THE MYSTERY OF TIME IN THE CHURCH
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INTRODUCTION

Few issues have disturbed twentieth-century Orthodoxy more than the question of the Church’s calendar. The Pan-Orthodox Conference of 1923 and the subsequent adoption of the “new calendar” by a number of local Churches has led to violent reactions, even schisms, within Churches and quarrels between them, which have colored other aspects of Church life. Discussions with other Christian bodies aimed at discovering a common formula for dating Pascha have further complicated the matter.

It might seem that, with all the discussion of this issue over the last seventy-five years, there was little reason for another author to take up the question. However, after reviewing some of the literature on the subject, I believe that there are points both of theology and history which have not been properly addressed by any side of these debate. My purpose in this discussion is to examine some of those concerns in a more consistent manner and from a more strictly theological perspective.

This discussion consists of three parts. The first considers the theological implications of the astronomical phenomena which lie behind the calendar, and considers the so-called Gregorian reform in their light. The second section will examine the dating of Pascha in relation to early Christian practice and the conclusions of the first section. The third section, the least controversial, will discuss the meaning of the seven-day week.

The calendar issue has evoked passionate accusations and responses over the years. I concede from the outset that I support the use of the new calendar; my researches have uncovered nothing to dissuade me from that position and much which, I feel, confirms my adherence. At the same time, however, there is much, particularly in the discussion of Pascha, which will disappoint some who might expect to find comfort here. I ask the reader, whatever his initial position, to read with charity. My purpose is to lay out what I believe is a more proper Orthodox perspective on this question, based on the teaching of Holy Tradition as enshrined in the Scriptures and elucidated by the holy Fathers and the Councils. These words are written out of love for Christ and His Church. May that love bind us all together, so that we may be one even as God is one.

1. THE NATURAL YEAR AND THE CHURCH YEAR

With the last days of winter, we enter into Great Lent and our season of preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. Our great celebration of the Lord’s death and resurrection falls each year in the first weeks after the beginning of spring. As the Church Fathers affirm, this common occurrence of Pasch and the advent of spring is not coincidence. Budding forth with new life, nature itself echoes and anticipates the events of salvation and proclaims anew that our Creator and our crucified and risen Savior are one and the same. The conjunction of Pascha and spring also tells us something about the way in which the Scriptures and the Fathers organized our
Church calendar, which directs our annual commemoration of the events through which our Lord opened the way to His Kingdom.

Astronomers know the event which marks the beginning of spring as the vernal equinox. It occurs about March 21st. From the earth-centered viewpoint of ancient science, it is the date on which the sun, in its apparent motion across and through the heavens, seems to pass through the celestial equator. From the very beginning of God’s revelation to man the motions of celestial bodies are given a religious as well as an astronomical significance. In the account of creation in Genesis, the heavens are understood to reflect the glory of God as creator. Scripture asserts that the sun, moon and stars are intended to delimit for us the passage of time, “for signs and for seasons, for days and years” (Genesis 1:14). The Psalmist confirms this: “Thou has made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting” (Psalm 103:19 LXX). Thus, when we use the heavenly lights to mark our days and measure our years we are merely acknowledging the purpose that the Creator has set for them.

The Church Fathers echo the Scriptural understanding, that we should measure time by the heavenly bodies and that their movement determines the day and the year. St Athanasius notes that, “The sun has authority to shine throughout the day and no more; and the moon through the night and the stars together with them accomplish the seasons and years, and become for signs, each according to the need that calls for it” (Against the Arians 2, 17). St Basil, interpreting Genesis 1:14, states, “By times, we understanding the succession of seasons, winter, spring, summer and autumn, which we see follow each other in so regular a course, thanks to the regularity of the movement of the luminaries …. The functions of the sun and moon serve further to mark years …. As to the solar year, it is the time that the sun, having started from a certain sign, takes to return to it in its normal progress” (On the Six Days of Creation 6, 8). St John of Damascus writes, “So, then, it is the sun that makes the seasons, and through them the year: it likewise makes the days and nights, the days when it rises and is above the earth, and the nights when it sets below the earth” (On the Orthodox Faith 2, 7; note also 2, 1). We might add to these other Fathers such as St Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Homilies 9, 8) and St Gregory the Theologian (Third Theological Oration 3; Homily on Theophany 8). The Apostolic Constitutions, a collection of ancient directives on Church life compiled in the fourth century, directs that special care should be taken in determining the spring equinox each year, so that we may properly set the date for Pascha (5,17). This same rule lies behind the decisions regarding the date of Pascha issued by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea.

As the other great light in the heavens, the moon also acquires importance. The full moon of spring assumed a particular significance. Even before our Lord’s incarnation the Jews read Genesis 1:16-18 as indicating that the moon was created full so that it might from the beginning assert its lordship over the night, as the sun did over the day. This idea is adopted by the Church Fathers. St John of Damascus tells us, “It should be understood that the moon was made full by the Creator, that is, a fifteen days’ moon: for it was fitting that it should be made complete” (On the Orthodox Faith 2, 7).

The changes of the seasons – and especially the coming of spring, with its renewal of plant and animal life – acquired great significance for virtually every culture and people. Pagan cultures, however, feared and worshiped the forces of nature themselves. Israel, on the other hand, served the God who was Himself the Creator, who unleashed or held in check the power

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of nature and who transcended the fertility of soil and livestock. As with the movements of the heavenly lights, so also in the springtime burgeoning of vegetation and the fertility of domestic animals, the Old Testament saw a reflection of the glory and providence of the Creator and an extension of His creative power. The month of the Jewish calendar which contained the beginning of spring is called “the first of months” (Exodus 12:1). Ancient Israel understood this to mean that it was not just the image of Creation but indeed marked the anniversary each year of that event.

This understanding from the Old Testament is also adopted by the Fathers. For example, St John of Damascus writes, “It is through the sun that the four seasons are brought about. And the first of these is spring: for in it God created all things, and even down to the present time its presence is evidenced by the bursting of the flowers into bud, and this is the equinoctial period, since day and night each consist of twelve hours” (On the Orthodox Faith 2, 7).

The springtime of creation marked the beginning of history, but for Israel spring acquired another meaning because of the Exodus and their liberation from slavery in Egypt during that season. This event they commemorated year by year with the feast of Passover, celebrated at the full moon of the first month of spring. Thus spring reminded them that God was their Lord both because He was Creator and because He had redeemed them and called them forth as His chosen people. But Israel also recognized in the Exodus and the Passover festival something that pointed beyond their nation and its status, toward the situation of all men. Their bondage in Egypt symbolized mankind’s enslavement to sin and death. The liberation of Israel from their Egyptian bondage early came to signify God’s promise to redeem the whole human race by His power and love.

We will treat the relationship between the Jewish Passover and the Orthodox Christian Pascha later. However, we must note here that the Jews expected their hopes for a savior to be fulfilled at Passover. Passover was not just the anniversary of their liberation in the days of Moses; in this same season too the Messiah would reveal Himself to save the world. And indeed, in fulfillment of this very prophecy, it was at Passover that our Lord endured the Cross and rose from the dead, conquering death and opening salvation to all mankind.

The Fathers see in springtime’s renewal a prophecy of our Lord’s Passion and Rising and of the coming of His Kingdom. St Gregory of Nyssa, for example, sees a reassurance of our own triumph over sin and death through the saving dispensation of Christ in the bright paschal moon and in the lengthening days and shrinking nights which follow the spring equinox. “Accordingly the season in which our mystery of godliness begins is a kind of exposition of the Divine dispensation on behalf of our souls. For meet and right it was that, when vice was shed abroad without bounds, upon this night of evil the Sun of righteousness should rise, and that in us who have before walked in darkness the day which we receive from Him Who placed that light in our hearts should increase more and more …. But the feast of the Resurrection; occurring when the days are of equal length, of itself gives us this interpretation of the coincidence, namely, that we shall no longer fight with evils only upon equal terms, vice grappling with virtue in indecisive strife, but that the life of light will prevail, the gloom of idolatry melting as the day waxes stronger. For this reason also, after the moon has run her course for fourteen days, Easter exhibits her exactly opposite to the rays of the sun, full with all the wealth of his brightness, and not permitting any interval of darkness to take place in its
turn: for, after taking the place of the sun at its setting, she does not herself set before she minglesthe genuine rays of the sun, so that one light remains continuously, throughout the whole space of the earth's course by day and night, without any break whatsoever being caused by theinterposition of darkness” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, Letter to Eusebius).

We should note here a principle common to the Scriptures and the Fathers. They invoke the true movements of the celestial bodies and real occurrences in nature as prophecies and manifestations of spiritual realities. Orthodox Tradition, as embodied in Scripture and the Fathers, sees in these astronomical phenomena markers given us by the Creator by which we track the passage of time. Therefore they are also the measures we should employ to regulate the celebration of our fasts and feasts. The lengthening days of spring and the increased warmth of the sun are the source from which the budding plants draw their rebirth and new growth. In these natural phenomena, heavenly and earthly, Scripture and the Fathers see both the working of our loving Creator in the physical world and prophecies of the spiritual spring which will come through His incarnation, death and Resurrection.

For Scripture and the Fathers, the year is the real year, not an artificial thing. The actual movements of sun and moon and the orderly progression of the seasons rest upon divine mandate; our observance of them reminds us of Him who created them and us, and they serve as prototypes and assurances of our redemption in Christ. In the phenomena shining forth in the heavens and manifest to all, we see reflected the glory of our God and His providence and love for us. The true “religious” year is one that affirms the natural year and thereby also acknowledges God as Creator and Redeemer.

Thus the Church calendar should reflect as accurately as possible the astronomical year. Since ancient times calendars have attempted to do so. The Jews sometimes added an extra month to their year to insure that it remained in step with the seasons and the sun. The Gentile world used a variety of calendars – the Asian, the Egyptian and the Roman – and each people adjusted their system to better agree with the earthly seasons and the celestial year. Julius Caesar reformed the old Roman calendar for the same reason. His calendar, the Julian calendar, eventually became the basis for the calendar of the Orthodox Church, although in ancient times the Church in each region generally used the local calendar. The Church used the Julian calendar in part because it was the common calendar of the Roman Empire, being the official government calendar. They also used it and the Egyptian calendar because of their relative accuracy, as compared to others of the time.

The Julian calendar, however, is not as close as it might be to the true year, as determined by the celestial order divinely established in creation. It falls short by about eleven minutes each year. This seems a small amount but it builds up over time, amounting to about three days in four hundred years. Since the days of the apostles this error adds up to thirteen days. Thus, March 21st, which is supposed to be the date of the spring equinox on the Julian calendar, in fact arrives almost two weeks after that event. This discrepancy will increase century by century. Eventually those following the old calendar will see Christmas falling in spring and then summer, and Pascha occurring in summer and even autumn or winter.

Today most civil governments use the Gregorian or “New Calendar”. It has also been adopted by a number of Orthodox Churches, including our Orthodox Church in America. This
calendar is actually identical to the old calendar in the names and lengths of the months and the occurrences of feasts in those months. The difference is that the New Calendar corrects most of the difference between the Julian calendar’s average year and the true year determined by the divinely mandated motions of earth and sun. It brings the calendar back in sync with the seasons and the sun.

The New Calendar is not perfect; it still differs from the tropical year by a few seconds each year. But it approximates better the true year as established in creation and governed by the sun, moon and stars, which God placed in the heavens to regulate our counting of time. The New Calendar thus better serves part of the purpose of the Church calendar, which is to affirm our faith and obedience to God as our Creator and our Savior through our observance of the seasons and the natural cycle of the year.
2. THE ORTHODOX PASCHA AND THE PASSOVER

In the previous section we spoke of the relationship between the Church calendar and the natural year, and we demonstrated from Scripture and the Fathers how, by conforming the one with the other, we affirm our faith in God as Creator and Savior. This principle applies particularly to the so-called fixed feasts, that is, to those like Christmas which fall on the same calendar date each year.

We have another set of celebrations, however, centered around Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, our annual commemoration of our Lord’s death and Resurrection. There are many aspects of this most sublime Feast which we might discuss, for it directs us toward the events which secure our salvation, the Savior’s Passion and Rising. For now, however, we will discuss primarily the way we determine the date of the Feast, and what that teaches us about this celebration.

Anyone with any knowledge of the Orthodox Church knows, of course, that we differ from western Christians in our calculation of Pascha. Some years the Pascha coincides with their Easter, or may fall a week later than their celebration. Other years, however, the two may differ by a month, more or less.

There are three elements by which we fix the date of Pascha. The first is the coming of spring marked by the vernal equinox; this depends on the earth’s orbit through space around the sun and the apparent course of the sun through our earthly skies. The second element is the day of the week: Our Lord was crucified on Friday, lay in the tomb on the Sabbath, and rose on the First Day of the week. The third rests on the historical fact that our Lord was crucified and rose from the dead at the time of the Jewish Passover; the Hebrew festival, in turn, depends on the phases of the moon.

All three elements derive from a Jewish background. Even the name we give the Feast, Pascha, originates in the Jewish festival; Pascha is Passover’s Aramaic name and is related to its name in Hebrew, Pesakh. As we mentioned previously, the Chosen People honored spring as the season both of Creation and of the Exodus from Egypt. Therefore Passover, the great festival affirming these events and witnessing to God’s power and providence as Creator and Redeemer, belonged in that season. The Fathers of the Church carry this understanding over to Pascha, the Christian Passover, which celebrates the renewal of creation and our own exodus from sin and death into new life through the death and Resurrection of the incarnate Divine Word.

The second element involves the week, which we draw also from Old Testament revelation. The significance of the week deserves a discussion of its own, which must wait for another time. For now we simply note that our commemoration preserves the original relationship between and the significance of the days of the week and the events surrounding our Lord’s death and Resurrection: Our Lord was put to death on Friday, the day on which man was created; He lay in the tomb on the Sabbath, the day of divine rest; and He rose on the First Day which is also the Eighth, the Day of creation and of new creation, the Day beyond time, “the never-ending Day of the Kingdom.”
The last element relates Pascha to the Jewish Passover. Our Lord’s crucifixion and Resurrection took place in conjunction with that Jewish festival. He suffered on its eve, the Sabbath on which He lay in the tomb was also the first and greatest day of the Feast, and He rose on the following day. The Passover commemorated the Exodus, the miraculous liberation of the people of Israel from their enslavement in Egypt. At the center of this celebration lies a special meal with a prescribed menu, held on the first evening of the feast. The main course is a lamb, which in ancient times had to be slaughtered in sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem and which was often called simply “the Pascha.” The meal is not accompanied by regular bread but by unleavened bread, made without yeast and not allowed to rise.

The Apostles themselves have taught us that the Exodus prefigured our Lord’s suffering and rising, by which He liberated mankind from sin and death, gathered His Church into a “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9), and bestowed upon us the hope of His Kingdom. They even interpreted the Passover supper, and especially the sacrificial Paschal lamb, as a prophecy of Christ: “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8) and elsewhere, “You know that you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (I Peter1:18-19). St John applies to our Lord’s crucifixion a rule from Exodus about the preparation of the Passover lamb, “... but when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs .... For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken’ (John 19:33, 36, quoting Ex 12:46).

Among the Fathers, St Hippolytus of Rome is typical. He denies that the Last Supper was a Passover meal and asserts that the Lord kept the Passover in His own person through His Passion. He contends that, “... at the time when Christ died, He did not eat the Pascha of the Law. For He Himself was the Pascha which had been foretold and which was fulfilled on the day set for it” (Against All Heresies), and in another place, “He did not eat the Passover: He suffered it” (On the Pascha). Later Fathers continue to interpret our Pascha through comparison and contrast with the Passover, with the latter as the image and the former as its fulfilment. St John Chrysostom, for example, asks, “Do you not see that their Passover is the type, while our Pascha is the truth? Look at the tremendous difference between them. The Passover prevented bodily death, whereas the Pascha quelled God’s anger against the whole world; the Passover of old freed the Jews from Egypt, while the Pascha has set us free from idolatry; the Passover drowned the Pharaoh, but the Pascha drowned the devil; after the Passover came Palestine, but after the Pascha will come heaven” (Against the Judaizers, Homily III, 6, 7)

Thus, from its earliest days, the Church viewed its Pascha as the continuation, completion, and fulfilment of the Old Testament Passover, and she derived even the date of her Feast from the older festival. The solar or tropical year, the length of the earth’s orbit around the sun, is the basis of our Christian calendars, both old and new. Our months are artificial divisions of the tropical year, and, although the word month derives from the word moon, our months no longer coincide with the moon’s phases. The Jewish calendar, however, is both solar and lunar: the earth’s path around the sun governs the year, but the phases of the moon determine the months. Thus a Jewish calendar month begins with the new moon, and the full moon occurs in the middle of the month, on the fourteenth day. According to the
Jewish calendar, Passover begins the fifteenth of the month of Nisan, and thus would commence on the evening of the full moon.

This is why the full moon enters into the calculation of the Orthodox Pascha. The full moon possesses no importance in itself. But the full moon is the marker for Passover. Thus, when we say that Pascha must fall after the spring full moon, this is merely another way of saying that Pascha must fall after Passover. We see this confirmed by St Ambrose, who writes, “Two observances are necessary in solemnizing the Passover: the fourteenth of the moon and the first month, called the month of new fruits. Now that we may not seem to depart from the Old Testament, let us review the very chapter which concerns the month of new fruits, specifying that it be the first month, saying, ‘This is the beginning of months for you, it will be their first of the months of the year’ (Ex. 12:2) and ‘thou shalt offer the Passover to the Lord thy God on the fourteenth day of the first month’ (Ex 12:6)” We must emphasize that, by quoting Exodus, St Ambrose explicitly connects the fourteenth day of the moon (the full moon) with the Old Testament’s Passover regulations. He associates the commemoration of the Passion with the full moon (that is, with Passover), saying, “. . . the writings of the Old Testament show that we must celebrate the Passion one day and the resurrection another. We note, too, that the day of the Passion is appointed on a fast day . . . for then you will eat it with anxiety, since those fasting have anxiety. On the day of the Resurrection there is the joy of refreshment and happiness, . . . . It is evident then that the day of the Resurrection should be kept after the day of the Passion, and the former should not be on the fourteenth of the month but later, as the Old Testament says” (PL 16, 1025; FOTC 26, 189)

Christians of the earliest centuries, in trying to preserve the connection between Pascha and Passover, observed two dates. Some communities, mostly in what is now western Turkey, kept Pascha at the same time as the Jewish Passover, no matter what day of the week it might fall on. Thus, they did not maintain the original tie to the day of the week, our second element noted above. Most of the Church, however, kept the feast on the Sunday after Passover. There were occasional controversies between partisans of the two dates, but in general, toleration and good will prevailed. The whole issue resolved itself as the Sunday Pascha gradually won out; it had become almost universal in the Church by the fourth century. We should note, however, that in the early centuries no one celebrated Pascha before Passover. Christians celebrated either with the Jews or afterward. Eventually, all observed the Feast afterward.

Among other things, having Pascha after Passover meant that Christians were keeping their pre-paschal fast while the Jews were celebrating. Several ancient Christian sources note this fact with approval. Typical is The Apostolic Constitutions, a document from the fourth century containing older traditions: “Do you therefore fast on the days of the Passover . . . for they are days of lamentation and not of feasting” (V, 18), and “When therefore the People keeps the Passover, do you fast; and be careful to perform your vigil within their [feast of] Unleavened Bread” (V, 20).

Unfortunately this understanding was lost in the western churches with the Gregorian reform. The Gregorian calendar admirably adjusted the fixed calendar to bring it back into line with the tropical year, as we noted before. But it erred when adjusting the calculation of Pascha. Thus the western Easter can often fall with or before Passover, something which the Fathers never intended. The Orthodox calendar keeps the essential part of the sequence: Pascha falls after Passover, so that we are still in the sadness of Lent or Holy Week at that festival, and our Feast, the fulfillment, follows the Jewish celebration, its pattern and pattern.
Part of the reason for the error in the Gregorian paschal calculation stems from misreading a decision of the Council of Nicea, held in 325. This Council did not fully discuss the Church calendar nor even the date of Pascha, but it did deal with one issue related to the latter. The Council Fathers decreed that Pascha cannot be celebrated before the beginning of spring, the vernal equinox. Their decision includes the injunction that Christians should not observe Pascha “with the Jews.” Some have interpreted that phrase to be an absolute command, meaning that Christians should take no note whatsoever of Passover in calculating the date of Pascha. They contend that, in the years just after the Council, Pascha coincided with Passover several times, proving that the Council did not intend to prohibit such concurrences; they support their view with an ancient list giving dates of Passover and what they assume are dates of Pascha for the years 328 through 346.

This contention, however, takes the phrase out of context and thus misinterprets it. The Council was not discussing the date of Pascha in general but rather, as St Athanasius and others note, was dealing with a specific problem. The Jewish calendar had become somewhat confused in the 3rd and 4th centuries; Passover was falling before the beginning of spring. Most Christians were correcting for this error; when Passover fell before the spring equinox, they moved their Pascha later. However, some Churches, notably in Syria and the lands to the east, were not making this correction. Thus they were observing Pascha before the beginning of spring and violating one of the elements which we mentioned above. This was the problem the Council addressed. The phrase “not with the Jews” should not be taken out of context: It meant that Christians were not to follow the Jews when their Passover was too early, thus leading Christians into the error of keeping Pascha at the wrong time, before the beginning of spring. As to the list of dates, it too has been misinterpreted: It does not give dates for Pascha, but for the paschal full moon. They cannot be dates of Pascha because, of the nineteen dates in question, only two are Sundays. Moreover, we have St Athanasius’s letters announcing the dates of Pascha for those years. In no case does his date coincide with or precede the date the list gives for Passover.

One could bring forward more evidence, from both ancient and modern writers, showing that the early Church assumed that Pascha should come after Passover. By observing the feast in this manner, the Church strove to maintain the connection between the Old Testament prototype and its fulfillment in Christ. But the Church also sought to make evident which was the greater festival, by arranging that her faithful should be fasting on the Passover – since our Lord had been betrayed, condemned, and crucified then – and only afterward should rejoice, basking in the Resurrection’s glory, grace, and light.

Some Christian groups have interpreted the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to indicate that Friday, not Saturday, was the beginning of Passover and thus that the Last Supper on Thursday evening was the Passover meal. Since that Supper is the origin of the Eucharist, they have therefore advocated the use of unleavened bread in their communion. However, the Gospel of John clearly makes the day of the crucifixion the eve of Passover, and indeed fixes the time of the Lord’s self-sacrifice on the Cross to the hour when the priests began slaughtering the Paschal lambs in the Temple. the Church of the first centuries clearly used this version of events: as the services of Holy Week developed they assume St John’s record of events, and the Eucharist was everywhere celebrated with leavened bread only, until the western church introduced unleavened wafers in the Middle Ages. The references to the...
eating of the Passover are explained in light of St Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians cited above: the Supper is an anticipation of our partaking of Christ, the true Paschal lamb, in Holy Communion, and the crucifixion is itself the true sacrifice of the Lamb of God once and for all time. St Hippolytus of Rome, in the last second century, expresses these ideas quite well, saying, “... at the time when Christ died, He did not eat the Pascha of the Law. For He Himself was the Pascha which had been foretold and which was fulfilled on the day set for it” (Against All Heresies), and in another place, “... He who had previously declared, 'I eat the Passover no more,' took His dinner in suitable fashion before the Passover. He did not eat the Passover: He suffered it. For it was not the right time to eat it” (On the Pascha)

REFERENCES FOR PART 2:

Christ as Paschal lamb cf Jn 19:31-37; I Cor. 5:7-8; I Peter 1:19:

**John 19**
31 Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.
32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him;
33 but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.
34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.
35 He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe.
36 For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him shall be broken."
37 And again another scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

**John 1**
20 He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."
21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No."
22 They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"
23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."
24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.
25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"
26 John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know,
27 even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."
28 This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who © Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America
takes away the sin of the world!
30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.'
31 I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'
32 And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.
33 I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'
34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'
35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples;
36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"
37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

1 Corinthians 5
7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.
8 Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Peter 1
18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
20 He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.
21 Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

“For the one who was born as Son, and led to slaughter as a lamb, and sacrificed as a sheep, and buried as a man, rose from the dead as God, since He is by nature both God and man” (St Melito of Sardis, On the Pascha)

Theme of sacrifice introduced by inclusion of Passover as anniversary of the Binding of Isaac (Targum on Exodus 12:24)

“Do you not see that their Passover is the type, while our Pascha is the truth? Look at the tremendous difference between them. The Passover prevented bodily death, whereas the Pascha quelled God’s anger against the whole world; the Passover of old freed the Jews from Egypt, while the Pascha has set us free from idolatry; the Passover drowned the Pharaoh, but the Pascha drowned the devil; after the Passover came Palestine, but after the Pascha will come heaven” (St John Chrysostom, Against the Judaizers, Homily III, 6, 7)

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CANON 7. (8.) If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, shall celebrate the holy day of Easter before the vernal equinox, with the Jews, let him be deposed.

Apostolic Constitutions V, 18: “Do you therefore fast on the days of the passover . . . for they are days of lamentation and not of feasting.”

Apostolic Constitutions V, 18: Part of the Holy Saturday vigil was to “beseech God that Israel may be converted, and that He will allow them place of repentance, and the remission of their impiety.”

Apostolic Constitutions V, 20: “Wherever, then, the fourteenth of the Pascha falls, so keep it . . . When therefore the People keeps the Passover, do you fast; and be careful to perform your vigil within their (feast of) Unleavened Bread.”

St Ambrose asserts, “Two observances are necessary in solemnizing the Passover: the fourteenth of the moon and the first month, called the month of new fruits. Now that we may not seem to depart from the Old Testament, let us review the very chapter which concerns the month of new fruits, specifying that it be the first month, saying, ‘This is the beginning of months for you, it will be their first of the months of the year’ (Ex. 12:2) and ‘thou shalt offer the Passover to the Lord thy God on the fourteenth day of the first month’ (Ex 12:6)” We must note that St Ambrose explicitly connects the fourteenth of the moon with the Old Testament’s Passover regulations by citing Exodus in justification. He associates the commemoration of the Passion with the fourteenth of the moon (that is, with Passover), saying, “… the writings of the Old Testament show that we must celebrate the Passion one day and the resurrection another. We note, too, that the day of the Passion is appointed on a fast day . . . for then you will eat it with anxiety, since those fasting have anxiety. On the day of the Resurrection there is the joy of refreshment and happiness, . . . . It is evident then that the day of the Resurrection should be kept after the day of the Passion, and the former should not be on the fourteenth of the month but later, as the Old Testament says” (PL 16, 1025; FOTC 26, 189)

SAINT ATHANASIAS
On The Councils, 5

As to the Nicene Council, it was not a common meeting, but convened upon a pressing necessity, and for a reasonable object. The Syrians, Cilicians, and Mesopotamians, were out of order in celebrating the Feast, and kept Easter with the Jews; on the other hand, the Arian heresy had risen up against the Catholic Church, and found supporters in Eusebius and his fellows, who were both zealous for the heresy, and conducted the attack upon religious people. This gave occasion for an Ecumenical Council, that the feast might be everywhere celebrated on one day, and that the heresy which was springing up might be anathematized.

To the Bishops of Africa, 2
For the former council was summoned because of the Arian heresy, and because of Easter, in that they of Syria, Cilicia and Mesopotamia differed from us, and kept the feast at the same season as the Jews. But thanks to the Lord, harmony has resulted not only as to the Faith, but also as to the Sacred Feast. And that was the reason of the synod at Nicaea.
SYNOD OF ANTIOCH, CANON 1
WHOSOEVER, shall presume to set aside the decree of the holy and great Synod which was assembled at Nice in the presence of the pious Emperor Constantine, beloved of God, concerning the holy and salutary feast of Easter; 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 any one 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 Easter [at the same time] 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.

SYNODAL LETTER, COUNCIL OF NICEA
We further proclaim to you the good news of the agreement concerning the holy Easter, that this particular also has through your prayers been rightly settled; so that all our brethren in the East who formerly followed the custom of the Jews are henceforth to celebrate the said most sacred feast of Easter at the same time with the Romans and yourselves and all those who have observed Easter from the beginning.

CONSTANTINE’S LETTER TO THE BISHOPS ABSENT FROM THE COUNCIL
When the question relative to the sacred festival of Easter arose, it was universally thought that it would be convenient that all should keep the feast on one day; for what could be more beautiful and more desirable, than to see this festival, through which we receive the hope of immortality, celebrated by all with one accord, and in the same manner? It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom [the calculation] of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded. In rejecting their custom, we may transmit to our descendants the legitimate mode of celebrating Easter, which we have observed from the time of the Savior’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 Savior has shown us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course (the order of the days of the week); and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast. How can they be in the right, they who, after the death of the Savior, have no longer been led by reason but by wild violence, as their delusion may urge them? They do not possess the truth in this Easter question; for, in their blindness and repugnance to all improvements, they frequently celebrate two passovers in the same year. We could not imitate those who are openly in error. How, then, could we follow these Jews, who are most certainly blinded by error? for to celebrate the
passover twice in one year is totally inadmissible. But even if this were not so, it would still be your duty not to tarnish your soul by communications with such wicked people [the Jews]. 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 Savior 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. As, on the one hand, it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord; 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, but also that it is right to demand what our reason approves, and that we should have nothing in common with the Jews. 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 favor, 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.

3. THE WEEK AND BEYOND

We have already discussed the relation of the Church’s calendar of feasts to the natural year. We have also looked at Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, and the days of Holy Week leading up to it and their relation to Passover. Now we turn to what is truly the heart of the Christian calendar, the seven-day week, which brings together these various elements.

As we noted earlier, the week recalls and commemorates the Creation. The account of the making of the world in the Old Testament organizes the process around a seven-day period (Genesis 1). In general, the Fathers do not contend that the creation actually occurred during seven twenty-four hour days. Indeed, the length of the days of Genesis 1 is not an issue to which they pay much attention. They do affirm, however, that our present week is the symbol of creation, and that in keeping the week we acknowledge God as the world’s Creator and Sustainer. This symbolism focuses particularly on three of the days of the week, the sixth day on which mankind is created; the seventh, or Sabbath, day on which God rests from the labor of creation; and the first day.

The most prominent day in the Old Testament is the seventh day, the Sabbath. In © Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America
Genesis the seventh day is not a day on which God actually makes anything; it is the day of rest, which completes and seals His work. The word Sabbath, indeed, comes from the Hebrew word for rest. That God had finished His work as Creator, however, did not mean that He withdrew from the world, leaving it spinning off unattended or uncared for. Thus, while the Sabbath indicated that His work of establishing and ordering the universe was over, it also signified His continuing love and care for His handiwork. As an early Christian writer notes, “God’s resting is not, then, as some conceive, that God ceased from doing. For, being good, if He should ever cease from doing good, then would He cease from being God, which it is sacrilege even to say. The resting is, therefore, the ordering that the order of created things should be preserved inviolate, and that each of the creatures should cease from the ancient disorder” (Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 6, 16). The Sabbath observance of Israel showed their trust in and reliance upon the Creator as the one who continued to provide for His creatures.

The Sabbath, as the completion of the week, originally symbolized the whole week in itself. Thus in observing the week we too affirm our reliance upon divine Providence and the peace and repose we enjoy through our confidence in His faithful care. In imitation of the Creator the Jews observed a literal rest on that day, refraining as much as possible from physical labor. When the Church took over the week and its Sabbath she also spiritualized it. “The sabbath rest of God signifies the complete reversion of created beings to God” (Saint Maximos the Confessor, First Century on Theology, 47). “Thou shalt observe the Sabbath, on account of Him who ceased from His work of creation, but ceased not from His work of providence: it is a rest for meditation on the law, not for idleness of the hands” (Apostolic Constitutions 2, 36). We are not called to cease work on that day, but to dedicate our various activities of that day, and the rest of the seven which it sums up and symbolizes, to God our Creator and Sustainer.

Of course, we know that for the Church the Sabbath is not the focus of our week. The coming in the flesh of our Lord and Savior added to the significance and altered the relative importance of the days. The Sabbath symbolizes this world, which was made by God but which has been corrupted by mankind’s fall into sin. Our Lord came to renew the world and free it from that corruption. Thus, with His death and resurrection, the week no longer commemorates just the creation. Now it also symbolizes our redemption through His saving death and Resurrection. The Gospel accounts are careful to connect the events of our Lord’s passion with the days of the week: our Lord is condemned and crucified on Friday, the sixth day; His Body rested in the tomb on the Sabbath; He rose on the First Day. This program relates to and fulfills the former significance of these days. The sixth day on which man was created becomes the day of his redemption. The Sabbath rest is fulfilled in the rest of the incarnate God from His work of redemption. The first day, which marks the beginning of creation, becomes the first day of the Gospel. From it echoes for the first time the glorious proclamation, “The Lord has risen indeed!” (Luke 24:34) The message of that joyful Day links creation with the Holy Week of salvation through Christ’s death and rising. It proclaims that the Passion and Resurrection are truly the renewal and restoration of the world. It affirms that Christ, the eternal Word of God, is both our Creator and our Redeemer and Restorer.

Because of the Lord’s resurrection, the first day of the week acquires overriding importance. The day with which the great drama of creation first unfolds now becomes the Lord’s Day; indeed, that is its name in Greek (Kyriake emera), and it is so referred to in the New

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Testament (Rev. 1:10). The early Church was not creating something new in honoring the first day. Already the Jews were looking for something beyond the Sabbath, to an “Eighth Day” which would mark the era of redemption and restoration for fallen man. They saw the first day of creation, on which God had commanded light to come forth and on which He began to form the world, as an anticipation of a future Day of the Lord, on which He would cleanse mankind and his world from the pollution of sin and restore them in righteousness and glory. This new First Day would therefore be the Eighth Day, the Day beyond this age, the eternal Day of the Kingdom.

The Fathers see in our Lord’s resurrection on the first day of the week the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy. The whole week is tied together in that supreme day, the Lord’s Day, the Day of Resurrection. Our Lord’s great acts of redemption, His work of New Creation, fall into place around this One Day. The sixth day, on which God made man, is now the day on which He re-creates man through His sacrifice on the Cross. The Sabbath rest, which closes and seals His original creative labors, is fulfilled and completed by His repose in the tomb, preparing to come forth again in power and glory. His resurrection on the First Day completes His great work of salvation. From her earliest days, even when most of her people had come from Judaism, the Church assembled after the Sabbath, on the Lord’s Day, to partake of the Mystery of His crucified and risen Body and Blood and to “proclaim the Lord’s death until He come” (I Cor. 11:26).

We cannot forget this last element. The week and the Lord’s day look to events of the past, creation and the Passion and Resurrection. But they also look to the future and to the Kingdom which is the Eighth Day, the Day beyond this age. St Basil the Great speaks of the week as the image of eternity and as our expression of faith in the God who rules both time and eternity: “God who made the nature of time measured it out and determined it by intervals of days; and, wishing to give it a week as a measure, he ordered the week to revolve from period to period upon itself, to count the movement of time, forming the week of one day revolving seven times upon itself: a proper circle begins and ends with itself. Such is also the character of eternity, to revolve upon itself and to end nowhere. If then the beginning of time is called ‘one day’ rather than ‘the first day,’ it is because Scripture wishes to establish its relationship with eternity” (On the Six Days of Creation). St Basil’s last comment alludes to a peculiar turn of phrase in Genesis 1:5. At the end of the account of God’s first acts, we read, “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” St Basil and many other Fathers note that the text does not say “the first day,” but rather “one day.” From the very beginning, our Creator points us toward the end of time and draws us toward His Kingdom, the Age of eternal life. He encourages us in our labors and tribulations in this world with the assurance that we will “more perfectly partake of Him in the never-ending day of His Kingdom.”

Thus, in keeping the Lord’s Day as the central day of the Christian week, we proclaim that the one God is our Maker, that He also is our Savior and Protector now in this world, and above all that He is our Hope in the age to come. Indeed, the whole week is instituted so that we may fully focus ourselves on our life in Christ every day and in every activity. The fasts of Wednesday and Friday recall our Lord’s betrayal and His death. Saturday is particularly the day for remembering the dead, whose souls rest now in the peace of the Lord, and whose bodies lie as did His own in the tomb, awaiting their awakening and reunion on His return. But particularly on Sunday, the First Day, we assemble to partake of His crucified and risen
Body and Blood, receiving from Him grace and sanctification to struggle in this world in anticipation of life and joy with Him in the never-ending Day of His kingdom. Thus, through observing the week we infuse the humble routine of our daily life with the eternal truth of Christ, and we prepare ourselves for His Kingdom.

Our Lord’s Day worship is something outside of time, because in it we symbolically unite the pristine world of creation, this age with its earthly cares and its spiritual struggles, and the glorious world to come, through the grace of the risen Savior and the power of the Holy Spirit. The seven days of the week are united in the One Day, the Lord’s Day, the Day of the Resurrection and the Day of the Liturgy. Through this Day the hope and grace of the Kingdom penetrate and permeate our lives. The hope and assurance of eternity must always inspire and direct our lives. The week is God’s gift to help us in this task.

– Father Dimitri Cozby

ABOUT ARCHPRIEST DIMITRY COZBY

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