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Noah Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time: Holidays in France from Louis XIV through Napoleon*. Washington, D.C.: the Catholic University of America Press, 2010. xv + 299 pp. 5 maps, 5 figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$74.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9-780813-217253.

Review by William Doyle, University of Bristol.

Generally speaking we take our public holidays for granted. Nor do we dispute the right of public authority to decide what they should be, or when they should fall. It is one of the functions which voters entrust to those they elect. Yet when governments try to use that right to change the established pattern, it seldom passes without protest. British conservatives still grumble forty years on after the introduction of a May Day holiday which they see as a celebration of socialism. The French were outraged much more recently when President Jacques Chirac suggested the abandonment of the Whit Monday holiday in 2004 as a gesture of social solidarity. And how far should they be workless? Government services and banks might close, but universities teach through most official days off, and shop assistants find themselves working harder than usual. Public holidays have a life of their own, formed by time and habit, with which it is dangerous to tinker.

This is one of the general lessons of Noah Shusterman's survey of holidays in France over a particularly eventful period in their history. Between the 1660s and 1815, the number of work-free days in addition to Sundays shrank from an average of thirty-three a year to just four. This was even fewer than today. During the Revolution, Sundays themselves came under attack, as the revolutionary calendar, introduced at a time of dechristianisation, sought to substitute one rest day in every ten for the biblical one in every seven. Compliance with such radicalism was never more than patchy and Napoleon firmly reinstated Sundays fully six years before the official abandonment of the revolutionary calendar. But even when the Concordat brought back an official Catholic Church, there was no return to the workless saints' days observed under the old regime.

All this was long seen as the consequence of economic modernisation, the inexorable pressure of growing capitalism's attempts to maximise and exploit the productivity of labour at the expense of popular leisure. Shusterman rejects any such interpretation. He shows that there was always widespread, though certainly not uniform, popular support for limiting or diminishing the number of workless days. Workless days yielded no income for families often desperate to make ends meet. And surprisingly often, these everyday imperatives were recognised by the church. It was in fact largely on ecclesiastical initiative that the average number of workless days fell by almost a half over the century preceding the Revolution. This was because the power to authorise or suppress religious holidays was firmly in the hands of the bishops. The pope himself was entirely happy with this state of affairs, and so in general was the king. Shusterman marshals convincing evidence that the decline in holidays before the Revolution owed little to pressure from the state. Louis XIV's one positive intervention in this sphere was an attempt to authorise a new holiday in honour of St. Joseph, but most bishops ignored his suggestion and, far from persisting, in 1695 he positively strengthened the authority of bishops over such matters.

At the same time, secular authorities were reluctant to involve themselves in enforcing prohibitions on working when zealous prelates did demand pious observance. Episcopal authorisation meant that there was no uniformity across the kingdom in the number of religious holidays, or in the rate at which their numbers declined over the eighteenth century. The variations were wide, depending both on the convictions of individual bishops and on local customs. In some dioceses in the seventeenth century, religiously ordained workless days could run to over forty. Nor was it uniformly clear what observing a saint's day meant. Sometimes it meant processions and pilgrimages, sometimes merely not working in

public. Sunday observance was generally more uniform with taverns being closed during the hours of mass; but at harvest times and other moments of natural urgency all prohibitions could be cheerfully suspended. In the eighteenth century, much of this was entirely in line with the prescriptions of utilitarian *philosophes*. They tried to use saints' days as yet another stick with which to beat the church, arguing that days without work were squandered in worthless leisure and not socially useful, but the church itself was far from deaf to the claims of public morals and utility in this sphere. In any case, enlightened Catholicism was anxious to play down the veneration of saints as a distraction from the centrality of Christ in salvation. Some *philosophes*, however, such as Condorcet or Sylvain Maréchal, had dreams of calendar reform which would completely sweep religious festivals away. The arrival of the Revolution presented an opportunity to try it.

Just over half of the book is devoted to these experiments. Until the Revolution, argues Shusterman, the steady diminution in the number of holidays was an example of centralisation happening without orders from the centre—a process perhaps worth exploring in other contexts. The French revolutionaries, however, sought to create uniform institutions by central authority, and they never for a moment imagined that the church, and all the habits which it controlled and sanctioned, would be immune from this. When the civil constitution of the clergy split the church and made bishops who accepted it state servants, the old independent authority behind workless days dissolved. It now became unequivocally the state's prerogative to fix public holidays. And when, three years later, the republic broke entirely with organised religion, it decided to reorganise the whole calendar. Sundays as well as saints' days now disappeared, to be replaced by a handful of secular festivals (proclamation of the republic, execution of the king) and the ten-day week culminating in the workless *décadi*.

From the start, there was widespread resistance. Popular adherence to Sunday proved deep-rooted and conformity to the new calendar could only be enforced through the machinery of terror. The moment terror ended, Sunday observance resurfaced massively. Influential voices advocated abandoning the new calendar, but that was seen as a surrender to fanaticism and the Directory enshrined it in the constitution of the Year III. In the leftward shift which followed the coup of Fructidor, enforcement was redoubled again, though not with the methods of terror. Accordingly it was easier to resist or evade, and Shusterman devotes many pages to the subterfuges of Sunday observance and flouting the *décadi*. He has clearly enjoyed exploring the ingenuity, not to say effrontery, deployed by pious peasants in demonstrating their contempt for secular, republican authority.

The revolutionaries, he argues, overestimated the power of legislation to overturn ingrained habits. It was much better to seek ways of accommodating them and the wisdom of Napoleon was to recognise this. When he made his deal with the church in the Concordat of 1801, he made it a condition that the state would control everyday religious practice. But the church could not be restored without Sunday and that alone was enough to doom the revolutionary calendar. It laboured on in official usage, even two years beyond the proclamation of the empire, but its failure to take hold outside the bureaucracy made mockery of authority in ways which Napoleon never found acceptable. As to workless days beyond the Sabbath, he had no problem in securing papal consent to reducing their number to four—although establishing the new feast of the hitherto unknown Saint Napoleon taxed even his authority. It disappeared with him, but in other respects the return of the Bourbons did not mark a return to the old regime. Episcopal authority remained constrained by the Concordat and the state kept a firm grip on the authorisation of workless days. They did not rise in number from the Napoleonic level until late in the century, while initial attempts to impose a Sunday observance far more strict than anything before 1789 came to nothing.

All this is analysed in clear and largely jargon-free language, even if key points are driven home with a good deal of repetition. A series of maps and tables usefully set out the statistical information behind the arguments. When Matthew Shaw's book on the revolutionary calendar appears later this year, the two together will give us a very full account of that famous, confusing, and much mocked experiment. Shusterman meanwhile raises important general questions about the processes of modernisation and the limits of state action, which suggest that both are more complex to unravel than we tend to suppose. He introduces very little comparative material, but exploring these issues in other contexts is surely the way to see how far his conclusions have wider significance.

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