

## THE PASCHALION: AN ICON OF TIME

James R. Campbell

### *The Patristic Tradition*

The Paschalion is a set of traditional rules used by the Church to determine the date of Easter. The fundamental intention of these rules is to ensure that each yearly Paschal celebration will be a true *mimesis*, an “imitation” or “representation,” of the unique chronological pattern of events surrounding our Lord’s Passion and Resurrection. The formation of this “liturgical icon” took place in Apostolic times and received its definitive form in the Patristic era. The Paschalion, then, is to be venerated both as a hallowed tradition of the Church and as an iconic representation in rubrical form of the decisive moment of Christian faith.

Apostolic Canon 7 is perhaps the earliest documented reference to the Paschalion:

If any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon celebrate the holy day of Easter before the vernal equinox with the Jews, let him be deposed.<sup>1</sup>

Some commentators have derived two rules from this one statement—that Pascha is always to be observed after the equinox, and that it is never to be celebrated concurrently with Passover on the 14th of Nisan. Historical investigation, however, shows that because of calendrical errors, the Jews of the diaspora frequently celebrated Passover before the vernal equinox during Apostolic times. Canon 7 therefore prohibits any observance of the rabbinical calendar then current, and establishes one rubric only:<sup>2</sup> that Pascha must be celebrated after the spring equinox.

The next available source of information concerning the Patristic

<sup>1</sup>*The Rudder*, Cummings ed. (Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Education Society, 1957), p. 9.

Paschalion is the decision of the First Ecumenical Council regulating the Quartodecimian controversy. The letter of Constantine I to all those not present at the Council reports the decision thusly:

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.<sup>3</sup>

We know from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (V:23) that the Quartodecimian practice was to observe the 14th day of the first lunar month as Pascha, whether or not it fell on the first day of the week, the day of our Lord's resurrection. This observance was at variance with that of the Church in Rome and in Alexandria, where the Sunday immediately following the 14th moon was always celebrated as the day of the Paschal feast. This discrepancy of practice had provoked controversy throughout the third century, and various local synods and councils prior to Nicea I had formulated a rule that the mystery of Pascha was to be celebrated on no other day than the Lord's Day itself.<sup>4</sup> Constantine's reference to "one and the same day" is therefore to be understood by all as meaning "Sunday," and the action of the Council is to be seen as affirming the decisions of those local synods which had preferred the practice of Rome and Alexandria to that of the Quartodecimian diocese of Asia Minor.

Thus, two rules of the Patristic Paschalion can be explicitly documented: Pascha always follows the spring equinox, and always falls on a Sunday. Since in Jewish calendrical practice the 14th of any given month begins with the night of the full moon, the resolution of the Quartodecimian controversy logically implies that Easter Sunday must also follow the full moon of Nisan. This lunar month is regulated calendrically so as to occur always in the spring—it is the "first of months" and the one during which the Passover is always to be celebrated (Ex 12:2 and Deut 16:1).<sup>5</sup> The Christian liturgical tradition continues this observance of the first lunar month of spring, but adds to it the unique sequence of days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—as a final and decisive factor in determining the date of the Lord's Pascha.

<sup>2</sup>Bishop Peter of New York, "The Date of Orthodox Easter: An Erroneous Interpretation," *The Russian Orthodox Journal*, Vol. 55 No. 10 (April 1983), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Eusebius, *Vita Constantine III: 18-20, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 14, pp. 54-55.

<sup>4</sup>Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History V: 22-23, Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 19, pp. 332-334.

<sup>5</sup>Old Testament "Abib" later becomes "Nisan."

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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 be kept after the day of the Passion, (so) the former should not be on the fourteenth of the (lunar) month, but later.<sup>8</sup>

The avoidance of the 14th of Nisan as an acceptable date for Pascha is a logical extension of the principle that it is the Sunday *following* the full moon that is to be celebrated. This prohibition of concurrence of the lunar date of the Passion with the historic day of the Resurrection forms the fourth and last element of the traditional Paschalion. It distinguishes the Christian Passover from the Passover of the Law so that the fulfillment of the latter by the former will be made manifest, and so that the liturgical sequence of Passion and Resurrection can more closely imitate the chronological signs recorded in the Gospels.

The four Patristic rubrics that constitute the Orthodox Paschalion can therefore be stated as follows:

Pascha is the Sunday / immediately following / the first full moon / after the vernal equinox.

<sup>6</sup>Turner, *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885-1903), Vol. 2, pp. 130-149.

<sup>7</sup>Chrysostom, *Paschal Homily VII*, Migne, *Patrologiae graecae* Vol. 59, col. 747A.

<sup>8</sup>Ambrose, Letter to the Bishop of Amelia, *Fathers of the Church* Vol.



discrepancy between Eastern and Western date for Easter, but rather it is the Orthodox use of a conventional equinox and a conventional full moon that it the main cause of the divergence. In 1984 the conventional dates do not conflict with the sequence of astronomical events, so the day of Pascha is the same for both despite the difference in calendrical dates.

There are two parallel but distinct causes for the discrepancies ( $D_1$  and  $D_2$ ) in these conventional dates. First, the tabular system of Paschal dates created by the Alexandrians, and still used by the Orthodox Church, is based upon the Julian O.S. solar year of 365.25 days/year. This figure, measured from equinox to equinox, is in error by .0078 days/year, or 1 day every 128 years, because of a yearly precession<sup>11</sup> of the solar equinoxes that was not adequately anticipated in the calendrical system. Second, the Paschal tables are constructed according to a 19 year cycle of recurrence of solar-lunar conjunctions that was devised by the astronomer Meton (c. 432BC), and which contains a discrepancy of at least 3 days/1000 years. That is, the cycle of repetition is not perfectly matched to the natural phenomena it describes and tries to predict.<sup>12</sup> Since the 19 year cycle is based upon the O.S. solar year, the conventional Paschal tables are inextricably bound up with both these sources of astronomical inaccuracy. It is also apparent from an examination of subsequent disputes over correcting these errors that the calendrical tables were and are often confused with the Paschalion.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Gregorian Reform*

Thus, when Pope Gregory XIII proposed a calendrical reform for the year 1582, he was obliged to change not only the calendar, but also the conventional Paschal tables. And when the Eastern Patriarchs under the leadership of Jeremy II of Constantinople decided not to adopt the Western reforms, they were obliged to retain the use of an incorrect calendar because it was an integral part of the Alexandrian system of calculation that they were unwilling to abandon or to change. The most frequently mentioned reason for the Patriarchal rejection of the new Gregorian Paschal tables is that

<sup>11</sup>Precession—The westward drift of the equinoctial point (the intersection of the sun's apparent orbit with the earth's equatorial plane) relative to the fixed stars.

<sup>12</sup>*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1973 ed. S.v. "Calendar."

<sup>13</sup>An extreme example of this is presented by Sakkas, *The Calendar Question* (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1973).

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 Jewish Passover) with the Sunday of the Feast of the Resurrection;<sup>14</sup> and this *is* contrary to Patristic practice as described by both John Chrysostom and Ambrose of Milan.

In addition to this “canonical” imperfection, the Gregorian reform of calendar as well as of Paschal tables suffered from another great drawback. They had been designed without consultation with the Eastern hierarchs, and they were imposed by Papal fiat. Both the Orthodox Church and Byzantine culture (Greek and Russian) were exposed to tremendous external pressures during this period of their history, and could scarcely be expected to welcome any form of sudden institutional change. The effort of resistance to Islamic rulers and Jesuit missionaries made internal coherence a vital necessity,<sup>15</sup> and retention of the O.S. calendar became a symbol of cultural autonomy, especially within the Uniate Churches. The language with which the Gregorian innovations were rejected by the Council of Constantinople in 1583 makes the pastoral concern of the Patriarchs for unity within the world of Orthodoxy abundantly clear.

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 well 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.<sup>16</sup>

The reasoning upon which this decision is based is not at all clear from this passage, but the general idea is the same as that of the 8th canon from a similar Council in 1593.

<sup>14</sup>As was the case most recently in 1981.

<sup>15</sup>Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 104-105 and 108.

<sup>16</sup>Rudder, p. 13-15.

It is our will that the disposition made by the Fathers (of Nicea?) in regard to Holy and Salutory Easter remain unchanged as it is. . . .<sup>17</sup>

In effect, the Patriarchs are saying that the Byzantine rescension 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.

This virtual identification of Paschal tables with the Paschalion can be traced historically to at least the 14th century. In 1324 AD Nicephoras Gregoras calculated the equinoctial precession to be one day per 300 years, and the current calendrical error to be three days. He proposed a reform to Andronicus II which was not adopted, apparently from sheer lack of popular or political support.<sup>18</sup> This failure can be seen as due to a lack of concern for astronomical accuracy, and as symptomatic of an already firmly entrenched view of the calendar as a sacred tradition. Despite this evident confusion of a calendrical tool with the Patristic method itself, the 14th century canonist Matthew Blastaris enumerates the traditional rules of the Paschalion thusly:

First, that it is necessary to celebrate the Pascha after the spring equinox; second, that it is not (to be) the 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.<sup>19</sup>

In this Late-Byzantine version—just as in the Patristic evidence already cited—the determinants for the date of Pascha are astronomical rather than calendrical events. Neither March 21st nor 14th Nisan are ever mentioned when stating the rules. If then, the hierarchs in their

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15. Text in Dosithee, *Tomos Agapis*, p. 541-547.

<sup>18</sup>Guiland, *Essai sur Nicephore Gregoras* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1926), pp. 282-284. Also *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1931) Tome 11, col. 455. For Western counterparts see Welborn, *Calendar Reform in the 13th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Dissertation, 1935), p. 31. Grossteste calculated the error to be six days a century before Gregoras, and was correct.

<sup>19</sup>Matthew Blastaris, *Syntagma Alphabeticum*, Migne, PG 145, 96D-97A. This text is also quoted in a letter from Patriarch Jeremy II to Michael Severos in 1583. See Vittorio Peri, *Due date un'unica Pasqua* (Milano: Societa Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1967), pp. 218-228. Letters to Gregory XIII in Hofman, "Griechische Patriarchen und Römische Päpste . . ." *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, Vol. 24 No 2 (1932), pp. 242-244.

decision equate the Paschalion with the Paschal tables, it is not because the correct formulation of the rules has been forgotten, but because the iconic function of the Paschalion had become confused with the symbolic perfection of the calendrical cycle of recurrence.

When it finally became obvious in 1324 that the conventional Paschal dates did not always conform to the Patristic rules, the contradiction was set aside without being actually resolved. The Patriarchs' evocation of Patristic authority for the Paschal tables themselves amounts to an assumption that the Fathers intended, by their approval of the Alexandrian system at Nicea I, to allow substitution of a conventional moon and a conventional equinox for the actual celestial phenomena. It is true that after 325 AD the Alexandrian system of using March 21st as the equinox and the 15th through the 21st moons as acceptable dates for Easter became the standard for all Christian Churches. But it is also a fact that this date for the spring equinox was established on the basis of the most accurate astronomical observations available, and that it was chosen by the Nicene Fathers in preference to the Roman system which used March 25th, the conventional equinox on the Julian calendar, as the basis for its Paschal tables.<sup>20</sup> The appeal of the 16th century hierarchs to "the disposition made by the Fathers" is therefore not sufficient to justify their adherence to a demonstrably inaccurate and conventional system.

### *The Iconic Dimension*

The decisive factor in this controversy, however, is neither pragmatic nor historical nor canonical, but theological. Although frequently ignored or misconstrued, the true theological significance of the Paschalion is revealed by its pastoral function as an icon of the Christian conception of time. The four Patristic rules were formed as an expression of a uniquely Christian conception of the relation between *kairos*—the decisive moment of time, and *chronos*—any given span of time.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the Paschalion is based upon the decisive

<sup>20</sup>Jones, "The Development of the Latin Ecclesiastical Calendar" in Bedae, *Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1943), pp. 1-104. Also, a concise account of these changing systems can be found in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Vacant et Mangénot eds. (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ane, 1931) Tome 11 part 2, cols. 1948-1970.

<sup>21</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Friedrich, tr. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), Vol. 3 pp. 458-461 and Vol. 9 pp. 589-593.

events of revelation in so far as they give direction and character to temporal duration.

For Christianity time is a created, and hence a contingent reality; and it is also conceived of as a linear-historical succession of events—that is, it is seen as directional, continuous, and non-repetitive in character.<sup>22</sup> This conception of temporality is distinctly at variance with the ideas of cyclical recurrence of worlds prevalent in Hellenistic cultures. Repudiating these pagan theories, in which “the coming and the passing ages revolve as on a wheel,” St Augustine says,

Far be it from us, I say, to believe this. For Christ died once for our sins, and “having risen from the dead, dies now no more, death shall have no dominion over him;” and we, after the resurrection, “shall ever be with the Lord.”<sup>23</sup>

This is a genuinely scriptural exposition of the theological foundation for the “once and for all” character of temporal experience within Christianity. The mythological concept of eternity as an endless “becoming” is also excluded from the Christian vision of time as a limited condition of transient being.

No times are co-eternal with you (O Lord), because you are permanent, whereas if they were permanent, they would not be times.<sup>24</sup>

The directionality of time is established by its having Creation as its beginning and the *Parousia* as its *telos*. This is true for both the individual life history and for the history of the cosmos; and it gives a radical character to human freedom that is unique to Christianity. This freedom is not an absolute independence from contingent causality, but rather a capacity to choose between good and evil, between life and death, between faith and despair at each moment of our finite duration.

Conceptually, the radical character of Christian freedom is represented by a dialectical distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* within any given event. Time is experienced as both a directional change,

<sup>22</sup>Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup>Augustine, *City of God* XII: 14, 21, *The Fathers of the Church* Vol. 14, p. 267. For a discussion of this passage see Gilles Quispel, “Time and History in Patristic Christianity,” *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* Vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), pp. 85-107.

<sup>24</sup>Augustine, *Confessions* II: 16/17, tr. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960), p. 287.

and as a transcendent moment of change. The tension between these two elements unifies and gives form to experience—that is, it constellates an event as the dialectical synthesis of the two elements. This interpretation of the logical distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* is based upon exegesis of John 7:6.

My time (*kairos*) has not yet come, but your time (*kairos*) is always here. (RSV)

The force of this double use of *kairos* is to define the time-world of the disciples as an ordinary duration in which each moment is equivalent to every other, and hence one in which transcendence is not able to be comprehended. A *kairos* which is always the same is nothing but *chronos*, or calendrical time. The ordinary created time of the world is only the possibility of *kairos*—the significant moment of contact with the divine.

It is within this concept of temporality that the iconic function of the Paschalion must be evaluated. As with all images, its value rests upon the fidelity of its representation and the harmony of its form with its content and function. The 7th chapter of John's Gospel shows that the Feast of Tabernacles is not the true moment of fulfillment because the event which fulfills the Scriptures concerning the Messiah—the Passion and Resurrection—can only reveal its true significance within the context of the Feast of Passover. Within historical time Jesus awaits and moves towards that one moment; within calendrical time the Church awaits and prepares the liturgical moment of the Paschal Mysteries. A contemporary theological document describes this Eucharistic event rather concisely:

The celebration of the Eucharist reveals the divine energies manifested by the Spirit at work in the Body of Christ. The eucharistic celebration is the *anamnesis* ("memorial"): truly, but sacramentally, the *ephapax* ("once and for all") is and becomes present. The celebration of the Eucharist is *par excellence* the *kairos* ("proper time") of the mystery.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously, what is true of the Eucharist in and of itself applies with even greater force to the Paschal Eucharist. The rules of the Paschalion guide the Church in the determination of this unique moment

<sup>25</sup>Roman Catholic-Orthodox Theological Document, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," *Sourozh*, No. 11 (February 1983), pp. 26 and 28.

by setting forth the relevant chronological marks of our Lord's Passion and Resurrection for yearly imitation. In a sense the Paschalion sacramentalizes the calendar: it places the moment of eucharistic transcendence within the chronological context of the liturgical year, and thereby unites *kairos* and *chronos* in the one event of Pascha.

As an image of the temporal dialectic for Pascha, the Paschalion is both mimesis and paradigm. The Quartodeciman observance of the 14th of Nisan as Pascha, whether or not it fell on a Sunday, was a liturgical imitation that was deficient in both of these dimensions. It did not commemorate the unique day of the Resurrection—the Lord's Day—every year, and so failed to be fully mimetic of the historical content. It also failed as a paradigm of the theological significance of the event because it did not clearly distinguish the type (Passover) from the fulfillment (Easter). By remaining fixated upon the Jewish calendrical forms it did not witness to the newness—to the once and for all quality—of the Resurrection, and so failed to demonstrate pastorally the new dialectic of *kairos* and *chronos* which is definitive for the Christian vision of time.

The Quartodeciman observance was rejected by the consensus of Nicea I, and of local synods before and after 325 AD, despite the acknowledged orthodoxy of their bishops. Polycarp traces his Paschal tradition back through Ignatius to John the Evangelist.<sup>26</sup> An extant Paschal homily of the Quartodeciman bishop Melitos of Sardis is fully Orthodox in both content and style:

This is he who rescued us from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from oppression to an eternal kingdom, and made us a new priesthood and a chosen people for ever. . . . This is he who was made flesh in a virgin, whose bones were not broken upon the tree, who in burial was not resolved into earth, who arose from the dead and raised man from the grave below to the heights of the heavens.<sup>27</sup>

The controversy between the bishops of this tradition and the general consensus of the Apostolic tradition lasted more than two centuries: the principles that finally prevailed must therefore embody a vital force which is deeply rooted in liturgical theology.

<sup>26</sup>Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V:24, p. 335.

<sup>27</sup>Melito of Sardis, *The Homily on the Passion by Melito Bishop of Sardis*, Campbell Bonner ed. and tr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1940), pp. 168-180.

When the Patristic Paschalion is recognized as a temporal icon, the source of its vitality and authority becomes clear. The dangers inherent in calendrical conventionalism also become evident. In order for the Paschalion to be a true mimesis and paradigm of the tension between transcendence (*kairos*) and creation (*chronos*), neither element of the synthesis can be attenuated or absorbed into the other. If the *chronos* of created time is displaced by calendrical conventions, the dialectic loses the force and immediacy of reality. This in turn undercuts the theological significance of the Paschal liturgy by placing it within a ritualistic and mythological context of eternal and perfect cycles of recurrence.<sup>28</sup> This was the ultimate danger that the Fathers sought to avoid by suppressing the Quarto-decimian observance of a conventional date for Easter, and by establishing a Paschalion that is defined in terms of celestial and created times. Yet this same type of conventionalism was the ultimate fate of the Orthodox observance itself; the liturgical calendar coming to be treated mythologically rather than iconically. The distinction and dialectic between Paschal liturgy and the Passion chronology seems to have been completely unknown among Byzantine hierarchs and theologians. Apparently the knowledge of an iconic function for the Paschalion was never differentiated from the prevalent amorphous veneration for the calendrical tradition inherited from Alexandria. The prevailing confusion of Paschal tables with the Paschalion thereby acquired an irrational strength that prevented the reforms of 1324 or 1582 (or 1924) from bearing any fruit other than an intensification of phyletism and a proliferation of schism within the world of Orthodoxy.

### *The Present Situation*

In particular, the movement for partial reform on a voluntary and local basis that began in 1924 has produced schism in nearly every autocephalous Church that has instituted it.<sup>29</sup> In light of the functional significance of the Paschalion for the entire liturgical calendar, the use of New Style chronology for the fixed feasts and Old Style tables from the Paschalion further corrupts the integrity of the dialectic between *kairos* and *chronos*. Not only is the Paschal Eucharist based upon a conventionalized and unreal concept of created time, but that same chronology is then confessed to be inad-

<sup>28</sup>Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 161.

<sup>29</sup>Sakkas, *The Calendar Question*, p. 43-46.

quate for regulating the date of secondary and derivative feasts such as Christmas and Epiphany. The Paschalion is thus deprived of reality and value. If its iconic function remains at all, it can only convey a distorted image of that temporal dialectic between creation and transcendence which is essential to the liturgical experience itself.

Those who refuse partial calendrical reform nevertheless commonly fail to see the necessity of total reform—beginning with the Paschal tables and extending to the festal calendar. Following Nicea I, the Alexandrian system of tabulation became firmly established as the standard for all Christian Churches, but there is no indication that the Nicene Fathers intended thereby to establish a cycle of *dates* rather than a set of principles. The Alexandrian cycle was the most astronomically accurate, the most mathematically consistent, and the most widespread of the various pre-Nicene Paschal systems:<sup>30</sup> in choosing it, the Fathers turned away from calendrical formalism and followed the best science of their day. By defining the Paschalion in terms of celestial events, they were also obedient to Scripture:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years. . . ." And it was so. (Gen 1:14-15)

Therefore, in stating the Paschal rules, it is always the "equinox" (*isimera*) that must be taken into account, and never a calendrical date as such (whether Julian, Gregorian, Jewish, or Islamic). Since the fact of the precession of the equinoxes was well known to astronomers in Alexandria through Ptolemy's use of Hipparchus' work in his *Almagest*,<sup>31</sup> and hence also known to Bishop Anatolius and his fellow makers of Paschal tables,<sup>32</sup> the avoidance of any substitution of dates for events in the phrasing of the Paschalion can only mean that the Fathers had no intention of making March 21st a permanent equinoctial date. Nonetheless, the current practice of the Orthodox Church uses both a conventional equinox (March 21st O.S.) and conventional tables for the date of the full moon which follows that artificial marker. The result is an observance of Pascha

<sup>30</sup>Jones, "Latin Calendar," pp. 11-17.

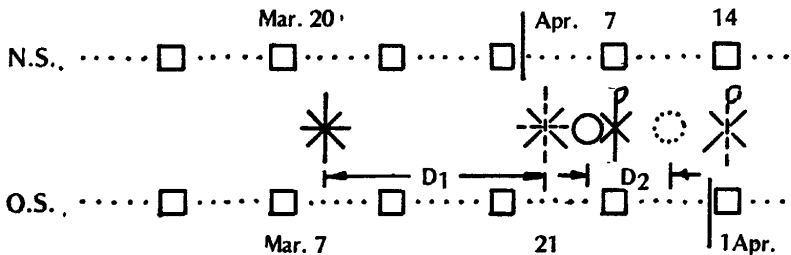
<sup>31</sup>*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1969 ed., s.v. "Hipparchus."

<sup>32</sup>Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, 2nd. ed. (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1883-96), Vol. 1, pp. 318-319. Translation of Anatolius' Paschal work in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VII, 32 in *Fathers of the Church* Vol. 29, pp. 153, 155-158.

that is at variance with the determinative celestial phenomena in roughly three out of every four years.<sup>33</sup>

The year of 1983 was a conspicuous example of this frequent discrepancy because both errors had an effect, causing a retardation of the Orthodox Pascha by a full five weeks from its proper date. In 1985 the divergence will be less extreme, Pascha being observed on April 14th N.S. instead of on April 7th—a difference of only one week. The cause of this anomaly is shown schematically in Figure 2. The vernal equinox will occur at 9 P.M. Wednesday, March 20th; and the first full moon of spring will occur at 5 P.M. Friday, April 5th.<sup>34</sup> The night on which this full moon will first be visible is liturgically the eve of Saturday, April 6th, hence the Sunday immediately following (April 7th N.S.) is the proper date for the celebration of Pascha. The discrepancy ( $D_1$ ) between the actual and the conventional dates of the vernal equinox has no effect on the retardation of Pascha in this year. But the use of a conventional table of dates for the occurrence of the full moon instead of actual astronomical observances ( $D_2$ ) results in the selection of the 14th of April N.S. instead of the 7th as the Sunday of the Resurrection.

Figure 2



Note that the postponement here is not an example of the avoidance of concelebration of Pascha and Passover: the 14th of Nisan falls on Saturday, April 6th, not on Sunday April 7th. The fact is, then, that the persistent difference between Orthodox Pascha and both Western and Patristic Easter is caused by the consistent use of Byzan-

<sup>33</sup>See the table of Paschal dates in Haggood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, 5th ed. (Englewood: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, 1975), p. xix/xx.

<sup>34</sup>Astronomical data was obtained through the courtesy of Adler Planetarium, Chicago, Illinois.

tine Paschal tables that no longer have a real or valid relation to the created time of the cosmos and of human history.

Within historical, chronological time, Christ acted in obedience to the *kairos* which was the will of the Father. Hence we are expected to do the same, which with regard to the Paschal celebration is to keep "the first month of the year" (Ex. 12:2) as determined by the conjunction of lunar months and the spring equinox. This is the moment of the Passover which Christ himself observed. In commemorating his Passion and Resurrection, Christians (in addition to these two celestial signs) await the first day of the week for the festival of the Resurrection, and are careful not to celebrate Pascha on the day of the full moon itself. The *chronos* of this observance changes from year to year and from calendar to calendar, but it is not therefore a matter of indifference which date is celebrated, since the date must change in obedience to the mimetic *kairos*. This, then, is the tradition of the Paschalion which no local Church is free to change, whether by innovation or by negligence, and which must be cherished by all as a visible symbol of the spiritual unity of the Church throughout the ages and in all places.

By not adjusting the Paschal tables to the change in the vernal equinox (in the 14th, 16th, or any following century), the Orthodox Church has ceased to follow the intention of the First Ecumenical Council. As a consequence of this *heteropraxis*, Orthodoxy is schismatic with respect to the Patristic Church catholic, and has broken the uniformity of liturgical observance throughout time. By sheer inertia she has fallen away from the source of that unity. Cyprian of Carthage vividly describes the nature of this unity and the effect of division:

Just as the sun's rays are many . . . yet their oneness abides by reason of their starting point. Cut off one of the sun's rays—the unity of that body permits no (such) division of its light; break off a branch from the tree, it can bud no more; dam off a stream from its source, it dries up below the cut.<sup>35</sup>

Fully interpreted, this means that profound disturbances of temporal and liturgical authenticity will be experienced by any culture which becomes cut off from observance of the Patristic Paschalion.

<sup>35</sup>Cyprian of Carthage, *Unity of the Catholic Church* Chapter 12 in *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1957), Vol. 25, p. 48.

Late Byzantine society experienced a profound degeneration of its Christian eschatological vision of the Parousia into an apocalyptic vision of cosmic doom. Often centered on numerological speculations that 1492 would be the end of the world,<sup>36</sup> one text asks,

“By what signs will the coming of the end be proved?  
How will this our city, the New Jerusalem, pass away?”<sup>37</sup>

How, indeed, can a Christian society conceive of the New Jerusalem as passing away into the abyss of nothingness? As for contemporary Orthodox societies, the prevalent malaise seems to be due to an insidious disintegration of liturgical authenticity. These symptoms (Byzantine and Modern) may well reflect one and the same disruption of the temporal dialectic that unifies history and liturgy.

The Paschalion is the touchstone of that uniquely Christian type of synthesis. Yet in order for Orthodoxy to conform to the Patristic Paschalion, all that is necessary is for her to discard the Alexandrian/Byzantine Paschal tables and begin using contemporary astronomical observations for regulating the festal cycle of the Church. This can most conveniently be done on a year such as 1984 or 1987 in which the conventional date of Pascha accidentally coincides with the correct day; and the change need *not* involve an adoption of the Gregorian tables, or of any such cyclical system at all. For what need is there to know the date of Pascha more than one year in advance? No one knows the day or hour of the final Parousia, but we are told to live in expectation of it (Lk 21:36). Therefore we must not act as though we did not expect it for an extremely long period of time yet to come—which is what we implicitly do by constructing tables of Paschal dates running a century ahead of our own times.<sup>38</sup>

The First Nicene Council established a fourfold Paschalion, yet pastoral laxity concerning that tradition continues to distort the theological meaning of the Paschalion, and of the Christian conception of time upon which it is based. In such a situation, no autocephalous Church is obliged to wait for pan-Orthodox re-affirmation of the Patristic Tradition: it has only to implement the traditional rules correctly. A resolute abandonment of the old Byzantine Paschal tables and the Old Style Julian Calendar is the only real hope for reconciliation of the many schismatic factions within contemporary

<sup>36</sup>Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 104-105.

<sup>37</sup>Ryden, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 28 (1974), pp. 215 & 221. (Text on pp. 201 & 209.)

<sup>38</sup>For example, the table referred to in note 33.

Orthodoxy, for it is the only solution that is fully grounded in the living tradition of the Church. The Paschalion is an iconic image of the temporal dialectic within the one event of Passion and Resurrection. When calendrics distort the intended mimesis into a mythologem of eternal return,<sup>39</sup> the true form of the Paschalion is destroyed and the calendrical system becomes less than worthless pastorally.

During the long course of iconoclastic controversy in the Eastern Church, John of Damascus and others established a clear distinction between the image and its vehicle. Leontius of Neapolis in Cyprus expresses this principle with eloquence when he says,

As long as wood is fastened together in the form of a cross,  
I venerate it because it is a likeness of the wood on which  
Christ was crucified. If it should fall to pieces, I throw the  
pieces into the fire.<sup>40</sup>

Since the Fathers did not hesitate to sacrifice sentimental attachments in their quest for a truly spiritual worship, let us go and do likewise, and rejoice in the fullness of the Spirit.

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<sup>39</sup>Eliade, *Myth of Eternal Return*, chapter 1.

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