

Pope Pius XI

Pope Pius XI, born Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti, was born to the wealthy owner of a silk factory on 31 May 1857 in Desio, Italy. He was ordained to the priesthood at the age of eighteen, at which time he began a long life devoted to study, peacekeeping, and the betterment of societies around the world. Pius XI is noted here for his contribution to the Roman Catholic Church's early twentieth century approach to issues regarding contraception and abortion, which was presented in his December 1930 encyclical "Casti Connubii."

From very early in his life, Achille Ratti showed a love of books that made his studies a pleasure and his first jobs a blessing. He received three doctorate degrees from the Gregorian University in Rome, in philosophy, canon Law, and theology. Immediately afterwards he served as a professor for the Padua Seminary, from 1882 to 1888. He then served as an expert paleographer for the Ambrosian Library of Milan from 1888 to 1911, being appointed as the chief of the library in 1907. Pope Pius X took notice of Achille Ratti's appreciation of books and appointed him to vice-prefect of the Vatican Library in 1911 and subsequently prefect in 1914.

Achille Ratti's career took a sudden turn toward diplomacy, however, under the reign of Pope Benedict XV, when he was named a papal representative and sent to Poland in 1918. His aptitude for the post was acknowledged a year later when Pope Benedict elevated Achille Ratti to the position of papal nuncio and titular archbishop of his region. His success was again rewarded by being shifted to the place of archbishop of Milan in 1921, and soon after given the highest recognition by being elected Pope Pius XI upon the death of Pope Benedict XV on 6 February 1922.

Pope Pius XI's reign was characterized by his constant appeals to end communism, fascism, socialism, and strict secularism, arguing that the Church could not be supportive of political systems that trespassed on human rights and the principle teachings of God. He worked to end the harsh dictatorships of his time in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union; his attempts were often met with little or no cooperation from those nations' leaders. One such appeal, called "Divini Redemptoris," was released in 1937, condemning the cruelty of the Soviet regime.

Pius XI also increased Church efforts to expand missions, to reach out to the world at large, and to unite the Eastern and Western divisions of Catholicism under one faith. His personal fondness of technology and academics spurred his development of Vatican Radio in 1931, and he became the first Pope to be broadcast by radio. He also founded the Pontifical Academy for the Sciences in 1936.

Pope Pius XI's active papacy came to an end after a period of poor health on 10 February 1939, the day before his scheduled address renouncing fascism and anti-semitism under Mussolini's rule. Because of his relatively recent reign, an entry on Pope Pius XI is not included in the Catholic Encyclopedia. Documents from his papacy have been opened to access by researchers, however, as of Pope Benedict XVI's decree in September of 2006.

One document that is indicative of Pius XI's teachings regarding the ideal society is "Casti Connubii," meaning "On Christian Marriage." It is in this encyclical that the Pope reiterated the Roman Catholic Church's aversion to contraception, sterilization, and abortion at any stage of pregnancy as contrary to the holy purpose of marital union. He denounced abortion for eugenic or family planning purposes, as well as for the convenience or general health of the mother, stating that society must protect innocent life and that doctors should aim to protect both patients (the woman and her unborn offspring) instead of killing one for the sake of the other. Pope Pius XI further declared that public funding of such procedures could not be tolerated, and quoted St. Augustine of Hippo in his

strong condemnation of abortion at any stage as fatal to the intended bond of marriage. His discussion of these topics was also elaborated on in great detail by Pope John Paul II, whose writings also stressed the sanctity of marriage and the importance of keeping purity and procreation at the center of the marital relationship.

Sources

1. "Pius PP.XI: Achille Ratti." The Vatican: The Holy See. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/index.htm (Accessed May 23, 2007).
2. Pius XI. "Encyclical of Pope Pius XI, On Christian Marriage." Casti Connubii. The Vatican, 1930. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121930_casti-connubii_en.html (Accessed May 24, 2007).