



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS AT A CONGRESS  
ON "THE HERITAGE OF THE MAGISTERIUM OF PIUS XII  
AND THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL"  
PROMOTED BY THE PONTIFICAL LATERAN UNIVERSITY  
AND THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 8 November 2008

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Congress on "The Heritage of the Magisterium of Pius XII and the Second Vatican Council", promoted by the Pontifical Lateran University and the Pontifical Gregorian University. It is an important Congress for the theme that it treats and for the erudite persons from various nations that are taking part in it. In addressing my cordial greeting to each one, I particularly thank Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Rector of the Lateran University and Fr Gianfranco Ghirlanda, Rector of the Gregorian University, for the kind expressions with which they have interpreted your common sentiments.

I have admired the demanding theme on which you have concentrated your attention. In the last years, when one spoke of [Pius XII](#), the attention was drawn in an excessive way to only one issue, considered, moreover, in a rather unilateral manner. Every other consideration aside, this has impeded an adequate approach to the figure of great historical-theological depth that [Pope Pius XII](#) has been. The convergence of the impressive activity that took place during this Pontificate and, in a singular way, his Magisterium on what you have considered in these days is an eloquent proof of what I just affirmed. Indeed, his Magisterium is characterized for the vast and beneficent breadth, and also for his exceptional quality, such that one cannot fail to say that it constitutes a

precious heritage of which the Church has and continues to treasure.

I have spoken of "the vast and beneficent breadth" of this Magisterium. It suffices to recall, in this regard, the [Encyclicals](#) and the many [Addresses and Radio Messages](#) contained in the 20 volumes of his "Teachings". There are more than 40 Encyclicals published by him. Among them [Mystici Corporis](#) stands out, in which the Pope deals with the theme of the true and intimate nature of the Church. On the scale of research he sheds light on our profound ontological union with Christ and in him, through him and with him with all the other faithful moved by his Spirit, who are nourished by his Body and, transformed in Him, are able to continue to extend his salvific work in the world.

Intimately linked to [Mystici Corporis](#) are two other Encyclicals: [Divino afflante Spiritu](#) on the Sacred Scripture and [Mediator Dei](#) on the Sacred Liturgy. These present two sources from which those who belong to Christ Head of that Mystical Body, the Church must draw. In this wide ranging context, Pius XII has considered the various categories of persons: priests, religious and laity who, by the will of the Lord, partake in the Church, although with different vocations and duties. Thus he has pronounced wise norms on the formation of priests, who must distinguish themselves for personal love for Christ, simplicity and sobriety of life, loyalty to their Bishop and open to those who are entrusted to their pastoral care. Then in the Encyclical [Sacra Virginitas](#) and in other documents on religious life Pius XII has put in clear light the excellence of the "gift" that God grants to certain persons inviting them to consecrate themselves totally to his service and to their neighbour in the Church.

In this perspective the Pope strongly insists on the return to the Gospel and to the authentic charism of the Founders and Foundresses of the various religious Orders and Congregations, foreseeing also the necessity of some healthy reforms. There have also been numerous occasions in which Pius XII has treated the responsibility of laity in the Church, in particular taking advantage of the large international Congresses dedicated to this theme. He willingly faced problems of specific professions, indicating, for example, the duty of judges, of lawyers, of social workers, of doctors: to the latter, the Supreme Pontiff dedicated numerous discourses illustrating the deontological norms that must be respected in their work. In the Encyclical [Miranda prorsus](#), the Pope dwelt on the great importance of the modern means of communication, which in an ever more incisive way are influencing public opinion. This is exactly why the Supreme Pontiff, who utilized the new invention of the radio maximally, emphasized the duty of journalists to supply truthful information respectful of the moral norms.

Pius XII also addressed his attention to science and to the extraordinary progress that it achieved. While admiring the conquests reached in these fields, the Pope did not fail to warn about the risks that research which disregards moral values could bring. It suffices to recall one example: the famous discourse he pronounced when the atom was split, with extraordinary foresight, however, the Pope admonished about the need to impede at whatever cost that these ingenious scientific progresses would be used to build deadly arms that would be able to provoke dreadful

catastrophes and even the total destruction of humanity. How can one not recall the long and inspiring discourses concerning the hoped-for re-ordering of civil society, national and international, for which he indicates justice as a necessary foundation, true supposition for coexistence among peoples: "*opus iustitiae pax!*". Equally worthy of special mention is the Mariological teaching of Pius XII, that would reach its culmination in the proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary Most Holy, through whom the Holy Father intended to emphasize the eschatological dimension of our existence and exalt the dignity of the woman as well.

What can be said of the quality of Pius XII's teaching? He was contrary to improvisations: he wrote each discourse with the maximum care, weighing each phrase and each word before pronouncing it in public. He attentively studied the various questions and he had the habit of asking council from renown specialists when he treated themes requiring a particular competence. By nature and temperament Pius XII was a realistic and measured man, disinclined to easy optimism, but he was likewise immune from the danger of pessimism that is not suitable for believers. He abhorred sterile polemics and was deeply distrustful in regards to fanaticism and sentimentalism.

These interior attitudes of his justify the value and depth, as well as the trustworthiness of his teaching and explain the confident adherence that not only the faithful reserve for them but also many people who do not belong to the Church. Considering the lofty and widespread quality of Pius XII's Magisterium, one must consider how he was able to do so much although he had to dedicate himself to many other duties connected to his office as Supreme Pontiff: the daily governing of the Church, the nomination and the visits of Bishops, the visits of the heads of state and of diplomats, the countless audiences granted to private persons and many diverse groups.

Everyone acknowledges Pius XII's uncommon intelligence, iron memory, singular familiarity with foreign languages and a noteworthy sensitivity. It is said that he was an accomplished diplomat, an outstanding jurist, an excellent theologian. All this is true but it does not explain everything; in him there was also the continuous effort and the firm will to give himself to God without regard for his delicate health. This was the true driving force of his behaviour: all was born from love for his Lord Jesus Christ and from love for the Church and for humanity. Indeed, before all else he was a priest in constant and intimate union with God, a priest who found the strength for his enormous work in long periods of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, in silent colloquy with his Creator and Redeemer. From there sprang the origin and impulse of his Magisterium as, on the other hand, it was for his every other activity.

Therefore it must not be surprising that his teaching continues even today to shed light in the Church. Already 50 years have passed since his death, but his multifaceted and fruitful Magisterium remains even for Christians today one of priceless value. Certainly the Church, Mystical Body of Christ, is a living and vital organism, not steadfastly defending what was 50 years ago. But development occurs in coherency. This is why the heritage of the Magisterium of Pius XII

has been gathered by the Second Vatican Council and repropounded to the later Christian generations. It is well known that of the oral interventions and writings presented by the Second Vatican Council Fathers, over 1,000 references cite the Magisterium of Pius XII. Not all the documents of the Council have an array of Notes, but in those documents that do have them, the name of Pius XII recurs more than 200 times. This means that, with the exception of Sacred Scripture, this Pope is the most authoritative and frequently cited source. It is also well known that the special notes of these documents are not, generally, simple explicative references, but often constitute true and proper integral parts of Conciliar texts. They do not furnish only justifications to support what the text affirms, but offer an interpretive key.

Therefore we can rightly say that in the person of the Supreme Pontiff Pius XII the Lord has made an exceptional gift to his church for which we must all be thankful. Therefore I renew the expression of my appreciation for the important work you undertook in preparing and carrying out this International Symposium on the Magisterium of Pius XII and I hope that the precious inheritance that the immortal Pontiff left to the Church continues to be reflected upon to draw useful application to the problems emerging today. With this wish I invoke the help of the Lord upon your endeavours and I warmly impart my Blessing to each of you.

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