

The Unknown Pope

Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace

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Contents

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Introduction

1 From Genoa to Rome

2 Bologna

3 Pope

4 Benedict, the war and Italy

5 Humanitarian relief and peace diplomacy

6 Peace and its problems

7 Benedict XV and Italy, 1918–1922

8 Benedict XV, the Church and the world

Epilogue

Bibliography

Index

List of Illustrations

1. The Della Chiesa family in 1862.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
2. Giacomo and family in 1902.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
3. Gioacchino Pecci, Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903).
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
4. Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, Secretary of State to Leo XIII and Giacomo's mentor.
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
5. Giuseppe Sarto, Pope Pius X (1903–1914).
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
6. Cardinal Raphael Merry Del Val, Secretary of State to Pius X.
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
7. Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, Secretary of State to Benedict XV and Pius XI (from 1922 to 1930).
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
8. The consecration of Giacomo Della Chiesa as bishop in the Sistine Chapel, 1907.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
9. Archbishop Della Chiesa visiting a mountain parish, 1908.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
10. The coronation of Benedict XV in the Sistine Chapel, 6 September 1914.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
11. French prisoners of war brought to Switzerland by Benedict XV.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
12. British prisoners of war brought to Switzerland by Benedict XV.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
13. Benedict XV in his study in the Vatican.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.
14. The French diplomatic delegation in the Vatican for the canonization of Joan of Arc in 1921.
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
15. Benedict XV on his deathbed, January 1922; his friend Carlo Monti is on his knees, his head turned towards the camera.
By kind permission of Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
16. The tomb of Benedict XV in the crypt of St Peter's Basilica.
Courtesy of the Della Chiesa family archive.

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Sutton-in-the-Is
June 19

To the memory of Peter Hebblethwaite,
vaticanista straordinario

Introduction

On 3 September 1914, Cardinal Giacomo Della Chiesa, Archbishop of Bologna, was elected Pope. When the American Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, arrived at the Vatican and was told the news he is reported to have said of Della Chiesa ‘Who’s he?’¹ His ignorance can be excused, as can that of the Romans, who were equally puzzled at the announcement of the name of Della Chiesa. Giacomo Della Chiesa was not a very well-known figure outside of his Bolognese exile, and had been a cardinal for only four months. He became a world figure during his pontificate, 1914 to 1922, when he attracted hostility from both sides as a result of his efforts to bring the First World War to an end, and gratitude from some of the many people, military and civilian, who were helped by his humanitarian activities.

His reputation was to suffer further misfortunes after his death. Indeed he faded into almost complete obscurity, perhaps on account of the shortness of his reign – only seven years and five months in all. Peter Hebblethwaite describes him as ‘... the most invisible and unappreciated pope this century’.² Fernand Hay ward wrote a biography of him entitled *Un Pape méconnu: Benoît XV*, ‘The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV’. By the Second World War he had become largely forgotten. In dictionaries and encyclopedias which deal with religious and ecclesiastical matters, he has attracted scant attention – *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, for example, devotes only twenty lines to him³ and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* less than two pages: Popes Pius X, Pius XI and Pius XII all get more coverage.⁴ Curiously, he is immortalized in the pages of a novel – Anthony Burgess’ *Earthly Powers*.⁵ In Italian, there is only one serious, full-length biography of Benedict, written by Vistalli, and that was published in 1929; admittedly, since then, some useful biographical essays have been published.⁶ He has fared better in English: in 1959 Fr Walter Peters wrote *The Life of Benedict XV*. This is a very serious and scholarly study which should be read by anyone interested in the story of Giacomo Della Chiesa. But it suffers from a major defect, the author’s limited knowledge of the contexts in which Benedict operated, in particular the Italian political one. It has also, inevitably, become outdated with the passage of time and the opening up of various private and public archives. Those of the Vatican are now open to the end of Benedict’s reign and it has also been possible to consult the Della Chiesa family archives and the archives of the archiepiscopal curia in Bologna. In addition, biographers now have available to them both the letters of Benedict to his friend Valfré di Bonzo and to his vicar-general in Bologna, Ersilio Menzani. Most important and most precious of all are the diaries of Baron Carlo Monti, life-long friend and the intermediary between Benedict and the Italian government for the whole of his reign.

In this book I have tried to go beyond the limitations of Peters, setting Giacomo Della Chiesa firmly in the appropriate historical contexts. I have used both the primary source material now available and the many books which have been based on it: the works on his peace diplomacy are especially numerous, as the Bibliography shows. One of the strengths of Peters’ account of Benedict is the wealth of personal detail and anecdote that he manages to weave into it: I have chosen not to reproduce most of that in order to preserve space for other matters. It is for the reader to judge the merits of my approach.

Just about the only thing for which Benedict XV is remembered is his ‘Peace Note’ of August 1914 in which he offered the warring powers proposals to bring about the cessation of hostilities. The Peace Note was, in fact, only one, albeit the most important and dramatic, of many, many initiatives which

Benedict and his Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, took either to stop the conflagration from spreading or to bring the First World War to an end. In a broader sense, Benedict's whole pontificate was dedicated to the pursuit of peace as he saw it: peace among the nations of Europe; peace in human society torn by class conflict and ideological clashes, and peace in the Church after the excesses of the anti-Modernist campaigns of his predecessor, Pius X. He had only limited success in his efforts, but he deserves to be remembered in history for the noble project to which he committed himself and his pontificate.

Notes and references

1. Moynihan, p. 329.
2. Hebblethwaite, p. 105.
3. Cross (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 156.
4. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. II, BAA-CAM, pp. 279–80.
5. Burgess, p. 199: 'Pope Benedict XV, that great pacifist prelate to whom neither the Germans nor the Allies would listen, Giacomo Della Chiesa, James of the Church, lawyer and diplomat, hopeless with money, his prodigality of aid to the needy having put the Vatican in debt, he had died and been succeeded by Pius XI ...'
6. For instance, G. De Rosa in *Dizionario degli Italiani (Bellucci-Beregand)* and Monticone in Guerriero and Zambarbieri (eds), *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XXII, I: in French there is Jankowiak entry for Benedict in P. Levillain (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la Papauté* and in English the essay on Benedict in Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century*.

From Genoa to Rome

Benedict XV, Giacomo Della Chiesa, is one of the odd men out among twentieth-century Popes. Unlike five of the seven Italian Popes this century – Pius X, Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul I – Benedict XV was not born and brought up in the classic Catholic milieu, that is among the rural middle/lower middle class or peasantry of north-eastern Italy, Lombardy and Venetia. Rather, like Pius XII, he came from an urban, and in his case, aristocratic, family. And the particular urban milieu into which he was born, Genoa, was not an especially Catholic city, unlike the Lombard towns of Brescia and Bergamo or the Venetian cities, Padua and Treviso. A great port city, with a proud past as an independent republic until 1799, Genoa was a radical, tumultuous place and was most notable as the home of the explorer Christopher Columbus and the birthplace of Giuseppe Mazzini, the ideologist and leader of the Italian democratic nationalist movement.

Giacomo Giambattista Della Chiesa, to give him his full name, was born prematurely on 21 November 1854, the sixth child of his parents (two of his siblings died in infancy), the Marchesi Giuseppe and Giovanna Della Chiesa. The family formed part of the Genoese patriciate; its name and coat of arms were inscribed in the Golden Book of the former Republic, and it had achieved particular prominence in public life in the sixteenth century. His mother's family, the Migliorati of Naples, was also aristocratic, and had already provided a Pope – Innocent VII – whose reign was, however, brief and undistinguished (1404–06). By the 1850s, the Della Chiesa family was no longer as wealthy as they had once been, forcing them to live in what one of his earliest biographers, Vistalli, has described as 'a modest, bourgeois house' in Genoa,¹ though retaining the family property in Pegli, a village which is now a suburb of Genoa itself. Moreover, as Giacomo was to acknowledge when he became Pope, he would not have been able to continue his education without the support of relatives. According to Count Carlo Sforza, a contemporary Italian politician who knew him well:

The Della Chiasas were relatively poor, while Durazzo Pallavicini was the wealthiest patrician of Genoa. When after the University, young Giacomo wanted to enter the Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici ... his rich cousin Durazzo assumed the quit considerable expense involved. Thus when Durazzo led a delegation of Genoese to greet the new Pope, and addressed Benedict with the words 'Your Holiness ...', The Pope answered: 'You call me Holiness! Why, we are old cousins and we always were.' And addressing the kneeling deputation, he said: 'Gentlemen, if I am Pope you have among you the one who made it possible; is my cousin who paid for my studies.'²

It was a loving family atmosphere in which Giacomo was raised, even if his father appears to have been a little cold and distant in his relations with his children. On the other hand, Giacomo was close to his mother, his sister Giulia and his brothers Giovanni Antonio and Giambattista ('Baccino') and remained so throughout his life.

The smallness and physical frailty consequent upon Giacomo's premature birth, which also left him with a limp, meant that much of his early education was at home. In 1866 he entered the Istituto Danovaro e Giusso, one of the best academies that the Ligurian city could provide. Here he met and made friends with Pietro Ansaldo, a scion of the noted Genoese steel manufacturing firm, and Carlo Monti. Giacomo seems to have maintained these and other friendships, like the one with Teodoro Valfré di Bonzo, throughout his life: another friend from his adolescence was Giuseppe Migone, whose son Giuseppe would eventually become Giacomo's chaplain and secretary as Archbishop of

Bologna. Yet in his childhood and teens Giacomo was not notably garrulous – he actually spent much time reading – nor did his physique encourage sporting activity. And into his adult life, Giacomo retained a certain reticence of manner. Francis MacNutt, a rich American convert and a high-ranking lay member of the papal court in the reigns of Leo XIII and Pius X, wrote of Giacomo thus: ‘He was never confidential with me and I did not feel that I knew him after twenty years much better than I did after one.’³ Giacomo was clearly a successful, though not especially exceptional, pupil. His exercise books, preserved in the Della Chiesa family archive, demonstrate interest, diligence and competence in a diverse range of subjects – from ecclesiastical history to mathematics, French composition to German grammar.⁴ What also emerges from these sources, and from the accounts which he kept meticulously from the age of nineteen, is a neat, ordered and tidy mind and the development of his characteristically neat, consistent handwriting.⁵

If Giacomo’s studiousness emerged at an early age, so too did his vocation to the priesthood: his interest in the Mass and ‘preaching’ are described in picturesque detail by Walter Peters.⁶ His piety, which was founded on his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, not to mention to the Madonna della Guardia, the form under which Our Lady was locally honoured in Genoa and district, emerged early. Very quickly, Giacomo decided he wanted to be a priest and he came under the influence of the writings of Cardinal Alimonda, Archbishop of Genoa, and that of his own uncle, who became his chief spiritual guide.⁷ His was an obviously Catholic home⁸ and it must have felt a serious conflict of loyalties on the question of Church–State relations. On the one hand, his father had the natural loyalty of a Genoese aristocrat who had been in the service of the Savoyard royal family which, in the person of Victor Emmanuel II, came to the throne of the united Italian kingdom in 1861; on the other, there was the problem that this same monarch progressively ‘despoiled’ the Papacy of its temporal power, that is to say its territorial sovereignty over the Papal States of Central Italy, as the process of Italian unification proceeded between 1859 and 1870. This Church–State conflict, the ‘Roman Question’ as it is called, was one of the dominant factors in Italian politics until 1929. How that conflict resolved itself for the elders of the Della Chiesa family is not clear, but all of Giacomo’s earlier biographers stress his passionate commitment to the papal cause from an early age.⁹

Graduation from high school precipitated a family crisis: Giacomo wanted to proceed immediately to the diocesan seminary to train as a priest. His father resolutely opposed this on the grounds that he might not yet know his own mind and that everyone, including a priest, should have a university degree in the new secular society in which they were living. Only when he had successfully completed his university studies, the Marchese argued, should he dedicate himself to priestly training. This was a sensible strategy given the modesty of the family means (the family possessed little in the way of landed property at that time) and the number of siblings to be provided for. Both his brothers, Giovanni Antonio and Baccino, took up a secular profession – the navy. Giacomo accepted reluctantly but by way of compromise was allowed to study scholastic philosophy and apologetics as a lay student at the diocesan seminary while also studying at university.

University was a challenge for Giacomo, not because of the intellectual demands it made on him, rather because of its strongly anti-clerical atmosphere. When he entered the Royal University of Genoa in 1872, like the other academic institutions in the kingdom, it had already been strongly secularized. Italy’s Liberal-Conservative ruling class, aided and abetted by more radical parliamentary elements, having confiscated much church property, and reduced the powers and privileges of the Church and its influence in politics, now sought to eliminate its influences from the educational system as well. A year after Giacomo’s admission, they finally abolished the faculties of theology in state universities.¹⁰ Giacomo quickly showed where his loyalties lay by entering the ‘Society for the

Promotion of Catholic Interests' and eventually becoming its secretary. In this he was swimming against the tide: most of his fellow students, all from aristocratic or upper middle-class families, adopted a secularist, sceptical and sometimes strongly anti-clerical attitude. When Giacomo graduated from the University of Genoa in 1875 with a doctorate of laws (*dottore di giurisprudenza*), his father agreed to his pursuit of an ecclesiastical career. But the Marchese's ambitions for his son would not countenance sending him to the diocesan seminary: Giacomo had to go to Rome, to the Collegio Capranica and the Gregorian University, which the Marchese believed would permit a more rapid career development than staying at home. Time proved his judgement to be sound.

Rome

When Giacomo arrived in 1875, Rome was a difficult place for an aspiring cleric to live in. Five years after the occupation of Rome by Italian forces, following the capture of the city by Italian troops in September 1870, and its proclamation as the capital of Italy, the Eternal City was undergoing massive changes. The Quirinale Palace, formerly the Pope's chief residence, was now the official seat of the Italian monarchy and Pius IX had retreated to the Vatican, whose 'prisoner' he declared himself to be. Other ecclesiastical properties had been secularized too, including the Jesuits' Collegio Romano which had become the National Library. An array of new, monumental edifices were going up to accommodate the state bureaucracy and demonstrate its authority to the world, and whole new residential quarters were being built to house the bureaucrats. In 1871, the Italian Parliament had passed the Law of Papal Guarantees as a means of regularizing relations between Italy and the Holy See on a unilateral basis, because Pius IX was not prepared to negotiate. The Law of Guarantees was not a bad law; it established the immunities and privileges of the Pope as a sovereign, and gave extra-territorial status to the Vatican and the papal villa at Castelgandolfo.¹¹ But Pius IX refused to accept the Law, and tension remained between the Vatican and the 'usurping' government in Rome, sometimes flaring up into serious anticlerical outbursts, like the brawl which accompanied the transportation of Pius IX's body to the Basilica of San Lorenzo in July 1881. That Giacomo was strongly affected by this atmosphere is demonstrated by the prayer card at his ordination:

O Peter, Prince of the Apostles, whom we venerate on the throne of Rome, and who illuminates the peoples with the light of truth, give me the strength to maintain your rights sacred and inviolable, and to repel with an indomitable heart the unhappy assaults of the enemies of the Papacy.¹²

Giacomo's early career in Rome was unremarkable: he was a diligent student, who attended lectures assiduously, especially those of Fr J. Franzelini (official theologian to the First Council of the Vatican), Fr Antonio Ballerini, the famous moralist, and Fr Camillo Mazella. His education, like that of several generations of clergy trained in the centre of Catholicism, was in '... the narrow orthodoxy of the Roman schools'.¹³ Giacomo's first pastoral experience was as catechist to the children of the parish church of S. Maria in Aquiro near the Pantheon and he was ordained on 21 December 1878, in the presence of his family, by Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, the Pope's vicar for the Rome diocese in St John Lateran (the cathedral of Rome). He celebrated his first Mass, not at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles as he had planned, and as most newly ordained priests in Rome aspired to do, but prophetically at the altar of the Cathedra in the apse of St Peter's.

We have a remarkable piece of evidence of his early preaching style as a priest, and implicitly of his conventional, paternalistic attitudes to the 'social question', in the sermon he gave on the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost in the village church of his own, beloved Pegli. No doubt the parish priest was both relieved to be excused the task of a Sunday sermon and pleased to have the bright young Rome-

trained cleric to take his place. No doubt also, Giacomo's parents and family listened with immense pride to his efforts. What is, therefore, fascinating is the honesty and directness with which he approached his task. He divided his hearers into three classes of people – *agricoltori* (peasants), *commercianti* (shopkeepers and tradespeople) and what he described as *agiati* (the 'well to do') – and proceeded to address his sermon to each one separately, but without a hint of condescension. To the peasants he recommended prayerfulness at work and the avoidance of blasphemy; he warned the tradespeople to store up spiritual goods against that day when '... not only will all trade and commerce cease, but when all need of earthly goods will come to an end', and he finished by reminding the well-off of their good fortune and, therefore, of their supreme duty to set a good, Christian example to everyone else.¹⁴

The Marchese's optimism about his son's career prospects in Rome were rewarded when Giacomo eventually graduated doctor of theology *cum laude* in 1879. In 1880 he also received a doctorate in canon law. Given these considerable academic accomplishments, it is surprising that Sforza says: 'Della Chiesa himself admitted he knew nothing about theological questions. He had not had a seminary education, as he did not become a priest until he was twenty-six.'¹⁵ He was wrong on all three counts. Giacomo may not have been either an intellectual or even a natural academic, but he was educated at the Capranica College which was a seminary; he was ordained at twenty-four, the normal age, and he had a theology degree, which most priests did not have. In all probability, in his scrupulously honest way, Giacomo put it about that he was not an expert in theological questions, which he undoubtedly was not. In the meantime, he had entered the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics, the school for high-flying clergy and the training ground of Vatican diplomats. The prestige and importance of the Academy is attested by the fact that Cardinal Consalvi, who had successfully negotiated the restoration of the Papal States at the Vienna Congress of 1815, Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903), the great Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro, Secretary of State to Leo XIII, Cardinal Merry Del Val, Secretary of State to Pius X between 1903 and 1914, Pope Pius XII (1939–58) and Pope Paul VI were all alumni and Pope Pius XII taught there. Giacomo very quickly shone in this élite atmosphere and of all the academic institutions he frequented, he regarded it as his true Alma Mater. It was at the Academy that there occurred in 1881 an event which was to shape Giacomo's life for the next twenty-seven years: he met Monsignor (as he then was) Rampolla when he was giving the traditional address each student was obliged to make each year. Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro was a formidable but saintly Sicilian aristocrat, who was to have a brilliant career in the Holy Roman Church, only failing to reach the papal throne because of Austrian intervention in 1903 (see p. 18). Rampolla quickly took a liking to Giacomo. Impressed by his intelligence and industry, he had him appointed Professor of Diplomatic Style at the Academy and *apprendista* (apprentice) in the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, that part of the Secretariat of State which dealt with relations with states and countries which Rampolla was secretary.

Madrid

Within a very short time, Giacomo's career took a further turn. In 1883 Rampolla was appointed to the Madrid nunciature, the second most important posting in the Vatican diplomatic corps after Vienna, and decided to take his new apprentice with him as secretary to the nunciature. Thus began not only Giacomo's firsthand experience of Vatican diplomacy in action, but also his close relationship with the great Sicilian cardinal who was to become both his mentor and his friend. Rampolla was to remain as nuncio in Madrid for another four years. Having served in the Madrid nunciature in the 1870s, he was not surprised to find a difficult situation there a few years later. The Spanish Church was riven by

deep tensions, most of them generated by the problem of living under the restored, Liberal monarchy which, to the traditionalist Carlists, like the Bishop of Osima, was anathema. Rampolla was initially hampered in his work by the need of his two young subordinates, Giacomo and a colleague, to learn Spanish. Nevertheless, he testified to their commitment and intelligence in a letter to Jacobini, Cardinal Secretary of State.¹⁶ An incident which occurred during Giacomo's service in the Madrid nunciature illustrates how quickly his extraordinary sense of professional devotion developed, and is revealed in a letter to a friend whom he had made at the Academy, Valfré di Bonzo, like him from the Piedmontese aristocracy. Because of the posting to Madrid, Giacomo had not been able to be present at the latter's consecration as Bishop of Cuneo in 1885. A year later, Giacomo paid a brief visit to Italy, but as he explained in a letter to his friend, he was again unable to visit him because, 'the Pope added that he would give me some papers for the Nuncio, and I, naturally, did not dream of saying that it was not my intention to return immediately to Madrid. It would have been a gross dereliction of the first order I had received personally from the Pope.'¹⁷ This strict sense of duty and service was to remain with Giacomo for the rest of his life.

Spain was an important learning experience' for Giacomo in other ways; in a letter to Valfré di Bonzo in 1883 he wrote: 'Madrid ... is literally a school of contemporary life.'¹⁸ On the surface, Spanish politics presented many similarities with those of his native country: a Liberal, parliamentary monarchy made to function largely by *caciquismo*, an Iberian version of the electoral clientelism and corruption which pervaded the politics of Liberal Italy.¹⁹ But below the surface, the subversive activities of the republicans and the continued tendency towards *pronunciamentos* – military *coups d'état* – rendered Spanish politics potentially much more unstable. The death of King Alfonso XII in 1885 and the long minority of his posthumous heir – Alfonso XIII – did not help. The shrewd grasp of the complexities of Spanish politics which Giacomo quickly gained is revealed in other letters to his friend. In 1883, following a failed *pronunciamento* he warned of the dangers of a revolution²⁰ and following a very serious republican uprising in Madrid in 1886 he wrote: 'The condition of this country is not a happy one. We are on the morrow of a military insurrection and perhaps on the eve of yet another. The government has lost a lot of prestige, the army is corrupt and much of the officer class desires a republic. It seems unlikely that the regency of Maria Christina can last for another fifteen years.'²¹ Only in respect of this last prediction was he to be proved wrong.

Though he made many friends in Spain, and was the beneficiary of a great deal of Spanish hospitality, he missed Rome and his work there. In a letter of 24 March 1883 to Valfré di Bonzo he wrote: 'I am so grateful for your apostolic efforts in providing the spiritual exercises for the pupils of The Carissimi ... how much I envy you, now that I am not able to be involved in that holy work!'²² Acquisition of Spanish would soon make it possible for him to hear confessions and to preach, but it was a poor substitute for the pastoral work, albeit limited, that he had carried out in Rome. His letters also mention the 1884 earthquake and 1885 cholera epidemic but, typical of his modesty, they fail to reveal the humanitarian work which he and the nuncio carried out during both disasters.²³ Nor do they give any intimation of the close relations which he developed with the Spanish Court, which would ensure strong Spanish support for his proposed appointment as nuncio to Spain in 1907 (see p. 25).

Back to Rome

In June 1887, Monsignor Rampolla was appointed Secretary of State to Pope Leo XIII and cardinal, and Giacomo returned with him to Rome. The city to which they returned had changed much during their years in Madrid. Its political life, and therefore the politics of Italy, was now increasingly

dominated by Francesco Crispi, formerly one of the radical democrat Garibaldi's 'Redshirts' and now an almost reactionary upholder of the monarchical principle. But Italy's relations with the Vatican under his rule were more influenced by his intransigent, irredeemable anti-clericalism, than by his opportunism. Pope Leo XIII was, accordingly, no more reconciled to Italy than his predecessor, Pius IX, whom he had succeeded in 1878. Leo continued to seek some resolution of the 'Roman Question' by diplomatic means. Having tried, unsuccessfully, to play off Germany against Italy following the end of the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf* (the campaign against the church), the Pope and his new Secretary of State now turned to wooing France, the 'Elder Daughter of the Church'.²⁴

If anything, by 1887, the Vatican's international situation in relation to Italy had got worse. In that year, Italy renewed its Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary on better terms, though thanks to the Emperor Franz Josef, the latter still refused to guarantee the Italian possession of Rome.²⁵ That was little consolation for Leo XIII who was to threaten to leave the city on at least three occasions during his reign.²⁶ Nor was he convinced by the Austrians' repeated attempts to persuade him that the stability of the Italian monarchy, which the Triple Alliance was meant to ensure, was of benefit to the Vatican.²⁷ Thus the policy of Rampolla was to seek by all means possible closer relations with France. In 1890 Leo XIII launched the *Ralliement*, an attempt to persuade French Catholics, bishops, clergy and laity, to accept the democratic republic and seek to render it Catholic and conservative. But by the turn of the century, this policy was in ruins. The majority of French Catholics did not heed Leo's pleadings, and the Dreyfus Affair, when French Catholics lined up with Nationalists and anti-Semites against the democratic French Republic in the row over a spy trial, demonstrated that they were even more estranged from their government than ever.²⁸

Inevitably, Giacomo was increasingly drawn into the implementation of these policies, as the Secretary of State's most loyal and favourite subordinate. As *minutante*, his job was to prepare detailed briefings for his boss on the various questions submitted to him – a true apprenticeship indeed for later high office. Leo's wide-ranging diplomacy, including the missions he sent to both Canada and the USA in the 1890s would have increased enormously the young *minutantes* knowledge of the complexities of the world-wide Church. In particular, he would have seen the detailed report of special legate Mgr Germano Straniero, on the strength and problems of the American Church. As Anthony Rhodes says, 'Leo XIII was the first pope to appreciate the potential importance of the United States to the Catholic cause.'²⁹ On the other hand, until his appointment as Sostituto of Ordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs in 1901, Giacomo rarely left Rome. Thus he had little experience of either Paris or Vienna, the other two major diplomatic postings after Madrid, and none of London or Berlin. Only in 1888 and 1889 did he go to Vienna on confidential business for the Cardinal, to sort out the troubled affairs of the Austrian Christian Socialist party whose leader, Karl Lueger, had embarked on a particularly virulent anti-Semitic campaign.³⁰ It is likely that the second visit had more to do with the recent suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf and the death of his lover Mary Vetsera at Mayerling. If the latter was the case, then Giacomo was richly rewarded with orders and decorations by the Emperor Franz Josef. In 1887, he was also involved in the controversial visit of the German Emperor William II to the Vatican. The behaviour of both the Emperor's suite and of his wife, who refused to wear the customary black mantilla, caused immense offence in the Vatican.³¹ Giacomo was heavily involved in William II's second visit, in 1902, and was honoured with the Great Cross of the Order of the Prussian Crown.³²

The years between Rampolla's appointment as Secretary of State and Leo XIII's death in 1903 were momentous ones for both Italy and the Vatican. Giacomo's attitude to all the major events of the period appears to have been exclusively determined by his hostility towards the Italian 'Liberal' State.

which was typical of Italian clergy of his day. It was not simply a question of the injustices which it had imposed upon the Papacy; it was its founding ideology – nineteenth-century Liberalism, with its strong secularizing tendencies – that he abhorred. The extreme distrust of Leo and Rampolla towards the Italian State must also have been a factor in determining his attitudes on political matters. In 1890 he wrote to Valfré di Bonzo, without a hint of irony: ‘There is little or nothing new in Rome, at least in our camp; as for the adversary, there is a great deal to do over the golden wedding anniversary of the King and Queen.’³³ For Giacomo, as for most of the Italian clergy, the State and its ruling class were the ‘adversary’, the enemy. Of his reactions to the ‘End of Century Crisis’, that is the series of economic difficulties which resulted in social distress and disorder, and the ensuing political conflicts which assailed Italy in the 1890s, we know almost nothing, but when the crisis reached its climax in the assassination of King Humbert II by an anarchist at Monza in 1900, he commented, ‘what terrible food for thought’, and then immediately went on to advise Valfré di Bonzo how to handle requests from the civil authorities for requiem Masses, etc., observing the formalities which the continuing conflict with the Italian State imposed.³⁴ He had always been sceptical of the attempts by some of the higher clergy, most notably Bonomelli of Cremona, but also his friend Valfré di Bonzo, now Bishop of Como, to encourage efforts at a reconciliation between Church and State. He was not even sympathetic to the inevitable desire of many Catholics to learn from the horrors of the ‘End of Century Crisis’, and unite with Liberal-Conservatives against the Marxian-orientated Socialist party and trade unions which had emerged during the course of it. In particular, he disapproved of Pius X’s willingness to permit a relaxation of the *non expedit*, the Vatican decree of 1864 which forbade Italian Catholics from participating in national elections, as a means of meeting the Socialist challenge.³⁵

On the other hand, Giacomo clearly approved of *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII’s great social encyclical. In 1897, six years after the publication of the encyclical, he wrote to Valfré di Bonzo as follows: ‘The Holy See wishes to see the bosses and the rich taken down a peg or two, and does not disapprove of the talk about the rights of the workers; at the same time, however, it is necessary not to forget to remind them of their duties.’³⁶ He almost certainly shared the feeling, general among Italian clergy at that time, that industrial capitalism, which was making its first major appearance in Italy in the 1880s and 1890s, was the ‘evil child’ of philosophical and political liberalism, seeing in the latter’s emphasis on self-centred materialism the root cause of many social problems. *Rerum Novarum*, while condemning Socialist solutions to the problems which industrial capitalism had thrown up, also criticized the excesses and injustices of that system, and urged Catholics to involve themselves actively in remedying them, including the setting up of trade unions. Benedict XV’s openness on the ‘social question’ would be in stark contrast to that of Pius X, who came very close to condemning trade unionism altogether.

Giacomo very quickly developed a mastery of the Vatican and its peculiar ways. This is amply demonstrated in his correspondence with Valfré di Bonzo, in which he gave him sound, practical tips on how to solicit financial support from the Vatican for his pet venture, *L’Ordine*, the diocesan newspaper of Como,³⁷ and then explained how to deal with visiting *personaggi*, i.e. members of the Italian Royal Family and Government ministers, in the still strained atmosphere between Church and State: ‘What is absolutely to be avoided is meeting them at the station and taking part in banquets or receptions. At the most, a courtesy visit should be paid to the King, accompanied by your secretary and the vicar-general of the Diocese ... but in normal clerical day wear NOT full canonicals,’ he explained to his friend.³⁸ He even dared to advise Valfré di Bonzo about his relations with his fellow bishops. In November 1896, he warned him of the dangers of too close a relationship with Mgr Geremia Bonomelli, Bishop of Cremona: ‘I trust that he will not take you too much under his protection because here in Rome a man is judged by the company he keeps.’³⁹ This was very sound

advice: Bonomelli was a very controversial figure in the Italian Church because of his 'softness' on the Roman Question. He had repeatedly advocated reconciliation with the Italian State, which was emphatically not the policy preference of the Vatican at that time.⁴⁰

Giacomo quickly became known as *il piccoletto* ('the little one'), because of his stature and gait. These passages help to explain why so many people in the Vatican bureaucracy deferred to *il piccoletto* when a difficult decision had to be made. Peters actually cites him as acknowledging this: 'Once as Pope, he was recounting an incident about a well-meaning group whose members had blundered into a very difficult situation. Over his otherwise so fastidious lips the following remark slipped out: "They would have been in a fine mess, if *il piccoletto* had not stepped in and pulled them out."' ⁴¹ And this story suggests that the claim that Giacomo even saved Rampolla himself from several hasty decisions was not far from the truth.⁴²

Meanwhile, Giacomo's personal life assumed a pleasant routine. Having installed himself in an apartment in the Palazzo Brazzà, in the Piazza S. Eustachio, he found in the local parish church an outlet for his pastoral gifts. Here he celebrated Mass, helped recite the daily offices, preached and heard confessions, earning after his death the erection of a monument in his memory from its parishioners. His spiritual life did not finish there: in addition to his duties in the Secretariat of State and his part-time work in the parish, he contributed to the spiritual life of two priestly confraternities.⁴³ In 1892, after his father's death, he invited his mother to come to live with him, just like any other Italian parish priest. He was very genuinely fond of his mother and enjoyed the domestic happiness which her presence provided. MacNutt has left this picture of the Della Chiesa Roman household:

My relations with him [Giacomo] were unbrokenly good. His mother, a charming, dignified old lady, the Marchesa Della Chiesa had, during my student days, an apartment near the Piazza in Aquiro, where I was invited and met his sister. To be thus received in the family circle of that particular class of Italians, people of good ancestry and title, but not of the fashionable world, signifies more than some of my readers may realise.⁴⁴

But like other over-solicitous parents, the Marchesa could prove an embarrassment to her son on occasion. The story goes that at a social function, having been presented by her son to the Cardinal Secretary of State, the Marchesa took the opportunity to venture her opinion that Giacomo's talents were not sufficiently recognized. Rampolla is alleged to have replied: 'Signora, your son will take only a few steps, but they will be gigantic ones.'⁴⁵ Whatever the truth of the story, in reality, by comparison with some of his contemporaries, Giacomo's career had hitherto been unspectacular. Already his friend Valfré di Bonzo, only one year older, had been a bishop since 1885 and was to be promoted Archbishop of Vercelli in 1905. The career of another colleague, Mgr Rafaele Merry Del Val, who was ten years younger, was in even more striking contrast with that of Della Chiesa. According to Roberto Perin, 'Leo XIII entrusted him [Merry Del Val] with special missions to London, Berlin and Vienna. He was held in such esteem that at the young age of twenty-seven he entered the pope's household as secret papal chamberlain.'⁴⁶ In 1897 he sat on the papal commission that declared Anglican orders of bishop, priest and deacon to be 'null and void' on the grounds that the Church of England had lost the Apostolic Succession at the Reformation. Merry Del Val strongly supported that judgement⁴⁷ and in the same year he was sent to Ottawa as special apostolic delegate, the fourth in a series of five Roman prelates appointed to investigate the troubled affairs of the Canadian Church. By 1903 he was President (principal) of the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics and a titular archbishop. On the other hand, it was not until 1901, when Giacomo was already in his late forties, that this close confidante and collaborator of the Cardinal Secretary of State was raised to high office in the Vatican. On 15 April, he was appointed Sostituto, that is papal Under-Secretary of State

with the title of 'Right Reverend'.

The simple explanation for Giacomo's slow career progression may have been Rampolla's desire to keep him by his side. As late as 1902, when Leo XIII had considered Giacomo as a possible archbishop of his native city, Rampolla had dissuaded the Pope from this appointment in order to keep him in the Vatican.⁴⁸ But there were almost certainly other reasons. Unlike Merry Del Val, or even Valfré di Bonzo, Della Chiesa lacked the appearance, demeanour or perhaps even the personality of a high-flying ecclesiastic. A contemporary, Cardinal O'Connell of Boston, was struck by his physical unattractiveness: 'He might pass unnoticed for any impressiveness of appearance, for his figure was rather angular and he walked with something of a limp. His complexion was sallow and his head, generally tilted to one side, gave no indication of the very fertile brain within it.'⁴⁹ Confirmation of this impression of Giacomo comes from another source, Francis MacNutt, who was in regular contact with Giacomo and wrote this about him:

In person he was undersized, of a sallow, bilious complexion; he had an impenetrable mat of black hair, prominent teeth, and everything about him was crooked: nose, mouth, eyes and shoulders – all were out of drawing. Despite these blemishes, his bearing was dignified, his manners courtly though a trifle stiff, and he could never be mistaken for other than he was – a gentleman.⁵⁰

The picture of him at his consecration as bishop (see Plate 8) gives graphic reality to this description.

Contemporaries were divided in their judgement of Giacomo's role in the Vatican. MacNutt, for example, was a little dismissive:

He was usually esteemed a great diplomat. Frankly, I must say that he impressed me as a meticulous, accomplished bureaucrat; conscientious, painstaking understudy of Cardinal Rampolla ... He possessed a vast store of carefully sorted information upon which to draw; he was accurate and very precise, acquainted with all the rules and traditions of his chancellery and not ignorant of those of other governments. In matters of protocol – etiquette, precedence, etc. – he was as infallible as a man could possibly be. Of brilliancy or originality, I never perceived a trace, but since an exhibition of such traits was not required during his years of subordinate service, it was proof of the greatest wisdom and tact on his part to dissemble any such he may have possessed. What he became as Pope, others more competent than me must judge.⁵¹

On the other hand, at the time of Della Chiesa's appointment as *minutante* in 1887, Mgr (later Cardinal) Agliardi wrote to a friend, 'this young man is regarded as being a new Consalvi'.⁵² Agliardi changed his tune in 1914 (see p. 62).

While Giacomo's equally well-known timidity, his avoidance of the spotlight, would also have contributed to his relative obscurity in the Vatican, there is no denying his power and influence there after his promotion in 1901. Along with the Secretary for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Mgr Pietro Gasparri, who was appointed at the same time, the Sostituto was the most important person in the Vatican after the Secretary of State himself. Their offices were the 'clearing houses' of all essential matters in the government of the Roman Catholic Church. To them came many other Vatican officials and bishops from all over the world, giving them a remarkable knowledge of the world-wide Church. Frequently, in the absence of the Secretary of State, the Sostituto dealt directly with the Pope himself. It is clear that by 1901, his lack of physical and social grace notwithstanding, Giacomo had established for himself a unique reputation as a cautious, discreet and diplomatic powerbroker. An indication of his powerful position in the Vatican is given by this incident, which took place shortly after the death of Leo XIII in July 1903, related by Francis MacNutt:

On July 28th there was a venomous attack in *L'Italia* on the Accademia [of Noble Ecclesiastics, in which MacNutt had also studied] and its alumni. Bishops Merry Del Val, Misciatieli, della Chiesa and myself were mentioned by name and described as forming a close *camarilla* of ambitious spirits, bent on controlling the Vatican. The hope was expressed that the new Pope, whoever he might be, would have the strength and courage to suppress us. We were even denounced as a threat to the spread of

One suspects that the story was ‘planted’ by a Vatican malcontent, and even allowing for MacNutt’s mistake in describing Giacomo (and Misciateli) as a bishop, when he did not receive that rank until four years later, the essence of the story is correct – by 1903 both Merry Del Val and Della Chiesa were powerful people.

The election of Pius X

Neither Giacomo’s power nor his peace was to last for long. Less than two years after his appointment as Sostituto his world was turned upside down by the death of Leo XIII. Because of the sudden and unexpected death of Mgr Volpini shortly afterwards, the cardinals were obliged to appoint another secretary to the impending conclave, the official who was responsible for making all the practical and legal arrangements. Cardinal Camerlengo nominated Merry Del Val and Gasparri. Then Della Chiesa was nominated in the latter’s place. Finally, Merry Del Val was elected. Peters argues:

This apparently insignificant election was a decisive event that did much to change the history of the papacy in modern times and set in motion a remarkable chain of circumstances. In that very hour Giacomo’s star began to wane, and for almost a decade its light as an influence on world affairs would be totally extinguished.⁵⁴

All this requires explanation. In the first place, of crucial importance to Giacomo’s future was the failure of Rampolla to get elected Pope. The strongest candidate until the fifth ballot, Rampolla was effectively knocked out of the contest by the intervention of Cardinal Puzyna, Archbishop of Cracov (then in the Austrian Empire), who pronounced a Veto’ on behalf of Franz Josef. There after, despite Rampolla’s very dignified reaction, his vote declined and Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, Patriarch of Venice, was elected in his stead, taking the name Pius X. It seems fair to assume that, but for this incident, Rampolla would have been elected, even allowing for the opposition to him in the Sacred College. If that is the case, then Giacomo would also have stood some chance of being appointed Secretary of State.

With the election of Sarto as Pope, therefore, changes were bound to occur in Della Chiesa’s life. By tradition, a new Pope meant a new Secretary of State – the tradition was not to be broken until 1922, when Pius XI insisted on keeping his predecessor’s Secretary of State, Pietro Gasparri. Rampolla was accordingly retired – given the insignificant post of Archpriest of St Peter’s and made Prefect of the congregation which supervised its fabric. But the choice of his successor was unexpected, and was to have unfortunate consequences for Della Chiesa in his position as Sostituto. The obvious candidate, in fact, was Cardinal Ferrata, but it was precisely his great experience and standing – he had served as nuncio to France and in the Secretariat of State – that ensured that he would be passed over. Pius X, like his predecessor of the same name, was a man of strong will. To have appointed Ferrata would have meant accepting as collaborator a man who was at least his equal. With Ferrata out of the running, the two undersecretaries, Della Chiesa and Gasparri, were both eligible (Gasparri more so than Giacomo, since he had been an apostolic delegate in South America) yet they too were passed over. The man whom the Pope did choose, Mgr Merry Del Val, was young, very young – only thirty-eight – and inexperienced, thus he would be a true executor of the Pope’s wishes in a way that neither Ferrata, Gasparri or perhaps even Della Chiesa could have been.

Son of Spanish aristocrats, but with British connections and education, Merry Del Val was a protégé of Leo XIII, who had forced him to abandon plans to enter the Scottish College in Rome and had him sent to the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics instead.⁵⁵ It was a little unusual to enrol someone

there who was not already ordained (though MacNutt had been), and for Merry Del Val it was a personal tragedy because it effectively precluded the career in pastoral ministry he so desired. Following his ordination, he very quickly rose up the Vatican ladder as we have seen; indeed, shortly before the conclave of 1903 he had actually been on the *terna* of candidates proposed by the canons of Westminster for election as ordinary of that archiepiscopal see.⁵⁶ Yet despite his meteoric rise, according to Perin he was less than popular with the French Canadian bishops, and in the Vatican his youth earned him the soubriquet *il ragazzino* ('the little boy') and his fastidiousness that of *la ragazzina* ('the little girl'), and more importantly, his analysis of the situation in Quebec was denounced by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Begin as seriously flawed.⁵⁷ Not a good start for a future head of Vatican diplomacy.

Having been appointed Secretary to the Conclave, in preference to both Della Chiesa and Gasparri his superiors in the Vatican hierarchy, Merry Del Val thus came into contact with Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, Patriarch of Venice, and according to Cenci, Del Val's biographer, it was he who persuaded the reluctant *papabile* to accept the tiara.⁵⁸ Sarto was very deeply impressed by Merry Del Val, and continued him in service as personal secretary until he had made a decision about the Secretariat of State. Merry Del Val was to become Pius X's most faithful servant, indeed their relationship was an extraordinarily close one by any standards, more like that of father and son. There is not a little analogy between this relationship and that between Rampolla and Della Chiesa. Merry Del Val was devastated by the Pope's death in 1914: Della Chiesa had been equally distressed by the death of his mentor and friend the previous year. While Pius X undoubtedly laid down the main lines of the Vatican's diplomatic policy, the suave, brilliant aristocrat with an easy command of six languages would undoubtedly have exercised a strong influence upon it. Count Giuseppe Dalla Torre, who was one of the most influential Italian Catholic laymen in the first half of the twentieth century claimed that Merry Del Val, 'enjoyed the complete and absolute confidence of the Pope'.⁵⁹ While Merry Del Val was not the 'evil genius' of the Vatican during Pius X's pontificate, he certainly had a powerful influence upon its policies which did not please either Della Chiesa or Gasparri, his two immediate subordinates.

The first major bone of contention was France. In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, relations between the Third Republic and the Vatican were severely strained, but at least they continued to exist on a diplomatic level. All this changed shortly after Pius X's election. The visit of President Loubet of France to the Italian King in the Quirinale Palace in April 1904 provoked a rupture. Whereas non-Catholic sovereigns, princes and heads of state were permitted to visit the King of Italy, provided that they visited the Vatican first and followed Vatican protocol to the letter, Catholic heads of state were effectively debarred from setting foot in Rome. The papal protest to other powers about the visit leaked out and, splashed all over the French press, was taken as a deliberate insult in the Elysée and Quai d'Orsay.⁶⁰ France then withdrew its envoy to the Vatican, claiming that Vatican was only keeping a nuncio in Paris in order to influence the elections.⁶¹

Loubet's visit to the Quirinale was almost certainly a deliberate provocation on the part of a militantly anti-clerical French government. The subsequent attitude of the Vatican was high-minded but counterproductive. When the French Law on the Separation of Church and State was passed in 1905, and the *associations cultuelles* were set up to provide a legal framework for the holding of all Church property, and therefore effectively the continued practice of the Catholic faith, Pius X forbade French bishops and priests to have anything to do with them, even though the bishops had decided by clear majority to the contrary.⁶² Relations progressively deteriorated thereafter. They were not helped by the Pope's refusal to allow the writings of the extreme right-wing, anti-Semitic politician and author Charles Maurras to be placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, while the ideas of Marc Sagnier

and Le Sillon (both of a Christian Democratic tendency) were. According to Cobban, 'Action Française [of which Maurras was the leader] was treated as an ally by Pius X'; given that this was an extreme right-wing, Nationalistic and anti-Republican organisation, it could only have inflamed French anti-clerical feeling.⁶³

One wonders what Leo XIII and Rampolla would have done in the circumstances: it is hard to see how they could have avoided the rupture with France given the anti-clerical mood in that country. But Larkin is undoubtedly right when he says that, 'Certainly, the consequences of the Separation in France would have been less crippling if Rampolla had been materially in charge.'⁶⁴ Unfortunately, Rampolla was not in charge any more and did not approve of the new policies. Della Chiesa was, however, still in office and according to Sforza, he tried to avoid the worst:

As long as he remained, as Under-Secretary of State, until his exile to Bologna, della [sic] Chiesa tried, respectfully and prudently to prevent the relations of France and the Vatican from degenerating to the point of disastrous rupture, the obvious conclusion according to him, of Pius X's and Merry Del Val's policy. He gained nothing by his efforts except to be no longer received by the Pope.⁶⁵

Sforza's judgement is almost certainly correct, though there is no evidence that the Pope refused to see Della Chiesa any more. On the contrary Papa Sarto seems to have retained his esteem for him. But Della Chiesa's subtle, patient brand of diplomacy was no longer acceptable in the Vatican – it was associated with Rampolla and the policies of the previous pontificate. It was, therefore, even dangerous for Della Chiesa to continue to frequent his former boss and mentor who appears by now to have been effectively ostracized. Indeed, Merry Del Val himself made it clear that under the new regime, it was 'not diplomatic'.⁶⁶ Rampolla and Della Chiesa must have been even less happy with the 'needlessly gladiatorial methods' Merry Del Val used in the disputes which developed with Spain in 1909, following the expulsion of some religious orders, and with Portugal after the Liberal revolution of 1910.⁶⁷

It is also doubtful whether Della Chiesa was happy with Pius X's policy towards Italy. Under the pressing fear of the rise of a Marxian Socialist working-class movement, especially following the events of the 'End of Century Crisis' in 1897 and 1898, Pius X moved the Italian Church towards a lessening of the dispute with the Italian State, in common cause against socialism. In particular, after 1904, he repeatedly relaxed the *non expedit* decree, permitting Catholics to vote for Liberal-Conservative candidates who promised to protect the Church's interests and, most importantly, not to support the introduction of a divorce law,⁶⁸ even allowing Catholics to be candidates. These so-called 'clerico-moderate' alliances were created in an attempt to stem the Socialist electoral tide at both a local and national level. This was a realistic policy, a further retreat from temporalistic intransigence. Despite the ritual reiteration of the protest over the Italian 'usurpation of Rome', Papa Sarto's attitude towards the Italian royal family was much less inflexible than that of his predecessor. There is evidence, for example, that he received members of that family in the Vatican, and the 'black aristocracy' – the great Roman families who remained loyal to the Pope and eschewed the new occupant of the Quirinale after 1870 – found their social, not to say, financial position more and more difficult in the new pontificate.⁶⁹ It is likely that Della Chiesa was exceedingly sceptical about the wisdom of these political manoeuvres, but was forced to conform to the new Vatican line. The report of the Prefect (civil governor) of Rome province, when consulted by the Ministry of Justice on Giacomo's suitability for nomination as Archbishop of Bologna – the State held a veto over such appointments – noted that:

though Della Chiesa closely associated himself with the temporalistic policy of Cardinal Rampolla, it would appear that since the beginning of the pontificate of Pius X, he has allowed himself to change his attitude sufficiently to bring it into line with the

The anti-Modernist crusade

Of all his various policies, the pontificate of Pius X will probably be remembered most for his crusade against 'Modernism'. This attack on theologians, biblical scholars and ecclesiastical historians – most of them French, like Loisy – who sought to use modern scientific methods in their work, became an obsession with him. In 1907 he issued two major statements, *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi*, against them and their ideas which he defined as the 'synthesis of all heresies'. Very soon, a purge of seminaries, theological faculties and of the priesthood itself got under way, and a strict anti-Modernist oath was imposed on all clergy. Pius X's chief collaborator in this 'sacred terror' was Mgr Umberto Benigni. It was he who ran the headquarters of the anti-Modernist 'secret police', under the innocuous title of the Sodalitium Pianum (alias La Sapinière) organization: operating from the Secretariat of State where he was himself an official, Benigni's agents and informants spread throughout Italy, France and other parts of Catholic Europe.⁷¹ No one, not even bishops, cardinals and high-ranking prelates, was spared the denunciations of Benigni's agents or the suspicions of Pius X. Cardinal Ferrari, Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Maffi, Archbishop of Pisa, Cardinal Amette, Archbishop of Paris, and Cardinal Fischer, Archbishop of Cologne, were all subjected to humiliating harassment for their 'softness' on Modernism.

Hebblethwaite claims that 'One of the first victims of *Pascendi* was Giacomo Della Chiesa',⁷² and he implies that this was why he was appointed to Bologna in December 1907. As is clear from his pastoral activities as archbishop of that city, Della Chiesa disliked the excesses of the anti-Modernist crusade and even found himself occasionally a target of them (see pp. 44–5), but he was emphatically not himself a Modernist and it is extremely unlikely that any suspicion of Modernism on his part ever crossed Pius X's mind. Certainly, he would never have considered promoting Della Chiesa to such an important see if he had thought him remotely unsound on that score. On the other hand, others obviously did think he was unsound – it is the only way to explain his remark to the cardinals after his election as Pope in September 1914: 'And We assure you that the Holy Father is not a modernist!'⁷³

Like Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII), Della Chiesa, while sympathizing with some of the ideas of the so-called modernists, was very careful to keep on the right side of the fence. On the other hand, his cautious attitude towards doctrinal controversy, and his penchant for fair play, would undoubtedly have brought him into conflict with the anti-Modernist zealots, the so-called *integristes* in the Roman Curia – such as Cardinal De Lai, Prefect of the Concistorial Congregation, and the Spanish Capuchin friar Cardinal Vives y Tuto (Vives fa Tutto, 'Vives does everything' as he was known in the Vatican), Secretary to the Holy Office of the Inquisition, who, along with Pius X and Merry Del Val, were the chief supporters of Benigni. According to Bedeschi, these three constituted a triad which effectively controlled the Vatican during the pontificate of Pius X.⁷⁴ Ironically, when Vives went mad in 1908 and had to be confined,⁷⁵ Rampolla was appointed in his place and remained there until his death in December 1913. But in a letter to Bishop Bonomelli he complained that he only saw the Pope four or five times a year, and had no control over the Index or the bishops.⁷⁶

Internal Vatican politics, then, were the causes of Della Chiesa's removal to Bologna, and Merry Del Val was almost certainly the prime mover, anxious to rid himself of an uncomfortable subordinate. It is significant that it was also in December 1907 that Gasparri left his post in the Secretariat of State, being very conveniently appointed head of the commission for the codification of canon law and cardinal, a useful way of separating the two men. We know that he too was opposed to

the anti-Modernist crusade. Of the Sodalitium Pianum Gasparri said that it was ‘an occult, espionage organisation above and beyond the control of the hierarchy ... a kind of Freemasonry unheard of in the history of the Church’.⁷⁷ Carlo Falconi argues that the removal of Della Chiesa had the blessing of Pius X, who saw it as an opportunity to remove the friction between his favourite and a powerful subordinate.⁷⁸ As Sostituto, Della Chiesa could reasonably have expected his next career step to have been posting to a major nunciature – Madrid, Paris or Vienna. There were rumours of his appointment to Madrid throughout Pius X’s pontificate, one such surfacing in the pages of the Roman newspaper, *Messaggero*, on the day that Pius X decided to appoint him to Bologna. Not surprisingly, Rampolla encouraged the idea as far as he could, even though, given the deterioration of relations between Church and State in Spain, it would not have been an easy posting. ‘As far as I am concerned,’ he wrote to Della Chiesa in Bologna, ‘if there is any need to help, I will do it gladly, but I count for nothing any more.’⁷⁹ There is also evidence that the Spanish Government would have welcomed his appointment.⁸⁰

But sending Della Chiesa to Madrid was not a solution likely to appeal to Merry Del Val; as nuncio, Della Chiesa would still have been in continuous contact with the Secretariat of State. Furthermore, at the completion of his posting, Della Chiesa would have been entitled to the cardinal’s hat and a powerful position in the Roman Curia – an even less attractive prospect for Merry Del Val. In a letter to a friend in 1912, following renewed rumours that he was to be sent to Madrid, Della Chiesa remarked: ‘But I must not get involved in matters of diplomacy: I was thrown out of it, and I really do not wish to return.’⁸¹ This said, in July 1918, Benedict told his friend Carlo Monti that Merry Del Val did want to send him to Madrid, but that Pius X wanted him to go to Bologna.⁸² The only possible explanation for the contradiction in these statements is that by the time he was elected Pope, Giacomo was prepared to forgive and forget, and that for political reasons he was also anxious to play down the rift between himself and Merry Del Val. Certainly, such a rift existed, even though two previous biographers of Della Chiesa denied it. Vistalli argued: ‘The claim that there existed a conflict between Mgr Della Chiesa and Cardinal Merry Del Val was an unedifying legend that, for a period of time, enjoyed credence with a certain element of the press’,⁸³ and Peters insists: ‘it is quite evident that much of the animosity [between Della Chiesa and Merry Del Val] which writers hint at existed only in the minds of those who craved the sensational’.⁸⁴ However, the antagonism between them is clear, and the most damning evidence is provided by the testimonies of two witnesses at the beatification process for Merry Del Val.⁸⁵ Merry Del Val did not believe that Della Chiesa was worthy of the cardinalate. This much is proved by the failure to raise him to that rank for seven years after he became Archbishop of Bologna, one of the Italian archiepiscopal sees invariably entitled to the honour.

Thus Della Chiesa’s appointment to Bologna was a defeat, and a banishment from the Vatican, and judging by the letter cited above, he clearly saw it in those terms. It was comparable, in fact, as Falconi argues, to the exile of Mgr Giovanni Battista Montini (later Pope Paul VI) to Milan in 1954⁸⁶ and the analogy is reinforced by the fact that Montini was refused the red hat while Pius XII was alive but like Montini’s exile to Milan, his time in Bologna was to provide Della Chiesa with the pastoral experience which made his election to the Papacy in 1914 possible. Bologna was a convenient exile for an uncomfortable subordinate. The accounts of the way in which Pius X conveyed the news to Della Chiesa confirm his and Merry Del Val’s involvement,⁸⁷ and the pontiff’s decision to consecrate his new archbishop himself was merely a consolation prize. Nevertheless, it was a handsome one as consolation prizes go and confirmed the Pope’s personal esteem for him. Della Chiesa was consecrated in the Sistine Chapel, with his friend Valfré di Bonzo as a co-consecrator and the Pope

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