

# NOTES, QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE PATRONAGE OF THE DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH

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The concept of a patron saint is one intimately familiar to Catholic life and practice. Most Catholics know at least a few of the major intercessors, such as Saint Christopher, the patron of travel, or Saint Anthony, the patron of lost things (and, it seems, of lost keys in particular). But while saints may be relied upon to intercede for the causes of everyday life, there are also more formal and institutional patrons. The patron saint of the United States of America, for example, is Mary, under the title of her Immaculate Conception. She was formally declared as such in May 1846 by the bishops of the country assembled at the Sixth Council of Baltimore.<sup>1</sup>

Dioceses have their patrons, as well. The question that this article seeks to address is the surprisingly ambiguous and complicated history of the saintly patronage of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Research into this topic is not as straightforward as one would suppose. The relative importance and prominence of a diocese's patronage depends upon the initiatives of a given bishop and the awareness of the people, along with other similarly intangible factors, such as the vibrancy of the devotional life of the period in question. Moreover, diocesan patronage is something that comes up parenthetically almost as a rule. It may be that a certain bishop ends each of his encyclicals with a phrase such as, "invoking the assistance of our diocesan patron, N.," while none of his predecessors did the same. Fortunately, there are certain formal ecclesiastical declarations which do reliably make mention of the diocesan patron, but they provide very little context by which to draw further conclusions.

This article has done its best to rely on the available data,



**Stained glass depiction in Pittsburgh's St. Paul Cathedral of first Mass by Father Denys Baron at Fort Duquesne in 1754 depicting the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin as the patroness of the fort's chapel**

Source: Rev. Aleksandr Schrenk

recognizing that a truly exhaustive investigation of this topic would be better suited to a long and well-researched, if rather tedious, book. The sources which furnished most the material for this work are the proceedings of the diocesan synods and archived editions of the *Pittsburgh Catholic*.

When it comes to the patronage of the Pittsburgh diocese, the sources indicate something of a trajectory. As of the year 2019, the language used to describe the diocesan patronage relies upon a distinction of "primary" and "secondary" patrons. The primary patroness of the diocese is Our Lady under the title of her Immaculate Conception: the same as the patroness of the nation. The secondary patron is Saint Paul the Apostle.<sup>2</sup> As this article will demonstrate, the

clear-cut distinctions of that language have not always been so clear.

The question of diocesan patronage for Pittsburgh is tied up intimately with the history of the diocese. The first Mass celebrated at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers was on April 17, 1754 at Fort Duquesne. Soon after, a wooden chapel was constructed and named in honor of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin for reasons which can only be supposed. The most likely explanation has come down to us from the pen of Michael O'Connor, the first bishop of the diocese of Pittsburgh: "It is presumed it was dedicated under this title on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin after their [the French soldiers'] first arrival, as it is only after that day that it is designated by that name in the Register."<sup>3</sup>

Bishop O'Connor's reason for meditating upon the dedication of that early chapel was his own dedication of the newly-formed diocese in 1844. "[T]hough no one was aware at that time of the previous dedication under the same title,"<sup>4</sup>

one of his first acts as bishop was to entrust the patronage of his see to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. This was accomplished at the first diocesan synod, held on June 16, 1844.<sup>5</sup> The choice of patron was partly corporate and partly personal. The bull which established the diocese was issued on August 11, just four days before the feast of the Assumption, and O'Connor had been consecrated a bishop on the feast day itself: August 15, 1843.<sup>6</sup>

And yet, despite the aptness of that patronage, it was not to last. The general historical narrative is that, for reasons which are not well established or even particularly well documented, Bishop O'Connor changed the diocesan patronage from the Assumption to the Immaculate Conception. The exact timing of this change is difficult to establish, but being an official act, the most appropriate venue would be a diocesan synod, just the same as when the original patronage was declared.

Indeed, the diocesan synod represents the clearest and most official record of patronage, because at least before the Second Vatican Council, it was always inaugurated using formal language that made mention of the diocese's saintly patron. Therefore, the earliest certain indication of Pittsburgh's patronage comes from the edited decrees of the first, second, and third diocesan synods. Unfortunately, the full proceedings of these earliest synods are lost. A condensed précis of their decisions was produced by the publisher Jacob Porter in 1870,<sup>7</sup> and the statutes which resulted are presented as those of the 1844 synod – amended, however, by the synods of 1846 and 1854.<sup>8</sup> They therefore represent a kind of amalgam, and if certain decrees or statutes changed between 1844 and 1854, the reported result is presumably the latest one. Given what is reported in those statutes, there is good reason to believe that this kind of “overwriting” occurred in relation to the diocesan patronage.

In the combined statutes of those first three diocesan synods is found the following:

We desire that the Blessed Virgin Mary be honored with particular devotion in this diocese, and since this Virgin, immaculate and conceived without sin,



**Detail of 1954 painting of the first Mass at the Point shows the image of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary nearly hidden in the clouds**

Source: Diocese of Pittsburgh

has been selected as the principal patron of these provinces, we wish that the feast day of the Immaculate Conception be celebrated with particular care in all the churches of the diocese, and that the faithful be encouraged to frequent the sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist and to profit from the indulgences granted by the Apostolic See on that day.<sup>9</sup>

The word “provinces” here refers to the United States of America, and the “selection” of this patronage occurred, as noted on the outset of this article, at the sixth Council of Baltimore in May 1846. One might reasonably conclude that the patronage of the diocese was altered to coincide with the selection of a national patroness in the second diocesan synod of 1846. This, at least, is the opinion of Father Henry Szarnicki, in his 1975 biography of Bishop O'Connor.<sup>10</sup>

This is anything but settled history. A different narrative surrounding the apparent change of patronage is expressed in a 1958 article in the *Catholic*, which attempted to summarize the history of the diocesan patronage in these concise terms:

It was Bishop O'Connor... who went to Rome in 1854 to be present at the declaration of the dogma

of the Immaculate Conception, and some changes in the wording of the decree were made because of his learned suggestions. The Diocese subsequently was placed under the protection of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>11</sup>

This seems to be the more reasonable account for a change in diocesan patronage. After all, if Bishop O'Connor was so influential in the proclamation of the dogma, would that not be a good enough reason to slightly adjust the diocesan patronage to honor Mary under the mystery of her Immaculate Conception rather than her Assumption?

And yet, something is fundamentally misaligned with this idea. The third diocesan synod was held in 1854, but the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pope Pius IX on December 8 of that same year. Bishop O'Connor was personally present for the promulgation of the dogma, since he was handpicked by Archbishop Kenrick as a theological representative for the United States. He left for the Eternal City on October 14, 1854 and did not arrive back in Pittsburgh until January 24, 1855.<sup>12</sup> It is impossible, then, that the proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception as a revised diocesan patronage could have been done *after* O'Connor's return from Rome, unless it was accomplished by episcopal fiat and outside the context of a diocesan synod – a decree of which no record exists, and which seems irregular at best. Father Szarnicki, at least, assumed that this had to have been done at a synod, with all the proper processes of consultation, voting, and acclamation.

It is possible that, knowing how things were progressing towards the proclamation of the dogma, O'Connor placed his diocese under the protection of the Immaculate Conception even before he left for Rome. This certainly would have been a meaningful sign of his favor for its promulgation. It is simply impossible to know without having a more complete account of what transpired at those first three diocesan synods.

Whatever the case, the matter seems to have become very quickly confused in the historical record of the diocese. For example, an 1896 article in the *Catholic*, describing the events scheduled in the cathedral for the patronal feast day, states: "The first Bishop of the Pittsburgh see, Right Rev. Michael O'Connor, of sainted and illustrious memory, when he assumed the duties of his episcopal office among us, dedicated the diocese and his work to the honor of the Mother of God, placing it under the protection of the Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception."<sup>13</sup> By the witness of the bishop's own words, this is not correct.

The one thing taken for granted by all these sources is that the Immaculate Conception was definitely assigned by Bish-

op O'Connor as diocesan patroness. And yet, a close look shows that this is anything but explicit. We have Bishop O'Connor on record stating that the original patroness was the Assumption. The only *contemporary* indication of this having changed is a statute – a statute which says nothing about the diocese. "This Virgin, immaculate and conceived without sin" it says, "has been selected as the principal patron of these provinces." There is no mention of the diocese in particular.

If the reader will permit the author a wild proposal, could it be that O'Connor never intended to – or never *did* – change the original patronage? Father Szarnicki notes that "despite the historical and sentimental attachments to the August dates of the erection of the diocese and the consecration of its first bishop, O'Connor and the synod, probably in 1846, adopted as diocesan the same principal patron which had been selected by the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore for the whole province."<sup>14</sup> But this is merely an interpretation of the synodal statutes, which do not present such a history on their own. Why would a diocese alter its patronage to mirror the national patronage anyway? To do such a thing deprives the diocesan patronage of its distinctive character – a problem that endures to this day, since the patronal feast day of the diocese is always eclipsed by the national commemoration.

Is there any evidence to show that O'Connor himself referred to the Immaculate Conception as a specifically *diocesan* patroness? This author has found none. In fact, by virtue of omission, there are many indications to the contrary.

Take, for example, the extended and very florid account of the proclamation of the dogma which graces the pages of the January 13, 1855 edition of the *Catholic*. The article ends with an exhortation: "Let the Catholics of America acknowledge their past tepidity of faith, and hasten to shake it off. Let us betake ourselves to our great Patroness – Mary of Immaculate Conception [*sic*]." No mention is made of the *diocesan* patroness in this account or anywhere else in the paper, which is full of pieces about the dogma, the news of which must have just reached Pittsburgh from overseas.<sup>15</sup>

It was noted previously that O'Connor arrived back in Pittsburgh from the proclamation of the dogma on January 24, 1855. First, however, he stopped in Philadelphia to give a sermon at St. John's Church in that city. The subject was the Immaculate Conception. The talk he gave, reprinted in a contemporary edition of the *Catholic*,<sup>16</sup> does not mention that he had placed his diocese under her protection, nor had any plans to do so.

Perhaps that is not strong evidence for or against the fact, since it was hardly the topic of the address. So instead,

# Diocese Pays Tribute to Mary, Its Patroness



**OUR LADY OF ASSUMPTION** and St. Bernard are the subjects of this painting, which is one of the shrines in Old St. Patrick Church, 716 St. and Liberty Ave. and one in May, "Mary's Month," for all through the year. Our Lady's feast day occurs first in the subject of great devotion in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The Diocese is dedicated to her under her title of the Immaculate Conception. The first chapel here was named for her in the first years of nearly one out of every five parishes in the Diocese.

## May Devotions Climax Homage of Centuries

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the month of May almost is one of the most joyful of the year. The May in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and May, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of the Diocese, as she is, too, of the entire United States.

Long before the United States was named in 1776, the United States had been closely associated with the Immaculate Conception.

It was on April 17, 1764, that in the first act of public devotion in what is now the City of Pittsburgh, that most noble of Irish Catholics in a chapel dedicated to the "Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception," the City.

### Mary's Protection

In the first Diocese of Pittsburgh, in 1764, Bishop Richard Smith, the first Bishop of the Diocese, was elected under the protection of the Holy Spirit under the title of the Assumption, though at one time Bishop Smith was elected as the first of the parishes, which were named for the same title.

St. Bernard's feast day, which occurs in June in 1816, is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, and some devotion to the study of the lives of the saints, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese.

Through the year, the devotion to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, has been carried for the Diocese by the Diocese.

of St. Mary's feast, the Assumption, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, has been carried for the Diocese by the Diocese.

### Immaculate Mother Mary

Throughout every year, and especially during May, special devotion is paid to the Immaculate Conception. This devotion is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, and some devotion to the study of the lives of the saints, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese.

Devotion to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, has been carried for the Diocese by the Diocese.

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**THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY** is depicted in this mural at St. Bernard, St. Lawrence. With Our Lady are (left to right): St. John the Evangelist, who defended Our Lady against heretics in the early ages; St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote and preached about Our Lady; St. Joseph, Mary's spouse; St. John the Baptist, the Blessed Apostle, who used for Our Lady on earth; St. Catherine of Lorraine, who used the Blessed Mother in the form of the Miraculous Medal; and Pope Pius III, who defined the dogma of the Assumption in 1513.



**DEVOTION TO OUR LADY OF FATIMA** is a favorite in many Pittsburgh Diocese parishes. Here, a pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which carries from church to church in a marching order of special devotion, arrives at St. Michael Church, St. Elizabeth, who follows Our Lady's request to pray the Rosary daily, and to their children the special Holy Family prayer.



**THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION** is the subject of this play at St. Mary's Church, St. Elizabeth. It is a play, in great honor, of the Immaculate Conception by St. Bernard in the Vatican.



**THE EVENING ROSARY** was held at St. Michael's in making the beginning of the night near the evening. May 1, the feast anniversary of the Assumption, Bishop John E. Dunne of Pittsburgh leads the recitation of the Rosary, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese, and some devotion to the study of the lives of the saints, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese.



**FATIMA DEVOTION** to Mary are a prominent feature of the Pittsburgh Diocese. Mary has been the subject of devotion to Mary on the grounds of their homes and many Catholic homes in May. These scenes are often the scene of the Holy Rosary and are a favorite place for private and family prayer.



**ANNUAL MARY'S DAY OBSERVANCE**—Tens of thousands of the Diocese gathered for the annual observance of the Immaculate Conception in the City of Pittsburgh. The Diocese is dedicated to her under her title of the Immaculate Conception. The first chapel here was named for her in the first years of nearly one out of every five parishes in the Diocese.



**MAY CONFESSION** and a part of the devotion of the Diocese, and some devotion to the study of the lives of the saints, which is the subject of the devotion of the Diocese.

Full-page spread in May 1958 issue of *Pittsburgh Catholic* showcases Marian devotion in the Diocese of Pittsburgh as well as recognition of Mary's patronage

Source: *Pittsburgh Catholic*, May 1, 1958

consider a letter, published in the *Catholic* on November 10, 1858, in which Bishop O'Connor appeals to the diocese for donations to support the foundation of the American College in Rome. He concludes his appeal in the following way: "May the Blessed and Immaculate Patroness of the American Church keep you ever under her powerful protection."<sup>17</sup> No mention is made of a diocesan aspect to that patronage, which seems strange coming from the pen of the bishop who helped to define it, when addressing the faithful of his own see.

The fourth diocesan synod, held under Bishop O'Connor on August 12, 1858, declares simply: "The Feast of the Immaculate Conception should be celebrated with the greatest solemnity possible, and ought to be preceded with a Novena, or at least a triduum of prayers."<sup>18</sup> While this certainly expresses a desire for the feast day to be given due honor, there is no mention of *why* this honor is to be accorded. It is entirely suitable that the national patroness should be commemorated in such a way. Once again, any specifically diocesan character to the feast day is absent.

Even after the O'Connor episcopacy and into the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, all commemorations of the Immaculate Conception seem to be solely national, rather than diocesan, in scope. For example, the December 5, 1863 edition of the *Catholic* contains an exhortation for its readers to pray for the war-torn country on its upcoming patronal feast day. No mention is made of the diocese's patronage on that same day.<sup>19</sup>

And again, a letter by Bishop Domenec in a November 1873 edition of the *Catholic* mentions the national feast day, but never refers to its significance for the diocese. The matter at hand is a consecration of the diocese to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> "We direct that this solemn consecration of our Diocese to the Sacred Heart of Jesus be made under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For this purpose we have selected the 8th of December, the day on which the Church celebrates the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Patroness of the Catholic Church in America, as the day."<sup>21</sup>

The sixth diocesan synod, convened by Bishop Phelan and held from February 7 to 9, 1893, is, as far as we can tell, the first explicit reference to a dual diocesan and national patronage – nearly fifty years after this patronage was supposed to have been defined.

Curiously, the statutes of this synod are marked by an inexplicable alteration of the decrees put forward by Bishop O'Connor. It is customary, in issuing new diocesan statutes, to begin with some record of the older statutes which remain in force. The original Latin statute, derived from the first three synods, reads as follows:

*Beatam Virginem Mariam peculiari devotione in hac diocesi colendam cupimus, cumque hac Virgo Immaculata absque labe concepta in patronam principalem harum provinciarum selecta sit...*<sup>22</sup>

Bishop Phelan's 1893 statutes add the following phrase:

*Beatam Virginem Mariam peculiari devotione in hac diocesi colendam cupimus, cumque hac Virgo Immaculata absque labe concepta in patronam principalem harum provinciarum hujusque diocesae selecta sit...* [emphasis added].<sup>23</sup>

The new phrase means "and of this diocese": that is, "the Immaculate Virgin, conceived without sin, was selected as principal patron of these provinces *and of this diocese.*" Was this addition seen as a clarification or as an outright alteration of the original synodal statutes? It is impossible to tell.

Whatever the circumstances, this new clarity about the diocesan patronage marks all the proceedings of the 1893 synod. Take, as an example, the formal decree of indiction calling the synod to order. This decree, which was read aloud to begin the synod, uses a standard formula. (A similar formula was probably used in the earlier five synods, but the text is not preserved as part of the notes from any of them.) It begins with an invocation of the Blessed Trinity, followed by an invocation the diocesan patron. In this case, it is the Immaculate Conception, which is very clearly mentioned as the "primary heavenly patron of these States and of this diocese."<sup>24</sup>

This formal indiction, along with Bishop Phelan's "clarified" recollection of the 1844 statute, is done in the same way and in the same language at many following synods.

In the decrees of the tenth synod, convened in 1905 by Bishop Canevin, handwritten notes from the synod files show that the proceedings were called to order using the same formula which makes special reference to "the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without original sin, primary patroness of these United States and of this diocese."<sup>25</sup> The same wording is used in multiple places in the proceedings of the



**Bishop Richard Phelan, under whose episcopacy the first indisputable and definite indications of the Immaculate Conception's patronage of the diocese emerged**

Source: Egan and Maurice Francis, "Plate, The Right Rev. Richard Phelan, D.D., Bishop of Pittsburgh, PA." Falvey Memorial Library, accessed October 17, 2019, <https://library.villanova.edu/Find/Record/vudl:402650>

1919 synod as well.

Whether Bishop O'Connor ever formally defined a change in patronage is hard to ascertain, but what lies beyond a doubt is that, by the start of the twentieth century, it had become accepted and explicit that the Immaculate Conception was patroness in equal measure of the nation and the diocese.

The archival files of the sixteenth synod in 1939, however, represent a bizarre divergence from this neat progression. They contain the same standard formula used to convoke the other synods – but with a dramatic difference.

Contained in the files preserved from that synod is a script, prepared on a typewriter, along with preparatory notes customized to the Pittsburgh synod. It seems that these were working notes, representing what was actually read during the synod proceedings. There, we see the following:

We, Hugh Charles, by the grace of God and the Apostolic See, Bishop of the Church of Pittsburgh, for the greater glory of God and in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived without original sin, primary patroness of these United States, *and to the praise also of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of her Assumption, patron of this diocese...* [emphasis added].<sup>26</sup>

What could this mean? Has the original diocesan patronage been recalled? Is this a restoration of the prominence of the Assumption and a break with the progressive stabilization of the Immaculate Conception as patroness of the diocese?

A possible hint lies in a small booklet, which is also included in the 1939 synod files. It is a liturgical rubric which lays out all the proper texts for convoking a diocesan synod, with a publisher's note on the cover page: *Printed for a recent Diocesan Synod by the Dolphin Press, 1904 Arch St., Philadelphia, printer of the Ecclesiastical Review.* That text includes blank lines for filling in the name of the bishop and the name of the diocese itself... but it does not blank out the text referring to the diocesan patron.

We can only suppose that this printing sample – presumably sent out to various diocesan chanceries to tempt them into having the program of events typeset by Dolphin Press – was originally produced for a diocese whose patronage really was the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>27</sup> This text was retained in the Pittsburgh synod proceedings, apparently out of ignorance or oversight. Unless this error was caught sometime between the preparation of the synod notes and the synod itself, it is very possible that the diocesan patronage reverted – if only in a purely ceremonial sense and for a short moment! – back to the Assumption in 1939

Much has been said about the patronage of Mary. Whether under her Assumption or Conception, she was the sole and undisputed patroness of the diocese for much of its history. Then, in the middle of the twentieth century, enters the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saint Paul.

His first appearance is at the seventeenth synod, held in 1954 under Bishop Dearden. In a modified formula for the indiction of the synod, no longer is Mary alone mentioned:

*We, John Francis, by the grace of God and the Apostolic See Bishop of the Church of Pittsburgh, for the greater glory of almighty God and in honor of Blessed Mary ever-Virgin, conceived without sin, primary patroness of these United States and of our Diocese, and Saint Paul the Apostle, the most faithful patron of our church...*<sup>28</sup>

Now, it is unclear here whether “our church” (*ecclesia nostra*) refers to the cathedral or to the entire diocese. Of course, the titular saint of the cathedral had always been Saint Paul, from the moment that the parish church of St. Paul was designated the cathedral of the diocese by Pope Gregory XVI in 1843. This fact is not intrinsically related to diocesan patronage, but Bishop Dearden, or someone on his preparatory committee, apparently believed that it should be. This begins a trend that, for the next sixty years, will place Saint Paul at equal standing with Mary Immaculate.

To be clear, this official, albeit secondary, recognition of Saint Paul is not something found in any of the older sources. As far as the sources consulted by this author indicate, it is a phenomenon only as recent as the 1950s. Yet over the past few decades, there has been a subtle but distinct shift away from recognition of the patronage of the Mother of God in favor of the patronage of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

That said, Mary was certainly not immediately forgotten after World War II. Marian devotion reached a kind of historical culmination in the 1950s, with 1953 seeing a special Marian year proclaimed by Pope Pius XII and the formation of dozens of sodalities and pious organizations across the diocese and the region. All of these organizations took Mary, and particularly Mary of the Immaculate Conception, as a model and heavenly intercessor. Indeed, in 1958, the *Catholic* proclaimed that the devotions of that year had represented the “climax” of the “homage of centuries.”<sup>29</sup>

It is also clear that, even if Bishop Dearden had invoked Saint Paul during the diocesan synod, he had no intention of supplanting the diocesan patroness with the Apostle. In his farewell letter to the diocese, he concludes by mentioning only the primary patroness: “May God in His goodness, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, the special

patroness of this Diocese, bless you always.”<sup>30</sup>

But in 1969, the onward march of Saint Paul makes a strong step forward. In that year, Bishop Wright wrote a letter announcing plans for convening the diocesan synod. That letter, published in the *Catholic*, makes a new distinction between the patronage of Mary Immaculate and Saint Paul: “We ask the gracious help of Our Lady, the Virgin Mother of Christ (who, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, is the principal patroness of this diocese) and of the Apostle Paul (patron of our Cathedral).”<sup>31</sup> This is a more explicit phrase than the 1954 synod’s *ecclesiae nostrae patronus fidelissimus*, and, arguably a more restrained one. But it is clear that the status of Saint Paul as a diocesan patron of some kind was by then firmly enough established in the minds of the faithful that invoking him in such a context was treated as a matter of fact.

A careful treatment of the nature of Saint Paul’s patronage continues for the next two decades. For example, a December 16, 1983 *Pittsburgh Catholic* article describing the coat of arms of the newly-installed Bishop Bevilacqua notes that the sword on the diocesan arms refers, not to Paul as patron of the diocese, but rather as “the titular of the Cathedral in Pittsburgh.”<sup>32</sup> At the same time, this careful wording of Saint Paul’s status is accompanied by a seemingly reduced prominence of Mary’s patronage. A 1986 article on the importance of the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, for instance, mentions her status as patroness of the country, but adds nothing at all about her patronage of the diocese.<sup>33</sup>

Before the end of the century, a dramatic shift takes place. No longer is the patronage of Saint Paul mentioned haltingly under provisions like “titular of the cathedral.” Around this time, the now-current language of primary and secondary patronage arises – but occasionally even *this* distinction is transgressed. In 1997, the *Catholic* ran Bishop Wuerl’s announcement of preparations for the 2000 synod. This document finished with the requisite acknowledgment of Mary Immaculate as the primary patroness of the diocese – but now along with “St. Paul, *co-patron* of the diocese” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> Is this language really meant to raise Saint Paul to equal status as diocesan patron? No official proclamation to that effect has been made, and it is not reflected in the liturgical *ordo* of the diocese. But it does speak eloquently of a trajectory which shows little sign of turning back.

Despite the rich and significant history of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s patronage of Pittsburgh, recognition of this reality seems to be lower today than at any time in history. Moving into the twenty-first century, a 2002 article in the *Catholic*, promisingly entitled “Pittsburgh bishop played role



**Diocese of Pittsburgh’s coat of arms, designed in the 1910s by heraldic artist Pierre de Chaignon la Rose, featuring the sword of St. Paul, patron of the cathedral**

Source: Rev. Aleksandr Schrenk

in defining Immaculate Conception,” is all about Bishop O’Connor’s participation in defining the dogma and Mary Immaculate’s national patronage.<sup>35</sup> In that article, not a word about diocesan patronage is included. From the author’s own experience, diocesan gatherings often feature a pious mention of “Saint Paul, our patron,” while the Mother of God is usually ignored.

Perhaps this ignorance is due to the same dynamic that may have contributed to the lack of attention to diocesan patronage in the late 1800s. If Mary Immaculate is the patroness of the country, it somehow seems less special that she is also the patroness of the local church. But given the weight of history which lies behind the patronage of the Immaculate Conception for the Church in southwestern Pennsylvania, it is time for a rediscovery and rehabilitation of the Blessed Virgin as patroness of the Diocese of Pittsburgh – under whatever title she is invoked.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Henri de Courcy, *The Catholic Church in the United States: Pages of Its History*, trans. John Gilmary Shea (New York: Edward Dunigan and

- Brother, 1857), 179: "The sixth Council of Baltimore assembled on the 10th of May, 1846. Twenty-three bishops took part in its deliberations, and the first decree was to choose the 'Blessed Virgin conceived without sin' as the Patroness of the United States. The Fathers of the Council thus honored the Immaculate Conception with an ardent and unanimous voice. 'Ardentibus votis plausu consensuque unanimi.' And this solemn declaration might even then convince the holy Fathers of the aspirations of the Church for the dogmatic definition of the glorious privilege of the Mother of God."
- <sup>2</sup> This information can be obtained in an official capacity from a publication referred to as the *Ordo*, formally entitled *Order of Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours and Celebration of the Eucharist*. In the United States, these manuals are published yearly by Paulist Press and on a regional basis. They include exhaustive information on the proper choice of liturgical texts throughout the year, along with notes on seasonal celebrations, a record of diocesan clerical necrologies, and feasts that are specific to particular churches (that is, dioceses). In the *Ordo* for the dioceses of Allentown, Altoona–Johnstown, Erie, Greensburg, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Scranton, it is noted that December 8 is the feast day of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "patronal feast day of the United States of America and principal patroness of the diocese of Pittsburgh". On June 29, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the *Ordo* notes that Saint Paul the Apostle is the secondary patron of the diocese.
- <sup>3</sup> A. A. Lambing, *A History of the Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburg and Allegheny from its Establishment to the Present Time* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1880), 33. Lambing cites this quote by Bishop O'Connor as having come from the "Diocesan Register," which as far as this author can tell, refers to a set of notebooks kept by Lambing himself. Only one of these notebooks is in the possession of the diocesan archives, and it begins at too late a date to have provided any material for this particular work of Msgr. Lambing. The most likely context behind the quote is John Gilmary Shea's discovery of the registers of Fort Duquesne in Montreal in the 1850s. Perhaps the bishop's words were reported to Msgr. Lambing via Mr. Shea?
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>6</sup> Henry A. Szarnicki, *Michael O'Connor: First Catholic Bishop of Pittsburgh, 1843–1860* (Pittsburgh: Wolfson Publishing, 1975), 52.
- <sup>7</sup> *Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis lata in synodo diocesana habita A.D. 1844 cum decretis in aliis synodis A.D. 1846, 1854, 1858 et 1869 promulgatis* (Pittsburgh: Jacob Porter, 1870). This work will henceforth be cited as "*Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis 1844*".
- <sup>8</sup> Szarnicki, 52.
- <sup>9</sup> "Beatam Virginem Mariam peculiari devotione in hac diocesi colendam cupimus, cumque hæc Virgo Immaculata absque labe concepta in patronam principalem harum provinciarum selecta sit, volumus ut dies festus Immaculatæ Conceptionis peculiari cultu in omnibus diocesis ecclesiis celebretur, et ut fideles excitentur ad sacramenta Penitentiae et Eucharistiae frequentanda et ad lucrandas indulgentias illo die a Sede Apostolica concessas." *Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis 1844*, 5–6.
- <sup>10</sup> Szarnicki, 52.
- <sup>11</sup> "Diocese Pays Tribute to Mary, Its Patroness," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, May 1, 1958, 14.
- <sup>12</sup> "The Past Reviewed," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, August 17, 1893, 1.
- <sup>13</sup> "A Solemn Triduum," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, December 3, 1896, 1. This article appears to have benefited from the direct contribution of A. A. Lambing, who is quoted later on in the text, which is even more of a surprising reason for its inaccuracy.
- <sup>14</sup> Szarnicki, 52.
- <sup>15</sup> "Immaculate Conception of Our Most Blessed Lady," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, January 13, 1855, 2. The article was contributed, not from the *Catholic's* editorial stables, but from the *New York Freeman*.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Immaculate Conception," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, February 10, 1855, [389] 4.
- <sup>17</sup> *Pittsburgh Catholic's*, November 13, 1858, [290], 4.
- <sup>18</sup> "Cum maxima, qua fieri poterit, solemnitate celebretur Festum Immaculatæ Conceptionis, cui Novena, vel saltem Triduum sacrarum precum, præmitti debet." *Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis 1844*, 30.
- <sup>19</sup> "Pray for the Country," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, December 5, 1863, [324], 4.
- <sup>20</sup> The consecration of a diocese to a particular devotion, whether it be the Immaculate Heart of Mary or the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a one-time affair, can be repeated again, and bears no relation to the diocesan patronage.
- <sup>21</sup> "Circular," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, November 20, 1873, 4.
- <sup>22</sup> *Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis 1844*, 5.
- <sup>23</sup> *Statuta Dioceseseos Pittsburgensis in Synodis Diocesanis habitis annis Domini 1844, 1846, 1856, 1858, 1869, lata, et prout nunc prostant promulgata in synodo diocesana sexta, diebus 7, 8, et 9 Februarii 1893 habita* (Pittsburgh, 1893), [17] 2. This work will henceforth be cited as "*Statuta Diocesis Pittsburgensis 1893*".
- <sup>24</sup> "Itaque, invocato nomine SS. Trinitatis ac Beatissimæ Virginis Mariæ Immaculatæ, primariæ horum Statuum et hujus dioceseseos Patronæ cœlestis ad evellendos funditusque tollendos, si qui forte irrepserint, abusus..." *Statuta Dioceseseos Pittsburgensis 1893*, [16], 1.
- <sup>25</sup> *Statuta Dioceseseos Pittsburgensis in Synodis Diocesanis lata, et prout nunc prostant promulgata in synodo diocesana decima, die 10 mensis Octobris, A.D. 1905 habita* (Pittsburgh, 1906), 13.
- <sup>26</sup> "Nos, Hugo Carolus, Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia, Episcopus Ecclesiæ Pittsburgensis, ad omnipotentis Dei maiorem gloriam, et in honorem Beatæ Mariæ Virginis sine labe originali conceptæ, horum Statuum Fœderatorum Patronæ primariæ, ad laudem etiam Beatæ Mariæ Virginis sub titulo suæ Assumptionis huius Diocesis patronæ..." See "Convocation," 1939 Synod, Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives.
- <sup>27</sup> A quick search of dioceses near Philadelphia under the patronage of the Assumption yields the possibility that this booklet was produced for the Diocese of Fall River in Massachusetts.
- <sup>28</sup> "Nos, Ioannes Franciscus, Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia Episcopus Ecclesiæ Pittsburgensis, ad omnipotentis Dei majorem gloriam, et in honorem Beatæ Mariæ semper Virginis sine labe conceptæ, horum Statuum Fœderatorum et Nostræ Diocesis Patronæ primariæ, atque Sancti Pauli Apostoli, Ecclesiæ Nostræ Patroni Fidelissimi..." See *Order of the Seventeenth Synod, 1954*, "Convocation," 1954 Synod, Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives.
- <sup>29</sup> "Diocese Pays Tribute to Mary, Its Patroness," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, May 1, 1958, 14: "In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the month of May always is one of the most joyous of the year. For May is the Month of Mary, and Mary, under her title, of the Immaculate Conception, is Patroness of the Diocese, as she is, too, of the entire United States."
- <sup>30</sup> "Archbishop Dearden's Farewell to Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, January 29, 1959, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> "Official," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, January 17, 1969, 6.
- <sup>32</sup> "Coat of Arms," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, December 16, 1983, 52.
- <sup>33</sup> "Immaculate Conception," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, December 5, 1986, 4.
- <sup>34</sup> "Call for a synod for the year 2000," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, May 23, 1997, 6.
- <sup>35</sup> Craig Meier, "Pittsburgh Bishop Played Role in Defining Immaculate Conception," *Pittsburgh Catholic*, December 6, 2002, accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.pittsburghcatholic.org/News/pittsburgh-bishop-played-role-in-defining-immaculate-conception>.