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Source: *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Spirituality and Devotionalism (Fall, 1997), pp. 57-80

Published by: [Catholic University of America Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154604>

Accessed: 03/11/2013 17:17

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Sanctity in the Era of Catholic Action: The Case of St. Pius X

Steven M. Avella with Jeffrey Zalar

According to the popular stories, Patriarch Giuseppe Sarto had purchased a round-trip ticket when he came from Venice to the papal conclave in August 1903. When informed by a French cardinal that he could never be pope because he did not speak French, Sarto reportedly replied: “Good!” However, after the candidacy of Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro was vetoed by the Austrian emperor, a new round of balloting began which saw Sarto’s name rise higher and higher in the tallies. Terrified at the prospect of his election he earnestly begged the cardinals to reconsider and fled to the Pauline chapel to pray, like Christ in Gethsemani, “that this cup pass me by.” Encouraged by his future secretary of state, Raphael Merry del Val, to accept the burdens of office, he reluctantly donned the white papal soutane and bestowed the blessing *urbi et orbi* to the adoring crowds inside the Vatican basilica. He would rule the church for nearly eleven years, issuing a steady stream of decrees that would have a considerable impact on Catholic life in the twentieth century. He died in August 1914, according to the popular lore, of a broken heart brought on by the onset of World War I. Not even fifty years later, he would be raised to the dignity of the altars and proclaimed among the ranks of the saints in heaven. American Catholics would play a role in the promotion of Pius X to sainthood.

“Christian holiness is incarnational,” wrote Kenneth Woodward in his 1990 work, *Making Saints*. “Each saint occupies his own ecological niche of time, place, and circumstance.”¹ The “ecological niche” of the cult of Pius X in the United States was the climate created by the intense American Catholic ultramontanistism of the latter part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Jay Dolan has observed of this era in American Catholic life: “A popular cult of the Papacy developed. The bishop and priest remained very powerful in the spiritual life of the faithful, but the communications revolution

1. Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 405.

of radio and television brought the Papacy closer to home. . . . Such popularity reinforced the pope's position as monarch in the Church."² American Catholics did indeed develop a warm affection for the papacy and these sentiments were brought to expression in a number of ways, but most publicly through a plethora of organizations and movements that developed under the wide umbrella of "Catholic Action." These movements flourished in the period after World War I until the end of the Vatican II.³ One could hear "the living voice of Christ" (as the pope was frequently called) regularly invoked in the Catholic Evidence Guild, the Legion of Decency, the Catholic Youth Organization, study clubs, liturgical days and weeks, in adoration societies, the Holy Name, and in the voice of the labor priest who assured industrial workers: "the pope wants you to have a union." Given the fact that this devotion to the papacy was so effectively mobilized by the forces of Catholic Action in this era, it is small wonder that Pius X was the first pope to be raised to the dignity of the altars since the austere Dominican St. Pius V in 1712.⁴

The cult of Pius X not only reflects the spiritual meridian of this era but also the distinctive contours of American Catholic ultramontanistism. As Patricia Byrne and Sandra Yocum Mize have demonstrated, loyalty to the papacy in America has always had a distinct "twist" that has specifically related the person and office of the pope to certain elements of American character and identity.⁵ As such, it should come as no surprise that the hierarchy and clerical elites, who managed the cult of Pius X in the United States, used the popular details of Pius X's life to shape an appealing public image for the pontiff for American audiences. These opinion-makers were especially adept at accentuating his fondness for the people of America, especially young children, and his deep concern for their spiritual well-being. They especially emphasized the simplicity and near poverty of his earlier life, casting him as the hero of a

2. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 387.

3. A good comprehensive history of Catholic Action in America is waiting to be written, but two good secondary sources are Debra Campbell's chapter "The Heyday of Catholic Action and the Lay Apostolate, 1929-1959" in Jay P. Dolan et al. *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 222-252 and Dennis Michael Robb, "Specialized Catholic Action in the United States, 1936-1949: Ideology, Leadership, and Organization" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation University of Minnesota, 1972). Philip Gleason deals with the distinctive quality of Catholic organizational activity in this period in his essay "The Search for Unity and Its Sequel" in *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 136-151.

4. Joseph Chinnici discusses a portion of the spirituality of Catholic Action in his discussion of the retreat movement. See, *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1989), 166-171.

5. Patricia Byrne, C.S.J., "American Ultramontanistism," *Theological Studies* 56 (June, 1995): 301-326 and Sandra Yocum-Mize, "The Common-Sense Argument for Papal Infallibility," *Theological Studies* 57 (June, 1996): 242-263.

familiar Yankee rags-to-riches success story.

At the same time they also used the pontiff as an inspiration and a shield for their own projects and ideas. This was especially true of the organization that took the lead in promoting the cause of Pius X, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD). Although by no means the only American Catholic group promoting the cause of Pius X, the CCD under Archbishop Edwin Vincent O'Hara (1881-1956)⁶ was far and away the most broadly based and effective. O'Hara was one of a group of clerical impresarios of the era, ready, able and willing to organize Catholics in behalf of papally-inspired causes.⁷ A peripatetic organizer whose interests and organizational abilities caused him to sponsor projects that would have a significant impact on American Catholic life, he was the quintessence of the Catholic Action impulses of the day. As a priest in Oregon, he played a major role in ameliorating working conditions for women. Even before he became bishop of Great Falls, Montana in the thirties, he had plunged head-long into the rural Catholic apostolate, helping to form the National Catholic Rural Life Conference in 1922. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which he would organize on a national level in the thirties would be the chief medium for the propagation of the cult of Pius X. O'Hara's activities in behalf of the pontiff's beatification/canonization provide an excellent case-study of the ways in which Catholic ideology, i.e., ultramontanist, was mobilized in this era.

Early Impressions and Efforts on Behalf of Pius X

O'Hara did not have an intrinsically difficult task. From the outset, Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, took Sarto to their hearts. He appeared to be a simple man, unaffected and generous — a man not unlike their own great democratic heroes, Jackson and Lincoln or even the mythical Horatio Alger who had risen to high office by the sheer force of the goodness and humility of his character. Such images of self-made men resonated well with American Catholics and were captured best by a pseudonymous Paulist writer, "A. Diarista" who wrote in an issue of *Catholic World* shortly after his election in 1903: ". . . The American people too will like him. The fact that he has risen by sheer force of his own merits from an obscure origin to the highest position in the world, and it in all he preserved his love for the simple ways of

6. Timothy Dolan, *Some Seed Fell on Good Soil: The Life of Edwin Vincent O'Hara* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994).

7. To these ranks one could add the Sodality's chief apostles, Jesuit Daniel Lord, the chief convert maker, John A. O'Brien, Bishop Bernard Sheil of Chicago and the Catholic Youth Organization, a variety of labor priests, such as Pittsburgh's Charles Owen Rice, and even the controversial radio priest, Charles Coughlin.

his early life, will commend him to their admiration. He has come from the loins of the people, and loves their strength and their energy. He is pronouncedly democratic in his tastes and in his daily life.”⁸

The level of enthusiasm and support for Pius X among American Catholics was considerable even when he was alive. For example, Catholic periodicals and newspapers made much of the fact that one of his first audiences as pope was granted to a hundred Americans at the behest of Cardinal Gibbons. There was cause for rejoicing, when in 1908 he quietly lifted the United States out of its missionary status, a recognition of its prolific growth and readiness to stand with all the other autonomous churches in the world. The pontiff’s special love for America was in evidence when he bestowed the cardinal’s galero on William Henry O’Connell of Boston and John M. Farley of New York in 1911. Moreover, fifteen new dioceses had been erected in the United States under his reign.⁹

Pius would register an especially strong impression on the scores of American Catholic seminarians (many of whom later became bishops when his cause for beatification and canonization came up) who had attended one or the other of the various Roman colleges. Typical of these warm recollections of the pontiff and his kindly solicitude for “Benjamini miei” (my Benjamins) as he paternally referred to the young men among whom was Samuel Stritch, later Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago.¹⁰ Writing home to his mother after a meeting with the pontiff in 1907:

Last Sunday, we had an audience with the Pope. The audience was strictly private. We — 125 in number together with the Rector and Mons. Farrelly awaited His Holiness in the Private Consistory Hall — a beautiful place furnished with elegant Dutch tapestries which are unequaled in their beauty of workmanship. At the appointed time, His Holiness together with his secretary and body of guards came in. The pope then allowed us each to kiss his hand and gave us each a silver medal for the excellent showing we have made in our studies and general ecclesiastical spirit — quite a present which is seldom given. After this he permitted us to stand, for one is obliged to kneel in His presence. . . He then exhorted us to be faithful also to the Holy See which is now besieged on every side but which sits on the rock of perpetuity showing the world that is divine and that man cannot destroy it. . . . Then imparting his benediction to us, our parents,

8. A. Diarista, “Pius X: From Venice to the Vatican,” *The Catholic World* 68 (September, 1903): 715-722.

9. They are Bismarck, North Dakota (1910); Corpus Christi, Texas (1912); Crookston, Minnesota (1910); Des Moines, Iowa (1911); El Paso, Texas (1914); Fall River, Massachusetts (1904); Kearney (Grand Island), Nebraska (1912); Great Falls, Montana (1904) Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (1905); Rockford, Illinois (1908); Spokane, Washington (1913); Superior, Wisconsin (1905); Toledo, Ohio (1910) — Belmont Abbey Nullius, North Carolina (1910); Ukrainian Greek Catholic Diocese (1913).

10. Marie Cecile Buerhle, *The Cardinal Stritch Story* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1959), 1-2.

relatives, friends, etc. he left us leaving behind him 125 hearts that would shed their last drop of blood for him, their Pope and Father.¹¹

Indeed, Pius X's very presence seemed to have a powerful effect on anyone in his presence amplifying the warm sentiments of affection and esteem they already held for the papacy. Indeed, one bishop, far less youthful and impressionable than young Samuel Stritch, wrote: "You can never be alone with him without telling him all you think and wanting to do all he wishes."¹²

Even secular writers were taken with him. This included Booth Tarkington, who visited the Vatican in early 1904 and wrote of the pontiff for the June issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*: ". . .Pius X has the effect of pathos; perhaps it is the transparent and touching quality of simple goodness that is in his face. . . . Pius X is of a good height, strongly made, even stout, and has a fine grace of carriage; his dignity is as great as his position, but utterly without haughtiness or pomposity or pride of office. He has none of the 'magnetism' of the 'popular preacher,' actor, or orator; nevertheless he is remarkably magnetic; its is the magnetism of unmistakable goodness and good will to all the world."¹³

After his death in August 1914, the calls for the pontiff's elevation to sainthood grew steadily. In the initial vanguard of his organized admirers were the devotees of the Liturgical Movement, who adopted Pius as their special patron.¹⁴ These calls became so insistent (especially on the part of Pius XII)

11. Samuel A. Stritch to "Dear Mama" January 20, 1907, Stritch Papers, Tennessee Historical Society. At the time of his beatification and canonization only one American bishop actually appointed by Pius X was still in office, Joseph P. Lynch of Dallas-Fort Worth. Others who cherished warm memories of him included Bishop Charles White of Spokane who had the pontiff autograph his breviary during a 1910 audience and Archbishop Henry Rohlmann of Dubuque who received a plaudit from the pontiff for not attacking Protestants in his work on a diocesan mission band. See "Devotion to St. Pius X in America" *The Catholic Choirmaster* 40 (Fall 1954): 133-135. From the time of his beatification until 1962, there were roughly thirteen American bishops ruling dioceses who had been students in Rome during the era of Pius X. Figures compiled from Official Catholic Directories by Mr. James Bohl.

12. Quoted in M. Kenny, S. J., "The People's Pope" *America* 3 (August 10, 17, 1912).

13. Booth Tarkington, "A Vatican Sermon," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 109 (June, 1904): 69-74.

14. The Liturgical Movement claimed Pius X early on as an important inspiration and source of authority for their activities. Integral to their appropriation of the pontiff was their reading of his 1903 *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudine* which called for reforms in church music. Repeatedly promoters of liturgical reform invoked Pius X's comment in the document: "The primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit is participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public, official prayer of the church." The instrumentality of Pius X in the life and efforts of Liturgical Movement founder, Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B., are amply demonstrated in Paul Marx, *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1957) 56, 58. Michel himself invoked the pontiff's memory in the inaugural edition of *Orate Fratres* 1 (November 28, 1926): 1-4. Gerald Ellard S.J. was also in the vanguard of Pius X's admirers in the Movement, see as an example in the same inaugural issue, "Gregory and Pius, Fathers of the Liturgy" *ibid.*: 12-16. Pius X's cause was strongly endorsed by the movement and his sanctity and contributions to liturgical reform often invoked at annual liturgical weeks. One example is the keynote address of

that the tradition of waiting fifty years after his death was suspended and Pius X had the second speediest canonization process since the procedures were formalized. Indeed, the rapidity of Pius X's cause was only exceeded by the gentle Carmelite, Therese of Liseiux (died in 1897 and canonized in 1925.) Yet, unlike Therese, who was literally cloistered and in obscurity her entire adult life, Pius was a well-known and heavily observed church official, a figure fresh in the memory of many who gathered for his canonization in May 29, 1954. On that day nearly half a million Catholics, many of them Americans, thronged St. Peter's Square to witness his canonization. Many more watched the proceedings on NBC or CBS affiliates which had taped the ceremonies for re-broadcast on American television. Hundred of articles and anecdotes about him appeared in the Catholic press or the myriad of Catholic magazines that catered to popular religiosity. Everywhere, in newspapers, periodicals, in church vestibules, Papa Sarto's kindly features were illustrated: a gentle white haired prelate, attired in a scarlet cape, his hand upraised in three-fingered pontifical blessing looking earnestly and piously beyond the devotee. These images had been familiar to Catholics in America since the forties when they began to adorn first communion certificates, holy cards, and appeared in cheap plaster statues displayed in school rooms, religious houses, and easily procurable from religious goods stores. In 1952, Bishop John Treacy of LaCrosse, Wisconsin even formed a diocesan congregation of religious brothers devoted to religious instruction named for Pius X.¹⁵ The timing of his beatification (1951) and his canonization (1954) allowed his name to catch the crest of the wave of Catholic institutional expansion after World War II, and founding pastors and bishops were eager to affix his name to parishes, schools, seminaries, retreat houses, etc. and to proclaim him the primary or secondary patron of their dioceses. By 1965 over ninety parishes would bear his name, fourteen missions, nearly sixty grade schools, eleven high schools, six seminaries, and two retreat houses.¹⁶ No other pope, save St. Peter, would have so many Catholic institutions named for him.

What had brought American Catholics to this significant outpouring of

Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand at the first liturgical week held at Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral in October, 1940. See *National Liturgical Week, Chicago, October 21-25 1940* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1941), 7. After Pius X's beatification, the annual week in Grand Rapids was dedicated to the theme "Pius X and Social Worship." See *St. Pius X and Social Worship, 1903-1953, Proceedings of the National Liturgical Week, Grand Rapids, Michigan, August 17-20, 1953* (Elsberry, Missouri: The Liturgical Conference, 1953). O'Hara had regular contact with officers of the Liturgical Conference in his efforts to revise the official Roman ritual.

15. These were the Brothers of St. Pius X, formed by Bishop John P. Treacy for the Diocese of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. See Edward J. Penchl, "Brothers of St. Pius X," *Worship* 34 (August-September, 1960): 462-463.

16. These statistics are derived from the Official Catholic Directories from 1952 though 1966. They were painstakingly compiled by Mr. Jeffrey Zalar.

affection and devotion to Pius X. One man: Edwin Vincent O'Hara.

O'Hara and the Cult of Pius X

While Bishop of Great Falls, Montana (1930-1939), O'Hara was anxious to provide religious education for those who could not attend Catholic schools, and became convinced that the CCD was the single most effective instrument available for this task. Had had been ordained to the priesthood the year Pius X's 1905 letter *Acerbo Nimis*, which mandated the existence of the Confraternity "in each and every parish" had been issued and had actually met the pontiff on a trip to Rome in 1910. Re-reading the text of *Acerbo Nimis* with its injunction that the Catechism be imparted to one and all "in a plain and simple style adapted to the intelligence of the hearers" stirred him to action.¹⁷ He then insisted that every parish in his diocese establish the Confraternity as soon as practicable. He would replicate these policies when he was transferred to Kansas City, Missouri in 1939.

Taking shape in the heyday of official Catholic Action, with ample provisions for lay activity under hierarchical and clerical guidance, O'Hara's efforts met a warm reception. Not content to make this merely a matter of diocesan policy and encouraged by his success with the Rural Life Conference, O'Hara pressed for a national effort to establish the CCD. In 1933, with the concurrence of the American bishops, he set up a special office for the CCD in Washington, D.C. This office was ably run by a senior secretary, Miriam Marks, and a priest secretary, Sulpician Joseph Collins, both of whom would later assume major responsibility for the day-to-day promotion of Pius X's cause. At the time the national office was created, only five dioceses had functioning CCD programs. By 1948, 119 dioceses had local offices for the development of the CCD. O'Hara also launched a series of regional and national catechetical congresses, developed a successful publications program, providing materials for local program, and spearheading major revisions of the *Baltimore Catechism* and translations of the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, he maintained a steady flow of contact with diocesan directors through correspondence as well as a widely circulated monthly newsletter. Once the decision to mobilize in behalf of the beatification and canonization of Pius X was made, O'Hara had one of the best communications networks available at the time. Moreover, the National Catholic News Service to which O'Hara and his associates in the CCD fed a regular supply of copy, also became an important outlet for disseminating information about the life of Pius X and the state of efforts to beatify and canonize him. Catholic newspapers

17. Pius X, *Acerbo Nimis* (Paterson: Confraternity Publications, 1946).

across the country consistently plugged the cause and life of the pontiff in articles, cartoon drawings, and status reports on the progress of his cause. Many of these were generated by O'Hara and his associates.

O'Hara's biographer Timothy Dolan, does not devote much attention to the details of his prodigious efforts to see the pontiff beatified.¹⁸ Uppermost in O'Hara's mind was to seek a heavenly blessing on the work of the CCD which he held dear to his heart. It is also clear, however, that at least a portion of it had to do with strategic reasons. Specifically, not every American bishop enthusiastically embraced the Confraternity in their dioceses, and some indeed were hostile. No one raised issues of heterodoxy or heresy (although there would be hints of this in O'Hara's other efforts to revise the scriptures) but objections often stemmed from personal and jurisdictional reasons. Some bishops were annoyed by O'Hara's ceaseless paperwork and questionnaires. Moreover, as the chief religious educators in their respective dioceses some bishops objected to "orders" coming from a central Washington office to their local catechetical directors.¹⁹ An examination of the copious records of the Pius X crusade in the Confraternity papers make it clear that the beatification and canonization of the man who was responsible for the creation of the CCD was in part intended to inoculate the movement from serious episcopal criticism.

O'Hara's opening for a full-fledged campaign in behalf of Pius X came in the midst of World War II, when Pope Pius XII formally began the cause for the pontiff's beatification in February 1943. On June 27-28, 1944, the body of the pontiff was disinterred from its resting place in the crypt of the Vatican basilica, robed in papal regalia and laid out in state for two days in the Chapel of Relics. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* noted that among the curious viewing the blackened body of the late pope were scores of U.S. servicemen who had only recently liberated Rome.²⁰ With the process advancing apace in Rome, the annual meeting of the Advisory Board of the National Center for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in August 1944, agreed to take the lead in promoting the cause of Pope Pius X in the United States by the promotion of a crusade of prayer. "In this crusade," a press release read, "not only members of the Confraternity but all Catholics will be afforded an opportunity to join a great army of Christians in furthering the cause of Pius X."²¹ Receiving the approval of the bishop's committee on the CCD at their November 1945 meeting, O'Hara and his associates worked closely with the formal beatification process taking place in Rome.²² The CCD then became the American clearing

18. Dolan, *Some Seed*, 154-155.

19. Dolan, *Some Seed*, 148-153.

20. "The Vatican," *Time* 44 (July 10, 1944):75; "Pope Into Saint," *Newsweek* 24 (July 10, 1944): 84.

21. "For the Beatification of Pius X, Modern Patron of The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine" (1944) Cause of Plus X Files, Edwin Vincent O'Hara Papers, Archives of the Catholic University of America. All following citations are taken from this source hereafter referred to as O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

22. "Confraternity Launches Crusade of Prayer For Cause of Pius X" Copy of press release of CCD

house for ideas to promote the cause, the organizational point for the various crusades of prayer, pilgrimages to the burial and birth places of the pontiff, and the source of holy cards, pictures, and even the design of statuary for public veneration. It also became the main publishing house for the works of the pontiff. Ultimately, Collins would assume the role of a vice-postulator of the cause, and regularly received letters describing miracles and works of grace attributed to the heavenly intercession of Pius X. By mobilizing their considerable network of diocesan CCD directors and by a steady barrage of carefully tailored information about the pontiff that found its way into a variety of print sources, O'Hara and his associates played a pivotal role in shaping the public image of the pontiff for American Catholics.

O'Hara was no stranger to these public relations campaigns, having honed his skills in these matters with the Rural Life Conference. Once they received the sanction of the bishops and the Christmas holidays were behind them, O'Hara and his associates Miriam Marks and Joseph Collins set to work, planning and managing with painstaking detail every facet of the campaign to make Pius X a saint. Beginning in February 1945, they launched the first of several prayer crusades which sought to raise public awareness of the virtues and significance of Pius X. Intuitively aware of the power of material objects to educate and underscore the lessons he sought to impart, O'Hara and his associates flooded the market with a number of devotional items that cultivated knowledge of and devotion to the pontiff. This first effort urged people to commit themselves to attending Mass and receiving communion one day a week (excluding Sunday) to secure Pius's beatification. To recruit devotees, O'Hara produced a small two-fold prayer pamphlet in February 1945, decorated with a reproduction of an oil painting of Pius X that hung in the Apostolic Delegation and included information about the pontiff's life and virtues as well as a prayer for his beatification. Miriam Marks, O'Hara's faithful executive secretary, then dispatched thousands of these pamphlets to CCD directors around the nation as well as to interested parties who wrote independently.

The next year, in anticipation of a Catechetical Congress to be held in Boston that Fall, O'Hara and Marks produced glossy reproductions of the colored portrait of Pius X in the Apostolic Delegation and sold them for \$3.50 a piece.²³ At Marks' suggestion, a "Pius X Plaque" was commissioned and O'Hara endorsed it as a way of stoking the enthusiasm and devotion of the CCD directors to whom he intended to present them. O'Hara explained, ". . .this plaque was prepared with the view of enlisting prayers for the canonization of Pius X as well as affixing the loyalty of the group to the Modern Founder of the Confraternity and his apostolic work."²⁴ At the same Boston Congress,

Report at Bishop's Meeting, November 19, 1945. O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

23. O'Hara to Miriam Marks, March 13, 1946, O'Hara/Plus X Papers, ACUA.

24. O'Hara to Marks, June 12, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

O'Hara passed out twenty-one Pius X medals to the visiting hierarchy, replete with different colored ribbons for cardinals, archbishops and bishops.²⁵

Once Pius X was beatified and an official public cult of veneration could begin, O'Hara commissioned official statuary to add to his repertoire. In 1952, he directed the Paladini Statuary Company of New York to manufacture a 25 inch ivory statue of the pontiff taken from one of O'Hara's favorite photographs.²⁶ The same year, Cardinal Stritch had commissioned a statue to be executed by the DaPrato Statuary Company of Chicago. Since by that time the CCD was the official clearing house for the dissemination of the public cult of the pontiff, Stritch directed the statue maker to secure approval from O'Hara before he began marketing the image.²⁷

At Pius X's beatification, O'Hara's office became one of the prime sources for relics of the pontiff. In anticipation of the official permission to disseminate relics, O'Hara helped distribute a picture of the pontiff in death that had been provided by Sarto's sister, Maria Pia Sarto. Reflecting a practice familiar among Latin peoples of photographing a deceased person, the image showed the pontiff laying peacefully in death, his hands firmly clutching a crucifix and his hair and the bed clothing neatly arranged. Affixed to it was a relic of the pillow on which his head rested. Although this image may have jarred American sensibilities, it nonetheless had the effect of bringing home the aura of sanctity which attended his passing.²⁸ Countless copies of this photograph circulated the globe and many of them turned up in the archives of religious communities of men and women.

Until the official appointment of Collins as vice-postulator of the cause, O'Hara's office proceeded cautiously on the subject of miracles attained and prayers answered through Pius X's intercession and the whole matter of public veneration of the saint (their prayers and holy cards were for private use only.) Nonetheless, letters asking for prayers and relics were often directed to O'Hara's office, and once Pius was beatified, he began to supply relics to those who sought them. His office also began to receive letters from people asking for special prayers or announcing some favor gained by the intercession of the pope. Collins probably forwarded to the Roman postulator most of the letters from Americans citing prayers answered or hearings attained through the intercession of Pius X. The few that remain in O'Hara's files give us some idea of

25. O'Hara to Marks, October 2, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

26. STATUE OF BLESSED PIUS X. O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

27. John Rigali to Joseph Collins, January 31, 1952, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

28. In an interesting conjunction between the two promoters of the cult of the pontiff, it is liturgical pioneer, Martin B. Hellreigel's account of receiving the same photo that demonstrates its power. When he visited Rome in 1928 to place a wreath on the pontiff's tomb and celebrate Mass Hellreigel recalled in 1953: "Towards the evening, I paid a visit to Miss Sarto, the then still surviving sister of Pius X. . . . When I was about to leave, Miss Sarto gave me a card with the Pope's picture and a small piece from his garments attached to it. 'Take this with you as a remembrance of my brother Beppo.' " See Martin B. Hellreigel, "A

the types of appeal the cult had for some American Catholics.²⁹

The production of holy cards, medals, pictures and statues was only a part of the strategy. As he had in previous crusades, O'Hara relied on intellectual experts and theologians for intellectual ballast and a fund of useful information. At the annual Catechetical Congress, held in his see city of Kansas City to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the issuance of *Acerbo Nimis* in 1945, he hosted a major symposium on the life and work of Pius X. This was a low-key affair because of continued restrictions on travel. Nonetheless it highlighted papers on the pontiff from serious scholars among whom were Benedictine Godfrey Diekmann, Conventual Franciscan Raphael Huber, Jesuit Gerald Ellard, and his own secretary, Sulpician Joseph Collins. These fourteen papers were laid on the altar at the Kansas City Catechetical Congress in October 1945, and were published in 1946 along with a comprehensive bibliography.³⁰ At the same time a separate volume was issued under Collins editorship which included key catechetical documents of Pius X.³¹ These works, constituted the raw data, as it were, on the life and significance of the pontiff.

All of the work of 1945 and 1946 was beginning to bear fruit reflected in increasing interest in the cause of the pontiff. Already in June 1946, O'Hara had suggested: "I am inclined to suggest that the Episcopal Committee of the CCD lead a pilgrimage to Riese, the birth place of Pius X in 1949." He noted

Demonstration of Holy Mass" in *St. Pius X and Social Worship: Proceedings of the National Liturgical Week, Grand Rapids, Michigan, August 17-20, 1953* (Ellsberry, Mo.: The Liturgical Conference, 1953), 3.

29. A minor theme of the cult was the reputation of Pius X as a healer. As the cult took off under O'Hara's direction, it soon took on a life of its own and people began to look to the pontiff as a ready friend in time of need. Ultimately, it was the cure of an Italian Carmelite nun, attributed to Pius X which provided the definitive miracle needed for his canonization. But Pius X's reputation as a healer had already begun while he was alive. One of these stories told of Pius holding a paralyzed child in his arms during a public audience. As he was coddling him, the child wriggled free from his arms and began to run around the room. On another occasion, a couple with a two-year old child ill with meningitis wrote to the pope, to whom they had often gone to confession when he was bishop of Mantua. The Pope responded with a letter bidding them to hope and pray. Two days after the receipt of the letter, the child recovered. Other hearings attributed to the pontiff included those of Ernesto Ruffini and Clem Lane. Ruffini, later cardinal archbishop of Palermo related to the investigators of the pontiff's cause that he had visited the pontiff after being diagnosed with tuberculosis. "Return to the seminary after the summer holidays," the pontiff told the young man, "and everything will be alright." Ruffini lived to be one of the major conservative forces at Vatican II. After the pontiff's canonization, Christian Family Movement activist, Clem Lane related how a first-class relic of Pius X had been affixed above his oxygen tent after he suffered a major heart-attack and had been given Extreme Unction. His recovery astounded his doctors, who had given him up for lost.

One Sister of Loretta at Webster College, St. Louis Missouri, wrote of the restoration to health of her priest brother through the pontiff's intercession. O'Hara also received a plea from a Texas cement executive: "Could you please kindly say a Mass in honor of Pius X at his tomb when you are in Rome . . . and ask the good Pius, if it be God's will to intercede for my only son that he may be cured of his epilepsy?"

30. *A Symposium on the Life and Work of Pope Pius X: Commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of His Encyclical "Acerbo Nimis" Issue with a View to Promoting the Cause of the Venerable Servant of God, Pius X* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1946).

31. Joseph B. Collins, S.S. (ed.) *Catechetical Documents of Pope Pius X* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1946).

the practicality of it, "This will be the year when the American Bishops will be expected to visit Rome."³² However the success of the Boston Catechetical Congress and the sincere enthusiasm for the cause evidenced by Archbishop Richard Cushing and his auxiliary Bishop John Wright led Marks to suggest: "During 1947 will some consideration be given to the pilgrimage to the tomb of Pius X in Rome in 1948?"³³ O'Hara presented the matter to Cushing who leapt at it eagerly and somehow secured the fabled luxury liner, *Queen Mary* for the trip. When all was said and done, the CCD sent over five-hundred pilgrims in that October. In tandem with the pilgrimage, O'Hara, Marks and Collins coordinated a tremendous prayer crusade that produced a spiritual bouquet that was presented to Pius XII containing the names of over two million Catholics who promised Masses and prayers for the cause of the beatification of the pontiff. In all the bouquet tabulated a total of 157,758,175 good works performed by devout Catholics in behalf of the pontiff's cause.³⁴ O'Hara led 45 devotees to the tomb in 1950 and then to Sarto's ancestral home of Riese as well as to Venice. In 1951 and again in 1954, O'Hara led delegations of two hundred each to attend the beatification and canonization rites. After 1950 O'Hara collected money to repair the church in Riese where Sarto had been baptized.

Without a doubt, the efforts of O'Hara and his associates, Joseph Collins and Miriam Marks, were spectacularly successful in making Pius X and his cause widely known. Thousands of books, prayer cards, plaques, statues, pictures and ultimately relics of the pontiff found their way into the hands and prayer books of American Catholics. They heard of him in radio dramas, in speeches at regional and national congresses of the CCD, and they read about him in Catholic newspapers thanks to the hundreds of press releases issued to the National Catholic News Service by the CCD office. Crusades of prayer to him and for his beatification were dutifully pressed by local CCD directors, parish priests and women religious.

But what did people hear about the pontiff? Although the official CCD publications and O'Hara himself tended to hold up the pontiff as a great educator and patron of religious education, the image shaped by his promoters had a much broader appeal, one calculated to the specific demands of sanctity in American culture. In shaping this O'Hara would rely on substantial assistance from popular writers.

32. O'Hara to Marks, June 12, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

33. Marks to O'Hara, December 3, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.

34. This figure was given in "World News in Brief," *Ave Maria* 68 (August 28, 1948): 257.

Shaping the Image: Popular Authors

Obviously in generating support for Pius X, O'Hara and his associates were not starting from scratch. There had indeed been a healthy array of books on the pontiff stemming back to his days on the throne of Peter, coming down to the beginnings of his campaign in the forties.³⁵ However, with the resources and promotional energies he generated, O'Hara was able to help three authors of popular works on the pontiff. Two of these, Katherine Kurt Burton and Francis Beauchesne Thornton, wrote for adults. A third, Teri Martini wrote for children. All three accentuated their efforts to tailor the pontiff's image for the consumption of the American people.

One of the writers O'Hara encouraged to help him stir up popular devotion to the pontiff was the convert-author, Katherine Kurt Burton, who wrote *The Great Mantle: The Life of Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto* published in 1950 by

35. The scope of this article does not permit an extensive examination of the various popular works on the pontiff. Four books on Pius for English-speaking audiences were written while he was still alive. Three of them were lavishly illustrated and in picture and text helped to frame for American readers the basic contours of Pius X's early life. The first, *Sede Vacante: Being a Diary Written During the Conclave of 1903* (Oxford: James Parke and Co., 1903) by Monsignor Hartwell De La Garde Grissell, a long-time fixture in the papal household, was a stuffy account of the events leading up and including the conclave and coronation of Pius X.

In 1904, two works appeared that offered substantial accounts of the pontiffs life up to his election. The first was a translation of Monsignor Anton de Waal's *Life of Pope Pius X*, trans. Joseph William Berg (Milwaukee: The M.H. Wiltzius Company, 1904). De Waal, the Rector of the German Campo Santo in Rome allowed his work to be translated by Milwaukee seminary professor, Joseph William Berg. Already in its second edition when it reached America, it gave one of the first in-depth studies of the pontiffs background and character for an English-speaking audience. Although filled with many of the same details of ceremonial and rubric that Grissell provided, DeWaal's book sharply etched the contrast between the pope and his more reserved and seemingly aristocratic predecessor. Berg himself took liberties with the text, often interspersing its chapters with panegyrics to the pontiff designed to accentuate the loyalty of American Catholics.

The second text written by Edward Schmidlin, appeared under the title *Life of His Holiness, Pope Pius X*. Drawn heavily from the same general sources as De Waal, this work too was expertly illustrated and contained a flattering preface by Cardinal James Gibbons. Schmidlin wrote in English for an American audience his book was heavily apologetic in nature.

The third major text, *Life of Pius X* (New York: The American Catholic Publication Society, 1907) was written in 1907 by Monsignor E. Canon Schmitz, another German stationed at the Roman Campo Santo and published under the auspices of The American Catholic Publication Society. With a beautifully embossed leather jacket and lavishly illustrated, Schmitz sought to bring some intellectual detachment to the work of writing about the pope. The story he writes was not substantially different from DeWaal or Schmidlin, but one might speculate that the sheer beauty and exquisite illustration of this book (including many fascinating photographs from the pontiff's younger days) might have made it the book of choice for rectories, seminaries, and the waiting rooms of chanceries, and as such, a primary source of information for sermons and public addresses honoring Pius X.

After the pontiff's death in 1914, books and articles began to appear re-telling the already well-known details of Pius X's life and especially highlighting his sanctity. A representative sampling of some of the most widely distributed provides a good overview of their character. In 1918, the first English biography written after the pontiff's death, *Life of Pius X* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1918, 2nd ed. 1924) appeared, written by Mother Frances Alice Forbes, a religious of the Sacred Heart and one of several

Longmans Press.³⁶ Burton, who had entered the Catholic Church from Episcopalianism in 1930, devoted virtually the rest of her literary career to religious biography specializing in works about converts like herself. While relying heavily on earlier works about Pius X, she collaborated extensively with the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine receiving substantial help and resources, a fact she acknowledged in her work.³⁷ Burton's hagiographical tone was evident in her reporting of supposed conversations that took place between Pius and his deputies (all of which she claimed were based in fact). Burton's work, filled with endearing anecdotes of the pope, made it one of the most quotable and portions of it were reprinted in the popular *Catholic Digest*.

While not as formally affiliated with the CCD as was Burton, the book editor of the *Catholic Digest*, Father Francis Beauchesne Thornton, also contributed to the growing body of literature on Pius X. In 1952, under the imprint of Benziger Brothers, Thornton published *The Burning Flame: The Life of Pius X*.³⁸ An aspiring poet, Thornton was a priest of St. Paul, Minnesota who had been sent to study at Notre Dame, Columbia, and Oxford. Upon his return to St. Paul he was appointed associate editor and book editor of the *Catholic Digest*. Like Burton, he used existing secondary sources (Thornton apparently used more in Italian with which he apparently had more familiarity) and acknowledged the role of the CCD in helping him write the book. Thornton divided up the pontiff's life according to the canonical hours of the divine

convert authors who wrote about Pius X. Forbes's account was based also on foreign language sources, and provided a sober, if at times fanciful overview of the pontiff's life, with its primary emphasis on the initiatives of his papacy. Merry del Val, the pontiff's secretary of state, claimed it was the truest estimation of Pius X's life and work and kept the book on his shelf until his death.

Forbes dedicated the book to Merry del Val who was himself another conduit, especially to Americans, of information and devotion to Pius X. In 1939, his secretary, Nicola Canali published a slim memoir that the cardinal had left behind entitled *Memories of Pius X* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1951 reprint of 1939 edition.) The memoir, which would be reprinted in 1951, told endearing stories of the pontiff's holiness, humility, and loveliness. Del Val's cause for canonization would be introduced in 1953.

In 1928, the prolific French Catholic novelist, Rene Bazin's *Pius X* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1928) appeared in English translation, offering little in difference from DeWaal's and Forbes general accounts, but emphasizing, as they all did the simplicity and humility of the pontiff. In 1941 convert Lilian Browne-Olf produced a brief portrait of Pius X in her study *Their Name is Pius: Portraits of Five Great Modern Popes* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1941) produced as part of Milwaukee-based Bruce Publishing Company's Science and Culture Series under the general editorship of Jesuit Joseph Husslein.

36. Katherine Burton, *The Great Mantle: The Life of Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto, Pope Pius X* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950).

37. A more extensive search of O'Hara's papers might reveal more details regarding the nature of Burton's association with the CCD. The Pius X files indicate that she was apparently bilingual and served as chair of a meeting of women writers from North and South America interested in promoting the CCD. See O'Hara to Marks, September 18, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA. Marks also was interested in having her as the NC News correspondent on the 1948 pilgrimage to Rome.

38. Francis Beauchesne Thornton, *The Burning Flame: The Life of Pope Pius X* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1952).

office. Rich in detail and anecdote like Burton's work, Thornton's book reveals how deftly wove the public and private life of the pontiff together.

The image of the pontiff that emerged from the pens of these popular writers, one which was widely disseminated through O'Hara's network, was calculated to appeal to American Catholic audiences particularly to their egalitarian instincts and democratic sensibilities. It is no coincidence that his cult flourished during America's ideological mobilization in the midst of World War II and in the ensuing Cold War period. At a time when American democracy was being promoted and extended as never before in response to the twin threats of fascism and communism, the unaffected simplicity and goodness of the pontiff who had gone from rags to riches, so associated with the myth "American dream," struck a resonant chord with many Americans.

This consistent theme of Pius X's humble origins, particularly his somewhat impoverished childhood, was popularized in the text of the radio play about the pontiff written under O'Hara's supervision and broadcasted on the popular "Catholic Hour" on NBC affiliates on Sunday, October 31, 1945. Entitled "Heart of Flame" it began with a flourish of melodramatic organ music and the gentle voice of the narrator: "*Giuseppe Sarto . . . son of the village postmaster of Riese, in Northern Italy . . . Giuseppe Sarto, a little Italian boy who ran barefoot to school, because he wanted to be a priest, and priests were poor, and how would he hope to repay his parents the cost of a pair of shoes.*"³⁹ Indeed, O'Hara would hit this childhood poverty theme so much that he earned a mild reproof from Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani, who urged him to alter such a reference in the text of a sermon believing "we were overplaying the humble origin of Pius X." Obediently he deleted the words "barefooted" and "peasant" in his text.⁴⁰

Equally powerful were the carefully crafted images of Pius X as a gentle, white-thatched friend of children, forever uncomfortable with the pomp and flummery of the Vatican — a sort of Mr. Smith gone to the banks of the Tiber. Here, Katherine Burton carried the message most effectively. In an article for the popular *Catholic Digest*, Burton related the horror of some of the pontiff's entourage on the day of his coronation when it was discovered that his pectoral cross was made of gilded metal. Pius responded that it had served him well on other occasions — why not now? "Besides, I really brought no other with me." Burton also noted Pius's abolition of the custom of dining alone, waving aside the ancient custom with a sweep of his hand. "Since when has it been custom?" he asked. "Since Urban VIII set the rule," was the answer. "If Urban VIII had the right to make such a rule," he countered, "then Pius X has an

39. A copy of this script is found in File 211, O'Hara Papers, Microfilm, Marquette University Archives.

40. O'Hara to Marks, August 26, 1946, O'Hara/Pius X Papers, ACUA.



The sanctity and piety are clearly centered in this holy card of St. Pius X. (All illustrations in this article are courtesy of the author)

equal right to abolish it.” When chided by Rome’s social leaders to make his peasant sisters papal countesses, Pius retorted with amusement, “I have made them sisters of the Pope; what more can I do for them?”⁴¹ It is well to note that these same anecdotes were constantly re-circulated in both lengthy pieces in Catholic newspapers as well as in the “filler” items that lay-out editors tucked in at the end of unfinished columns. No doubt they also provided ample material for Catholic educators as well.

These efforts to portray Pius X as a simple, humble man who rose from poverty to greatness appear to have influenced the secular reporting of the details of his beatification and canonization. For example, *Time* announced that the way for his beatification had been cleared in a brief clip entitled: “Pope of the Poor.”⁴²

Describing the beatification ceremonies in St. Peter’s Square in 1951 rival *Newsweek* reported the standard boilerplate: “Pius X never belied his peasant stock, cutting papal ceremony to the bone and inviting friends to share his meals at the Vatican.”⁴³ *Life* magazine carried extensive photo-story coverage of his beatification and a lengthy piece “The Making of a Saint” which carried digests of the testimony compiled in his behalf. Throughout the stories emphasized his simple tastes, his use of cast-off clothing, even his making coffee for one of his successors, Pius XI, who had visited the chancery archives at Mantua.⁴⁴ The photo story covering his canonization summed it up: “Pius XII Proclaims Pius X A Saint: Rare Outdoor Ritual Canonizes Cobbler’s son.”⁴⁵

Tailoring this egalitarian message for a specifically American Catholic audience, O’Hara took pains to characterize Pius X’s decision to extend commu-

41. Katherine Burton, “Blessed Pius X” *Catholic Digest* (June 1951): 1-9.

42. “Pope of the Poor,” *Time* 56 (September 18, 1950): 68.

43. “Blessed Pius X,” *Newsweek* 37 (June 4, 1951).

44. “The Making of A Saint,” *Life* 36 (May 31, 1954): 98-100.

45. “Pius XII Proclaims Pius X A Saint,” *Life* 36 (June 14, 1954): 69-70.

nion to more and more of the Catholic people in exactly the same vein. What could be more democratic than opening the communion rail to more and more men, women — indeed making the communion railing an altar of human equality? In his 1945 radio play, O’Hara characterized opposition to the decree by those who feared irreverence as a form of spiritual elitism. Using the expansive and “democratic” sentiments of the pontiff in rebuttal, O’Hara underscored the priority Pius assigned to access to the graces of the sacraments — an access that took priority over genuine fears of a lack of reverence:

Priest I: But, Holy Father, with daily Communion such as you advocate, how can we protect the honor due our Lord?

Sarto (gently): You must remember my son, that the primary purpose of the Holy Eucharist is not that the reverence due our Lord may be safeguarded. . . Neither is the Sacrament intended as a reward of virtue. . . Its first purpose is to give the faithful strength to resist their sensual passion and to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults.

At the close of the broadcast, the commentator returned to the theme:

The Pope of the People and the Pope of the Blessed Sacrament is dead. But his blessing lives on. . . It lives on in the heart of every little child receiving his God for the first time in Holy Communion. It lives in the heart of every man and woman approaching the altar rail to receive the Eucharist daily. . . It lives on in the heart of every man in a war torn world longing for peace.

However, even with the emphasis on Pius’s closeness to the common people and his kindness, it was also well known that he had exercised papal authority in a fairly punitive manner. Best known was his harsh suppression of the so-called Modernist movement in the church in 1907. However two controversial foreign policy decisions, impacting directly on American sensibilities reflected a heavy hand. One was the negative papal reaction to the separation of church and state in France in 1905.⁴⁶ The other was Pius X’s refusal in 1910 to receive in audience neither the former American vice-president, Charles W. Fairbanks who had addressed the Methodist Association at their church in Rome, nor former president Theodore Roosevelt who wished to address the same group.

Yet even in the most controversial and harsh actions of his regime, the shapers of Pius X’s image in America gave their hero a positive spin by explaining the pontiff’s firmness as necessary to defend the simple people of the church against the wiles and machinations of misguided intellectuals and

46. The details of this controversy are discussed in Claude Fohlen, “American Catholics and the Separation of Church and State in France” *Catholic Historical Review* 80 (October, 1994): 741-756.

anti-clericals. Francis Beauchesne Thornton was particularly strong in this regard. “By the time Giuseppe Sarto had come to the Chair of Peter, the promising groups of young clerics in schools and seminaries had been radically infected with the false learning of their age.” He concluded, “Giuseppe Sarto hated heresy. The doctrines of Modernism had to be brought out into light where their malign character could be seen and condemned. Liberal susceptibilities were often hurt by the Pope’s blunt and uncompromising stand against anything that smacked of the new hydra-headed horror.”⁴⁷ Thornton even defended the activities of the notorious *Sodalitium Pianum* who reported scores of priests and bishops as Modernists on the flimsiest of evidence. He portrayed favorably the pontiff’s response to the opposition that broke out in clerical ranks over his anti-modernist encyclical *Pascendi*: “He met its cloak-and-dagger implications by the toleration and mild encouragement of an anti-modernist society known as the *Sodalitium Pianum*. . . . The truth of the matter is that Giuseppe Sarto **tolerated** the work of the Sodalitium. . . . The secret machinations of Modernism had to be fought with an instrument capable of meeting surreptitious activity with its orthodox counterpart.”⁴⁸ In an era when McCarthyism was still running its course, these words may not have been too shocking. However, this somewhat harsh image of the Pius as defender from the forces of unchecked intellectual pride was tempered by his even more widely disseminated reputation as a friend of children.

Pius X: Friend of Children

“For years before his death, Pius X had been popularly hailed as ‘the Holy Pope,’ ” wrote Thomas F. Doyle. Church dignitaries were deeply impressed by his informality and simplicity. The poor loved him for his tender benignity. Children, above all were attracted to him. Once, it is related, a very small child, answering a question, looked into the Pope’s gentle eyes and replied: ‘Yes Jesus.’ ”⁴⁹ Pius X’s special affection for children was specifically acknowledged in the ceremonies of his beatification when Pius XII declared: “The real glory of the Pontiff is that he is in our own day the Pope of the Holy Eucharist. Here indeed, we see the harmony between the Vicar of Christ and the very spirit of Jesus. . . . It was he, then who gave Jesus to the children, and the children to Jesus. . . .”⁵⁰ Indeed, Sarto had brought a reputation as friend of

47. Thornton, 177, 181.

48. Francis Beauchesne Thornton, *The Burning Flame: The Life of Pope Pius X* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1952) 181, 182-185.

49. Thomas F. Doyle, “The Saintry Pius X,” *Ave Maria* 73 (May 19, 1951): 615-621.

50. Quoted in H.A. Reinhold, “Frequent Communion, Accessible and Integrated,” in *St. Pius X and Social Worship*, 67.

children with him to the papacy. For children he was the genial pontiff who carried candy in his pockets for the street urchins of Mantua and Venice and who taught them the catechism. His weekly catechetical lessons in the courtyard of San Damaso in the Vatican always included a special place for children and his decision to issue *Acerbo Nimis* was motivated by his desire to reclaim children from religious ignorance: a condition he observed all too often in his various pastoral postings.

Yet of all the things that inextricably linked Pius to the cause of children, it was his decision to lower the age of first communion by the decree *Quam Singulari* of August 8, 1910. Even before officially relaxing the prohibition against communion before the age of twelve, Pius X himself gave first holy communion to a four-year-old English lad whom the pope gently asked if he knew whom he was receiving when he received the Eucharist. When the lad answered affirmatively, “Jesus” Pius then ordered his parents to bring him to his Mass the next day to receive the sacrament. At another event, the pope gave communion to four hundred French children who had been brought to Rome on pilgrimage. Early first communion, according to Carlo Falconi was mandated by Pius X: “in order to impress the solemn event on children’s minds and to afford their parents a new stimulus towards religious observance. . .”⁵¹

Ironically, given the later power of the image of Pius as friend of children, the initial reception given to *Quam Singulari* was not universally enthusiastic. Leslie Tentler relates that the decree was “met by a notable lack of enthusiasm” by Bishop John Foley of Detroit. Moreover, many of Detroit’s priests worried that early first communion might cause parents to withdraw their children from Catholic schools in the early primary years.⁵²

Ultimately however, the practice was not only accepted, but became a memorable and sentimental occasion for Catholic young people and their families. Vincent Yzermans summed up the feeling of many Catholic school children for this pontiff when he recorded the comment of a Minnesota second grader a day after her first communion: “Sister,” she said to her teacher, “Pope Pius must have been awful nice to give us Jesus.”⁵³ In the post-war baby-boom, with its larger concerns about family and proper child-rearing, Pius X’s tender regard for the spiritual life of these little ones reinforced a benign church role in the critical tasks of rearing children. Indeed, the transfer of the rituals of solemn communion to children of a younger age caught on among American Catholics. Priests came to view the earlier age (as did Pius X) as an opportunity to positively influence the young in a life of virtue and church affiliation as

51. Falconi, 21-22.

52. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 171.

53. Vincent A. Yzermans, “Blessed Pius X and the United States,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 5 (March 1954): 10.

tender and more malleable age. Parents looked forward to the spring time rites of first confession and first communion as family events and the event was often scheduled on Mother's Day to wed two very powerful family celebrations into one. As Tentler observed of Detroit, "No parish was so small that it failed to mount a lavish celebration."⁵⁴ Frequent characterizations of the event as "the happiest day of your life" and oft-repeated stories (especially in a somewhat more cynical post-Vatican II age) of nun's warnings not to chew the host (for fear of hurting Jesus) or even stronger injunctions not to loosen the communion wafer that often got stuck on the roof of a very dry mouth (because of the midnight-to-reception of communion fast) etched themselves into popular Catholic memory.

Again, it was O'Hara who hammered home the connection between the pontiff and children. O'Hara's most logical connection was his emphasis on catechetics, the cause to which he devoted the lion's share of his organizational energies. Educating rural and city youth who had neither opportunities nor resources to attend Catholic schools was the driveshaft connecting the CCD and the pontiff who spent long hours working over similar problems in his early years as a curate and a pastor, as well as a bishop. O'Hara himself occasionally held catechism classes in his episcopal quarters and saw well how the pontiff's appeal to children could be mobilized in behalf of the cause of his canonization. Confraternity materials stressed the importance of the pope in making religion accessible to little children.

As part of his wider public relations plan to publicize and drum up support for Pius's elevation to the altar, he worked with a third popular writer, Teri Martini, a young woman who had somehow secured some priceless original photographs of the pope. She wrote a children's book, entitled *The Fisherman's Ring: The Life of Giuseppe Sarto, The Children's Pope* appeared in 1954 under the imprint of St. Anthony Guild Press, the publisher of The Confraternity. Opened with a preface by O'Hara, the story included a series of familiar vignettes of the pontiff's life that accentuated his love and pastoral concern for young people. "Children were still very dear to Pius X. He soon became known as the Pope of Little Children. There were many children's pilgrimages to Rome. During many audiences the Holy Father would gather the children about him. Together, they would talk of things that interested the young."⁵⁵

As the cult of Pius X accelerated in the forties and early fifties, the pontiff's association with children and his care and solicitude came to be more highly emphasized. Evidence of this is found in the fact that shortly after his beatification his image began to appear on first holy communion certificates printed

54. Tentler, 9.

55. Teri Martini, *The Fisherman's Ring: The Life of Giuseppe Sarto, The Children's Pope* (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1954), 111.



The death of Pope Pius X

by church goods suppliers. These certificates, which had been handed out to American Catholic children since the nineteenth century, represent in themselves an important window into shifting perceptions of the meaning of the day. Early certificates carried images of the other sacraments or were decorated with marvelous Old Testament typologies of Eucharist and Sacrifice (e.g. the sacrifice of Isaac or the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek.) The handsome scroll with the child's name and date of reception of first communion was occasionally framed or displayed in the family home or preserved in a special location with other important family valuables. The certificates, popular in the fifties, tended to focus almost exclusively on the act of receiving communion and often pictured Pius X either giving the Eucharist to a kneeling boy or girl or standing behind them with a gentle smile as they received their first Holy Communion.

It is not coincidental that the accentuation of the pontiff as a special friend of Catholic children should have been most heavily emphasized after World War II and the onset of the famous baby-boom. Indeed, if priests and laity of the teens and twenties came to accept the wisdom of Pius X's insistence on first communion at the age of reason, even more the post-war baby boom generation embraced the practice with even greater fervor. Indeed, the extensive publicity for Pius's beatification and canonization coalesced with a particularly active period of concern for family life and formation.⁵⁶ Catholic organizations

56. See Jeffrey M. Burns, *American Catholics and the Family Crisis, 1930-1962: An Ideological and Organizational Response* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

such as the Christian Family Movement and the Catholic Family Life Movement, which became popular at this time, contributed their share towards promoting the cause of the pope. The CFM in particular, under the guidance of liturgical pioneer, Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand, linked the pontiff's efforts to restore the liturgy to the health and vitality of family life.⁵⁷ Hillenbrand himself insisted on daily Mass attendance and regular communion by the children of his parish, insisting that the Mass (in which there was popular participation) was an agent as integral to the full education of children as were their classroom lessons.⁵⁸ According to Jeffrey Burns, the Catholic Family Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, under Benedictine Edgar Schmiedler, "sponsored and encouraged an increasing number of activities geared to restore the religious life of the family — family communion, the family rosary . . . family rituals. . ."⁵⁹

His care and affection for children certainly made him even more appealing when the post-war baby boom made American Catholic parents even more aware of their responsibilities in the proper rearing of their off-spring in the ways of the faith. Here the kindly pontiff's face, smiling at a first communicant on a communion certificate or holy card could function as a warm reminder that the church was there to help in this critical task.

The End of the Cult

Two years after he witnessed the canonization of Pius X in 1954, O'Hara died. Two years after his death another Venetian Patriarch would take the throne of Peter. The cult of Pius X, linked as it was with the distinctive world of pre-conciliar Catholicism, was one of the many casualties of the post-conciliar age. Ironically, the reaction against Papa Sarto would be commenced by the new pope, one, Angelo Roncalli, who had been singled by the witch-hunts associated with the Modernist campaign. Indeed, one interpretation of his papacy was to complete the repudiation of the anti-Modernist crusade begun under Pius X and continued by subsequent popes.⁶⁰

As serious historical scholarship began to train its eye on the pontiff, a much more critical and complex image of him has emerged. Indeed, his harsh treatment of the Modernists which had allegedly been a cause of some anxiety for the Congregation of Saints during the course of his beatification and canoniza-

57. Adolph Schalk, "Pius X and the Lay Apostolate," *Priest's Bulletin* 1:3 (1954).

58. Robert L. Tuzik, "The Contribution of Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand (1905-1979) to the Liturgical Movement in the United States: Influences and Developments." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1989), p. 227.

59. Burns, 160.

60. This seems to be the theme of Peter Hebblethwaite's *Pope John XXIII, Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985).

tion proceedings would come back to haunt and tarnish his memory. Indeed, less than flattering images began to emerge of Pius X that belied his reputation for gentleness and kindness. One chilling story, reported by Carlo Falconi had the pontiff respond to a pleas for mercy towards the clerical practitioners of Modernism, “Kindness is for fools.”⁶¹ Modernism’s ideas ceased to be fearful. (The oath was abolished in 1967.) Those who studied the issue looked somewhat sympathetically on those who had their careers ruined or been run out of the church by the harshness of Pius X and his regime.⁶²

Accompanying this revisionism in his image and the diminution of support for his signature crusade against Modernism, were other matters that had gone into the American cult. In one sense, the catechists and the liturgists (who had also used Pius X as their special patron) had secured their respective goals by Vatican II. Liturgical reforms became a reality already in 1964 and the wide-scale acceptance of Confraternity-style religious education programs took off as well, challenging the long hegemony of the Catholic schools as the chief religious educators of American Catholic children. Having won legitimation, they no longer needed a papal patron. Moreover, Pius X may have actually become a liability to some of the groups. The liturgists in particular came to discover that Pius was not as great a friend of liturgical study as the early liturgical pioneers had suggested.⁶³ In fact, as sacramental theology began to develop in the wake of the council, Pius X’s decision to extend first Eucharist to young children before confirmation came to pose a serious pastoral problem for the latter sacrament — breaking it out of the sequence of a sacrament of initiation. Even today, the age of Confirmation floats about like the Flying Dutchman of the sacramental system.

Finally, the image of the papacy has been decisively altered not only by the effects of the Council, with its halting steps in the direction of papal decentralization and collegiality, but perhaps even more by the level of American Catholic reception of papal teaching. Beginning with the birth control issue of 1968, but also extending to a relative indifference to stern papal injunctions concerning the distribution of wealth, many American Catholics no longer take Roman pontiffs as the final word on anything. In short the “ecological niche” in which Pius X’s rapid rise to sainthood took place no longer exists.

61. Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century: From Pius X to John XXIII* (Muriel Grindrod, tr.) (Boston: Little Brown Company, 1967), p. 54. To date the best current monographic study of Pius X is Gianpalo Romanato, *Pio X: la vita di Papa Sarto* (Milano: Rusconi, 1992).

62. Modernism has been the object of much study in recent years. See. Marvin R. O’Connell’s *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); David G. Schultenover, *A View from Rome: On the Eve of the Modernist Crisis* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993) and R. Scott Appleby, “Church and Age Unite”: *The Modernist Impulse in American Catholicism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

63. Telephone interview with Reverend Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B. December 14, 1995.

Nonetheless, even though the cult was in large measure orchestrated by a particularly able ecclesiastical impresario its powerful appeal to American Catholics of the period after World War I through Vatican II opens a window into the complex networks of life and holiness that informed the lives of American Catholic men and women of the twentieth century.