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Facing the Emergence of the Modern Middle East:
Benedict XV's Diplomacy in Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine)
1914-1922

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By

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Pope Benedict XV's pontificate (1914-1922), misunderstood by his contemporaries and neglected by recent scholarship, coincides with the reshaping of the Middle East, from the beginning of World War One to the assignment of Mandates to France and Britain over Syria and Palestine.

This study examines Benedict XV's diplomacy in Greater Syria. Its unique aspect resides in the combination of two approaches. Benedict's main priority was to ensure the survival of Christians in the Middle East, providing them with a dynamic ecclesiological structure. The pontiff completed and institutionalized the traditional ecclesiological approach in favor of unionism, with the goal to strengthen the ecclesial structures of the Eastern churches and equip them with solid legal foundations. This ecclesiological approach was integrated in Benedict XV's global geo-political vision that shifted away from its past Eurocentric vision and was combined with an anticipation of the decolonization era. Benedict completed these guiding principles with a policy of emancipation of the missionary world from the bondage of colonial powers, preparing the Church for an active role in the world. These principles were implemented in Syria-Lebanon, as Benedict XV navigated between the pressure of French imperialism and

Prince Feisal's Arab nationalism, as well as in Palestine, dominated by the tension between Britain and France, the implementation of a Jewish national home, and the proselytizing of Protestant missions.

The core of the dissertation, which stands at the confluence of Church history, international politics, and law, rests upon a historically critical evaluation of documents found in the *Vatican Secret Archives*, the *Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches*, and of the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* in Rome, Italy.

Benedict XV reigned during a decade that shook the world. He witnessed, in Greater Syria, events that had tremendous historical, religious, and political implications for the future of the region and our understanding of the unending turmoil affecting the Middle East a century later. Pope Benedict emerges as a wise pontiff, a skilled geopolitician, well ahead of his time. This dissertation is the first regional study of Pope Benedict's diplomatic endeavors.

This dissertation by Agnes Aupepin de Lamothe-Dreuzy fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Church History approved by Jacques M. Gres-Gayer, STD, Ph.D., as Director, and by Sidney H. Griffith, STL, Ph.D., and Charles Morerod, O.P., Ph.D., as Readers.

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his tremendous help in navigating through the Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

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“A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words,” wrote C.S. Lewis. Through good health and illness, through joy and sadness, along this journey I have been supported by my dearest friends, Fr. Thomas Longua, Eugenie Cabot, Maika Fowler, Anne-Elisabeth Giuliani, Jill Kalinski, Solveig Loretz, and Clare Wilde. I am grateful beyond words. Maybe one day they will find the time to read this dissertation!

I dedicate this work to my husband Philippe and my children Olivia and Pierre. They are my pillars and my inspiration.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ACCO</i>	<i>Archivio della Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali</i>
<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
<i>AES</i>	<i>Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari</i>
<i>AP, N.S</i>	<i>Archivio della S. Congregazione “de Propaganda Fide,” Nuova Serie</i>
<i>Arch. Deleg.</i>	<i>Archivio Delegazioni Apostoliche</i>
<i>Arch. Nunz.</i>	<i>Archivio Nunziatura</i>
<i>ASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctae Sedis</i>
<i>ASV</i>	<i>Archivio Segreto Vaticano (Vatican Secret Archives)</i>
<i>CRFJ</i>	<i>Centre de Recherche Français de Jerusalem</i>
<i>FO</i>	<i>Foreign Office (G.B)</i>
<i>KCB</i>	<i>Knight Commander (Order of Bath)</i>
<i>KCMG</i>	<i>Knight Commander (Order of St. Michael and St. George)</i>
<i>NASB</i>	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
<i>Segr. Stato</i>	<i>Segreteria di Stato</i>

INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING BENEDICT XV'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

If the successor of Gregory and Innocent is not to-day the monarch of monarchs, the dispenser of crowns, the distributor of continents and oceans, he still personifies the greatest moral force of the world ... If he is not a sovereign, for lack of territory, he is still treated as a sovereign ... However, he does not have to make war.¹

Had Pope Benedict XV read these lines, written in 1896 by the famed French Professor of International Law, Alphonse Rivier, he would have approved, adding that indeed the successor of Peter “does not have to make war,”² but may become involved in it as the Church endures its hardships.

Pope Benedict XV, elected to the throne of Peter on September 3, 1914, a month after the start of the First World War, was not the first pontiff to weather a war, but this conflict was different. It was a “total war”³ that involved the world’s Great Powers and Empires. It was fought on European and Ottoman soils as two different wars. “The first was a war of soldiers ... and civilian populations under occupation, where individual suffering and distress were on a massive scale ... The second was a war of War Cabinets

¹ Alphonse Rivier, *Principes du droit des gens*, 2 volumes (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1896), 1:120. (My translation).

² Rivier, *Droit des gens*, 1:120.

³ This term was coined during the First World War and implies “the breakdown of the distinction between organized combat and the societies, economies, and political systems that support it.” Roger Chickering and Stig Förster eds., *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/The German Historical Institute, 2003), 3.

and sovereigns ... repleted with political and territorial ambitions and ideals, determining the future of Empires, nations and peoples.”⁴

Pope Benedict, although not a *de jure* sovereign since the loss of the Papal States in 1870,⁵ was actively involved at both levels. “Two-thirds of the Catholics of the time were directly involved in this war, 124 million on the side of the Entente, [and] 64 million on the side of the Central Powers.”⁶ The pontiff witnessed the sacrifice of a whole generation. He offered his personal wealth sparing no energy to bring relief to the wounded soldiers fighting in the trenches as well as to the civilians suffering cruelties and deprivation. He also met with Presidents, Ministers, and Ambassadors to ensure the protection of Catholic rights and interests in Europe and in the crumbling Ottoman Empire.

The Great War was to be the war to end all wars. In the words of the historian David Fromkin, the Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919 by Germany and the Allied powers, was akin to *A Peace to End All Peace*.⁷ In Europe, the Second World War, with its cortege of atrocities, was a direct outcome of the Great War. In the new emerging

⁴ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), xv.

⁵ In the nineteenth century, a secular movement grew to unite Italy. By September 1870, all Papal States were lost as the King moved his court from Florence to Rome. Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) retreated to the Vatican. While the pontiff lost temporal power over the Papal States, his moral prestige grew worldwide. For more details, see Chapter 1, 35.

⁶ Hubert Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, vol. X (New York: Crossroad, 1980-1982), 35. The Entente was a war-time military alliance between the United Kingdom, France, and the Russian Empire. They were joined by Italy in 1915 and the United States in 1917. Other minor members were Belgium, Serbia, Greece, Romania, and Japan. The Central Powers were allied against the Entente. It was originally the alliance of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was then extended to Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.

⁷ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989).

Middle East, carved out of the spoils of the vanquished Ottoman Empire, decisions were made whose consequences still hover over today's world politics. On the threshold of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire had become an anachronism in a world dominated by nation states. The opening of hostilities in August 1914 and the victory of the Entente Powers accelerated the disintegration of the "Sick Man of Europe."⁸ Its alliance with Germany made it easy prey for partition among the victorious powers eager to reinforce their presence in this most strategic part of the world.

Pope Benedict XV's pontificate coincides exactly with the time of the reshaping of the Middle East, from the beginning of the First World War in August 1914 to the assignment of Mandates in 1922 to France and Britain over the newly carved territories of Syria and Palestine. During this period, the pontiff designed a foreign policy tailored to answer the new developments taking place in the region. The abrogation of the French Catholic Protectorate in the Ottoman Empire, the fall of the Russian Empire and with it, the weakening of the Greek Orthodox Churches, the increased sense of Muslim solidarity against the Christian population, the development of Zionists' ambitions, the British-Arab complicity, and the interest of Protestant America in the region were new challenges to be faced as the Middle East was partitioned in different zones.

The purpose of the dissertation is to examine, through the case of Greater Syria,⁹ the originality of Benedict XV's diplomacy in the emerging Middle East and provide insight into his geo-political vision of the world and the role that the Catholic Church

⁸ On the eve of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was commonly referred to as the "Sick Man of Europe" because of the financial and territorial difficulties it was facing.

⁹ Greater Syria covered the territories of today Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.

would be called to play in it. In the course of this study I will attempt to offer a detailed and systematic analysis of the different components that forged Benedict's regional diplomacy, accentuating on the interlocked religious and political dimensions of the issue. I also intend to give broader insights into Pope Benedict's international foreign policy, in so far as it serves as a reflection of his Middle Eastern policy.

The unique aspect of Benedict XV's Middle Eastern diplomacy resides in the combination of two approaches. The main priority of Pope Benedict, in continuity with his predecessors, was to implement a diplomacy that ensured the protection of Catholic interests and the survival of Christians in the Middle East, providing them at the same time with a dynamic ecclesiological structure. The pontiff completed and institutionalized the traditional ecclesiological approach in favor of unionism,¹⁰ with the goal to strengthen the ecclesial structures of the Eastern churches and give them solid foundations in the international legal sphere. This ecclesiological approach was integrated in Benedict XV's global geo-political vision that sought to emancipate the Catholic Church from the bondage of the European powers and prepare it for a new and prominent role in the world order that emerged following the end of the First World War.

An overview of the scholarship related to the 1914-1922 period highlights the discrepancy between the number of social, cultural, and political studies devoted to the era and the limited interest shown by Church historians in the study of Benedict XV's reign. Almost a century after his election, Pope Benedict is still unknown, as he has been

¹⁰ The traditional unionist ecclesiology was understood as a return of the separated brethren to the Catholic fold.

overlooked and his pontificate eclipsed by the war. Benedict's contemporaries, in their great majority, projected a negative image of a pontiff whose vision was mocked and misunderstood.

A much-needed reappraisal of Benedict XV's reign emerged in the late twentieth-century, starting with the short but well researched biography of the pontiff by John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*,¹¹ published in 1999. It was the first study written in English since Walter H. Peters' *The Life of Benedict XV*,¹² written in 1959 without access to the Vatican archival materials. Benedict XV's European diplomacy during the Great War has also recently received attention by historians of the period (Nathalie Renoton-Beine, *La colombe et les tranchées*; Francis Latour, *La papauté et les problèmes de la paix pendant la première guerre mondiale*)¹³ but no extensive study has been done by Church historians regarding other aspects of Benedict's short reign.

Many influential works on the emergence of the new Middle East have been published (David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958*; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*)¹⁴ beginning with the 1938 publication of George Antonius' seminal but controverted *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab*

¹¹ John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope. Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999).

¹² Walter H. Peters, *The Life of Benedict XV* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1959).

¹³ Nathalie Renoton-Beine, *La colombe et les tranchées. Les tentatives de paix de Benoît XV pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Cerf, 2004); Francis Latour, *La papauté et les problèmes de la paix pendant la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

¹⁴ David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989).

National Movement,¹⁵ but they stress historical and political aspects of the issue. There has been, however, no historical study exploring the relation between the juridico-political perception of the Eastern diplomacy of European powers and the religious dimension of the issue stressed by Benedict XV, with the exception of Frazee's *Catholics and Sultans (1453-1923)*¹⁶, and an article by J. Brian Hehir, "The Catholic Church and the Middle East, Policy and Diplomacy."¹⁷

The Mandate years in Syria and Palestine have been the subject of many studies, from a historical and political perspective. While the French Mandate in Syria is the center of attention of few specialized scholars (Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*; Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*; Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*)¹⁸, the British Mandate on Palestine is the object of an ever-increasing volume of literature (H. Eugene Bovis, *The Jerusalem Question, 1917-1968*; Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*; Henry Laurens, *Le retour*

¹⁵ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

¹⁶ Charles Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans. The Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1923* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁷ J. Brian Hehir, "The Catholic Church and the Middle East, Policy and Diplomacy," in *The Vatican, Islam, and the Middle East*, ed. Kail C. Ellis, O.S.A (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate. The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987); Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, 2d ed. (New York: Octagon Books, 1972); Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004). See also Gérard D. Khoury, *La France et l'Orient arabe: Naissance du Liban moderne (1914-1920)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993) and from the same author *Une tutelle coloniale. Le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban. Ecrits politiques de Robert de Caix* (Paris: Belin, 2006).

des exilés; Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine* and his more recent study *Palestine, a Twice-Promised Land?*; F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers*).¹⁹

The volumes covering the Vatican policy in Palestine focus essentially on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict born of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. George Emile Irani's *The Papacy in the Middle East: the Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israeli Conflict*²⁰ covers the period from 1962 to 1984. Andrej Kreutz's study, *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, the Struggle for the Holy Land*,²¹ covers a much longer period spanning from Leo XIII to John Paul II's pontificate and gives a convincing and far less prejudiced treatment of the relationship between the Holy See and the Zionist movement than does Sergio Minerbi's *The Vatican and Zionism*.²² Minerbi's study is interesting as it covers a much shorter period (1895-1925) and therefore focuses largely on Benedict XV's pontificate. His book, although thoroughly researched, presents a partisan view of the issue that calls for a reexamination of his main thesis.

¹⁹ H. Eugene Bovis, *The Jerusalem Question, 1917-1968* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1971); Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961); Henry Laurens, *Le retour des exilés. La lutte pour la Palestine de 1869 à 1997* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998); Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918. British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); and his more recent study *Palestine, a Twice-Promised Land? The British, the Arabs, and Zionism (1915-1920)* vol.1 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000); F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem. The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

²⁰ George Emile Irani, *The Papacy in the Middle East. The Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

²¹ Andrej Kreutz, *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. The Struggle for the Holy Land* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).

²² Sergio Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism. Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

It is after exhausting the relevant and limited literature covering Benedict's short pontificate that I came to wonder if Benedict's mocked visionary leadership was not actually the mark of a geo-political master, wise, and well ahead of his time. Two tangible facts triggered this inquiry.

First, I noticed "the rush of civil governments to the Vatican since the war."²³ In 1914, a dozen states were represented at the Vatican with five nuncios and two internuncios abroad, whilst in 1921, twenty-five states had established ties with the Vatican²⁴ and twenty-four nuncios and internuncios had been sent abroad.²⁵ The demise of the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empires and their giving birth to new independent states only partially explains this stunning increase. "The increase was in quantity as much as in quality. Governments formerly without relationships have established them. Governments which had broken off relations have reestablished them and governments which had secondary relations have raised them to first-class."²⁶

Second, I started to speculate about the significance of the special tribute paid by Turkish Muslim, Jewish, and Christian rulers and notables to Benedict XV's reign in their funding of a bronze statue of the pontiff that stands in the courtyard of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Constantinople, honoring him with the following words: "To the Great Pope of the World's Tragic Hour – Benedict XV – Benefactor of the People –

²³ "The Procession to the Vatican," *Literary Digest*, October 29, 1921, 30.

²⁴ They sent eight ambassadors and seventeen ministers to the Roman court.

²⁵ The Holy See dispatched nineteen nuncios and five internuncios.

²⁶ "Procession to the Vatican," 30.

without discrimination of nationality or religion – a token of gratitude from the Orient 1914-1919.”²⁷

This rapid assessment led me to a thorough study of Benedict XV’s pontificate, with the ambition to support the recent scholarly reappraisal of his reign and remedy the absence of detailed and comprehensive regional foreign policy studies relative to his pontificate. No better example than Benedict’s policy in the dying Ottoman Empire and the new emerging Middle East can illustrate the depth and breadth of his vision, the consistency of his mission, and his discernment in goal setting. To avoid generalization, I focused my research on the geographic area known as Greater Syria, the region that, in 1914, included Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. Between 1914 and 1922, a new reshaped area emerged that became the theatre of old and new ambitions of the Great Powers.

The core of the dissertation rests upon a historically critical evaluation of documents found in the *Vatican Secret Archives*, the *Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches*, and those of the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*²⁸ located in Rome, Italy. As the issue is at the confluence of Church history, international politics, and law, all documents that evidence a dialogue between Pope Benedict XV’s diplomacy and that of the main European powers present in the newly redesigned Middle East were of primary interest, in the light of the Holy See’s ability to protect the Catholic Church in this new environment. The Middle East “was turned,

²⁷ These are the words inscribed on the base of the statue of Benedict XV.

²⁸ The *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* has been renamed in 1967 *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*. It is commonly referred to as *Propaganda Fide*. I will use this terminology when mentioning this institution.

under imperialism, into a periphery of the Western-dominated world system.”²⁹

Therefore, moving back and forth from the core to the periphery, I also paid attention to all diplomatic exchanges between Constantinople and the Holy See in as much as they informed specific decisions relative to Greater Syria.

After multiple fruitful trips to the Eternal City and hours spent in deciphering the many dispatches at hand, I found that Benedict XV eventually emerged as a pontiff ahead of his time, a pontiff who anticipated the geo-political revolution that would take place in the wake of the Great War and discerned the first tremors that would initiate the decolonization movement. His wisdom was, in the midst of the war cataclysm, to set multiple attainable goals in order to fulfill his core mission of protecting the Catholic minority in a Muslim environment.

Pope Benedict XV and his contemporaries witnessed in Greater Syria, events that had tremendous historical, religious, and political implications for the future of the region and our understanding of the unending turmoil that affects the Middle East almost a century later. That Pope Benedict’s pontificate coincides with the emergence of a new volatile Middle East, “epicenter of world crisis,”³⁰ is a blessing to any scholar interested in both papal diplomacy and international geopolitics. Although the foreign policy of a sovereign state is a set of political goals in relations with other nations and thus differs

²⁹ Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

³⁰ Hinnebusch, *International Politics*, 1.

from its diplomacy, which is the process by which the policy is carried out,³¹ both terms are usually used interchangeably. I will follow the same practice.

As a study that belongs primarily to Church history, this dissertation unfolds following a thematic and geographic approach within a chronological framework. Therefore, this work is divided into two parts that cover respectively the war-time period until the liberation of Jerusalem by British troops (September 1914 – December 1917) and the post-war Mandate era, closing with the untimely death of the pontiff in January 1922 (December 1917 – January 1922).

Chapter One introduces Pope Benedict and outlines the pontiff's policy and priorities in Europe, the main theatre of war. It serves as the context within which the pontiff's Eastern diplomacy unfolded. Dubbed the "Pope of Peace," Benedict XV crafted a foreign policy marked by its universality and peacemaking efforts, pursuing his own brand of *realpolitik*.

Part I is divided into four chapters that cover the different aspects of Benedict XV's war-time Eastern diplomacy in his protection of Catholic communities, his effort to arrange a positive environment for the *rapprochement* with the separated brethren, and his praised humanitarian assistance to all, without discrimination of nationality or religion.

³¹ S.L. Roy, *Diplomacy* (New York: APT Books, 1984), 26. Hans J. Morgenthau defines "diplomacy as the technique by which foreign policy is effectuated." Hans J. Morgenthau, "Diplomacy," *The Yale Law Journal* 55 (August 1946): 1067.

Chapter Two serves as a historical and diplomatic background. It explores the environment and conditions in which the Eastern and Latin Catholic communities survived in the Ottoman Empire, assessing their religious and legal status before the entry of the Porte³² into the war against France, Great Britain, and Russia on November 5, 1914. It emphasizes the unique role granted to France through the Capitulations and the French Catholic Protectorate in its protection of the Eastern and Latin Catholics in the Empire, in the absence of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Sublime Porte. It analyzes how the competition of the unofficial Russian Protectorate of the Orthodox churches affected both France and the Holy See in their diplomatic endeavors with Constantinople. The unilateral abrogation of the Capitulations by the Ottoman Government, on September 9, 1914, was received with shock by the European powers. Its implication on the maintaining of the French Protectorate in the Ottoman Empire, and more particularly in the Holy Land, is also detailed in this chapter.

Chapter Three forms the core of the thesis for the war-time period. It argues that the originality of Benedict XV's foreign policy resides in its integration of classical diplomatic functions of negotiation with an ecclesiastical policy that reflects his Eastern ecclesiology. The Pontiff's foreign policy, which demanded high-level statesmanship, was meant to serve his unionist ecclesiology and ensure the protection of Catholic interests. At the geo-political level, the pontiff crafted a diplomacy that answered a new situation, as the French Protectorate had become ineffectual and the Ottoman Government pressured the Holy See to establish direct diplomatic ties. Pope Benedict

³² The Sublime Porte (or the Porte) is another name referring to the Ottoman Government.

chose a strategy of patient observance, motivated by the uncertainty of the situation on the military front and the determination to avoid future confrontation with France. At the ecclesiological level, Benedict XV completed and institutionalized the traditional approach in favor of unionism previously implemented by Leo XIII, providing a solid theoretical and practical underpinning to his Eastern foreign policy.

With Chapter Four, we enter the realm of regional diplomacy, as it documents and analyzes the daily struggle of the Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Syria to prevent the confiscation of Catholic property and the persecution of Catholic clergy by the Ottoman Government. The discontinuation of the French Protectorate and its consequences on the diplomatic Ottoman chessboard provided opportunities for the pontiff to engage in a direct dialogue with the Porte. This chapter could not have been written without access to the rich material found in the *Vatican Secret Archives* and the archives of *Propaganda Fide*. The daily correspondence between Rome and the Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Syria is arranged and safeguarded in the archives and sheds light on the novel situation facing the Holy See.

Chapter Five delves into the large scale humanitarian assistance offered by Pope Benedict to the destitute population of Syria and Palestine during the war. It is directly connected to Chapter Four as it provides the larger context in which the protection of Catholic property and clergy was tackled. This chapter highlights the paradoxical situation where, despite ample evidence of the Holy See's humanitarian endeavors especially appreciated in the Ottoman Empire, the relief provided by the Vatican was rarely mentioned in the Western press and literature. It is argued that this state of affairs

was mostly the consequence of the American Protestant competition and the American attempt to control the philanthropic arena in the Ottoman Empire, a situation that eventually led to accusations of discrimination against the Catholic populations. This situation changed with the entry of the United States in the war in April 1917 on the side of the Entente powers and their eviction from Ottoman soil.

Part II of the dissertation covers the period between the liberation of Jerusalem by British General Allenby on December 9, 1917 and the official assignment of the Mandates for Syria and Palestine to France and Britain respectively, in July 1922. During this period, shortened by the unexpected death of the pontiff on January 22, 1922, Pope Benedict laid down the principles upon which the post-war pontifical foreign policy will be based on. His regional diplomacy in Syria and Palestine serves as study-cases as its guidelines mirror his foreign policy worldwide.

In an effort to follow the same pattern as in Part I, Chapter Six forms the core of the thesis for the post-war period. The main argument of this chapter rests upon a critical analysis of the three principles that underpin Pope Benedict's vision of the new world order. The pontiff, who acquired a new moral authority and political prestige with the close of the war, initiated a new policy that shifted away from its past Eurocentric vision of the world. This approach was combined with an anticipation of the decolonization era and self-determination of national minorities. Pope Benedict completed these guiding principles with a policy of emancipation of the missionary world from colonial powers, preparing the Church for an active role in the post-war world.

Chapters Seven and Eight examine Benedict XV's diplomacy in the short period that preceded the official assignment of the French and British Mandates on Syria and Palestine respectively, under the light of the principles expounded in the previous chapter.

Chapter Seven delves into Pope Benedict's diplomatic initiatives in Syria and Lebanon, as he navigated between the pressure of French imperialism and Prince Feisal's Arab nationalism. In this chapter, I relied on two very useful studies published by the French historian, Gérard Khoury. One is a compilation of letters and official reports written by Robert de Caix with added comments from Khoury.³³ The other study compares the political visions of Robert de Caix and Louis Massignon.³⁴ Both men were very influential in the crafting of French foreign policy in Syria and Lebanon. In this chapter, I argue that Pope Benedict's guiding principles in forging his diplomacy in Syria were attuned to Massignon's global vision of the Arab world that resented nationalist tendencies. Massignon, like Pope Benedict, was thinking in the long term and emphasized the interdependence between the spiritual and the political world. This approach was opposed by Robert de Caix, a forceful advocate of a French Mandate as a colonial device. Most members of the higher clergy supported de Caix's vision, as they

³³ Gérard Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale. Le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban. Ecrits politiques de Robert de Caix* (Paris: Belin, 2006).

³⁴ Gérard Khoury, "Robert de Caix et Louis Massignon: Deux visions de la politique française au Levant en 1920," in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/ Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, eds. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 165-184.

were anxious to ensure immediate protection of Catholic minorities living in a Muslim world in turmoil.

Chapter Eight analyzes Pope Benedict's diplomacy in Palestine, in a context dominated by the tension between Britain and France regarding the continuation of the French Protectorate over the Holy Sites, the implementation of a Jewish national home, and the aggressive proselitizing of Protestant missions. The foundational question revolved around the control of Palestine by the British and how they would satisfy the Holy See's claims over the Holy Places. This chapter argues that Pope Benedict, to the dismay of many Catholic dignitaries, endorsed the British Mandate willingly, as it represented a unique opportunity for the Holy See to gain its emancipation from France. British rule meant the advance of the Zionist and Protestant causes in Palestine. This was well understood by the pontiff. In contrast with Minerbi's conclusion in *The Vatican and Zionism* that Benedict XV's pontificate maintained an anti-Zionist stance, I contend that the thorough analysis of archival documents, once situated in a long-term geo-political context, supports the thesis that Benedict's policy was sympathetic to Zionist ambitions, hence breaking with his predecessors.

The protestant threat was also well evaluated by Benedict XV, as the solution to confront this danger had been at the core of Pope Benedict's pontificate since the first day. In order to survive and thrive as minorities, the Latin and Eastern Catholics, already strengthened by the ecclesial structure provided by the *Congregation for the Oriental Churches*³⁵ and the guidance offered by Pope Benedict in his encyclical on missions,

Maximum Illud,³⁶ needed to present a common front, therefore re-establishing harmony among the different Catholic factions.

This study concludes with Chapter Nine whose main purpose is to offer a reflection on the implications of Pope Benedict's foreign policy for the future of the Church and discuss its relevance for our times.

Benedict XV reigned during the decade that shook the world, especially the Middle East,³⁷ and brought the long nineteenth century to a close. The pontiff responded to new stakes with new perspectives and equipped the Church for its future, following a twofold goal. One purpose was to ensure the immediate and long term protection of Eastern Catholics in the Middle East by strengthening their ecclesial structure, and prepare the Church for an expected *rapprochement* with the Orthodox churches. Benedict's second ambition was universal as he foresaw the major geo-political shifts of the mid-twentieth century and how they would affect the Church. He freed the Church from the shackles of imperialism and restored the prestige and moral authority of the papacy, hence guaranteeing its independence in the new emerging world order.

Benedict XV's pontificate inspired his successors in their discerning the role of the Church in the modern world. Fifty years after his election to the throne of Peter, Pope

³⁵ Benedict XV, "Motu Proprio *Dei Providentis* [May 1, 1917]," AAS 09 I (1917): 529-31.

³⁶ Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* [November 30, 1919]," AAS 11(1919): 440-55.

³⁷ Nadine Picaudou, *La décennie qui ébranla le Moyen-Orient, 1914-1923* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1992).

Benedict's vision was eventually vindicated by the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.³⁸

³⁸ Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) [December 7, 1965]," *AAS* 58 (1966): 1025-1120.

CHAPTER 1

BENEDICT XV, POPE OF PEACE

January 22, 1922, 6:00 A.M.: the world has just lost a unique pontiff, a man of great insight and wisdom, a spiritual leader whose “separately small and quiet achievements all at once add[ed] up such a sum of accomplishment”¹ that one feels compelled to question the extent of the vilification he had to endure during most of his pontificate. Benedict XV’s short reign – seven years, four months, and nineteen days – although a manifest evidence of “his roving intelligence, his vivid penetration,”² failed to impress his contemporaries. Benedict XV was dubbed the “Pope of Peace,” a pope with idealistic views and unrealistic expectations. His thoughts and actions were actually those of a gifted geo-political leader who pursued his own brand of *realpolitik*.

The Road to the Chair of Peter

In November 1917, in a confidential memorandum to the London Foreign Office, J.D. Gregory, Secretary at the British Mission to the Holy See, described Giacomo Giambattista Della Chiesa, Pope Benedict XV, as “a very decided mediocrity,” with “the mentality of a little official, the inexperience of a parochial Italian who was hardly traveled at all and a tortuous method of conducting affairs which arises from years of

¹ Anne O’Hare McCormick, *Vatican Journal, 1921-1954* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1957), 17.

² McCormick, *Vatican Journal*, 19.

office work connected with a fifth rate diplomacy.”³ Francis MacNutt, papal chamberlain under Pius X, more charitable in his verdict, recognized that Benedict XV was “esteemed a great diplomat,” but added that he impressed him more “as a meticulous, accomplished bureaucrat; a conscientious, painstaking understudy of Cardinal Rampolla, under whom he had served some sixteen years, and whom he honoured and venerated.”⁴

Giacomo Della Chiesa was well equipped for the diplomatic service of the Holy See. Born on November 21, 1854 in a noble Genoese family, he was ordained a priest in 1878, graduated doctor of theology *cum laude* in 1879, and received a doctorate in Canon Law in 1880. He became a student at the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics, “the training ground of Vatican diplomats,”⁵ where he met Msgr. Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro in 1881, an encounter that shaped his future. The latter was won by Della Chiesa’s diligence, his logic and insightful mind, and by his power of objective analysis, a critical skill in diplomatic matters. His first significant assignment, at the age of twenty-nine, was to the nunciature of Madrid, Spain. He was appointed Secretary to the new nuncio, his mentor Msgr. Rampolla, under whom he served from 1883 to 1887. When, in 1887, Pope Leo XIII called Rampolla to be his Secretary of State, the newly appointed cardinal

³ J.D. Gregory to the London Foreign Office, F.O. 371/3086, Confidential Memorandum, November 30, 1917, in *Great Britain Legation. Anglo-Vatican Relations, 1914-1939, Confidential Annual Reports of the British Ministers to the Holy See, London, England*, ed. Thomas E. Hachey (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1972), xx.

⁴ Francis Augustus MacNutt, *A Papal Chamberlain: The Personal Chronicle of Francis Augustus MacNutt* (London: Longmans, 1936), 312.

⁵ John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope. Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 7.

named Della Chiesa his secretary, then his *sostituto* in 1901.⁶ On the retirement of his long time friend, following the election in 1903 of Pius X, Della Chiesa continued to hold office at the Curia under the new Secretary of State, Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val, before being “exiled” to the see of Bologna in 1907.⁷ This move was interpreted as a “means of shelving a diplomatist whose views no longer harmonized with those which prevailed at the Vatican.”⁸ Pius X named him cardinal barely four months before he entered the conclave to elect the pontiff who was to succeed Pius, who had breathed his last on August 20, 1914.⁹

The conclave met at a very inauspicious time, a month after the opening of the First World War, from August 31 to September 3, 1914. The odds of succeeding Pius X did not seem in favor of Giacomo Della Chiesa. Many were puzzled by his election since he was not well-known outside “his Bolognese exile,”¹⁰ a cardinal for only four months. His first biographer Walter Peters recounts that the American Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, “when told that Della Chiesa was the new pope, innocently asked ... ‘Who’s he?’”¹¹ He was considered the Rampolla candidate with diplomatic views in line with those of his patron. Mariano Cardinal Rampolla, a Sicilian aristocrat, had been the

⁶ After the Secretary of State, the *sostituto* – or papal Under-Secretary of State – is usually the most influential official at the Curia.

⁷ Bologna was the fourth largest diocese in Italy.

⁸ Editorial, “Benedict XV,” *Times* (London), September 4, 1914.

⁹ Giacomo Della Chiesa received the biretta on May 25, 1914.

¹⁰ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, xiii.

¹¹ Walter H. Peters, *The Life of Benedict XV* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1959), 75.

brilliant Secretary of State of Leo XIII. His pro-French positions and his alleged Russian sympathies had cost him the throne of Peter in the conclave of 1903. In that conclave, the election of Rampolla, who had received the most votes in the first rounds, was vetoed by the Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary.¹²

History did not repeat itself. According to Pollard, Cardinal Piffl's diary¹³ "makes clear that the five Austro-Hungarian cardinals present [at the conclave] consistently voted for [Della Chiesa], despite their government's objections."¹⁴ They were not convinced by the objections of Cardinal Hartmann of Cologne who tried to dissuade them from supporting the heir of Rampolla, claiming that it would be an insult to the memory of Pius X.¹⁵ On the third day, on the tenth ballot, Giacomo Della Chiesa was elected 258th successor of Peter.

Although the political situation was radically different from the one under which Leo XIII (1878-1903) had reigned, Della Chiesa's election was immediately understood as a return to the policies of Leo XIII and those of his secretary of state, Cardinal Rampolla. He assumed the name of Benedict in honor of Prospero Lambertini, the pope who had been archbishop of Bologna until his elevation to the throne of Peter in 1740, and as a special devotion to Saint Benedict of Nursia, patron saint of Europe. "It was the

¹² Jan Cardinal Puzina of Krakow, exercising for the very last time this ancient privilege on behalf of the emperor, sanctioned Rampolla's pro-French positions, which were displeasing to the Central Empires and his alleged Russian sympathies which were upsetting to the Polish Church.

¹³ Gustav Cardinal Piffl was the Archbishop of Vienna.

¹⁴ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, 64.

¹⁵ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, 60.

first time in 140 years that a pontiff had not selected the name of Leo, Gregory, or Pius.”¹⁶

Benedict was supported in his diplomatic task by his faithful Secretary of State and close collaborator, Pietro Cardinal Gasparri who succeeded Cardinal Ferrata who had died unexpectedly on October 10, 1914, barely a month after having been appointed. Pietro Gasparri, nicknamed *il contadino*,¹⁷ had “humour, geniality and diplomatic ability.”¹⁸ After years spent as professor of Canon Law at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris and Apostolic Delegate in South America,¹⁹ he was called back to Rome by Pius X in 1904 to lead the project of a new code of Canon Law, which was eventually promulgated in 1917.

In his diary, Baron Carlo Monti, director of the office for administrating ecclesial funds in the Italian government and personal friend of Benedict XV, asserts that the pontiff was sole architect of the Holy See’s foreign policy for two main reasons. Above all, Cardinal Gasparri, until mid-1917, was absorbed in the compilation of the Code of Canon Law. Another explanation was that, although Gasparri was a great mind,²⁰ he

¹⁶ Peters, *Life of Benedict*, 80.

¹⁷ “The farmer.”

¹⁸ Alec Randall, *Vatican Assignment* (London: Heinemann, [1956]), 61.

¹⁹ Pietro Gasparri was offered the chair of Canon Law at the Catholic Institute in Paris in 1879. In 1898, Leo XIII sent him as Apostolic Delegate to Peru, Bolivia, and Equator. He was made a cardinal in 1907.

²⁰ Gasparri was considered by some observers as the new Consalvi, the gifted Secretary of State of Pius VII, who had negotiated both the Concordat of 1801 with Napoleon and the restoration of the Papal States at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

lacked the sophistication and diplomatic tact fitting for the task.²¹ Count de Salis, in a report on the British mission to the Holy See, corroborated Monti's depiction of Gasparri, describing him as "careless in dress and impatient of formalism."²² Rennell Rodd, British ambassador to the Italian court, predicted that Gasparri would be an "active assistant" rather than a "counselor or guide" in foreign affairs, since Pope Benedict had solid diplomatic skills inherited from the school of Leo XIII and Cardinal Rampolla.²³ Peters also notes in an interesting point that Benedict XV's choice of Gasparri as his Secretary of State broke a long tradition since the latter "had never attended the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics... It was unthinkable [he wrote] that one should rise to the highest office in the specialized field of Vatican diplomacy without the training of that school,"²⁴ especially in time of war.

Benedict XV, the Universal Pope

It was the fate of this "little man, awkward, tired, sallow, one shoulder slightly higher than the other, with no eloquence, no radiance, no personal charm,"²⁵ to bear the heavy burden of laboring during a war he will repeatedly call "the suicide of civilized

²¹ Antonio Scotta, *La conciliazione ufficiosa, diario del barone Carlo Monti "incarito d'affari" del governo italiano presso la Santa Sede (1914-1922)*, 2 volumes (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1: 45.

²² *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 15.

²³ Rodd to Grey, disp. 355, 6 September 1914, F.O./371/2006, in William A. Renzi, "The Entente and the Vatican during the Period of Italian Neutrality, August 1914 - May 1915," *The Historical Journal* 13 (September 1970): 491.

²⁴ Peters, *Life of Benedict*, 90.

²⁵ McCormick, *Vatican Journal*, 17.

Europe.”²⁶ Although Pope Benedict did not have physical attributes that stir people, expectations were running high after his election to the throne of Peter. His young age – he was only sixty years old – and his training in the realm of ecclesiastical diplomacy were significant assets in war-time. A skilled politician and a moral leader, he was expected to be an active player on the war scene, taking side, judging governments in the name of the long accepted just war theory.²⁷

He was indeed an active participant but as a transnational actor,²⁸ seeking peace for all through reconciliation.²⁹ He sacrificed momentarily moral prestige for the sake of evangelical and charitable considerations, laboring for peace against nationalistic forces at work. On August 24, 1918, a few months before the guns fall silent, the *Journal de*

²⁶ Benedict XV, “Lenten Letter to Cardinal-Vicar Pompilj, *Al Tremendo Conflitto* [March 4, 1916],” AAS 08 (1916): 59.

²⁷ The just war doctrine was first articulated by St. Ambrose and later developed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. According to this theory, all governments are obliged to avoid war. However, in some specific circumstances, it is the right and duty of leaders to wage war in order to obtain justice. The act must be morally justifiable. It must be a last resort, done with the right intention, and must be proportional to the offense.

²⁸ The originality of pontifical diplomacy derives from the universal character of the Holy See’s spiritual sovereignty, a sovereignty transcending legal frontiers. Ivan Vallier, in a famous 1970 essay, defined and explored the role of a transnational actor. A few years later, J. Bryan Hehir described the Holy See as a transnational actor, based in one place but whose presence is felt in several states. It “possesses a trained corps of personnel, a single guiding philosophy, and a sophisticated communications system.” Ivan Vallier, “The Roman Catholic Church: A Transnational Actor,” in *Transnational Relations*, ed. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 129-152, and J. Bryan Hehir, “The Catholic Church and the Middle East, Policy and Diplomacy,” in *The Vatican, Islam, and the Middle East*, ed. Kail C. Ellis, O.S.A. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 110.

²⁹ On this point, I take exception to Maurice Pernot’s opinion suggesting that Benedict XV “manquait de génie,” that, in war-time, he was “un observateur attentif et ému, plutôt qu’un acteur résolu et efficace.” Maurice Pernot, *Le Saint-Siège, l’Eglise catholique et la politique mondiale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1924), 30.

Genève encapsulated in a few sentences the crux of the situation facing Benedict XV's pontificate, putting forward "one of the best defences of ... [the pontiff] and his policy."³⁰

In summary, to assess in fairness the policy of the Holy See, one must comprehend its underlying motives. Powerless to be, in the midst of the twentieth century, the supreme judge and the arbitrator of humanity – that his most ferocious adversaries, the anti-clericals, accuse him not to be – the pontiff became everywhere the protector of Catholic communities. Once the retrospect of history enables us to appreciate all of the complexities of this war, it is likely that our descendants will be less severe towards Benedict XV.³¹

Pope Benedict did not take side during the conflict. Because of this choice he was vilified in both camps by governments, lay people, and clergymen alike. He was accused of concealing his true leanings. The Entente suspected pro-German tendencies while the Central Powers called him the *Französische Papst*. The protestations of the British minister to the Holy See, Count de Salis, that Benedict was "genuinely neutral,"³² as well as the unexpected support of his secretary, J.D. Gregory, who had found the pope "a very decided mediocrity," but was "convinced that he [was] not either temperamentally or politically pro-German,"³³ did not prevail. The British government was certain of the Holy See's support to the Central Powers. Lord Cecil³⁴ minuting on a report in February

³⁰ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 6.

³¹ "En résumé, pour apprécier avec équité la politique du Saint-Siège, il faut en comprendre la raison profonde. Ne pouvant aspirer, en plein vingtième siècle, à être le juge suprême et l'arbitre de l'humanité – que ses adversaires les plus résolus, les anticléricaux, lui reprochent ... de ne pas être – le Pape s'est fait partout le protecteur des catholiques, individus et collectivités. Lorsque le recul de l'histoire permettra d'apprécier toutes les complexités infinies de cette guerre, il est probable que nos descendants seront moins sévères pour Benoît XV." (My translation). *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 6.

³² V.H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 103.

³³ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, xx.

1917 commented that “the moral failure of the papacy in this crisis is a blow to all forms of Christianity.”³⁵ Msgr. Baudrillart, the future French cardinal, also expressed his disappointment over and over. In a diary entry of October 13, 1914, he noted that

[T]here was a time when the Holy See was seeking on what side justice stood and was courageous enough to stress it. By being gentle with everyone, the Holy See will end up leaving, at the end of the war, the role of moral judge to the Protestant President of the United States.³⁶

On December 3, 1914, he missed again the reason at the heart of Benedict’s position, asking for more “grandeur morale” and courage, adding that “a simple encyclical on Christian laws of war would be a relief for conscience.”³⁷ Courage, the pontiff did not lack, courage to stay firm throughout the storm raging against his impartial position. With time, Baudrillart softened his stance, recognizing Benedict XV’s obligation to protect Catholics on both sides of the war theater, but like most of his contemporaries he regretted the pontiff’s apparent lack of charisma. In a letter to his friend Father Vogt sent after his meeting with Gasparri and Pope Benedict on September 10, 1915, Baudrillart wrote:

³⁴ In 1915, Lord Robert Cecil became British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and early in 1918, Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. One of the architects of the League of Nations, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937.

³⁵ Minutes on a letter from Roderick Jones to Lord Cecil, 26 Feb. 1917, Lloyd George MSS.F/62/3/3, in Rothwell, *British War Aims*, 103.

³⁶ “Il fut un temps où le Saint Siège se donnait la peine de chercher de quel côté était le droit et avait le courage de le dire. A force de ménager tout le monde, le Saint Siège finira par laisser, à la fin de la guerre, le rôle d’arbitre moral au Président des Etats-Unis protestant.” (My translation). Alfred Baudrillart, *Les carnets du Cardinal Baudrillart, 1er août 1914-31 décembre 1918* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 86.

³⁷ Baudrillart, *Carnets*, 112.

The pope is not a *Boche déguisé*; he believes in the final victory of Germany... He is convinced that the duration of the war will worsen the Allies' situation. This consideration, the fear of a revolution in Italy, and a profound sentiment of humanity that makes war atrocities despicable to him, explain his attitude. Unfortunately, neither him, nor his Secretary of State has the *grande manière* to say or make things known.³⁸

Could the pope's stance have been different? Would Leo XIII (1878-1903) or Pius X (1903-1914) have followed a different policy? These were persistent questions asked during and after Benedict XV's pontificate. Both popes would likely have acted differently, if for only one reason, their very different characters. "Leo XIII, with his love of dramatic deeds and his well-known Francophile tendencies, and Pius X, with his impulsive character,"³⁹ would maybe have condemned the Central Powers leaving their Catholic populations in a perilous situation.

"The prudent but not inactive silence of Benedict XV"⁴⁰ and his impartial stance were the most effective way of action in such a delicate situation. To side with one or the other party would have put the Holy See in a dangerous position, and would have denied the pope the possibility to offer widespread relief through humanitarian assistance. The pontiff chose silence, which bore another kind of danger, but did not fail to support any charitable considerations crucial to him. "The fulminations of Justice are no doubt worthy

³⁸ "Le pape n'est pas un *Boche déguisé*; il croit à la victoire finale de l'Allemagne ... Il est persuadé que la durée de la guerre aggraverait la situation des Alliés. Cette considération, la crainte de la révolution en Italie, et un très profond sentiment d'humanité qui lui rend odieuses les atrocités de la guerre, expliquent toute son attitude. Malheureusement, ni lui, ni son Secrétaire d'Etat n'ont la *grande manière* pour dire ou pour faire entendre les choses." (My translation). Baudrillart, *Carnets*, 258.

³⁹ George F. La Piana, "From Leo XIII to Benedict XV," *The American Journal of Theology* 21 (April 1917): 188.

⁴⁰ La Piana, "Leo XIII to Benedict XV," 190.

of respect, but Charity has sometimes a more excellent way.”⁴¹ The supposed moral bankruptcy of the papacy cost it a temporary loss of prestige. It was a heavy price that the “Pope of Peace” was ready to pay.

Benedict XV was a man ahead of his time, laboring relentlessly against the current. Beyond the practical constraints bearing on his war-time diplomacy, his line of policy in foreign affairs was guided by two main postulates. He had a modern sense of the role of the Church in the world, a world in which the Church had lost its temporal power. He had the sense of a Church not above the world but actively guiding it through charitable principles.⁴² He understood the transnationality of the institution as a mean to reach beyond all borders and devise peace for all for the sake of Christian unity. The foundation of this universal role was found in the Gospel, in a complete surrender to God’s Providence, stressing charity over justice.

It is in such context that Benedict’s condemnation of the war must be appreciated. He was genuinely appalled by this “useless slaughter.”⁴³ There was no “just” or “unjust” war in his eyes. He had, however, no theological intent to modify the Church’s doctrine on warfare which, since St. Augustine, justified the recourse to arms in case of “just” war.

⁴¹ Algernon Cecil, “Vatican Policy in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs* 4 (January 1925): 13.

⁴² “You know well, and We have frequently reminded you of it, nothing was so often and so carefully inculcated on His disciple by Jesus Christ as this precept of mutual charity as the one which contains all others... ‘Let us love one another for charity is God.’” Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Pacem, dei munus pulcherrimum* [May 23, 1920],” AAS 12 (1920): 211.

⁴³ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Appeal to the Heads of the Warring Peoples* [August 1, 1917],” AAS 9 (1917): 423.

To preserve the integrity of the Church and stop the carnage that was leading to the destruction of Europe, Benedict accepted to relinquish his moral prestige for the sake of peace. He resisted the temptation to point fingers in a world crippled by raging patriotism. “At the beginning of war,” wrote the British philosopher Bertrand Russell in January 1915, “each nation, under the influence of what is called patriotism believed that its own victory [was] both certain and of great importance to mankind.”⁴⁴ Self-righteousness was the motto of all belligerent countries. Therefore, restoration of peace could only come through a well deserved victory. Among the Entente nations the enemy with its real or invented cortege of atrocities was clearly identified. Germany was seen as the great sinner promoting a “*Kultur* of destruction.”⁴⁵ Proofs abounded. The invasion of Belgium whose neutrality was guaranteed by a treaty to which Germany was a signatory, the atrocities committed against civilians, and the destruction of churches could not be acts of a civilized nation. Therefore, amongst the French in particular, ran the idea that a “just” war had to be fought in the name of God and *la patrie* as a crusade against the barbarians.⁴⁶ The French Catholic became a patriotic militant ready and sometimes willing to sacrifice his life for his country. This sacrificial dynamic took momentum in the first months of the war, supported by more than 25,000 clerics in uniform. French Catholics, Italian Catholics, Austrian Catholics were French, Italian, Austrian first. Their allegiance was first to their country in danger, then to the Church and its pontiff.

⁴⁴ Salo Baron, “Impact of Wars on Religion,” *Political Science Quarterly* 67 (December 1952): 545.

⁴⁵ Annette Becker, *The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-1930* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 11.

⁴⁶ It was also a war of revenge against the affronts made to their country by the Prussian victory of 1870.

Benedict XV, the Peace Maker

In this environment, very little room was left to the pope's message of peace and the universal Church's teaching transcending both historical and geographical boundaries.

On September 8, 1914, a few days after his election, Benedict issued an exhortation to all the Catholics saying that

We hold it a duty imposed on us by the Good Shepherd to embrace with fatherly affection all the lambs and sheep of His flock. After His example, We must be, and indeed We are, ready to give Our life for their salvation, and therefore We are firmly resolved to leave nothing undone to hasten the end of this calamity.⁴⁷

On his deathbed the pontiff made the same statement, uttering that he was willingly laying down his life for the peace of the world.

The promulgation of his first encyclical *Ad Beatissimi*,⁴⁸ on November 1, 1914, “caused keen disappointment. In the estimation of a vindictive world the document was too gentle and too weak,”⁴⁹ emphasizing love and charity above justice and authority. A few months after the promulgation of the encyclical, on January 10, 1915, Cardinal Gasparri published the details of a day of prayer to be held all over the world.⁵⁰ Again,

⁴⁷ “Nous avons reçu de Jésus-Christ, Bon Pasteur ... le devoir d'embrasser dans un amour paternel tous ceux qui sont des agneaux et des brebis de son troupeau. Puisque donc, à l'exemple du Seigneur lui-même, Nous devons être prêts, ainsi que Nous le sommes, à donner même Notre vie pour leur salut à tous, Nous avons fermement décidé de ne rien négliger de ce qui sera en Notre pouvoir pour hâter la fin d'une si grande calamité.” Actes de Benoît XV, vol. 1 (Paris: Bonne Presse, 1924), 15.

⁴⁸ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum Principis* [November 1, 1914],” AAS 06 (1914): 585-99.

⁴⁹ Peters, *Life of Benedict*, 102.

the reception was negative. The most outspoken, like Benito Mussolini in Italy, criticized “the ridiculous prayers for peace even among the fighting soldiers.”⁵¹ A few bishops, in Belgium especially, refused to read the pontiff’s text.

Benedict XV’s efforts, in the first months of the war, to secure the neutrality of Italy ended in failure.⁵² The entry of Italy into the war on May 24, 1915, on the side of the Entente, compelled the Holy See to devise a new line of European foreign policy. Its fragile enclave position on Italian soil justified this move. A direct consequence of the new diplomatic difficulties, the Holy Father published, on July 28, 1915, an Apostolic Exhortation *To the Belligerent Peoples and their Rulers*,⁵³ which marked a turning point in the development of the Holy See’s foreign policy. From a diplomatic line limited to

⁵⁰ “Dismayed by the horrors of a war which is bringing ruin to peoples and nations, we turn, O Jesus, to Thy most loving Heart as to our last hope. O God of Mercy, with tears we invoke Thee to end this fearful scourge; O King of Peace, we humbly implore the peace for which we long. From Thy Sacred Heart Thou didst shed forth over the world divine Charity, so that discord might end and love alone might reign among men. During Thy life on earth Thy Heart beat with tender compassion for the sorrows of men; in this hour made terrible with burning hate, with bloodshed and with slaughter, once more may Thy divine Heart be moved to pity. Pity the countless mothers in anguish for the fate of their sons; pity the numberless families now bereaved of their fathers; pity Europe over which broods such havoc and disaster. Do Thou inspire rulers and peoples with counsels of meekness, do Thou heal the discords that tear the nations asunder; Thou Who didst shed Thy Precious Blood that they might live as brothers, bring men together once more in loving harmony. And as once before to the very of the Apostle Peter: *Save us, Lord, we perish*. Thou didst answer with words of mercy and didst still the raging waves, so now deign to hear our trustful prayer, and give back to the world peace and tranquility. And do thou, O most holy Virgin, as in other times of sore distress, be now our help, our protection and our safeguard. Amen.” Official translation in *The Ecclesiastical Review* 58 (February 1918): 204. The Latin text is found in Benedict XV, “*Decretum Preces Pro Pace Certis Diebus Dicendae Praescribuntur* [January 10, 1915],” AAS 07 (1915): 13-14.

⁵¹ Peters, *Life of Benedict*, 123.

⁵² Although in the original Triple Alliance Treaty, signed in 1882 between Italy, Germany, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy had agreed to support Germany in case of French attack, amendments were made to the treaty in 1902 removing this clause. The Triplice collapsed after Italy refused to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers.

⁵³ Benedict XV, “Apostolic Exhortation *To the Belligerent Peoples and their Rulers* [July 28, 1915],” AAS 07 (1915): 365-68.

general principles and localized actions, Benedict XV's turned to *realpolitik*, to a full-blown active diplomacy. After the failure of his pacifist approaches, the pontiff entered into a peace offensive. Secret diplomatic efforts to bring the belligerents to the negotiating table collapsed.⁵⁴ His famous peace note of August 1, 1917⁵⁵ to the warring powers was received with contempt and swiftly discarded.

The Papal Note of August 1, 1917 suggested a return to the *status quo ante bellum*. If the impact of nationalism was the immediate danger to face, the collapse of the existing balance of powers was a long term danger that could affect the authority and integrity of the Church. A *status quo ante bellum* would avoid two great dangers. A German victory would mean a Protestant victory but even worse for the Holy See, a victory of the Entente could mean the collapse and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fall of the Habsburg Empire was anticipated with apprehension by the pontiff, not so much because it was the only remaining Catholic bastion but because of its role as a bulwark against Russian Orthodoxy and an element of stabilization in a region in turmoil.

Benedict's offer to the belligerents was met with disdain. Germany informed the pope that "the Imperial Government [would], in this peace respect, support every proposal which is compatible with the vital interests of the German Empire and people."⁵⁶ On the Entente side, the long-due reply was officially forwarded to the pope by

⁵⁴ Francis Latour, *La papauté et les problèmes de la paix pendant la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 106-147.

⁵⁵ Benedict XV, *Appeal to the Heads of the Warring Peoples*, 417-20.

⁵⁶ *Times* (London), *The History of the Times, the 150th Anniversary and Beyond, 1912-1947* (London: Times Printing House Square, 1952), 332.

the American President Woodrow Wilson, in the name of the Allies. If Great Britain had politely acknowledged the note stating that no definitive answer could be formulated until Germany had made clear her intentions regarding the future of Belgium, Italy was furious against the allegation that the Entente powers were fighting in a “useless slaughter,”⁵⁷ implying that Italy and its Allies were engaged in an immoral war. The papal appeal was understood as a maneuver to derail the fighting spirit of the troops, but above all as a strategy to increase the Holy See’s international prestige and to eventually participate to the future Peace negotiations. France simply dismissed the note. Initially, Paris and London advised Washington to ignore the pope’s message. A very different recommendation was given to President Wilson by his adviser Colonel House asking him “to take the peace negotiations out of the hands of the pope and hold them in [his] own.”⁵⁸ Wilson’s reply reached Benedict XV on August 29, 1917. It was a carefully worded text stating that “we cannot take the word of the present rulers of Germany as a guarantee of anything that is to endure.”⁵⁹ It was a polite but firm *fin de non recevoir* and a complete political defeat for the pope.

⁵⁷ Benedict XV, *Appeal to the Heads of the Warring Peoples*, 420.

⁵⁸ Charles Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, vol. 3 (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926-28), 156-57.

⁵⁹ Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New-Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 235.

Benedict XV, the Realist Diplomat

The Roman Question, a Church-State conflict between the Holy See and the Italian Republic lingering since 1870, contributed significantly to the Holy See's diplomatic retreat in Europe prior to the opening of the First World War hostilities. The political state of affairs between Italian forces in way of unification and the Holy See had been deteriorating since 1848.⁶⁰ The unstable situation reached its climax on September 20, 1870, when royal Italian troops stormed Rome, annexed the city, and forced the pontiff to abandon the Papal States. Pope Pius IX retreated to his last bastion, the Vatican.⁶¹ The Holy See's loss of the Papal States meant the loss of its temporal sovereignty. The question arose immediately about its new international legal status. Anti-clerical forces and political theorists implied that with the loss of temporal power, the Holy See had also lost its privileges as an international juridical subject. Against this allegation, the papacy opposed its unparalleled spiritual sovereignty as the foundation of its international juridical personality.⁶²

⁶⁰ Following the revolutionary upheaval of 1848 and the storming of the papal residence, Pope Pius IX fled Rome and took refuge in Gaeta in November 1848. He returned in 1850 after the fall of the ephemeral Roman Republic.

⁶¹ A final settlement that created the Vatican City State and established a concordat between the Holy See and Italy was reached with the Lateran Treaties in 1929. Until then, the pope dubbed himself "the prisoner in the Vatican."

⁶² The Holy See participated to the Congress of Vienna in 1815. On this occasion, its role and status as subject of international law were clearly stated and its prestige enhanced. The Apostolic Nuncio, as a permanent diplomatic representative of the Holy See, was named Dean of the entire Diplomatic Corps. Yet, it was the papal court's first and last significant diplomatic involvement with the Concert of Europe until the Great War. Observers interpreted this development as the diplomatic swan song of the papacy. Pius IX did not take part to either the Congress of Paris in 1856 or the Congress of Berlin in 1878, even though the main issues at stake were religious. The Holy See was excluded from the 1899 and 1907 Hague Peace

From 1870 onwards, the papacy fought for absolute “independence, real and apparent.”⁶³ From 1870 to 1929, when a viable agreement was finally reached to solve the Roman Question, the papacy asserted that its sovereignty, and therefore its international juridical status, had never been founded on its temporal power and the possession of territories but on its spiritual and divine sovereignty that nobody ever contested. Without temporal sovereignty, the Holy See subsisted as a *sui generis* power, which had the right to enter into diplomatic relations with individual states.⁶⁴ This right derived from its spiritual sovereignty and was never granted to the government of the Church by other nations, on the basis of the possession or not of an independent territory, which was “an external, though entirely accidental, expression of sovereignty.”⁶⁵

The loss of temporal power stimulated a redesigning of papal international relations. Reigning over an institution whose mission had become essentially spiritual, the pontiffs started to exert a diplomatic influence that did not rest upon classic weapons such as military power, but on the moral prestige and religious authority of the papacy.⁶⁶

Conferences, and despite its most strenuous diplomatic efforts, was also barred from participating in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

⁶³ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 28.

⁶⁴ Charles Loiseau, *Politique romaine et sentiment français* (Paris: Grasset, 1923), 139.

⁶⁵ Edward Heston, “Papal Diplomacy: Its Organization and Way of Acting,” in *The Catholic Church in World Affairs*, ed. Gurian, Waldemar, and Fitzsimmons (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), 38.

⁶⁶ “Diplomacy without arms is music without instruments,” once uttered Frederick the Great. Echoing this well accepted realist theory, many political scientists and diplomatic historians stress the ineffectiveness of diplomatic persuasion without the ability of threatening to use force, as a policy instrument. The respected diplomatic historian René Albrecht-Carrié noted fifty years ago that “if diplomacy stresses negotiations, these have no meaning divorced from the background of power.” Paul Gordon Lauren, “Theories of Bargaining with Threats of Force: Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy,” in

The spiritual nature of the government of the Church suggests a diplomacy anchored in idealism more than realism. This has always been true but only to a certain extent. The pontifical line of foreign policy, pragmatic and prudent, is very much entrenched in realism, paying attention to designing a balanced policy, which takes into account, in each state, the power of national forces at work and the need to protect the rights and interests of Catholic communities. The main challenge encountered by the Holy See has always been to adapt to changing situations and maintain the Church's tradition through a prudent and moderate diplomacy rooted in continuity, while seeking "justice and charity as fundamental principles of the international order."⁶⁷ Such a delicate crafting became a true challenge to Pope Benedict during the Great War. His pontificate attests that the Holy See's "relationship in the international order [is] of moral and humanitarian nature."⁶⁸

With the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, the European diplomatic scene underwent a Copernican change affecting "the general conception of international intercourse and the methods of conducting it."⁶⁹ "Whether 'just' or 'unjust', war is the

Diplomacy, New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New-York: Free Press, 1979), 184, quoting Robert Heinl, Jr., *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 88, and René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (London: Harper and Row, 1958), 4.

⁶⁷ A.C.F. Beales, *The Catholic Church and International Order* (Hardmondsworth, Middlesex, 1941), 66.

⁶⁸ John R. Quinn, "From a Moral Voice Raised in the International Dialogue," *Origins* 13 (May 3, 1984): 571.

⁶⁹ J.D. Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy. Rambles and Reflections, 1902-1928* (London: Hutchinson, [1928]), 34.

supreme disaster, a disaster for which nothing can compensate.”⁷⁰ War implies a rupture. The First World War meant for the Church a dangerous disruption of unity and loyalty to the Holy See. The main source of dissension was understandably the power of patriotic discourse in belligerent countries and the intensification of nationalistic trends.

The disruption of unity was as destabilizing as the difficulty to keep long-term diplomatic goals in a time of complete reshuffling of the geo-political and social scene. “In war-time, foreign policy became war-policy.”⁷¹ It concretely means that, for military powers, “Long-term political objectives sometimes had to be sacrificed in view of immediate military necessities.”⁷² For the Holy See, it implied a prudent diplomacy that was partly dependent upon military successes of belligerent countries. To attain long-term and steadfast goals, the Holy See must be ready to consider new interlocutors and reassess the importance of historical ties, without having to sacrifice deep-rooted diplomatic continuity.

At the opening of the hostilities, the Great Powers’ political and military alliances were such that a diplomatic discrepancy was immediately noticeable at the Vatican. On the Entente side, France, Great Britain, and Russia were allies of the first hour. Italy joined them in 1915 and the United States in 1917.⁷³ The diplomatic presence of the

⁷⁰ D.A. Binchy, “The Vatican and International Diplomacy,” *International Affairs* 22 (January 1946): 50.

⁷¹ Roberta Warman, “The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918,” *The Historical Journal* 15 (March 1972): 134.

⁷² Warman, “Erosion of Foreign Office Influence,” 134.

Allies at the Vatican was an embarrassment to themselves and very inadequate in consideration of the 124 million Catholics that were living on this side of the war theater.⁷⁴ Catholic but anti-clerical France had cut ties with the Holy See in 1904 and had thus no official legation at Rome at the outbreak of war. Imperial Orthodox Russia did have a *chargé d'affaires*, Dimitri Nelidov, but his influence was hampered by the Tsar's religious policies in Russian Poland.⁷⁵ Protestant Great Britain had no envoy since the sixteenth century. As for Italy, the Roman Question prohibited any diplomatic ties. Only Belgium was represented at the papal court by Maximilian d'Erp, who was suffering poor health.

The situation of the Central Powers, dominated by "a principle of authority, traditions of hierarchy and discipline to which the Catholic Church had always shown predilection,"⁷⁶ was incomparably more mutually enjoyable. More than sixty-four million Catholics were living in Protestant Germany and the Catholic Austrian Empire. A small minority was scattered in the Muslim Ottoman Empire. "The Central Powers' representation at the Holy See out-classed the Allies in both number and quality of their

⁷³ The United States, a newcomer on the European political scene, had no diplomatic ties with the Holy See. Many other countries eventually joined the war on the Entente side (Greece, Romania, Serbia, Portugal, Montenegro, and possessions of the British Empire) but none of these powers was as politically or military influential as Great Britain, France, Russia, or even Italy. None had an established diplomatic presence at the Vatican at the outbreak of the war. Some of them entered in diplomatic intercourse with the Holy See in the post-war years: Serbia (1919), Portugal (1918), and Romania (1920).

⁷⁴ Jean-Marie Mayeur, "Les Eglises et les relations internationales. L'Eglise catholique," in *Guerres mondiales et totalitarismes (1914-1958)*, vol. 12, *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, Jean-Marie Mayeur et al., eds. (Paris: Desclée, 1990), 305.

⁷⁵ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, xv.

⁷⁶ Pernot, *Eglise catholique et politique mondiale*, 28. (My translation).

diplomatic missions.”⁷⁷ Three distinguished diplomats enjoyed much prestige at the Curia. The Austro-Hungarian envoy, Prince Johann Schonburg, was the Catholic ambassador *par excellence*. Also very devout was the Bavarian Minister, Baron Otto von Ritter, who with the Prussian Minister, Otto von Mühlberg, represented the German interests at the Holy See.

Great Britain was the first and only Entente ally to realize the importance and immediate necessity to enter in diplomatic intercourse with the Holy See. During the first months of the conflict, Cardinal Gasquet, the only British resident cardinal in Rome, was alone to defend the Entente’s conduct of the war and explain the reasons that had motivated the opening of the hostilities.⁷⁸ Fighting a “brave battle with few supporters and not much ammunition in face of highly organized offensive,”⁷⁹ Cardinal Gasquet was able to convince the British Government to act. Two main reasons justified its sending a diplomatic mission. Millions of Catholics on each side of the war theater could prove a powerful and influential force. Diplomatic relations were then necessary to counterbalance the assumed leaning of the Holy See in favor of the Central Powers. On arrival in Rome for the conclave, which elected Benedict XV, “the English cardinals ... [had] found strong pro-German influences at work.”⁸⁰ After centuries of “evasions and

⁷⁷ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, xv.

⁷⁸ Renzi, “Entente and Vatican,” 497.

⁷⁹ Shane Leslie, *Cardinal Gasquet* (London: Burnes Oates, 1953), 212.

⁸⁰ Leslie, *Cardinal Gasquet*, 213.

subterfuges,”⁸¹ Great Britain, in a most pragmatic move, appointed an envoy to the Holy See. On December 12, 1914, the London *Times* announced that “the king has been pleased to approve the appointment of Sir Henry Howard, K.C.B, K.C.M.G., as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, with a view to his proceeding on a special mission to His Holiness the Pope. He will be accompanied by Mr. J.D. Gregory, of the Foreign Office, as Secretary of the Mission.”⁸² Both men were Roman Catholic. In October 1916, Sir Henry was replaced by Count de Salis. The British Mission was initially conceived as a war-time expedient. Controversy over the need to maintain it after the end of the hostilities led the British government to “suggest(ed) that its removal might offend the millions of Roman Catholic British subjects throughout the Empire.”⁸³ It was thus given the status of legation and became permanent in 1926. England might well be a Protestant country, but its Empire not so.⁸⁴

The official reason for sending an envoy was to explain to the Holy See the motivations behind the war and to convert the pope to the British view with the hope that he would eventually take sides in favor of the Entente. The instructions issued to Sir Henry by Sir Edward Grey⁸⁵ were to present the pope with “the motives which compelled

⁸¹ Robert, Graham, S.J. *Vatican Diplomacy: A Study of Church and State on the International Plane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 70.

⁸² Editorial, “British Mission to the Pope. Sir H. Howard’s Appointment,” *Times* (London), December 12, 1914, p. 9, col. C.

⁸³ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, xxi.

⁸⁴ “‘Really with all the Catholic interests in the Empire, it seems absurd that there should be no official means of communication between the British Government and the Pope,’ wrote Cardinal Gasquet to Lord Grey on November 20, 1914.” Leslie, *Cardinal Gasquet*, 214.

His Majesty's Government to intervene in the War, and to inform him of the British attitude towards the various questions arising therefrom."⁸⁶ The British government was hoping to benefit from the moral authority of the pope if he came to embrace the Allies' side. It was also hoped that the mission would have access to the wealth of information that the Holy See had the reputation to collect. Ecclesiastical and political information inundated the Holy See's Secretary of State with data sent by nuncios, missionaries, and Catholic laymen from all over the world.

The British government tried to persuade the French to resume diplomatic relations with the Holy See. It was opposed by Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé who feared that a ferocious anti-clerical reaction could endanger the *union sacrée*.⁸⁷ He eventually sent an unofficial delegate in 1915, the writer Charles Loiseau, a good observer of Roman politics. The presence of British and French envoys, official or not, did allow a more fruitful diplomatic intercourse between the Allies and the Holy See.

As long as Italy stayed neutral, communications between the Holy See and belligerent countries on both sides went smoothly. Italy was adamant to ostracize the Holy See on the diplomatic scene, in order to avoid a much feared internationalization of the Roman Question, which had been the objective of the papacy since the onset. The personality of Italian Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, his anti-clericalism, Protestantism, and Jewish heritage were as many obstacles to good will and

⁸⁵ Sir Edward Grey was British Secretary for Foreign Affairs from 1905 to 1916.

⁸⁶ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, viii.

⁸⁷ Renzi, "Entente and Vatican," 500.

understanding with the Holy See. Italy entered the war on the Entente side in May 1915, on one express condition stated in the secret Treaty of London, which was signed between Italy and the Entente powers on April 26, 1915. Article 15 of the Treaty concerned the status of the Vatican. It stipulated that “France, Great Britain and Russia pledge themselves to support Italy in not allowing the representatives of the Holy See to undertake any diplomatic steps having for their object the conclusion of peace or the settlement of questions connected with the present war.”⁸⁸ Baron Sonnino’s insistence on inserting this article prohibiting the Holy See to sit at the peace table was a direct response to Pope Benedict’s clear intention to raise the Roman Question at the future Peace Congress. In his first encyclical *Ad Beatissimi* the pontiff had expressed his wish.

For a long time past, [he wrote], the Church has not enjoyed that full freedom which it needs... And so while earnestly desiring that peace should soon be concluded amongst the nations, it is also Our desire that there should be an end to the abnormal position of the Head of the Church, a position in many ways very harmful to the very peace of nations. We hereby renew, and for the same reasons, the many protests Our Predecessors have made against such a state of things, moved thereto not by human interest, but by the sacredness of our office, in order to defend the rights and dignity of the Apostolic See.⁸⁹

Against their many protests,⁹⁰ once the terms of the secret Treaty were leaked to the Holy See by the end of 1915, the Allies remained firm.⁹¹ The Holy See did not participate officially in the Peace negotiations.

⁸⁸ J.A.S. Grenville ed., *The Major International Treaties, 1914-1973: A History and Guide With Texts* (London: Methuen, 1974), 26, quoted in Robert John Araujo and John A. Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace: The Vatican and International Organizations from the Early Years to the League of Nations* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2004), 104.

⁸⁹ Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, art. 31.

Italy's decision to enter the war on the Entente side raised another diplomatic difficulty for the Holy See. The status of the representatives accredited to Rome by the Central Powers became a delicate issue, which was resolved with their leaving the Italian territory and finding refuge in Lugano, Switzerland. Although the lines of communication remained open between the Holy See and both camps, diplomatic intercourse between the Vatican and the Central Powers went under special scrutiny by the Italian government. The war years went eventually rather smoothly between the Holy See and the Quirinal.⁹² Baron Carlo Monti, the director of the Office for administering ecclesial funds, the *Fondo del Culto*, a childhood friend of Benedict XV, deserves credit for his unrelenting good will and thoughtfulness in his facilitating unofficial diplomatic intercourse between the Holy See and the Italian Government.

It is within this European diplomatic context that Pope Benedict assessed the significance of the many issues raised by the vulnerability of Catholic communities in the Ottoman Empire. The volatile diplomatic situation on the Ottoman battlefield, although secondary to the European war scene, remained high on Benedict's foreign policy list of priorities. The Holy See's distinctive interest for the fate of Catholic communities in the

⁹⁰ Ragonesi to Gasparri, December 16 and 23, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 84. In December 1914, the Holy See had been informed by Msgr. Ragonesi, the Apostolic Nuncio in Madrid, that Italy would not allow the Holy See to participate to the future Peace Conference. In late 1915, Cardinal Gasparri tried to enroll the help of the Apostolic Delegates in Canada, Australia, and United States. All replied that there was nothing they could do. See especially a letter sent by the Apostolic Delegate in Canada to Cardinal Gasparri, in which he laments the extreme difficulty to obtain Protestant support: "Con quei signori noi non abbiamo, si puo dire, alcuna relazione." Pellegrino Stagni to Gasparri, November 19, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 84.

⁹¹ Scotta, *Diario del barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 334.

⁹² The Quirinal Palace is the official residence of the Italian President.

Ottoman Empire was informed by two circumstances. First, it has always been the Holy See's policy to protect Catholics and preserve Catholic interests wherever they are in the world. This unswerving commitment throughout the centuries was given additional impetus under Benedict XV's pontificate. Dubbed the "Pope of Peace," Benedict should also be remembered as "the pope who so loved the East."⁹³ As such, he initiated a new model of proactive and integrated diplomacy that intertwined classic diplomatic functions of negotiation with an ecclesiastical diplomacy that reflected his Eastern ecclesiology.

⁹³ In a talk given to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, on June 9, 2007, Benedict XVI stressed that he took the name "of a pope who dearly loved the East."
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070609_congr-orientchurch_en.html

PART 1

IN SEARCH OF A NEW COMPASS: VATICAN PROTECTION OF CATHOLIC
INTERESTS IN PRE-WAR AND WAR-TIME
(September 1914 – December 1917)

CHAPTER 2

PRE-WAR PROTECTION OF CATHOLICS: FROM *DHIMMITUDE* TO CIVIL EQUALITY

Christians in Greater Syria, the cradle of Christianity, progressively became a minority among Muslims. From the conquest of Syria by the Ottomans in 1516 to the onset of World War I, in the wake of the slow ongoing transformation of the Ottoman State, the personal legal and religious status of the Christian Ottoman subjects evolved from *dhimmitude* to civil equality. The *dhimmis* were members of autonomous communal-religious structures, the *millets*.

Starting in the 16th century, the Capitulations, granted by the Sublime Porte to the king of France through his consuls, established a *de jure* French religious Protectorate over Latin Catholics who were not Ottoman subjects. A *de facto* Protectorate over the Eastern Catholic Ottomans, subjects of the Sultan and members of different *millets*, eventually became an article of tradition.

In the absence of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire, France became the sole legal protector of Latin and Eastern Catholics, as well as the sole representative of the Holy See to the Sublime Porte, eventually creating an atypical situation for the Holy See. In 1904, France severed all diplomatic ties with the Holy See but kept insisting on the maintaining of the French Protectorate, a political and cultural device that, with time, had lost much of its religious luster. To the French

Protectorate for Catholics there corresponded an unofficial Russian Protectorate for Orthodox Greek Christian subjects.

“The dramatic events of the autumn of 1914 opened a new chapter in the history of the Middle East.”¹ A first Copernican change occurred on September 9, 1914, when the Ottoman Government unilaterally abolished the Capitulations on which the French Protectorate had rested for centuries. Although all powers concerned complained that the act was not legally valid because of its unilaterality, the legal and religious status of all Catholics and Catholic property was brutally transformed, leaving them on uncharted territory for the first time in their existence under Ottoman rule, without the protective net provided by the French or Russian Protectorates.

The danger of this new situation did not escape the attention of the Holy See. The abrogation of the Capitulations implied an abrogation of the French Protectorate with direct implications concerning the welfare of Catholic communities and the legal status of Catholic properties, especially in the Holy Land, land of centuries-old inter-religious strife.

Barely two months after the abolition of the Capitulations, on November 5, a second Copernican revolution took place, when the Ottoman Empire, siding with Germany, entered the war against the Entente powers. Any diplomatic alternative that the Holy See had tried to craft after the abolition of the Capitulations was void, leaving the Holy See in uncharted territory.

¹ Jukka Nevakivi, *Britain, France, and the Arab Middle East, 1914-1920* (London: Athlone, 1969), 13.

Status and Organization of Eastern Christians in Muslim Land

Islamic Law and Christian Rights: Dhimmitude and Millet System

Islam moved from Arabia to Syria in the seventh century. Jerusalem and Damascus became holy cities, “second only to Mecca and Medina.”² The region, the cradle of Christianity, eventually became predominantly Muslim.³ With the Ottoman invasion of Syria in August 1516, the newly subjugated country became part of the Ottoman Empire. As such, it was integrated in the Ottoman fabric united by a common language, Arabic, and a common religion, Islam. “A mosaic of religious and other minorities,”⁴ Jewish and Christian for the most part, strove to survive and develop in this Muslim environment.

The Ottoman rulers developed a sophisticated system of Islamic law, differentiating between the Ottoman Muslim majority and the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects. The Islamic law, which established a “pattern of stratification among the Christian and

² A.L. Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria, Including Lebanon and Palestine* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 20.

³ Sidney Griffith notes that “They [the Christians] of the population were by far the majority [in 732] in the former Roman provinces, in the three so called Oriental Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem ... perhaps 50 percent of the world’s confessing Christian from the mid-seventh to the end of the eleventh centuries found themselves living under Muslim rule,” 11. But “by then [the times of the Crusades] the indigenous Christians living among the Muslims had begun their long slide into that demographic insignificance in the Middle East that is the fate of their communities in modern times,” 13. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). See also Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 9. Campos notes that “by the sixteenth century, the split between the Muslim population and the non-Muslim population in the empire had flipped to approximately 60-40.”

⁴ Tibawi, *Modern History of Syria*, 20.

Muslim inhabitants,”⁵ was enforced at both the personal and communal levels. To the rights and duties of the *dhimmis* as individuals corresponded the rights and duties of the *millet* as a communal-religious community.⁶

Regarded as “People of the Book”⁷ by Muslims, Christians were considered as *dhimmis*, or *rayas*, tolerated and protected, but their status was inferior to the status of the Muslims, suffering from many restrictions.⁸ They “became sociological minorities, subaltern populations subject to discrimination, disability, and at times even persecution,”⁹ but they were not forced to convert.¹⁰ Their life in *dhimmitude*¹¹ as second-class citizens “shaped their enduring ecclesial identities, both culturally and intellectually, within the context of several local determining circumstances: their encounter with the

⁵ Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29.

⁶ Recep Senturk, “Minority Rights in Islam,” in *Islam and Human Rights. Advancing a US-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter with Huma Malik (Washington, DC: CSIS Press/Center for Strategic and International Studies, c2005), 71.

⁷ The “People of the Book” are those who possess a monotheistic religion based on revelation. Islam recognizes Christianity as an incomplete form of Islam itself. Jews are also considered as “People of the Book.”

⁸ The *dhimmis* could not serve in the civil service or the imperial army. Other restrictions were imposed regarding the clothes they might wear or their places of worship. Churches could not be higher than mosques and no new churches could be built.

⁹ Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 17.

¹⁰ Bat Ye’Or points out that “either the individual or the tribe would convert to Islam, thus submitting to the Prophet’s authority, or conversion was replaced by payment of a tribute to the Prophet ... principles directly mentioned by Muhammad in the letters he sent to the Christian leaders and governors. He gave them the choice between conversion or tribute, failing which war was declared.” Bat Ye’Or, *Islam and Dhimmitude. Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 41.

¹¹ “The area of *dhimmitude* also concerns intervention by Christian states in the form of political, commercial, and religious protection, and of the missiological movements – with their consequences for the various *dhimmi* groups.” Bat Ye’Or, *Islam and Dhimmitude*, 27. The term *dhimmitude* was coined by Bashir Gemayel, the Lebanese president who was assassinated in 1982.

Muslims, their adoption of the Arabic language, and their isolation from other Christian communities outside of the Islamic world.”¹²

For centuries, in the absence of nationalistic movements, religion was given a determinant role in the establishment of corporate identities in the Ottoman Empire. The line of demarcation between communities was not along racial or geographical lines but along religious lines.¹³ This distinctiveness was associated with the *millet* system.¹⁴ Bernard Lewis described this system as “a series of *ad hoc* arrangements made over the years, which gave each of the major religious communities a degree of legal autonomy and authority with the acquiescence of the Ottoman state.”¹⁵ “They mix but do not combine,”¹⁶ he added, pointing out a fundamental weakness of the Empire. The *millet* system was originally conceived to institutionalize the status of the Orthodox Christians, “granting them nearly complete autonomy in religious and cultural affairs by introducing a new principle of religious representation.”¹⁷ The first *millets* were the Greek Orthodox (1453), Armenian Orthodox (1461), and Jewish (end of 15th century) *millets*. They had

¹² Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 130.

¹³ Zeine N. Zeine, *Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Beirut: Khayat's, [1958]), 28.

¹⁴ A.L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923* (London: Longman, 1998), 7.

¹⁵ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 12.

¹⁶ Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, 1.

¹⁷ Kemal H. Karpat, “Ottoman Views and Policies towards the Orthodox Christian Church,” in *Orthodox Christians and Muslims*, ed. N.M. Vapori (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986), 141. The Greek *millet* was instituted in 1453, after the conquest of Constantinople by Ottoman forces, by a concordat between Sultan Mehmet II and Patriarch Gennadios of Constantinople.

their own religious edifices, schools, hospitals, and ecclesiastical courts. The chief of a *millet* reported directly to the Ottoman Sultan.

In the mid-nineteenth century, during the Tanzimat period, a generalized effort by the Ottoman government to recognize and empower new Christian *millets* was launched under the pressure of European powers.¹⁸ The Tanzimat period was an era of reforms and westernization that followed the Russian military defeat in the Crimean War, and the acknowledgment of French and British political and military ascendancy in the Empire.¹⁹ This expansion transformed the essence of the *millet* from “a large, basic religious community” into a “small ethno-religious and national congregation.”²⁰ “By the end of the [nineteenth] century the number of *millets* had been increased from the original three to nine and then eleven, usually by the separation of one group from the mother *millet*.”²¹ The majority were new Eastern rite Catholic *millets* that parted from their original Orthodox community.

Except for the Maronites of Lebanon, who claim to have always been Catholic in communion with Rome, the Eastern rite Catholic Churches stem from an Orthodox

¹⁸ The Tanzimat, which means “reorganization” in Turkish, was a period of reform that lasted from 1839 to 1876. It culminated with the promulgation of the first Ottoman Constitution in 1876. “It is necessary to recognize the essential fact that the Balkan and Middle Eastern societies, and their socio-cultural-economic structure in the Ottoman era, were subject to transformation through the impact of internal forces long before massive European influence accelerated this transformation.” Kemal H. Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (July 1972): 243.

¹⁹ The Crimean War (1853-56), fought by Russia against France, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire, finds its immediate origin in the Franco-Russian dispute over the Holy Sites of Palestine. Russian attempts to secure a protectorate over the Orthodox population collided with the French Catholic Protectorate and the country’s political and religious interests in the region.

²⁰ Karpat, “Ottoman Views and Policies,” 151.

²¹ Karpat, “Ottoman Views and Policies,” 151.

schismatical body.²² All of them accept the spiritual and legal authority of the pope. They are autonomous and retain their distinctive liturgical rites and canonical traditions. They are headed by their own patriarch. The main Eastern Catholic *millets* in Greater Syria were at the outbreak of the Great War, the Melkite,²³ or Greek Catholic *millet* of Byzantine rite (recognized in 1848), the Armenian (1831), as well as the Syrian (1830) *millets*. The Maronite Christians of Lebanon who had been part of the Armenian millet were granted autonomy in 1860-61.²⁴ The Maronites and Melkites were the most numerous in Lebanon and Syria. A vestige of Christianity in the heart of Islam, the Eastern rite Catholics of the Ottoman Empire were like many “frail branches united to the trunk of the Universal Church.”²⁵ “Eastern Catholics were ... Arab but not Moslem, Eastern but not schismatic, Catholics but not Latin.”²⁶ A minority among a large Latin Catholicity, they also remained a minority in a predominantly Orthodox Eastern Christianity.

As for the Latin Catholics, foreign non-Muslim subjects, they were never identified as members of a *millet*. They were essentially members of the numerous religious orders

²² Byzantine Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and the Assyrian Church of the East form the Orthodox body. The first Eastern rite Catholics originated in Aleppo, Syria, in 1583.

²³ Sydney Griffith defines the Melkites as those who “in consequence of this loyalty [they accepted the orthodoxy of the ‘six councils’ enforced by the Byzantine emperors] those who accepted Byzantine orthodoxy who lived in the newly conquered Islamic world came soon after the sixth council (III Constantinople, 681) to be called ‘Melkites’ (‘imperialists,’ ‘royalists’) by their ‘Jacobite’ and ‘Nestorian’ adversaries.” Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 13.

²⁴ Karpas, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, 745.

²⁵ Neophytos Edelby, “Our Vocation as Eastern Christians,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 3 (1953): 201-17, quoted in Maximos IV Sayegh ed., *The Eastern Churches and Catholic Unity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 25.

²⁶ Edelby, “Our Vocation as Eastern Christians,” 25.

that covered the Ottoman Empire with a net of missions, and as such, were under foreign diplomatic protection. French and Italian religious orders were the most visible.

From Dhimmitude to Civil Equality

In the mid-nineteenth century, making good use of their dominant position, France and Great Britain sought improved welfare for the Christian populations of the Empire, requesting from the Sultan measures of equality between *dhimmis* and Muslims. The Sublime Porte bowed to the Franco-British petition, proclaiming in the most solemn manner new rights for the *dhimmis*.

On February 18, 1856, the Sultan announced, in the *Hatt-i Humayun*,²⁷ reforms that would “guarantee the safety of property and persons and the equality of all his subjects before the law, irrespective of religion.”²⁸ In December 1876, the first constitution in Ottoman history was promulgated, which stressed that “all Osmali are equal before the law ... without distinction as to religion.”²⁹ Although the principle of equality had become official policy, real equality never prevailed. The Constitution of 1876 was suspended in 1878 and restored in 1908, after the Young Turks revolution.³⁰

²⁷ Imperial Reform Edict.

²⁸ Bat Ye’Or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam. From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 167.

²⁹ Roderic H. Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 59 (July 1954): 848. Quoting *Das Staatsarchiv*, XXXI, 1877, 5948.

³⁰ The First Constitutional period lasted from November 23, 1876 until February 13, 1878. The era ended with the suspension of the Ottoman parliament by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The Sultan was compelled

Aspiring to transform the Ottoman Empire into a modern nation-state on the model of European nations, the reformist Young Turks' objective was to resist European encroachment and to counter nationalist and separatist tendencies at work in some of the Christian *millets*. Resting on the principle of equality, the new Ottoman citizenship obtained by the *dhimmis* should have logically signaled the termination of the *millet* system. In effect, the *millets* were not abolished but their essence changed. To a religious *millet* consciousness succeeded a national *millet* consciousness. An Ottoman consciousness was never able to take shape.³¹

Christians in Muslim Land: A Symbolic Presence

It is nearly impossible to provide reliable statistics regarding the size of the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, even less to single out their Catholic population. Estimates offered by Western sources often conflict with Ottoman censuses.³²

to restore the Constitution of 1876 after the 1908 Young Turks revolution, starting the Second Constitutional era.

³¹ Senturk, "Minority Rights in Islam," 87- 8. Senturk notes that "this project of integrating all religious communities under one national identity failed ... as ethnic groups rose as minorities with distinct secular identities." For the Constitution of 1876, see Kemal H. Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State," 272: "The war of 1877 with Russia, and the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin of 1878-9, resulted in the loss of vital territories south and southeast of the Danube and the Caucasus, which were populated by large numbers of Muslim-Turkish people. The mass migration of over one million people ... began in this period ... In the following decades the empire lost additional European territories and witnessed the migration of additional thousands of Muslim Turks into Thrace and Anatolia. Consequently, the empire's Christian-Muslim balance disappeared, and the Muslim element acquired an overwhelming majority in the remaining areas. The idea of a multinational state based on common citizenship lost its practical importance since the Ottoman state became predominantly inhabited by Muslims."

³² J.M. Wagstaff, "A Note on Some Nineteenth-Century Population Statistics for Lebanon," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1986): 27. Wagstaff, in agreement with Kemal H. Karpat, argues that "the Ottoman censuses of 1828/29 – 1831, 1881/82 – 1893 and 1906/07 ... are far more reliable than the statistics presented by most foreign 'experts' and local community leaders."

According to Western sources, by 1914, the Christian population of Greater Syria – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant - represented almost a third of the overall population, reaching a peak after a steady increase started in the second half of the nineteenth century.³³ Christians made up 58.6% of the Lebanese population, 11.3% in Palestine, and 10.1% in Syria.³⁴ These statistics, which do not differentiate between Catholic and other Christian denominations,³⁵ should be taken with circumspection. According to Ottoman statistics for Lebanon, in 1914, the Christians represented only 30.7% of the total population, with 16.8% recognizing themselves as Maronites (11.1%) or other Catholics (5.7%).³⁶ The discrepancy between estimates, although noteworthy, did not mask the Christians' marginal position in an overwhelming Muslim environment. Christianity progressively became a minority in Greater Syria. In the late nineteenth century, Syrian economic emigration to Europe and the New World, and Muslim immigration from the European territories lost to the Ottoman Empire accelerated the existing trend.³⁷

³³ Philippe Fargues, "The Arab Christians of the Middle East: A Demographic Perspective," in *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 48-66. According to Fargues, two main factors explain this "turnabout in the tendency of the preceding millennium." Conversions to Islam had become rare thanks to the structure provided by the *millet* system; and differential birth and death rates were in favor of the Christian communities.

³⁴ Fargues, "Arab Christians of the Middle East," 48-66.

³⁵ Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6. According to Minerbi, before World War I, about 80% of the Christians in Palestine were Greek Orthodox.

³⁶ Wagstaff, "Population Statistics for Lebanon," 33. According to the same sources, the Muslims represented 69.3% of the total Lebanese population and the Orthodox Greeks 15.1%.

³⁷ "In the period 1860-1914 at least 600, 000 people emigrated from Syria – many of them from Mount Lebanon – to North and South America, 80-85% of them Christians." Wagstaff, "Population Statistics for Lebanon," 28.

Yet, the Christians' religious, cultural, and political significance in Greater Syria transcends all numbers. Descendants of the first Christians, they have a symbolic role especially in the Holy Land, the cradle of Christianity. Because of their education in European missionary schools, they also facilitated the westernization of the region. They were the linchpin between Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, with a strong influence on the decision-making process of the Holy See and the Great European powers.

Christians under Religious Protectorates

Capitulations and French Catholic Protectorate

For centuries, the protection of the Latin and Eastern rite Catholic Churches in the Middle East has rested not on the Holy See, which had no diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Government,³⁸ but on France's privileged relationship with Constantinople.

Foundation of its cultural and economic influence in the region, this exclusive relationship of France with Constantinople went back to 1536 when Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman sultan, granted to King Francis I of France concessions in order to facilitate trade. These extra-territorial commercial and juridical conventions became known as Capitulations. They allowed French diplomats accredited to the Porte

³⁸ The Holy See was represented by an Apostolic Delegate who had no diplomatic status and therefore no official power to interact with the Porte. Apostolic Delegates are named in countries that have no formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

to protect French interests.³⁹ French subjects gained commercial rights and fiscal immunity. They answered to French law only, since foreigners had no juridical status in Ottoman Muslim lands.⁴⁰

The Sublime Porte developed a balanced legal system, differentiating between Ottoman and non-Ottoman Christian subjects. Christian Ottoman subjects, as *dhimmis*, were members of different *millets*, benefiting from their special jurisdiction. Except for the Maronites, the majority of them were then Orthodox Christians, all under Ottoman rule. Non-Ottoman Christians were originally merchants, navigating under French pavilion, who were protected by the King of France in their commercial activities. In 1604, new capitulations broadened this French Protectorate to European pilgrims to the Holy Land. The French Protectorate had become religious.

In 1740, the Porte granted new Capitulations to the “Eldest Daughter of the Church,” converting two hundred years of tradition into an international legal document. According to this detailed text, France could invoke a French Catholic Protectorate over all Latin rite Catholics, thus becoming the official representative of the Pope in a predominantly Muslim Empire. Latin Catholics living in the Empire, Catholic

³⁹ The privileged status enjoyed by France through the Capitulations was later extended graciously by the sultans to other nations but the French ambassador always kept preeminence over other representatives of European courts: Britain in 1583, Holland in 1613, and Austria in 1615.

⁴⁰ “Le consul était doté de pouvoirs juridiques et administratifs sur les commerçants placés sous sa protection. Le consul, représentant de l’autorité royale, était doté de pouvoirs importants. Chargé de faire respecter l’ordre, il pouvait condamner à des amendes, emprisonner ou renvoyer en France des marchands perturbateurs.” Hussein I. El-Mudarris and Olivier Salmon eds., *Le Consulat de France à Alep au XVII^e siècle. Journal de Louis Gédoyen, vie de François Picquet, mémoires de Laurent d’Arvieux* (Ray, 2009), 11-12.

missionaries, and papal Apostolic Delegates, regardless of their country of origin, were under French diplomatic protection.⁴¹

The Latin Catholic Protectorate was later extended to the Eastern rite Catholics, although this right never became official.⁴² The *de facto* protection of Eastern Catholics, who were Ottoman subjects, was not mentioned in the Capitulations of 1740 and as such represented an abuse of law. The establishment, in the nineteenth century, of new Eastern Catholic *millets* created a novel situation, in which members of the *millet* had a double allegiance, to the Sultan as Ottoman subjects, and to the Pope as Catholics. As Catholics living under the limitations imposed by the Islamic law, it became therefore natural to those communities to seek the protection of France.

Although accepted as a customary right, the Protectorate over Eastern Catholic Ottoman subjects became an object of tension between the French government and the Porte.⁴³ In the nineteenth century, in some instances, Eastern Catholics re-interpreted the traditional Protectorate of France in the Orient, transforming its essence from a spiritual and religious protective device into an abusive use of consular prerogatives.⁴⁴

⁴¹ El-Mudarris and Salmon, *Consulat de France à Alep*, 18. The Franciscans were present in the Holy Land since the Crusades, under the protection of French consuls, but were not considered as missionaries. The first missionaries were the Jesuits, followed by the Capuchins in 1625.

⁴² Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 41.

⁴³ The Protestants, British and American missionaries and their converts, were under the protection of the British consuls.

⁴⁴ Nadine Picaudou, *La décennie qui ébranla le Moyen-Orient, 1914-1923* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1992), 22.

In the absence of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire, France became the sole representative of the Holy See before the Sublime Porte. On August 20, 1898, in a letter addressed to Cardinal Langénieux, Pope Leo XIII officially recognized the French Protectorate as

a special mission [in the Orient] entrusted to her [France] by Divine Providence; a noble mission consecrated not only by a centuries-old practice, but also by international treaties, as recently acknowledged by our Congregation of Propaganda in its deliberation of 22 May 1888. The Holy See, in fact, does not wish to interfere with the glorious patrimony which France has received from its ancestors and that it, without a doubt, deserves to retain, always proving itself to be up to its mission.⁴⁵

The Capitulations, “a relic of the medieval system of international law,”⁴⁶ had signaled the beginning of French preeminence in the Ottoman Empire, a supremacy that was not seriously challenged until the late nineteenth century, when British influence began to supplant that of France.⁴⁷ France’s prestige was dependent upon a vast array of religious and educational institutions,⁴⁸ and on its financial and cultural influence in many sections of the population. The *mission civilisatrice* of France had become “one of

⁴⁵ “La Francia ha in Oriente una missione speciale, affidatale dalla divina Provvidenza; nobile missione, consacrata non soltanto da una pratica secolare, ma altresì da trattati internazionali, come lo ha riconosciuto in questi giorni la Nostra Congregazione della Propaganda colla sua dichiarazione del 22 maggio 1898. La S. Sede, infatti, non vuole toccar nulla del glorioso patrimonio che la Francia ha ricevuto dai suoi antenati, e ch'essa intende senza alcun dubbio meritarsi di conservare, mostrandosi sempre all'altezza della sua missione.” (My translation). Leo XIII, “Apostolic Letter *Maximo cum Animi* [August 20, 1898],” ASS 31 (1898-1899): 193-95.

⁴⁶ Hans Kohn, *Nationalism and Imperialism in the Hither East* (London: Routledge, 1932), 69.

⁴⁷ “In 1831 Mehemet Ali, Pasha of Egypt, inflicted disastrous defeats on the sultan, whose empire was saved from imminent destruction only by British intervention in 1840. From that day British influence began to supplant that of France in the Near East.” Henry H. Cumming, *Franco-British Rivalry in the Post-War Near East, the Decline of French Influence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 6.

⁴⁸ “The scope of French cultural interests is exemplified by claims that the total pre-war number of Syrian students attending French schools amounted to 50,000, while the total number of students attending the schools of other nationalities was 23,000.” Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East*, 5.

the bywords of French colonial expansion,”⁴⁹ a mission perceived as a “moral duty to extend the benefits of her civilization and her language to a wider world.”⁵⁰

In the course of centuries, tradition and interest had justified France’s jealous defense of her privilege, the Protectorate having proven a crucial weapon in the battle of influence among the Great Powers in the Near East, satisfying France’s imperialistic designs in the Ottoman Empire, above all in Syria. In the volatile nineteenth century, it became an object of power and attack in the great diplomatic game opposing Europeans nations on the Ottoman theatre. After 1900, France narrowed and focused its religious and cultural interests on Greater Syria.⁵¹ Its international position became insecure as the severing of diplomatic ties with the Holy See in 1904, followed by the separation of Church and State in 1905, harmed the legitimacy of maintaining the French Protectorate. Although future Prime Minister Clemenceau was quick to announce that “anticlericalism is not an export article,”⁵² France’s position was attacked domestically and internationally.

⁴⁹ Matthew Burrows, “‘Mission Civilisatrice’: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914,” *The Historical Journal*, 29 (1986): 109.

⁵⁰ Peter Sluglett, “The Mandates: Some Reflections on the Nature of the British Presence in Iraq (1914-1932) and the French Presence in Syria (1918-1946),” in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/ Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, eds. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004).

⁵¹ Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1910-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 27.

⁵² Howard Sachar, *The Emergence of the Middle East, 1914-1924* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 162.

Domestically, anti-clerical republican forces questioned the Catholic exclusivity implied by the Protectorate, alienating not only the Muslim population but most importantly the Orthodox communities, which needed help against Muslim harassment.⁵³ While some diplomats of the old school, such as Paul Cambon⁵⁴ and Camille Barrère,⁵⁵ regretted the slow vanishing of the centuries-old Protectorate, others such as the ambassador in Constantinople, Maurice Bompard,⁵⁶ were in favor of its dying out, arguing that economic and financial tactics should be the instrument of modern imperialism.⁵⁷

Internationally, the attacks were even more substantial. In 1913, a decisive study was presented to the French government that considered the different factors weakening France's position in the Levant as well as its Protectorate.⁵⁸ The severing of diplomatic ties with the Holy See had had the most damaging effect. In mission fields, Italian and German priests have been replacing French missionaries after the closure of Catholic seminaries and the expulsion of religious orders from France. Italian was spreading

⁵³ Joseph Hajjar, *Le Vatican, la France et le catholicisme oriental (1878-1914)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 278.

⁵⁴ Ambassador to Great Britain from 1898 to 1920.

⁵⁵ Ambassador to Italy from 1897 to 1924.

⁵⁶ Ambassador to the Porte from 1909 to 1914.

⁵⁷ Catherine Nicault, "The End of the French Religious Protectorate in Jerusalem (1918-1924)," *Bulletin du CRFJ* 4 (Spring 1999): 80.

⁵⁸ Archives du Quai d'Orsay, Paris, le 30 Avril 1913, Protectorat et Saint Siège. Saint Siège, protectorat, dossier général, X, (37), fol. 34-35 in Hajjar, *Vatican, France et catholicisme*, 310.

quickly, replacing French as privileged language.⁵⁹ At the Curia, the author noted, Germany was influencing the pope to abolish the French Protectorate in favor of Italy. Italy itself was very powerful at *Propaganda Fide*, in charge of organizing all the missionary activities of the Church. Already in 1906, France, under papal pressure, had been forced to relinquish part of its Protectorate enabling Italian missionaries to seek protection directly from their native consulates in Syria, effectively reducing the Protectorate to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate. Although theoretically an international institution, the Custody was under Italian control, thus no longer as secure a support of the French Protectorate as it has been in the past.

The existence of a French Protectorate was a double-edged sword for the Holy See. On one hand, it had efficiently ensured the protection of Catholics in the Ottoman Empire since the 1500s. On the other hand, it had been a limitation to direct influence of the Holy See on Catholic missions active in the Ottoman Empire, since many of their missionaries were of French nationality, directly dependent upon the policy of their country in the region. Because of the association of the French Protectorate with western missionary activities, it also “raised cultural and political barriers between Frenchmen ... and the Muslim majority.”⁶⁰ It was also true of other Christian Europeans with the Muslims.

Anti-clerical France slowly reoriented its centuries-long policy of protection of Christian populations only. Paris chose to limit its zone of intervention to Greater Syria

⁵⁹ Burrows contends that “The French language was still the most spoken and written language in the area at the time of the First World War and one all the other foreigners – British, Germans, and Italians – had themselves to speak.” Burrows, “Mission civilisatrice,” 110.

⁶⁰ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 27.

but to provide culturally and economically to the entire population. This new policy of “deconfessionalization of the Levant”⁶¹ hurt directly the Holy See’s interests in Syria. Hence, although the Holy See had no direct diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Empire and needed the support of one of the Great Powers, the question was raised of the legitimacy of the French Protectorate and the resolution of the Holy See to maintain it. In 1904, Cardinal Gasparri had written a study reviewing the legal aspects of the French Protectorate and its limits.⁶² According to the future Secretary of State, “the protectorate had been established a long time ago in order to secure the interests of the Church from the oppression of a hostile and semi-barbarous Government. Various States had obtained similar rights under Capitulations, but France was best able at the time to give the required protection to religious interests.”⁶³ It was therefore reasonable to assume that, in the case of a non barbarous Government, one which would “practice the rule of justice in its actions,”⁶⁴ the French protectorate would have no reason to remain. The cardinal’s position, which was later endorsed by Pope Benedict, was a clear reminder that, viewed from a Vatican perspective, the French Protectorate was the result of a non-legally binding preferential treatment granted to France by the Holy See.

⁶¹ Vincent Cloarec, *La France et la question de la Syrie, 1914-1918* (Paris: CNRS, 1998), 39.

⁶² Pietro Gasparri, *Il Protettorato cattolico della Francia nell'Oriente e nell'estremo Oriente; studio storico giuridico di un prelate Romano*, 1904. Gasparri was a canon lawyer very much at ease with legal subtleties that were numerous in the Capitulations.

⁶³ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 21.

⁶⁴ Gasparri, *Protettorato*.

Nevertheless, on the eve of the unanticipated abrogation of the Capitulations by the Sublime Porte, in September 1914, the French Protectorate was alive although weakened, resting on three main pillars that enhanced the prestige of France: the Capitulations, the order given by the Holy See to all religious communities of Latin rite, regardless of their country of origin, to seek consular protection with France, and the liturgical honors granted to French officials,⁶⁵ a customary prerogative which had never been binding on the Holy See.⁶⁶

France was not the only nation with a tradition of protecting Christians in the Ottoman Empire. In 1774, the Capitulations had been extended to Russia, which took advantage of this new development in Russo-Turkish relationships. Claiming a Protectorate over the Greek Orthodox population of the Empire, on the model of the French Protectorate, Russia never officially obtained this privilege but could allege a manifest *de facto* role in the protection of the Orthodox population and, to the Holy See's greatest concern, in the active proselytizing religious policy led by Russian missionaries and envoys.

⁶⁵ The liturgical honors were granted by *Propaganda Fide* in "Règlement de la S.C. de la Propagande de 1742, sur les honneurs à rendre aux consuls de France dans le Levant." "On y établit qu'à l'entrée en charge du consul, on chanterait un Te Deum solennel dans l'Eglise de la Mission; que dans l'Eglise il y aurait une place réservée au consul; que le Préfet de la Mission devrait envoyer un serviteur avertir le Consul de l'heure de la Messe." ASV, Arch. Nunz. Parigi, b. 392, fasc. 304, Affari politici e religiosi Questione d'Oriente. Letter in French with no signature addressed to "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," some time after the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The letter appears to be from Cardinal Gasparri to the French Ambassador.

⁶⁶ Gasparri to Denys Cochin, June 26, 1917, in response to Denys Cochin to Gasparri, June 4, 1917, ASV, A.E.S. Francia, 1917, pos. 1295-96, fasc. 686. Denys Cochin was the Under Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris, France.

Competition of the Russian Orthodox Protectorate

Since the eighteenth century, the Holy See had entertained a deep apprehension about Russian Orthodoxy⁶⁷ and its expansionist policy in the Ottoman Empire. The Holy See's fears were justified. In 1774, the vaguely worded article 3 of the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji⁶⁸ had given Russia a pretext for interfering in the Holy Land affairs and claiming a religious Protectorate over the Ottoman members of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁹ The immediate consequence was the beginning of Russian interference in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs, and dependency of the Greek Orthodox Church on the Russian Orthodox Church. In the nineteenth century, in a determined pan-Slavic and pan-Orthodox effort, Moscow, which dubbed itself the third Rome, sought to supersede the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople by first taking foot in the Holy Land. The goal was to hold the smaller Patriarchate of Jerusalem, then to justify the taking over of the powerful Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁷⁰ The visit of

⁶⁷ The Orthodox Church of Russia became autocephalous in 1589. In 1721, Tsar Peter the Great abolished the Russian Patriarchate and created a "Holy Synod" to govern the national Church.

⁶⁸ Peace treaty (1774) signed between Catherine II of Russia and the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid at the end of the first Russo-Turkish War. Many diplomats of the time considered that treaty as the first step towards the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and its carving up among the Great Powers. Article 11 of the treaty extended the privilege of the Capitulations to Russia and article 3, very vague in his wording, constituted the foundation for a Russian protectorate over the Orthodox communities in the Ottoman Empire.

⁶⁹ In 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, Russia attempted to secure an *official* protectorate on all Orthodox Christians under the Sultan's rule, to no avail.

⁷⁰ "La possession des sanctuaires chrétiens est, pour la Russie, une question très importante, car, en s'en emparant, elle coupera toutes les sources de revenus du patriarcat ... après les Héliènes, elle délogera les Arméniens sans protecteurs et les Latins abandonnés par la France ... maître des deux patriarchats arabes, les Russes entameront facilement ceux d'Alexandrie et de Constantinople." Negib Azoury, *Le réveil de la nation arabe dans l'Asie turque* (Paris: Plon, 1905), 74.

General Alexis Neidhart in 1893 to Jerusalem comforted the Holy See and the Great Powers in their fear that Russia was trying “to establish complete control over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ... in order to confirm her pretensions to the protection of the Greek Orthodox Christians, and ultimately to her rule over the Holy Land.”⁷¹

Russia was responding to French Catholic progress in Greater Syria. It had noticed with worry that the Orthodox Community in Palestine was plummeting, while the Catholic population had risen from 3,000 to 13,000 between 1840 and 1880.⁷² In 1882, to counteract this dwindling of the Orthodox population, Tsar Alexander III extended his support to the foundation of the *Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society*, with the intention to reinforce the Orthodox communities under Russian protection and eventually conquer Palestine and Syria.⁷³ The *Palestine Society* came after the Russian launching in 1858 of a permanent ecclesiastic mission in Jerusalem whose goal was not only to counter Catholic and Protestant proselytizing, but also to maintain a political presence in the region. The religious and military conquest of Jerusalem would have given the Tsar much prestige. Not only it would have provided a much needed homogeneity to the Russian

⁷¹ Confidential dispatch No. 63 from Consul J. Dickson, Jerusalem, to Sir F. Clare-Ford, Constantinople, 12 October 1893, regarding the visit to Jerusalem of General Alexis Neidhart, Chief of the Chancery of the Emperor of Russia [FO195/1806], in *Minorities in the Middle East. Religious Communities in Jerusalem, 1843-1974 and Minorities in Israel, Volume 1: 1843-1918*, ed. B. Destani (Chippenham, UK: Archive Editions, 2005), 259.

⁷² According to Hopwood “the Orthodox community continued to decline. In 1840 it had formed 90% of the total Christian population of Palestine and by 1880 had decreased to 67%.” Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914. Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 99.

⁷³ “The society was accused of fraud, self-interest, cupidity and indifference to the welfare of the Church. Such acrimony in the Russian camp was seized upon by French Catholic polemicists ... the French believed the Palestine Society to have only one goal – the physical conquest of Palestine and Syria.” Hopwood, *Russian Presence*, 121.

Orthodox fabric but, most importantly, the Tsar would have acquired a moral authority equal to the Pope's, with the utmost advantage of possessing Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity, while the Roman Pontiff was a "prisoner in the Vatican."⁷⁴

The Holy See was disturbed by a movement that could eventually affect the stability of the Eastern rite Catholic communities.⁷⁵ These Catholic communities were under constant proselytizing from both their mother church and the recently established Protestant missions. Some Eastern rite Catholics were attracted by their Orthodox original church at a time when Rome had engaged in a much resented effort of latinisation of the Eastern rites, especially under Pius IX.

In this unstable context, the abolition of the Capitulations by the Ottoman government, on September 9, 1914, came as a thunderbolt to the Great Powers. The first consequence of this unilateral act was the collapse of the foundations on which the protection of Christians, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant had rested. To the Holy See, it meant a complete reappraisal of its religious policy in the Ottoman Empire and, by the same token, a questioning of the role of France as privileged protector of Latin and Eastern Catholics in the Empire.

⁷⁴ Azoury, *Réveil de la nation arabe*, 54-55.

⁷⁵ Hajjar, *Vatican, France et catholicisme*, 248.

Abolition of Capitulations and Future of French Protectorate

A View from Constantinople

After secret negotiations with Germany, which had been a very influential political, economic, and military presence in Constantinople since the beginning of the reign of Emperor Wilhelm II (1888-1918),⁷⁶ the Ottoman Government, under the ruling of the leading Young Turks, Enver Pasha, Mehmed Talat, and Djemal Pasha,⁷⁷ ranged itself with the Central Powers on August 2, 1914. It was a deep anchored fear of Russian expansionism that eventually “forc[ed] Turkey into the arms of Germany.”⁷⁸ It took another couple of months after the signing of the secret treaty for Constantinople to enter the war against the Entente.

Taking advantage of the situation created by the outbreak of the war in Europe, the Ottoman government abolished the Capitulations on September 9, 1914, taking effect on October 1, 1914. At this time, Constantinople was still following a rule of neutrality in the European conflict. The abrogation was the first tangible result of the secret alliance treaty signed between Germany and the Ottoman Empire in August 1914. It amounted to a call to further emancipation following the restoration of the Constitution in 1908 and an official denunciation of all protectorates.

⁷⁶ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 49.

⁷⁷ They were leaders of the Young Turkey Party also known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that had taken control of the Ottoman Government in 1908. Enver Pasha was pro-German, Mehmed Talat was not afraid of Russia, and Djemal Pasha was known as a Francophile.

⁷⁸ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (New York: Doubleday, 1918), 27.

Although it should not have come as a complete surprise to the Great Powers,⁷⁹ this unilateral act was received with shock and anger by all nations concerned, Germany included. In a most unusual move, countries at war “joined with their enemies ... in presenting a joint European protest to the Porte.”⁸⁰ The Capitulations were international binding treaties whose unilateral abrogation was therefore not juridically valid.⁸¹

The Ottoman decree abolishing privileges enjoyed through the Capitulations also caused grave concern at the Vatican. In an article published in the *New York Times* a few days after the promulgation of the decree, on September 14, the author synthesized with some emotional exaggeration the issues at stake.

It [The Ottoman decree] not only sweeps away the famous French protectorate over Christian affairs in the Orient, but also utterly destroys the liberty of public worship and the rights of semi-religious institutions, such as schools and hospitals, which Christianity, in virtue of a portion of the Capitulations, has enjoyed throughout the Ottoman Empire since the age of the Crusaders... The Holy See is entering a lively protest because it foresees that so revolutionary a change must deprive it of all binding force in administrative matters, while the resultant disendowment means financial ruin.⁸²

⁷⁹ In 1869, long before the Young Turks had questioned their existence, the Porte had complained about the abusive use of the Capitulations by Christian Ottomans. In a memo written by an official of the Ottoman government, the Porte expressed its frustration. For the text of the memo, see G. Pélissié du Rausas, *Le régime des capitulations dans l'empire ottoman*, 2 vols (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1902), 1: 222: “Les capitulations ayant été consacrées par les traités postérieurement conclus entre la Sublime-Porte et les puissances étrangères, doivent ... être scrupuleusement respectées au même titre que ces traités. Il est toutefois connu que, dans la pratique, on leur donne une élasticité qu’elles ne comportent pas, et qu’à côté des privilèges déjà exceptionnels accordés par ces actes, il existe des abus manifestes qui occasionnent des difficultés incessantes ... C’est pourquoi la Sublime-Porte, en ordonnant aux autorités impériales d’observer strictement et en toute loyauté les dispositions contenues dans les capitulations, ne saurait trop leur recommander en même temps de repousser toute prétention qui dépasserait les limites des privilèges consacrés par ces actes et qui porterait atteinte aux droits souverains et imprescriptibles de sa Majesté Impériale le Sultan.”

⁸⁰ Fromkin, *Peace to End All Peace*, 69.

⁸¹ The Great Powers refused to recognize the abolition of the Capitulations as a valid legal act. They remained officially in effect until the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.

In a long report sent by Msgr. Vincenzo Sardi⁸³ to Msgr. Pacelli, Secretary for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, on September 10, 1914, the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople elaborated, in a more balanced approach, on the same points of concern.⁸⁴ The question of freedom of worship was not a source of worry to him. He emphasized the financial consequences of the abrogation of the Capitulations, pondered the future independence of Catholic schools, and argued that the cessation of the French Protectorate would not be harmful to the Holy See and the Catholic communities in the Ottoman Empire.

Regarding the freedom of worship, unlike the *New York Times*' writer, Msgr. Sardi "does not think that there will be any repercussion on the free exercise of the Christian and Catholic cults in Turkey."⁸⁵ He added that the hatred demonstrated in the past by Muslims against "the Christian dogs" was quickly receding and stressed that, although the Young Turks manifested an attachment to religious indifference, the majority of the population was very religious. There was, therefore, no risk to see the Ottoman government choosing an anti-religious or areligious course.⁸⁶ To the risk of potential Christian persecutions, Msgr. Sardi opposed the good relations between the Ottoman government and the Catholic Church. The risk of a return to *dhimmitude* was almost

⁸² "Vatican Will Oppose the Ottoman Decree," *New York Times*, September 14, 1914, p 4.

⁸³ Msgr. Vincenzo Sardi was Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople from 1908 to November 1914. He was replaced by Msgr. Angelo Dolci who took office on November 13, 1914.

⁸⁴ Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

⁸⁵ "Non pens[a] che avra alcuna ripercussione nel libero esercizio della religione Cristiana e Cattolica in Turchia." (My translation). Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

⁸⁶ Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

nonexistent due to the Young Turks' last efforts to modernize the empire and modify the judicial status of foreign subjects. The abrogation of the Capitulations was more a cry for complete sovereignty than an attack against Christians.

The financial repercussions of the abolition of the Capitulations were a source of concern to Msgr. Sardi. The loss of capitulatory privileges meant the loss of tax exemption enjoyed until then by all religious establishments, seminaries, schools, and other properties that were listed by France as being under French protection,⁸⁷ decreasing the funds otherwise available to these establishments. He explained that the abrogation would subject most of the religious institutions to the common tax law, but not all establishments. Those intended for worship, like churches and chapels, would certainly benefit from the same rights that were granted to the Mosques, as required by the Qu'ran.⁸⁸

In addition to new taxes, the religious establishments would also be subjected to new customs duties. Until then, the churches were able to obtain goods from abroad necessary for the cult, exempted of custom duties. The Catholic churches benefited greatly from the tax exemption.⁸⁹ Sardi concluded that the new measure was not unjustified being, in part, a response to the abusive behavior of European residents who were taking advantage of this privilege.

⁸⁷ This list of establishments had been officially recognized by the Ottoman Government in the Treaty of Mytilene of 1901. A new agreement was signed in 1913, in which the rights and privileges of the Catholic communities in the Holy Land were established.

⁸⁸ Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

⁸⁹ Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

As regards the independence of the Catholic schools, the Apostolic Delegate noted that most of the students were “Turkish, Greek, schismatic Armenian, Jewish, all of them Ottoman subjects.”⁹⁰ Therefore, the abolition of the Capitulations would not affect them. The only change would be the right of the government to inspect the schools and to order that the Turkish language be taught.

As long as the Ottoman Empire stayed neutral in the war, the issue of the maintaining of the French Protectorate was not perceived as a major problem by the Holy See. In the same relation, Msgr. Sardi noted that the French Protectorate was the result of two kinds of agreements. One, ratified by international treaties, dealt with the privileges accorded by the Ottoman Empire to France. This agreement was questionably revoked by the unilateral abrogation of the Capitulations by Constantinople. The other one was between the Holy See and France. It was a privilege recognized by the Holy See but not a binding agreement, contrary to what a French Minister had uttered in 1905 that “this protectorate over the Orient did not stem from the pontiff’s benevolence, but from international treaties.”⁹¹

In the absence of diplomatic ties with France since 1904, and in a context of declining influence of the French Protectorate since the beginning of the century, the Holy See had the diplomatic power to ponder the future of the Protectorate and consider other alternatives, among them transferring the Protectorate to another Catholic power or entering into direct diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Government. Msgr. Sardi made no

⁹⁰ Sardi to Gasparri, September 19, 1914. (My translation)

⁹¹ Gasparri to French Ambassador, no date, ASV, Arch. Nunz. Parigi, b. 392, fasc. 304. (My translation).

mystery that France was not interested in religion *per se* but that the French government was continuing to protect Catholic schools, not because they were Catholic but rather because they were French.⁹² The French zeal to respect their commitment was, according to Msgr. Sardi, visible in only two fields: the liturgical honors and the diplomatic representation of the Holy See to the Porte. Dismissing the issue raised by the maintaining of the liturgical honors as incidental, he noted with some irritation that “the ostentatious tutelage of the Apostolic Delegate, whom, according to the [French] embassy, should not make a move without being taken by the Ambassador’s hand,”⁹³ had become even more exigent since the diplomatic break.

A few weeks later, Cardinal Gasparri echoed Msgr. Sardi’s frustration and irritation when he wrote – although the letter was never sent - to the new Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Angelo Dolci, and instructed him to

end the dependence of the Apostolic Delegation on France in matters regarding visit to the Sultan as it does not fall under the obligations of the Protectorate and is extremely unseemly for the papal representative ... If the ambassador calls upon history or tradition, [wrote Gasparri] Msgr Dolci [will] reply that the Apostolic Delegation cannot, without it being at the expense of its dignity, be subjected to the continuation of a humiliating tutelage, devoid of any legal foundation and much less understandable now that France ignores the Holy See.⁹⁴

⁹² Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

⁹³ “La tutela ostentata del Delegato Apostolico, il quale, secondo le idee dell’Ambasciata, non dovrebbe muoversi se non condotto a mano dall’Ambasciatore.” (My translation). Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

⁹⁴ “Cessare la dipendenza della Delegazione Apostolica dall’Ambasciata di Francia nelle visite al Sultano sia perche essa non rientra affatto nel Protettorato sia perche e in sommo grado indecorosa per il rappresentante Pontificio ... [S]e l’ambasciatore appellasse alla tradizione o consuetudine, Mons. Dolci risponda che la Delegazione Apostolica non puo senza scapito della sua dignita assoggettarsi alla continuazione di una cosa umiliante tutela, priva di qualsiasi fondamento giuridico e tanto meno comprensibile ora che la Francia ignora la S. Sede.” (My translation). Instructions for Msgr. Dolci, October 1, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc.1.

Msgr. Sardi concluded his relation predicting that the cessation of the French Protectorate, after the abrogation of the Capitulations, would not hurt the Holy See's interests.⁹⁵

A View from the Holy Land

From Beirut, a few hundred miles east of Constantinople, the Apostolic Delegate to Syria, Msgr. Frediano Giannini, shed a different light on the impact that the abrogation of the Capitulations would have on the Catholic presence in the Holy Land. Since 1906, when Italian missionaries were granted the Holy See's authorization to seek protection from the Italian consulates, the French Protectorate in the Holy Land had been reduced, aside from French institutions, to the Latin Patriarchate and was weakened in the Franciscan Custody, his members being Italians.⁹⁶ Unlike Msgr. Sardi who, in Constantinople, was at the center of the international diplomatic game, Msgr. Giannini had a more concrete approach, aware of the daily vicissitudes of the Custody and the Latin Patriarchate. He considered "la cosa (e) gravissima."⁹⁷

The Holy Sites of Palestine had always been at the core of the Holy See's diplomacy in the Middle East. "It is imperative that you bring to your brothers in the East the help so often promised and so urgently needed," Pope Urban II had urged in his

⁹⁵ Sardi to Pacelli, September 19, 1914.

⁹⁶ Catherine Nicault, "The End of the French Religious Protectorate in Jerusalem (1918-1924)," *Bulletin du CRFJ* 4 (Spring 1999): 80.

⁹⁷ Giannini to Gotti, October 15, 1914, ASV, Arch. Nunz. Libano. Registry Propaganda Fide, 68 (1913-1916), 162-63.

closing speech at the Council of Clermont in 1095. “They have been attacked ... by Turks and Arabs ... Churches have been destroyed and the country laid waste.”⁹⁸ To his request to wage war against Islam and deliver the Christian Holy Sites from Muslim hands, thousands of Latin Catholics had answered, launching the First Crusade. Jerusalem fell into Christian hands in July 1099. The establishment of the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem soon followed.

Latin Catholics established in Palestine and peacefully cohabitated with Eastern rites Christians already present in the Holy Land. The first Latin clergymen were Franciscan friars. They were authorized by the Sultan to take care of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1219. After the departure of the Crusaders, they became guardians of the site. In 1342, with the bull *Gratias Agimus*, Pope Clement VI officially handed over the Holy Places to the Franciscans, giving birth to the Franciscan Custody.⁹⁹ Their custody on the Holy places was not to be threatened by the military victory of the Ottoman sultan, Selim I, who led his armies into Palestine and conquered Jerusalem in December 1516.¹⁰⁰

Throughout centuries, the small Latin Catholic community, heir of the Crusaders, faced two opponents. The Ottoman Muslims, who had taken control of the Holy Land, treated the Christians with some tolerance but as *dhimmis*. They were respectful of the Franciscan Custody over the Holy Sites. The question of the Holy Places was essentially

⁹⁸ Régine Pernoud, *The Crusaders* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), 37.

⁹⁹ Joseph Hajjar, *Les chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), 273.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1923* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 59.

a problem affecting different Christian denominations and their conflicting claims of ownership of the Holy Sites. Although the Franciscans asserted their authority on the Holy Places going back to the fourteenth century, the Orthodox Churches alleged their own rights as sole owners of the same sites since the fourth century. The dispute over conflicting rights eventually became a political issue that greatly influenced the state of affairs in Europe.

Sole official owners of the Holy Sites, the Franciscans had allowed Greek Orthodox to enjoy free exercise of their devotions. Still, frictions were frequent. Over the centuries, the Greek Patriarchs of Jerusalem were able to secure firmans¹⁰¹ from the Sultan, giving them possession of different Holy Sites, signifying therefore the end of the Franciscan supremacy over the Holy Land and the beginning of open conflict between European countries interested in strengthening their presence in Palestine through the diplomatic protection of their Christian subjects. The Holy See, whose interests and rights in Palestine preceded those of European powers,¹⁰² could only rely on the goodwill of France in its enforcing the Capitulations and defending the popes' rights through the protection of the Latin rites churches and missions.

France had the opportunity to demonstrate its good intentions toward the papacy when a new firman was secured in 1676 by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, giving him sole ownership of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. After France complained, in 1690, a famous firman was eventually issued which declared the Franciscans legitimate owners

¹⁰¹ In the Ottoman Empire, the firman was a mandate decreed by the sovereign.

¹⁰² Minerbi, *Vatican and Zionism*, 8.

of the Holy Sites.¹⁰³ The situation was unstable. The Franciscans needed French help to fight the religious battle against the Greek Orthodox Church although they resented France's protection,¹⁰⁴ being more naturally inclined towards other Catholic countries, Austria under the Habsburgs especially. Most of the Franciscans involved in the custody were Italian or Spanish and were reluctant to accept French diplomatic protection, favoring the patronage of Spain, Piedmont-Sardinia, or Austria.¹⁰⁵

The atypical relations between Paris and the Holy See, a consequence of the Protectorate, had ambiguous effects on the successive popes' attempts to ensure the protection of the Holy Places. No concrete action was possible without French diplomatic intervention, which didn't swerve over the centuries. This dependency restricted the Holy See's efforts to find common grounds with the Orthodox Church, efforts that would have implied a friendly relationship between France and Russia, the Greek Orthodox Church's protector.

The question of the Holy Places eventually became a political battle between France and Russia. While the Holy See's rights to protect the sacred sites of Palestine depended on the French Catholic Protectorate, the Orthodox Church's fortune on the same sites was directly contingent upon the state of its relations with Orthodox Russia. The political friendship or animosity between the Sultan and the Tsar was consequently

¹⁰³ Joseph Hajjar, *Le Christianisme en Orient* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1971), 7.

¹⁰⁴ French kings were often in military alliance with the Muslim Ottoman Sultan against Catholic Austria.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Laurens, "Le Vatican et la question de la Palestine," in *Nations et Saint-Siège au XXe siècle*, Colloque sous la direction d'Hélène Carrère d'Encausse et de Philippe Levillain (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 305.

of crucial importance to the Holy See. Therefore, from the quality of the diplomatic relations between France and Russia, one could infer the influence exerted by Rome or the Orthodox Church on the condition of the Holy Sites of Palestine.

In the context of alliance between Paris and Constantinople through the Capitulations, the tension between Latin Catholics and Greek Orthodox put a strain on Russian-Ottoman relationship. The firman of 1690 acknowledged this state of affairs and officialized French protection. The Capitulations of 1740 solemnly confirmed the rights of France, especially on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Merely twenty years later, the Latin Catholics were expelled from Bethlehem and the Sultan placed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and several other sanctuaries under the protection of the Greek Orthodox.

Geo-strategic reasons motivated political alliances and added to the difficulties of the Holy See to ensure the protection of the Holy Sites. Starting in the nineteenth century, France, Russia, and the Holy See could not count without the British, to whom Palestine had become a strategic buffer of Egypt. London was extremely sensitive to the strategic importance of Palestine,¹⁰⁶ and the Holy Sites were part of the issue at stake.¹⁰⁷ The nineteenth century, an era of imperialistic appetites in the Ottoman Empire, was the receptacle of all rivalries and changing alliances among the Great Powers. The Eastern question, i.e., the issue of the decay of the Ottoman Empire and its consequences for

¹⁰⁶ London was extremely protective of its dominion over Egypt and later over the Suez Canal. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British route to India shifted from the Bosphorus and Middle East route to Egypt and the Suez Canal, which was opened in November 1869.

¹⁰⁷ Sachar, *Emergence of Middle East*, 188.

greedy European powers, was intricately linked to the question of the Holy Places of Palestine.

With the first half of the nineteenth century came multiple causes of concern to the papacy. Pope Pius IX expressed his apprehension to the French government on the occasion of the establishment, in Jerusalem, of an Anglo-Prussian bishopric in 1841 and the constitution of a Russian ecclesiastical mission in 1847. Facing French reticence and fear that a Latin Patriarchate could weaken the Catholic Protectorate, Pius IX nevertheless reestablished it with the Apostolic Letter *Nulla Celebrior* of July, 23 1847.¹⁰⁸ The revival of the Latin Patriarchate created new tensions between the Patriarch and the Custodian, but did not abate the wide influence kept by the Franciscan Custody, ecclesiastically under the authority and jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. The inter-religious tension reached its peak in 1851, when France intended to reassert the sole rights of the Latin rites Churches over the Holy Places. Saint Petersburg's reply was immediate and threatening. Russia impressed upon a weak Ottoman Empire its claim as protector of the 15 million Ottoman subjects of Orthodox obedience.

The Crimean War ensued, leading to Russia's defeat. The treaty of peace, signed in Paris in 1856, designed a specific law regarding the Holy Places of Palestine. The treaty of Berlin of 1878, in its famous article 62, reaffirmed "the right of official protection by the Diplomatic and Consular Agents of the Powers in Turkey (is recognized) both as regards the above-mentioned persons [ecclesiastics, pilgrims, and monks of all

¹⁰⁸ There was no Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem since 1291, after the last crusading stronghold had fallen.

nationalities] and their religious, charitable, and other establishments in the Holy Places and elsewhere. The rights possessed by France are expressly reserved, and it is well understood that no alterations can be made in the *status quo* in the Holy Places,” *status quo* in favor of France and the papacy. This notion of *status quo* that referred to the long-established agreements drafted by the Ottoman Government, regulating issues of ownership and usage of the Holy Places, was based on a short Ottoman royal decree (firman) of 1852.

Under Leo XIII’s papacy, the situation became more complex. In Pope Leo’s “Great Design” to rechristianize the world, Russia was a key piece. Thus, he favored the Franco-Russian alliance of the late nineteenth century, which had implications for the Holy Places. The French and Russian governments were eager to transpose their good relationship on the continent to the Holy Land, which had a positive impact on the cohabitation between Latin Catholics and Greek Orthodox in the region. But it also had the unwelcome consequence of giving Russia and France legitimate reasons to gain control over Palestine under the pretext of protecting the Holy Places.

In this unstable context, the abrogation of the Capitulations came as a shock to both the European Powers and the Holy See. On October 14, 1914, the general governor of Beirut issued instructions stipulating that

[T]he religious and personal protectorate resulting from ancient treaties that the French government and other foreign powers enjoyed over foreign Catholics was abolished. The right to a protectorate that ... France had over religious of French nationality and foreign establishments of Latin rite was also abrogated. Consequently, the intervention of consuls will be forbidden in the Ottoman Empire

and especially in the Holy Places ... The Statu quo in the Holy Sites remains as it was before.¹⁰⁹

On the same day, Auguste Boppe, adviser to the French embassy at Constantinople, echoed the concern expressed by Msgr. Giannini regarding the future of the Holy Sites. In a note addressed to René Viviani, President of the Council, the diplomat questioned the validity of the decree of abrogation of the Capitulations as regards their impact on the status of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites. He stressed the international dimension of the issue and its earlier resolution by article 62 of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. In a detailed report, he explained that, according to the Ottoman Government, the suppression of the religious Protectorate over the Holy Sites was a direct consequence of the abrogation of the Capitulations, concluding that

It [the Protectorate] has been ... sanctionned ... by the Treaty of Berlin that bears the signature of Turkey along with that of the six European Great Powers... It is a serious question that is raised with incredible thoughtlessness by the Ottoman Government, that the conflagration of Europe has rendered foolish.¹¹⁰

France and the Holy See were aware that since the Congress of Paris in 1856 that admitted the Ottoman Empire into the family of nations, the Ottoman government was eager to abolish the Capitulations, which they saw as a serious infringement of their

¹⁰⁹ “A été aboli le protectorat religieux et personnel résultant des traités anciens qu’avaient le gouvernement français et les autres puissances étrangères sur les catholiques étrangers. A été aboli aussi le droit de protectorat ... que la France avait sur les religieux de nationalité française et sur les établissements étrangers du rite latin. En consequence on n’acceptera plus l’intervention des consuls en pays ottoman et spécialement dans les Lieux Saints ... Le status quo dans les Lieux Saints demeure comme auparavant.” (My translation). Gotti to Gasparri, October 29, 1914 (Inserto : Comunicato del Governatorato Generale di Beirut, 15 Octobre 1914,) ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1913-1915, pos. 1047, fasc. 445.

¹¹⁰ “Il a ... été consacré ... par le traité de Berlin qui porte la signature de la Turquie à côté de celle des six autres grandes Puissances de l’Europe ... C’est une bien grave question qui se trouve ainsi posée avec une incroyable légèreté par le gouvernement ottoman, que la conflagration de l’Europe a littéralement frappé de vertige.” (My translation), in Joseph Hajjar, *L’Europe et les destinées du Proche-Orient*, Vol. 5 (Damas: Dar Tlass, 1998), 43.

sovereignty and rights. The Young Turks were in the process of reforming their whole judicial system when the war broke out.¹¹¹ Therefore, the apparent surprise of the French government, as well as the reaction of the Holy See and other powers, were disingenuous and an indicator of the little political credibility the Ottoman Government had been left with. This fact will have a noticeable impact on the Holy See's choice of diplomatic course during the war, in its interaction with the Porte.

The entry of the Ottoman Empire in the war as an ally of the Central Powers on November 5, 1914, caused another Copernican revolution on the Ottoman diplomatic scene. The recriminations of the Entente Powers that the abrogation of the Capitulations and the ending of the protectorates were unlawful were lost in the tumult that ensued once the Ottoman Empire became engulfed in the conflict. The protectorates effectively ceased to exist for the next three years, until Jerusalem returned to Christian hands for the first time since the Crusades, with the liberation of the Holy City by British General Allenby in December 1917.

¹¹¹ Norman Bentwich, "The Abrogation of the Turkish Capitulations," *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 5 (1923): 183.

CHAPTER 3

VATICAN WAR-TIME FOREIGN POLICY: INTEGRATING DIPLOMACY AND ECCLESIASTICAL POLICY

In war-time, diplomatic relations between governments are experienced at two levels: a level of immediacy where rapidly evolving political and military developments request constant diplomatic adjustments to strategic objectives, and a level of anticipation of long term geo-political and geo-strategic changes, as the consequence of the war experience. Although not a belligerent in the war, the Holy See was not exempt from this dual level of interaction with both the Ottoman government and the Great Powers involved in the conflict.

From the onset of the First World War in Arab Ottoman lands on November 5, 1914 to the liberation of Jerusalem by British General Allenby on December 9, 1917, Pope Benedict crafted and kept adjusting an Eastern policy that aimed to create an immediate and long-term diplomatic environment that ensured the war-time protection of Eastern and Latin Catholic communities in the Empire, as well as a conducive environment for a future *rapprochement* with the separated brethren. The Holy See strove to distinguish in this diplomatic process, the essential from the ephemeral.¹

The originality of Pope Benedict's Eastern foreign policy was manifest in his effort to integrate classic diplomatic functions of negotiation with an ecclesiastical policy that

¹ G. R. Berridge, Maurice Keens-Soper, and Thomas G. Otte, *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 133.

reflected his Eastern ecclesiology. The pontiff engaged in a dynamic diplomacy, assessing the suitability of new paradigms to guide its war-time foreign policy in the Ottoman Empire. This strategy at the geo-political level was articulated in a comprehensive and cohesive ecclesiological frame. Benedict XV completed and institutionalized the traditional ecclesiological approach in favor of unionism and *rapprochement* with the separated brethren, previously implemented by Leo XIII, providing a solid theoretical and practical underpinning to his Eastern foreign policy.

With the entrance of the Porte into the war against the Entente, a new diplomatic situation arose, leading to the expulsion of the French ambassador from Constantinople, thus rendering ineffectual the French Protectorate. As a result, the prospect of direct diplomatic ties between Rome and Constantinople became an open question on the diplomatic agenda of the Holy See. The eventual decision to maintain a prudent wait-and-see attitude was motivated by the complexity and uncertainty of the military situation and the determination to avoid any kind of confrontation with France.

The Russian parameter complicated the already intricate diplomatic equation. The Holy See launched a diplomatic offensive to prevent the catastrophic event that Russian ownership of Constantinople, as agreed on in secret treaties, would represent for Eastern Catholicity. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and its denunciation of all war treaties came as a blessing to the Holy See.

At the same time, Pope Benedict was actively and personally involved in the institutional support of Eastern Catholics, with the creation of an ecclesiological frame that ensured a stronger cohesion among them. The newly acquired independence of the

renamed *Congregation for the Oriental Church*, announced in May 1917 by Pope Benedict, was hailed as a major break-through. It was supported in its mission by a *Pontifical Oriental Institute*, founded in October 1917.

Rome and Constantinople in Diplomatic Negotiations:

The Future of the French Protectorate

On November 2, 1914, the Tsar opened the hostilities against Constantinople. A few days later, on November 5, France and Britain amended their proclamations of war against the Central Powers to include the Ottoman Empire.² “In a speech delivered in London on 9 November 1914, the [British] Prime Minister [Herbert Asquith] predicted that”, now that the hostilities had been opened with the Ottoman Empire, “the war had ‘rung the death-knell of Ottoman dominion, not only in Europe, but in Asia.’”³ The road to a new emerging Middle East was being paved.

With the abrogation of the Capitulations on September 9, 1914, followed by the entry of Constantinople into the war on the side of the Central Powers, the French Protectorate became *de facto* ineffectual. The French ambassador to the Porte, Maurice Bompard, informed Msgr. Pompilj, Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, that “before his departure ... he had entrusted the protection of French interests to the American embassy, and of Catholic interests in the Holy Sites to Spain,” adding that he could not

² David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 72-73.

³ Fromkin, *Peace to End All Peace*, 75 citing Asquith, *Letters*, 402. Herbert Henry Asquith was Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916. He was succeeded by David Lloyd George who was British Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922.

leave Catholic interests in the hands of a Protestant country but also knew that the Spanish minister “(is) [was] not powerful enough”⁴ to take care of all Catholic interests in the Empire.⁵

Msgr. Pompilj relayed the information to Cardinal Gasparri and addressed in the same breath the topical issue of the representation of the Holy See at Constantinople. He acknowledged that it was a delicate subject, sensitive to the reputation of France among the Catholics residing in the Empire.⁶

Pope Benedict was facing a difficult situation. The war, which was not expected to last long, had just started. It was too early to predict accurately the final results of the conflict in which two major Catholic countries, France and Austria, were fighting in opposite camps. Meanwhile, the Holy See was weakened on the diplomatic scene because of Benedict’s impartial stand in the war and had therefore little political leverage.

Was it therefore reasonable for the Holy See to break abruptly with four centuries of tradition and definitely abandon the already weakened French Catholic Protectorate?

The question of the substitution of the French Protectorate was complicated by the difficulties presented by each alternative option. The pope and his Secretary of State pondered three different diplomatic moves: the transfer of the French Protectorate to

⁴ Pompilj to Gasparri, November 3, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁵ Relazione intorno all’espulsione dei Religiosi dalla Palestina e sullo stato del Patriarcato di Gerusalemme e delle sue missioni, February 22, 1915, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126. Sr. Antonio de la Cervia, Count of Ballobar, Royal Consul of Spain to Jerusalem, was directly in charge of French interests in the Holy Land.

⁶ Pompilj to Gasparri, November 3, 1914.

Austria-Hungary, the only Catholic country allied to the Ottoman Empire; the opening of a nunciature in Constantinople, an option strongly supported by the Ottoman government; and finally, the maintaining of the *status quo* in the hope of an Entente victory, restoring thereafter the French Protectorate. The debate regarding the feasibility of opening a nunciature was the guiding thread in diplomatic discussions between the Holy See, the Porte, and the Great Powers.

The Transfer of the French Protectorate

From the onset of the war until the year 1917, the Western Front was the scene of a war of attrition, a devastating trench war during which neither side was able to deliver the final blow. As Pope Benedict originally believed in a final victory of the Central Powers,⁷ the transfer of the French Protectorate to Catholic Austria-Hungary was therefore an option worthy of consideration in the early months of the conflict.

In a letter dated December 18, 1914, the nuncio to Austria-Hungary, Msgr. Raffaele Scapinelli, communicated to Cardinal Gasparri the content of an interview he had with Count Berchtold, during which the Imperial Foreign Minister asked if the Holy See was planning to transfer the French Protectorate to Austria.⁸ The nuncio replied that “the Holy See was not intending to innovate in this matter: but ... without changing anything in the current state of law with respect to the Protectorate, Austria, according to the treaties, was

⁷ “Le pape n’est pas un *Boche déguisé*; il croit à la victoire finale de l’Allemagne.” Alfred Baudrillart, *Les carnets du Cardinal Baudrillart, 1er août 1914-31 décembre 1918* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 258.

⁸ Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 18, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

also enjoying this prerogative.”⁹ He further explained that, although the political benefit of becoming responsible of the Catholic Protectorate was not to be dismissed, the Austrian Empire was limited in its diplomatic action by its friendly relationship with Constantinople, its ally in the war. The Austrian government was prudent and did not want to exercise a right that the Ottoman Government was not recognizing anymore.¹⁰ Furthermore, noted the nuncio, the Austrian Government was committed to Turkey since the time of the annexation of Serbia, as it had promised to support the abolition of Capitulations when the time comes.¹¹ The abolition of the Capitulations meant the end of all protectorates and the beginning of full independence. Consequently, the Austro-Hungarian government and the Holy See never entered into serious negotiations regarding the possibility of transferring the Catholic Protectorate from France to Austria.¹² A dangerous diplomatic vacuum was therefore evident in Constantinople.

⁹ “La S. Sede nulla intendeva innovare per ora in questa materia: ma ... senza nulla mutare dello stato attuale di diritto riguardo al Protettorato, anche l’Austria, secondo il trattato, gode di questa prerogative.” (My translation). Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 18, 1914.

¹⁰ Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 18, 1914.

¹¹ Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 18, 1914.

¹² In addition, Count de Salis noted that “the increasing encroachments of officialism, the tendency to treat the Church as a mere department of State, a spirit of ‘Josephismus,’ of which the Cardinal [Gasparri] complained more than once, were creating friction. The predominance of Hungary, with its chauvinism and strong Calvinist element, was not too favourable to the Church ...” in Thomas E. Hachey, ed., *Great-Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations, 1914-1939, Confidential Annual Reports of the British Ministers to the Holy See* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1972), 3.

The Opening of a Nunciature in Constantinople

The political weakness of the Spanish ambassador, officially in charge of Catholic interests in the Holy Land, was a hindrance to the diplomatic pressure he could have exercised at the Porte on behalf of the Holy See, regarding Catholic interests in the Empire. The new Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Angelo Dolci,¹³ a smart and astute diplomat, took advantage of the unstable situation and undertook to demonstrate to Pope Benedict the advisability of entering into official diplomatic relationship with the Ottomans. His insight on the political situation in Constantinople diverged from the view held by the pontiff and his Secretary of State. With a broader perspective, the pontiff advocated more prudence and a wait-and-see attitude.

The plan to establish direct diplomatic ties with the Porte went back to 1896, during Leo XIII's pontificate.¹⁴ It was met with French opposition and was abandoned after Pope Leo reaffirmed the authority of the French Protectorate in his Apostolic Letter *Maximo cum animi* of July 20, 1898.¹⁵ Although the diplomatic situation was different under Benedict's pontificate, the Holy See followed in Leo's steps and regarded the

¹³ Angelo Dolci (1867-1939) was appointed Apostolic Delegate in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru in 1906 before being transferred to Constantinople. He officially became the Apostolic Delegate of Constantinople on November 13, 1914. In 1922, he was appointed nuncio to Belgium before being sent to Romania.

¹⁴ "Dès 1896, la question est de nouveau à l'ordre du jour. C'est la diplomatie allemande qui prend à charge de persuader le pape ... Il s'agissait cette fois d'attaquer l'alliance franco-russe face à la faiblesse du gouvernement français à l'égard de l'expansion de l'orthodoxie russe au Proche Orient ... Il s'agissait de renforcer l'Eglise latine, en lui assurant un statut officiel dans l'empire ottoman, ... et d'aider en conséquence le patriarcat latin de Jérusalem et son titulaire, le Franciscain italien, Mgr. Piavi, à se maintenir à son siège et lutter plus efficacement que les Français contre les provocations orthodoxes." Joseph Hajjar, *Le Vatican, la France et le catholicisme oriental (1878-1914)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 129.

¹⁵ Leo XIII, "Apostolic Letter *Maximo cum Animi* [August 20, 1898]," ASS 31 (1898-1899): 193-95.

eventuality of entering in direct diplomatic relations with Constantinople with hesitation and prudence.

The pressure to consider direct ties came from the Ottoman Government. The Porte entered the negotiation arena using the fear factor. With the abolition of the Capitulations and Constantinople in the war against France, the Holy See was facing a perilous situation. In a dispatch of November 20, 1914 to Gasparri, Dolci informed the Holy See that all Catholic institutions (schools, orphanages, and religious houses) in the Holy Land had been confiscated on the ground that they were French property.¹⁶ With the French expelled from the Empire and in the absence of official representation, Catholic interests were at the mercy of Constantinople's good or bad will. Confirming the dire situation in which Catholic interests stood, Msgr. Giannini, the Apostolic Delegate to Syria, wrote that he had heard from the German consul in Damascus that

Most of the hardships facing religious establishments ... was an attempt to urge the Holy See to consider direct and official relations with the Sublime Porte, in order to bring the era of the religious protectorates in the Ottoman Empire to a close.¹⁷

The Porte used various diplomatic weapons to influence the Holy See. When, in early December 1914, Msgr. Dolci solemnly introduced himself to the Sultan as the new Apostolic Delegate,¹⁸ he delivered a handwritten letter by Pope Benedict. The

¹⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

¹⁷ "Gran parte dei malanni fatti subire adesso agli stabilimenti religiosi ... provrebbe dal proposito fermo di volere incurire la Santa Sede a mettersi in directa ed ufficiale relazione con la Sublime Porta, per chiudere in tal guise l'era dei protettorati religiosi nell'Impero ottoman." (My translation). Giannini to Gotti, January 16, 1915, A.P. N.S., Volume 592 (1917), Rub. 126, fol. 44rv.

Porte immediately raised the question of the diplomatic value of the missive, arguing that it was an official letter of credence, while the Holy See interpreted it as a simple letter of recommendation.¹⁹ Msgr. Dolci explained to Cardinal Gasparri that

Had the Holy Father's autograph been acknowledged by the Sultan, it would have conferred [him] the official title of Representative of the Holy See to the Sublime Porte, as for its form and content ... the autograph of His Holiness could be considered a letter of credence.²⁰

Msgr. Dolci's visit to the Sultan did not go unnoticed. The European press commented on the meeting, pointing out that it was

the first time that the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople ... was received by the Sultan without the presence of the Ambassador of France, through whom only the papal envoy was able to communicate with Turkish authorities according to the protectorate over Catholic missions in the Orient that France exercised ... in the Ottoman Empire through an old right the Porte considered void since the suppression of the Capitulations. This development is therefore very important.²¹

A few months later, in September 1915, the Porte used another diplomatic ruse to keep pressure on the Holy See. For a few days (September 15-23, 1915), the Ottoman

¹⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, December 12, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1914, rubr. 257, fasc. 1, ff 19-22.

¹⁹ "Sa mission dont le susdit prélat est appelé à s'acquitter dans votre empire n'a pas seulement pour objet les intérêts de la religion mais aussi ceux de la paix et de la concorde civile, car il ne manquera pas de faire en sorte que les sujets catholiques de Votre Majesté s'affermiront toujours davantage dans les dispositions de soumission respectueuse et de fidélité sincère qui doivent les animer à l'égard de leur sérénissime souverain." Copy of Benedict XV's letter to the Sultan, filed with letter of December 23, 1914 from Dolci to the Sultan, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, DOLCI, I.

²⁰ "l'autografo del S. Padre, se fosse stato accettato dal Sultano, mi avrebbe conferito il carattere ufficiale di Rappresentante della S. Sede presso la Sublima Porta, giacche per la forma ed il contenuto ... l'autografo di S. Santità poteva considerarsi come lettere credenziali." (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, December 28, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

²¹ "la primera volta che il delegato apostolico a Costantinopoli ... e ricevuto dal Sultano senza la presenza dell'ambasciatore di Francia, attraverso il quale solamente l'inviato del papa poteva corrispondere con le autorità turche in virtù del protettorato sulle Missioni cattoliche in Oriente che la Francia esercitava ... nell'impero ottomano per un antico diritto che ora la Porta ritiene decaduto dopo la soppressione delle Capitolazioni. Il fatto è quindi veramente importante." (My translation). Press article filed with letter of December 23, 1914, from Dolci to the Ottoman Sultan, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci, I.

office of military censorship blocked the flow of ciphered communications between the Apostolic Delegate and the Vatican, on the ground that Italy was now a belligerent.²² Msgr. Dolci interpreted this move as another measure to compel the Holy See to enter in formal diplomatic relations with the Porte. The censorship lasted only a few days after Dolci stressed that the pontiff was interpreting the measure as a grave offense and a lack of confidence.²³ He was then able to convince the Ottoman Government to keep corresponding with the Holy See “in view of the great initiative of the Holy Father in favor of universal peace.”²⁴

While Constantinople was resolute to enter into official diplomatic relations with the Holy See, the pontiff and his Secretary of State resisted the offer, acting against the advice of their Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Beirut. Rome made a global geo-political assessment of the diplomatic scene that conflicted with Msgrs. Dolci and Giannini’s regional analysis. Rome was pondering the appropriateness of entering in diplomatic relations with the government of a Muslim empire, empire whose collapse was anticipated. But even more critical was the risk to anger France with which the Holy See was hoping to eventually resume diplomatic relations.²⁵ Meanwhile, Msgr. Dolci

²² Because the Vatican was an enclave in Italian territory, the Italian government was monitoring the communications between the Apostolic Delegation and the Vatican.

²³ Dolci to Gasparri, October 8, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915, pos. 1061.

²⁴ Dolci to Gasparri, October 8, 1915. (My translation).

²⁵ “La question de la représentation de la République française auprès du Vatican est loin d’être abandonnée. Des difficultés qui tiennent à un formalisme, antérieur aux événements actuels, retardent seules une évolution à laquelle d’ores et déjà tout le monde est préparé – et même consentant.” Confidential Note about the Religious and Political Situation of France by Mr. Hanoteaux, January 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1918, rubr. 244, fasc. 93.

preferred to emphasize the good relations existing between the Eastern Catholics and the Muslim population, and the urgency to ensure the immediate protection of Catholic interests in the Empire. Like his predecessor Msgr. Sardi, he questioned the maintaining of a French religious Protectorate that was abused by France to promote its politico-economic interests.

Following closely the evolution on the military front, Pope Benedict was trying to buy time. Msgr. Dolci, aware of Rome's resistance, was looking for a diplomatic solution that would satisfy Rome, Paris, and Constantinople. The Apostolic Delegate tried to convince the Holy See to enter into a lesser form of diplomatic relations arguing that "a refusal from the Holy See would create a very serious incident and he could not predict the very damaging consequences, as it would be considered an offense to the Sultan," but even more dangerously, it would anger Djemal Pasha, Head of the Fourth Army in Syria, against the significant Catholic population of the region.²⁶ He offered to establish immediate direct ties with the Ottoman Empire, based on a mini-concordat that would address only a few general points (official recognition of the Catholic Church, election of bishops, matrimonies ...) in lieu of a full-fledge relationship.²⁷

Cardinal Gasparri's response to Dolci came plain and without room for negotiation, stating that "diplomatic relations or negotiation about a concordat with the Ottoman

²⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, January 17, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

²⁷ Telegram from Dolci to Gasparri, January 15, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1. See also Dolci to Gasparri, January 31, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915, pos. 1055, fasc. 448: "Mi gioverebbe conoscere la finalita della mente dalla S. Sede se veramente vuole entrare in rapporti diplomatici con questo Governo e specialmente quando se prima; dopo la guerra, o sul tramonto di essa."

Empire was not agreeable to the Holy See.”²⁸ The Secretary of State justified the position of the Holy See in a few points that Dolci had already listed in a note of January 17, 1915, following Gasparri’s dispatch of December 25, 1914. First and foremost, Pope Benedict wanted to avoid offending France. He considered a simple diplomatic relation (without any form of concordat or convention) sufficient because “it would give an immense prestige to this Delegation in its relation with the hierarchy of all the schismatic churches.”²⁹ Dolci had already pondered the feasibility of a concordat noting that

A concordat would give us more power to enforce and vindicate the rights of the Church, but as of today it is almost unfeasable, as once the war ceases, the provisions of this government may be discontinued, and the Holy See may encounter great difficulties. Furthering the concordat with the Ottoman Empire would require a very long time to write and ratify it.”³⁰

No matter the level of relationship the Holy See would have been willing to consider, the Apostolic Delegate insisted on the prestige that the Apostolic Delegation and the Catholic Church would gain in the eyes of the Orthodox Churches. In a long letter of February 7, 1915 to Gasparri, an enthusiastic Dolci wrote:

There is no doubt that the strengthening of [diplomatic] relations with the Empire is of the greatest importance ... I would call it one of the most remarkable event of the century... How many important religious interests and variety of cults do we have in this empire ... The idea that the unity of rites would cement under the prestige of the Roman pontificate will encourage Catholics, who will feel proud to see their religion appreciated... a strong stimulus in favor of the union of the

²⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, January 31, 1915, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci 90, II. (My translation).

²⁹ Dolci to Gasparri, January 17, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

³⁰ “Un concordato ci darebbe molto piu forza per fare osservare e rivendicare i diritti della chiesa, pero in questi momenti si presenta quasi inattuabile, poiche, cessata la guerra, cesseranno forse le disposizioni di questo governo, ed anche la S. Sede potra incontrare delle grandi difficolta. Inoltre il concordato con l’Impero Ottomano, esigerebbe un lunghissimo tempo per redigerlo e ratificarlo.” (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, January 17, 1915.

schismatic churches with Rome ... and a similar occasion, at least during our lifetime, will not present again.³¹

By the beginning of February 1915, Dolci had succeeded in convincing the Ottoman Government to settle for a simple diplomatic relation without any concordat. The Porte had expressed its frustration and Dolci had to explain that many nations (Brazil, Belgium ...) that entertained diplomatic relations with the Holy See were doing so without a concordat.³² In his dispatch of February 7, 1915, Msgr. Dolci presented the Ottoman Empire's official request to engage immediately in the transformation of the Apostolic Delegation in a nunciature, without the negotiation of a concordat.³³ The Holy See was not interested and asked Msgr. Dolci to buy time until further notice. A few days later, on February 16, Gasparri reiterated his opposition to the establishment of diplomatic ties with or without convention, before the end of the hostilities.³⁴

³¹ "Non vi ha dubbio che lo stringere le relazioni con questo Impero e un fatto di grandissima importanza. ... Io lo chiamerei uno dei piu salienti eventi del nostro secolo... Quanti immensi importantissimi interessi d'indole religiosa non abbiamo in quest'impero e per la variet  dei culti ... Lo giudico che col prestigio del pontificato romano si cementerebbe l'unit  dei riti, s'incoraggierebbero i cattolici che si sentirebbero orgogliosi di vedere cos  altamente apprezzata la loro religione, si fidecherebbe l'orgoglio di questo decrepito patriarcato scismatico, e ... il sulero che risalterebbe in questi luoghi al pontificato romano sarebbe unanamente parlando un forte sprone all'unione con Roma di queste chiese scismatiche, tanto da parte del clero, quanto da parte dei loro proseliti. Ed una simile occasione, almeno lungo il corso della nostra vita, non si presentera piu mai." (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, February 7, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

In another letter, Dolci to Gasparri: "Certo che un occasione piu propizia da questa per dare una personalita legale al Delegato Apostolico riteneto sempre un Cappellano dell'Ambasciata di Francia, e sabone intatto il protettorato francese coll'entrare in relazioni senza concordato ed anche senza previa convenzione non si presentera piu mai. Oggi poi che si puo aspettare di bene da un governo massonico?" Dolci to Gasparri, January 31, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915, pos. 1055, fasc. 448.

³² Dolci to Gasparri, January 17, 1915.

³³ "Il Governo di S.M. il Sultano nell'ultimo consiglio tenuto ha deliberato di entrare subito in semplici rapporti diplomatici nella S. Sede, cioe, senza concordato e senza alcuna convenzione, colla nomina dei rispettivi Rappresentanti: Il Governo vi prega di trasmettere telegraficamente questa proposta alla S.Sede ed attende risposta." Dolci to Gasparri, February 7, 1915

The Holy See knew that its equivocations were misunderstood by Constantinople and raised concern in Paris. A clear and cut decision had to be made. On March 12, 1915, Cardinals Gasparri, Vannutelli, Gotti, Merry del Val, Lorenzelli, and Vico met to discuss the issue.³⁵ Vico put some order in the different positions taken by the Holy See since the end of 1914, admitting that the pontiff was in a quandary and that a compromise, like the mini-concordat suggested by Dolci, was not workable.

On one hand, the Holy See was eager to prepare a conducive environment for the eventual resuming of diplomatic relations with France. Any infringement on France's centuries-old religious prerogatives was received with resentment by Paris. On the other hand, as Msgr. Dolci had repeatedly stressed, the responsibility of the Holy See was to ensure the best protection possible of Catholic interests and populations in Greater Syria, especially against the risk of Muslim persecution. Therefore, the idea of establishing direct ties with Constantinople, with or without concordat, should have theoretically been considered with interest. To end the deadlock, Vico suggested to satisfy the Porte and enter in simple diplomatic relations with Constantinople in order to safeguard Catholic interests in the Empire. He indirectly dismissed the ability of all countries, Catholic or not, to efficiently protect Catholic interests and, in effect, proposed that the Holy See

³⁴ Gasparri to Dolci, February 16, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

³⁵ Daniela Fabrizio, "Il protettorato religioso sui Cattolici in Oriente: La questione delle relazioni diplomatiche dirette tra Santa Sede e Impero ottomano, 1901-1918," *Nuovo Rivista Storica* III (1998): 602. See AES, Austria, pos. 1055, fasc. 448, Rapporti sessioni 1915, Sacre Congregazioni Marzo 1915, "Turchia: sulla proposta di stabilire relazioni diplomatiche con la S. Sede," in Daniela Fabrizio.

become responsible for the political and religious national interests of all Catholic countries involved in the war.³⁶

A letter was therefore drafted that explained to the French Cardinals that “the Holy See, in the midst of all the rivalries that had put in danger the safety of the religious interests in the Empire, had to intervene quite suddenly and take into its own hands the protection of those interests.”³⁷ Gasparri stressed that this move was not an attempt to get rid of the French Protectorate but an act of necessity and duty towards the Catholic populations of the Empire. He added that

At the end of the war, or the capitulations will be definitely abolished, which will also mean the end of the French protectorate, removing any difficulty against the continuation of direct diplomatic relations, or instead, France will manage, thanks to appropriate agreements with Turkey, to reinstate the capitulations and in this case it will not be the Holy See that will cause harm to the protectorate.³⁸

The letter was never sent. Pope Benedict had another change of heart and finally decided to reject the Porte’s offer to enter in any kind of official diplomatic relations.³⁹

The reaction of the Ottoman Government was immediate. In a dispatch of March 13, 1915,⁴⁰ Msgr. Dolci informed Gasparri that the Porte had decided to officially abolish

³⁶ Fabrizio, “Protettorato religioso,” 603.

³⁷ Fabrizio, “Protettorato religioso,” 603. (My translation).

³⁸ “Al termine della guerra o le capitolazioni resteranno definitivamente abolite, e cio importerà altresì la fine del protettorato francese, rimuovendo ... qualsiasi difficoltà contro la continuazione delle relazioni diplomatiche dirette, o invece la Francia riuscirà, grazie ad opportuni accordi colla Turchia, a far ritornare in vigore le ora sopprese capitolazioni ed in tal caso non sarà certo la S. Sede quella che recherà pregiudizio al protettorato.” (My translation). Fabrizio, “Protettorato religioso,” 603.

³⁹ Fabrizio, “Protettorato religioso,” 605: “Il timore di incrinare ulteriormente i rapporti con il governo francese, l’incertezza del momento storico, la non chiara prevedibilità degli sviluppi post-bellici ed il dubbio di non essere in grado di proteggere da sola le comunità cattoliche e gli interessi religiosi in Oriente prevalsero sul dar compimento alla decisione di accettare la proposta turca di relazioni diplomatiche dirette.”

all protectorates and transform the current Latin Chancellery into an autonomous entity.⁴¹

An imperial edict ordered ten Catholic Ottoman subjects to assemble a new Latin Catholic Community that the Porte would officially recognize as representing the Latin Catholic Church in the Empire. This new community would have to elect its own Patriarch and bishops, who had to be Ottoman subjects. The Patriarch would have jurisdiction over all the Latin Churches, religious houses, and schools.

In a private note, Dolci explained why a Latin Community could not be accepted by the Holy See. In a few points, he listed the main obstacles. Among them, he mentioned that the principle of a national church was in contradiction with the catholic, universal principle of the Church, one and united with the Roman Pontiff.⁴²

Dolci further clarified his thought.

This imperial edict sets off an open struggle with the Vatican because the Holy See will never be able to recognize to the community the power to elect the Patriarch and bishops ... As for me, as soon as the government will release the edict, I will fill my duty by excommunicating the community organized by the government ... by denouncing in all the churches of Constantinople and the Empire that the community, as it is constituted, is not a catholic community but rather a schismatic community.⁴³

⁴⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, March 13, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915, pos. 1057, fasc. 458.

⁴¹ Dolci to Gasparri, March 13, 1915.

⁴² Appunti di risposta al Governo Imp. Sul progetto della erigenda Comunità latina. Saggio, Brutta copia, studio (non presentato), ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, April 1915.

⁴³ “Ce tradé impérial engage une lutte ouverte avec le Vatican parce que le Saint Siègne ne pourra jamais reconnaître dans la communauté le pouvoir d’élire le Patriarche et les évêques... Quant à moi, aussitôt que le gouvernement publiera ce Tradé, je dois remplir mon devoir en frappant d’excommunication la communauté organisée par le gouvernement ... en dénonçant dans toutes les Eglises de Constantinople et de l’Empire que la communauté constituée de telle façon n’est pas une communauté catholique mais une communauté schismatique.” (My translation). Progetto Patriarcato Latino, April 1915, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci 90, II.

On April 5, 1915, barely a month after the plan was launched, Dolci announced to Gasparri that it was to the credit of the German and Austrian embassies that the project had failed and the ten members had resigned.⁴⁴

Msgr. Dolci never abandoned the idea of convincing the Holy See to enter into direct diplomatic relations with Constantinople, even if, with the end of the hostilities, the Porte became the government of a truncated empire, amputated of Syria-Lebanon and Palestine. In August 1918, three years after the question had been put to rest, the Apostolic Delegate wrote to Cardinal Gasparri that

the entrance of China, a non Christian power, in diplomatic relations [with the Holy See], the likely one of the United States... the resumption [of relations] with Portugal, could not produce a grateful impression on the Imperial Government, which from the beginning of [his] mission had asked with insistence to tighten up its relations with the Holy See.⁴⁵

However, he recognized the very delicate situation the Holy See was facing and the impossibility of making any decision at this point in the peace process.⁴⁶

A couple of years later, in April 1920, the Turkish Government, under the new leadership of Mustafa Kemal, rejected any diplomatic attempt to establish diplomatic relationships. The political situation had gone through a Copernican change. France had lost its protectorate in the Holy Land but was still adamant to maintain it in the rest of the

⁴⁴ Dolci to Gasparri, April 5, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915, pos. 1057, fasc. 458.

⁴⁵ “L’entrata in relazioni diplomatiche della Cina, potenza non cristiana, quella probabile degli Stati Uniti ... la ripresa col Portogallo, non possono produrre una grata impressione a questo Governo Imperiale, il quale fin dal principio della mia missione aveva dimandato di stringerle insistentemente colla Santa Sede.” (My translation). Rapporti del Delegato Apostolico in Costantinopoli circa l’attivamento di relazioni diplomatiche tra il Governo ottomano e la S. Sede, August 1, 1918, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1918, pos. 1337, fasc. 529. Cardinal Gasparri vehemently denied the rumors of diplomatic relations with the United States and China.

⁴⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, August 1, 1918.

crumbling Empire and would not tolerate any damaging move coming from the Holy See. The Porte could not, as a defeated country in the war, resist France's wishes. Dolci resumed the situation in a letter of April 17, 1920, informing Gasparri that the minister had abandoned any hope to enter into official diplomatic relations with the Holy See as it was responding positively to French energetic demands to reinstate the protectorate over Christians.⁴⁷

The minister justified his decision arguing that with the Ottomans' loss of the Holy Sites, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Lebanon, the remaining Eastern Catholic population was too small to bear heavily on the diplomacy of the Holy See, active in its resuming relationships with the Eldest Daughter of the Church.⁴⁸

Conclusion: The Maintaining of the Status Quo

In a confidential report of January 1915 to the Holy See, Gabriel Hanoteaux, a French official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed the pontiff over the maintaining of the French Protectorate and "asked the Holy See to abstain from any innovation: quieta non movere."⁴⁹ Hanoteaux complained to the pontiff about rumors circulating about the Holy See's endorsing the end of the French Protectorate and indirectly expressed his refusal of direct diplomatic ties between Rome and

⁴⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, April 17, 1920, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1920, pos. 1337, fasc. 529.

⁴⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, April 17, 1920.

⁴⁹ Confidential Note about the Religious and Political Situation of France by Mr. Hanoteaux, January 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1918, rubr. 244, fasc. 93.

Constantinople. Aware that the French Protectorate was accused of being a weapon to support the political and financial interest of France in the Orient, Hanoteaux claimed that

The French Catholic protectorate does not rest only on political interests and historical tradition. The papacy always thought ... that the Catholic protectorate was defending in the Orient ... the very principle of Catholicism, that is the principle of Unity. If the Catholic establishments and charities were entrusted to all the nations to which the ... directors of these charities belong, it would be a dreadful cacophony. The strength and the success of Catholic charities are due to the unity of supervision under the age-long protection of France.⁵⁰

The French official went as far as claiming that, without France, there would be no Catholicism in the Orient.⁵¹

The Pope, who regarded France as an essential piece on the religious and political European chessboard, chose to maintain the *status quo*, while gaining time with Constantinople. Once the military situation stabilized and the chance of an Entente victory started to materialize, Gasparri informed the French that

The Holy See will not move, as far as it is concerned, to abolish or weaken in any way the protectorate of France ... But it is obvious that the future of the protectorate itself will depend on the situation created by the current conflict in the Orient ... if the Turkish rule was to disappear, or the abrogation of the capitulations was maintained, the protectorate of France over the citizen of other nations would cease naturally.⁵²

⁵⁰ “Le protectorat catholique de la France ne se fonde pas seulement sur les intérêts politiques et sur les traditions de l’histoire. La papauté a toujours pensé ... que le protectorat catholique défendait en Orient ... le principe même du Catholicisme, c’est-à-dire le principe de l’Unité. Si les établissements et les Œuvres catholiques étaient confiés à toutes les nations auxquelles les ... directeurs de ces œuvres appartiennent, ce serait une cacophonie épouvantable... La force et le succès des œuvres catholiques tiennent à l’unité de direction sous la protection séculaire de la France.” (My translation). Confidential Note about the Religious and Political Situation of France by Mr. Hanoteaux, January 1915.

⁵¹ Confidential Note about the Religious and Political Situation of France by Mr. Hanoteaux, January 1915.

⁵² “Le Saint Siège ne fera rien, en ce qui le concerne, pour abolir ou diminuer en quelque manière que ce soit le protectorat de la France...Mais il est évident que l’avenir du protectorat lui-même dépendra

The decision of the Holy See not to enter into direct relationship with the Porte was a sign of its political weakness on the European diplomatic chessboard, but also a sign of Benedict's insight about the future role of the Catholic Church in a devastated Europe and a new emerging Middle East. The Christian future of Europe was Benedict's first and foremost priority. Early in the war, the pontiff had lamented the "suicide of civilized Europe."⁵³ The risk of further dechristianization of a land rooted in Christian tradition concerned Pope Benedict.⁵⁴ While engaging in an active diplomacy to bring the war to an end,⁵⁵ he looked for diplomatic interactions with European countries, to establish, re-establish, or improve bilateral diplomatic relations. France was an essential piece of this strategy to assist the Holy See in the moral reconstruction of Europe after the war.⁵⁶

Therefore, keeping the "Eldest Daughter of the Church" satisfied in the Ottoman Empire became crucial to Benedict's long-term plans. France was not only in charge of the Protectorate in the Ottoman Empire but also had a protectorate in China, and as a colonial power, had a strong presence in Africa and in South East Asia. Benedict's

de la situation que le conflit actuel créera en Orient ... si la domination turque venait à disparaître, ou que l'abrogation des capitulations fut maintenue, le protectorat de la France sur les sujets des autres nations cesserait par la nature même des choses." (My translation). Gaparri to Denys Cochin, June 26, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Francia, 1917, pos. 1295-96, fasc. 686.

⁵³ Benedict XV, "Lenten Letter to Cardinal-Vicar Pompili," 4 March, 1916, in Editorial, "Pope Calls War Suicide of Europe," *New York Times*, March 6, 1916, p. 1.

⁵⁴ With the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 and its impact on Western Europe's social, religious, and political fabric, Benedict XV's worries increased.

⁵⁵ Benedict XV, "Note to the Heads of the Belligerent peoples [August 1, 1917]," AAS 09 I (1917): 417-20.

⁵⁶ Benedict XV also planted the first seeds of reconciliation with Italy by allowing Catholic politicians to enter the Italian political arena. He allowed Don Luigi Sturzo to found the *Partito Popolare Italiano* in 1919.

immediate mission was, in the regional context of the Middle East, to protect the Catholic communities in the Empire. But his global mission was the immediate and long-term protection of Catholics all around the world, in countries where France and England were active colonial powers. Thus, re-establishing diplomatic ties with France was far more important to the Holy See than satisfying the Porte.

In a time of turmoil, with little political visibility, Pope Benedict crafted a subtle diplomacy that managed to keep open his political options in Europe for the long term and ensure the immediate protection of the Catholic communities in the Ottoman Empire, by keeping the communication channel open with Constantinople.

There is little doubt that Pope Benedict never intended to enter into direct diplomatic ties with the Porte.⁵⁷ Establishing diplomatic relations with a Muslim country for the first time in the history of the Holy See was a decision that would have had numerous political repercussions and would not have assured the protection of Christians against Muslim persecution. Benedict, although ahead of his time, was not interested in engaging in a Muslim-Christian dialogue. A *rapprochement* with the Byzantine Orthodox was his main goal, a goal that would have been endangered by the establishment of strong ties between the Catholic Church and the Porte. On a practical level, it was anticipated by all Governments that the “Sick man of Europe” was not going to survive the war as an Empire. No sensible government would have taken the risk to establish diplomatic relationships in such a context.

⁵⁷ The Holy See eventually entered into direct diplomatic relations with Turkey in 1960, under the pontificate of John XXIII who had served as Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul from 1935 to 1944. The first Muslim country the Holy See established diplomatic relations with was Egypt in 1947, followed by Syria and Iran in 1953.

Benedict's diplomatic subtlety resided in his using the sensitive issue of direct diplomatic ties to satisfy two powers with opposite interests: France and the Ottoman Government. By maintaining an "active *status quo*," the pontiff gave each government proof of his goodwill while anticipating the future of the geo-strategic international scene. Although he had limited options in war-time, Pope Benedict demonstrated unique qualities in the pursuit of his mission. He acted without precipitation and with much prudence, showing the qualities of a political Realist, grounded in Charity. What was perceived by contemporary observers as a timid papal diplomacy was actually the mark of his discerning sense of politics.

Constantinople and the Russian Equation

The year 1917 was a military and diplomatic turning point in the unfolding of the war. One main event transformed the geo-political map, an event that put to rest the worst fears of the Holy See: the Russian Revolution, which had broken out in February of the same year. In October 1917, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Movement and new head of the Russian government, entered into negotiations with Germany and Austria to secure a peace deal. On March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed between Russia and the Central Powers, which signified the exit of Russia from the war. With this withdrawal the Holy See's worst nightmare faded away. Russia had always been a crucial piece on the papal diplomatic chessboard and a source of anxiety. The expansion of Russian Orthodoxy in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire had motivated this concern.

Constantinople and Russia

Constantinople had always been central to Russian religious culture and geopolitics. Uniting Europe with Asia, its strategic geographical significance lies in its location on the Bosphorus Strait and its proximity to the Dardanelles.⁵⁸ The problem of Constantinople and the Straits, as it became known, was the result of the Russian interest in the Black Sea area. With time, it became critical for the Russian Empire to secure a free passage to the warm seas of the south for men and merchandise. This expansionist policy ran up against French and British strategic interests in the region. Until the late nineteenth century, the hostility of Great Britain was especially enduring due to the Empire's absolute necessity to protect this vital communication route with India.

As a "commanding point to the Straits,"⁵⁹ Constantinople was of strategic significance to both Russia and the European Great Powers, but as "the source of the religion and culture of the Russian people,"⁶⁰ as the center of Orthodox Christianity, it was a cause of huge and constant concern to the Holy See. Prince Trubetskoy⁶¹ illustrated the religious Russian mind-set when he declared in 1915 that "the problem of Constantinople has for Russia a special interest and importance," adding that "We are brought to it by all the aspects of our life ... the spiritual essence of Russia is involved in

⁵⁸ The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles connect Southern Russia and the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, and southwards with the Mediterranean Sea.

⁵⁹ Samuel Kuchеров, "The Problem of Constantinople and the Straits," *Russian Review* 8 (July 1949): 205.

⁶⁰ Kuchеров, "Problem of Constantinople," 205.

⁶¹ Prince Evgeni Nikolayevich Trubetskoy (1863-1920) was a philosopher and professor of law in Moscow. He had an important role in the cultural and intellectual life of his country.

this problem. The Cathedral of Sophia⁶² is precisely that pearl of the Gospel for which Russia must be prepared to give everything she possesses.”⁶³ With strong messianic accents, Trubetskoy glorified the spiritual destiny of Russia as sole and true guardian of Eastern Orthodoxy.⁶⁴ Russian Orthodox doctrine had proclaimed Moscow the Third Rome, the guardian of the purity of Orthodox faith. The tsars had, for the longest time, contemplated the religious and political conquest of Constantinople.

To seize the Ottoman capital, Russia waged no less than eleven wars against the Empire, but its aspirations were still unfulfilled on the eve of the First World War. The opening of the hostilities and the entrance of the Ottomans into the war on the side of the Central Powers offered Russia a clear war aim. Russia and its Entente Allies first had tried to prevent the Porte from joining the Central Powers in the conflict. Russia rightly feared that Turkey would become a German satellite, with Constantinople being under the enemy's military and economic control. It was a situation of immense concern to the Entente. The Allies' failure to keep the Ottoman Empire out of the conflict prompted a new Russian diplomatic approach, focusing on obtaining a direct control of Constantinople and the Straits with the Allies' consent. To this effect, Russia approached

⁶² Chief monument of Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, built by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, became a mosque in 1453 after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople.

⁶³ Prince E.N Trubetskoy, *Natsionalnyi Vopros* (Petrograd: 1915), 97; quoted in Kuchеров, 208.

⁶⁴ The Council of Florence (1439), a last attempt at reconciliation with Orthodox Christianity, preceded the fall of Byzantium into Ottoman hands in 1453. It ultimately ended in failure and gave Russia a motive to claim a unique role as defender of Orthodoxy. Arguing that treason had been committed by the Orthodox Church and the Greek Ecumenical Patriarch, the Tsar contended that Constantinople had lost its position as the Second Rome, the center of Orthodox Christianity.

France and Great Britain to discuss the future of the Ottoman capital in case of an Entente victory.

In a memorandum of March 4, 1915, delivered to the ambassadors of Great Britain and France in St. Petersburg, the tsar demanded that “Constantinople, the west shore of the Bosphorus, the sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles, ... [be] included in the Russian Empire.”⁶⁵ The British government’s assent was a complete reversal of its traditional diplomacy in the question of Constantinople. It was a diplomatic act that had to be understood in the larger context of a war waged against a powerful enemy. Keeping Russia satisfied as an ally and avoiding a separate peace between Germany and Russia was paramount to British and French war aims. London and Paris imposed a single but essential condition to their consenting to Russia’s control of Constantinople. Anticipating the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, they wanted to have free rein in the Asiatic part of the Ottoman Empire, namely Greater Syria.⁶⁶

The memorandum of March 4 became the basis of the Secret Agreement of 1915. The terms of this Agreement reached the Holy See before the Russians made it public in December 1916, only to denounce it in April 1917 after the break of the Revolution. The President of the Council of Ministers, Prince G. E. Lvov, head of the new provisional revolutionary government proclaimed that “the aim of free Russia (is) [was] not to

⁶⁵ Robert J. Kerner, “Russia, the Straits, and Constantinople, 1914-1915,” *The Journal of Modern History* 1 (September, 1929): 413.

⁶⁶ Antonio Scotta, *La conciliazione ufficiosa, diario del barone Carlo Monti “incarito d'affari” del governo italiano presso la Santa Sede (1914-1922)*, 2 volumes (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1: 249. On July 16, 1915, he wrote: “La Francia in Asia avrebbe in compenso la Siria, la Celesiria ed il Libano ed all’Inghilterra si consentirebbe che la ferrovia Bagdad-Golfo Persico avesse il suo sbocco a Gallipoli, anziché a Costantinopoli.”

dominate other nations, not to deprive them of their national property, not to seize foreign territories, but to strengthen a stable peace based on self-determination of peoples.”⁶⁷

With the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed in March 1918 between the Central Powers and Russia, the question of Constantinople left Russian hands and consequently the Russian Orthodox Church, as the guardian of Eastern Orthodoxy, ceased to be a factor of political and religious importance in the Ottoman Empire.

Russia’s determination to seize Constantinople had always been a source of apprehension to the pontiffs. What was new was the real possibility of seeing Russia achieving its centuries-old goal. The disquiet displayed by the Holy See during the war must be interpreted in the larger context of a long-lasting antagonism between Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism. A thorough reading of Baron Carlo Monti and Cardinal Baudrillart’s diaries reveals a high level of tension in Benedict XV’s diplomatic conduct, seeking to avoid, in Cardinal Gasparri’s own words, “a threat and desolation equal to that of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.”⁶⁸

Rumors regarding the terms of the Secret Agreement quickly reached the Holy See. A concerned Benedict XV sent an alarmist message to the Entente Powers. A Russian possession of Constantinople would widen the schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism. He also stressed the negative long term consequences that such a takeover would have on French and Italian Catholic interests in the Ottoman Empire. But the Holy

⁶⁷ E.H. Adamov, *Konstantinopol i proliv* (Constantinople and the Straits), Document CCCIX, 2 volumes (Moscow: 1925-26), 476-77; quoted in Kuchеров, 212.

⁶⁸ “Un péril et un malheur égal à celui de la Réforme protestante du XVIème siècle.” (My translation). Baudrillart, *Carnets*, 230.

See was in a diplomatic quandary. Among the Catholic countries involved, Italy had no significant diplomatic influence on the issue. According to Benedict XV, the President of France, Raymond Poincaré, had a personal commitment to Russia⁶⁹ and would not budge. In a letter dated March 7, 1915 to the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Amette, Gasparri asked him to put pressure on the French government but to no avail.⁷⁰ The French rejected the Holy See's offer to recognize a French Catholic protectorate over Haggia Sophia if the church was returned to Catholic hands, in case of an Entente occupation of Constantinople.⁷¹ Great Britain was the most implicated in the issue but as a Protestant country had no pressing interests to see Haggia Sophia returning to Catholic hands.

The End of the Russian Threat

To his great relief, the nightmare that Benedict XV envisioned never unfolded. In April 1917, the new revolutionary provisional government denounced the Secret Agreement that had been drafted in 1915 between Russia, France, and Great Britain. Rumors surfaced that Constantinople would be given an international status. Cardinal Gasparri immediately informed Carlo Monti that the Holy See would be satisfied if

⁶⁹ Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 250.

⁷⁰ “Il cardinal Gasparri mi ha letto la nota che la segretaria di stato, in data del 7 Marzo 1915 scriveva all'arcivescovo di Parigi affinché facesse pratiche presso il governo francese, anche in caso di occupazione di Costantinopoli per parte degli alleati, la chiesa di Santa Sofia fosse destinata al culto cattolico, passando alla Francia, la qual cosa la Santa Sede avrebbe favorite com gran piacere riconoscendone anche il protettorato (October 2, 1915.)” Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 275.

⁷¹ Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 270.

Haggia Sophia was “bestowed to the Eastern Catholic churches, as it was when it was founded.”⁷²

In April 1919, Benedict XV expressed again his concern, this time related to a lingering fear of seeing Haggia Sophia falling in Greek Orthodox hands. The pontiff insisted on the “necessity to avoid this situation at all cost, [adding that] it would be an offense to the Catholic Church, to tradition, to history,”⁷³ but the Greeks were protected by the British.⁷⁴ The Holy See made no secret that it would prefer “the Crescent over the Greek Cross on the dome of Haggia Sophia, and that in Asiatic Turkey the Muslim indifference was better than Orthodox fanaticism”⁷⁵ and the ruin of Catholic works in the Orient.

The Holy See’s diplomatic response to the problem of Constantinople had a direct religious significance. The Russian situation was lucidly described by Prince Kudashev⁷⁶ in a letter of February 1915 to M. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister.

The fundamental problem of the Straits, ... [wrote Kudashev], will not be affected by the sending of one army corps, nor will it change my conviction that neither morally nor physically are we ready for the annexation of the Straits. When I say “morally” or “spiritually” this is what I mean: to settle down in Constantinople, as crusaders proclaiming the triumph of the Orthodox Church, is out of the question because of our Pan-Slavic sympathies and affiliations, and our dislike of the Greeks; to add to that, the moral authority of our clergy is hardly very

⁷² Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 81.

⁷³ Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1: 459.

⁷⁴ Maurice Pernot, *Le Saint-Siège, l'Eglise catholique et la politique mondiale* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1924), 180.

⁷⁵ Pernot, *Saint-Siège, Eglise catholique*, 180. (My translation).

⁷⁶ Prince Kudashev was the Russian representative of the ministry of Foreign Affairs at the army headquarters from August 1914 to March 1916.

high in the opinion of the Greek clergy. To play the part so brilliantly performed by England in Egypt, we are utterly incapable.⁷⁷

Benedict XV and Gasparri had quickly grasped Russia's physical and moral inability to secure its position in Constantinople, as described by Kudashev.⁷⁸ As confirmed by Count de Salis in his memorandum to the Foreign Office, "never, in his [Gasparri's] opinion, could the Russians alone take Constantinople." The pope and his Secretary of State "would be perfectly happy to see the British there, or even the French, in spite of the anti-clerical tendencies of their Government of the day."⁷⁹ But they were not naïve and knew that, in war-time, military necessities are paramount. Keeping Russia satisfied with its main war goal was crucial to the Entente.⁸⁰ Not only France and Great Britain could not afford to see Russia signing its own peace treaty with Germany, but also both were resolute to avoid the disaster that a German occupation of Constantinople would have implied for their economic interests. That London had accepted to reverse its centuries-old policy regarding Russia and the future of Constantinople was an unmistakable sign of the shift in its geo-strategic policy.⁸¹ Still Great Britain was anxious

⁷⁷ Michael T. Florinsky, "A Page of Diplomatic History: Russian Military Leaders and the Problem of Constantinople during the War," *Political Science Quarterly* 44 (March 1929): 113.

⁷⁸ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 3.

⁷⁹ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 3.

⁸⁰ "Ho fatto riflettere al Santo Padre che ben gravi dovevano essere le ragioni che avevano spinto l'Inghilterra ad aderirvi, se lo aveva fatto pur avendo in oriente interessi di gran lunga più rilevanti che l'Italia: è chiaro che senza la cooperazione della Russia, Inghilterra e Francia sarebbero battute." Scotta, 1:250.

⁸¹ In the late nineteenth century, Great Britain had moved the sensitive zone of defense of its Empire in Egypt and Palestine. Constantinople and the Straits had therefore lost much of their political and military function of protection of British interests.

to contain German expansionism in the region and was politically ready to transfer the protection of the Straits region to Russia. To this effect, London and Saint Petersburg had signed a convention in 1907, which remained active until November 1917. In this political context, the Holy See had no leverage over France or Great Britain to prevent Russian annexation of the Ottoman capital.

The problem of Constantinople and the Straits found its closure in 1923.⁸² Until then, the progresses and setbacks suffered by Russia and the Allies in the resolution of the question affected the stability of all Christian communities in the rest of the Ottoman Empire. In the question of Constantinople, Benedict XV regarded with undisguised apprehension the prospect of a reinvigorated Greek Orthodox Church under Russian control. The sudden and massive disruption brought about by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 destroyed the Russian Empire and weakened its Church. The new situation did not lessen the Holy See's concern regarding the future ownership of Haggia Sophia. The critical comments of Pope Benedict that "it would be an offense to the Catholic Church, to tradition, to history,"⁸³ if Haggia Sophia would fall into Greek Orthodox hands, showed the extent of the ecclesiological gap standing between the Catholic Church and the separated Christians of the East. This attitude illustrates the limit of Benedict XV's praiseworthy efforts in favor of a *rapprochement* with the Eastern Christians.

⁸² Mustafa Kemal was the founder and first President of the new Republic of Turkey created after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the war and its carving up among the Allies. He renamed Constantinople "Istanbul" and moved the capital to Ankara.

⁸³ Scotta, *Diario del Barone Carlo Monti*, 1:459.

Ecclesiastical Diplomacy and Unionist Ecclesiology

Although historiography has reserved the title to his successor Pius XI, Benedict XV was the “Pope of the East,” with high regard for the Eastern Catholic churches and a keen interest in the *rapprochement* with the separated brethren. In his allocution of June 9, 2007 to the *Congregation for the Oriental Churches*, Pope Benedict XVI reminded his audience that he “began this pilgrimage by taking the name of a Pope who so loved the East.”⁸⁴ His predecessor, Benedict XV, loved and admired the Eastern churches and their traditions. Like Benedict XVI, he believed that “without a constant relationship with the tradition of her origins, in fact, there is no future for Christ’s Church. It is the Eastern churches in particular which preserve the echo of the first Gospel proclamation.”⁸⁵

In an article published in *The New Republic* in early 1922, the author noted that “in a strictly ecclesiastical field his [Pope Benedict’s] handling of the schismatic tendencies in the emancipated nationalisms of ... the Near East may prove to be the outstanding feature of his pontificate.”⁸⁶ The pontiff’s Middle Eastern diplomacy was designed to support his ecclesiastical policy, foundation of his ecclesiological understanding of the Church. It was meant to protect the Latin and Eastern Catholic minorities and prepare a conducive environment for a *rapprochement* with the schismatic Orthodox churches.

After the interlude of Pius X’s reign that showed very limited interest in the fate of the Eastern churches, Benedict XV followed in the steps of Leo XIII, completing and

⁸⁴ www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xv

⁸⁵ www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xv

⁸⁶ Arthur Livingston, “Benedict XV and the New Age,” *The New Republic*, February 8, 1922, 305.

institutionalizing Leo's unionist approach. Under Benedict's pontificate, the *Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith for Matters of Oriental Rite*, established by Pope Pius IX on January 6, 1862 to oversee the Eastern rite Catholic churches, was detached from the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* and renamed *Congregation for the Oriental Church*.⁸⁷ In the same year 1917, a *Pontifical Oriental Institute* dedicated to higher studies in Eastern Christianity completed the structure.

Scholars have recently raised the question of how to properly qualify the ecclesiastical policy of Benedict XV in the Ottoman Empire. Was it a classic model of unionism or did he plant the first seeds of a Catholic ecumenism? The answer to this question - a detailed analysis does not pertain to this study – sheds light on the ecclesiological background of Pope Benedict's foreign policy.

The Unionist Tradition and Vatican Foreign Policy

Benedict XV followed in Leo XIII's steps benefiting from a heritage genuinely concerned with the destiny of the Eastern churches. Leo XIII's project with the Christian East was part of his "Great Design," a global policy meant to increase the standing of the Holy See in the world in order to better rechristianize it. The Eastern Catholic churches, long known as the Uniate churches – a term they rejected as derogatory – were to be the favored instrument for the conversion of the Orthodox Christians to Catholicism. "A form of missionary apostolate,"⁸⁸ the Uniate policy was a springboard for the assimilation

⁸⁷ The Congregation was later renamed *Congregation for the Oriental Churches* to acknowledge the diversity and richness of their rites.

of the Orthodox churches in Catholic structures. This policy of assimilation was the stumbling block to any real *rapprochement* between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Unionism, as a return to the Catholic fold, was the only model considered for the unity of churches.

Leo XIII's unionist policy was rooted in the conviction that, to be successful, a regeneration of the East should come from the East. It concretely meant that he would reject any attempt at latinisation of the Eastern Catholic patriarchates, respecting and conserving their liturgical rites and traditions. If Leo XIII's guiding principles diverged from his predecessor Pius IX's oriental policy, they were in harmony with Benedict XIV's vision of preservation of the rites of the Eastern Catholics. In his apostolic letter *Allatae Sunt* of July 26, 1755, on the observance of Oriental rites, addressed to the missionaries assigned to the Orient, Pope Benedict declared

We also wanted to make clear to all the good will which the Apostolic See feels for Oriental Catholics in commanding them to observe fully their ancient rites which are not at variance with the Catholic religion or with propriety. The Church does not require schismatics to abandon their rites when they return to Catholic unity, but only that they forswear and detest heresy. Its great desire is for the preservation, not the destruction, of different peoples-in short, that all may be Catholic rather than all become Latin.⁸⁹

The interests of these Eastern Catholics were defended by the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*, established in 1622 to organize the missionary territories in

⁸⁸ The declaration "*Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*," by the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, in its 7th Plenary Session which took place at the Balamand School of Theology (Lebanon), June 17-24, 1993, stated that as "a form of missionary apostolate," "uniatism", can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed or as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking." Centro Pro Unione, *Information Service* 83 (1993/II): 96-99.

⁸⁹ Benedict XIV, "Apostolic Letter *Allatae Sunt on the Observance of Oriental Rites* [July 26, 1755], <http://www.ewtn.com/library/encyc/b14allat.htm>

foreign lands. Pope Pius IX recognized the distinctiveness of the Eastern churches and the importance of paying special attention to them, yet favored a return to the Latin rite. Therefore, he created in 1862 a special division in the Congregation, the *Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith for Matters of Oriental Rite*.⁹⁰ It was a means to separate the Oriental affairs from the missionaries' activities among heretics and to exercise a closer control over the Eastern churches, keeping them under the mission territory epithet.

It is against Pius IX's policy of latinisation of the Eastern Rite Catholics, a policy strongly resented by these communities and supported by *Propaganda Fide* that Leo XIII reacted, in line with Benedict XIV's aspirations. Leo encountered much internal and external resistance against his policy of revival of the Orient by the Orient. The pope received little help from the Curia and predictably from *Propaganda Fide*, inciting him to work more closely with his Secretary of State.⁹¹ The *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*, which was rarely consulted under Leo's reign, resented the interference of the pope and his disapproval of the pastoral methods used by the missionaries in their ministry to the Eastern Christians. The French diplomatic milieu was also alarmed by Leo XIII's Eastern policy. Any change in the subtle balance established between the Holy See, the Sublime Porte, and France's diplomacy was to bear danger for French cultural, political, and economic interests. For the sake of reconciliation of the dissident Eastern

⁹⁰ *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide pro negotiis ritus orientalis* established by Pope Pius IX on January 6, 1862, with the Apostolic Constitution *Romani Pontifices*.

⁹¹ Hajjar, *Vatican, France et catholicisme*, 31.

Christians with Rome, Leo XIII was, in a somewhat unrealistic way, inclined to destroy this balance by entering into direct intercourse with the Porte, supporting at the same time the French Protectorate over the Eastern Christians. The French were, with good reason, worried and looked with apprehension at the Pontiff's achievements in favor of the Eastern Christians.

Leo XIII outlined his ecclesiological principles in the apostolic letter *Praeclara Gratulationis* of June 20, 1894, in which he invited the Orthodox churches to communion with Rome and reassured them that

there [is no] (any) reason for you to fear on that account that We or any of Our Successors will ever diminish your rights, the privileges of your Patriarchs, or the established Ritual of any one of your Churches.... On the contrary, if you re-establish Union with Us, you will see how, by God's bounty, the glory and dignity of your Churches will be remarkably increased.⁹²

In the same breath, the pontiff acted on his promises and organized a series of conferences which led to the publication on November 30, 1894 of the famed encyclical *Orientalium Dignitas*,⁹³ the charter to the Eastern Churches. In this landmark text, for the sake of the Eastern rite Catholic churches' healthy development as an instrument for the conversion of the separated brethren, the pontiff reacted against the policy of latinisation of the Eastern rite patriarchates by safeguarding "the significance of the Eastern traditions for the whole Church."⁹⁴

⁹² Leo XIII, "Apostolic Letter *Praeclara Gratulationis Publicae, On the Reunion of Christendom* [June 20, 1894]," in *Leonis XIII Acta*, 14 (1894), 195-214.

⁹³ Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas*, On the Churches of the East (November 30, 1894), *Leonis XIII Acta*, 14 (1894), 201-02.

The reasons for rivalry and suspicion must be removed, [wrote the pope], then the fullest energies can be marshaled for reconciliation. We consider this of paramount importance to preserving the integrity proper to the discipline of the Eastern Churches. ... Their antiquity is august, it is what gives nobility to the different rites, it is a brilliant jewel for the whole Church, it confirms the God-given unity of the Catholic Faith.⁹⁵

The Latin rite priests and missionaries' duty was to assist the Patriarchs and bishops, not to encourage conversion to the Latin rite. Any attempt was to be punished by being "deposed and excluded from [the priests'] benefice."⁹⁶

The reaction in French and Italian diplomatic circles was fierce, concerned as they were to lose their cultural and political influence on the Eastern Christians of the Empire. *Propaganda Fide*, which had been kept on the side, stayed silent. In the field, the reception of the encyclical by the missionaries was cold. To a sense of superiority, the Latin rite priests and missionaries added a penchant for nationalistic outburst, protecting their country's interests before satisfying their duty towards the universal Church.

Leo XIII's Eastern policy in the Ottoman Empire was idealistic and did not translate well on the ground. Twenty years later, the same stumbling blocks were on Benedict XV's oriental path when he resumed his predecessor's attempts to bring reconciliation between Rome and the Eastern Churches.

⁹⁴ John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Lumen*, to Mark the Centenary of *Orientalium Dignitas* of Pope Leo XIII, [May 2, 1995]," AAS 87 (1995): 745.

⁹⁵ Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas*, 201-02.

⁹⁶ Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas*, 201-02.

Benedict's Ecclesiastical Policy: First seeds of Catholic Ecumenism?

Benedict XV gave a new depth and breadth to the unionist ecclesiology, taking advantage of the war, which brought the Eastern Churches out of the straitjacket in which they were evolving under Ottoman rule and the pressure of Russian Orthodoxy. His first step was to recommend prayers for the return of the Eastern Christians to the Chair of Peter. In the brief *Romanorum Pontificum*⁹⁷ of February 25, 1916, followed by the brief *Cum Catholicae Ecclesiae* of April 15, 1916, the pontiff made a plea for Christian unity.

Since the truth of the Catholic Church shines mainly through its unity, [he wrote], nothing is more desirable for men unhappily torn from the arms of this Mother to eventually return to you with the correct thoughts and intentions.⁹⁸

The brief was accompanied by a prayer written by the pope himself. “The Holy Father’s beautiful prayer⁹⁹ composed with such grace for the reunion of the Eastern Churches ... made the most excellent impression on the schismatics, and many of them (are) [were] really enthusiastic,”¹⁰⁰ reported the Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Angelo Dolci,

⁹⁷ Benedict XV, “Brief *Romanorum Pontificum* [February, 25, 1916],” AAS 09 (1917): 61.

⁹⁸ “Poiché la verità della Chiesa cattolica risplende principalmente per la sua unità, [he wrote], nulla è più auspicabile che gli uomini strappati infelicamente dalle braccia di questa Madre ritornino finalmente a Lei, con pensieri e propositi corretti.” (My translation). Benedict XV, “Brief *Cum Catholicae Ecclesiae* [April, 15, 1916],” AAS 08 (1916): 137.

⁹⁹ “O Signore, che avete unito le diverse nazioni nella confessione del Vostro Nome, Vi preghiamo per i popoli Cristiani dell’Oriente. Memori del posto eminente che hanno tenuto nella Vostra Chiesa, Vi supplichiamo d’ispirar loro il desiderio di riprenderlo, per formare con noi un solo ovile sotto la guida di un medesimo Pastore. Fate che essi insieme con noi si compenetrino degl’insegnamenti dei loro santi Dottori, che sono anche nostri Padri nella Fede. Preservateci da ogni fallo che potrebbe allontanarli da noi. Che lo spirito di concordia e di carità, che è indizio della Vostra presenza tra i fedeli, affretti il giorno in cui le nostre si uniscano alle loro preghiere, affinché ogni popolo ed ogni lingua riconosca e glorifichi il nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, Vostro Figlio. Così sia.” Brief *Cum Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Preghiera per l’unione dei Cristiani d’Oriente alla Chiesa Romana.

¹⁰⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, May 7, 1917, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1917, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

after reception and divulgation of the prayer, which he took care to translate “in all languages, Italian, French, and especially Greek, Armenian, Turkish ...”¹⁰¹

Benedict XV’s interest for the issue was too genuine to just settle for good intentions and prayers. His ultimate concern was the successful reunion with the schismatic churches for which the prayers were offered. To bring fruit, this pastoral step needed to be supported by further concrete actions, which included the creation of an institutional framework.

The idea was not new. In 1894, Cardinal Langénieux had already outlined the necessity to create a special Congregation to serve the Eastern Catholic churches. In a note to Leo XIII, he had stressed the importance of instituting a Congregation independent from *Propaganda Fide*, for three main reasons. First, the Eastern churches were already “alive and constituted” bodies, which should not “be submitted to the missionary regimen.”¹⁰² Their organization supposed consistency and unity of action, impossible to implement if the envisioned *Congregation for the Oriental Church* was to be maintained as “un rouage secondaire de la Congrégation de *Propaganda Fide*.”¹⁰³ As a third most important point, Langénieux stressed “the tight connection between the religious question and politics in the Orient.”¹⁰⁴ Only an autonomous and empowered

¹⁰¹ Dolci to Gasparri, May 7, 1917.

¹⁰² Note du Cardinal Langénieux remise à Sa Sainteté le Pape Léon XIII à l’occasion des Conférences Patriarcales de 1894 et exposant la nécessité d’ériger une Congrégation spéciale pour le gouvernement des Eglises Orientales, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1429, fasc. 572.

¹⁰³ Note du Cardinal Langénieux.

¹⁰⁴ Note du Cardinal Langénieux.

congregation could efficiently address the sensitive issue of reunion with the separated Christians.

With the *Motu Proprio Dei Providentis* of May 1, 1917, Benedict XV founded this independent congregation, the *Congregatio pro Ecclesia Orientali*, “to forestall the fear that the Orientals might not be held in proper consideration by the Roman Pontiffs.”¹⁰⁵ The Eastern churches were no longer considered as “mission fields” under the jurisdiction of *Propaganda Fide*.¹⁰⁶ The new congregation’s first function was to strengthen the position and attend the concerns of the Eastern rite Catholic churches, which were meant to be “centres of contact”¹⁰⁷ with the Eastern Orthodox churches for their ultimate conversion. The pope reserved to himself, a sign of his genuine care, the title of Prefect, the head of the Congregation serving as Secretary. “When our Churches of the East shall see the supreme Pontiff watching in person over their interests,” he wrote, “they will without fail understand that it is impossible for the Holy See to give any greater sign of affection for them.”¹⁰⁸

The decision to launch the *Congregation for the Oriental Church* was the result of a diplomacy that integrated geo-politics with ecclesiastical policy. By the spring of 1917, it became evident that the collapse of both the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary was a

¹⁰⁵ Benedict XV, “*Motu Proprio Dei Providentis*, de Sacra Congregatione pro Ecclesia orientali [May 1, 1917],” *AAS* 09 I (1917): 529-31.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Batiffol, “Pope Benedict XV and the Restoration of Unity,” *The Constructive Quarterly*, (March-December 1918): 215.

¹⁰⁷ George Tavard, *Ecumenism: Two Centuries of Ecumenism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1st edition, 1960; Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1978), 117.

¹⁰⁸ Benedict XV, *Dei Providentis*, 529-31.

question of months, two empires that regrouped a majority of the Eastern Catholics. It was then time to “strengthen these communities ... and seek to transform them in outposts for the conquest of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches.”¹⁰⁹

The genesis of the Congregation has been well researched and documented. The works of Vincenzo Poggi and Msgr. Giuseppe M. Croce have exhausted the subject.¹¹⁰ If the first seeds are found in Cardinal Langénieux’s report, the project’s authorship goes to Fr. Delpuche, a White Father. In a series of notes addressed to the pope, he unfolded his vision of the future Congregation. He encouraged Benedict XV to take advantage of the “state of decomposition of (this state) [Russia],” that until then “was hypnotizing [the Byzantine rite communities, which represented a huge educated crowd] and paralyzed everything.”¹¹¹ He correctly anticipated the lack of direction that the Orthodox churches were to suffer after the war and the expected collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the damage that the Protestant proselytizing will do.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hervé Legrand, *La fondation de l’Institut Pontifical Oriental en 1917, premier pas vers l’œcuménisme*. Original, delivered in Rome, IPO, November 9, 2007, not published.

¹¹⁰ See Vincenzo Poggi, S.J., *Per la storia del Pontificio Istituto Orientale. Saggi sull’istituzione, i suoi uomini e l’Oriente Cristiano* (Rome: Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 2000) and “Il settantennio del Pontificio Istituto Orientale,” in *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: The First Seventy-Five Years: 1917-1992*, ed. Edward G. Farrugia (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 1993). Also, Giuseppe M. Croce, “Alle origini della Congregazione Orientale e del Pontificio Istituto Orientale: Il contributo di Mons. Louis Petit,” in *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: The First Seventy-Five Years: 1917-1992*, ed. Edward G. Farrugia (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 1993).

¹¹¹ ACCO, fasc.541/28, Bizantini-Melchiti. Institut Pontifical-Sacrée Congrégation Orientale. Travaux Préparatoires, Folder IIC. Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹¹² ACCO, fasc.541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

Politics worked hand in hand with ecclesiastical policy, especially during the war. Delpuche was aware that the power of Great Britain and the rise of the United States were manifest support to Protestant activism in a region politically and militarily dominated by the British. Only by “avoiding unfortunate latinisation, by giving confidence to the dignitaries of these churches, by organizing and by giving to the Catholic Greco-Melchite Patriarchate the position it deserves,”¹¹³ would any form of success be achieved.

Sensitive to Delpuche’s argumentation, Benedict XV founded the new *Congregation for the Oriental Church* stating that

The Church of Jesus Christ, since she is neither Latin nor Greek nor Slav but Catholic, makes no distinction between her children, and those, whether they are Greeks, Latins, Slavs or members of other national groups, all occupy the same rank in the eyes of the apostolic see.¹¹⁴

The Holy See allowed itself a six month period after the official creation of the Congregation to choose its secretary and staff, and to devise the future territory under its jurisdiction. In a memorandum of September 10, 1917, Delpuche outlined the “many reasons which militated in favor of the allocation of a separated territory to the Congregation that was going to be founded.”¹¹⁵ Stressing the necessity to “reestablish

¹¹³ ACCO, fasc.541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹¹⁴ Benedict XV, *Dei Providentis*, 529-31.

¹¹⁵ ACCO, fasc.541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

peace and union,”¹¹⁶ he went on at length explaining how important it was to agree on a special territory of action for the new institution, separated from *Propaganda Fide*’s field. He warned the pope of the necessity to give the new Congregation jurisdiction over both Latin and Eastern rite Catholics. In a spirit of concord and unity, he pointed out that “if each group can appeal to a different authority, each [congregation] listening exclusively to its flock ... it will foster among the diverse Catholic groups a discomfort and an uneasiness which will not elude the dissidents.”¹¹⁷

Other reasons militated in favor of a unique separated territory regrouping both Latin and Eastern rite Catholics. Another report to Pope Benedict clarified the situation in the field. “Religious communities, orphanages, hospitals, schools ... are Latin, have a very exclusive Latin character.... [They] live under Latin authority, integrate the Eastern populations by subordinating them to the demand of the Latin group.”¹¹⁸ The risk was to see the Latin members resorting exclusively to *Propaganda Fide* in case of problems. Consequently the *Congregatio pro Ecclesia Orientali* “would not have the care of any apostolate and would see its action paralyzed ...” Thus “the necessity of one strong and unique authority to guarantee unity”¹¹⁹ and avoid a sense of humiliation that the Eastern

¹¹⁶ ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹¹⁷ ACCO, Fasc. 541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹¹⁸ ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Bizantini-Melchiti. Institut Pontifical-Sacrée Congrégation Orientale. Travaux Préparatoires, Folder IIC. Deux rapports à Sa Sainteté le Pape Benoît XV faits à la suite d’une audience accordée par Sa Sainteté sur l’organisation de la congrégation et sur le choix des personnes. Rapports non datés.

rite Catholics would not fail to feel. To the protest that it would be bizarre to put the Latin rite members under the jurisdiction of a Congregation dedicated to the Eastern churches, the same report noted that there were no grounds to such an objection, since “the coexistence of diverse rites in the same place did not mean a plurality of ordinary jurisdiction.”¹²⁰ It also noted the very small numbers considered, “less than 70,000 Latins for 750,000 Eastern Catholics and six million schismatics.”¹²¹

All these reasons combined comforted Fr. Delpuche in his idea of drawing a special map of jurisdiction for the *Congregatio pro Ecclesia Orientali*, which would rule over both Latin and Eastern rites Catholics. He envisioned a territory which would cover the four oriental patriarchates. The pope opted against his rational argumentation. Delpuche feared the consequences of a double authority in the same geographical zone but respected the Pontiff’s decision who “seemed to fear to offend *Propaganda Fide* and sadden its members by demeaning their competence.”¹²²

The *Pontifical Oriental Institute* was established a few months later to support the *Congregation for the Oriental Church* and “to spread information in the Latin Church

¹¹⁹ ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹²⁰ ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Bizantini-Melchiti. Institut Pontifical-Sacrée Congrégation Orientale. Travaux Préparatoires, Folder IIC. Deux rapports à Sa Sainteté le Pape Benoît XV. (My translation).

¹²¹ ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Copie d’un rapport remis à sa Sainteté le pape Benoît XV sur la Sacrée Congrégation “Pro Ecclesia Orientali” par le Père Delpuche.

¹²² ACCO, fasc. 541/28, Bizantini-Melchiti. Institut Pontifical-Sacrée Congrégation Orientale. Travaux Préparatoires, Folder IIC. Note à Monseigneur Galli, secrétaire des brefs aux princes, sur les deux Motu Propii, October 20, 1917.

about the Oriental Churches so as to awaken and develop interest.”¹²³ The *Motu Proprio Orientis Catholici*,¹²⁴ dated October 15, 1917, created an institute whose “purpose (is) [was] educational and ecumenical,”¹²⁵ dedicated to the studies of the dogmatic, liturgical, spiritual, and canonical traditions of the Churches of the East. Benedict XV emphasized the “value of study and culture” and intended “that Rome [shall] be no stranger to anything concerning the Orient.”¹²⁶ The Institute started in slow motion. On November 2, 1918, under the administration of Fr. Antoine Delpuche, it opened its doors to the first students in a palace near St. Peter’s basilica.¹²⁷ In 1920, forty students enrolled while in 1921, only twenty-five were sent to the Institute. Almost all of them were Franciscans.¹²⁸ As Msgr. Batiffol noted in an article written in March 1918 about a future *rapprochement* with the schismatic churches, “We are not at the point at which direct relations can be renewed, but we are at a preparatory stage in which we can study each other at a distance with sincere respect for one another.”¹²⁹

In a talk delivered in Rome, Italy, in November 2007, to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the *Pontifical Oriental Institute*, Hervé Legrand O.P., debated the question

¹²³ Joseph Gill, S.J., “Interessamento Della S.C. Orientale Per Gli Studi Superiori,” in *La Sacra Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali. Nel Cinquantesimo Della Fondazione (1917-1967)* (Grottaferrata: 1969), 147.

¹²⁴ Benedict XV, “*Motu proprio Orientis Catholici* [October 15, 1917],” AAS 09 I (1917): 531.

¹²⁵ Gill, “Interessamento,” 147.

¹²⁶ Batiffol, “Pope Benedict XV and the Restoration of Unity.”

¹²⁷ The Pontifical Oriental Institute moved to Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore in November 1926.

¹²⁸ Gill, “Interessamento,” 151.

¹²⁹ Gill, “Interessamento,” 151.

of whether or not one can talk of Benedict XV's ecclesiology as a first step towards ecumenism.¹³⁰ Legrand stressed the anachronism of using the term of "Catholic ecumenism" in 1914.¹³¹ The Catholic ecclesiological thought of the time was not mature enough to grasp this notion, victim of an almost complete ignorance of the Eastern ecclesiology and religious life. This lack of awareness was partly due to Roman suspicions and to the harsh antimodernist reaction, which had distinguished Pius X's pontificate. The antimodernist crusade operated as an "étouffoir" that froze the development of the ecclesiological thought and eventually prevented a *rapprochement* with the Eastern Christians.¹³² Rome seems to have been unable to think of reunion except as the return of erring children to Mother Church.¹³³ Nevertheless, "principles of ecumenical communication"¹³⁴ were manifest in Benedict's ecclesiology although its form of unionism, depending on the Eastern Catholic churches to reach out to the separated brethren, was not explicitly ecumenical. The foundation of the *Pontifical*

¹³⁰ Legrand, *Fondation de l'IPO*.

¹³¹ The ecumenical movement which started in Edinburgh in 1910 developed outside the Catholic Church. The idiom "ecumenism", as we understand it today, was used for the first time by British Protestants on the eve of the Second World War.

¹³² Legrand, *Fondation de l'IPO*.

¹³³ "Yves Congar set out three stages ... constitutive of ecumenical theology. The first is the stage of explaining the ... faith to others; the second of wishing to learn from *others*; the third of wishing to learn *with* others. (G. Tavard, "Editorial," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964): 99)," G.R. Evans, *Method in Ecumenical Theology. The Lessons so Far* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

¹³⁴ P. Esterka, "Toward Union: the Congresses at Velehrad," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 8 (1971): 13, in G.R. Evans, 72. According to P. Esterka, the three principles of ecumenical communication were the following: "First, that there must be equality in the way the two sides treat one another, and secondly, that both must go as far as possible to meet their separated brethren. Thirdly, the richness of tradition and spirituality of the participating churches must be recognized, so that there is never any implication that reunion intends the 'conversion' of one by the other."

Oriental Institute was a sign of the papal determination to “go as far as possible to meet the separated brethren.”¹³⁵ The respect he demonstrated towards “the richness of tradition and spirituality”¹³⁶ of the Catholic Eastern churches reflected on his will to recognize this same richness among the Orthodox churches. However, the time was not ripe for anything else than a reunion that “intended the ‘conversion’ of one by the other.”¹³⁷

The most remarkable papal mark of esteem towards Eastern Christianity came later, on October 5, 1920, when Benedict XV proclaimed, in his encyclical *Principi Apostolorum*, St. Ephrem, a Syrian monk, Doctor of the Church. The pontiff sought to reach out to all Eastern Christians, pleading that

We humbly entreated God to return the Eastern Church at long last to the bosom and embrace of Rome. Their long separation, contrary to the teachings of their ancient Fathers, keeps them miserably from this See of Peter... meanwhile We received letters from the Venerable Brothers Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani, Patriarch of Syria at Antioch; Elias Petrus Huayek, Maronite Patriarch at Antioch; and Joseph Emmanuel Thomas, Chaldean Patriarch at Babylon. They presented weighty arguments beseeching Us earnestly to bestow upon Ephrem, the Syrian Deacon of Edessa, the title and honors of Doctor of the Universal Church...¹³⁸

The foreign policy crafted by Benedict XV in the Middle East had for ultimate goal to serve his unionist ecclesiology and ensure the protection of Catholic interests. In war and post-war turbulent times, the difficulty for the pontiff was to integrate its Eastern ecclesiology and supportive diplomacy in the larger realm of its European policies. As

¹³⁵ Esterka, “Toward Union,” 13.

¹³⁶ Esterka, “Toward Union,” 13.

¹³⁷ Esterka, “Toward Union.” On July 4, 1919, under Pope Benedict’s pontificate, the Holy Office issued a decree forbidding Catholics to participate in congresses for the promotion of Christian unity, AAS 11 (1919): 309.

¹³⁸ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Principi Apostolorum Petro*, on St. Ephrem the Syrian [October 5, 1920],” AAS 12 (1920): 457.

important as the Oriental policy was on the Pope's agenda, it was always secondary to its diplomatic relationship with the European powers, which became colonial rulers of the collapsed Ottoman Empire in the early 1920s. Keeping in mind the long term goal of "restoring the Eastern churches to their ancient glory and of leading the separated Eastern Churches to Catholic unity,"¹³⁹ the Holy See's immediate attention was directed to the preservation and protection of the Catholic brethren and properties.

¹³⁹ Dom Maternus Spitz, O.S.B., "Pope Benedict XV and the Apostolate," *Catholic Missions, Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, April 1922, p 77.

CHAPTER 4

WAR-TIME DIPLOMATIC PROTECTION OF CATHOLIC CLERGY AND PROPERTY

While the Holy See was pondering the state of its diplomatic relationship with the Ottoman Government, the Porte was imposing war measures on the Catholic clergy of belligerent countries present on Ottoman soil, expelling French, British, and Italian missionaries and confiscating their buildings. The state of war accelerated a movement that the Porte had already engaged in, since the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. In order to enjoy complete independence as a sovereign country, the Ottoman government had launched a diplomatic offensive to eliminate the French Protectorate and enter into direct relationship with the Holy See.

As the Holy See opted for a prudent wait-and-see attitude without officially denouncing the French Protectorate, the Porte subjected the pope to diplomatic pressure, deeming all religious establishments under French protection as French property. They were therefore confiscated as a war measure, throwing the Holy See in a diplomatic spat with Constantinople.

Under German pressure, the Porte expelled most members of the French, British, and Italian clergy, with the plan to substitute German and Austrian missionaries and clergymen. The entry of Italy in the war in May 1915 exacerbated the tension between the Holy See and the Sublime Porte, as many members of the Catholic hierarchy on Ottoman soil were Italians. The arrest and deportation of Msgr. Chibli, Maronite

Archbishop of Beirut, Msgr. Huyaek, Patriarch for the Maronites, and Msgr. Camassei, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, gave the Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Dolci, grounds to accuse the Ottoman government of religious persecution against Catholics, a charge rebuffed by Ottoman authorities.

By the end of 1917, with General Allenby's liberation of Palestine, the Catholic religious and cultural fabric was badly damaged. Most missionaries had left and many confiscated Catholic buildings had been sold or secularized. A massive effort to restructure Catholic life and institutions and to adjust to new post-war developments took place under new mandates' rule.

From November 1914 to the end of the war, Msgr. Dolci, the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, and Msgr. Giannini, the Apostolic Delegate in Syria, inundated the Secretary of State and *Propaganda Fide* with very detailed relations, describing the situation at hand. Msgr. Dolci was given much diplomatic leeway by Cardinal Gasparri, as long as he would follow three main guidelines. First, the Secretary of State emphasized the need to use prudence in all matters, as the Holy See was in diplomatic discussion, at the highest level, with Constantinople. Secondly, he diverted the question of the French Protectorate arguing that, legally, all Catholic institutions were property of the Holy See. Finally, the Holy See stressed the moral authority of the papacy. Dolci pointed out, as often as he could, the risk taken by Constantinople to see war measures interpreted as religious persecution, affecting the Porte's reputation among Christians and putting a shadow on the diplomatic discussions regarding the establishment of direct ties between the Holy See and the Ottoman Government.

Confiscation of Catholic Property

War Measure against Catholic Institutions

A few days after the entrance of Constantinople into the war, the Ottoman Government gave instructions to the provincial governments to confiscate Catholic institutions and expel French and British Catholic clergy.¹ Diplomatic maneuvers immediately started from the Holy See to persuade the Porte to cancel the drastic measures. The Holy See sought the help of the American ambassador, Henry Morgenthau,² who proved himself very efficient, as well as the support of the German and Austrian ambassadors,³ who as representatives of belligerent countries had more ambivalent behaviors.⁴ The Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Syria, supported by the ambassadors, negotiated with a disorganized Cabinet in Constantinople,⁵ constantly bringing to its attention the harsh measures taken by provincial governments, measures that were not always in phase with Constantinople's decrees.

¹ There were also members of religious communities from Belgium.

² Henry Morgenthau was the American ambassador at Constantinople from 1913 to 1916, under Woodrow Wilson's presidency.

³ The Italian and Spanish ambassadors were also involved but on a much smaller scale.

⁴ Giuseppe Pompilj to Gasparri, November 15, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

⁵ Dolci to Gasparri, September 21, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1. Dolci mentions "la disorganizzazione del Gabinetto, ogni dicastero nella sua sfera d'azione essendo assolutamente indipendente dal Gran Vizirato e dal Ministero degli Esteri." See also, Dolci to Gasparri, October 10, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110. Dolci complained that Djemal Pasha, Military Commander of Syria, acted independently from the central government, adding much disorganization to the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

The situation was especially thorny in Syria, a land deemed by Djemal Pasha his personal fief. Djemal Pasha, one of the leading Young Turks, was the military governor of Syria, wielding ruthless control over a larger geographic area that included Palestine.

In a series of missives sent to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, and to the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, Cardinal Gotti, the two Apostolic Delegates, Dolci and Giannini, informed the Holy See of the state of affairs regarding Catholic interests. The situation varied, depending on the area and the type of establishments concerned. Churches and chapels, as places of worship, were treated differently than schools or hospitals.

After a few weeks in the conflict, most French missionaries toiling on Ottoman soil had been expelled and their properties confiscated. One of the most sensitive issues was the closure of Catholic schools run by French missionaries. Giannini mentioned the Jesuits in Adana whose schools had been converted into military hospitals. Other schools like the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools were converted into Muslim schools.⁶ In a letter of November 17, 1914, Giannini stressed that only “the establishments under the flag of belligerent countries are concerned [essentially France].”⁷ The Ottoman Government was convinced, long before the start of the war, that before being Catholic, these schools, protected by the French Protectorate, were a vehicle

⁶ Relazione intorno all’espulsione dei Religiosi dalla Palestina e sullo stato del Patriarcato di Gerusalemme e delle sue missioni, from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, February 22, 1915, A.P., N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁷ Giannini to Gotti, November 17, 1914, A.P., N.S., volume 592 (1917), Rub. 126, f 18rv-19rv.

used by France to promote French political, economic, and cultural interests and impose its *mission civilisatrice*.

After meeting with the Grand Vizir on December 12, 1914, Dolci sent a dispatch to Cardinal Gasparri, in which he explained that, in Ottoman view, the schools were an object of political propaganda.⁸ Among the many establishments confiscated by the Ottoman government, the American ambassador Morgenthau confirmed “that the Jesuit University at Beirut was closed and confiscated by the Government ... a large part of the furniture was taken by the government. The French medical buildings at Beirut were also confiscated by the Turkish Government ... In fact all the establishments belonging to the Jesuits in Beirut were confiscated.”⁹

With a few exceptions, Catholic churches and chapels met a different fate and were protected by the authorities as places of worship. Dolci reaffirmed in a dispatch of February 4, 1916 that the churches should not be closed, per decision of the Cabinet that considered them as worshipping chapels.¹⁰ Often, churches were closed by local governors and then reopened after intervention of the Apostolic Delegate and the German or Austrian ambassador to the Porte. Giannini noted the closure of Latin and Eastern Catholic churches in Aleppo, churches that were confiscated to host the military.¹¹ He reported that the Jesuit church in Beirut was closed and reopened twice. The motive

⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, December 12, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1914, rubr. 257, fasc. 1.

⁹ Letter from Ambassador Morgenthau, January 20, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

¹⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, February 4, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

¹¹ Giannini to Dolci, October 11, 1916, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2.

given to close the church was that “it was not convenient to have a Christian church on the same premise as a Muslim school.”¹² The church was reopened after the intervention of the Austrian ambassador.

Giannini shared his insight about the future of the Catholic churches in Syria, suggesting that the measures taken by the Ottoman Government were “intended to make impossible any work in this country.”¹³ Although the Porte insisted that all measures were politically motivated war measures, numerous examples in Syria and Palestine painted a different picture. The Holy See was wary that behind the excuse of war measures, Catholics were actually facing religious persecution, intended to put pressure on the Holy See and bring it to seriously consider entering into direct diplomatic relations with the Porte.¹⁴

The situation of Catholic establishments deteriorated even more after the entrance of Italy into the war in May 1915. The Apostolic Delegates, Dolci and Giannini, were both Italians. The welfare of the Custody of the Holy land, entrusted to Italian Franciscans, experienced a significant deterioration when Italy declared war on the Central Powers. In the early days of 1915, the Ottoman Government ordered the closing of twelve convents belonging to the Custody of the Holy Land on the motive that they were under French protection. Dolci explained in a letter to Gotti, the prefect for *Propaganda Fide*, that the Italian and Spanish ambassadors had negotiated with the

¹² Giannini to Dolci, October 25, 1916, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2. (My translation).

¹³ Giannini to Dolci, October 25, 1916. (My translation).

¹⁴ Giannini to Gotti, January 16, 1915, A.P. N.S., volume 592 (1917), Rub. 126, fol. 44rv.

Porte, explaining that the institutions were overwhelmingly staffed with Italians and therefore were the property of the King of Italy. Then, Dolci lamented that this nationalist attitude of the Spanish Minister not only offended the Government but also aroused the susceptibility of other powers with disastrous consequences.¹⁵ The Italian and Spanish ambassadors' attempts to replace the French Protectorate with a new Italian or Spanish protectorate was negatively perceived by a government eager to assert its absolute sovereignty.

Dolci, in order to obtain the reopening of the convents, moved the topic from a political plane to a religious one, arguing that the closing was perceived in Europe as a sign of religious persecution, and that the Porte had the duty to protect the Catholic religion, which was transnational and impartial.¹⁶ The Apostolic Delegate used political arguments to solve a religious problem. In a meeting with the Grand Vizir, he told him that he should not try to resolve this issue by damaging Catholic religious interests, which was to the exclusive advantage of the Orthodox churches, the Ottoman Government's "arch-enemy." He suggested that the reopening of the convents would have no political meaning because it had no bearing on the question of the protectorate.¹⁷ The arguments convinced the Vizir and the convents were reopened shortly after the meeting.

With the expulsion of French and Italian missionaries, most religious establishments were in jeopardy. The Ottoman Government closed and confiscated the

¹⁵ Dolci to Gotti, March 28, 1915, A.P. N.S., volume 592 (1917), rub. 126, fol. 59-63.

¹⁶ Dolci to Gotti, March 28, 1915.

¹⁷ Dolci to Gotti, March 28, 1915.

buildings on the grounds that they were French property, because of their being under French protection for centuries. To counter the measures of confiscation, the Holy See raised the legal issue of ownership, arguing that all establishments, although protected by the French, were the property of the Holy See, and therefore should not be confiscated. The question of the legal status of convents, schools, and other religious buildings became the crux of most diplomatic exchanges between the Holy See and Constantinople.

The Question of the Legal Status of Catholic Institutions

Early in the war, on November 17, 1914, Giannini wrote to the General Governor of Beirut, Bekir Sami Bey, raising the issue of the legal status of Catholic institutions in Syria and Palestine. He contended that the buildings belonged to the Holy See, since all Catholic Missions come under the Holy See regardless of the nationality of their occupants.¹⁸

The legal status of Catholic establishments was an issue going back to the Treaty of Mytilene of 1901 by which the Ottoman government acknowledged the legal existence of all Catholic institutions under French protectorate, allowing most of them to be exempted from municipal taxes and custom duties.¹⁹ A list of all establishments concerned was compiled with a clause allowing the addition of new establishments in the future.

¹⁸ Giannini to Gotti, November 17, 1914, A.P. N.S., volume 592 (1917), Rub. 126.

¹⁹ Alexander Mombelli, *Palestine: Catholics Affirm Principle of Their Rights*, Jerusalem, N.C.W.C. News Service, December 7, 1935.
http://www.catholicnews.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4266&Itemid=78

Nevertheless, the legal situation was never fully clarified as the official acknowledgment of these institutions was based on the presentation of deeds, often inexistent. Most of the establishments ruled by French missionaries were existing *de facto* and not *de jure* as many of them had been built illegally.²⁰ A new agreement was signed in 1913, alluding to the specific privileges of the Catholics in the Holy Land.

In a relation written on February 22, 1915, the Patriarch of Jerusalem developed the legal interpretation given by the Holy See regarding the establishments of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem under French Protectorate. He explained that

Since the Ottoman government has abolished the French protectorate, it could be said that the establishments that are not French, but only under the protection of France, would certainly have to come back under Ottoman administration, unless France presents these establishments as purely French, which would be an inaccuracy in respect to missions and schools under the Patriarchate.²¹

The Ottoman Government accepted the argument and kept the schools and missions belonging to the Latin Patriarchate open.

While the Porte was justifying its confiscating Catholic establishments by considering the Catholic buildings French property, the Holy See argued that there was a difference, with huge legal implications, between French property and property protected

²⁰ Jean-Paul Durand, O.P., “Les accords de Mytilène de 1901 entre le gouvernement français et la Sublime Porte,” in *Le pontificat de Léon XIII, renaissances du Saint-Siège?* eds. Philippe Levillain and Jean-Marc Ticchi (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2006), 185-202.

²¹ “avendo il governo ottoman abolito il protettorato francese, si direbbe che ne verrebbe di conseguenza che gli stabilimenti non francesi, ma protetti soltanto, avessero da tornare sotto il regime ottoman senz’altro, ameno che la Francia non avesse presentati tali stabilimenti come puramente francesi, cio che sarebbe stato un’inesattezza per riguardo alle mission e scuole del Patriarcato.” (My translation). Relazione intorno all’espulsione dei Religiosi dalla Palestina e sullo stato del Patriarcato di Gerusalemme e delle sue mission, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, February 22, 1915, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

by France. On these grounds, Dolci was instructed by Cardinal Gasparri to defend Catholic establishments as being the property of the Holy See.²²

In many cases, the situation was complicated by the sale of Catholic property by Ottoman authorities to local buyers. In February 1916, Dolci wrote to Gasparri regarding the confiscation of the mission belonging to the Sisters of St. Joseph in Beirut. Dolci was able to prove the ownership of the mission by the Holy See, presenting documents showing that the mission had been built with money sent by Pope Pius IX. Nevertheless, the rumor was that the mission had already been sold, which, as Dolci noted, “would complicate the transactions.”²³

The diplomatic discussions were especially tense regarding the establishments under the care of the Custody of the Holy Land and buildings in Syria shared by Catholic and Orthodox communities.

The Custody of the Holy Land presented a unique situation. Although entrusted to Italian Franciscans, the Porte considered the establishments under the guardianship of the Custody as French property and closed the majority of them. An exception was granted to the rare members of the Custody who were citizens of a neutral country. In a decree of April 1915, transmitted by Giannini to Dolci, the Ottoman Government stated that

Although it is not possible to recognize otherwise than French the convents of the Holy Land, of Jerusalem, and its surroundings ... religious members from neutral countries are allowed, out of gracious kindness, to stay from now on in the convents under the protection of the Ottoman Government.²⁴

²² Gasparri to Giannini, July 28, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

²³ Dolci to Gasparri, February 4, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

Giannini questioned the content of the decree. He observed that the Porte considered as belonging to the Custody, convents and other religious institutions situated “in the neighborhood” (e dintorni) of the Custody which, according to Giannini, raised a serious issue, as it would justify the closure of convents situated far away from Jerusalem.²⁵

As for the French ownership of all establishments under the Custody of the Holy Land, Giannini dismissed the Ottoman statement on two main grounds. Firstly, he argued that there was an important legal distinction between French establishments and establishments under French protection. Secondly, he noted that the Custody of the Holy Land was established by imperial decree, long before the signature of the first Capitulations between the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and King Francis of France, Capitulations that were the foundational basis for the establishment of the French Protectorate. In the firman establishing the Custody, stressed Giannini, “there is no mention of French property.” The fact that the imperial decree was promulgated upon French request did not imply that the establishments referred to in the decree became automatically French property. If it were the case, the Republic of Venice or Spain, which were also accorded firmans by the Porte, could also claim ownership of institutions under the guardianship of the Custody of the Holy Land.²⁶

²⁴ “Benche non sia possibile riconoscere altrimenti che come stabilimenti francesi i conventi di Terra Santa di Gerusalemme e dintorni ... e stato concesso ..., per graziosa gentilezza, ai religiosi sudditi delle nazioni neutre di dimorar per adesso nei loro conventi rilevanti unicamente dal Governo Ottomano.” (My translation). Giannini to Dolci, May 25, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

²⁵ Giannini to Dolci, May 25, 1915.

Then, Giannini gave a legal explanation to justify the ownership of the Custody of the Holy Land by the Holy See. The Franciscan Custody has always been deemed an autonomous entity.

“Its properties ... enjoyed the privileged status given to pious legacies by the legislation of the Ottoman Empire. And as under Canon Law, the Franciscans possess nothing, the true and lawful owner of the convents of the Custody and their belongings has always been and is still today the Holy See as a result of papal bulls, and has never been France or any other nation.”²⁷

Giannini’s legal demonstration was ratified by Djemal Pasha, admitting in one instance that a specific hospice in the Holy Land was not French property. Building on this unexpected acknowledgment, Giannini dismissed any further discussion about French ownership and centered his reasoning on the legal repercussions that the French protectorate entailed for the Custody of the Holy Land. The responsibilities attached to the protectorate belonged to the nation ensuring the protection, namely France, and not to those benefiting from the protection. Therefore, any retribution or war measure had to be addressed to France, the nation that signed the Capitulations, foundation of the protectorate, and not to those under its protection, like the Italians, guardians of the Custody of the Holy Land.²⁸

²⁶ Giannini to Dolci, May 25, 1915.

²⁷ “Le sue proprietà ... godevano dello stato giuridico privilegiato assegnato ai legati pii dalla Legislazione dell’Impero Ottomano. E poiché per legge canonica i Francescani nulla possiedono in proprio, la vera e legittima proprietaria dei conventi della Custodia e delle loro appartenenze fu sempre ed è anche oggi la Santa Sede, come risulta dalle relative Bolle Pontificie, e non mai la Francia o altra nazione.” (My translation). Giannini to Dolci, May 25, 1915.

²⁸ Giannini to Dolci, May 25, 1915.

Msgr. Dolci had then to convince the Ottoman Government of the validity of Giannini's legal demonstration. According to Fr. Tonizza, writing from the Custody, Dolci was confident that he would be able to prove the full ownership of the Holy See over the establishments of the Custody of the Holy Land, and would also try to obtain a new firman to recognize and confirm officially this right.²⁹

Pope Benedict was following closely the situation in the Holy Land. He waited until July 23, 1915, a couple of months after Italy had entered the war on the Entente side, to give his official consent to Dolci to "declare that the Holy See is the sole owner" of the establishments under the guardianship of the Custody.³⁰ With France and Italy fighting against Constantinople, the Holy See, which until then had chosen a prudent policy, had to become more proactive in defending its ownership over Catholic institutions in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Holy Land. Therefore, the pontiff engaged in a balanced diplomacy with the Porte, working to find a way to obtain satisfaction without having to budge on its wait-and-see prudent policy regarding the establishment of direct ties with the Ottoman Government.

Despite Dolci's reassuring dispatches, the diplomatic spat between the Holy See and Constantinople did not find an easy solution. In November 1915, the menace from the Ottoman Government to close and confiscate more Catholic establishments was still

²⁹ Giacinto Tonizza to Serafino Cimino, Minister General of the Franciscan Order, June 27, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. III.

³⁰ "Segretario di Stato il 23 corr. mese m'inviava il seguente Dispaccio cifrato: 'Per proteggere stabilmente Custodia Luoghi Santi, V. S. ... e autorizzata a dichiarare che la S. Sede ne e la sola proprietaria.'" Dolci to Gasparri, July 27, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

lingering. In a letter dated November 25, Dolci acknowledged that the Porte had adopted a “new orientation.”³¹ He informed Gasparri that he had met with the new minister who “assured [him] that the convents of the Custody of the Holy Land situated in Palestine would not be touched, but with regards to the other convents a study would be done.”³²

The Ottoman Government was not satisfied with oral or written general declarations of ownership by the Holy See and was now requiring legal documents to prove its rights over the Catholic establishments. The minister was convinced that they legally belonged to the Holy See, but unfortunately it was not enough to serve as legal proof of ownership.³³ The Minister suggested to Dolci that the Holy See was too-trusting in the return of the old regime and that they would be better protected if they could present the necessary documents.³⁴ This statement was a veiled threat, understood as such by Dolci who could not find any better immediate response than “to gain time.” He begged the Minister to reopen the churches belonging to convents that had been closed, arguing that the collection of legal deeds proving the Holy See’s ownership over Catholic establishments would take time. In the meantime, Catholic worship and life had to be maintained to avoid further disintegration of the Catholic fabric in the area. The Minister

³¹ Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1918, rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

³² Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915. (My translation).

³³ Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915.

³⁴ Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915.

accepted the request to keep churches opened and wait for proof of ownership before reopening the convents themselves.³⁵

Dolci noted two important points in the new orientation taken by the Ottoman Government. Firstly, he recognized the subtlety of the Turkish diplomacy in its distinguishing among the convents of the Custody, between those located in Palestine and those in areas like Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo, respecting the former and closing the latter. Dolci explained to Gasparri that the government had chosen a double-edged diplomacy. On one hand, it was maintaining the pressure on the Holy See to present legal deeds and enter in direct diplomatic ties. But on the other hand, it was avoiding direct confrontation with Christians worldwide, therefore maintaining the convents of the Holy Land open, the Holy Sites being famous all over the world.

Secondly, Dolci interpreted the order to present legal deeds of ownership as a way to give a legal and final answer to an old problem and avoid future claims of ownership or protectorate by other nations. In the same letter, Dolci lamented the passing away of Baron Wangenheim, the German ambassador, who had been very supportive. The new ambassador, Count Metternich, did not have the “intuition and energy” of his predecessor and could not help in this difficult matter. Therefore, Dolci gave his advice to Gasparri. Considering the foolishness of the political orientations of the Government, the uncertainty of the future, and the omnipotence of Djemal Pasha in Syria, who does not

³⁵ Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915.

comply with any disposition taken by the central Government, it would be wiser to keep a low profile and wait until the end of the hostilities.³⁶

Gasparri's response came in early January 1916. He thanked Dolci for his advice and thorough relation but asked him to be more proactive and keep the discussion open with the Ottoman Government. As a canon lawyer, Gasparri was comfortable arguing on legal grounds. He circumvented the delicate topic of ownership acquired through distinctive deeds for each property and appealed to Canon Law to resolve the matter. He emphasized the legal nuance between ownership (*proprieta*) and the use of this property (*uso*), arguing that the Mendicant orders, in this case the Franciscans, had the use of the convents that were legally ownership of the Holy See.³⁷

According to Gasparri, this argumentation should be sufficient to convince the Ottoman Government to abandon the idea of presenting deeds for each property. If Constantinople persisted, Gasparri recommended to gain time, arguing of the difficulty to collect the information and beg the government to reopen all the convents, a necessary step to provide spiritual assistance of Catholics in the area.³⁸

The Holy See was never convinced of the Porte's good will and feared that behind legalistic subtleties loomed religious persecution against Catholics. The fate of the

³⁶ "Vista la volubilita degli indirizzi politici del Governo, l'incertezza dell' avvenire, la disorganizzazione dei poteri, l'omnipotenza del General Djemal Pacha nella Siria, il quale non si attiene punto alla disposizioni del Governo central, per I pieni poteri di cui e investito; considerate le noie diplomatiche che ci verrebbero dal Gabinetto di Spagna e che, volendole evitare, la tesi non sarebbe accettata dal Governo, cerderei opportuno lasciare da parte, come mezzo di protezione, la rivendicazione di proprieta sotto qualsiasi aspetto, subire gli eventi, nella fiducia che, cessate le ostilita, si potra riparare a questi disordini pur troppo disastrosi." Dolci to Gasparri, November 20, 1915.

³⁷ Gasparri to Dolci, January 8, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1918, rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

³⁸ Gasparri to Dolci, January 8, 1916.

monastery of Mar-Elia, in Syria, was one situation that reinforced the Holy See's accusation that the Porte had engaged in an anti-Catholic campaign.

On January 24, 1915, the Patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch, Ignatius Ephrem Rahmani, wrote to Cardinal Gasparri to lament the treatment reserved to Eastern Catholics, especially to the Syriac Catholic Church.³⁹ He complained that two of its religious establishments, the monastery of Mar-Elia and a local church, had not only been confiscated but had been transferred to the Syriac Orthodox Church. The Patriarch explained in a memo the historical background of the issue. There was a time, he wrote, when the Ottoman Government, denying Christians the right to build new churches, had ordered the two branches of the Syriac Church (Catholic and Jacobites)⁴⁰ to share the same buildings. When the community became overwhelmingly Catholic, the religious establishments became its exclusive property. The Patriarch stressed that the Syriac Catholic Church had never recognized the French Protectorate and had always paid taxes to the Ottoman Government.⁴¹

On March 14, 1915, Cardinal Gasparri wrote to Msgr. Scapinelli, pro-nuncio in Vienna, asking him to solicit the support of the Austrian government via its ambassador in Constantinople.⁴² The Austrian and the German ambassadors promised to mediate in favor of the Syriac Catholic community of Mar-Elia.⁴³

³⁹ Rahmani, Patriarch of the Syriac Church to Gasparri, January 24, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁴⁰ The Jacobites are the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

⁴¹ Rahmani, Patriarch of the Syriac Church to Gasparri, January 24, 1915.

The Ottoman Government presented the decision to evict the Syriac Catholic community and favor the Jacobites as a war measure against religious establishments under French Protectorate. The religious were actually Ottoman subjects living on a territory, under special firman from the Ottoman Government, exempted from French protection. The measure taken by the Ottoman Government exacerbated the tensions between Catholic and Orthodox communities at a time when Pope Benedict was promoting a *rapprochement* with the separated brethren.

The Expulsion and Persecution of Catholic Clergy

War Measures or Religious Persecution?

While Catholic churches, convents, schools, and other buildings were closed, confiscated, and re-allotted for Ottoman purposes, the Catholic clergy was expelled and sent back to its country of origin or deported to a different area of the Ottoman Empire. The Holy See immediately expressed its fear that war measures against members of belligerent countries would transform into a religious persecution against Catholics.

Msgr. Dolci sought the help of Baron Wangenheim, the German ambassador in Constantinople, to avoid violent deportation of French clergymen. He claimed at the same time that “there was no doubt that the inspiration and the impulsion behind these reprisals against the French missions had come from Germany to destroy their national

⁴² Gasparri to Pro-Nunzio in Vienna, Scapinelli, March 14, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁴³ Dolci to Gasparri, April 8, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

influence.”⁴⁴ The German ambassador reinforced the Holy See’s apprehension when he dismissed any religious persecution against Christians in Syria but admitted that the Ottoman Government had taken some tough measures against French missionaries.⁴⁵

Different missives from clergymen in Palestine and Syria, as well as press articles, denounced the expulsions and bad treatment suffered by the Catholic clergy. The *New York Times* of January 11, 1915 worried that

hundred of missionaries and other religious workers in the Holy Land are facing starvation, according to reports received ... by the Rev. Godfrey Schilling of the Franciscan order, Commissary General for the Holy land in the United States. The reports show that the Turks have turned the Franciscans out of nearly all of their convents in Armenia, Upper Syria, and Galilee ... In Jerusalem flourishing communities of the Assumptionists, Dominicans ... the Poor Clares and other orders are said to have been put out into the streets.⁴⁶

A few days later, the Patriarchate in Jerusalem informed *Propaganda Fide* that the expulsion of religious members of belligerent countries had been sudden and brutal, and had been accompanied by many unnecessary vexations. Nevertheless, he praised the kind attitude of the government agents and the Muslim population, adding that the Patriarch himself was treated with much deference.⁴⁷

With the entrance of Italy into the war, the situation of the Catholic clergy deteriorated further. Dolci noticed that the treatment reserved to the Italian clergy was

⁴⁴ “non e dubbio che l’ispirazione e l’impulso di queste rappresaglie contro le Missioni francesi sia venuto dalla Germania per distruggere ogni loro influenza nazionale.” (my translation). Dolci to Gasparri, December 12, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁴⁵ Baron Wangenheim to Dolci, December 9, 1914, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁴⁶ “Oust Religious Workers,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1915.

⁴⁷ Relazione intorno all’espulsione dei Religiosi dalla Palestina e sullo stato del Patriarcato di Gerusalemme e delle sue mission, February 22, 1915, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

much harsher than what the French, Belgian, and British had to suffer. The reason lay upon a subtle distinction established by the Porte, not on religious grounds but on the political plane. In a meeting with Dolci, the Director for Political Affairs explained that he “found almost justified the hostile attitude of France and England against Turkey,” but “had strong words against the conduct of the Italian government, and recalling the Libyan War, the occupation of the Dodecanese ... he ended by saying that not satisfied to have reduced the territorial integrity of the Empire, [Italy] was seeking, taking advantage of the international military situation, to shed new blood in Turkey.”⁴⁸

The decrees against Italian clergymen had a powerful impact as most of the Catholic hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire was Italian. Dolci obtained from the Porte that Msgr. Giannini, the Italian Apostolic Delegate in Beirut, be protected and maintained in his function.⁴⁹ Yet, Giannini’s security was never fully ensured as Djemal Pasha, the Commander of the Syrian army, accusing most Italian and French clergymen of spying for their country, threatened to imprison him.

With the expulsion of French and Italian clerics and missionaries, the Catholic network was threatened and weakened. Dolci pointed out that the eventual expulsion of all religious from belligerent countries was a disaster for religious worship, parish life,

⁴⁸ “trovava quasi giustificabile l’atteggiamento ostile della Francia e dall’Inghilterra contro la Turchia ... aveva parole di fuoro contro la condotta del Governo italiano, e rievocando la Guerra libica, l’occupazione del Dodecanese ... terminava dicendo che essa, non soddisfatta di avere ridotta l’integrità territorial dell’Impero, cercava anche oggi, sfruttando la situazione bellica internazionale, di fare versare nuovo sangue alla Turchia.” (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, September 16, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

⁴⁹ Dolci to Gasparri, September 19, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

and the safe running of hospitals. He was able to avoid the worst by obtaining, with the support of the German ambassador, the cancelation of the order of expulsion for a selected few clergymen.⁵⁰

Dolci was adamant that the measures presented by the Ottoman Government as war measures against clergymen belonging to the Entente countries were, by their focusing on the clergy and by their scope and brutality, repressive measures characteristic of religious persecution.

By the end of 1915, little doubt was left. In a dispatch of December 12, Giannini described to Msgr. Scapinelli, the nuncio in Vienna what, in his view, amounted to clear religious persecution. Giannini recounted that the Vali of Beirut⁵¹ had ordered to the Sisters of St. Vincent and other congregations, the great majority of them being Ottoman subjects, to change their religious habit on the grounds that “it was a sign of foreign fashion.”⁵² He addressed this letter to the nuncio in Vienna with the hope that Scapinelli would be able to intervene directly, as Msgr. Giannini was forbidden to write to the Vali or any other authority or to ask police intervention. Gasparri, informed by the nuncio of the dangerous situation in Syria, asked Dolci to intervene with great prudence and be respectful of the Ottoman Government.⁵³

⁵⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, October 6, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁵¹ The Turkish governor of the region of Beirut.

⁵² Giannini to Scapinelli, December 12, 1915 and Scapinelli to Gasparri, January 4, 1916, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2.

⁵³ Gasparri to Dolci, January 18, 1916, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2.

A few days later, it was the turn of the Jesuits of Ottoman citizenship to be persecuted. The governor of Mount Lebanon commanded them to abandon their religious habit and change it for an oriental religious outfit. They were also summoned to leave their house in Zahle and return to their respective countries, as the governor was not willing to recognize the Latin Catholic worship.⁵⁴

In March 1916, the governor of Lebanon promulgated a decree enjoining all Latin Catholic priests, monks, and nuns of Ottoman nationality, members of a congregation whose headquarters were abroad, to break all ties with their order and leave their habit and any mark distinctive of their religious order. He allowed Lebanese religious men and women to keep their religious status as long as they would rejoin their former community, Maronite or Melchite.⁵⁵ That the headquarters of these congregations were in France and not in Rome complicated the situation. In a follow up letter to Gasparri, the nuncio in Vienna noted that “against the Turkish point of view, which notes that the religious congregations have their headquarters abroad, it would be easy to demonstrate that the center of Congregations can not be other than the Church itself; unfortunately this argument becomes ineffective by the unfortunate fact ... that several general superiors reside in France, location which does not coincide at all with the central power of the Church concentrated in Rome.”⁵⁶ The repressive measure shocked Pope Benedict

⁵⁴ Dolci to Gasparri, January 15, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 305-1.

⁵⁵ Instructions given by the Lebanese Government, March 7, 332, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2.

⁵⁶ “En face du point de vue turc qui relève que les Congrégations religieuses ont leur siège à l'étranger, il serait bien facile de démontrer que le centre des Congrégations ne peut être autre que celui de

who asked Dolci to put pressure on the Sublime Porte to stop massacres that sparked outrage from the world against the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁷

Once again, the provincial governors implemented measures much harsher than what Constantinople was ready to employ. The Porte was using the threat of religious persecution as a diplomatic weapon to force the Holy See to enter into diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Government, while local officials were promulgating decrees that fit their own interests and beliefs. The Valis were regularly receiving orders from Constantinople to cancel measures taken against Catholic members of the clergy, orders that were not always followed. Giannini and Dolci frequently complained about the internal tensions and state of disorganization of the Ottoman Empire in this matter.⁵⁸ Another explanation suggested by the European and American press regarding the local governors' decisions against Latin Catholics, often accomplished in complete impunity, was that "the Sultan without containing the Vali authority by giving formal orders ... clearly shows his systematic purpose that is the annihilation of Christian worship in order to form an Ottoman nation on Muslim foundation."⁵⁹ Dolci pointed out that by letting

l'Eglise même; malheureusement cet argument est rendu inefficace par le fait regrettable ... que plusieurs supérieurs généraux résident en France, résidence qui ne coïncide nullement avec la concentration à Rome, du pouvoir central de l'Eglise." (My translation). Scapinelli to Gasparri, September 25, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 112.

⁵⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, June 2, 1916, copying Gasparri's dispatch of May 28, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

⁵⁸ Dolci to Gasparri and Serafini, April 15, 1916, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc. 2.

⁵⁹ "Le Sultan en ne contenant pas l'autorité du Vali par des ordres formels ... montre clairement le but qu'il poursuit systématiquement, c'est à dire l'anéantissement du culte chrétien pour ne former qu'une nation ottomane sur une base exclusivement musulmane." (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, June 2, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 110.

local governors in Syria and Lebanon enforce measures of persecussion without efficient control, the Ottoman Government was acting against its own interest, as it should be quick to testify to the world that Christian worship did not need the protection of foreign Powers, its natural protector being the Ottoman Government.⁶⁰

Throughout the war, Dolci appealed to the German ambassador to act with energy to obtain the liberation of those religious men and women, victims of Ottoman persecution. Dolci grasped the ambiguous role played by the German ambassador. On one hand, Berlin, as a European Christian power, was supporting the Holy See in its attempt to protect all clergymen victims of expulsion or deportation. On the other hand, a chance was offered to Germany, as an ally to the Porte, to impose its political and religious presence in the Ottoman Empire by substituting a German and Austrian clergy to the French and Italian.

In the wake of the expulsion of the French, British, and Italian clergy from the Ottoman Empire, Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest created committees to discuss the most appropriate way to support the missions and other Catholic establishments surrendered to the Ottoman government.⁶¹ That Berlin and Vienna had for main goal to protect Catholic interests in Greater Syria was not in doubt. By taking over establishments that had been in Italian and French hands for centuries, Berlin, and in a lesser measure Vienna, was also aiming at political and cultural gain. Scapinelli, the nuncio in Vienna, warned Gasparri that sending German and Austrian members of the clergy to the Ottoman Empire would

⁶⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, June 2, 1916.

⁶¹ Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 17, 1915, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915-1916, pos. 1071, fasc. 465.

support the “grand design of Germany” that was to replace the old political influence of France in Greater Syria, but also to expand its power to the immense regions from Constantinople to Baghdad, through the the German railway project.⁶² Scapinelli feared that allowing the German clergy to substitute for French and Italian clergy would anger France, which would accuse the Holy See of taking side in the conflict through this mean.

A few weeks later, the papal nuncio at Munich, Cardinal Frühwirth, wrote to Gasparri along the same lines. Cardinal von Hartmann, the Archbishop of Cologne had written to Frühwirth regarding the spiritual care of Catholics in Turkey.⁶³ Hartmann reported that the German ambassador had confided to him that Msgr. Dolci, being Italian, would not obtain any positive results to his requests without the support of Germany. A German bishop, or at least a bishop from a neutral country, sent to Constantinople, would therefore solve the different issues facing the Holy See in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁴

While exchanging missives with the Holy See, Cardinal von Hartmann started a German Catholic propaganda campaign in the Ottoman Empire. He dispatched a clergyman, Dr. Straubinger, whose official mission was to deliver a letter of recommendation to the military chaplaincy.⁶⁵ In reality, he had been sent to investigate the current state of affairs in order to initiate German Catholic propaganda in the Orient.⁶⁶

⁶² Scapinelli to Gasparri, December 17, 1915.

⁶³ Frühwirth to Gasparri, January 25, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915-1916, pos. 1071, fasc. 465.

⁶⁴ Frühwirth to Gasparri, January 25, 1916.

⁶⁵ Dolci to Gasparri, February 10, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915-1916, pos. 1071, fasc. 465.

⁶⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, February 10, 1916.

Dolci dismissed a report written by the German agent, “Relazione sulle missioni e scuole cattoliche in Turchia e i cattolichi tedeschi,” criticizing its lack of accuracy and its being flawed because of a lack of genuine information. As a result of this report, Cardinal von Hartmann sent a doctor in Theology, Enrico Zimmermann to Constantinople.⁶⁷ A few other German clerics followed.

With Gasparri’s approval,⁶⁸ Dolci let the German clergymen work in Catholic institutions while avoiding upsetting France. He tempered the German activism of Straubinger whose energy was concentrated in converting French schools belonging to the Brothers of the Christian Schools into German missions, convincing him to consider the schools as Ottoman institutions.⁶⁹ He also suggested, with Gasparri’s consent,⁷⁰ to open schools with German Catholic features that would serve the German colony.⁷¹

Dolci was successful in his curbing German propaganda in the Ottoman Empire but was not able to assuage Italian and French fears. Carlo Monti, the Italian director of the office for administering ecclesial funds, expressed his concern to Gasparri about the German religious offensive in Palestine, which was aiming at overruling the Italians in the Custody of the Holy Land and establishing a German guardianship. As a proof of the collusion between the German government and the German bishops, Monti pointed out

⁶⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, February 10, 1916.

⁶⁸ Gasparri to Dolci, March 3, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915-1916, pos. 1071, fasc. 465.

⁶⁹ Dolci to Gasparri, February 10, 1916.

⁷⁰ Gasparri to Dolci, March 3, 1916

⁷¹ Dolci to Gasparri, February 10, 1916.

that the German government, which was Protestant, was paying all the travel expenses for the Catholic missionaries.⁷²

The German assault on Catholic missions and schools, backed by the German government, did not bear much fruit. The Holy See was attentive to maintain a prudent *status quo* with the French and the Italians, sending German and Austrian clergy on a case by case agreement. From Constantinople, Msgr. Dolci was enrolling the help of the German ambassador in settling diplomatic quarrels and welcomed the support of the few German clergymen that were sent to Greater Syria to sustain Catholic life and worship in a time of religious persecution against clerics from belligerent countries.

Ottoman Persecution of Catholic Dignitaries

Whether the vexations that accompanied the arrest and deportation of French and Italian clerics were proof of religious persecution and not the mere result of war measures against citizen of belligerent countries may be pondered. On the other hand, the treatment reserved to Catholic dignitaries left little room for discussion. The Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, Msgr. Chibli, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Msgr. Camassei, and the Maronite Patriarch, Msgr. Huayek, were victims of persecution because of their religious status and not because of their being citizens of a belligerent country. With the exception of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Msgr. Filippo Camassei who was Italian, none of them was of European extraction, neither French nor Italian.

⁷² Carlo Monti to Gasparri, May 14, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1915-1916, pos. 1071, fasc. 465.

Msgr. Chibli was the Maronite Archbishop of Beirut. Although not a Catholic of Latin rite, the rumor spread in the first days of July 1916 that he had been condemned to death by the Martial Court of the City of Beirut.⁷³ When Msgr. Dolci protested to the Minister of Foreign Affairs against the measure, the Foreign Minister questioned the veracity of the information and promised the Apostolic Delegate to intervene and stop the execution. Dolci pointed out the lack of communication between Constantinople and the governor of Syria, saying that the measure was “another stupid act from the Governor of Syria,” to which comment the Minister of Foreign Affairs replied that it was true indeed.⁷⁴ Msgr. Chibli was actually not condemned to death but to deportation along with other Maronite notables. He eventually died on March 20, 1917.

More sensitive was the situation faced by Msgr. Huayek, the Maronite Patriarch, who was forced with other high dignitaries of the Catholic Church in Syria and Palestine, to co-sign a statement praising the Commander in Chief of Syria, Djemal Pasha.⁷⁵ The language used was typical of propaganda communiqués. The text, written in French, was a rhetorical exercise that hid a veiled threat against the Catholic Church. The signatories of the statement praised General Djemal Pasha

⁷³ Dolci to Gasparri, July 8, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1916, pos. 1104, fasc. 470.

⁷⁴ Dolci to Gasparri, July 8, 1916.

⁷⁵ Opusculé “Réponse à la presse française – Démentis opposés par le Clergé supérieur de la Syrie et de la Palestine aux mensonges des journaux français,” Jerusalem, November 14, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), rubr. 244, fasc. 111.

well known for his wisdom, and whose arrival in the area is considered as a true blessing and a kindness from the Most High who, in the critical circumstances of human things know how to create men instrumental for the consolation of peoples.⁷⁶

The panegyric of Djemal Pasha was accompanied by personal letters written by different dignitaries, among them Msgr. Huyaek.⁷⁷ The Maronite Patriarch stopped short of praising the great heart and magnanimity of Djemal Pasha concentrating instead on tarnishing the image of France among Maronites, dismissing any beneficial role the nation had played in Syria-Lebanon.⁷⁸ This denigration of France was a necessary step to take to ensure the protection of the Maronite population, which was accused, often without any evidence, of collaboration and friendship with the French.

Praising the Ottoman Government and blaming France for all ills could not help the fate of Msgr. Huyaek who was condemned to deportation in July 1917. Dolci complained to the War Minister that Msgr. Huyaek, a high-ranking ecclesiastic who had celebrated his 75th birthday, had received orders to leave his summer residence of Diman, nested in the north of Lebanon, and move to Zahleh, in the Beka, where there were no Maronites to minister to and no adequate place to live. He stressed the negative repercussions that the measure would have on the image the Ottoman Government was eager to maintain with

⁷⁶ “Bien connu pour sa sagacité, et dont l’arrivée dans ces parages est considérée tout à fait comme un bienfait et une bienveillance du Très-haut qui dans les circonstances critiques des choses humaines sait créer des hommes utiles pour la consolation des peuples.” (My translation). Réponse à la presse française, November 14, 1916.

⁷⁷ Letters from Gregory IV, Patriarch of Antioch and from Dimitrios Cady, Kaimakam Patriarcal for the Greek Catholics, were also attached.

⁷⁸ Réponse à la presse française, November 14, 1916.

the Catholics worldwide,⁷⁹ but also with the Maronites who could enter in rebellion and reopen the long-standing question of Lebanese independence.⁸⁰

The deportation of Msgr. Huyaek was managed with much care and subtlety. Djemal Pasha did not order a violent arrest. He convoked the Patriarch to different meetings in distant locations, each time pushing him further away from his seat in Lebanon. When Msgr. Huyaek received the invitation to join Djemal Pasha in Zahle in August 1917, he presented excuses on account of his health and offered to be at the disposal of the governor at the residence of the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus in Shewan. He was eventually released after the intervention of the Holy See and the Emperor of Austria.

With the British troops approaching Jerusalem, tension rose among the Ottoman Government. After subjecting Msgr. Chibli and Msgr. Huyaek to persecution, Djemal Pasha turned his attention to the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, Msgr. Camassei. While Msgr. Huyaek was moved to exile but never arrested, Msgr. Camassei met a more brutal fate. Dolci informed Serafini at *Propaganda Fide* that Msgr. Camassei and his Vicar Msgr. Piccardo had been arrested by order of Djemal Pasha and sent to an unknown location.⁸¹ Conflicting reports reached Dolci. On December 2, 1917, General Bronsart, head of the German Military mission in the Ottoman Empire, reported to Dolci that, for

⁷⁹ Dolci to Ottoman Minister of War, July 26, 1917, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci III.

⁸⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, October 24, 1917, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 130-1.

⁸¹ Dolci to Serafini, November 25, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

military reasons, Msgr. Camassei had been sent to Angora⁸² where the climate was better for his health.⁸³ Bronsart insisted that the Patriarch had traveled in an automobile, a rarity at the time, in the most comfortable way. In the meantime, Sir Reginald Wingate, a British General, was alerting Count of Salis, the British representative to the Holy See, that Msgr. Camassei had been deported with much violence to Nablus, in Palestine, on November 19, 1917.⁸⁴ From his exile, Camassei was ordered by Djemal Pasha to write a letter to Pope Benedict with a special request to publish it in the *Osservatore Romano*.⁸⁵ In this letter, preserved in the Vatican Archives, Msgr. Camassei engaged in a forced propaganda exercise, similar to his previous panegyric of the Ottoman Government and the Military Commander of Syria, Djemal Pasha.⁸⁶ After lamenting the many calamities that had affected Lebanon, he expressed gratitude to Pope Benedict's actions to alleviate the Lebanese suffering and praised "the famous Djemal Pacha ...[who] actually took care of our situation and tried to alleviate our misery," stressing that he had always been "surrounded with the most kind gestures and the most benevolent consideration."⁸⁷

⁸² Angora was the historic name for today's Ankara, the capital of Turkey. It is located in Central Anatolia.

⁸³ Dolci to Serafini, December 2, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁸⁴ Telegram from Sir Wingate to Count of Salis, December 5, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁸⁵ Dolci to Gasparri (with letter from Msgr. Camassei of November 2, 1917,) December 5, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1917, pos. 1211, fasc. 496.

⁸⁶ Réponse à la presse française, November 14, 1916.

⁸⁷ Dolci to Gasparri (with letter from Msgr. Camassei of November 2, 1917,) December 5, 1917. (My translation).

According to Giannini's letter to Cardinal Serafini of December 6, 1917, Msgr. Camassei was exiled neither to Nablus nor Angora but was staying with a wealthy Melchite family from Damascus.⁸⁸ He announced in the same note the death of Msgr. Piccardo. To complicate the situation further, Francois Fellingier, Pro-Vicar for the Latin Patriarch, informed Gasparri that Msgr. Camassei had been deported on November 19, 1917 to Nazareth. On November 24, Msgr. Piccardo had been sent to Damascus where he died on December 2, after a long trip. He was 74 years old.⁸⁹

After the liberation of Jerusalem by British troops on December 9, 1917, Cardinal Gasparri officially requested the return of Msgr. Camassei to his seat. The situation was complicated by his probable sojourning in Nazareth, the headquarters for the German expeditionary force, still in Ottoman hands. General Bronsart advised Dolci not to insist on Msgr. Camassei's return to Jerusalem, because military reasons forbade it.⁹⁰ More to the point, the Minister of Foreign Affairs criticized Pope Benedict's congratulatory message sent after the fall of Jerusalem to the British and justified therefore his lack of eagerness to meet the pope's request to free Msgr. Camassei. "The pope has become our enemy" complained the Minister to Dolci.⁹¹

In view of the deadlock reached with Ottoman and German officials, the Holy See turned to Italy for help, which provoked the astonishment of the German Ambassador to

⁸⁸ Giannini to Serafini, December 6, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁸⁹ Telegram from Sir Reginald Wingate to Count of Salis, December 24, 1917, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 111

⁹⁰ Dolci to Serafini, December 30, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁹¹ Dolci to Serafini, January 28, 1918, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126. (My translation).

Constantinople.⁹² Msgr. Camassei was eventually freed in November 1918.⁹³ Writing to the *Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, the Patriarch declared

I believe that my exile was the means chosen by Providence to give our Holy Religion greater honor in this country. Both clergy and people accorded me a reception that moved me to tears.⁹⁴

The harassment of Catholic dignitaries in Syria and Palestine was ordered by Djemal Pasha. He was aware of the diplomatic tension he had raised with the deportation of Msgr. Camassei, whom he accused of being an Italian spy. In all his actions, he proved independent from Constantinople, ruling Syria as his fiefdom. He became more belligerent with time, especially after the British troops had started their successful approach to Jerusalem.

An Assessment

The Disintegration of the Catholic Religious and Cultural Network

Both Dolci and Giannini regularly expressed their fear that after years of war and religious persecution, and although the Government was resolute to protect Catholic churches, “few traces of Catholicism [would] remain after the war.”⁹⁵ The closing of schools, convents, and other Catholic establishments, accompanied by the expulsion of

⁹² Dolci to Gasparri, February 24, 1918, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 130-1.

⁹³ Francisco Fellingier to van Rossum, September 29, 1918, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁹⁴ “Missionary Notes and News,” *Catholic Missions (Society for the Propagation of the Faith)*, May 1919, 119.

⁹⁵ Dolci to Gotti, September 21, 1915, ASV, Segr. Stato, 1915, rubr. 257, fasc. 1. (My translation).

most missionaries and clerics weakened and shrank the Catholic religious, social, and cultural fabric.

With the liberation of Jerusalem came the time to assess the state of Catholic interests in Palestine and Syria. On March 2, 1918, Dolci informed Gasparri that he had heard rumors from the Greek Orthodox clergy that the Ottoman Government was preparing a law on Church property. The Government did not intend to return properties that had been confiscated during the war, many having been sold or used for other purposes. It also planned to confiscate the remaining establishments while taking on the maintaining of Christian worship.⁹⁶ The content of the future law was described by Dolci in another report to Gasparri of May 11, 1918. In addition to the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, the Porte elaborated a policy addressing non-Muslim religious bodies that suppressed the attributes and prerogatives of all Patriarchs. The various administrative bodies were to be replaced by one small committee, whose task was to run all schools, charitable institutions, and churches.⁹⁷

Rome's reaction was swift. Dolci was instructed by Gasparri to protest with energy but prudence against the new bill. The Apostolic Delegate met with the Minister of Cults who did not share much about the content of the bill. It had been prepared by a German adviser whose task was to study the German and Austrian legislation on Church property and draw his inspiration from it. Dolci described the German adviser as a "fanatic protestant," and questioned the authority of the German or Austrian law in this matter,

⁹⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, March 23, 1918, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1918-19, pos. 1314, fasc. 517.

⁹⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, May 11, 1918, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1918-19, pos. 1314, fasc. 517.

arguing that neither in Germany nor in Austria had religious property been subjected to a regime similar to the sacred Muslim law.⁹⁸

Entering in the legal aspects of the bill, Dolci complained of being left in the dark regarding the particulars of the text and articulated two hypotheses. If the law referred to properties that, in the future, would be bequeathed by Christians to the Catholic Church, it was then essential to recognize the legal identity (*personalité juridique*) of the Church, so that it will be able to acquire the properties legally and manage them independently. On the other hand, if the law addressed already existing Church properties, Dolci argued that it would create a very delicate situation with hazardous diplomatic repercussions.⁹⁹

The Catholic Eastern churches could not be compared or identified with the other schismatic Eastern churches claimed the Holy See. Their constitution was different. While the Orthodox Eastern churches were autonomous, the Catholic Eastern churches were under the authority of the Pope, which prevented any interference from a third party.¹⁰⁰

With the surrender of the Ottoman army and the signing of the Mudros armistice on October 30, 1918, which spelled the end of the conflict on Ottoman soil, the law never came into effect.

Time came for the Holy See to supervise the re-opening of the religious establishments, both Latin and Eastern Catholic properties that had been closed or

⁹⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, September 27, 1918, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, pos. 1314, fasc. 517.

⁹⁹ Dolci to Gasparri, September 27, 1918.

¹⁰⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, September 27, 1918.

confiscated by the Ottoman Government during the war. The religious network had been badly damaged and needed a thorough investigation before re-launching Catholic life to its fullest. *Propaganda Fide* and the newly established *Congregation for the Oriental Church* took over the task.

Acting in line with his predecessors, Pope Benedict's diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire had two main objectives: the protection of lay and religious Catholic communities and the protection of Catholic properties in a Muslim environment. The safeguarding and strengthening of Catholic minorities' presence in the Ottoman Empire had been supported throughout the centuries by France, and later by France and Great Britain, who fought for their welfare and status as protected religious minorities.¹⁰¹ The ultimate goal of the Holy See had always been to ensure the continuity of a Catholic presence in the cradle of Christianity, despite the very modest numbers that represented the Catholic communities. This policy of protection of Catholic communities was tied to the Holy See's strategy to guarantee the integrity of Catholic properties, especially in the Holy Places, a land to which all Christians turn with deep reverence and devotion.

Pope Benedict was the first pontiff to experience a war conflict of this scope and violence and to witness the forces of fragmentation at work in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, he had no example of past experience to rely on. The impact of his personality and of his personal understanding of the relationship between the Church and the World, and the Church and other religions was therefore more accentuated. He was a pioneer in this domain.

¹⁰¹ See the creation of new Christian *millets* during the Tanzimat period.

Although remaining impartial throughout the war, the pontiff chose to lead a vocal and active diplomacy that carried the risk of further endangering the welfare of both Catholic communities and institutions in a time of political instability. Refusing to remain silent to avoid persecution of Catholic communities on Ottoman soil, Pope Benedict chose to intervene as a spiritual leader in the affairs of the world. Instead of choosing silence, which is often held by the Holy See as being more effective than direct condemnation, he encouraged the Apostolic Delegate to move the diplomatic discussion from the purely political plane to the religious one, arguing on the basis of his moral authority and his Love for all.

Pope Benedict went beyond the simple acknowledgment of war-time measures against the Christian populations and elevated the debate to encompass the future of the relationship between Muslims and Catholics, arguing that the persecution of Christians would have the worst effect on worldwide public opinion. At a time when diplomacy of reciprocity was not possible, this strategy was the one that carried more chances of success. If it was a risky move, especially after the Ottoman Minister had declared that the pope was now their enemy; it was also a courageous step, a sign of how Pope Benedict understood the role of the Church in a world in the process of being completely reshaped.

Pope Benedict's expectations in regard to the protection of Catholic communities and properties in the Ottoman Empire can only be understood in the larger context of his humanitarian assistance to the destitute population of Syria and Palestine without

discrimination of nationality or religion, founded on the precept of Charity and love for one's neighbor.

CHAPTER 5

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: BENEDICT XV'S FRONTLINE DIPLOMACY

Humanitarian relief efforts relayed by governments on a foreign theater of war are often interpreted as diplomatic efforts meant to support and sometimes validate specific foreign policy objectives. Seldom are they recognized as charitable efforts *per se*. Pope Benedict's humanitarian policy during the First World War was a genuine charitable endeavor, answering the foundational moral precepts of true Catholic charity. But although the Holy See had for main objective the relief of war victims and a will to radiate ethical convictions, it was also hoping to enhance its influence and prestige in Greater Syria, a schismatic land to be won back.

It was only through well oiled diplomatic channels that humanitarian assistance could be safely provided. Situated in essence above the political realm, papal humanitarian relief efforts were yet directly dependent upon the evolution of the political situation on the war theater and the diplomatic ability of the Holy See's representatives on the scene. Pope Benedict's humanitarian policy was innovative. The pontiff designed an original relief policy, a third path between pure charitable acts and a humanitarian diplomacy that furthers foreign policy objectives. His diplomacy was at the crossroad of idealist and realist policies. His humanitarian assistance diplomacy was not a substitute for political action. While providing relief to all in need, in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, Pope Benedict was diplomatically very active on the European scene trying to

secure peace.¹ Political action and humanitarian assistance strategy were developed hand-in-hand.

The main actors in humanitarian relief efforts in the Ottoman Empire were the Holy See and the American Government, through the American Red Cross and the Near East Relief. The collaboration between the two was difficult and eventually resulted in an accusation of discrimination against the Catholic population by the Near East Relief workers.

Catholic Humanitarian Assistance: a Phantom?

Foundations and Motivations of the Holy See's Humanitarian Assistance

From Europe to the end of the Ottoman Empire conditions were chaotic, civil victims and prisoners of war were suffering, dying of illnesses, starvation, or exhaustion after deportation. Through its closely knitted network of parishes and missions, although most had been confiscated and French and Italian missionaries had been expelled, the Catholic Church reached every corner of the war theater, offering the Pope and his Secretary of State a unique listening post, in spite of difficulties of communication and the large amount of disinformation and false rumors circulating. The missionaries became the “cornerstones”² of humanitarianism and their influence “at the policy-making level increased during World War I.”³

¹ See Benedict's *Peace Note of 1917* in Chapter 1, Benedict XV, Pope of Peace, 32-33.

The Holy See spent “an estimated 82 million gold lire, including the majority of Benedict’s personal wealth,”⁴ for humanitarian assistance. The French essayist Romain Rolland dubbed it the “Second Red Cross.” It tracked and secured the exchanges of thousand of prisoners of war. In the Ottoman Empire, it rescued civil populations from complete destitution, from starvation, and tried to prevent massacres in Armenia.

In Greater Syria, it alleviated daily sufferings, tending the sick and negotiating the shipment of food and medicine to sick and starving populations. Designed by the pope and his Secretary of State in Rome, the humanitarian assistance was implemented by Catholic missionaries under the guidance of Msgr. Dolci, Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, and Msgr. Giannini, Apostolic Delegate in Beirut. The commitment of the Church to bring relief to suffering populations also originated from the lower level. It was the combination of a strong sense of purpose at the Vatican and the devotion of missionaries relayed by Apostolic Delegates on the ground that transformed the Church into an original and dedicated humanitarian world agency.

“What we now call humanitarianism, our ancestors called charity.”⁵ Until the 1870s the cornerstones of humanitarian relief were the Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Answering the moral imperative of service to humanity, they acted upon the

² David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night. Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 67.

³ Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975: A Survey* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 61.

⁴ Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed., *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1999), 78.

⁵ Rieff, *Bed for the Night*, 57.

belief that every human being was a gift of God without regards to his race or religion. With the introduction of the Swiss-inspired International Red Cross movement in 1863, civil officers with no religious affiliation increased the ranks of humanitarian workers. The Red Cross rapidly became the “legally recognized guardian”⁶ of the international humanitarian law of war.

The openings of the hostilities in 1914, a conflict of unknown violence and scope, called for an unprecedented level of involvement. Relief workers from the Red Cross joined missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, who were enrolled by the Holy See and the American government respectively, to alleviate the suffering of starving populations. The missionaries became, willingly or not, intelligence agents. Their first-hand reports and the personality of some of them influenced the policy-making of their native countries. This was particularly true of the American Protestant missionaries toiling on Ottoman soil. To their government, humanitarian relief efforts were as much a charitable endeavor as a diplomatic tool to use against the Turkish government.

When Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador at Constantinople from 1913 to 1916, initiated “a kind of national crusade”⁷ in his home country intended to raise funds to alleviate the sufferings of Ottoman subjects in the Empire, the impressive success of his charitable endeavor was regarded as a piece of a larger diplomatic effort. The ultimate goal was to put pressure on the Ottoman government to stop the massacre of

⁶ Rieff, *Bed for the Night*, 70.

⁷ John A. deNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 103.

Christian and Jewish Armenian populations. As the representative of the only great power still neutral in the conflict, he had firsthand knowledge of the atrocities committed in the Ottoman Empire. Information officially meant for the State Department was leaked to the American public, which rapidly demanded American involvement. Morgenthau, pressing the moral and political power of his country upon the Turkish government, tried to convince the Ottomans that they would greatly suffer in reputation for not taking American public opinion into account.

Benedict XV's Humanitarian Assistance: Divergent Assessments

The Holy See also used the leverage of international Catholic opinion to dissuade the Ottoman government from carrying out massacres and to convince it to open its frontiers to food shipments. Although a respected source of morality and wisdom, the papacy found itself in a complicated position facing another esteemed source of morality in the persons of the American President Woodrow Wilson and Ambassador Henry Morgenthau. Their humanitarian relief efforts sustained by large donations made by American citizens were publicly acknowledged and regularly praised in newspapers of the time. Anglo-Saxon literature on the subject commends American humanitarian relief as well as the International Red Cross's dedication to saving lives. The Holy See was rarely mentioned. Ambassador Morgenthau's seminal book, a narrated *Personal Account of the Armenian Genocide*⁸ published in 1918, mentioned the Apostolic Delegate at Constantinople, Msgr. Dolci, once in passing. Ten years later, James L. Barton, in his

⁸ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story. A Personal Account of the Armenian Genocide* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1918).

*Story of Near East Relief*⁹ gave no acknowledgment of Catholic involvement. Cardinal Gibbons, the Archbishop of Baltimore, is cited in the American context. Neither Msgr. Dolci nor Msgr. Giannini is acknowledged as personality to be mentioned. The commitment of the Church at the highest hierarchical level as well as at the lower level represented by priests and missionaries is ignored.

During the world conflict, the public picture of humanitarian relief portrayed the American Protestant assistance in its center, working hand in hand with the American Red Cross, keeping the Holy See's diplomatic and practical involvement at the periphery. Was this picturing a distortion of reality or did it represent the truth of the times? How should we assess the content of numerous envelopes and boxes kept in the Vatican Archives, the *Congregation for the Oriental Churches*, and *Propaganda Fide* that methodically depicts the struggle of the Apostolic Delegate at Constantinople to obtain assistance, the various conversations he had with officials at the Porte, the responses from Cardinal Gasparri, and the voluminous amount of letters written by missionaries crying for help? How should we appreciate the significance of the erection in Constantinople of a statue of Pope Benedict a few weeks before his death in 1922, bearing the inscription "To the Great Pope of the World's Tragic Hour – Benedict XV – Benefactor of the People – without discrimination of nationality or religion – a token of gratitude from the Orient 1914-1919?"¹⁰ How should we value the gratitude bestowed upon the Pontiff by

⁹ James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930): An Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1930).

¹⁰ Robert John Araujo and John A. Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace: The*

the Sultan, the Vice-King of Egypt, the great Rabbi of Turkey, the Armenian, Gregorian and Georgian Patriarchs - all Muslims, Jews or schismatic Patriarchs - while the pope's involvement is only mentioned in passing by European and American governments?

A few answers can be offered. First and foremost, Pope Benedict XV greatly disappointed European governments and public opinion – Catholics and non-Catholics alike - when he declined to take sides in the world conflict. His impartial stance cost him tremendously in terms of moral authority and ability to significantly influence the course of events. The American President, Woodrow Wilson, benefited from the situation and gained a new status as moral leader. In addition, the pope's choice of neutrality left the Holy See in an uncomfortable position to ask for military support for its relief efforts. The Allies were convinced that behind a public impartial façade, the Holy See had always been in favor of the victory of the Central Powers.

But what was perceived as a liability in Europe and in the United States became an asset in Ottoman perspective. Papal neutrality allowed greater efficiency, although few missionaries were able to remain on Ottoman soil, after those native to the Entente countries were deported. The Pontiff was able to devise a new approach to humanitarian relief in a context of greater freedom. The French Protectorate was in shambles and the majority of French missionaries had left the Ottoman Empire. The so-called *mission civilisatrice* that France had impressed on the Ottoman Empire through the work of its missionaries had no other goal than establishing a political, economic, and cultural

control under the cover of humanitarianism. This centuries-long policy had hurt the Holy See's universal charitable mission. But since November 1914, France had joined the ranks of the Ottoman Empire's enemies, opening a legitimate and unique door of action to the papacy.

Benedict XV: "Benefactor of the People"

The International and American Red Cross, the American Jewish Committee, the Near East Relief, and the Holy See, all neutral parties in the conflict until the break of diplomatic relations between Washington and Constantinople in April 1917, were energetic actors in humanitarian relief efforts. Early in the hostilities, alarming information about the destitute state of Syria and Palestine had reached the American continent. On January 30, 1915, the *New York Times* reported that "A ship loaded with food for the famine-threatened people of Palestine and Syria will soon be dispatched from the United States by the provisional Zionist Committee... The food will be distributed through American consular agents not only to Jews but also to Mohammedans and Christians."¹¹ In another article of July 7, 1916, lamenting the lack of cooperation of Ottoman officials, the *New York Times* reported that "from 50,000 to 80,000 Syrians already have perished, and that the Turkish military authorities still are draining the country of its food."¹² According to the *New York Times* of October 22, 1917, in the absence of relief, 1,200,000 were starving in Syria. If the condition of the civil population

¹¹ "Americans to Send Aid to Palestine," *New York Times*, January 30, 1915.

¹² "Turkey will permit Relief for Syrians," *New York Times*, July 7, 1916.

was bearable inland, “in the Lebanon and on the coast, it was otherwise ... From the first hour of the war shipping ceased to arrive ... Isolation from the outside world was nearly complete.”¹³

Papal Project for Supply to Populations of Syria and Lebanon

The famine in Syria developed in 1915 out of a shortage of food especially felt in Lebanon. Its population, predominantly Catholic, the Maronites of Mount Lebanon, was accused of supporting the Entente countries and was then neglected by the Ottoman Government, especially by Djemal Pasha, the Military Commander for Syria and Palestine. In a dispatch of June 19, 1916, the Apostolic Delegate in the United States, Giovanni Bonzano, conveyed to Cardinal Gasparri the fears of American emigrated Lebanese about the fate of their families and friends, most of them Maronites.¹⁴ The American press and the mail which was able to reach that side of the Atlantic reported numerous arrests, deportations, and executions among the Christian population. Distraught men and women begged the Apostolic Delegate to ask for the Holy See's humanitarian and diplomatic intervention. A few months later, on September 26, 1916, Cardinal Amette, the Archbishop of Paris, transmitted to Gasparri a missive from the *Comité d'Action Française en Syrie*¹⁵ pleading for papal involvement. “Vous n’avez pas

¹³ Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 48.

¹⁴ Apostolic Delegate in the United States, Giovanni Bonzano to Gasparri, June 19, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1916, pos. 1099, fasc. 469. See also “Fear of Massacre of Syrians,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1916.

idée,” wrote the Committee “du mal qui a été fait à toute la population syrienne... On ne massacre pas, on laisse mourir en empêchant les entrées de céréales.”¹⁶

The response given by Gasparri to both Bonzano and Amette sheds light on the diplomatic visibility of the Holy See on the humanitarian scene in Syria in mid-1916. In a reassuring tone, the Secretary of State pointed out that the pope was aware of the situation faced by the Christian population in Syria and especially in Lebanon, and trusting the word of the Ottoman minister, asserted that those Christians that had been arrested were political agitators. The government assured the Holy See that there had been neither persecutions nor massacres against the Christian population.¹⁷ In Beirut, among twenty-nine people that had been arrested and executed, twenty six were Muslims and only three were Christians.¹⁸

In his reply to Amette, Gasparri positioned the Holy See in the shadow of the American government, asking Dolci to intercede with the Ottoman government in favor of the American Committee¹⁹ established to organize the sending of a supply ship from the United States to the Syrian Coast. Unlike the American Government, the Holy See did not own any ship able to navigate to Syria nor did it have the ability to raise

¹⁵ The letter is dated May 22, 1916. The *Comité d'action française en Syrie* was composed of important personalities : senators, members of the *Institut de France* ...

¹⁶ Cardinal Amette to Gasparri, September 21, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 562.

¹⁷ Gasparri to Bonzano, July 21, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1916, pos. 1099, fasc. 469.

¹⁸ Frühwirth to Gasparri, June 20, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 110.

¹⁹ Gasparri to Amette, September 30, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 562. See also Gasparri to Dolci, June 27, 1916, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 562.

significant funds. At this stage of the conflict, the most efficient papal diplomacy was one of support of the American government whose moral authority had not yet been undermined by the break of diplomatic relations between Washington and Constantinople.

In Constantinople, the Holy See, represented by Msgr. Angelo Dolci, was well respected. Its impartiality was not challenged as it was in Europe. Its moral authority was not weakened by Ottoman fears of military or politico-economic appetites. Unlike the Holy See, the American government was accused of harboring political goals under the cloak of humanitarian assistance. The accusation was not without foundations. Wyndham Deedes, a British Army Officer, had alluded in his conversations about American relief shipments to “how much there is ‘political’ at the back of all relief.”²⁰ On July 24, 1916, Dolci met with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs to convince him that the joint relief effort was a real act of philanthropy and was not harboring any political motives.²¹ His efforts were vain. The Turkish Minister questioned the Entente powers and the United States’ sudden interest in the welfare of Muslim Ottoman populations. According to him, the governments of the Entente were trying to encourage a revolt in Syria, as they had already attempted with Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the Emir of Mecca.²²

²⁰ Vivian D. Lipman, “America-Holy Land Material in British Archives, 1820-1930,” in *Themes and Sources in the Archives of the United States, Great Britain, Turkey and Israel*, vol. 2 of *With Eyes toward Zion*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York: Praeger, 1986), 42.

²¹ Dolci to Gasparri, July 29, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 562.

²² Dolci to Gasparri, July 29, 1916. Dolci reproduces the content of his interview with the minister quoting him: “Perche l’America, cosi il Ministro all’Incaricato d’Affari Americano, e piu chiaramente l’Inghilterra e la Francia non commuovono per i poveri di Costantinopoli e di Smirne? Perche si sentono impietositi solamente per gli abitanti della Siria? ... I governi dell’entente con questo progetto tentano

Msgr. Dolci's mission of support of American humanitarian endeavors with the Ottoman Government had reached a dead end. Personal papal intervention on behalf of the starving population of Syria was then the last resort. On August 31, 1916, the Apostolic Delegate reported to Cardinal Gasparri that he had written to Cardinal Gibbons, asking him to use his influence with the American government and obtain that the American ambassador in Constantinople support Dolci's relief endeavors on behalf of Pope Benedict.²³ Cardinal Gibbons confirmed to Gasparri that the new American ambassador, Abram I. Elkus, had received orders from his government to help the Apostolic Delegate.²⁴ In the meantime, the United States were still contemplating dispatching their own humanitarian relief with the help of the Red Cross. In its edition of September 15, 1916, the *New York Times* announced that, reversing their previous attitude, "the Turkish Government ... consents to shipment of relief supplies from the United States to famine sufferers in Syria."²⁵

By the end of the year 1916, neither the American Government nor the Holy See had succeeded in their attempts to organize an official and grand scale operation to alleviate the sufferings of the Syrian population. The Ottoman Empire was not to blame, who had given authorization to the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief

favorire delle rivolte come hanno fatto per quella dell'Emir della Mecca." In June 1916, the Sharif of Mecca, allied with the British, initiated an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire. The account of the Arab revolt is chronicled in T.E. Lawrence's seminal book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. (T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom, a Triumph* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1935).

²³ Dolci to Gasparri, August 31, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1916, pos. 1123, fasc. 476.

²⁴ Gibbons to Gasparri, November 1, 1916, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1916, pos. 1123, fasc. 476.

²⁵ "Turkey Will Permit Relief for Syrians," *New York Times*, September 15, 1916.

for the shipment of relief supplies. In a letter to Cardinal Gasparri of January 31, 1917, Msgr. Giannini, the Apostolic Delegate to Syria, accused the British of detaining an American ship in Alexandria under the excuse that they didn't have all the security guarantees for this relief supply effort.²⁶ The naval blockade was enforced by the British fleet, the dominant naval force in the war. But according to the *New York Times* "the American relief ship Caesar ... never arrived owing to the refusal of Germany and Austria-Hungary to grant her safe passage to Beirut."²⁷

The situation changed dramatically with the break of diplomatic relations between Washington and Constantinople on April 2, 1917. Although the American government never declared war on the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish, allied to Germany, ceased allowing the delivery of relief by American means. Therefore, the Holy See became the privileged interlocutor of the Ottoman government to discuss humanitarian assistance in Syria.

Msgr. Dolci seized the opportunity. A couple of months earlier, in a letter addressed to Cardinal Gasparri on February 6, 1917, he had proposed to ask the Ottoman Government to allow that humanitarian relief be dispatched with ships navigating under the pontifical ensign. With this goal in view, he planned the creation of a commission, represented by the Consuls of the Powers still present in Beirut, under the presidency of

²⁶ Giannini to Gasparri, January 31, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos. 1418, fasc. 563.

²⁷ "1,200,000 Starving in Syria," *New York Times*, October 22, 1917.

Msgr. Giannini.²⁸ A series of meetings ensued between Dolci and Turkish officials. Enver Pasha, the Minister of War, approved Dolci's suggestion that the relief supply would be done "directly by the Holy Father and in the name of the Holy Father."²⁹ The moral authority of the papacy and the complete impartiality demonstrated by the Holy See since the beginning of the hostilities convinced the Ottoman Government to accept that the relief transportation be done with a ship from a neutral country, with pontifical pavilion.³⁰ The Spanish Government, after a series of secret meetings between Dolci and its ambassador at Constantinople, offered to charter a ship to deliver the relief supplies.

Msgr. Dolci was very pleased with the results of his interviews with Turkish officials. Although the operation was, without any doubt, a genuine charitable endeavor, the Apostolic Delegate didn't lose sight of the politico-religious profit that the Holy See could gain from its humanitarian efforts. If the Holy See can send one ship to Beirut's harbor, wrote Dolci to Gasparri, this

²⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, February 6, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos 1418, fasc. 563. See also *Projet de ravitaillement approuvé par le gouvernement ottoman le 22 juillet 1917*, ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci II, fasc.2 The project specified that the central committee would be under the presidency of the Apostolic Delegate in Syria and the Vice-Presidency of the Procurator of the Custody of the Holy Land. Eight others members would be chosen by both the Ottoman Government (two members) and by the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople (six priests of different nationalities.)

²⁹ Dolci to Gasparri, February 11, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos 1418, fasc. 563.

³⁰ Dolci to Gasparri, February 11, 1917.

deed in favor of the poor wretched Christians [will bring] so much greater glory to the Roman Pontiff in these schismatic regions! The prestige of the Holy See ... will shine with so much radiance. All the ... admirable initiatives of the Holy Father, which have dried out so many tears and relieved many pains, have always aroused great admiration, not only among the Catholics, but among all without distinction of nationality and religion.³¹

The Apostolic Delegate was aware that the position of the Holy See was envied. He had always felt a sentiment of jealousy coming from the American embassy.³² Commenting on the food supplied by the American ship *Caesar*, Dolci complained that he had been kept in the dark. He had already raised this issue in August 1916, when the Apostolic Delegate had informed Gasparri that the American chargé d'affaires had complained to an Ottoman Minister that the liberation of Italian prisoners had been granted to Pope Benedict through his Apostolic Delegate and not to the American embassy in Constantinople.³³

Once the Ottoman government had given its authorization in principle to proceed with the dispatching of relief supplies to the destitute population of Syria and Lebanon,³⁴ the Holy See needed to secure the authorization of the belligerent countries active in the region. Since a naval blockade was imposed by the British fleet, it was to the government of His Majesty that the Holy See officially asked for the authorization to dispatch the

³¹ “carita per quei poveri infelici cristiani ... quanta maggior Gloria per il Pontificato romano in queste regioni scismatiche! Il prestigio della S. Sede ... ha brillato di tanto fulgore. Tutte ... admirabili iniziative del S. Padre, che hanno asciugato tante lagrime ed alleviati tanti dolori, hanno sempre suscitato un’ammirazione indicibile, non tra i cattolici ..., ma in tutti senza distinzione di nazionalità e di religione.” (My translation). Dolci to Gasparri, February 11, 1917.

³² Dolci to Gasparri, February 17, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos 1418, fasc. 563. Dolci noted that “L’Ambasciata ha sempre con me dei repressi sentimenti di gelosia.”

³³ Dolci to Gasparri, August 22, 1916, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 1.

³⁴ The official authorization came on July 22, 1917.

relief supplies. The British government forwarded the demand to the French who, in a dispatch of April 16, 1917, gave their approval. The permission note stated that

The supplying of Syrian populations having already been accepted in principle by the Allied governments last October, and the circumstances having not allowed the American government to perform this task under the conditions laid down, the French government makes no objection to the passage through the blockade of ships chartered by the Spanish government to ensure the supplying.³⁵

An agreement in principle, although a stepping stone, was not a final deal. The Vatican philanthropic endeavor needed all the security guarantees necessary in war-times, guarantees that in British eyes were not met at that point. The British wanted guarantees that the relief supply would not be used by the enemy, an assurance that the Holy See could not give.³⁶

The British Government asked for more details about the Committee in charge of dispatching the relief. Dolci had political savvy and immediately understood the necessity to find a way to include preeminent non-Catholic ecclesiastics in the committee to satisfy Protestant England, without budging on the necessity to have the relief supplies delivered in the name of the pope.³⁷ “May I recommend [wrote Dolci to Gasparri] that the relief be

³⁵ “Le ravitaillement des populations syriennes ayant déjà été admis en principe par les Gouvernements Alliés en Octobre dernier et les circonstances n’ayant pas permis au gouvernement des Etats-Unis de l’effectuer dans les conditions prévues, le Gouvernement français ne fait aucune objection au passage à travers la ligne de blocus des navires affrétés par le Gouvernement espagnol pour assurer ce ravitaillement.” (My translation). French Ministry for Foreign Affairs to His Majesty’s Embassy, Paris, April 16, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos. 1418, fasc. 563.

³⁶ French Ministry for Foreign Affairs to His Majesty’s Embassy, Paris, May 11, 1917. ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos. 1418, fasc. 563.

³⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, July 24, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos. 1418, fasc. 563.

done under pontifical banner and be distributed in the name of the Holy Father, these two conditions being absolutely essential for the prestige of the pontificate...”³⁸

After months of back and forth correspondence between British officials and Gasparri, the papal efforts reached a dead end. In a final message from Lord Balfour, transmitted to Gasparri by Hugh Gaisford, a British official attached to the British Delegation to the Holy See, the Holy See’s request met with a flat refusal. The British Foreign Secretary brought the hopes of the Pope to a close, explaining that the operation did not meet the essential guarantees necessary to move forward.³⁹

The argument was reasonable but not the fundamental reason justifying the British refusal. The Holy See’s philanthropic action ran against British interests in the region at that time. On June 28, 1917, Prime Minister Lloyd George had appointed General Edmund Allenby, Commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, with one mission: “to take Jerusalem as a Christmas present for the nation.”⁴⁰ A policy designed to protect the British Empire and maintain its prestige among those faithful to the British flag, the military campaign led by Allenby was a great achievement after a decisive victory at Gaza against the Turks in early November 1917 and the capture of Jerusalem on December 9, 1917. A papal relief effort was thus unthinkable in such circumstances.

³⁸ Dolci to Gasparri, July 24, 1917.

³⁹ Hugh Gaisford to Gasparri, October 11, 1917, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, 1916-1922, pos. 1418, fasc. 563. See also Benedict XV to Cardinal Gibbons, October 18, 1917. In this letter the Holy Father asks Cardinal Gibbons to try to obtain from the American President Wilson that he intercedes with the British Government on the issue of relief delivery.

⁴⁰ David F. Burg and L. Edward Purcell, *Almanac of World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 176.

Turkish troops were concentrated in the area and would have, without any doubt, seized any food supply provided by the Holy See for the destitute populations of Syria. The anticipated capture of Jerusalem did not necessitate a papal intervention.

Beyond the tactical military considerations, the Allied negative response also acknowledged the weakened position of Pope Benedict who, since his ignored Peace Note of August 1, 1917, was going through a momentary crisis of moral authority in Europe.

In such circumstances, the Holy See had no political leverage. Military reasons prevailed over charitable considerations in the decision taken by the Entente Governments. Although the papacy was not able to provide relief support on a grand scale, especially in Syria, it was nevertheless very active in Constantinople. Under the enlightened guidance of the Apostolic Delegate Dolci, less ambitious projects were created to help the poor. Pope Benedict's charity, *Essuyer les larmes cachées*, was founded to provide food to the destitute of Constantinople, without distinction of nationality or religion. Funds were sent from Rome to support the charity under the presidency of the Marquise Pallavicini and Countess Bernstorff, the Austrian-Hungarian and the German ambassador's wives.⁴¹ The pontiff's devotion to the destitute in the Ottoman Empire earned him a respected and much liked reputation among the local populations.

⁴¹ Dolci to Serafini, December 11, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 630 (1919), Rub. 126, fol.137rv-138r.

Rumors of Persecution of the Jewish Population

In 1914, the estimated population of Palestine was 700,000. Of this population the Jews numbered around 85,000 souls.⁴² Rumors of widespread persecution of the Jewish population were repeatedly reported by American newspapers. Between 1915 and 1917, the *New York Times* devoted its columns to numerous articles describing the mistreatment of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Palestine.⁴³ After Otis Glazebrook, the American Consul at Jerusalem, informed Ambassador Morgenthau of the destitute state of the Jews of Palestine, the American ambassador appealed for relief supplies.⁴⁴ Millions of Jews in America, joined by other concerned American citizens, responded with great generosity to the American Jewish Committee's appeal to bring help to the Jewish population of Palestine⁴⁵ and other areas, especially Eastern Europe.

Especially appalled by the treatment reserved by the Poles to their Jewish population, the Jewish Committee published a book "The Jews in the Eastern War Zone," to better inform the American population. In December 1915, a copy of the report was sent to Pope Benedict. Although the pamphlet focused exclusively on the condition of the Jews in the Eastern war zone, it gave a good insight into the expectations of American Jewish leaders regarding the potential involvement of the Holy See in relief efforts in

⁴² Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*, 61.

⁴³ "Turks Killing Jews Who Resist Pillage," *New York Times*, May 20, 1917, and "Cruelties to Jews Deported in Jaffa," *New York Times*, June 3, 1917.

⁴⁴ Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*, 61.

⁴⁵ Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*, 62. Bryson stresses that "the initial Jewish problem centered about the fate of some 50,000 Russian Jews in Palestine."

favor of the Jewish population. The 10th Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee⁴⁶ published the petition to the Holy Father that accompanied the book,⁴⁷ a petition “praying him to exert his powerful influence to ameliorate conditions.”⁴⁸ Stressing “the profound moral, ethical, and religious influence”⁴⁹ of the Catholic Church and the long tradition of the Vatican to provide relief to every soul in distress, without discrimination of nationality or religion, the committee, “recall[ed] with admiration and gratitude that on many occasions in the past some of the revered predecessors of Your Holiness have under like conditions extended protection to those of the Jewish faith, in the interest of right and justice.”⁵⁰

The Holy See’s reply came on February 9, 1916 from Secretary of State Gasparri to the President of the American Jewish Committee, Louis Marshall. In the committee’s eyes, the papal response was akin to an “encyclical against anti-Jewish prejudices.”⁵¹ Gasparri’s response, published in the Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee, stressed that the pope, “in principle, as the head of the Catholic Church ... faithful to its divine doctrine and its most glorious traditions, considers all men as brethren and teaches

⁴⁶ 10th Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee, 12 November 1916, in *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 19, 434-500.

⁴⁷ The petition, dated December 30, 1915, was signed by Louis Marshall, President of the American Jewish Committee, and the Executive Committee.

⁴⁸ 10th Annual Report of the American Jewish Committee, 12 November 1916, in *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 19, 453.

⁴⁹ American Jewish Committee, 454.

⁵⁰ American Jewish Committee, 454.

⁵¹ American Jewish Committee, 453.

them to love one another ...”⁵² The editor of *La Libre Parole*, Edouard Drumont, notoriously anti-semite, evaluated the papal statement as a response that “has been what it should have been – cordial, charitable, and consoling. One cannot help feeling a sentiment of pity for those who suffer, [he wrote], no matter who they are, and we are not permitted to doubt the sincerity of the declarations expressed by the American Jewish Committee. We are rather inclined to recognize the wisdom of its initiative in rendering such respectful homage to the wisdom and the sense of justice of the head of the Christian Church.”⁵³

Rumors of persecution and massacre of the Jewish population of Palestine were sometimes just rumors. Ambassador Elkus met with Rabbi Messinger, Second Chairman of the Swiss Zionist Society, to inform him that “the reports received in this country of wholesale massacre and maltreatment of the Jews in Turkey and Palestine were entirely unfounded.” According to these reports, “the Jews in Turkey ... were not subjected to any oppression or discrimination.”⁵⁴ It was confirmed by Msgr. Camassei, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, in a dispatch to Dolci stating that the deportation of the Jewish population was very limited and done for military reasons, to avoid casualties in case of bombardment by the Entente troops. There was no massacre.⁵⁵ Dolci also wrote to the

⁵² American Jewish Committee, 455.

⁵³ American Jewish Committee, 457-58. Drumont wrote in the same article “The Jews of New York did not fail in their address to St. Peter to say that they recalled ‘with admiration and gratitude’ that on numerous occasions in the past, the Papacy has shown a benevolent attitude toward the members of the Jewish faith... On every page of history will be found traces of the protection extended to the Jews by the Papacy.”

⁵⁴ “Found Turks Fair to Jews,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1917.

prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, Cardinal Serafini, telling him that the German ambassador had been informed by his consuls in Palestine that there had been no persecution against the Jewish population. The deportation that had been mentioned and amplified by the European and American media concerned all the inhabitants of Jaffa. The consuls had witnessed neither persecution nor destruction of villages.⁵⁶ This information had been confirmed by diplomatic officials of Austria, Spain, and Holland. On the other hand, the American Consul Garrels, sojourning in Alexandria, Egypt, described the Jaffa deportation under a different light. His report, published in the *New York Times*, noted that

The orders of evacuation were aimed chiefly at the Jewish population. Even German, Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian Jews were ordered to leave the town. Mohammedans and Christians were allowed to remain provided they were holders of individual permits. The Jews who sought the permits were refused.⁵⁷

Dolci met with the Great Rabbi of Turkey, Haim Nahum, to inform him that he had received instructions from the Holy Father to intercede with the Ottoman Government in favor of the Jewish population.⁵⁸

When a statue of Benedict XV was erected in Constantinople, the great Rabbi of Turkey, Haim Nahum, was among the notable contributors. The statue bears the inscription “To the Great Pope of the World’s Tragic Hour – Benedict XV – Benefactor

⁵⁵ Dolci to Serafini, June 1, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

⁵⁶ Dolci to Serafini, June 3, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126. In a follow up dispatch of June 4, Dolci confirmed that there had been no persecution of the Jews of Palestine, adding that there were 50,000 inhabitants in Jaffa with barely 7,000 Jews.

⁵⁷ “Cruelties to Jews Deported in Jaffa,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1917.

⁵⁸ Dolci to Serafini, June 5, 1917, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126.

of the People – Without Discrimination of Nationality or Religion – a Token of Gratitude from the Orient 1914-1919.” In a few words, Benedict XV’s achievements are summed up. There is no similar monument in Western Europe to honor his dedication and charity.⁵⁹ But with all the good will of contributors, the statue stands in the courtyard of Saint Esprit Cathedral “completely hidden from passer-bys, visible only to those going to the office, which means only the Catholics.”⁶⁰ Even the Turkish newspaper *L’Atti*, in its edition of November 1, 1918, lamented the location of the future statue, arguing that “It [would] be a pleasure for all, instead of raising the statue of the Pope in the courtyard of the Cathedral, to erect it on one of the largest boulevard of Pera ...”⁶¹ Benedict’s humanitarian assistance corresponded to the precepts of charity held by the Catholic Church and to his own understanding of the world, a modern world that opposed nationalism, colonialism, and ethnocentrism, in which the Church has a decisive role to play.

⁵⁹ Araujo and Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace*, 159.

⁶⁰ “Notre première statue,” *Le Soir*, October 28, 1918, A.P, N.S., volume 658 (1920), Rub. 126, fol. 377. (My translation).

⁶¹ “Prière à la Préfecture de la ville,” *L’Atti*, November 1, 1918, A.P, N.S., volume 658 (1920), Rub. 126, fol. 377. (My translation).

The American Near East Relief and the Accusations of Discrimination Against Catholics

The relevant literature that chronicles the many relief efforts for the destitute populations of Syria and Palestine, praises the role of the United States through its ambassador at Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau, and the consuls in the region. The contribution of the Holy See to the vast humanitarian relief endeavors is never mentioned.⁶² Not only was the widespread involvement of the Catholic Church under the leadership of the pope ignored but by the end of 1917, rumors spread in Syria and Palestine that Catholics were discriminated against by American and British officials in charge of the American Near East Relief. As a result, collections in the United States fell off sharply. “The peak year for collections was 1919 when \$19.4 million was raised. Collections fell off the following year to \$13 million and still further in 1921.”⁶³

The American Near East Relief and Catholic Contribution

The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief was founded in September 1915 in the wake of the Turkish onslaught on the Armenian population.⁶⁴ The

⁶² Vivian D. Lipman, “America-Holy Land Material in British Archives, 1820-1930,” in *Themes and Sources in the Archives of the United States, Great Britain, Turkey and Israel*, vol.2 of *With Eyes toward Zion*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York: Praeger, 1986) or Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*.

⁶³ Thomas A. Bryson, “A Note on Near East Relief: Walter George Smith, Cardinal Gibbons, and the Question of Discrimination against Catholics,” *The Muslim World* 61 (July 1971): 202.

⁶⁴ Bryson wrote that “on 3 September, Morgenthau cabled the State Department the grim news [of the Armenian massacre], and suggested that Cleveland Dodge, a wealthy American industrialist and philanthropist, organize a relief committee to save the Armenians. In mid-September Dodge convened a

Committee was later incorporated by Congress in 1919 as the Near East Relief. It was rooted in the missionary work of Protestants but was later opened to Catholic and Jewish contribution in order to expand the basis for the fund-raising campaigns.⁶⁵

“A narrative of American philanthropy,”⁶⁶ the history of the Near East Relief is one of tremendous success. According to James Barton, the biographer and first chairman of the organization, the Near East Relief, “irrespective of religion and creed, (it) clothed the naked, fed the starving and provided shelter, care and practical schooling for more than a hundred and thirty thousand fatherless waifs left as wreckage from the Great War.”⁶⁷ It raised more than \$90 million during the war years that were dispatched essentially in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire. Until the entry of General Allenby in Jerusalem, in December 1917, the relief efforts were under the chairmanship of Bishop McInnis, the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem.⁶⁸

The Near East Relief started as a Protestant endeavor but after two months in existence, it became clear that, in order to raise more funds, the support of American Catholics was necessary. Therefore, Barton’s interest turned to Cardinal Gibbons.⁶⁹

group in his New York office, and there founded one of the most effective relief organizations in modern history.” Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*, 60.

⁶⁵ Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations*, 60

⁶⁶ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, introduction.

⁶⁷ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, introduction.

⁶⁸ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 76.

⁶⁹ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 7.

James Cardinal Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore, a respected eighty years old clergyman, enjoyed an international reputation.⁷⁰ His efforts for relief of the victims of war were already known and widespread, from Belgium to Poland. His becoming a member of the Near East Relief, along with representatives of Judaism, gave a new depth and breadth to the Committee.

Completely ignoring the physical and diplomatic presence of the Holy See in the Ottoman Empire, Barton was afraid that, with the anticipated entrance of the United States in the war on the side of the Entente Powers, “if all missionaries and teachers and heads of institutions withdrew, the Christian population would be without help and completely at the mercy of a hostile government.”⁷¹ This statement was a complete denial of the influence exerted by the Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Syria on the Ottoman Government, to alleviate the suffering of the population. When the American Red Cross announced in April 1918 that “a commission of about sixty members, headed by John H. Finley, Commissioner of Education of New York, (is) [was] to be sent to Palestine ... to study the needs of the people of the Holy land and assist in their relief,”⁷² and work with General Allenby, it mentioned that “the work (is) [was] to be done in connection with the British Syria and Palestine Relief Fund and the American Armenian and Syrian Relief Committee.”⁷³ No mention was made of Catholic work.

⁷⁰ John Tracy Ellis, *The Life of James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, 1834-1921*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1952), 222.

⁷¹ Barton, *Story of Near East Relief*, 5.

⁷² “Finley Heads Palestine Mission,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1918.

One reason for ostracizing the Holy See could be that there was no Catholic structured organization.⁷⁴ The Holy See was counting on an already existent network through its missions, schools, and hospitals. Another reason that was offered at the time was the deliberate will to discriminate against Catholics.

Accusations of Discrimination against Catholics

The first report of discrimination by the Near East Relief workers against Catholics in Syria and Palestine went back to the spring of 1919. The situation was grave enough that Cardinal Gibbons considered withdrawing the American Catholic support from the Near East Relief. Although he never officially quit the Executive Committee, arguing that he had received enough evidence that there had been no discrimination against Catholics, the rumor spread in the United States and the collections fell sharply. In 1919, \$19.4 million were collected. The number fell to \$13 million in 1920.⁷⁵

The task to prove that there had been no discrimination against Catholics fell on Walter George Smith, a Roman Catholic attorney in Philadelphia, member of the Near East Relief Committee.⁷⁶ Stationed in Constantinople to determine the needs of the destitute population, he started his investigation. Eager to defend the Near East Relief

⁷³ “Finley Heads Palestine Mission,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1918.

⁷⁴ In response to the Near East Relief, the Catholic Near East Welfare association (CNEWA) was founded in 1926 by Pius XI to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, without regard to nationality and creed. The Association followed criteria set out by Benedict XV.

⁷⁵ Bryson, “Note on Near East Relief,” 202.

⁷⁶ Bryson, “Note on Near East Relief,” 203.

that he considered a “worthy institution,”⁷⁷ he appealed to Msgr. Dolci and requested that he write to Cardinal Gibbons “that since the arrival of the American Commission for Relief of Near East, relief is given without distinction of race or religion.”⁷⁸ In early June 1919, he visited Cardinal Gasparri in Rome to put an end to the rumors. Both Dolci and Gasparri trusted Smith’s report that there was no organized discrimination against Catholics from the Near East Relief.

By the end of 1919, the situation was still tense. Not only the Near East Relief workers⁷⁹ were accused of discrimination against Catholics but they were also accused of using the relief efforts as a means of proselytizing among the Catholic community. In a letter addressed to Cardinal Marini, the Secretary of the *Congregation for the Oriental Church*, Giannini, in a veiled criticism of Dolci’s credulity, refuted the Apostolic Delegate’s assertion that the distribution of goods by the American Red Cross and the Near East Relief was done with complete impartiality, without distinction of race or religion.⁸⁰ He explained that it was difficult for Dolci, being stationed in Constantinople, to obtain reliable and regular information regarding the situation in Syria and Palestine. Giannini bluntly criticized the “subjectivity and the bias displayed by the American Red Cross in this region” and “the spirit of Protestant proselytizing.”⁸¹ A few months later he

⁷⁷ Bryson, “Note on Near East Relief,” 203.

⁷⁸ Dolci to Cardinal Gibbons, June 10, 1919, Walter George Smith, unpublished “Journal of a Journey to the Near East,” Walter George Smith Manuscript Collection, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, in Bryson, “Note on Near East Relief,” 205.

⁷⁹ The Near East Relief was working with the American Red Cross.

⁸⁰ Giannini to Marini, November 1, 1919, ACCO 115/5 (2803).

wrote to Cardinal Gasparri to complain that the Americans had “transformed [what was originally a] philanthropic work into a work of Protestant proselytizing and into a war instrument against Catholicism.”⁸² In a letter to Smith, he alerted the attorney that

Major Nicol who is ... the current director of the “Near East Relief Association” is purely and simply a member of the protestant Regular Mission, established in Turkey for many years, transformed for the occasion in an officer of the American Red Cross.⁸³

Therefore, a simple change of label was sufficient for the Protestant Mission to acquire the administrative monopoly over the resources of the Near East Relief.⁸⁴

Reports of cases of discrimination against the Catholic community piled up on Giannini’s desk. The Jesuit Fathers of the University St. Joseph in Beirut published in their periodical *Al Bechir* (The Messenger) a letter they had received from Zahle relating “that some priests, anxious to instruct Catholic orphans in their faith, had been refused admittance into an shelter controlled by the Committee for the Near East Relief.”⁸⁵ The facts were confirmed by the Managing Director in Beirut who apologized and promised

⁸¹ Giannini to Marini, November 1, 1919. (My translation)

⁸² Giannini to Gasparri, March 11, 1920, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 565. (My translation)

⁸³ “Le major Nicol qui est ... l’actuel directeur du ‘Near East Relief Association’ est purement et simplement un membre de la Regular Mission protestante établie en Turquie depuis de nombreuses années, transformé pour le besoin de la cause en officier de la Croix Rouge Américaine.” (My translation). Giannini to Walter George Smith, March 13, 1920, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 565.

⁸⁴ Giannini to Walter George Smith, March 13, 1920.

⁸⁵ “Near East Relief Orphan Asylums Barred to Priests,” *Catholic Mission, Society for the Propagation of the Faith*, January 1921, 8; “Editorial, Notes, Near East,” *Catholic Mission*, February 1921, 46.

to put an end to these occurrences that were not the fact of some personal prejudice but a line of conduct decided by the Executive Bureau.⁸⁶

Giannini's complaint shed light on the new challenges facing the Catholic Church in Syria and Palestine, at the end of World War I. "This is very interesting for the present and future of Catholicism in these regions," he wrote, adding that "[T]hat the Holy See could help us avoid the damages resulting from this huge American charity, monopolized in favor of protestant proselytizing, I cannot but be grateful from the bottom of my heart."⁸⁷

At the end of the war, the scope of Pope Benedict's humanitarian assistance in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire and his reaching out to all, without consideration of race or religion, appeared as a monumental achievement by the papacy. As he did to protect the lay and religious Catholic communities in Syria and Palestine, Pope Benedict chose a vocal diplomacy in favor of the destitute population in the area. Against the expectations of public opinion but faithful to his impartial position, he did not offer an encyclical or an official statement to condemn Ottoman actions.⁸⁸ He chose to unceasingly appeal to the Ottoman Government to ensure the safety and survival of all its citizens, case by case. It was never a vague appeal without consequences but a practical

⁸⁶ The Director of the asylum said to the visiting priests: "This is our line of conduct; it has been traced by my superiors, and I will follow it to the end," in "Near East Relief Orphan Asylums Barred to Priests," 8.

⁸⁷ Giannini to Gasparri, March 11, 1920.

⁸⁸ "Toute la presse, européenne et américaine, après avoir mis au grand jour l'anéantissement de la race arménienne, s'élève avec indignation contre le Saint-Siège et contre l'Auguste Personne de Sa Sainteté le Pape, qui, dès le début de cette persécution contre les Chrétiens de Syrie et surtout du Liban, n'a pas protesté, par un acte public et officiel, devant le monde civilisé." ASV, Arch. Deleg. Turchia, Dolci 90, fasc. 2.

commitment. The pontiff enrolled his Apostolic Delegates to labor under His name and obtain concrete results. By his actions, the destitute populations of Syria and Palestine, an image of the suffering humanity, were touched by the love of Christ for his neighbor.⁸⁹ Pope Benedict chose to exhibit pure charity to all in need, “acknowledging the centrality of love.”⁹⁰ He exemplified the motto of the International Committee of the Red Cross, “Inter arma caritas.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Benedict XVI, “Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* [December 25, 2005],” AAS 98 (2006:3): 217-52.

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 217.

⁹¹ “In war, charity.” (My translation). See Yves de la Brière, “Le règne pontifical de Benoît XV,” *Etudes* (February 5, 1922): 261.

PART 2

ADJUSTING TO NEW GEO-POLITICAL REALITIES: POST WAR PROTECTION OF CATHOLIC INTERESTS (December 1917 – January 1922)

CHAPTER 6

THE HOLY SEE AND THE POST-WAR WORLD ORDER

The Holy See at the Center of the Diplomatic World

The New Diplomatic Prestige of the Papacy

With the post-war collapse of empires and monarchies, and the emergence of non-European political players,¹ a major cultural, social, and political shift took place in Europe. The *status quo ante bellum*, characterized by its Eurocentrism and colonial expansion, was defunct. Benedict XV understood that the long nineteenth century had come to an end and that the Holy See will have to develop a new diplomatic approach that will take into account the new complexion of the diplomatic chessboard in Europe and beyond.

Two main evolutions had taken place. The creation of the League of Nations expanded the political map and embraced the world, a realization that encouraged the pontiff to think in larger terms than the nineteenth-century Eurocentric model.² He also acknowledged the fading away of most Catholic kingdoms and embraced the new democratic nation-states issued from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, establishing official diplomatic relations with them. Therefore, the papacy

¹ Like the United States, Japan or Brazil.

² More than thirty countries worldwide sent delegates to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

became the center of the emerging new world and acquired a renewed spiritual and political prestige.

In a speech delivered at the National Catholic Congress held at Liverpool, England, in July 1920, Cardinal Gasquet echoed a British Minister's remark that "the man who best came out of the war was the pope."³ The sudden surge of civil governments to enter into diplomatic relations with the Holy See startled contemporary religious and political observers alike,⁴ as the common agreement was that, with the war, the Holy See's diplomatic standing had reached its nadir.

After the resounding failure of the papal diplomatic attempt to bring the world conflict to an end with Benedict XV's Peace Note of August 1917,⁵ the Vatican diplomacy, still wearing the shackles of the so-called Roman Question, had been fading into oblivion. As stipulated in Article 15 of the Treaty of London of 1915,⁶ the Holy See was barred from the post-war decision-making process. It did not get a seat at the Paris Peace Conference that convened on January 18, 1919 to establish the peace terms for the

³ Georges Goyau, *Papauté et chrétienté sous Benoît XV* (Paris: Perrin, 1922), 17.

⁴ "The Procession to the Vatican," *The Literary Digest*, October 29, 1921, 30.

⁵ Benedict XV, "Encyclical Letter *Appeal to the Heads of the Warring Peoples* [August 1, 1917]," AAS 9 (1917): 417-20.

⁶ The secret Treaty of London concluded by Britain, France, Russia, and Italy on 26 April 1915, stipulated in its article 15 that "France, Great-Britain and Russia shall support any such opposition as Italy shall make to any proposal in the direction of introducing a representative of the Holy See in any peace negotiations for the settlement of questions raised by the present war." With the addition of this article, the fears of the Italian government to see the Holy See using the international diplomatic scene to raise the Roman Question, were quietened. See J.A.S. Grenville, *The Major International Treaties, 1914-1945. A History and Guide with Texts* (London and New-York: Methuen, 1987), 24-7.

defeated Powers and devise the rules of the new international order.⁷ It was also excluded from the negotiations that were carried on at the newly created League of Nations.

In this political climate, the absence of the Holy See at the post-war settlement table would have had grave consequences on Catholic interests worldwide, were it not for the surge in bilateral relationships between the Holy See and new and old states, eventually building a solid and enviable diplomatic network.

On the threshold of war, a dozen states were represented at the Vatican. After four years of a conflict the pontiff lamented as the “suicide of civilized Europe,”⁸ the international geo-political scene changed dramatically. The demise of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires gave birth to new independent states that looked for diplomatic recognition by the Vatican Court. The Holy See welcomed with open arms the new governments of Poland, Serbia,⁹ Czechoslovakia, and other nation-states issued from the dismemberment of the defeated empires.¹⁰

The natural increase of states only partially explained that in 1921 twenty-five Chancelleries had established ties with the Vatican.¹¹ The rise in the quality of already existing diplomatic relations was also a source of satisfaction to the Holy See. Belgium,

⁷ The Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Msgr. Cerretti, was sent to Paris, as secret representative of the Holy See to the Paris Peace Conference.

⁸ Benedict XV, “Lenten Letter *Al Tremendo Conflitto* [March 4, 1916],” AAS 08 (1916): 59.

⁹ The Kingdom of Serbia was renamed in 1929 as “Yugoslavia,” the union of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs.

¹⁰ No concordat was signed between the Holy See and these new states.

¹¹ Eight ambassadors and seventeen ministers.

Chile or Brazil, states that enjoyed second-rank diplomatic ties, raised their legations to full-rank embassies.¹²

Most noticeable for the international prestige of the Holy See and its influence over the future political developments of the new world order outside the world of multilateral diplomacy was the transformation of the British Special Mission into a permanent Legation and, even more critical, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with anti-clerical but Catholic France, in May 1921.

In Cardinal Merry del Val's own words, "France was too great a lady to come up the backstairs."¹³ During the presidential campaign of 1920, the Socialist candidate, Alexandre Millerand,¹⁴ had expressed his wish to re-establish diplomatic ties with the Holy See.¹⁵ As freshly elected president, he openly and publicly engaged in debates to resume diplomatic relations with the Vatican court. On March 21, 1920, Jean Doucet was sent to Rome as Minister Plenipotentiary. On May 18, 1921, the chief of the Government, Aristide Briand, dispatched Charles Jonnart as Ambassador Extraordinary.¹⁶

¹² L.J.S. Wood, "Vatican Politics and Policies," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1921, 404.

¹³ Cited in Wood, "Vatican Politics and Policies," 398. Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val was the Secretary of State of Pius X, under whom diplomatic ties with France were severed.

¹⁴ Alexandre Millerand was Chief of the Government of France from January 20 to September 23 1920, before being elected to the presidency. His mandate ended on June 11, 1924.

¹⁵ Raymond Leslie Buell, "The Vatican and the New World," *Current History* 16, April-September 1922, 981.

¹⁶ Buell, "Vatican and New World Order," 981.

France's decision to resume diplomatic relations with the Holy See was driven by considerations of foreign policy. In a dispatch of May 29, 1921, Jonnart reported on the meeting he had with Pope Benedict, Cardinal Gasparri, and Msgr. Cerretti, the new nuncio to Paris. The pontiff indicated that he would support France's efforts in favor of the "reconciliation of peoples" and facilitate the role of the French missions in the Middle East.¹⁷ To comfort its political, financial, and cultural standing, Paris was eager to maintain its religious protectorate in a newly reshaped Middle East and was hoping to enroll the Holy See in its undertaking.

As for the Holy See, it never concealed its intention to rebuild trust and confidence with France and eventually re-enter into healthy diplomatic intercourse. With the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the blocked political situation with Italy, France, although anti-clerical, was the only imposing Catholic nation and could not be ignored. The canonizations of Joan of Arc on May 16, 1920, the patron of France, and Margaret Marie Alacoque on May 13, 1920, were demonstrations of the pontiff's goodwill towards the "Eldest Daughter of the Church."

At the end of Benedict XV's pontificate, Italy was one of the few politically noteworthy European nations without an official representative at the Roman court. In *Pacem Dei Munus*, his encyclical on peace and Christian reconciliation, published on May 23, 1920,¹⁸ the pontiff renounced the papal decree prohibiting Catholic heads of

¹⁷ M. Jonnart, Ambassadeur Extraordinaire de France près le Saint-Siège à M. Briand, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères. Rome, 29 mai 1921, in *Documents diplomatiques français*, 1921, ed. Commission de publication des documents diplomatiques français, Série 1920-1932, vol.4 (16 Janvier-30 Juin) (Bruxelles: PIE, Peterlang: 2004), 669.

states to make official visits to the Quirinal. This decision was understood as a first step towards reconciliation, although Benedict, reiterating the message of his first encyclical *Ad Beatissimi*, made clear that it “must not be interpreted as a tacit renunciation of its sacrosanct rights by the Apostolic See, as it acquiesced in the unlawful situation in which it is placed.”¹⁹

As soon as France resumed diplomatic relations with the Holy See, the Quirinal expressed, through its national press, its willingness to consider further steps on the road to official reconciliation.²⁰ The Italian government authorized the creation of a Christian-inspired Party²¹ whose role was to oppose the Socialist party²² and serve as cement for the Italian society. It was founded with the blessing of Pope Benedict.

Most European powers had established, re-established or upgraded their diplomatic relations with the Holy See, driven by foreign political motivations but domestic considerations were also significant. The risk of being swept up by the revolutionary turmoil that was spreading throughout the European continent in the wake of the militantly atheist Bolshevik Revolution led many nations to turn to the Holy See for

¹⁸ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Pacem Dei Munus Pulcherrimum* [May 23, 1920],” AAS 12 (1920): 209-18.

¹⁹ Benedict XV, *Pacem Dei Munus*, 209-18.

²⁰ “Il a suffit que la France se décidât à reprendre les relations diplomatiques avec le Vatican, pour que la presse italienne ... fit campagne en faveur d’une réconciliation officielle entre les deux rives du Tibre. Et comme elle est la première à savoir que cette réconciliation soulève des questions préjudicielles, elle n’a pas hésité à reconnaître que la loi des garanties pouvait être l’objet d’une révision.” Charles Loiseau, *Politique romaine et sentiment français* (Paris: Grasset, 1923).

²¹ The Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) was founded by Don Luigi Sturzo, a Catholic priest.

²² After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) aligned itself with the Soviet Government’s directives.

political and social support. Pacifist socialists had long thought that their time had come to export the Petrograd riots over Europe, transcending all nationalistic barriers.²³

Therefore, recognized as the only powerful transnational institution, the Holy See's assistance was welcomed by European nations to act as a buffer against this wave. As a result, the post-war years saw a resurgence of Catholic politics in Europe, supported by the Holy See. It represented a third path between Marxist socialism, validated by the Bolshevik Revolution, and the individualism born of Anglo-Saxon liberal capitalism.²⁴

Under Pius X and his Secretary of State Cardinal Merry del Val, the Vatican was consigned to relative diplomatic oblivion. Benedict's impartial stance during the war accentuated the Holy See's isolation and crisis of moral authority. Therefore, the unexpected strengthening of its prestige and influence on the post-war international diplomatic scene became a source of speculation and the favorite topic of discussion of many newspapers and reviews of the time. Looking beyond domestic and international political motivations, observers of Vatican politics conjectured on what other reasons could explain the renewed influence that the Holy See was exerting on the course of European diplomacy.²⁵

²³ There were dangerous communist uprisings in Hungary and Bavaria.

²⁴ Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 33.

²⁵ Sisley Huddleston, "The Revival of the Vatican," *The Fortnightly Review*, July 1920, 67-77; Alexis François, *Semaine Littéraire de Genève*, October 29, 1921.

The Holy See emerged from the war as a spiritual force to be reckoned with. The nineteenth-century positivism of Auguste Comte,²⁶ favored by the liberal European intellectual elite, had lost its power of attraction. In order to combat the disillusionment of the post-war age, many felt a need to reconnect Europe with its Christian cultural heritage. The papacy became “a partner within the community of peoples and states,” challenging politicians to lead with a “listening heart.”²⁷ Pope Benedict was setting an example for other nations of how to approach the world of international relations in order to guarantee long term peaceful results, conducting a diplomacy grounded in patience, hope, and charity.

The Holy See’s new post-war prestige was built on a twofold paradox. With the nineteenth-century demise of the Papal States, the Holy See lacked a territorial realm, which from a secular political point of view should have signified its exclusion from the diplomatic sphere of international relations. However, the loss of Papal States became a gain in papal hands, as it reinforced the Vatican’s spiritual kingdom worldwide. Moreover, rather than confining the Vatican in a second class political role, the Holy

²⁶ Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is the father of positivism, a political and philosophical movement. According to the French philosopher, humanity follows the Law of the Three Stages, passing through three successive stages; theological, metaphysical, and positive. In the theological stage, supernatural interventions are the response to all questions asked by the human mind. In the third stage, the positive stage, absolute notions give place to relative ones, through observation and experiment. Peace and love will reign by worshiping the religion of Humanity. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia created a new geo-political balance that became a menace to the positivist philosophy.

²⁷ Benedict XVI to the Bundestag, “*The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law* [September 22, 2011],” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin_en.html

See's exclusion from all post-war peace negotiations reinforced its universal appeal and allowed the pope to act in foreign affairs as the universal pastor of a global Church.²⁸

It is the universality and transnationality of the Catholic Church that allowed the Holy See to address the universal craving for order and moral authority that fostered a rebirth of religious sentiment.²⁹

Pope Benedict had been physically and politically isolated from the European diplomatic scene during the war years. After the guns fell silent, the personal moral qualities of the pontiff started to shine through, enhancing its prestige and influence. After years of carnage that he deplored and tried to stop by all means in his power, Benedict was recognized for his humanitarian efforts, if not his peace activism. In this domain, he was unrivalled. His compassion for humankind became a source of reflection and attraction.

Acknowledging the inviolability of human dignity as foundational to human relations, he had depleted the Vatican's revenues to assist those in need, without regard to race or religion. He was praised for his large-scale efforts to provide for "spiritual and material assistance to prisoners."³⁰ He fed the starving and protected widows and young orphans. The humanitarian network he led was akin to a second Red Cross. On the European front, he pursued his humanitarian efforts long after the war had come to an

²⁸ Sisley Huddleston, "Vatican's New Place in World Politics," *The New York Times Current History*, October 1920 - March 1921, 199.

²⁹ "Two Internationals: Red and Black," *The New Republic*, August 30 - November 22, 1922, 123.

³⁰ John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope, Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 113.

end. In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, he made appeals for the relief of famine in Eastern and Central Europe as well as in Russia. On December 1, 1920, “inspired by the consciousness of (that) universal fatherhood,” he dedicated a special encyclical *Annus Iam Plenus* to the children of Central Europe.³¹

In the new emerging Middle East, he had already been recognized for his humanitarian initiatives during the war. A statue was erected in his honor in the courtyard of the Saint Esprit Cathedral in Constantinople, bearing the famous words, “To the Great Pope of the World’s Tragic Hour – Benedict XV – Benefactor of the People – Without Discrimination of Nationality or Religion – a Token of Gratitude from the Orient 1914-1919.”³²

The pope eventually reaped the reward of his impartiality and consistency during the world conflict. The numerous bilateral diplomatic ties established with Catholic and non-Catholic nations were a testimony to the newly re-discovered charisma of the papacy. Moreover, Pope Benedict’s contemporaries acknowledged him as the most notable moral force active in international politics, debating on the influence the pontiff could exert on the newly created League of Nations.³³ The Holy See did not obtain a seat at the League. The pontiff’s newfound spiritual authority on peoples did not translate well

³¹ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Annus Iam Plenus* [December, 1, 1920],” AAS 12 (1920): 554.

³² Robert John Araujo and John A. Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace: The Vatican and International Organizations from the Early Years to the League of Nations* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2004), 159.

³³ Huddleston, “Revival of the Vatican,” 74.

in the confined political world of the powers devising the covenant for the League of Nations.

The Exclusion of the Holy See from the League of Nations

The Paris Peace Conference opened on January 18, 1919. As stipulated in the article 15 of the Secret Treaty of London of 1915, upon Italy's insistence, the Holy See was excluded from the peace negotiations. The pope lamented this situation, although he publicly denied any interest in getting a seat at the table of negotiations.³⁴ The Holy See was also denied membership in the League of Nations, the new center of multilateral diplomacy.

In January 1919, just before the opening of the Peace Conference, Pope Benedict and President Woodrow Wilson met at the Vatican. Although nothing transpired from their meeting, the encounter did not pass unnoticed as Wilson was the first American President to meet a Roman pontiff. With the mediation of Cardinal Gibbons, Pope Benedict and President Wilson had come to respect and trust each other. Excluded from the Paris Peace Conference and still diplomatically at odds with France, the pontiff put his trust in "this former professor who was the moralistic son of a Presbyterian minister."³⁵ Later in the year, in July 1919, in an effort to influence the negotiations from which he was barred, Benedict wrote to Wilson asking the president's help to ensure the

³⁴ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, 141.

³⁵ Michael P. Riccards, *Vicars of Christ: Popes, Power, and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 90.

protection and freedom of the Catholic missions in the former German colonies. Wilson agreed to use his political and moral authority in support of the pope's query.³⁶

During the war, the prestige and moral authority of the United States were esteemed, supplanting the Holy See's influence on the unfolding of the conflict. The French novelist Romain Rolland, in an article of October 1, 1914, *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, implored President Wilson's help. "Dans cette guerre néfaste, [he wrote], les yeux ... se tournent vers vous et votre pays. Puissiez-vous faire entendre votre voix juste et ferme au milieu de ces frères ennemis!"³⁷ The American President eventually answered the call. The United States entered the war in April 1917, on the side of the Entente powers.

A few months later, Pope Benedict published his Peace Note of August 1, 1917, his greatest effort to end the war. President Wilson followed in his footsteps and delivered, on January 8, 1918, a message to the US Congress laying out his peace aims. He stated fourteen points, which "were to be the United States blueprint for the securing of a lasting and just world peace."³⁸

While Pope Benedict's Peace Note was decried and ignored, President Wilson's Fourteen Points were widely acclaimed as a "generous and non punitive postwar

³⁶ See Letter of Benedict XV of July 1, 1919 to Woodrow Wilson and Wilson's response of August 15, 1919, in Joseph P. Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson as I know Him* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1921), 482-83.

³⁷ Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 158.

³⁸ Joel S. Poetker, *The Fourteen Points* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1969), prologue.

settlement”³⁹ and established the American President as the new moral leader of the world.⁴⁰ Two main guidelines shaped Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Point six to thirteen advocated self-determination for national minorities in Europe. But it was Point fourteen that became paramount as it endorsed the foundation of “a general association of nations [that] must be formed ... for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.”⁴¹

The underlying philosophy behind the Covenant for the new League of Nations can be traced back to the Fourteen Points outlined by Wilson. The draft for the Covenant was presented by the Paris Peace Conference in April 1919 and officially ratified on June 28, 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed.⁴² The League started to operate on January 10, 1920.

Pope Benedict and President Wilson shared a common view of the post-war world, a view that rejected colonialist expansion and favored self-determination of nationalities. Eventually, neither the pontiff nor the American President was able to defend their views at the future League of Nations as none of them became a member.

Although most Americans saw the League of Nations as “without doubt the most important feature of the peace treaty” and “‘an absolutely necessary piece of machinery’

³⁹ Thomas Paterson, J. Garry Clifford, and Shane J. Maddock, *American Foreign Relations: A History to 1920*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2010), 290.

⁴⁰ Araujo and Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace*, 108.

⁴¹ Christine Compston and Rachel F. Seidman ed., *Our Documents, 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 150.

⁴² Araujo and Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace*, 116. The League Covenant was an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles.

for carrying out the terms of peace,”⁴³ the American Senate twice rejected a resolution of ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.⁴⁴ Therefore the United States did not become a member of the League, which weakened the international prestige and credibility of the new institution dedicated to promote peace and stability worldwide. The pope had also lost a potential support at the League.

Article 1 of the Covenant of the League restricted membership to self-governing states, also eliminating the Holy See as potential member.⁴⁵ Acknowledging the newfound prestige of the Holy See, contemporary observers of Benedict XV’s pontificate wondered if it “would not be to the advantage of the League to have the representative of the Pope on its council.”⁴⁶ The League could benefit from Benedict’s esteemed political and spiritual standing. But, it was argued, the League being essentially a moral authority, the pope would have to be the head of such a body, an option that could not be considered by secular nations.⁴⁷

The pontiff had also alluded to the creation of a community of nations in his Peace Note of August 1917, stating that “instead of armies, [he was calling for] the institution of arbitration, with its lofty peacemaking function, according to the standards to be agreed upon and with sanctions to be decided against the State which might refuse to

⁴³ “A Review of the World,” *Current Opinion*, June 1919, 344.

⁴⁴ To be ratified, the Treaty needed to be approved by two-thirds of the Senate. The resolution was first rejected on November 19, 1919, and in a subsequent vote on March 19, 1920.

⁴⁵ It was argued that Italy would never allow the Holy See to join the League of Nations, fearing that the Pope would use this venue to raise the question of its territorial sovereignty.

⁴⁶ Huddleston, “Revival of the Vatican,” 74.

⁴⁷ Huddleston, “Revival of the Vatican,” 75.

submit international questions to arbitration or to accept its decisions.”⁴⁸ The pontiff’s thoughts on the concept of a League of Nations evolved and matured. In his encyclical *Pacem Dei Munus*,⁴⁹ published on May 23, 1920, Pope Benedict broached the topic of a Christian League, voluntarily omitting mention of the already existing League of Nations. Calling for an “association of nations,” the pontiff stated that “all States, putting aside mutual suspicion, should unite in one league, or rather a sort of family of peoples, calculated both to maintain their own independence and safeguard the order of human society.”⁵⁰

The pope was calling for a League inspired by Christian principles of morality, integrity, and forgiveness. “The Church will certainly not refuse her zealous aid”, he wrote, “to States united under the Christian law in any of their undertakings inspired by justice and charity, inasmuch as she is herself the most perfect type of universal society.”⁵¹ Pope Benedict’s statement can be understood as the first official papal statement asking a secular international body to officially recognize the universal nature of the Church and the acknowledgment of the Christian roots of Europe as a source for worldwide peace and stability.

Although many unsuccessful attempts were made in this direction, the final draft of the Covenant of the League of Nations did not include any reference to religion “as a

⁴⁸ Benedict XV, *Appeal to the Heads of the Warring Peoples*, 417-20.

⁴⁹ Benedict XV, *Pacem Dei Munus*, 209-18.

⁵⁰ Benedict XV, *Pacem Dei Munus*, 216.

⁵¹ Benedict XV, *Pacem Dei Munus*, 216.

means of determining the physical boundaries of the state,”⁵² or guarantees of religious freedom.⁵³ While self-determination, equality of nations or justice were concepts listed as foundational principles, religious factors, such as freedom of conscience and worship, that could have substantially influenced the international social peace, were dismissed.⁵⁴ Instead separate Minorities Treaties were instituted to protect the minorities’ rights but the opportunity to give those rights an international stature was lost.⁵⁵

The decision to omit all mention of religion or Christian principles in the Covenant of the League of Nations was disappointing to the pope as it did not reflect the newly restored prestige and influence enjoyed by the Holy See on the diplomatic scene. However, it is the League’s failure to lay down solid foundations to secure world peace and collective security that concerned Pope Benedict. By refusing to include all the major powers, defeated or not, in the organization, the new body was closing the door to the opportunity to become a universal organization that, as another moral authority, could have competed with the universality of the Church. The vindictive choice made by the founders to rebuff Germany was in complete opposition to the moral principles expounded by Pope Benedict since the beginning of the war. It was therefore to the

⁵² Malcom D. Evans, *Religious Liberty and International Law in Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.

⁵³ Evans, *Religious Liberty*, 83.

⁵⁴ “It was President Wilson who had been the champion of a provision on religious freedom.” Evans, *Religious Liberty*, 96. Wilson was absent from the meeting where the provision was deleted upon the demand of the French Legal Adviser.

⁵⁵ Manfred Franz Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Gläser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 258. The first of these Minorities Treaties was the Polish Minorities Treaty intended to protect the Jewish population in Poland. It then came to embrace the welfare of all the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe.

benefit of the Holy See to stay aloof and keep developing a unique moral and political aura. The Holy See lost an opportunity to officially join the international body of sovereign nations through the newly founded League of Nations. However, its remaining outside this international body while maintaining bilateral diplomatic relations with most of its members, gave the papacy more freedom in its diplomatic undertakings, as the Holy See could exert its influence at the League through the conduit of members of the League amenable to the Holy See's policies.

The Mandate System: Concealed Colonization

Mandate System and Imperialism

Pope Benedict had little time left to follow the development of the League of Nations, as he died a couple of years after it started to be in full operation. During these years, he established private and unofficial contacts with members of the League in order to monitor decisions that would have a direct influence on the future of Catholic interests in the world.⁵⁶ The pontiff's primary concern was to ensure the protection of Catholic rights in the emerging Middle East.

The birth of the Mandate System,⁵⁷ a system meant to govern the colonies or territories that once belonged to the defeated Powers, put a lid on France and Britain's

⁵⁶ Araujo and Lucal, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace*, 146.

⁵⁷ The Mandate System was originally conceived to address the future of the former German colonies. It also applied to the non-Turkish territories of the former Ottoman Empire.

claims to share the spoils of wars in the collapsed Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸ The British and French demands for annexation of those territories were firmly opposed by Woodrow Wilson as being in contradiction with the philosophy underlying the League of Nations. The Mandate System emerged as a compromise between the Powers' imperialistic intentions and Woodrow Wilson's opposition to annexationist policies and his promise to national minorities that they would be granted the right to self-determination.⁵⁹ Pope Benedict was following with keen interest the deliberations regarding the organization of the Mandate System, as he supported Wilson's call in favor of self-determination of national minorities.

As a compromise, the Mandate System did not clearly answer the question of its finality. Was it aiming at the future abolition of colonialism or was it creating a system that would allow the colonial powers to amend and redesign their colonial politics?⁶⁰

In point Twelve of his Fourteen Points, dealing specifically with Turkey, Wilson had implicitly notified France, Britain, and Italy that the United States would not accept any war-time agreement on the carving up of the Ottoman Empire and the attribution of spheres of influence between the allied powers.⁶¹ Point twelve stated that

⁵⁸ Nele Matz, "Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship," in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, eds. A. von Bogdandy and R. Wolfrum, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 48.

⁵⁹ Evans, *Religious Liberty*, 105.

⁶⁰ Matz, "Civilization and the Mandate System," 54.

⁶¹ John A. deNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 110.

The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.⁶²

Considering the political prestige enjoyed by the American President in Europe and the Middle East, France and Britain had no other choice than to verbally adopt Wilson's call for self-determination in the region while, at the same time, making sure that it would be practically impossible to implement.⁶³

On November 9, 1918, France and Britain issued an ambiguous joint declaration tackling the issue of self determination. It stated that

The object aimed at by France and Great Britain in prosecuting in the East the war let loose by the ambition of Germany is the complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations.⁶⁴

But the same statement was pouring cold water on indigenes' dreams of self-determination, making France and Britain's support conditional on their acceptance of guidance from "advanced nations," a statement with colonial connotations, foreshadowing the institution of future mandates.⁶⁵

⁶² Compston and Seidman, *Our Documents*, 151.

⁶³ James Gelvin, "The Ironic Legacy of the King-Crane Commission," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, ed. David W. Lesch (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 14.

⁶⁴ Gelvin, "Ironic Legacy," 15.

⁶⁵ Gelvin, "Ironic Legacy," 15.

French and British Mandates in Syria and Palestine

In his *History of Syria*, the late historian Philip K. Hitti described Greater Syria as “the largest small country on the map, microscopic in size but cosmic in influence.”⁶⁶ Lacking in natural resources, it is its strategic geographical location and its history that explain its disproportionate role in the region.⁶⁷ Greater Syria lies at the meeting-point of three continents, and served as a trade and culture route between the Occident and the Orient, for over 3,500 years.⁶⁸ In an address delivered in 1934, George Antonius, author of the seminal book *The Arab Awakening*,⁶⁹ defined geographical Syria⁷⁰ as a “rectangle of land which forms the eastern boundary of the Mediterranean Sea, and is bounded on the north by the Taurus Mountains, on the east by the Syrian Desert, on the south by the Sinai Desert and Peninsula, and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea.”⁷¹

From the nineteenth century onwards, geographical Syria had been the battlefield where French and British Empires vied for domination of the Near East. The liberation of Jerusalem by British troops in December 1917 signaled the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the partitioning of Greater Syria between the rival empires.

⁶⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of Syria Including Lebanon and Palestine*, vol.1 (Piscataway, NJ: First Gorgias, 2002), 3.

⁶⁷ Neil Quilliam, *Syria and the New World Order* (Reading, UK: Gamer, 1999), 28.

⁶⁸ Quilliam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 30.

⁶⁹ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945).

⁷⁰ The terms “Geographical Syria” and “Greater Syria” are used indistinctly.

⁷¹ George Antonius, “Syria and the French Mandate,” *International Affairs* (July 1934): 523-524.

Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations established the Mandate System, emphasizing “as one of the core principles the well-being and development of peoples living in those colonies that as a result of the war have lost their former colonial sovereign as a sacred trust of civilization.”⁷² France and Britain were therefore offered mandates on the basis of a “tutelage [that] should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.”⁷³

Article 22 of the Covenant classified the mandates into three groups, depending on the stage of development of the territories. Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria received a Class A mandate as representing non-self-governing societies that would need supervision for a short period of time before being granted independence.⁷⁴ The Mandatory’s mission was essentially to provide advice and support to allow these territories to be granted independence after reaching an advanced stage of political, economic, and social maturity.

The implementation of the new Mandate System went through different phases. On April 24 and 25, 1920, at the Conference of San Remo, the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers confirmed the Allied Mandates Commission’s resolution to partition Greater Syria and allot a civil mandate for Syria to France, while Great-Britain was entrusted with a mandate for Palestine. The details of the mandates waited to be drafted

⁷² Matz, “Civilization and the Mandate System,” 55.

⁷³ Covenant of the League of Nations, art.22, par. 2, in Grenville, *Major International Treaties*, 24-7.

⁷⁴ Three types of mandates were created by the League of Nations. Class A mandates consisted of former Ottoman Empire territories, including Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Transjordan. Class B mandates covered German colonies in Central Africa. As for class C mandates, they consisted of South-West Africa territories and some Pacific Islands.

and approved by the League of Nations. The borders of the new Syria and Palestine were defined by the French and British governments at a conference in London, on December 4, 1920.⁷⁵ The final terms of the British and French mandates were eventually approved by the League of Nations on July 24, 1922, a few months after Benedict XV's passing away, and became operational on September 29, 1923.

The interpretation that the future Mandatory Powers would give of the article 22 of the League Covenant had a direct bearing on Pope Benedict's ecclesiastical and diplomatic policy, as the pontiff was in the midst of devising a new approach to the relations between the missionaries in the world and their allegiance to their country, most often one with colonial territories worldwide.

The principle of decolonization was not explicitly mentioned in article 22 of the League Covenant, but it could be inferred, after a close reading, that the Mandate System was intended to be a first step on the way to the abrogation of the colonial system. The class A mandates of Great Britain and France regarding the former possessions of the Ottoman Empire stipulated that Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan were deemed to "have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Howard Grief, *The Legal Foundation and Borders of Israel under International Law* (Jerusalem: Mazo, 2008), 55. The final Franco-British boundary agreement was signed in Paris on December 23, 1920.

⁷⁶ Par. 4 of Art. 22 of the League Covenant, in Grenville, *Major International Treaties*, 24-7.

However, in practice, the Wilsonian ideal of self-determination was met with reticence by both France and Great-Britain in Syria and Palestine. The practical implementation of the two mandates was dictated by the state of Anglo-French relations and their respective colonial interests. The importance of the class A mandates was essentially due to their strategic position for both the French and British Empires. The welfare of the Arab populations of the area and their training for future independence was secondary in the global imperialistic schemes of the two Great Powers.

The Mandate years were a time of growing tension between the rules imposed by the Mandatories and the growing demand for independence of the populations under foreign governance. The resistance against colonial behaviors was fueled by the development of nationalist movements that had gained in maturity after the war.⁷⁷ The Holy See, with its network of Catholic institutions, churches, and missions, was directly concerned by the model of control adopted by the Mandatories and its effect on the local populations.

The Holy See's Policy of Emancipation

Pope Benedict was not alone in judging that the Mandate System had answered the imperialistic cravings of powers like France and Great-Britain, but had also sown the seeds of future decolonization. However, it was to the pontiff's credit to foresee the consequences that this first step in the process of decolonization would have on the universal Church and its mission network worldwide. Pope Benedict acted upon this

⁷⁷ David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

unique opportunity to emancipate the missionary world from the shackles of the Great Powers. He liberated the Church from its identification to the Eurocentric Model that the post-war scene had rendered geo-politically inadequate and morally untenable.

A Universal Call to Emancipation: Encyclical Maximum Illud

After four years of a war that saw Christian nations fighting against each other, the “credit of European civilization”⁷⁸ in the colonies was gone. In September 1920, the Orientalist Gertrude Bell evoked the danger of this moral collapse bluntly. “Over and over again, people have said to me [she wrote] that it has been a shock and a surprise to them to see Europe relapse into barbarism. I had no reply – what else can you call the war? How can we, who managed our affairs so badly, claim to teach others to manage theirs better?”⁷⁹ In the same vein, the American historian Lothrop Stoddard pointed out in 1922 that “the Western rulers will always remain an alien caste: tolerated, even respected but never loved, and never regarded as anything (sic) than foreigners.”⁸⁰

In this context, Benedict grasped the need for the Church to emancipate itself from the colonial powers, especially France and its Catholic Protectorate.⁸¹ Against the Eurocentric and nationalist positivism of the nineteenth century, he affirmed the unity and universality of the Church. To the positivist philosophy that assumed the superiority

⁷⁸ Lady Bell ed., *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, vol.2 (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 404.

⁷⁹ Bell, *Letters*, 404.

⁸⁰ Lothrop Stoddard, “Islam Aflame with Revolt,” *The World’s Work*, May-October 1922, 138.

⁸¹ For centuries, in the colonies, France had been associated with Catholicism and Catholicism with France, regardless of the state of the diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Paris.

of European civilization and culture, the pope opposed a vision of society based on the equality of men and cultures, nurtured by Catholic missions. With much insight, Benedict foresaw that the expansion of the world, embodied in the new League of Nations, would challenge the secular Eurocentric political and cultural model. He contemplated a world in which the Catholic Church, a universal and transnational institution, would rethink and reorganize the missionary world in order to strengthen harmonious international relations and world peace. The international missionary network, free from the control of the Great Powers, was moving away, slowly and gradually, from a nationalistic spirit, eventually becoming the cornerstone on which Pope Benedict anchored the Church in the modern world.⁸²

Most of the measures Benedict XV took to protect the missions in lands under French and British mandates are expressed in his Encyclical *Maximum Illud*, on the propagation of the faith throughout the world,⁸³ promulgated on November 30, 1919. At that time, the Covenant for the League of Nations creating the Mandate System had already been approved on July 28, 1919; but the League of Nations was not in full operation. The Conference of San Remo of April 1920 had not yet authorized the mandates for Palestine and Syria to Great-Britain and France.

Maximum Illud was not an encyclical about the missions in the Middle East. It was a document written to respond to the concern of a Belgian missionary in China, Vincent Lebbe, who in 1918 had complained to *Propaganda Fide* about the rising conflict

⁸² Matz, "Civilization and the Mandate System," 60.

⁸³ Benedict XV, "Encyclical *Maximum Illud*, on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World [November 30, 1919]," AAS 11(1919): 440-55.

between Chinese nationalism and the French Catholic Protectorate, criticizing the exacerbated nationalism of French missionaries.⁸⁴ The encyclical was the first papal document to provide an international and comprehensive approach to the missionary world.

Pope Benedict entrusted the missions with two main goals. The pontiff highlighted the necessity to train an indigenous clergy with “the same kind of education for the priesthood that a European would receive,” so “that some day they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people.”⁸⁵ By training “local candidates,” Benedict’s hope was to get access to “places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated,”⁸⁶ often because he was associated with a European colonial enterprise.

Maximum Illud was a revolutionary document as it directly challenged the missionaries and their hierarchy to rethink their relationship with the colonial rulers and engaged them to draw a clear line between their Catholic and nationalist allegiance, cutting ties between the missionary and his country.

In *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict sternly denounced missionary nationalism.

It would be tragic indeed [wrote the pope] if any of our missionaries forgot the dignity of their office so completely as to busy themselves with the interests of their terrestrial homeland instead of with those of their homeland in heaven. ... Such behavior would infect his apostolate like a plague. It would destroy in him, the representative of the Gospel, the sinews of his love for souls and it would destroy his reputation with the populace.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Jacques Leclercq, *Thunder in the Distance: the Life of Père Lebbe* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958).

⁸⁵ Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 445.

⁸⁶ Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 445.

The message was especially intended for French missionaries who provided most of the Catholic missionary force.⁸⁸ Pope Benedict was careful not to use a vocabulary that could be misunderstood by the missionaries, as the nuance was subtle between the idea of nationalism and patriotism. The term of “nationalism” is difficult to define. One definition is given by Princeton scholar, Maurizio Viroli, who points out that

“nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism ... By ‘patriotism,’ [he wrote] I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon people... nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation...”⁸⁹

In the words of Max Weber, nationalism is based upon “‘sentiments of prestige,’ rooted deep in notions of common descent and essential cultural/ethnic homogeneity. The prestige of a nation is directly linked to the foundational idea ... of that nation’s ‘mission’ in the world.”⁹⁰ This is this form of nationalism that Pope Benedict was fighting against, a nationalism that, in the case of France, was hiding behind the concept of *mission civilisatrice*, the foundation of French colonial politics.

A couple of years after the promulgation of *Maximum Illud*, in an additional effort to restructure the world of missions, Pope Benedict recommended the Society for the

⁸⁷ Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, 446.

⁸⁸ *Maximum Illud* identifies three main priorities for the missionary clergy: the formation of a native clergy, the recognition of human dignity of all men and cultures, and the missionaries’ renunciation to nationalistic endeavors.

⁸⁹ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

⁹⁰ Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

Propagation of the Faith to the attention of *Propaganda Fide*. Founded in 1822 in Lyons, France, by a lay woman, Pauline Jaricot, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith had, as its core mission, to pray for missionaries and collect alms intended for the missions worldwide.

As the Society had made substantial headway since its founding, Pope Benedict planned to transfer its headquarters from Lyons to Rome, for the sake of closer clerical control and release from French political pressure. On January 1922, on the occasion of the preparation for the celebration of the centenary of the Society, the *Osservatore Romano*, the official organ of the Vatican, published an article announcing the transfer of the Society to Rome.⁹¹ There is no doubt that, had he not died a month later, Pope Benedict would have made official the measures announced by the newspaper. The transfer was effected a few months later by Pope Benedict's successor, Pius XI, in his *Motu Proprio Romanorum Pontificum* of May 3, 1922.⁹² In this document, the new pope raised the Society to the status of *Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith*.

With these measures, the papacy concentrated in Rome the control and distribution of missionary resources. By centralizing the collection of international alms, the Holy See was breaking away from France in an attempt to remove accusations of nationalism leveled against missionaries. This financial emancipation was to be understood as the Holy See's dissociation from the colonial powers, so that the populations of territories

⁹¹ "Editorial Notes: Centenary of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith," *Catholic Missions*, May 1922, 118.

⁹² Pius XI, "Motu Proprio *Romanorum Pontificum* [May 3, 1922]," *AAS* 14 (1922): 321-30.

under mandate rule “would not confuse with the same distrust the priest, the soldier, and the merchant, so that the day the latter two would be pushed away, the priest could at least stay.”⁹³

A Regional Reality: Catholic Missions in Syria and Palestine

Maximum Illud was promulgated in November 1919, more than a year after the liberation of Palestine and Syria by British troops. During this period, Catholic missions strove to ensure the reopening of their buildings and to enroll missionaries in order to relaunch their activities and quickly return to their pre-war glory. They took initiatives, independently from the Vatican, which immediately brought them to the attention of the pontiff. A joint meeting of Cardinals from various Congregations took place to discuss the situation. A series of resolutions, approved by the pope, were issued that anticipated the more general recommendations that will be made by Benedict in *Maximum Illud*.

A document was eventually published by the Vatican in June 1919. Anticipating *Maximum Illud* and its denunciation of missionary nationalism, *Propaganda Fide*, the *Congregation for the Oriental Church*, and the *Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs*, in a joint address, clarified “the disposizioni da prendersi per provvedere al risarcimento dei Danni subiti dalle Missioni e dalle Diocesi Orientali.”⁹⁴

⁹³ “... ne confondissent dans la même défiance le prêtre, le soldat et le marchand, afin que le jour où ces deux derniers seraient repoussés, le prêtre du moins put rester.” (My translation). Msgr. Beaupin, “Introduction,” in *L’apostolat missionnaire de la France*. Conférences données à l’Institut Catholique de Paris, Série” 1924-1925 (Paris: Téqui, 1924-26).

⁹⁴ Adunanza Mista delle Sacre Congregazioni “de Propaganda Fide,” “Pro Ecclesia Orientali,” e degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, “Relazione sulle disposizioni da prendersi per provvedere al risarcimento dei Danni subiti dalle Missioni e dalle Diocesi Orientali,” June 1919, ACCO, 4/7 bis. In

The issue at stake was a cause of concern. European superiors of Oriental missions, impatient to obtain compensation for the damages their missions had suffered during the war, were sending their demand “*directly* [to] the Government of their own country,”⁹⁵ without informing the Holy See. The controversy revolved around whether or not the missionaries receiving financial support from their native country would be legally bound by this act to the contributing nation, and how that would affect both the missions and the Holy See.

The cardinals worried that “if a foreign government ... [would] give a sum of money to restore the buildings of Missions as well as churches ... this government [would] surely pretend tomorrow to exercise a right of protection, even if not a control over those buildings.”⁹⁶ As many missionaries, “without much judgment”, would accept financial support from their native country, the patrimony of the Holy See in the region would eventually end up in foreign secular hands, not only suppressing the autonomy of the Holy See but also transforming “the territory of the oriental Patriarchates in land of conquest for the interests of their own nation, rather than the supernatural interests of the souls.”⁹⁷ This affirmation was a direct forerunner of Pope Benedict’s guiding principles that would be enunciated in *Maximum Illud* a few months later.

addition to Cardinals Gasparri, van Rossum, and Marini, Cardinals DeLai, Vico, Merry del Val, Frühwirth, Scapinelli, Lega and Gasquet were present at the meeting.

⁹⁵ ACCO, 4/7 bis, June 1919.

⁹⁶ “se un governo straniero ... dara delle somme per ripristinare gli edifice delle Missioni ... quel Governo domani pretendera molto probabilmente di esercitare una protezione, se non pure un dominio su quegli edifice.” (My translation) ACCO, 4/7 bis, June 1919.

The final answer to this problem was complicated as the Holy See had to find a way that would ensure the independence of the Church while accepting donations to rebuild the missions. At this time, the Holy See was broke.

On June 6, 1919, the mixed Congregation published official guidelines that stipulated that the missionaries were allowed to accept compensations from a foreign country in order to rebuild their institutions. Nevertheless, they had to ensure that the indemnity provided as a measure of justice and reparation would not give the nation a right that would constitute a constraint on the freedom of the Church, or would be assimilated to a title of property of the Catholic establishment. The Holy See was the final authority to accept or reject the offer from the donor.⁹⁸

In the emerging post-war world, Pope Benedict articulated a threefold rationale underlying the Holy See's diplomatic approach in Europe and the Middle East. The pontiff initiated a new policy that shifted away from its past Eurocentric vision of the world, embracing the role of the Church as a universal and transnational institution. This approach was combined with an anticipation of the decolonization era and self-determination of national minorities. It is based on these two premises that Pope Benedict completed the principles guiding his diplomacy with a policy of emancipation of the missionary world from colonial powers. Benedict XV prepared the Church for an active role in the modern world. In Syria and Palestine, the pontiff adjusted his diplomacy to the

⁹⁷ “il territorio dei Patriarcati orientali come un terreno di conquista piuttosto per gli interessi della propria nazione, anziché per gli interessi soprannaturali delle anime.” (My translation). ACCO, 4/7 bis, June 1919.

⁹⁸ ACCO, Fasc. 39/29, Segreteria – Orientali Missioni, June 10, 1919.

new setting imposed by the Mandate System as he designed a prudent policy that would adapt to short term developments without compromising his long term goal of emancipation of the Church from the colonial powers and the colonial mindset.

CHAPTER 7

THE HOLY SEE BETWEEN FRENCH IMPERIALISM AND ARAB NATIONALISM IN SYRIA

The Holy See and Arab Nationalism

The Significance of Syria

Syria has always been a pivotal gateway between the East and the West. It was of equal concern to France and the Holy See as it historically sheltered the largest Christian community in the Middle East and the most significant of French interests. Furthermore, Great Britain had no pressing interest in the region. As an imperial power, it was essentially concerned about its strategic position in Palestine, south of Syria, and its takeover of oil fields in Mesopotamia. Therefore at the end of the war, the British government's goal was to ensure that Syria would fall into the hands of a friendly power. Its policy on this matter evolved from supporting an Arab kingdom led by Prince Feisal, the son of Hussein, Sharif of Mecca, to reluctantly consenting to a French mandate.

Syria had never been of great concern for French economic or financial development, leaving it on cultural and religious grounds that Paris claimed a right to a mandate. Historically, France had an undeniable privileged presence and moral involvement in the area. Since the sixteenth century, its Catholic religious Protectorate had ensured the protection of Latin and Eastern Catholic communities. It is on this religious ground that the Holy See's interests over Syria converged with those of France.

The Holy See always had as its core mission the protection of the rights and interests of Catholic populations in the Near East.

But times had changed. The First World War had sounded the death knell for the pre-war international system with France having lost its privileged position. During the war, France was politically weakened in the Middle East due to its minor military contribution. Conversely, Britain's military accomplishments made her the dominant power in the region, with troops stationed in all the previous Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

In this context, Pope Benedict engaged the Holy See in a new universal policy of emancipation from the colonial powers, which meant, in the new emerging Middle East, the implementation of a supple diplomacy that would adjust to any political environment, granted the independence of the Holy See and the protection of Catholic interests would be guaranteed.

This novel policy explains why the pontiff responded with genuine interest to Prince Feisal's offer to discuss the future government of Syria. The son of the Emir of Mecca, Feisal, was expecting, in accordance with the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of war-time,¹ to establish an independent united Arab kingdom that would stretch from Aleppo in Northern Syria to Aden in Yemen.²

¹ The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence was an exchange of eight letters, from July 14, 1915 to January 30, 1916, between the Sharif Hussein of Mecca and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt. It concerns the Ottoman lands that the British were ready to cede to the Arabs in exchange for the Sharif's revolt against the Ottoman Government.

² In September, 1918, British General Allenby and his army entered into Syria. He was accompanied by Prince Feisal, whose troops had supported the British on the Arab front during the war. On October 3,

At the regional level, the Apostolic Delegate of Syria, Msgr. Giannini, worried about an Arab kingdom engulfed in Muslim fanaticism while, thousands of miles away in Rome, Pope Benedict was receiving Prince Feisal warmly and acquiesced in him becoming king of Syria, as long as religious freedom for the Latin and Eastern Catholics would be enforced.

Prince Feisal Meets with Pope Benedict

For the first time in the history of the papacy, “the head of the Catholic Church received the son of the Commander of the Faithful,”³ an extraordinary event in itself but one which, for the very few scholars who mention it, concretely “amount[ed] to nothing.”⁴

Although Pope Benedict did not directly influence the course of political events in Syria, such an encounter sheds light on the changes that had occurred on the diplomatic scene. That Feisal asked for a meeting with the pope was a sign of the international

as Allenby’s troops were advancing towards Damascus, the British General stopped his own army and let Feisal enter victoriously in Damascus, accompanied by Colonel T.E. Lawrence. This episode “created the myth of an Arab Revolt, advancing in triumph and crowning its progress with the capture of a great city, only to be cheated of victory by underhanded intrigues and sordid ambitions.” On these events, see Jan Karl Tanenbaum, “France and the Arab Middle East, 1914-1920,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 68 (1978): 21 (1-50).

³ “Moslem Prince at Vatican: Feisal Tells Pope of Arabia’s Hope of Complete Independence,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1919, 26.

⁴ See Sami Moubayed, *Syria and the U.S.A.: Washington’s Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 20. Gérard Khoury mentions the meeting in one line, (Khoury, 52). Nevertheless, Robert de Caix, civil secretary-general of the High Commissioner in Syria, mentions the meeting and its meaning to Minister Stephen Pichon. In Gérard Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale. Le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban: Ecrits politiques de Robert de Caix* (Paris: Belin, 2006), 167.

stature that both the pontiff and Prince Feisal had gained since the end of the conflict, allowing them to discuss the future of Syria without the mediation of France.

Feisal spent four months in Europe,⁵ meeting with Pope Benedict on April 21, 1919. At this time, the Holy See knew that, in accordance with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916⁶ as well as the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the British had reserved Palestine for themselves, promised Mount Lebanon to France, and given inner Syria to Feisal. Rome was also aware that the negotiations between Feisal and Clemenceau, the head of the French government, regarding the establishment of a Sherifian kingdom under French protectorate, had failed.⁷ At this time, British troops were still occupying Syria and Lebanon, which infuriated French officials.⁸

Therefore, when Feisal met with Pope Benedict, no final *de jure* settlement had been devised and no mandate had been allotted yet, leading to speculation about who would eventually govern the country.

⁵ On February 6, 1919, a few days after the opening of the Paris Peace Conference, Prince Feisal, invited by Great Britain, was granted a hearing before the Council of Ten and defended the legitimacy of an independent and sovereign Arab Kingdom. The Arab world was in effervescence, hoping to build an Arab kingdom, worried though by the imperialistic ambitions of France and England.

⁶ Secret agreement concluded in May 1916 between the French and British governments that partitioned the Arab possessions of the Ottoman Empire between France and Britain, in the expectation of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement handed over control of Syria, Lebanon, and Cilicia to the French while Palestine, Jordan, and Baghdad went to the British. The terms of the agreement conflicted with McMahon's promises to Sherif Hussein.

⁷ Khoury, 30-42.

⁸ Peter Sluglett, "The Mandates: Some Reflections on the Nature of the British Presence in Iraq (1914-1932) and the French Presence in Syria (1918-1946)," in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/ Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, eds. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 120.

On May 20, 1919, Gasparri sent a report of the meeting to Cardinal Marini, the Secretary of the *Congregation for the Oriental Church*. He informed Marini that Feisal had confirmed in a written document that the Syrian government, under his leadership, would guarantee complete freedom to all Catholics, “respecting the rights of the Church, of monasteries and religious institutions.”⁹ There would be no return to the *millet* system, rendering any French interests to restore the Catholic Protectorate obsolete. In the letter forwarded to Marini, it is not clear if it is Gasparri, on his own account, or Pope Benedict who asked Abbot Ubaid,¹⁰ Feisal’s interpreter, to construe the terms of the meeting and explain what the prince concretely meant by “to facilitate the union between the Christian and Muslim populations of Syria and Palestine, therefore facilitating the establishment of an independent Arab state in the region.”¹¹ The abbot responded that, in his understanding, Prince Feisal was encouraging the Holy See to

Explain in the first place these unifying actions towards the Catholic Patriarchs of oriental rites, telling them... that the Holy See was aware of the Emir’s intentions and that they bring him complete satisfaction in respect to the absolute safeguard of liberty and religious independence of Catholics, churches and pious foundations.¹²

⁹ Gasparri to Marini, May 20, 1919, ACCO Fasc. 614/32 – Oriente: L’Emiro faisal: Udiienza del S. Padre (1919). (My translation).

¹⁰ Abbot Luigi Ubaid was a Maronite priest.

¹¹ “vedere agevolata l’unione tra l’elemento cristiano e quello mussulmano della Siria e della Palestina e facilitata in tal modo la costituzione di uno stato arabo indipendente nelle regioni suddette.” (My translation). ACCO, 20 May 1919.

¹² “Spiegare tale azione unificatrice innanzitutto verso gli Eccellentissimi Patriarchi Cattolici di rito orientale, facendo sapere a questi ... che la Santa Sede conosce gli intendimenti dell’Emiro e che questi sono di sua completa soddisfazione, in quanto salvaguardano nel modo più assoluto, la libertà e la indipendenza religiosa dei cattolici, le chiese e le fondazioni pie.” (My translation). ACCO, 20 May 1919.

Then, he emphasized how delicate but greatly important it was to inform Msgr. Giannini and the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, Msgr. Camassei,¹³ about the guarantees of complete religious freedom given by Prince Feisal to the pontiff, thus avoiding subjecting them to any political friction.

Pope Benedict approved Abbot Ubaid's suggestions. Cardinal Marini was invited to address a formal letter to Msgr. Giannini, Msgr. Cadi, Melkite Patriarch, and Msgr. Huyaek, Maronite Patriarch. They received the missive on June 13 and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was in Rome at that time, was directly informed.

Pope Benedict's response was pragmatic and shed light on his diplomatic approach to the thorny Syrian question. He clearly perceived the benefits Feisal could gain from establishing good relations with the Holy See. Since the end of the war, the papacy was enjoying a sudden resurgence of moral authority. As a universal institution with strong interests in Syria, it could become a precious and unique ally to Prince Feisal, assuming that his provisional government was meant to stay.

In the long run, both parties could also envision the establishment of official diplomatic ties, an opportunity declined by the Holy See with the Ottoman Empire during the war. In the new emerging world order, Pope Benedict was in a position to seize this unique opportunity to engage in direct diplomatic exchanges with a Muslim leader. It was a bold path to choose, as the Holy See was, at the same time, planning to resume

¹³ Msgr. Camassei arrived in Rome in May 1919 to meet with Pope Benedict and take some rest, after the sufferings he endured during the war.

diplomatic ties with France. As had already been done, Paris would vehemently oppose the Holy See's attempt at emancipation.

Benedict's global and regional foreign policy shows that he had chosen a diplomatic route that would establish a clear line of demarcation between the colonial and semi-colonial possessions of France and the *Métropole*. He was already anticipating the soon-to-come era of decolonization and was seeing in Arab nationalism, a potential anti-imperialistic weapon against France. The visit of Prince Feisal was a positive sign of his will to assume, with the blessing of the British, the role of protector of Catholics in Syria, replacing the French.¹⁴ In April 1919, at the time of the meeting, the pontiff was preparing his groundbreaking encyclical *Maximum Illud* that would initiate a policy of emancipation of the Holy See from the colonial powers, especially France.

Pope Benedict's diplomacy towards Prince Feisal's Syrian administration was also in line with Pope Leo XIII's policy regarding the Holy See's approval of different forms of governments. In his encyclical *Diuturnum* of 1881, on the origin of civil power, Pope Leo stated that

There is no reason why the Church should not approve of the chief power being held by one man or by more, provided only it be just, and that it tend to the common advantage. Wherefore, so long as justice be respected, the people are not hindered from choosing for themselves that form of government which suits best either their own disposition, or the institutions and customs of their ancestors.¹⁵

¹⁴ Khoury citing a letter of Robert de Caix of 22 April 1919 to Stephen Pichon, 167.

¹⁵ Leo XIII, "Encyclical Letter *Diuturnum*, on the Origin of Civil Power [June 29, 1881]," ASS 14 (1881): 3-14.

Therefore, as long as Catholic communities would be protected, Pope Benedict would be satisfied with a Syrian kingdom, in so far as religious freedom and independence from colonial enterprise were guaranteed.

Pope Benedict's global and conceptual foresight was completed by an analysis of the practical situation in Syria. At this regional level, the pontiff's policy conflicted with the Apostolic Delegate's immediate focus on Catholic life in a Muslim and nationalist environment. Giannini, living at the center of the Syrian turmoil, wrote three important letters to Cardinal Gasparri to defend his position.

His first letter was written on May 7, 1919, before he was made aware of the content of the meeting between Pope Benedict and Feisal. Giannini understood the danger of an Arab sovereignty in Syria and, although cognizant of the imperialist rivalry between France and England, opted for a French protectorate as the least damaging solution for Catholic interests.¹⁶ He warned that

the prospect of a sherifian dominion completely independent would be very serious... In this case ... our poor Christian minority would surely be increasingly reduced to the minimum and possibly condemned to fade away ... faced with the inevitable invasion of the Islamic element of Arabia attracted to Syria because of the many material advantages that it offers in contrast with their native country.¹⁷

Giannini had no confidence in Feisal's ability to guarantee the protection of Christians in Syria, not so much because he could not be trusted, but because he would

¹⁶ Giannini to Gasparri, May 7, 1919, ASV, A.E.S. Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 564.

¹⁷ "Molto grave sarebbe ... la eventualita di un dominio sceriffiano tutt'affatto indipendente In questo caso ... la nostra povera minoranza Cristiana si vedrebbe sicuramente sempre piu ridotta a minimi termini e forse condannata a sparire, di fronte all'inevitabile invasione dell'elemento islamico del Arabia attirato in Siria dai molti vantaggi materiali che questa offerta rimpetto al native paese." (My translation). Giannini to Gasparri, May 7, 1919.

not have the authority or power to prevent violent Muslim outbursts against Catholic minorities. Therefore, he encouraged the Holy See to lobby in favor of a French protectorate. However, if not politically possible, a British protectorate would still be better than the Arab government of Feisal.

France was the obvious choice as it had been the age-old protector of Catholic interests in the Near East. Although he accused British agents in Syria of “a raging propaganda mostly Muslim and also schismatic and protestant,”¹⁸ Giannini believed a British protectorate would be more amenable to Catholics than a fanatic Sherifian government.

He noticed a fact that could not have been missed by Pope Benedict. Feisal came back to Syria on a French war ship, a sign of the advancement of the negotiations between him and the French government. However, he neglected to visit Catholic establishments, most of them French, but instead visited the Protestant American University of Beirut.¹⁹ Three interpretations are possible. Perhaps Feisal was not inclined to publicly demonstrate specific attention towards Catholic missions, a fact that weakened the promise he made to Pope Benedict. It is also likely that the British troops being installed in Syria, a visit to Catholic establishments would have been discouraged, or even forbidden by the British. Furthermore, visiting the American University could be interpreted as a signal to the U.S. Government that Feisal was eager to obtain American protection in Syria and would be accommodating to both Catholics and Protestants.

¹⁸ Giannini to Gasparri, May 7, 1919.

¹⁹ Giannini to Gasparri, May 7, 1919.

Giannini was especially worried by the prospect of a British mandate in Lebanon, recalling that, before the war, Great Britain had exercised a destructive anti-Catholic influence and instead favored the Druses, who, after the Catholic Maronites, were the most numerous religious group. The Apostolic Delegate concluded:

If the sovereignty of the Emir Feisal is unavoidable, I would like it detached from the Hejjaz, under French Protectorate and with constitutional guarantees well defined from the beginning, regarding the freedom of Syria in general, as well as the special privilege of Lebanon to remain autonomous as far as possible.²⁰

His conclusion was a very perceptive anticipation of the political future of the region.

A couple of weeks after sending this letter to Gasparri, on May 24, Giannini addressed another missive to the Secretary of State, reinforcing his previous argument regarding the danger of a Sherifian sovereignty over Lebanon.²¹ He mentioned widespread agitation in Lebanon, especially among the Maronites who “cannot resign themselves to the idea of seeing themselves again more or less tightly under the detestable yoke of Islamism traditionally exploiting and persecuting.”²² Patriarch Huayek was planning to travel to Paris to defend the Lebanese Catholic identity at the Peace Conference and lobby in favor of independence.

²⁰ “Se la sovranita dell’Emir Feisal e inevitabile, io la vorrei del tutto staccato dal Heggiaz, sotto protettorato francese e con garanzie costituzionali ben fissate sin dal principio, si per le liberta in generale di tutta la Siria, come per gli speciali privilege del Libano, da conservarsi, per quanto e possibile, autonomo.” (My translation). Giannini to Gasparri, May 7, 1919.

²¹ Giannini to Gasparri, May 24, 1919, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, pos 1304, fasc. 516.

²² “non possono rassegnarsi all’idea di vedersi di nuovo piu o meno strettamente aggiogati al l’odioso carro dell’islamismo tradizionalmente sfruttatore e oppressore.” (My translation). Giannini to Gasparri, May 24, 1919.

The anti-Sherifian tone used by Giannini in those two letters did not change after he received notice of the content of the meeting between Pope Benedict and Prince Feisal. He became even more insistent. In a note of July 13 addressed to Marini, in response to the Cardinal's letter of June 13, the Apostolic Delegate emphasized that Christians in general, Catholics and dissidents alike, vehemently rejected the prospect of a Sherifian sovereignty. He noted that

The Emir Faisal [was considered] a simple general of a division of the army of occupation... ; it would be difficult to demonstrate that his promises have any weight. Therefore a potential disclosure of such promises, in these moments of excitement, [would] be badly interpreted. I would not be able reasonably to hope for anything but the most disadvantageous results for the prestige of the Holy See.. And for my part, I will abstain to publish [the note].²³

What Giannini meant was that a written document by Feisal served as a *bona fide* intention but had no official value. Giannini was directly challenging the diplomatic course chosen by Pope Benedict as he was right to remind Rome that Feisal's assurances regarding religious freedom were not likely to be implemented. Without the physical and political protection of France or Britain, Catholics and Maronites would be at the mercy of their local governors. During Feisal's trip to Europe, Arab extremist nationalists had become empowered in Damascus.²⁴

²³ "L'Emir Faisal... un semplice generale di divisione dell'armata occupatrice...; sarebbe difficile il dimostrare che le sue promesse abbiano un qualche peso. Percio da un'eventuale divulgazione di siffatte promesse,... in questi momenti di effervescenza, ad essere molto male interpretate, io non potrei ragionevolmente aspettarmi che effetti piuttosto svantaggiosi al prestigio della Santa Sede. E dal canto mio mi guardero bene dal divulgarle." (My translation). Giannini to Marini, July 13, 1919, ACCO Fasc. 614/32. Oriente, Varie : L'Emiro Faisal: Udienza del S. Padre (1919).

²⁴ Howard M. Sachar, *The Emergence of the Middle East, 1914-1924* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 273.

In the fall of 1919, the British government, until then the banner bearer of Arab nationalist ideology, abruptly changed its policy in the Middle East. Forsaking its previous support of Feisal's dream of an Arab kingdom in Syria, British officials let French troops enter Beirut on October 8 and withdrew from Damascus on November 26, 1919.

Pope Benedict followed closely the evolution of the new political situation. On one hand, considering the extremism of many of the Arab nationalists in Damascus who had brought the country to the verge of anarchy, the pontiff could not but be satisfied by the military and political presence of France in both Syria and Lebanon. On the other hand, Benedict's policy of emancipation was in jeopardy, as France was ready to reinstate its religious protectorate in the region. On November 21, 1919, General Gouraud was appointed first French High Commissioner in Syria. Well-known for his devotion to the Church, he was also respected among French Catholics for his determination in dealing with Muslims.²⁵ He was accompanied by Robert de Caix, his civil collaborator and architect of the Quai d'Orsay's Syrian politics.

After a short interlude that saw Feisal crowned, France took the upper hand. Comforted by the conclusions of the conference at San Remo in April 1920, Gouraud sent an ultimatum to Feisal, ordering him to resign and accept the French mandate in Syria as legitimate. Feisal refused and fled.²⁶

²⁵ Sachar, 276. Gouraud had a prewar experience as a colonial administrator in Morocco and Mauritania.

²⁶ He was later enthroned king of Iraq by the British.

Although times had changed, the political situation in the Middle East was still not ripe for any form of independence. Therefore, Pope Benedict adjusted his policy to the new mandate system, without losing sight of his ultimate goal of emancipation. He was paving the way for his successors.

The Holy See, France, and Syria's Struggle for Independence

Benedict XV, Robert de Caix, and Louis Massignon

On January 6, 1920, Prince Feisal and Clemenceau signed a provisional agreement²⁷ in which France “confirms its recognition of the rights of Arabic people of all faiths, settled in Syria, to gather to govern themselves as an independent nation.”²⁸ But France was to help the new kingdom to organize civil and military administrations.²⁹ Feisal would recognize the integrity and independence of Lebanon, under French mandate.³⁰

The famous agreement, although never executed, was negotiated by Robert de Caix and Louis Massignon. The unfolding of the negotiations showed “two different

²⁷ Gérard Khoury, “Robert de Caix et Louis Massignon: Deux visions de la politique française au Levant en 1920,” in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/ Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, eds. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 180-83.

²⁸ “confirme sa reconnaissance du droit des peuples de langue arabe, fixés sur le territoire syrien, de toutes confessions, à se réunir pour se gouverner elles-mêmes à titre de nation indépendante.” (My translation). Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 180.

²⁹ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 181.

³⁰ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 182.

approaches towards the Levant in 1920.”³¹ Clemenceau, a notorious anti-colonialist, was eager to find a balance between the unification of the Arab populations, a position defended by Massignon, and the imperious necessity to satisfy French interests, an approach favored by de Caix.³² From January 1920 until the battle of Maysalun on July 23, 1920 that signified the end of the Sherifian dream and the implementation of the French mandate in Syria, the two visions were expounded. Eventually, it is de Caix’s vision that was implemented after the fall of the Sherifian government.³³

To my knowledge, there are no documents in the different archives of the Vatican that can shed light on Benedict’s direct evaluation of de Caix and Massignon’s perspectives regarding the future of Syria, but his inclination towards Massignon’s approach can be inferred. Conversely, in the letters sent by the Apostolic Delegate in Syria, Msgr. Giannini, to the Holy See, one can discern an analogy of thought with Robert de Caix. The divergence of viewpoints between Pope Benedict and Giannini mirrored the opposition existing between the two French strategists, Massignon and de Caix. The Holy See had an immediate and long term interest in the future of Syria and was therefore following closely the grand politics at work between France, Britain, and Feisal.

Louis Massignon, a renowned French scholar of Islam, was appointed in 1917 the liaison officer attached to Feisal. He had a global and idealistic vision of the Arab world

³¹ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 165.

³² Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 169.

³³ Clemenceau lost the elections of January 1920 and therefore resigned, giving room to more extremist positions like de Caix’s.

and believed in the future of “a form of unitary Arab nationalism.”³⁴ Massignon was thinking in the long term. In a letter of July 17, 1920 written to Gabriel Boulad, one of his friends,³⁵ he revealed his strategy and its underlying philosophy. As a negotiator, he acted as a Catholic who loved and knew the Muslim world. In his view, one cannot dissociate the political from the spiritual and human realm. To his friend, he wrote that “the current crisis in Syria, we want to live it ‘hic et nunc’ with our Lord Jesus. It is the only way to live it *bien et juste*,” adding a few lines later that “it is not a waste of time, neither for ‘political action’ nor for the ‘acute sense of social realities’ to visit the Holy Sacrament.”³⁶ Keeping in sight the protection of the Eastern Christians as a main goal, he explained that this protection would be best assured by a united Arab kingdom that would defend religious freedom for all confessions.³⁷ He resented the emigration movement that saw Christian Syrians fleeing their country, accusing them of not acting in a Christian way, lacking a good political education.³⁸

Massignon sought to enhance the Arab cultural heritage of Syria while maintaining a French presence in the background. It was a position that was fiercely opposed by

³⁴ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 165.

³⁵ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 170. Massignon to Gabriel Boulad, July 17, 1920, 178.

³⁶ “la crise actuelle en Syrie, nous voulons la vivre ‘hic et nunc’ avec NS Jésus. C’est le seul moyen de la vivre *bien et juste* (emphasis mine) ... ce n’est pas du temps perdu, pour ‘l’action politique’ ni pour le ‘sens aigu des réalités sociales’ qu’une visite au Très St. Sacrement.” (My translation). Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 178.

³⁷ Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 172.

³⁸ “Cette émigration navrante ... n’est pas un acte chrétien, c’est une déception qui prouve combien l’éducation *politique* des chrétiens de Syrie se ressent de l’esclavage ancien.” Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 178.

Robert de Caix, because it was weakening the prestige and the potential future of France in the region.

Robert de Caix, a journalist who entered the diplomatic world late in his life, became the secretary-general of the High Commissioner in Syria, a position he held from November 1919 until 1925. Editor-in-chief of the “Bulletin de l’Asie française,” he was also a member of the Colonial Party, therefore a forceful advocate of a French mandate in Syria. A realist in politics, he envisioned a Middle East founded upon a federal system made of confessional communities, under the protection of a great power. This approach that favored the Christian minority was adopted after Feisal fled from Damascus in July 1920.³⁹ In a letter of April 11, 1920 to an official at the Quai d’Orsay, Mr. Bargeton, de Caix rejected the eventuality of a Sherifian kingdom that would not support French interests. He was opposed to the united kingdom favored by Massignon, an idea that led to the future balkanization of the region. He wrote that

The peace of the world would be better served if there were in the Orient a number of small states whose relations under the control of France or England would be administered with the fullest domestic autonomy and would not have the aggressive tendencies of the big national unitary states.⁴⁰

France’s objective was to divide Syria in order to contain Arab nationalism.⁴¹ De Caix’s vision planted the seeds for future regional instability. By favoring the Christian

³⁹ The *Parti Colonial*, to which de Caix belonged, regrouped a number of engaged Catholics.

⁴⁰ “La paix du monde serait en somme mieux assurée s’il y avait en Orient un certain nombre de petits Etats dont les relations seraient contrôlées ici par la France et là par l’Angleterre, qui s’administreraient avec le maximum d’autonomie intérieure, et qui n’auraient pas les tendances agressives des grands Etats nationaux unitaires.” (My translation). Khoury, “de Caix et Massignon,” 169. de Caix to Mr. Bargeton at the Quai d’Orsay, April 11, 1920.

and Shi'a minorities against the Sunni small majority, he destroyed the balance that had been in existence for centuries. His goal was to maintain the prestige of French culture in the Levant through the generalized use of French language and French institutions. This went against the Sherifian dream of Syrian nationalism anchored in a united nation with the Arabic language as official cement.

While Louis Massignon's vision of post-war Syria has been put under the microscope of scholars, nothing similar had been done for Benedict XV, even though they were contemporary and shared a common vision. Both believed in the interdependence of the spiritual and political world, which led them to a shared vision of the universal dimension and centrality of man. Benedict, like Massignon, resented nationalist tendencies and wanted to see peoples of the Middle East, Christian, Muslim, Jews or else, embracing their own common destiny.

But, in 1920, they reacted as men of their time, although very much in advance with this time. None of them took an anti-colonial stance but they were anticipating the era of decolonization. Instead, in their areas, they advocated a new approach to colonialism. Benedict fully developed his philosophy in *Maximum Illud* in November 1919, emphasizing the need to train an indigenous clergy and respect indigenous cultures, paving the way for future inculturation.

⁴¹ Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987), 57.

The comparison stops here. While Pope Benedict lamented that non-Christians were “pitiable creatures living under a cloud of eternal damnation,”⁴² seeking their conversion, Massignon “was departing far from a simple missionary brief.”⁴³ Massignon sought in place of conversion, which he found an unnecessary and inhospitable condition to lay upon the friendship between two peoples ... rather the ... inculturation of the vision of Jesus Christ as the son of God within the religious discourse of Islam.”⁴⁴

The similarity of views between Pope Benedict and Massignon can serve as a means to surmise Benedict’s personal opinion of Prince Feisal’s dream of a united Arab kingdom. We do not have additional information regarding their meeting other than the letters already cited, found in the Vatican Archives.

Massignon’s approach was opposed by Robert de Caix who demonstrated a short term understanding and interest in the affairs of Syria. However, he was genuinely convinced that he was working in favor of a peaceful long term. De Caix did not trust the Arab people and envisioned a federal structure governed by France. The maintaining of the cultural prestige and political influence of France was essential to him. Msgr. Giannini, in his correspondence with Cardinal Dubois, the archbishop of Rouen who started a journey to the Middle East in December 1919, emphasized this need for a strong

⁴² Benedict XV, “Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* [November 30, 1919],” AAS 11(1919): 440-55.

⁴³ Cleo McNelly Kearns, “Mary, Maternity, and Abrahamic Hospitality in Derrida’s Reading of Massignon,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 86.

⁴⁴ McNelly Kearns, 86.

colonial power like France to assuage the fears of the Christian minorities in Syria and Lebanon.

Cardinal Dubois' Mission to the Near East

The new world order, although more amenable to the Holy See's independent diplomatic action, was still guided by a colonial impulse that disrupted the chain of command from the pontiff to both the Apostolic Delegate in Syria and the bishops of the victorious powers. Three bishops visited Palestine and Syria after the war, but none was officially sent by the pope. They were on a mission planned by their own government but needed papal assent before embarking in their journey.

Cardinal Dubois, the Archbishop of Rouen, was following in the steps of Cardinal Bourne of England and Cardinal Giustini of Italy. He is the only one who left a detailed relation of his visit to Lebanon.⁴⁵ The travels that took him to the Balkans, Constantinople, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt lasted one hundred days, from December 14, 1919 to March 24, 1920. The Cardinal did not travel through inner Syria because of the unresolved political situation.⁴⁶

In a conference he gave after returning from his trip, Dubois expressed his state of mind on the eve of his departure. "For this crusade of a new kind [he said] we were going to bring together, during three months and a half, our prayers, our goodwill, our

⁴⁵ Cardinal Bourne and Cardinal Giustini's missions were essentially directed towards Palestine.

⁴⁶ Dominique Trimbur, "Une appropriation française du Levant: La mission en Orient du cardinal Dubois, 1919-1920," in *Une France en Méditerranée: écoles, langue et culture françaises, XIXe-XXe siècles* ed. Patrick Cabanel (Paris: Créaphis, 2006), 115.

patriotism, our efforts – and also our hopes.”⁴⁷ In the same breath, he mentioned prayers and patriotism, Church and homeland. The question worth asking is how Cardinal Dubois understood patriotism. Many scholars do not make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism, arguing that “‘patriotism’ is not, ultimately, distinct from nationalism, and thus cannot provide the solution to nationalism’s deficiencies that its proponents desire.”⁴⁸ Pope Benedict would have agreed that nationalism and patriotism “undermine human flourishing by prioritizing the unstable, abstract notion of the ‘compatriot’ over the concrete reality of the ‘neighbor’.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, some scholars contend that “nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism,” as “a particular place and a particular way of life which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people.”⁵⁰ If we follow Viroli’s definition, we can argue that although Cardinal Dubois may have been genuinely patriotic minded, the French government had a clear nationalist goal that was embodied by Dubois.

⁴⁷ “Pour cette croisade d’un nouveau genre, nous allions mettre en commun, pendant trois mois et demi, nos prières, notre bonne volonté, notre patriotisme, nos efforts – et aussi nos espérances.” (My translation). Une mission en Orient. Conférence faite à la société normande de géographie, le 28 mai 1920, par son Eminence le cardinal Dubois, archevêque de Rouen, Rouen, 1920, 7. Cited in Dominique Trimbur, “Une appropriation française du Levant,” 115.

⁴⁸ Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

⁴⁹ Backhouse, *Kierkegaard’s Critique*, 2.

⁵⁰ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

Benedict XV's groundbreaking encyclical on missions, *Maximum Illud*, had been published a few months earlier, urging clergy members to put the interests of the Church before those of one's country. One can assume therefore that Cardinal Dubois was establishing a distinction between patriotism and nationalism but he did not express it plainly.

The French Government was eager, with Cardinal Dubois's compliance, to associate in Arab minds France and Catholicism, perpetuating the pre-war model founded on the French Catholic protectorate. Father Lobry, a Lazarist who escorted Dubois on his trip, clearly stated that "it is in the name of France that His Eminence Cardinal Dubois must travel over the Orient ... in a country where religion is not distinct from nationality, he will emerge as a great character from France, whilst being a great religious leader."⁵¹ Pope Benedict, whose goal was to reestablish diplomatic ties with Paris, did not interfere. Cardinal Dubois was one of three cardinals who had traveled in the Middle East in those immediate post-war years. Benedict was especially satisfied with Cardinal Bourne's visit of Palestine. The presence of Cardinal Dubois was seen by the Holy See as almost anecdotal.

While in Beirut, Dubois complained to Msgr. Giannini about the cold reception he had received in Lebanon. In a memo of February 26, 1920,⁵² Giannini bluntly exposed

⁵¹ "C'est au nom de la France que S. Em. le cardinal Dubois doit parcourir l'Orient ... dans un pays où la religion ne se sépare pas de la nationalité, il apparaîtra comme un très grand personnage de France, tout en étant un grand chef religieux." (My translation). In *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, tome 85, 217-263 – Asie, Syrie, Journal de M. Lobry, Mission de S. Em. Le Cardinal Dubois en Orient, 221, cited in Dominique Trimbur, 116.

why, considering the French tradition in Syria, the French mission did not receive the welcome it expected in Beirut, a reception less friendly than in Palestine or Egypt. He accused the French government of pursuing a timid diplomacy that was overshadowed by the British and favored the Muslim population of Syria and Lebanon.

The behavior of Colonel de Piedpape,⁵³ [wrote Giannini], although a Christian, clearly gave the impression that France was above all ... a Muslim power. His visit to the great mosque, his attitude that ignores the work of Catholic missionaries, his project of neutral schools in Lebanon have already produced a profound uneasiness.⁵⁴

He concluded ominously that the pan-Islamic peril was not a myth anymore. Only a strong France, protecting Catholic rights and interests, could reverse the trend.⁵⁵ At the end of 1919, under Clemenceau's government, France, a colonial power with strong interests in Muslim countries,⁵⁶ was leading a dual diplomacy to assuage the risk of Muslim outbursts in her colonies, while satisfying her Catholic population in the *Métropole*, and preparing for a resumption of her diplomatic ties with the Holy See.

The reaction of the Apostolic Delegate to Cardinal Dubois' complaints highlights the gap existing between Pope Benedict's global vision of emancipation from colonial ties and Giannini's practical reasoning that favors a natural return to a pre-war model.

⁵² Giannini to Cardinal Dubois, February 26, 1920, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 565.

⁵³ The first French troops landed in Lebanon on October 24, 1918 under Major de Piedpape.

⁵⁴ "L'attitude du Colonel de Piedpape, un chrétien cependant, a donné nettement l'impression que la France était surtout ... une puissance musulmane. Sa visite à la grande mosquée, sa manière d'ignorer l'œuvre des missionnaires catholiques, son projet d'écoles neutres dans le Liban ont produit un malaise déjà profond." (My translation). Giannini to Cardinal Dubois, February 26, 1920.

⁵⁵ Giannini to Cardinal Dubois, February 26, 1920.

⁵⁶ Among them, Morocco and Algeria.

Giannini was not able to think in other terms than those resulting from *passé* imperialist and colonial paradigms. Pope Benedict had the advantage of being far from the direct center of action in Syria, therefore able to design a long term policy but, furthermore, he demonstrated his quality as a global thinker and visionary whose strategy seemed counter-intuitive but recognized the end of an epoch with its old-fashioned protectorates.

A Christian State: Greater Lebanon

Catholic Maronites and the Confessional State

In order to weaken Arab nationalism in Syria, France applied the principle of “divide and rule.”⁵⁷ General Gouraud, the newly appointed High Commissioner, divided the territory of Syria under mandate into six states.⁵⁸ On September 1, 1920, the state of Greater Lebanon was established.

To make it economically viable, the coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, and Tripoli, as well as the Bekaa valley and the regions of South Lebanon were added to the predominantly Christian *mutassarifiyyah* of Mount Lebanon,⁵⁹ which was created in 1861.⁶⁰ Those new added cities were predominantly Sunni Muslim, except for Beirut, the capital, which had a population evenly mixed between Christians and Muslims, while the

⁵⁷ William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 218.

⁵⁸ The six states were the states of Damascus and Aleppo (1920), the Alawite (1920) and Jabal Druze (1921) states, the autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta (1921), and the state of Greater Lebanon (1920).

⁵⁹ Or Sanjak of Mount Lebanon. A Sanjak was a subdivision of an Ottoman vilayet.

⁶⁰ The *Règlement organique* for Mount Lebanon was signed on June 9, 1861. It stipulated that the *mutassarifiyyah* would be administered by a Christian governor, appointed by Constantinople.

Bekaa valley and the southern area were Shiite Muslim, therefore tipping the religious scales against the once-majority Christian population. The pre-war Sanjak of Mount Lebanon was 76% Christian and 24% Druse.⁶¹ In 1920, Greater Lebanon was the home of Christian and Muslim sects that were all minorities. The Maronites and other Christians represented 58% of the population. The Maronites, once representing 54% of all Christians, were now the largest minority group, reaching barely the 30% mark.⁶² This redistribution in favor of the Muslim population was accelerated by the exodus of an estimated 100,000 Christian Lebanese who, between 1900 and 1914, had left Mount Lebanon for Egypt and the Americas, leaving behind them a territory that, at that time, was too small and economically not viable.⁶³

The history of the Maronites goes back to the fifth century and the person of St. Maroon, the first Patriarch of the Maronite Church. Originally settled in Northern Syria, they fled to the Lebanese mountains during the Islamic conquest of the seventh century.⁶⁴ The Crusades of the late eleventh century were a turning point that opened the community to the French crusaders and the Holy See.⁶⁵ Since then, the Maronite Church has boasted of its unbroken ties with the papacy and of being the only Eastern Catholic

⁶¹ Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs. A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 216. The Druses are members of a religious sect that descends from the Shiite branch of Islam in Egypt. The split occurred in the eleventh century.

⁶² Cleveland, 225. Also William W. Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon: History's Revenge* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2005), 42.

⁶³ Rogan, 212.

⁶⁴ Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 46.

⁶⁵ Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et mort des chrétiens d'Orient* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 369 and 372.

Church without an Orthodox counterpart. They entered in full union with Rome in 1736, retaining their own Syriac liturgy.

The Maronites and France also enjoyed a close cultural and political relationship. In 1860, after the massacre of Maronites by the Druses, France, as the protector of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, had sent troops to rescue them. An international agreement followed that made the Sanjak of Mount Lebanon independent and governed by a non-Lebanese Christian appointed by the Sultan with the approval of the Western Powers. As a result, Lebanon became exclusively associated with the Maronites, converting their Church into a supporter of Lebanese nationalism.⁶⁶

With the advent of Greater Lebanon, this favored relationship did not go without some inconsistencies from the perspective of French international politics. Although the French government supported Maronite claims in favor of an independent confessional state, it also gave proof of its goodwill to the Muslim constituency of Syria, in order to satisfy their co-religionists in the French empire of North Africa. Thus, the French reinforced their ties with the Muslim minorities of Lebanon and Syria. This new Muslim policy was also an answer to the new demographic realities that showed a growth of the Muslim population in territories under French mandate, combined with a decrease of the Christian communities.⁶⁷ Conversely, in Greater Lebanon, disregarding the demographic data, France gave the Maronites disproportionate representation in the new governing

⁶⁶ Eisenberg, 47.

⁶⁷ Vincent Cloarec, *La France et la question de Syrie, 1914-1918* (Paris: CNRS, 1998), 39.

body. The Christian population was represented by ten members while four Sunni Muslims, two Shiite Muslims, and one Druse represented the other confessions.⁶⁸

The “stronghold of our [French] influence,”⁶⁹ the new state of Greater Lebanon became the national home that most Maronite Christians were longing for. Lebanon had always been “more westernized than the rest of Syria.”⁷⁰ Most Maronites, although of Arabic descent, were more attracted to French culture than to their own. Robert de Caix repeated in a letter to the Quai d’Orsay what a young Maronite from Beirut had told him:

A century ago, everyone in the [Lebanese] mountains spoke Syriac and this was the national language of my grand-father; the Arabic language, it is the tongue of the conqueror; I rather speak French.⁷¹

Some Maronites even wanted the French language to become the official language of Greater Lebanon.

In 1919, the Maronite Patriarch Huayek, endowed with both spiritual and temporal power, made the trip to the Paris Peace Conference to reassert the special connection between Lebanon and France. “The Lebanese people”, he wrote, “is French from time immemorial.”⁷² He compared them to the non-Christian populations of Greater Syria, supporters of Prince Feisal, stressing that

⁶⁸ Rogan, 217.

⁶⁹ Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale*, 203. Robert de Caix sur la politique de l’accord avec Feisal, Paris, January 26, 1920.

⁷⁰ Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale*, 255. Robert de Caix, July 17, 1920: Esquisse de l’organisation de la Syrie sous le mandat français.

⁷¹ “Toute la montagne parlait syriaque il y a encore un siècle et c’était la langue nationale de mon grand-père; l’arabe, c’est la langue du conquérant; j’aime autant parler le français.” (My translation). Khoury, *Une tutelle coloniale*, 315. Robert de Caix to Albert Kammerer, February 28, 1921.

A sedentary people, prolific, civilized, able to direct its own domestic affairs, and able to develop in the future its progress and enrichment, should not be compelled to work under the suzerainty and for the benefit of wandering and poor populations, or populations who are idle, uncultivated and without traditions.⁷³

Patriarch Huayek had strong nationalist beliefs that he expressed through *communiqués* to the Maronite faithful. His most debated topics were the Maronite union with Catholicism, patriotism, and education.⁷⁴ He interpreted patriotism as a way to express his religion through the love of his nation. Therefore, the Maronite Catholic identity served as the link with both France and the Holy See, transforming the confessional identity into a national one.

Although it may seem to be common sense, “only a few Maronites saw the contradiction between Christian Lebanon and Greater Lebanon.”⁷⁵ Huyaek was warned by Robert de Caix that “the Christians’ ‘megalomania’ would sow the seeds of disintegration for the state they were trying to create.”⁷⁶

Patriarch Huyaek was well respected and loved. During the war, he had suffered physically and morally under the rule of Djemal Pasha, the Ottoman Commander of

⁷² Pro-Memoria prepared by Maronite Patriarch Huayek, attached to letter from Giannini to Gasparri, June 2, 1919, ASV, A.E.S., Austria, 1919, pos. 1304, fasc. 516.

⁷³ “Un peuple sédentaire, prolifique, civilisé, en mesure déjà de diriger ses propres affaires intérieures, et capable de développer dans l’avenir son progrès et son enrichissement, ne saurait être contraint à travailler sous la suzeraineté et pour le bénéfice de populations errantes et pauvres, ou bien oisives, incultes et sans traditions.” (My translation). Pro-Memoria prepared by Maronite Patriarch Huayek, attached to letter from Giannini to Gasparri, June 2, 1919.

⁷⁴ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 38.

⁷⁵ Eisenberg, 49.

⁷⁶ Eisenberg, 48.

Syria, a trauma that necessitated a long time of recuperation. His semi-retreat left a vacuum in the Maronite Church that weakened it at a crucial time. This void opened an opportunity for the Holy See to intensify its involvement in the affairs of the Maronite Church, an instance of Pope Benedict's resolve to strengthen the relations between the Roman and Eastern Catholics. Consequently, the Apostolic Delegate, Msgr. Giannini, strengthened his already existing friendship with the patriarchal vicar, Bishop Abdallah al-Khuri, supporting his efforts to take over the Maronite patriarchate.⁷⁷ Al-Khuri, a dominant force in Lebanese politics, was a friend to look after.

The creation of Greater Lebanon, although under a mostly Christian governing body, gave the French the power to establish a new religious legislation that would satisfy equally Christians and Muslims. It was Pope Benedict's main concern to see that the Catholics would not lose their old civil and religious privileges.

In April 1921, Giannini forwarded to Gasparri a pro-memoria he had prepared upon the request of General Gouraud, regarding the new legislation in civil and religious matters that would affect the Catholic communities.⁷⁸ In civil matters, Giannini asked Gouraud to grant the Catholic clergy and religious institutions the same privileges and exemptions they were enjoying before the war. In religious matters, he asked the high commissioner to ensure that religious freedom would be recognized for all communities. It concretely meant freedom from governmental encroachment in matters like recruitment of secular and religious clergy.

⁷⁷ Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood, 1926-1939* (London: I.B. tauris, 2000), 43.

⁷⁸ Giannini to Gasparri, April 19, 1921, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 566.

The Holy See, France, and Protestant Propaganda

The growth of the Muslim population in Syria and Lebanon was not the only challenge encountered by Catholic authorities. American Protestant propaganda, sometimes fueled by French authorities, was a major competitor to Catholic presence in Lebanon. Catholic missions were hard pressed to efficiently fight the proselytism of American missionaries, lacking the financial means to be successful.

American Protestantism had a long history in Lebanon. In 1823, when the first American Presbyterian missionaries landed in Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch was outraged.⁷⁹ In 1847, the Ottoman Government authorized the Protestants to have their own *millet*, therefore being legalized under British consular protection. But it was the establishment of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut⁸⁰ in 1866 that confirmed the ascendancy of Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire and opened Catholic eyes to the need to react to this new organized and powerful competition.⁸¹ The Jesuits returned to Lebanon in 1831, the Holy See's answer to American Protestant proselytizing in geographical Syria. St. Joseph University opened in Beirut in 1875 under Jesuit patronage, a response to the Syrian Protestant College. Consequently, Beirut became the intellectual center of Syria.

⁷⁹ Charles A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire (1453-1923)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 276.

⁸⁰ The Syrian Protestant College changed its name to American University of Beirut in 1920.

⁸¹ Frazee, 282.

It is interesting to note that the literature about the Ottoman Empire and the new emerging Middle East barely mentions the role of Catholic missions and their influence in education. George Antonius in his seminal book *The Arab Awakening*, published in 1939, acknowledged the influence of Catholic missions and schools in the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, but saw them as a pale imitator of Protestant schools. Although more recent historians have reversed Antonius' s interpretation, most of the time they dismiss the role the missions played in the cultural and religious development of the populations of the Empire.⁸² This is an odd omission in the view of the actual contribution of French religious orders in Syria, especially the Jesuits. They maintained schools, a seminary, and the St. Joseph University in Beirut.⁸³ Their reputation was such that they were able to lobby at the Paris Peace Conference in favor of a French mandate in Syria and Lebanon. They were especially vindicated after General Gouraud was appointed High Commissioner of Syria and Lebanon. A devout Catholic, he was also the brother of a Jesuit.⁸⁴ Jesuits were especially active in the field of education, offering an education of high quality to the cultured families from Lebanon.

The Protestant competition was fierce. Msgr. Giannini, the Apostolic Delegate, complained to Cardinal Gasparri and Admiral Mornet⁸⁵ that it was evident that the

⁸² Elizabeth Thompson, "Neither Conspiracy Nor Hypocrisy: The Jesuits and the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon," in *Altruism and Imperialism: Western Cultural and Religious Missions in the Middle East*, ed. Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon (New York: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 2002), 67.

⁸³ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 43.

⁸⁴ Thompson, "Neither Conspiracy Nor Hypocrisy," 74.

Protestants were launching an anti-French propaganda. It was quite understandable, Giannini noted, as “in Syria, France and Catholicism have been synonyms for centuries.”⁸⁶

He protested against a religious propaganda funded in part by American Catholics unaware that their contribution was helping Protestant proselitizing. In addition, France, which was keen to associate itself with Catholicism in order to keep its prestige in Greater Lebanon intact, was oddly promoting Protestant activities in Syria by granting their agents the administration of French charities.⁸⁷ Giannini also lamented the choice of a lay protestant, a violent man under a pleasing appearance,⁸⁸ as Director of Public Instruction.

Pope Benedict was closely following the Protestant activities in the Middle East as they were directly affecting his oriental policy of strengthened ties with the Catholic Eastern Churches and *rapprochement* with the separated brethren. Launching a “second spring of the Eastern Church,”⁸⁹ his most visible and applauded decision in this matter was his naming St. Ephrem,⁹⁰ the Syrian deacon and Patriarch of the ancient Syriac Church, doctor of the Church, in his encyclical of October 5, 1920 *Principi Apostolorum*.

⁸⁵ Admiral Mornet was the head of the Syrian division of the French navy, residing in Beirut.

⁸⁶ Giannini to Gasparri, March 23, 1920, A.P. N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126.

⁸⁷ Giannini to Gasparri, March 23, 1920.

⁸⁸ Giannini to Gasparri, March 23, 1920.

⁸⁹ J. Gorayeb, S.J., “St. Ephrem, The New Doctor of the Universal Church,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, New Series 1 (October 1921): 303- 315.

⁹⁰ St. Ephrem was born in Nisibis around 306. He lived in Edessa where he died in 373.

The pontiff sought to reach out to all Eastern Christians, pleading

We humbly entreated God to return the Eastern Church at long last to the bosom and embrace of Rome. Their long separation, contrary to the teachings of their ancient Fathers, keeps them miserably from this See of Peter... meanwhile We received letters from the Venerable Brothers Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani, Patriarch of Syria at Antioch; Elias Petrus Huayek, Maronite Patriarch at Antioch; and Joseph Emmanuel Thomas, Chaldean Patriarch at Babylon. They presented weighty arguments beseeching Us earnestly to bestow upon Ephrem, the Syrian Deacon of Edessa, the title and honors of Doctor of the Universal Church...⁹¹

As Sidney Griffith puts it

Of all the writers of the Syriac-speaking churches in the patristic period, it is undoubtedly Ephraem, the deacon of Nisibis and Edessa, whose name is the most immediately recognized today among those who treasure the thought of the teachers of the east in the formative centuries of Christian thought. His lifetime spanned the first three quarters of the fourth century, arguably one of the most significant periods in the formulation of the classic statements of orthodox doctrine.⁹²

Pope Benedict recognized in St. Ephrem a theologian, a musician, and a poet. “He was so accomplished in both arts [wrote the pontiff] that he was called the ‘lyre of the Holy Spirit.’”⁹³ His music and poetry united Catholics of different rites. The Maronite Church’s prayers and musical traditions were greatly influenced by St. Ephrem’s poetry and music. Therefore, his becoming the first doctor of the Church among the Eastern Catholic saints was interpreted by the Maronites as a clear sign of Pope Benedict’s esteem and protection of their community. St. Ephrem is also honored by Orthodox

⁹¹ Benedict XV, “Encyclical Letter *Principi Apostolorum Petro*, on St. Ephrem the Syrian [October 5, 1920],” AAS 12 (1920): 457.

⁹² Sidney H. Griffith, “*Faith Adoring the Mystery*”: *Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*, The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 1997 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 1.

⁹³ *Principi Apostolorum*, 463.

Christians, Nestorians, and Jacobites who perceived Pope Benedict's gesture as a sign of good will and of his hope for a *rapprochement*.

What Pope Benedict could not do in the political realm, he accomplished in the spiritual sphere. Naming St. Ephrem doctor of the Church was not only a sign of his resolve to work towards the unity of the church but also a way to recognize the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle East since the time of early Christianity.

The question of the future and protection of Catholic communities in Syria and Lebanon in the view of a growing Muslim population was paralleled in neighboring Palestine with the question of what effect the new Jewish home would have on the welfare of Catholics in the Holy Land. Two emerging nationalisms, Arab and Jewish, were fighting in the area that would affect the Christians population and further their demographic plummeting.

CHAPTER 8

THE HOLY SEE AND THE BRITISH MANDATE IN PALESTINE: ZIONISM AND PROTESTANTISM

Who Shall Control Palestine?¹

The Significance of Palestine

In an article published in the Jesuit review *Etudes* in September 1921, Father Joseph Huby argued that the Palestinian question was not an issue of colonial politics between Britain and France but rather, quoting the words of the distinguished Belgian Orientalist Father Henri Lammens, “an ecumenical question.”² It was actually both.

Palestine, the historical Holy Land, which for the purpose of this study corresponds to the territory that stretches from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, south of Mandatory Syria,³ lived under Muslim Ottoman rule from its conquest in 1516 until its liberation by British troops in December 1917. It was of little economic and political interest to the Ottoman Government as the land was underdeveloped and not extensively settled.

¹ See Doreen Ingrams, *Palestine Papers, 1917-1922, Seeds of Conflict* (London: John Murray, 1972), 36.

² Joseph Huby, “Le problème juif,” *Etudes* (Septembre 1921): 520.

³ Originally, the British Mandate over Palestine encompassed today’s Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank. In 1923, the British divided Mandatory Palestine in two distinct administrative units: Palestine, west of the Jordan River, and Trans-Jordan, east of the Jordan River.

On the eve of the Great War, Palestine was home to Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities that amounted to 700,000 Arabs (Muslim and Christian) and 85,000 Jews, most of them living in Jerusalem and its surroundings. Among the Arabs, the great majority was Sunni Muslim. “Only about 16% were Christian Arabs,” concentrated in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jaffa, Nazareth, and Haifa.⁴ Those Christians were overwhelmingly Greek and Armenian Orthodox. The Latin-rite Catholics numbered about 20,000 in 1914.⁵

For centuries, the city of Jerusalem, the heart of the Holy Land, has held a special place in the hearts and minds of those living in Palestine, as it has always been the source of strong religious sentiments and manifestations. To the Muslims, it is one of the three holy cities of Islam along with Mecca and Medina.⁶ It is the city where, according to Muslim tradition, Mohammed ascended to heaven. To the Jewish people, it is the holiest city, going back to Abraham, the father of Judaism, whose obedience was tested by God on Mount Moriah, the site where stood the Temple Mount, at the heart of the Old City.⁷ As to the Christians, Jerusalem is directly associated to the life of Jesus who blessed the

⁴ Neville J. Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977) xxi, or Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete. Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 22.

⁵ Francis M. Perko, “Toward a ‘Sound and Lasting Basis’: Relations between the Holy See, the Zionist Movement, and Israel, 1896-1996,” *Israel Studies* 2 (Spring, 1997): 3. A report presented by Fr. Robinson to the Holy See in May, 1921, put this number at 14,000. In ACCO, Rub. 19/10, fol. 5663, May 9, 1921. The discrepancy is due to the lack of reliable sources.

⁶ F.R. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁷ See Genesis 22:2 (NASB): “He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’”

city with his ministry, death, and resurrection. Louis Massignon, a renowned French Catholic scholar of Islam appointed in 1917 the liaison officer attached to Prince Feisal, spent many months in Jerusalem. He was moved by the city and the Holy Sites as he became convinced of their central role in the history of the world. “Si il y a une politique mondiale, dont le centre réel est la question des Lieux Saints,” he wrote to Claudel, the French Catholic writer and diplomat, “c’est parce qu’il y a quelque chose de permanent en ce monde qui périt sans cesse, le Siège de Saint Pierre, la volonté de Pierre, qui est celle du Christ.”⁸

It is the conflictual relationship among the three monotheistic faiths - Islam, Judaism, and Christianity - that gave to the Palestinian question its ecumenical dimension. A novel interest of the Great Powers – Britain, France, and Russia - for the Holy Land developed in the 1830s, adding a new political and geo-strategic level of interest intimately tied to the religious element. Each nation expanded its influence through the protection of religious minorities, supporting the missionary activities of its citizen.⁹

Russia, the unofficial protector of Greek Orthodox populations, was using the protectorate to put a foot in Palestine and eventually gain preeminence and political presence in Palestine. With the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, the Russian threat to French and British interests in the region faded away. The

⁸ Christian Destremau and Jean Moncelon, *Louis Massignon* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 160.

⁹ Alexander Scholch, “Britain in Palestine, 1838-1882: The Roots of the Balfour Policy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (Autumn, 1992): 40.

destruction of the Russian Empire and the collateral weakening of its Church drove Russia out of Palestine and threw the Greek Orthodox communities into confusion.¹⁰

Therefore, at the end of the war, France and Britain, the two major victorious colonial powers, were left facing each other in Palestine.¹¹ The Holy Land had become the *chasse gardée* of the British, the “strategic bulwark of Egypt,” a situation dictated by geo-political realities.¹² But Palestine’s future was not to be determined by geo-political and colonial rationale only. A British official commented in the early 1920s that “Palestine for most of us was an emotion rather than a reality,”¹³ which explained, in part, that Britain consolidated its role as protector of the Protestant communities and expanded it to the Jewish people, under the chiliastic concept of “restoration of the Jews.”¹⁴ British and Zionist aspirations became closely interrelated in the Holy Land.

As for France, Palestine was the land where the Eldest Daughter of the Church had the most significant religious responsibility. In addition to the long privileged tradition of protecting the Latin and Eastern Catholic populations, the French, as chief representative

¹⁰ See Chapter 3 regarding the role of the pre-war Russian Protectorate over the Orthodox communities of the Ottoman Empire.

¹¹ The role and influence of war-time allies like Italy was real but politically minor.

¹² Palestine became the “indispensable geo-political link between Mesopotamia and Egypt.” As Friedman explains, “The more firmly entrenched the British position in Egypt (since 1882) the deeper grew the estrangement from Turkey in the pre-war period, the more compelling became the need to change British policy. In contrast to the nineteenth century, it was now Egypt, not the Ottoman Empire that required British protection. Henceforth, the urge to widen the *cordon sanitaire* off the Suez Canal zone became almost irresistible,” 1 in Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918. British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 1-2.

¹³ Segev, 5. Quote cited in C.R. Ashbee, *Palestine Notebook, 1918-1923* (London: Heinemann, 1923), 276.

¹⁴ Scholch, 40.

of Catholicism, held a special position in the protection of the Holy Places of Palestine. With the liberation of the land by Christian troops, this protectorate had no more reason to exist.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the French were adamant and kept their colonial aspirations alive. Ronald Storrs, the British military governor of Jerusalem, recalled a conversation he had with Francois Georges-Picot, the French High Commissioner, who with some grandiloquence justified French interest in post-war Palestine, commenting that “‘C’était dans leur sang – plus fort qu’eux mêmes (sic)’ – and would have to be reckoned with.”¹⁶

The Holy See’s interest over Palestine is unique and, until the war, was closely tied to France’s policy in the region. Rome’s main diplomatic concern had always been the protection of the Holy Sites and of the Latin and Catholic communities in the Holy Land. This had been the task of the French since the sixteenth century. A Copernican change, with tremendous consequences for the Holy See’s influence in the region, occurred on December 9, 1917, with the liberation of Jerusalem by British troops led by General Allenby. The Holy See’s diplomatic role took a sharp turn as the papacy became a direct interlocutor in the Palestinian question. The time was ripe for Pope Benedict to contemplate the emancipation of the Holy See from French colonial politics, a simultaneous policy in Palestine and Syria, and reshape its past diplomacy now putting the British factor at the core. In this new context, Benedict XV embraced the Palestinian

¹⁵ See Chapter 2 for a discussion regarding the Catholic French Protectorate in the pre-war Ottoman Empire. The main Christian Holy Sites in the Holy Land are situated in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth.

¹⁶ Ronald Storrs, *Orientations* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945), 279.

question and developed a modern, independent and state-like diplomacy that addressed its political and interreligious aspects.

The Control of Palestine: Benedict XV's Assessment

The fall of Jerusalem was hailed by the Holy See with great rejoicing. After centuries of Muslim domination, Palestine had returned into the hands of Christianity. While in Rome, the bells of St. Peter's remained silent in accordance with the pontiff's vow of impartiality in the conflict, a *Te Deum* was sung in the Church of Santa Croce in Jerusalem.¹⁷

A unique opportunity was laid at Pope Benedict's feet to increase the influence of Catholicism in Palestine, claiming a direct role in the administration and the future of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites. The Peace Conference did not meet until a year after the liberation of the Holy City, in January 1919, therefore leaving the final status of Palestine, and specifically Jerusalem, officially undecided during this critical period. Although an occasion for the pontiff to affirm the power of the Holy See, any error of appreciation or wrong anticipation of the diplomatic situation by Pope Benedict would have long-lasting negative effects on the life and future of Catholicism in Palestine. Rarely in history had decisions been so crucial.

To the many popes prior to Benedict XV's pontificate, the main concern had been to ensure the protection of Catholic *dhimmis*, regrouped in *millets*, and maintain Catholic influence in the administration of the Holy Sites, most of them under Catholic and

¹⁷ Thomas E. Hachey, ed., *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations, 1914-1939, Confidential Annual Reports of the British Ministers to the Holy See* (London: G. K. Hall, 1972), 20.

Orthodox guardianship. Pope Benedict, conversely, faced a totally new exciting situation. Firstly, Palestine was back in Christian hands for the first time in seven hundred years. Secondly, Moscow, which had claimed the title of Third Rome, had withdrawn from world politics in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, leaving the Orthodox churches, which had been under Russian protection for centuries, in disarray. To an unprecedented situation Pope Benedict had to offer an unprecedented response.

The foundational questions facing the pontiff were who should control Palestine in order to fully answer Rome's claims over the Holy Sites and how would the Holy See be affected by the final outcome. On December 5, 1918, during a meeting of the British Eastern Committee, Lord Curzon¹⁸ summed up the available options concerning the future administration of the Holy Land. Both the Arabs, under the leadership of Prince Feisal, and the Zionists, led by Chaim Weizmann, had expectations of dominion over the Holy Land in accordance with war-time British promises. Pope Benedict's positive response to the prospect of a Sherifian kingdom has already been analyzed,¹⁹ but Feisal's dream was eventually rejected by both the British and the French. As for the Zionists' control of the Holy Land, this was not immediately possible.²⁰ Therefore, the only serious contenders to administer the region were Britain, France, and the United States, with the internationalization of the country hovering as a possible solution.

¹⁸ Lord Curzon (1859-1925), a shrewd analyst of foreign policy, joined the British War Cabinet in 1916 as Lord President of the Council. He became British Foreign Secretary in 1919.

¹⁹ See Chapter 7.

²⁰ The pontiff's response to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine will be addressed later in this chapter.

Palestine had been conquered by Britain, stressed Curzon during the meeting, with a “very insignificant aide from small French and Italian contingents, and ... now ... [was] administered by the British,”²¹ a statement that signified the British rebuff to any request from Paris regarding French administration of the Holy Land. The Committee was also opposed to the institution of an international administration but favored Great Britain or the United States as potential Mandatory powers.²²

In this decisive matter for the future of Catholicism, Pope Benedict’s diplomacy was guided by pragmatism and foresight. In an allocution delivered at the secret consistory of March 10, 1919²³ about the future of Palestine and the Holy Sites, the pontiff deliberately omitted to mention France, the centuries-long protector of Catholic interests in the Holy Land. This omission was noticed by the French and the Anglo-Saxon Press²⁴ and can be explained by the pope’s resolve to conciliate two complementary diplomatic goals.

On one hand, Benedict XV anticipated the assignment of the Palestine Mandate to the British and consequently adopted a prudent wait-and-see policy regarding the future of the French Protectorate. From this perspective, the omission was a signal sent to the British that the Holy See intended to have a say in Palestinian affairs without any French interference; but it was also a message to the French that Rome was keeping its options

²¹ Ingrams, 48.

²² Ingrams, 51. The thought of an American mandate over Palestine, although attractive to many, was quickly dropped.

²³ Benedict XV, “Allocution *Antequam Ordinem* [March 10, 1919],” AAS 11 (1919): 97-101.

²⁴ “Vatican Anxious to Conciliate France,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1919, p 2.

open in the Holy Land, inciting Paris to reconsider the state of its severed diplomatic relations with the Holy See. However, that Pope Benedict took for granted a future British protectorate did not mean that he was satisfied with this outcome, and that he had definitely relinquished any support from the French in the sensitive subject of the guardianship of the Holy Sites.

In June 1919, Duke Tommaso Gallarati Scotti,²⁵ an Italian writer, went on a mission to Paris on behalf of the Italian government. His report, the result of unofficial encounters with prominent French Catholics like Paul Claudel, sheds light on how Pope Benedict's response to the prospect of a British Mandate and its Zionist corollary was interpreted at the time.²⁶ According to Gallarati Scotti's interlocutors, "the future government of Palestine was not a major concern of the papacy,"²⁷ as the Holy See was mostly interested in resuming diplomatic relations with France and assuring a seat at the newly founded League of Nations, a mission entrusted to Msgr. Cerretti.

Although there is no reason to doubt the claims made by Gallarati Scotti's French interlocutors, the rationale behind the Pope's position needs further examination. Assuming that one of Benedict's main diplomatic goals was to secure a seat at the League of Nations, it would then be logical that the pontiff would not react directly, neither in favor nor against a British Mandate. He would be expected to shift the

²⁵ Tommaso Gallarati Scotti, an influential Italian Catholic writer, became ambassador to England and Spain after World War II.

²⁶ Frank E. Manuel, "The Palestine Question in Italian Diplomacy, 1917-1920," *The Journal of Modern History* 27 (Sept., 1955): 278.

²⁷ Manuel, 279.

diplomatic debate from bilateral talks to the new multilateral setting of the League, which Benedict envisioned as a universal body entrusted with the monitoring of the future French and British Mandates and a place where the Holy See could benefit from the support of other Catholic nations.

However, two facts contradict, or at least weaken the likelihood of this scenario. Firstly, as discussed earlier,²⁸ there is no solid evidence that Pope Benedict was eying a seat at the League of Nations, as he became quickly disenchanted with its failure to lay down solid foundations to secure world peace and collective security. As Sir Alec Randall, the British Second Secretary to the Holy See, noted in his book *Vatican Assignment*, “The Holy See, ... when the war was over, showed no sign of wishing to join the League of Nations and, as regards the peace treaties, merely tried to ensure, by unofficial contacts, that the religious rights of the Church and the Holy See were safeguarded as far as possible.”²⁹ Secondly, the assumption that Pope Benedict was not concerned with the future administration of Palestine because he trusted that England would protect Catholic communities and “establish ... the preservation of the custodianship of the sanctuaries ... in accordance with their historic rights,”³⁰ does not stand. The words of the pontiff, pronounced in his allocution to the consistory, highlight it.

²⁸ See Chapter 6.

²⁹ Alec Randall, *Vatican Assignment* (London: William Heinemann, 1956), 127.

³⁰ Manuel, 279.

Pope Benedict worried

[I]t would be ... a bitter grief if unbelievers in Palestine were put in a superior or more privileged position, still more so if the august monuments of the Christian religion were assigned to those who were not Christians. We know, furthermore, that non-Catholic foreigners endowed with ample means are taking advantage of the unspeakable misery and ruin produced by the war to disseminate their own doctrines. It is unbearable that so many souls, losing the Catholic faith, should go to perdition there in the very place where our Lord Jesus Christ won for them eternal salvation.³¹

Pope Benedict, in this stern statement, was accusing Britain of favoring the new Jewish settlers as well as the wealthy Protestant missions. This declaration clearly contradicts Gallarati Scotti's conjecture that the future government of Palestine was not a source of concern to Pope Benedict. Although, it could be argued with Minerbi that, in 1917 and early 1918, "it was not clear [to anyone] whether Palestine should be internationalized, be placed under an Anglo-French condominium, or come under exclusive British control,"³² by the time of the papal allocution of March 1919, the situation was settled in the public arena, although still unofficially, in favor of the British.

Pope Benedict did foresee the benefits that the Holy See could gain in the long run from British rule over Palestine, with the unique opportunity for the Roman Court to seize its independence from France, a policy simultaneously enforced in other areas of the emerging Middle East. However, Pope Benedict was not naïve and knew that British rule also meant the advance of Zionist and Protestant influence in the Holy Land. The

³¹ *Antequam Ordinem*, quoted and translated in *The Times*, "Pope and the Holy Places. Appeal to Peace Conference," March 12, 1919, p 9.

³² Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 15.

pontiff chose to support a scenario that was not ideal but gave the Holy See a new freedom that would have many opportunities to bear fruit in the future.

The consternation of prominent clergy members at Pope Benedict's apparent naivety was short sighted. Benedict was shaping his diplomacy for the decades to come, enhancing the Holy See's ability to respond to any new and unexpected situation with the most ammunition.

Cardinal Amette, the Archbishop of Paris, visited the Vatican in March 1919 and expressed his concern to the pontiff regarding the political and religious conditions in Palestine. He also met with Gallarati Scotti in Paris. The Cardinal's judgment conflicted with the pontiff's appreciation of the situation. One day after the occupation of Jerusalem by General Allenby's troops, Lord Balfour, the British Foreign Minister, instructed Count de Salis "to assure the Vatican that Britain promised to guarantee order at the Holy Places in Jerusalem,"³³ which assurance in no way meant that the influence of the Catholic Church would be maintained or enhanced. The Archbishop argued that British guarantees had no long term value. Amette rightly foresaw a Protestant offensive meant to weaken the moral influence of Catholicism in the Holy Land, and abate its historical rights in the custodianship of the Holy Sites.³⁴ His concerns were legitimate and shared by the pontiff, but Benedict was a man of vision who knew that the Holy See's diplomatic prestige, although very much enhanced since the end of the war, was not sufficient to conclusively affect the geo-political and colonial decisions of the Great Powers.

³³ Minerbi, 18.

³⁴ Manuel, 279.

Cardinal Amette's worry coincided with Cardinal Bourne's concern regarding the danger of the Protestant offensive in the Holy Land. Cardinal Bourne, the Archbishop of Westminster, visited Palestine between December 1918 and March 1919. Minerbi argues that it was his report fiercely decrying the influence that Protestants had gained among Catholic educational institutions in Palestine that convinced Pope Benedict to openly attack the Protestant propaganda in his allocution of March 10, 1919.³⁵

Pope Benedict chose a diplomatic course entrenched in Realism. He did not have a pro-British diplomacy *per se* but was amenable to the British Mandate in Palestine and to the French Mandate in Syria.

In the Anglo-French verbal agreement of December 1918 between French Premier Clemenceau and David Lloyd George, representing Britain, the French unequivocally ceded Palestine to the British in exchange for a mandate in Syria. When the question of Palestine came up again at the Conference of San Remo in April 1920, the new French Premier, Alexandre Millerand, maintained that in the settlement of December 1918, the French had agreed to a British mandate in place of international control of Palestine, provided that the question of the Holy Places would be settled in favor of France. Lloyd George, who represented Britain in these negotiations, and Italian Premier Nitti rejected the French claim.³⁶ It can therefore be successfully argued that in early 1919, the time of Gallarati Scotti's visit to prominent French Catholics and of Pope Benedict's allocution to the consistory, the pontiff was confident that, although the British would control

³⁵ Minerbi, 30.

³⁶ Eugene H. Bovis, *The Jerusalem Question, 1917-1968* (Stanford, CA.: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), 7.

Palestine, Catholic rights would still be protected either by France or an international commission.

According to Gallarati Scotti, the British assurance that, anticipating the end of the French Protectorate, an international commission would eventually be appointed to protect the rights of the Catholic Church in the guardianship of the Holy Places satisfied Pope Benedict, who was “primarily interested in securing universal recognition as an independent temporal power” and had therefore “no intention of engaging Britain in dispute over Palestine.”³⁷ Although it is hard to reconcile these statements with the harsh words of Pope Benedict’s address of March 1919, a more in-depth examination underlines two facets of the Holy See’s diplomacy in 1919. Firstly, at the international level, it highlights the high profile approach of the diplomatic dialogue between the Holy See and Britain, and the renewed influence exercised by the Holy See in the diplomatic game. Secondly, at the level of regional negotiation, it reinforces the assumption that the reshaping of the Middle East encouraged Pope Benedict to put his trust in the British.

The situation escalated dramatically in 1920 with the increased power granted to both Protestants and Zionists at the expense of Catholic influence, an evolution that will force the pontiff to re-adjust his diplomacy in the Holy Land.

³⁷ Manuel, 279.

Benedict XV and Zionism: Break or Continuity?

The relations between the Holy See and the Zionist movement, since its inception in the late nineteenth century, have been the topic of a multitude of studies, most of them covering a large span, from Theodor Herzl's meeting with Agliardi, the papal nuncio in Vienna, on May 19, 1896 to the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel of December 30, 1993. Most of these studies, with the notable exception of Andrej Kreutz's *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*,³⁸ are disappointing as they dwell upon the same well-known issues, often oversimplifying them or adopting a partisan position regarding the policy of the Holy See over the years.³⁹ The received narrative by Sergio Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism*, although thoroughly researched and widely influential, is an example of partiality in the treatment of the relationship between the Holy See and the Zionist movement. In this book, as in most other studies, Pope Benedict XV's stand on the Zionist question is described as definitely anti-zionist, in continuity with the position of his predecessors, especially Pope Pius X. There is no attempt to shed light on the motivating forces behind Pope Benedict's personal understanding of the long term impact that the Zionist movement had on the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, in view of the pontiff's appreciation of the future of the Holy

³⁸ Andrek Kreutz, *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, the Struggle for the Holy Land*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).

³⁹ See Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism*; Livia Rokach, *The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine*, (London: Saqi Books, 1987). Different articles also address the issue. See for example: Richard P. Stevens, "The Vatican, the Catholic Church, and Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10 (Spring, 1981): 100-110. Also, Adriano Ercole Ciani, "The Vatican, American Catholics and the Struggle for Palestine, 1917-1958: A Study of Cold War Roman Catholic Transnationalism," (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, Canada, 2011).

Sees's participation in international relations. In scholarly reviews of Minerbi's book, Eugene J. Fisher and George E. Irani challenged two of the author's main hypotheses.⁴⁰ Fisher argued against Minerbi's identifying the hostility of the Catholic Church against Zionism as the result of immutable doctrinal positions, while Irani criticized Minerbi's "interpretation of the Holy See's opposition to Zionism since its inception as an ideology."

A thoroughful research of the rich material found in the Vatican Archives gives basis for revisiting and questioning Minerbi's reasoning regarding the rationale behind Benedict's diplomacy and the outcome of his undertakings in Palestine. I will argue that Pope Benedict's policy in Palestine was supportive of Zionist aspirations, breaking therefore with his predecessors's stance, a reflection of Pope Benedict's understanding of the role and influence of the Church in the international community.⁴¹ The Zionist issue was, in the pontiff's appreciation, neither solely religious nor ideological, but also the British geo-political and imperialistic strategic's response to new regional realities in the Middle East.

However, Benedict's support did not suggest that he was relinquishing the Church's rights on the Holy Sites of Palestine. On the contrary, the pontiff's well publicized

⁴⁰ Eugene Fisher is the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Georges Irani is the author of *The Papacy and the Middle East: The Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1962-1984* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). See Eugene J. Fisher, "The Vatican and the State of Israel," *First Things* (April 1991) and George E. Irani, review of *The Vatican and Zionism*, by Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Catholic Historical Review* 78 (January, 1992): 135-36.

⁴¹ Andrej Kreutz also contends that "the Vatican's embroilment in the Palestinian problem and the reasons underlying it have undergone a constant evolution that is a reflection of transformations within the Church and in its relations with the international community," in Kreutz, x.

demonstrations against infringement on Catholic rights have to be analyzed in a context of support of a Jewish Home in Palestine and anticipation of its future after the British mandate's eventual termination.

Benedict XV's Support of Zionist Aspirations

The Zionist leaders had few opportunities to meet with popes and officials of the Curia until the publication of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917. The first encounter took place on May 19, 1896, when Theodor Herzl, the “spiritual father of the [Zionist] movement,”⁴² met with Antonio Agliardi, the Papal Nuncio in Vienna. Herzl’s goal was to “dispel the fears of the Christian world, and demonstrate that the Jews in no way constituted a threat.”⁴³ Adopting a resolute secular position, Herzl promised Agliardi that, in the eventuality of the future creation of a Jewish State in Palestine, Jerusalem and its Holy Sites, as well as Bethlehem and Nazareth, would be excluded from the Jewish territory. He promised to support the principle of extraterritoriality of those sites, under the protectorate of the Holy See. The Nuncio and the Curia remained unfazed.

Eight years later, Herzl received the same treatment when he met, on January 25, 1904, with Pope Pius X. The pontiff’s dismissal of the Zionist demands was rooted in doctrinal grounds.⁴⁴ Although the pope himself was not personally prejudiced against the Jews, the famous words he uttered as pope had a definite anti-Zionist tone. “We cannot

⁴² Kreutz, 32.

⁴³ Minerbi, 95.

⁴⁴ Kreutz, 33.

encourage this movement [said the pope]. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem – but we could never sanction it. The ground of Jerusalem, even if it were not always sacred, has been sanctified by the life of Jesus Christ. As the head of the Church, I cannot tell you otherwise. The Jews have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people.”⁴⁵ The traditional Christian “teaching of contempt” towards the Jewish people was the principle guiding the Holy See’s anti-Zionist stand.

Benedict XV had a different understanding of the role of the Church in the international community. He belonged to a new epoch and witnessed the emergence of a new world order in the Middle East and in Europe. The pontiff had been deeply involved in the humanitarian assistance provided to the populations of Palestine during the war. He had been in contact with various Jewish religious leaders, especially from the United States, who had reached out to him to ensure the protection of their people in Europe and in Syria-Palestine.⁴⁶ He was also well aware that Palestine was not “empty,” that in the words of two rabbis visiting the land in 1898, “[T]he bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man.”⁴⁷

With the exception of Kreutz’s study that highlights the issue without dwelling on it,⁴⁸ no scholarly source addresses “the hidden question”⁴⁹ of the Arab presence in

⁴⁵ Minerbi, 100, quoting Herzl’s diaries.

⁴⁶ See chapter 5 “Humanitarian Assistance: Benedict XV’s Frontline Diplomacy.”

⁴⁷ Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 23.

⁴⁸ Kreutz, 33.

⁴⁹ Goldman, 23.

Palestine from a Vatican perspective. To Pope Benedict, the recognition of the Arab population had a double meaning. It was first and foremost a sign of his paying particular attention to the fate of the Christian Arabs, especially to the Eastern Catholic communities and to the potential *rapprochement* with the Greek Orthodox. It was also, following the principles expounded by Wilson in his Fourteen Points, an issue tied to the self-determination of minorities, a principle supported by Pope Benedict.⁵⁰

The literature covering the meetings between Pope Benedict, Cardinal Gasparri, and the Zionist envoy Nahum Sokolow, in May 1917, is abundant and restates, without further research, Minerbi's thesis that the pontiff, initially sympathetic to the Zionist cause, later changed his mind. It is my contention that Pope Benedict's pro-Zionist stand did not change but simply adjust to the new situation, keeping in mind that his primary goal was the protection of Christian minorities and sites of Palestine.

When Pope Benedict and Sokolow met, in a long private audience, on May 4, 1917, the war was in stalemate, although it was well known in Vatican quarters that a victory of the Allies would mean the carving of the Ottoman Empire in favor of Britain and France. Sokolow was confident that Pope Benedict viewed the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine with goodwill. The pontiff's position was evidence that the Holy See did not base its pro or anti-Zionist stand on "immutable theological positions."⁵¹ Benedict broke with the anti-Zionist line of his predecessors. He saw the return of the Jews to

⁵⁰ See Chapter 6.

⁵¹ Minerbi, xxx.

Palestine as “providential.”⁵² Under his pontificate the anti-Zionist campaign led by the *Osservatore Romano* and the *Civiltà Cattolica* was curtailed.⁵³

Interpreting the famous words uttered by the pontiff during the meeting “Yes, yes, I think we shall be good neighbors,”⁵⁴ Minerbi and Friedman⁵⁵ conjecture that “the pope’s assurances of good neighborliness to Sokolow must ... be read not in the spiritual but in the geographical context,”⁵⁶ of a Catholic presence in an internationalized area, as planned by the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

The situation drastically changed at the end of 1917 with two correlated events; the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917 and the liberation of Jerusalem by British troops one month later. From that day onwards, the future of Palestine and Zionism remained in British hands. On November 2, 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, issued the “British Declaration of Sympathy with Zionist Aspirations,” known as the Balfour Declaration. The Declaration promised British support “for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,”⁵⁷ adding that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing

⁵² Minerbi, 111.

⁵³ Frank J. Coppa, *The Papacy, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 133.

⁵⁴ Minerbi, 112.

⁵⁵ Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918, British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

⁵⁶ Friedman, *Question of Palestine*, 155.

⁵⁷ J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, 1914-1956* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1956), 2:26.

non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” The fall of Jerusalem a month later and the establishment of a military (then civil) British government in Palestine turned the declaration of intent into a practical reality.

Pope Benedict entertained no illusion about the long term existence and development of the Jewish home. He did not change his mind, as Minerbi asserts, returning to the anti-Zionism of his predecessors but adjusted his diplomacy to the presence of the Zionists, a presence meant to last. Like most of his contemporaries, he understood the Balfour Declaration as a promise to eventually establish a Jewish state. A dispatch of Msgr. Giannini, the Apostolic Delegate of Syria, of November 7, 1918 that described the project of a Jewish national home as “ferocemente grottesco”⁵⁸ shows how few were those who shared Benedict’s insight and long term geo-political understanding of the future of Palestine. Contrary to Giannini, Benedict believed in the future of the Jewish national home. Therefore, his new diplomacy in Palestine was a reflection of a “threefold rationale for awarding Palestine to the Jews: geopolitical strategy, the civilizing mission of ‘enlightened imperialism,’ and ... ‘religion.’”⁵⁹

In an article published in 1989, *The Surrogate Colonization of Palestine*, the anthropologist Scott Atran argued in favor of this threefold rationale behind the British support of a Jewish national home. According to the author “from the outset, Weizmann

⁵⁸ Giannini to Gasparri, November 7, 1918, ASV, A.E.S., Stati Ecclesiastici, pos. 1418, fasc. 563.

⁵⁹ Scott Atran, “The Surrogate Colonization of Palestine, 1917-1939,” *American Ethnologist* 16, (November 1989): 721.

[the President of the Zionist Organization] stressed the strategic value of surrogate colonization,⁶⁰ stating

[I]f Great Britain does not wish anyone else to have Palestine ... it will have to watch it... that involves as much responsibility as would be involved by a British protectorate over Palestine ... I therefore thought that the middle course could be adopted ... the Jews take over the country; the whole burden of organization falls on them, but for the next ten or fifteen years they work under a temporary British protectorate.⁶¹

Pope Benedict, an astute diplomatist and strategic thinker, could not but have thought along the same lines, attentive to the geo-strategic importance of Palestine for the British as the bulwark of Egypt, with the Zionists as an ally and vital support to the British Empire.

The Jewish colonization would also follow “enlightened imperialist principles,”⁶² developing into a sophisticated nation that would serve as a “very effective guard for the Suez Canal.”⁶³ As the result of the immigration of the Jewish population of Eastern Europe to Palestine, up to 125,000 Jews populated the region in 1914, a sharp rise from the 24,000 present in 1882.⁶⁴ The volume of this continual flow was steadily increasing as the war had intensified the sufferings and oppression of the Jewish populations of Ukraine and Poland.

⁶⁰ Atran, 721.

⁶¹ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (Philadelphia: Jewish Pub. Society of America, 1949), 177, cited in Atran, 721.

⁶² Weizmann, 182, cited in Atran, 721.

⁶³ Weizmann, 149, cited in Atran, 721.

⁶⁴ Mandel, xxiv. Other authors mention 85,000 Jewish souls.

Finally, Pope Benedict was aware of the power of attraction that the return of the Chosen People to their promised land had on the Puritan evangelicism of British leaders like Prime Minister Lloyd George, Lord Balfour or Churchill. Most Anglo-Saxon Protestants regarded the Old Testament with “almost mystical veneration ... feeling deeply Christianity’s debt to the Jews.”⁶⁵ Weizmann stressed “that we Zionists represented to them [Anglo-Saxon Protestants] a great tradition for which they would have enormous respect.”⁶⁶

Contrary to the short term vision of men like Giannini, Pope Benedict anticipated that the Jewish national home was there to stay and grow under the auspices of Britain. His personal positive appreciation of Zionism ran against the pervasive anti-Zionism of the Christian and Muslim population of Palestine. In his dispatches, Giannini did not hide his anti-Zionism. In a letter of February 13, 1920, the Apostolic Delegate talks of the “hated Jewish Zionism warmly favored by the British colonial agents, sometimes with dubious means, and against which the Muslims and Christians have come together.”⁶⁷ Giannini was not the only member of the Catholic clergy complaining about the Zionists and their new national home. The lack of clarity of the Balfour Declaration left room for interpretation, encouraging Church officials to ask for its abrogation.

⁶⁵ Howard M. Sachar, *The Emergence of the Middle East, 1914-1924* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 197.

⁶⁶ Weizmann, 157, cited in Atran, 721.

⁶⁷ “odiato sionismo ebraico calorosamente favorite dagli agenti coloniali inglesi, con mezzi talvolta perfino poco puliti, e contro del quale si sono collegati gl’indigeni musulmani e cristiani.” (My translation). Giannini to Gasparri, February 13, 1920, ASV, A.E.S., Francia, 1919-1920, pos. 1333, fasc. 697.

One of the most fervent anti-Zionist clergymen was the newly appointed Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Luigi Barlassina. In a letter addressed to Cardinal van Rossum on May 8, 1921, Barlassina wrote, rather candidly, that “if the Holy See succeeded to obtain the cessation of the Zionist program, such an event would create a solid pedestal to our institutions against potential Muslim fanaticism. On the other hand, remaining silent would be surely interpreted or as indifference, or as a lack of interest from the Holy See for the cause of Palestine and its inhabitants.”⁶⁸

The Muslim-Christian Association (MCA), founded in Jaffa, in March 1918, with the blessing of the anti-zionist British military administration, also sought the annulment of the Balfour Declaration. Their goal was “to combat Zionism and to impede the purchase of land by Jews.”⁶⁹ They were loosely supported by some clerics at the Vatican.

As any well seasoned diplomatist, Pope Benedict was looking beyond the immediate local consequences of the implementation of the Balfour Declaration and had no intention to lobby in favor of the abrogation of the Declaration. As the government of a universal and transnational institution, the Holy See was in a very delicate position. Pope Benedict was taking into account the powerful worldwide influence of the Jewish diaspora. Any hostile attitude coming from the Holy See would stir up an anti-Catholic backlash and reinforce the anti-Zionist reputation of the Catholic Church among the

⁶⁸ “se la S. Sede riuscisse a ottenere la cessazione del programma sionista, certo sarebbe il trionfo della Chiesa Cattolica in Oriente, e tale avvenimento formerebbe un solido piedestallo alle nostre istituzioni contro ogni eventuale fanatismo musulmana. Il silenzio invece verrebbe certamente interpretate o come indifferenza, o come insufficienza della Santa Sede per la causa della Palestina, e dei suoi abitanti.” (My translation). Barlassina to van Rossum, May 8, 1921, A.P. N.S., volume 694 (1921), Rub. 126, fol. 69-94.

⁶⁹ Anthony O’Mahony ed., *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 19.

influential Jewish population. Moreover, the Holy See had a huge responsibility towards the Jews. Any anti-Semitic discourse or action could stimulate dangerous anti-semitic reactions in areas where the Jewish had already suffered tremendously during the war.

Pope Benedict did not address the Zionist question publicly until the opening of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919 and after receiving disquieting reports from Palestine. British Cardinal Bourne had embarked in a tour including the Middle East that lasted from December 1918 to March 1919. He arrived in Jerusalem on January 18, 1919 where he encountered a situation that he later described as “distinctly menacing.”⁷⁰ His reports to the British government and to Pope Benedict mentioned “a loud and emphatic protest against Mr. Balfour’s promises and against the projects of the Zionists.”⁷¹ He begged Lloyd George and Balfour to clarify the meaning of the declaration. If by “Jewish national home,” Balfour meant “Jewish State,” then, in Cardinal Bourne’s reasoning, Pope Benedict could only but withdraw his support to the Zionist cause and plans of development in Palestine.

The situation was serious enough that the pontiff decided to address the issue publicly, in the consistory of March 10, 1919 when he declared that

Our anxiety is most keen as to the decision which the Peace Congress at Paris is soon to take ... for surely it would be ... a bitter grief if unbelievers in Palestine were put in a superior or more privileged position, still more so if the august

⁷⁰ Ernest Oldmeadow, *Francis Cardinal Bourne* (London: Burne Oates & Washburn, 1943), 148. In 1925, he wrote: “When I visited the Holy Land in 1919, the situation was distinctly menacing. There was a tendency on the part of certain immigrant Jews to claim and assert a domination in no way in harmony with the Balfour Declaration.”

⁷¹ Oldmeadow, *Francis Cardinal Bourne*, 173.

monuments of the Christian religion were assigned to those who were not Christians.⁷²

The officialization of the British mandate on Palestine at the Conference of San Remo in April 1920 did not improve the status of the Christians in Palestine. For the second time, in June 1921, Pope Benedict came out of his reservation and addressed the College of Cardinals at the Secret Consistory of June 13, 1921 in rare non diplomatic terms:

Our fears have been only too well realized. It is known that the position of the Christians in Palestine has not only not been improved, but it has become worse under the new civil regime which has been established and which tends – if not in the intentions of its founders, certainly in its effects – to deprive Christianity of the position which it has hitherto held and to substitute for it the Jews.⁷³

The stern tone employed by the pontiff was interpreted as a signal of renewed anti-Zionism of the Holy See. Worried by the impact the allocution would have on restive Christian Arab populations in Palestine, the publication of Pope Benedict's talk was forbidden in Palestine by Colonel Storrs, the British governor. The anti-Zionist and anti-British Patriarch of Jerusalem, Luigi Barlassina, complained to Storrs that "the censor refused on the 17th, of June last, to allow us to publish in our paper 'Rakib Sahyoun'⁷⁴ the text of the Holy Father's Allocution of June 13th. It is needless to say [he added] that this prohibition was a source of pain and surprise to me and to all Catholics."⁷⁵ Storrs justified

⁷² Benedict XV, *Antequam Ordinem*, 97-101.

⁷³ Benedict XV, "Allocution *Causa Nobis* [June 13, 1921]," AAS 13 (1921): 281-84.

⁷⁴ The paper *Rakib Sahyoun* was the organ of the Patriarchate for the Diocese of Palestine.

⁷⁵ Barlassina to Colonel R. Storrs, August 12, 1921, A.P. N.S., volume 694 (1921), Rub. 126, fol. 140.

the censorship as that of an unofficial text that the “official version subsequently proved to be false.”⁷⁶ To Barlassina, who replied that “the Holy Father’s allocution was a textual extract of the official document, and there was not a phrase which has proved subsequently to be false,” it was an “injurious and slanderous attack made against the pope, with the view of lessening His prestige and authority.”⁷⁷ Beyond the veracity of comments on both sides, the censorship was evidence of the tension reigning in Palestine and the importance given to papal declarations.

In the allocution, it was actually the way the British were handling their mandate in Palestine that was the subject of Pope Benedict’s indignation more than the Zionist’s presence *per se*. The pontiff clearly stated that “We do not indeed wish that the rights of the Jewish element should be infringed upon but that the just rights of Christianity should not be subordinated to them.”⁷⁸ This comment, akin to an official recognition of Jewish presence and rights in Palestine,⁷⁹ evidences Pope Benedict pro-Zionist stance but even go further in recognizing an early form of potential ecumenism.

Both Minerbi and Kreutz conclude that the Vatican was strongly opposed to Zionism,⁸⁰ an assertion that, in view of this analysis, needs further examination. First and foremost, the voice of the Pope did not always coincide with the voice of other Catholic

⁷⁶ Barlassina to Colonel R. Storrs, August 12, 1921.

⁷⁷ Barlassina to Colonel R. Storrs, August 12, 1921.

⁷⁸ Benedict XV, *Causa Nobis*, 281-84.

⁷⁹ Jean-Dominique Montois, “Israël-Vatican: Le nouveau dialogue,” *Studia Diplomatica* 34 (1981): 755.

⁸⁰ Kreutz, 45 and Minerbi, xx.

dignitaries. After Cardinal Bourne's personal comments to the press that Zionism was "quite contrary to Christian sensitivity and tradition,"⁸¹ came the condemnation of Zionism uttered by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Rati. His words are especially important as he became pope after Benedict XV's death and took the name of Pius XI. In the October 7, 1921 issue of the newspaper *Palestine Weekly*, published in Jeusalem, an interview of Cardinal Rati by the Italian *Il Secolo* was printed, in which he stated that "the followers of His Excellency Sir Herbert Samuel with their disguised form of concessional protectionism neither can nor ought to aspire to make Palestine a Jewish monopoly, a condition which will only offend the most deeply-rooted feelings of the Christian masses. England, [he warned in unusual undiplomatic terms,] who covers with her prestige and power the acts of the High Commissioner in Palestine, should not forget that the Holy See has in its hands certain weapons of reprisal."⁸² Uttering such an unveiled threat is startling and a rare occurrence in diplomatic circles. It never got the pope's approval.

Armed with a large dose of patience, Pope Benedict was a visionary, a long-term thinker, and a seasoned diplomatist. His endorsement or rejection of Zionsim and the establishment of the British Mandate had no direct bearing on his Eastern diplomacy. The pontiff, attentive to the rising anti-semitism in Europe, was well aware that the Jewish immigration to Palestine would increase and that the British mandate, by definition, would have an end. As a realist and a pragmatist, Pope Benedict did not directly

⁸¹ Ingrams, 60.

⁸² "The Vatican and Palestine," published in *Palestine Weekly*, Jerusalem, October 7, 1921, A.P., N.S., volume 694 (1921), Rub. 126, fol. 309.

challenge the Balfour Declaration or the British mandate as he had no direct negotiating power, but he acted as any other sovereign state leader would do in order to protect his own interests, that is the protection of the Holy Sites and of the Catholic minorities in the Holy Land.

The Question of Jerusalem and the Protection of the Holy Sites

With the question of the protection of the Catholic communities and the Holy Sites, came the issue of the future of the French Protectorate. The situation was delicate. On one hand, Pope Benedict's main diplomatic goal was the emancipation of the Holy See from the French Catholic Protectorate. The liberation of Jerusalem by General Allenby and the assignment of a British mandate over Palestine, at the Conference of San Remo in April 1920, was therefore a unique opportunity to seize to obtain the removal of the Protectorate.

On the other hand, Palestine was becoming the national home of the Jews, a situation that brought about heated discussions regarding the ownership and protection of the Holy Sites. From this perspective, it was in Benedict's interest to devise a policy that without confirming the French Protectorate would not dismiss it, as long as a satisfactory solution would not be found and implemented. France had one negotiating card in hand that the Holy See could not and would not dismiss. The French Government could use the long-sought after resumption of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Paris as a strategic advantage, as it gave France the leverage to obtain satisfaction regarding the Catholic Protectorate.

The French Protectorate had been established to protect the Church interests in a land governed by a non-Christian government. With the establishment of the British mandate in Palestine, the protectorate had ceased to exist, a fact that was confirmed by France, Britain, and Italy at the San Remo Conference.⁸³ To compensate for the official loss of their protectorate, the French looked with favor to the Holy See's attempt to transfer the protectorate to Belgium, a policy akin to the establishment of a surrogate protectorate over the Holy Sites. Belgium was a Catholic country, without special interests in Palestine, but with close relations with Paris and the Vatican. A Belgian Protectorate would have allowed France to stay the hidden dominant power in the Holy Land. Belgian nationalists were also dreaming of territorial expansion and set their eyes on the Holy Sites of Palestine.

Therefore, Cardinal Mercier⁸⁴ wrote to Balfour offering Belgium as a candidate for the Catholic protectorate in Palestine, as a compensation for not having been selected to host the League of Nations.⁸⁵ Gasparri supported Mercier's demand.⁸⁶ According to the late historian Roger Aubert, Cardinal Mercier's plan was driven by anti-Zionist motives and the fear that the Jewish immigration to the Holy Land was importing communist and

⁸³ *Great Britain Legation, Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 22.

⁸⁴ Desire-Joseph Cardinal Mercier (1851-1926) was the Belgian Archbishop of Mechelen.

⁸⁵ Sebastiano Nicotra, Nuncio to Belgium, to Gasparri, June 16, 1919, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 112.

⁸⁶ Gasparri to Nicotra, July 9, 1919, ASV, Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-1918), fasc. 112.

German influences, detrimental to the Christian fabric of the country.⁸⁷ The Belgian efforts ended in failure.

The eventual solution to the protection of the rights of the different religious communities of Palestine and their claims over the Holy Sites came in the form of an international commission, whose rules were sketched by Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner, in November 1920. He proposed a commission of thirty one members with three Catholics recommended by the Holy See.⁸⁸ The details concerning the status of the Holy Sites and of this international commission were submitted on December 6, 1920 to the League of Nations, in two articles of the draft for the British Mandate. Article 13 placed the responsibility for the Holy Places on Britain, which was accountable to the League of Nations. The Holy See was flatly ignored. As for article 14, it originally called for an international commission, specifying that only the Chairman of the Commission would be nominated by the Council of the League of Nations.

The Holy See's response to those articles was fierce as Pope Benedict understood these two articles as evidence that Britain was taking over responsibility of the Holy Places, a situation that would not have created serious problems, were it not for the pro-Zionist and Protestant policy of the British government.

Pope Benedict died in January 1922, before a final agreement was reached. The text of the British mandate for Palestine was eventually accepted on July 22, 1922. Pius

⁸⁷ Roger Aubert, "Les démarches du Cardinal Mercier en vue de l'octroi à la Belgique d'un mandat sur la Palestine," *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques* 5 (1979): 204.

⁸⁸ Minerbi, 48.

XI, Pope Benedict's successor, kept Cardinal Gasparri as his Secretary of State, ensuring continuity with Benedict's diplomacy regarding the protection of the Holy Sites.

On June 4, 1922, the Holy See prepared an aide-mémoire presenting its claims.⁸⁹ After praising "the spirit of justice and impartiality" of Great Britain, the Holy See complained that, according to the draft of the Mandate, "the Jews would have in Palestine a privileged and predominant position over Catholics [and that] the rights of Christians – and especially those of Catholics – would not be sufficiently safeguarded."⁹⁰ The Holy See focused its attacks on the article 14 of the mandate that established "a special Commission to study and settle all questions and complaints concerning the different religious confessions" in the Holy Sites. Rome made clear that "it would never accept that this Commission could discuss the ownership of the sanctuaries, which, in their great majority, and for centuries, even under Turkish domination, remained peacefully in the hands of Catholics."⁹¹ The official text of July 24, 1922 gave satisfaction to the Holy See as it declared that "the method of nomination, the composition and the functions of this Commission shall be submitted to the Council of the League for its approval, and the Commission shall not be appointed or enter upon its functions without the approval of the Council."⁹²

⁸⁹ Aide-mémoire, June 4, 1922, ASV, Arch. Nunz. Parigi, b.395, fasc. 316.

⁹⁰ Aide-mémoire, June 4, 1922, ASV, Arch. Nunz. Parigi, b.395, fasc. 316.

⁹¹ Aide-mémoire, June 4, 1922, ASV, Arch. Nunz. Parigi, b.395, fasc. 316.

⁹² Walter Laqueur and Barry M. Rubin eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader. A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 6th edition (Penguin Books, 2001), 30-36.

The approval of the British Mandate by the Council of the League of Nations had been delayed by the Holy See's objections, relayed by the representatives at the League of a number of Catholic countries. "It is no exaggeration [wrote Balfour to Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet] to say that the reluctance of the French, Polish, Spanish, Italian and Brazilian representatives on the Council to discuss now the Palestine mandate ... has been due to the representations which have been made to their Governments by the Papal representatives."⁹³

At the close of Pope Benedict's pontificate, the British were rightly under the impression that the Holy See had warmed to their administration in Palestine but kept following attentively the Zionist and Protestant developments.⁹⁴

The Protestant Conquest of Palestine: A Mighty Danger to Catholic Future

The Protestant Danger

As the universal leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict supported the Protestant ecumenical movement that had started in 1910 with the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland. However, he refrained to send delegates to any of the meetings and forbade Catholics to participate.⁹⁵ In December 1921, the first Malines

⁹³ Ingrams, 168 (PRO, CAB. 24/136)

⁹⁴ Minerbi, 57.

⁹⁵ "In 1919 a *dubium* was placed before the Holy Office as to whether Catholics were allowed to attend meetings organized by non-Catholics for the purpose of Christian unity. The instruction of the Holy Office of 16 September 1864 had forbidden Catholics from becoming members of a certain London society established to procure the unity of Christians. The Holy Office had recourse to the earlier declaration and said that Catholics were not to attend the meetings." James M. Oliver, *Ecumenical Associations, Their*

Conversation started, with the approbation of the pontiff.⁹⁶ This was as far as the Holy See was ready to move in the debate over the unity of the Church.

In the meantime, in Palestine, at the regional diplomatic and ecclesiastical level, the tension between Protestants and Roman Catholics was palpable. Britain, as the Mandatory Power of Palestine, sheltered two groups of *protégés* in the Holy Land: the Jews and the Protestants.

The Protestants were under the unofficial protection of the British since the establishment of the Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem. In October 1841, in a letter to his friend Kelbe, John Henry Newman commented: “As to the Jerusalem matter, the simple case is – our government wants a resident religious influence there, such as the Greek Church is to Russia and the Latin to France.”⁹⁷ The future Catholic cardinal was referring to the King of Prussia’s suggestion to the British Government to set up a joint Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem⁹⁸ to “minister in the Near East to members of the Church of England and to German protestants and to be maintained jointly by the two powers.”⁹⁹ The Prussian-British bishopric was established in late 1841, against the recommendations

Canonical Status with Particular Reference to the United States of America (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Univresita Gregoriana, 1999), 18 and 31.

⁹⁶ The Malines Conversations were a series of five unofficial encounters between Anglicans and Roman Catholics at Malines, Belgium. The first of these conversations took place on December 6-8, 1921.

⁹⁷ John Henry Newman, *Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Kelbe and Others, 1839-45* (Birmingham Oratory, 1917), 148, quoted in R.W. Greaves, “The Jerusalem Bishopric, 1841,” *The English Historical Review* 64 (July 19149): 328-52.

⁹⁸ The creation of the bishopric in Jerusalem was met with reservation by many in the Anglican Church. For Newman, it was the *coup de grâce* that led him to eventually abandon the Anglican Church and enter the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹⁹ Greaves, “Jerusalem Bishopric,” 328.

of the Prussian Ambassador in Constantinople, who found the plan “to be inopportune, ill-informed, and visionary.”¹⁰⁰ The creation of the bishopric responded to the need to give Protestantism an institutional base in the Holy Land. The Protestant bishopric became a disappointment both politically and religiously. In 1881, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck “denounced the ecclesiastical basis of the bishopric as unduly favoring the Church of England.”¹⁰¹ Consequently, the joint bishopric was dissolved in 1885. While the German Protestants had freed themselves from the Anglicans, the American missionaries welcomed the Protestant Patriarchate as their growing numbers were necessitating the presence of a friendly power to protect them efficiently.

In the post-war era, with the military (then civil) British administration of Palestine, following the liberation of the land, the American Protestant missions intensified their activities. A report compiling questions raised by Msgr. Barlassina, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the Custody of the Holy Land was sent to *Propaganda Fide* on January 11, 1920. It highlighted the danger represented by Protestant proselytizing in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem. The author of the note specifically mentioned the danger that the American missions represented, pointing out that, until then, the Anglicans had not been very active “probably because their current bishop, Dr. McInnis, was not a man of action.” But things were to change soon as he was going to be replaced by Dr. Waggett,

¹⁰⁰ Greaves, “Jerusalem Bishopric,” 340.

¹⁰¹ Greaves, “Jerusalem Bishopric,” 352.

“a man of great influence, energetic and able to organize a redoubtable protestant movement.”¹⁰²

The same report noted that the Protestant missions benefited from unlimited funds and a very efficient organization. Ominously, he foresaw the complete ruin of Catholic schools and institutions and their takeover by the American missions.¹⁰³ A striking example was that, in Beit Djallah, a suburb of Jerusalem, “out of fifty children who used to attend the local Catholic school, twenty moved to the American school directed by a protestant pastor.”¹⁰⁴

The situation was worrisome as schools had always been the most efficient instrument to establish Catholic influence among Palestinian families. In a report sent to Rome in January 1919, Msgr. Camassei, who was soon replaced by Msgr. Barlassina as Latin Patriarch, explained that families wanted their sons to study English and Arabic, as Palestine was under British control, and stressed how the American Red Cross and other Protestant establishments were able to offer, in addition to an excellent education, free food and clothes.¹⁰⁵ It was therefore obvious that parents were not sending their children to the American mission schools for the sake of Protestantism but rather were attracted by the numerous concrete and practical advantages that the wealthy missions were able to provide.

¹⁰² Report to *Propaganda Fide*, January 11, 1920, A.P. N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126, fol. 135.

¹⁰³ Report to *Propaganda Fide*, January 11, 1920, fol. 135.

¹⁰⁴ Report to *Propaganda Fide*, January 11, 1920, fol. 137.

¹⁰⁵ Report from Camassei, “Stato delle missioni patriarcali,” January 27, 1919, A.P. N.S., volume 629 (1919), Rub. 126, fol. 173-77.

Re-establishing Harmony in the Church

“A quoi bon avoir délivrer la Palestine du joug musulman, si c’est pour livrer la jeunesse au protestantisme?”¹⁰⁶ lamented the report sent to *Propaganda Fide* in January 1920. Sweeping changes were necessary and pressing to respond to Protestant propaganda and reassert Catholic influence in Palestine. The remedies were twofold: modernize and financially support the Catholic educational network and, more importantly, bring about *une entente cordiale* between the different Catholic factions in Palestine to present a united stand against the Protestant danger.

Fr. Paschal Robinson, a Franciscan professor at the Catholic University of America, in Washington, DC, was sent to Palestine by the pope in 1919 to investigate the situation of Catholic education. He suggested the establishment of English Catholic schools in order to prevent “‘English’ from being almost immediately identified ... with ‘Protestant.’”¹⁰⁷ The eventual decision that this suggestion was not viable was an answer to Pope Benedict’s call to missionaries to forego nationalistic attitudes, a theme he had developed in his encyclical *Maximum Illud* on missions, promulgated in November 1919. The suggestion that English speaking Catholic ministers should be introduced to answer families’ demand to have their children taught in English was opposed by the fear that it would arouse susceptibilities and jealousy on the part of congregations of other nationality, as it would create a new “national center of interest,” adding that “the

¹⁰⁶ Report to *Propaganda Fide*, January 11, 1920, fol. 137.

¹⁰⁷ Minerbi, 56.

multiplicity of national centers of influence was exactly one of the nuisance that Catholicism was suffering the most in Palestine.”¹⁰⁸

In October 1920, Fr. Robinson was called back as apostolic visitor to Palestine to settle the dispute between the Latin Patriarchate and the Custody of the Holy Land, a dispute that created a rift among Catholics and was impeding the Church’s ability to present a united front and a successful approach to the Protestant threat.

As it was frankly stated in the earlier report

It remains obvious that, as of today, the first and main duty rests in the union of all the Catholic forces in Palestine against the common danger that threatens us because of the American propaganda and of other movements opposed to the Church. Consequently, the measure that is most needed is undeniably a cordial agreement, or if you wish more cordial than in the past between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the orders and religious Congregations in Palestine.¹⁰⁹

From the perspective of the British administration in Palestine, Fr. Robinson’s mission was very successful as it improved relations between the British administration and the Latin Patriarch, Msgr. Barlassina, famous for his anti-British and anti-Zionist stand. The relationship between the Latin Patriarchate and the Custody remained edgy and highlighted the tension existing between *Propaganda Fide* and the Secretary of State, an issue of domestic policy that bore direct influence on diplomatic relation between the

¹⁰⁸ “La multiplicité des centres nationaux d’influence est précisément l’un des maux dont le catholicisme a le plus souffert en Palestine.” (My translation). Documenti circa le varie questioni tra mons. Barlassina e la Custodia di Terra Santa, January 11, 1920, A.P. N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126, fol. 139.

¹⁰⁹ “Il demeure évident qu’à l’heure actuelle, le premier et le principal devoir consiste dans l’union de toutes les forces catholiques en Palestine contre le péril commun qui nous menace du fait de la propagande américaine et des autres mouvements opposés à l’Eglise. Par conséquent, la mesure la plus nécessaire est incontestablement une entente cordiale, ou si l’on veut plus cordiale que par le passé entre le Patriarcat de Jérusalem et tous les ordres et Congrégations religieuses en Palestine.” (My translation). Documenti circa le varie questioni tra mons. Barlassina e la Custodia di Terra Santa, January 11, 1920, fol. 140.

Holy See and Britain. Cardinal Gasparri, the Secretary of State, supported the Latin Patriarch, Msgr. Barlassina, who had difficult relations with *Propaganda Fide*, a supporter of the Franciscan Custody. These internal tensions explained why Gasparri was able to inform Doulcet, the French Chargé d’Affaires, that Fr. Robinson had been directly appointed by *Propaganda Fide* and that he did not have a hand in his nomination, which could be understood as an “expression of no confidence” in the Latin Patriarch, Msgr. Barlassina.¹¹⁰ Barlassina had the reputation of lacking in diplomatic tact but of being honest and obedient. Therefore, the Holy See never considered responding to pressure from both the Mandatory Power and the Custody to recall the energetic Patriarch.

The relationship between the Custody and the Latin Patriarchate had been unfriendly since the reinstatement of the Latin Patriarchate in 1847, to the point that the Custos directly and bluntly accused the Holy See of bearing responsibility for the tense situation.

On October 4, 1918, in the brief *Inclutum Fratrum Minorum Conditorem*,¹¹¹ on the occasion of the celebration of the seven hundredth anniversary of the Custody of the Holy Land, Pope Benedict confirmed the centuries-old position held by the papacy that the Franciscans will “guard, manage and govern”¹¹² the Custody of the Holy Sites.

¹¹⁰ Minerbi, 56.

¹¹¹ Benedict XV, “Brief *Inclutum Fratrum Minorum Conditorem* [October 4, 1918],” AAS 10 (1918): 437-39.

¹¹² “Custodire, reggere e governare.” (My translation). Pro-Memoria sui francescani e I Luoghi di Terra Santa to van Rossum, 1920, A.P. N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126, fol. 69-112.

Conversely, on June 14, 1920, regarding the question of the responsibilities of both the Custody and the Patriarchate over the Holy Sites of Palestine, *Propaganda Fide* declared that “the Custody of the Holy Land cannot do any alteration or restoration ... of the Sanctuaries of Palestine without the explicit consent of the Patriarch [because he] represents the Church.”¹¹³

The relation of *Propaganda Fide* was in direct opposition with the pontiff’s brief of October 1918, a fact immediately noticed by the head of the Custody of the Holy Land, Fr. Ferdinando Diotallevi, who bitterly complained about the Latin Patriarchate in a dispatch of July 3, 1921, sent to Gasparri and van Rossum.¹¹⁴ Diotallevi started his report reminding the Holy See that the Ottoman Government had always looked at the Custody as the “incarnation of Catholicism in the Orient.”¹¹⁵ The reestablishment of the Latin Patriarchate created an ambiguity that damaged both the Catholic fabric and the administration of the Holy Sites. In order to avoid tension and to restore the peace and harmony that were desperately missing in Palestine, Diotallevi asked the pontiff to reassert the power of the Custody against the Patriarchate. The issue endured after the Pontiff’s death in January 1922.

¹¹³ “il Custode di Terra Santa possono fare alcuna innovazione o restaurazione ... nei Santuari della Palestina senza l’esplicito consenso del Patriarca [because] il Patriarca rappresenta la Chiesa.” (my translation). *Relazione Circa il progetto di un Modus Vivendi*, November 1922, A.P, N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126, fol. 852.

¹¹⁴ *Pro memoria per determinare le relazioni fra il Patr. di Gerusalemme e la Custodia di Terra Santa*, July 3, 1921, A.P, N.S., volume 755 (1922), Rub. 126, fol. 691-706.

¹¹⁵ *Pro memoria per determinare le relazioni fra il Patr. di Gerusalemme e la Custodia di Terra Santa*, July 3, 1921.

While a palpable tension between Latin Catholic factions was hindering a much needed harmony, the Eastern rite Catholic churches of Palestine also needed much improvement. Dotallevi warned that “any attempt to unite the schismatic Oriental churches will be useless as long as the Catholic Eastern churches, regardless of their rite, will not be spiritually, morally and economically strengthened and developed.”¹¹⁶ The derelict condition of most Eastern Catholic churches was an obstacle to their ability to attract schismatics who were content with their own churches.¹¹⁷ The Latin Church did not provide an alternative to the schismatic Orthodox as they were under the “false belief that the Latin Church was seeking to absorb them; or rather ... to latinize them.”¹¹⁸ Their misgivings were reinforced by an aggressive anti-Catholic campaign mounted by the Protestants who benefited from the diplomatic support of the protestant Mandatory power.

Baron Monti, the unofficial *Chargé d’Affaires* for the Italian Government at the Holy See, expressed his worry after the visit of the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar to Smirna in March 1920. In his report he stressed that the danger of a *rapprochement* between the Anglican and the Greek Orthodox churches had to be watched. He added

¹¹⁶ Ferdinando Dotallevi, Custode di Terra Santa, Memoriale alla S. Congregazione Pro Ecclesia Orientali per l’Unione delle Chiese, Rome, May 1921, ACCO 1920, rub. 40, Rito greci, fasc. 6050. (My translation).

¹¹⁷ Ferdinando Dotallevi, Custode di Terra Santa, Memoriale alla S. Congregazione Pro Ecclesia Orientali per l’Unione delle Chiese, Rome, May 1921.

¹¹⁸ N. Anad, Maronita Assistente Onorario della Bibl. Vaticana to Isaia Papadopoulos, Assessore della S. Congregazione per la Chiesa Orientale, January 9, 1919, ACCO 1920, Rub. 40, Rito greci, Fasc.4956. (My translation).

that an official banquet was the occasion of an intervention of the Greek and British authorities to vote in favor of the union between the Protestant and Greek churches and to build the most intimate relations between England and Greece.¹¹⁹ Pope Benedict's effort to set up an environment conducive to a *rapprochement* with the Orthodox Church ran up against the British government's endeavors to take over the Greek Orthodox Church, by providing ample financial means to a bankrupt Church.¹²⁰

Pope Benedict had little time left to tackle the issue of the reorganization of the Latin and Eastern Catholic churches in the Middle East and devise a policy that would secure the protection of the Holy Sites. He passed away before the British mandate to Palestine was officially sanctioned on July 24, 1922. His legacy lived on as his successor Pius XI retained Cardinal Gasparri as his Secretary of State, a signal to the rest of the world, especially to the British and the French that the new pontiff's foreign policy would follow in the path of his predecessor Benedict XV.

¹¹⁹ Monti to van Rossum, no date, A.P, N.S., volume 693 (1921), Rub. 126, fol. 544 rv.

¹²⁰ ACCO Rub 19/10. With revenues from Russian pilgrims drying up after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Greek Orthodox Church was on the verge of bankruptcy.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Those who witnessed the Great War often described it in apocalyptic terms, “predicated on divine justice.”¹ It was a total war, in which all were expecting Benedict XV, the world supreme moral authority, to take side. He was vilified for resisting public and governments’ pressure as he chose to put the Church’s diplomacy at the service of peace and kept an impartial stance. His hope was to return to the pre-war *status quo*, maintain the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Catholic Empire, and keep Italy out of the hostilities. His greatest diplomatic attempt to end the war and prepare for peace, the Peace Note of August 1, 1917, was rebuffed by all governments when not received with contempt.

Pope Benedict’s war-time diplomacy ended in failure but, in an apparent paradox, the pontiff’s moral authority and the prestige of the Church were restored and enhanced in the few months that followed the armistice. Civil governments rushed to establish diplomatic ties with the Holy See. In the defunct Ottoman Empire, Turkish Muslim, Jewish, and Christian dignitaries paid a special tribute to Benedict XV as they funded a statue of the pontiff that still stands today welcoming visitors in the courtyard of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul.² The pontiff, scorned during the war, was then

¹ *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178.

² Before the creation of the Turkish state in 1923, Istanbul was known as Constantinople.

praised and through him the role of the Church as an active actor in world politics, was recognized.

Benedict XV's ecclesiastical and foreign policy bore the mark of a visionary whose response to the immediate needs and demands of his contemporaries was often overshadowed by the misunderstanding surrounding his international policies. The systematic analysis of his diplomacy in the emerging Middle East was an appealing study case as it allowed us to gauge the pontiff's statesmanship and to shed light on the long term repercussions of his diplomacy at the regional and international level.

With the abolition of the Capitulations by the Ottoman Government in 1914 and the end of the French Catholic Protectorate, a unique opportunity arose for the pontiff to release the Holy See from France's encroachment in its foreign policy. During the war, the pontiff was prudent and his supple diplomacy reflected a wait-and-see position.

He combined two policies at the political and ecclesiastical level, distinguishing between short term and long term diplomatic endeavors. At the political level, Benedict XV's diplomacy was designed to ensure the daily protection of Catholic communities and properties. Much energy was spent to respond to the persecution suffered by Catholic dignitaries, in the hand of Djemal Pasha, the governor of Syria, a persecution that was akin to a direct attack on the Catholic Church and the pope. The pontiff also devoted time and personal wealth to offer relief to the starving populations, without discrimination of religion or nationality. At the ecclesiastical level, Benedict institutionalized the unionist ecclesiology implemented by his predecessor, Leo XIII, and created a new ecclesial structure to strengthen the Eastern Catholic churches and prepare

a conducive environment for an anticipated *rapprochement* with the dissident Orthodox churches. The creation in 1917 of a special *Congregation for the Oriental Church*³ supported by a *Pontifical Oriental Institute*⁴ responded to these needs.

The Holy See had gained its diplomatic freedom from France since the abrogation of the French Protectorate, only to be caught in diplomatic tussle with the Ottoman government who was hoping to enter into diplomatic ties with the Holy See. The contempt and disparagement with which the pontiff's diplomacy was received in Europe had no influence on the Ottoman government, as it recognized in the head of the Catholic Church a moral authority to be reckoned with.

In the post-war era, the geo-political and religious situations became more complex as the region was redesigned and new powerful actors were emerging. The Arab provinces of the defunct Ottoman Empire were partitioned and assigned as mandates to France and Britain. During this period, Benedict XV became preoccupied with the issue of resuming diplomatic ties with France. The pontiff was not satisfied with the new prestige and moral influence the papacy was exerting on a wounded world as long as he had not been able to resume ties with France, a central piece on the ecclesio-political chessboard of the Holy See, in Europe as in the Middle East. In this matter, Benedict XV initiated a two-speed diplomacy that established a clear distinction between the French colonial Empire and Metropolitan France. This was a very astute and far-seeing policy. Although the French Catholic Protectorate was eventually abandoned, in people's minds,

³ Benedict XV, "Motu Proprio *Dei Providentis*, de Sacra Congregatione pro Ecclesia orientali [May 1, 1917]," AAS 09 I (1917): 529-31.

⁴ Benedict XV, "Motu proprio *Orientis Catholici* [October 15, 1917]," AAS 09 I (1917): 531.

Catholicism was still associated with France. The pontiff anticipated the decolonization movement and was aware that if Catholicism was still linked with France, Catholic interests, communities, and missions would be in great danger when the independence movements enter in action, especially in the turbulent Muslim world. The mandates received by France and Britain on Syria and Palestine were just that. They were temporary tutelages on behalf of the League of Nations, representing non-self-governing societies that would need supervision for a short period of time before being granted independence.

The Holy See's policy of emancipation was integrated in a universal vision of the world, detached from the old Eurocentric vision. When, in *Maximum Illud*, the encyclical on missionary work,⁵ Benedict XV asked the missionaries to resist nationalistic tendencies, he was asking them to cut ties with their homeland and put their trust in the Catholic Church to support and protect them, physically and financially. Benedict XV prepared the Church for this task.

Benedict XV's pontificate was solitary on all fronts. The war had confined the pontiff to isolation. Italy, as a result of the lingering Roman Question, had succeeded in excluding the Holy See from the Peace negotiations. The far-seeing pontiff's diplomacy was misunderstood by the European and American governments. His diplomacy in the Middle East was misunderstood even by clergy members closely associated with the crafting and implementing of the Holy See's foreign policy. A consistent pattern can be traced back to the early days of Benedict's pontificate. There are examples of

⁵ Benedict XV, "Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* [November 30. 1919]," AAS 11(1919): 440-55.

collaborators challenging the pontiff's diplomatic decisions, as they did not respond, in their view, to the immediate issue at stake. The Apostolic Delegates in Constantinople and Beirut, Msgrs. Dolci and Giannini, sent strongly worded reports to the Secretary of State that highlighted two levels of diplomatic negotiations; in Rome and at the local and regional level. When Msgr. Giannini respectfully complained about the naivety of Rome, he misread Benedict's diplomacy, as the Apostolic Delegate was still thinking in a pre-war and short term frame while Benedict was projecting the Church in the twentieth century and was thinking in universal terms.⁶

Throughout a pontificate that lasted less than eight years, Benedict XV navigated Peter's Bark through a war of unknown scope. He created a structure to strengthen the Eastern churches and prepared them for a *rapprochement* with the Orthodox churches. He was hailed by European and Ottoman governments for his humanitarian assistance. Once the war had ended, he acquired a new prestige and moral authority. He was the first pontiff to demonstrate an understanding of Zionism and understood that the Jewish National Home was there to stay. He witnessed events whose consequences still reverbate in today's politics.

Therefore, one question is worth asking. Why did Benedict XV's pontificate have to wait until the end of the twentieth century to benefit from a scholarly reappraisal of his reign, a reign that took place almost one hundred years ago? Although far from being a comprehensive reappraisal, the work initiated by a small group of scholars, making use of different archival resources, sheds light on different unexplored aspects of the pontiff's

⁶ For additional information, see chapter seven.

life and reign. The first study was undertaken by John. F Pollard in 1999 and served as an informative framework and inspiration for further work on the role of the papacy in the modern world. A couple of French scholars delved into Benedict's peace efforts⁷ but nothing similar has been done in the Anglo-Saxon academic world. A few articles address the pontificate of Benedict XV indirectly, as their main focus lays elsewhere.

Four circumstances motivate this new interest in Pope Benedict. First and foremost, Benedict XV benefited from a renewed interest in his name, as Cardinal Ratzinger chose the name of Benedict when he ascended the throne of Peter in April 2005.⁸ In his first message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace in 2006, the new elected Benedict XVI declared:

The very name Benedict, which I chose on the day of my election to the Chair of Peter, is a sign of my personal commitment to peace. In taking this name, I wanted to evoke both the Patron Saint of Europe, who inspired a civilization of peace on the whole continent, and Pope Benedict XV, who condemned the First World War as a "useless slaughter" and worked for a universal acknowledgment of the lofty demands of peace.⁹

⁷ François Latour, *La papauté et les problèmes de la paix pendant la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); Nathalie Renoton-Beine, *La colombe et les tranchées: Les tentative de paix de Benoît XV pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

⁸ Francesca Aran Murphy, "Globalization from Benedict XV to Benedict XVI: The 'Astonishing Optimism' of *Gaudium et Spes* in a Missionary Context," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 8 (Spring 2010): 395-424.

⁹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20051213_xxxix-world-day-peace_en.html

It is also through the recent scholarly interest for the pontificate of Pius XII during the Second World War that Benedict XV's reign is reappraised. Historians compared the two pontificates and their role during the two wars.¹⁰ Their interest was galvanized by the ties uniting the two pontiffs, as Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, served as Benedict XV's Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs in 1914, before becoming nuncio to Bavaria in 1917.

Two other simultaneous events are expected to draw attention to Benedict XV's pontificate, as we are approaching the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War One, which coincides with the 100th anniversary of the beginning of Pope Benedict's pontificate. Books, movies, and exhibitions are already re-assessing the war and its consequences on the unfolding of the twentieth century.

For all this positive reappraisal of his pontificate, no study addresses Benedict XV's diplomacy at the regional level. This dissertation is the first endeavor to answer this void as it focuses on the Middle East, a region of the world living in unending turmoil since the time of the British and French mandates. It is a timely study, in view of recent events in the region that directly affect the welfare and survival of Christian communities in an overwhelming Muslim world.

However, the dissertation suffers from some limitations with respect to archival sources and previous general studies. While the relevant sources held at the *Secret Vatican Archives*, the archives at *Propaganda Fide*, and the archives of the *Congregation*

¹⁰ John F. Pollard, "The Papacy in Two World Wars: Benedict XV and Pius XII Compared," in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (2001): 83-96.

for the Oriental Churches have been exhausted, a task not systematically undertaken by scholars who have previously addressed Benedict XV's pontificate, this work does not rely on a direct analysis of sources existing in the French and British archives.

Alternatively, the research depends upon the work of scholars who did have access to the French and British archives for their own study. Another limitation lays in the thinness of serious studies contemporary to Benedict XV's pontificate, as I considered studies that are neither a condemnation nor a panegyric of the pontiff's life.

This work is the first research on Benedict's pontificate that focuses on his diplomacy at the regional level. This new field can be further investigated. A timely study could delve deeper into Benedict XV's diplomacy in Syria and Lebanon and the role played by France, the mandatory power, in the formative years of the state. A similar reasoning could be applied to the study of Benedict XV's diplomacy in Palestine although the Zionist movement and the creation of a Jewish national home already benefit from a vast literature that presents the role of Britain and the position of the Vatican. Other regional studies are much needed regarding the role of Benedict XV in other part of the world, especially in Eastern Europe.

At the international diplomatic level, a study is needed that would investigate the long term legacy of Benedict XV's policy, in its ecclesiastical and political dimensions, especially on the role of the church in the modern world, under the light of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Constitution on the Church in the modern world, promulgated by Paul VI in December 1965, at the Second Vatican Council.

Pope Benedict XV's pontificate was the catalyst for all future pontificates throughout the twentieth century. It is

Out of his [Benedict XV's] pontificate [that] came the great Church diplomats who would become his successors – Pius XI, Pius XII, indirectly John XXIII, and Paul VI. They were men who were either schooled by him or by his associates and who helped shape the twentieth-century world and the Church in which they lived.¹¹

There is no greater legacy the unknown and misunderstood pontiff could leave behind him.

¹¹ Michael P. Riccards, *Vicars of Christ: Popes, Power, and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 85.

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