

# The Church Against Totalitarianism During the Pontificate of Pius XI

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**Summary:** During the interwar period, European soil witnessed the rise of both right and left-wing totalitarian regimes. The Church tried to protect its pastoral activities by stipulating concordats with different states. Due to the violation of the Concordat agreement in Germany and Italy, and the abuse of human rights and the persecution of the Church in the Soviet Union, Pope Pius XI took a strong stand defending the liberty of the Church and condemning racism. Three encyclicals, *Non abbiamo bisogno* (1931), *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937), and *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), reveal the position of the Church toward totalitarianism and demonstrate the social setting the Church was facing.

**Keywords:** communism; fascism; national socialism; totalitarianism; Pius XI; Hegel; Church.

## Introduction

During his pontificate, between 1922 and 1939, Pius XI published three encyclical letters against totalitarian ideologies. The one against Italian fascism, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, was published in 1931, and those against Nazism, *Mit brennender Sorge*, and communism, *Divini Redemptoris*, ensued in 1937. The Pope saw communism as the main »pernicious«, »perverted«, and »twisted« adversary. The Church was familiar with the communist notions concerning the revolution and dissolution of private property, all coming from the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. In

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1917, the first communist state was created in the Soviet Union, where communist principles were implemented most brutally<sup>1</sup>.

The Church tried to solve its relations with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany via Concordat politics. The Lateran Treaty of 1929 contained the Concordat stipulated with Italy, which allowed the Church free ecclesiastic activities in the totalitarian fascist framework. A concordat was also signed with Nazi Germany in 1933. Mussolini and Hitler both abused the Concordats to strengthen their political position. When they started violating them publicly, the Pope took a stand and began publishing the encyclicals.

In its attempt to re-Christianise society, the Church gave a prominent role to the laity. The laity involved in the association Catholic Action, working together with the hierarchy, strove to revitalize Christian principles in social life. Precisely because of its social activities, Catholic Action came under the counter-reaction of fascists in Italy, and in Germany, Catholic organisations were pounded by national socialists.

## 1. Philosophical origins of fascism and national socialism

Hijacint Bošković, in his book *Philosophical Origins of Fascism and National Socialism*, considers that both fascism and national socialism have their philosophical origins in the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as well as certain specificities. In his philosophy, Hegel puts an idea or thought first and the real world second. Ideas are constantly evolving. The perfect form of the objectivization of the idea is manifested in the society or the state, to which all the manifestations of the spirit are subjugated. The state absorbs the individual, the family, and other societies, thus making it the »absolute value and benchmark of every activity« (Bošković 30). It is the state where the absolute spirit and the absolute will are manifested. The individual consents to this type of state, thereby becoming a moral person. Goodness, truth, beauty, culture, everything receives its value from the state. Therefore, every order that is derived from the state is *ipso facto* a moral one. »There is no difference between just and wrong: everything that leads to welfare and development of the general spirit becoming an object in the state is good ... « (Bošković 31). In his work *Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Mile Babić gives his interpretation of Hegel, saying: »In this manner, the authentic moral element is situated outside the state« (241), giving religion the role of the foundation of morals, and, at the same time, recognising to the state the pinnacle of moral. »Religion is the foundation of moral, the moral world, and the state as the supreme form of the moral world« (Babić 254).

<sup>1</sup> Especially during the February and October Revolutions.

According to Hegel, an idea has absolute value. It is the principle of everything, constantly developing by some »fataality and necessity« (Bošković 34) without a specific goal. Hegel's students like Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) gave this idea a fatal will, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) gave it an impersonal matter. This reveals that Hegel's philosophy contained a contradiction that could turn both right and left. This is how Hegel was (mis)used to justify totalitarian systems. We can observe this in Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as well. »Heidegger thought that the national socialist state of the supreme leader was the truthful realisation of Hegel's idea of the state, as he will elaborate in the seminar *On the Essence and Concepts of Nature, History, and State* in 1933/1934« (Gretić 67). In the contemporary age, Italian philosopher Diego Fusaro (born in 1983), who calls himself an independent follower of Hegel and Marx, uses Hegel's thought to justify right-wing, sovereigntist, and anti-globalist positions (Veljak 191-199).

Hegel's idea, which might be called the primitive force, will, unconscious, or race, is constantly developing, seeing its biggest and absolute objectivization in the state.

»Therefore, in its essence, the State includes and absorbs everything. It is the synthesis of everything that is going on. It is the aggregate of all forces. This is the reason why it is the source of every right and every moral. It is the final development of all energies, which lay unconsciously hidden within individuals, and which are ultimately focused in the form of state institutions. The State completely absorbs the individual, who cannot even exist outside the State. The individual lives for the state and is dependent on the State. The individual does not have anything outside the State. In this way, the individual is completely lost in the State, which is hypostatized in one single person. The individual loses not only political but also personal freedom and is obliged to think as the Leader« (Bošković 46).

National socialism found its mysterious primitive and irrational strength in race. Faceless uniform mass was united with the will of their Leader and became lost in his personality, giving him their freedom and common sense. History had never before witnessed that the masses were so eager to blindly give themselves to one man.

»By observing this excited mass, one might get an impression, that some sort of mysterious fluid from the power of the Leader is being poured to the faceless segments of one unified whole, it pervades them, goes all the way to their souls, it unifies and synthetizes them in one inseparable being, which springs out of one blood, one soil, and one race.« (Bošković 45-46)

Totalitarian systems used and abused Hegel's teaching about the state. Having in mind the fact that Hegel also wrote about the relationship between the Church and the state, we will also present his general positions on religion as well. Critics of religion and Hegel have in common that they had denied »ontological differences between the Being and entity (philosophically speaking), between God and man, between Creator and creature (theologically speaking)« (Babić 252). Hegel does not reject religion, as Ludwig Feuerbach, K. Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud do, but he does reject what are, in his opinion, wrong forms of religion. He criticized the religion that negated human liberty. For him, true religion is the »religion of freedom«. Subjugated and perverted religion is the one that violates freedom, whilst the suffering and injustice in this world are being compensated by the promise of the next one. »The true religion does not have a negative (negating) or polemical relation toward the state. The true religion recognises and confirms the state« (Babić 238).

Hegel considered that all spirits: subjective (man), objective (people, society, state), and world spirits can be reduced to the absolute spirit, thereby turning God into an absolutist. He was not aware of this. Thus, he set the foundations for both theological and anthropological absolutism (a man who can encompass God by his thought turns himself into God the absolutist). All totalitarian regimes absolutize somebody or something. Religion is the foundation of the state. When he says religion, Hegel means faith in God which is made objective. While being aware of differences between religion and state, between faith and knowledge, this type of religion is acceptable. But, in the end, he reduces faith to knowledge, to absolute knowledge, which is violence.

In Italy, we can speak about the stronger influence of Hegelian thought in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) developed his philosophy of spirit. As a leftist, he could not influence fascism. This was done by Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), a professor at the University of Rome. He implemented Hegelian philosophy to develop fascist doctrine in 1923. Based on this doctrine Mussolini formulated the state in a totalitarian sense in which the people are something undetermined. Everything that has value is being realised only in the state.

Gentile managed to keep up with the idealist doctrine till 1929. This was the year when the Lateran Treaty was stipulated, where they had to consider the obligations that the state had toward the Catholic Church. Mussolini himself saw the danger of the conflict between the government and the Church. This is the main reason why fascism distanced itself from the idealist concept of the state and moved closer to the realist one. Mussolini found inspiration for his imperialistic tendency in the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), who sought the unity of all smaller

states on the territory of contemporary Italy. At the end of his political treatise *The Prince*, Machiavelli turns his gaze toward Lorenzo Medici (the uncle of Pope Leo X), hoping that with the assistance of God and the Church, he would be able to liberate Italy (Machiavelli 101).

Totalitarian systems, Italian fascism, German national socialism, and communism, all have the following distinct traits: »One ideology, one political party with one man in front – the leader, police completely in the service of this party, monopoly of the party on all the public media, the firm grip over the army, and centralised economy« (Jelenić 16). Totalitarian systems exclude political plurality. They direct special attention to education. An individual is subjugated to the race, nation, or collective. In addition to the secret police, the leader and the party use mass media to control the thoughts and actions of all members of society. Every resistance is crushed by the »purifying violence«. In communism, it is called the dictatorship of the proletariat. In real life, it was revolutionary terrorism and even genocide. At their core, totalitarian ideologies are myths about the leader and the race. The leader's will is interpreted as the »supreme law« (Jelenić 19). He wields absolute power. He is the embodiment of the state. The main theoretician of the fascist ideology Giovanni Gentile claims that the state is the »very personality of the individual« (Jelenić 20).

## **2. The Church in the re-Christianised society**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church sought the solution to three major issues: faith and science, Church and state, and Church unity (Lortz 389). This time, the Church was not facing heresy or misconceptions of the Church, but a lack of faith. Scholasticism was at its end. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Neo-Scholasticism emerged with the aim to harmonise its theses with new philosophical insights and scientific breakthroughs. Pope Leo XIII said that every Catholic school must teach the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as a reaction to modernism. Unlike scholastic philosophy, modern philosophy has a different perspective of reality. While scholastic philosophy sought every truth in the object itself, modern philosophy looked for the criterion of truth in the man himself. This individualistic and subjectivistic paradigm will set up the foundation of modern society that will be based on rationalism and individualism. The criterion of truth, according to protagonists of Enlightenment, does not lie outside, but within us. The moral law is the product of the human thought. Niccolò Machiavelli, in his book *The Prince* (Machiavelli), denied the metaphysical origin of the moral law, and for the protagonists of the Enlightenment reason became the supreme norm. What cannot be explained by reason should be thrown away. The Enlightenment protagonists had thrown away revelation, dogma, and every kind of intercession between God and man. They

accepted natural religion reduced to wider deism. Any kind of Divine intervention in this world was negated (Martina, *La Chiesa... II*, 204). Thus, the Enlightenment challenged the very foundations of Christianity, the revelation itself. Since it cannot be explained by reason, it should be thrown away. The Renaissance did not deny the transcendent, but it marginalised it by putting the man in the centre. The Enlightenment, under the influence of rationalism, threw away transcendence in the Christian sense. Kant speaks of people's inability to make use of their reason without the leadership of others. Thus, the Enlightenment is a way out of this self-inflicted immaturity. The motto of the Enlightenment is: »Have the courage to use your reason.«<sup>2</sup>

In its relations with the states, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church sought to stipulate the Concordats and to keep its autonomy. During the pontificates of Pius XI and Pius XII, a total of 13 Concordats were signed. Concordat strategy and Catholic Action were meant to be, according to Pius XI, the main principles in creating the »new Christianity« (Mayer 379).

The teaching that the Church is the *societas perfecta* (perfect society) started with Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), continued with Leo XIII (1878-1903), and was taken by the Secretary of the Holy See Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934), Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (1890-1979) and Pope Eugenio Pacelli (1876-1958). This expression was meant to point out that the Church can cooperate autonomously and independently in its organisation and mission, with the state which is the other »perfect society«. This teaching subordinated the secular order to the spiritual one. The ideal would be the cooperation of the confessional state with the Church.

The idea of the restoration after the French Revolution failed. What was valid from the times of Constantine the Great till the French Revolution, lost its value in liberal and democratic constitutional states. We can even contemplate the silent absence of the Church's social position. Oskar Köhler, when speaking about the formation of Catholicism in contemporary society, concluded: »Re-Christianisation of society had the character of an illusion« (Köhler 186).

This was the setting when the greater engagement of the laity in the Church began. It was not seen as something ordinary but rather as a »state of emergency«. During the Catholic Day in Bonn in 1881, jurist F. Porsch said that the engagement of laity

<sup>2</sup> »Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung. [ ... ].« (Kant 481-494)

was conditioned by the *Kulturkampf* and that one should hope that the time will come when »this watch will be done by those chosen by God to govern his holy Church« (Köhler 185).

When it came to democratic changes, the Church took a negative stand. For Pope Leo XIII patriarchal monarchy was the ideal form of the state. In certain cases, representatives of the public authority could be elected according to the »will and judgement of the people«, but only to execute and not to take over the authority. In this sense, democracy is stripped of its essence, and what remains could be called »Christian democracy« (Köhler 225). The latter would be a form of democracy that might be tolerated by the Church.

When it comes to the acquisition of capital, man becomes completely independent from both secular and Divine laws. The liberal concept does not put justice in the centre, but personal benefit and property. In this way, the entire social structure started to collapse. Unfortunately, humanity found »salvation« in something that proved to be another extreme form, totalitarianism. (Bošković 13-21)

### 3. The Church against the totalitarianism

The interwar period was marked by major changes in political, economic, and social areas. In Russia, the communists came to power in 1917, in the form of a brutal<sup>3</sup> Bolshevik system. In Italy, 1922 was the year when Benito Mussolini and fascism became major political protagonists. The Great Economic Depression (1929-1933) shook the traditional political system and helped the National Socialist Party, led by Adolf Hitler, to grab power in Germany in 1933. Religious persecutions that commenced in Russia and Mexico continued in the German Reich. Pope Pius XI, in two encyclical letters, *Mit Brennender Sorge* and *Divini Redemptoris*, pointed to the pernicious character of national socialism and communism.

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<sup>3</sup> The major characteristic of the Leninist-Stalinist type of communism was terror. In every communist system, brutal violence was conducted, and fear was introduced. Lenin himself had developed 'a theory of the necessity of the revolutionary violence' (Courtois 100.). The violence against the ideological adversaries soon became widespread against any person proclaimed an enemy. Above all, the enemies of the revolution were the aristocrats, the bourgeois, the rich peasantry, and priests. Mass executions were conducted, concentration camps were formed, and deportations were done; one could witness exiles and the use of famine as a tool of repression. Lenin himself gave the order that mass terror must be conducted. 'The mutiny of the rich peasants must be suppressed without mercy' (Courtois 102). When the new penal code was promulgated in 1922, Lenin gave the following instructions: 'A principle must be established, primarily political one, not necessarily the legal one, which will describe the essence and the justification of the terror, its necessity and boundaries. A court must not abolish the terror, in fact, it must establish it, legalize its principles, clearly, with no misconduct or hiding out the truth' (Courtois 102).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, national ideas were the most effective force in European history. From 1870, they started to lose their universal and humanitarian character. Giacomo Martina interpreted this shift through different perspectives. Based on the Hegelian concept of the ethical state that is the embodiment of the absolute spirit, an individual has become an »ephemeral and significantly small element of the nation, [...] a cell of the national organism, a national organ, an instrument, an asset for national purposes« (Martina, *La Chiesa ... IV*, 91). Nationalism can be seen as a result of literary tendencies, the capitalistic influence in the quest for new markets, a growing mistrust toward liberal regimes, and the fear of socialism (Martina, *La Chiesa... IV*, 91-92). Nationalism was transformed from being love for the Homeland into an idolatry cult. In Germany, totalitarianism assumed racist settings in the work of Alfred Ernst Rosenberg (1893-1946) *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, and in the book by Adolf Hitler *Mein Kampf*. This was manifested in the sterilization of the mentally ill (1933), in the physical elimination of the radical wing of the Party and right-wing opposition (1934), in different anti-semitic measures that peaked in the Crystal Night (1938), in murder, looting, and burning of Jews, and euthanasia of the ill.

Genesis and characteristics of the Russian totalitarianism are different from fascism and national socialism. War, corruption, incompetence of the ruling classes, and semi-feudal society in Russia, all led to the February and October Revolutions in 1917. The overwhelming poverty stoked the socialist current. Besides the precarious social conditions, a messianic movement was present, being an integral part of the Russian tradition. Life on this earth was diminished and the perfection of the afterlife was over-accentuated. Man and his major troubles and all the history cannot find solutions in this moment but only in the time of the second coming of Christ. The Christian West has always believed in the power of human nature and the solution to many problems, like social justice. This was always questioned by Slavic philosophers (Špidlík 81–101). This religious belief formed the basis for the Soviet rhetoric about the perfect communist society.

Bolshevism is not some external, random phenomenon. It is a severe spiritual condition of the Russian people, »a hallucination of the afflicted spirit of the people« (Berdjajev 54). Bolshevism pointed out a deep religious crisis, a demoralisation. Bolshevism was a form of government that corresponded with the state of the spiritual condition of that time. No other form of government, whether cultural or democratic, could have survived in that period.

Catholics were drawn to the superficial aspects of nationalism, like the defence of order and authority and the necessity of sacrifice for the higher cause, bearing in mind the identity of the enemy (liberals and socialists). The opposition of the



Church toward the left totalitarianism was very clear. When it came to right-wing totalitarianism, the Church believed that certain relationships could be established via Concordat stipulation which would then allow free pastoral activities. Pius XI saw communism as the main adversary of Christianity (*Divini Redemptoris -DR*). 60-year-long dispute with the Italian government was finally resolved by the Lateran Treaty of 1929. After making an agreement with Mussolini, the Church accepted a similar agreement with Hitler. When Pius XI completely understood Hitler's politics, in 1937, he wrote the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (*With deep anxiety*).

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, there has been an ongoing debate about the nature of totalitarian regimes. For example, Janko Bekić in his article *Question of crime: liberalism, communism, fascism* describes fascism as the criminal ideology and communism as the ideology in which the crimes were committed. He claims that in its theoretical framework, communism did not predict the elimination of class enemies, rather, it happened as an »incidental phenomena« (Bekić 41). Stéphane Courtois equates the class (communist) and racial (national socialist) genocide. He asks the question regarding the academic silence over the horrible communist crimes for almost 80 years. One of the reasons for this silence is the fact that communist dictatorships were very successful in concealing their crimes. Western allies put Nazism in the category of »Absolute Evil«, while communism, their ally, was in the group of »Good«. After 1945, communists got the legitimacy due to the antifascism.

This is how these »incidental phenomena« looked in praxis. An approximate number of casualties in the communist countries is as follows: »In the Soviet Union 20 million dead, in China 56 million dead, in Vietnam 1 million dead, in North Korea 2 million dead, in Cambodia 2 million dead, in Eastern Europe 1 million dead, in Latin America 150 thousand dead, in Africa 1.7 million dead, in Afghanistan 1.5 million dead« (Courtois et al. 13-14).

Referring to Hannah Arendt, Bekić claims that fascism and communism had their »objective adversaries«, Jews and kulaks. Jews had to vanish in the Nazi version of fascism, while kulaks were deprived of their land. »The historical fact that many kulaks were killed during the dekulakization does not equate fascism and communism because their deaths were not based on the Marxist theory but are a result of terror that was specific for the period of the Stalin absolute power« (Bekić 41).

*The Communist Manifesto* from 1848 deals with the »despotic seizing of private property« (MCP, 583) and the »abolition of the private property« (MCP, 577, 578). Communists »openly claim that their goals can be achieved only via violent overthrow of the entire existing social order« (MCP, 595). Therefore, the Manifesto openly supports violence, and it is incorrect to claim that the death of kulaks was

not rooted in the communist theory. Stalin's slogan of 1929 was: »Let's eliminate the kulaks as a class« (Courtois 109). Hence, given the brutality, the terror, and the acceptance of violent methods in achieving its objectives, communism stands side by side with fascism and Nazism.

### 3.1. THE CHURCH AND BOLSHEVISM

When we speak about totalitarian states then we refer to those states that had practical and theoretical limitless and exclusive power over the existence of human beings. Bolshevism, in theory and praxis, had a hostile attitude toward the Church. Nevertheless, the Church was contemplating setting up diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The famous statement of Pius XI corroborates this claim: »When there is a question of saving souls or preventing greater harm to souls, we feel the courage to treat with the devil in person« (Reppen 56). The Church made its first steps toward establishing closer relations with the Soviet Union in 1921 when a great famine was ravaging that country. The mission of the Church consisted of the distribution of food to the hungry population from 1922 to 1924. The second attempt of the Church to approach the Soviet Union happened during the session of the World Economic Conference in Geneva in 1922 when the new Bolshevik authorities were invited for the first time. Since the conference failed in its goals, so did this attempt.

For the Soviet Union, international recognition was very important. During the negotiations for the recognition, the Vatican demanded two concessions: the installation of bishops and free religious education for the youth in church facilities. The demands were not approved and the negotiations were terminated due to the continuing persecution of the Church.

When speaking about the struggle between good and evil and the violence that was spreading, Pius XI warned about the peril that many nations might fall into barbarity that springs from Bolshevik communism (*DR*). Already in 1846, Pius IX warned that communism was in contradiction with the natural law, and Leo XIII called it a »fatal plague«, which, if its influence spreads wide enough, can lead the entire human society into ruins (*DR*, no. 4). In 1924, Pius XI spoke about the persecutions transpiring in Russia, Mexico, and Spain. The Pope called communism a »satanic scourge« (*DR*, no. 7) and that was the reason he wanted to expose its atheistic principles. In interpreting its doctrine and results, the Pope claimed that communism represents a false redemption, a pseudo-ideal of justice, equality, and brotherhood of labour, a false mysticism. These ideas got a positive reception in the world where there was a lot of poverty, caused by the unequal distribution of goods of this world (*DR*, no. 8). The author of Marxist ideas is C. Marx, who reduced all reality to dialectic materialism.

»In this doctrine, as is evident, there is no room for the idea of God, no difference between matter and spirit, between body and soul; there is no survival of the soul after death and therefore no hope in the after-life. [...] all the forces, no matter of their character, which oppose such systematic violence, must be destroyed as the enemies of humankind« (DR, no. 9).

Communism strips man of his freedom and spiritual principles of his moral behaviour and turns the individual into a cogwheel of the system. Private property, as the source of economic slavery, must be destroyed completely. Communism turned marriage and family into mere civil institutions and the principal role of education is performed by the community (DR, no. 10 and 11). Collectivization is implemented without the consent of the individual through violence, with the aim of creating heaven on earth where everyone would »give in accordance with his powers, and receive in accordance with his needs« (DR, no. 12).

The Pope criticizes communism for putting everything into the collective. The individual is just one small part of the system, and private property as the source of economic slavery should be abolished. The principle of absolute equality, propagated by communism, is in jeopardy from private properties because they allow one man to rule over the other (DR, no. 10). The Pope does not accept the reduction of marriage to a civil society institution, and the emancipation of woman by turning the care and education of children over to the community (DR, no. 11). Materialistic tenets would create a civilisation without God (DR, no. 12). This society would have no class differences (DR, no. 13). The Pope proclaimed that the new Bolshevistic and atheistic gospel is »a system full of errors and sophisms, contrary to reason and divine revelation, a subverter of the social order because it destroys its foundations and gives a false idea of the origins of the nature and purpose of the state, and denies the rights, dignity, and freedom of human personality« (DR, no. 14).

The Pope sees the reasons for such a rapid spread of communism in the world in the incomprehension of its nature, its gleaming promises of improving the destiny of the working class and a more just distribution of earthly goods, and in using the global economic crisis. Communism is an illusion that contains a small portion of truth used to conceal communist brutality and inhumanity (DR, no. 15). Masses have embraced communism without question. In the liberal economy, the Pope detects the beginnings of de-Christianisation, and in communism, its rapid expansion (DR, no. 16). The success of the expansion of communism is also in the unprecedented propaganda that has enormous financial means at its disposal, allowing it to permeate all segments of society (DR, no. 17). The Pope notices the

conspiracy of silence in the non-Catholic world press about the horrible crimes that the communists had done in Russia, Mexico, and Spain (DR, no. 18). Crimes committed in these countries were not random events but results of the system that did not have any inner limitations. It is basically worse than barbaric nations which had some boundaries in the natural law (DR, no. 21).

Communism propagandised the creation of heaven on earth and, in this process, it rejected religion because it was the »*opium of the people*«. After exposing the »errors, and the violent and deceptive tactics of Bolshevistic and atheistic communism« (DR, no. 25), the Pope wrote that God is the supreme reality, the almighty Creator of all things, the wisest and the most just judge of all men and that the human soul is immortal (DR, no. 26-27).

In criticising the complete subjugation of the individual to society in communism, the Pope points out that man is not for society, but rather vice versa (DR, no. 29). Society cannot deprive man of his personal rights granted by the Creator. Both man and civil society come from the Creator, which is why the Pope rejects »collectivistic terrorism« (DR, no. 33). He calls communism a »*fatal enemy*« (DR, no. 40) which is »twisted« (DR, no. 57) and »perverse« (DR, no. 58).

The primary cure against communism for the Pope is the renewal of private and public life according to the principles of the Gospel. The Pope was aware that even in Catholic countries many are just formal believers. Unjust economic systems had a devastating impact through several generations. Workers were unable to secure the existence for themselves and their families. Referring to encyclicals *Rerum novarum* (DR, no. 62) and *Quadragesimo anno* (DR, no. 52, 54, 62, 68), the Pope pointed out the importance of social justice. In addressing the priests, he pointed out that, in their pastoral activities, they should strive »to win back the labouring masses for Christ and the Church« (DR, no. 62). He put great hopes in Catholic Action as a valuable assistant for priests (DR, no. 64 and 65). If the priests do not go to the poor and to the workers, they might fall easy prey to the »apostles of communism« (DR, no. 61).

In addition, with the encyclical letter *Quadragesimo anno*, especially with the introduction of the term 'subsidiarity', Pope Pius XI had a great impact on the development of the Christian Catholic *forma mentis* about the role of believers (primarily the laity) in society (Baloban 147-9). This vision is radically different from any totalitarian paradigm.

### 3.2. THE CHURCH AND FASCISM<sup>4</sup>

Since 1861, when the Italian parliament proclaimed Rome to be the capital, a so-called *Roman Question* was formed. When Rome was captured by the Italian troops in 1870, the Papal State collapsed and a dispute emerged that lasted till 1929. It was clear that the political power of popes was questioned (Mirošević 185). From 1861 to 1929, the popes considered themselves to be »Vatican prisoners«. The Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929 solved the dispute with the Italian government. The Lateran Treaty consisted of a state agreement, a Concordat, and a financial settlement. According to the treaty, the Vatican became the state with the Pope as its sovereign, and the Catholic faith was the state religion. Church marriage was legally made equal to civil marriage. The Church was assured compensation for the lost Papal State. The Pope recognised Rome as the capital of Italy. In the short term, the Church benefited from this agreement. The state authorities did not meddle in the Church matters, the Church got the legal foundation for the protection of Catholic associations and organizations, and it got rid of the historic weight that had an effect on the whole Church. For Mussolini, the Lateran Treaty was a success as well. The reconciliation with the Church was just a part of a grand tactical scheme for him. When he realised that he did not have the unconditional support of the Church and that Catholic Action was entering the political and social arena, in 1931, there was a great crisis in the relations between Church-State. The state set limitations on the operations of Catholic Action.<sup>5</sup> The Pope himself supported

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<sup>4</sup> There are different approaches to the definition of fascism. Fascism is often identified with Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), with the movement (since 1919), with the political party (in the period 1921-1945), and with the political regime (1925-1945). Although it did have certain typical Italian traits, it also had many similarities with the German Nazism (1920.-1945.) and with the Franco's system in Spain. From the historical perspective, we can regard fascism as a revolution, as a revelation, and as a reaction to communism. What type of revolution can be identified here? For liberals like Benedetto Croce, it was a deviation from European democracy. For Catholics like Jacques Maritain, it was a negative revolution of a Caesarian-idolatry type that connects the communistic and atheistic revolution with Nazi racism. For Ernst Nolte, fascism was the challenge to Bolshevism, and it represented the conservative revolution. The interpretation of fascism as a type of revelation puts it in the context of having continuity with the past. The danger of this interpretation is the connection with the past without solid and real grounds. The third interpretation of fascism is that it was a reaction to the newly formed communism in Russia. Fascism and communism cannot be interpreted as being isolated one from another. Fascism never underestimated communism, but communism did underestimate fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, by directing all its forces against capitalism. These three classic interpretations of fascism should be integrated and interdisciplinary completed by political, social, psychological, and economic sciences. (Pierini 280-284)

<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius XI defined Catholic Action as the 'participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate'. The genesis of Catholic Action can be traced to the encyclical of Pius XI *Ubi Arcano Dei* (1922). In its activities, Catholic Action was directed toward the working and peasant youth and students. This was the reason for the conflict with the fascist regime in Italy which sought to maintain the control of the youth. *Comp. Iserloh* 254.-257.

the social Catholic organisations and attacked the fascist education system. That was why Mussolini disbanded all Catholic associations of youth and students. The Pope's protests were not successful so he raised the issue on a whole new level in the encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* in 1931 (Repgen 34–69; Mirošević 186).

On 29 May 1931, Mussolini revoked Catholic Action, the police attacked all Catholic associations, and the press published false and compromising information about them. Pope Pius XI rose in defence of Catholic Action with the encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* (NAB). The Pope addressed the bishops in Italy and all those who were in communion with the Apostolic See. He appraised the bishops for following his directives to exclude Catholic Action from political and party activities (NAB 2). In the encyclical, fascism was exposed as the ideology that took over the youth for the benefit of one party and one regime. Fascist ideology is not compatible with Catholic teachings or with the natural rights of the family. It strives to limit the Church to celebrating the Holy Mass and the dispensation of the sacraments. The state press spread defamations against Catholic Action. The Pope himself admitted that he spent many years working in libraries, but he had never seen such a struggle against the truth and justice. Since he felt a certain duty toward the truth and justice, he had to defend the vital interests and rights of the Church (cf. NAB 1). The Pope condemned police measures against different associations, especially those aimed at youth (cf. NAB 4), persecutions and endangering of many rights and liberties (NAB 5-6), general accusations, never containing something concrete (NAB 6), justifications that the abolishing of Catholic youth associations was an act of the »defence of the state« (NAB 7). The Church never negated the obligations and rights of the state regarding the education of citizens, as long as it remained within the limits of its jurisdiction (NAB 11). The state crosses those limits when it insists that the youth belong to it from the earliest childhood.

Giovanni Sale wrote about Mussolini not as an »absolute evil« but as a »historical evil« that was absurd and wrong. His rule was harmful and fatal for both Italy and the entire Europe. Mussolini conducted political violence, despised representative institutions, implemented racial laws, and made a pact with Hitler with horrifying war consequences.

Mussolini was aware of the reputation of the Catholic Church, which is why he did not confront it directly but was rather seeking to find some sort of agreement. The Church signed the Lateran Treaty and stipulated the Concordat, but it also condemned the cult of the leader and state, racism, and totalitarianism.

For Mussolini, the Scriptures were just an illuminating legend, and dogmas were creations of the religious intellect deprived of objective values. Roman *Curia* and Pius XI had never permitted Mussolini's »Catholicization« from one part of the

clergy or the hierarchy itself. Mussolini abandoned the militant anticlericalism of his youth, but he never made any stronger claim about his faith. He approached religion as an anthropological and cultural fact (Sale 123-135).

### 3.2.1. Antiracial laws

Fascist rule was a dictatorship. Liberal state constitutions did not apply here. Fascism is taken as a »gender idea« for all ideologies and social orders like Italian fascism. Thus, even German national socialism is often taken to be a sort of fascism. Fascism and national socialism do have many similarities, but also many differences. Mussolini's racism and the persecution of Jews cannot be compared with Hitler's racism and the extermination of Jews.

Racial politics in fascist Italy began in 1935, and racial legislature appeared in 1938. The Decree of 5 September 1938 on the *Provisions for the Protection of the Italian Race* (*Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza Italiana*) legalized the discrimination of Jews. This anti-Jewish decree was first implemented by the fascists in the education system. Jews were banned from enrolling in schools and universities, and all Jews employed in state schools were suspended. Given that, according to the Italian legislature, all Italian citizens were obliged to attend school till the age of 14, on 23 September 1938, they promulgated the *Law on the Foundation of Primary Schools for Students of the Jewish Race* (*Istituzione di scuole elementari per fanciulli di razza ebraica*). The fascists also promulgated laws on family and legal status relationships. The law of 17 November 1938 forbade the stipulation of marriage between an »Italian citizen of the Aryan race« and a person of »another race« (Blažević and Alijagić 891).

At the beginning of World War II, in 1939, fascist Italy sent the 'suspected' Jews to prisons and concentration camps. The position of the Jews was nonetheless much better than in Nazi Germany. After the fall of the fascist regime, in 1943, the Nazis took over power. The deportation of Jews into death camps and the confiscation of Jewish property were underway. The Nazis started the realization of their concept of *the Final Solution to the Jewish Question* (Blažević and Alijagić 882-895).

## 3.3. THE CHURCH AND NAZISM<sup>6</sup>

In 1931, German bishops forbade the faithful to become members of the National Socialist Party. Friedrich Muckerman (1883-1946), a Jesuit, pointed out the

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<sup>6</sup> More in: Jelenić 16. National Socialism or Nazism emerged in Germany after World War I, and it represented the ideology of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The roots of national socialism were the following: postwar economic crisis, unemployment, famine, fear of the communist revolution, revival of aggressive Pangermanism, and major war reparations. The imprint of this ide-

pseudo-religious character of Hitler's party, and he called the idea of the salvation of the world through German race and blood »the heresy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century« (Franzen 318).

The Holy Office condemned the racial theory in 1928.

»The Catholic Church has always prayed for the Jewish people, depositories, until the coming of Jesus Christ, of the divine promise, regardless of their subsequent blindness, or rather, precisely because of it. Moved by that spirit of charity, the Apostolic See has protected this same people against unjust vexations, and just as it reproves all hatreds and animosities between people, so it especially condemns hatred against the people elected by God, a hatred that today is vulgarly called 'anti-Semitism.'«<sup>7</sup> (Suprema Sacra Congregatio S. Officii 104).

Upon rising to power, on 1 February 1933, Hitler »altered« his politics toward the Church. As their first task, he declared that they would restore the spiritual unity of the nation according to the will of the people, that they would defend the foundations on which the nation rests, and that they would protect Christianity as the »foundation of our entire morality, and the family as the cell from which our nation and our state spring out« (Franzen 319). »Rarely has one so unscrupulously employed lies in the service of his politics and diplomacy as Adolf Hitler« (Franzen 317). Hitler himself declared that he was prepared to give every day »six mendacious oaths« (Rauschnig 114). He was prepared to sign any kind of agreement and then violate it the very next day.

Hitler's struggle against the Church can be structured in three periods:

1. The first period lasted from 1933 to 1934. Measures against the Church were still disguised.

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ology was given by Adolf Hitler in his book *Mein Kampf* (»Nacionalsocijalizam ili nacizam« 548). National socialism has some similar or identical features with fascism and communism. These are:

1. *Sustaining economy.*
2. *Tyranny of one political party.*
3. *Police terror.*

<sup>7</sup> »Ecclesia enim catholica pro populo iudaico, qui divinarum usque ad Iesum Christum promissionum depositarius fuit, non obstante subsequente eius obcaecatione, immo huius ipsius obcaecationis causa, semper orare consuevit. Qua caritate permota Apostolica Sedes eundem populum contra iniustas vexationes protegit, et quemadmodum omnes invidias ac simultates inter populos reprobatur, ita vel maxime damnatur odium adversus populum olim a Deo electum, odium nempe illud, quod vulgo 'antisemitismi' » nomine nunc significari solet.« The Catholic Church condemned the integral national socialism which proclaimed the nation to be the central value in human life and a notion to which all other values must be subjugated. See more in: Pius XI, *Mit brennender Sorge* 7, 8, 11, 16.



2. The second period lasted from 1934 to 1939. There was an open confrontation with the Church. Church associations and youth organizations were banned, teaching in schools was either forbidden or hindered, the Catholic press was suppressed, and charitable and educational church institutions lost financial assistance.
3. The third period lasted from 1940 to 1945. The state leader of the SS<sup>8</sup>, Martin Borman, wanted to eliminate the Church and Christianity from the territory of the Reich. Onslaughts on monasteries had to be suspended because the people were too agitated (Franzen 321–322).

### 3.3.1. *Concordat with Germany (Segreteria di Stato 389–413)*

The Concordat with Germany has 34 articles. It was signed by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli<sup>9</sup> in the name of the Holy See and Franz von Papen (1879-1969) in the name of the German Reich. An integral part of the Concordat is also the Protocol, consisting of 32 points. The Concordat guarantees the Catholic Church freedom of religion and allows it to freely promulgate laws and directives within its jurisdiction (Segreteria di Stato Art. 1). The Holy See has complete freedom to communicate with the bishops, and the bishops may do the same with priests and faithful in matters that are part of their pastoral service. Instructions, ordinances, pastoral letters, and diocesan gazettes may be published freely (Art. 4). Priests are regarded as state officials and are guaranteed protection in the exercise of their work (Art. 5). Civil authorities may not require from the clergy information which fall under the obligation of pastoral secrecy (Art. 9). As a matter of principle the Church is free to appoint all ecclesiastic positions and privileges (Art. 14). The state does not impose any limitations whatsoever to religious orders and congregations with regard to their foundation, location, and number (Art. 15). Before taking full possession of their diocese bishops are obliged to swear an oath of loyalty to the German Reich and state (Art. 16). Property rights are guaranteed to the legal entities within the Church (Art. 17). Catholic theological faculties will remain part of the universities (Art. 19), and the Church is allowed to establish philosophical and theological schools for the education of the clergy if they do not seek the state support. The Church authorities have the exclusive responsibility for establishment and management of seminaries and boarding schools (Art. 20). Religious education

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<sup>8</sup> *Schutzstaffel* ('The Protection Section'), or the SS, started as Hitler's praetorian guard which only later got its military branch called the *Waffen SS*. Taking into consideration that they were formed in the Nazi ideology, they committed many crimes against humanity during World War II. In the purely military sense, they were well organised and highly disciplined, having a modern structure and warmongering spirit.

<sup>9</sup> After the death of Pius XI, Pius XII was elected as the new Pope.

in schools will be taught in accordance with the principles of the Catholic Church (Art. 21). Religious teachers may be removed from service by the bishop for moral reasons (Art. 22). Retention and establishment of confessional schools is guaranteed (Art. 23). Catholic primary schools will employ only Catholic teachers (Art. 24). Religious orders and congregations may establish and conduct private schools (Art. 25). The Church matrimony may be stipulated before the civil one (Art. 26). The Church is allowed to administer pastoral care in the army. In communication with representatives of the state the Church will appoint a military chaplain (Art. 27). The Church is allowed to provide spiritual care in hospitals, prisons, and other institutions (Art. 28). On Sundays and holidays, in accordance with the liturgical ordinances, a prayer for the prosperity of the Reich will be given in the cathedrals and parish churches (Art. 31). In case of dissidence regarding the interpretation of the articles of the Concordat, the Holy See and the German Reich will seek a mutual agreement (Art. 33).

The closing protocol asserts that the apostolic nuncio to Germany will be the doyen of the diplomatic corps (Art. 3) and that the Church may collect taxes (Art. 13).

### 3.3.2. *Antiracial laws, sterilization, and euthanasia of the ill*

Upon seizing power, the national socialists promulgated, on 24 March, the *Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Empire* (*Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich*). This law, also known as the *Enabling Act* (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*), enabled Hitler's cabinet, for a period of four years, to promulgate laws without *Reichstag*. The law was passed again in 1937 and remained in effect till 1945. After the death of President Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934), Hitler unified four major state functions, the head of state, the head of the executive branch, the main legislator, and the supreme judge.

The first signs of antisemitism appeared already in 1933. The *Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases* from 14 July 1933 prevented acquiring hereditary diseases by sterilizing those who suffered from »genetic diseases«. Sterilization was not a Nazi invention. English natural scientist Francis Galton (1822-1911), in 1865, wrote about preventing the procreation of the physically and mentally challenged. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of thousands of mostly women were sterilised in Europe and the United States. It is estimated that in the »Greater German Reich«, 400 thousand people were sterilised till 1945, and about 6 thousand people died from surgical complications. On 1 September 1939, Germany started to implement euthanasia, the death of the mentally ill and physically disabled people. Till 1941, they murdered 70 thousand people. Sterilization was implemented in other countries even before Hitler. »But, systematic murder of the ill and the unfortunate was conducted only in Germany« (Lüpke-Schwarz and Lohinski).

On 15 September 1935, in Nuremberg, they promulgated three foundational laws known as the *Nuremberg Laws* (*Nürnberger Gesetze*). *The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour* banned intermarriages and extramarital sexual relations between Jews and Germans. This Law forbade the employment of German women under the age of 45 in Jewish households, and it banned Jews from putting out the state flag. *The Reich Citizenship Law* revoked the citizenship of every person who was not of »German blood«. All Jewish officials were sent to retirement on 31 December 1935, and Jews could not be citizens of the Reich. *The Reich Flag Law* referred to the German flag which must contain the swastika (Blažević and Alijagić 895-902).

### 3.3.3. *Mit Brennender Sorge*

The Encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* was smuggled into Germany and printed in 300,000 copies, and then it was publicly read on Palm Sunday, on 21 March 1937. In January 1937, German bishops went to Rome on the *ad limina* visit. Since, in Germany, the relations with the Catholic Church were becoming increasingly hostile, and the Nazis did not keep the directives of the Concordat, it was set that the archbishop of Munich Michael von Faulhaber (1869-1952) proposes the text of the encyclical which was later finished by the Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli. The encyclical has 12 units.

The encyclical was directed to archbishops, bishops, and other ordinaries in communion with the Holy See, and it addressed the state of the Catholic Church in Germany. The Pope pointed out how they stipulated a concordat on the proposition of the Reich government, and how despite many misgivings the proposal was accepted. The Pope writes: »In the furrows, where we wanted to sow the seed of a sincere peace, the others have oversown, as the enemy in the Scriptures (Matt. 13:25), the weeds of distrust, discord, hatred, of public and secret defamation, from thousands of sources and with all means of fundamental enmity against Christ and His Church« (Pius XI, *Mit brennender Sorge* 4-5).

After the stipulation of the Concordat, the Reich government made »its unwritten rule« to violate the signed agreement (*MBS* 5). The Pope wrote about hidden or public persecutions of the Church in Germany, about religious intolerance. The encyclical speaks about the Christian God. The pantheistic and old Germanic notion of a god who would serve one race is not compatible with the Christian Trinitarian, personal God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

»Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, [...] whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, dis-

torts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds« (MBS 7).

God's commandments are »independent of time and space, country and race« (MBS 8).

The Pope calls the superficial minds those who confine themselves within the boundaries of one nation and one race (cf. MBS 8). Against the onslaughts of the »new paganism«, the bishops must keep watch to preserve God's Commandments as the foundations of moral life. The revelation of Jesus Christ cannot be amended with some arbitrary alternatives from the messengers of the »myth of blood and race«. Christ founded the Church and, therefore, it is for »all the races and all nations« (MBS 11). The Pope proclaims his support for those who had to pay dearly for their loyalty to Christ and the Church. Those who attempt to mislead the faithful with the national German Church and want to separate it from the Church of Christ will become sterile just like every branch that is separated from the vine (cf. MBS 16).

Bishops are warned of the peril that religious terms like revelation, faith, immortality, and the cross, do not become emptied of their religious content and given a profane sense connected to blood and race. The Pope warns of moral degradation if morality is moved from the granite foundation of faith to the sand of human regulations. There is a legion of those who wish to separate morality from the faith. »To hand over the moral law to man's subjective opinion, which changes with the times, instead of anchoring it in the holy will of the eternal God and His commandments, is to open wide every door to the forces of destruction« (MBS 20). In the abandonment of the moral law, the Pope sees »a sin against the destiny of a nation, a sin whose bitter fruit will poison future generation« (MBS 20).

As a sinister sign of modern times, the Pope sees the rejection of morality and of the natural law which is written by the finger of the Creator himself. Those human laws that negate the natural law abide by the principle that »right is what is useful for the people« (MBS 20). The encyclical, in opposition to this principle, cites Cicero: »Nothing can be useful if it is not at the same time morally good. And it is not morally good because it is useful, but because it is morally good it is also useful« (MBS 20-21).

Those laws that hinder the profession of faith are contrary to the natural law. The German youth is being presented with values in complete contrast with Christianity, and to their hearts the Pope sends these words of St. Paul: »If anyone should preach to you a Gospel other than the one you received 'let him be anathema'«

(Gal. 1:9). The Pope encourages priests and religious to serve the truth and refute errors despite the demanding situation. To waive these two things would mean to betray God and own vocation (cf. *MBS 25*).

The Pope praises the members of Catholic organisations who, even after many sacrifices, remained loyal to Christ. To parents, the Pope says not to let anyone take away their parental rights because the eternal judge will ask them: »Where are those I confided to you?« (*MBS 28*).

In his closing words, the Pope pointed out that he did not wish to be an accomplice by being silent, nor to be too strict with those who find themselves in delusion. The force of those who oppress the Church can be resisted by unconditional faith, hope anchored in eternity, and charity (*MBS 29*).

## **Conclusion**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church faced many challenges, the immense events after the French Revolution, the separation of the Church from the state, the abolition of the feudal system, the industrial development that brought wealth to a small portion of society and great poverty to the new social class – working class, many ideologies, and the loss of its centuries-long social role. Unfortunately, the Church promulgated many condemnations. It often did not understand the world around her, and it sought security by trying to turn the wheel of history backward. The attempts at re-Christianisation were illusory. It failed to recognise the real problems within its ranks and imposed bans on those who pointed them out.

Most of these unresolved issues were transferred to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. World War I brought unprecedented destruction, poverty, and famine. Communism, fascism, and national socialism found fertile ground. With their totalitarian spirit, they wanted to put everything under their control.

The hierarchy »pushed« the laity into areas filled by communists, socialists, and totalitarian ideologies. The engagement of the laity did not arise from theological realisation but mere necessity and helplessness to save the social role of the Church. The laity was just an extended arm of the clergy. We had to wait for the Second Vatican Council to shed theological light on the role of the laity, who, through the sacrament of baptism, receive their mission from Christ himself, and not from the hierarchy.

The Church condemned totalitarian regimes. It pointed out their errors and found itself in their crosshairs. To subjugate societies and individuals, totalitarian systems used racist ideologies, propaganda, violence, and terror of unseen proportions. They tried to destroy, defame, and completely marginalize all who stood in their way, including the Church.

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## CRKVA NASUPROT TOTALITARIZMU ZA VRIJEME PONTIFIKATA PIJA XI.

Grgo GRBEŠIĆ\*

**Sažetak:** U razdoblju između dvaju svjetskih ratova na europskom tlu nastali su totalitarni sustavi lijeve i desne opredijeljenosti. Crkva je nastojala zaštititi svoje pastoralno djelovanje uređujući konkordatima odnose s državama. Zbog kršenja odredbi konkordata u Njemačkoj i Italiji te gaženja ljudskih prava i progona Crkve u Sovjetskom Savezu Pio XI. oštro istupa braneći slobodno crkveno djelovanje i osuđujući rasizam. Tri enciklike – Non abbiamo bisogno (1931.), Mit brenner der Sorge (1937.) i Divini Redemptoris (1937.) – otkrivaju nam stav Crkve prema totalitarizmu i probleme s kojima se Crkva susretala.

**Ključne riječi:** komunizam; fašizam; nacionalsocijalizam; totalitarizam; Pio XI.; Hegel; Crkva.

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