

Papacy's history teaches many lessons

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

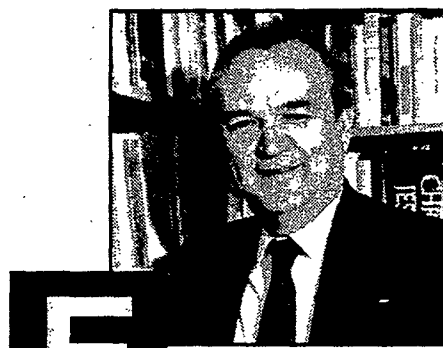
This series of columns on "summer saints" has had an abundance of positive material with which to work. Our subjects have included some of the greatest and most influential Catholic figures in the history of the church: St. Benedict of Nursia, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Dominic, St. Bonaventure and St. Augustine of Hippo.

The subject of this week's column, however, yields a more mixed report. Some 80 years after his death, the image of Pope St. Pius X (feast day, Aug. 21) remains at once lustrous and clouded in the history books.

Of humble origins (his father was a postman, his mother a seamstress), he was a personally holy man who, as pope, was concerned with the spiritual formation of priests, good preaching, improved liturgies, and the restoration of church music.

He became popular as the "pope of frequent Communion" and for having lowered the age for first Communion to the age of reason (about seven years) and for easing the rules for the reception of Communion by the sick.

Unlike other modern popes who spent much of their prior ecclesiastical lives in high-level positions, Pius X (then Giuseppe Sarto) served 17 years in parish ministry, nine as a country curate and eight as a pastor, and then a stint as a seminary spiritual director, before being appointed bishop of the



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run-down diocese of Mantua in Italy. About ten years later he was named patriarch of Venice and a cardinal.

By all accounts, he was a thoroughly dedicated, hardworking pastor, totally committed to his priests and the laity's spiritual needs.

Upon the death of Pope Leo XIII, 10 years after his appointment to Venice, Cardinal Sarto attended the conclave in Rome to elect a successor. The early favorite was Leo's moderate secretary of state Cardinal Rampolla.

But like many early favorites in the history of papal elections, Rampolla entered the conclave a pope and came out a cardinal. The Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph submitted a veto of Rampolla, but it is debatable whether the

veto was decisive by itself. It also became obvious — as is almost always the case in papal elections — that the cardinals wanted someone different in style from the previous pope.

On the seventh ballot the choice fell to Cardinal Sarto. When he chose the name Pius out of respect for Pius IX (the longest reigning pope in history and one of the most conservative), he signaled the direction he would follow in his own pontificate.

He immediately selected an ultra-conservative Spanish cardinal, Merry del Val, as his secretary of state and gave him a mandate to insist on the church's rights everywhere.

The pope broke diplomatic relations with France, and then, against the advice of its bishops, denounced the Law of Separation. He also protested church-state arrangements in Portugal. He offended many U.S. citizens when, in 1910, he refused to receive ex-President Theodore Roosevelt following a lecture at a Methodist church in Rome. American Catholics were also troubled by the pope's evident suspicion of democracy and his apparent snubbing of the pastoral leader of the U.S. church, Archbishop John Ireland.

But the pope's reputation for intransigence was primarily earned, fairly or not, through the manner in which he dealt with many of the church's theologians, biblical scholars, historians, and philosophers.

He condemned progressive individuals and movements, on the one hand,

but tolerated and even promoted right-wing, monarchist movements like Action Francaise, on the other.

He viewed modern philosophical, theological, and biblical developments as dangerous to the faith, placing them all under a single umbrella known as Modernism.

In 1907 he issued a decree, *Lamentabili*; and an encyclical, *Pascendi*, that became the central documents of a new and often punitive anti-Modernist campaign in the church. To enforce his views, the pope established a secret network of informers whose reports on various scholars, especially seminary professors, led in many instances to their dismissal from their teaching positions.

Some Catholic historians today believe that the pope's actions and the anti-intellectual atmosphere he at least indirectly fostered in the church set back Catholic scholarship some 50 years — a decline not effectively reversed until the Second Vatican Council's opening in 1962.

Less than three months after his death, Pope St. Pius X's successor, Benedict XV, issued an encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi*, calling a halt to the spying, the backbiting, and the accusations so freely bandied about by ultraconservative groups.

Although a saint in his personal life, Pius X's style of governance was not emulated by his successor. It is a lesson that the papacy's history teaches over and over again.

The Christian should always ask, 'Is it right?'

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 12:49-53; (R1) Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; (R2) Hebrews 12:1-4.

One word that might sum up best the message in Sunday's readings is "division." Jeremiah caused division in Jerusalem, and our Lord said, "Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? I assure you, the contrary is true; I have come for division ..."

You may retort: "How come? I thought Christ was the Prince of Peace?" You're right, of course. Christ did come to bring peace. There are, however, two kinds of peace.

First, there is *inner peace*, or peace of heart: the contentment, the inner satisfaction, that comes from doing what is right. This peace Jesus promised to all His followers here and now on earth: "My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you."

Then there is a second kind of peace: *outer peace*, or societal peace: harmony with others, getting along with others. Jesus never promised this kind of peace.

Jesus never promised His followers



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freedom from conflict, trouble and tension. In fact, He promised the very opposite: "I have come for division." He was saying, in effect, that those who seek to follow Him seriously cannot avoid conflict, trouble and tension. Why? Because God said: "My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts."

Jesus has His standards, and the world has its standards. Jesus has His

cross, and the world has its conveniences. Jesus sees life as a stepping-stone to another life; the world sees life here and now as the sole reason for existence. A clash is inevitable.

This is why the world hates two kinds of people: the very bad and the very good. The world crucifies the very bad like the two thieves on the cross, because they disturb society's peace (outer peace). And the world crucifies the very good like Jesus between the thieves, because he disturbs one's peace of soul (inner peace). "Everyone who does wicked things hates the light."

While some youths fight with their parents over drugs, drink and pre-marital sex, some adults fight with the church over artificial contraception, abortion, euthanasia, and confession. Society attacks Christianity, because it wants to rebuild the tower of Babel, the secular city.

If you took a cold shower and plunged into a pool of cold water, your system would not be shocked. If you took a hot shower, however, and then plunged into a pool of cold water, you would be shocked.

Similarly, when the Christian tries to

live the faith, the contrast with those who are not living it is so marked, that it causes shock, opposition, sometimes persecution. "Because you are not of the world, the world hates you."

Former Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn used to say: "To get along, go along."

But Jesus espoused the very opposite: "I have come for division." That was the fire He came to ignite on earth. Peace at any price is cowardice. Peace through appeasement or compromise of the truth is to betray Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi renounced his father on earth for a Father in heaven. St. Clare gave up title, wealth and kinsmen to become the bride of Christ. St. Jane Frances de Chantal literally stepped over her son's body to enter religious life. St. Thomas More preferred the Tower of London and the executioner's ax to family, fame and fortune. St. Maria Goretti was stabbed to death because she refused to have sex with the young man.

What are we to do? Be faithful to Christ, no matter the cross, the opposition, the division. The crook asks, "Is it safe?" The politician, "Is it popular?" The Christian, "Is it right?"

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