

[Pope Pius XII \(1876-1958\)](#) ^[1]

By: Brind'Amour, Katherine Keywords: [Catholicism](#) ^[2] [Popes](#) ^[3] [Biography](#) ^[4]

[Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] was born Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli on 2 March 1876 in Rome, Italy, to Virginia and Filippo Pacelli. Known for his oft-disputed role in the Roman Catholic Church's approach to the Nazis and World War II, [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] also contributed a number of important documents regarding [conception](#) ^[6], fertility, [abortion](#) ^[7], and reproductive control to the Vatican's collection of writings and doctrine on [procreation](#) ^[8].

Raised in a religious family, Pacelli excelled as a student and athlete in his early years. After deciding to become a priest rather than a lawyer, as was family tradition, Pacelli entered both the Capranica Seminary and the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1894. He received a Baccalaureate and Licentiate in Theology *suma cum laude* in 1895. Pacelli officially joined the priesthood on 2 April 1899, and while serving his first appointment in his home church, he pursued doctorates in Canon Law, Civil Law, Philosophy, and Theology at the Papal Athenaeum of St. Apollinaris. In 1904 Pacelli became Monsignor Pacelli and began assisting the Office of the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. He gradually fell into diplomatic assignments for the Vatican due to his sharp memory and uncanny ability to master new languages. In 1917 Pope Benedict XV appointed him an archbishop and Nuncio to Bavaria, Germany. His work with the poor there continued even through the beginning of [World War I](#) ^[9] and his dedication to peace won him the vote of every cardinal in the electorate, except his own, for his appointment to the papacy, which took place on 2 March 1939.

Though much of his papacy concentrated on issues of world peace and religious tolerance, [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] also took time to address the world on issues regarding [procreation](#) ^[8]. He repeatedly affirmed the Catholic support of the sanctity of life, rejecting therapeutic exceptions to [abortion](#) ^[7] in speeches to Catholic midwives, obstetricians, and medical councils. He likewise condemned [sterilization](#) ^[10] and the [birth control](#) ^[11] pill to prevent [conception](#) ^[6], only approving the use of such procedures or medicines when medically necessary for other health reasons. His statements on the [rhythm method](#) ^[12] and the concept of a [birth control](#) ^[11] pill influenced the creator of the pill, John Rock, to seek a natural means of monitoring and suppressing reproduction; he and Rock simply disagreed as to what constituted a "natural" method. Rock pursued natural [hormones](#) ^[13] as a way to regulate fertility, whereas [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] rejected the use of pills (natural or otherwise) to interfere with a woman's cycle for the sole purpose of preventing [conception](#) ^[6]. [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] was also vocal on the importance of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a tenet of church dogma that supports the Catholic viewpoint of human life beginning at [conception](#) ^[6].

Though [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] was principally known for his actions during World War II, his reactions to the new [birth control](#) ^[11] pill, [abortion](#) ^[7] procedures, and [sterilization](#) ^[10] techniques of the mid-twentieth century helped shape Roman Catholic views on these issues. His stance on these early development and fertility topics still represents the Church's opinion on beginning of life and fertility matters, as confirmed by each of his successors. [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5] died 9 October 1958, and was succeeded by [Pope John XXIII](#) ^[14], who often extended, clarified, and reiterated Pope Pius XII's statements on matters regarding [procreation](#) ^[8] and human life.

Sources

1. Cavanagh, John Richard. *The Popes, the Pill, and the People: A Documentary Study*. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1965.
2. Marchione, Margherita. [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5]: *Architect for Peace*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000.
3. Marchione, Margherita. "Pope Pius XII: Vicar of Christ, Servant of God." [Pope Pius XII](#) ^[5]. <http://www.piusxiipope.info/index.htm> ^[15] (Accessed April 7, 2008).
4. Pius XII. "Discurso del Santo Padre Pío XII al Congreso de la Unión Católica Italiana de Obstétricas con la Colaboración de la Federación Nacional de Colegios de Comadronas Católicas." Vatican Library. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511029_ostetriche_sp.html ^[16] (Accessed April 7, 2008).
5. Pius XII. "Discurso de su Santidad Pío XII a los Participantes en el II Congreso Mundial de la Fertilidad y la Esterilidad." Vatican Library. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1956/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19560519_vous-nous-avez_sp.html ^[17] (Accessed April 7, 2008).

Pope Pius XII was born Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli on 2 March 1876 in Rome, Italy, to Virginia and Filippo Pacelli. Known for his oft-disputed role in the Roman Catholic Church's approach to the Nazis and World War II, Pope Pius XII also contributed a number of important documents regarding conception, fertility, abortion, and reproductive control to the Vatican's collection of writings and doctrine on procreation.

Subject

[Pius XII, Pope, 1876-1958](#) ^[18]

Topic

[People](#) ^[19] [Religion](#) ^[20] [Reproduction](#) ^[21]

Publisher

Arizona State University. School of Life Sciences. Center for Biology and Society. Embryo Project Encyclopedia.

Rights

© Arizona Board of Regents Licensed as Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Format

[Articles](#) ^[22]

Last Modified

Wednesday, July 4, 2018 - 04:40

DC Date Accessioned

Thursday, May 10, 2012 - 14:02

DC Date Available

Thursday, May 10, 2012 - 14:02

DC Date Created

2010-06-10

DC Date Created Standard

Thursday, June 10, 2010 - 07:00

- [Contact Us](#)

© 2019 Arizona Board of Regents

- The Embryo Project at Arizona State University, 1711 South Rural Road, Tempe Arizona 85287, United States

Source URL: <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/pope-pius-xii-1876-1958>

Links

- [1] <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/pope-pius-xii-1876-1958>
- [2] <https://embryo.asu.edu/keywords/catholicism>
- [3] <https://embryo.asu.edu/keywords/popes>
- [4] <https://embryo.asu.edu/keywords/biography>
- [5] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=Pope%20Pius%20XII>
- [6] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=conception>
- [7] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=abortion>
- [8] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=procreation>
- [9] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=World%20War%20I>
- [10] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=sterilization>
- [11] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=birth%20control>
- [12] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=rhythm%20method>

- [13] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=hormones>
- [14] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=Pope%20John%20XXIII>
- [15] <http://www.piusxiipope.info/index.htm>
- [16] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511029_ostetriche_sp.html
- [17] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1956/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19560519_vous-nous-avez_sp.html
- [18] <https://embryo.asu.edu/library-congress-subject-headings/pius-xii-pope-1876-1958>
- [19] <https://embryo.asu.edu/topics/people>
- [20] <https://embryo.asu.edu/topics/religion>
- [21] <https://embryo.asu.edu/topics/reproduction>
- [22] <https://embryo.asu.edu/formats/articles>