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Pre- AD 196 Occurrence of the Christmas Date?

December 25th and the Epistle of Theophilus

Kurt M. Simmons

Following these comments is a translation of what is sometimes referred to as the *Epistle of Theophilus*, but more properly known as the *Council of Caesarea Concerning the Pascha*, or the *Acta Synodi* for short. The tract is, or purports to be, an account of the Council of Caesarea about AD 196 to establish a uniform rule for the observance of the Christian *Pascha* (“Passover”), commonly known in the English-speaking world as “Easter.”¹ The document exists in no less than 36 manuscripts and four recensions.² The two main versions are Recension A (long version), published by Baluze in 1683, and Recension B (short version), published by Bronkhurst in 1537. Recension A contains reference to the Christmas date. This reference, if authentic, bears witness to celebration of Christ’s birth December 25th prior to AD 196, making it arguably the earliest witness we possess.³

¹ Bede gives this following account for the term “Easter”: “*Eosturmonath has a name which is now translated “Paschal month”, and which was once called after a goddess of theirs named Eostre, in whose honour feasts were celebrated in that month. Now they designate that Paschal season by her name, calling the joys of the new rite by the time honoured name of the old observance.*” Bede, *De temporum ratione* 15 (Faith Wallis translation).

² Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, “Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656) and the History of the Easter Controversy,” *Studia Traditionis Tehologiae, Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology*, 26, Late Antique Calendrical Thought and its Reception in the Early Middle Ages, Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, Galway, 16-18 July, 2010, editors Immo Warntjes & Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, (2017, Bepols) 308-351, at 318.

³ “Theophilus, who lived about the time of the emperors Commodus and Severus, made first mention of it that I know for certain.” Rudolph Hospinian, *De Festis Christianorum Tractus* (Geneva, 1674), 168.

The document in all its versions is widely regarded as an “Irish Forgery,” written about AD 600 in defense of Irish customs regarding the proper limits for observing Easter, finally resolved by the Council of Whitby AD 663.⁴ Recension A refers to Eusebius and therefore cannot, at least in that part, be earlier than the fourth century or purport to be from the hand of Theophilus. Recension B does not include reference to Eusebius or the Christmas date; it is also the more widely attested. It is unclear which recension has the better claim to priority. On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine why an editor would add information naming Eusebius. On the other hand, if someone wanted to create the impression the document originated with Theophilus, as was believed by Bede and many others,⁵ it is easy to see why someone might remove it. Likewise with the Christmas date: since it is mentioned only incidentally in passing and defending the date is not part of the epistle’s purpose, it is difficult to see why an editor would add it. On the other hand, it is not difficult to see why it might be removed.

The *Pascha* followed the full moon and occurred at different times from year to year, moving back and forth within a 30-day window governed by the length of the lunar cycle. This made calculating and projecting when Easter Sunday would occur very difficult. Easter computists labored for centuries attempting to find the best cycle to accurately predict the date decades in advance so that all churches world-wide might observe it the same day.⁶ The difficulty involved with Easter computus doubtless made celebrating the *Pascha* on a fixed day in the solar calendar March 25th very attractive, and was the practice adopted by the Gauls. Moreover, to follow the moon seemed to them “Jewish.” That they could appeal to the fixed date of the Nativity December 25th would have tended to confirm the propriety of celebrating the Resurrection on a fixed day each year. After all, all dates in the Jewish lunar calendar change from year to year vis-à-vis the solar calendar, including the day of Jesus’ birth. In 2 BC when Jesus was most likely born,⁷ December 25th in the Julian calendar answered to Tevet 28 in the Jewish calendar;

⁴ Bruno Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie* (Leipzig, 1880), 303-310; Bartholomew MacCarthy, *Annals of Ulster* (Dublin, 1901), Vol. IV, pg. cxv. Eusebius’ account of the history of the Paschal controversy is found at *Eccl. Hist.* 5.23-25.

⁵ Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 47. Eusebius’ account of the history of the Paschal controversy is found at *Eccl. Hist.* 5.23-25.

⁶ See generally, Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (2008, Oxford).

⁷ Luke says Jesus was on the threshold of his thirtieth birthday when baptized in the autumn of AD 29; this would place his birth in 2 BC (Luke 3:23). The church fathers were all but unanimous that Jesus was born the 42nd year of Augustus Caesar (*e.g.*, 2 BC) based upon Luke. Those that give a different year for the nativity do so because of the way they reckoned the *reign of Augustus*, not because they believed Jesus was born in a different Julian year. For example, Tertullian (*Contra Judaeos* 7.8) and Clement Alexandria (*Stomata* 2.1.21) place Christ’s birth in the 41st year of Augustus when he had been reigning 28 years from the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra died 30 BC. 28 years from 30 BC is 2 BC. This may be compared with their regnal dates for Augustus. If dated from the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, the 41st year of Augustus would be 3 BC - a contradiction. But if dated from the Second Triumvirate, formed November 27, 43 BC, by enactment of the *Lex Titia*, this would point to 2 BC. Contradiction resolved. Identical results obtain in Irenaeus, Africanus, Hippolytus, Origen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius. The notion that Christ was born between 4-6 BC is a modern error that did not attain academic standing until publication of Emil Schürer’s *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner’s, 1896); reprint, revised G. Vermes and F. Millar, eds. 3 vols. in 4; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1973-1987) 1.281 n. 3; 1.2 84 n. 11; 1.327, n. 1. Schürer proposed that Herod the Great died in 4 BC. However, this has been all but refuted by recent scholarship: W. E. Filmer, *The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great*, JTS 17 (1966), 283–298; Earnest L. Martin, *The Nativity and Herod’s Death, Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (Eisenbrauns, 1989), 85–92; idem, *The Star that Astonished the*

if December 25th was Jesus' birthday in the Julian calendar, Tevet 28 was Jesus' birthdate in the Jewish. The next year, 1 BC, had a leap year with thirteen months or 384 days in the Jewish system.⁸ This extra thirty days pushed Tevet 28 over into the following Julian year, corresponding to January 13th, AD 1 (e.g., there was no Tevet 28 in 1 BC). In AD 2, it fell back to January 1st;⁹ in AD 3 (another leap year), it leapt ahead to January 20th, and so forth.¹⁰ This gives a sense of the complexity of correlating dates in a lunar calendar. If, rather than commemorating the Nativity on its day in the Jewish calendar, it could be fixed to a single date in the solar calendar, why not also the *Pascha*?¹¹ Arguments such as these may have prompted removing reference to December 25th, lest the simplicity and precedent of the fixed date for the one dissuade men from adopting the difficult, moveable date for the other. However, in the final analysis which recension is the original is not a deciding factor regarding the historical accuracy of the Christmas date. Indeed, for present purposes, even if we assume that the reference to Christmas is not original, this will not affect the question of its veracity, which is separate from the question of its originality.

Other than the opening paragraph, which provides the historical background leading to the Council, the document is written as a dialogue between Theophilus and the bishops of the Council. As a literary form, dialogue is an exposition by means of *invented conversation*, often consisting of contrasting or conflicting points of view. Perhaps the best-known examples of this literary form are the dialogues of Plato, in which he uses fictitious conversations between Socrates and other characters as a teaching device to advance his thesis. Just as the dialogues of Plato possess a quality that allow us to recognize we are dealing with a literary genre and not a deliberate deceit, the same seems true here. The exchange between Theophilus and the bishops is completely artificial; no reasonable person would argue that the Council transpired in the manner in which it is presented or that we have here the actual words of those that attended. The artificial quality of the dialogue cannot have been an accident: the author almost certainly intended that

World (2nd ed.; Portland: ASK Publications, 1996), 119–155; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 298–301; Andrew E. Steinmann, *When Did Herod the Great Reign?*, *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009), 1–29. The present trend of scholarship is to place Herod's death in 1 BC, consistent with Luke.

⁸ Twelve lunar cycles are completed in 354 days, eleven days shorter than the solar year. To bring the two back into sync, an extra month of thirty days ("Adar II") was added seven times in nineteen years. Dec. 25, 2 BC, +365-11+30 = Jan. 13, 1 BC.

⁹ The Julian calendar was initiated in 45 BC and had a leap year every third year thereafter until AD 12 when the calendar was reformed by Augustus to intercalate a leap year every four years. By that rubric, AD 1 was a leap year in the Julian calendar, making that year one day longer, so that twelve days, rather than eleven, come between lunar and solar calendars (366-354=12). This accounts for Tevet 28 corresponding to Jan.1, AD 2, whereas otherwise it would be Jan. 2.

¹⁰ <https://www.rosettacalendar.com/> accessed April 4, 2023.

¹¹ The difference, of course, is that the first day of the week has a special significance within the New Testament as the day of Christ's resurrection. From the start, it was the day of the common assembly of believers and the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:17-34; 16:1, 2). Because a fixed date in the solar calendar might fall on any day of the week, annual observance of the *Pascha* based on a solar calendar was thought to conflict with the special significance attached to Sunday and the resurrection. So Eusebius: "the mystery of the Lord's resurrection from the dead should never be celebrated on any other day but Sunday, and that on this day only we should observe the end of the paschal fasts" (*Ecclesiastical History*, V. 23.2). Nevertheless, liturgical writers tend to agree that the Quartodeciman *Pascha* was the original observation and that transference of the feast to Sunday came only later. Thomas J. Talley, "Liturgical Time in the Ancient Church: The State of Research" in *Between Memory and Hope: Readings for the Liturgical Year*, Maxwell E. Johnson editor (Liturgical Press, 2000), 26.

his piece be understood as an invention and not a verbatim account of the synod. This is particularly true in light of the reference to Eusebius, which openly dates the document to subsequent centuries. If so, it would be inaccurate to style the piece a “forgery,” which implies an intentional deceit. Rather, the piece is better understood as an exposition in which Theophilus and the bishops serve as literary props and characters used to investigate the typological corollaries of creation and redemption, and the proper limits of Easter.

In addition to the artificial nature of the dialogue is the tell-tale manner the rule itself is worked out. The bishops derive the limits for Easter more from the asserted facts and times of *creation* than the law of Moses or the actual historical circumstances surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. No attempt is made to identify when Jesus’ ministry began, how long it lasted, or when it ended based upon available evidence in the Gospels and other historical sources. Rather, creation week is seen as a prophetic type of God’s work of redemption, allowing the assumed facts of the one to establish and confirm those of the other. Because creation allegedly occurred on Sunday, March 25th, at the full moon of the vernal equinox, the resurrection purportedly occurred at that date and time as well: *end of inquiry*.

Placing the resurrection on March 25th, AD 31, indicates that the so-called “short chronology” was followed. The short chronology is based on a misreading of the synoptic Gospels and assumes Jesus’ ministry lasted only one year and several months, beginning late AD 29 and ending at Passover AD 31, in which year Nisan/Luna 17 fell on Sunday, March 25th, in the Julian calendar.¹² March 25th had historically been associated with the equinox among the Romans. However, due to an error of the Julian calendar, the equinox in the time of Christ occurred two or more days before March 25th.¹³ Thus, even if it is

¹² The short chronology is first encountered in Clement Alexandria (AD 153-217) among Christian writers: “And that it was necessary for Him to preach only a year, this also is written: ‘He hath sent Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’” (*Stromata*, 1.21). Cf. Isa. 61:2, Luke 4:19. However, it is documented a little before this by Irenaeus (AD 120-202) who refutes a similar tradition among the heretics: “They, however, that they may establish their false opinion regarding that which is written, ‘to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,’ maintain that He preached for one year only, and then suffered in the twelfth month” (*Contra Haereses*, 22:5). The synoptic Gospels pass over the first year-and-a-half to two years of Jesus’ ministry, and focus on Jesus’ Galilean ministry following the arrest of John instead (Mark 1:14; cf. Matt. 11:2). One explanation may be that the synoptic Gospels derive from a common original compiled by one of the apostles who chronicled Jesus’ ministry, perhaps Matthew who joined the twelve late in Jesus’ ministry (Matt. 9:9; cf. Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27) and whose notes would therefore have been largely confined to its last couple years. John’s Gospel supplies the first part of Jesus’ ministry before the Baptist’s arrest.

¹³ The tropical or solar year is 365 days 5 hours 48 minutes 46 seconds. The Julian year was set at exactly 365 days six hours, a difference of 11 minutes 14 seconds, or about one day every 128 years. Because the Julian year was longer than the solar year, the astronomical quarter points of the year occurred earlier and earlier than their calendar dates until whole days separated them. By the time of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the vernal equinox occurred four days early, on March 21st, which became the fixed dated thereafter for earliest limit of Easter. By the time the Gregorian calendar was adopted in AD 1582, ten days had accumulated between them. Ten days were therefore removed from the calendar the year of its adoption to return the equinox to March 21st. Reluctant to follow Catholic lead in this correction, Protestant England postponed adoption of the Gregorian calendar until 1752, requiring eleven days be removed from the calendar that year to return the equinox to March 21st. See generally, Denis Feeney, *Caesar’s Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (2007, University of California Press), 150.

assumed Jesus rose on March 25th, it would not have been the equinox. Passover was observed at the full moon on or first after the vernal equinox. Since the vernal equinox marks the beginning of spring, for the resurrection to occur on the equinox the third day following Passover would have required Jesus keep Passover in the closing days of *winter* preceding spring contrary to the law (Ex. 12:2-28). Finally, John's Gospel shows that Jesus' ministry spanned four Passovers in 3 ½ years, from autumn AD 29 to Spring AD 33.¹⁴ This was also the opinion of Eusebius who states Jesus' ministry was completed in the space of just less than four years¹⁵ and may provide another reason reference to Eusebius was removed: he contradicts the short chronology upon which the *Acta Synodi* is based. However, this much is clear: Jesus did not die or rise again March 25th, AD 31. The tract's appeal to creation typology was almost certainly intended to prop up the short chronology, which is itself short on facts.

Unfortunately, these points were not always understood in early times and March 25th acquired almost canonical status as the date of the resurrection or crucifixion. Part of the attraction of this date, despite having virtually no historical basis, is the perfect symmetry attained when combined with the December 25th Nativity. March 25th is nine months before December 25th thereby producing the triad of 3/25 – 12/25 – 3/25 for the Conception, Nativity, and Resurrection or Crucifixion of Christ.¹⁶ Belief John the Baptist was conceived on or about the Day of Atonement near the autumnal equinox meant that Jesus would have been conceived about six months later near the vernal equinox and Passover. The earliest trend among commentators was to place the Annunciation on or about the day of Passover, as we see for example in Hippolytus,¹⁷ Ephrem Syrus,¹⁸ and others. Occasionally, Passover might fall on March 25th, but this would have been very rare and happened only once in Jesus' life in AD 12.¹⁹ Theologically committed to Passover as the date of the Annunciation, commentators were slow to adopt March 25th instead. However, eventually the perfect symmetry of the dates 3/25 – 12/25 – 3/25 won popular imagination and carried the day.²⁰ The attempt to force dates into perfect symmetrical patterns and typological constructs continued into the Middle Ages and left a lasting mark in the ecclesiastical

¹⁴ Three Passovers are expressly mentioned at John 2:13, 23 (AD 30); 6:4 (AD 32); 13:1 (AD 33); the fourth (AD 31) occurred after John 4 but before John 5.

¹⁵ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 1.10.

¹⁶ There is much that makes it look like the triad first found expression with Julius Africanus (AD 160-240): Kurt Simmons, "Revisiting the Fathers: An Examination of the Christmas Date in Several Early Patristic Writers," *98 Questions Liturgiques* (2017) 143-180. Tertullian placed the Passion on March 25; *Adversus Judaeos* 8:18.

¹⁷ Thomas C. Schmidt, "Calculating December 25 as the Birth of Jesus in Hippolytus' Canon and Chronicon," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015) 542-563.

¹⁸ Ephrem Syrus, *Hymn IV on the Nativity of Christ*: "Moses shut up a lamb in the month Nisan on the tenth day; a type this of the Son that came into the womb and shut Himself up therein on the tenth day. He came forth from the womb in this month in which the sun gives longer light." Cf. Ephrem's comments on Ex 12:3: "The Lamb is a type of our Lord, who on the tenth of Nisan entered into the womb; for from the tenth day of the seventh month when Zachary received the message of John's birth, even to the tenth day of the first month when Mary received the message from the Angel, are six months."

¹⁹ <https://www.rosettacalendar.com/> accessed April 4, 2023.

²⁰ It appears that December 25th entered the church before March 25th. The earliest reference to March 25 occurs here connected with the Gauls where it appears in tandem with December 25th; March 25th also was used by Tertullian as the date of the crucifixion about this same time (*Adversus Judaeos* 8:18). December 25th, however, probably occurs sometime before AD 170 in early versions of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, probably borrowed from an already existing tradition within the church similar to January 6th and Epiphany (see below).

calendar of the Catholic church which retains many of these dates even today.²¹ The report that the Gauls observed March 25th as the Resurrection and December 25th for the Nativity reflects the beginning of the process we have just described.

The question before us is whether the report that believers in Gaul observed Christmas December 25th prior to AD 196 is entitled to credit? Here, it must be noted that virtually every other fact provided in the history leading up to the Council is unquestionably true. That there was a great diversity of practices commemorating the Passion and Resurrection is admitted by all. That the Gauls observed the *Pascha* annually on March 25th is admitted and documented by Bainton.²² That believers in Asia Minor kept the 14th of the moon with the Jews is also well known. That Victor called for a council and entrusted it to Theophilus is not in dispute.²³ Only the report that the Gauls celebrated the Nativity December 25th is open to objection, and this only upon the basis of the *Chronograph of 354* and the History of Religions Theory, which argues Christmas was adopted sometime after AD 274 making the claim here too early.²⁴ However, as the *Chronograph of 354* does not support the claims made for it, and as the Christmas date occurs about 30 years after the Council of Caesarea and perhaps 50 years or more before that Council, we will conclude that the *Chronograph of 354* offers no objection to the historicity of the *Acta Synodi* account.

Chronograph of 354 and the History of Religions Theory

The main theory in academic circles for the origin of the Christmas date is the “History of Religions Theory.” This theory has it that the Christmas date was surreptitiously appropriated by church officials in the middle of the fourth century to “Christianize” the pagan winter solstice or, more specifically, the festival *Sol Invictus*. The basis for this charge is the *Chronograph of 354*, an illuminated codex manuscript commissioned by a wealthy Roman senator named Valentinus. The codex is divided into seventeen sections, including a calendar (sect. VI), Paschal tables for the years AD 312-411 (sect. IX), a section entitled *Depositio episcoporum* (“Burial of bishops”) (sect. XI), and a section named *Depositio martirum* (“Burial of martyrs”) (sect. XII). The *Depositio episcoporum* consists of a short list containing the date, name, and place of burial of Roman bishops set in calendrical order from December 25th to December 24th.²⁵ The *Depositio martirum* consists of a similar list denoting the date and location of the burial of

²¹ The feast of the Annunciation is celebrated March 25th and the Birth of John the Baptist June 24 at the summer equinox in the Catholic Church. The quintessential attempt to force the conception and births of John and Christ into perfect conformity with the astronomical points of the year is anonymous tract *De Solstitiis et Aequinoctiis conceptionis et nativitatis Domini nostri Jesu Christi et Johannis Baptistae*, at one time misattributed to John Chrysostom.

²² Roland H. Bainton, “Basilidian Chronology and New Testament Interpretation”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 42, No. ½ (1923), pp. 81-134, 115-116.

²³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.23 – 25; cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.22.

²⁴ See Bainton, *Basilidian Chronology*, 115-116.

²⁵ In fact, the first entry is for VI kal. Ianuarias (Dec. 27th), but the consensus of scholarship is that the ecclesiastical year began Dec. 25th as evidenced by the birth of Christ in the section following. See R. W. Burgess, “The Chronograph of 354: Its Manuscripts, Contents, and History” in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5.2 (Fall, 2013) 345-396.

martyrs. Like the *Depositio episcoporum*, this section is arranged beginning with December 25th and the birth of Christ:²⁶ Here is the notation for the date of Christ's birth:

VIII kal. Ian. Natus Christus in Betleem Judeae

It is generally agreed that the *Depositio episcoporum* originally dates to AD 336 but was updated to AD 354 for inclusion in the codex by adding the deaths of the two most recent bishops.²⁷ Because it is arranged from December 25th to December 24th, it is apparent that the Nativity of Christ marked the beginning of the ecclesiastical year in Rome at least as early as AD 336. The calendar in section VI for the same date (VIII kal. Ian.) has the following abbreviated entry: N INVICTI CM XXX.

- N = Natalis ("birthday/nativity").
- INVICTI = "Of the Unconquered one."
- CM = Circenses Missus ("games ordered").
- XXX = 30.

Thus, for the birthday of the "unconquered one" that year, thirty games were ordered. It is widely believed that this is in reference to quadrennial games instituted in AD 274 by the emperor Aurelian who worshipped the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*).²⁸ On the strength of the shared date of December 25th, it is inferred by advocates of the History of Religions Theory that Christians surreptitiously appropriated the date for Christ's birthday to offset this allegedly popular pagan holiday. However, the basic assumption underlying this argument is without support; *viz.*, the games mentioned in the *Chronograph of 354* celebrated December 25th are probably *not* those instituted by Aurelian.

Roman tradition records worship of Sol from as early as the Sabine kings. Ritual calendars posted in Rome after adoption of the Julian calendar denote public sacrifices to Sol on August 8th, 9th, 28th, and December 11th. Of these, only August 28th still appears in the calendar of 354.²⁹ Two additional places in the *Chronograph* also denote games held in honor of Sol: October 19-22 and December 25th.³⁰ However, the games held December 25th are clearly differentiated by Julius the Apostate (AD 361-363) in his oration to Sol from the quadrennial games instituted by Aurelian. Hijmans notes:

For festivals of Sol there are three key passages in that hymn:

²⁶ The anomaly that a list denoting the date of martyrs' deaths should be headed up by the birth of Christ is generally explained by the view of early Christians that the date of one's earthly demise was equal to one's birth to heavenly life.

²⁷ Burgess, *The Chronograph of 354*, p. 379.

²⁸ Steven Hijmans, "Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas," in *Mouseion Series III*, Vol. 3, (2003), 377-398; C. Ph. E. Nothaft, 'The Origins of the Christmas Date: Some Recent Trends in Historical Research,' *Church History* 81 (2012), 903-11; S. K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, Liturgia Condenda 5 (Kampen, 1995); Roll, 'The Debate on the Origins of Christmas,' 1-16; S.K. Roll, "The Origins of Christmas: The State of the Question" in *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year* (Liturgical Press, 2000), 273:290.

²⁹ Steven Hijmans, "Usener's Christmas: A contribution to the modern construct of late antique solar syncretism," in *Hermann Usener und die Metamorphosen der Philologie*, eds. Michel Espagne and Pascale Rabault-Ferrière (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 147, 148.

³⁰ Aug. 28 - SOLIS·ET·LVNAE·CM·XXIII; Oct. 19 - LVDI·SOLIS, Oct. 20 - LVDI / DIES·AEGYPTIACVS, Oct. 21 - LVDI, Oct. 22 - SOLIS·CM·XXXVI; Dec. 25 - N·INVICTI·CM·XXX

1. near the beginning, in c. 3 he exhorts his reader to celebrate the annual festival of Sol as it is celebrated in the ruling city;
 2. in c. 41, he draws a contrast between the quadrennial games for Sol (τετραετηρικούς ἀγῶνας) which he characterizes as relatively new, and this annual festival which he ascribes to Numa.
 3. in c. 42-3, lastly, he states that this annual festival in honour of the rebirth of the sun takes place immediately after the Saturnalia and he gives a convoluted and quite fictitious explanation for why it is held a few days *after* the solstice rather than on the solstice itself. He refers to this latter festival as a περιφανέστατον ἀγῶνα.
- Clearly Julian is speaking of two different festivals to Sol, the one purportedly old, annual, and celebrated after the Saturnalia and before the new year; the other instituted fairly recently and celebrated every four years.³¹

But if the *annual* celebration was held December 25th following the solstice,³² then the *quadrennial* games must belong to some other date. Since that leaves only the games held October 19-22, it is obviously these Aurelian instituted, not those of December 25th.

Julian's claim that the annual festival held December 25th dates back to Numa is dismissed by Hijmans as a piece of fiction intended to give an ancient provenance to what was apparently a relatively new festival. In his words, "the notion that Mithraists celebrated December 25th in some fashion is a modern invention for which there simply is no evidence."³³ Indeed, Hijmans even goes so far as to speculate that December 25th was adopted by pagan authorities in response to Christian celebration of Christ's birth that date.³⁴ The upshot is that, although there is evidence for the Christmas date in Rome as early as AD

³¹ Steven Hijmans, *ibid*, 145. The passages in order are:

1. "Come then, and let us celebrate in the best way we can the anniversary festival, which the imperial city is keeping by sacrifices, with unusual splendour."
2. "If after this I were to mention that we worship *Mithras*, and celebrate quadrennial games, I should be speaking of more recent institutions; it is better therefore to confine myself to those of more ancient date in what I am going to add ... But our ancestors, from the time of that most religious King Numa, paying special honour to the god in question...settled to hold the New Year's festival in the present season, at what time the Sun returns to us."
3. "They did not fix the festival upon the *actual day* when the Sun makes the turn [but on the day] when it is apparent to all that he is making his progress from the South towards the North. For not yet known to them was the subtlety of those rules which the Chaldaeans and Egyptians invented, but which Hipparchus and Ptolemy brought to perfection; but they trusted to their senses, and followed the guidance of natural phenomena. And in this way, as I have said, the matter was discovered to be of such a nature by those who came after them. Immediately after the last month, which is Saturn's, and previous to the festival in question, we celebrate the most solemn of our Games, dedicating it to the honour of the 'Invincible Sun.'" (The Loeb translation is awkward and obscure; I have chosen the translation by C.W. King in *Bohn's Classical Library* (London, 1888) as better elucidating the points brought out by Hijmans.)

³² December 25th occurred after the solstice because by AD 362 when Julian the Apostate composed his oration to Sol an error in the Julian calendar caused it to lag behind the astronomical event by four days. The same phenomenon was noted by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 relative to the vernal equinox.

³³ Hijmans, *ibid*, 144.

³⁴ "Julian's contention that the winter solstice festival was instituted by Numa is a fabrication and his convoluted explanation of the date is impossible. The chronology of the feasts of Christmas and the Natalis Invicti may present a motive for Julian's fabrication. By placing Christ's birthday on such a cosmologically significant day the Christians

336, there is *no evidence* of a festival to Sol December 25th earlier than the *Chronograph of 354*.

According to Hijmans:

As the Christian celebration of Christmas on December 25th can be attested in Rome by AD 336, at which point it may already have been well-established, and the celebration of Sol on that day cannot be attested before AD 354/362 and had not yet entered the calendar in the late 320s, it is impossible to postulate that Christmas arose in reaction to some solar festival. There is quite simply not one iota of explicit evidence for a major festival of Sol on December 25th prior to the establishment of Christmas, nor is there any circumstantial evidence that there was likely to have been one.³⁵

In other words, the debate ultimately turns upon a question of chronological priority, whether Christians or pagans celebrated December 25th first. On the strength of the *Chronograph of 354*, it turns out that the evidence weighs completely in favor of Christians —*exactly the opposite of what we have been told for almost one hundred fifty years*. And as the *Chronograph of 354* is the sole basis for the charge that Christians adopted December 25th in response to Aurelian's quadrennial games, the History of Religions Theory obviously must be dismissed as a viable explanation for the origin of the Christmas date.

This brings us back to the *Acta Synodi* and the assertion that the Gauls celebrated the Nativity December 25th. Since the *Chronograph of 354* speaks only to the *fact* of the Christmas date not when or how it first entered the church, it cannot serve to reject or impugn the *Acta Synodi*. The only remaining basis to discredit the *Acta Synodi* is the questionable nature of the document itself. However, this offers small refuge: the questionable nature of the *Acta Synodi* does not negate the historical facts recited in its opening paragraph. As we have seen, virtually every other fact mentioned leading up to the Council is admittedly true. If every other fact is accurate, what basis do we have to reject its assertions about Christmas? The History of Religions Theory has been dispelled; what else is there? I know not any. Moreover, it does not logically follow that because mention of the Christmas date in the longer Recension A maybe the addition of a later hand that it is therefore false or historically inaccurate. Since the document itself is not from the hand of Theophilus, it is of little consequence whether the assertions about Christmas were part of the original; either way it does not date from AD 196. The question is whether the information is *accurate*, not when or how it found its way into the record. Occurrence of the Christmas date in other period documents suggest that it is, in fact, both accurate and reliable.

Initially, it should be noted that the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, which settled into its present form about AD 170,³⁶ assumes the winter birth of Christ by virtue of the fact that Zachariah, the father of John the

undermined through appropriation one of the main philosophical justifications of paganism, namely the divine order of the cosmos and the divine nature of its bodies. We cannot pursue this issue here, but one can speculate that the supposedly ancient festival of Sol was "rediscovered" by pagan authorities in response to the appropriation of the winter solstice by Christianity. We could then surmise that Julian more or less faithfully repeats the fabricated 'proof' that they presented to support this 'rediscovery'" (Hijmans, *ibid*, 350).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 348. See also Steven Hijmans, "Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas" in *Mouseion*, Series III, Vol. 3 (2003), 377-398.

³⁶ George Themelis Zervos, "The Protevangelium of James: Critical Questions of the Text and Full Collations of the Greek Manuscripts," in *Jewish and Christian Texts in Context and Related Studies*, T&T Clark Vol. 18 (Bloomsbury,

Baptist, was widely understood by the ancients to have been serving the week of Tishri 10 on the Day of Atonement.³⁷ Since John was about six months older than Jesus,³⁸ the latter would have been conceived per the story about the time of Passover and been born nine months later around the traditional date of December 25th. Thus, even in the form we presently possess it, the *Protevangelium* testifies that the traditional, early winter birth of Christ was extant in the church by AD 170 – twenty or more years before the Council of Caesarea.³⁹ However, there is evidence in Nicephorus Callistus and Julius Africanus that early versions of the *Protevangelium* expressly dated the Nativity to December 25th.

The Ecclesiastical History of Nicephorus records a fragment attributed to Evodius, a successor of the apostles and reputed martyr under Nero, in which the *Protevangelium Jacobi* figures prominently. Although it may be doubted whether Evodius is the actual author, it seems equally certain the fragment cited is very early. As already noted, the *Protevangelium Jacobi* is generally dated to the mid- to late-second century, perhaps AD 170. The fragment preserved here by Nicephorus, however, differs in various particulars which argue it represents a significantly earlier version. Here is the relevant portion:

The whole time from the Nativity until the passing of the mother of God he says were accomplished forty-four years, but of the whole of her life fifty-nine years. This obtains if in fact it was in her third year she was presented in the temple and there in the holy of holies passed eleven years. Then verily by the High Priest was given into the custody of Joseph with whom she remained four months when she received the joyful annunciation from the angel Gabriel. But it was in her fifteenth year on the 25th day of December that she bore the Light of the World. And when he who was the eternal and before all ages Word had passed thirty-three years, her son went forth from the earth. After the cross, however, at his request, she completed eleven years in the home of John, so that the whole age of her life being gathered together were fifty-nine years. Nicephorus Calistus, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.2

In the *Proevangelium Jacobi*, Mary lives in the sanctuary until she turned twelve when she was betrothed and placed in the custody of Joseph where she lived for four years before the annunciation by Gabriel and the conception of Christ. The reason for Mary leaving the temple when she does is expressly stated to be prompted by concerns of preserving the temple's ritual cleanliness *vis-à-vis* Mary reaching puberty and beginning menstruation.⁴⁰

2022) 2.11; Ron Cameron, "The Protevangelium of James" in *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (The Westminster Press, 1982), 108.

³⁷ See, for example, John Chrysostom, *On the Day of the Birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ, Christmas Sermon of 386*.

³⁸ Elizabeth was in her sixth month when Mary received the annunciation (Luke 1:24, 25, 36). Cf. Ephrem Syrus Commentary on Ex 12:3: "The Lamb is a type of our Lord, who on the tenth of Nisan entered into the womb; for from the tenth day of the seventh month when Zachary received the message of John's birth, even to the tenth day of the first month when Mary received the message from the Angel, are six months."

³⁹ We should point out that various indicia in the Gospels tend to confirm this tradition, for if Jesus was baptized in the autumn just prior to his 30th birthday (Luke 3:23), and if he began his public teaching ministry and made his first disciples after returning to John at Bethabara (John 1:26-51), followed by his first miracle at Cana January 6th marked by Epiphany (John 2:1-11), then his 30th birthday would have occurred sometime between late fall and early winter.

⁴⁰ "And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of the priests, saying: Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord?" *Protevangelium Jacobi* 8.2. However, since a prepubescent girl cannot pollute the temple, the passage is better understood as explanation why Mary's age was reduced from fourteen than why she was

Conversely, in the fragment preserved by Nicephorus, Mary is *fourteen* years old when she is betrothed to Joseph and lives with him only *four months* when she receives the annunciation and conceives the Christ child. Since Mary was capable of conceiving when she was betrothed, she would necessarily have already experienced menstruation. But as this would have polluted the temple under Levitical law (Lev. 15:19-33), the story was evidently rewritten to lower Mary's age to *twelve* at the time of her betrothal and extend the period until the annunciation from four months to *four years*.⁴¹

Thus, the *Protevangelium Jacobi* we now possess appears to be a later version rewritten to avoid the problem inherent in the version preserved by Nicephorus. If this is correct, and if the *Protevangelium Jacobi* we now possess settled into its present form by AD 170, then the copy attributed to Evodius necessarily dates earlier than that. More important for present purposes, in Nicephorus' edition, the date of the nativity is expressly stated to be December 25th, and Jesus is called the Light of the World – a probable reference to the solstice. Thus, if the version attributed to Evodius pre-dates the *Protevangelium* we now possess, then the Christmas date is attested before AD 170.⁴²

This same pattern occurs in a document known as the *Excerpta Latinae Barbari* where the December 25th birth of Christ is again embedded within portions of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*.

*In the same consulship our Lord Jesus Christ was born under Augustus on the eighth calends of January. He was born in a desert whose name was Puusdu: that is 'Pious.' On the same day he was born, the shepherds saw the star Chuac 28. Verily from Adam unto the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ there were 5500 years.*⁴³

The *Excerpta* have been shown elsewhere to ultimately derive from Julius Africanus' *Chronographia*.⁴⁴ Africanus is believed to have written the *Chronographiae* between AD 212 and 221.⁴⁵ Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170-235), a younger contemporary of Africanus, is also known to have used the Christmas date and helps to corroborate this early usage by Africanus.⁴⁶ That the *Protevangelium Jacobi* was the primary source of Africanus' birth narrative after the Gospels is witnessed by his reference to the martyrdom of Zachariah, father of John the Baptist, under Herod the Great, the three days mourning that followed, and the appointment of Simeon as high priest in place of Zachariah, all of which are taken directly from the

allegedly betrothed at twelve. In Luke's Gospel, Mary travels from Galilee to Judea alone to visit Elizabeth which a girl of 14 or 16 would never do (Luke 1:39-56).

⁴¹ Fourteen is the age preserved the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*. In the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, Mary is twelve when she is betrothed, but fourteen when she conceives. Only the *Protevangelium Jacobi* expressly mentions Mary defiling the temple due to her becoming of marriageable age as the reason for seeking her betrothal.

⁴² For a full discussion, see Kurt Simmons, "Revisiting the Fathers: An Examination of the Christmas Date in Several Early Patristic Writers," *98 Questions Liturgiques* (2017) 143-180.

⁴³ Translated from: Joseph Justus Scaliger, *Thesaurus Temporum Eusebii Pamphili Caesareae Palaestinae Episcopi* (Lugdunum Batavorum [Leiden], 1606), 2nd pagination, pp. 67-8 (= 1681, 82). Cf. Alfred Schoene, *Eusebii chronicorum liber prior*, 2 vols., (Berlin 1875-76), Vol. 1, Appendix p. 227 [50a].

⁴⁴ Simmons, "Revisiting the Fathers," 143-180.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Gelzer, *Sextus Julius Africanus* (Leipzig, G.G. Teubner, 1880-98), 12.

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Schmidt, "Calculating December 25 as the Birth of Jesus in Hippolytus' Canon and Chronicon," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015) 542-563; Thomas C. Schmidt, Nick Nicholas, *Hippolytus of Rome: Commentary on Daniel and 'Chronicon'* (2017, Gorgias Press).

Protevangelium Jacobi.⁴⁷ Since Africanus would have consulted the earliest version of the *Protevangelium Jacobi* available for his *Chronographiae*, he almost certainly made use of an edition similar in date and provenance as that attributed to Evodius where he also apparently found the date of December 25th for Jesus' birth. The Christmas date may have been dropped from later editions of the *Protevangelium Jacobi* when the notion Jesus was born January 6th became more popular, causing editors to leave this detail out of the story in order to give it wider reception, implicitly retaining the winter birth but with no date specified – the form in which we find it today.

In summary, there is significant evidence for the occurrence of the Christmas date near the time of the Council of Caesarea. Within 30 years or so after that Council, we find it in Julius Africanus and Hippolytus. The source for Africanus' citation, which he also apparently shared with Evodius, appears to date sometime before AD 170, 50 years or so before the Council of Caesarea. As such, there is no obstacle to receiving reference to the Christmas date in the *Acta Synodi* as historically accurate – at least not on the evidence we possess at present.

⁴⁷ In the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, Zechariah, the son of Berachiah, who was slain between the temple and the altar (Matt. 23:35), is equated with Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, rather than the Old Testament prophet by that name (Zech 1:1; cf. 13:7 where the prophet's martyrdom pre-figures that of Christ (Matt. 26:31) and is the probable reference alluded to by the Lord). Simeon is the gentle soul introduced by Luke at the presentation of the Christ child at the temple forty days after his birth (Luke 2:25-33). The author of the *Protevangelium* makes Simeon the successor of Zachariah as high priest after the latter's alleged martyrdom.

The Epistle of Theophilus

Council of Caesarea Concerning the Pascha

Acta Synodi

SYNODUS CAESARIENSIS DE PASCHATE⁴⁸

COUNCIL OF CAESAREA CONCERNING THE
PASCHA

1. Cum omnes apostoli ex hoc mundo tranissent, per universum orbem diversa errant ieiunia. nam omnes Galli unum diem anniversarium VIII Kal. April. Pascha celebrabant dicentes: Quid nobis est ad lunae computum cum Judaeis facere Pascha? sed sicut dominio natalem, quocunque die venerit, VIII Kal. Ianuarii, ita et VIII Kal. Aprilis, quando resurrection traditur Christi, debemus Pascha tenere. orientales vero, sicut historia Eusebii Caesariensis narrat, quocunque die mense Martio quartadecima luna evenisset, Pascha celebrabant. in Italia autem alii plenos quadriginta dies ieiunabant, alii triginta: alii dicebant, septem diebus, in quibus mundus concluditur, sibi sufficere ieiunare: alii, quia dominus quadriginta diebus ieiunasset, illi horas quadraginta deberent. cum haec ergo talis diversa esset observatio, maeror erat sacerdotum, quod

1. When all the apostles had passed from this world, different fasts roamed through the whole earth; for all the Gauls kept the Pascha one day annually, March 25th, saying: "Why should we keep the Pascha with the Jews according to the computation of the moon? But as we keep the nativity of the Lord on whatsoever day December 25th falls, we also ought to keep the Pascha March 25th, when according to tradition the resurrection of Christ occurred." Indeed, as the history of Eusebius relates, those in the east celebrate the Pascha on whatsoever day the fourteenth of the moon occurs in the month of March. However, in Italy some fast a full forty days, others thirty; some say seven days in which the world was made is sufficient for them to fast; others, because the Lord fasted forty days, suppose they ought to fast forty hours. Since, therefore, there was such diverse observation, the clergy

⁴⁸ The Latin text is Paul de Lagarde, *Mittheilungen* (1889), vol. 4, 274-282; See also S. Isidori Hipalensis Episcopi *Opera Omnia*, Bk. III, pg. 515; The paragraphing and numbering are mine - KMS.

ubi erat una fides, dissonarent ieiunia. tunc papa Victor Romanae urbis episcopus direxit, ut daret auctoritatem ad Theophilum Caesariensem Palaestinae provinciae episcopum, quia tunc non Hierosolyma metropolis videbatur, ut inde paschalis ordination proveniret ubi Christus fuisset in corpore versatus.

2. Accepta ita que auctoritate Theophilus episcopus videns tantum sibi opus fuisse iniunctum quod in mundi observationem transitteretur, non solum suae patriae, sed et de vicinis provinciis omnes episcopos et sapientes viros ad Concilium evocavit. cumque grandis illa multitudo sacerdotum vel sapientium virorum in omnibus scripturis spiritualibus erudite in unum fuisset collecta, tunc protulit Theophilus episcopus auctoritatem ad se directam papae Victoris, et quid sibi operis esset iniunctam patefecit. tunc pariter omnes dixerunt: Primum nobis inquirendum est quomodo in principio mundus fuerit factus: et cum hoc fuerit diligentius investigatum, tunc poterit ex eo paschalis ordination salubriter provenire. dixerunt ergo episcopi: Quem diem primum credimus creatum in mundo? Responderunt: Dominicum. Theophilus episcopus dixit: Quomodo potest probari quod primus Dominicus sit dies factus? responderunt episcopi: Dicente scriptura Et factum est vespere et factum est mane dies primus. inde secundus, tertius, quartus, quintus, sextus, et septimus, in quo requievit ab omnibus operibus suis. quem diem sabbatum appellavit. cum ergo novissimus sit sabbatum, quis potest esse primus nisi dominicus? Dixerunt: Sic est, et aliter non est.

3. Theophilus episcopus dixit: Ecce de die dominico quod primus sit, probastis. de tempore quid vobis videtur? quatuor enim tempora in anno accipiuntur, ver, aestas, autumnus, et heims. quod ergo tempus credimus primum in mundo factum? episcopi responderunt: Vernum. Theophilus episcopus dixit: Probate quod dicitis.

lamentated that, where there was one faith, there should be a disparity of fasts. Then papa Victor, bishop of the city of Rome, directed that authority be given to Theophilus of Caesarea, bishop of the province of Palestine (because Jerusalem did not then seem the metropolis), that a paschal rule might come whence Christ had dwelt.

2. Therefore, having received authority, seeing the task enjoined upon him alone should become a regulation to be sent through the world, bishop Theophilus called to counsel all the bishops and wise men, not of his country alone, but also from neighboring provenances. And when a great many clergy and wise men learned in all spiritual scriptures had gathered in one, bishop Theophilus then took the authority papa Victor directed him and made known the task that he was enjoined. Then they all said together: "We must first inquire how the world was made in the beginning: and when this has been diligently investigated, a paschal rule can wholesomely come about." The bishops therefore said: "What day do we believe was first created in the world?" They answered: "The Lord's Day." Theophilus the bishop said: "How can you prove that the Lord's Day was the first day made?" The bishops answered: "Scripture says 'And there was an evening and there was a morning the first day;' then the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh, in which God rested from all his works; which day he called the Sabbath. Therefore, since the last was the Sabbath, what can the first be save the Lord's Day?" They said: "So it is, and not otherwise."

3. Bishop Theophilus said: "Behold, you have proved that the Lord's Day was the first. What does it seem to you regarding the season; for there are four seasons in a year: spring, summer, autumn, and winter; what season therefore do we believe was made first in the world?" The bishops answered "Spring." Bishop Theophilus said: "Prove what you say." And they responded:

et illi responderunt: Dicente scriptura Germinet terra herbam foeni secundum genus suum, et lignum fructiferum faciens in se fructum: haec enim verno tempore videmus fieri.

4. Theophilus episcopus dixit: Venum est. et adjecit: quoniam tribus mensibus venum tempus accipitur, quo loco mundi caput esse credimus, in principio, an medio loc, an in fine? Episcopi dixerunt: In aequinoctio, id est, VIII Kal. Aprilis. Theophilus dixit: Probate quod dicitis. Et illi responderunt: Dicente scriptura Et fecit deus lucem, et lucem vocavit diem, et fecit deum tenebras, et tenebras vocavit noctem: et divisit deus inter lucem et tenebras aequas partes.

5. Theophilus dixit: Est verum. Ecce de die vel tempore probastis: de luna quid vobis videtur? quomodo dicimus fuisse creatam a principio, plenam, an minuentem? episcopi responderunt: Plenam. at ille dixit: Probate quod dicitis. episcopi responderunt: Scriptura divina dicente Et fecit Deus duo luminaria magna, et posuit ea in firmament caeli, sic ut luceant super terram. luninare maius incohesionem diei, et luninare minus incohesionem noctis, quae tota nocte luceat super terram, non potuit esse aliter nisi plena.

6. Theophilus dixit: Sic est verum. ergo quomodo fuisset creatus mundus, inveniamus. reponderunt: Die dominico, verno tempore, aequinoctio, hoc est, VIII Kal. Aprilis, et luna plena. episcopi dixerunt: Sicut in principio mundus creatus est, per ipsum tempus etiam per resurrectionem dominicam redemptus est a peccato. resurrexit itaque dominus noster Iesus Christus die dominico, verno tempore, in aequinoctio, luna plena. per ipsum tantummodo tempus elementa consurgunt

7. Theophilus dixit: Ecce investigavimus quomodo in principio factus est mundus, vel a peccato redemptus: nunc de observatione Paschae

“Scripture says ‘the earth brought forth the herb of grass according to his kind, and the tree yielding fruit whose seed was in itself’: for this we see come to pass in springtime.”

4. Theophilus the Bishop said: “True it is,” and added: “Since springtime has three months, when do we believe the world started, the beginning, the middle, or the end?” The bishops answered: “At the equinox, that is March 25th.” Theophilus said: “Prove what you say.” And they answered: “Scripture has said ‘And God made light, and he called the light ‘day’ and God made darkness, the darkness he called ‘night’: and God divided equal parts between the light and the darkness.’”

5. And Theophilus said: “It is true. Behold, you have proved regarding the day and season: what does it seem to you regarding the moon, how do we say was it was created in the beginning, full or waxing?” The bishops answered: “Full.” And he said: “Prove what you say.” The bishops responded, “The divine scriptures have said ‘And God made two great lights, and placed them in the firmament of the heaven, so that they should give light upon the earth; the greater to give light the duration of the day, the lesser to give light the duration of the night’, which could not give light upon the earth the whole night, unless it were full.”

6. Theophilus said: “Such is true. Therefore, in what manner should we find the world was made?” They responded: “On the Lord’s Day, in springtime, at the equinox, that is, March 25, and the full moon.” The bishops said: “Just as in the beginning the world was created, at exactly the very time itself, even by the Lord’s resurrection, was it redeemed from sin: Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ rose again on the Lord’s Day, in springtime, at the equinox, on the full moon. At the very time itself the elements arose.”

7. Theophilus said: “Behold, we have examined how the world was made in the beginning, and how it was redeemed from sin. Now must be

agendum est, quo die, aut quo tempore, vel luna, Pascha debeat ordinari. De die dominico quid vobis videtur? episcopi dixerunt: Numquid potest Dominicus dies paeteriri ut in eo Pascha minime celebretur, qui tot ac talibus benedictionibus sanctificatus est? Theophilus episcopus dixit: Quibus aut quantis benedictionibus, apertius dicite, ut scire possimus quas santificationes in eo asseritis, ut scribere possimus.

8. episcopi dixerunt: Prima illa benediction est, quod in ipso tenebrae remotae sunt, et lux apparuit. secunda, quod populus Israel ex Aegypto tenebrarum velut per baptismum fontis per mare rubrum de duro servitio fuerit liberatus. tertia, quia mandate Moyses ad populum et dicit Observatus sit vobis dies primus et novissimus, hoc est, dominicus et sabbatum. quarta, quia centesimus decimus septimus psalmus totus de passione et resurrectione cantatur. De passione: Circumdantes circumdederunt me, et in nomine domini vindicabor in eis. circumdederunt me sicut apes favum, et exarserunt sicut ignis in spinis. et interiectis versibus: Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes, hic factus est in caput anguli. Haec de passione. de resurrectione autem dicit: Haec dies quam fecit dominus, exultemus et laetemur in ea. et interiectis versibus: Constituite diem solemnem in donensis frequentantibus in cornu altaris. dixerunt sic esse verum ut die dominico Pascha celebretur, quia et tantis benedictionibus santificatus est, ut in eo die dominum nostrum Iesus Christum a mortuis manifestum sit resurrexisse.

9 Theophilus dixit: Ecce constitutum est de die dominico: de tempore quid vobis videtur? Responderunt: Numquid aliter itellegi potest nisi quod in divina scriptura praefinitum est, dicente per Moysen Hic mensis erit vobis initium mensium, Pascha facitote in eo? Non dixit in prima die mensis, aut decima, aut vicesima, sed

addressed regarding celebration of the Pascha the day, time, and whether the Pasch ought to be ordered by the moon? What does it seem to you regarding the Lord's Day?" The bishops answered: "What can surpass the Lord's Day, that on it the Pascha should not be celebrated, which is sanctified by so many kinds of blessings?" Bishop Theophilus said: "Declare plainly the type and number of blessings, so we may know those sanctifications and may write them.

8. The bishops said: "First, that day is blessed because in it darkness was removed, and light appeared. Second, because the people of Israel were freed from hard service out of Egyptian darkness through the Red Sea as if by the baptismal font. Third, because Moses commanded the people and said, 'You shall observe the first day and last', that is, the Lord's day and the Sabbath. Fourth, because the whole one hundred seventeenth Psalm [viz., 118th] sings about the passion and resurrection. Concerning the passion: 'Compassing they compassed me, but in the name of the Lord I will be avenged on them. They compassed me about like bees the honeycomb; but they are burned as a fire in thorns' and in the verses following: 'The stone that the builders refused is become the head of the corner.' This concerning the passion. Concerning the resurrection, however, he says: 'This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.' In the verses following: 'Establish the solemn day with numerous sacrifices on the horns of the altar.'" They said "Thus, it is just that the Pascha be celebrated on the Lord's Day, because with such great blessings it was sanctified, namely that in it our Lord Jesus Christ was shown to have been raised from the dead."

9 Theophilus said: "Behold, regarding the Lord's Day is settled: what does it seem to you regarding the time?" They answered: "What can otherwise be understood except what the divine scriptures before appointed, when they said by Moses 'This month will be to you the beginning of months, keep the Pascha in it?' He did not say on the first

totos triginta in Pascha sanctificavit. Theophilus dixit: Qui sunt hi triginta dies? At illi responderunt: Iam autem diximus principium mundi esse aequinoctium: ab octavo enim Kal. Aprilis usque ad octavam Kal. Maii, hi sunt triginta dies in Pascha sanctificati.

10 Theophilus episcopus dixit: Et impium non est ut illi tres dies passionis dominicae foras terminum excludantur, id est XI. Kal. Aprilis, quinta feria, quod caena Domini vocatur, qua cum discipulis suis discubuit, quando et Judae praedixit quod ab ipso esset tradendus? quod constat fuisse impletum. passus namque est dominus ab undecimo Kalendas Aprilis, qua nocte a Juda est traditus, et ad octavum Kalendas Aprilis resurrexit. quomodo ergo hi tres dies extra terminum excludantur? dixerunt omnes non esse verum ut foras limitem passio mittatur, sed introducantur hi tres dies in ordine paschali, et de novissimo reducantur. Et ita statutum est in illo concilio ut nec ante XI. Kal. Aprilis neque post XI. Kal. Maii fieri debeat Pascha.

11 Theophilus dixit: Ecce de die vel tempore statutum est: de luna quid vobis videtur? responderunt: Similiter et de luna praeceptum divinum servetur, decemque Moyses Et sit vobis observatio a quarta decima usque primam et vicesimam lunam. has octo lunas in Pascha fuisse consecratur. Quando ergo intra illum terminum statutum dies Dominicus et luna una ex his octo convenerit, Pascha nobis iussum est celebrare

day of the month, or the tenth, or twentieth, but the whole thirty he has sanctified in the Pascha.” Theophilus said: “What are those thirty days?” And they answered: “We have already said the beginning of the world was the equinox: from March 25th until April 24th, these thirty days are sanctified in the Pascha.

10 Bishop Theophilus said: “Is it not impious that three days of the Lord’s passion be excluded from the limit, that is March 22th, Thursday, which is called the Lord’s Supper, when he reclined with his disciples, and foretold that he would be betrayed by Judas? As to which it is well-known to have been fulfilled: For the Lord suffered from March 22nd, the night in which he was betrayed by Judas, and on March 25th he rose again. Therefore, how are these three days excluded from the limit? They all said it is not reasonable that the passion be placed outside the limit, but those three days should be added to the Paschal rule and subtracted from the last. And so it was decreed in that council that neither before March 22nd nor after April 21st ought the Pascha to be observed.

11 Theophilus said: “Behold, the day and time are established: what does it seem to you regarding the moon?” They answered: “Divine precept about the moon should likewise also be kept, when Moses said, ‘and you shall observe from the fourteenth unto the twenty-first of the moon.’ These eight moons he consecrated to be in the Pascha. When therefore the Lord’s Day and one moon of these eight occur within the established limit, we are commanded to keep the Pascha.