



Publié sur *La Vie des Classiques* (<https://96.ip-213-32-20.eu>)

[Accueil](#) > Discovery of unpublished letter by Eastern bishop on Easter, from the time of Nicaea, mentioning the Acts of Pilate

DISCOVERY OF UNPUBLISHED LETTER BY EASTERN BISHOP ON EASTER, FROM THE TIME OF NICAEA, MENTIONING THE ACTS OF PILATE

There are still treasures out there, slumbering in forgotten manuscripts in the collections of the west. French scholar Pierre Chambert-Protat today [announced on Twitter](#) that he has discovered a previously unknown ancient text in manuscript Montpellier 157. This 9th century manuscript, copied in 848, is a collection of extracts on Easter, assembled by Florus of Lyons.

Dr C-P is researching Florus, which is how he came to look at this manuscript, and to realise that the first item in it was unknown.

He has generously uploaded pre-prints of two articles on the subject at the French HAL repository. The first [here](#) discusses the manuscript and its contents. The second, [here](#), is entitled, “Une source inédite sur la question pascale au concile de Nicée : le *Liber Timothei episcopi de pascha*”^[1].

The letter is by a certain bishop Timothy to an unidentified group. His intention is to specify how they should calculate the date of Easter, and avoid falling into the errors of a certain Stephanus (recently condemned and otherwise unknown) and four other types of error. In the process he attacks those who want to fix the date of Easter to the Roman Julian calendar – shades of our own time! – and those who reference the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*.

The language is Latin, and contains various hellenisms, not well-understood always by the Latin translator. The subject matter seems to belong to Asia Minor or Syria, where many different methods of calculation were known. However the work seems to be known to St Augustine, which indicates that copies were in circulation in the south of Spain or in African in the second half of the 4th century.

He intends to publish the text with French translation in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series. In the mean time he gives a summary of the contents, which seems well worth reproducing here (translation mine):

§ 1 — The love which community receiving this letter have for the Gospels, as well as their faith, deserve congratulations.

§ 2 — Though now separated from them by his office, the author desires anyway to increase and strengthen the faith of this community.

§ 3 — First important reminder: there is no other truth than Christ.

§ 4 — More precisely, this letter aims to recall the meaning of Easter at a time when some are emptying this festival of meaning, as for example *Stephanus* did.

§ 5 — Easter must be related to 1 Cor. 5:7-8: *Nam and Pascha nostrum immolatus is Christus: ita solemnna celebremus not in fermento malitiae and nequitiae, sed in azymis sinceritatis and ueritatis.*

§ 6 – The figure of this sacrament was given in Exodus, along with the main rituals.

§ 7 — The Jews sacrificed only in figure, because the true sacrifice is that of Christ, the true lamb. [Quoted in the *Liber XXI Sententiarum*]

§ 8 — The rituals set forth in Exodus prefigured the Christian Passover typologically. [Quoted in the *Liber XXI Sententiarum*]

§ 9 — These days the Jews can no longer even follow the concrete provisions of the Law, and therefore they are in contravention of them on all points.

§ 10 — But it is the case of Christians that must be examined. For it is not enough to remember Christ: it must be done at the right time. The redeeming virtue of the sacrament is at stake.

§ 11 — Some people want to hold to the fourteenth day of the month, because of the Mosaic Law. But this is to cancel the sacrifice of Christ who freed us from it, as Paul has already said.

§ 12 — Furthermore, they cannot conform to the other precepts of the Mosaic Law, and therefore cease to be Christians without becoming Jews again. They are not anyone anymore.

§ 13 — And why do those who sanctify Sundays all year long refuse to sanctify the first Sunday of the year, the root and foundation of all others?

§ 14 — Basically, it is as if they do not even believe in the resurrection. If they believed in it, they would not neglect the day of his suffering. We must fast and rejoice at the right time. And these times, according to the evangelical precept, are days: not lunar cycles, which are right for the Jews.

§ 15 — The fake “Acts of Pilate” cannot be invoked either: their testimony is incompatible with the Gospels. Now the Gospels check the prophecies; while the fake Acts, well, we do not even know where they come from. From private or public hands? But which ones? It’s a low-grade swindle.

§ 16 — In a certain sense, they fall into the error of those who don’t intercalate a month to keep the solar and lunar calendars in step: to celebrate the Easter on a different day is like celebrating the Easter of a different Christ.

§ 17 — They fear that this intercalation may make them celebrate the Passover/Easter of the unclean. But it’s because they did not understand the calendar. Intercalation is not there to introduce disorder, but to restore order: it is the law of nature. And those who want to fix Easter according to the Roman calendar create an absurdity, since the Passover/Easter is a Jewish holiday, not a Roman holiday.

§ 18 — It is not a question of celebrating Passover with the Jews, but on the contrary, that the Christian perpetuation of this feast constitutes an accusation against the Jews. The calendar shift must serve this purpose.

§ 19 — But the worst of all are those who make Easter on the fourteenth of the month and commemorate the passion on the following Friday: they celebrate the passion after the resurrection, as if they suffered because Christ was risen!

§ 20 — This disruption of Easter disturbs all the rest of the liturgical calendar:

these Christians fast when we rejoice, and vice-versa. Their behaviour is a denial of all faith, a denial of Christ himself.

§ 21 — It is necessary, indeed, a terrible audacity not to observe the great day upon which all of the sacred history converges; the day of divine victory; the day that so many miraculous signs have saluted; the day when, for Christians, everything begins; the day of true sacrifice. Who neglects it excludes himself; who observes it saves himself.

§ 22 — And that is all that should be said about it, in a few words so that the assembly standing up is not tired out too much.

It sounds extremely interesting! Well done Drs. Chambert-Protat and Camille Gerzaguet for making this known!

1. ^[1]Pierre Chambert-Protat et Camille Gerzaguet, “Une source inédite sur la question pascale au concile de Nicée : le *Liber Timothei episcopi de pascha*”, in: *Revue bénédictine* 128, 2 (2018), p. 225–229. DOI : 10.1484/j.rb.5.116420. Preprint [here](#).↵
-