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Blast From the Past: Pope St. Pius X

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Distinctly Catholic

A final section from the RCIA lectures:

I. The papacy of Pope Pius X accomplished many good things, such as an increased focus on CCD, a liturgical renewal and a commitment to more frequent reception of the Eucharist. As well, Pius X was a saintly man whose piety impressed all who met him. But, his reign was a disaster in many ways and especially for the life of the mind. He issued an encyclical condemning modernism which he called the sum of all heresies. He instituted an oath against modernism that all university professors took. And he indulged a secretive organization, the Sodalitium Pianum, which undertook witchhunts against those it considered suspect. Among those considered suspect by the group were two future Popes, Benedict XV and John XXIII. The only notable American Catholic magazine, the *Ecclesiastical Review*, was shut down. American Catholic academic life went into a free-fall precisely when it was needed to challenge the increasing influence of John Dewey's pragmatism. In the great debate between evolutionary theorists and evangelicals that resulted in the famous Scopes trial, the Church was a bystander.

Just as problematic, during Pius's reign (1903-1914) appointments to prominent American dioceses were frequently done based on the influence of a Roman patron, a clear violation of the canon law then in place which required the input of local clergy and other bishops. The most prominent such case was that of William Henry O'Connell who got himself named Bishop of Portland in 1901 and then as coadjutor archbishop of Boston in 1906. He would be named a cardinal in 1911 along with James Farley of New York, giving America three cardinals. When Gibbons heard of the honor accorded to O'Connell, he wept. Archbishop Riordan of San Francisco said O'Connell's promotion was the worst thing to happen to religion in a century.

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