

# Edward J. Mahoney

## “Evening Masses”

### Clergy Review (1947)

#### EVENING MASS

When did the existing law forbidding evening Mass become firmly established in the Western Church?(A.)

#### REPLY

Canon 821, §1: Missae celebrandae initium ne fiat citius quam una hora ante auroram vel serius quam una hora post meridiem.

*Rubricae Generales*, XV, 1: Missa privata . . . quacumque hora ab aurora usque ad meridiem dici potest.

*De Defectibus*, X, 1: . . . si non sit tempus debitum celebrandi, quod est ab aurora usque ad meridiem communiter.

The earliest source quoted for the canon is the Constitution of Martin V, 22 February, 1418,<sup>1</sup> which in very general terms states that the approved custom of the Church does not permit Mass “post coenam”. In the next source quoted, Pius V, 29 March, 1566,<sup>2</sup> after reciting various alleged customs, indults and faculties permitting Mass on certain days “de sero etiam forsan circa solis occasum”, declares them to be abuses which are henceforth annulled and revoked, and he punishes by suspension those who violate the law: “districtius inhibens ne deinceps Missas vespertino tempore . . . quovis pretexto celebrare vel celebrari facere praesumant.” Shakespeare has a reference to evening Mass in Act IV, Scene 1, of *Romeo and Juliet*.

There was no written common law on the subject before this Constitution of Pius V, the appropriate hour for celebrating Mass being a matter of custom which varied in different places; even the Council of Trent in Sess. xxii, *de ref.* merely directed Ordinaries to secure by appropriate penalties that priests should not celebrate “aliis quam debitis horis”. The Pian rule appeared in the rubrics of the Missal of the same Pontiff published in 1570. A proposal to change the rubric, “quae diutissime mansit inconcussa et universalis”, for the needs of polar regions, was discussed and rejected by the Congregation of Rites, 2 November, 1634;<sup>3</sup> the rule is said to be universal and the difficulty about the aurora in polar regions could be met by a reasonable interpretation, particularly as the rubric *De Defectibus* reads “communiter”. Clement XI (1700–1721) declined to extend the time beyond mid-day,<sup>4</sup> but the reckoning, nevertheless, became widely interpreted, and was eventually extended by the Code one hour in each direction.

In many places the Pian rule was disregarded, especially in France, and Martène, who died about 1735, bears witness to the practice of evening Masses in his own day.<sup>5</sup> Even Benedict XIV, when Archbishop of Bologna, appears to have tolerated Masses on certain feasts “pluribus iam a meridie transactis horis”, until requested by the Holy See to stop the practice.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fontes*, n. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Fontes*, n. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Decreta Authentica*, n. 614.

<sup>4</sup> Gasparri, *De Eucharistia*, §100.

<sup>5</sup> *Ecclesiastical Review*, 1911, XLIV, p. 723.

<sup>6</sup> 2 March, 1737; printed in Ferraris, *Bibliotheca*, s.v. “Missa”, art. 5.

St. Thomas<sup>1</sup> witnesses for his own time that Mass was said on fast days “hora nona”, that is to say at 3 p.m., and John Burckard’s *Ordo Missae*, first published in 1502, gives the same hour.<sup>2</sup> The principle connecting the hour of Mass with the fast-laws explains the custom of remoter times when Mass was said during Lent in the evening, but on feast days in the morning: it was considered unfitting to celebrate publicly the sacred mysteries during hours devoted to penance.<sup>3</sup> Benedict XIV refers to it in *Etsi Pastoralis*, 26 May, 1742,<sup>4</sup> an important document which sanctioned and defended certain customs proper to Eastern rites as practised by Italo-Greeks: “et si alicubi viget consuetudo producendi ieiunium cum Missa usque ad vespem, minime aboletur, sed in suo robore et firmitate permaneat.”

Owing to indults for evening Mass granted during the war, the subject is often mooted in the Catholic press, and there are plenty of arguments for and against. It is for the Bishops to take the first steps for securing any change in our normal discipline; the possibility of obtaining the favour for the generality of the faithful was mentioned by the Bishop of Portsmouth in his Lenten Pastoral of 1943,<sup>5</sup> the question having arisen owing to war conditions then prevailing. It is quite clear that the impression most people have got that in the primitive Church Mass was in the evening, whereas now it is in the morning, is far too simple to be correct, and if the custom is ever partially restored it will not be a startling innovation, nor a serious departure from tradition.

#### SEMINARIST ENTERING RELIGION

Does the joint decree of two Roman Congregations, 25 July, 1941, requiring the permission of the Holy See before a seminarist may lawfully enter religion and *vice versa*, cover the case where a seminarist, without having left the seminary, desires for lawful reasons to enter religion? (R.)

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, 83.2, ad 2.

<sup>2</sup> H.B.S. *Tracts on the Mass*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Many, *De Missa*, §19; Gasparri, *De Eucharistia*, §98.

<sup>4</sup> *Fontes*, n. 328, §VI, vi.

<sup>5</sup> *The Catholic Herald*, 12 March, 1943.

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