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Magnus Lundberg

A Polish-American Pope:  
Adam Oraczewski – Adam II



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## **About the Author**

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Uppsala Studies in Church History 19

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Magnus Lundberg, *A Polish-American Pope: Adam Oraczewski – Adam II*. Uppsala Studies in Church History 19. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Theology, 2025.

ISBN: 978-91-985944-0-9

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# Introduction

In 1927, a suspended Roman Catholic priest, Adam Anthony Oraczewski (1883–1973), published a 60-page booklet in Kansas City, Missouri. It had a bold title: *All in One True Faith*. The front page features a photo of the author dressed in the papal white, declaring that as of August 7, he was Adam II, Pope of the Holy Catholic Church.

Oraczewski's pamphlet presented scathing criticism of the Roman Catholic Church and proposed a drastic ecclesiastical reform that, according to the author, would lead to greater piety and human unity. The publication was the climax of fifteen years of conflicts between Oraczewski and Catholic church representatives in a long series of U.S. dioceses, parishes, and seminaries.

Among the twentieth-century alternative pontiffs we know of, Polish-American Adam II is one of the earliest and least known. Wanting to refrain from using the confessionally loaded and pejorative word “antipope,” I coined the expression “alternative pope” to denote people who have claimed that they, not the infinitely more recognized Roman pontiff, are the true leaders of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a much expanded and thoroughly revised version of Lundberg 2018. Both texts are part of the Alternative Pope Project which I initiated in 2015. For the project publications, see [www.manuslundberg.net/2024/08/30/](http://www.manuslundberg.net/2024/08/30/)

Studying this phenomenon, I have identified about forty individuals who have made public papal claims. The vast majority appeared in the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), and there are just four known pre-World War II cases. Apart from Adam II–Adam Oraczewski—they were Mexican Eduardo I (Eduardo Dávila Garza, 1905–1985, sed. 1933–?) and Colombian Pedro II (Antonio José Hurtado, 1892–1955, sed. 1939–1955); and from the mid-1920s, at least some of his adherents regarded Jan Maria Michał Kowalski (1871–1942), the leader of the Polish Mariavite Catholic Church as “the Slavic Pope.”<sup>2</sup>

The sources I use to reconstruct Adam Oraczewski’s biography include his own writings, newspaper articles, public records, and, not least, abundant files from ecclesiastical archives in two Catholic dioceses in the United States: Cleveland and Oklahoma City. Undoubtedly, the most extensive documentation—more than 500 pages—is found in the Archdiocesan Archives of Oklahoma City. However, the lion’s part of those records only deals with the 1920s and, to some extent, the late 1910s and early 1930s. On the other hand, most records in the Diocesan Archives of Cleveland are dated toward the end of his life in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

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the-alternative-pope-project. I want to thank Maciej Chrzanowski, who in 2018, made me aware of Pope Adam’s existence. Earlier research on Oraczewski is minimal. Gaffey 1980: 149–150 includes a brief discussion about the Oraczewski case, Pietrzyk 1994 is an article in Polish about Oraczewski’s claim and Rigazzi, 2021 a biographical note. Oraczewski’s name also appears in passing in some works on independent Catholicism, see Sadlowski 1967: 46, Zukowski 1967: 43, and Ward, Persson & Bain 1990: 304.

<sup>2</sup> See Lundberg 2017, Lundberg 2019, and Lundberg 2021.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Natasha Seymour, archivist of the Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, and Emily Ahlin, archivist of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, for their kind help with facilitating copies of the documentation.

My biography of Oraczewski follows a chronological outline, but only a relatively brief period of his life can be studied in great detail. We know little about his life before 1911, when he still lived in Poland, while his first sixteen years in the United States, up to his papal claim in 1927, can be thoroughly reconstructed.

This period in Oraczewski's life was conflict-filled, and conflicts tend to create sources. His case produced hundreds of letters and other documents. While most records were written by church authorities investigating his case, the files also include many letters from Oraczewski.

In the official account of the church authorities, Oraczewski was a fraudster and crook, though they understood at least part of his behavior as the effects of mental illness. He was medically evaluated on several occasions and eventually confined to a mental institution. According to Oraczewski's counter-narrative, he was an innocent victim who suffered a large-scale conspiracy led by power-hungry and unscrupulous churchmen. The church reform he presented in *All in One Faith* was very much a part of this counter-narrative, as it was clearly a reaction to perceived injustices.

If Oraczewski's first sixteen years in the United States were characterized by constant moves throughout the country, the remainder of his life would be stationary. For more than four decades, between 1929 and his death in 1973, Oraczewski remained in Cleveland, Ohio, living a reclusive life. Such a life is challenging to study, even if we have some documentation of his last decade compiled by church authorities, while the many writings that once were gathered from Oraczewski's home have disappeared.

Adam Oraczewski's life story is very unusual and undoubtedly a part of the eccentric part of church history: an account of a pontiff in the periphery. It is a bewildering and tragic story, and it is worth telling.

## Background, Studies, and Early Conflicts

Adam Antoni Oraczewski was born on October 7, 1883, in Radzanów, a rural town of just over a thousand inhabitants about a hundred kilometers northwest of Warsaw. By then, a part of the Russian Empire, the small town had a Catholic majority but a sizeable Jewish minority, and most inhabitants were dedicated to agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

Adam Oraczewski was one of six children of farmer Albin Maciej Oraczewski and his wife, Marianna née Nadratowska.<sup>5</sup> After attending school in his hometown, in 1901, he arrived in Warsaw, taking a high school exam, studying privately, and later teaching at a high school. According to later testimonies, in 1905, he also briefly studied Philosophy at the Diocesan Seminar in Płock but left within a year.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ohio County Naturalization Records: Declaration of Intention by Adam Anthony Oraczewski, February 15, 1929. On the history of Radzanów and its Catholic parish, see Smoleń 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Archives of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City [hereafter AAOC], Adam Oraczewski file [hereafter AO], Catholic Parish of Radzanów, Baptismal Certificate and letter from Bishop Nowowiejski of Płock to Bishop Kelley of Oklahoma City, June 25, 1925. See also “Młyn mechaciczny w Radzanowie” 2018.

<sup>6</sup> AAOC, AO, Hearing of Adam Oraczewski, April 6, 1926 and letter from Bishop Nowowiejski to Bishop Kelley, June 25, 1925. In testimonies from the late 1960s, Oraczewski claimed that before arriving in the United States he was a Professor of Languages at the University of Warsaw, where he taught Latin, French, German, and Russian, but also “higher mathematics,” see

In 1925, when the diocesan authorities in Oklahoma investigated his case, they wrote to the bishop of Płock, who asked the pastor of Radzanów to gather testimonies about Oraczewski's background and character. Some witnesses stated they had nothing against Oraczewski, whom they considered a kind man. Still, he was well known for his shrewd business activities and not for being an avid churchgoer. According to them: "Everyone was astonished when they heard of Adam Oraczewski's ordination to the priesthood, for they had hardly considered him fit for this dignity."<sup>7</sup>

At the age of 28, on December 1, 1911, Oraczewski arrived in New York.<sup>8</sup> He was one of the tens of thousands of Poles who immigrated to the United States every year around the turn of the century. The early 1910s, before World War I, constituted the peak of Polish emigration, not least from the parts that belonged to the Russian Empire.<sup>9</sup> Like almost all Poles who arrived in the United States at the time, Oraczewski had family members there, and he went directly to Detroit, where his brother Joseph (Józef; 1878–1946) lived.<sup>10</sup> By then, Poles were

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Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland [hereafter ADC], Oraczewski file [hereafter OF], Social summary, May 22, 1970. However, nothing indicates that he was teaching at the University in any capacity.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop Nowowiejski to Bishop Kelley, June 25, 1925: "omnes tantum admiratos esse, cum audissent de ordinatione Adami Oraczewski ad sacerdotium verum, vix enim illum aptum ad hanc dignitatem existimasse."

<sup>8</sup> New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), vol. 3936, S/S St. Louis from Southampton, departure on November 22 and arrival on December 1, 1911.

<sup>9</sup> For a general history of Polish immigration and Poles in the United States, see Bukowczyk 2008.

<sup>10</sup> For Joseph Oraczewski, see World War I Draft Registration Cards, Detroit, September 12, 1918, serial number 1839, order number A 2120. Joseph, who was married and had children in Radzanów, soon returned to his homeland, see "Młyn mechaniczny w Radzanowie" 2018.

the most numerous immigrant group in the city, and many worked in the rapidly growing car industry or other factories.<sup>11</sup>

However, Adam Oraczewski soon left for Orchard Lake Schools, some 60 kilometers from Detroit. The institution had its roots in the Polish seminary in the city, founded in 1884. However, due to the growing number of students, in 1909, it moved to rural Orchard Lake, where it was housed in the buildings of a former military academy. By the early 1910s, the schools had more than 300 students. However, only a minority were in the five-year philosophy and theology studies program—the seminary in the strict sense—that would lead to ordination to the priesthood. Instead, most followed a curriculum based on a European gymnasium model. Apart from Polish students, the seminary was open to men with Lithuanian and Ruthenian backgrounds.

One of the seminary's goals was to preserve knowledge of the Polish language and culture and form new generations of Polish-American students who would stay in their new country. Though theology was taught in Latin, many other courses were imparted in Polish and some in English. The seminary was inter-diocesan, i.e., it should train priests not only for work in the diocese of Detroit but for other parts of the United States, which needed Polish-speaking clergy.<sup>12</sup>

After about one year at Orchard Lake, Adam Oraczewski was expelled. In a letter from the mid-1920s, the seminary rector stated that he was an academically accomplished student but had to leave because of “certain eccentric

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<sup>11</sup> On Polish Detroit, see e.g., Zunz 2000: 187–195.

<sup>12</sup> Oraszewski's name appears in the Seminary's alumni catalogue: *Wykaz członków alumnatu Seminarium Polskiego* 1937: 40. For the history of the Polish seminary in Detroit and the Orchard Lake Schools, see Michnowich 1965 and Radzilowski 2009.

peculiarities which earned his superiors to doubt his fitness for the priesthood.” In another document, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Detroit made very similar claims: that Oraczewski had been a good student but that he had had “a queer, eccentric character.”<sup>13</sup>

After leaving Orchard Lake, Oraczewski was enrolled at St. Joseph’s Major Seminary in Yonkers, New York, also known as Dunwoodie. St. Joseph’s had been an important intellectual center by the turn of the century. However, after accusations of modernism in 1908, the rector and part of the faculty were dismissed, and the academic milieu immediately deteriorated. When arriving at Dunwoodie, Oraczewski registered under his middle name, Anthony, but did not complete his studies for the priesthood, which most of the members of his class did in 1915.<sup>14</sup> The seminary rector later stated that Oraczewski was expelled because of his “mental and physical defects” and for improper relations with a woman.<sup>15</sup>

In 1916 and 1917, Adam Oraczewski taught at the Polish-language Sacred Heart School in New Britain, Connecticut. It was a Roman Catholic elementary school with close ties to the Polish parish that bore the same name. From 1895 and more than six decades onwards, Lucyan (Lucian) Bójnowski (1868–1960) led the local church. At the time, New Britain was home to many Polish immigrants, most of whom worked in hardware factories, and the Sacred Heart became the religious center for them, having almost 10,000 parishioners at its height.

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<sup>13</sup> AAOC, AO, the Rector of Orchard Lake to the Diocese of Oklahoma City, March 5, 1926 and Chancellor Doyle to Bishop Kelley, May 1, 1926.

<sup>14</sup> See the list of seminarians in Scanlan 1922: 143. On Dunwoodie and modernism, see Shelley 1992.

<sup>15</sup> AAOC, AO, the Rector of St. Joseph’s to the Diocese of Oklahoma City, April 30, 1926.

Bójnowski was both ecclesiastically and politically influential, defending Polish identity in the United States.<sup>16</sup> By working at the school in New Britain, Oraczewski hoped that he would get a letter of recommendation from Bójnowski to continue his studies toward priesthood. However, that would not be the case, and by the fall of 1917, he was dismissed.<sup>17</sup>

On October 1, 1917, the police arrested Oraczewski for violation of postal laws, accusing him of having sent defamatory letters to and about Bartolomiej (Bartholomew) Aloysius Slawinski (1882–1971), the pastor of the Sacred Heart parish in Easthampton, Massachusetts. Oraczewski blamed Slawinski for his dismissal from the seminary. He claimed that while at Orchard Lake Schools, he had confessed to the recently ordained Slawinski, and according to Oraczewski, the priest broke the seal of confession, reporting “his wrongs” to the faculty.<sup>18</sup>

Since then, Oraczewski claimed “he had gone from place to place trying to start anew,” but that Slawinski had put him under surveillance, “preventing him from getting a steady job.” Therefore, he had “turned upon the priest by sending him defamatory letters, accusing him of wearing the garb dishonestly and breaking the holy vows.”<sup>19</sup> Oraczewski was

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<sup>16</sup> On Bójnowski, see Buczek 1974.

<sup>17</sup> AAOC, AO, Hearing of Adam Oraczewski, April 6, 1926 and Pastor Bójnowski to Bishop Kelley, February 20, 1926.

<sup>18</sup> “New Britain Violator of Postal Law Arrested,” *Hartford Courant*, October 2, 1917, and “Federal Prisoner Accuses Priest of Breaking Vows,” *Hartford Courant*, October 3, 1917.

<sup>19</sup> “New Britain Violator,” *Hartford Courant*, October 2, 1917 and “Federal Prisoner,” *Hartford Courant*, October 3, 1917. On Slawinski, see *Sacred Heart of Jesus Church* 1984: 11–16.

found guilty of defamation and fined \$10.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter, he rapidly left New Britain and Connecticut.

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<sup>20</sup> AAOC, AO, Hearing of Oraczewski, April 6, 1926.

## Ordination and Parish Work

After his dismissal and the following legal process, Adam Oraczewski left for Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he, once more, tried to become a seminarian, but to no avail. After briefly teaching at a Polish parochial school in Hatfield, Massachusetts, where he borrowed money without paying it back, he moved to Omaha, Nebraska.<sup>21</sup> On his draft registration card, signed there in September 1918, Oraczewski claimed to be a priest, which he was not, though he was certainly determined to become one.<sup>22</sup>

While in Omaha, he approached Bishop Jeremiah J. Harty (1853–1927), who sent Oraczewski to study with Pastor Michael F. Gluba (1883–1958) in St. Francis parish. Later, Gluba testified that Oraczewski overstayed his invitation and that it “was dam hard to get rid of him.” He thought Oraczewski should never be ordained to the priesthood as he was very unsuitable.<sup>23</sup> Still, Oraczewski was adamant and wrote to the bishop of Oklahoma City, Theophile Meershaert (1847–1924), asking him to be ordained for work among the Polish population

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<sup>21</sup> AAOC, AO, Hearing of Oraczewski, April 6, 1926, cf. Amela Jablonska, Hatfield to Bishop Meerschaert, May 31, 1920.

<sup>22</sup> United States World War I, Omaha Draft Registration Cards, September 12, 1918, serial number 1783, order number A2832.

<sup>23</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Gluba to Bishop Kelley, August 18, 1926.

living in the diocese. In the letter, he claimed that he had finished his theological education.<sup>24</sup>



Bishop Theophile Meershaert. Creative Commons

On April 8, 1919, Adam Oraczewski was, indeed, ordained by Bishop Meershaert. The process was unusually swift. During the last weeks of March, he rapidly went through the minor orders, the subdiaconate, and the diaconate.<sup>25</sup> As we have seen,

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<sup>24</sup> AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Bishop Meershaert, January 27, 1919.

<sup>25</sup> AAOC, AO, transcripts of *The Orphans' Record* (Oklahoma City), March and May issues, 1919.

Oraczewski attended two seminaries in the United States but left without finishing the courses. Still, before ordination, he could present a document purportedly signed in 1915 by the Bishop of Płock Antoni Julian Nowowiejski (1858–1941), stating that he had completed his seminary education there. He also included a certificate from the diocesan seminary in Płock. To put it mildly, these and other related records about his academic training later proved problematic.<sup>26</sup>

Following ordination, Bishop Meershaert sent Oraczewski to assist John Van Den Hende (1873–1951), the pastor of St. John's parish in Bartlesville, a petroleum, zinc, and lead production center close to the border with Kansas. Most workers were Poles, and the pastor did not know Polish. Oraczewski stayed there during parts of 1919 and 1920.<sup>27</sup>

In 1920, he replaced Anthony J. Suwalski (1870–1962) as pastor in Harrah, a rural town in Oklahoma County with a Polish majority, primarily involved in farming and cotton ginning. Still, his stay in Harrah was brief, as he was accused of dubious economic activities. He appropriated large sums of money from the parish, and parishioners appealed to the bishop, who, after an investigation, found him guilty and ordered him to leave Harrah and the diocese. Oraczewski

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<sup>26</sup> "'Pope Adam II,' Once Priest in Oklahoma Accused of Fraud," *The Catholic Advance*, October 1, 1927. The document purportedly signed by Bishop Nowowiejski was dated on September 15, 1915. Together with other records about Oraczewski's alleged seminary training it is now in AAOC, AO.

<sup>27</sup> United States Census 1920, Bartlesville Ward 3, Washington, Oklahoma, District ED 270, sheet number 6B. See also *Official Catholic Directory* 1920: 492 and an advertisement in *Morning Examiner* (Bartlesville), July 19, 1919. On Poles in Bartlesville, see the entry "Bartlesville" in the *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

ignored the bishop's decision, and eventually, the civil authorities had to intervene to remove him.<sup>28</sup>

The diocesan authorities considered Oraczewski's behavior erratic, and after the events in Harrah, he was evaluated at a psychiatric hospital but not confined.<sup>29</sup> According to documents written more than four decades later, Oraczewski had planned to return to his native country, which had become an independent republic by then, "yet he could not get to Poland because of the unsettled political conditions there."<sup>30</sup> Instead, by March 1921, Oraczewski went to Cleveland, Ohio, where he briefly served as an assistant priest in the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, located in the Warszawa neighborhood.<sup>31</sup>

This church had an unusual background. In the 1890s, it began as an independent Polish Catholic congregation led by Anton Francis Kołaszewski (1855–1910), a former Roman Catholic priest who had been removed from parish duty and eventually excommunicated. The congregation that was ethnically Polish, recognized the principles of democracy and religious freedom in the U.S. Constitution, and opposed the dogma of papal infallibility. In his study of the parish, Charles R. Kaczynski defines the position as "Polish-Americanist."<sup>32</sup>

For a very brief time, the congregation was associated with the French independent Archbishop René Vilatte (1854–

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<sup>28</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Suwalski to Bishop Meershaert, December 1920 and Pastor Orzechowski to Bishop Schrembs, December 6, 1924, cf. *Official Catholic Directory* 1921: 492. On the Polish community in Harrah, see Koliński 1995: 44–45 and the entry "Harrah" in the *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

<sup>29</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Orzechowski to Bishop Schrembs, December 6, 1924.

<sup>30</sup> ADC, OF, Social summary, May 22, 1970

<sup>31</sup> ADC, Records of Priests: Adam Oraczewski, 1921.

<sup>32</sup> On the Immaculate Heart of Mary church, see Kaczynski 1998b.

1927) but largely autonomous. Still, in 1908, the parish was admitted into the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. By Oraczewski's time, Marion J. Orzechowski (1877–1939) had been the pastor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for over a decade. He was known for being diplomatic and trying to mediate conflict-filled relations between the parishioners who had been independents and others.<sup>33</sup> Still, he immediately clashed with Oraczewski, who once again was found guilty of economic irregularities.<sup>34</sup>

After just three months in Cleveland, between June 1921 and August 1922, Oraczewski was the pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Claremont, New Hampshire, which formed part of the Diocese of Manchester. There, he was actively involved in constructing a new church building for the Polish community. However, he was again found guilty of economic irregularities and shady business activities and dismissed.<sup>35</sup>

A newly ordained cleric serving for short periods in several parishes was not rare, but leaving his home diocese so close to ordination was less common, and to serve in three dioceses in as many years was even rarer. And Oraczewski was already well-known for his interest in money that did not belong to him. In a letter dated in late December 1924 to the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oklahoma City, Pastor Anthony Suwalski summarized Oraczewski's activities during the last three years: "everywhere his prime vice was cheating pastors and stealing money."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kaczynski 1998b, cf. Radeker & Sobola 1993.

<sup>34</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Orzechowski to Bishop Schrembs, December 6, 1924.

<sup>35</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Orzechowski to Bishop Schrembs, December 6, 1924, cf. *Saint Joseph Church* 1975.

<sup>36</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Suwalski to Chancellor McGuire, December 21, 1924.

According to the yearly published *Official Catholic Directory*, Oraczewski stayed in Claremont for a decade until 1932.<sup>37</sup> The reality was entirely different.

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<sup>37</sup> *Official Catholic Directory* 1922: 988; *Official Catholic Directory* 1923: 1022; *Official Catholic Directory* 1924: 1079; *Official Catholic Directory* 1925: 1113; *Official Catholic Directory* 1926: 1149; *Official Catholic Directory* 1927: 955; *Official Catholic Directory* 1928: 993; *Official Catholic Directory* 1929: 976; *Official Catholic Directory* 1930: 1033; *Official Catholic Directory* 1931: 1068; and *Official Catholic Directory* 1932: 1094

## Suspicion, Suspension, and Confinement

In February 1924, Bishop Meershaert died, and even before his successor as Bishop of Oklahoma City, Francis C. Kelley (1870–1948), was installed, the diocesan authorities began to document the behavior of Adam Oraczewski. The accusations did not only concern economic irregularities. After an investigation, he was found guilty of writing a letter to the Pope, forging the signatures of Vicar General Gustave Depreitere (1871–1961) and Chancellor John F. McGuire (1894–1950).<sup>38</sup> In the letter, he recommended himself as Bishop Meershaert's successor, claiming full support among the diocesan clergy:

With the common consent and desire of the entire clergy of the Diocese of Oklahoma, we prostrate ourselves at the feet of Your Holiness and humbly pray that You would deign to give us, as our bishop, the Most Reverend Adam Antonius Oraczewski, a most suitable priest of the aforementioned diocese, for he was an example of piety, prudence, and moral integrity.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Pope Adam II," *The Catholic Advance*, October 1, 1927, cf. "Suspended 'a divinis,'" *The Catholic Advance*, January 24, 1925.

<sup>39</sup> A transcript of the false letter to Pius XI, dated April 24, 1924 is found in AAOC, AO. In the Latin original, Oraczewski writes: "Annuentes communi consensu ac desiderio totius cleri dioecesis Oklahomensis, ad pedes Sanctitatis Vestrae provoluti, humillime oramus, ut pro episcopo nostro Reverendissimum Dominum Adamum Antonium Oraczewski, aptissimum, supradictae dioecesis presbyterum, dare nobis dignatus sis. Ipse enim pietate, prudentia, morumque integritate exemplar fuit."

SUAE SANCTITATI DOMINI NOSTRI PAPAE

PII XI

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.  
Die 24, Aprilis, 1924, an.

Beatissime Pater:

Annuentes communi consensu ac desiderio totius cleri diocesis Oklahomensis, ad pedes Sanctitatis Vestrae provoluti, humillime oramus, ut pro episcopo nostro Reverendissimum Dominum Adamum Antonium Oraczewski, aptissimum, supradictae diocesis presbyterum, dare nobis dignatus sis. Ipse enim pietate, prudentia, morumque integritate exemplar fuit.

Natus est ille:

Die 7, Octobris, 1885, ann.

Ordinatus:

Die 8, Aprilis, 1909, ann.

Locus habitationis illius est:

SS. Cyrilli & Methodii R. C. Church  
1709, East, 31, Street,  
Lorain, Ohio. U. S. N. America.

Hic ipsius facsimile "photograph", apponitur.

Administrator: G. Depreitere

Cancellarius: Mc Guire.

*Concordat cum originali servato in Archiepiscopio huius S. Congregationis*

*Romae 29 Aprilis 1924*



*Ecclesiae Archiepiscopii*

*Lloyd - Stewart*

Official transcript of the false letter to the Pope, April 24, 1924.  
Archives of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City (AAOC). Published  
with permission.

When writing the letter, Oraczewski served in a Hungarian parish in Lorain, Ohio. Later that year, he was an assistant pastor in Detroit and a chaplain at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Keany, Nebraska.<sup>40</sup>

Due to the falsified letter on January 12, 1925, Oraczewski was suspended *a divinis* by the Sacred Consistorial Congregation; i.e., he was forbidden to exercise all priestly acts.<sup>41</sup> Bishop Kelley confined him to the rural Sacred Heart Benedictine Abbey in the Seminole area. Initially, Oraczewski should stay at Sacred Heart Abbey for a one-month retreat. Thereafter, he would be on one year's probation, supervised by a parish priest.<sup>42</sup> In the end, his stay would be much more extended.

Bishop Kelley harbored other suspicions: that Oraczewski had fabricated the Polish documents he had presented before ordination. He appointed Ildephone Lonslots OSB (1859–1941) as an attorney, who would lead a committee investigating the case.<sup>43</sup> The diocesan officials scrutinized the testimonials and rapidly concluded that they were, indeed, false. Among other things, the papers, purportedly signed by the Polish bishop in 1915, and the certificate from the seminary in Płock bore a watermark used by a company based in Omaha, Nebraska,

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<sup>40</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Orzechowski to Bishop Schrembs, December 6, 1924 and Bishop Duffy of Grand Island to Bishop Kelley, January 27, 1925.

<sup>41</sup> AAOC, AO, Sacra Congregatio Constitutionalis, Monitum, January 12, 1925, see also *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 1925: 19: "Declaratur pro norma Ordinariorum, praesertim Foederatorum Statuum Americae Septentrionalis, sacerdotem Adamum Antonium Oraczewski, dioecesis Oklahomensis, a Sacra Congregatione Consistoriali, die 12 ianuarii 1.925, suspensum esse a divinis."

<sup>42</sup> ADC, Bishop Kelley to Fr. Ospital OSB, October 22, 1925. On the Sacred Heart Abbey, see Gaffey 1980: 138–143.

<sup>43</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Fr. Sausen OSB, March 30, 1926.

where Oraczewski lived just before arriving in Oklahoma City. Without any doubt, they were forgeries.<sup>44</sup> During the investigation, the diocese contacted several parishes, seminaries, and priests to obtain testimonies about Oraczewski's background and behavior during the last fifteen years.<sup>45</sup>



Bishop Francis C. Kelley. Creative Commons.

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<sup>44</sup> "Pope Adam II," *The Catholic Advance*, October 1, 1927 and "Suspended 'a divinis,'" *The Catholic Advance*, January 24, 1925. For the Trans-Mississippi Bond, produced by Carpenter Paper Co. in Omaha, which Oraczewski used, see *Watermarks and Brands* 1909: 74.

<sup>45</sup> All this correspondence is found in AAOC, AO.

On April 6, 1926, Oraczewski was formally questioned by Attorney Lanslots together with notaries John B. Dudek (1890–1963) and Richard R. St. John (1895–1954). Oraczewski maintained that he knew nothing about any letter from the bishop of Płock. When asked about his studies in Poland, he stated that before arriving in the United States in 1911, he had lived almost a decade in Warsaw studying and teaching. Still, in 1905, he entered the Plock Seminary but left within a year. Apart from that, he had not attended any Polish seminary.<sup>46</sup>

The attorney confronted him with a certificate from the diocesan seminary in Płock stating that he had completed all theological courses with excellent results. Oraczewski said he had never seen this document before and did not know who had sent it to Meershaert. Instead, he asserted that the bishop had ordained him without asking for any documentation. Oraczewski was also confronted with a letter from a non-existent priest in Omaha recommending him for ordination. Moreover, the attorney presented some torn papers, which the pastor in Bartlesville found in Oraczewski's trash bin when he had moved out in 1919. They included other forged documents.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> AAOC, AO, Hearing of Adam Oraczewski, April 6, 1926.

<sup>47</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor van den Hende to Bishop Kelley, August 9, 1926.

ANTONIUS JULIANUS  
**NOWOWIEJSKI**  
*Dei Miseratione et S. Sedis Apostolicae gratia*  
**EPISCOPUS PLOCENSIS**  
Praelatus Domesticus Suae Sanctitatis  
S. Th. M.

*Exhibet VII  
III*

Universis et singulis, quorum interesse potest,  
notum testatumque facimus, quantum Nos, dilectum in Chri  
sto, dominum Adamum Antonium Orackewski urbe Radzenowia  
Nostrae dioecesis, die 7 Octobris 1883 an., natum, ex ju  
risdictione Nostra spirituali, ut in dioecesi.....  
.....ad ordines tam minores quam maiores  
promoveri et beneficia ecclesiastica possidere queat, di  
mittimus minime eum ad reditum obligantes.

Insuper, in quantum sciamus, testificamur, eum  
nullo canonico impedimento irretitum esse et ubique et  
semper summa moralitate atque morum integritate sese excel  
luisse. In quorum fidem etc....



Datum Plociae, die 15 Septembris 1915 an.

+ Antonius Julianus Episcopus

Cancellarius

*F. Janowski*

Falsified letter from Bishop Nowowiejski of Plock, September 15, 1915. AAOC. Published with permission.

No. 126

## Seminarium S. Josephi

TESTAMUR PRAESENTIBUS

Dominum Adamum Antonium Oraczewski  
urbe Radanovia die 7<sup>a</sup> Octobris, 1883 anni  
natum, studia sua Theologica in supra dicto semina-  
rio peragisse, summa moralitate atque morum in-  
tegritate sese semper excelluisse.

In examine autem finali quarti anni  
sacrae Theologiae, peracto die 10<sup>a</sup> Junii 1915  
anni, sequentem in singulis doctrinis progressum  
exhibuisse:

INTR. BIBLICA.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
EXEGETIS.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
APOLOGETICA.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
DOGMATICA.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
SACRAMENTARIA.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
ETHICA.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
THEOL. MORALIS.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
PASTORALIS.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
HISTOR. ECCLES.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
PATROLOGIA.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
ARCHEOL. CHRIST.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
JUS CANONICUM.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
ELOQUENTIA SACRA.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
PEDAGOGIA, CATECHET.....	= <u>Optime,</u>
LITURGICA.....	= <u>Eminente,</u>
CANTUS GREGORIANUS.....	= <u>Optime.</u>

Datum Plociae, die 15<sup>a</sup> Junii 1915 an.

Rector F. Podbielski

Falsified certificate from the Diocesan Seminary in Plock, June 15, 1915. AAOC. Published with permission.

Suspecting that all or most of the Polish documents Oraczewski had provided were falsified, Bishop Kelley wrote to his colleague in Plock, who knew nothing about the papers. His conclusion was unambiguous: he had not signed any of them,

and the seminary had not issued any certificate.<sup>48</sup> The final result of the investigation was that all Polish documents, apart from a baptismal certificate, were deemed false. Based on the use of falsified documents to obtain ordination, Bishop Kelley suspended Oraczewski from all clerical functions according to Canon 2374, which reads:<sup>49</sup>

Whoever approaches orders without dimissorial letters or with false ones, or before the canonical age, or at least in some evil way, is by that fact suspended from the order received; and if [one does so] without testimonial letters or while detained by a censure, irregularity, or other impediment, he is to be punished with grave penalties according to the circumstances of things.<sup>50</sup>

Oraczewski answered the bishop, stating that this canon could not apply to his case because he had done nothing wrong. He maintained that he had not given Bishop Meerschaert any papers before ordination. He claimed that during the lunch after the ordination, the bishop had advised him to write “a good thanksgiving letter” to Bishop Harty of Omaha as he had provided him with the “best recommendations.”<sup>51</sup>

Though Adam Oraczewski was found guilty of providing falsified documentation, the ordination, as such, was considered valid. Still, Bishop Kelley would certainly not employ him in any parish, and he would not recommend him to

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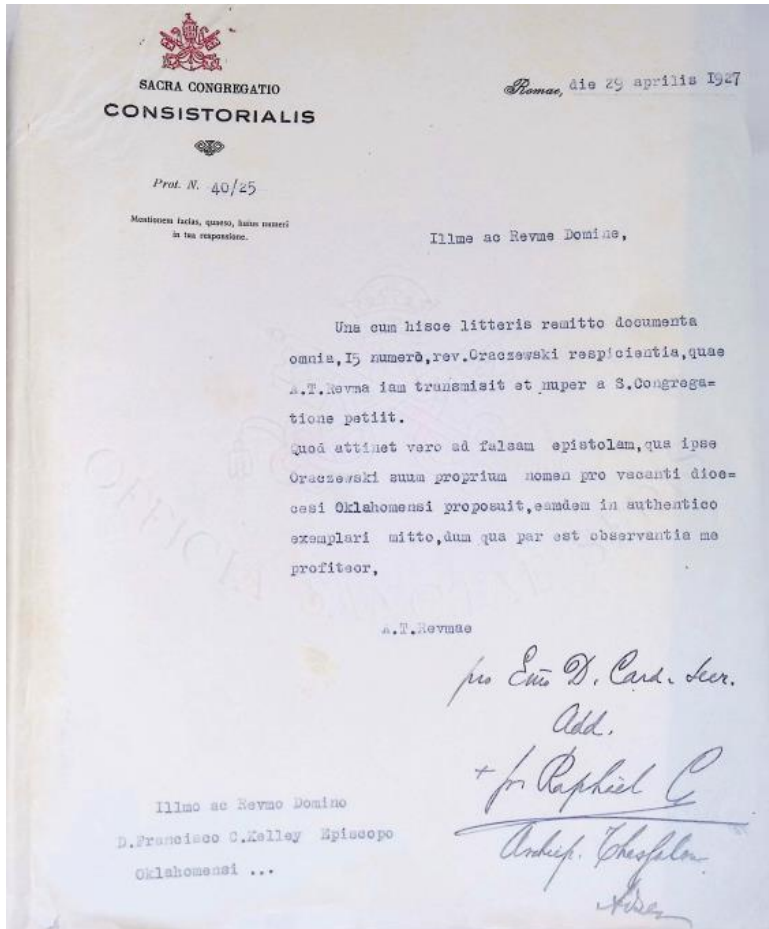
<sup>48</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Bishop Nowowiejski, August 18, 1926 and Bishop Nowowiejski to Bishop Kelley, September 10, 1926.

<sup>49</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Oraczewski, September 29, 1926.

<sup>50</sup> For the translation, see *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, can. 2374. The Latin original reads: “Qui sine litteris vel cum falsis dimissoriis litteris, vel ante canonicam aetatem, vel per saltum ad ordines malitiose accesserit, est ipso facto a recepto ordine suspensus; qui autem sine litteris testimonialibus vel detentus aliqua censura, irregularitate aliove impedimento, gravibus poenis secundum rerum adiuncta puniatur.”

<sup>51</sup> AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Bishop Kelley, October 6, 1926.

any other bishop in the United States. At the same time, the diocese paid for Oraczewski's board at the Abbey for almost two years. Trying to solve the problem in November 1926, Kelley forwarded Latin translations of all relevant files to Rome.<sup>52</sup>



Letter from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation to Bishop Kelley, April 25, 1927. AAOC. Published with permission.

<sup>52</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Pope Pius XI, November 6, 1926.

On January 31, 1927, the Sacred Consistorial Congregation declared that Adam Oraczewski had never been formally incardinated in the diocese of Oklahoma City. Consequently, they had no obligation to sustain him economically.<sup>53</sup>

In early May 1927, Oraczewski prepared an eight-page letter to Pope Pius XI, though it is unknown whether a copy of this letter ever reached the pontiff. In the document, he developed what he saw as the horrible ordeals he had gone through at the Sacred Heart Abbey during the last 27 months. He was convinced that he would die there, possibly murdered by the monks. He partially related his sufferings at the Sacred Heart to the fact that many of the monks were Germans who hated Poles.<sup>54</sup>

The ecclesiastical authorities informed Oraczewski that he should preferably return to Poland, and the bishop offered him \$200 to cover the costs of the journey.<sup>55</sup> An alternative would be to live a life of penance in, e.g., the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Louisville, Kentucky. Oraczewski was not happy with any of the solutions. He was convinced that all rumors about him had reached Poland, so he would never get a position in his old home country. Moreover, there was a great need for Polish-speaking priests in the United States.

In his long letter to the Pope, Oraczewski claimed that “the four million Poles” living in the United States needed priests who knew their language but that the German and Irish

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<sup>53</sup> AAOC, AO, Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Transcript of Protocol 40/25, January 1927 and letter from the Congregation to Bishop Kelley, April 25, 1927.

<sup>54</sup> AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Pius XI, May 9, 1927.

<sup>55</sup> AAOC, AO, Vicar General Depreitre to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington D.C., June 20, 1927, cf. Bishop Kelley to Bishop Gallagher of Detroit, March 7, 1927.

priests wanted to dominate the church and counteracted the Polish clergy. Therefore, he asked the Pope to intercede for him and the Polish-Americans.<sup>56</sup>

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Rev. Adam A. Oraczewski,  
Sacred Heart Abbey  
Sacred Heart, Oklahoma

May 9<sup>th</sup> 1927.

To His Holiness Pius XI.

Most Holy Father!

As I stay at Sacred Heart Monastery, Sacred Heart, Oklahoma, United States of North America, over 27 months and I clearly see by the concrete facts that the Bishop and the monks over here plotted and conspired against me as the things are gradually going from a bad to worse. In order to avoid a serious misfortune, and perhaps a murder, I most humbly and earnestly ask Your Holiness to settle the matter as soon as possible.

That Bishop Francis Clement Kelley plotted against me it is evident from the expression of Right Reverend J. Depreitere, Vicar General of the Diocese of Oklahoma, addressed to me, when I saw him on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1925, then he said: "It would be far better if you would not come to see the Bishop at all as he prepares a very hot time for you. You will be done for a good and forever."

Letter from Oraczewski to Pope Pius XI, May 9, 1927. AAOC.  
Published with permission.

<sup>56</sup> AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Pius XI, May 9, 1927.

Bishop Kelley thought that Oraczewski would not accept the decision but arrive at his residence, causing problems and possibly trying to steal the case files. He, therefore, asked the Apostolic Delegate in Washington D.C. to permit him to contact “secular authorities” if Oraczewski was trespassing and hopefully get him sent for psychiatric evaluation.<sup>57</sup> Kelley also tried to find ways to get Oraczewski deported. In a letter to the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the bishop wrote:

I should like you to make inquiry from the proper Federal Department to find out why this man [Oraczewski] cannot be deported. It is my opinion that if the facts were known to the Judge there is sufficient against him to prevent him from becoming a citizen – that he is entirely ineligible. When he is thrown on his own resources he will not be able to find any place to exercise this ministry, nor could he keep a place on account of his crazy behavior, if he got it ... I cannot understand how the law could give him any right to remain in the United States as a delinquent and practically a vagrant.”<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately, Oraczewski left Sacred Heart and the Diocese of Oklahoma City but did not return to Poland.

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<sup>57</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to the Apostolic Delegate, March 10, 1927 and Vicar General Depreitre to the Apostolic Delegate, June 20, 1927.

<sup>58</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to the Immigrant Department, National Catholic Welfare Conference, March 10, 1927.

ALL IN ONE TRUE FAITH



HIS HOLINESS ADAM II. P.P.

ADAM ANTHONY ORACZEWSKI

Born October 7th, 1883    Ordained April 8th, 1919, proclaimed

POPE OF THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

AUG. 7th, 1927

404 E. 10th St., Kansas City, Mo., U. S. A.

Copyright 1927 by Rev. Adam A. Oraczewski

Adam Oraczewski's 1927 publication. AAOC. Published with permission.



## The Papal Claim

By the summer of 1927, the diocesan authorities in Oklahoma learned that Oraczewski was in Kansas City, Missouri, and using forged letters of recommendation from Bishop Kelley, he could serve as a priest there. By early September 1927, the already complicated case took a new dramatic turn as Oraczewski made his public papal claims, publishing the booklet *All in One True Faith*, which he distributed to clergy, laypeople, and the media.<sup>59</sup> A few newspapers ran the unusual story, several of them poking fun at the front-page photo of Adam II dressed in the papal white:

On the first glance, Oraczewski's picture in papal garments makes him a pretty distinguished looking pope. With a little closer scrutiny, however, reveals that the chain of his pectoral cross appears to be a piece of curtain cord. His skull cap covers nearly his whole head. His white cassock with cape is noticeably

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<sup>59</sup> Oraczewski 1927 and AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Bishop Kelley, July 6, 1927, cf. "New 'Pope' Here Fails to Convince", *The Catholic Register*, September 8, 1927 and "Pope Adam II: A Clever Forger", *The Catholic Register*, September 15, 1927. See also "Pope' has Hard Job to Portray Vatican Part," *The Belleville News Democrat*, September 23, 1927, and "'Pope Adam II,'" *The Catholic Advance*, October 1, 1927. The news also reached Poland, see e.g., "Ks. Oraczewski awansował na 'papieża'", *Katolik Codzienny*, October 13, 1927. I would like to thank Maciej Chrzanowski for translating the Polish article.

longer on the right side than the left. And best of all his feet are encased in tennis shoes! <sup>60</sup>

On the front page of the booklet, Oraczewski noted that he was “proclaimed Pope of the Holy Catholic Church, August 7, 1927.” Briefly presenting his background, the author explained that he was raised and educated in the Roman Catholic Church and ordained eight years ago. However, through his seminary training and ministry, he realized that the church was thoroughly corrupt and had introduced dogmas and laws that “spoiled the purity of Christ’s simple teachings.”

In his view, in the current era, the Roman Catholic Church was filled with hypocrisy, and it did not contribute to improving people but the opposite. Realizing this state of affairs and the reform would not come from within the church, he “decided to fight with all our might and main” to restore the true faith. He did not state that he was a divinely elected pope but the initiator of the reform and wrote, “We do firmly believe that the almighty God will bless our enterprise.”<sup>61</sup>

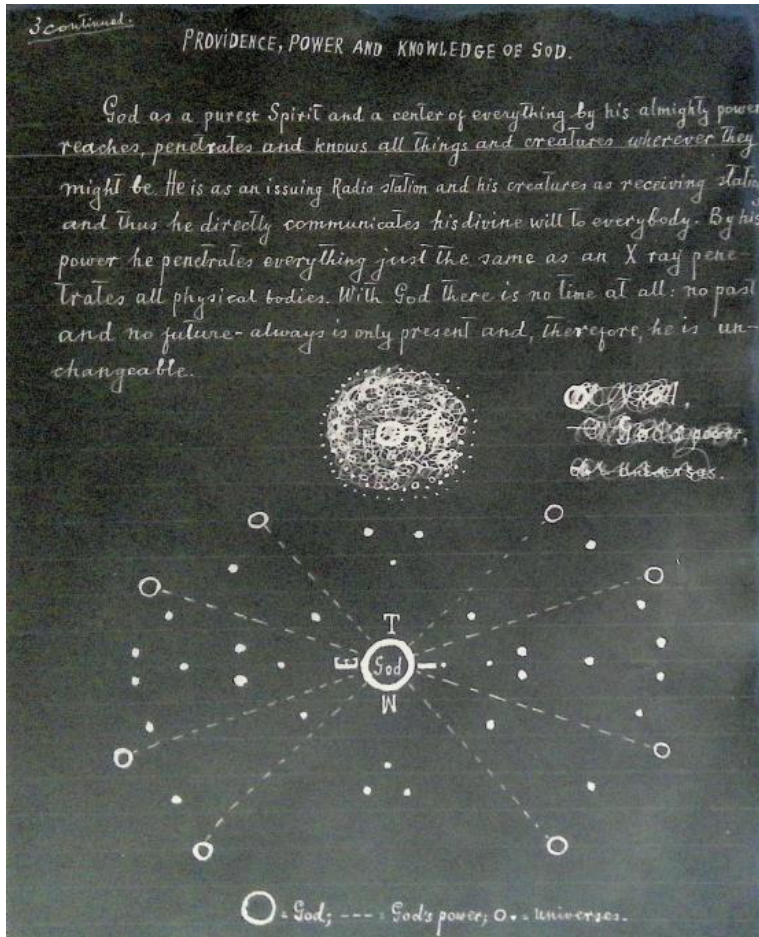
Oraczewski’s papal claim did not surprise the diocese of Oklahoma City. Even before *All in One True Faith* was published, they knew about its contents. Already in June 1927, the Benedictines at Sacred Heart Abbey learned that Oraczewski had sent the manuscript to a printer in Shawnee, Oklahoma. With the help of a lawyer, the diocese secured a photographic reproduction of the manuscript and presented it to a board of “country doctors and a judge” to obtain a

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<sup>60</sup> “New ‘Pope’ Here Fails to Convince”, *The Catholic Register*, September 8, 1927.

<sup>61</sup> Oraczewski 1927: n.p., 1 and 57–58.

declaration of insanity. However, the court ruled against it, not finding enough evidence.<sup>62</sup>



Part of Oraczewski's manuscript. The drawing is not reproduced in the printed version. AAOC. Published with permission.

<sup>62</sup> AAOC, AO, photo reproduction of the whole manuscript with Oraczewski's corrections and letter from Vicar General Depreitre to the Apostolic Delegate, June 20, 1927. See also Oraczewski to Heritage Printing Co. May 18 and June 6, 1927.

The diocese also knew that Oraczewski had bought a white cassock and skull cap and that he had had a studio take photos of him wearing the papal outfit. Thus, they were not unprepared for Oraczewski's pontificate. They also realized that he had used the bishop's money not to return to Poland but to print a booklet attacking the Roman Catholic Church and making his papal claim.<sup>63</sup>

While the press concentrated on the photo of Pope Adam and his claims, throughout *All in One True Faith*, Oraczewski put little emphasis on his papal office but focused on his diagnosis of the current Roman Catholic Church and his vision of a new, true Church. Pope Adam was convinced that his radical reform would lead the world to greater religious and social unity by proposing a common religious ground that could be accepted by non-Catholics, too. However, he saw the contents of his reform program as open for discussion. Still, he asked the readers to take it seriously, pray for its success, support it economically, and spread the message.<sup>64</sup>

In writing this booklet, we have in our mind a most cherished desire to find a common ground on which, by mutual concessions, all creeds, religions and religious denominations might be united in one true and reasonable faith under the banner of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.<sup>65</sup>

According to Oraczewski, the main problems of the Roman Catholic Church were seminaries, careerism, and celibacy. All these aspects led to hypocrisy and corruption and made the

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<sup>63</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to the Apostolic Delegate, March 26, 1927.

<sup>64</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 1-7.

<sup>65</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 1.

clergy an obstacle to true religion and the unification of humanity.

Pope Adam showed a particular dislike for seminaries, which he thought destroyed everything good in the young men who attended. He included an extended fictitious conversation between a newly arrived seminarian and others who had spent several years at a seminary to prove his point. Through the conversation, Pope Adam presented the seminary culture as the root of ecclesiastical hypocrisy, where young men crawled for the teachers to get good grades. They would gladly spy on their co-seminarians and report to the professors to receive favors. The confessors also contributed to the scheme by passing on secrets. He concluded that a seminarian would be expelled if he did not play the game astutely.<sup>66</sup>

After presenting what he saw as the dismal status of the seminaries, Adam II included a conversation between the same men, which took place several years after their ordination to the priesthood. They talked about the slave work that assistant priests had to do while the pastors did little or nothing. Moreover, they claimed that many, if not all, priests cohabited with women. However, if the diocesan seminaries were terrible, in their view, the education of the regular clergy was even worse. They claimed monasteries were perilous places, not least due to the prevalent power struggle. In short, the monasteries were seedbeds for corruption and produced even worse priests than the diocesan seminaries.<sup>67</sup>

Adam II's vision for the reformed church was standardized. Young men should begin their studies at the seminary at 20. After their five-year education, passing

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<sup>66</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 22–28.

<sup>67</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 35–44.

through minor, intermediate, and major seminary, they would be ordained and receive both a Ph.D. and a D.D. degree. After ordination to the priesthood, they should immediately become bishops and administrators of a parish; there would be no such thing as assistant clergy. To sustain a priest economically but still be manageable, a parish should comprise some 500 families.

According to Pope Adam, the vast distinctions between priests and bishops were among the many errors that plagued the Roman Church. He claimed that much intra-ecclesiastical corruption and abuse of power would disappear by making all priests into bishops. It did not require any special ritual, as apostolic succession was transmitted through the ordination to the priesthood.<sup>68</sup>

Adam II argued that there was no distinction between priests and bishops in the earliest church. The priest could administer all sacraments. Later, the bishops usurped the sacraments of ordination and confirmation. They also claimed special jurisdiction so priests needed the bishop's permission to say Mass and hear confession. Adam II said this development was due to the bishops' ever-growing lust for power and money. He claimed that nobody could become a bishop without good connections and bribery. Even more money was needed to be elevated to archbishop, cardinal, and eventually the Pope. All this money had to be "squeezed" out of the faithful and the lower clergy.<sup>69</sup> He concluded:

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<sup>68</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 9–12 and 47–50. Sadlowski 1967:46, Zukowski 1967: 43, and Ward, Persson & Bain 1990: 304 all claim that Oraczewski was consecrated a bishop, which he was not.

<sup>69</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 11–13.

the highest ecclesiastical dignities and honors are not given for the conspicuous services to the Church and religion to those, who really deserve them but to the most unscrupulous, who all their life worked only for themselves and to satisfy their proud purposes.<sup>70</sup>

In Pope Adam's vision, the ecclesiastical career should solely be based on the years of service. At 35, the bishop would become archbishop, at 45, cardinal, and when he turned 55, he would be named an apostle. The author said nothing about their tasks, whether a higher position meant increased ecclesiastical power or whether it was just an honor conceded for the work done. He only described the different types of garments they should use. At the top of the hierarchy was the Pope. Adam II did not indicate any age for the pontiff nor how he should be elected. It is, however, clear that the Pope was not infallible and should not be able to issue any church laws without the consent of the Congress of Clergy, where all bishops had an equal vote. In the near future, he intended to call such a Congress to vote on the reforms he had presented in his booklet. His ideal was a collegial church leadership.<sup>71</sup>

If joining Pope Adam's Catholic Church, Roman Catholic priests would immediately be named bishops, and all Protestant ministers could be ordained to the priesthood and made bishops, and so could rabbis.<sup>72</sup> Although Pope Adam opposed the ordination of women to the priesthood, he wanted to re-establish the office of deaconess, as it had been abolished due to false Roman Catholic teachings. Just as in the case of male clerics, former Roman Catholic sisters and nuns would be

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<sup>70</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 13.

<sup>71</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 43–55.

<sup>72</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 54.

blessed as deaconesses when joining the Reformed Catholic Church, but so could “accomplished nurses.”<sup>73</sup>

Neither clergy nor deaconesses should be celibate, as Pope Adam claimed that celibacy was both unnatural and biologically impossible. It was a “rampant abuse” and a supreme sign of hypocrisy. He argued that if God had intended to create some people destined for celibacy, he would have made them differently, i.e., without sexual organs. To force people to take a vow contradicting natural law went against fundamental human rights. He also claimed that the enforced celibacy made priests unnatural in their relations with female parishioners as they tried to counteract temptations. They would become “too stiff, too official, and too reserved.” In this way, due to enforced celibacy, ordained men became mean people and useless priests.<sup>74</sup>

Though Adam II dedicated much space to church organization, he also included more general doctrinal teachings. In his theology, he focused on God the Creator, and while he did not present any anti-Trinitarian doctrines, he said little explicitly about the divinity of Christ. He vehemently opposed the idea of evolution; God created everything from the beginning. Still, he conceded that humanity developed culturally through the ages and that this implied physical development, too: “certain modification of forms and limbs of the human body.” What the author meant by this curious statement was not explained.<sup>75</sup> Pope Adam presented a version of the so-called first cause argument for the existence of the Creator, which he saw as the basis of a “rational theology.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 29, 50 and 54.

<sup>74</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 14–20.

<sup>75</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 2–9 and 41–47.

<sup>76</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 7–8.

As every object has a maker, the universe must have a maker that is uncaused. Given his penchant for modern comparisons, Pope Adam started by describing a car found in a forest. That car had not grown by itself but was constructed by people with a deep knowledge of engineering and mechanics. Expanding on the car analogy, he argued for the necessity of a universal mechanic.

Suppose, that some ingenious mechanic should build a car, put into it a wonderful and complicated motor, and into the motor itself, he should put something special, which would make that car a living and reasonable creature, so that it would be able to run by itself and without any driver; to get gasoline, which mechanician would freely provide for it and put it into easy reach of it.

Sometime later on that same mechanician would make another car of the same pattern as the first one, but only with a very little difference. After several years, while the cars were at a joyful play, there would happen a very pleasant collision, and out of it the car number two would produce again and again the other baby cars. By this natural law they would produce the other baby cars and so on. So that that the cars would multiply themselves in a very large number. And if afterwards those cars would become so smart as to be able to build garages for themselves, to play music, to dance, to invent Radio, X-rays and many other wonderful things.

To make the cars perfectly happy, the mechanician would take a straw and a little molecule of wet soap on it and, putting it into his mouth, he would blow and produce a very beautiful ball, which could be suspended in the air and would shine and give at the same time a beautiful light and warmth. After the cars would become tired of running and playing, the beautifully shining ball would hide itself and thus the cars would be compelled to retire for a little while to rest and to be refreshed for the next play; if he would make a smaller light to shine during their rest for them very nice and refreshing showers once in a while to wash the dust off of them and make them clean. I a would, if he should do everything to make them

perfectly happy sati[s]fied and happy, would he not be a wonderful man?<sup>77</sup>

In Pope Adam's creation story, God was the ultimate mechanic who caused and created everything. The omnipotent mechanic was in himself eternal and uncaused, and he created immortal souls in his likeness so that humans could enjoy life on earth and after death, if living an upright life.

Though some knowledge of God could be grasped through observing the creation, according to Pope Adam, the Bible was the essential source of divine Revelation. It was written by "God's inspired people," and the reading of Scripture conferred grace. At the same time, he underlined that the texts had been subject to additions and omissions throughout the ages, which had corrupted God's message. Although he believed that Revelation ended with the compilation of the Bible, God could still communicate in extraordinary ways in the contemporary era, such as by transmitting messages through the radio. It is unclear if that indicates Oraczewski thought he had received his papal mission that way, but the radio theme is reiterated throughout the pamphlet.<sup>78</sup> For example, he stated, "God is like a radio station, issuing all communications directly to his creatures, which are receiving stations." On the other hand, this did not mean that God sent messages to contradict his original intentions but that he tried to cleanse the biblical texts from the later additions and omissions caused by humans.<sup>79</sup>

Some parts of Pope Adam's doctrinal teachings were traditional: he believed in the expiatory death and resurrection of Christ for the sins of humanity, the personal and the general

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<sup>77</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 7

<sup>78</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 7–9.

<sup>79</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 8.

judgment of humans, the existence of heaven, hell, and purgatory, and the resurrection of the body. He also stressed the intercession of the saints and the fact that humans can intercede for the souls in purgatory. The Virgin Mary does not seem to be central to Pope Adam. Still, he encouraged praying the rosary and the Hail Mary, thus not questioning her virginity or her intercessory powers.<sup>80</sup>

Pope Adam's sacramental theology is traditional in most aspects, seeing the sacraments as eminent channels of supernatural grace. He accepted the Church's seven sacraments and did not explicitly propose any reforms of the rites nor that any language other than Latin should be used. He emphasized the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist and that lay people should only receive communion under one species. However, with his proclivity for modern comparisons, he likened the sacramental effects to electricity.<sup>81</sup>

However, not all aspects of Adam II's sacramental theology were traditional. He included an eighth sacrament: betrothal. While abolishing the vow of chastity would improve the clergy, he argued that introducing the sacrament of betrothal would solve many matrimonial and societal problems. While a matrimony could not be dissolved, a betrothal could. When the sacrament of betrothal had been administered, the young man and woman would live together, so they got to know each other well before deciding whether to marry. During the betrothal period, which could "last as long as they would like," they were allowed to have sexual intercourse, but they should not procreate. Therefore, it was essential to use contraceptives,

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<sup>80</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 8, 44-47, 56.

<sup>81</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 28-29, 44-47.

while abortion was strictly prohibited. Adam II thought that the betrothal, including cohabiting, would lead to happier marriages and that “the morality of the human race would be uplifted to a very high standard.” A well-founded decision on whether to marry or not would mean nothing less than the end of infidelities, abuse, prostitution, and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>82</sup>

The Catholic press pointed out that Adam II’s ideas of betrothal were heavily inspired by Ben Lindsey’s (1869–1943) book *Companionate Marriage*, published earlier in 1927. There, the author defended “trial-marriage.” They also saw Sinclair Lewis’ (1885–1951) *Elmer Gantry* (1927), a satirical novel about religious hypocrisy, as a crucial source of inspiration.<sup>83</sup>

As for the marriage, Adam II gave quite detailed rules on procreation. The woman should only give birth between the ages of 25 and 40, and not more often than every third year, as he thought that the female body was not suited for more frequent pregnancies and that the parents must have a chance to raise their children in a good way, which is a “natural and undeniable right” of the infants. In this way, it was also possible for the parents to love each child equally. If the married couple wanted to use contraceptives, it was up to them, but five children should be the maximum.<sup>84</sup>

Independent Catholic churches generally oppose papal infallibility, as did Adam II. Still, for him, due to his many false teachings and complete corruption, the Roman pontiff was not a true religious leader at all. Still, a pope was necessary to unite the church and humankind, and Adam Oraczewski had

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<sup>82</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 28–32.

<sup>83</sup> “New ‘Pope’ Here Fails to Convince”, *The Catholic Register*, September 8, 1927.

<sup>84</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 32–34.

declared himself thus. His papal claims were universal; he was the Pope of the Holy Catholic Church, which had ceased to be Roman at his elevation to the papacy. However, the Holy Catholic Church led by him should be ruled collegially. He needed the consent of the episcopal college to make laws.<sup>85</sup>

Having outlined his theological and ecclesiological vision, on the last page of *All in One True Faith* comes something of a surprise. There, he presented a very ambitious and costly project. He wrote that he intended to collect no less than \$100 million to construct the headquarters of the Holy Catholic Church. This money should, among other things, be used to acquire 50,000 acres of land near Washington, D.C. The area would not be a part of the United States but would be proclaimed a free and independent state. He would construct a St. Peter's Church for at least \$25 million and a papal palace for some \$30 million. He informed the readers that the contributions could be deposited into the account of the Catholic Church in North America, which seems to have been the official name of his organization.<sup>86</sup>

At the time of the publication of *All in One True Faith* in August 1927, the church headquarters were located at 404 E. 10th St., Kansas City, in a room in a residential YMCA building where Oraczewski stayed. It was a long way to the Vatican outside Washington, D.C.<sup>87</sup>

In 1928, when still in Kansas City, Pope Adam sent a letter and a copy of his booklet to Bishop Kelley of Oklahoma City, inviting him to join the true church. Oraczewski wrote that he was working on a 500-page book, where he should

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<sup>85</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 48, 53–54.

<sup>86</sup> Oraczewski 1927: 59.

<sup>87</sup> Oraczewski 1927: n.p. For the location of the YMCA building, see *Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America* 1921: 114.

develop his teachings, and claimed that the new church was a success: "The things are growing and developing very rapidly and beyond our dreams."<sup>88</sup> However, it is unknown how many, if any, adherents Pope Adam had.

#### OUR PROGRAM

In order that our work might be successful and lasting, we propose:

1. To collect \$100,000,000.
2. To secure near Washington, D. C. a tract of land of 50,000 acres.
3. To name the place "VATICAN."
4. To build St. Peters Church for at least \$25,000,000.
5. To build a Pope's Palace for at least \$30,000,000.
6. To make "VATICAN" an independent and free State with a free access to the sea; with the United States protectorate against an armed force.
7. For the collections in every city and town ought to be organized at once a

committee, composed of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Auditor, Treasurer and Directors. President automatically becomes the highest donor; Vice-President automatically becomes the next highest donor; Secretary, a publisher of the local newspaper, or if there be many, one selected by them from amongst themselves; Auditor, one selected from the midst of women donors; Treasurer, one selected from amongst the local clergy by the clergymen themselves and Directors, who will be all the donors contributed over \$1,000. All the smaller Committees shall be subduced to the States Committee, and all the States Committees shall be subduced to the Central Committee at Washington, D. C., whose president is the Pope; Vice-Presidents, all the donors of \$1,000,000; Secretary, shall be selected from amongst the leading newspaper publishers by the publishers themselves; Auditor from amongst the highest women donors; Treasurer shall be selected from amongst the most eminent clergymen, and Directors, all donors of \$100,000. No person can hold two offices at the same time.

All donations ought to be made and deposited for: "THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA."

All these things can be freely discussed and subjected to the change and compromise.

May the Almighty God bless our work. Amen.

ADAM II, P. P.

POPE OF THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Oraczewski's 1927 publication. AAOC. Published with permission.

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<sup>88</sup> AAOC, AO, Pope Adam II to Bishop Kelley, April 2, 1928.

Adam II, P. P.  
Pope of the Holy Catholic Church,  
404. E. 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
Kansas City, Mo.

April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1928.

Rt. Rev. Francis C. Kelley, D.D.  
218 W. 5<sup>th</sup> St.  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Dear Bishop Kelley:

Herewith under a separate cover had been sent to you our booklet - All in One True Faith - We suppose that you are interested in our work and this will satisfy your curiosity. It is free of charge. However, we would not be opposing to receive any larger contribution advanced by you in support of our goodly work. We are writing another book of 500 pages, more interesting and more varied in topics. The style itself will be greatly improved as we feel more at ease in expressing our ideas in English!

We feel very grateful to you for giving us a hint in advancing the new ideas. You have been kind to us that in the Holy Roman Catholic Church there is a Canon Law, which can be disregarded by an influential personality which can transact whatever it wishes without any regard of decency and Christian ethics. This we endeavor to improve!

We wish you to make an application to join us. We would offer you a very high position. There shall be no change in religion. Even the Pope of Rome can occupy his position as a primus inter pares. In such a case all would be elected a president of the U. S.

Our apostolic blessing for you. Adam II, P. P. (Over).

Letter from Pope Adam II to Bishop Francis C. Kelley,  
April 9, 1928. AAOC. Published with permission.

Sua Sanctitas  
**ADAMUS II. P. P.**

Adamus Antonius Orszewski  
Dei Gratia Summus Pontifex  
**Sanctae Ecclesiae Catholicae**  
Omnibus has visuris salutem in Domino.

Rt. Rev. F. C. Kelley,  
218 W. 5<sup>th</sup> St.  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

*Dilectione Filii! (1)*

In possessione tua invenimus Nostrae litterae testimoniatas e Radzanovia in Polonia, quae  
est Parochia originis Nostrae, daturae. Valeas mittere Nobis, quam primum, rescriptum istarum litterarum.

In benevolentiam cordis Nostrae erga te sentientes tibi concedimus Indulgentiam plenariam  
servantis tamen communis conditionibus, nempe: Confessionem facias tempore Naboloma-  
dae Majoris, abolutionem recipis et Communionem Sacram sumere debes atque ad  
Nostrum intentionem oraberis. Nisi potes aliam domum egere ad propagationem doctrinae & beatitudinem Christiani.

Peccata peccata Sanctae Sedis Apostolicae reservata excoerant conscientiam tuam  
scilicet: excommunicatio, suspensio, interdictum atque alia similia tibi conce-  
dimus eligere quemcumque sacerdotem uti Deputatum Nostrum.

Ne dubites, fili, de conversione et salute tua. Etiam peccata tua multa  
sunt sicut areas maris atque rubra uti scarabaeum, dealbata fuerunt sicut nix.

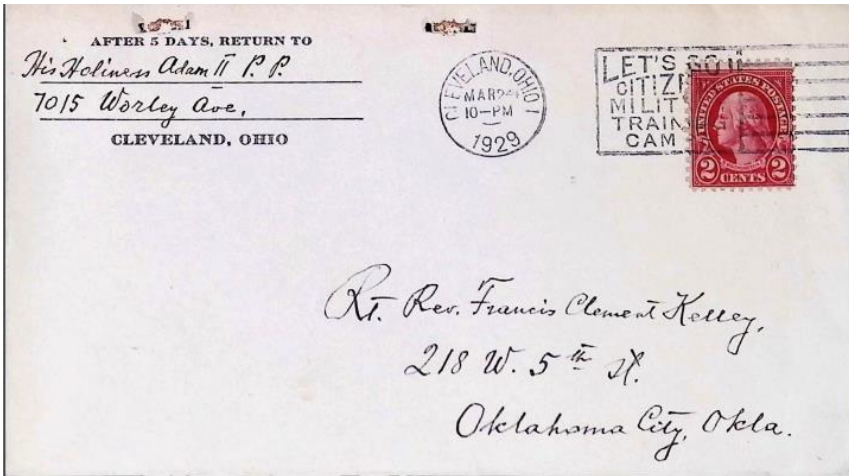
Respice et memora latronem bonum in cruce! Ipse enim in ultimo mortis mi-  
mento conversus et salvatus a vita sua recessit. Propter hoc benedictionem Nostram  
Apostolicam tibi, dilecte fili, concedimus.

Datum sub manu Sigillatice Nostrae 1015 Worley Ave. Clevelandine, Ohio Statibus Foederatis  
Americae septentrigintis die 23<sup>ae</sup> Mensis Martii, Anno Domini 1929.



+ Adamus II. P. P.

Letter from Pope Adam II to Bishop Francis C. Kelley, March 22, 1929. AAOC. Published with permission.



Letter from Pope Adam II to Bishop Kelley, March 22, 1929. AAOC.  
Published with permission.



## Four Decades in Cleveland

After leaving Kansas City and staying for some time in Chicago,<sup>89</sup> by early 1929, Pope Adam was in Cleveland, Ohio. In new letter to Bishop Kelley dated in March 1929, the Pope granted him plenary indulgence and hoped that he would ultimately confess his sins, convert and support “the advancement of the doctrine of the Holy Church.”<sup>90</sup> This letter is the last sign that Oraczewski claimed the papacy.

In a letter to his colleague in Cleveland, Bishop Joseph Schrembs (1866–1945), Kelley wrote:

When he [Oraczewski] left here [Oklahoma] he attempted to establish a church of his own, proclaiming himself Pope under the name of Adam II. He is a generous man, because he offered to make me a cardinal or something of the kind. I lost my opportunity to become a cardinal by following the policy of ignoring his letters; so I am still without the honor of this special kind of red hat. Having failed to get his his church going, he went to Cleveland.<sup>91</sup>

After over 15 years of constant moves throughout the United States and many dramatic turns, Adam Oraczewski would

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<sup>89</sup> AAOC, AO, Central Charity Bureau of the Archdiocese of Chicago to Bishop Kelley, June 28, 1928.

<sup>90</sup> AAOC, AO, Oraczewski to Bishop Kelley, March 23, 1929.

<sup>91</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Bishop Schrembs, March 19, 1930.

remain in the Cleveland area until his death in 1973.<sup>92</sup> Poles constituted Cleveland's second-largest immigrant group, only outnumbered by Italians. By the late 1920s, the city had some 35,000 Polish-born inhabitants and many more second-generation Polish-Americans. Many worked in the growing iron, steel, and textile industries.<sup>93</sup>

According to the 1930 Census, Adam Oraczewski was a boarder in a Polish woman's home on Worley Avenue in the neighborhood known as Warszawa, where he had served as a priest almost a decade earlier. While the census enumerator noted he was a priest and stated the Catholic Church as his employer, he deleted the title "Rev[erend]" from the document for some reason.<sup>94</sup>

Despite claiming that the Church employed him, Oraczewski was never incardinated in the Diocese of Cleveland, and apart from his three months in 1921 being suspended, he never served as a priest there. By May 1929, the Pastor of the parish of St. Stanislaus, where Oraczewski now lived, contacted the Diocese of Oklahoma City to ask for information about his canonical status. He was afraid that the Polish priest would cause problems.<sup>95</sup>

After meeting with Oraczewski and being briefed by his colleague in Oklahoma City, the Bishop of Cleveland, Joseph Schrembs, concluded that the Polish priest suffered from mental illness. He was later psychiatrically evaluated and diagnosed with "paranoia," and for over two years, between April 1932 and August 1934, Oraczewski was confined to

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<sup>92</sup> Ohio County Naturalization Records, 1929: Adam Anthony Oraczewski.

<sup>93</sup> On Poles in Cleveland, see Grabowski et al. 1976

<sup>94</sup> United States Census 1930, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio District ED 238, sheet number 14B.

<sup>95</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor Kalamaja to Bishop Kelley, May 6, 1929.

Cleveland State Hospital.<sup>96</sup> Given Oraczewski's past and Bishop Kelley's earlier attempts to get him deported, it is surprising that he became a U.S. citizen in February 1936.<sup>97</sup>

In 1940, Oraczewski published a 24-page pamphlet succinctly named *War*. Apart from the author's title, "Rev. Adam A. Oraczewski," which disclosed that he was ordained a priest, nothing in the book can be said to have religious content apart from some general expressions of U.S. civil religion. The text was printed by mid-1940 when Germany had invaded his native Poland, but also countries such as Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.<sup>98</sup>

In the preface, Oraczewski wrote that the booklet was directed to the American youth and called them to wake up. Throughout, he gave a detailed and well-informed analysis of the development of the war. Oraczewski argued that the United States was not safe from the enemy's aggression and must act to help the Europeans. He stated that the Germans "lulled" Great Britain and the United States, securing large loans that enabled them to build a strong army, and Hitler had managed to fool several countries into non-aggression pacts. To Oraczewski, however, from the very beginning, it had been clear that the Führer was a "perverse, sadical [sic!], degenerate, unscrupulous, ambitious maliciously-shrewed, German-nation and revenge bigot" and that the Nazi party was "devilish."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Kelley to Bishop Schrembs, March 19, 1930 and the Central Bureau for Men of the Cuyahoga County Relief Administration to Bishop Kelley November 2, 1934, cf. ADC, OF, Social Summary, May 22, 1970. See also the entry "Cleveland State Hospital" in *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

<sup>97</sup> Ohio, Cuyahoga County, Naturalization Records, February 25, 1936, certificate number 4076161

<sup>98</sup> Oraczewski 1940.

<sup>99</sup> Oraczewski 1940: 1–10, citation on p. 4.



I pledge allegiance to the Flag  
of the U. S. of America and to  
the Republic for which it stands  
One Nation indivisible with  
Liberty and Justice for All.

# “WAR”

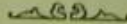


♦ BY ♦

**REV. ADAM A. ORACZEWSKI**

10712 Crestwood Ave.

CLEVELAND, OHIO



Copyright 1940 By REV. ADAM A. ORACZEWSKI

Oraczewski's 1940 publication. Magnus Lundberg's collection.

Though the Western European countries had for too long been “lulled” by Hitler, he had never hidden his real plan, including his goal to “destroy all the Slavic Race.” However, in this context, Oraczewski did not mention the Jews. In fact, they are not mentioned at all in the book. The author’s main message was that no part of Europe was safe from Hitler and that Germany threatened the United States, too, even if it was on the other side of the Atlantic. Using modern military technology, the Germans and their allies could invade the United States, primarily since the attack would be led by the “crafty, shrewd, cunning, faithless, barbaric, unscrupulous, blood-thirsty Adolf Hitler [together] with his devilish satellites Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin and Japan.”<sup>100</sup>

According to Oraczewski, the German-Italian-Japanese threat to the United States came not just from outside; the enemy was within. Given the considerable immigration, he noted that the United States was a “miniature world.” With that followed the risk of the presence of “fifth columns,” not least German-Americans and Italian-Americans, who supported the Nazi-Fascist cause. In Oraczewski’s view, this called for great caution so the country would not be attacked from within. For some reason, he also believed that African-American groups would support a German-Italian-Japanese invasion. He also saw several Latin American countries as potential enemies to the United States. However, in short, Oraczewski’s mission was for the United States to realize the threat against its own country and civilization as such and decide to enter the war as soon as possible. To wait would have disastrous effects.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Oraczewski 1940: 3-16, citation on p. 14.

<sup>101</sup> Oraczewski 1940: 16-24.

When Oraczewski published *War* in 1940, he lived at 10712 Crestwood Avenue in the Woodland Hills neighborhood. He had bought the house a few years earlier. Oraczewski lived in a room on the top floor and could rent out the remainder of the house, which was divided into several small apartments. His landlord activities soon expanded, and in the early 1940s, he acquired a lot on Belvidere Avenue in Eastside Cleveland, where he constructed several buildings that he rented out. In the decades to come, these rents seem to have been his principal or only source of income.<sup>102</sup> His activities as a landlord were not unproblematic. In February 1945, he made a plea deal for having “collected rents in excess of OPA ceilings.” The Office of Price Administration (OPA) was a wartime federal government agency regulating prices for goods and services, including rents. As a result of the plea deal, Oraczewski had to pay a hefty fine of \$500.<sup>103</sup>

In the 1940 Census, Adam Oraczewski still stated he was a priest employed by the diocese.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, on his registration card for the 1942 draft, Oraczewski noted that he was retired while mentioning Bishop Schrembs as his contact person.<sup>105</sup> The 1950 census indicates that Oraczewski still lived at Crestwood Avenue, but it is not stated that he was a priest.<sup>106</sup> Nothing more is known about Oraczewski’s life in the 1950s.

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<sup>102</sup> ADC, OF, cf. advertisements in *The Plain Dealer*, July 4 and 25, 1942; and August 27, 1945.

<sup>103</sup> “Rent Violaters Get Fines up to \$600”, *The Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1945.

<sup>104</sup> United States Census 1940, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio, District ED 92-719, sheet 2B.

<sup>105</sup> United States World War II Draft Cards (4th Registration) for the State of Ohio Registration Cards, 1942, serial number 1204.

<sup>106</sup> United States Census 1950, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio, District ED 92-604, sheet 73.

In a 1963 letter, William O'Donnell (1903–1982), the pastor of St. Philomena Church in East Cleveland, stated that he had become aware of the suspended priest several years ago and visited Oraczewski on numerous occasions. He lived in impoverished circumstances, though he had much money. After a while, Oraczewski regularly attended Mass, but as he was excommunicated, the pastor wanted to bring him back to Church, and the bishop of Cleveland, Edward F. Hoban (1878–1966), had tried to convince him that he needed to accept his reduction to lay status to return to the church. Still, Oraczewski would not accept his lay status and thought Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) should handle the matter directly.<sup>107</sup>

In 1965, the Bishop Coadjutor of Cleveland, Clarence Issenmann (1907–1982), acting with the support of the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, met with Oraczewski, who told him his life's story and confessed. As a result, the excommunication was lifted, and the bishop decided that he could wear clerical garb and collar but not say Mass or have any other priestly functions.<sup>108</sup>

By the early 1960s, Oraczewski's home at Crestwood Avenue was delapidated. He still lived in the small room on the top floor of his three-story house, which the authorities deemed was in such bad shape that it had to be thoroughly renovated or torn down. For the priests who met him during this time, it became clear that Oraczewski was afflicted both physically and

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<sup>107</sup> AAOC, AO, Pastor O'Donnell to Chancellor Reed, May 24, 1963.

<sup>108</sup> AAOC, AO, Bishop Issenmann to the Apostolic Delegate, September 20, 1965 and Chancellor Ritty to Archbishop Reed, September 21, 1965. See also ADC, OF: Social Summary, May 22, 1970. On the Saint Philomena Parish, see Kaczynski 1998a: 340–342.

mentally; he had poor eyesight and suffered from arthritis and “early dementia.”<sup>109</sup>

Given Oraczewski’s health issues and living conditions, in the fall of 1965, Bishop Issenmann arranged for Oraczewski to be admitted to the Jennings Hall nursing home in Garfield Heights, Cleveland. It was a Roman Catholic institution run by the Sisters of the Holy Spirit.<sup>110</sup>

His stay at the nursing home was very problematic. In a 1970 report, a caseworker wrote, “Father Adam has never really adjusted to living at Jennings Hall.” Despite having considerable funds in savings, stocks, and treasure bonds, he refused to pay anything for his stay, citing his priestly status and claiming that “the Holy Father has instructed the Bishop to provide for his every need.” He thought he had been kidnapped and saw Jennings House as a “poor house.” In his view, living there hindered him from being a parish priest and a landlord. The report concludes that Oraczewski had “never been realistic about his status in the Church.”<sup>111</sup>

Oraczewski’s real estate constituted a constant problem. The house on Crestwood Avenue was entirely decrepit. Throughout the 1960s, the authorities issued several warnings pointing to an increasing number of violations, which made the building “injurious to the public health and safety and a public nuisance.” The inspector pointed out a long series of violations that should be corrected; otherwise, the remaining social tenants should be evicted and the house demolished. According to the Cleveland Catholic Family & Children’s Services files, Oraczewski was not overly concerned as he believed the bishop

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<sup>109</sup> ADC, OF, Social Summary, May 22, 1970.

<sup>110</sup> ADC, OF, Social Summary, May 22, 1970., May 22, 1970. For Jennings Hall, see the entry in *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

<sup>111</sup> ADC, OF, Social Summary, May 22, 1970.

or the chancery would handle the problems. After many warnings, the house was finally torn down in 1970.<sup>112</sup>

His other properties at 6300–6306 Belvidere Avenue were also in bad shape, though not nearly to the extent of the building on Crestwood Avenue. Trying to save the house, the diocese attempted to put Oraczewski under guardianship. In June 1970, the probate court declared Oraczewski “incompetent by reason of advanced age” and appointed an attorney at law to the guardianship of his “person and property.”<sup>113</sup> Though it is not entirely clear from the extant documentation, the Belvidere Avenue properties were probably sold shortly thereafter.<sup>114</sup>

A few months before ninetieth birthday, on August 9, 1973, Oraczewski died at Jennings Hall.<sup>115</sup> His closest relatives were his brother Józef’s daughters, who lived in Poland. According to his testament, they were his sole beneficiaries.<sup>116</sup> He was buried at the nearby Calvary Cemetery. The inscription on the headstone concentrates very much upon him being a priest, even indicating the year of his ordination and a biblical reference to the eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek

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<sup>112</sup> ADC, OF, City of Cleveland, Department of Community Development, Division of Housing, Notice of Violation of Housing Ordinances, April 3 and September 12, 1969, No. 62–2137, cf. *The Plain Dealer*, June 16, 1971.

<sup>113</sup> ADC, OF, The State of Ohio, Cuyahoga County, the Probate Court, June 26, 1970.

<sup>114</sup> ADC, OF, City of Cleveland, Department of Community Development, Division of Housing, Notice of Violation of Housing Ordinances, April 20, 1970, No. 62-2137

<sup>115</sup> Ohio Death Index 1973, certificate number 66869, cf. United States Social Security Death Index, 1973, and the obituary in *The Plain Dealer*, August 10, 1973.

<sup>116</sup> ADC: OF, Social Summary, May 22, 1970.

(Ps. 110:4): “Rev. Adam Oraczewski. 1883–1919–1973. Thou art a priest forever” together with an image of a chalice.<sup>117</sup>

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