

Consider the harsh words Cardinal Newman wrote in 1850 in his *Anglican Difficulties* about the Church of England concerning what he termed the romantic illusion of its Catholic nature on the part of Anglo-Catholics: "as in fairy tales, the magic castle vanishes when the spell is broken, and nothing is seen but the wild heath, the barren rock, and the forlorn sheepwalk, so it is with us as regards the Church of England, when we look in amazement on that we thought so unearthly, and find so commonplace or worthless."

This may well prove *a propos* today if we were to substitute "American Catholic 'renewed' liturgy" for "the Church of England." The Anglican Use can play its part in fostering a "reform of the reform." Related to this, too, those clergy and particularly bishops who support the growth of Anglican Use communities, and those who oppose it, reveal thereby where they stand in what Msgr. George Kelly has termed "the battle for the soul of the Catholic Church" in America. To outsiders struck by the seeming contrast between the Catholicism whose claims have been the object of their investigation and that which they may have experienced in visits to dismal Masses or conversations with complaisant

clergy, the Anglican Use parishes offer the witness that it need not be so. And if a schism in American Catholicism is coming, Anglican Use parishes would have an invaluable role in witnessing to a confident and explicit and attractive Catholic orthodoxy.

To Anglicans, healthy Anglican Use parishes offer an appropriation of all that is best in the Catholic patrimony of Anglicanism, freed from that which is non-Catholic and freed as well from those interminable, because irresolvable, disputes about what constitutes "Anglican orthodoxy." In much of "official Anglicanism," Anglican orthodoxy, so far as it exists, has been or is being transformed into a sort of dialectical legerdemain which justifies ongoing conformity to the mores and practices of liberal religiosity and the cult of individual self-realization, while in "continuing Anglicanism" the question of what Anglican orthodoxy is constitutes the basic and continuing cause of division among the different jurisdictions. It is only in Anglican Use Catholicism — and, to be fair, in a version of "Western-Rite Orthodoxy," should any such come to be and flourish, which seems unlikely — that all that is good, true, and Catholic in Anglicanism can be preserved in a context that transcends these disputes. ■

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## **ANOTHER TRIUMPH FOR COMMERCE**

**THOMAS STORCK**

### **THE SHRINKING OF SACRED TIME**

**T**he bishops of the ecclesiastical province in which I live have recently announced that from now on the Feast of the Ascension will be observed on the Sunday following the traditional date for that feast. The bishops presumably had good

motives for this. As my own bishop wrote, "many of our Catholic faithful find it difficult to observe this important feast fully since they must work on Thursday and thus cannot bring to this day the appropriate relaxation of mind and body required for the keeping of a holy day." He went on to say, "I believe that transferring the solemnity... will lead to a more fruitful and widespread observance of this important feast." It was also pointed out that many other dioceses in the U.S., not to mention all the dioceses of Italy, have for some time observed Ascension Day

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on the following Sunday. It is a small adjustment, no doubt, a minor change in the life of Christ's Church. Surely, we need not bother ourselves about it, and anyone who is disturbed by it is confusing the essentials of the Faith with mere accidentals.

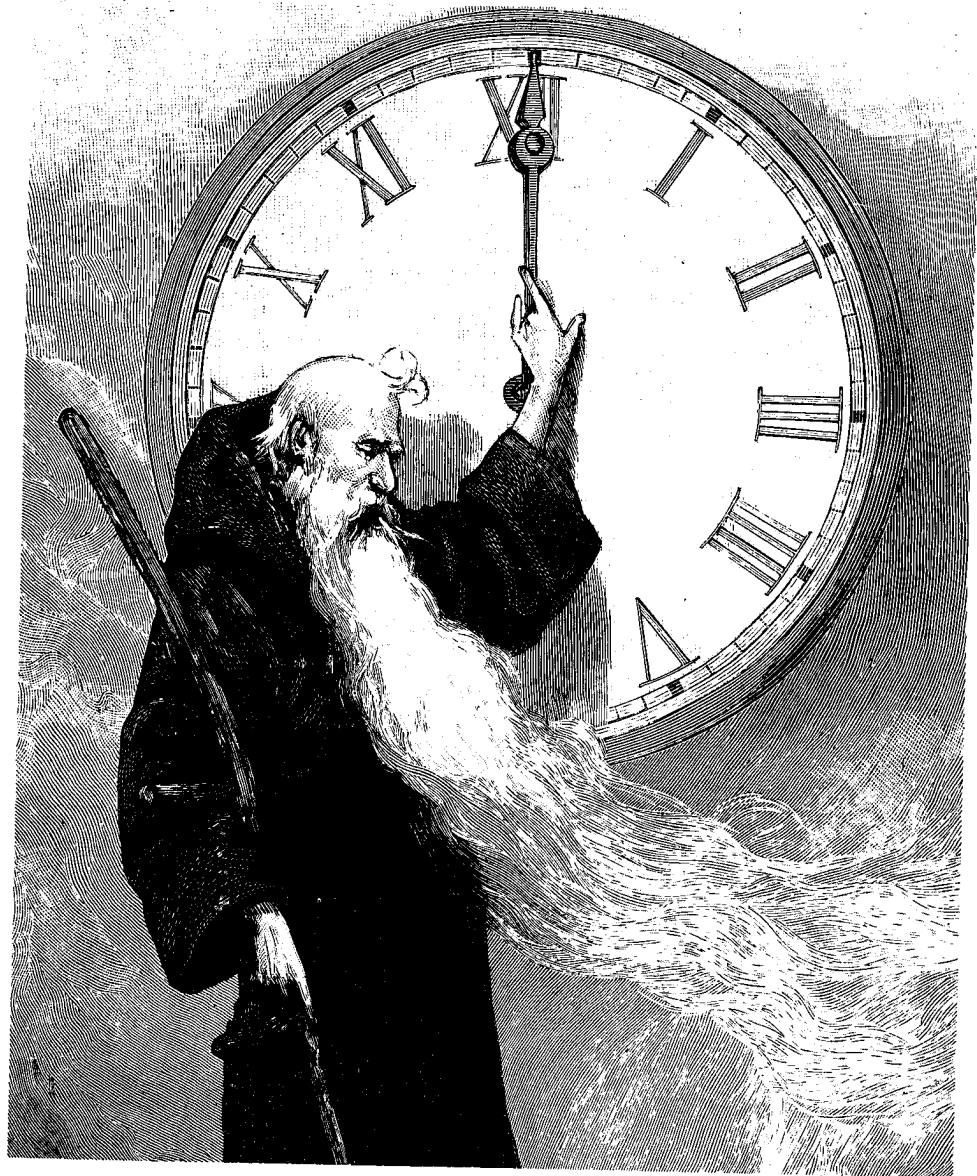
Nevertheless, I protest, and protest vehemently against this decision. For it represents nothing else but the retreat of the Church, the abdication of her task of sanctifying human life, another triumph for commercial civilization, in fact, and the acquiescence of the Church in her own decline.

The Catholic Church was given the mission by God of bringing men to Heaven. But in doing so, she has never taken the position that our life on earth is a mere featureless background to the all-important struggle for the destiny of each human soul. Because man is a composite of soul and body, because we must work out our salvation as creatures with bodies who live in a material world and for whom material things (as in sacraments) are even made the vehicles for grace, because in Heaven itself our souls will be reunited with our bodies, the entire realm of matter and all that goes with it is not irrelevant to the Christian life. That is why the Church has always fostered beauty and has worked to establish a Christian social order. That is why, even in their decay, lands that were formed by the Faith, such as Europe or Latin America, still exhibit traces of a way of life in which mankind not only found the fullest happiness of which it was capable here below, but many helps for attaining the true happiness for which we hope above. Although it is true that "here we have no lasting city" (Heb. 13:14), still the Church has never hesitated to baptize and sanctify ordinary life as she baptizes and sanctifies ordinary men.

Because we live among fi-

nite and passing things, we also live in time. And like place and matter, time is one of the elements that characterizes our life and which needs to be sanctified by the Faith. And of course the Church has done exactly that. We have the Church Year with its seasons and feasts — feasts which have both a liturgical and a popular side to them, the latter dependent on the former, but both intended to give glory to God.

Now, by establishing a Church Year, by naming certain days as feast days or fast days, the Church is making a claim about time. She is claiming that the dimension of time in which man lives not only can be sanctified but rightfully belongs to God. Just as the salvation of our souls should be our most important concern, so the claims of the Church over



time are more important than those of the state or any other human entity or organization. And where Catholics realize that the Church Year is not just something to be observed within the parish, where, for example, they refuse to mar the observance of Advent by a premature celebration of Christmas, and where they embellish saints' days with popular festivities — there the true meaning of Catholic time can be seen.

To understand what this means, let us contrast it with the way many Protestants look at time. Although Lutherans and Anglicans have some notion of the Christian Year, many Protestants allow their year to be shaped entirely by the civil and commercial order. The civil holidays, the ordinary names of the months and days, these are what mark off the temporal aspect of human life for such Protestants. Even Christmas and Easter are observed chiefly because they are sanctioned by the culture, and the Christmas season is defined by its commercial element. Christmas decorations go up soon after Thanksgiving because the merchants want them to, and on December 26 Christmas abruptly ends. That too many Catholics likewise allow their Christmas celebration to be dictated to them by the world is of course true, but that is only because such Catholics are not attempting to live a fully Catholic life. The point is that the Evangelical Protestant's life is *necessarily* bound by a time divorced from God and ruled only by the civic and the commercial, since he has nothing to sacralize his time. But a Catholic's life ought to be lived amidst a time that is a cycle of feasts and fasts and in which the saints accompany us throughout our yearly journey.

Thus the existence of holy days is important. Nor is it sufficient that Sunday be preserved as sacred and the rest of the week be turned over to the service of mammon. For it is all of life that our Lord came to redeem, and a Catholic cannot divide his life into two compartments. It is good therefore that we are sometimes stopped short during the work week and made to attend Mass. We are reminded that God owns all our time, that neither the pursuit of money nor the service of the state are ultimate ends, and that our life on this earth is a preparation for another life that will last forever. We have (or had) six holy days of obligation in this country. This is a minimum. In a Catholic country

we would be reminded by numerous celebrations and holidays throughout the year of the existence of the sacred. Here we had six interruptions of our frenzied pursuit of riches. Slowly they are being whittled down. Soon we may have none left.

But what of the reasons that my bishop proffered for his decision? To his credit, he did not refer just to fulfilling one's Mass obligation, but spoke of "the appropriate relaxation of mind and body required for the keeping of a holy day." But is this more difficult than in the past? The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* said we were to abstain from servile work on days of obligation (of course, there was an exception for those who had to work). But if the bishops are concerned about our keeping Ascension Day with "the appropriate relaxation of mind and body," when have our spiritual pastors attempted to urge the faithful to take the day off, if they can, to fulfill their religious duties? Today at least, many people have the ability to take a day of vacation pretty much whenever they want. Could we not have been urged, those of us who do have that ability, to take off work for the holy days of obligation? But no one seems to have thought that worth trying. No, rather the Church must retreat and turn over to the world another part of human life. The Church must retreat from the sanctifying of temporal existence which is part of her mission. The Church must abdicate her task of reclaiming from the Devil every part of God's creation.

There is also an assumption being made in my bishop's statement, an assumption that, if true, is in part the fault of the clergy for allowing it to develop in the first place. In positing that the demands of the capitalist order of work are more important than the Church's own liturgical year, the bishop is assuming that all or most of his flock participate in that capitalist work order. Now, in the not too recent past, nearly half of the adult population did not so participate. Who were these? Mothers who stayed home to raise their children and care for their families. That was before raising children had been contracted out to daycare centers and babysitters so that the money economy could conquer yet another aspect of human existence. And if the money economy has triumphed over the family economy, is it not in part because the Church failed to warn her children of the evils of both feminism and the mad race for riches, of the

abandonment of the home by mothers and their equal pursuit with their husbands of material goods, a pursuit that in reality has benefited no one but capitalists? The decision to contract out the raising of one's children so that capitalists could profit from a huge influx of new workers and thus keep wages low — this is the true story of what happened in the last quarter of the 20th century.

But in fact there are still many women who are at home taking part in a true family economy — not to mention children at both Catholic and public schools — who could observe days of obligation with something of a due “relaxation of mind and body.” Yet how many Catholic schools even give such days as holidays? Do not Catholics who are not part of the capitalist work system deserve as much consideration in the arrangement of the Church's life as those who choose to or must work outside the home?

Moreover, is it clear that even if Catholics cannot or do not observe holy days of obligation with the “relaxation of mind and body” that is proper for such feasts, and content themselves simply with fulfilling their Mass obligation, is it clear that there is no good gained by that? The existence of holy days of obligation still allows the Church to lay claim to all of man's time, even if circumstances are such that most Catholics do not fulfill the entire precept of past or current canon law and observe the day as a true feast day. Of holy days of obligation, the current *Code of Canon Law* (No. 1247) says that we are “to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body” (with an exception for those who have to work).

Religions that are confident of themselves are not engaged in watering down or eliminating sacred obligations. I have never heard that Islam has proposed to limit the Ramadan fast so as not to inconveniently clash with the workaday world.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls for Catholics to “seek recognition of Sundays and the Church's holy days as legal holidays” (No. 2188). Fifty years ago, if the bishops had waged a campaign for complete observance of holy days of obligation, rather than only attendance at Mass, it might even have been possible to enact legislation guaranteeing Catholics the right to practice fully their religion. Certainly it

would have been possible to start a general custom in which the faithful sought, whenever they could, to observe days of obligation according to all the norms of canon law. Now it appears to be too late.

The decline in the practice of the Faith will continue until the bishops honestly face up to the situation and have the courage to make the difficult changes necessary. The elimination of holy days of obligation shows only that certain bishops have no idea what the real problems are and thus no long-range plans to address them.

I would like to say that it is only a matter of time until enough courageous and intelligent bishops do rise up and a real reform of the Church occurs. I certainly hope and pray this will be the case. But then, can one forget those troubling words of our Lord, “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8). ■

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