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REPRESENTING RELIGION, LABOUR AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE
IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL EUROPE
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Introduction

In the autumn of 1724 a Fellow of the Royal Society traveled extensively through Brabant and Flanders. During his stay in the Austrian Netherlands the author observed with great interest the construction of the paved roads between the cities of Ghent and Courtray and Brussels and Namur. From these observations he calculated the total labour input of both men and horses. These calculations indicated that the construction of one league of paved road required 16.068 days of work of an adult male labourer and 6.564 days of work of a horse.¹ One league of paved road would thus occupy approximately 53 labourers and 22 horses during a year. But, as the author remarked, it would probably take more manpower and horses to construct a league of paved road in the Austrian Netherlands because work patterns were highly influenced by the number of religious holidays imposed by the Roman Catholic Church. The anonymous author added the following observation to his calculations:

“I here suppose the year to consist of three hundred days, which is nearly the number of working days in England, and in other Protestant countries, sixty five only being deducted for Sundays and holidays. But in Roman Catholic countries, an hundred days are the least allowance that can be made in computations of yearly labour; by which it appears how prejudicial that religion is to the temporal interests of the kingdoms where it prevails; for very near two seventh parts of the whole labour of the people are lost; and

¹ *A Short Specimen of a New Political Arithmetic Containing Some Considerations Concerning Public Roads*, London 1734, pp. 9-16. One league is approximately 5 km. On the expansion of the road network in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century see L. GÉNICOT, *Histoire des routes depuis 1704*, Brussels 1948. On road construction and political arithmetic in the eighteenth century see F. ETNER, *L’Ancien Régime et le calcul économique* in “Economies et Sociétés”, 18, 1984, pp. 175-198 (special issue on ‘Aspects de l’Economie Politique en France au XVIII^e Siècle”).

*almost a tenth more than in Protestant countries; so that meerly on account of labour, nine protestants are to be esteemed worth ten Catholics.*²

As the title of the work suggest, the author was a political economist. This anonymous author is just one of many dozens of politicians, economists, journalists, clerics and Enlightenment *philosophes* who identified religion as an important and significant factor that influenced the economy and economic performance of both nations and their inhabitants. On so-called holy days or saints' days the work cycle was interrupted. Religious rules stipulated that almost no forms of manual labour could be performed during these days. On religious holidays economic life and activity grinded to an abrupt halt. An increasing number of writers identified the relative frequency of these work interruptions as one of the causes explaining both the wealth and poverty of nations. Religious holidays however were not the only set of religious institutions that appear in these writings. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries other religious factors that had an impact on the economy were identified. During his European tour the British cleric and politician Gilbert Burnet passed through northern Italy during the winter of 1685. He observed that the vast amounts of silver that were used to decorate churches and were processed in church plate must have produced a profound effect on the money supply in this region. The precious metals that were being used in church plate and religious decorations could not be used in trade, and therefore, this would have occasioned monetary scarcity and resulted in "a great deadness in trade".³ The economic success of the Dutch Republic was equally perceived as the direct result of a specific set of actions with reference to religious matters. Seventeenth-century writers frequently referred to religious toleration as a source of wealth for the Dutch Republic. In this context, freedom of religion was perceived as one of the factors that stimulated economic growth.⁴ Other authors focused on

² Quoted from *A Short Specimen*, cit., pp. 16-17.

³ Quoted from G. BURNET, *Travels or Letters Containing an Account of what Seemed Most Remarkable in Switzerland, Italy, France and Germany etc.*, Amsterdam 1687, pp. 103-104. On Gilbert Burnet, his travels and the importance of his travel journals in shaping English thought about European continental Roman Catholicism see T. CLAYDON, *Europe and the Making of England 1660-1760*, Cambridge 2007, ch. 1. For late seventeenth-century estimates of the value of church plate relative to the total supply of gold and silver in Europe see G. KING, *Naturall and Political Observations Upon the State and Condition of England*, in *Two Tracts by Gregory King*, G.E. BARNETT ed., Baltimore 1936, p. 34. See also C. MULDREW, 'Hard Food for Midas': *Cash and Its Social Value in Early Modern England*, in "Past and Present", 170, 2001, pp. 78-120, esp. 109-113.

⁴ See P. CARRIVE, *Tolérance et prospérité chez les économistes anglais du XVII^e siècle*, in *La naissance de l'idée de tolérance, 1660-1689*, Rouen 1999, pp. 28-48 and M. VAN STRIEN-CHARDONNEAU, *Le voyage de Hollande:*

the impact of dietary restrictions during Lent, the high costs of elaborate and recurrent religious rituals, the vast numbers of unproductive members of the clergy and so on.⁵ In all these works and perceptions Protestant countries excelled and thrived. Whereas the Protestant religion was viewed as a spur to industry and development, the Roman Catholic religion was perceived as harmful to the economy.

The relationship between the number of holidays and the wider economy was perceived and viewed through various economic mechanisms. Some authors stressed the comparative trade advantages that nations could derive from observing fewer holidays and the positive effects on the balance of trade. Others advocated the suppression of holidays in order to increase the labour supply. As this paper will demonstrate, holidays mattered to the economy in the pre-industrial mind.

The relationship between religion and economy is complex and can be analyzed from different perspectives. In this paper only the authors that view religion as an independent variable are treated. In other words, the causal relation runs from religion (beliefs, attitudes, rules and institutions) to economic performance. Religion thus shaped the economy and not vice versa. This paper is an exploration of how late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers viewed the relationship between religious institutions and the economy and the mechanisms and causal relationships they identified between the economic and religious sphere. This chapter reviews the discourse about holidays in economic literature from c. 1650 to the end of the eighteenth century. As such, it is mainly concerned with the perceptions of these writers rather than with the historical reality.⁶ This paper does not analyze the impact of differences in the number of work days on the European economy. In recent historiography, the suppression of holidays and their effects on the economy, and the household economy in particular, has been much debated. Jan de Vries and Joachim Voth in particular have argued that the suppression of holidays during the early modern period enabled household to intensify

récits de voyageurs français dans les Provinces-Unies, 1748-1795, Oxford 1994, pp. 300-305. See also B. KAPLAN, *Dutch Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision*, in R. PO-CHIA HSIA and H. F. K. VAN NIEROP eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 8-26.

⁵ See for example A.F. BÜSCHING, *Introduction à la connoissance géographique et politique des états de l'Europe*, Strasbourg 1779, pp. 127-128.

⁶ For a similar approach see for example F. CROUZET, *The Sources of England's Wealth: Some French Views in the Eighteenth Century*, in IDEM, *Britain Ascendant: Comparative Studies in Franco-British Economic History*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 127-148 and G. RIELLO, P. O'BRIEN, *The Future is Another Country: Offshore Views of the British Industrial Revolution*, in "Journal of Historical Sociology", 22, 2009, pp. 1-29.

their activities and reallocate labour towards market-oriented production.⁷ As such, the suppression of holidays enabled households to raise their household income. Not all historians have interpreted the gradual disappearance of holidays in this positive light. For Albert Soboul, the introduction of the revolutionary calendar and the complete eradication of religious holidays symbolized the triumph of the capitalist bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. This new calendar, characterized by few work interruptions, made labour abundantly available and thus directly served the economic interests of employers.⁸ Whereas some historians tend to view the suppression and gradual disappearance of a vast number of holidays as a sign of increased industriousness, others have interpreted these trends as an indication of proletarianisation, social disciplining and the submission of labourers to capitalist work regimes.⁹ Between 1650 and 1800 these conflicting views do not appear in the economic literature. Only during the late eighteenth century, and increasingly during the first half of the nineteenth century, did some writers comment on the effects of a low number of holidays on the health and well-being of the labourer.¹⁰ Until 1800 most of the writers held the view that suppressing holidays liberated the worker from the forced yoke of inactiveness imposed by the church and religious holidays.

Protestant wealth versus Catholic poverty

⁷ J. DE VRIES, *The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution*, in "Journal of Economic History", 54, 1994, pp. 249-270; IDEM, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge 2008; H.-J. VOTH, *Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London*, in "Journal of Economic History", 58, 1998, pp. 29-58 and IDEM, *Time and Work in England, 1750-1830*, Oxford 2000.

⁸ A. SOBOUL, *Les Sans-culottes parisiens de l'an II*, Paris 1958, p. 319. For similar views see P. BOISSONNADE, *Colbert*, Paris 1932, pp. 273-274; H.C. PAYNE, *The Philosophes and the People*, New Haven and London 1976, p. 121 ("The issue of religious holidays provided a convenient focus for a continuing sense of social discipline"); C. LIS and H. SOLY, *Policing the Early Modern Proletariat, 1450-1850*, in *Proletarianization and Family History*, ed. D. LEVINE, New York and London 1984, p. 170 and M. PERELMAN, *The Invention of Capitalism. Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*, Durham and London 2000, pp. 17-18. On the relationship between the rise of the 'industrial and commercial bourgeoisie' in early modern Europe and the suppression of holidays see also the interesting observations by Karl Marx's son-in-law P. LAFARGUE, *Le droit à la paresse*, Paris 2007, pp. 37-38 (originally published in 1881).

⁹ C. LIS, J. EHMER, *Historical Studies in Perceptions of Work* in *The Idea of Work from Antiquity to Modern Times*, IDEM eds., Farnham 2009, p. 21. On the ambiguous relationship between leisure and living standards among labouring populations during the industrious revolution see J. MOKYR, *The Enlightened Economy. An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850*, New Haven and London 2009, pp. 467-468.

¹⁰ See for example H. GRANGE, *Les idées de Necker*, Paris 1974, pp. 193-195.

The economic map of Europe experienced profound changes during the early modern period. The internal distribution of economic power was characterized by a distinct geographical shift.¹¹ This process, sometimes referred to as the ‘little divergence’ did not escape contemporary observers. Much of the economic literature during the seventeenth and eighteenth century was concerned with identifying the forces and institutions that shaped and supported economic growth, in particular in England and the Dutch Republic.¹² For many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers it was no coincidence that both these nations also had embraced Protestantism during the sixteenth century. In most of the economic literature published during this period religion, and in particular the set of religious institutions that characterized Protestantism, was viewed as an essential ingredient of the success of the English and the Dutch. Protestantism apparently fostered and stimulated economic growth. Conversely, most of the countries that stagnated or experienced economic decline had remained loyal to Rome and Roman Catholicism. In the minds of a growing number of economists and politicians economic growth also had distinct religious roots.

The French economist Claude Dupin (1686-1769) was one of the authors who attempted to explain the causes of the divergence of the European economies during the early modern period and the relationship with religious regimes.¹³ In his work *Oeconomiques* (1745) he set out his analysis of the religious origins of the little divergence. According to Dupin, economic differences between the European nations were relatively small during the pre-Reformation era. All the European countries and regions had access to more or less equal forces of production. With particular reference to labour, Dupin observed:

“Les ouvriers anglois, hollandois, suédois, danois, allemands, suisses demeurent oisifs autant de jours dans l’année que les ouvriers françois; et comme les forces et les richesses

¹¹ For some recent comparative perspectives and estimates see J.L. VAN ZANDEN, *Early Modern Economic Growth: a Survey of the European Economy, 1500-1800* in *Early Modern Capitalism. Economic and Social Change in Europe*, ed. M. PRAK, London 2001, pp. 69-87; IDEM, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution. The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000-1800*, Leiden 2009, pp. 233-266; C. O’GRADA, *The Tortoise and the Hare: Economic Growth in Britain and the Netherlands c. 1500-1800* in *Les passions d’un historien. Mélanges en l’honneur de Jean-Pierre Poussou*, R. ABAD et al. eds., Paris 2010, pp. 553-564 and L. ANGELES, *GDP per Capita or Real Wages? Making Sense of Conflicting Views on Pre-Industrial Europe*, in “Explorations in Economic History”, 45, 2008, pp. 147-163.

¹² See J. APPLEBY, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England*, Princeton 1978, ch. 4.

¹³ On the life, career and writings of Dupin see J. LADANT, *Le fermier général Claude Dupin (1686-1769)*, in *Positions des thèses soutenues par les élèves de la promotion de 2000*, Paris 2000, pp. 181-187.

*ne sont grandes ou petites, fortes ou faibles, que par comparaison, toute l'Europe étoit au par pour le temps qui s'employoit à l'industrie et à la main d'œuvre, et les richesses qui en procèdent étoient par conséquent en égalité de proportion.*¹⁴

As a direct result, wealth was redistributed quite evenly across Europe. The Reformation however disturbed the economic balance in Europe. The countries that had embraced Protestantism introduced changes in the liturgical calendar that enabled their inhabitants to work at least 50 days more per annum compared to countries that remained Roman Catholic (such as France). As a result of fewer holidays Protestant nations had access to more labour power. This advantage, estimated by Dupin at one-seventh (or circa 14%) of the work year, fundamentally changed the balance of power between Protestant and Roman Catholic Europe. Protestant nations derived benefits from observing fewer holidays that enabled them to compete successfully with Roman Catholic economies. For Dupin, the most important advantage Protestant countries derived from a longer work year were comparatively low prices. Protestants were able to undersell Roman Catholic nations as they were able to produce manufactured goods at a lower cost. This economist assumed that the Protestant countries could produce industrial products cheaper because the cost of these goods included a lower number of days of forced inactivity by the producers. In Roman Catholic countries, forced holidays drove up the price of labour and, ultimately, of the manufactured end product. Thus, whereas France could produce a piece of cloth for 21 livres, Protestant economies could produce the same piece of cloth for only 18 livres. This price advantage of 14% for Protestant economies enabled them to crush competition in the international market. Next to the impact of holidays on the price of textiles products, Dupin also added an estimate of the financial and economic losses sustained by the French nation as a result of the forced inactivity on holidays or *fêtes chômées*. 5 million labourers were deprived of their average daily earnings of 5 sols in France on each holiday. The total loss of 50 holidays amounted to an impressive 62.5 million livres.¹⁵ Dupin was convinced that the origins of the economic supremacy of Protestant nations could be retraced to changes in the religious calendar introduced in the sixteenth century. As

¹⁴ C. DUPIN, *Oeconomiques*, ed. M. AUCY, Paris 1913, vol. 1, p. 62. The original edition was published in three volumes in Karlsruhe in 1745.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64. Dupin's analysis was almost literally reprinted in the article *Commerce* in *Dictionnaire universel des sciences, morale, économique, politique et diplomatique*, ed. J.-B.-R. ROBINET, London 1780, vol. 12, pp. 512-513.

this chapter will demonstrate many other economists advanced similar views on the causes of Protestant wealth accumulation. What sets Dupin somewhat apart from others is his distinct historical perspective of the differences that he could observe around the middle of the eighteenth century. Unlike many other writers Dupin did not juxtapose countries, but focused on religions. Whereas many other writers tended to view religion as one of the many factors explaining the economic success of England and the Dutch Republic, Dupin placed religion right at the centre of his analysis.

Dupin was certainly not the only one commenting on the relationship between the two main competing religious regimes in Europe and economic performance. Other writers too commented on the economic supremacy of Protestant countries, but provided less details. For example, the economist Richard Cantillon also observed a relationship between religion and economic success in Europe. As he stated in his magnum opus published in 1755: “*L’expérience fait voir que les Etats qui ont embrassé le Protestantisme [...] en sont devenus visiblement plus puissants.*”¹⁶ Numerous other examples can be cited. In 1753 an anonymous Irish writer stated: “*It is undoubted that the Protestants out trade and out work the Papist.*”¹⁷ In a similar vein another author noted that “*the Protestant religion is better calculated for trade than the Catholic.*”¹⁸ In 1791 an anonymous French author deplored that “*prodigieuse supériorité des nations protestantes.*”¹⁹ Already in 1716 the famous banker John Law observed that “*le commerce ne réussit pas si bien dans les Etats catholiques romains que dans ceux qui sont réformés.*”²⁰ Such views about the economic superiority of Protestant nations (especially England and the Dutch Republic) abound in the economic literature of this period. Whereas some authors were rather vague, other provided more details and information about the causal relationship between religion and economy. In the next sections these causal relationships are explored in greater detail.

¹⁶ R. CANTILLON, *Essai sur la nature du commerce en général*. London 1755, p. 125.

¹⁷ *A Dialogue Between Dean Swift and Tho. Prior, Esq.*, Dublin 1753, p. 52.

¹⁸ R. PARROTT, *Reflections on Various Subjects Relating to Arts and Commerce*. London 1752, p. 40.

¹⁹ *Pétition de tous les paysans français à tous les magistrats de France pour la suppression des fêtes*, in “La feuille villageoise”, 1791, p. 302.

²⁰ J. LAW, *Premier mémoire sur les banques présenté à son Altesse Royale Monseigneur le duc d’Orléans, régent de France*, in *Economistes financiers du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. E. DAIRE, Paris 1851, p. 521.

Religion, holidays and economic performance

As noted, economists identified and exposed various ‘religious’ influences on the economy. Most comments tended to concentrate on religious holidays and the effects these forced days of unemployment exerted on the economy. In this section a number of these mechanisms are analyzed and discussed. In most cases holidays were linked to the economy in two important ways. First, Roman Catholic nations were deprived of a part of their labour potential. Holidays forced days of involuntary leisure upon the labouring population and industrial infrastructure. As a result, much of the labour of Roman Catholic nations was not used productively. Secondly, through the labour supply, holidays also determined wage rates and price levels. It was argued that, as a result of numerous holidays, wages were relatively higher in Roman Catholic nations and the price of the industrial, commercial and agricultural output was much higher. These higher prices seriously hampered the position of Roman Catholic nations on the international market. Many of these ideas were developed with particular countries in mind. In most cases the situation in France was contrasted with England. These two countries frequently served as models of both the Protestant nations characterized by few holidays and the Roman Catholic nations bedeviled by frequent work interruptions imposed by the Church.

Laurence Braddon stated that the economy of France could never surpass England as a result of that “*spiritual curse of popery*”. Braddon estimated that the French economy annually lost £ 20 million as a direct result of their adherence to Roman Catholicism. One of the factors that explained these losses were holidays: “*The superstition of their religion obligeth France to keep (at least) fifty holidays more than we are bound to keep.*” The daily loss to the national economy of France of one holiday was set by Braddon at £ 120000.²¹ Louis de Beausobre, descendant of a family of Huguenot refugees and councilor to the king of Prussia, estimated in 1764 that the English economy gained an additional income of £ 12 million on account of fewer holidays. France, he calculated, could gain at least £ 30 million if 50 superfluous holidays were suppressed.²² For Ange Goudar

²¹ L. BRADDON, *An Abstract of the Draught of a Bill for Relieving, Reforming and Employing the Poor*, London 1717, p. VIII.

²² L. DE BEAUSOBRE, *Introduction générale à l'introduction de la politique, des finances et du commerce*. Berlin 1764, pp. 415-416. De Beausobre was also critical of other aspects concerning the organization of the Roman Catholic Church (high number of unproductive members of the clergy etc.).

fewer holidays in England amounted to a financial advantage of an impressive 200 million livres.²³ During the late eighteenth century a journalist of the *Feuille Villageoise* estimated the loss of twenty holidays in France at 100 million livres.²⁴ According to Cantillon, Protestant nations owed their economic supremacy over Roman Catholic countries partly to different calendars. In the latter the number of holidays reduced the labour supply with one-eighth (or 12.5%).²⁵ For some authors the advantages resulting from a longer work year were so powerful that they tended to neutralize other factors that should contribute to economic growth. Robert Molesworth, an Irish writer, reported this conversation to convince his readers: “*I once heard a merchant of Leghorn arguing why the Dutch must necessarily be richer than the Italians, who are the skilfullest merchants and best accomptants in the world. Can it be otherwise ? (said he) the Dutch have about a hundred days more in the year to get mony in, than we are permitted to have by our religion; and this overballances all other advantages we have over them in parts, sobriety and stock.*”²⁶ The effects of holidays were also estimated with particular economic sectors in mind. A loom operating in Catholic countries would on average produce annually 1200 ell of textiles. In a Protestant country an identical loom would produce 1300 ell of textiles on account of fewer holidays and forced work interruptions.²⁷ As a direct result of the specific religious institutions in Roman Catholic countries, output was reduced and the gross domestic product negatively affected. In the view of many economists the price of manufactured goods was burdened with the costs of holidays. Thus, Toustain de Fortebosc, argued that holidays were pernicious to the export of France because prices were higher as a result of holidays. In England the industrial apparatus worked six days per week. In France such output levels could not be achieved on account of the religious bans on labour. Fortebosc estimated that holidays

²³ A. GOUDAR, *Les intérêts de la France mal entendus*, Amsterdam 1756, p. 179. He further noted that the decorations and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church absorbed a great deal of labour and manpower that could be used more productively in industry.

²⁴ *Pétition de tous les paysans français*, cit., p. 302. The journalist arrived at this figure by multiplying the number of holidays (20) with the number of labourers (10 million) and their daily earnings (10 sous). On this revolutionary journal see M.A. EDELSTEIN, *La Feuille Villageoise: communication et modernisation dans les régions rurales pendant la Révolution*, Paris 1977.

²⁵ R. CANTILLON, *Essai*, cit., p. 125.

²⁶ R. MOLESWORTH, *Some Considerations for the Promotion of Agriculture and Employing the Poor*, Dublin 1723, p. 40.

²⁷ L. DE BEAUSOBRE, *Introduction générale à l'étude de la politique, des finances et du commerce*, Brussels 1791, I, p. 203.

in France drove up the price by some 20 %. As a result, the economic rivals of France (especially England) were able to extend their global exports at the expense of France.²⁸ Plumard de Dangeul, in a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the French and English economy, estimated that holidays reduced the work year by 11% and resulted in higher production costs.²⁹ Instituting holidays inevitably resulted in a weaker position on the international market.³⁰

Differences were not only analyzed on country level. Many of the ideas and economic mechanisms identified relating to the effects of holidays also entered economic writings dealing with very local problems and challenges. Pierre Bertholon for example analyzed the impact of holidays with particular reference to the urban economy of Lyon. Bertholon, a cleric and scientist, advocated a further reduction in the number of holidays in the diocese of Lyon. Bertholon estimated that 15 holidays raised the price of the industrial output of labourers and artisans in Lyon by some 5%.³¹ Other regions equally display examples of local economic interests linked to the abolition of holidays. The decree of the senate of Venice from 1772 contained an explicit reference to the economic arguments underpinning the decision to abolish 27 holidays. Unlike many similar decrees from that period it contained the following observations on the effects of holidays:

*“Outre les abus spirituels qui résultent de la profanation des fêtes, leur trop grand nombre est d’ailleurs si pernicieux à l’agriculture, aux arts et au commerce, que la richesse de la nation en est sensiblement diminuée. L’état Vénitien sent ce mal encore plus vivement depuis que des souverains, non moins éclairés que pieux, ont diminué dans les pays voisins le nombre des fêtes, ce qui a mis leurs sujets en état de donner plus de temps à la culture des arts, et à celle de leur territoire et de fournir par-là les produits de leurs terres et de leurs manufactures en plus grande quantité, et à un prix moindre que nous, ce qui procure aux familles plus d’aisance et de richesse.”*³²

²⁸ C.-F. TOUSTAIN DE FORTEBOSC, *Mémoire sur les fêtes*, in *Délibérations et mémoires de la Société Royale de la généralité de Rouen*. Rouen 1763, vol. 1, pp. 338-339.

²⁹ L.-J. PLUMARD DE DANGEUL, *Remarques sur les avantages et les désavantages de la France et de la Grande Bretagne par rapport au commerce*, Amsterdam 1754, p. 26.

³⁰ P. BOESNIER DE L’ORME, *De l’esprit du gouvernement économique*, Paris 1775, p. 183. On this author see A. SAUVY, *Deux techniciens précurseurs de Malthus : Boesnier de l’Orme et Auxiron*, in “Population”, 10, 1955, pp. 691-704.

³¹ P. BERTHOLON DE SAINT-LAZARE, *Du commerce et des manufactures distinctives de la ville de Lyon*, Montpellier 1787, pp. 105-107. Bertholon argued that prices were in reality some 14 % higher as a result of the excess consumption of labourers and artisans on holidays.

³² Quoted in the article *Fêtes* in *Les délassements d’un homme d’esprit*, London-Paris s.d. [circa 1780], vol. 1, pp. 395-396.

These examples clearly suggest that the ideas advocated in economic literature about holidays reached and also influenced local policy makers. Much of the comments on the economic effects of holidays tended to focus on urban and industrial activities until the middle of the eighteenth century. After 1750, and especially during the 1760's and 1770's, the rural economy became more dominant in economic literature.³³ With particular reference to the rural economy, Bielfeld argued that in Roman Catholic Countries, frequent work interruptions were the cause of the ruin of the inhabitants of the countryside. Bielfeld estimated that Sundays, religious holidays, country fairs, church festivals etc. resulted in a loss of one third of the year. As a consequence, agriculture was underdeveloped in many countries because not enough time and human energy was devoted to this sector.³⁴ Others too claimed to observe a relationship between religion and the state of agriculture and the rural economy. Claude-Jacques Herbert claimed that in German regions with few religious holidays wages were in general lower and agricultural land was better cultivated.³⁵ The Physiocratic school of economic thought would develop the arguments relating to the effects of holidays on the rural economy further and in greater detail.³⁶ Nowhere more than in France during the 1760's and 1770's was the issue of *fêtes chômées* more discussed and the subject of many *mémoires* and *essais*. The debate owed much to the efforts and influence of one man, Louis-François-Henry de Menon, better known as the marquis de Turbilly. In a very influential and widespread book on land clearance Turbilly had identified the high number of holidays as an obstacle to the productive use and exploitation of natural resources in France. In his view, numerous holidays deprived the land of the necessary labour.³⁷ Two years later Turbilly produced an essay on the economic effects of holidays. This essay was sent to all

³³ For the rise of agriculture and the rural economy as a dominant theme in French economic literature after 1750, see the data in C. THÉRE, *Economic Publishing and Authors, 1566-1789*, in *Studies in the History of French Political Economy From Bodin to Walras*, ed. F. FACCARELLO, London and New York 1998, pp. 1-56, esp. 28-33.

³⁴ J.F. VON BIELFELD, *Institutions politiques*, The Hague 1760, I, p. 152.

³⁵ C.-J. HERBERT, *Essai sur la police générale des grains*, ed. E. DEPTRE, Paris 1910, p. 73. Herbert added that the advantages resulting from observing few religious holidays were aided by low tax regimes. The first edition of this work was published in 1755.

³⁶ On the importance of numerical data and accuracy in the publications of Physiocrats see C. LARRÈRE, *L'arithmétique des physiocrates: la mesure de l'évidence*, in "Histoire et Mesure", 7, 1992, pp. 5-24.

³⁷ L. DE TURBILLY, *Mémoire sur les défrichements*, Paris 1760, p. 301. See also A. SAUVY, J. HECHT, *La population agricole française au XVIIIe siècle et l'expérience du marquis de Turbilly*, in "Population", 20, 1965, p. 283.

Royal Agricultural Societies in France and these were invited to consider the effects of religious holidays in their own regions.³⁸ The initiative of Turbilly proved highly successful as many Royal Agricultural Societies discussed and analyzed the impact of holidays on the rural economy.³⁹ Many of the authors that would publish on holidays during the 1760's and 1770's were closely linked to these Royal Agricultural Societies. In these memoirs most authors advocated either the suppression of holidays or referring them to Sundays.⁴⁰ In their analysis they focused on the effects of holidays on the rural economy. Charles Toustain de Fortebosc, a member of the Royal Agricultural Society of Rouen, published a *Mémoire sur les fêtes* in 1762. He stated that the observation of holidays was an obstacle to agricultural improvement. One of the arguments focused on the limitations holidays imposed on the efficient time-use of farmers. Fortebosc argued that farmers should be able to cultivate their land whenever climatic conditions were optimal. If the church forbade farmers to cultivate their land during holidays they could not capitalize on these ideal climatic conditions and were thus forced to delay their work. Fortebosc also argued, like many others, that numerous holidays exerted an upward pressure on wages and prices and were thus harmful to the economy.⁴¹ In many of the memoirs produced during this period few new elements are introduced. One of the authors, linked to the Physiocratic school, that would take the analysis of the impact of holidays on the economy one step further was Simon Clicquot de Blervache. In 1755 he published his most important work entitled *Le Réformateur*. This work contained some proposals for economic reform in France. One of the economic projects advanced by de Blervache centered around the suppression of holidays. According to Blervache some 24 superfluous religious holidays could be struck from the calendar in France. Blervache supported his claim to suppress holidays with detailed calculations. His calculations were novel in two important ways. First, Blervache assumed

³⁸ See for example *Délibérations et mémoires de la Société Royale d'Agriculture de la généralité de Rouen*, Rouen 1763, I, p. 61 (meeting of April 29 1762). I was not able to locate a copy of the *mémoire* of Turbilly on holidays.

³⁹ E. JUSTIN, *Les sociétés royales d'agriculture au XVIII^e siècle (1757-1793)*, Saint-Lo 1935, pp. 224-229 and E. LABICHE, *Les sociétés d'agriculture au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris 1908, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁰ See for example the long (120 pages) anonymous essay titled *Mémoire ecclésiastique et politique concernant la translation des fêtes aux dimanches en faveur de la population*, Philadelphia 1765. The author of this text was Antoine Yart (1709-1791), a cleric and member of various academies. He was also secretary and editor of the Royal Agricultural Society of Rouen. See *Délibérations et mémoires*, cit., II, p. VIII, 31, 41 and 52.

⁴¹ TOUSTAIN DE FORTÉBOSC, *Mémoire sur les fêtes*, cit., pp. 333-344.

that a holiday produced different economic effects for different social groups. In terms of financial losses, the impact of a holiday was quite different for a wealthy farmer than for an agricultural day labourer. Secondly, Blervache set out to calculate the net cost of holidays. Other authors assumed that the potential profit of suppressing one holiday could be calculated by simply multiplying the daily wage with the number of labourers. Blervache rightly assumed that a day's work did not only generate income, but that labourers had to be fed on these days. Blervache was one of the first to adopt a more sophisticated and scientific approach to the discussion about holidays.⁴²

Tab. 1 Estimated financial losses from the observation of religious holidays in France according to Clicquot de Blervache, 1755

	Loss of income per day (sols)	Total losses (millions of livres)
Male Day Labourer	12	66,96
Female Day Labourer	6	43,20
Plough Team with Horse	100	32,40
Plough Team with Oxen	50	32,40
	<i>Total</i>	174,96
	<i>Cost</i>	90,00
	<i>Net gain</i>	84,96

The calculations of Blervache are summarized in Table 1. Blervache did not consider all social groups of France to be equally affected by holidays. He distinguished between day labourers who depended on their livelihood and income on wage labour and a group of farmers who had access to land and other capital goods. For labourers the loss was equal to the wage they could earn during a day's work. For farmers however, the losses were more substantial. The value of a day's work with horses or oxen vastly exceeded the value of a day of manual labour. Blervache estimated that one day work of a team of horses was worth 100 livres. As oxen were considered less productive and efficient, the value of a day's

⁴² S. CLICQUOT DE BLERVACHE, *Le réformateur*, Amsterdam 1756, vol. 1, pp. 61-83. The first edition of this work was published in 1755.

work with these traction animals was only valued at 50 livres. Each day that these capital goods of farmers could not work as a result of religious holidays, the most productive class of France sustained financial losses. As a result, the total costs of holidays were much higher than assumed by many of his intellectual predecessors. The rural economy was highly affected by holidays as they reduced the capacity of farmers to optimize returns on their initial capital investments. The effects of holidays did not only affect the income of the day labourer, but also of the more wealthy farmer. This analysis, which tends to focus on the farmer rather than the day labourer, clearly unmask Blervache as a Physiocrat. Taken together the loss of income due to religious holidays in France could be estimated at circa 175 million livres. However, Blervache also acknowledged that both labourers and horses had to be fed on work days. He calculated the expenses resulting from feeding men and animals on these days. The cost to feed men and animals amounted to 90 million livres. The net cost of holidays, taking into account the socially differentiated loss of income and subsistence costs, could be set at circa 85 million livres. For Blervache these calculations indicated that religious holidays were particularly harmful to production in France and strongly advocated their suppression. If 24 holidays were suppressed ‘*les terres seront mieux cultivées, les manufactures et tous les arts travailleront vingt jours de plus*’.⁴³ Holidays were in his mind an unproductive tax on the productive potential of France. Although his conclusions were not very different from those of other writers, the method he used was quite novel. In the decades that would follow many other would follow his example and calculate the impact of holidays with particular reference to the household economy of various social groups and the impact on capital and land productivity. One of the works in which we can retrace similar arguments was published by Jean de Serres in 1766.⁴⁴ He too advocated the suppression of holidays based on different arguments. First, the labouring population lost income during these days. Secondly, holidays were detrimental to the rural economy and productivity of the land as they forced the agricultural population to remain inactive for at least 36 days per year (next to the Sundays). Finally, holidays caused agricultural capital to remain inactive. With particular reference to animals he stated: “*les mulets et les chevaux, qui demeurent sans rien faire faute de*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 63. Blervache was attacked for his views on holidays. See *Le réformateur réformé. Lettre à M****, Amsterdam 1756, pp. 29-38.

⁴⁴ J. DE SERRÉS, *Gouvernement politique et économique*, Amsterdam 1766, II, pp. 294-296.

conducteurs, et qui n'en mangent cependant pas moins."⁴⁵ Here too, the effects of holidays were analyzed from the viewpoint of the farmer and the productivity of his holding. Physiocratic thought concerning holidays was novel in this respect as they extended the analysis of the impact of holidays to what they considered to be the most productive member of any society; the farmer. Other elements that were stressed by Physiocrats centered around the continuous labour supply that could be generated by suppressing holidays. Abolishing holidays was equal to raising the number of productive hands in the countryside. For example, the Physiocratic periodical *Ephémérides du Citoyen* frequently reported on measures taken by both domestic and foreign religious leaders and governments to reduce the number of holidays. Reports of these initiatives were included in a section of the journal entitled "*Opérations louables.*" Interestingly, whilst some of these reports were titled "*suppression des fêtes,*" others were titled "*augmentation des jours de travail.*" Thus the decision of the bishop of Strasbourg to strike 13 holidays from the calendar met with great approval as "*ajouter treize jours de travail à l'année, c'est augmenter presque d'un vingtième la quantité des travaux.*"⁴⁶ The editors of this periodical thus considered the suppression of holidays beneficial to the rural economy as it increased the labour supply. Essentially, Physiocrats were concerned with creating the optimum economic environment for farmers to engage productively in agricultural activities. These ideal conditions included abundant labour. Important in this logic were the effects of the labour supply on wage levels. As labour became more abundant, wage levels would drop. Not only the labour supply, but perhaps more importantly the "*diminution du prix des travaux*" was the most important effect Physiocrats envisioned to arise from the suppression of holidays.⁴⁷

Throughout the eighteenth century quite similar arguments were advanced to support the abolition of holidays. Holidays decreased the national wealth as the labour potential was not used to its full capacity.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁴⁶ *Ephémérides du Citoyen*, (1770) 7, p. 245. See also *Ephémérides du Citoyen*, (1770) 8, pp. 188-190 (suppression of holidays in Vienna), (1770) 12, pp. 221-225 (suppression of holidays in Denmark) and (1771) 5, pp. 190-193 (suppression of holidays in Austria). On this economic review see P. STEINER, *Les revues économiques de langue française au XVIIIème siècle (1751-1776)*, in *Les revues d'économie en France : genèse et actualité, 1751-1994*, L. MARCO ed., Paris 1996, pp. 33-78 and F. DAUMALLE, *La presse économique en langue française au XVIIIe siècle (1751-1776)*, Paris 2002, pp. 106-132.

⁴⁷ Quoted in G. WEULERSSE, *Le mouvement physiocratique en France de 1756 à 1770*, Paris 1910, I, p. 596.

This resulted in losses for the state and, all other things equal, resulted in a lower gross domestic product. Holidays also drove up the price of labour and thus hampered export. Finally, and this element was particularly strong in French Physiocratic writings, holidays reduced capital productivity. The list of arguments against holidays, and the ‘accuracy’ of the estimates of the economic losses, expanded during the eighteenth century. Next to an emphasis on the economic effects of holidays in economic writings, other elements were stressed during the course of the eighteenth century. Simultaneously, and in some cases difficult to separate from the purely economic arguments, social arguments were developed to suppress holidays. An abolition of the number of holidays would not only result in economic gains, it was also a social measure to alleviate poverty. In the next section some of the ideas of social reformers and economists are treated who paid particular attention to the effects of holidays on the household economies of the labouring poor.

Religion, holidays and the household economy

The impact of forced days of inactivity on the household income of the poor was an issue that was frequently commented upon in the wider context of the economic effects of holidays. It was noted that, especially for those who were entirely dependant on wage labour, religious holidays were harmful to the household income. Bertholon for example was mainly concerned with the effects of holidays on the price levels of industrial products in Lyon, but also stressed that households found it more difficult to earn their subsistence when numerous holidays interrupted their work cycle.⁴⁸ In the course of the eighteenth century however, the issue of holidays would be increasingly treated from the viewpoint and budgets of the labouring poor. Suppressing holidays, it was argued, was also a social policy that would enable households to successfully balance income and expenditure. Some authors were quite vague on these issues. Condorcet for example advocated the suppression of superfluous holidays. This was, in his words a measure “*la plus efficace au soulagement des peuples*.”⁴⁹ The suppression of a number of holidays in 1768 was described as an action intended to “*donner du pain*

⁴⁸ B. BERTHOLON DE SAINT-LAZARE, *Du commerce*, cit., pp. 106-107.

⁴⁹ N. DE CONDORCET, *Du commerce des blés*, Paris 1775, p. 84.

aux journaliers.”⁵⁰ Other writers were more elaborate on these matters and provided detailed information on the effects of holidays on the poor accompanied with hard data about income and expenditure.

Such social views on holidays can be encountered during the first half of the eighteenth century in the work of Castel de Saint-Pierre. This author estimated that 20 % of the French population, or some 1 million households, were poor and had no other resources other than their own labour power. To enable these households to escape from poverty, they should be allowed to make more efficient use of their scarce resources. For Saint-Pierre, the most useful project in this respect was the partial suppression of holidays and lifting the prohibitions on Sunday work. Saint-Pierre suggested that poor households should be allowed to work during the afternoon on both holidays and Sundays. This would enable a poor household to earn an additional 5 sous per half day on some 80 days (holidays and Sundays taken together). Annually, this would add some 20 livres to the household income of the poor. Taken together, all poor households could thus earn an additional 20 million livres per year. In the view of Saint-Pierre, the liberty of poor households to work on these days was the best *aumone* that could be given to them.⁵¹

Two main arguments were developed against holidays in relation to the household economy of the poor. The first argument centered on the balance between days of labour and days of forced leisure. Work days had to produce sufficient income to cover the subsistence costs of these households when they were not working. Secondly, not all the members of a household were net producers. Some members of the household, as a result of their age and gender, consumed more than they earned. For example, young children, the elderly and pregnant women were viewed as net consumers. Sufficient opportunities had to be available to labourers to cover the costs of those members of their households who were not working and the days on which no income could be earned. The French politician and diplomat Louis-Gabriel du Buat-Nançay summarized these two arguments as follows: “*Mais encore faut-il que le journalier vive toute l’année, et nourrisse une femme et des enfants. Il faut donc que les jours ouvrables fournissent aux jours non-ouvrables, les saisons vivantes*

⁵⁰ *Lettre du Parlement de Provence au roi sur le commerce des blés*, in “Ephémérides du Citoyen”, 2, 1769, pp. 194-195.

⁵¹ C.-I. CASTEL DE SAINT-PIERRE, *Ouvrages politiques*, Rotterdam 1734, VII, pp. 73-77. See also S. SIÉGLER-PASCAL, *Un contemporain égaré au XVIIIe siècle. Les projets de l’abbé de Saint-Pierre, 1658-1743*, Paris 1900, p. 127.

*aux saisons mortes, les bras qui travaillent aux bouches qui n'ont point de bras propres au travail.*⁵²

In the second half of the eighteenth century these arguments were developed with more detailed information about patterns of labour, income and expenditure in labouring households.⁵³ Louis-Etienne Arcère, a member of the Royal Agricultural Society of La Rochelle, was one of the first to provide details about the work year of the labouring classes and their household budgets.⁵⁴

Tab. 2 Time budget of an agricultural day labourer in the region of Aunis, 1763

	Days	%
Sundays	52	14,3
Holidays	28	7,7
Bad Weather	20	5,5
Sickness	10	2,7
<i>Corvée Royale</i>	10	2,7
Work days	245	67,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>365</i>	<i>100</i>

As Table 2 reports, the actual work year of a household of an agricultural labourer only consisted of 245 days. During these 245 days sufficient income had to be earned to cover household expenditure during 365 days. In this particular situation the household could not make ends meet and expenditure exceeded household income. Arcère calculated the income of this household at 183-15-0 livres and expenditure at 189-13-0 livres. The difference was small, but nevertheless earnings proved deficient. A reduction of holidays could remedy this situation. If 28 holidays were suppressed or referred to Sundays, the household income could rise to 204-15-0 livres and exceed expenditure. With 28 holidays households

⁵² L.-G. DU BUAT-NANGAY, *Eléments de la politique ou recherche des vrais Principes de l'économie sociale*, London 1773, vol. 5, p. 77.

⁵³ Eighteenth-century French household budgets are discussed and analyzed in M. MORINEAU, *Budgets populaires en France au XVIIIe siècle*, in "Revue d'histoire économique et sociale", 1972, pp. 203-237 and pp. 449-481 and D. ROCHE, *A History of Everyday Things. The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 62-71.

⁵⁴ L.E. ARCÈRE, *Mémoire de la Société Royale d'Agriculture de la généralité de la Rochelle sur la nécessité de diminuer le nombre des fêtes*, La Rochelle 1763, p. 11.

were in deficit, without holidays they could earn a nice surplus. This was the new message that some social reformers tried to convey during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The importance of few work interruptions for the household economy of the poor was also stressed by some of the participants of the prize essay competition of the Academy of Châlons (1777) on the means to suppress mendicity and poverty. As one writer stated: “*Défendre au misérable de gagner son pain, n’est-ce pas lui ordonner de l’aller mendier?*”⁵⁵ Jean-Baptiste Briatte, a Protestant minister with French roots but who also worked in the Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands, analyzed the impact of holidays on the budgets of the poor. Briatte addressed the issue of holidays in the context of a broader investigation into the causes of poverty in late eighteenth-century Europe. Briatte painted a grim picture of the material living conditions of the European labouring poor. Only in England, the Dutch Republic and a few regions in Switzerland labourers enjoyed higher living standards compared to the rest of Europe. These relatively high living standards were exemplified in the quality of their diet and clothing. In most European regions however labourers were poor, malnourished and clothed in rags.⁵⁶ Briatte set out to identify the causes of this poverty. In many respects his analysis was highly original. Briatte identified three main causes of poverty in late eighteenth-century Europe. First, he stated that much of the labour potential of children and adolescents in particular was not used efficiently. Adolescents were ill-disciplined, lacked training and therefore contributed little or nothing to the household economy. Interestingly, the discrimination of women in the labour market also caught his attention. Briatte argued that women’s wages were below subsistence level. In other words, the wage of a woman barely sufficed to pay for her daily food expenditure.⁵⁷ In his

⁵⁵ *Les moyens de détruire la mendicité en France en rendant les mendiants utiles à l’état sans le rendre malheureux*, ed. J. DE MALVAUX, Châlons 1780 (2nd edition), p. 402.

⁵⁶ J.-B. BRIATTE, *Offrande à l’humanité ou traité sur les causes de la misère en général et de la mendicité en particulier*, Amsterdam 1780, pp. 136-138. When Briatte wrote this publication he worked as a Protestant minister in the city of Namur in the Austrian Netherlands. Briatte also wrote an essay in which he advocated religious tolerance of Protestants in the Austrian Netherlands. Religious toleration, he argued, would also result in economic prosperity as it facilitated migration. For the text of Briatte see E. HUBERT, *Notes et documents sur l’histoire du protestantisme à Tournai. Etude d’histoire politique et religieuse*, Brussels 1903, pp. 245-249. On economic arguments in favour of religious tolerance in the late eighteenth-century Austrian Netherlands see also L. DHONDT, *La réception de l’édit et de l’idée de tolérance dans le comté de Flandre au début de l’époque Joséphine*, in *La tolérance civile*, R. CRAHAY ed., Brussels and Mons 1982, pp. 86-87 (Études sur le XVIII^e siècle, volume hors série ; 1).

⁵⁷ BRIATTE, *Offrande*, pp. 267-268. With particular reference to the economic position of women among the poor Briatte wrote: ‘*Elles ont pour objet la dépense, et non la recette ; l’emploi de l’argent, plutôt que*

analysis of the household economy of the labouring poor most attention was devoted to the effects of holidays. According to Briatte, the work year of the labouring poor consisted of a maximum of 273 or 274 days. Briatte estimated that no work could be performed on approximately one fourth of the year (as a result of 20 to 25 holidays and 52 Sundays). To these days of involuntary leisure 15 to 20 days of forced inactivity as a result of bad weather and lack of work should be added. 365 days of household expenditure thus had to be covered by 273/274 days of labour. For Briatte the combination of low wages and numerous holidays was one of the main causes of poverty. It is no coincidence that Briatte supported both higher wages and fewer holidays. Importantly, this writer also observed that the effects of holidays were quite different across social groups. Briatte identified a number of professional groups that were, in his view, quite immune to the effects of holidays. For example state officials, soldiers and household servants were unaffected by holidays as they continued to be paid or nourished by their employer on holidays. For those who lived from the income of their rental revenues and financial investments, a holiday did not affect their budget. Finally, tradesmen and entrepreneurs were sufficiently rich not to suffer from work interruptions on holidays. The labouring poor in particular were affected by holidays. They still had to feed themselves at their own expense and could not earn anything on these days. Religious holidays, Briatte argued, were in particular harmful to those who were solely dependent on wage labour.⁵⁸ A reduction in the number of holidays was therefore a social policy. Unlike many other writers Briatte did not advocate the suppression of holidays to generate a larger gross domestic product, but viewed this measure as a social policy that would give poor households additional income.

These ideas about the effects of numerous holidays on the working gradually gained importance during the last decades of the eighteenth century. As prices rose and real wages declined, holidays were increasingly discussed in terms of their social effects. The difficulties encountered by households from high prices for basic foodstuffs and an artificially shortened work year by religious holidays was frequently noted in late eighteenth-century France.⁵⁹ In a pamphlet entitled

son acquisition. Les femmes dans la classe indigent travaillent beaucoup, et gagnent peu.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-290.

⁵⁹ See for example *Mémoire sur le prix excessif des grains par un citoyen des environs de Paris*, Paris 1789, p. 14.

Doléances du pauvre peuple, the issue was placed at the centre of attention. This text, allegedly written by poor labourers and artisans, requested the abolition of religious holidays. The text is almost exclusively concerned with the effects of holidays on the household economy of the labouring poor. Unlike many other texts during this period, there are no references to the effects of holidays on national wealth, prices and trade. The text focused exclusively on the effects of holidays on those social groups that had no property and depended entirely for their livelihood on wage labour. In the pamphlet it was stated that this category comprised half of the French population. The main argument against holidays centered on the balance between days of work and days of unemployment. It was stated that, Sundays and holidays combined, labourers were forbidden to work during almost a quarter of the year. The author(s) of this pamphlet specifically requested the suppression of nearly all religious holidays. Remarkably, the text also made an appeal for the right to work on Sunday after mass. Allowing labourers to work on Sunday afternoon would yield an extra 26 days of labour and income. Combined with the suppression of a large number of holidays, this would enable the poor labourer and artisan to create a more favourable balance between income and expenditure.⁶⁰

These ideas and projects did not only circulate in print. Some of these projects and suggestions were also translated into policy during the late eighteenth century. The discussions taking place within the Committee of Mendicity, the official organ charged with the reform of poor relief in the aftermath of the French Revolution, illustrates that the political elites were sensitive to the social arguments advanced against holidays. During the meetings of the Committee on Mendicity religious holidays were discussed on a number of occasions. It was argued that the reduction of the number of holidays was one of the most efficient ways to ban poverty from France.⁶¹ The proposal produced by one of the members of the Committee, the duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, contained all elements that had been advanced by economists and social reformers to suppress holidays in the previous decades. Liancourt argued that labour was the best remedy against poverty. He counted 23 religious holiday in

⁶⁰ *Doléances du pauvre peuple adressées aux Etats Généraux* in *Les élections et les cahiers de Paris en 1789. II: Les assemblées primaires et les cahiers primitifs*, ed. C.-L. CHASSIN, Paris 1888, pp. 589-592.

⁶¹ See *Procès-verbaux et rapports du Comité de Mendicité de la Constituante, 1790-1791*, C. BLOCH AND A. TUETÉY eds., Paris 1911, pp. 5-6, 24, 65, 134, 181-182. See also M. BOUCHET, *L'assistance publique en France pendant la Révolution*, Paris 1908, p. 187.

the diocese of Paris on which manual labour was forbidden. Of these 23 holidays 19 could be suppressed. Only 4 holidays would be retained (Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day and Christmas). Liancourt also added calculations of the economic gains resulting from this suppression of holidays. These profits amounted to the impressive sum of 274,55 million livres. The suppression 19 holidays would enable 17 million individuals to gain an additional 10 sols per day or a total of 161,5 million livres. Liancourt also estimated that during one holiday individuals spent 7 sols to entertain themselves. Suppressing 19 holidays would thus not only result in additional income, but would equally result in saving 113,05 million livres of expenditure.⁶² Importantly, all social groups, but in particular the labouring poor would benefit from this measure: "*Cette suppression des fêtes sera pour l'artisan honnête et laborieux le plus riche présent; pour le cultivateur une indemnité des jours enlevés à son travail par les pluies et les temps contraires; pour les indigents le secours le plus utile.*"⁶³ Unsurprisingly, the suppression of holidays was the first article in the *projet de décret* that emanated from the activities and meetings of the Committee on Mendicity.⁶⁴ During the early nineteenth century these suggested alterations in the calendar would be introduced by Napoleon in a great many European countries and regions.⁶⁵

Conclusion

This short overview of economic literature during the long eighteenth century has indicated that religion and religious institutions were an important part of mechanisms identified to explain why some nations thrived and others lagged behind. In this paper only some of the numerous English and French authors that addressed this relationship

⁶² Other authors also noted that on religious holidays households spent much of what they had previously earned on excessive drinking. Holidays therefore should not only be abolished to enable households to earn a higher income, but suppressing holidays would also reduce household expenditure on these days. See for example A. SABATIER, *Adresse à l'Assemblée Nationale sur la dépense de l'état*, Paris 1790, pp. 173-174.

⁶³ F. DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD-LIANCOURT, *Suppression des fêtes*, in *Procès-verbaux et rapports*, cit., pp. 65-67.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 435: "*Toutes les fêtes, à l'exception de celles de la Fête-Dieu, l'Ascension, la Toussaint et Noël, seront renvoyées au dimanche.*"

⁶⁵ See N. SHUSTERMAN, *Une loi de l'Eglise et de l'Etat: Napoleon and the Central Administration of Religious Life, 1800-1815*, in "French History", 21, 2007, pp. 313-330 on changes in the liturgical calendar introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

have been discussed. A similar corpus of quotations dealing with the relationship between economy and religion could be assembled from Spanish, Italian and German economic literature.⁶⁶ The arguments are in many ways similar. This suggests that there was a widespread agreement about the influence religion could exert on the economic performance of nations. All comments tended to focus on restrictions on the use of labour through the institution of holidays. In the writings and opinions of nearly all of these authors, a high number of holidays was negatively correlated to economic performance. These economists created and advanced the economic justifications to suppress a vast number of holidays. It is probably no coincidence that almost all Roman Catholic countries in Western Europe changed the liturgical calendar during this period and reduced the number of religious holidays. Time, as the calculations and estimates of these economists illustrated, was indeed money. All members of society benefited from few forced work interruptions. A low number of holidays served the interest of nearly all economic sectors; from manufacturing over agriculture to trade.

In their utilitarian approach to religion and religious holidays many writers viewed economic growth and wealth as something that could be quite easily achieved. Many of the economists believed that small alterations in the religious sphere (suppressing holidays) would produce a positive outcome. These ideas proved to be very resilient over time. Until the middle of the nineteenth century arguments about holidays that date back to the seventeenth century were still used to explain why some European nations flourished and others did not. For these writers religious institutions were important since these determined if a nation could use its natural resources efficiently and productively. As working hours converged in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, the argument about the number of holidays and economic growth and performance gradually disappeared from contemporary economic

⁶⁶ References are limited to the most important surveys for these countries. For Spain see R. MACKEY, "Lazy, Improvident People". *Myth and Reality in the Writing of Spanish History*, Ithaca and London 2006, *passim* and J. CASTILLA SOTO, *La otra cara de la fiesta: algunas de sus posibles repercusiones económicas*, in "Espacio, Tiempo y Forma Historia Moderna", 10, 1997, pp. 99-118. The vivid mid-eighteenth-century debate on the suppression of religious holidays in Italy is summarized in F. VENTURI, *Settecento riformatori: da Muratori a Beccaria*, Turin 1969, pp. 136-161. The writings of German economists and Cameralists with reference to the relationship between religion and the economy are discussed in P. MÜNCH, *Die Kosten der Frömmigkeit. Katholizismus und Protestantismus im Visier von Kameralismus und Aufklärung*, in *Volksfrömmigkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit*, H. SMOLINSKY ed., Munster 1994, pp. 107-119 and IDEM, *The Thesis Before Weber: An Archaeology*, in *Weber's Protestant Ethic. Origins, Evidence, Contexts*, H. LEHMANN and G. ROTH eds., Cambridge 1987, pp. 51-72. See also J. VINER, *Religious Thought and Economic Society*, Durham 1978, pp. 151-190.

analysis.⁶⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century the argument concerning religion and economy would take a new and brilliant turn. In 1904/1905 Max Weber argued that the specific mindset of the Protestant (partially) explained why some regions thrived and others lagged behind.⁶⁸ Values and ideas mattered to the economy, religious institutions (such as the number of religious holidays) did not anymore. Max Weber's highly influential and much debated book on the *Protestant Ethic* was the brilliant answer to a set of complex questions that still puzzled society, but for which the old 'institutional' explanations could no longer provide a satisfactory answer. Viewed from that perspective, Weber's *Protestant Ethic* marked both the end and the beginning of a tradition in the history of economic thought and analysis.

⁶⁷ On working hours see M. HUBERMAN, *Working Hours of the World Unite? New International Evidence of Worktime, 1870-1913*, in "Journal of Economic History", 64, 2004, pp. 964-1001.

⁶⁸ M. WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 1974 does not discuss the older literature on the relationship between religion and the economy. There might be an indirect reference (and critique) to this old tradition when Weber states: "*we have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism [...] could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation*" (*Ibid.*, p. 91.) This was a thesis that was quite widespread in economic literature before 1850. On the relationship between Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* and the older theories on religion and economic development/capitalism see also M. PELTONEN, *The Weber Thesis and Economic Historians*, in "Max Weber Studies", 8, 2008, pp. 80-81.