

St Irenaeus of Lyons and the School of John Fr John Behr

1: Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.23.1-4:

[at the time of Victor] no small controversy arose because all the communities of Asia thought it right, as though by a more ancient tradition to observe for the feast of the Saviour's Pascha the fourteenth day of the moon, on which the Jews had been commanded to kill the lamb. Thus it was necessary to finish the fast on that day, whatever day of the week it might be. ... [Yet such was not the custom] in the churches throughout the rest of the world, for from apostolic tradition they kept the custom which still exists that it is not right to finish the fast on any day save that of the resurrection of our Saviour.

... many meetings and conferences of bishops [were held about this, and] all unanimously formulated in their letters the ecclesiastical teaching for those of the faithful everywhere that the mystery of the Lord's resurrection from the dead could be celebrated on no day save Sunday, and that on that day alone we should celebrate the end of the paschal fast. [Eusebius claims that there are still extant letters of those who meet in Palestine, in Rome, in Pontus, in Gaul, over which Irenaeus was the bishop, in Osrhoene, and in Corinth] and of very many more who expressed one and the same opinion and judgement and gave the same vote.

2: Polycrates, *Letter to Victor* (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.24.2-8)

[2] We, therefore, keep the day without tampering with it, neither adding nor taking away. For indeed in Asia great luminaries have fallen asleep, such as will rise again on the day of the coming of the Lord, when he comes with glory from heaven to seek out all his saints; [he names Philip and his daughters] and, moreover, [there is] John also, who lay on the Lord's breast, who was [or 'became'] a priest wearing the petal, both a witness and a teacher [4] He has fallen asleep at Ephesus. [he then mentions Polycarp, Melito and others] [6] These all observed the fourteenth day for Pascha according to the Gospel, in no way deviating from it, but following the rule of faith [ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν κανόνα τῆς πίστεως ἀκολουθοῦντες].
[the letter then concludes with Polycrates appealing to his own kinsmen – seven of whom were bishops]

3: Eusebius *H.e.* 5.24.9:

Victor, who presided over [the church of] the Romans, immediately tried to cut off from the common unity [ἀποτέμνειν ... τῆς κοινῆς ἐνώσεως] the communities of all Asia [τῆς Ἀσίας πάσης ... τὰς παροικίας], together with the adjacent churches, on the ground of heterodoxy, and he denounced them in letters proclaiming that all the brethren there were absolutely excommunicated [ἀκοινωνήτους].

4: Irenaeus, *Letter to Victor* (*H.e.* 5.24.12–13)

[12] For the controversy is not only about the day, but also about the very manner of the fast; for some think that they ought to fast one day, others two, others even more; and in the opinion of others, the 'day' amounts to forty hours, day and night. [13] And such variation of observance did not begin in our own time, but much earlier, in the days of our predecessors who, it would appear, disregarding strictness maintained a practice which is simple and yet allows for personal preference, establishing it for the future, and none the less all these lived in peace, and we also live in peace with one another and the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith [ἡ διαφωνία τῆς νυστέας τὴν ὁμόνοιαν τῆς πίστεως συνίστησιν].

5: Irenaeus, *Letter to Victor* (*H.e.* 5.24.14–17)

[14] Among these too were the presbyters before Soter, who presided over the church of which you are now the leader, I mean Anicetus and Pius and Telesphorus and Sixtus. They did not observe it themselves, nor did they enjoin it on those who followed them, and though they did not keep it they were nonetheless at peace with those from the communities in which it was observed when they came to them, although to observe it was more objectionable to those who did not do so. [15] And no one was ever rejected for this reason, but the presbyters before you who did not observe [it] sent the Eucharist to those from other communities who did [ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ μὴ τηροῦντες οἱ πρὸ σοῦ πρεσβύτεροι τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν παροικιῶν τηροῦσιν ἔπεμπον εὐχαριστίαν] [16] and when the blessed Polycarp was staying in Rome in the time of Anicetus, though they disagreed a little about some other things as well, they immediately made peace, having no wish for strife between them on this matter. For neither was Anicetus able to persuade Polycarp not to observe it, inasmuch as he had always done so in company with John the disciple of our Lord and the other apostles with whom he had associated; nor did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, for he said that he ought to keep the custom of those who were presbyters before him. [17] And under these circumstances they communed with each other [ἐκοινωνήσαν ἑαυτοῖς], and in the church Anicetus yielded the celebration of the Eucharist to Polycarp, obviously out of respect, and they parted from each other in peace, for the peace of the whole church was kept both by those who observed and by those who did not [πάσης τῆς ἐκκλησίας εἰρήνην ἔχόντων, καὶ τῶν τηρούντων καὶ τῶν μὴ τηρούντων]. (*H.e.* 5.24.14–17)

6: Epistle of the Apostles, 15 (Coptic):

‘And you remember my death. If now the Passover takes place, then will one of you be thrown into prison for my name’s sake, and he will be in sorrow and care that you celebrate the Passover while he is in prison and far from you; for he will sorrow that he does not celebrate the Passover with you. I will send my power in the form of the angel Gabriel, and the doors of the prison will be opened. He will go out and come to you; he will spend a night of the watch with you, and stay with you until the cock crows. But when you have completed the remembrance that is for me, and the Agape, he will again be thrown into prison for a testimony, until he comes out from there and preaches what I have delivered to you’. And we said to him, ‘O Lord, is it perhaps necessary again that we take the cup and drink?’ He said to us, ‘Yes, it is necessary until the day when I come with those who were killed for my sake’.
(Ethiopic) ‘And you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, which is the Passover’ ... ‘And when you complete my Agape and my remembrance at the crowing of the cock’.

7: Epiphanius, Panarion, 70.10.1, 11.3, quoting the Diataxis:

When they feast, mourn for them by fasting, because on the day of the feast they crucified Christ, and when they mourn by eating the unleavened bread with bitter herbs, you feast’

8: Apollinarius of Hierapolis, from the Paschal Chronicle (ed. Dindorf, CSHB 17, 14):

The fourteenth is the true Pascha of the Lord
the great sacrifice
the Son of God standing in place of the lamb.

...

He is buried on the day of Pascha,
and a stone is put over his tomb.

9: Apollinarius of Hierapolis, from the Paschal Chronicle (Dindorf ed., CSHB 17, 13–14):

Now there are some who through ignorance love to quarrel about these matters: but what they maintain in this affair is forgivable. For ignorance does not respond well to accusations, but may be amenable to teaching. And they say that on the fourteenth day the Lord ate the sheep with the disciples, and that on the great day of unleavened bread he suffered, and they say that Matthew speaks thus, according to their interpretation. But their thinking is not in harmony with the Law and the Gospels seem to disagree with them.

10: NT Gathering on Sundays/First Day/Lord’s Day

1 Cor. 16:2: On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.

Acts 20:7: On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the morrow, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Apoc. 1:10: I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.

1 Cor. 11:26: For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

11: Epistle of Barnabas, 15.9:

We also celebrate with gladness the eighth day, in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and was made manifest, and ascended into heaven’

12: Ignatius of Antioch Magn. 9.1.

Christians ‘live according to the Lord’s [κατὰ κυριακῆν], on which also our life sprang up through him and his death’.

13: Justin Martyr, 1 Apol. 67.8:

And it is on Sunday [τῆν δὲ τοῦ ἡλίου ἡμέραν] that we all make assembly in common, since it is the first day, on which God changed darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead on the same day.

14: Irenaeus, Letter to Victor (h.e. 5.24.12–13):

For the controversy is not only about the day, but also about the very manner of the fast; for some think that they ought to fast one day, others two, others even more; and in the opinion of others, the ‘day’ amounts to forty hours, day and night. And such variation of observance did not begin in our own time, but much earlier, in the days of our predecessors.

15: John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (OUP 2007 [1991]), 348:

In the first half of the Gospel John had used the word ὑψοῦν [‘to lift up’] to suggest that Jesus’ exaltation is conditional upon and contained in his death, so that the passion and resurrection must be viewed as a single happening. Now the expression παραδίδόναι τὸ πνεῦμα [‘to hand over the Spirit’, cf. John 19:30] allows him to fuse Easter and Pentecost as well, hinting that there is no need to think of the latter as a distinct and separate event.

16: Polycrates of Ephesus, *Letter to Victor* (h.e. 3.24.3–4):

[There is] John also, who lay on the Lord’s breast, who was [or ‘became’] a priest wearing the petal, both a witness and a teacher [ὁ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος τοῦ κυρίου ἀναπεσών, ὃς ἐγενήθη ἱερεὺς τὸ πέταλον πεφορεκῶς καὶ μάρτυς καὶ διδάσκαλος]. He has fallen asleep at Ephesus.

17: *First Epistle of Clement* 7.2-5:

Let us put aside emptiness and vain cares, and let us come to the glorious and venerable rule of our tradition (τὸν τῆς παραδόσεως κανόνα), and let us see what is good and pleasing and acceptable in the sight of our Maker. Let us fix our gaze on the Blood of Christ, and let us know that it is precious to his Father, because it was poured out for our salvation, and brought the grace of repentance to all the world.

18: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 3.11.1:

John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, seeking, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among human beings, and a long time previously by those called the Nicolaitans, ... The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one God, the Almighty, who made all things by his Word, both visible and invisible, showing at the same time that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, he also bestowed salvation on the human beings within creation, thus commenced his teaching in the Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word’.

19: *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 22.3:

[Irenaeus] also handed on the ecclesiastical and universal canon [τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν κανόνα καὶ καθολικόν], as he had received it from the saint.

20: Eusebius of Caesarea (H.e. 3.18.1–3; cf. *haer.* 5.30.3; repeated at *h.e.* 5.8.6–7):

[1] It is recorded that at that time the apostle and evangelist John, being still alive, was condemned to dwell in the island of Patmos for his testimony to the divine word. [2] At any rate [γέ τοι] Irenaeus, writing about the number of the name ascribed to the Antichrist in the so-called Apocalypse of John, states this about John in these very words [αὐταῖς συλλαβαῖς] in the fifth book *Against the Heresies*: [3] ‘But if it were necessary that his name should be announced openly at the present time, it would have been declared by that one who also saw [ἐορακότος] the apocalypse, for it/he was seen [ἐωράθη] not long ago, but almost in our own generation, towards the end [πρὸς τῷ τέλει] of the reign of Domitian.

21: Muratorian canon (lines 9–34)

The fourth [book] of the Gospels is that of John [one] of the disciples [*ex discipulis*]. When his fellow-disciples and bishops urged [him] [*cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis*], he said: ‘Fast together with me for three days and, what shall be revealed to each, let us tell [it] to each other’. On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the Apostles [*ex apostolis*], that, with all of them reviewing [it], John should describe all things in his own name. And so, although different beginnings might be taught in the separate books of the Gospels [*et ideo licet varia singulis euangeliorum libris principia doceantur*], nevertheless it makes no difference to the faith of believers, since all things in all [of them] are declared by the one sovereign Spirit—concerning [his] nativity, concerning [his] passion, concerning [his] resurrection, concerning [his] walk with his disciples, and concerning his double advent: the first in humility when he was despised, which has been; the second in royal power, glorious, which is to be. What marvel, therefore, if John so constantly brings forward particular [matters] also in his Epistles, saying of himself: ‘What we have seen with our eyes and have heard with [our] ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you’ [Cf. 1 John 1:1, 4]. For thus he declares that he was not only an eyewitness and hearer, but also a writer of all the wonderful things of the Lord in order [*non solum uisorem sed et auditorem set et scriptorem omnium mirabilium Domini per ordinem profitetur*].

22: Clement of Alexandria (from *h.e.* 6.14.5–7):

John, last of all, seeing that the outward facts [τὰ σώματικὰ] had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by the disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel [πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον].

23: Origen, *Hom. Luke, Frag. 9:*

There is a report which must be noted that John collected the written Gospels in his own lifetime in the reign of Nero, and approved of and received those of which the deceit of the devil had not taken possession, but refused and rejected those which he perceived did not contain the truth.

24: Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha 66:*

This is the one coming from heaven onto the earth by means of the suffering one,
robing himself in that very one by means of a virgin womb,
and goes forth a human being;

Οὗτος, ἀφικόμενος ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν διὰ τὸν πάσχοντα,
αὐτὸν δὲ ἐκείνον ἐνδυσάμενος διὰ παρθένου μήτρας
καὶ προελθὼν ἄνθρωπος,

25: Ignatius of Antioch, *Romans, 6:*

It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. ... Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being (ἐκεῖ παραγενόμενος ἄνθρωπος ἔσομαι). Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.

26: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies 4.20.7:*

The glory of God is a living human being and the life of the human being is to see God.

27: Francis Moloney, *Johannine Son of Man (Rome, 1976), 207:*

Throughout the Gospel the reader has been directed to look forward; in 13, 31 he has been told: “Now is the Son of man glorified” and finally, in the ironic coronation and investiture of Jesus, it is Pilate who announces: “Here he is—the Son of Man!” The absurd glorification through humiliation has reached its high point.

28: John 16:20-2:

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. When the woman [ἡ γυνή] is in travail she has sorrow [λύπην] because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child [ὅταν δὲ γεννήσῃ τὸ παιδίον], she no longer remembers the tribulation [θλίψεως], for joy that a human being is born into the world [ἐγεννήθη ἄνθρωπος εἰς τὸν κόσμον]. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.