

worldview

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POPE PIUS XII

In our century, as in centuries past, the office and person of the Pope are sources of both unity and division, trust and fear, love and, yes, hatred in the world. In the almost universal courtesy that prevails when a Roman Pontiff passes, these facts are obscured. But they should not be forgotten, because they are central to the experience of our age.

In the years that lie ahead, the contentions that surround the role of the Papacy are likely to be heightened rather than healed. The prospects for some reunited "Christendom" are dim. But even if, through some miracle, religious unity could be regained, the divisions for which the Pope is a symbol would remain. Because the divisions that tear our world apart are more basic even than religious divisions. They involve the nature of man and society themselves. The great struggle that faces us is not among religions. It is between authentic religion on the one hand and militant secularism on the other. It is a struggle between those who insist that man has an inviolable freedom and dignity, and those who, in the ordering of a new society, would make of man a "thing."

And in this struggle Eugenio Pacelli, who reigned for nineteen years as Pius XII, spoke for forces much wider than those of his Church. In some of his specifically Catholic teaching he widened rather than narrowed the divisions among Christians. (This was undoubtedly true in the case of his encyclical *Humani Generis* and his definition of the dogma of the Assumption.) But in his teachings on the international order, on nationalism, on war and armaments, he achieved a universality that transcended any factionalism. Here he became a strong spokesman for those who seek justice and peace among men.

When Pius XII died, the popular press everywhere called him "the Pope of peace." This might have been mere sentimentality, but in the case of this Pope, it was an accurate description of his career. Eugenio Pacelli, as papal diplomat and as Supreme Pontiff, was passionately concerned with achieving a greater measure of order in the affairs of nations. In pronouncement after pro-

nouncement, he tried, as Bishop Otto Debelius puts it, to "hold up to the view of mankind" that vision of society "which is in accord with the spirit of the Gospel."

This Pope made an idolatrous nationalism his enemy. The first major pronouncement of his pontificate, made in October 1939, castigated statism at a time when the pagan statism of Nazi Germany was threatening to engulf Europe. He declared: "Whoever considers the state to be the end toward which all is directed, to which all must bow, is of necessity an enemy and an obstacle to all true and lasting progress among the nations." Through the next nineteen years Pius repeated this theme and continually warned that the only hope for peace lay in the direction of a strengthened internationalism.

In his Christmas Message of 1948, Pius wrote that, "in keeping with the will of God, the nations [should] form together a Community with a common aim and common duties. Even when the proclamation of this principle and its practical consequences gave rise to violent reactions, the Church denied her assent to the erroneous concept of an absolutely autonomous sovereignty divested of all social obligations." An enlightened internationalism, he insisted, was the necessary consequence of any religious concept of man's relationship to man.

To the surprise—and in some instances the scandal—of many, Pius XII refused to involve the Church completely in the political struggle between the Soviet Union and the West. He refused to become a kind of spiritual partner in NATO. Few of the documents in which he condemned the evils of Communist totalitarianism did not also contain sharp criticisms of the injustices and materialisms which haunt the Western world. He spoke for principles of justice and order which transcend any political camp, and he castigated the militarism that is common to both camps. Here again he spoke for all men of good will, and for the future as well as for now. If this troubled world has a future, it will owe more than a token debt to Pius XII.