

Calendrical Labyrinth and Paschal Envisioning: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Thorny Path towards a Common Easter Date

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Abstract

This paper provides, firstly, a survey of the diversity of Paschal celebrations and dates in early Christianity, as well as the Council of Nicaea's intention to establish uniformity; secondly, the essay discusses the Julian, Gregorian and Meletian calendars with their respective consequences for a chorus of churches and countries; it examines, thirdly, the twentieth-century debate on a fixed Easter date and, fourthly, the curious existence of two separate church years, including the conspicuous Good Friday intercessions, within the Roman rite; it presents, fifthly, the pivotal Aleppo Statement on a common Paschal date and the pertinent reactions by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation; sixthly, the paper digs into a range of serious factors which so far hinder the realization of the Aleppo Statement; seventhly, it dwells upon the surprising proposal that the Roman Catholic Church provisionally adapt to the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Easter computation, with also the idea of a possible role of the Eastern Catholic Churches as 'bridge-builders' coming up for debate; eighthly, it investigates the fundamental suggestion to celebrate Easter on the Sunday falling in Jewish Passover; the essay concludes with several considerations.

Acknowledgments

This paper is a fully revised, updated and augmented version of an earlier booklet, published in 2013 on the same topic.¹ The revision was prompted by a guest lecture – in digital mode, due to the corona virus pandemic – which I gave, on June 22, 2021, for the Graz section of the ecumenical Pro Oriente Foundation in partnership with the Theological Faculty of the University of Graz. To make the altered contents even clearer, I have given the paper another title, with its first four words expressing both the difficulty and the visionary aspect of the enterprise. The entire affair, however, began with an international ecumenical conference in Amsterdam on December 6, 2010 – the feast of St Nicholas, the city's patron saint and equally beloved in East and West – with mainly Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox participation. It deserves particular mention that one of the key speakers at this gathering was the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, who delivered a lecture on the importance and the fruits of ecumenism. He was later abducted

¹ *'How Long It Was and How Far': A Catholic and Ecumenical View on the Arduous Way to a Common Easter Date*, Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Reihe 35 (Graz, 2013). See also my articles 'The Long Way to a Common Easter Date: A Catholic and Ecumenical Perspective', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 63 (2011) 353-376; "Wie lange er doch ist, und wie weit weg noch ist das Ziel!": Der beschwerliche Weg zu einem gemeinsamen Osterdatum aus katholischer und ökumenischer Sicht', *Ökumenisches Forum / Journal for Ecumenical and Patristic Studies* 39 (2017) 117-135; 'Orthodox Liturgy in the West: Identity Preservation and Acculturation', in: *Eastern and Oriental Christianity in the Diaspora*, eds. Herman Teule and Joseph Verheyden, *Eastern Christian Studies* 30 (Leuven, 2020), 1-32, here 26-29; "Hoe lang het was en hoe ver": Een katholiek en oecumenisch uitzicht op een gemeenschappelijke paasdatum', *Perspectief: Digitaal Oecumenisch Tijdschrift* no. 19 (March 2013), 3-26 – see www.oecumene.nl/publicaties/perspectief (last access on December 27, 2021). Cf. 'A Common Date for Easter', <http://www.praytelligblog.com/index.php/2015/07/25/a-common-date-for-easter-bert-groen-in-interview/>, July 25, 2015 (last access on December 27, 2021).

in Northern Syria, on April 22, 2013, together with his travel companion, the (Byzantine-rite) Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Iskanderun, Boulos Yazigi, when both bishops returned to the city from a failed attempt to negotiate the release of two kidnapped priests. The driver, Fath Allah Kabboud, was killed in the attack, and the fate of the two bishops has been unknown ever since. Not long thereafter, on July 29, 2013, the Italian Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio, who was profoundly engaged in Christian-Islamic dialogue and peace work in war-torn Syria, was abducted, his fate being unknown. And then, on April 7, 2014, the Dutch Jesuit Frans van der Lugt was shot dead in the city of Homs; his lifework had been the amelioration of the dire conditions of disabled people in particular, and their societal integration, and he was also very committed to Islamic-Christian reconciliation.

All of them stand for the innumerable fatalities of the war atrocities in the Middle East. This paper is dedicated to the (often unnamed) victims, regardless of their ecclesial and religious affiliation. It is very ambiguous that, on the one hand, the Aleppo Statement of 1997, such a seminal ecumenical text for the topic of this paper, plays an important role on the following pages and that, on the other, the city of Aleppo has been mostly in the world news headlines, during the last decade, as a major site of a cruel war and the attendant losses and suffering for all parties involved, especially for the civilian population.

I am most grateful to Pablo Argárate, Ephrem Aboud Ishac and Dagmar Heller who were willing to look over the manuscript. At the same time, I remain indebted to Brian Butcher, Peter Galadza and Steven Hawkes-Teeples, who revised the first edition of this booklet. All of them have made many suggestions for textual improvement. I also wish to thank Paul Meyendorff and Ronald Roberson, who have drawn my attention to the declarations of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation on a common Easter date. Furthermore, Iosif Roilidis, Viorel Sava, Abdo Badwi, Jacob Thekeparampil, Niek Dubelaar, Barend ter Haar and Hirochika Nakamaki have provided me with valuable information on the question of time reckoning in Finland, Romania, the Middle East, India and China, respectively. Peter Ebenbauer and Thomas Pott, too, shared some insights on calendar reform with me. Gratitude is also due to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam, as well as to Pieter Kohnen (1971-2018), for their initiatives in putting the both contentious and timely topic of the common Paschal date on the agenda once more.

In my attempt to write as simply as possible for a large readership, I shall restrict myself to a number of general remarks in the fields of worship, ecumenism and calendar issues. This limitation means that a great many nuances and details are left out, and I shall discuss neither the complicated astronomical and mathematical dimensions of computing the Easter dates, nor aspects of canon law, nor details of the astonishing variety of Oriental and Occidental liturgical calendars, save (self-evidently) the Easter cycle, as well as a glimpse at Christmas and Epiphany, along with an occasional reference to other feasts.

The English translations from other languages are my own. This accountability is also true for any remaining error and misinterpretation in the paper's content.

Graz, January 6, 2022

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	...
2. Julian, Gregorian and Meletian Calendars	
3. Fixed Easter Date?	
4. Different Roman-Rite Calendars	
5. The Aleppo Statement and Pertinent Reactions by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation	
6. Inter-Ecclesiastical Obstacles	
7. Another Proposal and Its Attendant Challenges: The Church of Rome's Provisional Adaptation to the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Easter Calculation, and the Role of the Eastern Catholic Churches	
8. Easter During Pesach?	
9. Final Considerations	
Bibliography and Websites	

1. Introduction

In 2025, Eastern and Western Christianity will again celebrate Easter on the same date, while also the 1700-year jubilee of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) will then be enacted. With this prospect in mind and reflecting on the necessity of a pan-Christian celebration of Pascha, Archbishop Job (Getcha) of Telmessos from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, proposed to henceforth rely on the contemporary astronomical data for the calculation of the Easter date according to the Nicene rule. Thereupon, Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, greeted this appeal and advocated for effective efforts to implement it. But Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, who is at the helm of the Department for External Church Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow, publicly disagreed with the idea, which would result in substantial change for the computation of the major Christian feast, and stated that Orthodoxy cannot compromise in such a dogmatic issue as the celebration of Pascha. Musing on the reasons of his refusal to embrace the Greek Orthodox confrere's proposal, I see two possible motives. First, the metropolitan concerned, as well as some other representatives of his church who have voiced similar declining reactions, may fear another schism within the Russian Church due to 'harmful reformist' issues. Second, the current Russian rupture of eucharistic communion with the co-hierarchs in Constantinople and various other sister churches is likely to play out as well.

Another recent development is that the Holy Synod (the ruling ecclesial body) of the Syrian Orthodox Church deliberated in June 2021 on a common Paschal date and also on the

feasibility of an annual calendar shared by all faithful. The synod requested thereupon its faithful worldwide to reflect on two options, to wit, either that those who live in the Middle East will continue to celebrate the Easter cycle according to the Julian calculation, while those in India, where now the majority of the church's adherents live, and in the Western hemisphere hold fast to the corrected Gregorian time reckoning of the Paschal cycle, or – the second option – that the entire church will henceforth celebrate all major feasts, including of course the Paschal cycle, in accordance with the revised Gregorian calendar. The hierarchy's proposal has evoked disparate reactions, some of them appreciative, others abusive; plainly, the issue in question is for many highly emotional and contentious, although the bishops have clarified that it is not a dogmatic, but an astronomical one.²

The laudable proposals to reach a common Easter date for all denominations were made for the umpteenth time, as this is a long-standing pursuit, even dating from the first centuries of Christianity. It is also a laborious endeavour, because one observes not only compromises, often achieved with great toil, but also novel setbacks and a tenacious clinging to familiar confessional practices. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, once held fast to her own customs; it played also a pioneering role in introducing the Gregorian calendar; yet it was looking for compromise as well, even to the point of adopting, in certain places, the use of the Julian calendar; in addition, it has championed a fixed Easter date; and now it sets out again, jointly with other churches, to find a solution to the arduous issue at hand. So the history of taking aim at a common Easter date is highly complex, very polyphonic indeed. Many have given up today and think that a solution will only be reached 'at the Greek calends', 'when hell freezes over', whereas others continue to engage in this ecumenical vision. All in all, one wonders whether the quest for a common Paschal date for all Christian denominations will ever have a positive outcome. Let me also plainly state that I consider the enterprise to find a pan-Christian Paschal date certainly very significant, yet (generally speaking) not of primary, but of secondary importance. Why? The first and foremost task for any Christian assembly is meeting its vocation in living out the gospel, spiritual transformation, as well as full-scale restoration of internal and external communion. As the Dutch liturgical scholar and Benedictine monk from Chevetogne Abbey, Thomas Pott, sets forth, 'where there is no genuine interest in restoring the communion [in an encompassing spiritual, theological and liturgical way], establishing a common date for the celebration of Easter is not only impossible but also useless.'³ Even so, the search for a jointly celebrated Paschal date as a key unifier can, at the same time, contribute to coveted ecclesial unity. It can foster not merely inner-Christian coherence, but also operate as a token of unity in the eyes of adherents of other faiths and worldviews, such as the Muslims and Jews in the Middle East, amidst whom a variegated spectre of Christians lives as a minority. Moreover, in that part of the world, there are a high number of mixed, interdenominational marriages, for whom the directive to follow different calendars for the major feasts is very inconvenient; common dates for the key festivals would facilitate family life. Hence, it is especially in the Middle East that finding a pan-Christian Easter date is even more urgent than elsewhere.

I shall now, with the purpose to shed more light on the multidimensional subject of a common Easter date, first dwell upon its foundational festive dimension.

'The feast of feasts, the new drink, the famous and holy day...' With these words and in other poetic strains, St John of Damascus (ca. 650 – before 754 or ca. 675-749) extols

² <https://syriacpatriarchate.org/2021/07/patriarchal-encyclical-concerning-the-date-of-easter-english/> (last access on December 27, 2021).

³ See his 'The Problem of a Common Calendar: Do We Need to Reform Our Liturgical Calendar or Our Understanding of the Time of Salvation?', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60 (2016) 79-89, here 81. Cf. James R. Campbell, 'The Paschalion: An Icon of Time', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28 (1984) 245-262, who underscores also the pre-eminently theological significance of the Paschalion.

Easter in the paschal canon attributed to him.⁴ The liturgical calendars of both the Byzantine and the Roman rite, as well as of the Anglican Communion, commemorate this noted Oriental monk and theologian on December 4. Of course, not only at Easter, but in any celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, in sacramentals and blessings, Liturgy of the Word services, and the Liturgy of the Hours – in all of these, the Paschal Mystery is commemorated, with the Eucharist as the highpoint and nucleus of Christian worship. Preferably on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, Christians assemble to hear and experience the biblical words of liberation and reconciliation; to partake of the bread and cup of life, transformed by the Holy Spirit; to celebrate the body of Christ and to become this body themselves. Hearing and doing the word of God, ritually sharing the divine gifts and becoming a faithful eucharistic community make the church spiritually grow. Yet, it is the Easter festival, the feast of the crucified and resurrected Christ par excellence, in which all of this is most densely and intensely celebrated. It is the liturgical climax of maturation and transformation of the Christian assembly.⁵

As is well-known, this supreme festival is celebrated on differing dates, with two distinct calculation systems for determining Easter in force. One for Western Christianity, i.e., the Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist and Free (Evangelical) Churches, as well as large parts of the Pentecostal Movement, and one for the greater part of Eastern Christianity, namely most Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, as well as the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East. In some years, the gap between both dates is even five weeks. It occurs also that the two systems coincide, and this has happened even four times in the past decade, to wit, in 2010, 2011, 2014 and 2017. The next opportunity for a 'unified' Pascha will be in 2025, which, as we have just noticed, Archbishop Job induced to his appeal for a common celebration from then on. According to the pivotal Aleppo Statement of 1997 (treated further below), 'the Churches give a divided witness' by celebrating the feast of Christ's resurrection on different Sundays in the same year, thus 'compromising their credibility and effectiveness in bringing the gospel to the world'.⁶ In this instance, one may say, time is of the essence. Moreover, according to a number of prominent Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians from North America,

'families whose members belong to different Churches find themselves in conflict observing two Lenten cycles and two Paschal dates. Christians speak through their different Easter celebrations with divided voices'.⁷

The need for inter-ecclesiastical unity, these divines assert, is great, for the world has changed and is still changing rapidly. Secularism, on the one hand, and fundamentalist ideas and attitudes, on the other, are growing. On a worldwide scale, the effects of repression, poverty, terrorism and war are visible. Therefore, the theologians in question exclaim:

'Is there not more than ever a need for a unified Christian proclamation and a witness of the core of our common faith: the resurrection of our Lord?! Is the time not at hand for a permanent resolution of this issue?!'⁸

⁴ *Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον* (Athens ³1984), 2-5. 'Canon' means here a hymnological category of the Byzantine rite.

⁵ *Transition in the Easter Vigil: Becoming Christians*, eds. Daniel P. McCarthy and James G. Leachman (Farnborough, 2011).

⁶ *Towards a Common Date for Easter: World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, Aleppo, Syria, March 5-10, 1997* (Geneva, s.a. [pamphlet]).

⁷ For the two relevant statements in this respect, see (1) <http://www.scoba.us/resources/orthodox-catholic/1998aleppo.html> and (2) <http://www.scoba.us/articles/celebrating-easter-pascha.html> (last access on December 27, 2021). The first statement has also been published in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 46 (2001) 407-410. The now following quotations in my paper are from these two short and rather similar documents.

Manifestly, the divisive issue of the Easter date is not simply an academic one, without pastoral implications, but also a matter of concern in the European, North American and Australian contexts, with their respective migration flows and their differing customs. The influx of African, Asian and Latin American believers into these regions frequently results in local churches becoming truly global communities,⁹ on the one hand, and a variegated divergence of practices, on the other. In several other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East (as I have already indicated), there is yet an additional pressing issue, to wit, the fact that Christians make up a severely threatened (and divided) minority in a larger non-Christian society.

A historical flashback to the foundational epoch of Christianity serves to better comprehend the complexity of our subject. The first Christians were Jews who believed that in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah had come. Initially, they celebrated the festivals of the Jewish calendar, including Pesach/Passover.¹⁰ The New Testament includes many references to Pesach, and derives many theological motifs from it, e.g., the sacrificed Paschal lamb – see, for example, the *First Letter to the Corinthians* (chapter 5:7) – and the Exodus event itself. These motifs were transferred and applied to the salvific passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as to the Christian spiritual experience and moral practice. Exegetes and liturgists, however, are not unanimous on the question of whether during the New Testament period the first traces of a separate Easter festival may be discerned. In all likelihood, Christians did from the very beginning celebrate a festival grounded in and derived from the Old Testament / Jewish Passover and relying on the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. As Gerard Rouwhorst, a

⁸ See n. 7.

⁹ See for example: *Liturgy and Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyber Space*, ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville MN, 2012); *Liturgie und Migration: Die Bedeutung von Liturgie und Frömmigkeit bei der Integration von Migranten im deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann, *Praktische Theologie heute* 122 (Stuttgart, 2012).

¹⁰ I cannot discuss here the relationship between Jewish Passover and Christian Easter. See, e.g.: Clemens Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in Current Research* (Berlin, 2006); *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, eds. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Two Liturgical Traditions* 5 (Notre Dame IN, 1999); *Passover and Easter: The Symbolic Structuring of Sacred Seasons*, eds. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Two Liturgical Traditions* 6 (Notre Dame IN, 1999); Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford, 2002), 63-65; Gerard Rouwhorst, 'The Making of Early Christianity: A Processing Perspective on the History of its Rituals', in: *The Making of Christianities in History: A Processing Approach*, eds. Staf Helleman and Gerard Rouwhorst, *Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 106 (Turnhout, 2020), 83-118, here 88-89, 101-103; idem, 'Neue Sichtweisen auf die liturgischen Traditionen des frühen Christentums: Liturgiewissenschaft und Liturgiegeschichte', *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 67 (2017) 209-236, here 231-234; idem, 'The Origins and Transformations of Early Christian Feasts', in: *Rituals in Early Christianity: New Perspectives on Tradition and Transformation*, eds. Nienke M. Vos and Albert C. Geljon, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 164 (Leiden, 2021), 27-51, here 27-31; idem, 'Christlicher Gottesdienst und der Gottesdienst Israels: Forschungsgeschichte, Historische Interaktionen, Theologie', in: *Theologie des Gottesdienstes 2, Gottesdienst der Kirche: Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft*, vol. 2,2, eds. Martin Klöckener, Angelus A. Häußling and Reinhard Meßner (Regensburg, 2008), 491-572, here 539-547. From the abundance of literature on the relationship between the history of Jewish liturgy and that of Christian liturgy, I mention here only: Gerard Rouwhorst, 'Liturgie und Judentum', in: *Zukunftsraum Liturgie: Gottesdienst vor neuen Herausforderungen*, eds. Peter Ebenbauer and Basilius J. Groen, *Österreichische Studien zur Liturgiewissenschaft und Sakramententheologie / Austrian Studies of Liturgy and Sacramental Theology* 10 (Vienna, 2019), 173-187; Peter Ebenbauer, *Mehr als ein Gespräch: Zur Dialogik von Gebet und Offenbarung in jüdischer und christlicher Theologie*, *Studien zu Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn, 2010); *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum*, eds. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer, *Studien zu Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn, 2003); *Dialog oder Monolog? Zur liturgischen Beziehung zwischen Judentum und Christentum*, eds. Albert Gerhards and Hans Hermann Henrich, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 208 (Freiburg i.Br., 2004).

Dutch Roman Catholic expert in the realm of comparative Christian and Jewish liturgical studies, concludes:

‘... there can be no doubt that the oldest early Christian liturgical rituals (baptism, Easter, reading from the Bible, meal rituals) ultimately had their origins in Jewish liturgical practices, even if the Jewish elements were appropriated and transformed by Christian communities in specifically Christian ways, and non-Jewish Hellenistic elements also have played a role.’¹¹

It is, however, only during the second and third centuries that fuller forms of such a specific feast unfolded.¹² According to some scholars, however, the annual Christian Pascha was a late evolution. They reason that in Rome, for instance, in addition to the extant weekly eucharistic assembly, the Easter festival was only celebrated from ca. 165 – although in Alexandria and Jerusalem, such appears to have been the practice even earlier.¹³

As we have just noticed in Rouwhorst’s conclusion, there were besides the overriding Jewish impact on the origin of the Easter festival, also other constituents which shaped its further evolution. In particular, these elements comprised Greco-Roman stories about heroes who descended into the underworld and returned alive, Orpheus, Theseus and Hercules, for instance, with also Ulysses and Aeneas being able to communicate with the departed in Hades. Christians reworked and reinterpreted these mythical accounts for their own Paschal narrative.¹⁴

There were, moreover, a variety of dates and forms of celebration, as well as distinct theological views concerning the yearly commemoration of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.¹⁵ Christians in Asia Minor and in some parts of Syria east of Antioch, for instance, emphasized fasting and held to the date of 14/15 Nisan, regardless of the day of the week on which this fell; they thus remained faithful to an ancient Jewish-Christian tradition, on account of which they are often called ‘Quartodecimans’ (‘Fourteeners’). In all probability, they gathered after sunset and held a vigil during which biblical texts were read and typologically explained – certainly Exodus 12 on the eating of the Pesach lamb, and perhaps also a gospel passion narrative – and after midnight, a meal was taken in commemoration of

¹¹ Gerard Rouwhorst, ‘New Perspectives on Jewish and Christian Liturgies: Their Dynamics and Interactions with Their Environments’, in: *Analogie und Differenz: Das dynamische Verhältnis von jüdischer und christlicher Liturgie. Analogy and Difference: The Ever-Changing Relationship of Jewish and Christian Liturgy*, eds. Claudia D. Bergmann and Benedikt Kranemann, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 112 (Münster, 2021), 275-293, here 286.

¹² Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche*, aus dem Nachlaß herausgegeben von Reinhard Meßner und Wolfgang G. Schöpf, mit einem Beitrag von Clemens Leonhard, Liturgica Oenipontana 2 (Münster, 2003), 48, 101-102.

¹³ Cf. Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Alcuin Club Collections 86 (Collegeville MN, 2011), 50-51.

¹⁴ Carsten Colpe, ‘Jenseitsfahrt (Unterwelt- oder Höllenfahrt)’, in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1997) 466-489.

¹⁵ From the cornucopia of literature, here I only refer to: Auf der Maur, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche*; Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, 39-59; Karl Gerlach, *The Antenicene Pascha: A Rhetorical History*, Liturgia Condenda 7 (Leuven, 1998); Harald Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 64 (Innsbruck and Vienna, 2005), 783-822; idem, ‘On the Origin and Development of the Liturgical Year: Tendencies, Results, and Desiderata of Heortological Research’, *Studia Liturgica* 40 (2010) 14-45, here 18-21, 37-41; Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids MI, 2014), 229-233; Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 179-182. See also the now dated, but still important article: Thomas J. Talley, ‘History and Eschatology in the Primitive Pascha’, in: *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville MN, 2000), 99-109 – this essay has originally been published in: Thomas J. Talley, *Worship: Reforming Tradition* (Washington DC, 1990), 75-86. Outdated, but still of note is also Wolfgang Huber, *Pascha und Ostern: Untersuchungen zur Osterfeier der alten Kirche* (Berlin, 1969).

the salvific death of Jesus.¹⁶ Interestingly, the ‘Fourteeners’ did not already eat in the evening, as would have been customary in Jewish practice, but fasted; perhaps this constituted a kind of ‘alternate’ Passover. Be this as it may, detachment from Judaism and diverse forms of anti-Judaism have actually become conspicuous traits of the Christian liturgy, the Easter celebration included. A prime example thereof is the Paschal homily delivered by Bishop Melito of Sardes in a Quartodeciman community in Sardes between 160-170. In his sermon, Melito not only typologically juxtaposes, actually opposes, the now ‘superseded’ old covenant and the salvific Christ event, but also accuses the Jews of having rejected and killed the redeemer, a crime that has ushered in their own death.¹⁷ In later periods, Melito’s reproach has fatally returned in a host of Christian ‘adversus Judaeos’ texts and rituals.¹⁸

For the non-Quartodeciman faith communities in the Roman empire, inter alia, in Rome, it was the Sunday after 14/15 Nisan (or another Sunday shortly thereafter) which became the day to mark the Paschal event. It was on Sunday, after all, that they would come together for their regular weekly Eucharist, whereas another motive may have been the wish to distinguish the incipient Christian custom from its Jewish forebear. These Christians thought that fasting ought to precede Easter Sunday, and then cease. Scholarly opinion favours the antiquity of the ‘Fourteener’ tradition over that of those celebrating Pascha on Sunday.

Although this and other differences regarding the celebration of Easter had coexisted for some time, Bishop Victor I of Rome (189-199) determined that the usage of the ‘Fourteeners’ should no longer be held acceptable, and moved to excommunicate them. The fact that believers from Asia Minor and Syria were living side by side in the multicultural capital of the Roman empire and that, therefore, in the Church of Rome itself several Easter dates were being observed, may have been a motive for Victor’s decision. Nevertheless, the bishop of Lyons, St Irenaeus (ca. 140 – ca. 200), himself hailing from Asia Minor, urged his Roman confrere to be tolerant and conciliatory.¹⁹

Ultimately, the participants in the Council of Nicaea in 325 would stipulate that the Paschal feast be celebrated by all Christians on the same day;²⁰ the First Council of Arles in 314 had already decreed that Easter (‘Pascha Domini’) everywhere be celebrated on one and the same day.²¹ This ‘same day’ turned out eventually to be the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. The council fathers of Nicaea I would also reason that the Christian reckoning of the exact Paschal date ought not to depend on the Jewish calculation of Pesach. In later centuries, regrettably, the latter rationale was taken to imply Nicaea’s exclusion of any Jewish influence whatsoever, although in this case the council

¹⁶ Rouwhorst, ‘Christlicher Gottesdienst und der Gottesdienst Israels’, 541-542.

¹⁷ Alistair Steward-Sykes, *The Lamb’s High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Liturgy at Sardis*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Supplement 42 (Leiden, 1998); *Melito on Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Relating to the Quartodecimans*, ed., trans., intro., com. Alistair C. Steward (Crestwood NY, 2016); Melito of Sardis, ‘*On Pascha*’ and *Fragments*, ed. Stuart George Hall, *Oxford Early Christian Texts* (Oxford, 1979). See also: Auf der Maur, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche*, 58-72.

¹⁸ See, e.g.: Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)*, *Europäische Hochschulschriften* XXIII, 172 (Frankfurt a.M., 1998). See also: *L’antijudaïsme des Pères: Mythe et/ou réalité ? – Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (20-22 mai 2015)*, eds. Jean-Marie Auwers, Régis Burnet and Didier Luciani, *Théologie Historique* 125 (Paris, 2017).

¹⁹ Edward G. Farrugia, ‘Schism in the Early Church: Unity and Diversity at Stake in the Paschal Controversy’, unpublished paper read during the seventeenth annual meeting of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, Rome, October 6-10, 2021.

²⁰ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta: Editio critica, I: The Oecumenical Councils: From Nicaea I to Nicaea II (325–787)*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo et al., *Corpus Christianorum: Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta* 1 (Turnhout, 2006), 12; cf. 33-34. Cf. Raniero Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua nella Chiesa antica*, *Traditio Christiana* 3 (Turin, 1978), no. 53.

²¹ *Concilia Galliae A. 314 – A. 506*, ed. Charles Munier, *Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina* 148 (Turnhout, 1963), 5 (canon 1).

fathers probably wanted only to prevent compulsory dependence on the then inexact Jewish computation, in favour of a more correct procedure.²² Noticeably, the Jewish time reckoning, including the Pesach date, evolved from great diversity, which still prevailed in Late Antiquity, to a uniform and normative rabbinic calendar, used since the tenth century.²³ So for a long time, the variety of dates and the uncertainty which went with it, applied not only to the Christians, but also to the Jews and their fixing the date of Pesach. As regards the growing tendency to warn about Jewry, especially with respect to the celebration of Easter, an apt example are the *Apostolic Constitutions*, composed in approximately 380 in or near Antioch. This church order cautions for celebrating Easter together with the Jews, because Christians ‘have nothing in common with them’, as they are ‘disloyal, blinded and divinely renounced, walking far away from truth’. The document also alerts its audience to reckon the Easter date very accurately, because Pascha can be celebrated in a right manner only once a year.²⁴

Since the attendees of the Nicene council did, in all likelihood, not pass a proper canon or decree – no official records were made²⁵ – the assembly’s outcome must be reconstructed from other sources. Of particular importance is Emperor Constantine I (sole rule 324-337), who not only convened and presided over the council, but also wrote, after the assembly, a ‘Letter to the Churches’ (*Κωνσταντίνος Σεβαστός ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις* / *Constantinus Augustus Ecclesiis*). Therein, he obliged all churches to celebrate Easter on the same day and not depend upon the Jewish computation.²⁶ This letter, characterized by anti-Jewish invective,²⁷ and its corollary conciliar point of view heralded the final defeat of the Quartodeciman practice, in spite of the latter’s ostensible faithfulness to New Testament data. Nonetheless, despite opposition by representatives of the ‘official’ church, traces of this ancient custom could be found up until the ninth century. It is, incidentally, of note that liturgists and church historians have often paid great attention to the Quartodeciman conflict, as if this were one of the most decisive events in the ante-Nicene period. However, the divergence which it represents is just one example of the multiformity of Easter practices in the first centuries.

Alexandria with its noted astronomers was the most significant centre for the computation of the Easter dates according to the Nicene system, but it was not the only one. Despite the conciliar mandate reflected in Constantine’s letter, differences in calculating the Easter date, as well as varying schedules of Paschal dates (‘paschalia’), remained. Rome, Ireland and Gaul long stood by their own ways of reckoning, following Alexandria only much

²² See the seminal article by a Russian Orthodox professor of theology: Dimitri P. Ogitsky, ‘Canonical Norms of the Orthodox Easter Computation and the Problem of the Dating of Pascha in our Time’, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973) 274-284, here 275-279; this article was originally published in Russian in *Bogoslovskie Trudy* 7 (1971) 204-211. Also the Romanian Orthodox canonist Liviu Stan dismisses a general anti-Jewish interpretation of Nicaea’s regulation – see his ‘Pour que tous les chrétiens fêtent Pâques le même jour’, *Istina* 19 (1974) 471-485; this article originally appeared in Romanian in *Studie Teologice* seria II-a, 22 (1970) 368-383.

²³ Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, 2nd Century BCE to 10th Century CE* (Oxford, 2001). See also: *Calendars in the Making: The Origins of Calendars from the Roman Empire to the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Sacha Stern, Time, Astronomy, and Calendars 10 (Leiden, 2021), which informs on systems of time reckoning in different cultures and religions.

²⁴ *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, II: *livres III-VI*, ed. Marcel Metzger, Sources Chrétiennes 329 (Paris, 1986), 266-269 (book V, no. 17, 1).

²⁵ Thomas Graumann, *The Acts of the Early Church Councils: Production and Character*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, 2021), 18.

²⁶ For the text, see: Eusebius von Caesarea, *De vita Constantini – Über das Leben Konstantins*, eingeleitet von Bruno Bleckmann, übersetzt und kommentiert von Horst Schneider, *Fontes Christiani* 83 (Turnhout, 2007), 330-339.

²⁷ This invective originates from the emperor himself, not from Eusebius’ editing. See: Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden: Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea*, Patristische Texte und Studien (Berlin, 1999), 239-246.

later. Even the new imperial capital Constantinople for some time used another calculation system than that of the Egyptian metropolis.²⁸

According to Alexandria, the spring equinox fell on March 21, while according to Rome, it was March 25. Nor was a unanimous answer given to the question of what to do when the full moon appeared on a Sunday (celebrate Easter on the very same day, or delay it to the next Sunday?). In 387, for example, the Paschal festival was celebrated in Gaul on March 21, in Rome on April 18, and in Northern Italy (with Milan as its centre), as well as Alexandria, on April 25.²⁹ Of course, during the first millennium and the greater part of the second, modern communication means did not exist. Once experts in Alexandria and Jerusalem had determined the full moon and, with respect to the Jewish Passover, the new crescent, it did not follow that people elsewhere would immediately be informed. The ‘Easter Letters’, which church leaders exchanged, and the abovementioned ‘paschalia’ thus proved to be important sources for obtaining, to some extent, certainty.³⁰ In the Great Palace of Constantinople, there was a room with the schedules of the Paschal dates, where the emperor, his courtiers and others could see on which future dates Easter would fall.³¹ However helpful these tables and the Easter Letters may have been, they could not abolish the extant interregional differences. During the seventh and eighth centuries, in Britain and Ireland, for instance, monastic and episcopal debates on the accuracy of the method and criteria of the Easter date reckoning were common; dissimilar interpretations of astronomical, scriptural and patristic data as well as divergent theological approaches ushered in differing calculation models.³² Sometimes meetings of prominent astronomers and other scholars were held to discuss calendar matters, including that of the Paschal date. In 809, for instance, such a gathering took place in Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen, Germany), an important cultural, ecclesiastical and political centre in the Frankish empire.³³

²⁸ *The Easter Controversy of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Immo Warntjes and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Turnhout, 2011); Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, 2008); Thomas J. Talley, ‘Further Light on the Quartodeciman Pascha and the Date of the Annunciation’, in: *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw*, eds. Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (Portland OR, 2004), 71-77 – also published in: *Studia Liturgica* 33 (2003) 151-158; Gerard Rouwhorst, ‘The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach’, *Questions Liturgiques* 77 (1996) 152-173; Grigorios Larentzakis, ‘Das Osterfestdatum nach dem I. ökumenischen Konzil von Nikaia (325): Die Rolle von Alexandrien und Rom’, *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 101 (1979) 67-78; Vittorio Peri, *La date de la fête de Pâque: Note sur l’origine et le développement de la question pascale* (Rome, 1968). See also: Wolfgang A. Bienert, ‘Osterfeststreit’, in: *Lexikon der Ökumene und Konfessionskunde*, eds. Wolfgang Thönissen et al. (Freiburg i.Br., 2007), 1017-1020; Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, The Penguin History of the Church 1 (Harmondsworth, 1993), 84-85; idem, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2001), 25-26, 100, 163, 204-205, 249-250, 256, 672.

²⁹ Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, 59.

³⁰ See, e.g.: Auf der Maur, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche*, 97-100, 103-104. See also: Olaf Pedersen, ‘The Ecclesiastical Calendar and the Life of the Church’, in: *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar: Proceedings of the Vatican Conference to Commemorate its 400th Anniversary, 1582-1982*, eds. George V. Coyne, Michael A. Hoskin and Olaf Pedersen (Vatican City, 1983), 17-74.

³¹ Pertinent information can be found in, e.g.: *The Book of Ceremonies*, a pivotal manual for civil and ecclesiastical ceremonies in the Eastern Roman empire, at the court in particular, compiled at the behest of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus (d. 959); its final redaction took place during the decade after his death. See: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, vol. I-II, trans. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall with the Greek edition of CSHB (Bonn 1829), *Byzantina Australiensia* 18, 1-2 (Canberra, 2012).

³² Julianna Grigg, ‘The Paschal Theology of Abbot Ceolfrith of Wearmouth-Jarrow’, *Innes Review* 70 (2019) 113-134; Celia Chazelle, ‘Bede, the Old Testament, and Easter’, in: *From Theodulf to Rashi and Beyond: Texts, Techniques, and Transfer in Western European Exegesis (650 – 1100)*, eds. Johannes Heil et al. (Leiden, forthcoming).

³³ *Pracht auf Pergament: Schätze der Buchmalerei von 780 bis 1180* (Munich, 2012), 51, 62-63. For a survey of calendar reform, mainly in the Latin West, see also: C. Philipp E. Nothaft, *Scandalous Error: Calendar Reform and Calendrical Astronomy in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2018).

After this brief survey of various regional practices within the Christian orbit and the Council of Nicaea's attempt to establish some uniformity, I shall now attend to three salient endeavours to reorder time computation, with their concomitant consequences for the Paschal date.

2. Julian, Gregorian and Meletian Calendars

In 46/45 BCE, Gaius Julius Caesar acting in his capacity as pontifex maximus, carried out a revision of the Roman system of time calculation. The fact that it was Rome's highest officiant in the religious domain who put this important change in place signals the religious dimension of calendrical alteration, which entails also public cult and its attendant festivals. In the course of the centuries, however, the Julian calendar named after Caesar began to display some minor inaccuracies. Because these increasingly became *major* imprecisions,³⁴ Pope Gregory XIII (incumbent 1572-1585) introduced in 1582 a reformed, more accurate time reckoning; this revision increased the exactitude of the solar year by ten minutes and forty-eight seconds. The papal decision had been meticulously prepared in the years 1577-1582 and was chiefly the work of the Jesuit Christoph Klau (in Latin: Clavius, 1537/38-1612), a renowned mathematician and astronomer.³⁵ Pope Gregory had ordered that in 1582, October 4 be immediately followed by October 15. In the 'Gregorian calendar', the dates were realigned so that the vernal equinox would always fall on March 20 or 21, as in the time of Nicaea I. On the one hand, the calendar change resulted in a much-needed improvement of time reckoning. On the other, it caused in both the East and the West a rupture with respect to the calculation of Pascha, as there were henceforth in many places two different dates.³⁶ Yet, despite the chronological divergence, three factors, namely springtime, full moon and Sunday, have remained key constituents in both the Julian and the Gregorian Easter computations.

Whereas the new calendar was soon accepted in Italy, France, Poland-Lithuania and the Catholic Habsburg realm, its adoption in the Anglican world and the Protestant parts of Continental Europe took much longer. Only gradually – after sometimes fiery resistance to this 'papal' regulation, largely grounded in dislike of the papacy – the Gregorian time computation was accepted in the other, 'non-Catholic' parts of the Western world as well. The English court and parliament, for instance, intended to implement in 1582 a calendar reform similar to Pope Gregory's decision, but their plans were thwarted by the Anglican bishops, who feared that the proposed revision, so soon upon the heels of the papal reform, would connote submission to the Church of Rome. Eventually, England, its colonies and Ireland embraced the Gregorian calendar as late as in 1752.

As for the numerous German principalities, Catholic dioceses like Cologne, Munster and Trier soon espoused the Gregorian system of time reckoning, though the Protestant areas did so only from 1700, when official agreement was reached on the common calculation of the Paschal date. Nonetheless, its full-scale adoption took time: in several places, eighteenth-century German Catholics and Protestants still celebrated Easter on different dates for a while, and it is only since 1776 that Germans have been grounded in a uniform practice. The reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) himself had advocated, when commenting in 1539 on the

³⁴ J.D. North, 'The Western Calendar: "Intolerabilis, horribilis, et derisibilis": Four Centuries of Discontent', in: *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar*, eds. Coyne et al., 75-113.

³⁵ Clavius later explained and defended the reform in his *Novi calendarii romani apologiam ...* (Rome, 1595). See: Robert F. Taft, 'From Polemicists to Promoters: The Jesuits and the Liturgical Traditions of the Christian East', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 78 (2012) 97-132, here 110-111.

³⁶ August Ziggelaar, 'The Papal Bull of 1582 Promulgating a Reform of the Calendar', in: *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar*, eds. Coyne et al., 201-239.

First Council of Nicaea, a correction of the calendar regarding the Paschal date. Because Luther wanted to prevent serious calendric divergence between different countries with its attendant chaos, he hoped that the civil authorities would carry out the pertinent revision through international cooperation. But this did not happen.³⁷

Another fitting example of the necessity to draw distinctions are the Low Countries. There, several provinces, such as Zeeland and Holland, as well as the Estates General and some southern districts, embraced the New Style calendar as early as 1582/83, whereas other provinces did so only in 1700/01. This means that during the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age – a period of great blossoming of commerce, science and the arts in the Northern Netherlands – the province of Friesland still used the Julian reckoning, while the province of Holland was already on the Gregorian, and when a trader sailed from the Frisian capital, Leeuwarden, to the harbour of Amsterdam, he had to bridge a time difference of over ten days, taking this considerable variance in contracts and appointments duly into account. This is also true for birth, marriage and death certificates and the like. The foremost Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), for example, entered into matrimony with Saskia Uylenburgh (1612-1642), scion of a prominent Frisian family, in her home province on June 22, 1634, in accordance with the Julian calendar. However, in Holland, this day was equal to July 2, so a difference of ten days between the two provinces. Saskia died in Amsterdam on June 14, 1642, according to the Gregorian calculation, whereas in Friesland it was June 4.³⁸ Another province adjacent to Friesland, Groningen, ferried between the two systems: it embraced the Gregorian calendar in 1583, returned to the Julian soon afterwards (1584) and then adopted once more the Gregorian in 1700.

Or again, we might consider the Italian cities of Pisa and Florence, which both employed their own systems of time reckoning until compelled in 1749-1751 by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to espouse the Gregorian and celebrate New Year on January 1. Previously, in both cities, the new year began on the Annunciation, viz. the feast of the ‘incarnatio domini’. In Pisa it commenced nine months before Christmas, in Florence three months after Christmas, resulting in a difference of one year between both cities. It deserves mention that nowadays in both Pisa and Florence, the feast of March 25 is enacted, in addition to January 1, as a second New Year’s Day; but this happens chiefly for touristic and folkloric reasons.

An interesting exception is Crete, which from 1211 to 1669 was under Venetian control. After the sack of Constantinople in 1204 and the dividing-up of the Eastern Roman empire by participants in the Fourth Crusade, Venice laid its hands on this large isle; its dominion, lasting over 450 years, only ended with the surrender of the Cretan capital Candia/Heraklion to the Ottoman troops in 1669. Grown wise by experience – the frequent efforts to convert the Orthodox to Catholicism nearly always came to nothing – the Venetian civil authorities did not permit the Roman Catholic Church to introduce the Gregorian calendar on the island, because they wished to avoid further annoyance with local Orthodoxy and, in view of the growing Ottoman threat, preferred peaceful coexistence between Italians and Greeks, Catholics and Orthodox.³⁹

³⁷ On the Anglican stance and Luther’s position, see: Michael Hoskin, ‘The Reception of the Calendar by Other Churches’, in: *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar*, eds. Coyne et al., 255-264, here 256-259; Owen Gingerich, ‘The Civil Reception of the Gregorian Calendar’, in: *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar*, 265-279, here 268-273; Martin F. Connell, ‘The Date of Easter and Shakespeare’s “Progress of the Stars”’: Creed and Chronometry in the Sixteenth Century’, *Worship* 87 (2013) 130-148.

³⁸ Christoph Driessen, *Rembrandts vrouwen* (Amsterdam, 2012), 66; Froukje de Jong-Krap, *Saskia Uylenburgh 1612-1642: Uit de schaduw van Rembrandt* (Sint-Annaparochie, 2012), 74-75, 103.

³⁹ Nikolaos Panagiotakes, *El Greco: The Cretan Years*, Centre for Hellenic Studies King’s College London Publications 13 (Farnham, 2009), 72.

Orthodoxy

Dwelling upon Byzantine-rite Orthodoxy, we notice that the said Pope Gregory negotiated, on revision of the calendar, with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremiah II (in office 1572-1595). Although the pope argued that his reform aimed at being faithful to the First Council of Nicaea's stipulation, no agreement was reached. In 1583, 1587 and 1593, local synods in Constantinople wishing to be faithful to what they perceived as the long-standing divine ecclesial tradition, repeatedly rejected the Gregorian calendar revision as an illegitimate innovation.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that earlier the Greek Byzantine scholar and astronomer Nicephorus Gregoras (1295-1359), observing that the Julian way of calculating time was no longer correct, had proposed in turn a calendar revision. The Eastern Roman emperor, Andronicus II Palaeologus (ruled 1282-1328) was in favour of Gregoras' suggestion, but ultimately declined it for fear of strong resistance. And in 1371/72, it was the monk and astronomer Isaac Argyros (ca. 1310 – ca. 1375) in Constantinople who championed revision of the 'paschalia', because in his opinion the divergence between the Julian calendar and the computation of the correct Easter date was bound to increase ever more. But as before, the idea came to naught.⁴¹ Interestingly, the eclectic philosopher Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355/1360-1452/1454) authored a revised calendar which he might have brought to the notion of prominent Catholic intellectuals during his stay in Italy. His time-reckoning is not unlikely to have exerted a posterior influence on the composers of the Gregorian one.

In Poland-Lithuania, the Catholic king's adoption of the Gregorian calendar stirred controversy. On the one hand, the king allowed the Ruthenian Orthodox population to retain the Julian reckoning, on the other, Latin bishops tried to impose the new Gregorian computation on the Orthodox citizens of the Polish Commonwealth. The coexistence of two different schedules for fasting and feasting, especially in mixed households and neighbourhoods, as well as the discrimination of the Orthodox in general, proved to be a source of irritation.⁴²

Only much later, during the first half of the twentieth century, did a new situation arise. Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III (in office 1878-1884 and 1901-1912) first appealed, in a 1902 encyclical to the other Orthodox Churches, that Christian unity be restored, advocating amongst other things an investigation of the calendar issue.⁴³ By 1904, however, the Holy Synod of Constantinople itself was already putting the brakes on the patriarch's initiative, arguing that there was still lack of clarity. In 1920, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, inspired by the League of Nations (founded in the wake of the First World War, in 1919), addressed not only the other Orthodox Churches, but all 'Churches of Christ', exhorting them to form a 'League/Communion of the Churches' (κοινωνία τῶν ἐκκκλησιῶν).⁴⁴ The latter encyclical, seminal for the twentieth-century Ecumenical Movement, argues in

⁴⁰ Vittorio Peri, *Due date, un'unica Pasqua: Le origini della moderna disparità liturgica in una trattativa ecumenica tra Roma e Costantinopoli (1582-1584)* (Milan, 1967).

⁴¹ For a concise survey of different Easter date computations in the Byzantine period and pertinent reform attempts, see: Anne Thion, 'Astronomy', in: *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, eds. Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Sinioglou (Cambridge, 2017), 183-197, here 195-196; Vasileios Livanides (protopresbyter), *Η ημερολογιακή μεταρρύθμιση: Κανονικολειτουργική θεώρηση*, master thesis, Faculty of Theology, School of Pastoral and Social Theology, Aristotelian University of Thessalonica (Thessalonica, 2019), 57-66 – I am grateful to Chrysostom Nassis, who brought this thesis to my attention.

⁴² Sophia Senyk, *A History of the Church in Ukraine, II, 1300 to the Union of Brest*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 289 (Rome, 2011), 217-219.

⁴³ For the text of the 1902 and 1920 encyclicals, as well as for other relevant documents, see: *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement 1902-1992*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva, 1994); *Orthodoxe Kirche und Ökumenische Bewegung: Dokumente, Erklärungen, Berichte 1900-2006*, ed. Athanasios Basdekis (Frankfurt a.M. and Paderborn, 2006).

⁴⁴ Natallia Vasilevich, 'The 1920 Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Proposal for a "League of Churches": Translation or Interpretation', *The Ecumenical Review* 72 (2020) 673-682.

favour of pulling down mutual distrust between the churches and strengthening love between them. To realize this ambition, the text makes numerous practical suggestions, such as implementing exchange programs for students of theology, and celebrating the key liturgical festivals in accordance with a uniform calendar. Although Easter and Christmas are not expressly mentioned, the intent is clear.

A further step was taken at a so-called ‘Pan-Orthodox Conference’, held from May 10 to June 8, 1923 in Constantinople and dedicated to the calendar revision as well as several other urgent issues. Despite its name, however, this meeting was hardly pan-Orthodox, since it was attended only by delegates from Romania, Serbia, Greece and Cyprus, with special guests, such as the Anglican bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore (1853-1932), who adhered to the Anglo-Catholic branch of his church. The conference was chaired by the colourful Patriarch Meletios IV Metaxakis (incumbent November 1921 – September 1923),⁴⁵ a progressive theologian and church leader who, throughout his impressive ecclesiastical career, reorganized church structures, furthered education of both clergy and laity, introduced innovations like electric light in church buildings and conducted also ecumenical dialogues with Anglicanism and various Protestant denominations, acknowledging the validity of the Anglican ordinations, namely the orders of deaconate, presbyterate and episcopacy. (In this way, he made it possible – at least for a while – for Greek Orthodox faithful to receive the sacraments from Anglican and, in North America, Episcopalian clergy. In contrast, as Pope Leo XIII proclaimed in 1896, the Roman Catholic church leadership considered the Anglican ordinations invalid, although a good number of Orthodox prelates shared the pope’s opinion in this case and Meletios Metaxakis was the odd man out.) Meletios served his church also as metropolitan of Athens (1918-1920) and, at the outset of his monumental career, in the Patriarchate of Antioch and as secretary of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, further as metropolitan of the Cypriot diocese of Kition (Larnaka), as archbishop of America (1921) and finally, as patriarch of Alexandria (officiating 1925/26 until his decease in 1935). He thus possessed peerless administrative competence in worldwide Orthodoxy and, owing to his international experience, he was aware of the confusion to which the use of differing calendars gave rise. Surely, his convening the sister churches for a gathering with the purpose to settle an urgent matter was in line with his overall policy and vision.

The participants of the 1923 conference took a far-reaching decision which was, however, not officially binding on their churches, namely that Orthodoxy adopt the ‘revised Julian calendar’ (their term for the Gregorian time computation).⁴⁶ But the conference attendees did slightly correct the Gregorian reckoning, as they consented to a pertinent proposal made by the Serbian scientist Milutin Milanković (1879-1958). Fact is that the 1582 reform lags, over 3,300 years, one day behind, whereas according to Milanković’s calculation, the ‘revised Julian calendar’ of 1923 loses one day only over 43,000 years. (Because this

⁴⁵ Evangelos Pringkipakis, ‘Μελέτιος: Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. 4. Δ' ο Μεταξάκης (1921-1923)’, in: *Μεγάλη Ορθόδοξη Χριστιανική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* 11 (2014) 310-312; Vasil T. Stavridis, ‘Two Ecumenical Patriarchs from America: Meletios IV Metaxakis (1921-1923) and Athenagoras I Spyrou (1948-1972)’, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999) 55-84, esp. 56-62, 68-79; Andreas Nanakis, ‘Ελληνορθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ Ἐλευθέριος Βενιζέλος’, in: *Γηθόσνον σέβασμα: Αντίδωρον τιμῆς καὶ μνήμης εἰς τὸν καθηγητὴν τῆς Λειτουργικῆς Ἰωάννην Φουντούλην († 2007)*, I-II, eds. Panagiotis I. Skaltsis and Nikodimos A. Skrettas (Thessalonica, 2013), 1367-1386; Ioannis Ch. Konstantinidis, ‘Μελέτιος: Ὁ Μεταξάκης’, in: *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια* 8 (1966) 965-969; Andreas Tillyrides, ‘Meletios Metaxakis: A Historic Document’, *Θεολογία* 55 (1984) 526-532; Peter Plank, ‘Der Ökumenische Patriarch Meletios IV. (1921-1923) und die orthodoxe Diaspora’, *Orthodoxes Forum* 21 (2007) 251-269, here 264-265.

⁴⁶ Patrick Viscuso, *A Quest for Reform of the Orthodox Church: The 1923 Panorthodox Congress – An Analysis and Translation of Its Acts and Decisions* (Berkeley CA, 2006); Viorel Ioniță, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, trans. Remus Rus, *Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia* 62 (Fribourg and Basel, 2014), 4-15, 105-108, 201; Anastasios Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil: Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie*, *Orthodoxe Perspektiven* 10 (Münster, 2013), 93-97, 101-107, cf. 114-115.

minimal difference is insignificant for us now, I shall not further take it into account, and instead of saying that a number of Orthodox Churches after 1923 embraced the more precise ‘revised Julian calendar’, I speak simply of their adoption of the ‘Gregorian calendar’, even though this is not entirely correct.) In addition, the attendees of the Constantinople conference decided not to take the Greenwich meridian as the point of departure for the Easter computation (as Western Christianity did), but the Jerusalem one instead, because theologically speaking, the latter meridian, which crosses the dome of the Holy Sepulchre Church, seemed more correct to them. The participants of the 1923 conference argued also in favour of the celebration of Easter on a fixed Sunday – a subject that was topical in the age, would then vanish from the agenda, but be revived today (more on this below). Furthermore, concretely they agreed to skip thirteen days in October 1923, that is, from October 1 a ‘leap’ would be made to October 14. It was, however, not until 1924 that the Patriarchate of Constantinople ‘jumped’ from March 10 to March 23.

This arrangement concerned only the immovable annual feasts, not the movable Easter cycle. In order to promote calendrical unity between the Orthodox Churches which adopted the Gregorian calendar (or would adopt it), and those Orthodox Churches still employing the Julian one, a further decision concerning a common inter-Orthodox Easter date was taken when the Holy Synods of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Greece accepted, in the autumn of 1923, the compromise proposed by Archbishop Chrysostomos Papadopoulos of Athens (in office 1923-1938), to wit, that all Orthodox Churches would continue to determine the Easter date according to the Julian reckoning.⁴⁷ The ‘Meletian calendar’, named after Patriarch Meletios himself, who was so much involved in this issue, is a blend computus, combining the Gregorian time-keeping with the determination of Easter according to the Julian reckoning. Use of the Meletian calendar, which is also sometimes called the ‘Greek calendar’, thus means that even those Orthodox Churches which rely on the Gregorian computation for fixed feasts, still celebrate the cycles of Great Lent and Pascha in accordance with the Julian ordering of time.⁴⁸

Yet, in Greece, Orthodoxy’s adoption of the ‘New Calendar’, as the Gregorian time computation is commonly called both there and in other Orthodox countries (with some people speaking also of the ‘Neo-Julian calendar’), did not happen wholeheartedly. At first, the Greek authorities decided by Royal Decree to espouse the Gregorian calendar in 1923 – February 16 would be transmuted into March 1 – while the Church of Greece went on to follow the ‘Old’ one. But employing these two differing systems of time reckoning in one and the same country proved to be confusing. Particularly the festive enactment of the yearly national holiday of March 25, when the church commemorates the Annunciation of the Mother of God, and the state celebrates the Greek Revolution against the Ottomans in 1821, with both occurrences indissolubly tied up with one another, but in 1923 separated by thirteen

⁴⁷ Basilio Petrà, ‘L’ortodossia tra vecchio e nuovo calendario: Il rischio di una Pasqua di divisione’, *Rivista Liturgica* 88 (2001) 135-155; Stefano Parenti, ‘La questione pasquale nell’Oriente ortodosso: Tra liturgia, pastorale ed ecumenismo’, *Rivista Liturgica* 88 (2001) 197-2004; Peter Plank, ‘Zeitrechnung und Festdatierung als ökumenisches Problem’, in: *Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde*, II, eds. Wilhelm Nyssen et al. (Düsseldorf, 1989), 182-191; Franz Mali, ‘Julianische Berechnung des Osterdatums und Gregorianischer Kalender?’, *Ostkirchliche Studien* 53 (2004) 309-327; ‘De oosterse kalenders’, in: *Handboek Oosters Christendom*, eds. Herman Teule and Alfons Brüning, met medewerking van Leo van Leijsen (Leuven, 2018), 956-957.

⁴⁸ See also: Chrysostom Nassis, ‘The Eucharist, the Presanctified Liturgy and Great Lent: Two Contemporary Decisions of the Patriarchal Synod of Constantinople’, in: *Studies on the Liturgies of the Christian East: Selected Papers of the Third International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Volos, May 26-30, 2010*, eds. Steven Hawkes-Teeple, Bert Groen and Stefanos Alexopoulos, *Eastern Christian Studies* 18 (Leuven, 2013), 179-201, here 190-191.

days, sparked discontent. For this matter, the Orthodox Church converted a year later also to the ‘New Calendar’, transforming March 10, 1924 to March 23.⁴⁹

In spite of the fact that the parish clergy and laity had barely been prepared for the imminent change of calendar, and despite controversy within the hierarchy and among monastics, the Holy Synods of a number of other Orthodox Churches did voluntarily accept the Gregorian time calculation after the 1923 conference, namely the Patriarchate of Constantinople – save Mount Athos – and the Church of Cyprus in March 1924, too; the Patriarchate of Romania and the Church of Poland in October 1924. After the newly-founded state of Albania adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1912 – the Roman Catholics in its territory had already espoused it in 1583 –, Albanian Orthodoxy followed suit after the Constantinople conference, embracing the Meletian compromise computation system.

The Patriarchate of Alexandria, reluctant at first, switched over in 1928, so when the aforementioned Meletios was at its helm. The Patriarchate of Antioch had also been averse, but swung round in the same year as Alexandria.⁵⁰ In this, we should call to mind that there existed in this period socio-political upheavals in the Middle East, communication means were often deficient and there was also personal animosity between several patriarchs. Besides, both ancient patriarchates opined that the matter ought to be regulated at a future pan-Orthodox council; this remained the position of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which therefore turned down the calendrical alteration.

The Orthodox Church in Finland even accepted, in 1923, the Gregorian calendar ‘in toto’, that is, also the Gregorian computation of the Easter cycle. This move was partly made because of pressure exerted by the Finnish government, and happened against the background of the process of the Finns’ political independence from Russia and Finnish Orthodoxy’s separation from the Patriarchate of Moscow; on July 6, 1923, the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized Finnish Orthodoxy as an autonomous archdiocese under the jurisdiction of Constantinople, then led by Patriarch Meletios mentioned above. (A similar simultaneous, yet more complicated evolution can be observed in Estonian Orthodoxy.) It is, however, of note that Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow (in office 1917-1925) had already in 1918 permitted Finnish Orthodoxy to adopt the ‘New Calendar’. Yet the ecclesiastical transition to the revised time calculation in toto, confirmed in 1921 and 1925, was not a smooth process, because many monks remained opposed, with the famed Valamo Monastery as the centre of resistance. The decision to adopt the ‘New Style’ was also considered a sign of ecumenical rapprochement with the dominant denomination of Finland, the Lutheran Church. In this way, Orthodox Finns could henceforth celebrate Great/Good Friday and Easter on the same days as the Lutherans. In present-day multi-denominational Finland, one observes the joyous phenomenon that nearly all Christian confessions perform the Paschal rites together. An exception is a small Russian Orthodox community which celebrates the Easter cycle together with the Patriarchate of Moscow, but most Russian Orthodox living in Finland, celebrate Pascha in Russian-speaking communities under the auspices of the Orthodox Church of Finland, at the same time as the Orthodox Finns. There seems to be no major movement in Finnish Orthodoxy to return to the Julian calendar or adopt the Meletian.

Striking is the position of the Romanian Patriarchate, since it not only accepted, as noted, the Meletian calendar, but at the behest of the rather progressive Romanian primate, Miron Cristea (in office 1920-1939), it observed the Easter cycle twice (in 1926 and 1929) in

⁴⁹ Andreas Michael Wittig, *Die orthodoxe Kirche in Griechenland: Ihre Beziehung zum Staat gemäß der Theorie und der Entwicklung von 1821–1977*, Das östliche Christentum N.F. 37 (Würzburg, 1987), 121-127; Iakovos Pililis, *Αἱ μεγάλα ἑορτὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (Δεσποτικά καὶ Θεομητορικά)* (Athens, 2002), 390.

⁵⁰ Kallistos Ware, ‘Old Calendarists’, in: *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of a Plural Society*, ed. Richard Clogg (London, 2002), 1-23; Mali, ‘Julianische Berechnung des Osterdatums und Gregorianischer Kalender?’. The dates that I mention are taken from Ware’s study. According to Mali’s article (pp. 322-323), Romania accepted the revised calendar as late as 1925 and Antioch only in 1929.

accordance with the Gregorian calendar, just as in Finland. The full adoption of the Gregorian reckoning was likely related to the elevation of the Church of Romania to the rank of patriarchate in 1925. Boosted by pan-Orthodox recognition of its new patriarchal status, Patriarch Miron was keen to open up his faith community to the Ecumenical Movement. Initially, nearly the entire hierarchy and clergy followed the decision of their leader to espouse the Meletian calendar. However, the two Paschal celebrations in accordance with the Gregorian reckoning, allegedly tainted by association with the ‘imperialistic’ pope of Rome, and the disturbing fact that in the Orthodox Churches located in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, there were then two distinct Paschal dates – the Gregorian in Romania and the Julian elsewhere – evoked highly ambiguous inner-Orthodox reactions. Especially in Moldavia, Bessarabia and Bucharest, resistance mounted, and schism between the Holy Synod and adherents of the ‘Old Style’ occurred. This made the Romanian church leadership renege upon the idea of a full-scale implementation of the Gregorian calendar and return to the Julian Easter calculation, thus re-joining ‘mainline’ Orthodoxy.

In Russia, the Julian calendar as such had been adopted as late as in 1700, a decision taken by the Western-minded Tsar Peter the Great (ruled 1682-1725). He thus replaced the reckoning of time ‘from the creation of the world’, employed until then in the Russian empire; December 31, 7208 (sic!) was at once followed by January 1, 1700. Once tsarist Russia had become the Soviet Union with the communists in power, the new leaders introduced the Gregorian time-keeping for civic and state affairs, doing so by the end of January 1918, when after January 31 followed at once February 14. (An interesting consequence of this calendrical alteration is also that the October Revolution has henceforth been celebrated on November 7.) As for the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow, forced by the Bolsheviks and impressed by the outcome of the ‘Pan-Orthodox Conference’ in Constantinople, gave the order in September 1923 for the Gregorian calendar to be adopted by the Church of Russia as well. But this behest was not carried out, because the patriarch became aware of the antagonism in many Orthodox precincts to calendrical change and because of the disputed reforms proposed by the Living Church movement in Russia itself. (At the behest of the Polit Bureau of the Communist Party, in 1922, a group of ‘Reformers’ within the Patriarchate of Moscow rebelled against church leadership and assisted the party in expropriating ecclesial property. At a local council in May 1923, the members of this group decided to abolish the patriarchate, allow bishops to marry and priests to conduct a second marriage, as well as embrace the Gregorian calendar. Because the ‘Reformers’ were an instrument of the atheist Communist Party, and the party’s only goal was to demolish the church from within, not to reform it, they met with great resistance from the clergy and laity. Soon the ‘conciliar’ decisions of this schismatic band became just a piece of paper, and it became itself part of the past as well.) At the same time, Patriarch Tikhon received information on the ‘non-representative’ composition of the Constantinople conference, and he rescinded his earlier order. Ever since, ecclesial embrace of the Gregorian time reckoning has been out of the question, and also the contemporary Russian Church eschews the Gregorian calendar as ‘contaminated’ with its association with the communist period and tied up with schism.⁵¹

As for Bulgaria, the state embraced the ‘New Calendar’ already in March 1916, so during the First World War, when it was allied with Austria-Hungary and Germany. At the time, however, Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church refused to follow suit. It had not been invited to the 1923 conference in Constantinople due to schism with the Ecumenical Patriarchate from 1872 to 1945. Eventually, in 1967, the Bulgarian Holy Synod gave up its opposition and decided to adopt the Meletian blend calendar as of December 1968.⁵² I surmise that the

⁵¹ Vladimir Khulap, ‘Pastoral Problems of a Reform of the Liturgical Calendar in Russia’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60 (2016) 65-77.

⁵² Ivan Sofranov, ‘Oosterse kroniek: De orthodoxe kerk in Bulgarije’, *Het Christelijk Oosten* 21 (1969) 53-62, here 55-58.

church conceded not only because it was urged to do so by the communist regime, but also because the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Greece, which were trying to solve the divergences within worldwide Orthodoxy resulting from the contemporaneous use of different calendars, persuaded their Bulgarian sister to do so. Nonetheless, several popular festivals from the immovable cycle continue to be observed according to the Julian time reckoning. For example, the important feast day of St George, which on the Gregorian calendar falls on April 23, has remained on May 6. Currently St George, who according to legend once killed a life-threatening dragon, is venerated as the patron saint of the Bulgarian army, and his feast has been turned into an official holiday.⁵³ Interesting is also the fate of the beloved Bulgarian festival of Sts Cyril and Methodius on May 24 (Julian reckoning). Under the communist regime, this day had been transformed into a secular state holiday of ‘Slavic Literature and Bulgarian Culture’ without religious reference. According to the Gregorian calendar, the feast of both saints is now officially celebrated on May 11, but May 24 is for many people still the proper date to commemorate the two ‘Apostles of the Slavs’. Consequently, the day of Slavic Literature and Bulgarian Culture on May 24 has not lost its meaning, even being marked in the official church calendar. This again demonstrates that calendrical change is a both delicate and polyphonic matter.

Polish Orthodoxy initially, in 1924, espoused the ‘New Calendar’. In 1945, however, it returned by and large to the Julian computation, so when it was under the sway of the Soviet Union and the Patriarchate of Moscow. Since nowadays the overwhelming majority of Polish Orthodoxy follows the Julian calendar, the Holy Synod officially revoked, in 2014, the erstwhile adoption of the Meletian compromise. But it permitted the few parishes which still adhere to the Gregorian time-keeping to continue their usage. (Particularly several parishes in the Western world hold fast to the Gregorian calculation for the immovable cycle, while following the Julian one for the Easter cycle.) This applies also to various Russian Orthodox communities in the West, as well as for the Orthodox Church of America (OCA) in the USA. It is of note that in several countries, the Netherlands for example, all Orthodox bishops of different jurisdictions concelebrate on the first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and thus strengthen inter-Orthodox cooperation.

After the Ottoman authorities had been using the Islamic lunar calendar for centuries, they replaced it in 1839, in the context of ‘tanzimat’ (a variety of reforms, especially regarding religious freedom), with the solar ‘Rumi’ – that is, Roman – time reckoning, based on the Julian computation. In the newly established republic of Turkey, this was for its turn substituted for the Gregorian one (1926). The adoption of the Gregorian time-keeping was part of an array of measures to Westernize the country, including the introduction of Sunday as rest day instead of Friday; replacement of the Arabic script with a slightly modified form of the Latin alphabet; espousal of Swiss civic law instead of the Ottoman legal system; abolition of the caliphate; closure of the Koran schools; and prohibition of the Dervish orders and their monasteries. A bitter irony of history is that the Occidental, Christian-inspired calendar was put in place after the genocides of the Armenian, Syrian, Assyrian and Greek populations, as well as after the enforced departure of nearly all Greek Orthodox from Turkey to Greece, and of almost all Islamic Turks from Greece and other South-eastern European countries to Turkey. (A number of salient exceptions were the continued presence of Muslims in Greek Thrace, and of Greek Orthodox in Istanbul and on several islands. The Arabic-speaking Orthodox living in South-eastern Turkey were also allowed to stay in their habitat, because they fell, not under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but that of Antioch.) The outbreak of violence and the preceding propaganda for aggressive nationalism effectively erased Christian-Islamic coexistence, which, in the Ottoman empire, was (generally speaking)

⁵³ Basilius J. Groen, ‘Verfolgung und Neuanfang: Die Religionsgemeinschaften in Bulgarien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg’, in: *Пътят на България: Църква – Държава – Общество / Bulgarien auf dem Weg: Kirche – Staat – Gesellschaft*, eds. idem and Valery Stojanow (Varna and Vienna, 2008), 469-530, here 494, 503-504.

characterized by harmony and peace, with the Greek Orthodox and Turkish Islamic communities, for instance, attending each other's festivals, jointly venerating saints like Mary/Maryam and 'syncretically' sharing in a number of other religious rituals, such as drinking holy water.⁵⁴ Moreover, atrocities were also committed to Yezidi, Islamic Kurds and Arabs and, in Palestine, Jews. The overall intent was to bring about, in lieu of a polyethnic and multireligious Ottoman empire, a monoethnic and Islamic 'Turkey of the Turks'.⁵⁵

A further relevant example, in another part of the world, is China. There, since 1912 and 1928/29 respectively, the Western Gregorian calendar was used in the political domain and that of the economy. In 1949, also the communist leadership of the People's Republic of China decided to cling to this way of time reckoning. Nonetheless, the complex traditional Chinese calendar has remained popular and is still widely utilized for social and religious rituals and festivals, such as weddings or the New Year. Chinese Muslims may also rely on their own lunar Islamic calendar, but as is the case with all other 'non-Gregorian' systems of time-keeping in China, it must be linked to the Gregorian, which has priority over all others.

Unlike this, in the state of Israel, the Jewish religious calendar is the official one; adjoining it, the Gregorian one is also used for civic purposes, so the differing dates from the two computation systems often stand side by side.

Unfortunately, the acceptance of the Gregorian calendar has also led to schisms within Orthodoxy. To wit, within the Churches of Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus and Romania, since the adherents of the 'Old Calendar' set up, in consequence, independent ecclesial organizations, namely the 'True Orthodox Churches'. These were condemned by the official Holy Synods of their countries and persecuted by the civil authorities, while in Greece the government zigzagged between austere warnings and actual toleration of the Old Calendarists. In clinging to the Julian calendar, the faithful underscore what they call the 'uninterrupted continuity' of their ancient liturgical and spiritual traditions, including time-keeping, and they strictly reject the compulsory introduction of the new Gregorian computation. As long as the official Holy Synods hold fast to the new calendar, the Old Calendarists – they possess their own parishes, monastic houses and hierarchies, with several vying with one another in one and the same country – decline communion with them, and they regard the sacraments celebrated in the official Orthodox Church as invalid. Many believe that only a pan-Orthodox council may take a decision on the possibility of calendar improvement. Generally speaking, these 'True Orthodox' consider ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues heretical, and ecumenism a pan-heresy. They are usually closely interconnected and in communion with their co-religionists in neighbouring countries, as well as with non-canonical Orthodox groups in Ukraine,

⁵⁴ On the long-term relations between the communities of the 'Romii' and the Muslims in Anatolia up to the commencement of the twentieth century, see: Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and Its Destruction in Late Ottoman Anatolia* (Oxford, 2013), 15-130.

⁵⁵ From the cornucopia of pertinent literature, I mention here only: Doumanis, *Before the Nation*; Emin Yesim Bedlek, *Imagined Communities in Greece and Turkey: Trauma and the Population Exchanges under Atatürk* (London, 2016); *Verfolgung, Vertreibung und Vernichtung der Christen im Osmanischen Reich 1912-1922*, ed. Tessa Hofmann, *Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte* 32 (Münster, 2004); Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924* (Cambridge MA and London, 2019); Hilmar Kaiser, 'Genocide at the Twilight of the Ottoman Empire', in: *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, eds. Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (Oxford, 2013), 365-385; Florence Hellot-Bellier, *Chroniques de massacres annoncés: Les Assyro-Chaldéens d'Iran et du Hakkari face aux ambitions des empires 1896-1920*, foreword Herman Teule, *Cahiers d'Études Syriaques* 2 (Paris, 2014); Joseph Yacoub, *Qui s'en souviendra? 1915 Le génocide assyro-chaldéen-syriaque* (Paris, 2014); Joseph and Claire Yacoub, *Oubliés de tous: Les Assyro-Chaldéens du Caucase* (Paris, 2015); *La questione armena*, I-VII, ed. Georges-Henri Ruysen (Rome, 2013-2015); *La questione caldea e assira 1908-1938*, I-IV, ed. idem (Rome, 2019); *Sayfo 1915: An Anthology of Essays on the Genocide of Assyrians/Arameans during the First World War*, eds. Shabo Talay and Soner Ö. Barthoma (Piscataway NJ, 2018); Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Talât Pascha: Gründer der modernen Türkei und Architekt des Völkermordes an den Armeniern – eine politische Biographie* (Zürich, 2021).

Montenegro and elsewhere. Originally, they were also tied up with the Synodal Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. But, when the latter re-united with the Patriarchate of Moscow (May 2007), the Bulgarian and Romanian Old Calendarists, for their part, broke off communion with it.⁵⁶ In North America, several formerly Old Calendarist parishes and monasteries now adhere to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, while retaining the Julian reckoning, not only for the Easter cycle, but for the fixed feasts as well.

The most important Orthodox Churches which today rely on the Julian reckoning for the fixed annual feasts are the Patriarchates of Jerusalem, Russia and Serbia – the latter one inclusive of two uncanonical confessions, namely the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church; the civic authorities of Yugoslavia adopted the Gregorian calendar as of 1919 –, furthermore the Catholicate of Georgia, the Church of Poland, the Church of Czechia and Slovakia, as well as Ukrainian Orthodoxy, with the latter chiefly comprising the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, declared autocephalous by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in January 2019, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow.⁵⁷ The monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos follow also the Julian computation in toto; the ancient Vatopedi Monastery, which had accepted the New Calendar in 1924, returned in 1975 to the practice of the other monastic houses on Mount Athos. As for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, it had declined in 1923 to adopt the decision on the calendar change because of the local ‘Status Quo’ (see below) with its fixed worship services schedule of all denominations involved. Serbia’s condition for embracing the Gregorian computus had been that entire Orthodoxy should agree, which (as we have just seen) did not happen. Interestingly, also Romania had stipulated this as a condition, and nevertheless changed its calendar for a while.

As for terminology, one has to distinguish the non-canonical Old Calendarists, who regard themselves as the only genuine Orthodox, and those canonical Orthodox Churches which adhere to the Julian calendar. There are also Orthodox Churches in which several groups rely on the new time-keeping – some solely for the fixed festivals, others also for the Easter cycle – and others employ the old one; these groups coexist without schism and participate in each other’s observances.⁵⁸ Currently, the Julian calendar ‘lags’ thirteen days behind the Gregorian, while in 2100 the difference will become fourteen days.

Oriental Orthodoxy

Given that the paschalia of the Meletian blend calendar are identical to that of the Julian time-keeping, the Byzantine-rite Orthodox Churches, with the sole exception of the Church of Finland and some small communities in the Western world, celebrate Easter on the same date as the Oriental Orthodox (Coptic, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Syrian and a number of Armenian

⁵⁶ For a concise survey of the Old Calendar Orthodox Churches, see: Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey* (Rome, 2008), 128-132; idem and Matteo Paparozzi, ‘Old Calendar Orthodox Churches’, in: *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Christian East*, ed. Edward G. Farrugia (Rome, 2015), 1380-1382.

⁵⁷ I cannot enter here into the virulent discussion on autocephaly of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. See, e.g.: Thomas Bremer and Sophie Senyk, ‘The Current Ecclesial Situation in Ukraine: Critical Remarks’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 63 (2019) 27-58; Dagmar Heller, ‘Was hat der “Tomos” gebracht? Die Entwicklungen in der Orthodoxie in der Ukraine und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Ökumene’, *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 70 (2019) 87-91; *Autocéphalies: L’exercice de l’indépendance dans les églises slaves orientales, IXe-XXe siècle*, eds. Marie-Hélène Blanchet, Frédéric Gabriel and Laurent Tatarenko, Collection de l’École Française de Rome 572 (Rome, 2021); *Autocephaly Coming of Age in Communion: Canonical, Liturgical and Theological Studies*, eds. Edward G. Farrugia and Željko Paša, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (Rome, forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Cf. Hans-Dieter Döppmann, *Die orthodoxen Kirchen in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Trierer Abhandlungen zur Slavistik 9 (Frankfurt a.M., 2010), 167-170.

communities), since the greater part of the Oriental Orthodox ‘commonwealth’ also adheres to the Julian calendar. On November 6, 1923, however, the foremost Armenian Apostolic Catholicate of Etchmiadzin, then part of the Soviet Union, adopted the Gregorian time reckoning in toto. But other Armenians hold to their traditional calendar, as the following data makes clear: On account of the ‘Status Quo of the Holy Places’ for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, dating from the Ottoman period (1852), which meticulously lays down the days and hours when every denomination may liturgize, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem has retained the Julian calendar. And several other Armenian dioceses do likewise; if the Diocese of Tbilisi, for example, were to follow the Gregorian reckoning, its faithful would be isolated from the Georgian Orthodox.⁵⁹ Furthermore, often with the consent of their mother churches, also some Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox congregations in the West have embraced the Gregorian time-keeping. For its part, the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East (which outsiders often call ‘Nestorian’) remains divided on the calendar issue. The decision taken by Mar Simon in 1964 to accept the Gregorian time reckoning has stirred great controversy and even schism. Presently, some Assyrian communities hold to the Julian system, while others have embraced the Gregorian. So, interestingly the Oriental Orthodox and the Assyrians employ either the Julian or the Gregorian calendar in toto, rather than a compromise such as the Meletian.

Glimpse at Christmas and Epiphany

The astounding complexity of the calendrical conundrum can also be grasped by considering the case of two interrelated key feasts of the immovable calendar, namely Christmas (in many countries the emotional and commercial highlight of the year) and Epiphany. In Austria, for instance, the Western denominations and the Greek and Romanian Orthodox celebrate the Birth of Christ according to the Gregorian time reckoning on December 25, with the worship services beginning on the eve, as religious festivals always begin on the evening before, the commencement of the new day (just as in Judaism and Islam); so for the overwhelming majority of Christians in this country, Christmas falls on the same day. The Russian and Serbian Orthodox, as well as most Oriental Orthodox living in Austria, however, celebrate Christmas on January 7, which for them, of course, corresponds with the Julian reckoning December 25.⁶⁰ The Armenian Apostolic Church, for its part, still celebrates the original Eastern Christian Epiphany feast – a combination of Christmas and Epiphany – on January 6, but the Armenian Catholics know a distinct Christmas feast on December 25. The Western Christians commemorate on January 6 the Child’s revelation to the gentile magi (Twelfth Night and Day), and the Greek and Romanian Orthodox then enact, in their impressive Great Water Blessing, Jesus’ baptism. The Russian and Serbian Orthodox perform the Epiphany rituals on January 19.

In the Holy Land, the aforementioned inner-Armenian calendar divergence actually results in the curiosity that, while elsewhere most Armenian communities do celebrate Christmas/Epiphany on January 6, those in Israel and the Palestinian Territories do so on January 19. Concretely, this means that in present-day Bethlehem, Christmas is observed three times: firstly, the Roman Catholics, other Western Christians, as well as the Romanian Orthodox and some more Orthodox, on December 25; secondly, the Greek Orthodox

⁵⁹ For the Armenian annual festal cycle, see: Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, *The Calendar of the Armenian Church* (New York, 1995); Vahan Hovagimian, ‘Der armenische Kalender’, in: *Armenische Liturgien: Ein Blick auf eine ferne christliche Kultur*, eds. Erich Renhart and Jasmine Dum-Tragut, Heiliger Dienst: Ergänzungsband 2 (Graz and Salzburg, 2001), 243-252.

⁶⁰ Cf. John A. McGuckin’s pertinent remark in his lemma ‘Calendar’, in: *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, ed. idem (Chichester, 2011), 95-97, here 96.

Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Russian Orthodox and other Orthodox, as well as a variety of Oriental Orthodox Churches on January 7; and thirdly, the Armenian community on January 19. Furthermore, regarding the celebration of Epiphany in the Holy Land, the Copts, Ethiopians, Syrian Orthodox, as well as the local Orthodox Church adhering to the Julian calendar, commemorate the salvific event of Jesus Christ's appearance as Son of God at his baptism in the Jordan River on January 19, whereas the Roman Catholics and many other Occidental Christians celebrate Epiphany on January 6.

With the purpose to allow for the great chronological diversity of the two festivals in the Holy City, the Week for Christian Unity falls in Jerusalem, not from January 18 to 25 (like elsewhere in Christendom), but from 20 to 28, so after the Armenian Christmas and Greek and Russian Epiphany. During this week in Jerusalem, there is also a 'para-liturgical' celebration, into which all churches involved participate.⁶¹ Given the multifaceted character of the Christian communities in the Holy Land, it calls for mention that global Christianity is also visible, during the worship rituals, in the high number of foreign labourers from Ukraine, Romania, India (particularly Kerala), Sri Lanka, the Philippines and other regions, be these workers Orthodox, Catholics, or Protestants.

If all of this is complicated enough for insiders, not to say for outsiders, then even more difficult is the coexistence of distinct civil and ecclesial calendars. This happens in Russia and Serbia, for instance, where New Year's Eve and the beginning of the civil new year are celebrated *before* Christmas. Yet, this too is something that many Russians and Serbs have become accustomed to, even though it means that New Year parties take place during the Christmas fast.

Roman Catholic Regional Convergence

We have noticed so far that a variety of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox communities celebrate main festivals on the same days as Roman Catholicism and other Occidental denominations do. But there is also the reverse phenomenon that the Catholic Church observes Holy Week, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost on the same days as the local Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches do. This is the case in Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Jordan, as well as some other regions. In the South-eastern Turkish city of Antakya (formerly Antioch, the radiant metropolis in the eastern part of the Roman empire), for example, the tiny Catholic community has celebrated Easter, since 1988, on the same date as the local Orthodox Church, the latter being much larger than the former – although both are small minorities juxtaposed to the Muslims and Alawites. Central Catholic reasons for the alteration of the Paschal days in the countries concerned are, first, the improvement of ecumenical relations with the two Orthodox ecclesial families and, second, internal arrangements within the Roman Catholic Church itself.

To further illustrate this, we shall have a look at the colourful Catholic community of Greece, which nowadays consists of an array of nationalities. Of the ethnic Greeks, approximately 50,000 adhere to the Roman rite, while circa 2,000 faithful belong to the Byzantine rite, and there are also some Armenian Catholics. These numbers are swelled, however, by the great number of Catholic immigrants and migrant workers, numbering at least 200,000. This phenomenon means that, just as during the periods of Genoese and Venetian rule in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church in Greece has again become largely a foreigners' church; while many foreigners work officially in embassies or international firms, the majority are of irregular status, working illegally as domestics (Filipino women, for

⁶¹ *Irenikon* 91 (2018) 97-98.

example) or field labourers. Most Roman Catholics from abroad are Poles, Filipinos, Africans and Western Europeans, who normally would observe the Paschal cycle in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. But among this group, there are also Byzantine-rite Ukrainians, who as a rule celebrate Pascha according to the Julian reckoning, and Chaldean Catholics who have fled the conflicts in Iraq.

Overall, a striking characteristic of the very diverse Roman Catholic community in Greece was for a long time its great variety of Easter dates, which led also to occasional confusion and made common planning of all ecclesial traditions sometimes very difficult. Consequently, the Catholic Church's decision to have all its Greek faithful celebrate the Easter cycle henceforth in accordance with the Julian calendar has positive implications not only for ecumenical relations in Greece, but also for the inner cohesion of local Catholicism itself. It is of note that also the established Protestant Churches in Greece observe Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost on the same days as the Orthodox, which evidences Protestant willingness to contribute to a solution of the Paschal conundrum.

It deserves particular mention that Roman Catholic adjustment to the date of celebrating Pascha in Greece is not an isolated fact, because the Church of Rome has manifested its desire for ecumenical rapprochement in still another realm which for centuries has divided the Byzantine East and the Latin West, viz. the 'filioque', the Occidental addition to the creed of the first two ecumenical councils of Nicaea I and, in 381, Constantinople I; according to this addition, the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, instead of from the Father.⁶² Fact is that in Greece and several other countries where the Roman Catholic Church is a tiny minority in a mainly Orthodox environment, it is currently Catholic practice to leave the filioque out of the confession of faith. In Greece, this has happened since 1978 when the Catholic Bishops' Conference in this country ordered that the Roman rite henceforth 'skip' the filioque. Incidentally, also a great many Byzantine Catholic communities – all Ruthenian Catholic eparchies in the USA and a chorus of Ukrainian Byzantine Catholic congregations there, for instance – now leave out the filioque, which they formerly had adopted in their creed as a consequence of Latinization; since the Second Vatican Council, which encouraged the Eastern Catholic Churches to restore their own liturgical and spiritual traditions, many have set out to do so.⁶³ Moreover, a good number of Old Catholic and Anglican communities have also omitted the filioque for ecumenical reasons, followed by certain Lutherans, as well as other Protestants.

In contrast with the situation in Greece, the Roman Catholic Church in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia – countries where Orthodoxy clearly is the dominant Christian denomination – goes on to celebrate the Easter cycle in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. This means that the Roman-rite Catholics there usually observe the Paschal cycle on dates other than those of the Orthodox and the Byzantine Catholics, except (of course) when the Easter dates coincide. In Serbia, a major reason for this divergence is that people are used to it, as well as the fact that many Catholics are of Slovenian and Croat origin. The current practice makes it easier for them to remain connected with their relatives in Slovenia and Croatia. Yet one might ask about the possibility of Roman Catholics in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria adapting to the Orthodox Easter cycle, following the example set by the Catholic Church in Greece and elsewhere.

⁶² Of particular note is the pertinent statement from the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, 'The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue? An Agreed Statement' – see: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/filioque-church-dividing-issue-agreed-statement> (last access on December 27, 2021). See also, e.g.: *Die Filioque-Kontroverse: Historische, ökumenische und dogmatische Perspektiven 1200 Jahre nach der Aachener Synode*, eds. Michael Böhnke, Assaad Elias Kattan and Bernd Oberdorfer, Quaestiones Disputatae 245 (Freiburg i.Br., 2011).

⁶³ See, e.g.: Mark M. Morozowich, 'Tradition or Innovation: An Analysis of Recent Liturgical Developments in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States', *Worship* 86 (2012) 16-39, here 27-28.

A specific case is Kosovo, where besides confessional distinction, we find inter-ethnic conflict. The few remaining Orthodox in Kosovo are typically Serbs, whereas most of the Roman Catholics are ethnic Albanians. Small wonder that the latter, making up a tiny minority among their fellow-citizens, who for the most part are Muslims, adhere to the Gregorian calendar, and thereby to contacts with Roman Catholics in Albania and throughout the world. Such distinctiveness proves to be life-sustaining and essential for their identity. In addition, ecumenical contacts with the Serbian Orthodox tend to be emotionally charged with the inter-ethnic tension, given the violent events which have taken place in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s and thereafter.

In Jerusalem, the historical place of Jesus' passion and resurrection, inter-denominational convergence of the Paschal dates has not yet been reached. As the Belgian ecumenist Frans Bouwen, a member of the Society of Missionaries of Africa ('White Fathers'), resident in St Anne's community in Jerusalem, puts it:

'Finding a common date for the celebration of Easter is undoubtedly the ecumenical demand that the Christians in the Middle East express most frequently and most insistently. They consider it as an essential common witness in the eyes of the Muslims and Jews in whose midst they live. It is also a very concrete and human problem in many mixed Christian families.'⁶⁴

Thus, this city, sacred to Christianity, Judaism and Islam, remains also a place where inner-Christian division is conspicuous. Yet ecumenical cooperation can also be found, especially in everyday life of common Christians and, on the level of church leadership, e.g., with respect to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the restoration work on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and joint declarations on urgent political issues.

Of direct relevance for our topic is that, in 2012, the Catholic bishops in the Holy Land decided that, beginning in 2013, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem – an Arabic church to which Roman-rite Catholics in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Cyprus all belong – would observe, 'ad experimentum', Easter and the related pre- and post-Paschal festivals on the same dates as the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox. This concerned particularly the inland parts of Israel and the regions of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, because in Jordan, Northern Palestine and Ramallah, which is located fifteen à twenty kilometres north of Jerusalem, such concurrence already existed; the local Anglican, Roman Catholic and Lutheran parishes had already decided, in 1995, to henceforth celebrate Easter on the same date as the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox co-faithful and no longer await authorization by their bishops.⁶⁵ The salient alteration elicited mixed reactions among the Catholics in the Jerusalem and Bethlehem regions, as well as in inland Israel, as some were enchanted and others quite averse, and due to the high number of exceptions in the prescribed change, it caused also confusion. Not very surprising – for those opposed to the change reassuring and for those in favour of it disappointing – the same bishops, evaluating the alteration, rescinded in 2014 their decision and returned to the former usage. That is, Jordan, the Ramallah region and Northern Palestine continue to observe the Paschal cycle according to the Julian calendar, while in the inland parts of Israel and the Jerusalem and Bethlehem regions, the Easter rituals are henceforth again performed in accordance with the Gregorian computation. The bishops determined also that wherever use of the Julian calendar is advisable, this is certainly

⁶⁴ Frans Bouwen, 'The Ecumenical Dimension of the Synod: Critical Evaluation, Results and Perspectives', in: *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges: Reflections on the Special Synod of the Middle East*, ed. Dietmar W. Winkler, Pro Oriente Studies in Syriac Tradition 3 (Piscataway NJ, 2019), 72-99, here 94.

⁶⁵ Bouwen, 'The Ecumenical Dimension of the Synod', 94 – Bouwen also mentions, on p. 86, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim's advocacy of a common Easter date, 'a general request of all the Christians of the Middle East'.

possible, but only with unanimity of all parties involved, including the episcopate.⁶⁶ In addition, the bishops laid down that as of 2015 the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Holy Land – Armenian Catholics, Chaldeans, Maronites, Melkites (the Byzantine-rite Catholics in the Middle East) and Syrian Catholics – would also celebrate the Paschal cycle according to the Julian calendar.⁶⁷

In all of this, the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem plays no role, as the Latin Patriarchate remains obliged to conduct its worship services there according to the Gregorian computation, due to the aforementioned Status Quo for the Holy Places. Fairly speaking, an advantage of the obligation to hold fast, in this respect, to the Status Quo is that the massive influx of pilgrims from all over the world can better be regulated; if there were merely one Holy Week and Easter festive cycle in Jerusalem, the sheer quantity of foreign worshippers would prompt even larger lines and jams than happens now. Yet for many people, the baffling polyphony of differing Easter cycles with their computational counterpoints remains. As I have just said, in Ramallah, the Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans celebrate Easter together with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, whereas this is impossible in the Holy City itself.

It should not be left unmentioned that for Palestinian Christians there exist restrictions of access to many Holy Places, such as the obstruction of entry into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Easter. These limitations do not apply to the pilgrims from abroad, who usually do not notice the absence of the local Christians.

Furthermore, a glimpse into the multidimensional spectre of Roman Catholicism in the Holy Land discloses that there is also a small group (about 1,000) of Hebrew-language Catholics who live in the state of Israel, especially in its cities, although they are also present in the worldwide diaspora. Some Hebrew Catholics celebrate Pesach and other Jewish festivals, whereas other members of this group enact the Easter festivities according to the Roman rite.

A fascinating phenomenon in the Middle East concerns inner-Christian mixed marriages, for instance, those of Orthodox, Maronite or Byzantine Catholic women with Protestant men, a topic on which the Lebanese Reformed theologian Rima Nasrallah has conducted seminal research.⁶⁸ According to custom in the Arabic world, the wives usually join the denomination of their husbands, but without fully giving up attendance of the worship services in their native faith communities. Hence, the women in question lead fluid liturgical lives, crossing and moving between their Eastern mother churches and the Protestant denominations, blending the diverse worship calendars and attributing new meanings to specific days of the week and to the seasons of the liturgical year. On Easter Sunday and also on other Sundays, the women usually attend the Protestant service, which resembles a kind of school to them, as the Scripture readings, sermon and pulpit take first place in the ‘empty’ church – that is, a building devoid of icons, colourful vestments, candles and the like –, and the ‘audience’ is instructed about God’s will. During Holy Week, however, the women participate in the Oriental liturgical rituals, in which they experience Jesus’ physical presence (his grave, the flowers, candles, icons) and through their senses feel that they belong to Christ’s ecclesial body. In addition, they can connect the church’s sorrow on the death of the Redeemer and the perspective of his resurrection with the sorrow and hopes of their own lives. Thus, the women move and ‘glide’ between, indeed negotiate, two disparate worship traditions. On the one

⁶⁶ *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 63 (2013) 185, 412-413; 65 (2015) 172. See also: Frans Bouwen, ‘L’œcuménisme vécu à Jérusalem et en Terre sainte’, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 67 (2017) 294-310, here 304.

⁶⁷ Barbara Spies, ‘Identification and Unity: Easter Celebration in the Holy Land’, in: *Communication and the Global Landscape of Faith*, ed. Adrienne E. Hacker Daniels (Lanham MD, 2016), 159-173.

⁶⁸ Rima Nasrallah, *Moving and Mixing: The Fluid Liturgical Lives of Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Women within the Protestant Churches in Lebanon*, Doctoral thesis Protestant Theological University Amsterdam and Groningen (Amsterdam, 2014).

hand, their crossing of the boundaries between diverse liturgical types makes them critical of unquestioned fixated practices both in their Oriental mother church and in their new Reformed faith community. On the other hand, many clergy of the Eastern and the Protestant communities alike look suspiciously and disapprovingly on these women, whom they cannot consider reliable members and true believers.

The diversity of the ecclesial landscapes across the globe is even more manifest when we take a look at the situation in India. In Kerala and elsewhere in India, the large Syro-Malabar Church (Eastern Syrian tradition) and the smaller Syro-Malankara Church (Western Syrian tradition) celebrate Easter in accordance with the Gregorian calendar, thus celebrating simultaneously with the Roman-rite faithful, the Anglican Churches of South India and North India, and the Mar Thoma Church. The Indian Syrian Orthodox Church and the other large Syrian Orthodox Church of India have also embraced the Gregorian Paschal computation and even observe Christmas on the ‘Gregorian’ date. In addition, the small Assyrian Church in Trichur (Kerala), which held to the Julian calendar until 1988, has since then been celebrating Christmas and Easter on the same dates as the other Christian denominations. This adaptation of local Oriental Orthodoxy to the Gregorian computation might be regarded as a positive sign on the arduous trajectory toward a common Paschal date.

3. Fixed Easter Date?

Before moving on to the question of whether and how further rapprochement regarding a common Easter date is possible, I shall discuss another, mainly nineteenth- and twentieth-century debate, namely the (eventually failed) effort to determine a fixed Paschal date, so a date which does not depend on the movable lunar cycle, but is immovable. It is worth reviewing some of the highlights of this effort. In 1923, the League of Nations advocated, with the purpose to facilitate international exchange and travel as well as accommodate the business sector and its settlement of accounts, an appointed Paschal date, namely the Sunday following the second Saturday of April. This was to be put in place in agreement with the Christian churches. In 1928, in a similar move, the British Parliament passed the ‘Easter Act’, which also provided for a fixed Paschal date, again on condition that the Christian denominations unanimously agree. Ecclesial consent, however, did not occur. In addition, the United Nations repeatedly discussed, after the Second World War, a fixed Easter date to be part of a new Universal Calendar. Again, this proposal was not materialized.

Furthermore, in 1963, in an appendix to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, concerning calendar revision, the Second Vatican Council declared itself unopposed to celebrating Easter on a fixed Sunday in the Gregorian calendar, provided that all those concerned, especially the non-Catholic Christian communities (literally, ‘the brethren not living in communion with the Apostolic See’) agree.⁶⁹ Before the council, the Roman Catholic Church had actually been ferrying between support of and aversion to similar

⁶⁹ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, III: *The Oecumenical Councils of the Roman Catholic Church, From Trent to Vatican II (1545-1965)*, eds. Klaus Ganzer et al. (Turnhout, 2010), 286-287. Cf. Herman Schmidt, *Die Konstitution über die heilige Liturgie: Text, Vorgeschichte, Kommentar* (Freiburg i.Br., 1965), 117 – this book was originally published in Dutch (Antwerp, 1964). See also: Reiner Kaczynski, ‘Toward the Reform of the Liturgy’, in: *History of Vatican II*, III: *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intersession, September 1963 – September 1964*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll NY and Leuven, 2000), 189-256, here 199-200. The post-conciliar General Roman Calendar resumes this issue – see *Calendarium Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici concilii vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli pp. VI promulgatum* (Vatican City, 1969), 64 (‘De solemnitate Paschae certae dominicae assignanda’).

proposals.⁷⁰ After the council, Pope Paul VI (in office 1963-1978) was at the forefront of initiatives to draw near to a common Paschal date, thereby acting not on his own, but in consultation with the Catholic episcopate.⁷¹ A committee set up by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, recommended in 1965 that provisional solutions be sought at local and regional levels, thus anticipating the final solution of a common Easter date for all churches at the universal level.⁷² In fact, such a provisional solution would later be implemented in Greece and several other countries, as we have noticed earlier.

Finally, the World Council of Churches (WCC), also animated by the Roman Catholic Church's drive, has taken up this thorny item several times.⁷³ During a symposium organized by the Faith and Order Commission at the Orthodox conference centre at Chambésy, Switzerland, for instance, (March 16-20, 1970), the Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox participants argued for a fixed Paschal date.⁷⁴ And during the WCC Fifth General Assembly in Nairobi (1975), this item was on the agenda again, viz., the proposal that all churches celebrate Easter henceforth on an appointed Sunday, preferably the Sunday after the second Saturday of April. Although this proposal was then widely applauded, no decision was taken, because the Orthodox delegates insisted that they consider this item first thoroughly at a pan-Orthodox consultation (see below).⁷⁵ The proposal for an invariable Easter date was revived once more, fairly recently this time, when a number of church leaders, doubling down on the need for a common Paschal date, subscribed to an appointed day. Among them were the Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II, who in May 2015 advocated the third Sunday of April, after he had already communicated, in May 2014, to Pope Francis, his plea for a solution of the contentious Easter date debate.⁷⁶ For his turn, the Roman pope

⁷⁰ See, e.g.: Jean Michel Hanssens, 'La date pascale et sa réforme', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 36 (1922) 291-295, 338-348, 456-467; Adolphe Chauve-Bertrand (abbé), *La question de Pâques et du calendrier* (Paris, 1948, first edn. 1936); idem, 'Zur Kalenderfrage', *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 11 (1961) 107-108; Honoré Vinck, 'Une tentative de Pie X pour fixer la date de Pâques: Quelques documents inédits', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 70 (1975) 462-468; I. Pizzoni, 'De reformatione Calendarii', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 64 (1950) 368-378; Rb. van Doren, 'Kalendarium', in: *Liturgisch Woordenboek, I*, eds. Lucas Brinkhoff et al. (Roermond, 1958-1962), col. 1204-1210.

⁷¹ See also: John A. Radano, 'A Common Date for Easter? Roman Catholic Initiatives and Interest since the Second Vatican Council', *One in Christ* 36 (2000) 268-285.

⁷² *Istina* 19 (1974) 385-387.

⁷³ Many people think that the Roman Catholic Church does not associate with the WCC. The two institutions, however, maintain a cordial cooperative relationship. Although it is true that the Roman Catholic Church does not formally adhere to the WCC – its members consist of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Independent Churches and other denominations –, it is a full member of the important WCC Faith and Order Commission; is represented in the Commission for World Mission and Evangelization; supports the WCC financially; co-organizes the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18-25; sends a delegation of observers to the WCC assemblies; and collaborates with the WCC in several other realms. Since 1965, a Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC has discussed theological and ecclesial issues. On top of this, the Roman Catholic Church is now a full member of many regional, national and international ecumenical bodies, such as the Middle East Council of Churches (founded in 1974, with Catholic membership since 1990). See, e.g.: William Henn, 'Catholic', in: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, eds. Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan (Oxford, 2021), 121-136; John A. Radano, 'Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity', in: o.c., 396-405. On the structure and membership of the WCC, see <https://www.oikoumene.org> (last access on December 27, 2021); *A Handbook of Churches and Councils: Profiles of Ecumenical Relationships*, ed. Huibert van Beek (Geneva, 2006); Dagmar Heller, 'World Council of Churches', in: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, 387-395.

⁷⁴ *Istina* 19 (1974) 457-462.

⁷⁵ *Bericht aus Nairobi 1975: Ergebnisse, Erlebnisse, Ereignisse – Offizieller Bericht der Fünften Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen, 23. November bis 10. Dezember 1975 in Nairobi/Kenia*, eds. Hanfried Krüger and Walter Müller-Römheld (Frankfurt a.M., 1976), 205-207. Cf. Arnoldus Burg, 'De oosterse kerken in Nairobi', *Het Christelijk Oosten* 28 (1976) 188-202, here 198-199.

⁷⁶ *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 64 (2014) 337, 340. On Pope Tawadros' ecumenical engagement, see also: Dietmar W. Winkler, 'Neuer Papst mit neuen Perspektiven? Tawadros II. und der Beitrag der Koptisch-Orthodoxen

championed, in letters and telephone calls to several Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox hierarchs, the proposal in question, now arguing in favour of the second Sunday of April. Additionally, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Aphrem II expressed, in June 2015, also his desire to reach an agreement, and Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury (in office from 2013) supported, in January 2016, the proposal of a fixed Paschal date. Noticeably, the Syrian Orthodox Church also earlier demonstrated its willingness to exit the Easter date labyrinth, proposing an appointed date (1971 and 1984).

Let us now turn our attention to some pertinent developments in the Byzantine Orthodox world in its own right. In 1961, those attending the First Pan-Orthodox Conference, which was held on the Greek isle of Rhodes, decided that the common Easter date be one of the agenda items of the future Pan-Orthodox Council. In the subsequent years, the question of whether this debatable issue should be on the conciliar agenda, or not, was to return.

A remarkable interplay occurred on June 11, 1969, when an ecumenical symposium on a common Paschal date and related issues was held in Athens.⁷⁷ Noticeably, this conference took place during the military dictatorship (1967-1974) when, on the one hand, the leadership of the Orthodox Church of Greece danced to the tune of the colonels' regime with the latter's slogans concerning the indissoluble ties between Orthodoxy and 'Greekness', but on the other, intended also to carry out necessary ecclesial reform. Besides Orthodox bishops and theologians, also representatives of various other churches (especially Roman Catholics, Protestants and Armenian Orthodox), astronomers, jurists and journalists took part in the symposium in question. The attendees discussed the possibility of a *fixed* date, because they were convinced, as so many others, that the contemporary computation of the Easter cycle according to the Julian calendar was inaccurate. Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (in office 1948-1972), a visionary of the Ecumenical Movement and a passionate advocate of a common Paschal date for all Christian churches,⁷⁸ proposed the Sunday between April 8 and 14, whereas the conference participants themselves suggested the Sunday falling in the period from April 15 to 21. The Russian Orthodox canonist Dimitri P. Ogitsky from the Theological Academy of Moscow argued in favour of the Sunday between April 12 and 18, with the possibility of a later date.⁷⁹ The liturgist Ioannis M. Foundoulis (1927-2007), later to become renowned as professor of liturgical studies and homiletics at the Aristotle University of Thessalonica, shed light on the great advantages, for the remainder of the church year, of an invariable Easter date falling on the second or third Sunday of April. It would henceforth no longer be necessary, Foundoulis reasoned, to shift the feast of St George (normally on April 23) from the austere pre-Paschal fasting period to the joyful time after Easter. Concurrently, the Greek national holiday of March 25, the Annunciation to the Mother of God, could no longer fall during Holy Week, and the Apostles Fast (which runs from All Saints – the Sunday after Pentecost, concluding the movable Paschal cycle – to the feast of Sts Peter and Paul on June 29) could no longer be mitigated or, in some years, omitted altogether due to a very late

Kirchen zur Ökumene', in: *Christen in Ägypten*, eds. Heike Behlmer and Martin Tamcke, Göttinger Orientforschungen, IV. Reihe: Ägypten 60 (Wiesbaden, 2015), 155-168.

⁷⁷ See a report of the Roman Catholic Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 'Pour une commune célébration de la fête de Pâques', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 19 (1969) 234-239; it appeared also in *Notitiae* 5 (1969) 391-397. The report mentions erroneously that the symposium took already place on May 10. Cf. the extensive footnote in Philipp Harnoncourt, *Gesamtkirchliche und teilkirchliche Liturgie: Studien zum liturgischen Heiligenkalender und zum Gesang im Gottesdienst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des deutschen Sprachgebiets* (Freiburg i.Br., 1974), 63-65, nt. 3.

⁷⁸ In his Easter message of 1969, Patriarch Athenagoras made a passionate plea for a common Paschal date, urging his readership to lose no time in pursuing this lofty endeavour.

⁷⁹ Ogitsky, 'Canonical Norms of the Orthodox Easter Computation and the Problem of the Dating of Pascha in our Time', 279-284. See also his 'Le problème du calendrier ecclésiastique', *Istina* 19 (1974) 462-471, originally published in Russian in *Bogoslovskie Trudy* 4 (1968) 109-116.

Easter date. All in all, the rubrics laid down in the Typikon would become far simpler.⁸⁰ Moreover, a valid ‘semi-liturgical’ argument in favour of the third Sunday in April instead of the second would be that later in the month nature blossoms more verdantly, giving a stronger impulse to the vernal and popular character of the Easter festival. (Naturally, Foundoulis’ point of view applies only to the Northern hemisphere. In the Southern one and the tropics, Easter falls in autumn and summer, respectively.⁸¹) But overall, Foundoulis asserted, it would still be preferable, despite all the advantages of an appointed Paschal date, to abandon the idea, if all the Orthodox Churches would not agree. Another schism, that is, a rupture between ‘new-paschites’ and ‘old-paschites’, would be dramatic, for unity is the highest good, even should some ancient canonical regulations be violated.⁸²

The Greek press reacted with enthusiasm to the supposed ‘ecumenical breakthrough’ reached at this short conference. However, prudence and reticence on the part of the policy makers outweighed the symposium’s high spirits. In spite of the reforming zeal of a part of the church leadership, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece decided that the symposium had been a private, unofficial initiative whose outcome was not binding on the ecclesiastical authorities and that Patriarch Athenagoras’ proposal was only a ‘point of departure’ for a common pan-Orthodox inquiry into this matter.⁸³

Given the controversial character of a fixed Easter date, it is not surprising that it was not on the agenda of the First Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee meeting, July 16-28, 1971 in Chambésy. Nonetheless, the items of calendar reform and a common Paschal date, in general, had been entered on the agenda. According to the Preparatory Working Document, the current calendrical differences between the Orthodox Churches cause detriment to their unity, and their contemporary Easter computation violates the regulations of Nicaea I. The document recommends, therefore, celebrating Pascha on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring, and making use of the most precise ‘New Orthodox Calendar’ (viz. the amended version of the Gregorian time-keeping), not only for the calculation of the Easter date, but also for the immovable festivals. However, ‘for pastoral reasons’, the recommendation was not binding: any local Orthodox Church should deliberate and decide whether and, if so, when it would implement the advice. Alongside this, the document advocates further study, in partnership with the non-Orthodox, of the issue in question.⁸⁴ Manifestly, an appointed date was not considered altogether.

⁸⁰ Cf. Livanides, *Η ημερολογιακή μεταρρύθμιση*, 121-124.

⁸¹ In order to adequately address this issue, the Filipino Benedictine, Anscar J. Chupungco, famed for his pleas in favour of ‘inculturation’, intends to ‘leave the traditional date alone, but recreate and reinvent the symbols, texts, and music of Easter in harmony with the actual season and surrounding circumstances.’ – see his article ‘The Liturgical Year: The Gospel Encountering Culture’, *Studia Liturgica* 40 (2010) 46-64, here 53-59 (quotation on 57). In addition, Clare V. Johnson, ‘Inculturating the Easter Feast in Southeast Australia’, *Worship* 78 (2004) 98-117, underscores the major problem of ritual incongruence between the spring Paschal festival originating from the Northern hemisphere, and actual ecology in the Southern hemisphere. Yet she proposes only minor adaptations, such as reinterpreting the symbols of fire, light and water. Another Australian Roman Catholic, Tom Elich, is even more reticent, laying emphasis on the different context, but considering new texts and rituals unnecessary – see his article ‘A View from the Antipodes: The Invincible Summer Sun’, *Studia Liturgica* 40 (2010) 85-93. Needless to say, for both Johnson and Elich, changing the Easter date by transferring the feast to the Southern hemisphere’s spring, is out of the question, as it would harm ecclesial unity.

⁸² His short lecture has been published in the conference proceedings (Athens, 1969), which I was unable to consult. I rely on a re-edition of the lecture, with a somewhat different title, in: Ioannis M. Foundoulis, ‘Ο σταθερός έορτασμός του Πάσχα από όρθοδόξου τελετουργικής πλευράς’, in: idem, *Λειτουργικά Θέματα* 7 (Thessalonica, 1986), 99-106. As for this author’s name, one comes also across ‘Phountoules’ and ‘Fountoules’.

⁸³ Communiqué issued on July 11, 1969. See: S. Wilhelmus Aarns, ‘Oosterse kroniek: Griekenland’, *Het Christelijk Oosten* 22 (1970) 114-124, here 122-123.

⁸⁴ Γραμματεία προπαρασκευής της Αγίας και Μεγάλης Συνόδου της Όρθοδόξου Έκκλησίας, *Πρός την Μεγάλην Σύνοδον*, 1: *Εισηγήσεις της Διορθόδοξου Προπαρασκευαστικής Επιτροπής επί των έξ θεμάτων του πρώτου σταδίου* (Chambésy, Geneva, 1971), 47-49 (Greek original text); *Istina* 19 (1974) 485-487 (French version);

The reluctance of a high number of Orthodox bishops to an invariable Easter date remained, the visionary patriarch Athenagoras obviously having run far ahead of his brethren. During the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, when as noted the common Paschal date was on the agenda, the Orthodox delegates voiced reservation, stating that they preferred to maintain the status quo until a pan-Orthodox decision on any change had been taken. Caution was also shown at an Orthodox consultation on a pan-Christian fixed Paschal date, held in Chambésy, from June 30 to July 3, 1977. On the one hand, those in attendance expressed fear of schisms if they would comply with an appointed Easter date. On the other, they advocated use of the most accurate scientific data for determining the paschalia and also expressed their wish that their churches once and for all regulate the calendar issue, implying the careful revision of the Julian reckoning. In addition, they deemed adaptation of Orthodox communities in the diaspora (where they constitute minorities) to the Easter date of other Christian denominations unwise, because this would threaten inner-Orthodox cohesion.⁸⁵ Finally, at the Second Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, again in Chambésy (September 1982), the participants postponed the calendar revision to a ‘more suitable time’, arguing that the people of God were not sufficiently well-prepared, that ecclesial unity was of key importance, and that the first priority was to provide adequate information to all levels within the Orthodox Church.⁸⁶

To exemplify Orthodox reticence and anxiety to conduct official consultations on a common Easter date, I point to the preparations for the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church, which convened in June 19-26, 2016. For a long time, the topic of a common Easter date was, as we have seen, on the preparatory designs of the conciliar agenda. Shortly before the council, however, the primates decided, during their synaxis in January 2016 in Chambésy, to exclude this subject from the agenda. Every Orthodox independent church ‘is free to practice what it thinks best for the spiritual formation of its herd’, the primates asserted,⁸⁷ and in consequence, the issue was not officially discussed during the council sessions.⁸⁸ According to John Chryssavgis, scholar and archdeacon of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, this decision signals provincialism and isolationism.⁸⁹ And the Romanian Orthodox theologian Ioan Moga misses, in the said decision, courage and the willingness to find a solution in this obnoxious theme.⁹⁰ It is of note that the Oriental

Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 386-388 (German version), 400-401; cf. 405, 410, 412, 418, 424, 428-430, 433.

⁸⁵ Alkiviadis C. Calivas, ‘The Date of Pascha: The Need to Continue the Debate’, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35 (1990) 333-343, here 342-343; Robert Levet, ‘La Pâques des Orthodoxes et la Pâques des Latins’, in: *Θυσία αίνεσεως: Mélanges liturgiques offerts à la mémoire de l’archevêque Georges Wagner (1930-1993)*, eds. Job Getcha and André Lossky, *Analecta Sergiana* 2 (Paris, 2005), 157-172, here 163-172; Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 430-432. According to Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, however, the said consultation judged such adaptation to the local circumstances ‘praiseworthy’ – see his ‘Le saint and grand concile de l’Église orthodoxe’, *Irénikon* 84 (2011) 203-244, here 211-213 (quotation 212).

⁸⁶ Damaskinos Papandreou (Metropolitan of Switzerland), ‘Zur Vorbereitung des Panorthodoxen Konzils’, in: *Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde*, III, eds. Wilhelm Nyssen et al. (Düsseldorf, 1997), 261-286, here 266, 268-269; Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 442-443; cf. 448-453 (position taken by Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev); *Orthodoxe Kirche und Ökumenische Bewegung*, ed. Basdekis, 347-349; Livanides, *Η ημερολογιακή μεταρρύθμιση*, 67-120. Cf. Dagmar Heller, ‘The Date of Easter: A Church-Dividing Issue?’, *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (1996) 392-400.

⁸⁷ Thaddée Barnas, ‘Le Saint et Grand Concile de l’Église orthodoxe, Crète, juin 2016’, *Irénikon* 89 (2016) 246-275, here 250.

⁸⁸ For the conciliar documents, see: *Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta: Editio critica, IV/3: The Great Councils of the Orthodox Churches, Decisions and Synodika – Crete 2016*, ed. Alberto Melloni, Corpus Christianorum: Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta IV/3 (Turnhout, 2016).

⁸⁹ John Chryssavgis, ‘Toward the Great and Holy Council: Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60 (2016) 317-332, here 323.

⁹⁰ Ioan Moga, ‘Erwartungen und Anfragen an die Heilige und Große Synode’, *Catholica* 69 (2015) 197-207, here 202-203.

Orthodox Churches have also chosen to put the issue of a common Paschal date on the backburner. Fear of disunity and schism have prevailed, thus paradoxically continuing inter-ecclesial and, in some places, inner-ecclesial division.

After the 1970s, debate on a common Easter date occasionally went on, especially within the scope of the 1997 Aleppo Statement, to which we shall soon turn. But the item of an appointed date in its own right disappeared for a while from the ecclesiastical agendas, as it then seemed to be dated, to wit, a product of its time. At the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare (1998), for instance, which I attended as a correspondent of a Dutch newspaper, I heard the moderator of the Central Committee, the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia, Aram, briefly arguing for a common date, but without mentioning the possibility of a fixed one.⁹¹ In the Aleppo Statement, the item of an appointed Paschal date, so characteristic of previous pertinent thought, has also been abandoned.

It seems to me that, on the one hand, an invariable date has several advantages, especially for civil calendars and long-term time planning, inclusive of academic terms, but that on the other hand, its theological disadvantages are obvious. A first disadvantage is that it would contradict the stipulations of Nicaea I – not to mention the biblical witness itself and significant segments of the Christian tradition. Another drawback of overriding importance is that the close connection between the movable Jewish Pesach and the Easter celebration would be lost. This is not just an astronomical and a calendar issue, but has to do with the Jewish roots of the Christian tradition and liturgy. As the Second Vatican Council's decree on non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, clearly states, Judaism and Christianity essentially belong together. Pope John Paul II (in office 1978-2005) has also often shown his great personal commitment to Christian-Jewish dialogue and reconciliation. God's self-revelation takes place in the entire Bible, not solely in the New Testament, but in the whole Jewish Tanakh. Indeed, according to St Paul, Christianity is a wild branch grafted onto the cultivated Jewish olive tree (Romans 11:17-24).

So Christian Pascha is, as we have already noticed earlier, closely tied up with Jewish Passover.⁹² Well then, this bond is centre-pieced in still another proposal to find a way out of the Easter date labyrinth. But before we attend to this, we need to dwell upon various other relevant developments.

4. Different Roman-Rite Calendars

Besides the pursuance of an invariable Paschal date, there is still another occurrence within the Roman Catholic Church which (partly) pertains to the topic of this essay. On July 7, 2007, by his *Motu proprio* entitled *Summorum Pontificum*, Pope Benedict XVI (officiated 2005-2013) allowed most of the Roman-rite service books in use prior to the liturgical reform initiated by Vatican II, to be employed again on a regular basis.⁹³ Before, the Congregation for Divine Worship and also Pope John Paul II himself had already opened the door, in 1984 and 1988, respectively, for this ambiguous development, meant to reconcile those at odds with the Vatican II renewal of the liturgy and to restore ecclesial unity. Because the 'pre-conciliar' and the 'post-conciliar' service books saliently differ as regards the Easter cycle, I shall dig here into this issue, an apt example of curious bifurcation, 'bi-rituality' *within* the

⁹¹ *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, ed. Diane Kessler (Geneva, 1999), 80, 156.

⁹² On the complexity of this interconnectedness, see the literature referenced in nt. 10.

⁹³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007) 777-781.

Roman rite. Whereas in the ‘pre-conciliar’ books – also named ‘Tridentine’ (after the sixteenth-century Council of Trent) – the liturgical year encompasses a pre-fasting period (called after the names of the Sundays: Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima), as well as a Pentecost octave, these units are missing in the ‘Vatican II’ service books, because the latter are intent to concentrate on the essence of the forty days of Lent, including Holy Week – especially on repentance, and the commemoration and preparation of baptism – and on the fifty-day period from Easter to Pentecost, respectively. The revised service books clearly focus on the irreplaceable central position of the Paschal Mystery and Sunday. Another major difference between the two worship ‘types’ is the meaning ascribed to Judaism, a very contentious topic in the history of Holy Week and Easter.

Returning to Pope Benedict’s policy, we notice that the Vatican instruction *Universae Ecclesiae* by the pontifical commission ‘Ecclesia Dei’ provides practical directives with the goal to put the 2007 papal decree in place (April 2011).⁹⁴ Note that *Summorum Pontificum* and *Universae Ecclesiae* apply not only to the 1962 Roman Missal, but also to the Roman Ritual (baptism, matrimony, extreme unction, funerals, exorcism, blessings, etc.), the Breviary (liturgy of the hours) and the Caeremoniale Episcoporum, which regulates those celebrations over which a bishop is to preside (confirmation, consecration of altars and churches, and so on). The papal regulation does, however, not concern the ordinations of bishops, presbyters and deacons, which are part of the Caeremoniale Episcoporum as well; here only the renewed ordination liturgy is to be made use of.⁹⁵ According to *Summorum Pontificum* and *Universae Ecclesiae*, the service books published at the behest of the Second Vatican Council, constitute the ‘ordinary Roman rite’ and those based on the reforms animated by the Council of Trent the ‘extraordinary Roman rite’; both forms are possible and legitimate as two ‘applications’ of the one Roman rite. Advocates of this development point to what they call the continuity and unity of the Roman rite, to wit, that what for centuries has been the Roman rite remains valid today. Some even consider the ‘pre-conciliar’ liturgy much more dignified, contemplative and sacral than the ‘post-conciliar’, which in their opinion is anthropocentric and secular.⁹⁶ Critics, however, underscore the necessity of revision and change which the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement and the Second Vatican Council called for. Concretely, they state, the full participation of the congregation and the entire people of God, and the pre-eminent role of the Paschal Mystery in the revised calendar are now far more explicit, the choice of Scripture readings is much wider, and so forth.⁹⁷ Fact is that innumerable Roman Catholics have experienced the reforms as an essential improvement of liturgical life. The current assertions of certain individuals that most faithful were satisfied

⁹⁴ Pontificia Commissio “Ecclesia Dei”, ‘Instructio “Universae Ecclesiae”’, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 125 (2011) 234-240.

⁹⁵ Traditionalist groups, such as ‘Fraternitas Sacerdotalis Sancti Pii X’ (founded by Bishop Marcel Lefèbre, 1905-1991), which observe the pre-conciliar Roman rite, but are considered non-canonical by the Roman Catholic leadership, continue to employ the ‘Tridentine’ ordination liturgies.

⁹⁶ Thus, e.g.: *Der Widerstand gegen die Alte Messe*, ed. Georg Muschalek, mit Beiträgen von Robert Spaemann und Georg Muschalek (Denkendorf, 2007). Cf. the article by the Vatican prelate Bruno Gherardini, ‘Per una pace liturgica’, *Divinitas* 55, *nova series* (2012) 24-34, in which he censures the Belgian bishops led by Cardinal Suenens, who in his opinion have been disloyal to the pope and the ‘romanitas’ of the Catholic Church.

⁹⁷ For assessments of this dispute, see: *Ein Ritus – zwei Formen: Die Richtlinie Papst Benedikts XVI. zur Liturgie*, ed. Albert Gerhards (Freiburg i.Br., 2008); Winfried Haunerland, ‘Ein Ritus in zwei Ausdrucksformen? Hintergründe und Perspektiven zur Liturgiefeier nach dem Motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum”’, *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 58 (2008) 179-203; Norbert Lüdecke, ‘Kanonistische Anmerkungen zum Motu Proprio. “Summorum Pontificum”’, *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 58 (2008) 3-34; Enrico Mazza, ‘I messali di Paolo VI e di Giovanni XXIII: un confronto’, *La Rivista del Clero Italiano* 88 (2007) 680-703; Martin Stuflesser, *Eucharistie: Liturgische Feier und theologische Erschließung* (Regensburg, 2013), 266-276; Martin Klöckener, ‘Wie Liturgie verstehen? Anfragen an das Motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum” Papst Benedikts XVI.’, *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 50 (2008) 268-305; Eckhard Nordhofen, *Tridentinische Messe – ein Streitfall: Reaktionen auf das Motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum” Benedikts XVI.* (Kevelaer, 2009).

with the good old ‘Tridentine’ liturgy and that the liturgical reform implemented by the Second Vatican Council is a disaster, are simply not accurate, as the few persons who contend this idealize the past without really knowing it; they discard also the fact that nearly all bishops who attended the council championed the renewal announced in the constitution. Noticeably, many bishops, indeed some Bishops’ Conferences disagreed with Pope Benedict’s *Motu proprio*, and therefore he wrote a special letter to his confreres trying to persuade them of the correctness of his views.

On top of this, the contents of the ‘pre-conciliar’ service books contain a number of serious problems, such as an array of anti-Jewish constituents during Holy Week. Because the prayers, hymns and additional ritual enactments of the Easter cycle services reveal both the Christian – in this case, Roman Catholic – self-understanding and the mental and emotional posture towards Judaism, I shall delve into this controversial subject by supplying a plain pertinent example, namely the intercession for the Jews during the Good Friday service in accordance with the former Roman Missal. Interposed between the intercession for the heretics and schismatics and the one for the pagans, Catholics have for centuries been praying ‘for the disloyal Jews’ (‘*pro perfidis Judaeis*’).⁹⁸ The priest exhorted the assembly to pray that ‘God may take away the veil from their hearts, so that they may also acknowledge Jesus Christ’. The themes of the subsequent oration consist of God’s mercy shown ‘even’ on the ‘Jewish faithlessness’; the ‘blindness’ of the Jewish people; a petition to God that this people be freed from the ‘darkness’ in which it dwells and may recognize Christ, the ‘light of truth’. With the ulterior design to soften the widely-perceived negative meaning of the words ‘*perfidus*’, ‘*perfidia*’, the 1962 revised version of the Roman Missal titles this intercession anew as ‘for the conversion of the Jews’ (‘*pro conversione Judaeorum*’).⁹⁹ A pathbreaking change, however, has finally occurred in the post-conciliar Roman Missal. Now, the congregation simply prays ‘for the Jews’ (‘*pro Judaeis*’), to whom God has spoken first, and the church petitions for growth of their love to God’s name and for loyalty to the covenant, and that the Jews may attain the fullness of redemption. Israel’s prime vocation and outstanding features of the Jewish religion, such as the Torah and hallowing God’s name, are explicitly and respectfully mentioned, and the necessity of conversion is no longer referred to.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the intercession’s new position is now immediately behind the one for Christian unity. While candidly and affirmatively demonstrating the ‘*via Judaica*’, the text evidences at a key moment of the church year, namely the ‘*Sacrum Triduum*’, that Christians and Jews – despite their difference in their assessment of the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth – jointly walk on the divine paths.¹⁰¹ Critics accordingly declare that to rely on the service books antecedent to the Vatican II liturgical reform and use them without careful examination and alteration, or expurgation, of such anti-Jewish elements would constitute a reversion to

⁹⁸ I use here: *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti concilii tridentini restitutum S. Pii V pontificis maximi jussu editum aliorumque pontificum cura recognitum a Pio X reformatum et ssmi d.n. Benedicti XV auctoritate vulgatum, Editio VII juxta typicam vaticanam* (Regensburg, 1923), 202-203.

⁹⁹ *Missale Romanum anno 1962 promulgatum*, eds. Cuthbert Johnson and Anthony Ward, *Bibliotheca “Ephemerides Liturgicae”*, *Subsidia, Instrumenta Liturgica Quarreriensia: Supplementa 2* (Rome, 1994), 173-175.

¹⁰⁰ *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli pp. VI promulgatum Ioannis Pauli pp. II cura recognitum, iuxta typicam tertiam* (Chicago, 2007), 250-251. For a survey of the vicissitudes regarding the fundamental change of Roman Catholic teaching on Judaism during the twentieth century, see: John Connely, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge MA, 2012). This magisterial book delves, regrettably, neither into the effect of the liturgical texts and rituals, nor into their pathbreaking alterations. See also: Magda Teter, ‘The Catholic Church’, in: *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, eds. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury and Kalman Weiser (Cham, 2021), 65-77.

¹⁰¹ For reasons of limitation, I leave aside here the contentious intercession for the Jews that Pope Benedict wrote (published in February 2008).

the period before the breakthrough in Catholic thought on Judaism formulated in the aforementioned conciliar decree *Nostra Aetate*.¹⁰²

A somewhat similar, this time inner-Christian ecumenical concern is raised in regard to the intercession and oration for the ‘heretics and schismatics’ (implying, inter alia, Orthodox and Protestants) in the Good Friday liturgy of the ‘pre-conciliar’ Roman Missal, in which God is asked to give heed to the souls of the heretics and schismatics ‘deceived by diabolic fraud’ and to free them from all their errors.¹⁰³ It is true that, in comparison with its previous editions, the 1962 Roman Missal has modified the intercession’s title into ‘for the unity of the church’ (‘pro unitate ecclesiae’), but the prayer’s contents have remained the same.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, the post-conciliar 1970 Roman Missal beseeches, in its intercession ‘for the unity of the Christians’ (‘pro unitate Christianorum’), God to ‘gather all our brethren who believe in Christ’ and ‘are consecrated by one baptism.’¹⁰⁵ Similar ameliorations can be observed with respect to the intercessions and orations for the non-believers. ..

With respect to many festivals, the papal 2007 decree resulted in the Roman Church possessing two differing calendars and two different liturgical years, ‘each having largely different presidential prayers, prefaces and readings’.¹⁰⁶ Noticeably, in the Roman rite, the dates of the solemnities of Trinity Sunday, the Body and Blood of Christ – ‘Corpus Christi’ – and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the festive commemoration (‘memoria’) of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, depend also on the computation of the Easter cycle. This applies to both ‘forms’ of the Roman rite. Nonetheless, the two ‘forms’ diverge from one another, as I have already mentioned, regarding the beginning and the ending of the Paschal period. Regardless of whether the two ‘forms’ are celebrated simultaneously or consecutively in one and the same church building, their disparity in start and finish of the Easter cycle brings about disharmony, *within* the Roman rite, for the observation of the major annual festive period. And as for the fixed annual cycle, two examples suffice to show the bifurcation.¹⁰⁷ First, my own name-day now falls on January 2, when St Basil the Great is commemorated in tandem with St Gregory Nazianzus, whereas according to the former service books, St Basil’s feast falls on June 14. (The Byzantine Catholic and the Orthodox Churches celebrate the feast of St Basil on January 1, and that of St Gregory Nazianzus on January 25.) The second example concerns St John of Damascus, whom the Roman-rite service books antecedent to

¹⁰² Rita Ferrone, ‘Anti-Jewish Elements in the Extraordinary Form’, *Worship* 84 (2010) 498-513. Cf. Benjamin Leven, ‘The Good Friday Prayer for Jews: A “Borderline Case” of Christian Prayer’, *Studia Liturgica* 41 (2011) 78-91; “...damit sie Jesus Christus erkennen”: *Die neue Karfreitagsfürbitte für die Juden*, eds. Walter Homolka and Erich Zenger (Freiburg i.Br., 2008); my ‘Antijudaismus in der christlichen Liturgie und Versuche seiner Überwindung’, in: *Prekäre Zeitgenossenschaft: Mit dem Alten Testament in Konflikten der Zeit – Internationales Bibel-Symposium Graz 2004*, ed. Joachim Kügler, bayreuther forum Transit: Kulturwissenschaftliche Religionsstudien 6 (Münster, 2006), 247-278, here 249-262.

¹⁰³ *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti concilii tridentini...* (1923 edition), 202.

¹⁰⁴ *Missale Romanum anno 1962 promulgatum*, 173.

¹⁰⁵ *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici concilii Vaticani II* (2007 edition), 250-251. The English version renders ‘fratribus’ with ‘brothers and sisters’ – see *The Roman Missal* (Collegeville MN, 2011), 322.

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Regan, ‘Two Advents Compared: Ordinary and Extraordinary’, *Worship* 84 (2010) 527-549, here 527. Regan (1938-2017), a US American Benedictine monk and professor at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute Sant’Anselmo in Rome, critically juxtaposes the two forms of the church year in his study *Advent to Pentecost: Comparing the Seasons in the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Roman Rite* (Collegeville MN, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ *Calendarium Romanum* (1969). Cf. Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: “Sacrosanctum Concilium”* (New York and Mahwah NJ, 2007), 2-3, 23-25, 91-94. It is not surprising that, after Pope Benedict’s decree, several people experienced the coexistence of two different calendars within the Roman rite as disturbing, and hence argued for a compromise between the ‘two forms of the one Roman rite’ and in favour of a uniform annual calendar – thus, e.g., Gherardini, ‘Per una pace liturgica’, 33. This question, however, does not really concern the Easter date computation and the ecumenical effort to reach a common Paschal date, and is therefore beyond the scope of my paper.

the Vatican II liturgical reform commemorate on March 27, whereas currently, as noted at the outset of this paper, his feast falls on December 4.

However, on July 16, 2021, Pope Francis (incumbent since 2013) issued a *Motu proprio* titled *Traditionis custodes*, in which he revokes the decisions taken by his two predecessors in this domain and declares that the service books composed in the spirit of the Vatican II liturgical reform constitute ‘the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman rite’. The pope concludes that, to his regret, adherents of the service books antecedent to the conciliar worship reform consider Vatican II to be treason to the ‘true church’ and holy tradition and that, for this matter, the earlier permits with respect to the service books in question have widened the gap within the *Catholica* instead of bringing about unity. Even so, the pope leaves it up to the local bishops to regulate, under certain conditions, the celebration of services according to the ‘pre-conciliar’ Roman Missal.¹⁰⁸ In a letter to his episcopal confreres, he elucidated his decision.¹⁰⁹ Still in 2021, on December 18, he announced even further restrictions, explicitly forbidding ordinations and confirmations according to the ‘old rite’. The clergy’s and laity’s reactions have so far been mixed, as many hailed the papal decision as prophetic and courageous, even long overdue, while some others were very disappointed and dismayed.¹¹⁰

All this is inherent to the inner-Catholic reception of the Second Vatican Council. The implementation and full-scale acceptance of conciliar decrees needs often a very long time – think of Chalcedon (451), which has not only clarified Christology, but has also led to further division, and Trent (1545-1563) – and Vatican II is no exception to this. In addition, quite a few proponents of the service books antecedent to their conciliar reform reject also the main tenets of Vatican II as regards ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, religious freedom, liberty of conscience, pastoral bearing and allowing for today’s modern world (‘aggiornamento’). In consequence, many supporters of the ‘pre-conciliar’ books do not particularly sympathize with celebrating Easter in partnership with non-Catholic Christians, not to mention possible Paschal intersection with Passover (see below).

5. The Aleppo Statement and Pertinent Reactions by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation

In March 1997, an important consultation on our subject met in Aleppo, Syria, with the said Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim acting as host. The consultation was jointly sponsored by the Middle East Council of Churches and the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, a commission in which the Roman Catholic Church fully participates.¹¹¹ In Aleppo, a statement was issued, entitled ‘Towards a Common Date for Easter’.¹¹² This document, which in its own words ‘rightly calls attention to the centrality of Christ’s resurrection as the basis of the common Christian faith’ and describes the resurrection as ‘a sign of the unity and reconciliation which God wills for the entire creation’, makes pivotal recommendations, including:

¹⁰⁸ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu-proprio-traditionis-custodes.html (last access on December 27, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/20210716-lettera-vescovi-liturgia.html> (last access on December 27, 2021).

¹¹⁰ As for dismay, see: *From Benedict’s Peace to Francis’s War: Catholics Respond to the Motu Proprio Traditionis Custodes on the Latin Mass*, ed. Peter A. Kwasniewski (New York, 2021).

¹¹¹ See nt. 73.

¹¹² See nt. 6.

- a. maintaining the norms established by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, according to which Easter must fall on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring, and
- b. calculating the necessary astronomical data (spring equinox and full moon) by ‘the most accurate possible scientific means’, using the Jerusalem meridian as the basis for reckoning.

The lucid Statement was also explicitly supported by official representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and many other Christian communities. Prominent liturgists and ecumenists, such as the Methodist Geoffrey Wainwright (1939-2020), pointed out that the Easter date must be variable indeed (hence, not fixed) and be calculated in accordance with the most precise data.¹¹³ The Greek Orthodox theologian Anastasios Kallis declared that the Aleppo Statement held out the highest chance of success in solving the thorny issue of the Paschal date.¹¹⁴

The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation has issued two declarations in which it expressly tackles the issue of the Easter date: a ‘Common Response to the Aleppo Statement on the Date of Easter/Pascha’ in 1998¹¹⁵ and its reaffirmation ‘Celebrating Easter/Pascha Together’ in 2010.¹¹⁶ In both documents, the Consultation warmly welcomes the Statement’s recommendations and wholly accepts them. Because of the importance of this North American consultation as an outstanding joint Catholic-Orthodox theological initiative, allow me to cite the reasons why it gives its endorsement to the statement. First, the document concerned

‘calls attention to the continuing relevance of the Council of Nicaea. This council is a fundamental point of reference for the traditions of both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. This also implies the rejection of proposals to establish a fixed date for Easter/Pascha.’

Second, the statement sets forth that

‘the Council of Nicaea was willing to make use of contemporary science to calculate the date of Easter/Pascha ... This principle still holds valid today. Scientific observations about the cosmos reveal the goodness and wonder of God’s creation, which He embraced in the incarnation of his Son. Moreover, to deny an observable truth about the world is to reject God’s gift to us. Our Churches need to use the findings of contemporary science as did the Fathers of Nicaea ... The key today to resolving the issue in accordance with the mandate of Nicaea is to determine the equinox from the meridian of Jerusalem (longitude 35° 13’47.1) using the most accurate scientific instruments and astronomical data available. This will resolve the conflict in our liturgical observance by aligning existing Church calendars to the Nicene formula: not just the calendar from one set of Churches, but from both Eastern and Western traditions. As disciples of the risen Lord who all profess adherence to the mandate of the Council of Nicaea, we find a profound need to adhere to Nicaea’s formulae, and to calculate the yearly date accurately. As Churches whose faith is rooted in Scripture and Tradition, let us ensure we stay rooted in The One Who is Truth.’

Third, the Aleppo document

‘accurately presents historical circumstances relating to the Council of Nicaea’s treatment of the relationship between the Christian Pascha and the Jewish Passover. The practice of continuing to celebrate Pascha according to the ancient Julian calendar has often been defended, by some Eastern

¹¹³ See, inter alia, his contribution ‘Easter’ in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva, 2002), 343-344.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/towards-a-common-date-for-easter> (last access on December 27, 2021). See also Anastasios Kallis, *Von Adam bis Zölibat: Taschenlexikon Orthodoxe Theologie*, *Orthodoxe Perspektiven* 5 (Münster, 2008), 247-250.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.scoba.us/resources/orthodox-catholic/1998aleppo.html> (last access on December 27, 2021).

¹¹⁶ See nt. 7. The following quotations in my paper are from these two short and rather similar documents.

Christians, as resting on a decision associated with that council prohibiting the Churches from celebrating the Paschal feast “with the Jews”. However, as scholars ... have very clearly demonstrated, this prohibition was directed against making the calculation of the date of Easter depend upon contemporary Jewish reckoning, not against a coincidence of date between the two festivals. In fact, a coincidence of Passover and Easter dates continued to occur from time to time as late as the eighth century. Only later, when the increasing “lag” of the Julian calendar made any coincidence impossible, did the prohibition come to be misinterpreted as meaning that the Jewish Passover must necessarily precede the Christian Passover each year.¹¹⁷

In sum, the North American Catholic-Orthodox Consultation considers

‘that the implementation of the recommendations of the Aleppo Statement would allow our Churches to adhere more exactly to the mode of calculation mandated by the First Council of Nicaea. The Aleppo Statement is both faithful to this Council and it takes into account the contemporary situation, which calls for a common witness to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the central mystery of the Christian faith.’

During the last decades, also the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Anglican Lambeth Conference, the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of Churches in the USA, the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv,¹¹⁸ the patriarch of the Melkites, Gregory III (Laham, incumbent 2000-2017), and other dignitaries and institutes, have championed a common Paschal date, and most of them also endorse the Aleppo Statement.¹¹⁹

In contrast to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, many Orthodox Churches have not reacted at all, at least at an official level. This seems strange, because the Aleppo Statement explicitly aspires to find a viable way of applying the teaching of Nicaea I – such an important council for Eastern Christians, though not, of course, only for them – to modern times. Yet the same is true for a host of Roman Catholic and other Western communities. For most of them ‘Aleppo’ has remained a dead letter, an interesting statement for scholars and calendar experts, but seemingly without any relevance to everyday pastoral reality.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ogitsky, ‘Canonical Norms of the Orthodox Easter Computation and the Problem of the Dating of Pascha in our Time’. During the 1969 Athenian conference, the Greek Orthodox liturgist Foundoulis made also a plea to investigate the question of whether Nicaea’s regulation that Christian Easter and Jewish Pascha not coincide is ‘dated’ or not. If it is an issue bound to its age and the Orthodox Churches can let it go, this greatly facilitates, in Foundoulis’ opinion, a common Paschal date – see his article ‘Ο σταθερός έορτασμός του Πάσχα από ορθόδοξου τελετουργικής πλευράς’, 102. Here I cannot dig into the relations between the Orthodox Churches and Judaism, which have often been very ambiguous; this is, of course, also true for the relations between Western Christianity and Judaism.

¹¹⁸ The Ecumenical Institute of this (Byzantine Catholic) university organized an international seminar on the common Paschal date in Lviv on May 15, 2009. The seminar participants advocated a common pan-Christian date, remarking that mutual inter-ecclesiastical distrust was the most important obstacle to realizing this ideal. See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/a-common-date-for-easter-is-possible> (last access on December 27, 2021).

¹¹⁹ Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship*, Faith and Order Paper 171 (Geneva, 1995), 9-10, describe also other conferences which champion the search for a joint Paschal date.

¹²⁰ Cf. Ephrem Ishac, ‘Being Christians together? The Situation of Ecumenism in the Middle East: An Institutional Perspective’, in: *Thinking about Christian Life in the Turmoil Times of the Middle East: Insights and Reflections from East and West – 6th International Consultation of “Study in the Middle East” (SiMO) and Near East School of Theology (NEST), Göttingen, April 24-27, 2019 – Selected Contributions*, eds. Martin Tamcke and Claudia Rammelt (Göttingen, 2020), 67-94, here 85-88.

6. Inter-Ecclesiastical Obstacles

The North American Consultation underscores

‘that the recommendations of the Aleppo Statement have different implications for Eastern and Western Churches. For Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christianity, changes in the actual dating of Easter are more perceptible than for Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant Christianity. Fortunately, the Aleppo recommendations to a large extent repeat proposals already developed by the Orthodox themselves with regard to their preparations for a Holy Pan-Orthodox Council this should significantly enhance the Aleppo recommendations’ prospects for success.’

Yet the theologians concerned conclude that

‘at the same time, in many Eastern Churches, adherence to their present method of calculation often has been a symbol of the Church’s integrity and freedom from the hostile forces of this world.’

Therefore,

‘implementation of the Aleppo recommendations in these circumstances must proceed carefully and with great pastoral sensitivity. The material presented in the Aleppo Statement can be of great help to these Churches, should they attempt to carry out this effort to be faithful to the great tradition of the Church.’

I earnestly agree. At the same time, I fear that inter-confessional obstacles may seriously hinder the Aleppo Statement’s implementation. Non-theological factors, such as sociocultural divergences and differences in religious popular culture, as well as lack of trust and ecumenical formation, play a substantial role in making the Christian denominations stand still and stagnate in multiple respects, including this one. Are the churches mature and daring enough to move forward? Certainly, numerous Oriental and Occidental Christians are at the present time ready to move in this direction. But simultaneously, a multitude of groups are not willing altogether to take such a step. I am thinking of some Pentecostal milieus which regrettably regard the Byzantine rite, as well as the worship traditions of Oriental Orthodoxy, as non-biblical, idolatrous, backward and exotic; according to the same milieus, also the Roman rite is unbiblical and flawed. Alongside this, various Roman Catholic groups extol in a one-sided way the alleged superiority of their own Roman tradition (‘*praestantia ritus latini*’). The influence of traditionalistic groups has increased in the Church of Rome at the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third, although it is diminishing today under Francis’ pontificate. According to the ‘traditionalists’, full salvation is only to be found in the Roman Catholic tradition. Why should they make compromises with other confessions?! They admit that certain elements of truth can be found elsewhere, especially in the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, but maintain that also there the fullness of redemption is missing. ‘Romanitas’ prevails over ecumenism! For many other Catholics and Protestants, common dates for Easter (and Christmas) are irrelevant, because this issue does ‘not concern them’. Particularly in many Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations, the church year is, aside from Christmas, insignificant. For them, Good Friday is theologically of supreme significance because of Christ’s death on the cross and the resultant subsidiary atonement, but convergence with other denominations is usually of secondary importance.¹²¹

¹²¹ The US American Evangelical liturgist Melanie Ross juxtaposes ‘evangelical’ and ‘liturgical’ approaches of worship services, with each one having consequences for the observance of the church year. See the documentation of her outstanding fieldwork conducted in a variety of Evangelical congregations throughout the USA: Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Worship: An American Mosaic* (New York, 2021); eadem, *Evangelical*

I think also of various groups in Russia, Romania and Bulgaria, for example, which insist on being the true Orthodox and being distinctive, that is, different from other Christian communities, which they tend to regard as heretics and/or schismatics. In the three countries, a main reason for antagonism to both calendar modifications and ecumenical cooperation is the conviction that the salvation of souls can only happen in their own Orthodox Church, and hence that any dialogue with other denominations is a ‘rotten compromise’. Related to this attitude is the lack of intercultural and ecumenical contacts and formation, as well as the sad memory of the excesses of the communist period. Because communist regimes have explicitly favoured such international inter-church cooperation, active adversity to ecumenism and calendar revision is now considered true Orthodoxy. Additionally, for these groups, adjustment of the ecclesial time-keeping is unnecessary and illegitimate anyway, because the calendar employed by the fathers attending the First Council of Nicaea was the Julian. Hence, the Julian time reckoning partakes of the sacrosanct character of this council! Concurrently, to several Russian fundamentalists a common Easter date, even if it is not ‘devised’ by ‘heretical ecumenists’, but rather a natural consequence of the occasional coinciding of the Julian and Gregorian computations, resembles an illegitimate adoption of the ‘Western’ calendar and treason to the authentic Orthodox tradition.¹²² It comes, therefore, as no surprise that these milieus dream of the state’s and civic authorities’ return to the Julian time calculation with the purpose to re-sanctify ‘Holy Russia’ in this field as well. Moreover, in some Russian groups, an apocalyptic mood predominates, with their members awaiting the upcoming end of this ‘wicked’ world; so why worry about revision of the church calendar if the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is at hand, entailing far greater spiritual concerns, viz. accountability before the divine judgment seat?! In any case, after decades of living under communist regimes – a most difficult period of vicissitudes, predicaments and persecution – the churches in Eastern Europe still are in the process of finding their sociocultural and political positions and defining their new identities.¹²³ Of course, in these faith communities also hierarchs, priests and theologically trained laypeople can be found who know the traditions of other denominations well and stand for dialogue and ecumenical open-mindedness. Yet it seems to me that presently they do not constitute a majority.

I suspect that also in the Orthodox Churches of Cyprus and Greece, the time is not yet ripe for a daring move as suggested in the Aleppo Statement. In these churches, too, ecumenical relations with other Christian denominations are, generally speaking, not well-developed.¹²⁴ An additional problem is that the local hierarchies hardly provide, to the Orthodox believers, any solid information about the results of international ecumenical

versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy, foreword Mark A. Noll, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids MI, 2014).

¹²² Cf. Vasilios N. Makrides, ‘Orthodoxer Rigorismus und Orthodoxismus: Die Bedeutung des wortgetreuen Verständnisses von Rechtgläubigkeit’, *Una Sancta* 69 (2014) 44-50.

¹²³ Cf. Thomas Bremer, ‘The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Challenges of Today: Reflections on a Difficult Relationship’, in: *Rethinking Ecumenism: Strategies for the 21st Century*, eds. Freek L. Bakker et al., IIMO Research Publication 63 (Zoetermeer, 2004), 153-166; Thomas Bremer, ‘The Official Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches’, in: *Quo Vadis Eastern Europe? Religion, State and Society After Communism*, ed. Ines Angeli Murzaku, Collana di studi sui Balcani e l’Europa Centro-Orientale 30 (Ravenna, 2009), 61-73; Wil van den Bercken, ‘“Orthodoxy or Death!”: Anti-Ecumenical Voices in Russia’, in: *Rethinking Ecumenism*, 167-179; Paul Mojzes, ‘Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue in Eastern Europe’, in: *Quo Vadis Eastern Europe?*, 27-48.

¹²⁴ See, e.g.: Pantelis Kalaitzidis, ‘Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010) 365-420; idem, ‘The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church between Synodal Inertia and Great Expectations: Achievements and Pending Issues’, in: *Eastern and Oriental Christianity in the Diaspora*, eds. Teule and Verheyden, 77-153, esp. 110-120. Cf. my ‘Homogeneity and Otherness: The Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek People, and Heterogeneous Cultures and Religions’, in: *Griechische Dimensionen südosteuropäischer Kultur seit dem 18. Jahrhundert: Verortung, Bewegung, Grenzüberschreitung*, eds. Maria Oikonomou, Maria Stassinopoulou and Ioannis Zelepos, Studien zur Geschichte Südosteuropas 17 (Frankfurt a.M., 2011), 141-153.

dialogues in which their very own churches take part. This constitutes both a serious hindrance and an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, official pan-Orthodox consultations posit that the time has not yet arrived for calendar revision, and that more information must first be given to the whole people of God (see above); on the other hand, at the local level, viz. within the Orthodox Churches just mentioned, such data is scantily supplied, if at all, with the result that the average Greek or Cypriot parishioner knows next to nothing about the international ecumenical initiatives of his or her own faith community. I fear that the situation in other Orthodox Churches in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe is not much better.¹²⁵

When looking closely at inner-Orthodox tension between traditionalistic forces and moderate, one gets the impression that the former are nowadays stronger than the latter; fundamentalist and separatist penchants are advancing. Tied up with this strain, in which polarization and hostile clashes feature, is, in traditionalistic circles, growing anti-Occidentalism, which has (in diverse forms) been present for ages. It is widespread, prevalent in many monastic communities and among parts of the clergy and the hierarchy, as well as ubiquitous among the Old Calendarists and on Mount Athos.¹²⁶ It tends to sharply demarcate ‘unique’ Eastern Orthodoxy, which possesses the absolute truth, from ‘decadent’ and ‘inferior’ Western thought, both religious and secular, while separating it even there where such divergence hardly, or not at all, existed; in the latter case, fictitious and generalized categories are adduced.¹²⁷

Yet a different perspective must also be allowed for. To wit, generally speaking, better education, the extensive use of internet and international electronic exchange, international travelling, visits, ‘exposure’, exchange and dialogue programmes, the long-standing experiences of Orthodox foreign workers in Western Europe, North and Latin America and also Australia, the high number of mixed (inter-confessional) marriages, as well as Greek, Cypriot, Bulgarian and Romanian membership of the European Union, and still other international contacts, have gradually brought about changes in many people’s thought, in the said countries, on their own identity and ‘otherness’, including other churches. In our present

¹²⁵ Similar remarks in: Levet, ‘La Pâques des Orthodoxes et la Pâques des Latins’, 167-168. Cf. my ‘Spannungen und Dialoge zwischen der römisch-katholischen Kirche und der orthodoxen Kirche: Geschichtliche Phasen und heutige Situation’, in: *U službenju Božjemu narodu: Zbornik radova u čast msgr. dr. Antuna Škvorčevića, prvoga požeškog biskupa prigodom 60. obljetnice života, 35. obljetnice svećeništva i 10. obljetnice biskupstva*, eds. Josip Baričević et al. (Požega, Croatia, 2007), 414-450, here 446-449.

¹²⁶ Pantelis Kalaitzidis, ‘The Image of the West in Contemporary Greek Theology’, in: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, eds. George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York, 2013), 142-160; idem, ‘Raisons théologiques, historiques et culturelles des mouvements anti-ocuméniques dans l’orthodoxie’, *Istina* 59 (2014) 43-70; idem, ‘La découverte de l’hellénicité et l’anti-occidentalisme théologique chez trois théologiens grecs des années soixante: le Père Jean Romanidis, le Père Basile Gondikakis et Christos Yannaras’, *Contacts* nos. 259-260 (2017) 402-442; Elizabeth H. Prodromou, ‘Shaking the Comfortable Conceits of Otherness: Political Science and the Study of “Orthodox Constructions of the West”’, in: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, 193-210; Effi Fokas, ‘Religion in the Greek Public Sphere: Debating Europe’s Influence’, in: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, 181-192; Vasilios Makrides and Dirk Uffelman, ‘Studying Eastern Orthodox Anti-Westernism: The Need for a Comparative Research Agenda’, in: *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe: Selected Papers of the International Conference held at the University of Leeds, England, in June 2001*, eds. Jonathan Sutton and Wil van den Bercken, *Eastern Christian Studies* 3 (Leuven, 2003), 87-120; Julia Anna Lis, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des ‘Westens’ bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides*, *Erfurter Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des Christentums* 17 (Berlin et al., 2019); Vasilios N. Makrides, ‘Orthodoxes Christentum und westeuropäische Aufklärung’, *Ökumenische Rundschau* 57 (2008) 303-318. Cf. idem, ‘Orthodoxer Antiokzidentalismus und Antikatholizismus: Aktuelle Entwicklungen und Anpassungsprozesse’, in: *Dialog 2.0: Braucht der orthodox-katholischer Dialog neue Impulse?*, ed. Dietmar Schon, *Schriften des Ostkircheninstituts der Diözese Regensburg* 1 (Regensburg, 2017), 134-159. See also: Livanides, *Η ημερολογιακή μεταρρύθμιση*, 133-143.

¹²⁷ Makrides and Uffelman, ‘Studying Eastern Orthodox Anti-Westernism’, 111. The authors speak of ‘a kind of collective neurosis’ in the Orthodox East in this respect.

global world, this process speeds up. Although there are various ‘anti-globalist’ reactions which emphasize the specific confessional and national identity, it is to be expected that the process I am sketching will continue.¹²⁸ This, however, does not imply altogether that the hierarchy and other church professionals automatically share in this process, as they may even try to hinder it, inter alia, by doubling down on their own salvific ‘unique’ and ‘unchangeable’ ecclesial legacy.

Concurrently, it is highly advisable for Roman Catholics, as well as for Evangelicals and other Protestant denominations, to pay careful attention to Orthodox suspicion of their initiatives. These Occidental faith communities have a history of mission and proselytism among Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Assyrians. Especially the historical long-standing superiority claim and attempts made by the Latin Church to submit Orthodoxy to papal authority have nurtured Orthodox distrust of Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, as I have just indicated, a substantial part of the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian and Russian Orthodox hierarchy, as well as a good number of politicians and faithful, regard Orthodoxy as the guardian of morals and national values, which must be protected from religious pluralism and foreign ‘sects’. Religious multiformity and multiculturalism are new concepts and phenomena which they are not accustomed to, and hence these remain undesirable for most of them. They resist ‘Westernization’, with particular hierarchs fearing to be ‘absorbed’ in the huge European Union and the consequent ‘loss of identity’. Instead, they like to point out that their people are homogeneous and ‘pure’, both nationally and religiously. They also often denounce the ‘syncretistic universality’, which according to them does not make any distinction between Orthodoxy and heresy. A disputed item, such as calendar reform and the pursuit of a common Paschal date for all churches, risks becoming just a pawn on the chessboard of the confrontation between ‘anti-modernists’ and ‘ecumenists’, with ‘ecumenism’ even becoming an invective.

Usually Greeks and Cypriots who no longer live in their native countries, but in Western and Central Europe, North America or Australia, possess far more experience of people adhering to other denominations, religions and worldviews. The same applies to Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians, etc. who live in the West. Call to mind (although this concerns a bygone era) Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, Russian and Armenian émigrés in France with their fascinating theological and spiritual syntheses which are fully Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, respectively, and simultaneously receptive to renewal. As for today, think of Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University (a Jesuit university), to name but this one, and there exist also a few pertinent isles of Orthodox theologians in Romania, Russia and Greece, as well as in Western and Central Europe. In Austria, the Greek Orthodox theologian Grigorios Larentzakis has repeatedly championed further advance in inter-ecclesial collaboration, inclusive of a common Paschal date.¹²⁹

We should, nonetheless, also notice that in the West, particularly among converts – former Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans and others – there are many who highly appreciate their new church employing, not the ‘new Roman’ calendar, but the ancient Julian one, ‘bound up’ with the hallowed First Council of Nicaea. (The bond concerned, however, is merely implicit, not explicit.) This makes the Orthodox Church trustworthy in their eyes, unlike the Western ‘heterodox’ confessions, putatively tainted by secularism and modernism, such as ordaining women, allowing girls to serve in the chancel, and liturgical adjustment to

¹²⁸ Cf. Johannes Oeldemann, ‘Die Komplementarität der Traditionen: Grundlagen, Problemfelder und Perspektiven des ökumenischen Dialogs mit der Orthodoxie’, *Catholica* 56 (2002) 44-67, here 65.

¹²⁹ He has advocated, and continues to do so, in many a journal, weekly and periodical, inter-ecclesial rapprochement, including a common Easter date. See, e.g.: *Die Tagespost* [German Roman Catholic weekly], June 24 and July 1, 2021. In *Die Tagespost*, July 8 and 15, 2021, Cardinal Kurt Koch responds affirmatively to Larentzakis’ suggestions. See also: Larentzakis, ‘Das Osterfestdatum nach dem I. ökumenischen Konzil von Nikaia’.

modernity. In the USA, in particular, the impact of traditionalistic converts has grown during the last decades; this phenomenon does certainly not foster US American Orthodox willingness to find a solution to the calendrical conundrum – there are, naturally, also converts, such as the British Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, who greatly contribute, in their ‘new’ church, to renewal and ecumenical dialogue.

In the Middle East and India, the situation at large is quite different again. In Southern Indian Kerala, the ‘St Thomas Christians’ and Muslims constitute (sizable) minorities in Hindu-dominated society. The Orthodox Patriarchates of Constantinople (on Turkish soil), Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch in Syria (Damascus), as well as the Copts in Egypt and the Syrian Orthodox, all constitute minority churches in countries dominated by Islam. The same is true of the Maronite and Melkite Churches and the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia, which have become minorities in Lebanon. To nearly all of these groups, ecumenical contacts with worldwide Christendom are of vital importance; membership in the WCC, to which most of them belong, and in other inter-ecclesiastical councils and associations, delivers them from their isolation and offers them spiritual and material support. It is also worth noting that throughout the Middle East, down through the centuries, the two Orthodox families coexisting there (Orthodoxy and Oriental Orthodoxy) have often displayed a more open attitude to associating with Western churches than the Orthodox in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In many Middle-Eastern places, Oriental and Byzantine-rite Orthodox maintain also close bonds with Oriental Catholics. Nonetheless, it is not the entirety of the Middle East which glitters with ecumenical gold, since even there many ecclesiastical officeholders in leading positions tenaciously cling to their own confessional discipline, traditions and privileges, refusing compromises with other denominations – even when the majority of their faithful might be favourable; whereas many clergy designate themselves first and foremost as adherents of a certain church, usually the ordinary faithful call themselves simply Christians, while at times playing down existent inter-ecclesiastical theological divergences and stating that the sole matter which sets them apart is the Pascal date.¹³⁰ With the aim to mend imbalance in the domains of ecumenism, worship and pastoral care, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has issued a pertinent statement (October 2021). Therein, the bishops encourage ecumenism and acknowledge the ‘instinct of faith’ of the common believers, but lay also emphasis on several caveats, pointing out what is allowed, and not, for Catholics in the domain of the sacraments, the Eucharist in particular. It is manifest that the Assembly, to which also the Eastern Catholic churches belong, wishes to set the record straight.¹³¹

On the one hand, a number of hierarchs and theologians of both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in particular, continue to hold fast to their own approaches, positions and practices, and confessional self-complacency constitutes a major stumbling-block.¹³² On the other, despite confessionalism, clinging to certain privileges and an at times exclusive focus

¹³⁰ Frans Bouwen, ‘Moissonner ce qui a été semé: Implications et potentialités des accords œcuméniques’, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 70 (2020) 107-125, here 119; idem, ‘Middle East’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, eds. Wainwright and McPartlan, 536-544, here 542.

¹³¹ ‘Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines for Catholic Churches in Holy Land’ / ‘Directives pastorales œcuméniques pour les églises catholiques en Terre Sainte’. See: <https://bit.ly/3dDwpsE> and <https://www.lpj.org/posts/pastoral-ecumenical-guidelines-for-catholic-churches-in-holy-land.html> (last access on December 27, 2021). The document does not address the topic of a common Paschal date. It does, however, disapprove of eucharistic concelebration of Catholics and non-Catholics, and this concerns also the messianic banquet on Easter. For an overview of this document and some pertinent remarks, see also: Bernd Mussinghoff, ‘Gemeinsam vorangehen: Neue Töne in der Ökumene im Heiligen Land’, *Das Heilige Land* 1/2022, 27-28.

¹³² We Choose Abundant Life Group, *We Choose Abundant Life – Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices* (Beirut, 2021). Cf. Herman Teule, ‘Les chrétiens du Moyen-Orient: Quelques réflexions’, *Irénikon* 93 (2020) 231-253.

on respective communal interests, remarkable ecumenical initiatives can also be observed; they need further support.¹³³

Incidentally, all these observations make clear that the quest for a common Easter date is not just a ceremonial detail, an insignificant internal ecclesial affair, uninteresting for those who do not belong to the ‘hard core’ of a given denomination. The topic of this essay concerns intercultural factors which are bound up with one another, whether in the Middle East, in Eastern/South-eastern Europe, or elsewhere. Hence, one must bear in mind the myriad religious cultures and traditions coexisting in these regions.

The joint faith testimony of all Christian denominations in the Middle East was one of the objectives of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Bishops’ Synod in Rome, October 10-24, 2010. According to the *Lineamenta*, the preparatory document for this gathering, there remain, on the one hand, ‘insurmountable difficulties’ with respect to a common date for Christmas and Easter, owing to church order, tradition and the like; on the other hand, the faithful throughout the Middle East ardently desire that these two festivals at last be celebrated together by all people involved (no. 58). In the *Instrumentum laboris*, the actual working document of the assembly itself, the tone is more optimistic, as one reads here that agreement on a date for the common celebration of Christmas and Easter is a most significant outcome of the ecumenical dialogue (no. 82). Furthermore, during the assembly sessions, a considerable number of Catholic bishops made pleas that the various Christian communities in the Middle East celebrate Easter on one ‘unified’ date, advancing a similar argument with respect to Christmas. Unsurprisingly, the assembly’s unofficial final Propositions submitted to the pope, recommended ‘working for a common date for the celebrations of Christmas and Easter’ (no. 28).¹³⁴ Yet in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, signed by Pope Benedict XVI in September 2012 during his visit to Lebanon, the common Paschal date received no specific mention, although the pope energetically fostered and commended ecumenism and joint action on the part of all Christians.¹³⁵

An exception to the relative interdenominational open-mindedness of the churches in the Arab world has been, for a long time, the standoffish attitude taken by the hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Important reasons for the latter’s indifference were the Greek aspiration to preserve and guard ‘Hellenism’ in the Holy Places; tension between the patriarchate’s Greek leadership and the Arabic constituency of its parishes; the loss of members as a consequence of mission campaigns held by Western denominations; and the complicated local situation. Currently, however, there are positive signs that the Patriarchate

¹³³ We Choose Abundant Life Group, *We Choose Abundant Life*.

¹³⁴ *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges*, ed. Winkler, 202-203.

¹³⁵ For these three documents and other texts of the assembly see:

http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod/en/synodal_assemblies/2010-special-assembly-for-the-middle-east---the-catholic-church-.html (last access on December 27, 2021). See also: Dietmar W. Winkler, ‘Towards a “Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East”: From the Announcement of the Synod to the Promulgation of its *Instrumentum Laboris*’, in: *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges*, ed. idem, 6-24 – an earlier version appeared in: *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, eds. Anthony O’Mahony and John Flannery (London, 2010), 37-68; Dietmar W. Winkler, ‘Recalling the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East’, in: *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges*, 43-53, noting the assembly’s active support of a common Paschal date (p. 52); Frans Bouwen, ‘Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East’, in: *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, 87-105; idem, ‘Assemblée spéciale du Synode des évêques pour le Moyen-Orient: Rome, 10-24 octobre 2010’, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 60 (2010) 314-334. For reports of the assembly and the pope’s visit to Lebanon see, e.g.: *Irénikon* 83 (2010) 573-584 and 85 (2012) 458-463, and (from a Melkite perspective) *Le Lien: Revue du Patriarcat Grec-Melkite Catholique* 75 (2010) no. 3-4, pp. 5-14, 35-152; 77 (2012) no. 1-3, pp. 25-144.

of Jerusalem assumes a more receptive posture towards the other established Christian confessions in Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan. A key reason is the ongoing oppression of many of its Arabic faithful, which necessitates joint action and statements by all church leaders involved. It deserves also mention in this framework that the constituency of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has changed in recent years, due to the influx of many tens of thousands of Romanian and Russian Orthodox immigrants, a phenomenon that internationalizes this patriarchate.

Noticeably, throughout the Middle East, numerous Christians are leaving and migrating. Some do so for economic reasons, others because they do not feel secure any longer due to the political instability, and are deterred by rising Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism. In addition, for many Arabs, Iranians and Turks, the wars waged by the USA and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan have frequently led to an identification of ‘the West’, especially the USA (‘America’), aggression and Christianity in general. And also the nearly unquestioned Occidental support for the state of Israel has promoted their rejection of ‘the Christian world’. For militant Muslims, this attitude is strengthened by memories of the colonial past when Western Christian missionaries were evangelizing in the Middle East. Another important reason of discrimination of and violence against Christians is the austere Saudi version of Islam, Salafism (or Wahabism), which is repugnant to the religious diversity that characterizes the Western part of the Middle East, aiming at driving out ‘non-Islamic’ groups (including Shiites) and practices there. All of this, however, does not imply that Christians are continuously and systemically persecuted in the Middle East, as regular everyday Christian-Islamic coexistence is mainstream. The narrative of ongoing harsh persecution of Middle-Eastern Christians by Muslims is a Western product.¹³⁶

Ironically, alongside emigration, Christian immigration is taking place, as hundreds of thousand migrant workers – their exact number is unknown –, originating from Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Philippines and elsewhere are currently working in the Arab world for companies, or private households, often in the most dire of circumstances, without rights and poorly paid. Most Catholics among them adhere to the Roman rite, with a number from Kerala following the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara rites. Notwithstanding their economic woes, a favourable consequence of such a cosmopolitan Christian presence in the Middle East is that there – more than in Eastern and South-eastern Europe – reflection on joint initiatives, such as common dates for Easter and Christmas, actually gets off the ground. Just as the modern Ecumenical Movement was more or less born in the African and Asian mission territories, where missionaries from different Christian denominations met (and more than once collided), so also the cohabitation of different ecclesial families and the phenomenon of mass migration are proving to be pivotal factors in promoting the search for a common Paschal date.

At any rate, whether for Western or for Eastern Christianity, it remains necessary to intensify ecumenical formation – for the faithful to really get to know and esteem each other’s communities by way of personal exposure, and thus recognize Christ’s church in other ecclesial traditions. This could considerably shorten the long way toward a common Paschal date.¹³⁷ In this connection, I should draw attention to the *Charta Oecumenica*, a pioneering document edited by the Conference of European Churches – to which most Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Old Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe belong – in tandem with the (Roman Catholic) Council of European Bishops’ Conferences. The document deals with forms of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, and with the role and meaning

¹³⁶ Mitri Raheb, *The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire* (Waco TX, 2021) debunks this myth.

¹³⁷ See, e.g., the pressing plea of reform in: Pierre Sollogoub, ‘Why a Reform of the Established Liturgical Calendar and of the Easter Date is Necessary’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60 (2016) 53-64.

of the churches for the society in which they live. It is no coincidence that it was signed on April 22, 2001, the first Sunday after the common Easter date of that year.¹³⁸ Although the *Charta Oecumenica* does not explicitly mention the endeavour to attain a common Paschal date, its ecumenical contents and the day chosen for putting the signatures are significant for our topic.

7. Another Proposal and Its Attendant Challenges: The Church of Rome's Provisional Adaptation to the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Easter Calculation, and the Role of the Eastern Catholic Churches

At the outset of the 2010s, several Roman Catholic bishops and theologians considered that their church for the time being should adapt to the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions, and that Rome embrace for a while the Meletian blend calendar with the purpose to pave the way to a common pan-Christian Easter date. Among others, in a letter to Pope Benedict XVI (spring 2011), the bishop of the Dutch Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam, Jozef Punt, argued in favour of this initiative, while doing so on the occasion of an ecumenical symposium which he had organized (see above in the Introduction). At the end of this gathering, the attendees unanimously advocated adaptation by Rome to the Meletian mixed calendar.¹³⁹

This is an eye-catching development, in view of the fact that, for a long time, leading Roman Catholic ecumenists have rather rejected this possibility. For example, in 2001, a prominent Austrian liturgist, ecumenist and expert on calendar issues, Philipp Harnoncourt (1931-2020), asserted that 'it would be absurd when the Western Churches would return to the Julian calendar, which obviously contains errors.'¹⁴⁰ Of course, Harnoncourt's observation that the Julian time computation system, including the Easter date, is currently wrong, is correct, and his academic and personal contributions in the field of the calendrical disparity are substantial.¹⁴¹ It is, however, obvious that times change, too. And, given the deadlock in the long-standing difficulty of a common Paschal date, it seemed – a decade ago when

¹³⁸ Its text has been published in many places. Here I only refer to: <https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf> (last access on December 27, 2021); *Charting Churches in a Changing Europe: Charta Oecumenica and the Process of Ecumenical Encounter*, eds. Tim and Ivana Noble, Martien E. Brinkman and Jochen Hilberath, Currents of Encounter 28 (Amsterdam and New York, 2006), 205-216; 'Charta Oecumenica: Leitlinien für die wachsende Zusammenarbeit unter den Kirchen in Europa', *Ökumenisches Forum* 23-24 (2000-2001) 389-398.

¹³⁹ Also Pott, 'The Problem of a Common Calendar', 89, advocates for Western Christians to celebrate Pascha, for a set time, in accordance with the Julian reckoning; they can thus show how well-disposed towards Christian unity and fraternity they are. Even more important than such calendar revision is, in Pott's view, loyalty to Christ and living an authentic spiritual and liturgical life. Pott delivered his paper, originally given in French, during an international conference at Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, October 18-20, 2012, about the issues at stake with regard to the upcoming council of the Orthodox Church. Another paper, given by Pierre Sollogoub, representative of the 'Fraternité orthodoxe de l'Europe occidentale', argued for the necessity and feasibility of calendar reform and a common Paschal date – see the English version: 'Why a Reform of the Established Liturgical Calendar and of the Easter Date is Necessary'.

¹⁴⁰ Philipp Harnoncourt, 'Unterwegs zu einem gemeinsamen Ostertermin aller christlichen Kirchen', *Heiliger Dienst* 55 (2001) 78-94, here 90: 'Es wäre absurd, wenn die Westkirchen wieder zum offensichtlich fehlerhaften Julianischen Kalender zurückkehrten; diese Möglichkeit wird daher nicht einmal diskutiert' ('therefore, this option is not even discussed [by PH]').

¹⁴¹ See the detailed survey in his 'Der Kalender', in: *Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit* II/1, *Gottesdienst der Kirche: Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft* 6,1 (Regensburg, 1994), 9-63. See also his 'Unterwegs zu einem gemeinsamen Ostertermin aller christlichen Kirchen', and his review article 'Osterkomputation, Geschichtstheologie, Theologiegeschichte: Kalendarische Fragen und ihre theologische Bedeutung nach den Studien von August Strobel', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 27 (1985) 263-272. Cf. his *Gesamtkirchliche und teilkirchliche Liturgie*.

Western provisional return to the Julian computation mode was suggested – that creativity and unconventional methods were required. One might have thought of the ancient Latin adage, ‘In extremis extrema tentanda sunt’, and of the saying ‘If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go the mountain!’¹⁴² One may, from the perspective of worship and religious popular culture, also recall the famous dancing procession at Echternach, Luxemburg, held annually on Whit Tuesday, when the participants take steps forward and back, but ultimately reach the shrine of the Apostle to the Frisians and first bishop of Utrecht, St Willibrord (ca. 658 – 739).¹⁴³

Given the hindrances and pitfalls in the present ecumenical landscape, the proposal that the Church of Rome provisionally adapt to Orthodoxy and Oriental Orthodoxy seemed, at the time, inviting and a significant contribution to interdenominational rapprochement in the thorny field of a common Easter date. The proposal’s gist is that the Roman Catholic Church keep the Gregorian calendar for the immovable, fixed festivals, such as Christmas and Epiphany, but celebrate the cycles of Great Lent and Easter according to the Julian reckoning. In a statement made on April 20, 2011, the Roman Catholic bishop of Moscow, Paolo Pezzi, even advocated a fuller calendar adaptation of his church to Russian Orthodoxy, that is, not only for the Paschal cycle, but for the invariable Christmas feast as well.¹⁴⁴ A few prominent Orthodox bishops have likewise suggested that in regard to the Easter cycle, Occidental Christianity adjust for a while to Orthodoxy. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, for instance, put forward in 2010 that for a period of ten years all churches celebrate Pascha according to the Julian calendar, and then all of them implement the Aleppo Statement. Earlier, the same hierarch had warned that the question of calendar ought not to be made absolute. That is, in his view, there exists neither a ‘genuinely ecclesial calendar’ (though according to several Russian Orthodox fundamentalists, it does exist, viz., the Julian time reckoning), nor a calendar which supposedly is ‘only secular’ (according to the same fundamentalists, such is the case with the Gregorian, ‘papal’ calendar). The church, the metropolitan sets forth, has always in fact adapted to the actual civil time computation.¹⁴⁵ Assuredly, his helpful and sanguine statements in this domain are by far not always consistent. But this is also true for Roman Catholic leadership, as well as that of other denominations, and the writer of this essay is probably no exception.

The initiative for the Roman Catholic Church to provisionally adjust its Easter date to Orthodoxy and Oriental Orthodoxy seemed to its advocates to be launched in a suitable moment, a veritable ‘kairos’. Nonetheless, it could not remove the necessity of facing several major challenges.

A first problem is evidently that the said proposal falls very short of realizing the excellent Aleppo Statement. Moreover, an Easter date as late as the beginning of May – as sometimes happens in the Julian calendar – hardly corresponds to the prescription of Nicaea I concerning the first Sunday following the *first* full moon after the spring equinox. To counter this serious difficulty, the proponents of adoption of a kind of Roman Catholic ‘Meletian’ calendar have replied with confidence: Who knows what new and unexpected developments

¹⁴² There exists a variant with Moses as well. The saying is also found in several other languages.

¹⁴³ Originally, the pilgrims were wont to take three steps forwards and two steps back. It attracted a lot of attention, but appeared also inefficient and in fact frequently caused chaos. Nowadays, the dance is simpler. And, like before the revision, the dancers still reach their goal, that is, veneration of the saint’s relics.

¹⁴⁴ Another interesting example is that the Roman Catholic monastic Bose Community in Northern Italy, which warmly promotes ecumenical contacts with the Orthodox Churches, commemorates the eminent Russian iconographer St Andrei Rublev (whose festival falls on July 4) in its liturgy on July 17, i.e., on the same day as the Patriarchate of Moscow. See: *Calendario Ecumenico di Bose 2013* (Magnano, s.a.).

¹⁴⁵ Hilarion Alfeyev, *Geheimnis des Glaubens: Einführung in die orthodoxe dogmatische Theologie*, trans. from Russian by Hermann-Josef Röhrig, eds. Barbara Hallensleben and Guido Vergauwen, *Ökumenische Beihefte zur Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 43 (Fribourg, 2003), 137-142.

might follow?! If this is an endeavour animated by the Holy Spirit and if all parties involved recognize it as such, it will be difficult to stop it!

Another obstacle is that this proposal cannot entirely solve the calendar problem, because the difference between the Julian and the Gregorian computations for the appointed festivals, like Christmas and Epiphany, remains. Hence, Bishop Pezzi's proposal just mentioned. And the difficulties in the complicated realm of the rubrics in the Byzantine rite and other Oriental traditions continue as well, viz., when immovable feasts, e.g., that of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and that of St George, coincide with worship services of the Great Lent cycle, especially Holy Week. Before, I have mentioned the ideas of the Greek Orthodox liturgist Foundoulis, who has demonstrated that a fixed Paschal date on the second or third Sunday in April could solve a lot of these problems; his point of view is also valid for the application of 'Aleppo'. Yet all of this is in principle an inner-Orthodox problem which must internally be dealt with.

A third challenge is the danger of a new, this time inner-Western disparity of Paschal dates. If the Roman Catholic Church were going to celebrate Great Lent and Easter according to the Julian calendar, and the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic and the diverse Protestant Churches were to continue celebrating the Paschal feasts according to more modern (and more accurate) computations, there would be new divisions within Christianity. Many mixed marriages, for instance, would suffer from this. Especially in countries where Roman Catholicism and other Occidental faith communities coexist, this would be a new and undesirable obstacle. It is therefore important that, in case of any potential official Roman Catholic initiative, the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and Baptist Churches, as well as the Pentecostal Movement, be consulted.¹⁴⁶ If all have open hearts and minds, these denominations are likely to join. Noticeably, several prominent Protestant ecumenists, like the German Lutheran theologian Dagmar Heller, think that out of all initiatives to reach a pan-Christian Paschal date, Western Christian adaptation to the Orthodox computation is, in the present-day ecumenical landscape, probably the only one with a good chance of success.¹⁴⁷ At any rate, many Protestant Churches are eager participants in the Ecumenical Movement and most willing to find solutions to divisive calendar issues. In Ukraine, for example, not only the Greco-Catholics, but also most Protestant denominations celebrate Christmas according to the Julian time-keeping. However, in Greece, where (as noted) the Roman Catholic Easter date has been adjusted to the Julian calendar, Protestants continue to celebrate Pascha in accordance with the Gregorian computation.

By all accounts, the goal of ecumenism cannot be a Catholic-Orthodox coalition without participation of the other Western churches. Its objective is that *all* confessions together seek unity in Christ. As Pope John Paul II has repeatedly stated – in his impressive 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint*, for example¹⁴⁸ – ecumenism occupies a central place in the Roman Catholic Church, and all dimensions of Catholic life must be imbued with the ecumenical spirit. Similarly, according to his successor Benedict XVI, ecumenism is a vital

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, already in 1982, during a Vatican scholarly conference on the 400th anniversary of the Gregorian calendar, a presenter remarked that regarding the Orthodox Churches '...there is more hope of the adoption of a compromise ecclesiastical calendar than of the straightforward acceptance of the Gregorian reform. *Provided what is done is equally acceptable to the principal Protestant churches*, there seems to be no reason why the Papacy should not be open to such a compromise if as a result all Christians can celebrate their principal feast together' (emphasis mine). See: Hoskin, 'The Reception of the Calendar by Other Churches', eds. Coyne et al., 262.

¹⁴⁷ Dagmar Heller, 'Efforts towards a common Date for Easter – a hopeless situation?', <https://www.monasterodibose.it/en/community/news/the-window-of-dialogue/11820-efforts-towards-a-common-date-for-easter-a-hopeless-situation> (last access on December 27, 2021).

¹⁴⁸ *Encyclical Letter "Ut Unum Sint" of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism* (Vatican City, 1995).

aspect of Catholicism – even if, according to critics, it appeared sometimes as if this truth was not sufficiently expressed in concrete policy-making. Pope Francis, eager to attend to and engage in burning ecumenical issues, navigates at times unconventional trajectories, yet always with the goal to reach pan-Christian unity.¹⁴⁹ And also the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity underscores, self-evidently, the task of any bishop to engage in ecumenism.¹⁵⁰

It deserves mention that while the proposal for Western Christianity to adapt temporarily to the Julian paschalia represents a substantial compromise, the Aleppo Statement does so, too, though to a far lesser degree: According to this statement, the Jerusalem meridian – i.e., not the one which the Occidental churches currently rely on, viz., the Greenwich meridian – would be the basis of reckoning. Nonetheless, embracing the Julian computation for Pascha constitutes a more drastic course of action than a change of meridian. Alongside this, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church leaders might also consider the merits of the Meletian revised calendar, which is (as explained above) technically more accurate than the Gregorian reckoning.¹⁵¹ All in all, that which might at first glance appear to be an odd step backwards, could end up proving an effective sign of sincere good will and ecumenical partnership – and thus, a step in the right direction indeed. Orthodox not infrequently regard Western Christianity as arrogant and as ‘always to trying to impose itself’ on the Christian East. Although in the past there have occurred many events to warrant such feelings, it must be stressed that the Roman Catholic initiative, supported by several Protestant individuals and groups, to adapt to the East for the central festival of Pascha sets a remarkable example of ecclesial kenosis. This ‘folly’ – the Julian computation of the Easter date clearly being wrong – could actually be edifying for all those who consider Rome to be ever seeking after ways to submit non-Catholics to its power.

In this respect, might Eastern Catholic Churches, such as the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church in Eastern Europe, and the Melkites and the Chaldeans in the Middle East, serve as ‘bridge-builders’?¹⁵² In many places, they already celebrate Easter on the same date as their Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox coreligionists. Assuredly, in the Middle East, in particular, many fine initiatives, jointly undertaken by Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Catholics can be observed. In the Western diaspora, however, it is not only that many Eastern Catholic parishes make use of the Gregorian calendar, but also that, in a good number of diaspora places, there exist competition and distrust between Eastern Catholics and Orthodox/Oriental Orthodox. Two key reasons are, first, the Eastern Catholic preference to pursue primarily cooperation with the Latin Catholics and, second, the Orthodox option, when relating to Catholicism, to turn chiefly to the Latins.¹⁵³ I have, however, also observed (mainly in North America) a variety of examples of collaboration between Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox parishes.

¹⁴⁹ See, e.g.: Kurt Kardinal Koch, *Wohin geht die Ökumene? Rückblicke – Einblicke – Ausblicke* (Regensburg, 2021), 122-139.

¹⁵⁰ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum* (Vatican City, 2020) – also published in: *Acta (Ecumenica: Information Service of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity 2* (2020) 225-256. In no. 21, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are listed as key festivals of the liturgical year. Although the document does not mention the striving for a common Paschal date, its overall intent with respect to our topic is clear.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Levet, ‘La Pâques des Orthodoxes et la Pâques des Latins’, 171, nt. 23.

¹⁵² For comprehensive surveys of the Eastern Catholic Churches, see: Congregation for the Eastern Churches, *The Catholic East* (Rome, 2019); Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali, *Oriente Cattolico* (Rome, 2017).

¹⁵³ Herman Teule, ‘The Synod on the Middle East and the Challenge of the Diaspora’, in: *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges*, ed. Winkler, 166-180, here 174-175.

Another important exception regarding a common Paschal date are the Lebanese Maronites, who as early as in 1606 espoused the Gregorian calendar; unlike almost all other Eastern Catholic Churches, they have no Orthodox counterpart, to wit, no Orthodox ‘mother church’. However, in Lebanon and Syria, the Melkites – they adopted the Gregorian time-keeping in toto in 1857 –, the Syrian Catholics and the Armenian Catholics also celebrate Pascha according to the Gregorian reckoning. This shows the current Roman Catholic strategy, already recommended 1965 by the committee established by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (see above), namely, in regions where the Catholic Church ‘outnumbers’ other Christian denominations, it tries to pursue unity by maintaining the Gregorian calculation and inviting the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches to do likewise. (In Lebanon and Syria, however, these churches have not accepted the Catholic invitation, but still hold to the Julian computation. We have already seen that the Orthodox 1977 consultation on a pan-Christian fixed Easter date judged such adaptation ill-advised.¹⁵⁴) By contrast, wherever Orthodoxy constitutes the dominant Christian faith community, the Catholic Church seeks to embrace the Julian calendar. Nevertheless, as we have observed, while this principle has been successfully applied in several countries, in others, such as Serbia and Albania, it has not. A relevant example is also this: During the visit of Pope John Paul II to Syria in 2001, the Melkite Patriarch Gregory III announced that his church would celebrate Easter as of 2002 according to the Julian calendar, with the aim to pursue inter-ecclesial concord in this salient realm. This announcement, however, has proven controversial, meeting with both consent and dissent on the part of other local Catholic communities, such as the Maronite Church, and even within the patriarch’s own church, because it might result in Catholic disunity throughout Syria and Lebanon and, for that matter, was inconsistent with actual Roman Catholic policy in Syria and Lebanon. Hence, in January 2002, the Permanent Synod of the Melkites, determined not to carry Patriarch Gregory’s plan into effect.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, I have already referenced above the Bishops’ Assembly on the Middle East and the fact that in the Holy Land, the Catholic bishops at first suited the action to the word (save the Status Quo issue, which can only be adequately addressed by all parties involved), and then revoked their decision. Meanwhile, the Chaldean patriarch, Louis Raphael Sako (in office since 2013), has advocated in Baghdad a common Paschal date for the sake of the Assyrian sister church (even ‘mother church’) in Iraq.

It calls for particular mention here that the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Eastern Catholic Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, explicitly permits local adaptations and solutions to pastoral problems, such as family situations (no. 20-21). To promote unity of Christians who live in the same region or country, the hierarchies of Eastern Catholic communities may consult all parties involved and thus pursue unanimous agreement concerning the celebration of Pascha on the same Sunday.¹⁵⁶ This conciliar permission is an apt starting point for further necessary change on the part of the Catholic Church, for example with respect to the Easter date.

Nonetheless, far from being bridges, the very existence of Eastern Catholicism has often has been the subject of bitter Catholic-Orthodox controversy and dispute. According to the Balamand Statement (named after the Orthodox Monastery of Balamand in Northern Lebanon, within the Patriarchate of Antioch), drawn up in 1993 by the Joint International Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church,

¹⁵⁴ See, however, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev’s article to which I referred above (nt. 85).

¹⁵⁵ See: *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 52 (2002) 401-402. According to John Wooley, ‘The Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East’, in: *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, eds. O’Mahony and Flannery, 153-183, here 167, re-adoption of the Julian Paschal computation by the Armenian Catholics is difficult, because it would imply rupture with their Armenian Orthodox counterparts. Wooley deplores the lack of coordination in this respect.

¹⁵⁶ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, III, eds. Ganzer et al., 356-357.

uniatism has given rise to deep wounds in the Orthodox Church. (This is, of course, also true for the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Assyrian Church of the East.) According to the statement in question, uniatism is, on the one hand, to be henceforth rejected as a method for achieving ecclesial union, given that the Catholic Church no longer considers the Eastern Catholic Churches as models for such a union. On the other hand, the actual existence of these faith communities and the right to their own pastoral care is to be accepted by all. The document declares that these churches should participate in the theological dialogue itself, and that freedom of conscience for the believers, love, forgiveness and respect, open communication and condemnation of all acts of violence against other churches should be the criteria for inter-ecclesiastical contacts. In addition, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches recognize each other as sister churches.¹⁵⁷

On the one hand, the Balamand Statement is deemed courageous and open-minded, a great step towards the solution of the bilateral problems between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. On the other, it has been seriously contested, while remaining disputed.¹⁵⁸ By all accounts, the conviction held by numerous Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox alike that the ecclesiological status of the Eastern Catholic Churches is irregular, given that the latter result from a deep

¹⁵⁷ *Service d'Information: Conseil Pontifical Pour la Promotion de l'Unité des Chrétiens*, no. 83 (1993/II), 99-103; *Growth in Agreement, II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*, eds. Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch, Faith and Order Paper 187 (Geneva and Grand Rapids MI, 2000), 680-685; *Una Sancta* 48 (1993) 256-264. Cf. Frans Bouwen, 'Balamand 1993: VIIe session de la Commission internationale pour le dialogue théologique entre l'Eglise catholique et l'Eglise orthodoxe', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 43 (1993) 91-112; Hermenegild M. Biedermann, 'Orthodoxie und Unia: Das Dokument von Balamand (17.-24.6.1993)', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 44 (1995) 11-32; Waclaw Hryniewicz, 'Uniatismus: Einst und jetzt – Reflexionen zum Dokument von Balamand (1993)', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 43 (1994) 328-339; Antonius J. van der Aalst, 'De theologische dialoog tussen de orthodoxe en de katholieke kerk: Achtste vergadering – Balamand, Libanon, 17-24 juni 1993', *Het Christelijk Oosten* 45 (1993) 242-257; Pierre Duprey, 'Une étape importante du dialogue catholique-orthodoxe: Balamand, 17-24 juin 1993', in: *Communion et réunion: Mélanges Jean-Marie R. Tillard*, eds. Gillian R. Evans and Michel Gourgues, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 121 (Leuven, 1995), 115-123, here 121-123; Serge Keleher, 'The Freising, Ariccia and Balamand Statements: An Analysis', *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 34 (1993) 427-463; John H. Erickson, 'Concerning the Balamand Statement', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997) 25-43; Emmanuel Clapsis, 'The Roman Catholic Church and Orthodoxy: Twenty-Five Years after Vatican II', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35 (1990) 221-236; Vsevolod of Scopelos (Ukrainian Orthodox Bishop in the USA under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate), 'Reflections on Balamand', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997) 221-243; Peter Galadza, 'Good News from Balamand', *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 34 (1993) 352-354; Benoît Bourguine, 'La réception de la Déclaration de Balamand', *Irénikon* 74 (2001) 538-560.

¹⁵⁸ For reasons of limitation, I shall not further dig into this seminal statement and the turbulent history of its reception. See, e.g.: Frans Bouwen, 'Relire le document de Balamand 1993: 25 ans après', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 69 (2019) 300-315, and the upcoming volume, *Balamand After Balamand: The Reception of the Balamand Declaration (1993-2018) and Current Relations Between the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches and Their Catholic Sister Churches*, eds. Jaroslav Z. Skira et al., Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven, in press). For a survey of Greek Orthodox reactions to the Union of Brest, see my 'The Trojan Horse and a Grecian Gift: Present-day Greek Orthodox Reactions to the Union of Brest', in: *Four Hundred Years Union of Brest (1596-1996): A Critical Re-evaluation*, eds. Bert Groen and Wil van den Bercken, Eastern Christian Studies 1 (Leuven, 1998), 201-238. With respect to the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, see also: Mykola Krokosh, 'Die Ukrainische Griechisch-Katholische Kirche und die Ökumene: Eine selbstkritische Bilanz der Nachuntergrundszeit', *Der Christliche Osten* 67 (2012) 93-105, who also critically asks whether and how an ecclesiology focused on Roman primacy and the eucharistic ecclesiology of local churches can be harmonized. Cf. Hervé Legrand, 'L'ecclesiologie eucharistique dans le dialogue actuel entre l'Église catholique et l'Église orthodoxe: Convergences atteintes et progrès encore souhaitables', *Istina* 51 (2006) 354-374; Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 629-641; Natalia Kochan, 'The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church on Ecumenism: Some Comments on a Recent Document', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54 (2002) 269-285; Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Lubachivsky, 'Letter to Cardinal Cassidy', *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 35 (1994) 417-424.

wound within the former, must be taken seriously.¹⁵⁹ And yet this need not exclude the potentially positive effects of Eastern Catholic initiatives to achieve a common Easter. The Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Major Archbishop, Sviatoslav Shevchuk (in office since 2011), for example, advocates a joint Eastern Catholic-Orthodox initiative in this field, while he alerts at the same time to the danger of new division and calls for pastoral sensitivity for all faithful of different paces, viz., the slow-moving and those in the ‘fast lane’. An interesting detail in this framework is that the archbishop’s church in diaspora countries, such as Argentina, Italy, Portugal and Spain, holds to the Gregorian time-keeping, whereas in Austria the community in Vienna observes the Julian calendar and the parishes in Graz and elsewhere in Austria rely on the Gregorian.¹⁶⁰

To crown it all, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (incumbent since 1991) has not solely often pointed out that uniatism is a traumatic experience for the Orthodox East, but admitted also several times – during his visit to the Benedictine Monastery of Chevetogne on November 15, 1994, for example¹⁶¹ – that the Eastern Catholic Churches have indeed been able to transmit, even transfuse, Oriental patristic spirituality and liturgical theology into the Latin Church and thereby enrich the Occidental Christian traditions. The debate on the Paschal date might even be a fitting opportunity for the Eastern Catholic communities – despite, or owing to, their various miscellaneous forms of liturgy, theology, spirituality and canon law, which constitute often blends of Eastern and Western traditions – to demonstrate their possible competence as bridge-builders. This, however, presupposes that they are first recognized as having said competence. If someone does not walk over a bridge, but rather wishes to demolish it, service as bridge-builder seems out of the question.

The supposedly irregular status of the Eastern Catholic Churches, their presumed lack of ecclesiological balance and their ‘blend traditions’ make it sound as if the status of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches is regular, well-balanced and pure instead. But are not all churches to a certain extent irregular, unbalanced and schismatic as long as the ruptures of communion between them persist? And is blending not an inevitable consequence of coexistence, mutual impact and cross-fertilization?¹⁶² Do the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches themselves fully apply the principles of synodality and collegiality, and have they attained equilibrium between primacy/hierarchy and the fullness (πλήρωμα) of the entire People of God?¹⁶³ The ecclesiological problems with regards to collegiality, primacy, and so on, are definitely not an exclusive Eastern Catholic ‘privilege’! This is not to say that there exist no serious ecclesiological difficulties concerning the Eastern Catholic traditions, since the supposed ‘praestantia ritus latini’ and the process of Latinization – be it through Roman coercion, or be it through Eastern Catholic self-Latinization¹⁶⁴ – has led to great losses of authentic Eastern Christian traditions in the realms

¹⁵⁹ Waclaw Hryniewicz, ‘Union und Uniatismus im katholisch-orthodoxen Dialog: Probleme, Schwierigkeiten und Hoffnungen’, *Ostkirchliche Studien* 54 (2005) 209-241.

¹⁶⁰ *Ökumenische Information*, August 10, 2021 (no. 32), 8.

¹⁶¹ *Irénikon* 68 (1995) 102-106.

¹⁶² See, e.g.: my ‘Die Fremdbestäubung zwischen dem byzantinischen und dem römischen Ritus: Einige Beispiele’, *Ostkirchliche Studien* 68 (2019) 52-68, and my ‘The Interplay of Hebrew, Greek and Latin in Christian Worship during the First Millennium: Some Views’, *Ökumenisches Forum / Journal for Ecumenical and Patristic Studies* 40/41 (2018/2019), 39-62.

¹⁶³ Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion: Re-Thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality – A Study by the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group* (Los Angeles et al., 2019), also published in *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 63 (2019) 59-125.

¹⁶⁴ For some interesting examples of ‘auto-Latinization’ see: Constantin Simon, ‘Eastern Catholicism: Modern Historical, Ecclesial and Contemporary Contexts – A Background Study to the Synod for the Middle East’, in: *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, eds. O’Mahony and Flannery, 69-86, here 81-83. See also the description of problems in: Michel Van Parys, ‘Comprendre et vivre l’identité des Églises orientales catholiques: Approche théologique’, *Irénikon* 70 (1997) 163-182, here 178-179; Robert F. Taft, ‘The Liturgy in the Life of the Church’, *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 40 (1999) 187-229; Vsevolod of

of theology, liturgy, spirituality and canon law. Currently, a confusing phenomenon can be observed: on the one hand, the Roman authorities encourage the Eastern Catholic Churches to restore their own original Oriental liturgical and spiritual traditions and, on the other, they are reluctant to extend the latter's jurisdiction and grant them more autonomy. At any rate, after the 'divorce' of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, especially the Byzantine Catholics find themselves in a difficult position, trying to maintain relations with both 'parents'. However, giving a satisfying answer to the question of who is to 'blame' for this, and of how viable ecclesiological solutions are to be found, exceeds the limits of this essay.

8. Easter During Pesach?

Thus far, we have more than once noticed the interplay between the Jewish Passover and Christian Pascha, their interaction with respect to origin and (in)dependence, congeniality and reciprocal demarcation. Such a delimitation has also occurred in other realms, such as the two weekly fasting days, since the fledging Christian religion preferred Wednesday and Friday instead of Monday and Thursday (although there were also other Jewish subpopulations who observed Wednesday and Friday, so these days were not exclusive observances of the early church). Demarcation happened also with respect to the weekly day of rest, Christians opting for Sunday instead of Sabbath.

The key Easter feast was set apart from Pesach, with several regulations preventing their coincidence, though they sometimes do coincide. Yet despite their partition, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism did not fully sever all relationship, as reciprocal interaction and (strained) contacts continued.¹⁶⁵ A deep wound, however, that Christendom has inflicted, for ages, on Jewry are long-standing discrimination and violence, especially the pogroms on Good Friday because of the alleged Jewish guilt and accountability for the 'murder of God'.¹⁶⁶ On the other, today a number of usually well-meaning Christians enact Easter versions of the Passover Seder with the goal to demonstrate their closeness to the Jewish religion; however, Jews may experience it as an unpleasant appropriation of their own tradition.

Given Easter's multifaceted, yet ambiguous and historically very contentious relationship with Pesach, a fairly recent proposal, quite different from the ones made so far, deserves attention.¹⁶⁷ That is, in February/March 2021, the German Benedictine monk and expert in liturgical and Eastern Christian studies, Nikodemus Schnabel from Dormitio Abbey in Jerusalem, suggested the Sunday which falls in the Jewish Pesach festival, so the Sunday after Nisan 14, as the future pan-Christian Paschal date. (Note that, in the state of Israel, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread usually lasts seven days, whereas elsewhere it may last eight days, with some communities celebrating one or a few days extra or less.) In this way, Fr Nikodemus asserts, Christianity will evidence its roots in Judaism, and interfaith dialogue will

Scopelos, 'The Commitment to Ecumenism: Orientale Lumen', *Logos* 40 (1999), 351-369; Johan Meijer, 'Een katholieke variant: De Grieks-Katholieken in Oost-Europa', in: *Katholieken in Oost-Europa: Opleving, getuigenis en engagement*, eds. Cor Arends and Geert van Dartel (Kampen, 1989), 142-165, here 161-164. According to Rembert Weakland, 'Ecumenism and the Eastern Catholic Churches', *Logos* 40 (1999) 333-349, here 344-347, the specific religious identity of Greco-Catholics should not be the Latin usage which distinguishes them from the Orthodox, but essential 'Eastern' characteristics, such as a high sense of 'sacredness' in the liturgy, synodal structures and the special place of monasticism.

¹⁶⁵ Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 95 (Tübingen, 2003).

¹⁶⁶ Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus Judaeos-Texte; L'antijudaïsme des Pères*, eds. Auwers, Burnet and Luciani.

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.pro-oriente.at/?site=ne20210409110346> (last access on December 27, 2021),

be boosted. A concomitant advantage would be a break-through of the inner-Christian dilemma, namely the stalemate of the proponents of the Julian computation and those of the Gregorian.

In their appraisal of Schnabel's advance, other academicians, like the Austrian church historian Andrea Riedl, pointed out how sensitive this issue is, as the Easter date computation has been bound up, for centuries, with anti-Jewish discourse – think in this framework of the interpretation of the respective section of Nicaea I, mentioned above. Concurrently, Jewish scholars, such as the German rabbi Walter Homolka, appreciated the proposal concerned, on the one hand, while on the other, they cautioned for Christian appropriation of Jewish spiritual and liturgical property. In my view, Schnabel's move is visionary and laudable, but perhaps premature. Why? The Christian Holy Week and Paschal liturgies have actually featured, for quite a few centuries, anti-Jewish hymns and rituals. And in a great many worship texts, the old and new covenants were, and partly still are, opposed to each other, implying that God cancelled the covenant with the Jews, and redemption by God's Son from the old covenant was, and in part still is, proclaimed.¹⁶⁸ Avowedly, during the second half of the twentieth century, the churches, especially the Catholic (including several Eastern Catholic), the Anglican and the Protestant ones, have set out to revise their service books, purging them of anti-Jewish statements. And also in the Byzantine Orthodox tradition, attempts at revision are undertaken, with the French Orthodox catechism, *Dieu est vivant*, acting as herald. This harbinger denounces the Christian crimes against the Jews and points out that God never cancelled the divine covenant with the Jewish people; that Jesus, the Son of God, Mary and the apostles had 'Semitic faces'; and that Christians are like Judas in danger of being hypocrites and becoming traitors and slayers of Christ by betraying their fellow human beings.¹⁶⁹ And the seminal Greek Orthodox statement on social ethos, too, confirms Jesus' Jewishness and God's everlasting covenant with Israel; it deplores antisemitic violence, perpetrated by some Orthodox; and it fosters love and regard of Judaism.¹⁷⁰

Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go in this expurgation process and attain, in all fields of Christian liturgy and theology, the common conviction that holding on to God's holy name and keeping the covenant is a key hallmark of both Judaism and Christianity.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, substitution theories which reduce Israel, its Scripture and its Righteous to a historical prelude to the coming of Jesus – they thus deny due attention to the continuity of God's appearance throughout the Bible – can still be found in diverse types of Christian worship. In addition, multiple Orthodox believers – as we have noticed, especially in Russia, but also elsewhere – nurture ideas about the unchangeability of the 'God-given' Julian

¹⁶⁸ For an historical example, see, e.g.: Martin Klöckener, 'Die Sicht des Alten Testaments und der Juden im *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* des Durandus von Mende (ca. 1291)', in: *Analogie und Differenz*, eds. Bergmann and Kranemann, 119-141.

¹⁶⁹ *Dieu est vivant: Catéchisme pour des familles par une équipe de chrétiens orthodoxes* (Paris, 1979), 164-171.

¹⁷⁰ *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, eds. David Bentley Hart and John Chryssavgis (Brookline MA, 2020), 75-77 (no. 57).

¹⁷¹ Regarding Byzantine-rite Orthodoxy, see: Michael G. Azar, 'Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox: Jews and Judaism in the Holy Week and Pascha Observances of the Greek Orthodox Church', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10 (2015) 1-27; Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Anti-Jewish Rhetoric in Byzantine Hymnography: Exegetical and Theological Contextualization', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 61 (2017) 39-60; Elisabeth Theokritoff, 'The Orthodox Services of Holy Week: the Jews and the New Zion', *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 25 (2003) 25-50; Alexandru Ioniță, 'Byzantine Liturgical Texts and Modern Israelology: Opportunities for Liturgical Renewal in the Orthodox Church', *Studia Liturgica* 44 (2014) 151-162; idem, 'Byzantine Liturgical Hymnography: A Stumbling Stone for the Jewish – Orthodox Christian Dialogue?', *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (2019) 253-267; Alexandru Mihăilă, 'Facing Anti-Judaism in the Romanian Orthodox Church: Why the Need to Accommodate the Biblical and the Liturgical Texts?', *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (2019) 237-252; my 'Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 (2008) 369-387, and my 'Old Testament Saints and Anti-Judaism in the Current Byzantine Liturgy', in: *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Cult of Saints in Past and Present*, eds. Marcel Barnard, Paul Post and Els Rose, *Liturgia Condenda* 18 (Leuven, 2005), 145-159.

calendar and consider any adjustment to another computation model as treason to the authentic spiritual and liturgical legacy. Mutatis mutandis, such ideas can also be found in traditionalistic Roman Catholic circles. Not rarely, the said ideas are coupled with anti-Jewish, even antisemitic concepts. So, for all of these reasons, the time may not yet be ripe for Fr Nikodemus' idea. But I hope that I am wrong!

9. Final Considerations

Obviously, there is great need for careful education and pastoral sensitivity in approaching the question at hand. According to the aforementioned North American Consultation, it is essential that the ecclesiastical media 'take care to report on this issue with accuracy and fairness'. This group of theologians deems it necessary for both Orthodox and Catholic media to 'emphasize the hope and joy that a united Easter/Pascha witness will bring' to their churches and to the entire world; such a charge must also be assumed by the Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant and other Christian media. Indeed, as the consultation exhorts, 'there are significant pastoral needs at stake: can the members of our inter-church families celebrate Easter together? For the mission of the Church, a common celebration would support the unity we already share and help to build it further in the future. Like the Fathers of Nicaea, our bishops are called to be agents of healing to resolve once and for all this ancient dispute in the life of the Church. This change would benefit all Christians and enable them to proclaim together, with one voice, heart and mind, "Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!"'

A common Paschal cycle implies also that Eastern and Western Christianity can better share their liturgical theological treasures and their impressive worship services during the Great Lent, Holy Week, Easter and the fifty days of Pentecost. I admit that one could turn around this reasoning, to wit, that fortunately the duplication of the Paschal cycle enables people to celebrate its festivals twice in the same year. This argument seems, on the one hand, attractive and serves in Jerusalem, as we have noticed, also the practical purpose to steer the crowds of pilgrims in the right directions. Nonetheless, it contradicts the theological dimension of joint ecclesial testimony of Jesus' resurrection. Moreover, (a) planning of weddings of partners from denominationally mixed families – a common phenomenon in the Middle East – would be much easier if an array of calendar hindrances could be avoided; (b) as regards vacation, the current problem that Christmas and Easter fall for some students in their Christmas and Easter holidays, respectively, and for others not, could be solved if there were a joint computation of key feasts; and (c) from a culinary perspective, taking the fasting prescriptions into account, it is of high significance for mixed families not to be obliged to prepare two quite different menus – one for relatives still fasting with beans and water, and one for those already feasting with meat and wine – but be able to share one table.

Reciprocity and dialogue between hierarchy, 'lower' clergy, and laity is of utmost importance. Both in Catholicism and in Orthodoxy, laypeople – women and youth in particular – as well as 'ordinary' priests and deacons, are hardly involved in ecclesial policy-making. This results often in resentment and indifference. It would be a pity if rapprochement between East and West regarding the Paschal date would only be based on mutual understanding between different episcopates. Neglecting the laity and the 'lower' clergy might prove to be a backlash.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Cf. Nicholas E. Denysenko, 'Primacy, Synodality, and Collegiality in Orthodoxy: A Liturgical Model', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48 (2013) 20-44, here 43-44; We Choose Abundant Life Group, *We Choose Abundant Life*; Noël Ruffieux, 'Das Panorthodoxe Konzil: Vorbereitung, Durchführung und Rezeption', *Catholica* 67 (2013) 101-120.

The ecumenical relevance of a common Paschal date does not limit itself to the liturgy, to the form and content of the worship assembly. According to the French Roman Catholic expert in the field of sacramental theology, Louis-Marie Chauvet, the word of God celebrated in the liturgy, including the sermon, is inseparably connected with the divine word in Scripture heard in catechesis, and with the one lived out in diakonia and charity activity. If these diverse forms of God's word are separated, the liturgy risks becoming only navel-gazing, 'a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal' (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1).¹⁷³ As the Romanian Orthodox theologian Ion Bria (1929-2002) sets forth, there is also the 'liturgy after the liturgy',¹⁷⁴ and – I may add – the 'liturgy before the liturgy'. The liberating force of the Paschal Mystery, also of the common Easter date, must be put into everyday charity practice. Noticeably, several readings of the Roman-rite Paschal vigil are taken from *Genesis* and *Exodus*: The events of Creation, the Exodus and the Covenant are not only related to the liturgical rites, but refer also to everyday Christian life. The liturgy proclaims the experience of extrication and redemption by God. Concretely this means being freed from slavery, poverty and hunger, and the actualization of the biblical vision of food and shelter for all; life in peace and health, coexistence in solidarity, reconciliation, mercy and loyalty; the vision of a new world and a new covenant. This is not only what Creation, Exodus and Covenant are about, it also is what Christ's resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit imply. The triune God reaches out saving hands to the world, and believers are asked to enter into the community and love relationship of the three divine persons, and be touched, changed and converted by them. The process of transformation and conversion happens in and through the Holy Spirit, whose 'energizing' takes place not only on Pentecost – the fullness of the self-revelation of the Holy Trinity¹⁷⁵ – but always, because truly being church implies a continuous Pentecost. This concerns not only individual liturgical participation and spirituality, but also social care and the biblical commitment to fight poverty and injustice. The 'lex orandi' and the 'lex credendi' must be joined with the 'lex agendi', because true orthodoxy intersects with orthopraxy.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Du symbolique au symbole: Essai sur les sacrements, rites et symboles* 9 (Paris, 1979), 81-122. See also: *Die diakonale Dimension der Liturgie*, eds. Benedikt Kranemann and Thomas Sternberg, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 218 (Freiburg i.Br., 2006); Alexandros Papaderos, 'Aspekte orthodoxer Sozialethik', in: *Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik: Der Auftrag der Kirchen im größeren Europa*, eds. Ingeborg Gabriel, Alexandros Papaderos and Ulrich Körtner (Mainz, 2005), 23-126, here 62-75, 38-39; Ulrike Suhr, 'Gottesdienst und Diakonie', in: *Handbuch der Liturgik: Liturgiewissenschaft in Praxis und Theologie der Kirche*, eds. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, Michael Meyer-Blanck and Karl-Heinrich Bieritz (Göttingen, 2003), 673-684; my 'The Alliance between Liturgy and Diakonia as Witness of the Church: Theological Foundation and Several Examples', in: *La liturgie comme témoin de l'Église: LVIIe Semaine d'Études Liturgiques, Institut Saint-Serge, Paris, 28 juin-1 juillet 2010*, eds. André Lossky and Manlio Sodi, *Monumenta studia instrumenta liturgica* 66 (Vatican City, 2012), 239-255.

¹⁷⁴ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva, 1996). Cf. Dragica Tadic-Papanikolaou, 'Orthodox Contributions for the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia (the "Liturgy after Liturgy")', in: *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (Oxford, 2014), 725-732. The paragraphs of the Greek Orthodox statement on social ethos, *For the Life of the World*, commence with fragments of liturgical prayers, thus emphasizing the interconnectedness of worship and ethics. See also: Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria, *Social Mission Statement* (Vienna, 2006), nos. 285-308 [title of the original German 2003 version: *Sozialwort*].

¹⁷⁵ Gabriel Bunge, *Der andere Paraklet: Die Ikone der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit des Malermönchs Andrej Rubljov, mit einem Geleitwort von Sergej S. Averintsev* (Würzburg, 1994), *passim*. A fine English translation, made by the eminent Orthodox theologian Andrew Louth, is entitled *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood NY, 2007). Cf. my "'Glory to the Holy Trinity": Trinitarian Theology of the Byzantine Liturgical and Spiritual Tradition', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 64 (2012) 201-251.

¹⁷⁶ See the multidimensional discussion in: *"Ahme nach, was Du vollziehst...": Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik*, eds. Martin Stuflesser and Stephan Wahle, *Studien zur Pastoralliturgie* 22 (Regensburg, 2009).

The community of the three divine persons, their substantial interrelationship (περιχώρησις),¹⁷⁷ are a model for ecclesial unity. That is, diverse faith communities characterized by genuine ‘communio’ (κοινωνία) are, just as the Father, the Son and the Spirit (metaphorically speaking), simultaneously one and diverse.¹⁷⁸ Celebrating the foundational festival of Pascha together, in different rites, would stand as a landmark of this ecclesial harmony.

This applies, mutatis mutandis, also to the academia. It is not only that liturgy and ecumenism intersect,¹⁷⁹ but also that ecumenical scholarship, to wit, close collaboration of scholars from different ecclesial traditions, may foster high-quality research and contribute to the bringing about reconciliation and, not uniformity, but reciprocal solidarity.¹⁸⁰

Tradition is not passive and immovable, but an active, dynamic process.¹⁸¹ It does not consist in veneration of the burnt ashes, but in passing on the flame!¹⁸² Required is, by all

¹⁷⁷ Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), 1077-1078; Theodor Damian, ‘Perichoresis’, in: *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. I-II, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Chichester, 2011), 444-445.

¹⁷⁸ See, e.g., the reference to the prominent Anglican theologian Mary Tanner in: Grigorios Larentzakis, ‘Die Dreieinheit Gottes als Modell für die Ökumene der christlichen Kirchen aus orthodoxer Sicht’, in: *Trinität: Die Drei-Einheit Gottes im theologischen und künstlerischen Diskurs – Dokumentation des wissenschaftlichen Symposiums vom 19. bis 22. Juni 2011 in Graz*, eds. Peter Ebenbauer and Erich Renhart, Allgemeine wissenschaftliche Reihe 28 (Graz, 2012), 81-93, here 93.

¹⁷⁹ *Liturgie als Chance und Herausforderung für die Ökumene: Beiträge der Liturgiewissenschaft zur Einheit der Kirchen*, eds. Regina Augustin et al., Pro Oriente 41 (Innsbruck, 2018); Philipp Harnoncourt, ‘Die Bedeutung der Liturgie für die Verständigung der Kirchen (Koreferat)’, *Heiliger Dienst* 56 (2002) 5-65; *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (New York, 1997); Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis, 2015); Daniel Galadza, ‘Logikē latreia (Romans 12:1) as a Definition of Liturgy’, *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 52 (2011) 109-124; my ‘Eine faszinierende Dialektik: Die Wechselwirkung zwischen Liturgie und Ökumene’, in: *Zukunftsraum Liturgie: Gottesdienst vor neuen Herausforderungen*, eds. Peter Ebenbauer and Basilius J. Groen, Österreichische Studien zur Liturgiewissenschaft und Sakramententheologie / Austrian Studies of Liturgy and Sacramental Theology 10 (Vienna, 2019), 145-172.

¹⁸⁰ Robert F. Taft, ‘Perceptions and Realities in Orthodox-Catholic Relations Today: Reflections on the Past, Prospects for the Future’, in: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, eds. Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou, 23-44; Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome, 2001), 287-288. See also Taft’s retrospective of his academic career, ‘Good Bye to All That: Swansong of an Old Academician’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 59 (2015) 129-161, also published (slightly revised and updated) in: *Studies in Oriental Liturgy: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, New York, 10-15 June 2014*, eds. Bert Groen, Daniel Galadza, Nina Glibetic and Gabriel Radle, Eastern Christian Studies 28 (Leuven, 2019), 357-383.

¹⁸¹ See, e.g.: Job Getcha, ‘La tradition liturgique byzantine et la modernité’, in: *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, eds. Assaad E. Kattan and Fadi A. Georgi, Balamand Theological Conferences 1 (Tripoli [Lebanon] and Münster, 2010), 79-91; *Fundamentalism or Tradition: Christianity after Secularism*, eds. Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos (New York, 2019); Nicholas E. Denysenko, *The People’s Faith: The Liturgy of the Faithful in Orthodoxy* (Lanham MD, 2018), 186-192; Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 198-199; Kallistos Ware, ‘Tradition and Creativity’, *Sobornost, incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 42/1-2 (2020) 8-21; *The Living Tradition: Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of the Christian Tradition*, ed. Anton Houtepen, IIMO Research Publication 41 (Utrecht, 1995); John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood NY, 1975), 7-9, 13-26; Emmanuel Clapsis, ‘Tradition: An Orthodox-Ecumenical View’, in: idem, *Orthodoxy in Conversation: Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements* (Geneva and Brookline MA, 2000), 11-39; Robert F. Taft, ‘The 2001 Vatican Addai and Mari Decision in Retrospect: Reflections of a Protagonist’, in: *The Anaphoral Genesis of the Institution Narrative in Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: Acts of the International Liturgy Congress, Rome, 25-26 October 2011*, ed. Cesare Giraudo, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 295 (Rome, 2013), 317-334, esp. 333-334; Thomas Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform: A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition*, trans. Paul Meyendorff, pref. Robert F. Taft, Orthodox Liturgy Series 2 (Crestwood NY, 2010); Mark M. Morozowich, ‘Tradition and Natural Disaster: The Role of Liturgical Scholarship’, in: *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship: Proceedings of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Rome, 17-21 September 2008*, eds. Bert Groen, Steven Hawkes-Teeple and Stefanos Alexopoulos, Eastern Christian Studies 12 (Leuven, 2012), 1-17.

accounts, a kenotic spirituality, namely that the churches adopt an attitude of willingness to not make their own confessional identities absolute, but rather make sacrifices for unity.¹⁸³ Catholics, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglicans, Protestants and other Christians should not wait for the other denomination to take the first step with the aim to reach concord and expect it to make concessions – ecumenism is not about winning or losing. Just as Jesus emptied himself (Philippians 2:7), the established churches need an attitude of self-emptying, not unto a loss of their own essential characteristics, as some might fear, but unto life in its fullness.

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¹⁸² This adage is ascribed to Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), as well as to several other luminaries of intellectual and artistic life.

¹⁸³ Waław Hryniewicz, ‘Towards a More Paschal Christianity: Ecumenism and Kenotic Dimensions of Ecclesiology’, *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 91 (2001) 22-43; idem, ‘The Cost of Unity: The Papal Primacy in Recent Orthodox Reflection’, *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55 (2003) 1-27. During his visit to Rome in June 1995, also Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople used these words – see *Episkepsis* no. 520 (July 31, 1995) 10, 15. Cf. John A. Jillions, ‘Kenotic Ecumenism’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, eds. Wainwright and McPartlan, 645-662. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Francisco, John R. Quinn (1929-2017), accentuates in his book *The Reform of the Papacy: The Costly Call to Christian Unity* (New York, 1999) the necessity of making such sacrifices for unity. The former Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk and current Chaldean patriarch, Louis Sako, emphasizes the urgency of full-scale renewal in the Oriental Churches. In his opinion, such renewal can only happen if the hierarchy and clergy practice kenosis – see his ‘Kirchen brauchen Reform’, *ICO: Information Christlicher Orient* no. 15 (September 2004), 9-10.

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