

Arnold Brecht on Cardinal Pacelli and Radio in the Early 1920s (Retrospective Account, 1966)

Abstract

In this short text, German jurist and government official Arnold Brecht (1884–1977) recalls his first impressions of both Cardinal Pacelli (1876–1958), the future pope Pius XII, and the new medium of radio. Brecht describes Pacelli’s charismatic personality, and the effect it had on him and others, and then recounts how he and Pacelli listened to an early live radio broadcast without remotely anticipating the enormous role broadcasting would play in the future.

Source

It was not so much the content of the conversation as the personality of [Cardinal] Pacelli that made such a lasting impression, which was intensified by later meetings in Berlin. In the summer of the same year (1921) Joseph Wirth, then Chancellor, and I as the acting chief of the Chancellery were guests of Pacelli at a small luncheon in the Hotel Kaiserdorf and later were invited with a group of some twenty statesmen and church dignitaries to another Berlin hotel. The dignity and friendliness, at once ascetic and elegant, with which he received his guests and then took them with inimitable grace of bearing and gait past the band playing jazz, past the shoes, big and small, placed outside rooms in corridors, along to his suite, took the whole company out of the all-too-human surroundings. Everywhere he went was holy. Another time I met him on the top floor of the Vox House in Potsdamer Strasse, where he, Ebert’s secretary Meissner, and I had been invited to one of the first radio tryouts. I was at the time head of the division in the Ministry of the Interior which was in charge of radio affairs, and I listened, absorbed, to this new technical wonder. When we got up, Pacelli said to me quietly but urgently: “But *what* will the people be told by means of this new medium?” I have never forgotten that.

Source: Arnold Brecht, *The Political Education of Arnold Brecht: An Autobiography 1884–1970*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 200.

Source of original German text: Arnold Brecht, *Aus Nächster Nähe: Lebenserinnerungen 1884–1927*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH, 1966, p. 336.

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