

St Pius V:

"I have been called to serve the Church, not to have the Church serve me."

"I am far from denying," wrote John Henry Newman, "that St. Pius was stern and severe. Yet such energy and vigor as his was necessary for his times. He was emphatically a soldier of Christ in a time of insurrection and rebellion, when, in a spiritual sense, martial law was proclaimed." Newman's comment helps to situate the labors of Pius V, who came to the papal office in 1566. By the time he arrived at the papacy, many reform initiatives had begun to transform the Church, from John Colet and his circle in England, to Catherine of Genoa and the Oratories of Divine Love, to the founding of the Jesuits and the Theatines, to the renewal of the Franciscans in the Capuchin order, to the apostolic ministry of Philip Neri in Rome. These were only the best known among many expressions of renewed life and fervor working their way in the Church. But if the Church as a whole was to be realigned to the Gospel, that reforming spirit needed to reach the head—a renewed Church demanded a transformed papacy.

The iniquities of the Renaissance popes have become a regular item in the litany of the sins of the Catholic Church. But in the exaggerated propaganda that has swirled around their names, the true nature of the disease that afflicted them is often not perceived. The trouble with these popes was not that they behaved worse than other men of authority around them - kings and princes and dukes. It was rather that they behaved no better. They who were meant to act above the world had fallen into the easy and obvious but devastatingly destructive sin of becoming very much like the world. They were salt that had lost its savor.

The most infamous among them, Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, pope 1492-1503), was a strong-minded ruler, a charming personality, an able and intelligent administrator, a patron of the arts, and a skilled diplomat. He also spent most of his energies increasing his wealth and power and that of his family, he fathered many illegitimate children whom he openly promoted, and he cared nothing for Church reform. Which is to say, he handled himself like the majority of his contemporaries.

His successor, Julius II (Giuliano della Rovere, pope 1503-13), was a masterful personality who established the Papal States on a firm political and economic basis. He courageously led his armies into battle, patronized great artists like Raphael and Michelangelo, set the foundation stone for St. Peter's Basilica, and cared enough about the state of the Church to convoke the reforming Lateran Council. He also fathered three illegitimate children, engaged in political intrigue

against his enemies the Borgias, and embroiled the papacy in a political struggle for the control of northern Italy.

His successor, Leo X (Giovanni de Medici, pope 1513-21), was the son of the Florentine ruler Lorenzo the Magnificent. Made bishop at eight, cardinal at thirteen, and pope at thirty-eight, he has been credited with the line: "Let us enjoy the Papacy, since God has given it to us." Whether or not he actually said this, it is a good description of his attitude. He was an amiable man who enjoyed seeing those around him having a pleasant time. Pampered and extravagant, he sponsored lavish entertainments and revelries of all kinds, bankrupting the papal finances. At the same time, he was personally pious and morally upright, a great patron of the arts, and generous in his gifts to the poor.

After the brief interlude of the reforming papacy of Adrian VI, another Medici, Leo's cousin Clement VII (1523-34), followed in the papal office. Clement was an intelligent man of irreproachable personal life, but ineffectual as a pope. He suffered the calamity of Rome's sack in 1527, and he did little to reform the Church or alter the lines of papal policy.

His successor, Paul III (1534-49) from the powerful Farnese family, was an active and energetic ruler who struggled successfully to convoke the Council of Trent, and who brought to Rome many talented and reform-minded cardinals. He also fathered illegitimate children whom he enriched and promoted through papal influence, and he raised two of his nephews, one fourteen and the other sixteen, to the cardinalate.

He was succeeded by Julius III (Giammaria Ciocchi del Monte, pope 1550-1555), who has sometimes been called the last of the Renaissance popes. Julius was a well-meaning but insipid character who found the ecclesiastical and political challenges of his office more than he could handle. He managed to convoke the second session of the Council of Trent, but he spent most of his time being entertained in his luxurious villa, and his papacy was ineffectual and dogged by scandal.

None of these figures would find a secure place in a gallery of the world's great villains. They seem typical rulers of their time, with a mixture of abilities and faults that one might expect from men of their background and their experience. 1 Set against many of their contemporaries, they would compare favorably enough. It could then be asked, why have they been handled so harshly by so many, and further, why was the papacy of their day so difficult to reform? There is a spiritual

principle at work here that can help to explain both the need and the greatness of Pius V.

Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. (Lk 10:13-15)

When Jesus pronounced these harsh words over the sleepy fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee, he must have startled his hearers. Their sins could hardly have been as great as those of the great pagan cities further north. Jesus later elucidated the principle that he was applying: "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required" (Lk 12:48). The cities of Tyre and Sidon had not been given the grace of the constant presence of Christ among them, so their sin was less grave. God judges on a curve.

In the old Latin adage, *corruptio optimi pessima*: the corruption of the best is the worst. When a man acts like an irrational beast, he is much worse than the beast because he has willfully turned from the possibility of being much better. When in Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* Sebastian Flyte indignantly tells his unbelieving friend Charles that Catholics can be much wickedder than other people, he is invoking the same principle. Since there is more grace in the revelation given through the Catholic Church, those who turn from that grace have fallen further than others, whom they may apparently resemble but who haven't had access to the same grace. A similar idea is behind St. Alphonsus Ligouri's claim that while the renewal of faith among the laity can be reasonably hoped for, when a priest has fallen into tepidity and worldliness it requires a special miracle of God to bring him back.

This principle helps to explain why it can be so difficult to reform a Christian institution such as a religious order, or a Catholic school, or, in this case, the papacy. When a Catholic institution loses its distinctive Christian character and becomes worldly, it may come to look like the world, but it is in fact much worse than the world; there has been a special intransigence involved, a determined resistance to grace. When a pope behaves like a typical Italian prince of the Renaissance period, he has fallen far below those of Italian princes; he has somehow managed to turn away from the potent graces of his office. If that kind of resistance to grace becomes entrenched over time and incarnates itself institutionally as a web of worldly habits, customs, and expectations, the process of

reform becomes a more than simply human task. We are told by Jesus that there is a kind of demon that can only be overcome by prayer and fasting. It was that kind of darkness that was afflicting the popes of the sixteenth century; and it took the prayer and fasting of Pius V to set the papacy back on its true course.

Pius as a Dominican Friar Antonio Ghislieri (later Pope Pius V) was born in 1504 to a family from northern Italy whose roots were in the upper classes, but who had been reduced to poverty. Antonio had an early desire to be a priest, but his family had no resources and no special connections by which to set him on that path. Yet he was an intelligent and hard-working boy, and at the age of twelve he caught the eye of a local patron who arranged for him to do some preliminary studies. His progress was impressive, and two years later he became a novice of the Dominicans, taking the Archangel Michael as his patron and assuming his name.

By the age of twenty he had gained the status of master of theology. At twenty-four he was ordained to the priesthood, and for the next sixteen years he taught theology and philosophy at the University of Pavia. He was a rigorous but fair teacher, and his reputation for intelligence and faithfulness to the Dominican ideal led to his being tapped for various offices in the order. He served as master of novices and was prior of more than one Dominican house. His personal life was characterized by long hours of prayer and a strict ascetic regimen. He was a sought-after spiritual director.

Northern Italy, with its many great cities - Milan, Venice, Genoa, and Florence, to name only the most prominent - was among the wealthiest and most populous areas of Europe, rivaled only by the region of the Low Countries at the mouth of the Rhine. With its rich cultural traditions and its bustling commerce, it was an area of great strategic importance in the intensifying European battle for political supremacy. Both the Kingdom of France and the Hapsburg power seated in Spain and the Empire had their eyes on it, and much of the papal politics of the time involved playing those great powers against one another in an attempt to forge a Rome-led Italian power bloc. When Charles VIII led a French army over the Alps in 1494, he inaugurated a decades-long period of warfare and unrest in the north of Italy that left much of the area in turmoil and ruin. At the same time, Switzerland had seen an outbreak of Protestant ideas, first in Zurich and then yet more potently in Calvin's Geneva. Those reforming currents were making their way down the alpine valleys into the north Italian cities and countryside. Northern Italy was a combat zone of ideas as well as of armies.

Michele Ghislieri thus grew up and was formed in his priestly and Dominican character during a time and in a place of serious disorder. Both by temperament and by experience, he came to think that the prime need of his day was the restoration of fundamental Christian order in both the ecclesiastical and temporal realms. Upon being ordained in 1528, he went to his home village to celebrate his first Mass, and there he found his parish church burned to the ground and his home half destroyed by the same imperial troops that had sacked the city of Rome a year earlier. His teaching at the University of Pavia had brought him face to face with currents of thought making their way south from Protestant Switzerland. He was well aware of the rampant disorders of his time, and he came to see his God-given vocation as attending to those disorders, and working to re-establish the foundations of Catholic faith and life.

Ghislieri's road to the papacy was not an obvious one. Unlike his predecessors for close to a century, he did not come from a powerful family whose interests might help place him on the papal throne. He had no desire for the office, nor for any of the trappings that came with an ecclesiastical career. He lived as a poor Dominican friar, strictly adhering to his rule, and he cared little where his labors might lead him. At the age of forty, he was called from his professorial duties to the post of inquisitor for 1 the troubled northern Italian region of Como. His combination of zeal for the Faith, intelligence, administrative acumen, and scrupulous attention to justice, along with a detachment from 1 personal motives, made him a highly effective inquisitor. It was thus no surprise that he ran into stiff opposition and was forced to leave the city for his own safety. His response was undaunted and characteristic: "Nothing can be too severe for those who attempt to hinder the ministers of religion in their rightful duties by means of the civil power."

Ghislieri's efforts and talent had not gone unnoticed, and, in 1551, under Julius III, he was brought to Rome and given the post of general inquisitor. When Cardinal Carafa, who had been his sponsor under Julius's pontificate, became Pope Paul IV in 1555, he not only confirmed Ghislieri in his office, but he made him first a bishop, then a cardinal, and then general inquisitor of all Christendom, a newly created post. The reforming policies of Paul IV generally meshed well with the concerns of his inquisitor; but it is a sign of the independence of Ghislieri's mind that he was willing to run afoul even of the pope when justice demanded it. On one occasion he found himself in trouble, berated and railed at by Paul IV in front of the whole papal court for his defense of the archbishop of Toledo, whom he thought innocent, but whom the pope for personal reasons wanted to have prosecuted. In his anger at being thwarted, the pope went so far as to call his inquisitor a Lutheran - surely the only person ever to use that adjective about him.

Ghislieri took the criticism mildly, and the incident had no effect on his behavior; he continued to insist on justice. The next pope, Pius IV, was less favorably inclined to Ghislieri, especially after he was personally rebuked by his inquisitor for making his thirteen-year old nephew a cardinal and supporting him from papal funds. But Pius's more discerning nephew, Borromeo, saw the worth and the wisdom of the strong-minded cardinal and arranged for him to remain in Rome. When Pius IV died and a new conclave gathered to elect his successor in 1566, no one had Michele Ghislieri in mind for the office, least of all himself. He was already beginning to suffer from the disease that would eventually take his life. He had powerful family interests that might put him forward to further their own aims.

He had never courted popularity, either w the Roman Curia or with heads of state who at the time h significant sway in papal elections. True enough, he was widely respected as a man of holiness and integrity, but he was also widely feared as a man with strong and (to some) unpalatable convictions concerning church reform. A man who would play no favorites and who was impossible to bribe did not seem a promising candidate for those who hoped to bend papal influence to their wishes. Ghislieri was not the first choice of the electors, nor the second. But as the conclave went on and no candidate was able to gain the requisite number of votes, Borromeo took things in hand and put Ghislieri forward as the right choice. The conclave then elected him, with what one can only imagine was a collective gulp. His first act in office was to dismiss the papal court jester. As the Venetian ambassador said of him, "He is no laughing matter."

Pius as Pope: The Roman populace was at first ambivalent about their new pope. They knew of his strictness in judicial matters, his concern for doctrinal and moral purity, and the rigor of his personal life. They had recently lived through the reforming papacy of Paul IV, and the memory was bitter. But they soon began to understand that an entirely different sort of man was on the throne of Peter. Pius lived in the papal palace with all the simplicity of a poor friar. He diminished the expenses of the court and gave the money away in alms. He used his own finances to ransom Christian captives from the Ottomans. He reformed the court system, insisting on quick justice especially for the poor. He spent much of his day available to all comers, listening to their concerns and complaints and giving judgment. He built schools and rebuilt churches. He passed laws that demanded reverence in church and that removed prostitutes from the public spaces of the city.

He improved the drinking water of Rome and tried to clean up the Tiber. Most tellingly, he would be found walking the streets of Rome barefoot in procession, carrying a large crucifix and interceding for Rome and its inhabitants, and word

began to go around the city of his constant fasting and his long hours of prayer. Austerity mingled with pride and an autocratic spirit, as in Paul IV, was a hard taskmaster; but the restoration of order accompanied by kindness and evident concern for souls has its own deep attraction. It did not take long for the Romans to realize that they had a saint for a pope; and as the Milanese had done with Borromeo, after initial misgivings, they soon took him to their hearts.

In attempting to understand the character and policies of Pius V, the image of martial law again comes to mind. The Spanish ambassador wrote of him: "One thing only he has at heart, the salvation of souls. This is what determines his entire policy; on this he bases every service and reckons the value of every institution and act." Pius was convinced that the Church had come to a crisis point and that the time was past for compromise and equivocation. The disease was rampant, the patient was ailing and in serious danger, and clear and decisive remedies were necessary for the renewal of health and life. A tourniquet is not a comfortable device, but it does have the advantage of saving a life that would otherwise bleed to death. Pius applied a kind of tourniquet to stanch the gaping wounds of the Church. He initiated or supported an astonishing array of reform activities in many different spheres. It can be convenient to gather them into three main areas. One had to do with improving the general state of Catholic belief and practice, especially among Church leaders; the second looked to stem the continuing advance of Protestantism; and the third dealt with the growing Ottoman threat to Europe's survival.

As to the internal state of the Church: Previous decades had seen the arrival and growth of promising new centers of Church reform. But the task was only begun, and the reform was at a delicate stage. The Council of Trent had completed its work, but there was no guarantee that its pronouncements would be anything more than an impressive set of empty words. Pius made it his goal to see that the provisions of the council took root in the practice of the Church. He saw to the completion and publishing of the Catholic Catechism, a project on which Borromeo had spent long hours. He arranged for a new Roman Breviary, and he regularized the Roman rite of the Mass. Where possible, he appointed cardinals and bishops by merit rather than by familial or regional patronage. During his six years as pope, he appointed over three hundred carefully chosen bishops. He then expected those bishops to reside in their dioceses, and he removed them if they delayed or refused. He insisted that priests wear clerical garb. He fought hard against the principle of commendam, by which the benefice of a monastery would be held by an absent layman. He attempted to root out the practice of buying church offices. When it was pointed out that all of this rigorous reform would

result in a significant loss of papal revenue, he said that he preferred poverty to corruption. He reformed religious houses and made praying the Divine Office in those houses obligatory, even for the Jesuits. He insisted that cardinals live more modestly. To strengthen the clarity of Church teaching, he saw to the publication of the complete works of Thomas Aquinas and arranged to have Aquinas taught in seminaries. What made Pius so different from many of his predecessors was that he not only spoke about reform, but he was tireless and reasonably effective in getting reform measures put into practice.

When it came to confronting the Protestant challenge, Pius was no less energetic. By the 1560s, Protestantism was advancing on many fronts. Northern Germany was largely Lutheran, as was Scandinavia. There were significant Protestant gains among the Dutch and the Swiss. England under Elizabeth was reverting to Protestantism, France was in turmoil, and there were inroads into Poland. In the sixteenth century, dealing with faith meant dealing with temporal rulers; it was impossible for a religious body to survive without at least the tacit consent of the secular power. The attempt to oppose the new Protestant movement thus necessarily involved Pius in negotiations with many of Europe's heads of state. As he attempted to restore European order, he invoked a long-standing, if increasingly fragile, tradition concerning the relations between the spiritual and temporal authorities. He expected Catholic monarchs to embrace the duty of putting down heresy in their dominions and had little room for attempted compromises, which he thought at this late date to be concessions to division and defeat. He famously excommunicated England's Queen Elizabeth; he ran afoul of Queen Catherine of France by insisting on removing eight French bishops for heresy; he wrangled with Emperor Maximilian in Germany and with King Sigismund in Poland. Always insisting on clarity of policy, he was inexorable in his claims upon them. The results that he achieved in this arena were, predictably, mixed. Poland and parts of Germany, along with the north of Italy, were largely secured for Catholicism under his efforts. Results in France were more ambivalent, and in England things quickly came to a point of crisis.

Pius is perhaps best known to history for his role in confronting the Ottoman Empire. From the time of their conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans had been expanding in strength and in territory and like a slowly rising tide were overtaking much of the Mediterranean world. Byzantium had been the great buffer to Turkish expansion, and with its fall, there seemed to be a growing inevitability in the Ottoman occupation of Europe. Region after region fell like dominoes to the Turks. Much of Serbia was taken soon after Constantinople's fall; three years later Athens fell along with most of Greece. In 1463, Bosnia fell. In 1480 Mehmet III

attacked Italy, hoping to conquer Rome and set himself up as the ruler of a newly united Roman Empire. He took the city of Otranto but was unable to hold onto it. In 1499 Venice was attacked, and most of Venice's possessions along the Adriatic coast were taken. Then in 1520, Suleiman "the Magnificent" came to the Turkish throne and set out on a new wave of expansion. Belgrade fell in 1521, the island of Rhodes in 1522, and, in 1526 at the decisive battle of Mohacs, most of Hungary was taken. Three years later Suleiman led a huge army into Austria and laid siege to Vienna. Had he been able to conquer that city, the whole of the Danube valley would have lain like an open road for him into the heart of Europe. The Viennese were able to hold out, and Suleiman was forced to return home; but the Ottoman wave had only been slowed, not turned back. In 1538 most of the navy of Charles V was destroyed by an Ottoman fleet. In 1541 the cities of Buda and Pest in Hungary fell to the Ottomans. During this time the whole of the coast of North Africa became Ottoman, from where attacks began to be launched on the Spanish and Italian coasts. In 1560 the Ottomans again won a significant naval battle against the Christians. In 1565 the Turks laid siege to the highly strategic island of Malta; they were repulsed by the heroic defense of the Knights of St. John. Then in 1570 they landed a large force on Cyprus in an attempt to take it from the Venetians.

Meanwhile, as the Turkish threat grew ever greater, the Christian princes were fighting among themselves and could formulate no concerted effort for the defense of Europe. Pius recognized that unless some kind of united front could be achieved, the Ottomans would defeat the Christian powers piecemeal and thus conquer the whole of Europe. He organized a coalition that he named the Holy League, made up of most of the Italian states - Venice, Genoa, Naples, Tuscany, Savoy, the Papal States - along with Spain. After immense efforts in negotiation, he was able to put a Christian fleet into action under the command of Don John of Austria. By the time the Christian army settled their differences and sought action, it was too late to save Cyprus, which was now fallen to Turkish forces. The Ottoman fleet, of some 230 ships, was at large, seeking to gain control of the entire Mediterranean. A Turkish victory would have been a disastrous blow and would have put all of Italy immediately in peril of invasion. The two navies met in a furious battle at Lepanto, and there the Turks suffered an overwhelming defeat: their fleet was destroyed and many of their troops were taken captive. The story goes that late in the afternoon on the day of the battle, Pius was looking over accounts with the papal treasurer. He suddenly jumped up from his desk and went to an eastern-facing window. He then turned around with a light in his eyes and said, "The Christian fleet is victorious!" It was two weeks before the victory could be confirmed by couriers. The victory at Lepanto was not the end of the Ottoman

threat to Europe, but it was the end of their inevitable expansion. The onrush had been halted; the rising tide had been contained. A century-long standoff followed between the Christians and the Turks, after which Europe grew steadily stronger and the Ottomans steadily weaker.

It would be too much to say that Pius V was successful in all his efforts at reform, or that seen from hindsight all his policies gained their objectives. But his efforts had accomplished a great deal. The necessary remedies had been applied, and the wounds of the Church had been attended to. From that point on, those who sought reform had the backing of the highest authorities in the Church. Perhaps most importantly, Pius had given to the papacy a new character and a renewed moral prestige, always the Church's greatest source of influence. After Pius, a pope might still be less than a saint, but he could no longer confidently carry himself like a worldly prince. That persistent demon had been exorcised.

It can be instructive to set side by side the papacies of these two reforming popes, Paul IV (Carafa), pope from 1555 to 1559, and Pius V (Ghislieri), pope from 1566 to 1572. Both were courageous and strong-willed men of faith. Both held clear views about the need for Church reform and were ready to put those views into practice. Yet the results of their reforming activity differed greatly. Granting the difficulty of reading the inner motivations of others, especially from a distance of time, still it seems that there was one great difference between them. Paul IV, while promoting many good causes and putting down many abuses, was often imperiously proud; Pius V, though capable of stern justice and sometimes lacking in charm, was always unfailingly humble.

This contrast between the two can be seen in any number of instances. Pius V pursued reform by implementing the Council of Trent, putting into place what he himself had not originated. Paul IV wanted nothing to do with reconvening the council; he preferred to work through papal decree. He was confident in his own powers of implementing change, and he had no interest in the diplomacy and the communal effort a council would demand. Pius kept his family far from his papacy; he allowed only one relative to take a curial post, and even then only when it was clear that he was well-qualified and of sincere faith. Paul promoted his family interests by making two of his nephew's cardinals, and their behavior so scandalized the city that he was forced to banish them from Rome. Pius's policies toward heads of state were founded on settled and consistent principles. Paul's politics, notably his hatred for the house of Habsburg, seemed driven more by personal animosity. Pius held a certain balance in his reforms, such that even those who opposed him could see the point in them. Paul tended to an unbalanced rigor

in his activity, such that even those who agreed with him found him overbearing. The response of the Roman populace at the death of these two popes was telling. When it became clear that Paul IV was close to death, the city erupted and many of the citizenry began rioting; they cut the head off of Paul's statue and threw it into the Tiber. When Pius was close to death, the city became quiet and people came to St. Peter's to pray. Significantly, there was no statue of him anywhere in the city; he had prohibited it when the idea had been proposed. At the death of Paul IV, the Romans rejoiced as if freed from someone they considered a tyrant. In losing Pius V, the Romans mourned as those who had lost a father.

The lives and ministries of Pius V and Charles Borromeo point to a spiritual principle of great importance for the renewal of the Church. The Church is unlike any other power or institution in the world as regards the source of her life and continuance in history. This world's kingdoms and powers are ultimately founded upon and sustained by force: by political and economic strength. The Church, though resembling other institutions in her outward appearance, goes forward under an entirely different dynamism. Her existence is founded on invisible sources of strength, and the paradox of her being is that she gains by losing and rises by falling. Pius and Borromeo were influential over the hearts of those around them precisely because they did not seek that influence by worldly means. They were obeyed and honored because they paid no attention to their personal dignity. They were able to influence men of worldly wealth and power because they so evidently cared nothing for worldly wealth or power. John Henry Newman has cogently expressed this principle of Church life:

So is it with the Church of Christ. If she were to seek power, wealth, and honor, this were to fall from grace; but it is not less true that she will have them, though she seeks them not, or, rather, if she seeks them not. For when men see disinterested goodness, and holiness which has no selfish aims, and conscientiousness which is strictly bound by a sense of duty, and faith which sacrifices this world for the next, they cannot help giving to those who display these excellences that which such persons are content to lose, and for which they ask not—credit and influence. He who withdraws himself, is courted; he who solicits favor, is disdained...

The Saints live in sackcloth, and they are buried in silk and jewels. The Church refuses the gifts of this world, but these gifts come to her unbidden. Power, and influence, and credit, and authority, and wealth flow into her, because she does not ask for them: she has, because she does not seek: but let her seek them, and she loses them. She cannot help the accumulation of worldly goods, except by seeking

them, except by showing anxiety about them. Men aim at robbing her of them, when they see that she prizes them. They envy her them, when she makes much of them. They grudge her them, and stint her of them, when they see that her ministers squander them on themselves, on their own persons, on their families, their relations, and their dependents; when they convert them into private property, and desecrate them, and leave them away by will for purposes not religious....
We rise by self-abasement.