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Executive Director NETWORK, Washington, DC

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—Terrence W. Tilley
Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., Chair in Catholic Theology,
Fordham University

“Faggioli has produced the first biography in English based largely on the recently completed edition of Roncalli’s extensive diaries. He is able therefore to trace the external events in Roncalli’s life in a newly reliable way but, more important, also to reveal the pope’s internal journey from a naive peasant boy into one of the world’s most respected and beloved leaders.”

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John XXIII

The Medicine of Mercy

Massimo Faggioli



LITURGICAL PRESS

Collegeville, Minnesota

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Cover design by Stefan Killen Design. Cover illustration by Philip Bannister.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2014930906

ISBN 978-0-8146-4951-0

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Abbreviations

- ASV Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Città del Vaticano: *Archivio della Delegazione Apostolica in Bulgaria* (32 folders), and *Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari* (AES), Bulgaria, Indice IV (periodo), 2 (23 folders).
- Il Giornale dell'Anima* *Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 1: Il Giornale dell'Anima: Soliloqui, note e diari spirituali.* By Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/Pope John XXIII. Edited by Alberto Melloni. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2003).
- Diaries 1905–1925* *Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 2: Nelle mani di Dio a servizio dell'uomo: I diari di don Roncalli, 1905–1925.* By Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/Pope John XXIII. Edited by Lucia Butturini. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le

scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII,
2008.)

Diaries Bulgaria
1925–1934

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 3: Tener da conto: Agendine di Bulgaria, 1925–1934. By Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/Pope John XXIII. Edited by Massimo Faggioli. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2008.)

Diaries Turkey–Greece
1935–1939

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 4.1: La mia vita in Oriente: Agende del delegato apostolico, 1935–1939. Edited by Valeria Martano. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2006.)

Diaries Turkey–Greece
1940–1944

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 4.2: La mia vita in Oriente: Agende del delegato apostolico, 1940–1944. Edited by Valeria Martano. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2008.)

Diaries France
1945–1948

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 5.1: Anni di Francia: Agende del nunzio, 1945–1948. Edited by Étienne Fouilloux. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le

scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII,
2004.)

Diaries France
1949–1953

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 5.2: Anni di Francia: Agende del nunzio, 1949–1953. Edited by Étienne Fouilloux. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2006.)

Diaries Venice
1953–1955

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 6.1: Pace e Vangelo: Agende del patriarca, 1953–1955. Edited by Enrico Galavotti. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2008.)

Diaries Venice
1956–1958

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 6.2: Pace e Vangelo: Agende del patriarca, 1956–1958. Edited by Enrico Galavotti. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2008.)

Diaries Pontificate
1958–1963

Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 7: Pater amabilis: Agende del pontefice, 1958–1963. Edited by Mauro Velati. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le

scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII,
2007. Pp. xxxvii, 569.)

History of Vatican II *History of Vatican II*, vols. 1–5, ed.
Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed.
Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll,
NY: Orbis, 1995–2006).

Predicazione a Istanbul Angelo G. Roncalli (Giovanni XXIII),
*La predicazione a Istanbul. Omelie,
discorsi e note pastorali (1935–1944)*,
ed. Alberto Melloni (Firenze: Olschki,
1993).

All the translations are the author's except where otherwise
indicated.

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of my long-lasting interest in John XXIII that took concrete shape in the year 2007–2008 for the edition of the “little notes” of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli in Bulgaria (1925–1934). The research was made possible by the release in September 2006 of documents of the Apostolic Delegation in Bulgaria in the Vatican Secret Archives.¹ The book was conceived during the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II and written in 2013, a year of particular importance for the Catholic Church. It completes and complements my research on the history and theology Vatican II as the key to understand the church of today.

This short biography of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/John XXIII owes much to the seminal work done by my mentors and colleagues at the Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII in Bologna, where I did research between 1996 and 2008. First of all, I want to recognize Giuseppe Alberigo (1926–2007) who introduced me to this field of

1. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/Pope John XXIII, *Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli–Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 3: Tener da conto: Agendine di Bulgaria, 1925–1934*. Ed. Massimo Faggioli (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2008).

study in his church history course at the University of Bologna in the academic year 1991–1992 and after that involved me with the team doing research for the five-volume *History of Vatican II* between 1995 and 2001. Others deserving recognition include Alberto Melloni, who has done seminal work on the papers of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, beginning in the 1980s with the first scholarly edition of the *Giornale dell'Anima*; Giuseppe Ruggieri for his groundbreaking reflections on the theology of Roncalli; Federico Ruozzi for the pioneering work of the video historical sources for the history of John XXIII and Vatican II; and Enrico Galavotti for his labor for the complete edition of the private diaries of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/John XXIII, accomplished in ten volumes between 2003 and 2008 thanks to the acrobatics of the editors of the other volumes, Lucia Butturini, Étienne Fouilloux, Mauro Velati, and to the editorial expertise of Gianstefano Riva and Paolo Albertazzi. This treasure of personal notes of the future pope of Vatican II (published in Italian and not translated into English, except for a previous edition of *Journal of a Soul*) are key to this book in the attempt to gather and translate the best of the scholarly works on Roncalli from the last three decades and to reinterpret John XXIII in the context of the Catholic Church fifty years after Vatican II.

The historical studies of these last three decades are crucial for understanding not just the life of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, but modern Catholicism in general, and especially the particular role of the papacy in the global church and in a global world. This scholarly research has resonated in a particular way in these last few months with the election of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013. For this reason this book is the fruit of personal encounters during this last unforgettable year, when I had several occasions to speak about

Vatican II and Pope John XXIII, in particular in a series of most enjoyable public events at various venues in New York City. Here I want to thank the friends and colleagues that made those events possible: Chris Bellitto, James McCartin, Sr. Simone Campbell, Drew Christiansen, SJ, David Gibson, Natalia Imperatori-Lee, and Terrence Tilley.

My “Jesuit connections” in America have been a large part of the work I managed to accomplish during my first six years in the United States. Thanks to John Baldovin, SJ, Daniel Madigan, SJ, James Martin, SJ, and David Schultenover, SJ, and especially to John O’Malley, SJ, and Mark Massa, SJ. Other colleagues are an essential part of this new conversation of which I have been a part since the summer of 2008, when I moved to America: Kevin Ahern, John Borelli, Thomas Cattoi, Kathleen Cummings, Robin Darling Young, E. J. Dionne Jr., Richard Gaillardetz, Patrick Hayes, Tom Heneghan, Cathleen Kaveny, Gerard Mannion, Tim Matovina, John McGreevy, Robert Orsi, Anthony Ruff, OSB, Maureen Sullivan, OP, and Terry Tilley.

Liturgical Press encouraged me to “seize the moment” in the spring of 2013; I thank Hans Christoffersen and Barry Hudock for their initiative and encouragement. I thank also the many good colleagues at the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, MN) in the theology department and my students who continue to be fundamental for my rediscovery of the relevance of key themes and figures in church history and in the history of theology.

This short biography is an opportunity, in light of the signs of our times, to better understand Roncalli’s life: missions, travels, contacts, spiritual life—which contributed to a turning point in the history of modern Catholicism. Much of that has to do with the fact that Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/John XXIII expanded the horizons of his worldview by

living almost thirty years outside of Italy in Bulgaria, Turkey, and France. Every biographical work is to some extent, consciously or unconsciously, also autobiographical. For this reason, this book is dedicated to my teachers and mentors in Ferrara, Bologna, at the Monastic Community of Bose, in Tübingen, Boston, and Washington, DC.

Minneapolis, January 25, 2014
Fifty-fifth Anniversary of the Calling of the
Second Vatican Council

Introduction

Making Popes Saints

The year 2014 marks an important date in the history of the Catholic Church and of the papacy with the canonization by Pope Francis of two of his closest predecessors on the chair of Peter: John XXIII (1958–1963) and John Paul II (1978–2005). John XXIII, the pope who called Vatican II in 1959, and John Paul II, who was a bishop at Vatican II, are proclaimed *saints* of the Catholic Church on the same day and during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Vatican II (2012–2015). For both popes, the final decision regarding their canonization follows what church historian Enrico Galavotti, in his masterful book on the Roncalli trial, called the “shadow canonization” effect¹—a canonization already sanctioned by the people, waiting for the decision of the Vatican “saint factory” in the Roman Curia.²

1. Enrico Galavotti, *Processo a papa Giovanni. La causa di canonizzazione di A.G. Roncalli (1965–2000)* (Bologna, Italy: il Mulino, 2005), 439.

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

2 *John XXIII*

As a Catholic and a historian, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli took seriously the role of the saints and popes, particularly the popes of modern church history who had been proclaimed saints, such as Pius X (canonized by Pius XII in 1954). Both Pius X and John XXIII belong to a sense of Catholicism that accepts the idea of a pope being proclaimed a saint, which has not always been typical of the Catholic Church. Paradoxically, it was only after the pontificate of Pius X, the pope who in 1907 launched the purge against theological “modernism,” that this modern phenomenon has become part of the theological and public understanding of the papacy.

At the end of 2013, 81 of the 263 predecessors of Pope Benedict XVI were regarded by the church as saints. Of these 81 popes, 47 of them were among the first 48 successors of Peter; half of these 47 “popes/saints” were martyrs and died before the year 500.³ The most recent popes to be canonized in the modern era before Pius X in 1954 were Pius V in 1712 and Gregory VII in 1726. After Gregory VII (1073–1085) and until the year 2000, only three popes were canonized (Celestine V, Pius V, and Pius X), and only eight have been beatified.⁴

The change in practice for canonization and beatification relates to the theological and cultural changes involving the Roman papacy—the “mystique of the papacy.”⁵ For almost

3. *Ibid.*, 281. Of the thirty-three popes after Peter considered “martyrs,” we now know most of them died natural deaths. See John O’Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham MD: Sheed and Ward, 2009) and Eamon Duffy, *Saints & Sinners. A History of the Popes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

4. For the process for Celestine V and Pius V, see Galavotti, *Processo a papa Giovanni*, 31.

5. Massimo Faggioli, “Something Lost . . . and Gained. The Mystique of the Papacy after Benedict’s Departure,” *The Tablet*, 2 (March 2013): 10–11.

every pope of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, starting with Pius IX, the process for beatification has been opened. The results have been diverse: Pius X was canonized in 1954 and Innocent XI (1676–1689) in 1956.⁶ During the last fourteen years alone three popes—Pius IX, John XXIII, and John Paul II—have been beatified (the first two in 2000, the third in 2011), and John XXIII and John Paul II were canonized by Pope Francis in 2014. For more than two centuries no pope was canonized; during the last fourteen years (2000–2014) there have been three beatifications of recent popes and two canonizations in 2014.⁷ The process of beatification has been opened for Pius XII, Paul VI, and John Paul I.⁸ For the first time in history, there was the beatification of a pope, John Paul II, by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, his immediate successor (and his theologian-in-chief in the Roman Curia for twenty-five years).

Almost twenty-five years ago in his description of the “saints-making machine,” Kenneth Woodward argued that papal causes present special problems. First, papal causes are only introduced by another pope. Second, the published

6. The process of beatification for Innocent was introduced in 1741 by Benedict XIV. The canonization of Innocent XI “savior of Christendom” by Pius XII in 1956 played a role in the Cold War era confrontation with Communism portrayed as the “new Islam.” See *Diaries Venice 1956–1958* (October 7, 1956), 224.

7. Beatification was once called “semicanonizatio,” the authorization of a cult at the local level, even if the distinction was clear already in the Middle Ages.

8. Pius XII’s cause of canonization was opened on November 18, 1965, by Paul VI. John Paul II opened the process for Paul VI in 1993 and for John Paul I in 2003. In the recent history of the papacy after Vatican I, among the last ten popes, only Leo XIII, Benedict XV, and Pius XI have so far been excluded from this process.

writings of a pope are not subject to the usual preliminary scrutiny by theological censors. Third, popes generate much more written material that postulators are expected to examine, but which they examine only in part—even in complicated cases like Pius XII’s. Fourth, “unlike most saints, popes tend to make many enemies. . . . Thus no papal cause, especially that of a controversial figure like John or Pius, is apt to move quickly as long as any of his opponents remain alive and influential in the church.” Fifth, “a pope must be judged not only on his personal holiness but also on his stewardship as supreme teacher and head of the church,” as the manual published by Benedict XIV (1740–1758), *De canonizatione sanctorum*, explained clearly.⁹

Woodward’s description of possible problems says much about Saint John XXIII. On October 28, 1963, at the Second Vatican Council, prominent cardinals such as Giacomo Lercaro, cardinal of Bologna, and Leo Jozef Suenens, cardinal of Mechelen-Bruxelles, famously proposed John XXIII, the pope who called Vatican II and who died during the first intersession of the council in June 1963, for an ancient “conciliar canonization.”¹⁰ But Paul VI waited two years, until November 18, 1965, before making public his decision to open a “normal” process of beatification for John XXIII together with the process for Pius XII. This decision tied

9. Woodward, *Making Saints*, 288. See also Miguel Gotor, *I beati del papa. Santità, Inquisizione e obbedienza in età moderna* (Florence, Italy: Olschki, 2002).

10. It is worth remembering that the speech of cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens was never included in the multivolume “corpus” of the official documents (*Acta Synodalia*) of Vatican II edited by Roman Curia officials. See Alberto Melloni, “La causa Roncalli: origini di un processo canonico,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, XVIII/3 (1997): 607–36; Galavotti, *Processo a papa Giovanni*, 58–77.

together at least three purposes: “a beatification by acclamation was avoided . . . John XXIII and Pius XII were associated as links in the Roman continuity . . . [and] the two popes were placed in the service of the post-conciliar period and of the *aggiornamento* as revised by Paul VI.”¹¹ Paul VI’s move “put a definitive end to the movement that took off right after John’s death for the council to canonize him by acclamation.”¹²

“They were using John [XXIII] to get at Pius [XII],” as Fr. Paolo Molinari, postulator to the cause of Pius XII, put it.¹³ But many believed that in the pairing of Pius XII and John XXIII, one would make impossible the canonization of the other. The paths of these two causes took different directions, despite the intention of Paul VI to tie them together, mostly due to the impact of the debate on the pontificate of Pius XII during World War II and his decision (made consciously) not to publicly denounce the Holocaust of the Jews carried out by the Nazis, with whom he had signed a concordat in Germany in 1933 as a papal nuncio.¹⁴ While the process for Pius XII stalled until very recently,¹⁵ the process for John XXIII advanced for many reasons. The collapse of Soviet communism in 1989–1991 put an end to

11. Christoph Theobald, “The Church under the Word of God,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. V: 362.

12. John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 283.

13. Woodward, *Making Saints*, 285.

14. Roberto Rusconi, *Santo Padre. La santità del papa da San Pietro a Giovanni Paolo II* (Rome: Viella, 2010), 496–530.

15. On December 19, 2009, Benedict XVI acknowledged the “heroic virtues” of Pius XII and declared him “venerable,” based on the recommendation of the committee. John Paul II was declared “venerable” on the same day.

the conspiracy-minded speculations about the communist sympathies of John XXIII for the Soviet Union. A second element was the impatience of John Paul II with the canonical procedures in general; a third element, especially important, was the development of the reception of Vatican II. During the pontificate of John Paul II, Vatican II rose to the status of a “providential event.” John Paul II, the last pope who had been a council father, defined Vatican II as a “compass” for the Catholic Church.

Making John XXIII a Saint

It is important to examine the canonization of John XXIII, the pope who convened Vatican II, in the context of the church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. On the one hand, the canonization became part of the debate on Vatican II, and it survived the attempt of some in the church to minimize Vatican II and to indict the pope who called it.¹⁶ On the other hand, the canonization of the pope of *aggiornamento* could not count on a powerful religious order (such as Opus Dei for Escrivà de Balaguer, who was beatified in 1992 and proclaimed saint in 2002), nor on a new Catholic movement for the beginning of the process (such as the Focolare Movement for John Paul II), nor on a coherent Curia group of insiders (such as the archconservative milieu around Msgr. Piolanti and the Pontifical Lateran University for Pius IX).¹⁷ After the worldwide broadcasted stunt of the *Santo subito!* banner in

16. Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).

17. See Galavotti, *Processo a papa Giovanni*, 425–29. The process for Pius IX’s beatification was begun on February 11, 1907, and recommenced three times.

St. Peter's Square immediately after John Paul II's death, the process for him followed a normal path but with an accelerated pace;¹⁸ nevertheless, Benedict XVI did not choose to promote the canonization of his predecessor *ex certa scientia*, which is exactly what Pope Francis decided to do for John XXIII with his decision announced on July 5, 2013.

Within the context of these new trends, the canonization of a pope is an eminent act of church politics (and not only for the Catholic Church if we think about the canonization in the year 2000 by the Orthodox Church of the Romanov family, killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918), more than the beatification or canonization of "normal" saints.¹⁹ The double beatification of Pius IX and John XXIII in 2000 was undoubtedly aimed at balancing different interpretations of the relationship between Vatican II and the change in the church during the twentieth century. It took ninety-three years to beatify Pius IX, thirty-five for John XXIII, and only six for John Paul II. It took longer for John XXIII, despite the fact that many council fathers wanted to canonize him at Vatican II following an ancient procedure.

The beatification and canonization of a pope by another pope is the ultimate phase in a long history of the centralization of the politics of sainthood in Rome. It is the final moment of a history that began in the eleventh century from a situation in which the consensus of locally elected bishops was necessary for establishing the sainthood of a pope, to the situation of today where the consensus of the pope is the only necessary element for making both bishops and

18. But not as fast as other processes, like St. Anthony of Padua (canonized in 1232 less than a year after his death) and St. Francis of Assisi (canonized 18 months after his death).

19. See Woodward, *Making Saints*, 280.

saints.²⁰ With the joint canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II in 2014, Pope Francis elevated two of his close predecessors. One of the challenges for Catholicism is to reconcile this tendency of proclaiming popes saints with Pope Francis's clear view of the papacy as a humble ministry serving the church. But it is also clear that the pair of John XXIII and John Paul II canonized by Pope Francis is significantly different from the pair of John XXIII and Pius IX beatified in 2000 by John Paul II—and much different from the other pair in the pipeline of the “saint factory” in the early 2000s, John XXIII and Pius XII.

In the spring of 2011, when Benedict XVI announced the beatification of John Paul II, the journal *Foreign Policy* published an article on the miracle required for a beatification, with the subtitle “Some Theology, a Little Science, and a Whole Lot of Politics.”²¹ This is true for many popes who were proclaimed saints. Since early church history, the saint-hood of the pope became a necessary requisite for the new “legal” understanding of the see of Rome in light of the principle *prima sedes a nemine iudicatur* (nobody can judge the see of Rome): “If the bishop of Rome was exempted from every kind of ecclesiastical judgment it was at least possible to conclude that he could not sin, or at least not seriously, and that he had received, along with his office, the promise that he would remain holy.”²²

20. See Rusconi, *Santo Padre*, 40.

21. Joshua E. Keating, “How Does the Vatican Decide What’s a Miracle?” *Foreign Policy* (January 14, 2011), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/14/how_does_the_vatican_decide_what_s_a_miracle.

22. Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy. From Its Origins to the Present* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 88.

The situation of John XXIII is different from any other pope beatified and canonized: “The fame of sanctity of Roncalli resembles that of Wojtyła for its timeliness, but not for its content.”²³ The fame of sainthood of John XXIII has always been universal and global, in the Catholic Church as well as in cultural and spiritual milieus very distant from the official Catholic one. This is not because John XXIII was the first pope of television. German-American and Jewish political thinker Hannah Arendt saw in John XXIII the realization of the possibility of “a Christian pope”—a pope whose faith witness was more important than the monarchical-imperial elements of the papal *aura*.²⁴ The Italian writer, filmmaker, and public intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini (arguably

23. Alberto Melloni, *Papa Giovanni. Un cristiano e il suo concilio* (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 2009), 8.

24. Hannah Arendt, “The Christian Pope,” *New York Review of Books* (June 17, 1965), a review article of *The Journal of a Soul* (translated by Dorothy White and published in English by McGraw-Hill, 1965): “For pages and pages it [*The Journal of a Soul*] reads like an elementary textbook on how to be good and to avoid evil. And yet in its own strange and unfamiliar way, it succeeds in giving a clear answer to two questions [that] were in the minds of many people when, two years ago, ‘Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli who took the name of John XXIII’ lay dying. They were very simply and unequivocally brought to my own attention by a Roman chambermaid: ‘Madam,’ she said, ‘this Pope was a real Christian. How could that be? And how could it happen that a true Christian would sit on St. Peter’s chair? Didn’t he first have to be appointed Bishop, and Archbishop, and Cardinal, until he finally was elected to be Pope? Had nobody been aware of who he was?’ Well, the answer to the last of her three questions seems to be ‘No.’” Arendt’s essay was republished in Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968, 57–69) and recently as a book in Italian with the title *Il papa cristiano. Umanità e fede in Giovanni XXIII* (Bologna, Italy: EDB, 2013).

the last non-Catholic prophetic voice in contemporary Italy) dedicated his movie *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) “to the dear, joyous, familiar memory of Pope John XXIII” who had died a few months before.²⁵

The fame of sainthood for John XXIII has not been damaged these last fifty years because more is known about him than any other pope in church history. Through his private journal, which has been used for this biographical study, the daily life path of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli/John XXIII has been rebuilt with a degree of accuracy and depth that is not available for any other pope.²⁶

25. About Pasolini and John XXIII, see “Marxismo e Cristianesimo,” lecture given by Pasolini in Brescia on December 13, 1964, published in *L'Eco di Brescia*, December 18, 1964, and recently in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e la società*, Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, eds. (Milan, Italy: Mondadori, 1999), 787–824: “John XXIII performed the highly democratic act chuckling at the thought of himself in authority. . . . John XXIII accomplished, in his short pontificate, a profound revolution in the Church” (795).

26. Giuseppe Alberigo, “Roncalli ‘privato’?” *Revisitare Giovanni XXIII*, Enrico Galavotti, ed., *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, XXV/2 (2004): 457–79.

CHAPTER ONE

The Young Angelo Giuseppe

(1881–1904)

Young Catholic in a Young Italy

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was born on November 25, 1881, in the village of Sotto il Monte (literally “under the mountain”), which is ten miles from Bergamo and thirty-five miles northeast of Milan, in Northern Italy. He was the fourth of thirteen children with an extended family of more than thirty members. He was baptized the day of his birth by the village pastor, Don Francesco Rebuzzini, whose sudden death Angelo Giuseppe would witness in 1898, when he was a seventeen-year-old seminarian.

Angelo Giuseppe’s family shaped his spiritual habits, and he stayed in close touch with them his whole life. His parents, Giovanni Battista and Marianna Mazzola, were married in 1877. They lived a very frugal life, sometimes close to poverty, as was typical of peasants working the land owned by somebody else—in their case the rich Morlani family from Bergamo. Angelo’s father was a *mezzadro*, a

sharecropper, and the land worked by the Roncalli family was not very productive: polenta and soup were on the family's table more often than bread, bread being the food for more affluent people in Italy at that time.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli belonged to the first generation of Italians born in the new Kingdom of Italy, which was unified by the dynasty of Savoy (formerly ruling from Turin over the kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia) during a five-decades-long series of wars of independence called the "Risorgimento"—the resurgence of the Italian nation after centuries of domination by other European powers and the papacy. The new Kingdom of Italy, proclaimed in 1861, conquered its new capital, Rome, in 1870 during the celebration of the (first) Vatican Council under Pius IX. This new Italy was being built at the expense of the Papal States of the last "Pope King" Pius IX and at the expense (financially, politically, and culturally) of the Catholic Church. From 1870 until 1929, all the popes saw themselves as "prisoners in the Vatican"—deprived of their sovereignty as a political entity. The new Regno d'Italia "secularized," that is, incorporated, many properties of the church and banned the teaching of theology from state universities (the only ones existing on Italian soil). Until the beginning of the twentieth century, popes and bishops did not acknowledge the moral and legal legitimacy of the new state.¹

Bergamo was in the region of Lombardia, one of the so-called "white regions" of Italy, where Catholicism had been particularly shaped by the Council of Trent since the time of Saint Charles Borromeo (1538–1584, archbishop of Milan 1560–1584). Catholicism in Bergamo also was

1. Giovanni Miccoli, *Tra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione* (Casale Monferrato, Italy: Marietti, 1985).

shaped by a committed “social Catholicism” made of workers unions, Catholic credit banks, and the first Catholic-democratic politicians in an Italy run by secularist and anticlerical politicians. Milan was considered the “second Catholic capital” of Italy and was a proud example of an intellectual approach to religion and the church—certainly not less intellectual than the Rome of the popes. It was the center of the beginning of a new Italy and also for the relationship between the central Catholic Church in Rome and the rest of Italy. Catholicism was still pondering the effects of the Vatican Council (1869–1870), but Catholics in Italy were not the reactionaries and “ultramontanists” the Vatican wanted them to be; they were cautiously opening up to modern times and its challenges. It was during this time when many Italians (196,000 in the year 1888 alone) migrated abroad (many to the United States) looking for work.

“I Am Far from Being an Angel”

Roncalli was in touch with this devout and traditional practice of Catholicism. At the same time, he was well-read and influenced by his great-uncle Zaverio Roncalli (brother of his grandfather), from whom he received the first elements of a traditional Christian education. Catholicism in the Roncalli family was solid and conventional, in a country and region where everybody was a “cradle Catholic” and religious diversity was not part of the landscape. It was Angelo Giuseppe’s experience of the world wars that exposed him to people of other faiths, such as non-Catholic Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

In 1889 Angelino was confirmed in the Church of Carvico and then admitted to Holy Communion. Between 1887 and 1890 he received his first education in grade school, and in

1890–91 Fr. Pietro Bolis, parish priest of Carvico, gave him classes in Latin and Italian. He studied in Celana in a school founded by St. Charles Borromeo, the model saint of Catholicism post-Council of Trent, who was canonized in 1610.

In 1892, at age eleven, Angelo Giuseppe entered the seminary (*seminario minore*), and in 1895 the *seminario maggiore*. In 1895 he received the clerical habit, and between 1898 and 1899 the minor orders. For the Roncalli family, sending Angelo Giuseppe to the seminary was possible only through two benefactors who helped pay tuition, the canon Giovanni Morlani and Fr. Francesco Rebuzzini. Roncalli always remembered the financial difficulties of his family without romanticizing poverty and with no sense of shame or guilt. Poverty was a gate for better understanding God in his life—a life that might have been planned differently in a family with more financial resources.

Gaetano Guindani, bishop of Bergamo from 1879 until his death in 1904, was the first bishop Angelo Giuseppe met. Roncalli's aspiration in life was to be a pastor in the church, and Guindani was the first in a series of important episcopal figures in the career of the future John XXIII. Guindani's consecrator in 1873 had been Geremia Bonomelli, bishop of Cremona, one of the most important church leaders in Italian "social Catholicism" at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1893 Guindani published a commentary on Leo XIII's social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), causing some uproar among the priests of his diocese for the "social views" of their bishop.²

2. See Giorgio Vecchio, "I vescovi lombardi e l'enciclica *Rerum Novarum*," *I tempi della "Rerum Novarum"*, Gabriele de Rosa, ed. (Rome/Soveria Mannelli: Istituto Luigi Sturzo—Rubbettino, 2002), 412.

The first years of Angelo Giuseppe's formation took the form of rules to be scrupulously observed—daily guidelines for the nourishment of the soul and the avoidance of sins and vices to which the young seminarian saw himself inclined. At the end of 1895, at the age of fourteen, he began to write *Il Giornale dell'Anima* (Journal of a Soul), a journal that he kept his entire life. It took different forms—a spiritual journal; entries from retreats and spiritual exercises; and day-by-day notes of appointments, meetings, and remarkable events of the day. The first few years of his spiritual notes included ongoing comments about the poor quality of his Christian character, based on no particular reason but just a fundamental feeling of inadequacy compared to the high standards set by the saints of the Catholic tradition and especially of the Counter-Reformation.

On the first page of *Il Giornale dell'Anima*, Roncalli included part of a canon of the decree of reformation from Session XXII of the Council of Trent. It was about the life of priests and their need to control their lives and customs “in order to conform their dress, gestures, gait, and conversation” to the standards of a life shaped by religion. Roncalli built his life around three foci: “devotion, study, and discipline” and wrote his “rules for life, to be observed by youth willing to be proficient on the way of piety and the studies.”³ They included the following:

- fifteen minutes of “mental prayer” upon waking and one hour of spiritual reading in the evening (from Scripture, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales, and others) every day;

3. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell'Anima*, 24.

- confession and Eucharist every week, with fasting every Friday and Saturday;
- choosing a patron saint and one day of a special retreat every month;
- general confession and spiritual exercises once every year, paying attention to staying away from temptations encountered while on vacation;
- deepening the virtues of charity, purity, chastity, humility, and avoiding improper familiarity of any kind with women “of any condition, age, and degree of relationship.”⁴

The seminary young Roncalli attended was separated from the world in order to ensure that the cultural and moral formation of a cleric was different from lay persons outside the seminary. The use of dialect was forbidden; gambling, games, or theater were not allowed; reading of “good literature” was encouraged to avoid the temptations coming from poetry; and spiritual life was punctuated by prayer and devotions. The closest example for young seminarians was St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–1591), a model of purity and devotion to the Virgin Mary.⁵

Roncalli found his times of vacation from the seminary particularly full of temptations. In 1895 he wrote “Method of Life for My Vacations,” building for himself a very tight schedule of prayer, meditations, study, liturgies, and examinations of conscience—and staying clear of populated

4. *Ibid.*, 4 (spiritual notes for 1895). See also Alberto Melloni, *Papa Giovanni. Un cristiano e il suo concilio* (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 2009), 49–79.

5. Maurilio Guasco, *Storia del clero in Italia dall’Ottocento a oggi* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 1997), 64–155.

places and public squares, instead choosing for his walks less populated places.⁶

The rules for the formation of his habits and mentality came from a Jesuitical model, very common to seminary education in the nineteenth century. This would gradually shape the whole structure of *Il Giornale dell'Anima* from 1896 on, when “Ad majorem Dei gloriam” appeared as a recurrent theme in the headings or in the body of the spiritual annotations. The sources for the spiritual and theological formation of Roncalli were Tertullian, Thomas à Kempis, St. John Vianney, Teresa of Ávila, Robert Bellarmine, Francis de Sales, and Francis of Assisi. The most important book for Roncalli was the *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis: this was a key source for the *ressourcement* of Roncalli's theology because it allowed him to go back to the sources of the Christian spiritual tradition beyond the “Tridentine paradigm” ruling modern Catholicism until Vatican II.⁷

As a teenager, Roncalli aimed at spiritual perfection with remarkable seriousness. His name called him to be like “an angel”: “I am a cleric, therefore I have to be with God like an angel. . . . But what a shame for me, always to be called an angel, to have to behave like an angel, without ever having been really an angel. My name *Angelo* must be for me an encouragement to be really an angel cleric . . . because actually I am far from being an angel.”⁸

6. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell'Anima*, 21–24 (spiritual notes for 1895).

7. Giuseppe Alberigo, *Dalla laguna al Tevere. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli da San Marco a San Pietro* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000), 19–20. Roncalli read particularly book III of the *Imitatio*, focused on the themes of peace and grace.

8. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell'Anima*, 44 (spiritual notes for 1898).

In April 1898, at the end of Holy Week, Roncalli still saw himself far from the ideal model of a priest and of a Christian set by the seminary education. His private journal makes evident a sequence of self-accusations of not being pious enough, humble enough: “The Holy Week has passed, vacations have gone, and I, instead of improving myself, kept going backwards. Is that possible, after all the promises I had made? . . . My Jesus, mercy! I do not know how to explain this.”⁹ The biggest temptation for Roncalli’s moral rectitude was the time of vacation, far from the tight schedule of the seminary and influence of peers and seminary directors. Roncalli knew that sometimes seminary gossip exaggerated minor things, but even in those cases, young Angelo accepted the rebuke as grounded in something he had done wrong, if not in practice, in his heart: “My superiors heard things about me, that I think were exaggerated about the pride I showed during my vacations, and for that I was scolded. I had to humiliate myself without need, but in the end, there is something to that. . . . I have to prepare myself better for those damn holidays” (*maledette vacanze*).¹⁰

Young Roncalli’s life was divided between the seminary in the urban setting of Bergamo and his home village of Sotto il Monte. Attending school sometimes meant walking for much of the day to cover the ten miles from Sotto il Monte to Bergamo.¹¹ In November 1898, Roncalli returned to the seminary from the summer break and began his theological formation. Slowly his responsibilities in the life of the seminary grew: he became “prefect” (assistant) of one of the classes of the “ginnasio” (ninth grade). But that did

9. *Ibid.*, 49 (April 22, 1898).

10. *Ibid.*, 53 (June 5, 1898).

11. *Ibid.*, 86 (November 3, 1898).

not improve Roncalli's opinion of himself or his perception that others thought of him as naïve and gullible. He took this as one more reason to work on his humility: "I only have reasons to rejoice [of my reputation as a naïve and gullible person] because this way my pride gets even more humiliated—not unlike, although in a very distant and unworthy way, the treatment Jesus received."¹²

The year 1900 was a year of jubilee, a "holy year" for the Catholic Church. In September, nineteen-year-old Angelo Giuseppe traveled to Rome, Loreto, and Assisi on a pilgrimage. (He repeated the same itinerary sixty-two years later, a few days before the opening of Vatican II.) A few months before his pilgrimage, he made a solemn promise to the Sacred Heart of Jesus under the auspices of St. Aloysius Gonzaga: "I promise, with solemnity and strength, that this act can keep myself pure, today and forever, from any attachment to any voluntary venial sin, thanks to God's grace."¹³ Later that year Roncalli recorded in his journal the "rules" of St. Francis de Sales and put them in practice at the age of twenty while studying law at the University of Padua: "against pride, for a more orderly way to interact with other persons; modesty and civility without being austere and melancholic; friend of all and intimate with few; discretion." Roncalli described a different attitude toward sin and the failure to be at the level of ideal standards: "With those sad and melancholic people, who like to show their flaws, I'll be watchful and I will say nothing, because these people would be able to talk for ten years and more even on the slightest imperfection. And then, what purpose is

12. *Ibid.*, 92 (April 16, 1899).

13. *Ibid.*, 109 (February 27, 1900).

served by the disclosure of the faults we commit? Are they not visible enough? Do not they show by themselves?”¹⁴

A Lombard Studying in Rome (1901–1904)

Early in the morning on January 4, 1901, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli arrived in Rome to continue his seminary formation. He lived in the Seminario Romano, thanks to a scholarship from the Fondazione Canonico Flaminio Cerasola, a Catholic foundation from Bergamo that ran a college in Rome connected with the Seminario Romano. Two other seminarians from Bergamo went to Rome with him. Roncalli was chosen as the best among the brightest seminarians from Bergamo. He stayed in Rome until the end of 1904, except from the end of 1901 until the end of 1902 because of his military service in Bergamo, which was an experience that opened his eyes to the world outside of the seminary.¹⁵

Roncalli studied theology at the Seminario Romano, not a field considered “high profile” from an academic standpoint, but nevertheless representing a wave of new cultural inputs for the young student from a small village. During this time Roncalli experienced Rome as the capital of Italy and the Rome of the Catholic Church. He had been in Rome only once, the year before in September 1900, for a diocesan pilgrimage. At the time, Rome was still considered the capital of a nation that according to the reactionary Catholic propaganda “robbed” the papacy of the Papal States. Church and Italy were far from reconciled; they coexisted in a relationship marked by cautious and undeclared cultural and

14. *Ibid.*, 110 (spiritual notes for 1900).

15. Until the year 1929 there was no concordat between Italy and the Holy See, and therefore seminarians had to serve in the military.

political negotiation. The nationalist sentiments of the new Italy and the bitter resentment of many bishops and priests required adjustments after centuries of a “nationless” Italy dominated by the popes and foreign powers.

Rome changed Angelo Giuseppe’s daily routine, and his spiritual and intellectual life evolved. By April 1901 he felt that Rome was also about “acquiring good scholarship, in order to earn souls for Christ through this route that has now become most important.”¹⁶ Roncalli received his degree in theology in June 1901, during the time when Rome was part of the beginning of a new relationship between theology and science—one that Leo XIII had criticized in 1902 and was harshly repressed by Pius X in the antimodernist purge in 1907. Roncalli was in touch with those intellectuals and teachers, but as a student it was from a distance.¹⁷ When John XXIII was elected pope in 1958, some tried to paint him with the heretical “modernist” brush by recirculating critiques of modernism from 1907–8, but to no avail. Although these accusations may have damaged his career as a young scholar and priest working in Catholic institutions in Rome, they would not have that same effect on him decades later.

The visible change in Angelo Giuseppe’s approach to his spiritual life happened when he first met with the spiritual director of Seminario Romano, the Liguorian Francesco Pitocchi (1852–1922). He wrote, “December 19, 1902: *God is everything: I am nothing*. And that is all for today.”¹⁸ That counterpoint to Teresa of Ávila’s famous “*solo Dios basta*”

16. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 126 (April 28, 1901).

17. Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII. Pope of the Century* (London/New York: Continuum, 1984), 20.

18. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 141 (December 16, 1902).

(in Italian he wrote instead “e per oggi basta”) marked the end of the spiritual hyper-perfectionism typical of the early years of Roncalli in the seminary in Bergamo. Almost paradoxically, the usual perception of Rome as guilt-inducing for Catholics was for Roncalli the beginning of a journey toward a more reconciled view of himself and his moral life in relation to God. A few days later he wrote, “In me God is everything and I am nothing. I am a sinner and much more miserable than I can imagine. If I had done something good in my life it was all the work of God, that would produce the best results if I had not hindered and prevented. . . . The rule must be the object of all my care, not only the rule in general, but each and every rule in particular. . . . *I should not want to be what I am not, but I should be very good at what I am*—so says my St. Francis de Sales.”¹⁹

In Rome, Roncalli began not only his theological studies but also the development of his spiritual life: “I will start again as if thus far I had done nothing, nothing.”²⁰ This was the beginning of a key idea for Roncalli, later John XXIII: renewal as *aggiornamento*—“the past is no longer an oppressive mortgage on our today.”²¹ For Roncalli this was a critical reexamination of his past spiritual practices: “I am convinced the idea of sainthood that I applied to myself was false. I always asked myself, ‘In this instance, what would St. Louis do and not do, or would he do this or that?’ I could never achieve what I had imagined I could do, and I became anxious. It is a wrong system. From the virtues of the saints

19. *Ibid.*, 144–45 (December 20, 1902; emphasis mine).

20. *Ibid.*, 162 (January 19, 1903).

21. Alberto Melloni, *Il “Giornale dell’anima” di Giovanni XXIII* (Milan, Italy: Jaca Book, 2000), 88.

I must take the substance and not the details.”²² Roncalli began to reject a “one-size-fits-all” idea of sainthood.

The difference between the substance and the details (*la sostanza e gli accidenti*) became crucial in Roncalli’s understanding of the nature of his spiritual life and also of the life of the church in general. The same thing happened in his intellectual approach to theology and the beginning of his interest in history. His professor of church history, Umberto Benigni (who later, from 1907 on, became the most inflexible of the antimodernist persecutors during the pontificate of Pius X) told students: “Do not read much, but read well.” Roncalli was part of that Catholic world that, even in the closely watched institutions of higher education for church officials in Rome, received important intellectual contributions from eminent academics (such as Louis Duchesne and Henri Denifle), representatives of the incipient historical-critical approach to Catholic theology and church history.²³ Those were the very same years—immediately after the condemnation of theological Americanism by Leo XIII in 1899—when Italian Catholicism was looking with curiosity at American Catholicism and at important episcopal figures in the United States, including James Gibbons, John Ireland, and John Lancaster Spalding (who delivered an important lecture in Rome in the spring of 1900 on education and cultural renewal in the church).²⁴ Roncalli would have liked

22. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 159–60 (January 16, 1903).

23. Stefano Trinchese, *Roncalli “storico.” L’interesse per la storia nella formazione e negli studi di papa Giovanni XXIII (1905–1958)* (Chieti, Italy: Solfanelli, 1988).

24. Daniela Saresella, *Cattolicesimo italiano e sfida americana* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001); Ornella Confessore, *L’americanismo cattolico in Italia* (Rome: Studium, 1984).

to have the opportunity to go deeper in his studies, but his superiors at the Seminario Romano “did not allow that.”²⁵ Nevertheless, Roncalli studied Spalding with particular interest.²⁶

Young Angelo Giuseppe witnessed church history happening in Rome on February 20, 1903, when the church celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the pontificate of Leo XIII (then ninety-three years old). The seminarian from Bergamo went to St. Peter’s Square and celebrated the event with poetic words about the Holy Father, but at the same time looked to a future when friends and enemies of the church “would embrace as brothers in front of the throne not of a sovereign but of a Father.”²⁷ It was an announcement of Roncalli’s interpretation of episcopal ministry: being a father. It also applied to the bishop of Rome who had been deprived of his temporal power only a few years before.

For the young Catholic Roncalli, Rome was really the center of the world. Between the twenty-fifth anniversary of Leo XIII and the death of the pope on July 20, 1903, Roncalli saw visits to the Vatican by Edward VII, king and emperor of the United Kingdom (who was on his way to India) and the visit of Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany. In August 1903, Pius X was elected by the conclave; Roncalli had seen him celebrate Mass in Bergamo in August 1898. It was the beginning of a difficult period for the church with theologians and scholars repressed by the institution for their historical-critical approach to theology. Roncalli was

25. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 132 (December 1902).

26. Lucia Butturini, “Tradizione e rinnovamento nelle riflessioni del giovane Roncalli,” in *Un cristiano sul trono di Pietro. Studi storici su Giovanni XXIII*, Fondazione per le scienze religiose di Bologna, ed. (Gorle, Italy: Servitium, 2003) 13–70.

27. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 169.

aware of that, and tried to mediate between his intellectual curiosity and his solid formation:

I will always investigate the sacred sciences. In matters theological or biblical, I will investigate first the traditional doctrine of the church, and based on that, I will judge the latest science. I do not disregard the critical approach, and I will stay away from thinking ominously or disrespectfully of the critical approach. I indeed love the critical studies: I will follow with passion the latest results of its investigations; I will make myself aware of new systems in its incessant developments; I will study its trends. Critical approach is for me light and truth, and the truth is holy and one. However I will endeavor always to bring to these discussions a great moderation, harmony, balance, and serenity of judgment, not separated by a prudent and circumspect mindedness. In points that are in doubt, I will choose to be silent as if I were ignorant instead of venturing into propositions differing from the right thinking of the church. I will never be surprised about anything, although certain conclusions, though still intact in the sacred deposit of faith, were to be a little surprising. Surprise is the daughter of ignorance mostly. In fact I will take consolation from the fact that God has prepared everything to make more clear and more pure the sacred treasure of his revelation. In general my rule will be to listen to everything and everyone, thinking and studying much, and being slow to judge: do not gossip, do not make noise, and keep an eye on the thinking of the church without ever moving an iota of distance from her.²⁸

Although surrounded by the clerical culture of Italian Catholicism between the end of the nineteenth and beginning

28. *Ibid.*, 211–12 (December 9–18, 1903).

of the twentieth centuries—what historian of clerical culture Maurilio Guasco called “a spirituality of submission”²⁹—Roncalli was already looking at the role of critical knowledge in its relationship to the tradition of the church as a key element to his pastoral call. In December 1903, Roncalli received the ordination to deacon, and on August 10, 1904, he became a priest. In his notes during his retreat to prepare for ordination, Roncalli wondered what he would become: “What will become of me in the future? Will I become a good theologian, a jurist, a country priest, a bishop, a cardinal, a diplomat, a pope, or a simple poor priest? Should that all matter to me? I must be none of this and even more than that, following the divine provisions. My God is everything: *Deus meus est omnia*. The good Jesus will send up in smoke my ideals of ambition and reputation before the world.”³⁰

The beginning of Roncalli’s life as a priest coincided with a delicate moment in the history of Italian Catholicism. In July 1904 Roncalli received his doctorate in theology. The proctor for his written exam was Eugenio Pacelli, future Pius XII; the one who would make him cardinal fifty years later, would be his predecessor on the chair of Peter. A few weeks later, in August 1904, he was ordained priest in the Church of Santa Maria in Monte Santo, in Piazza del Popolo in Rome. But 1904 was important for Italian Catholicism for other reasons, too. The Vatican put an end to the important experiences of “social action” of Italian lay Catholics organized in the “Opera dei Congressi”—an active and effective organization especially in the part of Italy from where Roncalli came. The year 1904 meant the beginning of more strict control by the Vatican on the initiatives of

29. Guasco, *Storia del clero in Italia*, 152–55.

30. Roncalli, *Il Giornale dell’Anima*, 227 (August 1–10, 1904).

Italian Catholics, especially related to social and political action. This would have an impact on Roncalli in the next few years in his role as secretary of the new bishop of Bergamo. The new pontificate of Pius X meant a significant restriction in the academic freedom of theologians, seminarians, clergy, and laity. The period was marked by the antimodernist “purge” inaugurated by the “syllabus” of 1907, the letter *Lamentabili*, which was expanded a couple of months later (September 1907) by the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*.³¹

31. Claus Arnold and Giovanni Vian, eds. *La condanna del modernismo: documenti, interpretazioni, conseguenze* (Rome: Viella, 2010); Guido Verucci, *L'eresia del Novecento: la Chiesa e la repressione del modernismo in Italia* (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 2010).