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The Easter Season

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THE EASTER SEASON

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Feast of the Resurrection has been called the most glorious feast in the Christian year. Easter is the climax for which the Church and Christians wait. From Septuagesima Sunday through the waiting and fasting of Lent, Christendom looks forward to the great day of victory and resurrection, the Feast of Easter. Yet, in spite of all of the praise heaped upon this day, the day of Easter is gradually losing its special importance. Christmas has taken such a place of prime importance that it almost completely overshadows Easter. Easter and its season, although universally observed and acknowledged, is in reality a feast of which the majority of clergy and laity know little.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate Easter and its season. The pertinent questions to be answered are these: What is the history of Easter, and how does this history effect the observance today? What special message do the propers have for the Church today? What is the accent of the season? How has Easter affected folkways and customs?

This problem of Easter and its season took on special meaning for the author during his vicarage year. For the first time the meaning of Easter and its season began to take on a new and fuller meaning. However, many problems still

presented themselves. When the great spiritual value of this season is considered and the lack of knowledge of this season is seen, it becomes imperative to study and present these facts. Consequently the investigation of Easter and its season was undertaken. The results of that investigation are presented in the present thesis.

As simple as the title, "The Easter Season," sounds, the term is ambiguous and, in many respects, practically indefinable. The Easter season can be from Septuagesima to Pentecost. At the opposite extreme is the view that the Easter season is the Feast of Easter and its octave. For purposes of this paper, the Easter season will be defined as the Vigil of Easter, Easter Sunday, and the season following Easter till Exaudi. According to this definition the Feast of the Ascension is included in the Easter season. The reason for this definition of the Easter season is to make the topic manageable as to size and scope.

Because of the limitations of time and space, the report will concern itself only with Easter and its season in the western tradition. At various points, however, the East cannot be overlooked if one is to gain a fair and complete view of this season. In such cases the eastern tradition will be taken into account. No special investigation is made into the hymns or music for the season since this would be beyond the limited scope of this paper.

Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglian sources have been

consulted to give an over-all view of the western tradition of the Easter season. However, in some cases it is to be noted that very little Lutheran and Anglican material is to be found. The recent re-emphasis of Holy Week, the Easter Vigil, and Easter in the Roman Communion has resulted in a wealth of material on this subject. To counteract this one-sided emphasis, German Lutheran authors have been used since little English material written by Lutherans is available.

The thesis has been organized into four chapters. The second chapter gives the historical foundations of the Easter season. In this chapter the denominational character is not stressed. The season is viewed rather from the complete western tradition.

The third chapter on the propers for the season does not presume to be an original interpretation. The interpretations of experts such as Pius Parsch and Strodach have been consulted and relied on heavily. The main emphasis in this section is on the present day Lutheran usage.

The final chapter deals with the customs of Easter. First, the customs of liturgical and theological importance are considered. However, Easter affects not only the worship and spiritual life of the people but also their social and folk customs. Therefore, the folk customs of Easter are also briefly reviewed.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF EASTER AND ITS SEASON

A. Easter, the Greatest Day in the Year

The Feast of the Resurrection is the climax of the Church's year, and the historical fact which it commemorates is the innermost center of the Christian life and eternal hope.¹ To be sure, in each Sunday celebration the totum opus redemptionis is present. The church year simply grew out of this Christian Sunday. But in a feast such as Easter this is unfolded in a richer and more dramatic form. Easter, being such a great feast, was at first the only feast of the whole year. Dom Odo Casel states, "The remaining festivals which gradually attached themselves to it live in its (Easter) luster."² The Church kept our Lord's resurrection as a weekly commemoration. This weekly commemoration was not displaced by the annual observance but was only re-emphasized thereby.³

The importance of Easter is readily seen from the time given to Easter in the Church calendar. In the Church's calendar major feasts are celebrated with an octave. Easter,

¹Paul Zeller Strodach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Church Publication House, c.1924), p. 149.

²Ernest B. Koenker, The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1954), p. 57.

³Strodach, The Church Year, p. 149.

however, is the greatest of the Christian feasts, solemnitas solemnitatum. Accordingly, the Church celebrates Easter not simply during one octave but during seven octaves and a day, a jubilee octave of fifty days.⁴

Yet, in spite of the fact that author after author can praise this day and season, calling it the most beautiful crown of the Church year in Christendom⁵ and the most important day in the year,⁶ something is lacking. Such men as Dr. Pius Parsch recognize this. He states:

Easter is the greatest feast in the Church's calendar. It is the feast from which all others stem. Every Sunday is Easter in miniature. Nevertheless, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we no longer realize or appreciate what Easter really means. Other feasts like Christmas, Sacred Heart, and All Souls have taken precedence, while Easter has receded in importance and dignity.⁷

This fact is true not only in the Roman Communion but also in the Lutheran Church. Even though the Lutheran Church maintains that Easter is the oldest, greatest, and holiest day and time of the year, it does not celebrate Easter with the festive joy that the Eastern and Roman Communions do. Heinrich Alt feels that this is perhaps due to the fact that

⁴Pius Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, translated by William G. Heidt and Rudolph Kraus (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1954), III, 46.

⁵Wilhelm Löhe, Haus, Schul und Kirchenbuch für Christen des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses (Stuttgart: Verlag von S. G. Liesching, 1859), II, 21.

⁶Charles Alexander, The Church's Year (London: Oxford University Press, c.1950), p. 93.

⁷Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 12.

the Lutheran Church does not fast. There is no physical reminding of the approaching day of resurrection.⁸

Perhaps, however, the loss of much of the joy of Easter is due to the fact that Christian people have tended to forget the heart of Easter. The heart of Easter is our Lord's glorious resurrection from the dead. By this act Jesus Christ showed that He was truly God. As this central fact is stressed and as it becomes meaningful in the lives of Christians, a new appreciation of Easter has a chance to develop.⁹

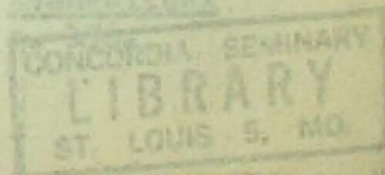
B. Easter in Relation to the Church Year

To get a true understanding of Easter, the day and its season must be viewed in its entire setting. It is impossible to understand merely by concentrating on one day or one season without seeing this feast and its season in the whole church year.

The system of corporate worship that the Church possesses today was not born of scientific exactness, but of spiritual experience. It developed against a background of historic depth and consciousness with annually repeated commemorations of scriptural facts and persons. The church year constitutes an effective and beautiful way of preserving and presenting

⁸Heinrich Alt, Das Kirchenjahr des christlichen Morgen- und Abendlandes mit seinen Festen, Fasten und Bibellektionen, Vol. II in Der christliche Cultus in drei Abtheilung (Berlin: G. W. F. Müller, 1860), p. 504.

⁹Alexander, op. cit., p. 93.



the whole body of fundamental Christian truth in devotional form. This regular review of Christian essentials is theologically adequate, devotionally inspiring, and pedagogically sound.¹⁰ The beneficial use of the church year might be summarized as historically warranted, educational, and conservative as well as salutary in its effect.¹¹

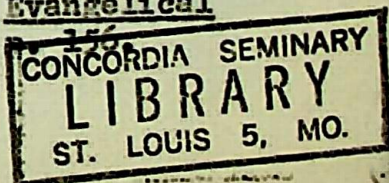
The benefits of the church year have been recognized by an ever increasing number of Protestant Churches. The National Council of Churches has now set up a Protestant Christian year for use by its member churches. Up to this time only the major days of Christmas and Easter were celebrated in Protestant Churches. The need to tie these days into the total structure of the worshiping Church was realized.¹²

The church year is more than days of a calendar or a wonderful system of commemorative days to tie the year into a bundle. The church year is sacramental. God appears in time. He steps out of eternity into time and fills it with grace. God does not merely come abstractly into time, but He redeems, saves, and fills the Church with grace. The

¹⁰Luther Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 427.

¹¹Frederick Gotwald, The Value of the Observance of the Church Year (Philadelphia: Board of Education of the United Lutheran Church, c.1924), p. 15.

¹²Ilion Jones, A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1954),



time is therefore "God-filled" time.¹³ It is in this God-filled time then that the Church lives, always conscious of her past; perpetuating the life of her founder in the actuality of the present. It is a re-living as though it were wholly a new experience for the testimony that this may bear to the world and the inspiration it will be to her children.¹⁴ It is into this re-living that Easter is placed as the crown of the year. The eastern Church marks this fact very forcibly by beginning the new church year with the fast preparatory to Easter.¹⁵

The full church year may be viewed in several ways. It may be taken as a whole. The four Sundays in Advent remind the Church of the four thousand years before the birth of Christ. This is followed by our Lord's birth, His circumcision, life, passion, death, and resurrection. The season of Easter, a relatively long period of the year, deals with a relatively short period in the life of our Lord. Only in this season does the Church commemorate the life of our Lord on a day for day basis as she follows Him from the empty tomb to the mount of His Ascension. Finally, the period from Pentecost to the end of the year deals with the life of the

¹³Pius Parsch, Volksliturgie (Klosterneuberg: Volksliturgisches Apostolat, 1952), p. 606.

¹⁴Strodach, The Church Year, p. 7.

¹⁵Gotwald, op. cit., p. 1.

Church till the end of the age.¹⁶

Parsch also believes that the church year can be understood on the basis of the two great feasts of the year. He calls them the winter and the summer feasts, Christmas and Easter. Each is followed by a festival season; Christmas by Epiphany, and Easter by Whitsunday, with Easter as the high-point of the year.¹⁷ In either view of the year, Easter still stands as the summit day, the capstone. It is from this feast that the whole year receives validation.

C. Easter in its Relation to Sunday

As Easter stands like a giant in the church year, it nevertheless has importance for every Sunday of the year. Each week may be classified as a church year in miniature, for every Sunday is a reminder of the day of the resurrection.¹⁸ Sunday has always had close ties with Easter. While Sunday played no important role in our Savior's ordinary life, it suddenly became important at the climax of His life and thus also in the life of the Church. It was on Sunday that Jesus (1) entered Jerusalem; (2) rose from the grave; (3) appeared to the apostles; (4) appeared to St. Thomas; and (5) poured

¹⁶Parsch, Volksliturgie, p. 603.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 608.

¹⁸Paul Graff, Geschichte der Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands bis zum Eintritt der Aufklärung und des Rationalismus (Göttingen: Banderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1921), p. 111.

out His Holy Spirit.¹⁹ It must be pointed out, however, that the Feast of Easter was not the source of Sunday, but rather that Sunday was the source of Easter, the foundation of the entire Easter structure.²⁰

Sunday itself finds its origins in the New Testament. The designation, the Lord's Day, is found in Revelations. The use of the name, Sunday, dates from the middle of the second century where it is found in Justin Martyr's Apology written at Rome between 148 A.D. and 161 A.D.²¹

As the Sabbath provided the model of a weekly day of worship, so its general influence is demonstrated by the fact that for a considerable time the Christian Sunday began at six the preceding evening. This fact is stated by The Testament of Our Lord, a manual of worship which represents the liturgical use of Asia Minor or Syria about the middle of the fourth Christian century.²²

In the second century there are various references which firmly underline the connection between Sunday and the resurrection. Ignatius of Antioch, martyred in 117 A.D. during his journey to Rome, wrote from Smyrna to the Magnesians.

¹⁹Wilfred Tunink, The Sanctification of Sunday (Conception, Missouri: The Liturgical Conference, Inc., c.1949), p. 66.

²⁰Allen McArthur, The Evolution of the Christian Year (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, c.1953), p. 13.

²¹Ibid., p. 14.

²²Ibid., p. 15.

He testifies to the connection and at the same time, contrasts the Lord's Day with the Sabbath. He states, "If then they who walk in ancient customs come to a new hope, no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord's Day, on which also our life sprang up through Him and His death. . . ."23

Justin Martyr writes in his Apology, "Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead."24

The binding link between Sunday and the resurrection may become more obvious when it is remembered that primitive Christian worship seems to have taken place at an early hour of the morning. The account in Acts indicates that it began before midnight. The letter of Pliny the Younger in 112 A.D. states, "The Christians have the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light."25

From the pilgrim Etheria, who made a visit to Jerusalem in the Fourth century, close connection between Easter and Sunday in the primitive Church is evident. The Sunday service in Jerusalem, she tells us, included the reading of

²³McArthur, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁴Ibid., p. 18.

²⁵Ibid.

the story of the resurrection. This took place on the Lord's Day and throughout the year.²⁶

About the middle of the fifth century Leo, bishop of Rome, communicating with Dioscurus, bishop of Alexandria, emphasized that ordinations should take place on Sunday and remarked, ". . . the beginning of the preceding night forms part of that period, and undoubtedly belongs to the day of resurrection as is clearly laid down with regard to the Feast of Easter. . . ." By the reference to Easter he means that the termini of the Lord's Day may be observed with great distinctness in the annual festival of the Christian Pascha.²⁷

Every Lord's Day is in a real sense then a little Easter. However, a problem still remains in the Easter--Sunday relationship. It has been pointed out by scholars that the primitive worship was eucharistic and that the setting of this eucharist was in a common evening meal. How does the morning celebration of a normal Sunday result?

The Jewish and hellenistic practice was to hold an evening meal, $\delta\epsilon\iota\pi\eta\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma$, with a eucharistic celebration included; however, in a short time the meal disappeared. There was nothing to stop the choice of another hour. Since Sunday as the day of resurrection was early promoted for weekly worship, the next step was easy. The early morning hour was

²⁶Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷Ibid., p. 16.

chosen since it was the time of our Lord's resurrection. Sunrise became the picture of Christ rising.²⁸ The Acts chapter twenty account points out how early this shift occurred.

While Easter depends on Sunday and Sunday is considered a little Easter, this has remained the case largely in the realm of theory. According to Gregory Dix it has had little appeal to popular piety in any part of Christendom. Sunday, it seems, has always been a stop gap, something for the liturgy to fall back on when the historical cycle has nothing more to offer.²⁹

D. Easter, its Name

There is considerable question as to the name of this festival and season. Since the origin of the Christian Easter is found in the Old Testament Passover, the investigation of the name must begin at this point. The Hebrew word is פֶּסַח from the root פָּחַח. The Aramaic used at the time of our Lord was פֶּסַח. The meaning is "passing over."³⁰ Gentile Christians unacquainted with Hebrew were led to derive the word Pascha from the Greek verb πᾶσχειν,

²⁸Joseph Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, translated by Francis A. Brunner (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., c.1951), p. 17.

²⁹Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Second edition; Westminster, England: Dacre Press, c.1945), p. 359.

³⁰Joseph Bingham, Origines Ecclesiasticae--The Antiquities of the Christian Church (London: Henry C. Bohn, 1856), II, 1148.

meaning to suffer.³¹

It is impossible to be absolutely certain of the origin of the name Easter. The Venerable Bede, the great scholar of the early English Church, is the authority for the derivation of the word from the Anglo-Saxon or Norse goddess of Spring, Eostre or Ostara, to whom the month Eastur or April was sacred. The pagan name was retained after the christianization of Britain.³² Modern philologists have traced the term Easter and the German word Ostern to the old German word urstan, meaning "to rise."³³ It would seem that in the light of this, the term Easter, even though derived from a pagan goddess, is a suitable name.

The name Easter is far from being universal. It is used among the English speaking people and among the German speaking people in the form Ostern. The French hark back to the Greek calling it Pasque.³⁴ The Greek Church names the day Lampra, meaning Bright Day.³⁵ The Russian Church calls it Resurrection Day, BOCKPECEHb.³⁶

³¹Charles Hefele, A History of the Christian Councils (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark, 1894), p. 307.

³²"Easter," The Lincoln Library, edited by Edwin Valentine Mitchel; et al. (Buffalo, New York: The Frontier Press, c.1953), p. 2070.

³³Strodach, The Church Year, p. 150.

³⁴James L. Monks, Great Catholic Festivals (New York: Henry Schuman, c.1951), p. 33.

³⁵Strodach, The Church Year, p. 150.

³⁶Tunink, op. cit., p. 37.

E. Length of the Easter Season

The ancient Church commonly included fifteen days in the whole Pasch; that is, the week before Easter and the week following. The week before Easter was called the Pascha *σταυρώσιμον* or the Pasch of the Cross. The week after Easter was called Pascha *ἀναστάσιμον* or the Pasch of the Resurrection. The Christian Passover included the passion as well as the resurrection of Christ who is the true Paschal Lamb. The Pascha, according to the ancient Church, had a wider connotation. In keeping with this, the Roman emperor Theodosius decreed the vacation of the Pascha was to include seven days before the resurrection and seven days after.³⁷

However, the length of this season is far from being clearly defined. There are almost as many views as to the length of the Easter season as there are authors on the subject of the church year.

Generally speaking, it would seem that Lutheran authorities hold that the Easter season extends from Easter to the first vespers of Pentecost. Ascension is a short or minor segment of the complete season of Easter. Thus, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost are the three major festivals and seasons of the year.³⁸

³⁷Bingham, *op. cit.*, p. 1148.

³⁸Galvin P. Swank, A Catechism in Christian Worship (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, c.1927), p. 67.

A Lutheran scholar like Alt, however, takes the Feast of the Ascension out of the Easter orbit. He states that Ascension is definitely part of the time of Pentecost.³⁹

Roman Catholic scholars include Pentecost in the Easter season or cycle. For example, Pius Parsch states that the Easter season covers the period from Easter to the Saturday after Pentecost.⁴⁰ In this country the authority of The Catholic Encyclopedia says that the season extends from the vigil of Easter to the first vespers of Trinity.⁴¹

Finally, some authors extend the season to its greatest limits and include Lent. The differentiation is made between the Easter season and the Easter cycle. The complete Easter cycle includes the forty days of Lent through the week after Whitsunday to the Feast of the Holy Trinity. Inside of this larger Easter cycle, the Easter season is defined as including Easter Sunday to Ascension Day. This particular definition of Easter gives the cycle a period of ninety-seven days.⁴²

As was stated in the introduction, the term "Easter Season" will be used to denote the period from the Easter Vigil through the Exaudi since the majority of Lutheran

³⁹Alt, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴⁰Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 46.

⁴¹Frederick Holweck, "Easter," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, c.1909), V, 225.

⁴²Lohe, op. cit., p. 39.

authorities thus define the Easter Season.

F. The Easter Controversy

In any study of Easter and its importance, it is impossible to overlook the Easter controversy that rocked the third and fourth century Church. For the sake of completeness, this paper will treat briefly the major controversy in the history of Easter.

The early method for setting the date of Easter seems to be shrouded in obscurity. By 195 A.D. a definite rule had been developed which the western churches generally followed. This rule, it seems, was considered to have been handed down from apostolic times, although this is considered doubtful by reputable scholars today. Simultaneously with the western rule, another rule for setting the date was adopted in the churches of Asia Minor. Dom Gregory Dix feels that the date used by Asia Minor may have been a result of the Judaizers of whom St. Paul wrote.⁴³

Since the Old Testament is regarded as a figure of the New Testament, Christians have always recognized in the pass-over lamb of the Jews the prototype of Christ. St. John the Baptist called Him the Lamb of God. St. Paul called our Lord $\tau\acute{o} \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\alpha \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$.

Although of apostolic origins, it would seem that the

⁴³Dix, op. cit., p. 337.

apostles did not determine how or when Easter was to be celebrated.⁴⁴ Thus all agreed on the observance of Easter but differed as to when the celebration should be held. Some kept it precisely on a stated day each year; others, mainly the Christians of Asia Minor, kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the first moon no matter on what day it fell. Still others, mainly the western churches, deferred the celebration to the first Sunday after the first full moon. Finally, according to Epiphanius, a small group in Cappadocia kept the Pascha on the twenty-fifth of March which is ordinarily observed as the Feast of the Annunciation. This March celebration was based on a date suggested in the apocryphal book, the Acts of Pilate. According to the Venerable Bede, this date was kept in Gaul till the beginning of the third century. However, St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons during the third century, never refers to such a date. It can be concluded that Bede had misinformation.⁴⁵ This was the state of affairs at the beginning of the third century.

In general, the main lines were drawn up between the churches of the West and the churches of Asia Minor. However, a third factor played into the whole controversy; that of the heretical sect, the Ebionites. The Ebionites insisted upon the continuance of the obligation of the ancient law, the old legal Passover. Their festival was properly a Jewish

⁴⁴Wefele, op. cit., p. 299.

⁴⁵Bingham, op. cit., p. 1148.

and not a Christian festival. The other protagonists felt that the prototype had ceased when it was accomplished in Christ. The West and Asia Minor disagreed on the time of Easter and the fast.⁴⁶

The Pascha of the ancient Church generally was a unitive commemoration of the cross and the resurrection.⁴⁷ The churches of the West felt that the festival of the cross and the resurrection, culminating as it did at "cockcrow" with the conclusion of the fast and beginning the rejoicing in Christ's victory, must coincide with the weekly commemoration of the resurrection, the Lord's Day. It ought, therefore, to fall on the Sunday succeeding the fourteenth of Nisan. The Asian churches must have been impressed by the apparent appropriateness of celebrating the festival of the cross and resurrection on the ancient day of the fourteenth of Nisan, the day when the paschal lambs were sacrificed. Indeed, this was regarded as a type of the crucifixion. By the Asian lunar calendar the Pascha might fall on any day of the year. Thus the observation might be made that Asia began from the passion whereas the other Christians began from the resurrection.⁴⁸ It is held by some scholars that the real controversy developed from the Asian false

⁴⁶Hefele, op. cit., p. 300.

⁴⁷McArthur, op. cit., p. 100.

⁴⁸Ibid.

interpretation of St. John, chapter eighteen, verse 28.⁴⁹

In summary, one party attached more importance to the day of the week while the other attached more importance to the date.⁵⁰

In the study of this controversy it is well to remember that the majority of the Christians regulated the celebration according to the Sunday date. The Quartodecimans, who held to a strict observance of the fourteenth of Nisan, were in the minority. Actually it is not accurate to speak of the East as opposed to the West in this controversy. A great number of eastern provinces also celebrated on Sunday. In support of their claims the Quartodecimans appealed to St. John and St. Philip while the other party appealed to St. Peter and St. Paul who, they maintained, introduced the custom.⁵¹

Thus far the basis for the whole controversy has been viewed. However, the concrete historical facts of the controversy must yet be viewed. The first hint of the controversy was the decree of Pius of Rome in 147 A.D. His pastoral letter demanded that the Pascha be celebrated on the Lord's Day.⁵² This edict of the bishop of Rome ran counter

⁴⁹"Quartodeciman Controversy," The Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Edwin Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 876.

⁵⁰Hefele, op. cit., p. 302.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 307.

⁵²Bingham, op. cit., p. 1148.

to what many of the bishops of Asia Minor had been practicing. Around 155 A.D. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, journeyed to Rome to discuss the matter with Anicetus, the bishop of the city of Rome. Polycarp had been a student of the apostle St. John, and he vigorously maintained that he was following the apostolic tradition of St. John. Anicetus held that the tradition of Rome was that taught by St. Peter and St. Paul. The talks ended with neither side able to convince the other.⁵³ It is to be noted that there was no anathematizing by either party; neither side felt compelled to force the other to accept his day of celebration.

With the consecration of Victor as bishop of Rome, the controversy entered its second stage. Victor forbade the celebration on the fourteenth of Nisan, maintaining that Easter could be celebrated only on Sunday. This move was vigorously countered by Polycrates, the bishop of Ephesus. Victor now presumed to excommunicate the Asian churches that celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, opposed this and in the name of peace prevailed upon Victor.⁵⁴ As a result of this open break, a large number of bishops gathered in Caesarea in 198 A.D. to try to settle the question once and for all. They compromised by stating that Easter must be celebrated between the twenty-second of

⁵³"Church Year," Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Edwin Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 232.

⁵⁴McArthur, op. cit., p. 102.

March and the twentieth of April. This, of course, did not settle anything.⁵⁵

The third century saw the complete confounding and confusion of the whole issue. Many meetings and conferences with bishops were held. Most of the bishops felt that the mysteries of the Lord's resurrection could be celebrated on no day save Sunday and that day alone should end the paschal fast.⁵⁶ In spite of the fact that solemn bishops could agree to this, a scholar of the magnitude of Tertullian could declare without misgivings that Christ suffered on the twenty-fifth of March. This particular tradition was carried into many calendars of the Middle Ages.⁵⁷

The question was further complicated by the break down of the Jewish calendar. The Christians had relied upon the Jewish celebration of the Passover in order to fix the fourteenth of Nisan. With the destruction of Jerusalem the celebration of the Passover had fallen more and more into disuse. Finally no one was sure on what precise day the fourteenth of Nisan did fall. They also faced the question: "How can the lunar date of the fourteenth of Nisan be reconciled with the solar year?"⁵⁸

⁵⁵Löhe, op. cit., p. 23.

⁵⁶McArthur, op. cit., p. 100.

⁵⁷Francis E. Gigot, "Calendar," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, c.1908), III, 160.

⁵⁸Hefele, op. cit., p. 317.

At the end of the third century the controversy was resolved into two methods of celebration: (1) If a Johannan Quartodeciman acted according to the equinox, he always celebrated Easter exactly on the day of the full moon after the equinox without minding on what day of the week it fell, or whether it coincided with the Jewish fourteenth of Nisan.

(2) The Western Christian acted according to the equinox and celebrated Easter on the Sunday after the full moon which followed the vernal equinox. If the full moon fell on Sunday, he celebrated the next Sunday because the resurrection ought not be observed on the day of Christ's death but always after.⁵⁹

In 314 the Council of Arles endeavoured to establish uniformity. The Council tried to suppress all other celebrations in favor of the Roman mode. However, it failed, as had the previous attempts.⁶⁰

The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. took the Easter controversy into its agenda and ruled in favor of the western date of celebration. Easter was to be always on a Sunday, but it should never be celebrated at the same time that the Jews celebrated the Passover.⁶¹ The mathematical computations of the Alexandrian scholars were followed in the decision.⁶²

⁵⁹Hefele, op. cit., p. 317.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 322.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 325.

⁶²Strodach, The Church Year, p. 151.

Differences did not cease after Nicea. Alexandria and Rome could not agree on the time of the equinox. For example, one year Rome picked the eighteenth of March as the equinox while Alexandria picked the twenty-first of March. In order to remedy this, the Synod of Sardina in 343 A.D. took up the question and tried to regulate the equinox by means of mutual concessions. Unfortunately, the Arian heresy was running rampant at this time, and this caused general disregard for the Sardinian decrees.⁶³

The wide divergence can be seen from a letter of St. Ambrose. In the letter St. Ambrose pointed out that in 387 A.D. Easter was celebrated on the twenty-first of March, the eighteenth of April, and the twenty-fifth of March. In 577 A.D. a similar divergence occurred. Gaul celebrated on the twenty-first of March, Italy on the eighteenth of April, and Egypt on the twenty-fifth of April.⁶⁴

At the time of Dionysius the Less, a nineteen-year cycle was set up. This cycle was adopted by Rome and Italy. Finally under Charles the Great the nineteen year cycle triumphed and the Continent was united on the Easter celebration. The Quartodecimans had gradually disappeared.⁶⁵ However, Irish and British Christianity did not fall into this general

⁶³Hefele, op. cit., p. 329.

⁶⁴Bingham, op. cit., p. 1151.

⁶⁵Hefele, op. cit., p. 331.

pattern until well into the eighth century.⁶⁶

The date of Easter was still far from being settled. By following the Julian calendar, the date of Easter was ten days behind the solar reckoning by the sixteenth century. As a result, in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII introduced the calendar of the Jesuit scholar Clovius. This calendar was immediately adopted by the Roman Catholic countries. The Greek Church would not accept it and has not accepted it to this very day. As a result, the present day Orthodox Julian calendar is twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar.⁶⁷ Incidentally, the use of the Gregorian calendar now makes it possible to celebrate on the same day as the Jews. This was forbidden by the Council of Nicea's rule.

Protestant countries did not accept the Gregorian calendar for almost two centuries. Finally on the sixteenth of April in 1777, the Corpus Evangelicorum gathered at Regensburg and adopted the Gregorian calendar.⁶⁸

In recent years the question of changing the date of Easter has again been suggested. The practical reasons for the reform are the dislocation of school terms, desire in northern lands to have milder weather for the first holiday of the year, and, in Great Britain, the importance of having only one Easter holiday in the financial year that ends on

⁶⁶F. C. Burkitt, Christian Worship (Cambridge, England: The University Press, c.1930), p. 35.

⁶⁷Hefele, op. cit., p. 331.

⁶⁸Löhe, op. cit., p. 24.

the fifth of April.⁶⁹

In 1926 a League of Nations committee reported in favor of fixing Easter on the Sunday following the second Saturday in April. This particular report was adopted by the British Parliament in 1928 on the condition of universal adoption of this report.⁷⁰

As late as 1949 the Lutheran scholar Peter Brunner brought up the question of the Easter date once again. To make things less confusing he suggested that the tradition of setting aside the twenty-fifth of March as the day our Lord suffered and died might be followed. The following Sunday would then be celebrated as Easter. The second solution was to equate the fourteenth of Nisan with the fourteenth of April, celebrating Easter on the following Sunday.⁷¹

At the present time the old Nicean rule is followed by the West with the modification of the Gregorian calendar. The Orthodox Communions follow the Nicean rule without the addition of the relatively new Gregorian calendar.

G. The Ancient Church's Unitive Celebration of Easter

Many Christian festivals were set up as counter festivals

⁶⁹W. K. Lowther Clarke, "The Calendar," Liturgy and Worship (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, c.1932), p. 205.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Peter Brunner, "Die Sonntage in Jahre der Kirche," Der Gottesdienst an Sonn - und Feiertagen (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1949), p. 81.

to rival pagan celebrations. However, such was not the case with Easter. Easter was a transformed festival of one that was native to the Church's immediate environment; that is, Judaism. The festival of the unleavened bread took place in the spring at the beginning of the barley harvest. This spring festival of the Passover recalled the liberation from Egypt, the slaying of the firstlings of the flock, the slaying of the first born, the unleavened bread, and the haste of the departure. The Passover was a day of deliverance.⁷²

The primitive Christian Pascha was a commemoration of the cross and resurrection. The early Easter was of a redemptive character rather than an historic commemoration as with the Church today. Like the Jewish Passover, it commemorated a deliverance from bondage and sin into the everlasting kingdom of God.⁷³ The early Pascha (according to a trustworthy source) included not only the resurrection but also the crucifixion, the ascension, and, even in a wider sense, the incarnation and the parousia. This was the day of deliverance.⁷⁴

The Passover, which in the Jewish community was the interpretation of the Exodus, became to the Christian the interpretation of what was at hand, that is the entering of our Lord into His Kingdom through the gate of suffering, death, and the resurrection. This same emphasis of the

⁷²McArthur, op. cit., p. 71.

⁷³Dix, op. cit., p. 339.

⁷⁴Tunink, op. cit., p. 81.

Pascha is seen in the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. The Pascha in the primitive Church was a unitive celebration of the cross and the resurrection. As a result, the Christian Passover developed into an all-night festival divorced from the Jewish date of celebration, but linked with the weekly liturgical day of the Church, Sunday, the day of resurrection.⁷⁵

F. E. Brightman says,

It is neither the commemoration of the passion nor of the resurrection, but both. Nor, as far as I know, is there any reference to Good Friday until we find it towards the end of the fourth century in Jerusalem, the original home and fountain head of all this type of realism, where so far as possible all events of the Gospel, from Palm Sunday to Low Sunday, are commemorated in some degree dramatically, at their proper times and places.⁷⁶

Dom Gregory Dix relates in his edition of the Apostolic Tradition,

It is simply the Jewish Passover feast transcended and Christianized. . . . It is simply the feast of the Christian redemption. . . . The Christian redemption was effected by the passion and resurrection of Christ in combination, viewed as a single act. There is no idea anywhere in Christendom, before the fourth century, of a separate commemoration of the passion on Good Friday and the resurrection on Easter Sunday.⁷⁷

Hippolytus, in his Apostolic Tradition of 217 A. D., states,

Those who are to receive baptism shall fast on the Friday and on the Saturday. And on the Saturday the bishop

⁷⁵McArthur, op. cit., p. 79.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁷Ibid.

shall assemble those who are to be baptized in one place, and shall bid them all to pray and bow the knee. And laying his hand on them he shall exercise every evil spirit. . . . And they shall spend all the night in vigil, reading the Scriptures to them and instructing them. . . . And at the hour when the cock crows they shall first all pray over the water. When they come to the water let it be pure and flowing. And they shall baptize the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family.⁷⁸

The conclusion that is to be drawn from this extract is that the Pascha lasted throughout the night at which time various lessons were read. The vigil culminated at dawn with baptism which was immediately followed by the prayers of the faithful and the Holy Communion. The paschal fast normally extended over Friday and Saturday, but in cases of necessity the former could be omitted. There is not the slightest indication of anything in the nature of Good Friday; and, indeed, the Friday is less important than the Saturday.⁷⁹

The Didascalia, a third century Syrian document, prescribes in Chapter XXI a six day paschal fast. The fast was completed by the vigil of Saturday--Sunday. During the vigil the reading of the Scriptures was very important as in the Apostolic Tradition. The hope of the resurrection entered only slightly into the vigil, since the main stress was on the passion of our Lord. The culmination of the vigil was the resurrection theme and the celebration of the Eucharist at three in the morning. This document's description gives

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁹Ibid.

strong evidence regarding the unitive character of Easter as the Pascha of the cross and resurrection.⁸⁰

There is a striking piece of evidence from Cappadocia in a sermon preached by Gregory of Nazianzus to the townsfolk in 362 A.D. "Yesterday the Lamb was slain and the door posts were anointed, and Egypt bewailed her first born. Today we have clean escaped from Egypt." This vigorous antithesis apparently contrasts the Saturday and the Sunday. The question of Friday does not begin to arise. Gregory is manifestly setting overagainst the Saturday of the paschal fast the Sunday of paschal joy. Nevertheless, it is all part of the one commemoration, the one Pascha, the Christian Passover.⁸¹

In the second century the development of the stations, Friday being the weekly commemoration of the cross, led to Friday before Easter being associated with the paschal fast of Saturday and thus to the formation of the root of Good Friday. By the fourth century this was fully developed so that the unitive festival had resolved itself into distinct historical parts.⁸²

A new historical understanding of the festival developed. The key point in the old system, the eschatological view, was changed to an historical-eschatological view with the greater emphasis on the historical. Jerusalem was the center of this

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 93.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 97.

⁸²Ibid., p. 107.

fourth century innovation.⁸³

The new historical emphasis of Easter can be traced to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop of that city from 350 A.D. to 386 A.D. In 385 A.D. Etheria, superior of a convent in Galicia in Western Spain, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and recounted in her diary the full historical Easter celebration. In 345 A.D., several years before Cyril became bishop of Jerusalem, he authored his Catecheses in which the section on Easter made no mention of any historical commemoration. Thus it would appear that the whole historical Easter celebration developed in Jerusalem during Cyril's episcopate. It is Cyril's Easter observance that has become the basis for the Church's observance of this culminating point of the church year.⁸⁴

In Constantinople, Carthage, or Rome, a development of this nature would not have been evolution but revolution. It was otherwise in Jerusalem. In and around the city of Jerusalem were the sacred sites of our Lord's passion and resurrection. At Jerusalem the Christian year, especially Holy Week, was intimately and topographically related to the sanctuaries of the holy places. Cabrol recounts that the Christian year before the fourth century hardly constituted a liturgical cycle. The original contribution of the Jerusalem Church in that century was not simply the creation of festivals, but

⁸³Dix, op. cit., p. 348.

⁸⁴Monks, op. cit., p. 34.

also the introduction of order and cohesion and the sense of advance in the movement from Epiphany to Pentecost.⁸⁵

The full growth of Good Friday as we know it meant that the commemoration of the passion was detached from the unitive Pascha, which eventually came to designate the resurrection alone.

From a sermon by St. John Chrysostom in 388 A.D. it would appear that by this time Good Friday was accepted in Antioch, but that Saturday of Holy Week was still associated with the passion.⁸⁶

In 400 A.D. St. Augustine said, "Consider now with attention these three most sacred days, the days signalized by the Lord's crucifixion, rest in the grave, and resurrection." The developed concept of Good Friday and Easter is clearly revealed by this quotation.⁸⁷

H. The Easter Vigil

As has been pointed out in the previous section, the Christian Easter celebration was a transformation of the old Jewish Passover. As such, it was always celebrated during the night into the next morning. The waiting of the night culminating in the morning celebration came to be known as the Easter Vigil.

⁸⁵McArthur, op. cit., p. 111.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁷Ibid.

Anciently the vigil started during the middle evening hours of Holy Saturday. St. Jerome in commenting on the second chapter of St. Matthew, the sixth verse, stated that it was a tradition among the Jews that the Messiah would come at midnight as they had been released from bondage in Egypt. Accordingly, St. Jerome continued, the apostolic tradition stated that no one should leave the Easter Vigil before midnight.⁸⁸

Likewise, it was ancient tradition to begin the actual celebration of the Eucharist around dawn so that the service could end about day break as the sun rose.⁸⁹

The Easter Vigil is made up of four major steps: (1) the blessing of the new fire and the paschal candle; (2) the prophecies; (3) the blessing of the font and the administration of Holy Baptism; and (4) the Easter Eucharist.⁹⁰

There is reason to think that originally the blessing of fire took place quite frequently, perhaps every day before Vespers; the fire was used to light the lamps and candles. It is assumed that this was borrowed from the ancient service known as Lucernarium.⁹¹

⁸⁸Alt, op. cit., p. 30.

⁸⁹Fernand Cabrol, The Year's Liturgy (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Limited, c.1938), I, 185.

⁹⁰Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, II, 345.

⁹¹Rodrigue Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J. A. Eisenzimmer (New York: Frederick Pustet Company, c.1946), p. 165.

Some scholars hold that the blessing of fire finds its origins in Celto-Germanic tradition. The custom of blessing fire did not find its way to Rome till the Middle Ages.⁹²

The blessing of fire was invested with special significance on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. Inasmuch as the new fire is started by flint which sparkles when struck, symbolists saw in it images of the body of the Redeemer radiant with life as He came forth from the tomb of stone on Easter.⁹³

According to an account given by Zachary, bishop of Rome in the seventh century, to St. Boniface, archbishop of Mainz, the fire was blessed on Holy Thursday. With this new fire three lamps were lighted. These were kept in a secret place until Saturday and were used to furnish light during the Easter Vigil.⁹⁴

The new fire was used to enkindle the candles used in the service. The use of a multitude of candles and lamps was a prominent feature of the Easter Vigil dating almost to apostolic times. Eusebius spoke of pillars of wax with which the night was transformed into day.⁹⁵

In particular, the new fire was used to light the paschal candle, the candle that burns during the forty days till

⁹²Pius Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, translated by Daniel Coogan and Rudolph Kraus (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1953), II, 345.

⁹³Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 165.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 168.

⁹⁵Gigot, "Calendar," The Catholic Encyclopedia, III, 246.

Ascension.⁹⁶ The paschal candle was ignited at the entrance of the church and then, after being blessed, carried in procession to the altar.⁹⁷

The next section of the vigil consisted in the reading of the prophecies. The choice was made from the books of the Old Testament of successive passages that formed the history of religion. The same events read in the prophecies were frequently frescoed in the catacombs.⁹⁸ Of course, these prophecies and the choice of readings had a very important purpose. They were to be the last lesson to the catechumens before baptism.

Included in the reading of the prophecies were many rites performed for the benefit of the catechumens. First the sign of the cross was made on the brow, then the laying on of the hands, and the exorcism of the devil. The ears and nostrils of the neophytes were touched with saliva and were commanded to be opened. The chest and the back were then anointed after which each renounced Satan.⁹⁹

This series of ceremonies, quite naturally, led to the next section of the vigil,--the blessing of the font and Holy Baptism. The procession to the baptistry or font was

⁹⁶Infra, p. 81.

⁹⁷John Baptist Mueller, Handbook of Ceremonies, translated by Adam Ellis (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1940), p. 321.

⁹⁸Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 166.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 171.

led by the newly kindled paschal candle. The paschal candle, so leading, was said to be symbolic of the pillar of fire that led the Jews in the wilderness. Each catechumen was conducted by a godparent. As the neophyte stepped into the waters, he was immersed three times and clothed in white garments.¹⁰⁰

Easter became a positive reminder to the whole Church that those who are Christ's must live and feel as the children of God.¹⁰¹ The Church viewed the festival of redemption as the best time to confer the sacrament of redemption.

The celebration of the Eucharist followed the baptism of the catechumens. The litany was sung as the procession once again re-entered the church from the baptistry. The service itself began with the singing of the Gloria in Excelsis.¹⁰² It is interesting to note that the present day propers given in The Lutheran Liturgy for Holy Saturday evening do not include an introit. The service starts with the Gloria in Excelsis.¹⁰³ It is quite possible that the present day Lutheran usage of Easter sunrise services takes its precedent in the Easter vigil. However, more than likely, the sunrise services gain validation from the reference in St. John,

¹⁰⁰Burkitt, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁰¹Parsch, Volksliturgie, p. 609.

¹⁰²Martin Hellriegel, Holy Week in the Parish (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1956), p. 24.

¹⁰³The Lutheran Liturgy (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 111.

chapter twenty, verse one.

For the Roman Communion a revised form of the Easter Vigil was restored by the decree of the eighth of February, 1951 by Pius XII.¹⁰⁴

I. Rogation Days and the Ascension of our Lord

The three days following the fifth Sunday after Easter and immediately before Ascension were days of penitential prayer. This observance is rather a surprise, since it is not the custom of the Church to interpolate penitential observance into a joyful season. From earliest Christian days the paschal season was always considered a kind of truce in the exercise of canonical penance.¹⁰⁵

The institution of the Rogation Days has been traced to St. Mamertus, bishop of Viennen in Dauphine, Gaul, around the year 470 A.D. These days were designed to stay the pestilence and famine that were afflicting the Christians and the Church. Rogationtide consisted of a three day fast with litany processions through the fields imploring God's grace.¹⁰⁶ The litany processions took place each morning and usually lasted six or more hours.¹⁰⁷

The litany processions became extremely popular among

¹⁰⁴parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, II, 339.

¹⁰⁵villeneuve, op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁰⁶cabrol, op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁰⁷villeneuve, op. cit., p. 206.

the people of Gaul. In 511 A.D. the Council of Orleans prescribed the annual observance of the Rogation Days.¹⁰⁸ The practice spread slowly from Gaul to England and to Rome. In the ninth century Leo III adopted the Rogation Days into the Roman calendar.¹⁰⁹ In England the custom included stops under certain trees to read the Gospel. To this present day in England trees bear the title "Gospel oak." The processions were stopped during the Reformation in the countries that followed the reform of the Church: In England Elizabeth I halted the processions.¹¹⁰

Originally no intentional relationship existed between the Rogation Days and the Ascension. Nevertheless, one soon developed. Christ was viewed as being ready to make His return journey to heaven. Before He left, the people hastened to give Him their problems and petitions that He might take them and place them at the feet of the heavenly Father.¹¹¹

During the latter part of the fourth century the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord began to appear. Pentecost had, up to this time, commemorated both the Ascension of our Lord and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The new historical emphasis on Easter had the same effect on Pentecost. Ascension

¹⁰⁸Walter Frere, The Kalendar, in Studies in the Early Roman Liturgy (London: Oxford University Press, c.1930), I, 99.

¹⁰⁹Cabrol, op. cit., p. 203.

¹¹⁰Alexander, op. cit., p. 121.

¹¹¹parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 140.

Day rapidly developed leaving Pentecost with the theme of the descent of the Holy Spirit.¹¹² St. Augustine spoke of the Feast of the Ascension as an established feast.^{113.}

J. Lutheran Celebration of Easter

After the break with the Roman pope, Luther maintained that the church year and the feasts of the year should be retained. Only those that were specifically against the Gospel were dropped. Thus, the great Feast of Easter remained in its proper place as it had through the Christian centuries with a normal three day celebration.¹¹⁴ However, the practice of the Lutheran Church soon dropped the Easter Vigil as it was celebrated in the Roman Church.¹¹⁵

It is interesting to note that the Church in Germany at the time of the Reformation once again felt the unitive character of the passion and resurrection that had been so characteristic of the primitive Church. The expression of that feeling is seen in the northern German celebration of Easter in the Reformation century. In the noon service on Easter the harmony of the passion and Resurrection was read.

¹¹²McArthur, op. cit., p. 141.

¹¹³George Gibson, The Story of the Christian Year (New York: Abingdon--Cokesbury Press, c.1945), p. 84.

¹¹⁴G. Rietschel, Lehrbuch der Liturgik, in Sammlung von Lehrbüchern der Praktischen Theologie (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther und Reichard, 1900), I, 205-207.

¹¹⁵Alt, op. cit., p. 507.

This was the harmony prepared by Bugenhagen. In some of the villages it was customarily read on Monday and Tuesday of Easter week.¹¹⁶

The Medieval practice of reading the Resurrection Gospel in parts in dramatic form continued as the customary usage in the Lutheran Church till the end of the seventeenth century. In the Lutheran Church this was sung, not merely by two deacons as in the Medieval Church, but by a larger group. The words of Christ were sung by the deacon while the words of the angel were sung by a boy. The words spoken by the women on Easter morning were sung by a chorus of two, three, or more voices. A full choir introduced and closed the Easter Gospel.¹¹⁷

The Lutheran usage was generally more festive in the use of hymns.¹¹⁸ The singing of harmonized Gospel accounts of the Resurrection became quite common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Vopelius composed such a harmonized account in 1682 which appeared in the Neuen Leipziger Gesangbuch. Perhaps the most famous of such compositions is that of Heinrich Schütz, Historia von der fröhlichen und siegreichen Auferstehung Jesu Christi 1623. Dr. Schoeberlein comments that by the nineteenth century these had disappeared from the usage of the Church.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Ludwig Schoeberlein, Die Auferstehung des Herrn in zwei liturgischen Andachten (Göttingen: Verlag von Bandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1871), p. 3.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹⁸Alt, op. cit., p. 508.

¹¹⁹Schoeberlein, op. cit., p. 4.

A special festive outdoor celebration was held in the Reformation century in Lutheran Germany. The people would gather in the churchyard as the sun was rising for a festive liturgical devotion. The liturgy, composed of sections from the Bible and Luther's explanation of the Small Catechism, was sung responsively by the officiant, choir, and the congregation. At the end of the service there was a special Easter remembrance of the dead.¹²⁰

In the middle of the seventeenth century it was customary to have three different sermons for Easter. The early morning sermon was on the Gospel. The noon service had a sermon based on the Catechism. The vesper's sermon was on the Epistle for Easter. The services were generally richer liturgically and musically. For example, in Leipzig in 1694 the normal spoken vespers became a choral service. The liturgical celebration of Easter continued at least two days and often for three days with a special sermon for each day.¹²¹

Ascension was of course retained by the Lutheran Church and celebrated with the same joy as had been found in the Church before the Reformation. Again the use of festive hymns seems to have been something very characteristic of the Church of the Reformation. Some of the most famous of the period are: "Auf diesen Tag bedenken wir, dasz Christ gen Himmel g'fahren" by J. Zwick, 1536; "Gott fähret auf gen Himmel mit frohem

¹²⁰Alt, op. cit., p. 509.

¹²¹Craff, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

Jubelschall" by Sacer, 1653; "Gen Himmel auffahren ist,
Hallelujah" by M. Frank, 1667.¹²²

¹²²Ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPER OF THE EASTER SEASON

According to Dr. Pius Parsch, Easter is a threefold resurrection. (1) Easter is a symbolic resurrection in nature. Spring with its transformation of hill and meadow is a great symbol of an event in sacred history and of an event now taking place within the Church. (2) Easter is also the culmination of the great redemptive work of Christ. Easter does not simply commemorate the Resurrection of Christ as Christmas recalls His birth. That would not be enough. In the mind of the Church, Easter is the feast of Christ's full triumph. On Easter the Incarnate Son of God has finished His redemptive work. He has triumphed. (3) The final resurrection proper to Easter is that which takes place in the Church. Easter is the common birthday of all who are the children of God.¹

It is through the propers of Easter that these resurrection facts are made known in the Church. The propers act as the medium. The gospel for the day usually presents the central objective thought. The epistle expands or impresses this in a practical way. The collect sums up the whole in a brief, pertinent prayer. The introit strikes the keynote and indicates

¹Pius Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, translated by William Heidt and Rudolph Kraus (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1954), III, 13-15.

the mood and spirit of the day. Finally, the gradual provides a transition from the epistle to the gospel or links the two thoughts.²

In this chapter the propers will be viewed in the context of their Sunday. It is only by viewing the propers that a true understanding of this season can be obtained. An analysis of the liturgy during the seven weeks after Easter furnishes grounds for dividing the season into two sections. The first section continues the themes proper to the Feast of Easter and extends to Quasimodogeniti, the first Sunday after Easter. Thereupon follows the second section oriented toward the coming mysteries. During this section the Church prepares for two events closely connected in God's plan of salvation, the Ascension of our Lord and the descent of the Holy Spirit.³

A. Propers of Easter⁴

Introit

When I awake, I am still with Thee. Hallelujah!
 Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me. Hallelujah!
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high,
 I cannot attain unto it. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 Psalm. O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me:
 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising.

²Luther Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 235.

³Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 98.

⁴The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1941), pp. 67-68.

Collect

Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, has overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

I Corinthians 5:6-8

Gradual

This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it.

V. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us!

V. Let us keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Hallelujah!

Gospel

Mark 16:1-8

Proper Preface⁵

But chiefly are we bound to praise Thee for the glorious resurrection of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; for He is the very Paschal Lamb which was offered for us and hath taken away the sins of the world; who by His death hath destroyed death and by His rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life.

The antiphon of the introit (Psalm 139:18, 5b, 6) as originally written had nothing to do with the resurrection

⁵The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 25.

of our Lord, but as it is used in the introit, it has direct application to Easter and the Resurrection of Christ. Our Lord could say, "When I awake, I am still with Thee." "Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me." God had given His Divine protection to Christ.⁶

Traditionally in the Church this Psalm has been viewed as one of the Messianic Psalms of the Psalter. This certainly makes it fitting for use as the Easter Introit.⁷ As the "Hallelujah" of the Introit rings out with the joy of the day, a note of somberness is added to temper the unrestrained joy. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it."⁸

The Gloria in Excelsis is hardly considered a proper of the service. Yet it must be considered at this point, since its strains have not been heard during the six week season of Lent. As an Easter song the Gloria in Excelsis is particularly appropriate for in it the Church praises the Lamb who took away the sins of the world.⁹ The Gregorian Sacramentary restricted the use of the Gloria in Excelsis. The presbyters

⁶E. C. Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals (Second edition; London: Sands and Company Limited, 1946), p. 48.

⁷Alfred Sauer, "Psalms," class notes from second semester of 1954-1955 school year.

⁸Paul Zeller Strodach, The Church Year (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Church Publication House, c.1924), p. 152.

⁹Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 11.

could use the Gloria in Excelsis only on Easter day. It was not until the eleventh or twelfth century that the Gloria in Excelsis was used on a normal Sunday by presbyters and bishops alike.¹⁰

The collect is cast in the classic form. It begins by establishing the historic fact of the Resurrection as the basis for its petition.¹¹ The disobedience of the first Adam had closed the gates of heaven. The obedience of the Second Adam opened them. That which was lost has been restored.¹² The collect teaches that simply because Christ is risen does not guarantee the resurrection of all mankind to heavenly bliss. Something is required. ". . . bring the same to good effect." God's continual help or grace is needed.¹³ The collect draws a parallel between the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ and the Christian's response to it.¹⁴

Rome interprets this collect in the light of its Semi-Pelagian theology. Only the power of Satan is broken. Christ has conquered but not annihilated the enemy. The door of eternal life is open, but people have the choice to enter or to

¹⁰Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Second edition; Westminster, England: Dacre Press, c.1945), p. 457.

¹¹Reed, op. cit., p. 464.

¹²Paul Zeller Strodach, The Collect for the Day (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1939), p. 120.

¹³Strodach, The Church Year, p. 152.

¹⁴parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 11.

refuse to enter.¹⁵

The epistle has often been accused of being totally inadequate for the great day of Easter. Such a comment however shows a complete misunderstanding of St. Paul's words. The epistle makes use of the Old Testament festival of the Passover. The Passover typifies the Easter mystery. Christ the Paschal Lamb is sacrificed. And now those who have partaken of the sacrificial meal must cast away forever the leaven of sin.¹⁶ "Seek the things above. Purge out the old leaven."

The gradual (Psalm 118:24,1 and I Corinthians 5:7b,8) carries the note of joy characteristic of Easter. The keynote of the gradual: "This is the day the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." The last verse of the gradual ties in with the epistle since it is taken directly from the epistle.¹⁷

The gospel has likewise been accused of being inadequate in that it describes only the empty tomb while no mention is made of the Risen Christ. This may be explained by the fact that the Gospel account was continued during the Easter week since the services were held every day during the great festive week.¹⁸ This lack of the gospel is not

¹⁵C. C. Martindale, The Sunday Collects, in The Prayers of the Missal (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), I, 45.

¹⁶Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 11.

¹⁷Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 132.

¹⁸Reed, op. cit., p. 464.

as serious as it would seem on first glance. The lack of mention of the Risen Christ is adequately made up by the rest of the propers.

The final proper in the liturgy of the Lutheran Church is the proper preface for Easter. This preface is striking in its simplicity and rhythmically worded in the classic style characteristic of the golden age of liturgical history. In two or three phrases it sums up the teaching of the day. Christ the true Paschal Lamb is sacrificed. He takes away the sins of the world by the sacrifice of His death. He has destroyed death by His Resurrection. Thus, all Christians shall likewise rise.¹⁹

B. Propers of Easter Monday²⁰

Introit

The Lord hath brought you into a land flowing with milk and honey, Hallelujah! that His law might be continually in your mouth. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Psalm. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people.

Collect

O God, who in the Paschal Feast hast bestowed restoration upon the world, continue unto Thy people Thy heavenly gift that they may both attain unto perfect freedom and advance unto life eternal; through Jesus Christ, who liveth, etc.

¹⁹Fernand Cabrol, The Year's Liturgy (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Limited, c.1938), I, 188.

²⁰The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 68.

Epistle

Acts 10:34-41

Gradual

This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it.

V. Let Israel now say: that His mercy endureth forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way: and while He opened to us the Scriptures? Hallelujah!

Gospel

Luke 24:13-35

The beginning of the eleventh century the Easter celebration was reduced from a full week to Monday and Tuesday of Easter week.²¹ The sixteenth century Lutheran Church retained the celebration to Easter Tuesday as the present day Lutheran Liturgy has done.²² According to the Kirchenagende of 1948, the Lutheran Church in Germany celebrates only to the Monday of Easter week.²³ Likewise The Common Service Book has listed propers for Easter Monday alone.²⁴

²¹Rodrigue Villeneuve, An Introduction to the Liturgical Year, translated by J. A. Eisenzimmer (New York: Frederick Pustet Company Incorporated, c.1946), p. 188.

²²G. Rietschel, Lehrbuch der Liturgik, in Sammlung von der Praktischen Theologie (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther und Reichard, 1900), I, 207.

²³Peter Brunner, "Die Sonntage im Jahre der Kirche," Der Gottesdienst an Sonn und Feiertagen (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1949), p. 241.

²⁴The Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, c.1917), p. 81.

The introit (Exodus 13:5 and Psalm 105:1) for this day may have special reference to the catechumens who were baptized on Holy Saturday. They are reminded that through Holy Baptism they were brought into God's "Promised Land." This is, as the introit says, a land "flowing with milk and honey." This fact was strikingly brought out to the neophytes by a ceremony in the service. After they had received Holy Communion they were given milk and honey.²⁵

Perfect spiritual freedom is the object of the Church's petition in the collect. The exile of Christians is now over. The child of God now enjoys full freedom in Christ, who by His resurrection has broken the power of Satan. Again, as this collect was used originally in the ancient Church, it had significant meaning. During Lent the Christians had worn rough penitential garb. At Easter they changed their dress. The reference to the freedom of Christ and the restoration of the world by Him reminded them that the exile was over. They took off the penitential garb. The exile truly was over.²⁶

The Church on Easter Monday does not content herself to rejoice in an accomplished fact alone. The One who rose gave the command to witness this fact to the world. Thus, in the epistle the Church begins witness bearing.²⁷ "We are witnesses

²⁵Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 19.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Strodach, The Church Year, p. 153.

of all things which He did." St. Peter spoke these words to the Gentile Cornelius. Quickly Peter unfolds a panorama of Christ's life as Redeemer, Good Shepherd, as the Man of Sorrow, as risen from the tomb. Peter is speaking of One whom he loved. Now he seeks to engrave Christ on the hearts of all who hear these words that they might become witness bearers also.²⁸

The gradual (Psalm 118:24,2 and Luke 24:32) leads into the gospel by prestatating the words of the Emmaus disciples. These words of the Emmaus disciples, in the gradual, can be taken as a very fitting response to the words of the Apostle Peter in the epistle. The heart of a Christian is bound to burn as he hears Christ confessed as the resurrected God and Lord.

The gospel is another witness bearer to the Risen Lord. The gospel sets in concrete form the manner in which two disciples became witnesses for Christ.²⁹

C. Propers of Easter Tuesday³⁰

Introit

He gave them to drink of the water of wisdom, and they will be strengthened thereby, and they shall not be moved, Hallelujah! and it will exalt them forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

²⁸Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 20.

²⁹Strodach, The Church Year, p. 153.

³⁰The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 69.

Psalm: Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; call upon His name: make known His deeds among the people.

Collect

Almighty God, who through the resurrection of Thy Son didst secure peace for our troubled conscience, grant unto us evermore this peace, that, trusting in the merits of Thy Son, we at length come unto the perfect peace of heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

Acts 13:26-33

Gradual

This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it.

V. Let Israel now say: that His mercy endureth forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way: and while He opened to us the Scriptures? Hallelujah!

Gospel

Luke 24:36-48

In the introit (Ecclesiasticus 15 and Psalm 105:1) of Easter Tuesday the illusion to the baptism of the neophytes is strong. "He gave them to drink the water of wisdom."³¹ Parsch sees in this introit the three Easter objectives of baptism, the Eucharist, and resurrection. The three objectives are brought out in the words: water, strengthened,

³¹Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 188.

and exalt.³²

In the collect the liturgy attempts to teach that Christians should not limit their appreciation of Easter to a few truths. Rather must Christians live on a new and higher spiritual plane, once they have risen with Christ.³³ Living the new spiritual life gives peace to the troubled conscience. This peace spoken of in the collect is not to be confused with any idea of political peace. This is a peace that passes all understanding, a peace founded in Jesus Christ.

The epistle, like the Epistle for Easter Monday, is from the book of Acts. The epistle is the testimony of St. Paul to the Risen Christ. St. Paul again stresses the witnessing of Christ's disciples for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "God raised Him from the dead on the third day; and He was seen during many days by those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem; and they are now witnesses for Him to the people."³⁴

The gradual once again repeats the words of the Gradual for Easter Monday. The words of the Emmaus disciples are a fitting introduction to the gospel. The gradual's words of the Emmaus disciples allude to the first appearance of Christ to His disciples. The gospel for the day gives the second

³²Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 24.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 25.

appearance of Christ to the disciples as He tells them to touch the print of the nails in His hands and feet.

The gospel gives the final summary to this day. Easter is a time of baptism, a time of the Eucharist, but more than both of these, Easter is the time of resurrection.³⁵ The resurrection theme is forcibly brought out in the gospel. The One who was crucified stands before His disciples and shows them the nail prints. Here is Easter, Christ appearing to men as the Risen Lord.

D. Propers of Quasimodogeniti³⁶

Introit

As new-born babes: desire the sincere milk of the Word.

Hear, O My people, and I will testify unto thee:
O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto Me.

Psalm. Sing aloud unto God, our Strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Collect

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

1 John 5:4-10

³⁵Ibid., p. 24.

³⁶The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 69.

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us
Hallelujah!

V. The angel of the Lord descended from heaven:
and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon
it. Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 20:19-31

This Sunday marks the octave of the Easter solemnities. The idea of celebrating a feast for eight days was common among the Jews. There is frequent mention in the Old Testament of a feast with an octave. It is not surprising that the Christians adopted the octave.³⁷

Quasimodogeniti is also known as Dominica in Albis. At baptism, as was noted above, the neophytes were dressed in white robes. During the Easter week they did not divest themselves of their baptismal apparel but wore it during the entire week.³⁸ On Quasimodogeniti they appeared as "new born babes" wearing their white robes for the last time. After a final exhortation by the bishop, they received Communion and removed their white garments.³⁹

Two ideas seem to have determined the choice of the prop-
ers of this day. The gospel relates an historical incident

³⁷Cabrol, op. cit., p. 190.

³⁸Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 48-50.

³⁹Strodach, The Church Year, p. 155.

in the life of the Risen Lord, tying this Sunday to Easter, while the other propers remind the baptized that the Lord has brought them with a great price and led them to a new country.⁴⁰

The name Quasimodogeniti is taken from the first word of the introit (I Peter 2:2a and Psalm 81:8,1) and means "as new born babes."⁴¹

The introit is an exhortation that had ancient reference to the newly baptized members. However, it has reference to all Christians today. All Christians are to desire the pure milk of the word as new born babies. This is not to infer that Christians are not to grow in sanctification or that they are to remain as infants in the faith. Rather, the desire of even the most mature Christian for the word must be like the desire of a baby for milk.⁴²

The collect begins with the historic foundation for the petition in the words: "We who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection." Thus, with this Sunday the great Easter solemnities come to an end. It is perhaps a sad fact that the Church cannot continue to remain keyed up to the pitch of the great Easter festival.⁴³ The petition of

⁴⁰Cabrol, op. cit., p. 191.

⁴¹Reed, op. cit., p. 465.

⁴²Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 49.

⁴³E. C. Messenger, The Sunday Collects (Second edition; London: Sands and Company Limited, 1946), p. 55.

the collect asks that the Church might bring forth fruits in life and conversation. As there are fruits of the Spirit, so there are also fruits of the resurrection. These fruits are the practical exemplification of faith's realization and acceptance. The epistle fits into this same sphere.⁴⁴ The collect has been termed "a life program in a few words."⁴⁵

The epistles for the Easter season are non-Pauline. The fact that St. Paul was not converted till after Pentecost may have determined the plan of selection of these epistles.⁴⁶ The epistle for this Sunday has the theme of a faith powerful enough to conquer the world. Those baptized are "born of God," for their faith in Christ can and does "overcome the world."⁴⁷

In the gradual (I Corinthians 5:7b and Matthew 28:2) the seasonal emphasis is strong.⁴⁸ By making use of two verses from the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Christ, the worshipping Christians are reminded of the great fact that was celebrated only eight days before. The gradual acts as a fitting prologue to the reading of the gospel. The gradual

⁴⁴Strodach, The Collect for the Day, p. 124.

⁴⁵Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 51.

⁴⁶Reed, op. cit., p. 465.

⁴⁷Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 51.

⁴⁸Strodach, The Church Year, p. 156.

tells how Christ rose from the grave, for in the gospel the Risen Lord makes an appearance to His disciples. The gradual leads the thoughts from the newly baptized to the main theme of Easter--resurrection.

The Church's characteristic desire to emphasize the teaching of the octave and the day is evident in the gospel. However, there is also the striving to relive the events of our Lord's life in point of time. "After eight days. . . ."49 One of the more memorable appearances of our Lord is presented in the Gospel. St. Thomas, the doubter, is present with the apostles. Our Lord comes to him and tells him to feel the wounds that he might believe. The theme of the whole Christian life might be interpreted according to this appearance to St. Thomas. When a Christian finds it difficult to believe, he should put his finger into Christ's wounds. Parsch interprets this to mean that the Christian is to receive the Holy Eucharist. Thus, he is strengthened and with St. Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!"50

E. Propers of Misericordias Domini51

Introit

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord: by word of the Lord were the heavens made.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 155.

⁵⁰Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 51.

⁵¹The Lutheran Hymnal, pp. 69-70.

Psalm. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.

Collect

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

1 Peter 2:21-25

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Then was the Lord Jesus known of the disciples in the breaking of bread. Hallelujah!

V. I am the Good Shepherd: and know My sheep and am known of Mine. Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 10:11-16

The name of the Sunday comes from a phrase in the antiphon of the introit, and means "the tender mercies of the Lord."⁵² Misericordia Domini is better known in some parts of the Church as "Good Shepherd Sunday." Every part of the propers for the day refer, or at least allude, to our Lord as the Good Shepherd. If a single picture is sought to recapitulate the Easter message, it is found in the picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd.⁵³

⁵²Strodach, The Church Year, p. 157. III, 74.

⁵³Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 72.

The note of the day is struck in the introit in the words, "rejoice in the Lord." This is the pervading note of joy that runs through the entire service. The introit (Psalm 33:5b,6a,1) is a psalm of praise to God's creative power, for He called into being the world by His word and power. Thus, the goodness of the Good Shepherd is more powerful than man, in spite of the fact that man tries to fight God with earthly might. The Psalm's original reference was to the history of the chosen people of Israel, but it is not equally applicable to the new Israel--the Church.⁵⁴

The completely unique address of the collect is the abrupt word "God."⁵⁵ Human life was down-cast by sin. It could not right itself, nor can any person. This was accomplished by the humiliation of God's Son who rescued mankind from perpetual death. God snatched man out of the power of Satan and proceeds to cause him to enjoy the utmost in everlasting joy.⁵⁶ Thus, the keynote of joy is seen in the collect also. The concept of the Good Shepherd is not totally absent. The fallen world, spoken of in the collect, is none other than the lamb that is rescued by the Good Shepherd in the account of the gospel.⁵⁷

The epistle depicts Christ as the Shepherd of souls,

⁵⁴Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 51.

⁵⁵Reed, op. cit., p. 466.

⁵⁶Martindale, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁷Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 74.

"Who suffered for you, leaving you an example that you may follow His steps." In the Orient the shepherd precedes his flock, and the sheep follow after. "For you were as sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."⁵⁸

Of all graduals of the year, this one is perhaps the best suited to lead into the thoughts of the gospel. The first verse of the gradual (Luke 24:35 and John 10:14) is from the story of Emmaus. The breaking of bread spoken of may have reference to the Eucharist. If this interpretation is taken, the second verse would have reference to the fact that Christians realize Christ fully in the Eucharist and by it come to know that He is the Good Shepherd.⁵⁹

The choice of the gospel may represent survival of a favorite passage from the earlier lectio continua.⁶⁰ In the gospel the Church meets the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep and who unites Himself most intimately with them. When the final words of the gospel and the epistle are compared, it becomes evident that one gives God's plan, the other its fulfillment. "Them also I must bring. . . ." (Gospel) ". . . for you were as sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd. . . ." (Epistle)⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁹Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 135.

⁶⁰Reed, op. cit., p. 466.

⁶¹parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 76.

F. Propers of Jubilate⁶²

Introit

Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honor of His name: make His praise glorious.

Psalm. Say unto God, how terrible art Thou in Thy works: through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee.

Collect

Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

I Peter 2:11-20

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. The Lord hath sent redemption unto His people.
Hallelujah!

V. It behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead: and thus to enter into his glory. Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 16:16-23

Once again the name for the Sunday, Jubilate, is from the first word of the introit and means "make a joyful noise."⁶³

⁶²The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 70.

⁶³Strodach, The Church Year, p. 161.

The introit Psalm (Psalm 66:1,2,3) was chosen for use in the paschal season because it was listed in the ancient Greek and Latin versions of Scripture as a "Psalm of the Resurrection." Early Christian commentators regarded it as suitable for use as a psalm of thanksgiving to God for the resurrection of all Christians on the last day. The change from the resurrection of Christ to that of Christians is an easy step. Statements of St. Paul in his epistles show how closely these two events are tied. Thus, the Church is joyful and gives thanks for the victory of Christ over death in which all true Christians share.⁶⁴

The collect is one of the oldest still in use. It is taken from the Leonine Sacramentary dated about 450 A.D. It is a reminder of the days when men were wandering in the darkness of sin. Then, at Easter, God showed the light of His truth. It now is the duty of Christians to remain in the path of righteousness.⁶⁵

The earliest collect text only says, "return into the Way." The reference was to the designation of the early Christians as followers of "the Way." The insertion of the word "righteousness" indicates the full significance of original sin and vice had been forgotten.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 53.

⁶⁵Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 101.

⁶⁶Reed, op. cit., p. 476.

It is recognized that the epistle describes how the Christian is to live in the "way of righteousness" spoken of in the collect. The epistle becomes a directory of practical living. Yet it must ever be kept in mind that the Christian is still only "a stranger and a pilgrim."⁶⁷

The gradual (Psalm 111:9a and Luke 24:26) still sounds out strongly the paschal message of suffering and resurrection and glory. The Old Testament psalm verse is used to apply to our Lord's paschal work.⁶⁸

The Gospel of Jubilate is the first mention made of Christ's ascension into heaven. "A little while and you shall not see me . . . because I go to the Father." It is well to contrast this somber note of departure with the joy of the introit. In spite of this contrast, both poses the true joy of the Easter season.⁶⁹ The "little while" of the gospel harmonizes well with the "pilgrim" theme of the epistle.

For more than a half century Jubilate has been superseded in the Roman Communion by the Feast of St. Joseph. The feast was proclaimed by Pius IX in 1847 and given an octave by Pius X, making this Sunday the normal day of celebration.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Farsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 102.

⁶⁸Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 135.

⁶⁹Strodach, The Church Year, p. 161.

⁷⁰Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 201.

G. Propers of Cantate⁷¹

Introit

Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song: for He hath done marvelous things.

The Lord hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen.

Psalm. His right hand and His holy arm: hath gotten Him the victory.

Collect

O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou does promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

James 1:16-21

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. Hallelujah!

V. Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over Him. Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 16:5-15

The propers of the Sunday continue to prepare the Christian soul for the moment of the Savior's elevation to heaven.

⁷¹The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 70.

"I am going to my Father who sent me." The prevalent thought of Cantate is the revelation of the Trinity. The Word speaks to the Church of the Father and of the Paraclete who will be sent. The resurrection merges with the coming days of Ascension and Pentecost.⁷² The propers allude not only to Ascension but also to the descent of the Holy Spirit and indicate that there is a connection between the two.⁷³

The Psalm of the introit (Psalm 98:1a,2,1b) is essentially a Messianic Psalm. "His arm and hand hath gotten Him the victory" has reference to the resurrection, with overtones foreshadowing the Ascension and Pentecost. The last verse of the introit suggests the words of the gospel that the Holy Spirit "will convince the world of sin."⁷⁴

The collect is perfect in construction and in relation to the lessons of the day. It prestates the words of the gospel in the phrase, "the minds of the faithful to be one will."⁷⁵

The word desursum is the key to the epistle. What is "the best gift, the perfect gift . . . coming down from the Father of Lights?" The answer is the Holy Spirit who begot us by the word of truth that we might be, as it were, the

⁷²Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 203.

⁷³Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 125.

⁷⁴Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 55.

⁷⁵Strodach, The Collect for the Day, p. 131.

firstfruits of His creatures.⁷⁶

In the Psalm verse of the gradual (Psalm 118:16 and Romans 6:9) the Church dwells on the Resurrection as the greatest of all miracles. Psalm 118 is the great Easter Psalm that is used throughout Easter week in the offices. The fact of the resurrection is attributed to God's right hand because it is an act of God's omnipotence. The second gradual verse, taken from the New Testament, proclaims that having once died, death no longer has dominion over Christ.⁷⁷

In the gospel the historic moment is emphasized. Yet the gospel looks beyond the Ascension to Pentecost. "The Comforter will come."⁷⁸ A double message is thus proclaimed. Christ will return to heaven, but in His place the Paraclete will come and inaugurate His saving work in the world.⁷⁹

H. Propers of Rogate⁸⁰

Introit

With the voice of singing declare ye and tell this:
utter it even to the end of the earth. Hallelujah!

The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob: Hallelujah!

Psalm. Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:
sing forth the honor of His name: make His praise glorious.

⁷⁶Reed, op. cit., p. 467.

⁷⁷Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 137.

⁷⁸Strodach, The Church Year, p. 163.

⁷⁹Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 126-127.

⁸⁰The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 71.

Collect

O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

James 1:22-27

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. Christ, who hath redeemed us with His blood: is risen and hath appeared unto us. Hallelujah!

V. I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father. Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 16:23-30

The name for the Sunday does not come from the introit as in the other post-Easter Sundays. The name Rogate, "Pray ye," is taken from our Lord's assurance concerning prayer in the Gospel for the day.⁸¹

In the introit (Isaiah 48:20b,c, and Psalm 66:1,2), the words of Isaiah have reference to the return from the captivity in Babylon. The people are to declare joy with "the voice of singing." The service begins with the celebration of the liberation or redemption of mankind from the captivity of sin.

⁸¹Reed, op. cit., p. 468.

By His death Christ secured this, and by His resurrection He applied it to mankind.⁸² In view of the introit, Strodach calls this Sunday's celebration a "Song of Victory."⁸³

To find a model of concise and intelligent prayer one need look no farther than the collect of this Sunday. There are no unnecessary words. However, its brevity should not tempt one to overlook its depth of thought. The first reminder of the collect is that all good things come from God. The petition is that God inspire His people with knowledge of what they are to do that finally with God's guidance and assistance they may live in accord with His principles.⁸⁴

Rorate still abounds with the joy of Easter. The joy of the followers of Christ is mingled with the confidence they have in their Savior who is going to return to heaven. The Epistle of St. James explains to the believer the necessity of conforming his manner of life to his faith.⁸⁵

The gradual (Luke 24:46,26 and John 16:28) is a summary of the benefits of Christ's redemption. The second verse summarizes the earthly life of our Lord, His coming, and His return to the Father. Here the impending return of Christ is foremost.⁸⁶

⁸²Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 56.

⁸³Strodach, The Church Year, p. 167.

⁸⁴Messenger, The Sunday Collects, p. 63.

⁸⁵Villeneuve, op. cit., p. 204.

⁸⁶Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 139.

In the gospel Christ gives the assurance that requests made in His name will always be heard. This promise constitutes the Sunday's "glad tidings." It is assumed that this stress on prayer occasioned the choice of the three Rogation Days that followed. The Gospel from our Savior's lips rings out as a final summary of His whole work on the eve of His Ascension.⁸⁷

I. The Ascension of Our Lord⁸⁸

Introit

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?: Hallelujah!

This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Psalm: Oh, clap your hands, all ye people: shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

Collects

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth, etc.

O King of Glory, Lord of hosts, who didst this day ascend in triumph far above all heavens, we beseech Thee leave us not comfortless, but send to us the Spirit of Truth, promised of the Father; O Thou who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest, etc.

Epistle

Acts 1:1-11

⁸⁷Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 142.

⁸⁸The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 71.

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. God is gone up with a shout: the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Hallelujah!

V. Thou hast ascended on high: Thou hast led captivity captive. Hallelujah!

Gospel

Mark 16:14-20

Proper Preface⁸⁹

Who after His resurrection appeared openly to all His disciples and in their sight was taken up into heaven that He might make us partakers of His divine nature.

The introit (Acts 1:11a,b and Psalm 47:1) paints the beautiful scene of the apostles gazing heavenward at the ascension of Christ into heaven. The very words that the angels spoke to the apostles are used to remind the Christians gathered to worship that this is not a day of sadness at the departure of Christ, but a day of joy. The scene of the apostles may be taken as a symbol of the Church gazing into heaven.⁹⁰

The two collects bring to a close the Church's immediate observance of the redemptive work of Christ. The first collect is a confession of faith: "having not seen yet have believed." The second collect carries the spirit of the Church

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 25.

⁹⁰Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 162.

year as it looks forward. In ten days the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will come to the Church in the great outpouring of Pentecost.⁹¹

The epistle is the narrative of the historic fact of Pentecost. It repeats the promise of the Holy Ghost and imposes upon the apostles the office of witness bearing into all the world. It was in this hope and promise that the apostles lived. It is in this promise that the Church now lives.⁹²

Originally Psalm 47 used in the gradual (Psalm 47:5 and Psalm 68:18) had reference to the shouts of joy and the trumpet blasts as the ark of God was brought into the Promised Land. God had promised His people victory. He was now the one who had granted the victory to the people. The Messianic overtones are not to be overlooked. For the Church, Christ is the divine King. He engaged the prince of this world in battle--the battle of redemption. On Calvary He conquered. With the shouts of joy and the blast of the trumpet the Church accompanies the Lord as He is taken up in a bodily manner. This is the triumph note that leads into the reading of the gospel.⁹³

The gospel records the Master's parting commission to

⁹¹Strodach, The Collect for the Day, pp. 138-140.

⁹²Strodach, The Church Year, p. 170.

⁹³Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 164-165.

go into all the world and preach the Gospel. It carries a step farther in that it tells of the commission fulfilled and blessed in the inspiration of the Ascended Lord who is absent yet ever present.⁹⁴

Through the epistle and gospel the Church takes part in our Lord's last few hours on earth. Both readings emphasize the fact that Christ appeared to the apostles while they were at table. Christ still does this in Holy Communion.⁹⁵

After the reading of the gospel, the paschal candle--the symbol of the risen Christ--is extinguished.⁹⁶ By means of this simple ceremony the fact is symbolized that our Lord has ascended into heaven.⁹⁷

The final proper of the liturgy is the proper preface for Ascension. The preface stresses the appearances that Christ made after the Resurrection. Christ was then taken out of the sight of the apostles. The purpose of the Ascension is given in the last phrase in which it is expressed that this was done to make Christians partakers of His divine nature.

On this day the Church year marks the complete and completed earthly life of our Lord.

⁹⁴Strodach, The Church Year, p. 170.

⁹⁵Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 163.

⁹⁶Infra, p. 81.

⁹⁷Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 158.

J. Propers of Exaudi⁹⁸

Introit

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: Hallelu-
jah!

When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said
unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek: Hide not Thy
face from me. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Psalm. The Lord is my Light and my Salvation:
whom shall I fear?

Collect

Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always
a devout will towards Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with
a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,
who liveth, etc.

Epistle

1 Peter 4:7-11

Gradual

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

V. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth
upon the throne of His holiness. Hallelujah!

V. I will not leave you comfortless: I go, and
I will come again to you, and your heart shall rejoice.
Hallelujah!

Gospel

John 15:26 to 16:4

The Latin name for the day is derived from the first
word of the introit--Exaudi, Hear!⁹⁹ The ringing joyfulness

⁹⁸The Lutheran Hymnal, pp. 71-72.

⁹⁹Strodach, The Church Year, p. 172.

that characterized the propers of the previous Sundays is absent today. On this Sunday the propers lead to a quiet reminiscing. The introit (Psalm 27:7,8,9,1) is not a Psalm of rejoicing or praise, but a longing plea to see the face of the Lord. It is the yearning of the primitive Church for the parousia.¹⁰⁰

The collect leads from the longing desire of the introit as it begs for grace to lead a true Christian life. Strodach in his book, The Collect for the Day, states that the gospel and the epistle give no background for the collect. Any relation between the lessons and the collect would seem to be artificial.¹⁰¹ Yet in his book, The Church Year, Strodach shows a fine correlation between the collect and the epistle. The Christian life spoken of in the epistle finds its counterpart in the collect's words, "serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart."¹⁰²

In the epistle the apostle catalogues a group of exhortations covering the life among Christians as the Christians wait and as they serve one another. The Christian life is to be lived in expectation of the coming of our Lord as each ministers the gift received as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 174.

¹⁰¹Strodach, The Collect for the Day, p. 141.

¹⁰²Strodach, The Church Year, p. 173.

¹⁰³Ibid.

The gradual (Psalm 47:8 and John 14:18;16:22) directs the eyes of the Church back to the Ascension of Christ. "God sitteth on the throne of His holiness." The second verse directs the eyes of the Church forward. It re-echoes the promise Christ made to send the Comforter. The gradual of the Sunday leaves the Christian in suspense, for Christ has ascended, but Pentecost has not yet come.¹⁰⁴

Two points are stressed in the gospel. (1) The Holy Spirit will come. (2) He will bear witness and will manifest Himself in the Church. Nevertheless, all Christians must also witness to Christ. The apostles gave testimony through blood and martyrdom. The Church bears witness today through fidelity and love.¹⁰⁵ It might also be added that the Church bears witness by taking seriously the words that our Lord spoke to the apostles and the entire Church.

The Sunday portrays for us the waiting Church--waiting for the Lord's return.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Messenger, The Sunday Introits and Graduals, p. 141.

¹⁰⁵parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, III, 176.

¹⁰⁶Strodach, The Church Year, p. 173.

Gregory Dix, The Mass of the Liturgy (second edition; Westminster, England: Duck Press, c.1945), p. 340.

Frans Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, translated by William Kraft and Joseph Krems (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1934), III, 47.

St. Allen McArthur, The Evolution of the Christian Year (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, c.1953), p. 21.

CHAPTER IV

CUSTOMS OF THE SEASON

A. Fasting and Kneeling

The fifty great days of the Pascha were recognized as a continuous feast. All penitential observances such as fasting and kneeling were prohibited.¹ From ancient times the posture of standing for prayer had been recognized as the most appropriate since standing pointed to Christ's Resurrection. For this reason standing was the posture for prayer during the Easter season.²

Between 200 A.D. and 206 A.D., Tertullian in Concerning Prayer referred to the absence of kneeling. Later in 121 A.D., Tertullian reminded Christians in his book, On Idolatry, that on the Lord's Day and the fifty days of Easter, the Church celebrates the time of joy as opposed to the heathen days of merriment. He then spoke of Easter as a festive day on which all Christians are to stand for prayer.³

¹Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Second edition; Westminster, England: Dacre Press, c.1945), p. 340.

²Pius Parsch, The Church's Year of Grace, translated by William Heidt and Rudolph Kraus (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c.1954), III, 47.

³A. Allen McArthur, The Evolution of the Christian Year (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, c.1953), p. 21.

The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. noted in Canon Twenty that all worshippers were to stand for prayer on Easter and all Sundays.⁴

Fasting was likewise considered out of place during Easter. In the third century there was a definite feeling that the only real time for official Christian fasting was in the period immediately preceding the great annual festival of the Pascha commemorating the death and resurrection of Christ.⁵

John Cassian, who paid two visits to Egyptian monasteries between 380 A.D. and 400 A.D., described the familiar absence of kneeling and fasting on the Lord's Day and during the season of Easter. "This, too, we ought to know, that from the evening of Saturday which precedes Sunday, up to the following evening, among the Egyptians they never kneel, nor from Easter to Whitsuntide."⁶

By the seventh century the rule of standing for prayer was considerably weakened. Apparently only on Easter Day was the standing rule in effect. In Canon Ninety, the Council of Trullo, 691 A.D. to 692 A.D., stated:

We have received from our divine fathers the canon law that in honor of Christ's resurrection, we are not to

⁴Ibid.

⁵G. Rietschel, Lehrbuch der Liturgik, in Sammlung von Lehrbüchern der Praktischen Theologie (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther und Reichard, 1900), I, 155.

⁶McArthur, op. cit., p. 15.

kneel on Sunday. Lest, therefore, we should ignore the fulness of this observation, we make it plain to the faithful that after the priests have gone to the altar from Vespers on Saturday no one shall kneel until the evening of Sunday, at which time after the entrance for Compline, again with bended knees we offer our prayers to the Lord.⁷

In keeping with this very ancient custom and tradition, the Lutheran Church makes it a point to stand for prayer rather than to kneel as in the Roman and Anglican Communions.

B. The Paschal Candle

Research seems to point to the necessity of assigning a very high antiquity to the paschal candle. St. Jerome, for example, replied to a letter of Presidius, deacon of Placentia, in which the deacon requests that Jerome would write a carmen cerei (a poem of the candle) or a form of blessing. This must presuppose the existence in 384 A.D. of the candle used at Easter and blessed by the deacon. The reply by St. Jerome makes it evident that the practice was neither of recent introduction nor peculiar to the church of Placentia.⁸

St. Augustine in De Civitate Die, XV, mentions casually that he had composed a laus cerei or candle song (blessing). Again the assumption is that the paschal candle was the cerei

⁷Ibid., p. 16.

⁸Herbert Thurston, "Paschal Candle," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, c.1911), XI, 515.

referred to.⁹

The paschal candle had a place in the Ambrosian Rite. The blessing of this rite was composed either by St. Ambrose himself or based on hymns that he had authored.¹⁰

In 417 A.D., Zosinu, bishop of Rome, conceded the use of the paschal candle to the suburbicarian churches of Rome.¹¹

The Venerable Bede in 701 A.D. related that the paschal candle was inscribed with the date and other particulars pertaining to the year. Sometimes this material was put on a piece of parchment and that affixed to the candle. Many Italian churches in the Middle Ages had a permanent marble paschal candle attached to the pulpit.¹²

The extremes to which the use of the paschal candle went is typified by the Sarum Directory of 1517. In this directory the candle was described to be thirty-six feet tall.¹³

The actual blessing of the candle is from the Jewish blessing of lights. The paschal candle is lighted and blessed by the deacon in the Easter Vigil.¹⁴ The candle then burns till after the reading of the Gospel on Ascension Day.¹⁵

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 516.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Supra, p. 35.

¹⁵Dix, op. cit., p. 23.

The original use of the candle was the very practical one of furnishing light for the vigil service. However, as time elapsed, the use of the candle was given highly symbolic meaning. The candle itself typifies Christ, the True Light of the world. The pure wax reminds us of the flesh which He took on at the incarnation. The wick is His human soul, while the flame is the divinity of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The five decorative grains of incense in the candle recall His five wounds. The lighting of the candle serves as an image of the Resurrection while the extinguishing reminds that He was taken bodily from the world.¹⁶

The paschal candle is used in the Roman Communion today. It has generally dropped from use in the Lutheran Church, although there are numerous revivals and restorations of this ancient Easter symbol of our Lord.

C. Folk Customs Connected with Easter

During the earlier Christian centuries the Easter customs took the form of freeing from prison and debt in honor and remembrance of Christ freeing the world from death. Emperor Valentinian in 367 A.D. started the custom of releasing all prisoners except those who had committed major crimes. As it appears from a letter of Cassidore, the same custom

¹⁶Thurston, "Paschal Candle," Catholic Encyclopedia, XI, 516.

was adopted into the laws of the Goths.¹⁷

In like manner many masters freed loyal slaves during this season. Although all other legal processes stopped during this season, the necessary legal machinery was kept active to free slaves.¹⁸

During the Middle Ages the folk customs surrounding Easter multiplied. For example, women were permitted to hit their husbands on Easter Monday while on Easter Tuesday men could hit their wives. In England it became customary on Easter day to lift the women off the ground three times after which they would receive a kiss.¹⁹

Fires were lighted on the mountains on Easter morning from a piece of flint. The Easter fires, in vogue all over Europe during the Middle Ages, were first prohibited because of their origins in paganism. Later they were adopted as a useful symbol referring to the fiery column in the desert and the resurrection.²⁰

The popular Medieval Easter plays originated from the custom of having two deacons go to the side altar on Easter

¹⁷Joseph Bingham, Origines Ecclesiasticae--The Antiquities of the Christian Church (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), II, 1154.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 1155.

¹⁹Herbert Thurston, "Easter," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, c.1909), V, 227.

²⁰Ibid.

morning and read the Resurrection Gospel. One deacon took the part of the women in the Easter story and the other read the part of the angel. This tenth century custom soon developed into plays using only the words of the Gospel and the Victimae Paschali, the most famous Easter hymn. From this the plays developed into regular drama in the vernacular. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the Easter plays became worldly and were filled with long burlesques speeches of slaves, slave dealers, Jews, soldiers, and demons.²¹

In Barvaria in the fifteenth century the Risus Paschalis originated. The priest would insert into his sermon a funny story on Easter morning which caused the congregation to laugh. Such a practice gave cause for great abuse. The practice continued after the Reformation in the Roman Catholic Church in Barvaria. It was finally forbidden by Pope Clement X, 1670 to 1676, and again in the eighteenth century by the Barvarian bishops.²²

In France and Germany handball was played by the clergy during Easter week. The ball was taken to represent the sun which was believed to take three leaps on Easter morning. Probably the explanation for the clergy playing handball is to be found in the strict discipline of Lent which was now lifted.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 226.

²²Ibid., p. 227.

²³Ibid.

In mid-twentieth century America the most popular symbols of Easter are the brightly colored eggs and the Easter rabbit.

The egg has long been associated with Easter Day. During the strict Lenten fast, eggs were forbidden. On Easter morning they were normally colored red to symbolize the joy of Easter. The symbolic meaning of Christ raising mankind to a new creation is a later added meaning. The actual foundation of the custom of using eggs in the spring season may have its roots in paganism. The egg was a symbol of the germinating of life of early spring.²⁴

The Easter rabbit who delivers the bright Easter eggs is also a carry-over from the pagan spring celebrations. The rabbit was the pagan symbol and emblem of fertility which was most appropriately used in the spring as new life appears.²⁵

²⁴"Easter," The Lincoln Library (Buffalo, New York: The Frontier Press, 1953), p. 2071.

²⁵Thurston, "Easter," Catholic Encyclopedia, V, 227.

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