THE DATE OF THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION (EASTER)

By Fr. John Ramzy

Since the beginning of Christianity, the Resurrection of the Lord of glory has been at the centre of the preaching of the apostles and fathers. They considered it the basis of Christian faith. "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain" (1Cor 15:14). Their proof of Christ's Divinity was His Resurrection: "and was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom 1:4).

For this reason, the Christians since the beginning found it important to celebrate the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord. And, since the dates of these two events were linked to the Jewish Passover, the faithful preferred to keep the tradition of linking Easter to the date of the Passover, yet celebrating it after the latter, so we may not partake of their feasts. The teachings of the apostles stated that whoever celebrates the Resurrection on a day other than the Sunday (which follows the Jewish Passover) is partaking with the Jews in their feasts, and has separated himself from the Christians.

The determination of the date of the Resurrection feast remained a matter of research and change, until Pope Demetrius, the 12th Patriarch of Alexandria, concerned himself with it, consulted the scientists of his time, such as Ptolemeus Farmawy, and came up with the EPAKTY (remainder) calculation, on the basis of which the dates of the Holy Great Fast (Lent), the Resurrection and Pentecost Feasts, and the length of the Apostles' Fast are determined.

Pope Demetrius sent his formula to the patriarchs of the Church, who accepted it and celebrated according to it. When the first ecumenical council convened in Nicaea, in 325 AD, the Church Fathers endorsed and confirmed the Epakty calculation. The council's resolution was that the Patriarch of Alexandria was to determine, every year, the date of the Resurrection Feast according to this formula and send to the whole world the dates of the start of Lent and of the

Feast, together with a paschal letter to be read in the churches worldwide on the Christian Pascha (Easter).

Briefly, the Epakty formula is a means of calculating the date of the full moon following the vernal equinox, and the date of slaying the Passover lamb. We celebrate the Resurrection on the Sunday following these dates.

And since the cycle of the Julian (Roman) or the Coptic year is 4x7=28 years (i.e. each group of 28 years is identical to the next, as far as the starts and ends their months and weeks), and since the lunar cycle of the Jewish year, the basis of calculation of the Jewish Passover, is 19 years (every group of 19 years is similar to the next in the starts and ends of their months), so the date of the Resurrection Feast is the same every 19x28 years, i.e. every 532 years. Some have written tables of 532 years, called vines, to determine the dates of Fasts and Feasts in every year of the cycle according to the Coptic calendar.

The whole Christian world celebrated according to these vines and formula until the sixteenth century, when Pope Gregory of Rome changed the Roman calendar, as we have mentioned in the January 2009 issue concerning the dates of Christmas. He established a different calculation for the Feast of the Resurrection, a clear infraction against the canon of the Nicene council, which had confirmed the Epakty calculation and had given the Patriarch of Alexandria the right to set the date of the Feast.

Pope Gregory decided to celebrate on the Sunday following the full moon following the vernal equinox, not considering the Passover, nor the canon of the council of Nicaea, nor the spirituality of the teachings of the holy apostles which urge us not to celebrate at same time as the Jews. The Western world now celebrates according to these innovations.

The Feast in the Western churches may fall before, during or after the Jewish Passover. On certain years, it could come approximately a month before the latter. This caused some Catholics to press Rome, in some instances, to correct the Gregorian formula. The Church of Rome has even permitted her followers in Eastern and Orthodox countries, such as Egypt, to celebrate with us according to the Canons of the Holy Fathers and Councils.

May the blessing of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be upon us all. Amen

Appendices will demonstrate the two formulae for Orthodox and Western Churches to calculate the Feast's date, using 2015 as example:

APPENDIX A

EPAKTY FORMULA

DETERMINING THE ORTHODOX PASCHA

FOR 2015 AD

1- Divide 2015 by 19 (lunar cycle) = 106 complete cycles.   Remainder = 1 year

2- Difference between solar and lunar years = 11 days.

   Total difference for this year = 1x11= 11 days

3- Subtract the number of days making complete Coptic months: 11 – 0 = 11 days.

4- Subtract from 40 (a constant): 40 – 11 = 29

   (If the result is higher than 30, reduce by 30): this is not the case here.

   Lunar Epakty for this year = 29

   Lunar Epakty = Passover day in Parmuda (if from 1 to 24),

         Or = Passover day in Paramhat (if from 25 to 30).

5- Slaying of the Passover lamb this year = 29 Paramhat, i.e. 7 April, and is a Tuesday.

6- Resurrection Feast is the following Sunday, 4 Parmuda, i.e. **12 April.**

APPENDIX B
DETERMINING THE WESTERN EASTER
FOR 2015 AD

1- Divide 2015 by 19 = 106   Remainder = 1 = a

2- Divide 2015 by 4 = 503   Remainder = 3 = b

3- Divide 2015 by 7 = 287.   Remainder = 6 = c

4- Y = 19a + m (m being a constant =24, between 1900 & 2099 AD)

 Y = (19x1) + 24= 43.

5- Divide Y by 30 = 43/30 = 1   Remainder = 13 = d

6- Z = 2b+4c+6d+n (n being a constant =5, between 1900 & 2099 AD)

 Z = 6+24+78+5= 113

7- Divide 113 by 7 = 16   Remainder = 1 = e

8- f = d + e = 13+1 = 14

9- X (number of days between 22 March and Easter) is determined as follows:

 X = f   if [f <34], or [f = 34 and d ≠ 28],

 X = f – 7 if [f = 34 and d = 28], or [f = 35]

10- In 2015 AD, X = f = 14 days

11- Easter (for Western churches) = 22 March + 14 days = 36 March, which is after 31 March;

 i.e. 36 – 31 (days in March) = **5 April**.