

The Patristic Church Calendar: An Indissoluble Element of Universal Church Tradition

“Keep Thy Church in Orthodoxy, O Christ, and our lives in peace.”
(*Fifth Resurrectional stichera on “Lord, I have cried,” Tone 1*)

God-loving Orthodox Christians,

You are opening the first *Calendar* of the True (Old Calendar) Orthodox Church of Bulgaria—a canonical community uniting those members of the Bulgarian Church who, without brandishing blatant politico–ecclesial slogans, labor zealously in word and in deed, to the full extent of their powers, to preserve the Apostolic and Patristic purity of Holy Orthodoxy.

This first *Calendar* of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria is dedicated to that ever–memorable Hierarch, patriot, and zealot of our Holy Orthodox Faith, Metropolitan Clement of Turnovo (Vassil Drumev, 1841–1901). In 1993–94, a hundred years will have passed since the brutal mistreatment of this honorable Hierarch before a court which unjustly banished him to the Glojen Monastery.

Two other anniversaries occurred shortly before the publication of this *Calendar*. In 1993, we saw the passing of seventy years since the so–called “Pan–Orthodox” Council in Tzarigrad, which decided, albeit in an uncanonical manner, to reform the Church Calendar; 1993 also marked the twenty–fifth anniversary of the calendar reform in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The tragic decision of the “Pan–Orthodox” Congress of 1923 to replace the Church Julian Calendar with the so–called New Julian Calendar—which, by the end of 2800 and after 2900 will coincide fully with the Gregorian Calendar—was gradually accepted by the administrative authorities of a number of local Churches, among which, sad to say, was also the Bulgarian Church. The calendar reform is not a small, insignificant change, as those who advocate it would have us believe. It is one step on a slippery path that leads to a broader religious and ecclesiastical reform in the

spirit of the panheretical *rapprochement* of ecumenism, which is virtually a “transformation of all things into impiety” (Saint Theodore the Studite). In the name of *rapprochement* with Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants, the advocates of the calendar reform *have rent asunder the age-old liturgical unity of the Holy Orthodox Church.*

In those local Churches which have adopted the New Calendar in establishing the Festal *Menaion*, Sacred Feasts and the memory of Saints are celebrated thirteen days earlier than the corresponding events according to the Julian Calendar. From the sixth century on, when the Church once and for all established a uniform Festal Calendar and *Paschalion*, *there has never existed the divergence in time for the celebration of one and the same Feast* that we see today. This present divergence is quite obvious on the days of the Greater Feasts: the Nativity of Christ, Theophany, or the Dormition of the *Theotokos*. Some Orthodox fast while others feast; for example, the New Calendarists celebrate the Dormition of the *Theotokos* on what is the second day of the Fast preceding this great Feast on the Church Calendar. Not to mention the tragic case of the local Church of Finland, which celebrates even Pascha according to the Gregorian Calendar—separate from all other Orthodox and together with the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants. This improper divergence in the times at which Church Feasts are celebrated raises the question: “Who celebrates—we or the Church?” If the answer is, “We,” then we lessen and obliterate the sacred nature of the Church’s Feasts, subordinating them to incidental considerations and personal preferences. If we answer, “The Church,” then, *only a uniform time of celebration is possible, since the Church is One.*

Why is this uniformity in the time of the celebration of Feasts dependent on the Julian Calendar, and why is it that precisely this calendar is considered a *Church Calendar*, in the proper meaning of the word?

It is because the Julian Calendar is *vitally* linked to the Alexandrian *Paschalion* of the ancient Church, to a common system of calculating time known among the Byzantines and the Slavs as the “Great Indiction” and in the West as the “Great Cycle.” *It is pre-*

cisely this system of calculating time that has determined for over a thousand years (that is, until the Gregorian Calendar reform of 1582) the liturgical calendar of all Christian peoples. Only the system of the Great Indiction and the traditional Orthodox Paschalion conform to the requirements of the Seventh Apostolic Canon and the dicta set forth by the First Œcumenical Synod, which are confirmed in the First Canon of the Council of Antioch. These rules explicitly forbid the celebration of the Christian Pascha on the same day as the Jewish Passover. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants, as well as the Orthodox (!) Church of Finland, have adopted the Gregorian Paschalion, according to which the Pascha of Christ (Easter) occasionally falls on the same day as the Jewish Passover, if not often even before it (which is in discord with the order of the events in the last week of Jesus Christ's earthly life as we find it set out in the Gospels). It is not by accident that the New Calendarists (with the exception of the Church of Finland) have adopted the New Calendar only for the festal cycle for permanent Feasts (that is, those Feasts fixed to a definite calendar date). For they still calculate the moveable Feasts (those dependent on the date of Pascha) by the Julian Church Calendar. By so doing, they paste together, in a most artificial manner, the Church and New Julian (Gregorian) Calendars, using both at the same time and thus adding even greater confusion into the Church's liturgical life.

Advocates of the New Calendar tenaciously argue that the Gregorian Calendar is more chronologically precise when compared to the Julian. For its part, however, the Julian Calendar has indisputable mathematical advantages over the Gregorian—it is not by chance, for example, that it is still used in many chronological and astronomical calculations.

Chronological accuracy in and of itself, however, cannot be an absolute standard, as far as the Church Calendar is concerned. Otherwise, the Church would fall to permanent dependence on the progress of astronomical science, which would in turn inevitably lead to a common date for Pascha and the Jewish Passover, in violation of the Canons, that is, to a disruption of the common mind established by the Church Synods and Councils and of the

Tradition of the Fathers. "Time is a mystery," a certain Orthodox monk once said, "and a mystery can be approached only through a symbol.

"The Julian Calendar is an Icon of time. If we want to make the notion of 'time' material, as the Icon can be materialized by its transformation into a portrait, why should we, in any case, turn to the Gregorian Calendar? There are far more precise calendars, such as the Calendar of the Incas or that of Omar Khayyam, the mathematical specifications of which are brilliant, and an even more precise calendar may appear in the future. However, we should not reach out in the direction of the observatories. We, the Church, possess these mysteries of time, which have been inscribed in the Bible and in the works of the Fathers. These mysteries have been entrusted to us and we are obliged to reveal them to the world."

Let no man, therefore, imagine that we argue about times, months, and days or suffer privations and persecutions for the sake of full moons and equinoxes (*cf.* Colossians 2:16 [*"Let no man therefore judge you...in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days"*])). To us, the Great Indiction, the Julian Calendar, and the Orthodox *Paschalion* are not one system of measuring time among many others. They are the fruit of the collective genius and work of a number of anonymous champions of science and the Faith, an integral part of the precious heritage of our Universal Church Tradition, to which the Holy Orthodox Church holds firm, proclaiming Her Good Tidings to the world!

Bishop Photii of Triaditza