

appears to have been the act of Julius the First, who presided as Pope or Bishop of Rome from 337 to 352, A.D.

But, notwithstanding the ancient usage, there still exists insurmountable difficulties with respect to the date of this great event. Sir Isaac Newton, in his *Commentary on the Prophecies of Daniel*, remarks that the Feast of the Nativity, and most of the ecclesiastical anniversaries, were originally fixed at certain cardinal points of the year, without any reference to the dates of the incidents which they commemorated—dates, which by the lapse of time, had become impossible to be ascertained. Thus the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary was placed on the 25th of March, or about the time of the vernal equinox; the Feast of St. Michael on the 29th of September, or near the autumnal equinox; and the birth of Christ and other festivals at the time of the winter solstice. Many of the apostles' days—such as St. Paul, St. Matthew, and others—were determined by the days when the sun entered the respective signs of the ecliptic, and the Pagan festivals had also a considerable share in the adjustment of the Christian year. As regards Easter and its accessory celebrations, there is good ground for maintaining that they meet with tolerable accuracy the anniversaries of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, since we know that the events themselves took place at the period of the Jewish Passover. But no such precision of date can be adduced as regards Christmas, respecting which the generally received view is, that it does not correspond with the actual date of the Nativity of our Saviour. One objection in particular has been made, that the incident recorded in Scripture, of shepherds keeping watch by night on the plains of Bethlehem, could not have taken place in the month of December, a period generally of great inclemency in the region of Judea.

Still, though the celebration may not take place on the actual natal day of our Lord, it becomes the duty of every Christian to hallow the one which has been appointed for that purpose, with the same fervour and devotional reverence as though the real day had been accurately ascertained and generally recognized; and that man must be a mere caviller, and unworthy of salvation through our blessed mediator Christ, who can object to solemnize the day that has been set apart for commemorating His Incarnation with all its attendant advantages to such as believe and follow His Gospel, whether it be precisely the same on which that event took place or not. Whatever difference of opinion may arise with regard to the actual time of our Saviour's birth, surely all persons may join in the offices which have, with so much judgment, been expressly appointed for the solemnization of that joyous event—as the season which the Church has chosen does not involv'd the credibility of the fact, nor affect any material point, either practical or devotional.

Though Christian nations have from an early period in the history of

th
on
nu
ar
me
plo
me
in
tin
it.
N
in v
Chu
tiva
man
The
into
Besi
alize
First
golde
tance
transf
God, t
had in
in the
freema
of mak
tival;—
—the s
Christn
more a
solstice
the ear
Christia
of the sp
compari
after the
minion i
in the sp
Christ, t
of darkn
the disco
Christian
and prese