celebrated before the 25th of April; and there are times when it is celebrated before the 25th of March; so that, (if ‘Spring equinox’ were so understood) Pascha is being celebrated in violation of this canon. Whence it appears that the wise apostles call something else the ‘Spring equinox.’ So the whole thrust of the canon is this, that Christians should not celebrate Pascha with the Jews (that is, on the same day). For it is fitting that their feast - which is no feast - is done first; and thus we do our Pascha. If one consecrated to God does this even once, he is removed from orders. The synod in Antioch also ordered this, in their first canon, where they stated that this was decreed concerning the feast of Pascha by the synod of Nicaea, although no such canon is found in the canons of the Nicene synod.¹⁷⁸

In his commentaries on the texts of Nicaea, Zonaras seems to discount the concept of the vernal equinox, although “he does not abbreviate the text of Canon 7 the way Aristenus (prior to Zonaras) had done by omitting the words entirely.”¹⁷⁹ Zonaras seems to imply that the vernal equinox, be it calculated notionally or astronomically, “is the ‘something else’ known to the ‘wise Apostles’ which makes both proposed calendrical dates incorrect, and the 12th century practice of the Church canonical.”¹⁸⁰ Since Zonaras was unconcerned with the celebration of Pascha before the vernal equinox, not celebrating Pascha along with the Hebrew Passover was considered separate canonically. This having been said, it is noted that “he (or perhaps Balsamon after him) adds the proviso ‘that is, on

¹⁷⁷ R. PEARSE, “John Zonaras on the date of Easter,” <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2019/06/22/john-zonaras-on-the-date-of-easter/> (10 January 2024).

¹⁷⁸ “Paschalion,” in *OrthodoxWiki*, <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschalion> (10 January 2024).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. See also ARISTENUS, “Commentary on Apostolic Canon 7,” in *PG* 137, 50.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. See also J. ZONARAS, “Commentary on Apostolic Canon 7,” in *PG* 137, 49-50.

the same day' in an effort to prevent anyone from taking 'with the Jews' to mean celebrating Pascha as though it were part of the Jewish feast. Hence, what not being on the same day/date means in practice is not letting the date of Passover determine the date of Pascha. So Zonaras may well be saying nothing new, though his words have been widely taken in an innovative sense."¹⁸¹

The consequence of this analysis of the classical rule for the celebration of Pascha is that, per Zonaras, "Pascha is supposed to follow Passover, or at least, 'it is fitting' that such a sequence is observed. This, of course, is what necessarily happens whenever the Nicene paschalion is correctly followed, provided 'Passover' is understood to mean the one day of 14 Nisan (or 15 Nisan in rabbinic practice) and not the entire eight-day feast of Passover which includes the Feast of Unleavened Bread."¹⁸² But when the dates of Pascha are inaccurately calculated, it could well happen that the day of Pascha would be the same day as the Passover, despite being independently calculated. This situation is one of the main concerns for the interpretation of Zonaras, which would imply disregarding the aforementioned Canon 7 by permitting the Jewish practice, to some extent, to determine the date of Pascha. It should be said, however, that "many who read this in Zonaras, however, saw only a mandated sequence of separate dates."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ "Paschalion," in *OrthodoxWiki*, <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschalion> (10 January 2024).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

In 1324 AD, a reform proposal surfaced within the Byzantine tradition by historian and theologian Nicephoras Gregoras. While he calculated the precession of the vernal equinox to be about one day in 300 years, (that is to say, not appreciably different from the Western computists such as Pierre d’Ailly and Nicholas of Cusa, as will be seen below), a proposal of reform for the Julian calendar was sent to Andronicus II. However, this proposal was not enacted, apparently from lack of popular or political support. Ultimately, this proposal would have corrected less than half of the seven-day error that existed at this juncture.¹⁸⁴ Campbell judges this failure as owing to “a lack of concern for astronomical accuracy, and as symptomatic of an already firmly entrenched view of the calendar as a sacred tradition.” He then goes on to argue for “evident confusion of a calendrical tool with the Patristic method itself.”¹⁸⁵

Gregoras was also engaged in controversy with Barlaam of Seminara (also known as Barlaam the Calabrian), who emphasized in *De Paschate* the difference between the actual and notional full moons should not impact nor need correct the paschal dates.¹⁸⁶

It was likewise during this time that the fourteenth century canonist Hieromonk Matthew Blastares enumerated the traditional rules of the Paschalion: “First, that it is necessary to celebrate the Pascha after the spring equinox; second, that it is not [to be] the

¹⁸⁴ See Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ J.R. CAMPBELL, “The Paschalion”, http://www.academia.edu/8246608/The_Paschalion_An_Icon_of_Time (10 January 2024).

¹⁸⁶ F. ACERBI, “Barlaam’s Paraphrase of Euclid, Elements II.1–10. A Critical Edition,” in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, (72) 2022, 4.

same day as the Jewish festival; third, that it is not [to be] merely after the equinox, but after the first full moon following the equinox; and fourth, that [it is to be] the Sunday immediately after the full moon.”¹⁸⁷ It has been argued as well that the second and third principles articulated by Blastares would, in a way, be redundant, were he not taking into account the difference between the notional moon of the paschalion/computus versus the actual astronomical full moon.¹⁸⁸ This is so because Blastares also described and defined the norms of the paschalion in a way that can be interpreted as requiring the Jewish calendar. The lagging of the Orthodox Pascha behind the vernal equinox, more so than the Jewish calendar would, was considered an advantage by Blastares. As the authors of the *Scientific Examination* argue, “his claim is the antithesis of that of contemporary ecumenists, who call this lagging a defect.”¹⁸⁹

A further proposal from an ecumenical voice (if the anachronism might be applied) would be that of Levi ben Gerson, a resident of southern France, whose proposals represented a mixture of the Christian and Jewish years. Likewise, Immanuel Bonfils of Tarascon devised tables for the Jewish calendar which later became translated into Greek.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ “Paschalion,” in *OrthodoxWiki*, <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschalion> (10 January 2024). Cf. also M. BLASTARES, *Syntagma Alphabeticum*, in *PG*, 145, 96D-97A.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 26-27.

¹⁹⁰ NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 86.

2.1.4 *The Councils of Rome, Constance and Basel*

A bishop of Cambrai who was elevated to the cardinalate in 1411 and who was present at the Council of Rome in 1412, d'Ailly offered the antipope John XXIII the *Exhortatio ad concilium generale super kalendarii correctione*, “which argued for the necessity of correcting the calendar as part of the imminent reform and reunion of the Latin Church.”¹⁹¹ Described as an artisan of the unity of the Church, this text in particular was influenced by the works of Grosseteste, Bacon, Sacrobosco and others, and d'Ailly himself suggested the notion of calculating based upon the meridian of Jerusalem.¹⁹² d'Ailly personally drafted a decree for calendar reform, found in an appendix to the aforementioned *Exhortatio*, and intended for promulgation once the unity of the Western Church had been effected consequent to the Western Schism.¹⁹³ The text, which proposes the issue of calendar reform as directly affecting liturgical worship, reads:

As is incumbent upon our office, we have convened a universal synod for the reformation of the Church. With its approbation, we have decided to reform that which is relevant to the divine worship as well as several other things. This is why we have entrusted our beloved sons, etc., diligently to concentrate on the examination of the aforementioned errors and their correction with the counsel of experienced astronomers, and to administer [the necessary steps] to bring the Roman calendar in line with the truth. Yet since this undertaking needs a great amount of time for discussion and will not come into common use without difficulty, and in order to have the error in determining Easter corrected more quickly and more easily, we have ordained, after due deliberation with experts and the holy council, that the following mode should be observed, namely that the vernal equinox and the new moons, which

¹⁹¹ *SE*, 236. See also L. THORNDIKE, “Four British Manuscripts by Pierre d’Ailly,” in *Imago Mundi*, vol. 16 (1962), 157-160.

¹⁹² NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 88.

¹⁹³ *SE*, 242-243.

change their locations in the calendar over time by ascending continuously, are brought to their correct positions.¹⁹⁴

Given the failure of the council of Rome to resolve the issue of the Western Schism, the proposals of d'Ailly were presented subsequently in March 1417 in Constance. During this same Council of Constance, the question of the reform of the calendar was undertaken by Jacobus Arrigoni, the bishop of Lodi, on 16 February 1416. Nothaft analyzes this document as “[predicting] that several burning issues were not going to receive sufficient treatment during the present council [of Constance] and were thus best deferred to a future one.”¹⁹⁵ Regarding the contacts between the universities and the Council on this matter, the nomination of various *commissarii* would have been expected. However, “none of these steps appears to have been taken at the time and the contributions made by Europe’s universities to the medieval calendar-reform debate remained on the whole very meagre.”¹⁹⁶ Subsequent to the Council of Constance, no less of a source than Jean Gerson also remarked on this controversy, as “on 4 April 1428 ... he wrote a letter to an unnamed correspondent (perhaps Oswald of Corda, vicar of the Grande Chartreuse) that decried the ‘inattention, if not to say laziness, of those presiding over the Church’, which had allowed the dates of the new moons and equinoxes to incur an all too manifest error.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 245.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 246. Cf. also O. DE SOLAN, *La Réforme du Calendrier aux Conciles de Constance et de Bâle*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2016 (=RCCCB), 31-37.

During the council of Basel, the treatises of Hermann Zoest as well as a report entitled *Avisamentum de correctione kalendarii* were of significant influence. The *Phaselexis* of Zoest, particularly the edition of 1437,¹⁹⁸ while also citing a number of Patristic texts and conciliar legislation, such as from St. Cyril of Alexandria, Paschasius of Lilybaeum, Anatolius, St. Leo the Great, Victorius, Theophilus of Caesarea and Proterius of Alexandria, as well as the councils of Antioch, Toledo IV, Carthage, Arles II, Carthage III, Chalcedon and Caesarea, especially affirmed that the councils of Caesarea and Nicaea fixed the vernal equinox in the Julian calendar. De Solan goes on to argue that Zoest had a considerable knowledge of canon law, citing not only the *Decretum Gratiani* as well as the false decretals, under the title of the *Liber Conciliorum* of Isidore.¹⁹⁹ The recent French translation of the *Phaselexis* substantively recapitulates the *status quaestionis* at the time of the council of Basel, particularly as argued from these canonical and theological sources, which include a proposal to omit the leap year every three hundred years.²⁰⁰

Not dissimilar to the arguments of Zonaras as previously classified, the Western reform proposals at this stage needed to take into account the two principles of the vernal

¹⁹⁸ A discussion of the manuscripts of this text may be found in DE SOLAN, *RCCCB*, 18-19.

¹⁹⁹ « Il fut prescrit que Pâques devait être observée depuis le 11 des calendes d’avril (22 mars) jusqu’au 7 des calendes de mai (25 avril) (*Phaselexis*, IV, p. 420) ». DE SOLAN, *RCCCB*, 127. Cf. also *ibid.*, 360.

²⁰⁰ “Insuper ne aliquis error circa hec contingat in futurum, statuit hec [*sic*] sancta sinodus quod semper post tricentos annos unus bisextus omittatur.” DE SOLAN, *RCCCB*, 520.

equinox, either in showing that 21 March is a relative precept, which must be understood as the equinox in general, or by showing that the vernal equinox must be fixed on 21 March.²⁰¹

2.1.5 Nicholas of Cusa

Nicholas of Cusa (Cusanus) had been appointed to the commission which was set into place by the Council of Basel (1431-1449) to revise the errors of the calendar. Nothaft notes that “the plan to restore the calculation of Easter to its ancient order had been on the council’s agenda since 1434, when the general assembly agreed to set up a special commission or task force dedicated to the problem.”²⁰² Around 1435-1436, in fulfillment of this role, Cusanus wrote the *De correctione kalendarii*, which took a simple approach to calendar revision and reform – so much so that it was presented to the Council of Basel in March 1437.²⁰³ It has been argued that Cusanus’ project “was a canonical project more than a scientific one, a sign that the question of the calendar was on the way out of the circle of astronomers and computists to become the affair of the whole Church.”²⁰⁴ The

²⁰¹ « La réflexion canonique doit donc viser à concilier les deux formulations de la date de Pâques, soit en montrant que le 21 mars est une prescription relative, qui doit être entendue comme l’équinoxe de printemps en général, soit en montrant que l’équinoxe de printemps doit absolument demeurer le 21 mars. » DE SOLAN, *RCCCB*, 128.

²⁰² C. P. E. NOTHAFT, “Strategic Skepticism: A Reappraisal of Nicholas of Cusa’s Calendar Reform Treatise” in É. MEHL and N. ROUDET (eds.), *Le Temps des Astronomes: L’Astronomie et le Décompte du Temps de Pierre d’Ailly à Newton*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2017, 65-66.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ « C’était un projet canonique plus que scientifique, signe que la question du calendrier était en passe de sortir du cercle des astronomes et des computistes pour devenir l’affaire de l’Église tout entière. » B. SÈRE, « *La réforme du calendrier aux conciles de Constance et de Bâle*, Corpus édité, traduit et commenté

canonical aspect of this discussion at Basel has also been described in its relationship to ecclesiastical unity, since “only two months later, the respected canon lawyer [Cusanus] left Basel to join pope Eugene IV, the council’s fierce opponent, in Italy, where the curia planned to negotiate a union with the Eastern Orthodox Church.”²⁰⁵

The proposal itself, in its scientific and mathematical import, made an adjustment to the lunar cycle, which Philipp Nothaft notes would go back to an earlier and more primitive form of the calculation of the Easter date. This would be more harmonious with the Nicene norms and would involve further harmonizations with the Jewish and Greek calculation of the lunar months.²⁰⁶

Consequently, Nicholas of Cusa “was no longer present to witness how the proposal was carried over into the draft text for a decree (*forma decreti*), whose presentation in September 1437 remained without the desired consequences. Three more years passed until the general assembly in Basel voted to lay the calendar reform to rest, aware that the newly arisen schism between Eugene IV and the council’s elected anti-pope Felix V (1439–1449) had rendered any such project infeasible in political terms.”²⁰⁷

par Olivier DE SOLAN », in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 3 (2018), 563-566, available online at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-de-l-histoire-des-religions-2018-3-page-563.htm> (10 January 2024).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ See NOTHAFT, “Strategic Skepticism”, 90.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Indeed, the argument Cusanus adduces in the *De Correctione* will be revisited later in the Aleppo Statement, in that Cusanus was the first to suggest a geographical location for calculating the vernal equinox based upon astronomical data at that location. Nothaft further opines that the selection of Jerusalem as the meridian point would be justifiable as the physical locus of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the concomitant relationship with the re-presentation of the Paschal date on the calendar.²⁰⁸

The *Ad Correctionem Calendarii*, which Nothaft would argue was addressed to Pope Clement VI, notes the conflicts which could have arisen over the reform of the calendar at this time, in particular regarding the secular powers of Europe, who might have potentially been keen to guard over the civil aspects of the calendar and hamper the papal effort at calendar reform. In the *Ad Correctionem Calendarii*, the anonymous author notes the possibility of various rebellions taking place, and causing the eventuality of divisions between civil and ecclesiastical powers on the basis of one or the other choosing to use a different year. Furthermore, the author claims that the calendrical calculation would therefore have a different length from that of the solar year, and as a consequence, the accurate time from the Incarnation of Jesus Christ would thereby be set aside, in a sense creating a new ecclesiastical practice.²⁰⁹ Ultimately, some reform project was necessary, and some impact was felt by these scholarly arguments. The Roman Pontiff and his curia,

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁰⁹ *SE*, 221-222.

as it has been speculated by Nothaft, were well aware of these points, to the extent of making a reform proposal by 1344. This is suggested on the basis of four letters of the Apostolic Chancery on 25 September and 1 October which mention the Golden Number as an aspect of amendment in the correction of the Julian calendar.²¹⁰

2.1.6 Johannes Regiomontanus

John of Monteregio (Johannes Regiomontanus) is described as being willing to consider the errors in the lunar calendar, as the claims of Dionysius Exiguus concerning the 19 paschal full moon cycle were considered as being “firm and immovable.”²¹¹ His criticism of the Alfonsine tables demonstrated that there were various dates between 1477 and 1532 when the date of Easter, per the ecclesiastical calculation, would vary from the true astronomical date.²¹² These tables provided a comparison between the date of Easter *iuxta usum ecclesie* and *iuxta decreta patrum*, the latter based upon the variation of the vernal equinox and the positions of the heavenly bodies. In his works, Regiomontanus mentioned an apocryphal *De instauratione kalendarii ecclesiae*, which never unfortunately has been discovered by any scholar. Under the patronage of Cardinal Bessarion, Pope Sixtus IV would summon him to Rome in 1476 to work on the very project of calendar reform, but he would unfortunately die en route.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 227-228.

²¹¹ Ibid., 126.

²¹² A. MOSLEY, “Regiomontanus and Calendar Reform,” <http://www.sites.hps.cam.ac.uk/starry/regiocalen.html> (10 January 2024).

2.1.7 Paul of Middelburg

While a professor at the University of Padua, in 1487, Paul of Middelburg wrote a letter to the faculty of his former university, Louvain, on the proper observance of Easter.²¹³ In 1491 he further sent to Innocent VIII a *libellus* on the reckoning of Easter and the *Exhortatio pro calendarii emendatione*.²¹⁴ He was summoned to Rome by Leo X and made president of a reform commission to work in the context of Lateran V.²¹⁵

In discussing the legal aspects of the paschal question, Paul of Middelburg deserves special note, for “rather than dwelling on the technicalities of a future reform, Paul put most of his emphasis on the question of legality, arguing that the pope had every right to go ahead and alter the existing rules for fixing the dates of the mobile feast days.”²¹⁶ Having a keen view on the history of this question, as well as the then-current ecclesiological understanding of the Church, “he conceded that in the days of the Council of Nicaea, when the sees of Alexandria, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Antioch were still influential contenders for authority within the Church, issues such as the calculation of Easter could only be resolved in the context of a general council. Yet now that all remaining sites of this one-time pentarchy had been conquered by Islamic forces and thus ‘removed from the

²¹³ PAUL OF MIDDELBURG, “Epistola Apologetica magistri Pauli de Middelburgo ad doctores Lovanienses,” Louvain, Ioannem de Westfalia, 1488.

²¹⁴ *SE*, 285. Cf. also A. DE CEULENEER, “Paulus van Middelburg en de Kalenderhervorming,” in *Handelingen van het eerste Taal- en Geschiedkundig Congres*, Antwerp, de Vos en van der Groen, 1910.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 286.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 285-286.

middle by the most frightful enemies of Christ's name, only the Roman Church, which is left standing without contradiction as the head of all churches, is seen to possess the remaining powers of a general council."²¹⁷ Furthermore, he describes the recent councils of Constance and Basel as times in which Martin V and Eugene IV had refused to correct the calendar and Easter date due to issues involving the conciliarist debates concerning the papacy and its prerogatives.²¹⁸

In his *Secundum compendium correctionis calendarii*, dated 4 June 1516²¹⁹, Paul echoes the other proposals mainly stemming from northern Europe advancing a possible astronomic calculation of the Easter date, as well as a possible fixed-date proposal. Nothaft, in considering this discussion, argues that “nearly all who submitted their expertise to the council were in agreement that the current rules for the calculation of Easter were in dire need of an overhaul and that it was the pope's prerogative to take the steps required.”²²⁰ He goes on to note the various other proposals, arguing that “some were willing to cut Easter loose from the vagaries of the Moon's course and simply assign it to a fixed date, or fixed Sunday, in the Julian year. More in keeping with established traditions were the various proposals on how to reform the lunar computus, where the basic choice was

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 287. See also PAUL OF MIDDELBURG, “*Secundum compendium correctionis calendarii*,” Rome, Franck, 1516.

²²⁰ Ibid., 287.

between adjusting the existing cycle with its Golden Numbers or switching to a more properly astronomical mode of calculation.”²²¹ Consultations were then sent out by the Roman Curia to the rulers and universities of Europe, with the Polish astronomer Marcin Biem offering a possible solution referring to the proposals of Cusanus by doubling the number of days to be removed.²²² The Dominican Cipriano Benet in 1515 responded to the consultation in the *Tractatus de non mutando Paschate* by recommending no changes be made whatsoever.²²³ Besides the *Secundum compendium*, Paul of Middelburg would respond in a letter of November 1516 to the pope entitled *Parabola Christi de correctione calendarii*, but not in time for the Lateran Council to make any decision in this regard.²²⁴

Furthermore, Pierre de Lille authored a text, *Tria calendaria parva*, from 1529, on the subject of the reform of the calendar, and corresponded on the question of the paschal date. It bears mentioning that “De Lille and van Middelburg exchanged tracts, even though they disagreed fundamentally: van Middelburg only wanted to reform the calendar with respect to the movable feasts (those that follow the Easter date), whereas de Lille argued

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 289.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 289-90.

for a complete reform of the solar calendar, that is, one that involved both the movable and the immovable feasts.”²²⁵

2.1.8 Copernicus

It is asserted per Paul of Middelburg in the *Secundum compendium* that “Nicolaus Copernicus Warmiensis” was one of the respondents to the Papal requests for reform proposals. The preface to the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543) attests that “not so long ago under Leo X the Lateran Council considered the problem of reforming the ecclesiastical calendar. The issue remained undecided then only because of the lengths of the year and month and the motions of the Sun and Moon were regarded as not yet adequately measured.”²²⁶ Such a situation gave rise to the widely-held belief, asserted as well by Christopher Clavius, that Copernicus was summoned to Rome for the reform efforts.²²⁷

2.1.9 Lilius

Luigi Lilio, by the year 1577, had prepared perhaps the closest schema to what would later be promulgated by *Inter gravissimas*. This schema, entitled *Compendium novae rationis restituendi kalendarium*, would be sent for review by the princes and

²²⁵ N. VIRASTAU, “Calendar Reform and World Chronology: Pierre de Lille’s *Tria calendaria parva* (1529),” in *Isis*, vol. 110, no. 3, 2019, 446.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* See also NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 98.

universities of Europe.²²⁸ While receiving various suggestions until 1580, it is noted that “the commission's final report, dated 14 September 1580, opted for measures that differed only in minor details from those outlined in the *Compendium*.”²²⁹

While recognizing Pierre d'Ailly's and Nicholas Cusanus' contributions at the Councils of Constance and Lateran V (respectively), Nothaft argues that, headed by Guglielmo Cardinal Sirleto, nine signatories to this final report were contented that the time had arrived for an authentic reform of the calendar, which had been stymied at the Fifth Lateran Council due to “the dissent of a few, as some were overly petty and feeble in desiring to call the Church back to the calculations of the astrologers, while others deemed it necessary to cling tenaciously to the cycles once accepted by the Church, however crippled they might be.”²³⁰ This *Compendium* is described as having received “an overwhelming response from Europe's learned and the planned reform was backed by the emperor, the foremost kings, and nearly all universities.”²³¹

²²⁸ A detailed discussion of this document may be found in G. MOYER, “Aloisius Lilius and the *Compendium Novae Rationis Restituendi Kalendarium*” in *GRC*, 171-188.

²²⁹ *SE*, 292-293.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

2.2 The Reform of 1582

Arguably, the most important – and indeed, hinge – of modern calendar and paschal date reform would be the papal reforms of Gregory XIII, which had not only canonical but also civil repercussions existing to this day.

2.2.1 *Inter gravissimas*

Being a papal bull with the force of ecclesiastical law, it is worth noting that the calendar and the paschal cycle effected by *Inter gravissimas* is a landmark of canon law with wide-ranging effects for the civil calendar and the reckoning of the paschal date. This bull was issued by Pope Gregory XIII only six months from the execution of the reform and mainly on the basis of the above-mentioned *Compendium novae rationis restituendi Kalendarium* of 1577, and undoubtedly influenced by the reform movements of the previous centuries and ecumenical councils.

The following salient points should be noted: firstly, the reform of the calendar was seen as the fruit of the Tridentine reforms, and was enacted in close conjunction with the reform of the liturgical books. Secondly, the Roman Pontiff asserts the necessity of the reform “maintaining intact the ancient rites of the Church.” The Pontiff does note in the bull the fact of Luigi Lilio as the author of the reforms, as noted above. However, it is worthwhile to note that the *vacatio legis* for the implementation of these reforms was

extended to October 1583 or 1584 for those lands which would not receive the bull in time for the scheduled October 1582 reforms.²³²

The historical origins of this decree have been noted in the proceedings of the 1982 Vatican conference on its four-hundredth (400th) anniversary. As discussed previously, the remote scientific preparation for this bull took place over the course of centuries, whereas the proximate preparation was attributed to [Pedro] Chacón with the contributions of Vincenzo Cardinal Lauro. Once completed, this text was sent together with an explanation of the calendar on 20 October 1581 from Turin to Guglielmo Cardinal Sirleto.²³³ It was signed by Sirleto, but also Vincenzo di Lauro, Christopher Clavius, Pedro Chacón, Ignatius Nemet Aloho, Lilius, Leonardo Abel, Serafino Olivari, and Ignazio Danti.²³⁴ On 11 February 1582 Sirleto sent Antonio Giglio to Mondragone, a villa outside Rome where the Pope was in residence. It was there that the decree was signed on 24 February 1582, where to this day the manuscript is preserved in the bullarium. On 1 March the text was published at the doors of St. Peter's Basilica, at the Roman Chancery, the building annex to the Basilica San Lorenzo in Damaso, and at the Campo de Fiori.²³⁵

²³² GREGORY XIII, bull *Inter Gravissimas*, available in English translation online at: <http://myweb.ecu.edu/mccartyr/intGrvEng.html> (10 January 2024) (= IG).

²³³ For a further discussion of the life of Sirleto, see G. DENZLER, *Kardinal Guglielmo Sirleto (1514-1585): Leben und Werk. Ein Beitrag zur nachtridentinischen Reform*, in *Münchener Theologische Studien, I. Historische Abteilung*, 17. Band, Munich, Max Hueber Verlag, 1964.

²³⁴ See F. VIZZA, "Aloysius Lilius, Author of the Gregorian Reform of the Calendar," <https://philpapers.org/rec/VIZALA> (10 January 2024), 6.

²³⁵ A. ZIGGELAAR, "The Papal Bull of 1582 Promulgating a Reform of the Calendar," in *GRC* (= "Papal Bull of 1582"), 219-220.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the calendrical scholar Elizabeth Achelis, described the genesis of this papal bull as responding to four questions:

The aging Pope, weary of wars and public works and financial difficulties, turned his attention at last to the calendar. Aided by a notable staff of scientists, he analyzed the problems. First, how could the year be brought back into accord with the seasons? Second, how could the leap-year rule be corrected to stop further dislocation? Third, could the beginning of the year be set in a fixed position, instead of being observed at different times by different peoples? Fourth, could anything be done about the wandering Easter, a cause of considerable inconvenience?²³⁶

In essence, the canonical implication of this bull would be that, as touching the calendar, *Inter gravissimas* legally imposed not only a new calculation of the Easter date, but also an entirely new calendar. Historically, it is evident that during this era, the Roman Pontiff's authority was perceived as being able to make such changes. One wonders if in today's world such an effect would be possible. In terms of liturgical law, the same decree can be read as a document of liturgical law, pertaining to the calculation of the Paschal date.

Gregory XIII appears likewise keen to maintain the continuity of legislation with his predecessors as well as the Council of Nicaea, as he affirms that "One notes in examining this that it is necessary to rule at the same time on three points to restore the celebration of Easter according to rules fixed by the previous Roman pontiffs, particularly

²³⁶ E. ACHELIS, "Gregory's Contribution," in *Journal of Calendar Reform*, June 1954, <http://myweb.ecu.edu/mccartyr/gregory.html> (10 January 2024).

Pius I and Victor I, and by the fathers of the councils, in particular those of the [first] great ecumenical council of Nicaea.”²³⁷ These rules of Nicaea are enumerated as such:

First, the precise date of the vernal equinox, then the exact date of the fourteenth day of the moon which reaches this age the very same day as the equinox or immediately afterwards, finally the first Sunday which follows this same fourteenth day of the moon. Therefore we took care not only that the vernal equinox returns on its former date, of which it has already deviated approximately ten days since the Nicene Council, and so that the fourteenth day of the Paschal moon is given its rightful place, from which it is now distant four days and more, but also that there is founded a methodical and rational system which ensures, in the future, that the equinox and the fourteenth day of the moon do not move from their appropriate positions.²³⁸

The intent of the Gregorian legislation was furthermore to simplify and return to a somewhat more pristine usage of the calendar, particularly by the removal of the Golden Number, and the usage of the newly-calculated cycle of epacts. Gregory XIII states:

So that the fourteenth day of the Paschal moon is given with precision and that the age of the moon is presented with precision to the faithful in accordance with the antique use of the Church, to take note of it each day with the reading of martyrology, we order that once the Golden Number is withdrawn from the calendar, one substitutes the cycle of the epacts for it which, thanks to its very precise rules mentioned above for the Golden Number, makes so that the new moon and the fourteenth day of the Paschal moon always hold their place. And this is seen clearly in the explanation of our calendar, where are also presented Paschal tables in conformity with the ancient habits of the Church and which make it possible to find more surely and more easily the sacred date of the Easter.²³⁹

Heilbron affirms that the various universities that were consulted over the reforms expressed disagreement; some universities, such as Vienna, argued for astronomical calculations of the Paschal date, which theologians at the Sorbonne rejected.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ *IG*.

²³⁸ *Ibid*.

²³⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁴⁰ HEILBRON, *SCCSO*, 44.

In regard to the *De anno et eius partibus*, which is the classic text which appeared in the *praenotanda* of the *Missale* and *Breviarium Romanum* from the issuance of *Inter gravissimas* until the revision of the liturgical books subsequent to the Second Vatican Council, “the author (s) are not known by name, but they should be among the members of the Reform Commission itself. In some sections, the bull *Inter gravissimas*, published on February 24, 1582, in which the main points of the reform were announced, is quoted literally or analogously. The section in which the new regulation of leap years is explained ... corresponds almost literally to Section 9 of the bull, of course with the necessary ones stylistic changes like ‘*Gregorius statuit*’ instead of ‘*statuimus*’.”²⁴¹ It should also be noted that in this document, reference is made to the *Liber novae rationis restituendi Calendarii Romani*, a work which has never been published.²⁴²

From a perspective of the separated churches, this bull was published in Greek in 1583 and contained the rules of Giambattista di Zanti for the application of the reform to

²⁴¹ “Die Abhandlung, deren lateinischer Text hier vorgestellt und dessen Übertragung in Deutsche hier versucht wird, findet sich in unveränderter Form seit Jahrhunderten im Missale Romanum und - stark gekürzt - im Breviarium Romanum. Der oder die Verfasser sind namentlich nicht bekannt, sie dürften jedoch unter den Mitgliedern der Reformkommission selbst zu finden sein. In einigen Abschnitten wird die unter dem Datum 24. Februar 1582 veröffentlichte Bulle ‘*Inter gravissimas*’, in der die Hauptpunkte der Reform bekanntgegeben wurden, wörtlich beziehungsweise sinngemäss zitiert. So entspricht der Abschnitt, in dem die Neuregelung der Schaltjahre erklärt wird, (‘*ut autem perpetuo conservaretur*’, ‘damit aber in Zukunft...’) nahezu wörtlich dem § 9 der Bulle, selbstverständlich mit den notwendigen stilistischen Änderungen wie anstelle von ‘*statuimus*’ ‘*Gregorius statui*’.” “Anmerkung zum Traktat: ‘*De Anno et ejus partibus*’”, <http://www.nabkal.de/missale1.html> (10 January 2024).

²⁴² “Es wird immer mit Beispielen gearbeitet, wobei Wert darauf gelegt wird, auch all jene Jahre zu berücksichtigen, in denen Probleme auftreten können. Eine generelle Erklärung und Begründung des Vorgehens wird nicht gegeben, vielmehr wird auf das Werk “*Liber novae rationis restituendi Calendarii Romani*” verwiesen. Ende 1585 stellte G. Moletto [*sic*] Tafeln fertig, die zu diesem Buch gehörten, das Werk selbst ist allerdings nie veröffentlicht worden.” Ibid.

the calendar of Greek Orthodox feasts.²⁴³ The latter also published by order of the Pope tables for the Syrians, in Arabic, printed in Syrian characters.²⁴⁴ The lack of inclusion of the Greek scholars was noted in the 1982 Vatican conference, and it has been argued that “the desire to correct the offense caused by not proposing the *Compendium* to the Greeks occasioned the edition in Greek of the decree *Inter gravissimas* with the calendar and its rules in Rome in 1583. It also contained the tables and rules of Giambattista di Zanti for the application of the reform of the calendar of Greek feasts.”²⁴⁵

2.2.2 *Clavius*

Christopher Clavius provides the most complete explanation of the calendar and paschal revisions enacted by *Inter gravissimas*, of which the original edition was published by Zanetti in Rome in 1603. It has been remarked that Clavius, who was regarded as the Roman authority on astronomy and mathematics, also affirmed and admitted the papal prerogative to declare Easter as an immovable feast.²⁴⁶ As one of the mathematical and astronomical architects of the 1582 reform (along with Luigi Giglio)²⁴⁷ the desire on the

²⁴³ ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 229.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 230.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 229.

²⁴⁶ H.M. NOBIS, “The Reaction of Astronomers to the Gregorian Calendar,” in *GRC*, 246. For insights into Clavius’ usage of calculations for the Gregorian calendar, see A. HENDRICKSON, “Lessons from reading Clavius,” conference presentation, Pittsburgh, MathFest, 2010, <https://faculty.cord.edu/ahendric/presentations/PittsburghClavius.pdf> (10 January 2024).

²⁴⁷ “Substantially the New Calendar follows the proposal in the *Compendium* so that Clavius in his *Explicatio* could recognize Luigi Giglio as the primary author of the reform.” ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 220.

part of the Roman Pontiff was to establish a perpetual system with the new calendar and the new paschal computus. However, the 1982 Vatican conference affirmed, “this has been misunderstood, as if no adjustment should ever become necessary. The true meaning is that the calendar is perpetual, because the figures placed at each date refer to the epacts and not the golden numbers.”²⁴⁸

As one of the architects of the calendar reform, it should be noted that an ecumenical spirit indeed colored even the scientific character of the famous reforms. Particularly in regards to the establishment of the equinox on 21 March rather than 25 March, in 1583, Clavius himself argued in favor of such a change, since the other proposal would cause difficulties “to all Christians but most of all to Greeks and Orientals.”²⁴⁹ In his *Explicatio* Clavius gave similar reasons and regards for “all the Greek Churches which are numerous and which above all have to be taken into consideration.”²⁵⁰

2.2.3 *The Reform of the Martyrology*

Originally, the *Martyrologium Romanum*, or daily listing of the saints and martyrs of the Christian religion, was published in two subsequent editions in 1583 by order of Pope Gregory XIII, not long after the revision of the calendar. On 14 January 1584, a final

²⁴⁸ D. SNOW, (ed.), “Proceedings of the Symposium on Christoph Clavius (1538–1612), July 21, 2005, University of Notre Dame,” <https://www3.nd.edu/~snow/Papers/ClaviusProceedings.pdf> (10 January 2024). Cf. also ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 224.

²⁴⁹ ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 231.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

edition was promulgated by the same pope along with an apostolic constitution *Emendatio iam kalendario*, becoming mandatory for use within the Roman Rite.²⁵¹ In its recitation at Prime in the Tridentine form of the Divine Office, the martyrology reading commences with the announcement of the day of the lunar cycle. Juan Salón, who was placed in charge of the revisions of the martyrology by Cardinal Sirleto, claims to have been following the revisions of the epacts designed by Paul of Middelburg. However, this schema had to be harmonized with the revised cycle of epacts definitively used in the Gregorian calendar.²⁵²

2.3 The Reform in Non-Catholic Lands

It is worth noting that while the necessity of such reform of the calendar (and, hence, the Paschal date) was quite evident within the Latin Church and those lands which held to Roman Catholicism, within other Christian confessions and churches, the adoption of these reforms would occur at varying rates throughout the subsequent centuries.²⁵³

2.3.1 Within Orthodoxy

The reforms made to the Julian calendar in the Western Church were not without repercussions in the official decrees of the Orthodox churches as well. Tzakadze states that

²⁵¹ *Martyrologium Romanum*, editio princeps, ed. M. SODI, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005.

²⁵² ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 224-225.

²⁵³ Cf. R. LAMONT, “The Reform of the Julian Calendar,” in *Popular Astronomy*, vol. 28, 1920, 18-32.

“the Church Council of Constantinople in 1583 acknowledged the fact that there were inaccuracies in the Julian calendar but refused to accept the Gregorian reform.”²⁵⁴

Proposals did exist at the time of the Gregorian reform to seek a mutually-agreeable solution between the Eastern and Western churches. Ziggelaar notes that “on 17 April, 1581 a Greek colonel from Candia, Antonio Eudemoniani, wrote from Venice to the Pope. He proposed negotiations with the four Oriental patriarchs in order to avoid differences between Greeks and Latins in places where they were mixed.”²⁵⁵ Echoes of this proposal can, in essence, be found in today’s agreements in places like the Holy Land where agreements have been reached to celebrate Easter on the date in the Julian calendar for the sake of a common celebration.

The most evident scientific rationale given for the rejection of the Gregorian paschalion by the Oriental churches was the violation of the rule that Easter/Pascha was to follow the paschal full moon, and not to occur simultaneously. Campbell argues that

The most frequently mentioned reason for the Patriarchal rejection of the new Gregorian Paschal tables is that they caused an inevitable violation of one of the rules of the Paschalion – that Pascha is not to coincide with the full moon, but to follow it. Despite the fact that this traditional element of the Paschalion was mistakenly derived from Apostolic Canon 7, the objection is valid. Roman Catholic practice does permit occasional coincidence of the full moon (and hence also of 14 Nisan and the Jewish Passover) with the Sunday of the Feast of the Resurrection; and this is contrary to Patristic practice as described by both John Chrysostom and Ambrose of Milan.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ TSAKADZE, *HCMA*, 122.

²⁵⁵ ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 229.

²⁵⁶ J.R. CAMPBELL, “The Paschalion,” http://www.academia.edu/8246608/The_Paschalion_An_Icon_of_Time (10 January 2024).

The rejection of the Gregorian Reform was also attributed to a desire for unity within Orthodoxy, particularly in matters such as these which were understood by these churches as touching upon the perennial traditions of their churches. The rejection of the Gregorian changes by the Council of Constantinople in 1583 reflect a concern of the Orthodox patriarchs for unity within Orthodoxy. The Council states:

“Whoever does not follow the customs of the Church as the Seven Holy Ecumenical Councils decreed, and Holy Easter, and the Menologion with which they did dwell in making it a law that we should follow it, and wishes to follow the newly-invented Paschalion and the new Menologion of the atheist astronomers of the Pope, and opposes all those things and wishes to overthrow and destroy the dogmas and customs of the Church which have been handed down by our fathers, let him suffer anathema and be put out of the Church of Christ and out of the Congregation of the Faithful.”²⁵⁷

While the logic of this conclusion remains unclear from this text, the notions remain identical to that of the eighth canon from a similar Council in 1593, which states: “It is our will that the disposition made by the Fathers [of Nicaea] in regard to Holy and Salutory Easter remain unchanged as it is...”²⁵⁸ Campbell, in the same traditional vein, remarks that “in effect, the Patriarchs are saying that the Byzantine recension of the Alexandrian Paschal tables (and the Julian O.S. calendar incorporated into that system) are a tradition established by Patristic authority and the consensus of the Church.”²⁵⁹

In Poland, the reform of the calendar remained a contentious issue in the century subsequent to the Tridentine reforms, particularly in parts of the realm which utilized the

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Oriental rites in contradistinction to the Latin rite. The Synod of Zamość in 1720 established a number of holidays, but the discrepancies between the Julian and Gregorian celebrations would cause tensions. The issue would only find some regulation under the bull *Paternae charitati* of Pius VI, issued 23 May 1775 and sent to twelve Polish dioceses, which would reduce the number of holidays on the local calendar.²⁶⁰ Subsequent to the partition of Poland, further correspondence with Leonardo Cardinal Antonelli in 1785-1788, reflected the Holy See's insistence upon keeping certain holy days sacrosanct in the ecclesiastical calendar.²⁶¹

It should be understood that the calendar reforms subsequent to Trent, as well as their reception throughout the world, had a definite goal of harmonizing relations with those who separated from the Church and as a major goal of the Church reforms initiated by the Tridentine Council; hence, the clear desire of the Commission to include members of the Orthodox and to respond to the claims of the Protestant Reforms. Ziggelaar argues that "the Pope presented his bull in 1582 as an implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent and thus an act of the Counter-Reformation, but he did so with a desire to meet the justified claims of the Reformers."²⁶²

²⁶⁰ See D. WEREDA, "The Attitude of Uniate Bishops Towards Calendar Reforms in the Latter Half of the 18th Century," in *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2018, 80-83. Cf. also PIUS VI, bull *Paternae charitati*, 23 May 1775, in *Bullarii Romani continuatio*, A. BARBERI (ed.), t. 5, Rome, Ex Typographia Reverendae Cameræ Apostolicæ, 1842, 61-82.

²⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 97.

²⁶² ZIGGELAAR, "Papal Bull of 1582", 227.

Indeed, the participation of the Orthodox in this process was anticipated. “In the first drafts of the report of the Commission, before the final text of 14 September 1580, the plan was seriously discussed of delaying the reform in order to invite representatives of the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria to the commission.”²⁶³ Patriarch Ignatius Nemet Aloho (or Na’matallah) of the Syriac Orthodox, who would be received into the Catholic Church by the same Pope Gregory XIII, was also one of the signatories of this commission’s report.²⁶⁴

The reception of the Gregorian reform by the Orthodox patriarchs during the subsequent centuries was quite negative, in general. Patriarch Joachim V of Antioch, who was in attendance at the Synod of 1593, decreed in his *Sigillion*: “Whosoever does not follow the Tradition of the Church and all that the Seven Oecumenical Synods have ordained concerning Holy Pascha and the Menaion, wishing instead to follow the new Paschalion and Menaion of the Papal astronomers, opposes all of the ordinances of the Holy Synods. Let such a one be anathema.”²⁶⁵

Patriarch Cyril I (1572-1630), Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, in the early seventeenth century, condemned the Gregorian Reforms by appeals to previous synods.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Ibid., 228.

²⁶⁴ See R. WILKINSON, “Syriac Studies in Rome in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture*, 6 (2012), 67-68.

²⁶⁵ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 43.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

In the eighteenth century, Patriarch Cyril V, in his *Sigillion* of 1756²⁶⁷, declared a strongly-worded commination against the Gregorian calendar. It has been said that “the insistent and unyielding tone of this pronouncement testifies to the incredible pressure to which the Orthodox were being subjected to accept the Gregorian Calendar.”²⁶⁸ Patriarch Anthimos VI addressed all Orthodox Christians in his Ecumenical Encyclical of 1848, which states that “in our Church, neither Patriarchs nor Synods can introduce anything new, because the guardian of piety is the very Body of the Church itself.”²⁶⁹

The reform itself has been evaluated as being rooted in the historical tradition, and as a desire to be faithful to the original intentions of the Council of Nicaea. Ziggelaar goes on to argue that “the authors of the Gregorian reform declared repeatedly that they preferred to keep to the rules of celebrating Easter derived from the Israelite religion and the Christian history of salvation and that they did not wish to break with any traditions but on the contrary to return to the exact, original intentions of the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Cf. CYRIL V OF CONSTANTINOPLE, “Sigillion of 1756,” in *OrthodoxWiki*, https://orthodoxwiki.org/Sigillion_of_1756 (10 January 2024). See also SERAPHIM OF BOGUCHAR, “Concerning the New and the Old Calendars: A Presentation by Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Boguchar to the Congress of Moscow 8-18 July 1948,” <https://www.dep.church/downloads/SerafeimMpok.pdf> (21 May 2024).

²⁶⁸ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 44-45.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ ZIGGELAAR, “Papal Bull of 1582”, 230.

In 1917, Russia, which at the time was being beset by the Bolshevik revolution, also ecclesiastically turned its attention to the question of calendar reform. It has been noted that “the famous Pan-Russian Church Synod of 1917-1918, which restored the Patriarchate of Moscow, also addressed the issue of the New Calendar. After a thorough examination of the problem, including not only dogmatic and canonical argumentation, but also contemporary scientific research, this Synod definitively refuted the Papal reform as unnecessary in the life of the Orthodox Church.”²⁷¹

2.3.2 *Within Protestantism*

Throughout the nations which had gone over to the sixteenth-century Reformation, a common thread can be identified – the lack of astronomical accuracy of the Gregorian reform and a desire to employ an astronomical reckoning for the Easter date, in contradistinction to the notional cycles of epacts presented within *Inter gravissimas* and the *De anno et eius partibus*. Leofranc Holford-Strevens argues: “Although Protestants were not disposed to accept any reform promulgated by the Pope, they found an easy target in the astronomical inaccuracies presented from time to time by the tables – whose defenders admitted them, while rightly insisting that no better tables of equal simplicity could be devised on a cyclic basis.”²⁷² Luther himself was characterized as wishing for a

²⁷¹ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 45-46.

²⁷² B. BLACKBURN, and L. HOLFORD-STREVENES, *Oxford Companion to the Year*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 798.

fixed paschal date, seeing the debates revolving around the calendar as a purely secular question.²⁷³ At the time of the 1582 reforms, Martin of Chemnitz, addressing a letter to Landgrave Wilhelm von Hesse documents a consciousness of the previous reform efforts, per Kaltenbrunner, and reflecting an anti-papal bias: “[Chemnitius] fully recognizes their usefulness and their necessity; nor does he share the fear that the omission of 10 days would create great confusion, because in 1583 everything would be back on the old track if only unanimous action were taken. On the other hand, he also draws attention to the fact that if the reform is adopted, the Pope is not granted any rights over the Evangelical Church.”²⁷⁴

From the standpoint of legislation, in 1699, German Lutherans voted to utilize the Gregorian dating of the calendar from 1 March 1700, but to reckon Easter by the astronomical full moon and the real equinox, i.e. the *calculus astronomicus*. This ‘Improved Calendar’ was adopted by Denmark and most of the Protestant cantons in Switzerland.²⁷⁵ It was also adopted, as the “Improved Julian Calendar,” by those Dutch

²⁷³ NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 102.

²⁷⁴ “Gleichfalls unter dem Übelstande ungenügender Information leidet das an den Landgrafen Wilhelm von Hessen gerichtete Gutachten des bekannten Martinus Chemnitius. Wohl kennt derselbe Kalenderfragmente aus Danzig, Posen und München, aber daraus erfahre man blutwenig über das Wesen der Reform. Chemnitius ist übrigens derselben günstig gesinnt, denn indem er die Fehler des alten Kalenders entwickelt und auch von den Reformbestrebungen der früheren Zeiten spricht, erkennt er ihren Nutzen und ihre Notwendigkeit vollständig an; auch teilt er nicht die Befürchtung, es werde durch die Auslassung von 10 Tagen große Verwirrung entstehen, denn 1583 würde ja alles wieder im alten Geleise sein, wenn nur einhellig vorgegangen werden würde. Dagegen macht auch er aufmerksam, dass man ja mit einer etwaigen Annahme der Reform dem Papste keine Rechte über die evangelische Kirche einräume.” F. KALTENBRUNNER, *Die Polemik über die Gregorianische Kalenderreform*, Wien, Karl Gerold’s Sohn, 1877, 524.

²⁷⁵ See J. POWELL MCNUTT, “Hesitant Steps: Acceptance of the Gregorian Calendar in Eighteenth-Century Geneva,” in *Church History*, vol. 75, no. 3 (September 2006), 544-564.

provinces that had kept the Old Style; but in practice they observed the Gregorian Easter.²⁷⁶ In 1740, Sweden would adopt the astronomical Easter dating, with the Danish Lutherans to follow. Such an astronomical dating would remain in force in Sweden until 1844, and in Finland until 1867.²⁷⁷ The Rudolphine Tables of Johannes Kepler were the source used for this computation, and used by the German Lutherans from 1700 until 1776, and in Sweden until 1844.²⁷⁸

At the University of Tübingen at the end of the 16th century, Michael Maestlin, an astronomer of Protestant background who had a close influence upon Johannes Kepler, had attacked the reform of the calendar, prompting a response from Clavius. “Maestlin had - as has been mentioned - cited the approaching end of the world as an argument against reform and at the same time described the Pope's undertaking as a symptom of it. [Johannes] Fabricius [a contemporary Lutheran astronomer] now asks him, what sense does it make to postpone the reform until 1600?”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ E. REINGOLD, and N. DERSHOWITZ, *Calendrical Calculations: The Ultimate Edition*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 150.

²⁷⁹ “Maestlin hatte — wie angeführt wurde — das herannahende Ende der Welt als Argument gegen die Reform angeführt und zugleich das Unternehmen des Papstes als ein Symptom desselben bezeichnet. Fabricius fragt ihn nun, was es bei diesen seinen Ansichten für einen Sinn habe, noch bis 1600 die Reform zu verschieben?” F. KALTENBRUNNER, *Die Polemik über die Gregorianische Kalenderreform*, Wien, Karl Gerold's Sohn, 1877, 539.

It should be noted that England exhibited a “sympathetic attitude to the reform on the part of the secular authorities.”²⁸⁰ Even in the decades subsequent to the Reformation, during the reign of Elizabeth I, calendar reform was accepted and taken quite seriously by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a Cambridge scholar, John Dee, at the royal request. The latter produced a document, “Playne Discourse”, advising a similar reform of the solar calendar, not impacting the lunar one as edited by *Inter gravissimas*.²⁸¹ In like manner, the Earl of Macclesfield had pressed for the adoption of the Gregorian calendar as early as 1600.²⁸² However, such an adoption would only arrive with the Calendar Act 1752, by which the Gregorian calendar would be “established by statute as a part of the English common law.”²⁸³ The adaptation of this reform, though, took place according to the modifications which happened in the Anglican liturgy as codified in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). A simplified, modified version of the Gregorian reform was used to determine the Easter date. Indeed, “when Great Britain adopted the New Style in 1752, the Church of England accepted the Pope’s Easter dates but not his tables; having no use for the martyrology and needing the moon’s age only to find Easter, it took up the rejected

²⁸⁰ M. HOSKIN, “The Reception of the Calendar By Other Churches” in *GRC*, 256.

²⁸¹ NORTH, “Western Calendar”, 104

²⁸² M. HOSKIN, “The Reception of the Calendar By Other Churches” in *GRC*, 259.

²⁸³ F. DEAK, “Computation of Time in International Law,” in *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 20 (3), 1926, 510.

method, but simplified it by assigning the Golden Numbers directly to the Paschal term or ‘Ecclesiastical full moon’. The necessary tables are printed in the BCP.”²⁸⁴

By 1584 in Ireland, at the time under English rule, several of the Gaelic lords, including Hugh O’Neill, baron of Dungannon, had begun using the so-called “new style” of dating Easter. However, throughout the subsequent century and its concomitant persecutions of Catholics, the ecclesiastical province of Armagh was the only one to be utilizing the new calendar. It is also noted that those Catholics in County Ulster, which was more and more inhabited by Protestants, applied to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1630 requesting a dispensation, which was being used at the time of the 1641 rebellion.²⁸⁵

2.4 Principles of Time Computation in the Codices of Canon Law

While it would be unnecessary to reprint herein a thorough analysis of the Catholic Church’s canon law on the computation of time,²⁸⁶ several points would be otherwise worth

²⁸⁴ B. BLACKBURN, and L. HOLFORD-STREVEN, *Oxford Companion to the Year*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, 797.

²⁸⁵ See H. MORGAN, “‘The Pope’s New Invention’: The Introduction of the Gregorian Calendar in Ireland, 1583-1782,” symposium paper at “Ireland, Rome and the Holy See: History, Culture and Contact”, Pontifical Irish College, Rome, 1 April 2006, https://celt.ucc.ie/Calender_Rome.pdf (10 January 2024), 1-9.

²⁸⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the topic, see A. MARCELLO, “The Computation of Time: A Canonical Overview,” in *Studia Canonica*, 51 (2017) 207-250. Cf. M. CONTE A CORONATA, *Institutiones Iuris Canonici*, vol. 1, Turin, Marietti, 1947, 60-68; G. MICHIELS, *Normae Generales Iuris Canonici*, vol. 2, Paris-Tournai-Rome, Desclée, 1949, 221-229; A. VAN HOVE, “*De Consuetudine – De Temporibus Supputatione*” in *Commentarium Lovaniense in Codicem Iuris Canonici*, Mechelen-Rome, Dessain, 1933, 238-282.

noting. Firstly, the Church's main prerogative in involvement with the computation of time (from a canonical standpoint) is to safeguard the integrity of the week, particularly in terms of the Sunday observance, and the necessity, as demonstrated in the foregoing historical analysis, of the reckoning of the solar and lunar year as relating to the paschal computation. It is also this author's opinion that scientific accuracy on these matters, coupled and harmonized with a desire to remain faithful to the mutual traditions of East and West, should guide future legislation on this matter from the hierarchies of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, with undoubted input from the ecumenical dialogues with the Reformed communities.

As previously mentioned in the introductory section of the *status quæstionis*, canon 1244, §1 of the 1983 *CIC* and its parallel canon 880, §1 in the *CCEO* govern any movement of these feast days, Easter inclusive. Canon 1244, §1 states: "It is only for the supreme ecclesiastical authority to establish, transfer, and suppress feast days and days of penance common to the universal Church, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 1246, §2." The parallel canon in the *CCEO*, 880, §1 reads: "Only the supreme authority of the Church can establish, transfer or suppress feast days and days of penance which are common to all of the Eastern Churches, with due regard for §3."

Besides the obvious competence of the Apostolic See in this matter (which José Antonio Abad affirms as being exclusive and universal), this same commentator notes in his remarks on §2 of canon 1244 ("Diocesan bishops can decree special feast days or days of penance for their dioceses or places, but only in individual instances.") that the

competence of the diocesan bishop in this matter is not exercised “in an established and definitive mode except *ad actum*.”²⁸⁷ Therefore, it would seem that transfers of the paschal date, as currently occur in various jurisdictions, should be regarded in an exceptional manner.

The 1917 *CIC*, in canons 31-35, set forth the main principles in canon law for time reckoning. Perhaps the main omission included in the revision of these canons subsequent to the Second Vatican Council was the allowance for the usage of various forms of time reckoning for liturgical observances as classified in canon 33, §1 of the 1917 Code. The canon states: “*In supputandis horis diei standum est communi loci usui; sed in privata Missae celebratione, in privata horarum canonicarum recitatione, in sacra communione recipienda et in ieiunii vel abstinentiae lege servanda, licet alia sit usualis loci supputatio, potest quis sequi loci tempus aut locale sive verum sive medium, aut legale sive regionale sive aliud extraordinarium.*”

Some commentaries, including the famous Bouscaren-Ellis-Korth, even included astronomical charts for the proper reckoning of solar time.²⁸⁸ Arthur Dubé, writing a dissertation on the computation of time in canon law, argues that “only the time-reckoning

²⁸⁷ J. ABAD, “Sacred Places and Times,” 1891. Revisions of this text took place in the *adunatio* of 6 December 1979, in Section III, “*De Temporibus Sacris*.” See *Communicationes*, Rome, PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE REVISION OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW (PONTIFICIA COMMISSIO CODICI IURIS CANONICI RECOGNOSCENDO), vol. 12 (1980), 357-358.

²⁸⁸ T. L. BOUSCAREN, A. ELLIS, and F. KORTH, *Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, 4th ed., Milwaukee, Bruce, 1963, 50-51.

involved by such liturgical laws as are found in the liturgical books is not affected by Title III [of Book I of the 1917 *CIC*].”²⁸⁹ Dubé goes on to classify the determination of Easter as a liturgical law, following the teaching of other canonists such as Ojetti,²⁹⁰ indicating its governance by the *De anno et eius partibus*. This author would be given to disagree with Dubé, since the determination of Easter is so closely inter-related with the juridical calendar legislation established and governed by the bull *Inter gravissimas* and once again reiterated by canon 202 of the 1983 *CIC* in the phrase “*prout sunt in calendario*.”

Alfons van Hove attests to the rootedness of the Julian and Gregorian calendar in canon law in stating that “in canon law, except in the liturgy and in the Martyrology in which the Church used the lunar year, the Julian calendar was first admitted, then the Gregorian or Julian calendar reformed by Gregory XIII in 1582. The Church's principles were borrowed from Roman law, ... concerning its interpretation and application of doctrine very different proposals were made.”²⁹¹

It should be noted, as this author has previously affirmed, that canons 200-203 of the 1983 *CIC*, specifically the aforementioned canon 202 in its entirety, can be understood

²⁸⁹ A. DUBÉ, *The General Principles for the Reckoning of Time in Canon Law*, JCD dissertation, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1941, 113.

²⁹⁰ B. OJETTI, *Commentarium in codicem iuris canonici: Normae generales (Can. 1-86)*, Rome, Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianaes, 1927, 192.

²⁹¹ “In iure canonico, praeterquam in liturgia et in Martyrologio in quibus Ecclesia usurpabat annum lunarem, prius admissum est calendarium Iulianum, deinde calendarium Gregorianum seu Iulianum a Gregorio XIII anno 1582 reformatum. Principia Ecclesia mutuata est a iure Romano, ... de eius interpretatione et applicatione doctrinae valde diversae propositae sunt.” A. VAN HOVE, “*De Consuetudine – De Temporis Supputatione*” in *Commentarium Lovaniense in Codicem Iuris Canonici*, Mechelen-Rome, Dessain, 1933, 241.

as giving wide berth for a scientific reappraisal of the accuracy of the calendar, which could be concomitant with any re-investigation of the question of the Easter date and its ecumenical implications. Such proposals will be investigated and evaluated in the fourth chapter of this work.

The 1917 Code mentions Easter in the following texts: canon 306, regarding the celebration of the *Missa pro populo*; canon 772, regarding the solemn baptism of adults at the paschal vigil; canons 859 and 866 regarding the Easter duty of Communion reception; canon 1108 regarding the solemn blessing of marriage being prohibited during Lent until Easter Sunday; and canon 2270 regarding the suspension of a local interdict on Easter Sunday.²⁹²

It is worthwhile as well to note that, just as in the 1917 Code, the 1983 Code only mentions Easter in several places: in relation to the bishop's obligation to reside in the diocese and that he should not be absent on Easter (amongst other dates) in canon 395, §3; in canon 530, 6° in relation to the pastor's function of blessing the baptismal font at Easter; the Easter duty (which may be fulfilled at another time during the year for a just cause) in canon 920, §2, and the recommendation to celebrate baptisms at the Easter Vigil (canon 895). Just as in the 1917 Code, no specific mention is made of the Easter date and its celebration.

²⁹² Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papæ XV auctoritate promulgatus*, Rome, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1936.

The 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches mentions Easter in two locations: canons 197 and 708. Canon 197 notes that the eparchial bishop is to “strive that the Christian faithful committed to his care ... know the paschal mystery in depth and live it so that they become one Body in the unity of the love of Christ.” Canon 708 states: The local hierarchs and the pastors are to see that with every diligence the Christian faithful are instructed concerning the obligation of receiving the Divine Eucharist in danger of death and also at those times which are established by a most praiseworthy custom or by particular law of their own Church *sui iuris*, especially at Easter time, during which Christ handed down the eucharistic mystery.” It notes the obligation of the local hierarchs and pastors to instruct the Christian faithful regarding the obligation of receiving the Divine Eucharist at Easter time “when Christ the Lord bequeathed the Eucharistic mysteries.” Interestingly, it has been affirmed in a recent commentary by Varghese Koluthara regarding this aforementioned final clause of this canon:

Two consultative bodies proposed the omission of the last clause because it was not necessary and incomplete with regard to Easter, during which Our Lord ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit. Another consultative body proposed to change the clause so that it could not be interpreted in the sense of the coincidence of the resurrection with the death of the Lord. PCCICOR [Pontificia Commissio Codicis iuris canonici orientalis recognoscendo] accepted the first proposal and changed the text.²⁹³

²⁹³ V. KOLUTHARA, “Commentary on canon 708,” in J. FARIS and J. ABBASS (eds.), *A Practical Commentary to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, vol. 1, Montréal, Wilson & Lafleur, 2019, 1277.

Conclusion

The paschal date legislation provided within the *Corpus iuris canonici* in the Tertia Pars of the *Decretum Gratiani* would thereby become an integral part of the Western canonical tradition. Medieval scholars, particularly at the various universities, would also have significant impact upon this canon law discussion. Roger Bacon would submit proposals to Clement IV and Pierre Vidal to John XXII. Johannes Regiomontanus, who was summoned to Rome to work on the calendar reform project, offered a critique of the Alfonsine Tables in use at this time. Furthermore, Nicholas of Cusa, in his proposal, suggested to Eugene IV the usage of the meridian of Jerusalem, for the calculation of the paschal date, as would later be suggested in the Aleppo discussions. Pierre d'Ailly himself suggested calendar reform as an imperative of ecclesiastical unity particularly within the context of the Western schism, but also had anticipated the proposal of the Jerusalem meridian himself.

Within the Eastern tradition, Nicephoras Gregoras, writing in the early part of the fourteenth century, would have remedied half the error of the calendar at that time in his proposal to the Byzantine emperor (although also contrasted by the proposal of Barlaam the Calabrian), and Matthew Blastares proposed a method which ultimately also relied upon the Jewish calendar. In a further example of the foreshadowing of the paschal date proposals which would become current over the recent centuries, Clavius was one of the first to suggest a fixed date.

The Reform of 1582 manifested itself in the papal bull *Inter gravissimas*, which was also published in Greek and Syrian in 1583 for the benefit of those churches. This decree represents the fulcrum of all discussions concerning the date of Easter and the reform of the calendar. Having been directly or indirectly accepted by civil and other ecclesiastical bodies for calendar and paschal legislation, it thereby retains importance for any proposals of revision. Therefore, all further discussion on this matter, at least from a standpoint of Roman Catholic and Orthodox canon law, must reckon with this landmark document. All further discussions on this matter must not only relate to this document (stemming, as it does, from papal legislation), but also consider the historical development of this topic, from the standpoint of the legislation of early Church councils and the major medieval scholastic contributions to this topic, which influenced both papal and conciliar legislation on this matter.

Some overtures were indeed made to Orthodox churches for their participation in this process of reform. One of the other main fruits was the *De anno et eius partibus*, an unsigned work which forms the backbone of the post-Tridentine legislation on the calendar and Easter date, as well as the reform of the martyrology. Within non-Catholic lands, there were those Orthodox nations desirous to maintain the Nicaean paschalion. Scandinavian Lutherans adopted the New Style all the while using an astronomical reckoning of Easter, with some doing so until the mid-19th century.

It is critical to mention the nexus of this study with current legislation. Canon 202 of the 1983 *CIC* uses the phrase: “*prout sunt in calendario.*” It should be noted that within

the 1917 and 1983 Codices of Canon Law, principles of time computation, particularly as reflective of the Gregorian calendar, remain clearly enshrined within the discipline of canon law. In no small part, this can be said to be due to the historically canonical nature of the reform of the calendar which was allied with the reckoning of the Easter celebration.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EASTER DATE AS A POINT OF CONTACT: A CONSPECTUS OF THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES AND SEPARATED ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

Introduction

In the third chapter, a descriptive and comparative legal methodology will be used to discuss the laws underpinning the date of Easter in Oriental Christian churches (both Eastern Catholic and Orthodox) and ecclesial communities based upon civil, episcopal, conciliar, and synodal legislation.

It should be borne in mind that there is a three-fold problematic at stake, as there exist three categories of churches and their Paschal calculation: firstly, those which use the Julian calendar as a calendar and for the Easter-date calculation; secondly, those which use the Gregorian or Meletian calendars for the fixed dates of feasts but retain the Julian calculation of the Easter date; and those which have accepted a revised calendar for both the calendar and the paschal date, be it Gregorian or Meletian.²⁹⁴

3.1 Old Calendarists

There have been a number of the Orthodox Churches who have chosen not to use the revised Meletian calendar (i.e. that established by the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress) nor the Gregorian paschal computus (or *paschalion*) in any way whatsoever. A polemical work in favor of the Julian calendar entitled *A Scientific Examination of the Orthodox*

²⁹⁴ See T. P. VERGHESE, *The Date of Easter and Calendar Revision in the Orthodox Churches*, Addis Ababa, The Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, 1968, 3.

Church Calendar enumerates them as follows, noting that certain Orthodox jurisdictions who have adopted the Meletian calendar have continued to use the Julian paschalion. Those Orthodox Churches using the Old [Julian] Calendar include the Jerusalem Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate (numerically, the largest Orthodox Church), the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR), the Serbian Patriarchate, the Georgian Patriarchate, the True Orthodox Church of Greece, the True Orthodox Church of Romania, the True Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (until 2023), and the monastic republic of Mount Athos. Furthermore, there exist New Calendarist jurisdictions which have dioceses or parishes holding to the Old Calendar, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Orthodox Church in America (Diocese of Alaska), the Polish Orthodox Church, the Czech Orthodox Church, and the Slovakian Orthodox Church. When the Macedonian Orthodox Church declared its autocephaly in 1968, the New Calendar was abortively introduced; however, strong popular opposition by the people caused this attempt to fail.²⁹⁵

Furthermore, from Hieromonk Cassian's polemical Orthodox perspective, the Gregorian paschalion is accused of violating the regulation of Nicaea concerning celebration of Easter with the Jews. It is noted that "The Gregorian Calendar fails to achieve its own objective. Instead of 'fixing' the vernal equinox and the 'fourteenth moon,' the Papists dislocated them in such a way that now, according to this newly fabricated calendar, the Feast of the Resurrection exceeds the boundaries set for it by the First Oecumenical

²⁹⁵ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 61.

Synod.”²⁹⁶ The conclusion that Hieromonk Cassian draws is that “the Papacy and its Protestant progeny often commit the folly of celebrating Easter earlier than the Jews celebrate Passover, in absolute contradiction of inviolable canonical rules.”²⁹⁷

3.1.1 Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church has been one of the strongest voices within Christendom for the preservation of the old-style Julian calendar and the old paschalion. While traditionalist voices within Orthodoxy often accuse this reform as stemming from Masonic origins relating to the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, in a memorandum of explanation by the Holy Synod, published by the Orthodox Church in America, the Russian Orthodox Church is described as having considered calendar reforms as early as the 19th century.²⁹⁸ The same Orthodox Church in America takes the position that reforms to the calendar are essential if Orthodoxy is to survive as a “pillar of truth.”²⁹⁹

However, many within Orthodoxy do not perceive any changes to the original Julian Calendar as being beneficial. The same *Scientific Examination of the Orthodox Church Calendar*, in describing the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, offers a somewhat conspiratorial view on the matter: “Misled by a G.P.U. agent into believing that the calendar reform of the ‘Pan-Orthodox Congress’ had received universal acceptance within

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 140.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, “Memorandum of Explanation: Revised Julian Calendar”, <https://www.holy-trinity.org/modern/calen3.html> (10 January 2024).

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

the entire Orthodox Church, this Holy New Confessor - undoubtedly out of a virtuous sense of humble submission to the conciliar wisdom of the Church - decreed that the New Calendar be introduced into the Russian Orthodox Church.”³⁰⁰ However, this innovation was not well received, and caused the same Patriarch to renege on the matter: “When the clergy and laity responded with staunch opposition and when, through the intermediation of the ‘Karlovsky Synod’ (the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad), the truth became known to him, Saint Tikhon immediately revoked the Patriarchal decree.”³⁰¹ Others, such as Fr. Basile Sakkas requested that the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) condemn the Revised Julian Calendar.³⁰²

This same ROCOR has taken a similar perspective, ultimately taking the lead from the Russian Orthodox Patriarch. It was noted that “the Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad stated their position by means of three synods convened in 1923, 1924, and 1925: ‘Since the Russian Orthodox Church and His Holiness, the Patriarch, do not accept the New Style, and Their Holinesses, the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem have rejected the same; bearing also in mind that the Eastern Patriarchs imposed anathemas in 1583 and 1756 - we have decided not to introduce any changes in the existing ecclesiastical time-reckoning.’”³⁰³

³⁰⁰ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 58

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² See B. SAKKAS, *The Calendar Question*, Jordanville, NY, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1973.

³⁰³ TCHAIKOVSKII, I, *A Textbook of the Paschalion*. Sofia, Holy Synod of Bulgaria, 1936, 6, quoted in HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 58.

It should be noted that ROCOR has not broken communion with other Orthodox Churches who have kept the new reckoning of Easter. In a letter dated 27 September 1961 and addressed to the True Orthodox Church of Greece from the ROCOR Synod of Bishops takes an irenic approach to the matter: “Our Church remains loyal to the use of the Old Calendar and considers the introduction of the new calendar to be an error. Nonetheless, its tactic was always to preserve spiritual unity with Orthodox Churches, even those who have adopted the New Calendar, but only to the degree to which they celebrate Pascha in compliance with the decision of the First Ecumenical Council. Our Church has never labeled the Ecumenical Patriarchate or the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America as schismatic, and never abrogated spiritual union with them.”³⁰⁴ Clearly, it can be affirmed that such unity in diversity is possible within the bonds of Orthodoxy.

Furthermore, in 1974, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad noted, referring the matter to an Ecumenical Council which would involve the whole of Orthodoxy: “Concerning the question of the presence or absence of grace among the new calendarists the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad does not consider herself or any other Local Church to have the right to make a conclusive decision, since a categorical evaluation in this question can be undertaken only by a properly convened, competent Ecumenical Council, with the obligatory participation of the free Church of Russia.”³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ “ROCOR on the New Calendar,” in *Eastern Orthodoxy Today*, 25 March 2013, <https://classicalchristianity.com/2013/03/25/rocor-on-the-new-calendar/> (10 January 2024).

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

3.1.2 Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem

The Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, with its headquarters at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, takes special concern with the old style Julian calendar and computus. Much of the rationale behind their maintenance of the old calendar and computus is due to its alleged proof and manifestation by the phenomenon of the Holy Fire descending upon the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. “This supernatural phenomenon only occurs on the Eve of Orthodox Pascha as calculated according to the Church Calendar. When the Holy Fire descends, it lights only the lamp of the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, which he places unlit on the Holy Sepulchre; the Patriarch then distributes the Holy Fire to all present.”³⁰⁶

It is attested that there was pressure placed upon the Church of Jerusalem by the same WCC to adopt the New Calendar, which caused the Holy Fire to not appear when the calendar was changed to the new. This same Hieromonk Cassian comments:

Testifying to the uncanny connection between the miracle of the Holy Fire and the Church Calendar, Archimandrite Sergius (Iazadjiev) relates the following: ‘In August of 1971, Nikolai [now Hieromonk Theophan] and I were coming back from rest and medical treatment at Narechen. Passing through the town of Plovdiv, we called in at the Metochion of Zographou to venerate the tomb of the Holy King Boris ... Schema-monk Seraphim of Zographou was in attendance at the tomb. He told us that recently (1969-70), under pressure from the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, the Jerusalem Patriarchate had introduced the 'New Julian' Calendar (as had the Bulgarian, Macedonian, and other Patriarchates, since there was overwhelming pressure at the time to introduce the New Calendar). That same year on Great Saturday, when from time immemorial the Holy Fire descends on the Lord's Sepulchre, this year the Fire did not appear. Shocked, Patriarch Benedict of Jerusalem commanded that the Old Calendar, which had been in use until then, be restored immediately in the jurisdiction of his Patriarchate. The next year, the Holy Fire once again descended on the Lord's Sepulchre on Great Saturday; the same occurs even until the present.’³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 110.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-112.

Such an argument remains unconvincing. While written to provide a justification of the logic of using the scientifically-inaccurate Julian calendar, the *Scientific Justification of the Orthodox Calendar* asserts, and indeed from a very strict and polemical perspective within Orthodoxy, that “it must also be noted that the attempt to justify and prove ‘correctness’ of the calendar using certain miracles is completely wrong and leads to a logical dead-end. First of all, the calendar question does not belong to the dogmatic field of the Church.”³⁰⁸ It is also noted that the Orthodox calculations according to the Julian paschalion are also not entirely correct: “Second, the miracles happen where the Church is. Alexandrian Paschal Tables show that in some years the canonical requirements for the Easter date determination are broken. Hence, if one uses a certain miracle to prove ‘correctness’ of the calendar, then with the same success one can show that the same miracle can ‘prove’ possibility of breaking and not fulfilling the canonical requirements about the Paschal question. Here is the logical dead-end.”³⁰⁹

The Orthodox Church of Jerusalem has indeed found common ground with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in regard to the celebration of the Easter date. In 2013, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal, during the course of a homily offered at the Holy Sepulchre on Easter, stated: “We have decided in our diocese of the Holy Land, with the exception of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, that the date of Easter follow the Julian calendar so that families of mixed confessions can celebrate this mystery together, as is the case in

³⁰⁸ TSAKADZE, 144-145

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

Jordan, Syria and Egypt.”³¹⁰ The Latin Patriarch asserts this as a witness to “Christ’s call for greater communion”, and that the difference between the different celebrations of the Easter date “does not come from God.”³¹¹

3.1.3 Coptic Church

The Egyptian Coptic Orthodox utilize a unique calendar based upon the ancient Egyptian calendar, and its thirteen-month, three-season year is also utilized by the Ethiopian Church. Specifically in relation to the paschal calculations, Dionysius Exiguus employed the Coptic computus in the context of the Julian calendar, and also taking into account St. Cyril of Alexandria’s Metonic cycles spanning from 153 A.M. to 247 A.M. As has been noted generally, the same Dionysius was the first to mark the Christian era from what he calculated as the birth-year of Christ, or the *anno Domini*. Dawood states that “he extended the list of St. Cyril to include another 95 years (that is, five 19-year cycles), and included new methods of finding the date of Easter in the Julian calendar. It was his method that was in use in the Chalcedonian Orthodox churches as well as Rome, until the Gregorian calendar was introduced.”³¹² Interestingly, despite the great divergence of the Coptic calendar from the Roman, it was Pope Tawadros II in 2015 who specifically argued in

³¹⁰ F. TWAL, **Easter Sunday Homily**, 31 March 2013, in *Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170713212750/https://en.lpj.org/2013/03/31/easter-solemn-mass-at-holy-sepulchre/> (10 January 2024).

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² B. DAWOOD, “The Coptic Calendar,” https://web.archive.org/web/20060928041231/http://www.copticheritage.org/parameters/copticheritage/calendar/The_Coptic_Calendar.pdf (10 January 2024).

favor of the fixed-date proposal for the Easter celebration. A tabulation of the *Liber de Paschate* of Dionysius Exiguus also provides these tables.³¹³

From a canonical perspective, Dionysius Exiguus in his preface also cites two canons concerning the Easter date, namely title 79, the first of the Council of Antioch, where it is stated:

We consider that all who have dared to dissolve the definition of the holy and great council which was assembled at Nicaea, in the presence of the most pious and venerable prince Constantine, on the salutary solemnity of the Pasch, are to be excommunicated and driven from the Church, if they persist in contention against those which are well decreed. And let these things be said of the laity. If, however, any of those who preside over the Churches, whether bishops, or priests, or deacons, after this definition, to the subversion of the people and the disturbance of the Churches, has attempted to gather separately, and to celebrate the Passover with the Jews, the holy synod has already judged this as alien from the Church: because this also was the cause of corruption and disturbance. And not only does he remove such from the ministry, but even those who, after condemnation, have attempted to communicate in this way, are damned, deprived of all outward honor, which the holy rule and priesthood of God has earned.³¹⁴

Citing Pope Leo, he affirms:

Contrary to the statutes of the canons of the fathers, which were based on spiritual decrees in the city of Nicaea long ago, no one is allowed to dare to do anything; in such a way that if anyone wants to decide something different, he should diminish himself rather than corrupt her. If, as it should be, they are kept undefiled by all the pontiffs, there will be peaceful peace and firm concord throughout all the churches.

³¹³ M. DECKERS, “The 19 Year Cycle of Dionysius,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20180707173914/http://hbar.phys.msu.su/gorm/chrono/paschata.htm> (10 January 2024).

³¹⁴ “Omnes qui ausi fuerint dissolvere definitionem sancti et magni concilii quod apud Nicæam congregatum est, sub præsentia piïssimi et venerandi principis Constantini, de salutifera solemnitate paschali, excommunicandos et de Ecclesia pellendos esse censemus, si tamen contentiosius adversus ea quæ bene sunt decreta perstiterint. Et hæc quidem de laicis dicta sint. Si quis autem eorum qui præsent Ecclesiæ, aut episcopus, aut presbyter, aut diaconus, post hanc definitionem tentaverit, ad subversionem populorum et Ecclesiarum perturbationem, seorsim colligere, et cum Judæis Pascha celebrare, sancta synodus hunc alienum jam hinc ab Ecclesia judicavit: quod non solum sibi, sed plurimis causa corruptionis ac perturbationis exstiterit. Nec solum a ministerio tales removet, sed etiam illi qui post damnationem huiusmodi communicare tentaverint, damnati sunt, omni quoque extrinsecus honore privati, quem sancta regula et sacerdotium Dei promeruit.” DIONYSIUS EXIGUUS, “Liber de Paschate,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20000925105639/http://hermes.ulaval.ca/~sitrau/calgreg/denys.html> (10 January 2024).

And again: In all ecclesiastical causes, he says, we obey these laws, which the Holy Spirit instituted through three hundred and eighteen bishops for the peaceful observance of all priests; so that even if a great many decide to establish something other than those, whatever is different from the aforesaid constitution is to be held in no respect.³¹⁵

The Ethiopian calendar remains similar to the Coptic in the sense that it is based upon a derivation of the Alexandrian Julian calendar, and differs from the Coptic Orthodox calendar in the matter of the observance of saints' feast days.³¹⁶ Both calendars begin their year in mid-September. The Ethiopian calendar is based principally on the regulations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.³¹⁷

In 1967, Patriarch Maximos IV declared that the Coptic Church in Egypt belonging to the Alexandria Patriarchate would, beginning that year, start to celebrate Easter according to the unrevised Julian calendar.³¹⁸

3.1.4 Polish Orthodox Church

Although having converted to the revised Julian calendar on 1/14 October 1924, The Polish Orthodox Church made a decision in the year 2014 to return to the Julian

³¹⁵ “Contra statuta canonum paternorum, quæ ante longissimæ ætatis annos in urbe Nicæa spiritalibus sunt fundata decretis, nihil cuiquam audere conceditur; ita ut si quis diversum aliquid velit decernere, se potius minuat quam illa corrumpat. Quæ si, ut oportet, a cunctis pontificibus intemerata servantur, per universas Ecclesias tranquilla erit pax et firma concordia. Et iterum: In omnibus, inquit, ecclesiasticis causis, his legibus obsequimur, quas ad pacificam observantiam omnium sacerdotum, per trecentos octodecim episcopos Spiritus sanctus instituit; ita ut etiamsi multo plures aliud quam illi statuere decernant, in nulla reverentia sit habendum quidquid fuerit a prædictorum constitutione diversum.” Ibid.

³¹⁶ S. GEBRE-MEDHIN, “Ethiopian Calendar, neither Gregorian nor Julian: Prof. Ephraim Issac” in *Horn Affairs*, 15 September 2014, <https://hornaffairs.com/2014/09/15/ethiopian-calendar-neither-gregorian-nor-julian-prof-ephraim-issac/> (10 January 2024). This calendar may be found in “Religious Holidays and Calendar” in *Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church*, <https://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/calendar.html> (10 January 2024).

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ See PATRIARCH MAXIMOS IV, “Bulletin of the Melkite Greek Catholic Community of Alexandria,” January-February-March 1967, 2-3.

calendar.³¹⁹ This occurred at the spring session of the Council of Bishops, on 18 March at the residence of Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland.³²⁰ The decree states that “On March 18, 2014 the Synod of Bishops of the Polish Orthodox Church revoked the Synodal decision of April 12, 1924 concerning the introduction of the ‘new style’ into the Church and decreed a return to the “old,” that is, to the Julian Calendar.”³²¹ This became effective 2/15 June 2014. The introduction of the new calendar was, however, not entirely popular within the Polish Orthodox Church.

Interestingly, such questions have devolved to the parish level within the Polish Orthodox Church; for instance, “in the Białostocka [*sic*]-Gdańsk diocese only about three or four parishes lived according to the ‘new style’ before, despite the fact that the diocese has fifty-seven parishes. Today only one community of the diocese has maintained the ‘new style’ as was decided by a parish meeting.”³²² It is noted that the 1924 decision to revise the calendar was not entirely received within this particular Orthodox church, and “was never implemented in the majority of parishes. Thus in the post-war period (after 1945) parishes organized their own liturgical life according to the demands of the faithful. The entire north-east, where the majority of Orthodox live, retained the old calendar.”³²³

³¹⁹ N. MIHAILOVA, “The Polish Orthodox Church Will Return to the Old Calendar in June,” in Pravmir.com, 29 March 2014, <http://www.pravmir.com/polish-orthodox-church-will-return-old-calendar-june/> (10 January 2024).

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ S. IVANOV, and M. LAVRESCHUK, “Why the Polish Church Returned to the Julian Calendar,” in pravoslavie.ru, 15 September 2016, www.pravoslavie.ru/97065.html (10 January 2024).

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

This is described as being a popular movement, wherein “for the faithful and clergy it’s more important that we should celebrate the feasts on the same days as in the Moscow Patriarchate, the Serbian Church, and in the monasteries of Mt. Athos.”³²⁴

3.1.5 Other Orthodox Churches

The new, Meletian calendar has been adopted by Orthodox churches as follows: in 1923, Estonia converted to the use of this calendar, and on 10/23 March 1924, it became adopted by the churches of Constantinople, Cyprus and Greece. Later, on 1/14 October 1928, the churches of Alexandria and Antioch transitioned to this use, and the Albanian Orthodox Church did so when it became autocephalous on 12 April 1937. As will be discussed below, the Finnish Orthodox Church would convert to the use of the Gregorian calendar and Gregorian computation of the Easter date. Later, on 7/20 December 1968, Bulgaria would then make the change.³²⁵

While the Romanian Orthodox Church transitioned from 1/14 October 1924 to the revised Julian calendar, it also changed the paschalion to the Latin observance. Despite the Romanian church having adopted the new calendar on the date specified by the conference, this church continued to observe the Julian paschalion. Consequently, in 1926 it would have been celebrated outside the canonical boundaries for the Paschal date. The Patriarch Myron, therefore, in 1926, ordered Pascha to be celebrated according to the Latin paschalion, and when he did so again in 1929, it evoked vociferous protest from many of

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ R. CLOGG, *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of a Plural Society*, London, C. Hurst & Co., 2002, 8-9.

his own clergy, lending tremendous impetus to the Old Calendar movement in that country.³²⁶ This, then, led to civil uprisings wherein there were disturbances and barricaded churches.

Groen remarks about the adoption of the revised calendar and the crisis it has caused within the Orthodox churches in certain countries, leading to the development of separate Old Calendarist ecclesial jurisdictions, particularly in cases such as the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, wherein there has been the genesis of such separated communities called “True Orthodox Churches”. Adherents to these groups are described as “holding on to the Julian calendar, these Orthodox faithful emphasize the uninterrupted continuity of their old liturgical and spiritual traditions, including the calendar, and they reject the compulsory introduction of the new Gregorian [*sic*] calendar put into effect by the ‘official’ Holy Synods in their countries.”³²⁷

Clearly, this has been a cause of decay of ecclesiastical communion, and such “Old Calendarists” often regard the established Orthodox churches with grave suspicion, declining any sort of hierarchical, spiritual, or liturgical communion. Ironically, while declining the revised Meletian calendar which was proposed by the Pan-Orthodox conference, “many of them think that only a pan-Orthodox council can take a decision on the possibility of calendar improvement.”³²⁸ These groups would also decline any participation in ecumenical dialogue, since “generally speaking, they consider ecumenical

³²⁶ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 57.

³²⁷ B. GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 2011, Vol. 63 (3-4), 357.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

and inter-religious dialogues as ‘heretical’, even as ‘pan-heresy’.”³²⁹ Such groups often do have connections amongst themselves, and share some semblance of communion with one another. Groen remarks that “usually they are closely connected – also in liturgical communion – with their co-religionists in neighbouring countries and with noncanonical Orthodox groups in Ukraine, Montenegro, etc. They were also linked to the Synodical Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, but when the latter re-united with the Moscow Patriarchate (May 2007), the Bulgarian ‘Old Calendarists’, for instance, broke off communion with it.”³³⁰ In an ironic twist, in 2014, two anti-ecumenical groups affiliated with the Old Calendarist movement made a declaration of their unity, “in an effort to become a united voice against the ‘heresy’ of ecumenism which they associate with the united canonical ancient patriarchal Churches, the two schismatic Old Calendarist groups known as the Holy Synod of Resistance and the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece have announced at the completion of their dialogue yesterday that they are uniting.”³³¹

Critics of the new calendar adoption within Orthodoxy also remark that anomalies have been created within the celebration of the divine services, particularly with the regular celebrations in the liturgical calendars of such churches. Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Bokoutsarsky ... stated the following, in his report on the calendar issue to the 1948 Conference in Moscow:

If, according to the requirements of the Canons, the introduction of the New Calendar in its fullness is intolerable, then it is inadmissible for Orthodox Christians to accept

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ J. SANIDOPOULOS, “Old Calendarists Uniting,” <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2014/03/old-calendarists-uniting.html> (10 January 2024).

the New Calendar in the form of a compromise. This compromise has been recently seen in the lives of some Orthodox Churches and finds expression in the fact that Pascha is celebrated according to the ancient Orthodox Paschalion, while all immovable Feasts are celebrated according to the New Calendar. However, such a calendric combination cannot be accepted by the Orthodox, since it entails violations of other Church practices designated in the Typicon, practices which we should reverently and strictly keep, since we should not forego obedience to our Mother, the Church. The New Calendarists sin because of their disobedience; by this, we mean their violation of the regulations in the Typicon concerning the immovable Feasts.³³²

Consequently, the use of this new calendar in any way appears to them to be a considerable, grave disruption of the unity of the celebration of the Orthodox liturgical year. Polemicists have gone so far as to argue that

in practice, the services held in New Calendarist Churches are something other than the traditional Divine Services of Orthodoxy, effecting a breach of unity within the Orthodox Church. The implementation of the New Calendar has had widespread repercussions with regard to the observance of the Fasts, the ordinances of the Church, and the order of the Divine Services ... Reform of the traditional Orthodox Church Calendar has led to perturbations, skepticism, and even bloodshed.³³³

In consequence, then, they would go so far as to argue that the reform of the calendar and paschalion, over the past century, has done nothing to advance the unity of Orthodoxy, but has only been a wedge put into place by the global ecumenical movement.

3.2 Eastern Churches Within the Catholic Communion

Groen cites the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in a speech at the bi-ritual monastery of Chevetogne on 15 November 1994, that the “debate on the Paschal date might be a fitting opportunity for the Eastern Catholic communities – in spite of, or owing to, their miscellaneous forms of liturgy, theology, spirituality, and canon law, constituting

³³² HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 98-99.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

often blends of Eastern and Western traditions – to show their possible competence as ‘bridge builders.’”³³⁴

In recent years, the main argument for a common Easter date within the ecumenical community has been the proposal to observe the Easter date via the Julian paschalion for all Christians. Groen argues: “The only solution - in my opinion - that has a realistic chance to solve the problem, but which has never been considered on an international level, is that all the churches would join the Orthodox reckoning of the Easter date using the Julian calendar. This proposal is not new, it is a solution which is practised on a local level in Egypt and Jordan, where - following an initiative of the Middle East Council of Churches in 1994, the Western churches decided to follow the Orthodox majority.” As far back as 27 January 1982, Bishop Michel Latim of the Greek-Catholic eparchy of Lattakieh, Syria, argued that “based on our faith in a single Christ, and for the realization of a United Church, we pray, we lay believers in Christ, all spiritual leaders, both patriarchs and bishops, to respond to our urgent desire for adoption of the Eastern calendar, to celebrate the glorious Easter together, so that it becomes a symbol of unity of our faith, instead of remaining, as it is currently, a symbol of our division.”³³⁵

Dagmar Heller’s opinion on the usage of the Julian paschalion is that

³³⁴ B. GROEN, *"How Long It Was And How Far": A Catholic and Ecumenical View on the Arduous Way to a Common Easter Date*, Graz, Grazer Universitätsverlag, 2013, 55.

³³⁵ « Basé sur notre foi en un Christ unique, et en vue de la réalisation d'une Église Unie, nous prions, nous les laïcs croyants en Christ, tous les chefs spirituels tant patriarches qu'évêques, de répondre à notre désir pressant d'adoption du calendrier oriental, afin de célébrer la glorieuse fête de Pâques ensemble, pour que celle-ci devienne un symbole d'unité de notre foi, au lieu qu'elle demeure, comme c'est le cas actuellement, un symbole de notre division. » M. YATIM, letter to Patriarch Maximos Hakim, 27 January 1982, <http://www.soufanieh.com/PETITION/19820107.lettre.unite.eveques.htm> (10 January 2024).

this solution allows to keep the Nicæan rule which presently unites all the Christian churches, and thus to take into consideration the link between Easter and the cycle of nature as well as its symbolic meaning related to the dramatic break of the resurrection into the natural flow of nature. The disadvantage would be though that the astronomic and therefore real equinox and full moon would not be considered, but at least symbolically it would be considered. Since Western churches would accept even to give up the Nicene rule, they could as well – for the sake of unity – give up the idea of following the astronomic accuracy.³³⁶

But this is not universally true, even in the Holy Land. Despite a 2013 document from the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land indicating that ‘within two years all Eastern Catholics and the Latin Patriarchate in the Holy Land will officially adopt the Greek Orthodox Julian calendar date’,³³⁷ it still remains the case that “ironically the Catholic Church continues to observe Easter on the Gregorian date in the Basilicas of the Nativity and the Holy Sepulcher.”³³⁸ One could conclude that this is a particularity for two church buildings. However, such is an example of agreements being preserved from the time of the rule of the Ottomans. These pacts govern the cohabitation of Catholic and Orthodox inhabitants and pilgrims in the holy sites of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as well as pilgrims who travel there. It has been commented that “far from ‘unifying’ Easter in the Holy Land, the Latin hierarchy's unilateral adoption of the Eastern Orthodox date of Easter has resulted in the Latin Catholic community being divided in its observance of Easter.”³³⁹

³³⁶ D. HELLER, “Efforts Towards a Common Date for Easter: A Hopeless Situation?” in *Monastero di Bose*, <https://www.monasterodibose.it/en/community/news/the-window-of-dialogue/11820-efforts-towards-a-common-date-for-easter-a-hopeless-situation?tmpl=component&print=1&pdf=1> (10 January 2024).

³³⁷ J. SUDILOVSKY, “Tale of Two Easters: Holy Land Catholics, Orthodox to Celebrate as One,” in *Catholic News Service*, 8 February 2013, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2013/tale-of-two-easters-holy-land-catholics-orthodox-to-celebrate-as-one-cns-1300518.cfm> (10 January 2024).

³³⁸ AUGUSTINUS [pseudonym], “A Fixed, ‘Unified’ Easter? Not so Fast! Part I: Why a Unified Easter Will not be Implemented in the Foreseeable Future,” in *Rorate caeli*, 19 January 2016, <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2015/06/a-fixed-unified-easter-not-so-fast-part.html> (10 January 2024).

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Lebanese Maronites adopted the Gregorian paschalion as far back as 1606.³⁴⁰

Recently, in the fall of 2019, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, argued that it may be worth considering a change to the Meletian calendar with the Julian paschalion, as he argues that “one concept is that of a neo-julian calendar, where the so-called 'immovable' (fixed-date) feasts - Christmas, for example - are celebrated according to the new style - i.e. according to the Gregorian calendar. While the celebration of the 'moveable' feasts that can change every year depending on the Easter cycle - including Easter itself - is determined by the old, Julian method for determining that date.”³⁴¹

From a legal standpoint, this is considered as being a disciplinary issue which could be changed under the aegis of the authorities of the Church. On 24 May 2023, perhaps partly due to geopolitical realities reflecting the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church did indeed switch to the Meletian calendar effective 1 September 2023 for the reckoning of the fixed celebrations of the liturgical calendar, while at the same time maintaining the former Julian paschalion for the calculation of the Easter date.³⁴² A decree reflecting this was issued by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada

³⁴⁰ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” 372.

³⁴¹ UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC ARCHEPARCHY OF WINNIPEG, “Head of Church Explores Move to ‘New’ Calendar,” 24 December 2019, http://archeparchy.ca/news_details.php?news_id=854 (10 January 2024).

³⁴² “Orthodox Church of Ukraine to switch to Revised Julian Calendar, celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25,” in *The Kyiv Independent*, 24 May 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/orthodox-church-of-ukraine-to-switch-to-revised-julian-calendar-celebrate-christmas-on-dec-25/> (10 January 2024).

on 1 December 2023, effective 20 December; this decree also requests the revision of their liturgical books (the ecclesiastical calendar and Typikon) to reflect this change.³⁴³

This movement has been echoed by the Ukrainian Catholic Church as well, with Archbishop Shevchuk moving the fixed celebration of Christmas to 25 December but continuing to celebrate Easter in majority-Orthodox Ukraine with the Julian computation.³⁴⁴

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has indicated the same – a diocese which includes Jordan, Cyprus, and the majority of Palestine. Their implementation of the Julian paschal date, in their opinion, has been positive. In recent years, those parishes of the Latin Patriarchate in Israel have been transitioning to this observance. It is noted that

what is new mainly has to do with the Patriarchate parishes who are in Israel. For Easter 2013, majority of Catholic parishes will join this decision and celebrate Easter on May 5 with exceptions made in Jerusalem and the Bethlehem area because the Status Quo Agreement. For Easter 2015 and the following years a decree formulated by the ACOHL will be submitted to the Holy See for approval. This decree should state that all the Catholic Churches of the Holy Land will permanently adopt the Julian calendar for the celebration of Easter ‘with the consequential adjustment of the liturgical calendar for the beginning of Lent and the feast of Pentecost. (...) Largely, this decision will be welcomed, respected and enacted by all of the Eastern Rite Catholics and Latin Catholics in the country as well as by foreigners residing in our diocese’ says the directive.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ METROPOLITAN ILARION, “Announcement of the Adoption of the Revised Julian Calendar by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada”, 1 December 2023, Edmonton, Alberta, <https://www.uocc.ca/primatial-encyclical-annoucement-of-the-adoption-of-the-revised-julian-calendar-by-the-ukrainian-orthodox-church-of-canada/> (2 December 2023).

³⁴⁴ P. HUDSON, “Ukrainian Catholic Church Moves to New Calendar” in *The Tablet*, 9 February 2023, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16601/ukrainian-catholic-church-moves-to-new-calendar> (10 January 2024).

³⁴⁵ C. LAFONTAINE, “Latin Patriarchate Will Celebrate Easter 2013 According to the Julian Calendar” in *Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem*, 23 October 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191202075542/http://en.lpj.org/2012/10/23/latin-patriarchate-will-celebrate-easter-2013-according-to-the-julian-calendar> (10 January 2024).

Finally, the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East is divided on the calendar issue: some communities hold on to the Julian calendar, others have taken on the Gregorian one.³⁴⁶

3.3 New Calendarists

It is necessary to distinguish, within the various Orthodox churches, those who adopted the use of the Gregorian calendar prior to the Pan-Orthodox Synod of 1923, and those who adopted the Revised Julian Calendar subsequent to this Synod.

The 1977 Orthodox conference at Chambésy noted that for the most part, the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox churches have adopted the reforms of the Meletian calendar, but have only applied them in a partial way, by celebrating Easter according to the ancient Julian paschalion. It is noted that such is the case of the majority of the Orthodox churches, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, the Orthodox Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, the Albanian Church, the Orthodox Church of [the former] Czechoslovakia, as well as the autonomous church of Finland. This same category applies to the diaspora dioceses and communities in Western Europe and America who follow these observances because of ethnic custom.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ « D'un autre côté, se rangent les Églises autocéphales et autonomes qui ont adopté les décisions de la Conférence interorthodoxe de Constantinople de 1923 pour la correction du calendrier, mais elles ne les ont appliquées que partiellement et emploient un calendrier mixte, c'est-à-dire le calendrier rectifié ou néo-julien (le "nouveau style"), tout en maintenant la pascalie (le cycle de Pâques et les fêtes mobiles) du vieux style, en célébrant donc la Pâque le même dimanche que les Églises de la première catégorie. C'est la situation de la plupart des Églises orthodoxes: le Patriarcat de Constantinople et ceux d'Antioche et d'Alexandrie, l'Archevêché de Grèce, l'Église orthodoxe de Roumanie et celle de Bulgarie, l'Archevêché de

In March 1924, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Greece – it has been argued that the acceptance for this proposal came especially from Eleftherios Venizelos – officially adopted the Revised Julian Calendar for use within their jurisdictions. However, recognizing that the adoption of this revised paschalion for the movable cycle of Feasts would be an affront to their understanding of the Nicaean practice, these churches decided to accept instead the Revised Julian Calendar only for the immovable cycle of Feasts.³⁴⁸ While remaining under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which follows the Revised Julian Calendar, the monasteries on Mount Athos still continue to use the Julian calendar.³⁴⁹

3.3.1 Bulgaria

The case of Bulgaria also represents a hybrid of observances, very similar to that established within the Polish Orthodox, in the sense that the desires for observance of the Julian paschalion have come from a grass-roots movement. It has been noted that “on December 20, 2009, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church [held] a meeting to consider the plea of a group of believers and their priest from the village of Chelopechene, asking that Christmas be celebrated on January 7. The plea was filed on November 20, 2009. The local priest Mariy Dimitrov has been serving according to the

Chypre, l’Eglise d’Albanie, l’Eglise orthodoxe de Tchécoslovaquie, l’Archevêché autonome de Finlande (dès 1917). Dans la même catégorie se situent les diocèses et les communautés de différentes nationalités constituant la “Diaspora” (dispersion) orthodoxe en Europe occidentale et en Amérique qui suivent le calendrier et la pascalie des Eglises nationales dont elles relèvent par leur origine ethnique ou par la juridiction canonique. » BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Brève étude historique et canonique du problème » in *Synodica*, 42. 21.

³⁴⁸ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 56-57.

³⁴⁹ TSAKADZE, *HCMA*, 125.

Julian Calendar for the last 20 years in his parish with the special permission of Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim. Those who filed the plea remind that a similar case for the restoration of the Julian Calendar in 1997 attracted the support of five bishops. Bulgaria switched to the Gregorian Calendar in 1916, and has been celebrating Christmas on December 25 since it was restored as an official holiday after the end of the communist regime.”³⁵⁰ The *status quo* remains since this time; namely the hybrid usage of the Gregorian calendar for the fixed festivals and the Julian for those which are movable.

Groen also affirms that despite the adoption of the Gregorian calendar by the civil authorities in Bulgaria in 1916, the Orthodox church only adopted it, as noted above, in 1968.³⁵¹ He goes on to opine regarding the genesis of this occurrence, not only due to pressure from the communist government,

but also because the Constantinople Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Greece, which tried to solve the divergences within worldwide Orthodoxy resulting from the contemporaneous use of different calendars, persuaded their Bulgarian sister to do so. Yet, a compromise was made and several popular festivals of the immovable annual cycle kept being celebrated according to the Julian calendar.³⁵²

There does exist an Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, under the leadership of Photius of Triaditsa, which is in communion with other Orthodox churches such as the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ J. SANIDOPOULOS, “Bulgarian Orthodox Church May Change Back to Old Calendar.” <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2009/12/bulgarian-orthodox-church-may-change.html> (10 January 2024). It should also be noted that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church follows the Revised Julian instead of the Gregorian calendar, as do all New Calendar Orthodox churches.

³⁵¹ GROEN, “Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” 356.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ “Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria Background, Structure, Statistical Data,” <https://bulgarian-orthodox-church.org/BOOCC-intro-en.html> (15 July 2022).

3.3.2 Other Oriental Orthodox Churches

A conspectus of the Oriental Orthodox churches depicts an equally variegated picture. For instance, the Armenian Apostolic Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1923/24, but the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and several other Armenian dioceses held on to the Julian calendar.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, often with the consent of their mother Churches, some Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian Orthodox congregations in the West have adopted the Gregorian calendar.

3.4 Gregorian Calendarists

A number of Orthodox churches have opted for the usage of the Western paschal computation and/or calendar due to varying rationales. It will be useful to consult the table provided in Appendix 1, which provides a conspectus of which calendars are used by which churches and ecclesial communities for the reckoning and celebration of Easter/Pascha.

3.4.1 Finnish Orthodox

The case of the Finnish Orthodox Church likewise presents an instance in which ecclesiastical unity itself was clearly threatened by the introduction of the Gregorian calendar and the Western paschalion in general. The Finnish Orthodox is the only Orthodox church which entirely celebrates the liturgical year according to the Gregorian time reckoning. There were very clear geo-political motives behind the establishment of this practice. Errickson states that:

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 358.

in November 1918 an edict by the Finnish government granted the Orthodox Church of Finland the status of the second national church of the country, after the Lutheran, with all attendant rights and privileges. However, due to the Russian Revolution in 1917, Finland sought to distance itself more and more from Russia, which forced Patriarch Tikhon to officially grant the Finnish Orthodox autonomy in 1921. Under the complex political circumstances, in order not to seem 'pro-Russian', the Finnish Church urged towards reforms allowed previously by Patriarch Tikhon, and in October of 1921 it adopted the Gregorian Calendar and began to celebrate Western Easter. The autonomy of the Finnish Orthodox proved to be difficult for them and they felt cut off from both Russia and Constantinople, therefore they chose their only option at the time, which was to become an autonomous archbishopric of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1923. For the sake of unity in Finland after the Soviets invaded part of the country and divided the faithful of Finland, it was urged in 1925 by Bishop German (Aav) for all Orthodox in Finland to adopt the Gregorian Calendar. Many refused, such as the fathers of Valaam Monastery, and therefore fled to countries where they could preserve the Julian Calendar, such as the Soviet Union or Serbia.³⁵⁵

With this having been said, however, it was noted in the Synodikon proceedings on the state of the calendar that “the Church of Finland, for example, already calculates Easter differently from the rest of the Orthodox Churches, but that has not broken its unity with the rest of Orthodoxy.”³⁵⁶

3.4.2 Estonian Orthodox

The issue of the calendar for the Estonian Orthodox bears similarities with that of Finland. Historically, the nation of Estonia was under Russian rule, in which the majority of the population religiously consisted of ethnic German Lutherans. Subsequent to the 1991 Russian Revolution, Estonia sought to distance itself considerably from the practice under Soviet rule. As such, the desire for ecclesiastical autonomy was correlated to the desire to use the Gregorian calendar. Indeed,

the General (clergy-laity) Assembly in 1919 sent the corresponding appeal for independence to the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. On June 15, 1920,

³⁵⁵ J. SANIDOPOULOS, “The Date of Easter in Finland and Estonia,” <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2013/06/the-date-of-orthodox-easter-in-finland.html> (10 January 2024).

³⁵⁶ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 53

the Synod decided to grant the Church of Estonia autonomy in economic, administrative and educational matters and the right to use the Gregorian Calendar. Because of the complicated situation in Russia, and like Finland, they felt the need to be connected with either Russia or Constantinople, the Estonian Church appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. So, in 1923, a delegation of Estonian and Finnish Churches went to Constantinople to ask for a correct canonical status for the Church in a newly independent country. On June 7th, 1923, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued the *tomos* of autonomy for the Estonian Orthodox Church.³⁵⁷

During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, the Estonian Orthodox church lost autonomy from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and subsequent to the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1996 the *tomos* was re-issued, despite protests from the Moscow patriarchate.

3.5 Protestant Ecclesial Communities

The ecclesial communities springing from the Protestant Reformation have virtually unanimously adopted the Gregorian celebration for Easter, as well as the usage of the Gregorian calendar. Political circumstances have generally brought about this occurrence, particularly the fact that most Protestant confessions were official state religions (particularly in the case of Anglicanism and Lutheranism, in various nation-states of northern Europe). The adoption of the Gregorian calendar, of course, occurred later in these lands than in those which retained loyalty to Catholicism. Three of the main Protestant confessions, Anglicanism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, should be considered.

3.5.1 Anglican Communion

The Church of England has inherited a rich tradition of the paschal computus and calendar reforms which stem back almost nine hundred years prior to the Reformation. The

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

Book of Common Prayer, being the main liturgical text of the Church of England, contains many ecclesiastical norms which further encompass the Anglican Communion. The continued printing of the Easter computation in various editions of this text brings this element into relief. It is noted that “the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549 adopted the seasonal calendar from the pre-Reformation liturgical books of the Sarum (Salisbury) use, a local adaptation of the Roman rite that had first been brought to England by St Augustine of Canterbury and accepted by the English church at the Synod of Whitby in 663.”³⁵⁸ Furthermore, “with the Restoration of King Charles II in 1661 came a new revision of the Prayer Book. The new book restored the calendar and added a table listing the Vigils, Fasts, and Days of Abstinence to be observed through the year immediately before the Calendar.”³⁵⁹

Since much Anglican legislation would emanate as well from the monarch as the head of the Church of England, the main acts of the English Parliament which would impact the calendar and Easter would be the Calendar Acts of 1750 and 1751, as well as the Easter Act of 1928, the latter of which would ostensibly legislate Easter on a fixed date for the Church of England. This Act, which ultimately was never brought into force, states that “Easter-day shall, in the calendar year next but one after the commencement of this Act and in all subsequent years, be the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April, and section three of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750, the new calendar, tables and rules

³⁵⁸ C. HEFLING AND C. SHATTUCK, *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, Kindle edition, Kindle locations 8630-8632.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8672-8673.

annexed to that Act, and section two of the Calendar Act 1751, are hereby amended and shall be read and construed accordingly . . .”³⁶⁰ The Act requires the agreement (in the form of the resolutions) of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, before the Prime Minister of the day may direct the Home Secretary to request the King or the Queen of the day to approve and issue a Commencement Order in Council, on condition that “before making such draft order, regard shall be had to any opinion officially expressed by any Church or other Christian body”.³⁶¹

Almost two decades after the passage of this Act, a commentator for the London *Telegraph* remarked that

so far as this country is concerned agreement has been secured. Though most people have forgotten the fact, or were never aware of it, an Act “to regulate the date of Easter Day and days or other periods and occasions depending thereon” has stood for twenty years on the Statute Book, ordaining that on and after a date to be fixed by Order in Council Easter Sunday shall always be the Sunday after the second Saturday in April—which is very nearly, but not quite, the same thing as saying that it shall be the second Sunday in April. The Bill for the stabilisation [*sic*] of Easter was introduced in May 1928, by two private Members, but it had the full blessing of the Government of the day and passed through both Houses without a division, Lord Birkenhead, as Government spokesman in the House of Lords, observing that ‘it must be long since there has been a consensus of opinion so remarkable, in so many countries, and among so many sections of opinion in those countries.’³⁶²

³⁶⁰ “Easter Act 1928,” in *UK Public General Acts*, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/18-19/35/section/1> (10 January 2024).

³⁶¹ “Easter Act 1928” in *UK Public General Acts*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/18-19/35/enacted?view=plain> (10 January 2024).

³⁶² W. POSTBRIDGE, “A Fixed Date for Easter?” in *Spectator Online Archives*, 26 March 1948, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/26th-march-1948/9/a-fixed-date-easter> (10 January 2024).

The 1979 reform of the *Book of Common Prayer* still contains a table for finding the date of Easter, along with the Sunday letters and golden numbers, as would be found (although in a more explicit form) in the Tridentine liturgical books.³⁶³

3.5.2 Lutheranism

Martin Luther himself was noted as being a proponent for the elimination of the difference between the Temporal and Sanctoral cycles in the liturgy. In his work “On the Councils and the Church,” he remarks:

How much better it would have been if they had let Moses’ law regarding Easter die altogether and had retained nothing of the old garment They should instead have reckoned and noted the days of the passion, the burial and the resurrection by the course of the sun and set a fixed day for these, as they did with Christmas, New Year’s, the day of the Magi, Candlemas, the Annunciation of Mary, the feast of St. John, and other festivals, which they call fixed, not wobbling festivals.³⁶⁴

Heilbron affirms that the German Protestant lands chose to calculate the Easter moon from the Rudolphine tables calculated by the Protestant Kepler rather than those established by Lilio.³⁶⁵

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in particular has made it a point of noting that they choose to follow the general Western calculations and algorithms for the date of Easter. Charts for dating Easter, following the Roman model, are likewise provided in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ “Tables and Rules for Finding the Easter Day,” in *The (Online) Book of Common Prayer*, <https://www.bcponline.org/Misc/tables.html> (10 January 2024).

³⁶⁴ MARTIN LUTHER, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), cited in A. ADAM, *The Liturgical Year: Its History and Its Meaning after the Reform of the Liturgy*, trans. M. O’CONNELL, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1990, 61.

³⁶⁵ HEILBRON, *SCCSO*, 146.

³⁶⁶ “Date of Easter,” in *Redeemer Church Huntington Beach*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171015065428/http://www.redeemer->

In March 2000, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ratified the decisions of Aleppo as indicated within the dialogue between the Lutheran confession and the Orthodox Churches. “We strongly affirm the basic principles of the Aleppo Statement and urge its careful and pastorally sensitive study,” said a seven-paragraph “common response” from the dialogue. This response went on to affirm that “our Lutheran-Orthodox Ecumenical Dialogue in the United States endorses the Statement's call to study during the period leading to Easter/Pascha 2001.”³⁶⁷ The statement rejects the idea of celebrating Easter on a fixed day of the year and adheres to calculations involving the sun and moon as “a salutary reminder of the cosmic dimensions of Christ's victory over sin and death.”³⁶⁸

3.5.3 Reformed Confessions

The Reformed communities in Europe typically celebrate five “evangelical feasts”, namely Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost.³⁶⁹ While during some of the earliest days of the Scottish and French Reformers, there was resistance at the idea of even celebrating such feast days, in modern usage, the dating is identical to that found in the other Protestant communities – particularly since the introduction of the Common Lectionary, which employs the Gregorian date of Easter.

lutheran.net/Articles/1000039347/Redeemer_Lutheran_Church/Media_Center/Pastors_Articles/DATE_OF_EASTER.aspx (10 January 2024).

³⁶⁷ EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, “U.S. Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue Backs Common Date for Easter,” <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/3811> (10 January 2024).

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ H. OLD, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Age of the Reformation*, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002, 426-429.

3.6 A Comparative Evaluation of These Approaches

The 1977 Orthodox discussion on the effects of a common Easter date do point out one rather glaring effect which would still remain lacking even if a common celebration of Easter were to be attained – the fact that doctrinal, liturgical, pastoral, and canonical divergences would still remain. A common date for Easter would not therefore be a panacea for bringing about unity between churches. Prof. John Errickson, a canonist participating in this consultation, observes that

lack of uniformity on the dating of Easter among the Orthodox might have a certain salutary effect, for so often we confuse uniformity with unity, as though if we celebrate Easter on the same day we are *ex opere operato*, truly one. To be sure, unity may lead to uniformity: We would all hope that one day all the Orthodox Churches – and all men might celebrate the saving Pascha on the same day. But unity cannot be reduced to uniformity: Baptists and Roman Catholics, for example, have a uniform calculation of the date of Easter, but that by no means makes them one church.³⁷⁰

From a mathematical standpoint, over the course of centuries, errors will continue to accumulate within the ancient Julian computus for Easter, making divergent celebrations of the Easter date more and more common between the Old Calendar churches and those following the Gregorian calendar. Philip Chrysopoulos, writing from the Greek perspective, attests that due to the errors of the Metonic cycle which have accumulated now for centuries, “Orthodox Easter is often celebrated not on the first Sunday after the full moon, but on the next or after the second full moon, instead of the first Sunday after the first Spring full moon, as the Nicaean Synod had decided.”³⁷¹ He goes on to remark that

³⁷⁰ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, p. 53

³⁷¹ P. CHRYSOPOULOS, “Why Greek Orthodox and Catholic Easter Will Never Coincide After 2700,” in *Greek Reporter*, 12 April 2023, <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/04/08/why-greek-orthodox-and-catholic-easter-will-never-coincide-after-2700/> (10 January 2024).

it is fairly common that Orthodox and Catholic Christians to celebrate Easter together, when both the Gregorian and the Julian-Metonic Easter moon fall from Sunday to Saturday of the same week However, after 2700, due to the accumulation of the Metonic error for almost seven centuries the Julian and the Gregorian full moon will never coincide in the same week again, so there will be no common Easter again.³⁷²

The solution that Prof. Errickson proposed in 1977 was prescient of the norms which would be proposed by the Aleppo statement of 1997 as well as the current practice, particularly observed in the churches of the Holy Land and other places where Easter is observed within both the Julian and Gregorian cycles. Errickson proposed and highly recommended the following three proposals for further ecumenical consideration regarding the celebration of Easter amongst various churches: “1) that the traditional canonical norms for the dating of Easter (the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox) be reaffirmed; 2) that this be established by the most accurate means known to modern astronomical science; but 3) that local churches be permitted to retain the old method of calculation if pressing pastoral and psychological problems so dictate.”³⁷³

A conciliatory approach such as this would seem to be beneficial, rather than imposing a standard that certain more-traditional Christian communities would not be able to accept. While the *Lineamenta* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Bishops’ Synod in Rome (10-24 October 2010) affirms, “the question of a communal date for Christmas and Easter, dealt with by the Middle East Council of Churches, is facing insurmountable obstacles (of discipline, of tradition, etc.). The great desire of the faithful in all Middle Eastern countries, however, is to be able eventually to celebrate these two

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 53.

feasts together,”³⁷⁴ it remains perplexing that such a statement would be made concerning this “great desire of the faithful” for a common celebration of these feasts. As demonstrated above, the faithful in many Orthodox countries have, in fact, made their voices heard that they wish to celebrate these feasts on the traditional dates. However, it has been noted as well that in the Middle East, there are more confessionally-mixed families than within Orthodox Eastern Europe, which would lend more practical viability to such practices.

Conclusion

The usage of the Julian or Gregorian calculation of Easter among the Orthodox churches varies, depending on the particular jurisdiction and tradition within Orthodoxy. There have been efforts within the Orthodox communion to address the issue of differing Easter dates and to promote unity in the celebration of Easter. However, achieving consensus on this matter has been challenging due to factors such as a tenacious loyalty to the historical tradition, cultural and political influences, as well as theological considerations. In general, the usage of the Julian or Gregorian calculation of Easter among these churches reflects a diversity of traditions and influences within Orthodoxy.

The Reformation confessions have generally retained the Gregorian calculation of Easter owing in large part to civil legislation upon their respective ecclesial communities, and on this matter at least, one can claim that there is unity. This is particularly the case

³⁷⁴ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Assembly for the Middle East, “Lineamenta: The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness”, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091208_lineamenta-mo_en.html (10 January 2024), no. 58.

when examining the Anglican Communion. It is evident that there are clearly stronger theological differences between the Reformed confessions and the Roman Catholic Church compared to the differences that exist relative to the Orthodox churches. Despite such differences, the contemporary ecumenical movement reflects a number of ongoing efforts to promote unity and dialogue on date of the Easter celebration.

A discussion on the unity of churches versus the common Easter date should refer to the comments of Prof. Errickson at the 1977 *Synodica* proceedings, whereby, the example of the Finnish Orthodox Church is highlighted. Despite the Finnish Orthodox use of the Gregorian calendar and paschalion, this Orthodox church remains in union with the other Orthodox churches. It is possible, therefore, to conclude that variations in practice of the Paschal computation or calendar would not (or perhaps, should not) adversely affect any future union between churches. Much of the intransigence of the Orthodox churches regarding the Paschal date stems from a perhaps overly-strict interpretation of the Nicaean norm.

Separated Eastern churches, Eastern churches *sui iuris*, the Reformed confessions and ecclesial communities, and the Latin Church all demonstrate a variegated portrait of celebrations, and ecclesiastical unity in worship and creed and legislation does not seem to be thereby harmed. As admirable a goal as a common Easter date would be, divergences in dates of celebration do not seem to be an insurmountable obstacle for ecclesial unity.

CHAPTER FOUR: ECUMENICAL ATTEMPTS AT RENEWAL IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Introduction

Within this chapter, the modern ecumenical approaches used by both the Eastern and Western churches and ecclesial communities will be described in detail and compared with one another. The ecumenical concerns of these various churches and ecclesiastical communities involved in the current discussion of this topic will be critically assessed and analyzed in light of their historical and canonical-legislative value. In this chapter, an historical methodology will also be used to discuss and evaluate the recent ecumenical developments touching upon this subject matter from the past century. The approaches used by both the Eastern and Western churches and ecclesial communities will be described and compared. This chapter specifically will consider the precedents to and considerations of the Pan-Orthodox Congress of 1923, the Second Vatican Council and its subsequent liturgical innovations, the ecumenical considerations brought up by the WCC and four conferences taking place within the past fifty years – the 1982 Vatican Conference commemorating the Gregorian reforms, the 1997 Aleppo Conference, the 2009 L'viv statement, and the 2022 *Orientalis Lumen* virtual conference. In brief, then, this chapter will focus on the twentieth-century attempts to come to a common understanding concerning the date of Easter, particularly from an ecumenical standpoint. This particular viewpoint, arguably, influenced much of the discussion on this topic during these times and up to our own.

4.1 Orthodox Discussion from 1902-1923

The Orthodox churches, in the early part of the 20th century, embarked upon a path of reform not dissimilar to that embraced by the Latin church in the 16th century, nevertheless making use of various modern techniques to address the question of the paschal date reform.

4.1.1 Circular letter of Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople (1902)

The primary consideration on the topic of the Easter date in the modern period from the Orthodox churches begins with the Circular letter of Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople (1902), which was signed by members of the Holy Synod like Joachim of Constantinople, Joachim of Ephesus, Nathanael of Proussa, Alexander of Neocaesarea, Basil of Smyrna, Constantine of Chios, Polycarpus of Varna, Joachim of Xanthi, Nicodemus of Vodena, Nicephoros of Lititsa, Tarasios of Helioupolis, and Hieronymos of Kallioupoli.

Within the modern era and subsequent to the Gregorian reform, this letter takes a very irenic approach to the question, presenting the strong arguments both for and against calendar reform. Indeed, the ecumenical import of this question is the overriding tone within the letter itself, affirming that

our Great Church of Christ considers this exchange of views on the above-mentioned points to be a simple indication of spiritual and practical inter communion, and as cementing the unity which should be maintained on all common questions and which is most effective in Orthodoxy; and she cherishes high hopes that her fraternal concern in this matter, and her earnest prayer for holy and evangelical conclusions, will find a sympathetic echo in the hearts of the venerable sister-Churches in Christ

and have the approval of their brotherly love, so that on each matter the views of those who reverently preside over the Churches may be made known.³⁷⁵

It should be noted that the Orthodox participation in the general ecumenical movement pre-dated participation by the Roman Catholic Church, whose substantive participation would only begin around the time of the Second Vatican Council, over half a century later.

Regarding the Easter date, a variety of viewpoints are expressed, and while no judgment was passed on these various proposals, a solution was sought instead which would satisfy all involved parties. This circular letter begins by affirming:

Worthy of no less attention, in our opinion, is the question of a common calendar, already for some time spoken and written about, especially proposed methods of reforming the Julian Calendar which has prevailed in the Orthodox Church for centuries, or the acceptance of the Gregorian: the former is more defective scientifically, the latter more exact, considering also the change of our ecclesiastical Easter after the necessary agreement.³⁷⁶

It was quite clear that some wished to hold to the Patristic tradition, while others simply avoided the topic, and others still, in the desire for accuracy, wished to introduce the Western calendar usage.³⁷⁷ Clearly, there was a desire to seek a common mind on the matter within the Orthodox churches and to bring together the “hallowed ecclesiastical

³⁷⁵ JOACHIM OF CONSTANTINOPLE et al., “Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical of 1902,” <http://www.montenet.org/2001/moc.html> (10 January 2024).

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ “In the studies on this topic, we see that the opinions which are held by Orthodox who have made a special investigation of it are divided. Some of them consider our ancient inheritance as alone fitting in the Church, having been handed down from the fathers and always having had the Church's authority; not only do they think that there is very little need for change, but they would rather avoid it, for the reasons which they elaborate. Others, champions of the Westerners' calendar and its introduction by us, suggest the greatest possible chronometric accuracy, or even the new usage of uniformity; and they advocate the practice of the Western Church as being reasonable, perhaps in expectation of possible religious benefits, in their own opinion.” Ibid.

decrees” with a renewed concern for “scientific accuracy.”³⁷⁸ Again, it appears that a balanced approach was sought-after and desired within the upcoming discussions on this issue – a procedure which would bring about ecclesiastical unity on this matter, at least within Orthodoxy.

4.1.2 1920 Encyclical of the Patriarch of Constantinople³⁷⁹

This encyclical letter continues the same ecumenical thrust of the 1902 encyclical letter, and likewise manifests a certain optimism toward the question of Christian unity as being fostered in regard to the question of the calendar. Unity between Christian communities is described in it as being “highly desirable.” The letter notes that “in our opinion, such a friendship and kindly disposition towards each other can be shown and demonstrated particularly in the following ways: By the acceptance of a uniform calendar for the celebration of the great Christian feasts at the same time by all the churches.”³⁸⁰

Clearly, such an irenic viewpoint is a positive outcome to be sought after for the purposes of re-establishing unity between Christian communities as relating to the Easter

³⁷⁸ “So, in our times, the discussion has been intensified, various and stimulating assertions being propounded by either side, both of a scientific and of a religious nature, on both of which in some Orthodox countries a certain inclination is evident of adherence to the notion of changing our Orthodox calendar or of some reform of it; and, inasmuch as this question (for all its obvious scientific form) has an ecclesiastical importance, it seems right to us to exchange with the other Orthodox Churches the relevant information in order that on this too a common mind might be reached among them, and a single opinion and decision of the whole Orthodox Church expressed. For, to her alone belongs the judgement on this matter and the research (if necessary) for a way of uniting (so far as is possible) the hoped-for scientific accuracy with the desired maintenance of hallowed ecclesiastical decrees.” Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Cf. C. PATELOS, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement, Documents and Statements 1902-1975*, Geneva, WCC, 1978, 40-43.

³⁸⁰ ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, “Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical of 1920,” <http://orthodox-voice.blogspot.com/2011/04/patriarchal-and-synodical-encyclical-of-26.html> (10 January 2024).

date. However, not all voices take the same sanguine view of the movement toward Christian unity proposed by these two documents. The “Orthodox Christian Information Center,” representing a highly rigorous viewpoint within Orthodoxy and strongly defensive of the Julian paschalion, counters that

the acceptance of a unified calendar for the simultaneous celebration of the great Christian feasts by all the Churches’ is considered by the Encyclical to be indispensable for the goal of this union ecumenistically [*sic*] intended and pursued. About this matter, although it may be reckoned superfluous to write so, it easily follows that, for the sake of pushing forward this imagined union, those who accepted the ‘Calendar Reform’ of the Churches thought it wholly advantageous and preferable to create a ‘Schism’ among the *Pleroma* of the Orthodox Church (which schism is preserved and continued unconsciously and irreparably even today among those who created this New Calendarist Ecumenism), seeing that ‘difficulties’ and the ‘thwarting’ of the ecumenist goals and plans would thereby be avoided!³⁸¹

4.1.3 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress

Patrick Viscuso provides a significant amount of background concerning the origins of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, and attributes its convocation squarely to the question of the reform of the calendar, stemming from the greater contact between the Eastern and Western nation-states at the time of World War I, necessitating the use of a common calendar for civil purposes.

On a purely secular/civil level, Bulgaria, on 14 April 1916, was the first Orthodox nation to convert to the use of the Gregorian calendar. Subsequent to the Bolshevik revolution, Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar on 14 February 1918, with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 27 January 1919. The final would be the Greeks on 1 March 1923. On an ecclesiastical level, the Orthodox churches in these nations would

³⁸¹ “The Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920: A Collection of Short Critiques,” http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/encyc_critique.aspx (10 January 2024).

continue to use the Julian calendar.³⁸² Viscuso affirms that this issue would arise as the “calendar question,” which precipitated the discussion within the Pan-Orthodox Congress of 1923. He indicates that “a report of this was made to the Phanar by the patriarchal representative in Greece, Chrysostomos Chatzestavrou (1880-1967), Metropolitan of Ephesos, who later served as Archbishop of Athens (1962-1967). This report provoked discussions in the Constantinopolitan Synod concerning the Church's response to the civil use of the Gregorian calendar. The result was a decision to acknowledge the legitimacy of the state use of the calendar.”³⁸³ Thus, in regard to the question of this usage, the synodal path taken by the Orthodox churches was evident: “With regard to the Church's adopting of the same system, the Synod resolved to assemble an ‘Inter-Orthodox Committee’ after Easter of 1923 composed of representatives from the autocephalous churches, which would then recommend a course of action. An invitation to the autocephalous churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Serbia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania was issued under Meletios IV's signature on February 3, 1923.”³⁸⁴

What is most evident is the desire amongst many Orthodox at this time to pursue a *tertium quid*, not following either the Julian nor the Gregorian calendars – a question which was “left to the academies.”³⁸⁵ Interestingly, the process followed was that of “common

³⁸² P. VISCUSO, *A Quest for Reform of the Orthodox Church: The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, An Analysis and Translation of Its Acts and Decisions*, Berkeley, CA, Inter-Orthodox Press, 2007 (=Quest), xvi-xvii.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., xviii.

deliberation ... with the object of a canonical solution.”³⁸⁶ Other concerns were likewise apparent, such as the needs of the Orthodox diaspora in various (Western) countries making use of the Gregorian calendar. These problems were seen to be a providential occasion, one which could “might serve as a means for pan-Christian unity when all those who call upon the Name of the Lord might celebrate the same day of His Birth and Resurrection.”³⁸⁷ This is seen as a right and duty of the Orthodox church. A multi-faceted approach, taking into account not only the desires within Orthodoxy for unity, but also the needs of the civil community, can be seen as a result of this discussion.

Viscuso goes on to note the responses of the various churches within Orthodoxy to the invitation to participate in this conference, which did not receive a uniform acceptance amongst these different bodies. Outlining the various reactions of these churches, he states:

In response to the patriarchal letter of invitation, the Churches of Serbia, Romania, Greece, and Cyprus sent representatives. Jerusalem and Antioch declined to participate. The Church of Alexandria did not reply. Although declining to participate, Jerusalem sent a telegraph indicating that ‘an agreement of Orthodox feast days with those of the Roman Church is judged inadvisable for the Orthodox in regard to the established liturgical order at the Holy Places, which forms part of the order at the Holy Places.’ Antioch had previously declined to participate in joint activities with other Orthodox churches earlier in the century and its response reflects this pattern.³⁸⁸

Interneccine politics certainly proved to be a contributing factor as well, as the Alexandrian Patriarch did not affirm Metaxakes’ election. Viscuso speculates that “Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Cyprus were motivated by their large Orthodox populaces

³⁸⁶ Ibid., xvii.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., xviii.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

using the Gregorian calendar in civil affairs, in contrast to the ancient patriarchates of the East with smaller congregations.”³⁸⁹

In regard to the ethnic diversity found within these nations, Viscuso maintains that “the Synod of Greece had already expressed an opinion that thirteen days should be removed from the Julian calendar. In addition, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and Romania had substantial Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite populations, who were already using the Gregorian calendar for religious celebrations.”³⁹⁰

This, too, is confirmed by other polemical sources more critical of this gathering. Hieromonk Cassian, the author of a *Scientific Examination of the Orthodox Church Calendar*, will contend, in regard to the representation found at this assembly, that

‘Pan-Orthodox’ was a gross misnomer for this assembly. Not a single delegate from the other ancient Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, or Jerusalem attended. Not a single delegate from the Patriarchate of Moscow—the largest Orthodox jurisdiction, both in terms of population and territory comprising three quarters of the Orthodox world—attended. Not a single delegate from those autocephalous and autonomous Churches separated from the Church of Russia after World War II attended. Not a single delegate from the Church of Bulgaria considered schismatic at the time by Constantinople, attended.³⁹¹

Many critics of the calendar and paschalion reform continue to remain suspicious of those who have promoted it. Hieromonk Cassian attributes less-than-noble motives to the author of the revised Julian calendar proposed by the Pan-Orthodox Congress: “After his initiation [in 1909], Brother Meletios spread Masonic activity everywhere he went,

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ HIEROMONK CASSIAN, *Scientific Examination*, 51-52.

during the entire gamut of his tumultuous life. There are very few, who, like Brother Meletios, embrace Masonry and make it the experience of their life.”³⁹²

Professor S.V. Troitsky, an Orthodox theologian and a long-standing consultant to the Council of the Hierarchs of the Serbian Patriarchate, likewise raised four main questions about this Congress. Firstly, he questions the appellation “Pan-Orthodox” on the grounds that more than half of the Orthodox churches were not present. Secondly, the patriarchal status of Meletios IV was questioned by several of the churches. Thirdly, the question of representation was raised, specifically that there was not equal representation. Fourthly, the question of synodality was raised, because the local churches had not previously formulated their opinions by means of local synods, leading to the notion that the representative delegates at this Congress would only be able to express their personal opinions, or rather perhaps, those of their individual synods.³⁹³

It is noted that at the first session that Serbian, Romanian, and Greek delegations made proposals for the changing of the calendar.³⁹⁴ The Greeks argued that thirteen (13) days should be removed from the Julian calendar without changing the *Paschalion* or *Heortologion* of the Orthodox Church.³⁹⁵ Archimandrite Pankratios of Vatopedi Monastery on Mt. Athos proposed “a radical restructuring of the months as well as complex computations for leap years ... [and] eventually became the only monastery on Mt. Athos

³⁹² Ibid., 51.

³⁹³ Ibid., 53.

³⁹⁴ VISCUSO, *Quest*, xxvii-xxxii.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

to accept the New Calendar recommended by the Pan-Orthodox congress.”³⁹⁶ The Serbian solution was to annul the 13 day difference and propose the new system. The Romanian proposition was suggested by Petre Draghici, whose proposal was allegedly given at Rome the previous year (likely to Pope Pius XI), and involved a more radical plan for changing the lengths and composition of months.³⁹⁷

Within the second session, three committees would take up the following questions, as outlined by Viscuso:

- 1) Dogma and the calendar question;
- 2) The canons and the calendar question;
- 3) Is it necessary for the *paschalion* to be reformed or is the adjustment of the immovable feasts to the corresponding days of the calendar sufficient?
- 4) Is any harm to the Orthodox anticipated from a calendar reform and how can it be avoided?
- 5) What are viewed as the most regarded of the proposed calendars and which of them is fit to be supported by the Orthodox Church?
- 6) In what way can the decision of the committee studying the question be authoritatively implemented throughout the entire Orthodox Church? May a Pan-Orthodox council be required or is its acceptance by the local churches sufficient?
- 7) If churches or parts of churches are found that do not accept the reform, what will be their position within Orthodoxy as a whole?
- 8) Is the Orthodox Church able to agree to the proposal concerning the establishment of the feast of Pascha as immovable?³⁹⁸

The decrees of this session also reflect a very clear desire on the part of certain participants, namely the metropolitan of Nicaea and the metropolitan of Kyzikos, to strengthen ecumenical relations with groups such as the Anglican Church, Old Catholics, and even the Roman Catholic Church.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Ibid., xxi.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., xxxi.

³⁹⁸ VISCUSO, *Quest*, xxviii.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 22-23.

The third session, in particular, brought to fruition a solution to the questions proposed by the second. The participants reached the conclusion that dogma is not involved in the question, and establishes this through a review of sources – the ecclesiastical histories of Eusebius, Sozomen, Socrates, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Irenaeus, as well as two main canonical texts: 7th canon of Holy Apostles⁴⁰⁰ and 1st Canon of the Council of Antioch.

Interestingly, the Committee concluded that the reasons for the enactment of the canonical legislation no longer existed, in stating that “consequently, the computation of the *Paschalion* and *Heortologion*, which is only indirectly connected with canonical legislation, and ‘is owed in other respects to the astronomical knowledge and experience of that period,’ in no way binds the Church.”⁴⁰¹ This said, however, “contrary to the report of the first committee, the Congress decided that the Orthodox Church was in fact bound by the stipulations of canonical legislation requiring the Paschal celebration after the vernal equinox.”⁴⁰²

This same Committee also argued for a sort of unity-in-diversity approach, which reflects the non-binding approach of the Congress, allowing the local hierarchs, as part of their Holy Synods, to confirm the decision, and allowing for latitude in regards to those who choose not to accept these decisions, in stating that “any decision will be referred to the Holy Synods of local autocephalous churches for acceptance and confirmation. If there

⁴⁰⁰ « Si un évêque, un prêtre ou un diacre célèbre le saint jour de Pâques avant l'équinoxe vernal, avec les juifs, qu'il soit déposé. » (quoted in P. DE CHERSONÈSE, “Les décisions du Concile de Nicée sur la célébration commune de Pâques et leur signification actuelle,” in *Synodica*, 38)

⁴⁰¹ VISCUSO, *Quest*, xxix.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, xxxii.

is non-acceptance by one or more of the churches, this should not be ‘viewed as a cause for disrupting brotherly relations.’⁴⁰³

The Congress proposed as well the calculation rule associated with the new Revised Julian Calendar as formulated by Milanković:

It then adopted a leap year rule that differs from that of the Gregorian calendar: Years evenly divisible by four are leap years, except that years evenly divisible by 100 are not leap years, unless they leave a remainder of 200 or 600 when divided by 900, in which case they are leap years. This means that the two calendars will first differ in 2800, which will be a leap year in the Gregorian Calendar, but a common year in the Revised Julian Calendar.⁴⁰⁴

An astronomical norm for the paschalion was also proposed for adoption, namely that the celebration of Pascha would occur on the Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, reckoned at the meridian of Jerusalem’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴⁰⁵ As noted, the Julian *paschalion* is still used by all Orthodox churches, with the exceptions of the Finnish Orthodox Church and the Estonian Orthodox Church, which use the Gregorian *computus*.

Viscuso does note in his analysis that much of the discussion at the conference on the calendar question did have some relationship with the rapport of the League of Nations with the Orthodox Patriarchate, and that a fixed date for Easter would not be necessarily rejected outright by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., xxx.

⁴⁰⁴ M. DIMITRIJEVIĆ and E. THEODOSSIOU, “The Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Church,” in *Astronomical & Astrophysical Transactions*, 21:1 (2002), 145–147. See N. GAJIC, “The Curious Case of the Milankovitch Calendar,” in *History of Geo- and Space Sciences*, 10 (2019), 235–243.

⁴⁰⁵ See GAJIC, “The curious case of the Milankovitch calendar,” 241.

These issues would also be addressed by the Inter-Orthodox Pre-Synod at Vatopedi Monastery in 1930, as well as in the 1961 First Pan-Orthodox Conference of Rhodes, prior to more intense discussion taking place in the 1976 Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy.⁴⁰⁶

4.2 Second Vatican Council

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, as noted above in the sections on the computation of time, various canonists such as Arthur Dubé, John Finnegan, and Conrad Morin studied the question of the Easter date in relation to the canon law on time computation. In a similar vein to the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, the question of a fixed date of Easter was very closely linked to the United Nations proposals for a world calendar, which had some notoriety until the 1950's. Therefore, the proposals of the Second Vatican Council on this topic did not arise out of a vacuum, and in many ways were foreshadowed by the discussions taking place within the Orthodox churches several decades prior.

Discussion on the date of Easter considerations took place during the first session of the Second Vatican Council, in conjunction with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Undoubtedly, this was a fruit of the numerous pan-Christian discussions of the past several decades concerning this subject, a fruit of the ecumenical movement which was, during this time, coming to fruition within the Catholic Church, as well as the discussions within the global community concerning the revision of the calendar. The text of the appendix to

⁴⁰⁶ ARCHBISHOP JOB OF TELMESSOS, "The Common Celebration of Pascha and Eastern-Western Christian Relations" in J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022, 34-35.

Sacrosanctum concilium reads as follows, which was approved by the Council Fathers on 22 November 1963:

A Declaration of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican on Revision of the Calendar: The Second Ecumenical Sacred Council of the Vatican, recognizing the importance of the wishes expressed by many concerning the assignment of the feast of Easter to a fixed Sunday and concerning an unchanging calendar, having carefully considered the effects which could result from the introduction of a new calendar, declares as follows:

- The Sacred Council would not object if the feast of Easter were assigned to a particular Sunday of the Gregorian Calendar, provided that those whom it may concern, especially the brethren who are not in communion with the Apostolic See, give their assent.
- The sacred Council likewise declares that it does not oppose efforts designed to introduce a perpetual calendar into civil society.
- But among the various systems which are being suggested to stabilize a perpetual calendar and to introduce it into civil life, the Church has no objection only in the case of those systems which retain and safeguard a seven-day week with Sunday, without the introduction of any days outside the week, so that the succession of weeks may be left intact, unless there is question of the most serious reasons. Concerning these the Apostolic See shall judge.
- Indeed, the Church does wish to safeguard the integrity of the seven (7) day week, for clear reasons of safeguarding the sanctity of the Sunday observance – sacrosanct to both the Jewish and Christian traditions.⁴⁰⁷

In the *Schemata constitutionum et decretorum*, the following should be regarded, particularly in terms of the rationale for approving the fixed-date observance and the fixed (world) calendar within the civil realm:

II - REVISION OF THE CALENDAR 85. [The Paschal Feast to be assigned to a certain Sunday]. The Sacred Council recommends that the feast of Easter be assigned to a certain Sunday in the Gregorian calendar, to the consent of those concerned, especially the separated brethren. 86. [Fixed calendar to be introduced]. The Sacred Council declares that it will not oppose the means and initiatives aimed at introducing the perpetual calendar into civil society. But of the various systems which have been devised to establish a perpetual calendar, it does not stand in the way only of those which keep and protect the week of seven days.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 4 December 1963, in *AAS*, 56 (1964), 133-134, English translation in N. TANNER (ed.), *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990 (=TANNER2), 843.

⁴⁰⁸ “II - DE CALENDARIO RECOGNOSCENDO 85. [Festum Paschalis certae dominicae assignandum]. Ut festum Paschatis certae dominicae in calendario gregoriano assignetur, assentientibus iis quorum intersit, praesertim fratribus separatis, Sacrosanctum Concilium commendat. 86. [Calendarium fixum inducendum]. Sacrosanctum Concilium declarat se non obstare mediis et inceptis, quibus tenditur ad

Indeed, the Council declares itself to be commendatory to the notion of a fixed date of Easter within the Gregorian calendar as a means to assisting the separated brethren, as well as the civil efforts toward a perpetual calendar which would respect and preserve the seven-day week.

Furthermore, in the decree on the Oriental Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, it is delegated to the patriarchs or to the supreme authorities in an area to agree “by unanimous agreement, after discussion with all concerned” on the celebration of the Easter date, until such time as a common date of Easter has been established amongst the churches.⁴⁰⁹

Writing nearly two years after this declaration of the Council, John Finnegan, in his doctoral dissertation on the computation of time, offered a brief analysis of the proposal of the Council, which also noted the ecumenical tone of the declaration, specifically its regard for any impact upon the Jewish observance. Finnegan’s animadversion to the “extra days outside the week” should certainly be read in light of the “World Calendar” proposal of the United Nations, which considered adjusting the calendar annually with several days outside of the normal seven-day week, and which Finnegan discusses to a great extent within his dissertation. The latter goes on to remark: “We notice from this declaration by the Second Vatican Council that setting a fixed date for Easter is still intrinsic to calendar reform, but

calendarium perpetuum in societatem civilem inducendum. Variorum autem systematum, quae ad calendarium perpetuum stabiliendum excogitata sunt, illis tantum non obstat, quae hebdomadam septem dierum servant et tutantur” (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Schemata constitutionum et decretorum de quibus disceptabitur in Concilii sessionibus, Series Prima*, Rome, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972, 190-191.

⁴⁰⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Eastern Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 21 November 1964, no. 20, in *AAS*, 57 (1965), English translation in *TANNER2*, 905.

the Council rejects any unilateral action in this regard. The strong opinion expressed stressing the integrity of the 7-day week is a surprise. The wish that the week be left intact without any days outside it may have been prompted by the ecumenical spirit of fraternal charity that surrounds the deliberations of the Council.”⁴¹⁰ Clearly articulating as well the general ecumenical thrust of the Second Vatican Council, Finnegan affirms, vis-à-vis relations with the Jewish people, “as we have noted, some Sabbatarians and Orthodox Jews would have been offended if the Holy See supported a calendar revision with extra days outside the week. Perhaps this is reason enough for the Council's actions.”⁴¹¹

4.3 World Council of Churches Discussions

The World Council of Churches (WCC) plays a significant role in facilitating ecumenical dialogue among various Christian denominations. Discussions related to the date of Easter have been a recurring topic within the WCC, particularly concerning the possibility of establishing a common date. These efforts have been ongoing for decades, with the aim of promoting Christian unity and simplifying logistical challenges associated with differing Easter dates.

Not long after the Second Vatican Council, the WCC considered this very question from the ecumenical perspective of various Christian churches and ecclesial bodies. While the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, it participates as a full member in the bodies of Faith and Order and other programs of the WCC.

⁴¹⁰ J. FINNEGAN, *Selected Questions in the Computation of Time in Canon Law*, JCD thesis, Rome, Officium Libri Catholici, 1965, 27.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

Drawing upon the above-mentioned text of the Second Vatican Council, in its 1965 document concerning “Particular Problems Concerning Various Areas of Collaboration,” the WCC and the Roman Catholic Working Group argued that

the fixing of one date on which all Christians would celebrate Easter is undoubtedly a project worthy of attention. The Group feels that detailed enquiry and study should be pursued on this point. Several churches have made their viewpoints known ... The Roman Catholic Church recently stated its position on this matter in the appendix to the Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.⁴¹²

The Executive Committee of the WCC sent out a six-question questionnaire, inquiring about the suitability and desirability of a common paschal date, and proposing solutions such as the fixed-date proposal, the Nicæan recommendation, and the Sunday subsequent to the Jewish Passover. The results of this survey were unanimous in favor of a common date of Easter, and that every church was free to reexamine the question.⁴¹³

Furthermore, in 1967, in the text of the WCC's report on “On Work So Far Achieved with Recommendations for Its Continuation”, the section on “The Faith and Worship of Churches” affirmed this work in progress, attesting that

the efforts to reach a common date for Easter accepted by all Christians have been continued. The World Council of Churches has organized an inquiry on the subject and many of the member Churches have already sent in their replies. The question will be further examined on the basis of these replies. The Roman Catholic Church has created a commission for the study of the issue. The Joint Working Group is aware of the difficulties involved in this problem. A solution cannot be expected in the near future, since it must be based on solid agreement between all the churches.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES and PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, “The Joint Working Group Between The World Council Of Churches And The Catholic Church: III. Particular Problems Concerning Various Areas of Collaboration” at *Centro Pro Unione*, http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/jwg/doc/i_jwg_03.html (10 January 2024).

⁴¹³ Further details may be found in L. VISCHER, “A Common Date for Easter? Notes on the Efforts in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Synodica*, 62.

⁴¹⁴ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES and PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, “The Joint Working Group Between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church,” http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/jwg/doc/i_jwg-n2_02.html (10 January 2024).

The 1970 Faith and Order consultation of the WCC, taking place in Chambésy, recognized some of the problems inherent in the quest for the common date of Easter, and noted two basic tendencies which could be employed in seeking a common solution for the Easter date, namely, that of the fixed date or the use of Gregorian rule for all churches. The consultation affirmed that any agreements which could be reached on this matter would best be served by seeking a solution based upon religious principles rather than any secular concerns.

The WCC would affirm in its Third Official Report that “the Joint Working Group recognized in its second official report that there was no easy or speedy way to solid agreement between all the churches on the date of Easter.”⁴¹⁵ To bring this agreement nearer, the Faith and Order Commission at the Orthodox Center at Chambésy, Geneva organized a consultation from March 16-20, 1970. Three Roman Catholic observer consultants participated in the consultation, representing the Secretariat for Christian Unity. The consultation felt that there were two possibilities.

The first possibility would be to fix Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox (employing the Gregorian calendar, which takes March 21 as the spring equinox and adopts scientific astronomical methods to determine full moon). This solution would respect the ancient rule as adopted by the Council of Nicaea.

⁴¹⁵ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, “Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council Of Churches: Third Official Report,” in http://www.christianunity.va/content/dam/unitacristiani/Relazioni%20ecumeniche/Sezione%20occidentale/Dialogo%20multilaterale/COE/JWG/Reports/JWG_3rd_Report_EN_OCR.pdf (25 November 2024), 3.

The second proposal was to choose a fixed Sunday in April. This solution, too, respects the wishes of the Council of Nicaea in the sense that the main concern of the Council was to arrive at an agreed date, although, of course, it does not follow the strict letter of the decision usually attributed to the Council. The consultation expressed its preference for the second alternative and suggested the Sunday following the second Saturday in April, though it had no objection to another Sunday being chosen if this would make the adoption of a common date for Easter possible for all Christians and in particular for all the Orthodox Churches.⁴¹⁶

Likely recognizing that the impetus for the movement toward a fixed date of Easter was, in many ways, being inspired by discussions within the global civil order, the WCC wished to emphasize that the discussion on this matter should be primarily guided by theological and ecumenical principles. “In any case, the churches should arrive at a solution for reasons based entirely on the religious meaning of the feast and for the purpose of Christian unity rather than for the purpose of satisfying inherently secular interests.”⁴¹⁷ Thus, several dimensions of the paschal question can be identified: the religious and canonical aspects; the technical arguments, which are a necessary but nevertheless ancillary aspect to the discussion, and finally the questions of practicality which tend to be of a more secular consideration.

⁴¹⁶ See *ibid.*

⁴¹⁷“Towards a Common Date for Easter,” Aleppo, World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, 1997, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/towards-a-common-date-for-easter/index#table> (10 January 2024) (=Aleppo).

The general summary of this consultation came to the conclusion that a distinction must be made between the question of the calendar and that of the common Easter date. Furthermore, the Council of Nicaea came to be an important factor of discussion, asking whether fidelity to the texts of Nicaea should be paramount, or whether it should be seen more in its historical context, especially taking into account the fact of the spread of Christianity to the southern hemisphere as well. Secular interests should not guide the discussion, but further consultation on the matter should be encouraged.⁴¹⁸

A further discussion of the WCC took place at the 5th Assembly in Nairobi between 23 November – 10 December 1975. Perhaps caught up in the spirit of the times in which the fixed Easter date was considerably in vogue, as well as at the inquiry of Pope Paul VI, it is noted that at this ecumenical gathering, “a vast majority of member Churches had already voted in favor of a fixed, common date for Easter. Orthodox Churches declared that they felt bound by the traditional way of calculating the date of Easter until such time as all the Orthodox Churches expressly agreed on a change.”⁴¹⁹ These member churches who would have voted for the fixed date would consequently be representatives of the Reformed traditions, as the Catholic Church would have only participated as observers. It was concluded here as well that it would be premature to accept at this time a common date, but that it was a goal which all were committed to achieving.

⁴¹⁸ VISCHER, “A Common Date for Easter? Notes on the Efforts in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Synodica*, 63-65.

⁴¹⁹ A. ADAM, *The Liturgical Year: Its History and Its Meaning after the Reform of the Liturgy*, trans. M. O’CONNELL, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1990, 61.

4.4 Paul VI

Pope Paul VI, subsequent to the Second Vatican Council, effected a wholesale revision of the Roman Rite, which took place under the aegis of the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*. Paul VI remarks that the liturgical revisions effected subsequent to the Council are intended to bring this centrality into greater relief and focus, and that the two main parts of the liturgical year, the *Proprium sanctorum* and the *Proprium de tempore*, should likewise reflect this centrality. Paul VI states: “The Paschal Mystery and its celebration constitutes the essence of Christian worship in its daily, weekly and yearly unfolding. The Second Vatican Council clearly teaches this. It follows therefore that the restoration of the liturgical year, whose norms have been formulated by the same Holy Synod, must put this Paschal Mystery in sharper focus with regard to the organization of the Proper of the Season and the Proper of the Saints as well as in the revision of the Roman Calendar.”⁴²⁰

Regarding the question of the Easter date in collaboration with Patriarch Athenagoras, Paul VI also corresponded with Patriarch Athenagoras in 1966, expressing a willingness to cooperate on the question of the Easter date; this was also reiterated in further correspondence in 1968 by Augustin Cardinal Bea.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ PAUL VI, motu proprio *Mysterii Paschalis*, 14 February 1969, in *AAS*, 61 (1969) 222–226. English translation taken from: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19690214_mysterii-paschalis.html (10 January 2024).

⁴²¹ See A. CARBONE, *The Determination of the Date of Easter and the Search for a Common Date of Celebration for All Christians*, Licentiate thesis, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America, 2002, 61-62.

4.4.1 Revision of the Liturgical Calendar 1969

This reform effort subsequent to the Council also included a considerable revision of the liturgical calendar of the Roman Rite. The decree promulgating the reform of the Calendar, *Mysterii Paschalis*, dated 14 February 1969, affirms the centrality of the Easter mystery in the Church's worship. The revision of the liturgical calendar places central importance upon the celebration of Sunday as critical to the sacred mysteries. Indeed, the liturgical day is defined as being the astronomical day, from midnight to midnight, whereas the Sunday liturgical observance, as St. Leo the Great describes it as the day of the Lord's Resurrection, begins with the celebration of Vespers on the preceding evening.⁴²²

The liturgical calendar revision did indeed take into account the possibility of Easter being fixed on a certain Sunday. In the revised *Calendarium Romanum* of 1969, a section is devoted to echoing the desire of many Christians for a fixed date of Easter, so long as consensus can be fostered amongst other separated Christians for this proposal. It also grants faculties for Patriarchs or other supreme ecclesiastical authorities in a certain region to transfer the observance of Easter to the Julian observance to foster celebration with separated Christians – a reality, which as we have seen, exists in the Holy Land and

⁴²² “Quamquam dies liturgicus decurrit, sicut dies astronomicus, a media nocte ad mediam noctem, Ecclesia quoad dominicam usum biblicum servavit computandi initium diei a vespere: factum est vespere et mane, dies primus (Gen. 1, 5): nam iuxta verba S. Leonis Magni dominica est dies resurrectionis dominicae, cui a vespera sabbati initium constat ascribi.” *Calendarium Romanum Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli VI Promulgatum*, Rome, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1969, 54-55.

which, as this text cites, was the will of Patriarch Maximos IV of the Copts as far back as 1967.⁴²³

4.4.2 Post-Conciliar Ecumenical Relations

Interestingly, throughout the 1970's, certain Orthodox jurisdictions saw fit to agree to the possibility of a fixed-date for Easter. Dagmar Heller remarks that “in 1971 the Syrian Orthodox Church proposed to fix the date of Easter on the Sunday following the second Saturday in April, and in 1984 it declared its readiness to celebrate Easter on any Sunday of April, provided that all churches agree.”⁴²⁴

Contacts were also renewed, subsequent to this Council, between the Holy Father and the Ecumenical Patriarch. Pope Paul VI first addressed Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I on 26 March 1975 affirming that

The world in which we live has perhaps a greater need than ever that we should testify ... to our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Moreover, his

⁴²³ “V. De sollemnitate Paschae certae dominicae assignanda. Aliqui mirari possunt quod annus liturgicus instauretur quin sollemnitas Paschae certae dominicae assignetur. Notare tamen liceat plures annos necessario requiri ad hanc sollemnitatem certae dominicae assignandam, quamvis ab omnibus christianis hoc optetur. Decrevit enim Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II ut hoc non fiat nisi assentientibus iis quorum interest, praesertim fratribus ab Apostolicae Sedis communionem seiunctis (Appendix ad Const. liturg.). Iam nunc qui Ecclesiis Orientalibus praesunt in eorum Synodis quaestionem posuerunt de hac re; longa ergo via adhuc superesse videtur, antequam ad commune consilium perveniatur. Ecclesia orthodoxa praesertim ante suum universale Concilium, quod nunc momentum praeparationis tantummodo vivit, certo certius nihil de hac re decemet. Dum omnes expectamus hanc optatam inter omnes christianos conventionem de unico die, quo sollemnitas Paschae ab omnibus celebretur, Concilium Vaticanum II suggestit, in Decreto De Ecclesiis orientalibus catholicis, ut interim, ad unitatem inter christianos in eadem regione vel natione degentes fovendam, Patriarchae vel Supremae in loco Auctoritates ecclesiasticae, unanimi consensu et collatis consiliis cum iis quorum interest, de Pascha eadem die dominica celebranda conveniant (art. 20). Hoc animo catholici Graeci et maior pars Aegyptiorum, sive ritus latini sive ritus orientalis, necnon Aethiopes, decreverunt Pascham ad interim celebrandam esse iuxta antiquum calendarium iulianum ante reformationem. (Cf. Mandatum Patriarchae Maximi IV de unificatione celebrationis Paschae in Aegypto, diei 1 ian. 1967.)” Ibid., 64.

⁴²⁴ D. HELLER, “Efforts Towards a Common Date for Easter – a Hopeless Situation?” in *Monastero di Bose*, <https://www.monasterodibose.it/en/community/news/the-window-of-dialogue/11820-efforts-towards-a-common-date-for-easter-a-hopeless-situation?tmpl=component&print=1&pdf=1> (10 January 2024).

Resurrection is the foundation of our faith - this faith that is called in question by many. Did not St Paul write that if Christ be not risen our faith is vain (1 Cor 15:14)? Moved by this conviction, and trusting in the power of the Risen Christ and his Spirit, we express our hope that by celebrating the mystery of mysteries with a single heart and voice, we may be able to render glory to God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who raised Him from the dead (Rom 16:6; Col 2:12).⁴²⁵

Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, president of the then-Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, proposed in writing to Patriarch Dimitrios I (18 May 1975) and other Orthodox leaders, with letters of similar contents sent to WCC general secretary Dr. Philip Potter and to leaders of various Christian denominations, that from 1977 (a year in which Easter would be celebrated simultaneously by all Christians) onwards, Easter should be fixed to the Sunday after the second Saturday of April.⁴²⁶

However, it was quickly discovered amongst the ecumenical movement that this proposal was fraught with difficulties. As part of its preparation for its 1975 assembly in Nairobi, the WCC was also surveying its member churches on the same question. As a result of its survey, the WCC concluded that, at this given juncture, any proposals would not have led to the goal of a united paschal celebration taking place on the same date. In reflecting upon this event in 2001, Msgr. John Radano of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity notes that “it therefore became clear that it was not possible to

⁴²⁵ PAUL VI, letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, 26 March 1975, cited in J. RADANO, “Celebrating Together Redemption in Christ,” in *World Council of Churches*, 9 April 2001, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/celebrating-together-redemption-in-christ> (10 January 2024).

⁴²⁶ See T. F. STRANSKY, and J. B. SHEERIN, (eds.), *Doing the Truth in Charity*, New York, Paulist Press, 1981, 171-174.

go further on the proposal at this point. Since the Catholic Church did not want to take a decision that would create another obstacle to unity, its plan was not put into effect.”⁴²⁷

4.5 Chambésy Conference (1977)

A 1977 conference, organized in Chambésy by the Secretariat for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, brought into relief many different aspects relating to the quest for a common date of Easter. The gathering, « Congrès pour l’examen d’une célébration commune de Pâques par tous les chrétiens le même dimanche (28 juin – 3 juillet 1977) » [Congress for the Examination of a Common Celebration of Easter by All Christians on the Same Sunday, 28 June – 3 July 1977], took up the problem in the following way, relating the Easter problematic to the calendar problematic: “We have to solve the question of the common Easter celebration because we first have to solve the calendar problem. This is why the problem whose discussion has brought us together here can be neither understood nor solved independently of that of the common calendar.”⁴²⁸

This conference also brings up the limitations of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox conference, specifically in light of the fact that the implementation of the Milanković

⁴²⁷ J. RADANO, “Celebrating Together Redemption in Christ,” in *World Council of Churches*, 9 April 2001, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/celebrating-together-redemption-in-christ> (10 January 2024).

⁴²⁸ « Nous avons à résoudre une question de la célébration commune de Pâques parce que l’on a premièrement à résoudre le problème du calendrier. Voilà pourquoi le problème dont la discussion nous a rassemblé ici ne peut être ni compris ni résolu indépendamment de celui du calendrier commun » (E. BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Brève étude historique et canonique du problème » in *Synodica*, 20).

calendar has only been a partial one, implementing only the calendar and not the *paschalion*. Ene Braniste argues that

the Gregorian reform of the calendar in 1582 broke for the first time the Christian unity concerning the calendar, and consequently the Easter unity, because the Orthodox Churches, then represented by the Patriarch of Constantinople, refused the reform, as coming of a Roman Catholic initiative.... The new calendar reform, carried out by the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Conference in Constantinople, although a good initiative and far superior to the Gregorian reform, further complicated the situation. Accepted so far only by certain Orthodox Churches, although these constitute the great majority, they have applied it poorly, because it was applied only partially. The rectification of the calendar is now the ‘paschalion’ of the old style combined with the calendar corrected according to the Constantinopolitan method (the Neo-Julian calendar), so that the unity of Orthodoxy is preserved at least in the celebration of the greatest Christian feast.”⁴²⁹

This conference also noted several other aspects of the Easter date problematic which need to be addressed, interestingly including the fact that the initiative for a common Easter date originates from outside Orthodoxy. These aspects were: “the pastoral dimension of the problem; the concern for the integrity of the Orthodox Church; the need for fidelity to the 1st Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Furthermore, a final aspect was considered, namely that the origin of this request for the common celebration of Easter does not come from inside the Orthodox Church.”⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ « La réforme grégorienne du calendrier en 1582 a rompu pour la première fois l’unité chrétienne au sujet du calendrier, et par conséquent l’unité pascale, car les Églises orthodoxes, représentées alors par le patriarche de Constantinople, ont refusé la réforme, comme provenant d’une initiative catholique romaine La nouvelle réforme du calendrier, réalisée par la Conférence inter-orthodoxe de Constantinople de 1923, bien qu’issue d’une bonne initiative et bien supérieure à la réforme grégorienne, a compliquée encore davantage la situation. Acceptée jusqu’ici seulement par certaines Églises orthodoxes, bien que celles-ci constituent la grande majorité, elles ont appliqué mal – parce que partiellement – la rectification du calendrier, maintenant la “pascalie” du vieux style combiné avec le calendrier rectifié suivant la méthode constantinopolitaine (le calendrier néo-julien), afin que l’on conserve l’unité de l’Orthodoxie au moins dans la célébration de la plus grande fête chrétienne. » (E. BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Brève étude historique et canonique du problème » in *Synodica*, 25).

⁴³⁰ « La dimension pastorale du problème; Le souci de l’intégrité de l’Eglise orthodoxe; Le besoin de fidélité vis-à-vis du 1er Concile œcuménique de Nicée; L’origine de cette demande pour la célébration commune de Pâques ne provient pas de l’intérieur de l’Eglise orthodoxe. » (G. KHODR, Letter dated 27 November 1976, in *Synodica*, 14).

Other limitations of the common Easter date were recognized, such as the question of moving the date to facilitate local celebrations of Easter, as well as the difference between the global regions (i.e. the antipodes), which would celebrate Easter at the beginning of their local fall season. Perhaps the most important concern is noted as well, namely the Orthodox churches which use the revised calendar (either Gregorian or Revised Julian) but yet still adopt the Julian *paschalion* for computation of the Easter date. The liberty of various churches to select a date for celebration was also considered: “Although it was unanimously stressed that the date of Easter must be common to all the Orthodox Churches, the question was asked of whether each local Church could have the freedom to celebrate the feast of Easter on a common date with other Churches and confessions in the same country.”⁴³¹ Khodr went on to mention that:

The Council of Nicaea in establishing the date of Easter, only considered the Mediterranean world. The presence of Christians in different geographical areas of the world poses new problems as to the date of Easter. For these reasons the decision of the Council of Nicaea should be interpreted according to the spirit which presided over its elaboration ... It would be desirable that we study and find a solution to the anomaly which exists in certain Orthodox Churches which have adopted the new calendar, but which, for the sake of unity and communion with the other Orthodox Churches, celebrate Easter according to the old calendar. It would be a question of aligning the ecclesiastical calendar with astronomical data.⁴³²

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² « Bien qu’il ait été unanimement souligné que la date de Pâques doit être commune à toutes les Églises orthodoxes, on a posé la question de savoir si chaque Église locale pourrait avoir la liberté de célébrer la fête de Pâques date commune avec d’autres Églises et confessions dans le même pays ... Le concile de Nicée en établissant la date de Pâques, n’a pris en considération que le monde méditerranéen. La présence des Chrétiens en différentes zones géographiques du monde pose de nouveaux problèmes quant à la date de Pâques. Pour ces raisons la décision du Concile de Nicée devrait être interprétée selon l’esprit qui a présidé à son élaboration ... Il serait souhaitable qu’on étudie et qu’on trouve une solution à l’anomalie qui existe dans certaines Églises orthodoxes qui ont adopté le nouveau calendrier, mais qui, par souci d’unité et de communion avec les autres Églises orthodoxes, célèbrent la fête de Pâques selon l’ancien calendrier. Il s’agirait de mettre en accord le calendrier ecclésiastique avec les données astronomiques. » Ibid., 15.

A very diverse picture of liturgical celebration is therefore painted – a challenging portrait to reconcile with the desires for ecclesiastical unity.

The conference also recognized the desire on the part of certain of the Orthodox to maintain the Easter date subsequent to the Jewish Passover, but also affirmed that this point of view was only a later development of Byzantine canonists (14th-16th centuries) as a means to discredit the Western reforms of the Julian calendar, and noting that the principle adopted by Nicaea was the vernal equinox. Ossorguine argues, within the context of the Chambésy discussions, that

Most Orthodox agree that Christ having suffered the Passion during the Jewish Passover and being resurrected after it, the date of Christian Easter should therefore be set according to the time of the Jewish holiday, and so that this feast always precedes the Christian celebration. But it was only between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries that, for the first time in history, this point of view was expressed by Byzantine canonists and this, apparently, in order to discredit the reform of the Julian calendar which was then in preparation in the West.... The Fathers of the Church, at the time of the Council of Nicaea, did not share this point of view expressed later by Byzantine canonists of the 16th century.... As for the calculation of the date of Easter, its starting point, according to the principle adopted at the Council of Nicaea (in the year 325), is the spring equinox.⁴³³

Remarks from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches were also proffered, in which the Roman Catholic observer, Mgr. Eleuterio Fortino, mainly reiterated the statement of the Second Vatican Council to this effect, and Rev. John Wynburn, observer

⁴³³ « La plupart des orthodoxes conviennent que, le Christ ayant souffert la Passion durant la pâque juive et étant ressuscité après celle-ci, la date des Pâques chrétiennes doit en conséquence être fixée en fonction du moment de la fête juive, et de telle sorte que cette fête précède toujours la célébration chrétienne. Mais c'est entre le XIVE et le XVIe siècles seulement que, pour la première fois dans l'histoire, ce point de vue a été exprimé par des canonistes byzantins et cela, apparemment, en vue de discréditer la réforme du calendrier julien qui était alors en préparation en Occident Les Pères de l'Église, à l'époque du Concile de Nicée, ne partageaient nullement ce point de vue exprimé plus tard par les canonistes byzantins du XVIe siècle Quant au calcul de la date de Pâques, son point de départ, selon le principe adopté au Concile de Nicée (en l'an 325), est l'équinoxe de printemps. » (N. OSSORGUINE. "La détermination de la date des Pâques chrétiennes est-elle indépendante de la Pâque juive?" in *Synodica*, 102-103).

from the Anglican Communion, noted the favorability amongst the British for a fixed-date of Easter.⁴³⁴

4.6 Vatican Conference (1982)

As a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the Gregorian calendar, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Vatican Observatory sponsored a conference on the same calendar, with discussion taking place on the question of the revision of the calendar and, specifically, scientific studies being made on this same subject.⁴³⁵ Many of the fruits of this research have been discussed previously in this study. On the occasion of this conference on 31 August 1982, John Paul II declared “the profound personal interest that the Church has had and continues to have concerning calendar revisions since such work influences the occurrence of religious feasts which constitute, as it were, the rhythm of the Church's daily life.”⁴³⁶ The Pontiff likewise noted the continued relevance of study of the calendar from a perspective of the relationship between faith and science for the overarching purpose of ecumenical unity: “Your examination of how the Gregorian Calendar was received by various societies and by various Churches will surely be of great help to all of us in these days when we sincerely seek a strengthening of that unity which Christ desired for his Church.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ See E. FORTINO, “La célébration commune de Pâques et l’Église Catholique-Romaine,” in *Synodica*, 68-69.

⁴³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “Address of His Holiness”, in *GRC*, xxi.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

4.7 Aleppo Statement (1997)

This consultation of the WCC at Aleppo, Syria, was attended by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Ultrajectine Old Catholics, certain Protestant ecclesial communities such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Lutheran World Federation, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Anglican Communion, the Evangelical Churches in the Middle East, the United Evangelical Church of Germany, and some of the Orthodox Churches (including the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch and Moscow, the Syrian Orthodox, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Armenian Orthodox).

The Aleppo Statement itself affirms the centrality of the celebration of Easter for unity amongst churches, and likewise begins to move away from the notion that a “fixed date” for Easter would be the predominant solution to this problematic. In May 1994, a consultation in Iasi, Romania, entitled “‘Christian Spirituality for Our Times’ ... proposed that ‘a new initiative be taken towards the common celebration of Easter.’”⁴³⁸ Even more striking are the conclusions reached by a consultation “Towards *Koinonia* in Worship” at Ditchingham, England, also in 1994:

[The recovery of the meaning of Sunday and the search for a common celebration of Pascha] is especially urgent, since an agreement on a common date for Easter – even an interim agreement – awaits further ecumenical developments. Such an agreement, which cannot depend on the idea of a ‘fixed date of Easter’, should respect the deepest meaning of the Christian Pascha, and the feelings of Christians throughout the world. We welcome all initiatives which offer the hope of progress in this important area.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ WCC, Towards a Common Date for Easter, Aleppo, World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, 1997 (=Aleppo), no. 2, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/towards-a-common-date-for-easter/index#table> (10 January 2024).

⁴³⁹ T. F. BEST and D. HELLER, *So We Believe, So We Pray, Towards Koinonia in Worship, Faith and Order Paper No. 171*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1995, 9-10, cited in *Aleppo*, no. 3.

It would seem that there exists a necessary connection between the movement away from a fixed-date proposal and a deeper valuation of the Nicaean council for purposes of Christian unity. The Aleppo Statement very clearly highlights this, and connects the importance of the Nicaean decrees to the ongoing ecumenical discussion. At Aleppo, “the participants came to a deeper appreciation of the continuing relevance of the Council of Nicaea for the present discussion. The decisions of this council, rooted as they are in scripture and tradition, came to be regarded as normative for the whole Church.”⁴⁴⁰

This Statement itself “calls attention to the continuing relevance of the Council of Nicaea” while similarly noting that the “Council of Nicaea was willing to make use of contemporary science to calculate the date of Easter/Pascha.” Likewise, it “accurately presents historical circumstances relating to the Council of Nicaea’s treatment of the relationship between the Christian Pascha and the Jewish Passover.” Establishing a fixed-date proposal would be tantamount to betrayal of the perennial tradition of both East and West, in the view of the Aleppo Statement: “The principles of calculation in the churches of both East and West are based on the norms set forth at Nicaea. This fact is of great significance. In the present divided situation, any decision by one church or group of churches to move away from these norms would only increase the difficulty of resolving outstanding differences.”⁴⁴¹

Furthermore, the best of scientific theory should be pressed into the service of the Easter date problematic, as Nicaea itself established: “The Council of Nicaea also has an

⁴⁴⁰ *Aleppo*, no. 7.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

enduring lesson for Christians today in its willingness make use [*sic*] of contemporary science in calculating the date of Easter. While the council sought to advance the concrete unity of the churches, it did not itself undertake a detailed regulation of the Easter calculation. Instead it expected the churches to employ the most exact science of the day for calculating the necessary astronomical data (the March equinox and the full moon).”⁴⁴²

A further consequence that should be extracted from the Aleppo Statement is that the local churches were delegated and designated by Nicaea to determine the proper means for calculating the Easter date, in some ways de-centralizing the question and leaving the question of ascertaining the proper scientific methods to the local churches.

Indeed, the desire for an astronomic solution to the Easter question is not without precedent, despite the fact that the Gregorian reform opted for a cyclical solution – allegedly to be in harmony with the principles established at Nicaea. Nothaft finds that

demands for such a solution had been voiced most audibly in the context of the Fifth Lateran Council, for instance by Andreas Stiborius and Georg Tannstetter, who wrote on behalf of the University of Vienna ... and by Johannes Stöffler, who taught mathematics at the University of Tübingen ... Christopher Clavius had shown similar proclivities for an exact astronomical calculation during the negotiations of 1577-80, but in the end he saw himself forced to agree with his colleagues that the Church was best served with a cyclical approach. Not only did such an approach obviate the need to decide on a particular meridian, but it helped keep the calendar’s principles intelligible to non-astronomers, who made up the majority of its intended users. Equally important, however was the way the use of cycles made it possible to maintain a fundamental continuity with the methods and principles that had been observed by the universal Church since the days of the Council of Nicaea, whose decrees the Gregorian reform intended to honour.⁴⁴³

Furthermore, there is a concern voiced within the Aleppo Statement that the principles used should likewise be harmonious with the regular courses of nature and the

⁴⁴² Ibid., no. 9.

⁴⁴³ *SE*, 297.

sun and moon: “The Nicene principles for calculating the date of Easter/Pascha, based as they are on the cycles of sun and moon, reflect this cosmic dimension much more fully than a fixed-date system.”⁴⁴⁴ However, the “barrier” that such a notion approaches is the fact that the southern hemisphere encounters seasonal opposites during the months of March and April.

The 1997 Aleppo Conference decided to maintain the Nicaean norms that Easter should fall on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox, and to calculate the astronomical data (the vernal equinox and the full moon) by the most accurate possible scientific means, using as the basis for reckoning the meridian of Jerusalem, the place of Christ's death and resurrection. This, as documented above, requires an astronomical understanding of time, and, according to the statement of the WCC, would involve “calculation of the astronomical data by the most accurate possible scientific means (as distinct, for example, from reliance on conventional cyclical tables or personal observation) [...] The consultation believes that it is being completely faithful to the spirit of the Council of Nicaea itself, which also was willing to make use of the best available scientific knowledge.”⁴⁴⁵ The proposal also was to enact this proposal by 2001, when the Julian and Gregorian calendars would coincide on their celebration of Easter/Pascha.

The reception of the Aleppo statement has generally been positive and, in the opinion of such scholars as Geoffrey Wainwright and Anastasios Kallis, would hold the

⁴⁴⁴ *Aleppo*, no. 11.

⁴⁴⁵ *Aleppo*, no. 12.

greatest probability of successfully resolving the Easter question.⁴⁴⁶ On 31 October 1998, not long after the Aleppo Statement was issued, the Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation in the United States offered a seven-point statement in response. The document “welcomes” the Aleppo Statement, and notes that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops takes the position that “in short, we consider that the implementation of the recommendations of the Aleppo Statement would allow our churches to adhere more exactly to the mode of calculation mandated by the First Council of Nicaea.”⁴⁴⁷ The United States bishops likewise described the terms of the Aleppo Statement as an “effort to be faithful to the great tradition of the Church” and that it would more noticeably affect the actual Easter date more for the Orthodox than for the West.⁴⁴⁸ Bert Groen himself attests to this: “For Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christianity, changes in the actual dating of Easter are more perceptible than for Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Christianity. Fortunately, the Aleppo recommendations to a large extent repeat proposals already developed by the Orthodox themselves’ concerning their preparations for a Holy Pan-Orthodox Council.”⁴⁴⁹ However, despite the conclusion of this document, which urges “serious consideration” of these proposals, no solution has been reached to date to implement this proposal within the Catholic Church in the United States of America.

⁴⁴⁶ GROEN, “How Long it was and How Far,” 37.

⁴⁴⁷ UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, “Common Response to The Aleppo Statement On The Date Of Easter/Pascha,” <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/response-aleppo-date-of-easter-pascha.cfm> (10 January 2024)

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date”, 367.

Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, then-prefect of the Pontifical Congregation for Promoting Christian Unity, however, had offered a favorable reaction to this proposal.⁴⁵⁰

In a subsequent meeting of the WCC in 1998 in Harare, the moderator of the central committee and the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia briefly argued for a common date without mentioning the possibility of a fixed date.⁴⁵¹

It should be noted that Orthodox communities still retain some resistance to the desires of Aleppo, taking a very strict and narrow reading of the decrees of Nicaea. It has been noted that

resistance to such a reform by Orthodox jurisdictions is apparently rooted in respect for a widespread belief that March 21st Julian was designated by the Nicene Fathers to be the only true vernal equinox, and nourished by persistent fears that changing the received tradition for dating Pascha would endanger the integrity Orthodoxy's witness to the Patristic Tradition by creating a purely 'cosmetic' unity with other Churches. And so it is that the Nicene *paschalion* continues to be differently implemented in practice, despite its original simplicity.⁴⁵²

Finally, there are some Orthodox who choose to simply take an un-scientific and ultimately fideistic approach to the question. Father Luke Luhl, of the Greek Archdiocese of North America, argues:

The proposals made by the WCC conference are in fact an insult to the Orthodox people; derive from a simple-minded approach to a complex issue; rely on pseudo-scientific formulae (as though science dictated our spiritual beliefs and customs, anyway); base themselves on a deceptive misrepresentation of the provisions of the Council of Nicaea concerning the date of Pascha; and succeed in 'pulling the wool over our eyes' in the name of condescending notions of ecumenical unity.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ J. RADANO, "Celebrating Together Redemption in Christ," in *World Council of Churches*, 9 April 2001, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/celebrating-together-redemption-in-christ> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁵¹ GROEN, "How Long It Was and How Far", 33-34.

⁴⁵² "Paschalion," in *OrthodoxWiki*, <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Paschalion> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁵³ L. LUHL, "The Proposal for a Common Date to Celebrate Pascha and Easter," in *Orthodox Christian Information Center*, http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/common_luhl.aspx (10 January 2024).

To be sure, such voices within Orthodoxy do not necessarily represent official positions of these churches; however, it would seem beneficial that such positions be properly addressed within future ecumenical dialogues from a standpoint of what might positively promote unity amongst churches and what positions might detract therefrom.

4.8 L'viv Conference (2008-2009)

At the Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv on 15 May 2008, a seminar was held in which the Aleppo proposals were studied by representatives of various churches and ecclesial communities. In a news release from the WCC, it is affirmed that “all participants at the seminar in Lviv, which included Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians from a variety of European countries, endorsed a compromise proposed at a WCC consultation in Aleppo, Syria, in 1997. The proposal was to keep the Nicaea rule but calculate the equinox and full moon using the accurate astronomical data available today, rather than those used many years ago.”⁴⁵⁴

The obstacle that must be overcome by all of these ecclesial bodies is, as the conference declared, “not the calculations, but the complex relations and missing of trust among different Christian denominations because of long divisions.”⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, the long history of theological and cultural differences does not easily dispose ecclesial bodies to come to a speedy agreement on a topic which is as sensitive and central to the life of the community as the Easter date. Indeed, Basilios Groen affirmed this as the most significant

⁴⁵⁴ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, “News Release: A Common Date of Easter Is Possible,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/a-common-date-for-easter-is-possible> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

challenge in stating: “This seminar too advocated a common pan-Christian paschal date and remarked that mutual inter-ecclesiastical distrust was the most important obstacle in realising this ideal.”⁴⁵⁶

There has been certainly a long history of mistrust between the churches and confessions on the Easter date issue for various reasons; some of which were noted in previous chapters, specifically regarding the post-Tridentine reform of the calendar and the participation therein of the Orthodox and Oriental representation within those reforms. The politico-religious tensions of the Reformation which directly impacted the acceptance of the Gregorian reforms in certain nations of Western Europe likewise caused notable divisions for centuries; such similar divisions between the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church stem from over a millennium. On the topic of the Easter date, the mistrust between Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church appears to be rooted in the Orthodox strict adherence to the norms of the council of Nicaea in opposition to the reforms which the Roman Catholic Church enacted subsequent to Trent – although not without having invited Orthodox participation even in those reforms, as previously discussed.

This having been said, however, some movement toward common ground has been established, particularly as a result of Aleppo, with the Catholic/Protestant perspective coming closer to that of the Orthodox. The French theologian Prof. Antoine Arjakovsky, representing an Orthodox position as director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies, stated: “Whilst the astronomic reckoning of the Nicaean rule comes closer to the Gregorian

⁴⁵⁶ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” 374.

calendar than to the ancient Julian one, the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches did take a step towards the Orthodox churches in Aleppo, accepting that the date of Easter should be established on the base of a cosmic calendar rather than by a fixed date as had been proposed prior to the inter-Orthodox meeting in Chambésy in 1977.”⁴⁵⁷

A response remains necessary from the Orthodox position, as there is a need for consensus amongst the Orthodox churches, whose positions have been demonstrated as being at variance with one another. “Expressing joy that such an important theme had been raised in the seminar, Metropolitan Andriy Horak mentioned that such a detailed answer from the Orthodox representation concerning the Aleppo proposals could be received only after a Pan-Orthodox consultation and, eventually, a council.”⁴⁵⁸ As of this writing, such a consultation on this matter (originally scheduled for 2016) has yet to materialize. Fr. Milan Zust, S.J., representative for the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said that “the Roman Catholic Church is waiting for a response from the Orthodox churches and [Zust] thinks that if the Orthodox would accept the Aleppo recommendations, then there would be no problems with establishing one, common date of Easter. If some remarks would come from the Orthodox representation or if they were to propose another variant, then the question would definitely need to be reviewed.”⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMERICA, news release “Ukrainian Catholic University Organizes Seminar on Easter Date,” 19 May 2009, <http://www.byzcath.org/index.php/news-mainmenu-49/2689-ukrainian-catholic-university-organizes-seminar-on-easter-date> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

4.9 Orientale Lumen Conference (2022)

In June 2022, a virtual conference was organized on the topic of “The Council of Nicaea and the Date of Pascha/Easter,” which included various academics and ecclesiastics representing the Catholic Church and various Orthodox churches. In particular, this conference sought to provide discussion concerning the upcoming common celebration of Easter/Pascha in 2025 on the same date (20 April).

The conference encompassed various topics, some of which have likewise been discussed throughout this current work, such as the technological aspects of the quest for a common Easter date, historical discussions on the Easter date from the Patristic era, as well as questions being raised on a united Easter date as essentially being an innovation within the history of Christianity. A panel discussion in three sessions also took place. While no conclusive statements were made at this conference, perhaps one of the most interesting perspectives would be that of Fr. Christiaan Kappes, academic dean at Sts. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Pittsburgh PA. Kappes notes that the perspective of the Holy See in recent times appears to be willing to sacrifice almost anything to ensure a common paschal date for ecumenical relations, and that the astronomical aspects are the only seeming non-negotiable aspect in this problematic.⁴⁶⁰

The same Fr. Kappes goes on to remark “if there were united Easters ... I don’t know when that happened we’re actually trying to do something that even within the

⁴⁶⁰ C. KAPPES, “Universal Date for Easter (Pascha): Worthwhile Innovation in the Annals of Christianity?” in J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Easter Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022, 91.

confines of the Roman Empire was not agreed upon.”⁴⁶¹ A common paschal celebration is not, in his opinion, something which is necessitated by history or theology properly understood. He goes on to note that the push for a common Easter in the years after Nicaea to have been civilly imposed, despite the fact that the Empire was nominally united as Christian, or at the very least anti-Arian. Kappes notes that much of the desire to utilize the Julian paschalion at all costs stems from a desire to identify one’s theological orthodoxy with this calendar, to the detriment of the actual astronomical data which provide accurate calculation of the Easter observance. He critiques as well the recent lenient tendencies of the Holy See toward permitting Easter to be celebrated according to the Julian paschalion.⁴⁶²

4.10 Other Contemporary Voices

Since the Aleppo statement, there have been a number of voices within the Catholic Church and Orthodoxy pleading for a speedy resolution to the Easter date situation. Others, however, have reflected more intransigent perspectives.

From a rather strict perspective within Catholicism, Louis Tofari, posting on the Catholic newspaper *The Remnant*, has noted at least three problems with Pope Francis’ desire to establish a fixed date of Easter: “1. The primary context for universally fixing the date of Easter is not to rectify a practical issue of liturgical praxis in the Catholic Church (amongst the West and East), but rather as an ecumenical bridge to foster a false unity with

⁴⁶¹ Panel Discussion, Session Three in J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022, 192.

⁴⁶² See *Ibid.*

those who are outside the One, True Fold in which Our Redeemer through His Passion, Death and Resurrection saves souls.”⁴⁶³ This argumentation is suspiciously similar to that which has been argued by the Old Calendarist Orthodox for the rejection of the Meletian calendar. There is, as has been amply demonstrated, a practical issue regarding the Easter Date which this work has attempted to address.

Secondly, it is asserted that Pope Francis “is practicing the error of collegiality in regards to the Orthodox, who do not respect the primacy of authority of the Papacy, and thus expect the Holy Father to behave as simply “another bishop” rather than as the Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church.”⁴⁶⁴ This ultimately reflects a tension between the universal Church and the particular Church which has been present since even the days of Pope Victor I and Polycrates, and which has been reflected even in recent ecclesiological debates between Josef Ratzinger and Walter Kasper.⁴⁶⁵

Finally, Tofari claims that “a fixed date of Easter would most likely be seriously problematic for the liturgical calendar of the 1962 *Missale Romanum* and *Breviarium Romanum*. As seen above, any necessary changes to the current calendar mechanics would not be minor ones.”⁴⁶⁶ In light of Conrad Morin’s proposal, this is not necessarily true, as

⁴⁶³ L. TOFARI, “Will the Pope Fix the Date? (Why Easter is not Ecumenical)” in *The Remnant*, 26 June 2015, <https://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/articles/item/1834-will-the-pope-fix-the-date-why-easter-is-not-ecumenical> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ For further discussion, see K. McDONNELL, “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” in *Theological Studies*, 63, 2002, 227-250.

⁴⁶⁶ L. TOFARI, “Will the Pope Fix the Date? (Why Easter is not Ecumenical)” in *The Remnant*, 26 June 2015, <https://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/articles/item/1834-will-the-pope-fix-the-date-why-easter-is-not-ecumenical> (10 January 2024).

he was able to realize a harmonization of the Tridentine liturgical calendar with the fixed World Calendar, basing Easter on a fixed Sunday. Continuing, Tofari opines: “though in itself fixing the date of Easter Sunday is a legitimate notion, due to the above-mentioned issues, the current attempt to reach an agreement would most likely have tragic results. It is often said that God can draw straight with crooked lines, while He can always draw good out of an evil situation. Perhaps in this light, the renowned and previously cited obstinacy of the Eastern Orthodox will work in favor of preventing a fixed date of Easter at this time.”⁴⁶⁷ It is clear that there exist many of a more traditional mindset within the Catholic Church who would question such a plan, in an apparently similar way as those of a more rigorist position within Eastern Orthodoxy.

While the author of this article clearly does not accept the principles of ecumenical overtures in general, it should be noted from the above documentation that the fixed-date proposal of Morin can, indeed, be interpreted as being quite harmonious with the calendar of the 1962 liturgical books. Furthermore, it should be remembered that even Christopher Clavius, whose calculations helped to form the Gregorian calendar, himself was not opposed to a fixed date for the Easter celebration.

It would be important to juxtapose these above proposals, of which one must be certainly critical, with that of Lizette Larson, writing on the more progressive *Pray Tell* blog, who opines on the value of keeping liturgical time and its great value for the good of a community: “Keeping time together is a means of communion and a creator of identity.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

Whether we observe liturgical feasts and seasons together as a worshipping community, or domestic observances such as morning and evening rituals, how we keep the feast is very much linked to *when* we keep the feast.”⁴⁶⁸

In a recent commentary on the Easter date question, the same Lizette Larson remarks: “‘In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.’ This much-used 17th century quote from the heart of reformation fights (Rupertus Meldenius or Marco Antonio de Dominis) captures the elusive reality of disagreeing in charity, but still raises the question about the essential or non-essential nature of keeping the great feasts and seasons of the liturgical year as symbol and sacrament of unity. Within the same community, is the calendar a dimension of essential unity? For many Christians around the world, the answer is apparently still not clear.”⁴⁶⁹

A priest of the Syrian Orthodox Church of the East, Paul Verghese, outlined a process of legal reform on the Paschal date, recommending in particular that those churches in union with Constantinople act on a conciliar level to reach consensus and introduce the Gregorian calendar, but also insisting upon unity in these matters being reached by the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC, and the various patriarchs, heads of particular churches

⁴⁶⁸ L. LARSON, “At odds with ourselves: the calendrical conflicts of bi-ritual ecclesial communities” in *Pray Tell Blog*, <http://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2018/06/13/at-odds-with-ourselves-the-calendrical-conflicts-of-bi-ritual-ecclesial-communities/> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

and other Christian ecclesial communities.⁴⁷⁰ Ultimately, Vergheese also comes down on the side of an astronomical reckoning of the paschal date.⁴⁷¹

On a more fundamentally theological level, unity within and amongst churches must be founded upon sacramental principles, and ultimately on the level of the unity of faith, law, and worship. Ludwig Hertling, S.J., writing in 1961, holds that the “individual bishops in antiquity were not bound together by the conviction that they must stay together in order to achieve a particular goal, but by the conviction that their unity was already present as a given fact, independently of what any individual might think or feel or do.”⁴⁷² As a problematic which has involved the universal Church since its earliest days, clearly the bond of unity amongst bishops and churches does and will continue exist regardless of a uniform solution (or lack thereof) to the question of the common celebration of Easter/Pascha.

4.10.1 Basilios Groen

One scholar who has studied this question in some depth, Basilios “Bert” Groen, affirms the ecumenical importance of the Aleppo Statement and the reality that it is a

⁴⁷⁰ See T.P. VERGHESE, *The Date of Easter and Calendar Revision in the Orthodox Churches*, Addis Ababa, The Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, 1968, 42-44. He includes as well “the President of the Lutheran World Federation, the President of the World Alliance of Reformed churches, the President of the World Methodist Council, the President of the Baptist World Alliance, the President of the World Evangelical Fellowship, the Chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals, the heads of other world-wide bodies (Congregational, Disciples, Mennonite, Pentecostal, etc.), the Head of the Salvation Army, and the Chairman of Friends’ World Committee for Consultation, and any other signatories necessary for ensuring universal representativeness” (Ibid.).

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁷² L. HERTLING, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, trans. J. WICKS, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1972, 49-50.

consensus-building document. He affirms that “during the last decades, also the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Anglican Lambeth Conference, the Lutheran World Federation, the Ukrainian Catholic University in L’viv, the National Council of Churches in the USA, and Patriarch Gregory III of the Melkites (Greek-Catholics in the Middle East), and others, also advocated a common Easter date and most of them endorse the Aleppo Statement.”⁴⁷³

4.10.2 Within the Catholic Church Hierarchy

Not long after the Aleppo Statement, John Paul II, in his January 25, 2001 homily concluding the Christian Unity octave, affirmed that “in 2001, for example, all Christians will celebrate Christ's Resurrection on the same date. This should encourage us to reach agreement on a common date for this feast.”⁴⁷⁴

Patriarch Gregorios III, in his Pastoral Letter of Easter 2010, notes that the Melkite Greek Catholic Church began using the Gregorian reckoning in 1857 during the time of Patriarch Clement.⁴⁷⁵ He emphasizes the “flexibility” of the Melkite church in this matter, noting that the Julian paschalion was adopted for use in Jordan in 1972, and later in 1995 for those faithful in places such as Ramallah, Nablus, and the northern part of the West

⁴⁷³ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” 366.

⁴⁷⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Homily on the Conclusion for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 25 January 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010125_christian-unity.html (10 January 2024), no. 7.

⁴⁷⁵ GREGORIOS III, Celebrating Easter Together: Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Gregorios III for Easter 2010, trans. V. CHAMBERLAIN, in *Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton*, <https://melkite.org/patriarchate/celebrating-pascha-together> (19 October 2023).

Bank, while those in other localities such as Beit Sahour, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, would continue to celebrate according to the Gregorian calendar.⁴⁷⁶

During the course of the 2010 Synod on the Middle East, at least one bishop, auxiliary William Somali of the Latin-rite Patriarchate of Jerusalem, spoke in favor of a united date of Easter as a united witness with the Orthodox Christians in this part of the world. However, it did not rise to the level of a formal proposal: “The hope for a common Easter date was not mentioned in many of the formal speeches of synod members, but according to the English-language synod press briefer, it came up repeatedly in the hour of free discussion in the synod hall each evening.”⁴⁷⁷

At the World Retreat of Priests at St. John Lateran in Rome on June 12, 2015, Pope Francis likewise made a brief remark about the date of Easter and his personal desire for an agreement in this matter, stating jocosely the scandalous nature of Christians mutually stating that “my Christ rose today, and yours next week.”⁴⁷⁸

4.10.3 Within Orthodoxy

The Russian Orthodox Church has demonstrated a somewhat more skeptical approach to the overtures of Pope Francis in regards to a common Easter date. In an article for *asianews.it* by Nina Achmatova, it is reported that:

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ C. WOODEN, “Synod Hears Repeated Calls for Common Christian Easter Date,” in *Catholic News Service*, 15 October 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110106100213/http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1004245.htm> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁷⁸ J. BURGER, “Pope Francis Calls for One Date for Easter,” in *Aleteia*, 22 June 2015, <https://aleteia.org/2015/06/22/pope-francis-calls-for-one-date-for-easter/> (10 January 2024).

according [to] archpriest Nikolai Balashov, deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department of External Church Relations, the Pontiff's statements as reported in the media are not sufficient to give a proper understanding of the essence of his proposal. 'I would prefer to know the exact statements of Pope Francis first, transmitted by different sources of information,' said Balashov, in an interview with *TASS* news agency, noting that 'if the Church of Rome intends to abandon Easter according to the Gregorian calendar, introduced in the sixteenth century, and go back to the old one (Julian), used at a time when the Church of the East and West were united and used to date by the Orthodox, then this intention is welcome'. If, instead, the idea is to 'have a fixed date for Easter and not tie it to the first full moon after the spring equinox, as established in the East and in the West by the Council of Nicaea in 325, then this proposal is totally unacceptable to the Orthodox Church', warned Balashov. 'We will wait for official Vatican sources,' he added. The Orthodox Russian representative further underlined that Constantinople and Moscow are at odds over Easter and that contrary to what is reported in the press, the pan-Orthodox council is expected to debate a review of the date on which to celebrate Easter.⁴⁷⁹

However, it should be noted that this subject has received scant attention, and consequently, the 2016 Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete, which began on 19 June 2016, even dropped the topic of calendar reform from its agenda.⁴⁸⁰ The proposal for a fixed Easter date, which was lauded by many during the 1960's and 1970's, has generally stalled, as evidenced from the WCC meeting in Nairobi in 1975 onwards. A cooling of formerly favorable ecumenical relations with the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow can be perceived. As it has been stated, "the pontiff's proposal does not seem to have been discussed in the 16 June [2015] meeting at the Vatican with Metropolitan Hilarion of

⁴⁷⁹ N. ACHMATOVA, "Moscow Patriarchate to Pope: On Easter a Gesture of Goodwill, Gut We Will Not Overturn Old Traditions," in *Asianews.it*, 16 June 2015, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Moscow-Patriarchate-to-Pope:-On-Easter-a-gesture-of-goodwill,-but-we-will-not-overturn-old-traditions-34519.html> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁸⁰ "AUGUSTINUS" (pseudonym), "For the record: the Russian No 1. No to Change of Date for Easter 2. No Imminent Meeting Between the Pope and the Patriarch of Moscow," in *Rorate Caeli*, 28 January 2016, <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2016/01/for-record-russian-no-no-to-change-of.html> (10 January 2024) and "Pan-Orthodox Council Not to Address Ukraine Issue, Transition to Unified Calendar" in *Interfax Religion*, 27 January 2016, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12696> (10 January 2024).

Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.”⁴⁸¹

There has been some recent discussion on the celebration of a common Easter date by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in April 2018. To this author’s knowledge, there has been no official response made to this overture at the time of this writing. Bartholomew, on the occasion of receiving Mgr. Angelo de Donatis and members of the Roman clergy on pilgrimage at Fanar, made the following statement: “Since the XVI century, the distance the Julian and Gregorian calendars have taken from each other has led to having a different Easter date. We are sure that, as soon as the time is right, our Churches will be able to humbly and willingly implement a joint [celebration] and to listen to St Paul’s invitation as a cry that sounds more urgent than ever nowadays, in a globalised, media-dependent world: ‘Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5, 7-8)”.⁴⁸²

Having considered the historical approaches presented during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it would be worthwhile to evaluate four recent proposals for the reform of the Gregorian calendar and fixed-date of Easter which have surfaced in past decades, as well as their consideration from a juridical, religious, and ecumenical standpoint.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² “Patriarch Bartholomew: To the Roman Clergy, ‘Even if Slow, the Walk Towards the Unity of Our Churches is Unstoppable’. Implementing a Project” for a Joint Easter’,” in *SIR: Agenzia d’Informazione*, 3 April 2018, <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2018/4/3/patriarch-bartholomew-to-the-roman-clergy-even-if-slow-the-walk-towards-the-unity-of-our-churches-is-unstoppable-implementing-a-project-for-a-joint-easter/> (10 January 2024).

4.11 Reforms of the Gregorian Calendar

In this section, three proposals will be considered for the reform of the calendar: the 1923 Revised Julian Calendar, the definition of the Easter date as a function of the vernal equinox, as well as the proposal of Yury Grabovsky, who aims at a *tertium quid*, which would essentially make some slight changes to the Gregorian calendar to perhaps even make it more accurate than the Revised Julian. From a canon law standpoint, such changes would necessitate at least some revision to the legislation of *Inter gravissimas*, which ultimately still governs the calendar and paschal computation particularly in the West.

4.11.1 Revised Julian Calendar (Milanković)

The Milanković calendar, in its original proposal dating back to the Pan-Orthodox Congress, was designed to place the Orthodox churches in a situation of scientific accuracy vis-à-vis the Gregorian. It would not merely be a matter of deleting days from the calendar (in the way in which the Gregorian calendar was introduced), but rather to adopt this new way of calculating the calendar. One can perceive a clear desire to improve the Gregorian methodology in the deliberations of the Congress, which would then have been over three centuries old:

In his historic speech to the Congress, Milanković told the delegates that if they only decided to delete thirteen days from the Julian calendar, the Orthodox Church would be in an inferior position in any future discussion on the calendar question. On the other hand, with the proposition of the Serbian delegation, the Orthodox Church would have the most precise and most scientific calendar in the Christian world, so it could confidently enter into any negotiations on the calendar question with Western Churches. Milanković underlined also that with such a decision, the Orthodox Church

would not be accepting the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, but would be adopting a better one.⁴⁸³

This proposal was affirmed by a number of Orthodox scholars and hierarchs, which took place just before the conclusion of the Congress itself.⁴⁸⁴ Later, the Orthodox Church in America would adopt this calendar on 1 September 1982⁴⁸⁵, arguing that the Church had originally adopted the Julian civil calendar, “baptizing” it, in effect, and sanctifying it.

4.11.2 *Ovidiu Vaduvescu*

Vaduvescu, a scientist affiliated with the Astronomical Institute in Bucharest, Romania, and writing from a more technical perspective, has offered in a recent paper “a new algorithm based on some classic astronomical formulae giving the Equinox date and the Moon phase, instead of using the old elements set to different calendars to calculate the Easter Date.”⁴⁸⁶ In the algorithm he has written and in the tables he presents, he offers a novel way to calculate the paschal computus, which likewise produces the astronomical date as well. Essentially, Vaduvescu’s method “defines the Easter date as a function of the equinox, and not of 21 March.”⁴⁸⁷ This would be in line with the suggestions of the Aleppo

⁴⁸³ M. DIMITRIJEVIĆ, E. THEODOSSIOU, and P. Z. MANTARAKIS, “Milutin Milanković and the Reform of the Julian Calendar in 1923,” in *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2008), 50.

⁴⁸⁴ “Milutin Milanković completed the final version of the calendar reform, which was then adopted by the Congress. The relevant document was signed on 8 June 1923, just prior to the conclusion of the Congress, by Patriarch Meletios IV, Kalinikos (Metropolitan of Kyzikos), Alexander (Archbishop of North America), Gavriilo Dožić (Metropolitan of Montenegro and Littoral), Vasilios (Metropolitan of Nicaea), Jakub (Metropolitan of Durachion), Archimandrite Julius Scriban, and Professors E. Antoniadis and Milutin Milanković.” Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ “The Calendar Change”, <https://holy-trinity.org/modern/calen2.html> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁸⁶ O. VADUVESCU, “An Astronomical Viewpoint on the Easter Date”, <http://arxiv.org/abs/math/0404109> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

Statement, which take their ultimate suggestion from the original proposal of Pierre d'Ailly and Nicholas of Cusa. From a canonical standpoint, were the suggestions of the Aleppo Statement accepted juridically by different ecclesiastical bodies, Vaduvescu's algorithm could prove quite useful in adjusting the ecclesiastical legislation which currently governs the Easter date.

4.11.3 Yury Grabovsky

Grabovsky, a mathematician at Temple University, offers another technical proposal, suggesting retaining the Gregorian calendar, but instead making a different adjustment to it in relation to the Meletian calendar. In a sense, this is a very simplified model which would retain the same structure of the Gregorian calendar, while making only minor adjustments. He argues that "according to the Gregorian calendar, there is 97 leap years in each 400 year cycle ... Canceling the leap year every 3,200 years will allow us to keep Gregorian calendar in the intervening time, while making it much more precise. The new system would accumulate a 1 day error in 100,000 years, that is, never."⁴⁸⁸

Grabovsky proposes three new schemata for the calendar reforms.

The first one corresponds to our Gregorian calendar. It is based on a 400 year cycle with 97 leap years: all those divisible by 4 (there is a hundred of them) except 100th, 200th and 300th years making up the needed 97 leap years in a cycle. The next fraction $121/5$ corresponds to a 500-year cycle calendar with 121 leap years in each cycle. *In such a calendar every year divisible by 4 would be a leap year unless it is divisible by 100 with the exception of years divisible by 500, which are still leap years. This system*

⁴⁸⁸ Y. GRABOVSKY, "Modern Calendar and Continued Fractions," Philadelphia, Temple University, 2000, <https://www.math.temple.edu/~yury/calendar/calendar.pdf> (10 January 2024), 12-13. For a further discussion of the matter, see also F. EISENBRAND, "Pope Gregory, the Calendar and Continued Fractions," in *Documenta Mathematica*, extra volume, 2012, 87-93 and E. REINGOLD, and N. DERSHOWITZ, *Calendrical Calculations: The Ultimate Edition*, 4th ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

*is as simple and as convenient as the Gregorian calendar and provides a better accuracy [emphasis mine].*⁴⁸⁹

Grabovsky argues for rejecting the Meletian calendar proposed in 1923 for the following reasons: “The last choice for the calendar offers a 900 year cycle. However, with 218 leap years in the cycle the calendar requires to make 7 exceptions to the fourth year leap rule ($218 = 900 \div 4 - 7$). Making this arrangement would create a more complicated calendar. And besides, the 900 year cycle may be just a bit too long to be convenient. So, we would reject this more precise calendar in favor of the simpler ones.”⁴⁹⁰

Therefore, a possible consideration for future canonical legislation would be one of two remaining proposals that Grabovsky suggests: “121 leap years in a 500 year cycle, or of canceling the leap year in the current 400 year cycle in years divisible by 3200: “The 500 year cycle calendar would have 1210 leap years in 5,000 years. In order to make 1211 leap years we might want to have February 30, 5000 in celebration of the 5th millennium. The 5,000 year cycle calendar will accumulate a 1 day error in a whopping 1 million years.”⁴⁹¹ The latter proposal of canceling the leap year in those years divisible by 3200 would accumulate a modest 1 day error in 100,000 years.

4.12 A Fixed Date for Easter?

From at least the 18th century, suggestions have surfaced to keep the Easter date on a fixed day in the calendar year. In 1723, the Swiss mathematician and scientist Jean

⁴⁸⁹ GRABOVSKY, “Modern Calendar and Continued Fractions,” 9.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 13. See also B. RASOF, “Continued Fractions and ‘Leap’ Years,” in *The Mathematics Teacher*, 63 (1970), 144-148.

Bernoulli suggested the first Sunday after 21 March. In 1834, Marco Mastrofini, a priest, suggested the date of 2 April – and his work would later receive the approbation of the Holy See in 1843.⁴⁹² Father Mastrofini would also be the father of the “World Calendar” project (see below).

While it is attested that Pope Benedict XV in 1922 called a convention of astronomers at the Vatican in April 1922 to discuss the Easter date question,⁴⁹³ it is, however, equally noted: “in 1923, expressing the view that there was no dogmatic obstacle to the proposed change [proposed by the Pan-Orthodox Congress], [the Holy See] decided, as late as the end of 1942, that it must oppose the idea definitely, on the ground of deep-rooted tradition—on the principle, in other words, that as things have been so they must ever remain.”⁴⁹⁴ This attachment to tradition – as deep-rooted within Catholicism as in Orthodoxy, among so many of the faithful – will of course remain a point of difficulty for any canonical reform in this area.

In 1926, the League of Nations issued a further proposal, that Easter be universally observed on the Sunday after the second Saturday in April; a proposal mirrored in the United Kingdom by the 1928 Easter Act. It should be noted as well, as mentioned above concerning the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, that the fixed-date proposal did receive some limited acceptance amongst Orthodox voices during this time when it came to be in vogue.

⁴⁹² L. KENNY, “Calendar Reform,” in *Ministry Magazine*, vol. 22, no. 5 (May 1949), 23.

⁴⁹³ F. BLANCHARD, “Simplifying the Calendar,” in *Current History*, vol. XV (1922), 938-939.

⁴⁹⁴ W. POSTBRIDGE, “A Fixed Date For Easter?” in *Spectator Online Archives*, 26 March 1948, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/26th-march-1948/9/a-fixed-date-easter> (10 January 2024).

Perhaps one of the most ambitious proponents of the fixed-date proposal appeared in the late 1940's in conjunction with the seemingly-abandoned project of a World Calendar, proposed by Mastrofini and recommended into the mid-20th century by Elizabeth Achelis.⁴⁹⁵

Conrad Morin, O.F.M., proposed the following harmonization of the Tridentine liturgical calendar with the World Calendar proposal. It is not difficult to note that with some minor alterations, this schema could be adapted to the post-conciliar revised calendar, and also be potentially acceptable to those who follow the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite:

Advent with its four complete weeks (26 November to 23 December); Christmas and Epiphany with their vigil and octave respectively, falling on their usual dates; there are four weeks after Epiphany (8 January to 4 February) which contain the feast of the Purification (2 February) and are followed by the three regular weeks of the Septuagesima, the Sexagesima and the Quinquagesima, including Ash Wednesday (5 February to 25 February), by the four Sundays of Lent and that of the Passion (26 February to 30 March) as well as by Holy Week (1 to 7 April) ; the five regular Sundays after Easter are also there (15 April to 12 May) as well as Ascension Thursday (16 May) and Pentecost (26 May) with their respective octaves; twenty-five consecutive Sundays follow Pentecost, the last, ending on Sunday, 19 November, without omitting the feasts of the Holy Trinity (3 June), Corpus Christi (7 June), of the Sacred Heart (15 June), of Christ the King (29 October), or the Sunday consecrated to the Propagation of the Faith (22 October). Finally the Ember Days are in their normal places, i.e., within the weeks containing: the first Sunday of Lent (29 February and 1 and 2 March); Pentecost (29 May and 1 and 2 June); the third Sunday in September (20, 22 and 23), and the third Sunday in Advent (13, 15 and 16 December).⁴⁹⁶

Such a proposal would, however, miss the historical connection of the determination of the paschal date with the lunar cycles – a reality ultimately connected (although not identical

⁴⁹⁵ See E. ACHELIS, *The Calendar for the Modern Age*, New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1959.

⁴⁹⁶ See C. MORIN, "Will the Jubilee Year 1950 Open the Era of a New Civil and Religious Calendar?" in *Journal of Calendar Reform*, vol. XVIII, 1948, 16-23. See also A. BASSAN, *Calendarium Perpetuum Ecclesiae Universalis*, Milan, Marietti, 1957, 39-126.

with) the Jewish tradition of the Passover, forming the roots of the Christian celebration of the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.⁴⁹⁷

While the Holy See's proposals for a fixed date of Easter in the 1970's were not entirely well-received within the ecumenical community for very realistic reasons of opposition by various Orthodox communities, the proposals of the WCC over the past several decades have consistently moved away from the fixed-date proposals. However, in recent times, Most Rev. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, has revisited this notion. He has stated "that Anglican leaders would join discussions with other church leaders about the move to fix the date for the first time and put an end to almost 2,000 years of controversy He said that Easter should most likely be fixed for the second or third Sunday of April."⁴⁹⁸

The Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Pope Tawadros II, in 2014, on the occasion of the first anniversary of his meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican, wrote to Pope Francis reiterating his desire that a common Easter date be found for all of the Christian churches. A press release notes that "the spokesman of the Coptic Orthodox Church has stated that the Patriarch's letter addressed to Pope Francis was delivered to the Apostolic Nuncio to the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Exc. Mgr. Paul Gobel, received

⁴⁹⁷ For further discussion on the connection of the Jewish calendar with the Latin rite liturgical tradition, see A. KUNITZ-DICK, "Audi, Israël: Jewish Feasts in the Propers of the Traditional Roman Rite," in *Rorate Cæli*, 31 August 2021, <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2021/08/audi-israel-jewish-feasts-in-propers-of.html> (10 January 2024).

⁴⁹⁸ J. BINGHAM, "Easter Date to be Fixed 'Within Next Five to 10 years'" in *Telegraph Online*, 16 January 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12102278/Easter-date-to-be-fixed-within-next-five-to-10-years.html> (10 January 2024).

yesterday, Tuesday, May 6 at the headquarters of the Coptic Patriarchate.”⁴⁹⁹ The letter goes on to state, reflecting the current situation of Christians in the Middle East: “The unification of the dates of the Easter celebration of the Resurrection is a particularly felt urgency in North Africa and the Middle East, where in the same area Churches and Christian communities live together and each have different Easter dates due to the fact that some have the Julian calendar and others the Gregorian.”⁵⁰⁰

Even more recently, in November 2022, Pope Francis, in speaking with Catholicos Awa III, patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, reiterated these concerns for the commonality of the paschal celebration. It has also been noted by various scholars that since the Julian and Gregorian celebrations of Easter will coincide in the year 2025 on 20 April, along with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the time would be ripe for movement toward such an agreement on the Easter date.⁵⁰¹ Indeed, such has been the overarching theme of the 2022 “Easter Together” virtual conference as previously discussed in section 4.9.

4.13 Tentative Proposals for Reform

The celebration of Easter by Catholic churches according to the Orthodox prescriptions has already been sanctioned by the Holy See in the instruction of the

⁴⁹⁹ “AFRICA/EGYPT - Coptic Patriarch Tawadros II writes to Pope Francis: let us unify the dates for the Easter celebration” in *Agenzia Fides*, http://www.fides.org/en/news/35673-AFRICA_EGYPT_Coptic_Patriarch_Tawadros_II_writes_to_Pope_Francis_let_us_unify_the_dates_for_the_Easter_celebration (10 January 2024).

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ K. MCCABE, “Analysis: Towards a Common Date for Easter?” in *Where Peter Is*, 14 April 2023, <https://wherepeteris.com/towards-a-common-date-for-easter/> (10 January 2024).

Congregation for the Oriental Churches, on applying the liturgical prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, in 1996. The text states:

Until the time in which all Christians reach the desired agreement of fixing one day for the common celebration of the Easter Feast, the practice, already in use among some Catholic communities living in countries of Orthodox majority, will be encouraged to celebrate Easter on the day in which it is celebrated by the Orthodox, in conformity with the indications formulated by Vatican Council II in the appendix of the *Sacrosanctum concilium* and in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 20. In addition to being a sign of ecumenical fraternity, this practice allows the Catholic faithful to enter harmoniously in the common spiritual climate, which often marks civilian life, avoiding inappropriate dissonance.⁵⁰²

With this in mind, however, there have been proposals to discard the connection with the lunar cycles which date back to the Jewish calendar, specifically that of Issa Khalil, who proposes to celebrate on a date closest to the historical date of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which would be 7 April.⁵⁰³ Another proposed solution would be to disregard the Nicæan stipulation of not celebrating Easter on or before the Jewish Passover, as being bound up with early Christianity's animosity toward the Jewish community.⁵⁰⁴ It must be said, however, that neither proposal would likely satisfy the Orthodox churches, which focus themselves squarely upon fidelity to the norms of Nicæa.

⁵⁰² CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Rome, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1996, 33-34.

⁵⁰³ See A. CARBONE, *The Determination of the Date of Easter and the Search for a Common Date of Celebration for All Christians*, 68-69; see also I. KHALIL, "A Common Date for the Celebration of Pascha/Easter", in *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 16-17 (1998-99), 163-167.

⁵⁰⁴ See *Ibid.*, 69-70.

4.13.1 Heller and Groen's Proposal

Dagmar Heller, former academic dean of the WCC's Ecumenical Institute, offers her own potential solution to the problem of the Easter date. Heller opines that the only plausible solution would be for all the other Christian churches and ecclesial bodies to adopt the Orthodox reckoning of Easter on the original Julian computus/paschalion. She goes on to remark that

this proposal is not new, it is a solution which is practised on a local level in Egypt and Jordan, where - following an initiative of the Middle East Council of Churches in 1949, the Western churches decided to follow the Orthodox majority. This solution allows to keep the Nicaean rule which presently unites all the Christian churches, and thus to take into consideration the link between Easter and the cycle of nature as well as its symbolic meaning related to the dramatic break of the resurrection into the natural flow of nature. The disadvantage would be though that the astronomic and therefore real equinox and full moon would not be considered, but at least symbolically it would be considered. Since Western churches would accept even to give up the Nicene rule, they could as well – for the sake of unity – give up the idea of following the astronomic accuracy.⁵⁰⁵

Heller's suggestion requires critical and careful evaluation. The fact that churches ignore the realities of astronomical science and the desire to retain the centuries-old and widely-accepted Gregorian calendar is not entirely helpful; this suggestion does raise the issue that there can be some divergence in practice among Christian communities regarding the celebration of Easter. It seems ill advised to ignore the empirical data of the greater accuracy of the Gregorian calendar by comparison to that of the Julian – and the even greater accuracy of the subsequent proposals outlined thus far. As Erekle Tzakadze has demonstrated in his analysis: "Obtained results reveal that the Alexandrian method used in most Orthodox churches often deviate from the astronomical reality and canonical rules,

⁵⁰⁵ HELLER, "Efforts Towards a Common Date for Easter."

and its accuracy can reach only 29% for the given period of years. On the other hand, the accuracy of the Gregorian method used in the Catholic/Protestant world can be as high as 92%.”⁵⁰⁶

Basilus Groen would second Heller’s proposal by suggesting a provisional adaptation: that the Roman Catholic Church take on an approach which is not unlike a number of the Orthodox churches. He proposes essentially a hybrid of the Gregorian calendar and Julian paschalion for an ecumenical goal: “Thus the Church of Rome would substantially contribute to ecumenical rapprochement in the important issue of a common Easter date. It would mean that this Church would keep the Gregorian calendar for the immovable, fixed festivals, such as Christmas and Epiphany, but celebrate the cycles of Great Lent and Easter according to the Julian calendar.”⁵⁰⁷ He does, however, note that in this circumstance, the solution could pose more issues than the problem itself, if the Catholic Church did not seek consensus first with the Protestant ecclesial communities: “If the Catholic Church were going to celebrate Great Lent and Easter according to the Julian calendar and the Anglican and Protestant Churches were to continue celebrating the paschal feasts according to more modern calculations, there would be new divisions within Christianity.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ TSAKADZE, *HCMA*, 107.

⁵⁰⁷ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date,” 370.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

4.13.2 Aleppo and the Fixed Meridian

The possibility of the Roman Church changing its *computus* to that of the Revised Julian Calendar relative to a fixed location is one which Heller herself notes as a possibility and carries with it the backing of the Aleppo Statement. Specifically, this would imply reckoning the Easter date relative to the meridian of Jerusalem.⁵⁰⁹ Such a calendar would not only be more astronomically accurate, but it would also remain identical to the Gregorian calendar until the year 2800 AD. It would certainly display goodwill toward the Orthodox, but it must be noted that such a suggestion would not be accepted universally by all autocephalous Orthodox churches.

During the 1977 Orthodox conference on this question, two proposals were considered: the first by Dr. T. Lederle of the Astronomical Institute of Heidelberg, a proposal based upon the meridian of Jerusalem, and the second offered by Prof. Georges Contopoulos of the University of Athens Observatory, based upon the Greenwich meridian. Several tables were included in this study indicating the variations of the date of Easter based upon these various proposals, and in comparison with the paschal date offered by the Gregorian calendar.⁵¹⁰ Of these tables, three (3) in particular are worth noting: an astronomical table of the Easter date⁵¹¹, a difference in weeks between the astronomical

⁵⁰⁹ D. HELLER, "The Date of Easter?" in *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3 (1996), 397.

⁵¹⁰ « Les trois différences entre les propositions pour la date astronomique de Pâques pour les années 1998, 2120 et 2143 sont dues au choix du méridien. » *Synodica*, 117.

⁵¹¹ T. LEDERLE, "Table 1: Dates Astronomiques de Pâques," in *Synodica*, 121-122.

date of Easter and the Gregorian computus⁵¹², and a comparison of the Easter/Pascha dates relative to the Gregorian and Julian computus/paschalion and the vernal equinox and new moon.⁵¹³

4.14 A Simple Revision to *De anno et eius partibus*

Perhaps the simplest path for the Roman Church, the Reformed ecclesial bodies, and for the secular community – setting aside any ecumenical considerations with the Orthodox churches, who themselves present a varied panoply of Easter calculations – might be to integrate the proposal of Grabovsky as mentioned above, which would leave intact the Gregorian calendar with but slight alterations. Changes could therefore be made in the *De anno et eius partibus* with very minimal alteration, and with a high degree of accuracy for the future of the calendar and Easter-date calculation. In the paragraph on the “Rectification of the Year; Its Necessity; the Gregorian Calendar”⁵¹⁴, it could be merely appended that in every year divisible by 3200, the leap year would become a common year. The Gregorian reckoning of the Easter date would remain therefore unchanged.

This solution, of course, has the advantage of simplicity of continuity with the Gregorian reforms which are known and employed throughout the Western Church. This

⁵¹² T. LEDERLE, “Table 2: Différence en semaines entre les dates astronomiques de Pâques et le comput pascal du calendrier Grégorien,” in *Synodica*, 123-124.

⁵¹³ T. LEDERLE, “Table V: Calcul astronomiques de la date de Pâques sur la base du méridien de Jérusalem: A) Equinoxe du printemps. B) Pleine lune. C) Date astronomique de Pâques. D) Dates de Pâques selon le calendrier Grégorien. E) Dates de Pâques selon le calendrier Julien. F) Pascha,” in *Synodica*, 133-145.

⁵¹⁴ *DAEP*, 49*; English translation from “The Year and Its Parts,” in *Breviary According to the Rite of the Order of Preachers*, pub. A. FERNANDEZ, vol. 1, Dublin, St. Saviour’s, 1967, liv-lv.

schema would suggest but the slightest of alterations, with the added benefit of the greatest accuracy, surpassing even that of the Revised Julian Calendar.⁵¹⁵ No need would even be made for complex astronomical calculations based upon a fixed meridian, such as that of the Holy Sepulchre. While this solution would perhaps be the most elegant in terms of the canon law of the Latin Church (and even perhaps for those churches utilizing the Meletian calendar), the ecumenical question would still remain somewhat unsolved.

Of course, one further solution would be the trivial one - simply doing nothing about this matter. Leofranc Holford-Strevens notes that if no changes are made in any calendar, from 6700 A.D. to 6799 A.D., Orthodox Easter will coincide with Western Pentecost, though the nominal dates in the Revised Julian calendar will be one day later⁵¹⁶, this latter reflecting the fact that those churches keeping the Revised Julian calendar likewise keep the Julian *computus* to determine Easter.

It seems clear, from an evaluation of the perspectives presented above, that the growth toward ecclesiastical unity from the perspective of the common celebration of Easter remains daunting, and will necessitate, in this author's viewpoint, an approach respecting unity-in-diversity, not unlike that which had been previously suggested in the early centuries of the Christian experience by St. Irenaeus.

⁵¹⁵ A similar proposal can be found in H. A. R. BARNETT, "Corrections to the Gregorian Calendar," in *IACA Colloquium*, Gleneagles, UK, 1996, https://www.actuaries.org/IACA/Colloquia/Gleneagles/Vol_2/Barnett.pdf (29 November 2023).

⁵¹⁶ L. HOLFORD-STREVENES, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, 63.

Conclusion

In the 20th century, there were several significant ecumenical attempts to establish a common date for Easter across Christian denominations. These efforts aimed to promote unity among Christians and alleviate the confusion caused by the differing dates of Easter celebration. The intra-Orthodox dialogue from the 1920's remains the most noteworthy, stemming from the 1920 letter of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, and the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress. The Second Vatican Council formed a watershed moment in the ecumenical movement within the Roman Catholic Church and provided conciliar legislation on the matter, but also influenced the discussions of the WCC in 1965, 1967, and 1970. In 1982, the Vatican hosted a conference on the reform of the calendar to mark the 4th centenary since *Inter Gravissimas*; the proceedings of which have remained an important research tool in this endeavor. For instance, it is this author's opinion that the ecumenical movement toward unity in this matter will be best served by having a clear understanding of and response to positions which hold to more intransigent perspectives on the movement of the Easter Date.

In the past quarter century, the statements of Aleppo and L'viv (which essentially endorsed the Aleppo statement) represent the most recent documents from the WCC on the matter. It is also important to consider the recent mathematical and scientific proposals for the reform of the Gregorian calendar, such as those of Milanković, Ovidiu Vaduvescu, and Yury Grabovsky, as well as the proposal which the Second Vatican Council offered for a fixed-paschal date. The ecumenical movement toward unity in this matter will be best

served by having a clear understanding of and response to positions which hold to more intransigent perspectives on the movement of the Easter Date.

The relationship of the ecumenical movement as described in this chapter with legislation on these matters within the churches seems to follow from discussion of the relationship of ecclesial unity versus the celebration of a common Easter date. In current legislation, the ultimate approval on these matters is reserved to the Apostolic See (if conferences of bishops choose to transfer or suppress them in the Latin Church, or if a church *sui iuris* legislates thereupon).⁵¹⁷ If a union with a separated church were to take place now, there would need to be some recognition of the legislative role of the Apostolic See. Since the Holy See has been indulgent in transferring the Paschal observance in places like the Holy Land for ecumenical reasons, the question does remain of how and in what way could a separated church accept this legislative oversight? This will be a question that further ecumenical dialogue will have to address.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. *CIC* 1246 and *CCEO* 880.

General Conclusion

An historical conspectus reveals that the debates over the Easter date are indeed very closely allied with ecclesiological and, indeed, canon law questions. The early legislative rulings on the date of Easter, stemming in particular from the Council of Nicaea, have clearly been normative for both the Eastern and Latin churches over the course of centuries. The patristic era saw divergences already between the Eastern and Western churches in terms of the paschal *computus*, and despite Nicaea's best efforts, the fragile unity unraveled not long thereafter. In the medieval era, legislative proposals concerning the date of Easter, as noted above, were brought forth in the context of the questions of conciliarism, and came from the substantial intellectual work of the Church taking place within academia. Reforms to the calendar and Easter computation ultimately came into legislative existence, with both ecclesiastical and civil ramifications, subsequent to the Council of Trent.

Likewise, subsequent to Vatican II, much of the discussion concerning common celebrations of Easter has taken place within the paradigm of the nascent ecumenical movement. However, over fifty years after Vatican II, it is becoming apparent that there does exist a greater diversity amongst the Christian churches on the celebration of Easter than can be easily be made strictly uniform by simple *fiat* legislation or juridical-liturgical agreements. On this point, perhaps one of the most significant discoveries of this research thus far has been the great diversity of celebration of the Easter date within both the Catholic and Orthodox spheres, in addition to the hindrances to ecclesial unity by the

disputes between various Orthodox churches. Concessions are made and indults are given within the Catholic Church to celebrate Easter in the Holy Land or Greece on the same date as the Orthodox celebration, and within Orthodoxy, there is latitude granted for celebrations to take place for pastoral reasons on different dates, particularly in areas where Orthodoxy is in the minority.

The present research results in finding two very different, contrasting perspectives from within the Catholic tradition to recapitulate these viewpoints – both of which appear endemic of the greatly-widening chasm between popular perspectives within Roman Catholicism. These opinions tend to mirror similar currents of thought within Eastern Orthodoxy vis-à-vis the ecumenical approach to the Easter date and ecclesiastical unity.

Basilius Groen provides a very comprehensive summation as well of the demographic and sociological challenges related to this very question. The experience of migration of peoples throughout the world, particularly from countries maintaining varied dates for the Easter celebration, has shown that their encounters with other Christian experiences will impact any further discussion in this matter.⁵¹⁸ There remain, as described previously, various parts of the Christian world where different Christian communities celebrate Easter on differing days, and there exist those who have reached agreements to celebrate on the same day in the same locality, such as in the Holy Land. Such agreements display a witness to the conception of unity within diversity.

⁵¹⁸ See GROEN, “How Long It Was and How Far”, 40-46.

To this author, it seems clear that the way forward, and any proposals *de lege ferenda* will involve movements respecting accuracy, such as the proposal discussed in section 4.11 of Grabovsky and/or Barnett, and movements respecting unity amongst churches. Any further legislation on the matter must respect balance and moderation, as certain churches and ecclesial communities would clearly set themselves in opposition to any proposal for unity on this matter, particularly with the advent of the Old Calendarist movement amongst the Orthodox churches. In short, ecumenism must be tempered by realism.

While there remains amongst the Orthodox jurisdictions a far greater interest in preserving the tradition of the ecumenical councils, it is also very apparent that the Roman Church, at least since the Second Vatican Council, and in contradistinction to the Orthodox churches, appears to be more willing to sacrifice some of these ancient legislative principles of the ecumenical councils regarding the Easter date for the purposes of ecclesiastical unity. It is clear that the Roman and Orthodox churches are operating from various principles on the matter; the Orthodox witnessing to a sincere respect for the tradition of Nicaea and the Roman displaying an obvious desire for overarching unity. Attachment to such principles, on an ecumenical level, would not in and of themselves seem inimical to the quest for unity amongst Christians; the Easter date, being a consequence of these principles, would be somewhat of a secondary nature.

Despite being a provisional proposal, the approach suggested by Bert Groen and Dagmar Heller, and described by Groen himself as a means of “ecclesial kenosis,”⁵¹⁹ which would essentially revert the Roman Church back to a point prior to the Tridentine reforms, does not appear reasonable or respect the scientific integrity of the Gregorian reforms which have been accepted throughout the majority of the Western world. Taking this as but one example, it seems that certain high-ranking officials within the Roman church (and certain in the ecumenical community, such as Groen and Heller) would be willing to set aside the Western canonical tradition surrounding the date of Easter, at least provisionally, in order to advance the ecumenical goal of a common celebration date of Easter. This proposal, in this author’s opinion, seems to wish to be judged more on its ecumenical intentions.

It is a fact that many of the largest Orthodox churches (specifically the Greek and Russian Orthodox) are adamant about their fidelity to the Nicaean paschalion as well as to the Julian calendar, and yet, as has been demonstrated, the medieval scholarship on this question, which would impact the legislation of the Gregorian calendar, is an important part of the history of this question, wherein scholars such as Zoest at the Council of Basel sought to balance both scientific accuracy and fidelity to the received tradition. Moreover, a recent study has demonstrated that even using the Julian paschalion/computus will begin to appoint a Saturday, rather than a Sunday, for the paschal date, because of the growing

⁵¹⁹ GROEN, “The Long Way to a Common Easter Date”, 51.

difference between the Julian and Gregorian/Meletian calendars, in contradiction to the prescriptions of Nicaea.⁵²⁰

It seems evident, at least to this author, that perhaps some mutual “exchange of gifts” could be foreseen in terms of the Roman Church perhaps re-discovering a sense of reverence for the historic norms of the ecumenical councils (as the Orthodox have carefully guarded), and the Orthodox churches developing a slightly more flexible approach for the purposes of establishing a common unification. Perhaps seeking a proposal which reflects a desire for accuracy, as suggested by Aleppo and historically based in the tradition (cf. Pierre d’Ailly and Nicholas of Cusa’s use of the Jerusalem meridian as well as the contemporary algorithm proposed by Vaduvescu), could be the way forward for not only the Roman Catholic Church, but also for those churches and ecclesial communities which participate in the WCC.

Therefore, upon further reflection, the central question that this study aimed to answer, concerning the relationship between Christian unity and the canonical aspects of the date of Easter, must be answered that ecclesiastical unity, in the juridical sense, will need to accommodate various liturgical and calendrical perspectives concerning the Easter celebrations.

Civil authorities will need to reach a consensus – perhaps not in the foreseeable future – on the accuracy of the civil Gregorian calendar, what steps should be made to

⁵²⁰ T. D. VĂLCAN, “Solving Two Problems Related to Determining the Date of Easter,” in *Astra Salvensis*, 9 (2017), 44.

revise it, and the role that the Catholic Church (who originally prompted the Gregorian calendar itself) could play in this process. In this author's opinion, the possibility of celebrating a common date of Easter amongst all Christians is chimerical. This dispute, as has been demonstrated, stretches back to the earliest days of the Christian experience. The question, therefore, seems to be left in a *status perplexus*.

Ironically, even during the COVID-19 experience, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments insisted that the date of Easter not be transferred – despite the possibility of observing the Julian Easter a week later, as would be done by, for instance, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁵²¹ And the proposal, furthered by some in the ecumenical community such as Groen and Heller, that the Julian paschalion be adopted by all churches, would be adopting a mathematical and logical falsehood (i.e. that Easter no longer follows the first full moon after the vernal equinox) at the center of the Church's most sacred celebration of the Resurrection. In a similar way, the “cosmic” dimension of the celebration of the Resurrection would otherwise be lost by a fixed-date proposal, which would also call into serious question the ecclesial fidelity to the Nicaean and pre-Nicaean tradition.

The counter-argument is always that this so-called “cosmic” dimension, relating the Resurrection to the new birth of springtime, does not hold true for Christians living in

⁵²¹ CONGREGATIO PRO CULTU DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM, “Decreta in tempo de Covid-19, Prot. 153/20,” <http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/decreti-general/decreti-general/2020/decreto-triduo-pasquale-2020.html> (10 January 2024).

the southern hemispheres.⁵²² To this, it must be said that if one is to take the astronomical reckoning of the paschal date, it is necessary to base it upon some meridian (as the Aleppo document suggests, perhaps that of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem). This being in the northern hemisphere, Easter would by definition be allied to the vernal equinox in this historical location of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With this having been said, the proposal of Aleppo seems to be the clearest proposal which could benefit not only the Gregorian Easter churches and ecclesial communities, but also those New Calendar Orthodox churches. While the adoption of the Revised Julian Calendar or even Grabovsky's considerably more accurate proposal by the Roman Church (in conjunction with world civil governments) as a necessary scientific and mathematical corrective to the Gregorian calendar would be a positive step forward in terms of relations with *certain* of the Orthodox churches, it would not, however, bring any foreseeable positive fruits with the Old Calendar churches, such as Russia.

From a scientific-mathematical standpoint, the Revised Julian Calendar itself, while perhaps at the cutting-edge in the year 1923, has been surpassed by other, simpler proposals for calendar revision. To adopt, for instance, Grabovsky's revision of the Gregorian calendar in conjunction with the proposal of Aleppo regarding the fixed meridian of Jerusalem could be a fortuitous move in regard to ecclesiastical unity and mathematical accuracy of the calendar and paschalion. To use a fixed meridian for the

⁵²² E. BRANISTE, « Le thème de la célébration commune de Pâques. Brève étude historique et canonique du problème » in *Synodica*, 29-30.

Easter date is, as has been stated above, something which was proposed even as far back as Pierre d’Ailly and Nicholas of Cusa. Nevertheless, the adoption of the Aleppo proposal, while likewise a fruitful proposal, would in and of itself still not achieve any long-sought-after ecclesiastical unity with such Old Calendarist ecclesial bodies.

Upon reflection upon the research presented thus far, a perspective of “unity in diversity” on the Easter date question would need to be adopted by all Christian communities – Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant – if any realistic movement toward ecclesiastical unity may be reached. The celebration of Easter, while nevertheless important from a liturgical and ecclesiological standpoint, has been already adjusted juridically (cf. canon 1244, §1 of the *CIC* and canon 880 of the *CCEO*) for local needs – as is already the case in many of the local churches in the Middle East and in countries of the Orthodox diaspora. This, in all reality, is the closest viewpoint to the early Patristic paradigm.

Furthermore, recent texts from Pope Francis would tend to lend support to approaches based upon subsidiarity, specifically *Evangelii gaudium* 16, which notes that “it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’.”⁵²³ This dynamic is clearly evident in the solutions to Paschal celebrations which are now being practiced in places such as the Holy Land.

⁵²³ FRANCIS, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, in *AAS*, 105 (2013), 1027, English translation from https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (4 May 2024).

Professor John Errickson offers a useful hermeneutic, citing the 1971 report of the Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, which likewise advances an approach of unity-in-diversity, but arguing that the calendar is of central necessity and a divergence in this area would constitute a “slackening of the bonds of unity.” Errickson tends to disagree with this necessity of uniformity as regards the calendar, noting that for some, the Julian calendar and paschalion denote the Church’s other-worldliness, and by other hermeneutics, is also an obstacle to mission to a world which has scientifically advanced. This author would concur, also given the reality of various ecclesiastical calendars being used throughout various particular churches even within the Latin Rite itself.

Doctrinal unity will ultimately be the necessary and sufficient condition for unity amongst churches, over and above differences of liturgical celebration, even on a matter as weighty as the central celebration of Easter/Pascha. Errickson, in conclusion, suggests a threefold proposition: 1) fidelity to the traditional norms for dating Easter; 2) calculating Easter by the most accurate scientific norms; and 3) allowing the old calculation for pastoral or psychological reasons.⁵²⁴

These latter three principles merit serious consideration as the basis for any future legal proposals regarding any alteration of the Easter date. Juridically speaking, any project of law on this matter will, within the Catholic Church, necessarily emanate from the supreme legislator, on the basis of the aforementioned canon 1246, §1 (*CCEO* 880). It would be crucial for such laws to reflect the need for astronomical and mathematical

⁵²⁴ ERRICKSON, *DECO*, 52-53.

accuracy (which is emphasized by the Aleppo Statement), but also leave enough liberty for those churches outside of the Catholic Communion to make accommodations for their own particular juridical needs. In such proposals, it would be nearly impossible for unity to equal uniformity. But this should not in itself be a stumbling block, since “the unity of the Church is derived not from uniformity but from her plurality.”⁵²⁵ The diversity of celebrations of the paschal date, as currently occurs, can reflect the legitimate plurality existing within the *communio Ecclesiarum*.

Errickson also mentions how Catholics and Baptists share the same paschal date, but theologically are quite distinct. Nevertheless, the counterpoint would remain that those churches which are doctrinally similar should, one might think, have greater harmony in regard to the Easter date. However, the record of the earliest Christian communities does not imply this; local churches in the Patristic era exhibited divergence in the paschal celebration without sacrificing doctrinal unity. On a practical level, as attested by, for instance, Christians in the Middle East and through migration, a diversity will be clear in the foreseeable future. Reaching a common paschal date, as it has been said, “does not mean yet unity.”⁵²⁶

While *communio* in the Eucharist has always existed as the basis of ecclesiastical unity, as Hertling describes it and as has been more broadly evaluated and discussed since

⁵²⁵ E. CORECCO, *Canon Law and Communio: Writings on the Constitutional Law of the Church*, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999, 64.

⁵²⁶ VISCHER, “A Common Date for Easter? Notes on the Efforts in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Synodica*, 67.

the Second Vatican Council, this does not preclude, as history attests, a varied and diverse unity with different expressions, even concerning the celebration of the central mystery of the Christian faith. Perhaps the main concern should be one which was noted over sixty years ago, specifically the habitual hazard present within Orthodoxy of “the tendency to determine the spiritual by the temporal.”⁵²⁷

The question is now left with a gulf being drawn between the work that has been done within the ecumenical community over the past century, and more fundamentalist voices making themselves known. One can see movements within Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism representing, on the one hand, a very strict view admitting of no change, and also voices expressing a willingness to set aside major aspects of the tradition for the purposes of ecumenical reconciliation. It is this author’s opinion that a *tertium quid* will be necessary. A process respecting accuracy, benefitting all users of the calendar, as well as unity, will be necessary, reflecting a reconciled diversity – a problematic present since the beginning. Perhaps accepting a moderate solution, such as Grabovsky’s mathematical proposal regarding the calendar and thereby adjusting the *De anno et eius partibus* accordingly, while also in subsidiarity allowing local churches greater freedom to determine their celebrations of Easter (cf. the current experience in the Holy Land), might be an option.

⁵²⁷ J. LYNAGH, “The World of Orthodoxy – Unity and Conflict,” in *Roman Echoes 1963*, Rome, DAPCO, 1963, 23.

Unity, it appears, will have to be found to exist within diversity. The quest for uniformity on the matter will likely remain chimerical. To these final points, perhaps it would be best to leave the final word on the matter to one of the first writers on the matter, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, who urged for a sensibly “irenic” approach to the question of the Easter date vis-à-vis the unity amongst churches: “And they parted from one another in peace, as indeed the entire Church had peace between those who observed and those who did not observe.”⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ IRENAEUS OF LYON, “Fragments of the Lost Writings”, in A. ROBERTS, J. DONALDSON, and A. C. COXE (eds.), *From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1.*, trans. A. ROBERTS, Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885, revised and edited for *New Advent* by K. KNIGHT, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0134.htm> (10 January 2024).

Appendix 1: Table of Ecclesiastical Calendar Usage

This table is formulated according to the classification specified by I. ANGELI MURZAKU, “Walking the Walk in 2025? Three Festivities in One Year - a Catholic Perspective” in J. LOYA (ed.), *Easter Together: An Ecumenical Exploration for a Common Date*, Fairfax, VA, Eastern Christian Publications, 2022, 148-152.

| I. Churches Completely Under the Old Julian Calendar | II. Churches of Mixed Calendar | III. Churches Entirely Under the Revised Julian Calendar | IV. Churches Under the Gregorian Calendar |
|---|---|---|---|
| <u>Catholic Churches:</u> | <u>Catholic Churches:</u> | <u>Catholic Churches:</u> | <u>Catholic Churches:</u> |
| 1) Ruthenian Catholic Church - Eparchy of Mukaceco. | 1) Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church - predominantly Old Julian Calendar, with all its parishes in Ukraine and Russia following it. However, hundreds of parishes in the diaspora use the Gregorian Calendar. | 1) Romanian Catholic Church. | 1) Latin Catholic Church (except in Greece and Suria, where by decision of the Bishops (in Greece) and by special order of Pope Saint John Paul II (in Syria) even the Latins observe Julian Pascha). |
| | 2) Russian Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite - follows the Old Julian Calendar in Russian, but either the Gregorian or Revised Julian in diaspora parishes. | 2) Bulgarian Catholic Church. | 2) Armenian Catholic Church. |

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| | 3) Melkite Greek Catholic Church - follows the Revised Julian Calendar in Syria, and the Gregorian Calendar in the diaspora and many parts of the Middle East. | 3) The Greek Byzantine Catholic Church. | 3) Coptic Catholic Church. |
| <u>Orthodox Churches:</u> | <u>Orthodox Churches:</u> | <u>Orthodox Churches:</u> | 4) Chaldean Orthodox Church. |
| 1) Russian Orthodox Church and its autonomous Churches (ROCOR, UOC-MP, Estonia-MP, Moldova-MP, Belarus, Japan, China, Latvia). | 1) Orthodox Church of America - predominantly Revised Julian Calendar, but with the Alaskan diocese and with a large number of parishes in the US West Coast and Canada still under the Old Julian Calendar. The main OCA Cathedral in Washington D.C. uses the Revised Julian Calendar for English Divine Liturgies and the Old Julian Calendar for Slavonic Divine Liturgies. | 1) Patriarchate of Constantinople (except, as noted in another section, for Mt. Athos and many of the Slavic Churches under its jurisdiction). | 5) Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. |
| 2) Serbian Orthodox Church. | 2) Orthodox Church of Poland - predominantly Old Julian Calendar, but with many parishes | 2) Patriarchate of Alexandria. | 6) Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. |

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| | and cathedrals in the western portions of Poland using the Revised Julian Calendar. | | |
| 3) Georgian Orthodox Church. | 3) ACROD (under the E.P.) - still predominantly Old Julian Calendar to the old Calendar, but with new parishes and some old parishes using the Revised Julian Calendar. | 3) Patriarchate of Antioch (at least one parish in Australia - formerly ROCOR - is on the Old Calendar). | 7) Syrian Catholic Church (Author not sure about them; believes they were ordered by Pope Saint John Paul II to observe Pascha in common with the Orthodox). |
| 4) Ukrainian and Belarusian Orthodox Church Churches in the diaspora under the E.P. | 4) Orthodox Church of Czech and Slovak Lands - predominantly Old Calendar, but with at least one eparchy using the Revised Julian Calendar. | 4) State Church of Greece. | 8) Maronite Catholic Church. |
| 5) Jerusalem Patriarchate and Church of Sinai. | 5) "Rue Daru" or the Russian Orthodox Exarchate in Western Europe under the E.P. - predominantly Revised Julian Calendar, but with many of the older and bigger parishes (Especially in France) under the Old Julian Calendar. | 5) Orthodox Church of Cyprus. | 9) Byzantine Catholic Church of America. |

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|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| 6) Mount Athos (not a "church" by itself, as everyone knows, but still sufficiently significant to be separately listed here). | | 6) Patriarchate of Bulgaria (although a very few diaspora parishes remain on the Old Calendar.) | 10) Italo-Albanian Catholic Church. |
| Hon. Mention) The Greek Old Calendarists, UOC-KP, UAOC, Macedonian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches also follow the Old Julian Calendar. | | 7) Patriarchate of Romania. | 11) Hungarian Catholic Church. |
| <u>Oriental Orthodox:</u> | | | 12) Slovak Catholic Church. |
| 1) Ancient (Assyrian) Church of the East. | | | 13) Ruthenians in Czech Republic. |
| 2) Coptic Orthodox Church (Follows its own calendar that is very similar to the Old Julian Calendar). | | | <u>Orthodox Churches:</u> |
| 3) Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Follows its own calendar that is very similar to the Old Julian Calendar). | | | 1) Finnish Orthodox Church. |
| 4) Armenian Patriarchate of | | | <u>Oriental Orthodox:</u> |

| | | | |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Jerusalem. | | | |
| | | | 1) All Oriental Orthodox Churches (except for the Ethiopians, the Coptic Orthodox and the Armenians in Jerusalem now follow the Gregorian Calendar. The British Orthodox Church, no longer in communion with the Coptic Orthodox Church, follows the Gregorian Calendar.) |

Appendix 2: The Astronomical-Mathematical Principles of the Computus

Deacon Anthony Kotlar outlines the different historical models for the calculation of the Easter date, beginning with the biblical model, based solely upon the appearances made manifest to the senses, which would find evidence in the means used to calculate Easter until the time of the fall of the Roman empire; the computational model, based upon arithmetic and basic mathematics, evident in the medieval computus and even up to the introduction of the Revised Julian Calendar; and finally the modern scientific model, based upon the principles of physics and calculus, as seen in the proposals of Aleppo.⁵²⁹

It is not necessary here to provide a listing of the paschal dates as well as their corresponding dominical letter and epact, as these can be easily found and calculated online and in the available literature.⁵³⁰

a. Solar Principles

“The period of time for the ecliptic longitude of the Sun to increase 360 degrees. Since the Sun's ecliptic longitude is measured with respect to the equinox, the tropical year comprises a complete cycle of seasons, and its length is approximated in the long term by

⁵²⁹ A. KOTLAR, “The Church Calendar: Theology and Technology,” in LOYA, *Easter Together*, 96-97. See also D. BRAVERMAN, *The Mathematics of the Gregorian Calendar*, Bloomington, IN, Xlibris, 2010.

⁵³⁰ Cf. E. POULLE, “Table Chronologique, 1971-2500,” in *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 1999, tome 157, livraison 2, 503-508, https://www.persee.fr/doc/bec_0373-6237_1999_num_157_2_450990 (10 January 2024). See also *Synodica*, 121-149. Cf. also R. FRANCIS, “The Easter Date Pattern,” in *Pi Mu Epsilon Journal*, vol. 9, no. 6, Spring 1992, 374-383.

the civil (Gregorian) calendar. The mean tropical year is approximately 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45 seconds.”⁵³¹

b. Lunar Principles

The synodic month (Greek: συνοδικός, synodikós, meaning “pertaining to a synod, i.e., a meeting”; in this case, of the Sun and the Moon) is the average period of the Moon's orbit with respect to the line joining the Sun and Earth. This is the period of the lunar phases, because the Moon's appearance depends on the position of the Moon with respect to the Sun from the vantage point of the Earth.

While the Moon is orbiting the Earth, the Earth is progressing in its orbit around the Sun. After completing a sidereal month, the Moon must move a little further to reach the new position having the same angular distance from the Sun, appearing to move with respect to the stars since the previous month. Therefore, the synodic month exceeds the sidereal month by 2.2 days. Thus, approximately 13.37 sidereal months, but only about 12.37 synodic months, occur in the course of a Gregorian year.

Since Earth's orbit around the Sun is not circular but rather elliptical, the principles of mathematical physics assert that the speed of Earth's orbit around the Sun varies during the year. Thus, the angular rate is faster nearer periapsis (or nearest approach to the Sun) and slower near the farthest point from the sun, or apoapsis. The Moon's orbit around the

⁵³¹ “Astronomical Almanac Online Glossary”, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191020131408/http://asa.usno.navy.mil/SecM/Glossary.html> (10 January 2024). For a comparison of the different measurements of the tropical year, see F. VIZZA, “Aloysius Lilius, Author of the Gregorian Reform of the Calendar,” <https://philpapers.org/rec/VIZALA> (10 January 2024), 19.

Earth is similarly elliptical. Due to such variations in angular velocity, the time between lunations may vary between approximately 29.18 to 29.93 days. The general average duration is 29.530587981 days (29 d 12 h 44 min 2.8016 s). The synodic month is also used to calculate eclipse cycles.⁵³²

c. The Paschal Algorithm

1. Cycles of Epacts

Prior to the Gregorian reform, the epact was defined as the age of the moon on 22 March; however, since the Gregorian reform, the epact is the age of the moon on 1 January. The epact is a notion which relates the lunar year to the solar year. The tropical year is the amount of time it takes for the Sun to return to its original position relative to the vernal equinox, and the synodic month is defined as the lunar month. The Metonic cycle was the original method in the Julian calendar for relating these two concepts, since 19 tropical years are the equivalent of 235 synodic months. Arithmetically, after every 19 years, the epact must be corrected by adding 1 for the cycle to properly repeat again, which is defined as the *saltus lunae*.

The genius of the Gregorian reform was in Lilius' proposal for a solar and a lunar equation, whereby in the former, the epact would decrease by 1 whenever the leap day is omitted (the century years indivisible by 400) and in the latter, the epact would increase by 18 times in 2500 calendar years.

⁵³² "Lunar Sidereal and Synodic Periods," in *Durham University Department of Physics*, https://astro.dur.ac.uk/~ams/users/lunar_sid_syn.html (17 August 2024).

2. Dominical Letters

The first seven letters, A B C D E F G, were an aid established to find the day of the week for a given date. In the year 2020, the Dominical letter was ED. If the numbers 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 are assigned respectively to A, B, C, D, E, F, G, then de Morgan's rule for calculating the Dominical letter is determined by $(\text{year} + \text{floor}(\text{year}/4) + \text{floor}(\text{year}/400) - \text{floor}(\text{year}/100) - 1) \bmod 7$.⁵³³

3. Golden Number

The golden number is discovered by taking the year (in either the Gregorian or the Julian calendar), dividing it by 19, taking the remainder, and adding 1. Mathematically, this would be expressed as $\text{year} \bmod 19 + 1$.

This Golden Number became widely used in the *Massa Compoti* of Alexander de Villa Dei around 1200 AD. From it, and in conjunction with the Dominical letter, can be derived the date of the Paschal full moon in the Julian computus.

4. Indictions

The indiction originally came into being as the Roman period of tax assessment, especially in the province of Egypt. The indiction is mathematically expressed as the $(\text{year} + 2) \bmod 15 + 1$. The Julian period is defined as the product of the 15 year indiction cycle, with the 19 year Metonic cycle and the 28 year solar cycle. Thus, the Alexandrian computus

⁵³³ See H. THURSTON, "Dominical Letter," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1909, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05109a.htm> (17 August 2024).

gives a 532 year cycle of paschal dates, whereas the Gregorian calculation gives a period of 5,700,000 years.

d. The *Ordo*

What was previously called the *Pye*, *Pica*, or the *Directorium* was the predecessor of the modern-day *Ordo Divini Officii Recitandi Missaeque Peragendi*, the book which describes the proper Masses and Offices to be celebrated on a given day for a given diocese. It is noted that there are thirty-five different ways in which Easter can fall between the extremes of 22 March and 25 April. This can be seen in the *Tabula Paschalis Nova Reformata* in the *De anno et eius partibus*, whereby to each Dominical letter, five different days exist on which Easter can fall. The website which this author maintains, *Divinum Officium*, a website which historically documents the changes in the *Breviarium Romanum* and *Missale Romanum* from 1570 until 1969, including some ritual variants including the Dominican and Benedictine usage, maintains a similar structure for its own internal *Ordo*, whereby there are files for each of the different days on which Easter can fall, which include the other liturgical days throughout the ecclesiastical year. These files indicate the annual changes which are to be made in the readings of Scripture, responsories, and saints' feast days which vary annually due to Easter-date variations, thereby creating a perpetual calendar for the unrevised Roman Rite.

e. Modern Paschal Algorithms

There exist several different mathematical algorithms for the calculation of the Paschal date. Perhaps one of the first was devised by Gauss in 1800, but by his own

admission was limited to the 18th and 19th centuries. A more complete algorithm, from an anonymous source, was listed in 1877 by Samuel Butcher in *The Ecclesiastical Calendar*, and was recently cited by the Belgian astronomer Jean Meeus in his 1991 book *Astronomical Algorithms*. Meeus also devised an algorithm for the Julian paschalion, which can be transposed for usage in either the Gregorian or Julian calendars.⁵³⁴

Professor R. H. Van Gent, of Utrecht University, has also analyzed the frequency of the Paschal date in the Gregorian paschal cycle of 5,700,000 years, as well as their recurrence, and also for comparison's sake provides a similar distribution of Julian Easter dates in the 532-year Dionysian paschal cycle, also providing reference to the Coptic/Ethiopian calendar.⁵³⁵

These algorithms, particularly the Julian *computus*, have even been mechanically devised into astronomical clocks displaying the Easter date. Such clocks exist at the cathedrals of Beauvais, Besançon, and Strasbourg, as well as in pocket watches, such as the “Calibre 89” pocket watch designed by Patek Philippe of Switzerland. A perpetual Gregorian calendar in mechanical slide rule format has been devised by Oliver Steffens, in a circular format divided into seven parts, and using modular arithmetic to establish the

⁵³⁴ A history of paschal algorithms since the time of C. F. Gauss can be found in R. BIEN, “Gauß and Beyond: The Making of Easter Algorithms,” in *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*, 58 (2004), 439-452. A simple description can be found in J. TATTERSALL, *Time and Calendars*, unpublished manuscript, Providence, Providence College, 1999.

⁵³⁵ R. H. VAN GENT, “A Perpetual Easter and Passover Calculator,” Utrecht, Universiteit Utrecht, <http://www.staff.science.uu.nl/~gent0113/easter/eastercalculator.htm> (10 January 2024). See also M. DAVISON, “The Frequency Distribution of the Dates of Easter,” in *Irish Astronomical Journal*, vol. 14 (5/6) (1980), 156-164.

divisions of months, years, and dates according to four distinct layers of the rule.⁵³⁶ Likewise, recently, Werner Bergmann devised a simple slide rule which could calculate the Easter date given a dominical letter (transposed to a mathematical digit) and epact.⁵³⁷ More simply, a chart, or nomogram, has also been devised in which the paschal date can be determined quite simply.⁵³⁸ Such charts have been used with frequency since the Middle Ages and still appear in the *praenotanda* of Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran service books.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ O. STEFFENS, “A Perpetual Calendar Slide Rule,” 17 February 2022, https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-oth-regensburg/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/5893/file/Steffens_Perpetual_Calendar_Slide_Rule.pdf (10 January 2024), 1-6.

⁵³⁷ W. BERGMANN, “Easter and the Calendar: The Mathematics of Determining a Formula for the Easter Festival to Medieval Computing,” in *Journal for General Philosophy of Science / Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1991), 15-41.

⁵³⁸ D. ROEGEL, “An introduction to nomography: Garrigues’ nomogram for the computation of Easter,” in *TUGboat*, vol. 30 (2009), no. 1, 88-104.

⁵³⁹ Further history of these diagrams in the medieval period can be found in F. WALLIS, “What a Medieval Diagram Shows: A Case Study of ‘Computus’,” in *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 36 (2015), 1-40.

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