

# The Church at the Time of Pius XI: the Kolbe Impact

(Danilo Veneruso)

## 1. *From Benedict XV to Pius XI*

Even if the “Pius Union” of the Militia of the Immaculate enters into the life of St. Maximilian Kolbe, especially during the pontificate of Pius XI (February 6<sup>th</sup> 1922 – February 10<sup>th</sup> 1939), it is during the pontificate of Benedict XV (September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914 – January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1922) that it is founded. The young religious from the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor Conventuals has the chance of confronting the two popes right at the moment of the passage of pontificates in an article written for the review of the Polish section of the Militia of the Immaculate, *Rycerz Niepokalanej*. Both popes are thankful for his heart. According to the temporal parameters of the most recent pontificates, whose durations at least went over the first decades, Benedict XV did not guide the Church for long: however, he created a place in the history not only of the Church but of all humanity for himself. Father Kolbe notes that the titles of «mediator of peace and benefactor of humanity» for the recently defunct pope suit him because they “underline briefly but in an expressive way his greatness: his heart was large, ardent, embrace the entire world: Christians and pagans, Catholics and Protestants or Schismatics”. Kolbe also underlines the connection that Benedict XV managed to establish with Mons. Achille Ratti, who would then become his successor to the throne of Peter, in the name of Poland: it goes to the Pope of the Church’s merit having individualized and discovered the Milanese prelate in the “sanctuary” of the Vatican Library, where he seems destined to pass a quiet life of a studious person, unknown to the vaster public, and making him Apostolic Visitor already in 1918, and while the outcome of the war is still uncertain and Poland is entirely in the hands of the Reich, victorious over revolutionized Russia through the peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, from a month earlier (March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1918). Mons. Ratti begins to actively exercise his position, as soon as the armistice with Germany puts an end to the war, and would change the title of his mission in Poland into the weightier one of Apostolic Nuncio, as soon as the Conference of Paris decides the solemn and common international recognition of the Polish State, returning to life after one hundred twenty six years (June 6<sup>th</sup> 1919). Father Kolbe’s words allow us to feel Benedict XV’s affectionate consciousness on the meaning of the Holy See’s closeness in the first steps made by Poland, reborn to a new life of sovereignty and independence: «Because the humble Mons. Ratti had a certain fear in accepting such an important position, the Holy Father heartened and encouraged him with the following words: “Do not be afraid of the difficulties: you will go to a people where faith holds the first place, and which is the first nation with regards to its religiosity: Polonia semper fidelis. You will go to a martyred people, having shed so much blood for the faith and for freedom; well, now they are rising from the tomb to a new life and, while still having the funereal shrouds wrapped around it, it no longer lies in the tomb”». For the return of a representative of the Holy See to have greater echo

and greater prestige, the new nuncio, before presenting his credentials to the President of the Polish Republic Pilsudski (July 19<sup>th</sup> 1919), was conferred the title of Titular Archbishop of Lepanto (July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919) and when a month later Mons. Ratti was to be consecrated (October 28<sup>th</sup> 1919), the consecration ceremony would take place in Polish land, in the capital's cathedral by the hand of the Primate of Poland Mons. Kakowski. On at least one other occasion, Father Kolbe underlines his closeness to Poland: in September 1935, commemorating President Pilsudski in the same review, he reports that the actual Pontiff, once nuncio in Poland told him about when in Vilna with the Marshall, he saw him fervently pray before the painting of the Divine Mother of Ostra Brama, many times.

## 2. *The Pope of Missions*

Other reports will deal with the relations between Pius XI and Father Kolbe for spreading the Militia of the Immaculate in Poland and in Japan, in a specific way: this report is entrusted with the duty of outlining the breadth of the Pontificate of Pius XI in relationship to the general history of the period between the two wars, which it almost covers completely.

As much as Pius XI follows the pontificate of Benedict XV by just a few years and intends to continue the tradition, the historical context he must deal with is different and, under some aspects, almost the opposite. Before delving into what is the better known aspect of this pontificate, what by its nature attracts historians' attention more, the inevitable and necessary confrontation of the Church with the world, as required by the incarnation nature of Christianity, we must consider what counts most, the spiritual framework of a pontificate looking for and finding the central point in the missionary impulse as well as what corresponds the closest to the spiritual framework in Father Kolbe.

### a) *The "in partes infidelium" missions*

While in other fields Pius XI proceeds carefully (enough to recall that the inaugural encyclical of his papacy was emanated a little less than a year after his election), in the missionary field he moves with great assuredness and determination. The first days of May 1922, with two distinct but logically tied provisions, he reorganizes the methods of collecting and distributing the offerings destined to the missions, and transfers to Rome, under the direct dependency of the Holy Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, the *Oeuvre de la propagation de la foi*, founded in Lyons exactly one century before and encouraged, in a special audience for its members held on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1922, the Missionary Union of the Clergy, which he hopes will be implanted in every parish. The following day, on Pentecost, Pius XI pronounces the programmatic manifesto on missions in St. Peter's Basilica: from the foundations of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, on its centennial year, indicates the primary duty of the Church, from the Pope to the last faithful, as the support and the promotion of Missions. He recognizes that a great deal had been done, but that this is nothing compared to still needs to be done: an entire continent, Asia, is impermeable to Christianity and even

Africa begins to create serious problems to the spreading of Christianity. That same year, he sends Mons Celso Costantini as apostolic delegate to China, who, in favor of the method of "adaptation", which corresponds to today's "inculturation of faith", means to accelerate the process of autochthony. Equal to Pius XI, and before him Benedict XV, the author of a missionary encyclical condemning any possible connection between missions and colonialism, the apostolic delegate in China is convinced that the difficulties the Church finds outside of the Euro-American sees come from the growing anti-colonial movement, very strong in Asia and slightly less in Africa. In agreement with Cardinal Van Rossum, Prefect of the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, and with Costantini, who in 1924 presides the first National Chinese Council and constantly presses for the nomination of Chinese bishops, Pius XI personally consecrates the first six Chinese bishops on October 28<sup>th</sup> 1926 at St. Peter's, in a solemn ceremony preceded by the apostolic letter *Ab ipsis* (June 15<sup>th</sup> 1926), assuring the Chinese people that the Church does not intend becoming a political instrument for the European powers and deeply respects the aspirations of unity and independence of the Chinese people.

Before the conclusion of his first year as pope, he clearly underlines how the missionary action is in his heart: wherever possible, placement of complete local hierarchies in the main missionary centers. The stages of this project include the following stages in succession: an apostolic visit to check the conditions, sending an apostolic delegate, creating a local clergy and, finally, entrusting the clergy to the local bishops. With this impulse and this method, between 1933 and 1934, there will be the consecration of the first bishop and the first National Council of Annam, resented by France who considers Indochina as its reserved area. Another notable fact is the collective letter the South African Catholic bishops emanated, hoping for the rise of the blacks.

When it comes to Japan, Father Kolbe goes there, sent to the center of evangelizing action of the Church in Japan, Nagasaki. In all cases, Pius XI tends to regulate relations between Catholics of Latin Rite with the Catholics of the Eastern Churches with liberality, giving up Latinization while, especially with the apostolic delegate in Bulgaria and later in Turkey and in Greece, Mons. Giuseppe Roncalli, he begins to establish neighborly relations with the Christian Orthodox religions.

After having given the 1925 Jubilee year a marked missionary characteristic, sealed by a great missionary showing, Pius XI emanates, on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1926, his missionary encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*, where he emphasizes and develops the preceding encyclical by Benedict XV *Maximum illud* dated November 30<sup>th</sup> 1919. In the beginning, after having recalled that the main commitment of the Roman Pontiffs has always been that of "making all the human race participate in the fruits of redemption and to spread the Kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the world", Pius XI sees the need to detach the evangelizing work from any politics, especially Western policies and from the interests of the European powers. The positive aspect of this detachment is represented by the creation of a local clergy, the key to modern evangelization: with his usual frankness, he denounces and decisively denies any contrary objections, which tend to present the locals "as an inferior race and obtuse". Therefore, the local priests must be treated as equal to their white brothers, rather as potentially superior because they are destined to support their churches and to furnish future bishops. The conclusion of the encyclical is obvious: the exaltation of the method of "adaptation".

In 1928 another step is taken on the path of de-westernization not only in the missions, but also in the entire Church. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, Pius XI addresses a salutation of approval and hope for the national independence of the most numerous people on the earth, the Chinese, to whom he assures loyal collaboration by the Catholic citizens in a time where this tormented country, from the beginning of the century knows no peace, may find unity and peace under the Kuomintang of Nanking, while on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1928, a convention is stipulated with Portugal for the liquidation of the religious part of the "patronage" in the Indies.

Missionary activity continues zealously also from the organizational point of view and with an exponential growth of investments in terms of financial resources, especially thanks to the capillary involvement of all the faithful. It is difficult to quantify the downfall of the success of evangelization: on average, we may calculate half a million new baptized adults per year in mission lands, a good number, but certainly very far from the Pope's aspirations.

Universalizing the clergy is considered as a necessary and unalienable consequence of the Church's universality: one of the Chinese bishops consecrated by Pius XI expresses himself in this sense in a conference held at Lovanio, placing the emphasis on the strict need that "the Catholics, who are all children of the same Father, redeemed by the same Jesus, nourished by the same Eucharist, must let the barriers of race and color, prejudice and antipathies of one nation for another fall". The exhortations by Pius XI to the priests involved in missionary activities were particularly well geared: for him, the priest must be capable of being a man of God and, as such, must stay away from any temporal greed and from any political competition, which would abase the figure and the function before the faithful.

#### *b) Catholic Action*

Evangelization, for Pius XI, if it contains a so-called *in partibus infidelium* external aspect in missions, it has an internal aspect in Catholic Action where the laity are called to evangelization, as the "*genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta*, the people of God". The distinction between clergy and laity finds its foundation in Jesus Christ, according to two parameters of judgment: on one hand the constant relation between unity and diversity and, on the other, in the noteworthy Christological tendency of theology in that time, fully understood by him in the encyclical *Quas primas*, emanated on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1925. The Eucharistic spirit also contributes in the Christological nourishment, which the Pope considers as a powerful factor of accord, of equality and of love among men: the Doctrine of the Mystical Body, going back to the Christocentric and sacramental nature of the Church, is therefore also a fundamental element of ecclesiology, another branch of theology that was developed during the papacy, as emerges from the reflections by theologians such as E. Mersch, C. Feckes, K. Adam, R. Guardini, embraced in Italy above all in the Brescia centers (where the publishing houses of Morcelliana and Queriniana are) and in Genoa, with G. Bevilacqua, G. Siri, E. Guano and, with special attention on the liturgical aspects, with G. Moglia, P. Righetti and G. Lercaro. The Jubilees are also occasions for renewed Christian spirituality: for this reason, Pius XI adds another two extraordinary Jubilees to the normal twenty-five year one, in 1929 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his

ordination, and in 1933 to celebrate the nineteenth centennial of Jesus Christ's Passion. Even beatifications and canonizations contribute to the reinforcement and the growth of the Church's spirituality, and in a particular way for the laity. Some of the saints proclaimed by Pius XI are extraordinarily popular like Teresa of Lisieux (little "Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus"), John Bosco, Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo, Bernadette Soubirous (the seeress of Lourdes), Jean Vianney (the "saint of Ars").

The concept of laity as an integral part of the Church (not only "understood" by the Church as usual until that time) also explains Pius XI favor towards Catholic Action, which from the modest and voluntary levels it was at for half a century was elevated to a center for distribution, religious formation and lay activities for both sexes, especially for the young. The religious nature of Catholic Action also explains the reason for Pius XI separates the religious duties from the economic, social and political ones: the undifferentiated unity of the Catholic movements in the 800's and 900's has been vanquished. This creates perplexities, if not even opposition and resistance by many churches, especially past the Alps, who find the centrality of the Holy See rather than the choice of the primacy of what is spiritual excessive and counterproductive. Facing the request for clarification by Cardinal Bertram, Archbishop of Breslau while in Germany, Pius XI sees the need to reclaim the constitutional function Catholic Action has as a sub-institution within the Church, defining it "a Catholic universal action, without making exceptions of age, sex, social condition, culture, national and political tendencies, if they do not go against evangelical doctrine and do not imply the renunciation of these doctrines and laws, action that embraces all of man in private and public life, for the best religious and civil formation". With the continuing or rather the growth and multiplication of resistance, the single model of Catholic Action must be abandoned. The Italian model, usually characterized by distinguishing sex and age, the Pope's closest thoughts, is extended only to the Iberian Peninsula: usually the multiple model, corresponding to the democratic stratification of society (France, Belgium, Holland, Weimar Republic): of particular importance is, also for the extension of its influence, the *jeunesse ouvrière* (young workers) in France and in Belgium. The constitutive nature Pius XI attributes to Catholic Action explains why this is constantly defended in the encyclicals, in the concordats and in the other public documents of the Holy See.

### 3. *Relation between faith and science*

As any good northerner used to dealing with the civilization of science and technology, Pius XI has no complexes regarding the mathematical, physical and natural sciences or the most advanced developments of technology. This is what he states in a speech to Catholic university students in 1927, "when dealing with science and faith, the difficult pretexts – pretexts, but unfortunately real and often fatal, come down to this: either one believes in science when it isn't or has no guarantee of science, or one takes for a faith what is not faith". He has no difficulties in placing the Holy See in the circle of science and modern technology with the introduction of motors and with the completion of electricity, with the creation of Vatican Radio (1931), with restructuring the Astronomic Specola. The Accademia dei Nuovi Lincei is transformed into the Pontifical Academy of Sciences with as "motu proprio" *In multis solaciis* on October

21<sup>st</sup> 1936, establishing the number of world famous scientists called to participate as seventy.

As for the philosophical sciences, Pius XI thinks about the need for a *philosophia perennis* as the logical basis of religious transcendence, giving it the characteristics of Thomistic philosophy such as the one guaranteeing the metaphysical foundation of a religion not wishing to be bogged down by and immanent and materialistic pantheism and with this, the same Christian social doctrine. This is considered an integral part of the Church's teaching because sociology and economy cannot escape the sphere of morals. With this in mind, already on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1923, he proclaims the encyclical *Studiorum ducem* to exalt the figure and the thinking of Saint Thomas and during the 1925 Jubilee, he promotes an International Thomistic congress in Rome.

Pius XI, meaning to promote a *corpus* of educated and updated priests, also hopes to make seminaries become cultural centers. In fact, he establishes the practice of elevating to the episcopacy and to the higher ecclesiastic positions the priests trained in the most important ecclesiastic institutes, possibly in Rome, elevated to the rank of university.

#### 4. *Church relations with the States at the time of the return of obligatory statism.*

a) *Full and unreserved recognition of the dimension of State and, at the same time, its limitations in foro jurisdictionis and in foro conscientiae. Condemnation of "immoderate Nationalism" and of statism.*

During the last year of World War I (1917-1918), due to the effects of the first Russian Revolution in February-March 1917, to The United States participation in the war with the Triple Entente and the closer political and ideological ties between British liberalism personified by the Prime Minister Lloyd George and the American one personified by Wilson, the Entente's conduct in the war moves from a strategy of imperialism to increase colonial expansion towards extra-European territories to the increasing promotion of positions more liberal-democratic. The victory of the democratic principle, through the victory of the Entente, sparks a process that leads to debate on the exclusive and all-powerful State and its transformation in favor of society. In fact the last and definitive incarnation of the modern State, the democratic one, does not constitute the last form of reinforcement of the State after those represented by the absolute monarchies between the 500's and 700's, by the national state and by the imperial model, conservative, militaristic and authoritarian of the central powers, was thought of as the destined dimension to fill the void between State and society.

Within this "democratic" context, Benedict XV universal action unfolds, beginning with the "Note for peace" on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917, as well as Wilson's proposal for an international order founded on the principle of self-determination. Parallel to this, the proposal for an international order based on Communism by Lenin is presented, which after the first doubts and wavering is considered the antithesis and the alternative to democracy.

At this point bipolarity seems to be delineated when, instead, before the middle of 1920, the bipolar scenario disappears rapidly, to leave the place to a sort of reincarnation of

the nationalistic-imperialistic State, which had been at the forefront before the War. This return to National imperialism is logically accompanied by the relative return to the model of the Jacobin State, characterized by exclusive power, one and indivisible.

Concerning this, we must take note that the arrest of the process of passing from the obligatory State to the primacy of society over State coincides with the passage of pontiffs. Benedict XV dies on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Pius XI succeeds him on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1922. At this time in Italy, liberalism, after having done away with the Sturzo model of primacy of society over State, is about to choose between the model of a modern State as proposed by the national revolution and the model of a modern State as proposed by the social revolution: this is an alternative where the outcome can have no doubts.

Therefore, Pius XI finds himself facing the general tendency of reinforcement of the Jacobin model of the obligatoriness of the State. Usually Pius XI is judged as the opposite of Benedict XV by historiography: just as his predecessor was oriented towards democracy, the new pontiff is oriented towards such a visible State as to be able to define it as "authoritarian". This is not the correct way to look at this problem. Apart from the differences in character and temperament of the two persons, which one must always bear in mind, the new pontiff realizes that, substantially, one must take into account whatever kind of State is present: all the rest, the political parties, the tendencies present in society, must be taken into consideration with regards to their pertinence to the interests of the State. Therefore, he comes into relations with the States not with the parties: within the possible limitations, he does not enter into relations with Catholic parties either. The range of this attitude can be clearly seen in relations with Italy, where for over half a century, there are no official relations between the Catholic Church and the State, but, a party of clearly Christian inspiration, such as the popular one has a pre-eminent position in public life. Even in this case, the Holy See, with Pius XI, prefers to maintain the channels reserved with the State rather than going through the party. But the European ensemble of reinforcement of the dimension of State urges him along the path of concordats, by which the freedom of religion of Catholics is attempted and guaranteed by direct relations with the States. In a situation where general freedom, which is none other than freedom of society, is constantly in discussion by the growing pretenses by the State, the Church's freedom, which lives in every society object of the State power, should be separated from the common fate it would have on a general level. Benedict XV aimed at society and on Catholic political parties as elements present in society because society allowed him to do this: Pius XI aims at the States because he cannot do otherwise. This is why he stipulates, during his papacy, eighteen concordats with States maintained by different types of regimes, liberal democratic, mixed, authoritarian, dictatorial like the Italian one: for a long time he thinks about stipulating a concordat even with the Soviet Union, through a mission entrusted to the French Jesuit Michel d'Herbigny, only giving this up at the end of the 20's, when the consolidation of Stalin's power makes this impossible. Of course, the content and the methods of the concordats depend on the diversity of the situations, especially as to what concerns the Catholic presence in the nation. Some are only a *modus vivendi* or ententes that regulate certain specific questions, such as the nomination of Bishops, the alignment of the boundaries of the ecclesiastic areas with the State boundaries, ethnic minorities. However, even the so-called general concordats, which concern the Church questions within the States, present different typologies according to the different situations. Pius XI uses three main types of concordats:

a) Concordats with States with an overwhelmingly Catholic majority (Bavaria, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1924; Poland, February 10<sup>th</sup> 1925; Lithuania, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1927; Italy, February 11<sup>th</sup> 1929; Austria, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1933). In these States the Church aims at obtaining the position as “State religion”, with the privileges given to educational matters, considered as the basis of State education, pertaining to ecclesiastic property, and in the exemption or reduction of taxation, of congruity to the clergy and in some cases, as in Poland and in Lithuania, the partial reintroduction of the ecclesial forum.

b) Concordats with States with a strong Catholic presence (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Baden, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1932, Prussia, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1929; Germany, July 20<sup>th</sup> 1933). In these States the Church attempts to obtain facilitations pertaining to educational and economic matters.

c) Concordats with States where the Catholics are a minority (Latvia, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1922, the first to be stipulated; Romania, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1927, with a particular convention stipulated on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1932, concerning Transylvania, a recently annexed region where Catholics are a great majority of the population). In these States, the Church is merely looking for the application of religious freedom and equality among the other religions.

The main point the church makes for stipulating concordats is the free choice of bishops, with the possibility for the governments to state motivated reservations of a political nature. For the drafting of the Concordat, the Holy See requires two tightly linked conditions: the first is bilateral negotiations, excluding other subjects such as the State’s Conference of Bishops, Catholic Action and other similar lay associations, Catholic political parties or inspired by Catholicism; the second is absolute secrecy, to avoid leaking news and comments or inopportune interpretations. Even the presence and the work by intermediaries, which usually complicate the problems to be clarified, are not desired.

From 1922 to 1924, the sources of spreading the virus of national imperialism can be found especially in Italy and in France. In his inaugural encyclical, *Ubi arcano* December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1922, Pius XI takes a firm stand against “immoderate nationalism” as a permanent threat to peace. He also realizes that action must be taken, relative to the specific denunciation, which on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1923 is concretized in a letter sent to his Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, where he deplors the occupation of the Ruhr by the French. At the time, the pontifical initiative provokes a reaction of rejection among those same French Catholics: however, the delineation of a tendency towards the decline of nationalistic tendencies with the victory of the *cartel des gauches* in the 1924 political elections offers the Holy See the occasion to attempt to rescind the ancient and dangerous tie between the French Catholics and *Action Française*. This is concretized in a papal deprecation against the “paganism” of the right-wing French movement. This brings about a detachment from the Pope by the integrators in each nation, including the Italians, who fear that an analogous provision may be taken against Italian fascism.

This explains how, during the Papacy of Pius XI, due to the direct intervention of the Pontiff or through his spokesmen or through the workings of the social doctrine of the Church and thereby the Catholic movements sustaining it, there are evermore delineated critical positions towards not only Communism, but also against extreme nationalism so hostile towards Christianity. These critical positions do not even spare fascism, whose clear corporativism appears more like a form of social control that has nothing to do with the corporate tradition of the Catholic social movement or with the social doctrine of the Church, which postulates the primacy of society over the State.



b). *The “binary choice”*

With this context in mind, the theological and historical meaning of Pius XI concordat choice can be explained, in a time and in a place where there is a return to the obligatory State, difficult to deal with especially in the Italian sphere where the obligatory State is presented in a dictatorial way, where the principles of uniqueness and exclusiveness of power are asserted by the form and in the greatest intensity. The principle of distinguishing between the Church and State spheres is thereby observed and applied with a *modus vivendi* where, concretely, the Church is given the sphere of society, while fascism reserves the power for itself: Mussolini is the only one who can do politics in Italy. In the final analysis, the work in society is more gratifying than political work: if the society is Christian, even the political power must keep this in mind. In effect, the period between the two wars gives a profile, under this aspect, of a situation that for some time recalls the *ancien régime*: the Italian people are compacted under the unity of the religious profession. But at this point, disappointment and contradiction arise: Mussolini's power is characterized by an ideology (in the sense of culture able to inspire political action) more and more diverging from the Gospel preaching, up until it underlines the radical incompatibility in the “fascist mystic”, where the cult of the person of the Dux takes the place of that of Christ and in the alliance “for life and death” with National Socialism, explicitly alternative to Christianity.

With the “binary choice”, Pius XI intends to make the most of the moment of legitimization of that power that does and cannot find foundation within itself. However, this is made vain by the only, exclusive, indivisible power of the final and extreme form of a modern and obligatory State, which therefore is dictatorial, exclusive, sectarian and violent. And this because in the stage of being an “ethical State”, it declares not needing legitimization from outside itself. This explains why, towards the end of Pius XI papacy, the positions between the Church and one of the last incarnations of the modern State are once again apart and the Concordat (but perhaps even the Treaty) are openly in discussion, on one side as the other.

6. *Father Maximilian Kolbe during the pontificate of Pius XI*

Already during the middle of the 20's, Father Kolbe is known by the vertices of the Holy See as the most active supporter in Poland of the Militia of the Immaculate. Therefore in 1926, the Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Gasparri writes Father Kolbe to let him know the Pope's appreciation and gratitude. After this, several times Kolbe directly or indirectly addresses Pius XI during his stay in Nagasaki, Japan, where between 1931 and 1936, he works towards the establishment, with a certain degree of success given the conditions of the Church there, the Militia of the Immaculate. Even after his return from Japan, Father Kolbe maintains direct contacts with Pius XI for the promotion of this Pius Union. Father Kolbe often refers to the missionary doctrine of Pius XI, and in particular to the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*, to validate his so-called maximalistic positions concerning missions. To be in agreement with the Pope's wishes concerning the press, Father Kolbe takes on the difficult task of founding a periodical in

Japan as an organ of the Militia of the Immaculate and gives useful advice for the foundation of a truly Catholic daily newspaper in Poland Father Kolbe appeals upon the authority of Pius XI, decisive for the promotion of the Militia of the Immaculate, to remove the obstacles still blocking its development therefore the name of Pius XI frequently appears in the articles Father Kolbe dedicates to the history of the Militia of the Immaculate and, with gratitude, in the history of the recent and often insidious independence of his homeland, Poland.

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