

TIME FOR TOMORROW

The Proposed Permanent Calendar and its Effects
On the Liturgy of the Church

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TIME, like the weather, is something about which many people complain, but about which they can do nothing. Throughout history man has devised methods of calculating time based on the regularity manifested in the phenomena of celestial change. The earth's rotation serves as a means of determining a complete day. The four seasons divide the year into natural quarters. The elliptical circuit of the earth about the sun marks one year. Every four years we add an extra day to compensate for the slight difference between the solar year and our measurement of it.

Our present calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 has been accurate and useful, but has had the one disadvantage that it is irregular and unstable. A slight revision, called The World Calendar, is proposed. This new calendar would divide the year into equal quarters of 91 days. The first month of each quarter would have 31 days (26 weekdays, 5 Sundays); the other two months of each quarter would have 30 days (26 weekdays, 4 Sundays). At the end of every year there would be a world holiday or holy day—called W or 31 December. Every four years a similar leap-year day would be added at the end of June—called W or 31 June. By this method *the same date would always occur on the same day of the week*. Mathematically the revised calendar would equal the present calendar; it would differ only in the way in which the days were computed.

The business and social advantages have been the most emphasized and publicized. Business statistics would be more easily computed; civil and school holidays could be permanently and advantageously planned or "staggered", etc. (At present, successive years are never identical.) Nor is it strange that these economic and civic aspects of the question have been stressed. The information disseminated has been mainly directed at gaining the support of civic organizations and of governments in order to revise the civil calendar. Those, therefore, sponsoring a revision in the civil calendar are interested in religious holy days only to the extent that they are also national holidays, either by law or custom, e.g., Christmas, Easter, etc. They recognize that the stabilizing of these feasts is for the jurisdiction of religious authorities. Thus, though they would like to see all religious feasts also stabilized, they leave this matter to ecclesiastical persons and groups and advocate at least a permanent civil calendar.

Since the advantages that would accrue to the Church through the use of a permanent calendar have not been widely publicized, some Catholics have assumed

the only advantages would be economic or social, and have therefore opposed the suggestion of a permanent calendar for the feasts of the Church. Or if they have not taken this antagonistic position, they are, generally, at least indifferent to the entire question. As Father Conrad M. Morin, O.F.M., has pointed out in an excellent article reprinted in the *Journal of Calendar Reform*,¹ two main benefits would be derived by the Church's use of a perpetual calendar, viz., the simplification of the missal and of the breviary. A permanent *Ordo* would make the missal easier to use—and who would not wish this? A permanent ecclesiastical calendar would be an obvious benefit to those who recite the divine office.

It must be emphasized here that a permanent calendar (civil or religious) would not make the year monotonous by removing the variety provided by the present calendar. The variety of the year is not due to any particular calendar, but rather to the fact that many different seasonal and festive events succeed each other. Order does not preclude variety. The seasons of the year follow in regular order and bring with them variety. If disordered variety were the purpose of a variable calendar, then one should logically change dates and days even more flexibly than at present. Why celebrate feasts on annual dates at all? Variety will not be lost but more perfect order gained by the use of a permanent calendar.

Easter is the one feast of special importance in the question of stabilizing the ecclesiastical calendar, as at present it is not determined by a particular date but rather by the vernal moon. It is important to know the reason why the Council of Nicea in C.E. 325 ruled that Easter was to be celebrated on the Sunday following the full vernal moon. Some Christian communities had been celebrating the feast on the same day as the Jewish feast of the Passover, i.e., on the full moon (the 14th of Nisan); others celebrated it on the Sunday following, while others observed it on definite dates, e.g. 25 March, 7 April. The council therefore decreed that “the brethren of the Orient should do as those of Rome and Alexandria, *in order that all, with one voice and on the same day, unanimously* celebrate the holy Easter festival”² (Italics ours.)

It is obvious from this ruling of the Council that the reason for this relative stabilization of Easter was *uniformity* among the various communities rather than any deference to the Jewish manner of determining the feast of the Passover. The Old Law as been supplanted by the New. The Paschal Lamb need no longer be prefigured. The early Christians showed that they realized that they need not hold the Jewish manner of measuring time as sacred or obligatory for them when they chose the first day of the week to be their day of worship rather than the Jewish seventh. Nor did they follow the Jewish calendar based on the cycle of the moon, but adopted the solar cycle. It is interesting to note that the proposed permanent date for Easter, 8 April, would approximate the *chronological anniversary*, which is estimated as 9 April.³

It is not the Catholic Church but some Protestant sects (such as the Seventh Day Adventists) who object to the proposed calendar on “dogmatic” grounds. These

Adventists and also some Jews object to the extra day as being contrary to the divine command to observe the Sabbath. They overlook the fact that the day is expressly designed as a world holiday, and may therefore be celebrated as a holy day. Do they think it wrong to worship God two days consecutively? The Jewish people have their own calendar, though in practice they have been forced to use the Gregorian calendar. It is, moreover, the Gregorian not the Jewish calendar that is proposed for revision.

The official position of the Catholic Church in regard to permanent Church calendar is stated by Pope Benedict XV in a letter to Cardinal Mercier: "In itself it is neither unsuitable nor forbidden to deal with the question of a new Paschal date, . . . without forgetting, thought that the Church cannot admit seven continuous working days." ⁴ In replying to the League of Nations committee which sought the opinion of the Holy See on the proposed permanent calendar, particularly in regard to the stabilizing of Easter and the adding of extra or "neutral" or "intercalary" days, the Papal Nuncio of Pope Pius XI wrote that "possible modifications in this matter, although they do not give rise to any dogmatic difficulty, would nevertheless result in the abandoning of firmly established traditions, from which it would be neither legitimate nor acceptable to depart *without weighty reasons of a universal interest.*" ⁵ (Italics ours.) Thus it is seen that the position of the Holy See in this matter has been conditional. If sufficiently important reasons can be advanced for adopting a permanent calendar, then the Church would undoubtedly agree to this change.

Are there, then, any reasons which might be considered by the Church as "weighty" enough and of "universal interest"? We consider that some reasons (in addition to those advantages for the missal and breviary) may be found in a consideration of the effects a perpetual calendar would have on the liturgical life of the Church if it should be adopted by the state and *not* by the Church. The complications which would inevitably arise would be numerous and serious. After a permanent calendar would have been in civil and not religious use for one year, Catholics would find themselves observing not only Easter but also every Sunday on a day that would be a civil weekday. Catholics would also find that their weekdays as well as their numerical calendar dates differed from those of their neighbors. All ordinary dealing with the rest of the citizens in the state would be practically impossible. Catholics would find themselves in the position of the Jewish people who, though they theoretically have their own calendar, have been forced by circumstances to adopt the calendar of their non-Jewish neighbors. Under these conditions Catholics would necessarily accept the permanent calendar for business and social activities and would try to use the non-revised, fluctuating calendar in their religious duties and devotions.

The question of what feast would be celebrated by the Church on these extra days is a matter for the Sacred Congregation to decide. It provided for the leap-year day in February of the non-revised Gregorian calendar. It can do so for 31 December and 31 June. The Church does not lack saints, old or new, whose feasts

could be celebrated on these days. The liturgy is replete with votive Masses. A Mass of Thanksgiving would be a very suitable way in which to end one year and begin another. A permanent Church calendar would not mean that no further feast could be added, but merely that the feasts would not be shifted around year after year.

In this question of a permanent calendar and its consequent relation to the Church's liturgy mere idle speculation? It is assuredly not that. Many nations have already approved The World Calendar. The House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States have before them bills for the approval and eventual adoption of this permanent calendar. It should be noted here that the League of Nations did not adopt a revised calendar, not because the nations were opposed to the question, but because of the innumerable plans of revision offered, it was unable to choose one in particular. Since that time one permanent calendar, The World Calendar, has won worldwide acceptance and has eliminated all the competition of the other plans. The Delegation of Peru has introduced to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations a bill (E/291) for the approval of this permanent calendar. After passage by the Council it will go before the General Assembly and, if passed, is to be adopted 1 January 1950 (**new: 2012**) when the two calendars would coincide. At this present time the prospects of passage seem excellent. This could be one bill on which the delegates might agree.

One can therefore see that this matter should not be a thing of indifference to Catholics. The example of Pope Gregory XIII in giving the world a more perfect calendar should be a great inspiration to the Church of the twentieth century for cooperating with the nations of the world in achieving a yet more perfect and more permanent calendar—especially as this new calendar would not only be a great benefit to the social and business activities of Catholics, but also, although only in external yet in an important way, it would be of advantage to the liturgy of the Church.

(See CHART ⁶ below footnotes.)

¹ Rev. Conrad M. Morin, O.R.M., "Will the Jubilee Year 1950 (**new: 2012**) Open the Era of a New Civil and Religious Calendar?" in *Culture*, December 1947 (Quebec). (Translated from the French by Dr. Herbert L. Rasmussen in the *Journal of Calendar Reform*. 17, pp. 16-42. New York, 1948.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 39 (Quoted from C. Tondini de Quarenghi, *Il decreto Niceno sull' unificazione della Pasqua e S. Leone il Grande*, Rome, 1900, pp 15-16.)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22

⁴ Original text reprinted in the article of Mgr. P. Piacenza, *An expediat ut aliquid novi statuatur circa celebrationem diei Paschalis in Ecclesia catholica*, published in *Ephemerides liturgicue* 32 (Rome, 1918), 248-249.

⁵ Text of the letter of Mgr. Maglione, then Nuncio at Berne, in reply to the League of Nations, in the *Rapport relatif à la réforme du calendrier*, published by the Communications and Transit Section, Geneva, 1926, p. 86.

⁶ Dr. Morris's chart, "DATES OF MAJOR FEASTS IN A PERMANENT CALENDAR" demonstrates simplification based around one possible choice for a Fixed Easter without implying endorsement by The World Calendar Association for that choice of dates. Paragraph three of this article well restates The World Calendar Association policy concerning religious applications of The World Calendar, which is to leave them to appropriate religious authorities.

DATES OF MAJOR FEASTS IN A PERMANENT CALENDAR

(These are based on 8 April as Easter Sunday.) ⁶

<i>DATE</i>	<i>DAY</i>	<i>FEAST</i>
1 January	Sunday	Circumcision
6 "	Friday	Epiphany
5 February	Sunday	Septuagesima
22 "	Wednesday	Ash Wednesday
24 March	Sunday	Passion Sunday
25 "	Monday	Annunciation
1 April	Sunday	Palm Sunday
8 "	Sunday	Easter Sunday
16 May	Thursday	Ascension Thursday
26 "	Sunday	Pentecost
7 June	Thursday	Corpus Christi
15 "	Friday	Sacred Heart
1 July	Sunday	Precious Blood
15 August	Wednesday	Assumption
8 September	Friday	Nativity of Mary
29 October	Sunday	Christ the King
1 November	Wednesday	All Saints
26 "	Sunday	26 th Sunday after Pentecost
3 December	Sunday	1 st Sunday of Advent
8 "	Friday	Immaculate Conception
25 "	Monday	Christmas

Link: www.TheWorldCalendar.org/ASSETS/TimeForTomorrow.pdf

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