

The Roman System (System E)

Despite the fact that the quasi-Quartodeciman System D, the early form of the western view, had made some important inroads during the first half of the second century C.E., its advocates still met with strong resistance. The Quartodecimans argued that Christians should observe only the 14th as the Phasekh supper and Eucharist mystery (cup and bread) because the messiah and his disciples kept that same day. This belief was deeply entrenched. It was made more difficult to overcome by the fact that System D was based upon the same apostolic authority (the apostle John) as was the Quartodeciman construct.¹ It soon became obvious that if the Roman assembly was to gain political dominance in the West, as well as over many of the eastern assemblies, a new strategy was required. In response, during the last decade of the second century C.E., the western leaders and theologians developed a new approach, the Roman assembly Phasekh and, after the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., canonized as the Roman Catholic Phasekh (System E).

Countering the Quartodecimans

In an effort to counter the Quartodeciman threat, which many in the West considered a form of Judaizing, those under Roman leadership modified System D, which observed the 14th through 20th days of the first moon for the seven days of unleavened bread. Under their new system (System E), as with System D, they retained the Sovereign's day—the first day of the week during the seven days of unleavened bread—as the time to celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist.

Yet major changes came in three areas. First, they advanced the Roman assembly view that the period which began with the Friday preceding the Sovereign's day until Saturday night was the time to fast.² Second, the advocates of System E made a decision to adopt the Hasidic construct for the seven days of unleavened bread (i.e., counting from the 15th until the end of the 21st day of Abib). However, they discarded the Hasidic interpretation to always observe the 15th and 21st of Abib as high Sabbaths. Third, they adopted the Hasidic interpretation that the 15th of Abib was the correct day for the legal Phasekh supper found in the written Torah. The ramifications of these changes were far-reaching.

¹ See above Chap. XVIII, pp. 295f.

² The observance of this fast was at the heart of the differences between Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus and leader of the Asian assemblies, and Victor, bishop of Rome, in 196 C.E. (Irenaeus, frag. 3; Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:11–16).

In our present chapter, we shall open our examination of those Christian systems that adopted the Hasidic view of the seven days of unleavened bread with a discussion of (1) the time frame and (2) the originators of the System E construct. Then in our next chapter, we shall document the mechanics of System E and examine other Hasidic-based Christian systems that followed.

Time of the Change

The time of change, when the western assemblies moved from System D to System E, occurred in the second half of the first century C.E. As we have already noted, the earliest advocates of the western view (System D) calculated the seven days of unleavened bread from the 14th day until the end of the 20th day of the first moon, a view that was itself Quartodeciman-based. Yet, unlike the Quartodecimans, they observed a Sunday-only celebration of the Phasekh Eucharist. As Raniero Cantalamessa observed:

Naturally the choice of the anniversary of the passion rather than the anniversary of the resurrection as the date of the feast meant emphasizing one of the events more than the other.³

The heart of the attempt to persuade other western and the eastern assemblies to leave the Quartodeciman system rested entirely upon very strong anti-Jewish rhetoric and the claim that the day of the resurrection was a much happier occasion to celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist. To solidify this view, the Roman bishops converted the Friday and Saturday preceding Phasekh Sunday into fast days. Yet these arguments were simply not strong enough to bring the Quartodecimans into the western camp. In the latter half of the second century C.E., the East still remained strongly Quartodeciman. In the eyes of the leaders of the Roman assembly, it became a time for change.

The leadership of the Roman assembly realized that they could only gain political dominance over all of these other assemblies if the greater Assembly⁴ was unified in its doctrines. Therefore, it was necessary for them to find a stronger basis for dismissing the 14th as the day of the Phasekh. The result of this activity was the development of a newer construct for keeping the sovereign's Phasekh of the resurrection—System E, which argued that the Phasekh could only be kept from the 15th to the 21st days of the first month. To further dismiss the Quartodeciman practice for celebrating Phasekh on the 14th, the accusation was made that those observing the 14th were committing an act of Judaizing.

The leader of this new movement is uncovered in the following way. Columbanus of Luxovium, who advocated System D, bitterly testified in a letter to Pope Gregory, dated to the year 598 C.E., that the culprit behind this innovation to dismiss the 14th as a day to observe Phasekh and charge it as being an act of Judaizing was Pope Victor of Rome (192–202 C.E.).

³ EEC, p. 9.

⁴ See above Intro.: Sect. II, p. 265, n. 2.

Columbanus of Luxovium writes (and we quote him at some length to gain the flavor of the dispute):

... after so many authors whom I have read, I am not satisfied with that one sentence of those bishops who say only, "We ought not to keep Phasekh with the Jews" (i.e., on the 14th). FOR THIS IS WHAT BISHOP VICTOR FORMERLY SAID; but none of the Easterns accepted his figment. But this, the benumbing backbone of Dagon; this, the dotage of error drinks in. Of what worth, I ask, is this sentence, so frivolous and so rude, and resting as it does, on no testimonies from sacred Scripture: "We ought not to keep the Phasekh with the Jews"? What has it to do with the question? Are the reprobate Jews to be supposed to keep the Phasekh now, seeing that they are without a temple, outside Jerusalem, and the messiah, who was formerly prefigured, having been crucified by them? Can it be rightly supposed that the 14th day of the moon for the Phasekh was of their own (i.e., a Jewish) appointment? Or, is it not rather to be acknowledged that it is from the deity, who alone knew clearly with what mysterious meaning the 14th day of the moon was chosen for the passage (out of Egypt).⁵

Under the guiding hand of theoreticians Victor of Rome and Irenaeus of Gaul, and with the agreement of others like Clement of Alexandria, the western assemblies did an about-face and accepted what had previously been shunned—i.e., the Hasidic premise that the seven days of unleavened bread extended from the beginning of the 15th until the end of the 21st day of the first moon.

The System E concept was developed as a result of the controversy which followed the visit of the Quartodeciman Polycarp of Smyrna, leader of the eastern assemblies, with Anicetus, the bishop of Rome and leader over several of the western assemblies. It was with this dispute that we hear for the first time of a difference between the observance of the 14th as the historical Phasekh and the western observance of Phasekh Sunday (System D) being practiced at Rome. It was no earlier than 158 C.E.,⁶ and probably shortly thereafter, that these two bishops tried to resolve their differences over the Phasekh issue. Little was accomplished. They only agreed to disagree. Polycarp, already a very old man and unwilling to cause a schism in the Assembly,⁷ quietly returned home and peace continued between the two sides.⁸

⁵ Gregory, *Epist.*, 127.

⁶ Anicetus did not obtain the bishopric of Rome until early in 158 C.E. (see Chart K).

⁷ Polycarp died after living as a Christian for 86 years (Polycarp, 9; Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:14:3f, 4:15:20). He was converted as a young boy (Pionius, *Poly.*, 3) and, based on various other factors (see App. F and G), he was at least 99 years old at his death.

⁸ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:14–17; Irenaeus, frag. 3; Socrates Schol., 5:22.

At the same time, members of the Roman assembly saw Polycarp's unwillingness to censure or excommunicate Anicetus as a sign of weakness. Polycarp's inability to convince Anicetus, allowing Anicetus to retain his own view, and then departing Rome on friendly terms actually represented proof in the minds of many members of the western assemblies that the western view was at least equal in authority to the older Quartodeciman view.⁹ Polycarp's inability to convince the leadership of Rome, therefore, became the first major step on the road to political dominance for the leadership of the Roman assembly.

Perceiving that they were now unfettered and justified in their approach, the Roman assembly began a major campaign to expand their power. During the latter half of the second century C.E., using a series of conferences, epistles, and meetings, they rapidly increased their dominance over many of the other western assemblies, extending their influence even over the Roman province around Jerusalem.¹⁰

Meanwhile, shortly before the death of Polycarp (about the spring of 170 C.E.),¹¹ the western doctrine of Phasekh was making its way into Asia. As a result, the Asian assemblies revived the Phasekh debate at Laodicea (in the spring of 167 C.E.).¹² Some were, for the first time, pleading an interpretation of the story of the messiah's suffering that reflected a strong Hasidic influence. The Quartodeciman Apollinarius of Hierapolis, for example, mentions the fact that at that time some, "on account of ignorance," had stirred up a dispute, arguing that Yahushua had eaten the Phasekh lamb with his disciples on the 14th but did not suffer death until the 15th, "on the great day of Unleavened Bread."¹³ The context of this debate is reflected in Apollinarius of Hierapolis' response, "the 14th is the true Phasekh of the sovereign."¹⁴ This disagreement reveals the beginning of an effort by those who were trying to introduce the Hasidic construct, which makes the 15th the first day of unleavened bread and a high Sabbath, into the Christian Phasekh debate.

At that time, Melito, bishop of Sardis, wrote his two books entitled *On the Phasekh*.¹⁵ In this work Melito defended the view of the Asiatic assemblies.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, in approximately 170 C.E.,¹⁷ Apollinarius, who was from the city of Hierapolis (located near Laodicea in Asia Minor), also wrote in defense of the Quartodeciman view. The Quartodecimans were now striking back hard. Indeed, their premise was extremely difficult to argue against. As one Quartodeciman pointed out in his debate with Hippolytus:

⁹ This attitude is clearly expressed by later writers such as Irenaeus, frag. 3; Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:14–18; and Socrates Schol., 5:22.

¹⁰ Roman assembly influence over the bishops of Palestine is clearly expressed by the willingness of Theophilus, bishop of Caesarea, and Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem, to join with Victor in the Phasekh controversy.

¹¹ For the date of Polycarp's death see App. F and G.

¹² See above Chap. XVIII, p. 291, n. 11, for the date of this synod.

¹³ Chron. Paschale, 1, pp. 13f; cf., EEC, p. 141, #26, n. b.

¹⁴ Chron. Paschale, 1, pp. 13f.

¹⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:26:1–3, which dates the work, "In the time of Servillius Paulus, proconsul of Asia, at the time when Sagaris was martyred" (i.e., c.164–167 C.E.; see Lake, *Euseb.*, i, p. 387, n. 7).

¹⁶ That Melito supported the Quartodeciman view see Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:5.

¹⁷ JTS (NS), 24, p. 76.

The messiah kept the Phasekh ON THAT DAY (the 14th) and he suffered; whence it is needful that I, too, should keep it (the Phasekh supper) in the same manner as the sovereign did.¹⁸

As a result of the Quartodeciman counter-attack, those holding to the early western view (System D) sought for a stronger argument. Under the leadership of Victor, bishop of Rome (192–202 C.E.), a major effort was made by the Roman assembly to gain doctrinal supremacy in reference to the Phasekh.

Many meetings and conferences with other bishops were held on this point, and all unanimously formulated in their letters the doctrine of the assembly for those in every country that the mystery of the sovereign's resurrection from the dead should be celebrated on no day save the Sovereign's day (Sunday), and that on that day alone they should celebrate the end of the Phasekh fast.¹⁹

The results were proclaimed in 196 C.E.²⁰ Victor, who held the leadership in the West, subsequently published a work entitled *On the Phasekh Controversy*.²¹ At that moment, the Roman assembly system of fasting for the two days before Phasekh Sunday had attained supremacy among the western assemblies. At the same time, the agreement to observe the Friday and Saturday fast before Phasekh Sunday was also an acceptance of a very different way of celebrating the suffering and resurrection of Yahushua. Instead of annually celebrating the Phasekh on the 14th and the following Sunday as the Sovereign's day, this new system always celebrated the same three-day sequence: Good Friday represented the day of the messiah's death, Saturday his time in the grave, and Sunday was the day of his resurrection.

The annual observance of the day of the messiah's death and his time spent buried in the grave was no longer based upon the exact day of the month, regardless of which day of the week they fell upon. This was the Quartodeciman system and it was controlled by the 14th of Abib. Instead, the new annual observance was based upon the exact day of the week, regardless of which day of the month it fell upon. Under this formulation, since the messiah was raised on the Sunday following Phasekh (the 14th), the messiah's death should annually be observed on the previous Friday and his resurrection on its proper Sunday. Under this Roman system, the days of Phasekh were controlled by the anniversary of the Sunday resurrection.

Conversion to the Hasidic System

The most important change instituted by the new Roman system of Phasekh was the introduction of the Hasidic system for the seven days of unleavened

¹⁸ Hippolytus, frag. 1.

¹⁹ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:23:2. With regard to the importance of the fast see above n. 2.

²⁰ Jerome (*Euseb.*, year 2212) associates this debate with the fourth year of Emperor Severus (196/197 C.E., May reckoning).

²¹ Jerome, *Lives*, 34.

bread, i.e., from the 15th to the 21st day of the first moon. The 14th was retained only for the purpose of determining when the first month of the year should be fixed (i.e., the vernal equinox must fall on or before the 14th day of the first moon). Therefore, the first Christians to fully adopt the Hasidic view of eight days of Phasekh were those following the approach of the Roman assembly (System E).²² In a broken passage, the *Liber Pontificalis* reports this change under Victor:

After *sacerdotes* (a priestly gathering) had been questioned concerning the cycle of Phasekh [var. text reads, "He also summoned a council and an inquiry was made of Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, concerning Phasekh and the first day of the week and the moon"],²³ he (Victor) issued a decree that the Lord's day of Phasekh . . . a discussion with priests and bishops and after holding a council to which Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, had been invited, (they determined that) the sacred Phasekh should be kept on the Lord's day from the 14th to the 21st day of the first lunar month.²⁴

The leaders who created System E were Victor of Rome, Irenaeus of Gaul, and several others. All "expressed one and the same opinion and judgment, and gave the same vote."²⁵ Due to the many conferences held on the matter, several bishops of the important Christian center at Alexandria, Egypt, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, quickly agreed. Included in this decision with Victor was Theophilus, bishop of Caesarea, and Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem. These assemblies were governed by non-Judahite Roman-style Christians, the Jews and Christians of Jewish descent having been banned from even coming near the old city.²⁶

The political shift in the days of Victor was now fully evident. This time, instead of the leader of Asia coming to correct the Roman bishop for his separation from the orthodoxy, the Roman leader of the western assemblies notified those in the East that they were to change to the new Roman assembly orthodoxy or face excommunication.²⁷

This episode reflects the changing position of the Roman assembly leadership toward intolerance. When Polycarp of Smyrna, leader of the eastern assemblies, visited with Anicetus, the bishop of Rome, in about 158 C.E. and argued that the Roman assembly should change its position in the name of unity, Anicetus utterly refused. Both sides agreed to disagree and toleration

²² See below Chap. XX–XXI.

²³ BTP, p. 18.

²⁴ Lib. Pont., 15. Cf. BPLP, p. 6.

²⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:23:3f.

²⁶ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:22:1–5:23:4, 5:25:1, which shows that Narcissus and Theophilus were in communication with the assembly in Alexandria, Egypt and established agreement between them on how to observe the Phasekh. For Hadrian's ban against ethnic Judaeans in or near Jerusalem see Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:6; cf., Dio, 69:12–14; Orosius, 7:13.

²⁷ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:9.

of each other's view of Phasekh was encouraged. With Victor and the events of 196 C.E., on the other hand, the Roman assembly saw its chance to suppress the older Quartodeciman view. Instead of toleration they moved toward an act of excommunication. This new attitude of the Roman leadership would eventually win the day. When Emperor Constantine, in support of the Roman assembly, held the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., the suppression of all other Christian Phasekh systems became the official Roman Catholic policy.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus (c.140–202 C.E.), presbyter and bishop of the diocese of Lyons, Gaul (France),²⁸ was a vital player in the formulation of this new Roman assembly view. Though early in his life he lived in Asia among the Quartodecimans and personally knew Polycarp, in his adult life he helped direct the western assemblies toward their new path.²⁹ Irenaeus was a strong and close ally of both Eleutherus (177–192 C.E.) and Victor, bishops of Rome.³⁰ He is noted for his participation in the conferences that created Victor's decrees to celebrate Phasekh according to the System E scenario.³¹ Irenaeus also wrote a book entitled *On Phasekh*, which also discussed Pentecost.³²

It is clear that the System E construct for Phasekh, if it was not actually invented jointly by Irenaeus and Victor, was brought to the forefront and advocated by them. This detail is indicated by the following statement made by Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby in 664 C.E.:

The Phasekh which we follow we have seen to be kept by all at Rome where the blessed apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered and were buried: this manner we have noted to be PRACTICED OF ALL IN ITALY, AND IN GAUL, countries which we have passed through in pursuit of knowledge or desire to pray: This manner we have found to be performed in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece and all the world, wherever the assembly HAS BEEN SPREAD, throughout different nations and tongues, after one order of time and that without variableness.³³

Notice that the original regions of this new view were Italy and Gaul, where Victor and Irenaeus were head bishops. The practice is then assumed to have spread throughout other countries, with the implication that it came from Italy and Gaul, where it was originally observed. Further, Eusebius (an advocate of System E) notes that Irenaeus represents "the orthodoxy of the Assembly."³⁴

²⁸ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:4:1, 5:23:4, 5:24:11; Jerome, *Lives*, 35.

²⁹ For more details regarding the life of Irenaeus, and his education in Rome before he migrated to Gaul, see App. G, pp. 453ff.

³⁰ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:4:1, 5:23:4, 5:24:9–18; Jerome, *Lives*, 35.

³¹ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:23:1–4, 5:24:11.

³² Irenaeus, frag. 7; Ps.-Justin, 115.

³³ Bede, *Hist.*, 3:25.

³⁴ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:23:2.

And Εἰρηνοῖος (Eirenaios; Irenaeus), who deserved his name, εἰρηνοποιός (*eirenoipoios*; peace maker), gave exhortations of this kind for the peace of the Assembly and served as its ambassador, for in letters he discussed the various views on the issue which had been raised (i.e. Phasekh), not only with Victor but also with many other rulers of the assemblies.³⁵

That Irenaeus was a major contributor is further demonstrated by his influence over Victor in the events that followed the series of conferences we have mentioned above. The bishop of Rome had already demonstrated his authority in the West by his ability to bring together the other western assemblies into doctrinal agreement with Roman leadership. This influence, in turn, gave him a great sense of power. As a result, Victor moved to eliminate his opposition.

Based upon the agreements he had reached with the other western assemblies, Victor issued a decree that all Christians must keep the Phasekh according to the Roman assembly system. Yet the Quartodecimans remained undaunted. In a formal letter to Victor from Polycrates, leader of the assemblies of Asia, they utterly refused.³⁶ Upon their rebuff, Victor immediately tried to cut off the dioceses of all Asia and the adjacent regions from the common unity. He “indited letters announcing that all the Christians there were absolutely excommunicated.”³⁷ At this point Irenaeus stepped in.

But by no means were all pleased by this, so they issued counter-requests to him to consider the cause of peace and unity and love toward his neighbors. Their words are extant, sharply rebuking Victor. Among them too Irenaeus, writing in the name of the Christians in Gaul, whose leader he (Irenaeus) was, though HE HAD RECOMMENDED that the mystery of the sovereign’s resurrection be observed only on the Sovereign’s day, yet nevertheless exhorted Victor suitably and at length not to excommunicate whole assemblies of the deity for following a tradition of ancient custom.³⁸

Due to the request of Irenaeus and the others, Victor recanted.³⁹ The special mention of Irenaeus, who “had recommended” the new view, demonstrates that he had important influence over Victor. Victor saw his chastisement as instruction from one who had been important in the development of the System E construct. Indeed, the works of Irenaeus prove him to be, as Johannes Quasten calls him, “the founder of Christian theology” as it is known today.⁴⁰

³⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:18.

³⁶ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:1–8.

³⁷ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:9; Socrates Schol., 5:22.

³⁸ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:24:9–11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Patrol.*, 1, p. 294.

The View of Irenaeus

Further evidence that Irenaeus was one of the original builders of the System E construct comes from the remnants of his works, composed between 180–189 C.E.⁴¹ It is in these letters that we first piece together the ideas forming the System E Phasekh. At first Irenaeus, mimicking the Quartodecimans, states that the messiah “ate the Phasekh, and suffered on the next day,”⁴² that is, he died during the next daylight period. Yet he also adds elsewhere:

Of the day of his suffering, too, he (Moses) was not ignorant; but foretold him, after a figurative manner, by the name given to the Phasekh; and at the very festival, which had been proclaimed such a long time previously by Moses, did our sovereign suffer, thus fulfilling the Phasekh. And he did not describe the day only, but the place also, AND THE TIME OF DAY AT WHICH THE SUFFERINGS CEASED, and the sign of the setting of the sun, saying: You may not sacrifice the Phasekh within any other of your cities which the sovereign deity gives you; but in the place which the sovereign your deity shall choose that his name be called on there, you shall sacrifice the Phasekh at *vespere* (even), toward the setting of the sun.⁴³

The writings of Irenaeus reflect the earliest Christian interpretation which held to the prescript that Moses had commanded the Phasekh lamb to be killed prior to the setting of the sun (i.e., at the end of the 14th day), being also the same time that the messiah died. Therefore, he interprets the day of the messiah’s death along Hasidic lines, while fully acknowledging that the messiah ate the Phasekh the night before (at the beginning of the 14th day). How the advocates of System E dealt with the dilemma of two Phasekh suppers (one eaten by the messiah on the 14th and one by the Jewish leaders on the 15th) shall be discussed as we proceed.

Clement of Alexandria

An important convert to System E was Clement of Alexandria (writing c.193–212 C.E.). When the bishops of Alexandria came over to the System E side, it tipped the scale strongly in favor of Rome. Eusebius classes Clement with Irenaeus as one of the two great men who “represent the orthodoxy of the assembly.”⁴⁴ In his own work on the Phasekh, Clement sets down Irenaeus’ account of the Phasekh debate, thereby showing that Irenaeus had important influence upon Clement.⁴⁵ Bringing the Alexandrian Christians over to the Roman side would prove to be an important political victory.

⁴¹ E.g., EEC, p. 145, #28, “Written between 180 and 185.” Sections were probably composed in the first years of Victor, when he was co-bishop with Eleutherus (189–193 C.E.), cf., Chart K.

⁴² Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, 2:22:3.

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, 4:10:1.

⁴⁴ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3:23:2.

⁴⁵ Clement, *Pas.*, frag. 25.

Clement was the product of an Alexandrian school taught by a man named Pantaenus. It was in the year that Commodus received the sovereignty (180 C.E.) that “a man very famous for his learning named Pantaenus had charge of the life of the faithful in Alexandria, for from ancient custom a school of sacred learning existed among them.”⁴⁶ Eusebius tells us of this man:

Pantaenus, after many achievements, was at the head of the school in Alexandria until his death, and orally and in writing expounded the treasures of the divine doctrine.⁴⁷

Eusebius also informs us that, “tradition says that at that time Pantaenus was especially eminent, and that he had been influenced by the philosophic system of those called Stoics.”⁴⁸ This Greek Stoic philosophy was also strong among the large Pharisaic community of Jews living in Alexandria, for the Pharisees were “a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school.”⁴⁹ In this regard, Pantaenus and the Jews held common ground.

Clement of Alexandria was a student of Pantaenus.⁵⁰ Indeed, Clement “was famous in Alexandria for his study of the sacred Scriptures with Pantaenus.”⁵¹ He even succeeded Pantaenus as head of the school at Alexandria.⁵² Clement’s activity in Alexandria is dated by his work entitled *Stromateis*. This book uses the death of Emperor Commodus (December of 192 C.E.) as a terminus, showing that Clement was writing early in the reign of Severus (193–211 C.E.).⁵³ At the outbreak of persecution under Severus in 202 C.E., Clement left Alexandria, never to return. He had served more than 20 years as a presbyter of the assembly in Alexandria.⁵⁴

In the many works attributed to Clement of Alexandria, two are relevant for our discussion. One is entitled *To the Judaizers*. It was dedicated to Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem (211 C.E.).⁵⁵ Though this book is now lost, its very title reflects his anti-Jewish sentiment. Clement also wrote an important book discussing the Phasekh. Eusebius informs us:

And in his (Clement’s) book *On the Phasekh* he professes that he was compelled by his companions to commit to writing traditions that he had heard from the elders of olden time, for the benefit of those that should come after; and he mentions in it Melito and Irenaeus and some others, whose accounts also of the matter he has set down.⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Jos., Life*, 1:2.

⁵⁰ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:11, 6:13.

⁵¹ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5:11.

⁵² Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6:6.

⁵³ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6:6.

⁵⁴ Butterworth, *Clement*, p. xii.

⁵⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6:13:3, cf., 6:8:7, 6:11, the year Antoninus Caracalla succeeded Severus (i.e., 211 C.E.), at the time when Alexander became bishop of Jerusalem.

⁵⁶ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6:13:9.

In another place he similarly states:

Clement of Alexandria quotes this treatise in his own *On the Phasekh*, which he says that he compiled in consequence of the writing of Melito.⁵⁷

This evidence proves that Clement of Alexandria composed his own work with regard to the Phasekh based upon his studies of arguments given by Irenaeus and Melito. Clement favored the views of Irenaeus and opposed the Quartodeciman views of Melito. He demonstrates his pro-System E bias when he writes:

Accordingly, in the years gone by, Yahushua went to eat the Phasekh sacrificed by the Jews, keeping the festival. . . . Suitably, therefore, to the 14th day, on which he also suffered, in the morning, the chief priests and the scribes, who brought him to Pilate, did not enter the Praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might freely eat the Phasekh at ἑσπέρας (*esperas*; twilight). With this precise determination of the days both the whole Scriptures agree, and the good news (New Testament) harmonizes. The resurrection also attests to it. He certainly rose on the third day, which fell on the first day of the Weeks of Harvest, on which the Torah prescribed that the priest should offer up the sheaf.⁵⁸

By claiming that the messiah always ate the Phasekh sacrificed by the Jews, and then tying it to the fact that on the morning of the 14th the Jewish leaders had not yet partaken of the Phasekh, Clement of Alexandria reflects the view that the messiah did not partake of the legal Phasekh supper for his Last Supper. The coupling of the *omer* wave offering on the first day of the week with the resurrection of the messiah, of course, reflects his intent on celebrating the Phasekh of the resurrection.

What is interesting about Clement of Alexandria's work on the Phasekh is that he also demonstrates the transition period from System D to System E. This detail is reflected in his thoughts about John 13:1–12. In a fragment from this work, where he uses an Egyptian (midnight to midnight) reckoning for a day,⁵⁹ we read:

But when he (the messiah) had preached he who was the Phasekh, the lamb of the deity, led as a sheep to the slaughter, presently taught his disciples the mystery of the type on the 13th day, on which also they inquired, Where will you that we prepare for you to

⁵⁷ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 4:26:4.

⁵⁸ Clement, *Pas.*, frag. 28.

⁵⁹ The Egyptians and Romans reckoned a midnight-to-midnight day (Pliny, 2:79).

eat the Phasekh (Matt., 26:17). It was on this day (the Egyptian 13th = the evening before midnight) then, that both the consecration of the unleavened bread and the preparation for the festival took place. Whence John naturally describes the disciples as already previously prepared to have their feet washed by the sovereign. AND ON THE FOLLOWING DAY (the Egyptian 14th) our saviour suffered, he who was the Phasekh, propitiously sacrificed by the Jews.⁶⁰

The interpretation of John, 13:1–12, which mentions a meal that took place on the day “before the Festival of the Phasekh” and during which the messiah washed the feet of his disciples,⁶¹ is for the first time found associated with the Last Supper.⁶² This shows Clement of Alexandria’s belief that the Phasekh supper of the messiah was held on the day before the legal Phasekh of the Jews.

As Cyril Richardson states, Clement of Alexandria makes the Last Supper “a pre-Passover enacted parable.”⁶³ No doubt the Egyptian work attributed to the Gospel of the Hebrews, as indirectly quoted by Jerome (c.348–420 C.E.), comes from the time of Pantaenus and Clement. It reads, “The eight days of the Phasekh, on which the messiah the son of the deity rose.”⁶⁴ This statement reflects the transition from the earlier Quartodeciman view of a seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread to the Pharisaic eight days.

Origen

The System E interpretation is also reflected in the works of Origen (c.185–254 C.E.), the pupil of Clement of Alexandria.⁶⁵ Origen was young as a student, for he was a teacher himself by the age of 20.⁶⁶ He was trained by Clement at the very time of Victor’s decree. Origen was originally from Alexandria but later left Egypt (234 C.E.) and was ordained in Caesarea in Palestine, where he began writing (between 234–251 C.E.).⁶⁷

Origen accepted the Pharisaic interpretation for the week of Phasekh. In his work *On Phasekh*, he recounts the commands given in Exodus, 12:3–5, where the Israelites are told to take the lamb on the 10th day of the moon and keep it until the 14th for sacrificing. Origen then explains this statement by saying, “but he does not sacrifice or eat him before five days have gone by.”⁶⁸ The fifth day after the tenth is the 15th, thereby placing the Phasekh supper on the 15th. He even connects the time for killing the lamb, “προς εσπεραν (*pros esperan*, at twilight),” with the “last hour” of the day, on the 14th.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Clement, *Pas.*, frag. 28.

⁶¹ John, 13:1f.

⁶² That the supper and feet washing of John, 13:1–12, actually occurred on the night of the 13th of Abib see FSDY, 2.

⁶³ JTS (NS), 24, p. 77.

⁶⁴ EEC, p. 38.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6:6.

⁶⁶ Daly, *Origen*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Daly, *Origen*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Origen, *Pas.*, 18.

⁶⁹ Origen, *Pas.*, 25, cf., 16, 17, 20.

Origen also interprets that it is on the 15th that the moon reaches its “fullest plenitude.”⁷⁰ Origen once more connects the eating of the Phasekh with the 15th by concluding from this typology, “And for our part, unless the perfect, true light rises over us and we see how it perfectly illumines our guiding intellect, we will not be able to sacrifice and eat the true lamb.”⁷¹ Like Clement of Alexandria, Origen places the incidents of the supper and feet washing found in John, 13:1–12, with the events during the day of the Last Supper,⁷² thereby connecting the Phasekh meal eaten by the messiah with the day before the Phasekh.⁷³

Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that an important movement toward the Christian Hasidic system got under way around 165 C.E. and blossomed in the days of Irenaeus, bishop of Gaul, and Victor, bishop of Rome, and their important proclamation of 196 C.E. The result was System E, which follows the Hasidic System of observing the seven days of unleavened bread, i.e., from the beginning of the 15th until the end of the 21st day of the first month of the scriptural calendar. Its advocates did not allow that the 14th day of that month was the legal Phasekh supper. Instead, they interpreted the data so that the messiah and his disciples kept the Phasekh sacrifice and supper on the night of the 14th as a pre-Phasekh enacted parable. The Last Supper, therefore, was merely a foretype of the future Phasekh that was to be kept only on the first day of the week when it fell on any of the days extending from the 15th to 21st of Abib.

⁷⁰ Origen, *Pas.*, 20.

⁷¹ Origen, *Pas.*, 21.

⁷² Origen, *Com. John*, 32.

⁷³ As stated in John, 13:1f.

