

V.—The Epistle to Bishop Basilides.⁷⁴⁶

Canon I.

Dionysius to Basilides, my beloved son, and my brother, a fellow-minister with me in holy things, and an obedient servant of God, in the Lord greeting.

You have sent to me, most faithful and accomplished son, in order to inquire what is the proper hour for bringing the fast to a close⁷⁴⁷ on the day of Pentecost.⁷⁴⁸ For you say that there are some of the brethren who hold that that should be done at cockcrow, and others who hold that it should be at nightfall.⁷⁴⁹ For the brethren in Rome, as they say, wait for the cock; whereas, regarding those here, you told us that they would have it earlier.⁷⁵⁰ And it is your anxious desire, accordingly, to have the hour presented accurately, and determined with perfect exactness,⁷⁵¹ which indeed is a matter of difficulty and uncertainty. However, it will be acknowledged cordially by all, that from the date of the resurrection of our Lord, those who up to that time have been humbling their souls with fastings, ought at once to begin their festal joy and gladness. But in what you have written to me you have made out very clearly, and with an intelligent understanding of the Holy Scriptures, that no very exact account seems to be offered in them of the hour at which He rose. For the evan-

746 Containing explanations which were given as answers to questions proposed by that bishop on various topics, and which have been received as canons. [The *Scholium*, p. 79, is transposed from here.]

747 ἀπονησιτίζεσθαι δεῖ. Gentianus Hervetus renders this by *jejunandus sit dies Paschæ*; and thus he translates the word by *jejunare*, “to fast,” wherever it occurs, whereas it rather means always, *jejunium solvere*, “to have done fasting.” In this sense the word is used in the *Apostolic Constitutions* repeatedly: see book v. chap. 12, 18, etc. It occurs in the same sense in the 89th Canon of the Concilium Trullanum. The usage must evidently be the same here: so that it does not mean, What is the proper hour for fasting on the day of Pentecost? but, What is the hour at which the ante-paschal fast ought to be terminated—whether on the evening preceding the paschal festival itself, or at cockcrowing, or at another time?—Gall. See also the very full article in Suicer, *s.v.*

748 I give the beginning of this epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria also as it is found in not a few manuscripts, viz., ἐπέσειλάς μοι...τῆ τοῦ πάσχα περιλύσει,—the common reading being, τὴν τοῦ πάσχα ἡμέραν. And the περίλυσις τοῦ πάσχα denotes the close of the paschal fast, as Eusebius (*Hist. Eccles.* v. 23) uses the phrase τὰς τῶν ἀστιῶν ἐπιλύσεις,—the verbs περιλύειν, ἀπολύειν, ἐπιλύειν, καταλύειν, being often used in this sense.—Cotelerius on the *Apostolic Constitutions*, v. 15.

749 ἀφ’ ἐσπέρας.

750 [Note this and the Nicene decision which made the Alexandrian bishop the authority concerning the paschal annually, vol. ii. Elucidation II. p. 343.]

751 πάνυ μεμετρημένην.

gelist have given different descriptions of the parties who came to the sepulchre one after another,⁷⁵² and all have declared that they found the Lord risen already. It was “in the end of the Sabbath,” as Matthew has said;⁷⁵³ it was “early, when it was yet dark,” as John writes;⁷⁵⁴ it was “very early in the morning,” as Luke puts it; and it was “very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun,” as Mark tells us. Thus no one has shown us clearly the exact time when He rose. It is admitted, however, that those who came to the sepulchre in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,⁷⁵⁵ found Him no longer lying in it. And let us not suppose that the evangelists disagree or contradict each other. But even although there may seem to be some small difficulty as to the subject of our inquiry, if they all agree that the light of the world, our Lord, rose on that one night, while they differ with respect to the hour, we may well seek with wise and faithful mind to harmonize their statements. The narrative by Matthew then, runs thus: “In the end of the Sabbath as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,⁷⁵⁶ came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. And his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.”⁷⁵⁷ Now this phrase “in the end” will be thought by some to signify, according to the common use⁷⁵⁸ of the word, the *evening* of the Sabbath; while others, with a better perception of the fact, will say that it does not indicate that, but *a late hour in the night*,⁷⁵⁹ as the phrase “in the end”⁷⁶⁰ denotes slowness and length of time. Also because he speaks of *night*, and not of *evening*, he has added the words, “as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.” And the parties here did not come yet, as the others say, “bearing spices,” but “to see the sepulchre;” and they discovered the occurrence of the earthquake, and the angel sitting upon the stone, and heard from him the declaration, “He is not here, He is risen.” And to the same effect is the testimony of John. “The first day of the week,” says he, “came Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken



752 κατὰ καιροὺς ἐνηλλαγμένους.

753 Matt. xxviii. 1.

754 John xx. 1.

755 τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ μιᾷ Σαββάτων.

756 τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν Σαββάτων.

757 Matt. xxviii. 1–6.

758 κοινότητα.

759 νύκτα βαθείαν.

760 ὄψέ, late.

away from the sepulchre.”⁷⁶¹ Only, according to this “when it was yet dark,” she had come in advance.⁷⁶² And Luke says: “They rested the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment. Now, upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared; and they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.”⁷⁶³ This phrase “very early in the morning”⁷⁶⁴ probably indicates the early dawn⁷⁶⁵ of the first day of the week; and thus, when the Sabbath itself was wholly past, and also the whole night succeeding it, and when another day had begun, they came, bringing spices and myrrh, and then it became apparent that He had already risen long before. And Mark follows this, and says: “They had bought sweet spices, in order that they might come and anoint Him. And very early (in the morning), the first day of the week, they come unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.”⁷⁶⁶ For this evangelist also has used the term “very early,” which is just the same as the “very early in the morning” employed by the former; and he has added, “at the rising of the sun.” Thus they set out, and took their way first when it was “very early in the morning,” or (as Mark says) when it was “very early;” but on the road, and by their stay at the sepulchre, they spent the time till it was sunrise. And then the young man clad in white said to them, “He is risen, He is not here.” As the case stands thus, we make the following statement and explanation to those who seek an exact account of the specific hour, or half-hour, or quarter of an hour, at which it is proper to begin their rejoicing over our Lord’s rising from the dead. Those who are too hasty, and give up even before midnight,⁷⁶⁷ we reprehend as remiss and intemperate, and as almost breaking off from their course in their precipitation,⁷⁶⁸ for it is a wise man’s word, “That is not little in life which is within a little.” And those who hold out and continue for a very long time, and persevere even on to the fourth watch, which is also the time at which our Saviour manifested Himself walking upon the sea to those who were then on the deep, we receive as noble and laborious disciples. On those, again, who pause and refresh themselves in the course as they are moved or as they are able, let us not press very hard:⁷⁶⁹ for all do not carry out the six days of fasting⁷⁷⁰ either equally or alike; but some pass even all the days as a fast, remaining without

761 [John xx. 1.](#)

762 *παρὰ τοῦτο...προεληλύθει.*

763 [Luke xxiii. 56; xxiv. 1, 2.](#)

764 ὄρθρου βαθέος.

765 προῦποφαινομένην αὐτὴν ἑωθινὴν ἐμφανίζει.

766 [Mark xvi. 1, 2.](#)

767 πρὸ νυκτὸς ἔγγυς ἤδη μεσοῦσης ἀνιέντας.

768 ὡς παρ’ ὀλίγον προκαταλύοντας τὸν δρόμον.

769 [1 [Tim. iv. 8.](#) Mark the moderation of our author in contrast with superstition. But in our days the peril is one of an opposite kind. Contrast St. Paul, 2 [Cor. xi. 27.](#)]

770 That is, as Balsamon explains, the six days of the week of our Lord’s passion.

food through the whole; while others take but two, and others three, and others four, and others not even one. And to those who have laboured painfully through these protracted fasts. and have thereafter become exhausted and well-nigh undone, pardon ought to be extended if they are somewhat precipitate in taking food. But if there are any who not only decline such protracted fasting, but refuse at the first to fast at all, and rather indulge themselves luxuriously during the first four days, and then when they reach the last two days—viz., the preparation and the Sabbath—fast with due rigour during these, and these alone, and think that they do something grand and brilliant if they hold out till the morning, I cannot think that they have gone through the time on equal terms with those who have been practising the same during several days before. This is the counsel which, in accordance with my apprehension of the question, I have offered you in writing on these matters.⁷⁷¹



771 To these canons are appended the comments of Balsamon and Zonaras, which it is not necessary to give here.

Canon II.

The question touching women in the time of their separation, whether it is proper for them when in such a condition to enter the house of God, I consider a superfluous inquiry. For I do not think that, if they are believing and pious women, they will themselves be rash enough in such a condition either to approach the holy table or to touch the body and blood of the Lord. Certainly the woman who had the issue of blood of twelve years' standing did not touch *the Lord* Himself, but only the hem of His garment, with a view to her cure.⁷⁷² For to pray, however a person may be situated, and to remember the Lord, in whatever condition a person may be, and to offer up petitions for the obtaining of help, are exercises altogether blameless. But the individual who is not perfectly pure both in soul and in body, shall be interdicted from approaching the holy of holies.

772 Matt. ix. 20; Luke viii. 43.

Canon III.

Moreover, those who are competent, and who are advanced in years, ought to be judges of themselves in these matters. For that it is proper to abstain from each other by consent, in order that they may be free for a season to give themselves to prayer, and then come together again, they have heard from Paul in his epistle.⁷⁷³

773 Referring to the relations of marriage, dealt with in [1 Cor. vii. 5](#), etc.

Canon IV.

As to those who are overtaken by an involuntary flux in the night-time, let such follow the testimony of their own conscience, and consider themselves as to whether they are doubtfully minded⁷⁷⁴ in this matter or not. And he that doubteth in the matter of meats, the apostle tells us, “is damned if he eat.”⁷⁷⁵ In these things, therefore, let every one who approaches God be of a good conscience, and of a proper confidence, so far as his own judgment is concerned. And, indeed, it is in order to show your regard for us (for you are not ignorant, beloved,) that you have proposed these questions to us, making us of one mind, as indeed we are, and of one spirit with yourself. And I, for my part, have thus set forth my opinions in public, not as a teacher, but only as it becomes us with all simplicity to confer with each other. And when you have examined this opinion of mine, my most intelligent son, you will write back to me your notion of these matters, and let me know whatever may seem to you to be just and preferable, and whether you approve of my judgment in these things.⁷⁷⁶ That it may fare well with you, my beloved son, as you minister to the Lord in peace, is my prayer. _____

774 διακρίνονται.

775 Rom. xiv. 23. [Gr. κατακέκριται = is condemned = self-condemned. Wordsworth cites Cicero, *De Officiis*, i. 30.]

776 [The entire absence of despotic authority in these episcopal teachings is to be noted. 2 Cor. i. 24.]