

## POPE AND PRESIDENTS: THE RELATIONSHIP OF DOMESTIC POLITICS AND RELIGION IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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### *Introduction*

Today's political scene is marked by Muslims in pursuit of Islamic-ruled states, Hasidic Jews' appeals for restoration of a spiritually led Israel, and the Dalai Lama's personal campaign for reinstatement as both ruler and high priest of Tibet. These political aspirations, arising from religious segments of society, prompt one to consider the effect of ecclesiastical systems on politics.

This article presents one such case study, relating the various forms that U.S. diplomatic ties have historically taken with the Vatican. Specifically, it examines how internal issues of political and religious diversity are played out in national affairs, and subsequently in the international arena. The research draws primarily on original source material from U.S. presidential libraries.

The discussion appropriately begins with the formation of the Vatican City-State.

### *A Shrinking Temporal State—A Growing Ecclesiastical Rome*

Popes ruled the Papal States for eleven centuries, beginning in 756 A.D. Thus the resistance of Italian nationalists, in an effort to unify Italy as a political power, was not unexpected. The September 20, 1870, invasion of Rome eventually resulted in the 1929 Lateran Treaty that delineated new ecclesiastical and political roles for both the Vatican and Italy.

In this Treaty, the Pope renounced all claims to the former Papal States in exchange for Italy's recognition of the newly created, independent Vatican City. It declared the position of the pope to be sacred and inviolable, assured absolute and visible independence in his ecclesiastical role, and guaranteed the Holy See's indisputable sovereignty in international matters. In return, the Holy See guaranteed that the Roman Catholic system would abstain from politics, pledging to remain apart from competition for the acquisition of other states and from international congresses for peace, unless a unanimous appeal was made for its involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Correspondingly, Italy recognized the right of the Holy See to diplomatic missions or legations, according to the general rules of International Law.<sup>2</sup> Yet

<sup>1</sup>Richard A. Taum, *Glossary of Church History* <<http://tatumweb.com/churchdrodent>>.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Sadow and Thomas Sarro Jr., *The Coins and Medals of the Vatican* (New York:

the practice of the Papacy of sending representatives to civil governments, such as the Imperial Court at Constantinople, was a long-established practice, beginning in the fifth century. Permanent ambassador appointments (nunciatures) were established by Pope Gregory XIII in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Since these early beginnings, the Vatican's role in international affairs has continued to expand. At the time of the First World War, more than thirty-four nations held diplomatic ties with the Vatican; that figure nearly doubled by the Second World War. Today, the Papacy maintains formal diplomatic relations with 166 nations. Thus the Holy See, possessing no airplanes, tanks, or warships, holds the status of an organized geopolitical unit equal to the greatest of military powers.<sup>4</sup> The Vatican defines its diplomatic role as one of

creating or deepening an atmosphere of friendly collaboration with different nations; inspiring social and educational legislation based on Christian principles; snuffing out the early beginnings of hostility or persecution; making it easier for all citizens to work together toward their heavenly goal and serving as a voice of conscience before a government.<sup>5</sup>

In order to carry out this stated purpose and to broaden its global influence, the Holy See participates with numerous international organizations. It holds permanent observer status at the United Nations in both New York and Geneva, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, and the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Paris. It has a member delegate at the International Atomic Energy Agency and at the U.N. Industrial Development Organization in Vienna, maintains permanent observers at the Council of Europe and the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., has diplomatic relations with the European Union in Brussels, and is also a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In 1971, it announced its decision to adhere to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and, in 1997, Vatican City-State became a member of the World Trade Organization.<sup>6</sup>

Supplementing the Vatican's official diplomatic corps are the extensive ecclesiastical connections throughout the vast majority of nations. From cardinals to archbishops to bishops, down to the local clerics, the Holy See is continually receiving information worldwide regarding local economic, social,

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Sandord Durst, 1997), 106-114. Full text of the 1929 Lateran Treaty can also be found at <[www.aloha.net/~mikesch/treaty.htm](http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/treaty.htm)>.

<sup>3</sup>James A. Corden, Thomas J. Gree, and Donald E. Heintschel, eds., *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 301.

<sup>4</sup>Avro Manhattan, *The Vatican in World Politics* (New York: Gaer, 1949), 26.

<sup>5</sup>Waldemar Gurian and M. A. Fitzsimons, eds., *The Catholic Church in World Affairs* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), 40.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Embassy at the Vatican Website: <[www.usis.it/usembvat/Files/background.htm](http://www.usis.it/usembvat/Files/background.htm)>.

political, and spiritual conditions.<sup>7</sup> The 2001 Catholic Almanac reported nearly a half-million priests worldwide: 211,827 in Europe, 79,542 in North America, 40,755 in South America, 41,456 in Asia, 26,026 in Africa, and 5,000 in Oceania.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Vatican's intelligence-gathering capacity compares with that of the most sophisticated world power.

World membership of Catholics is equally far-reaching. Despite the fact that Vatican City consists of an area slightly more than one-sixth of a square mile, with fewer than one thousand residents, managing a budget the size of a small-to-medium-size company,<sup>9</sup> worldwide membership of the Catholic Church far exceeds that of the population of the United States and Russia combined. This vast international community ensures an elevated level of recognition by political leaders.

Yet the substantial political influence wielded by the Holy See is derived, in large part, from its efficient structure of governance. The Vatican's constitution, as promulgated in February 2001, an update of the 1929 Basic Law, Article I, states that "the Supreme Pontiff, Sovereign of Vatican City-State, possesses the fullness of legislative, executive, and judicial powers."<sup>10</sup> Not a government of populist voice, nor of parliament, the Pontiff speaks and acts as sovereign, with sole and supreme powers to command, decide, rule, and judge. As Pope Leo XIII wrote: "The spiritual and eternal interests of man are surely more important than their material and temporal interests. . . . Emphatically, then, the church is not inferior to the civil power."<sup>11</sup>

#### *United States and Vatican Relations: The Early Years*

When, in 1783, Pope Pius VI sent good wishes to the United State of America<sup>12</sup> upon its newly gained independence, the nation was firmly committed to separation of church and state. One of the earliest expressions of this belief came from John Adams, then America's Commissioner to France. In his report to the 1779 Continental Congress on the matter of recognizing sister nations, Adams wrote: "Congress will probably never send a minister to His Holiness, who can do them no service. Upon condition of receiving a Catholic legate or nuncio in return, or in other words, an ecclesiastical tyrant, it is to be hoped the

<sup>7</sup>Manhattan, 26.

<sup>8</sup>Greg Erlandson, ed., *2001 Catholic Almanac* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.), 343.

<sup>9</sup>David Willey, *God's Politician: John Paul at the Vatican* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), ix.

<sup>10</sup>EWITN, "Vatican City-State Has a New Constitution," *Vatican Information Service*, February 1, 2001.

<sup>11</sup>John A. Ryan and Francis J. Boland, *Catholic Principles of Politics* (New York: MacMillan, 1940), 321.

<sup>12</sup>William J. Schmidt, "Roswell P. Barnes, Religious Freedom and an Ambassador at the Vatican," *American Presbyterians* 65/4 (1987): 259-273.

United States will be too wise ever to admit into their territories.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet, in 1797, less than two decades later, the U.S. government designated a consul to the Vatican. Giovanni Sartori, an Italian citizen, offered his services to help direct commerce between the United States and the Papal States, and to assist American tourists in Rome. He was the first of eleven consuls to serve in this position.<sup>14</sup> As such, consuls lacked official government recognition and financial support; rather, their fees were paid by those for whom services were rendered.

The first documented proposal exploring official diplomatic relations between the United States and Vatican City is contained in a dispatch to the U.S. Secretary of State, June 1847. This correspondence reveals that high officials of the Papal hierarchy, including the Pope, had expressed interest in formalizing ties. By November, the *New York Herald* caught wind of these trans-Atlantic discussions and printed its editorial support, claiming the idea to be “the fittest manifestation of American sympathy and admiration.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the Louisiana legislature expressed that it “would take keen pleasure should America open diplomatic relations with Rome.” And in his message to the Thirtieth Congress, President James Polk (1845-1849) remarked: “The interesting political events now in progress in these [Papal] States, as well as a just regard to our commercial interests, in my opinion, renders such a measure [i.e., closer ties with Rome] highly expedient.”<sup>16</sup>

Congress resisted Polk’s proposal to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican on the grounds that, under the U.S. Constitution, the government could have nothing to do with ecclesiastical matters and, furthermore, argued legislators, America had no commercial interests to protect in the Roman States. Yet surprisingly, a majority in both the House and Senate voted to finance the placement of a chargé d’affaires in Rome.<sup>17</sup> With this act, the U.S. government abandoned its original position, according some level of official status, by appointing a paid envoy to the Vatican.

However, Secretary of State James Buchanan’s April 1848 note of instructions to the United States’ first diplomat to Rome, Jacob Martin, reflected the caution of the hour:

There is one consideration which you ought always to keep in view in your intercourse with the Papal authorities. Most, if not all the Governments which have Diplomatic Representatives at Rome are connected with the Pope

<sup>13</sup>Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1852), 4: 109-110.

<sup>14</sup>Reuben G. Johnson, “A Survey of the United States’ Diplomatic Relationship with the Vatican” (M.A. thesis: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1952), 13.

<sup>15</sup>Editorial. *New York Herald*, November 1847.

<sup>16</sup>James D. Richardson, *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896-1899), 5:2401.

<sup>17</sup>Schmidt, 259-273.

as the head of the Catholic Church. In this respect the Government of the United States occupies an entirely different position. It possesses no power whatever over the question of religion. All denominations of Christians stand on the same footing in this country, and every man enjoys the inestimable right of worshipping his God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Your efforts, therefore, will be devoted exclusively to the cultivation of the most friendly civil relations with the Papal Government, and to the extension of the commerce between the two countries. You will carefully avoid even the appearances of interfering in ecclesiastical questions, whether these relate to the United States or any other portion of the world. It might be proper, should you deem it advisable, to make these views known, on some suitable occasion, to the Papal Government, so that there may be no mistake or misunderstanding on this subject.<sup>18</sup>

Buchanan's caution to "avoid all appearance of entanglement with religious powers" properly reflected the American public's reservations about forming an alliance with Rome.

Two Papal pronouncements, in particular, had excited anti-Catholic sentiment: the first, the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*, condemning the position held by some that the Holy See had no temporal power, and the second pronouncement of 1870, declaring Papal infallibility.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, however, it was rumors about Scottish Presbyterian diplomats being prohibited from worshipping within Vatican City proper that caused a cessation in diplomatic relations between the United States and the Holy See in 1867,<sup>20</sup> the mission of American consuls coming to an end in 1870.<sup>21</sup>

Congress was up in arms over the perceived lack of religious tolerance by the Pope, although the rumors turned out to be exaggerated. Others argued that relations between the U.S. and the Papacy might well be terminated, as there was no demonstrable need for assistance with commerce. The Honorable Thomas Williams argued:

I never could understand the reason for this mission. There might have been some ground for it when the Pope exercised temporal jurisdiction over all the Roman States, but he has not any such jurisdiction now, being "sealed up" as I believe he is, in the city of Rome, by the Kingdom of Italy, and if he is confined to the City of Rome our relations there now are purely spiritual and not diplomatic; not political; unless for the benefit of a particular church and a particular party.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Anson P. Stokes and Leo Pfeffer, *Church and State in the United States* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1964), 274.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 328-329.

<sup>20</sup>Dragan R. Zivojinovic, *The United States and the Vatican Policies, 1914-1918* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>21</sup>Michael Williams, *The Catholic Church in Action* (New York: MacMillan, 1934), 172.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Williams, *The Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, Second Session, December 03-March 02, 1866-67 (Washington, DC: Congressional Globe Office, 1967), 885.

*U.S. and Vatican Relations: From World  
War I to World War II*

Over the succeeding years, popes strongly advocated for an American representative to the Vatican. But President Woodrow Wilson's attitude (1913-1921) was that alliances with the Vatican should be avoided whenever possible. This he based, in part, on his clashes with the American Catholic hierarchy over the administration's Mexican policy. Likewise, there was concern that a U.S. appointment to the Holy See might be seen as supporting the Vatican's position in its political claims against Italy.<sup>23</sup> However, Wilson's administration was most dissuaded from forming an alliance with the Vatican with mounting evidence, during World War I, that its sympathies lay with the German Kaiser.<sup>24</sup>

Wilson was willing to recognize the Vatican's humanitarian aid and its work with nations to exchange prisoners of war,<sup>25</sup> but Papal leaders' concern extended beyond relief efforts. The Pope believed that Roman Catholic parishioners' loyalty to the church was weakening due to the war, being replaced with feelings of nationalism.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the inaugural encyclical of every pope from Pius VI to Pius XII (1791-1939) was devoted to the inherent capacity of the state to destroy the universality of the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike Wilson's aloofness, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945) sought connection with the Vatican. He argued that the Holy See could be used as "the listening ear" for what was transpiring in Eastern Europe during this time of global conflict. Second, Pope Pius XII and Roosevelt were united in their efforts to keep Italy out of the war. The President offered yet a third reason for establishing close ties with the Holy See. He hoped to engage the Vatican's international voice to speak out against expanding anti-Semitic feelings. After all, its centralization made for a powerful platform in communicating with twenty-one million American Catholics, and a total of 300 million Catholics worldwide. Concluding his argument in favor of ties with the Vatican, Roosevelt pointed out that the U.S. had expressed no reservation in naming an ambassador to England or Japan, where the head of state also served as head of the church, "so why particular concern over His Holiness?"<sup>28</sup>

Convinced by his own arguments, Roosevelt selected Myron Taylor to

<sup>23</sup>Zivojinovic, 142.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>26</sup>Papal Encyclicals: *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (On the Doctrine of the Modernists), September 8, 1907; *Praestantia Scripturae* (On the Bible Against the Modernists), November 18, 1907; and *The Oath Against Modernism*, September 1, 1910. All documents are found at the website of papal encyclicals <[www.geocities.com/papalencyclicals](http://www.geocities.com/papalencyclicals)>.

<sup>27</sup>Russell Hittinger, "The Future of the Papacy: A Symposium," *First Things: The Journal of Religion and Public Life* (March 2001): 28-36.

<sup>28</sup>George Q. Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism: Catholics and American Diplomacy, 1937-1945* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1976), 112, 113, 117.

serve as his "personal representative" to the Vatican. Without designating Taylor an ambassador, Congress would not be called upon to confirm the appointment and thus could not thwart the President's designs. And, as Chairman of the U.S. Steel Corporation, Taylor could well afford to personally finance his trips to, activities in, and stay at the Vatican, again circumventing required Congressional approval for allocation of federal expenditures.<sup>29</sup>

Although cognizant of the public's nonsupport of U.S.-Vatican relations, Roosevelt was not prepared for the strong and immediate opposition to his appointment. To some, the naming of a representative to the Vatican, however unofficial it was intended to be, implied U.S. support of the pope's claim of being Christ's representative on earth; some saw the move as prophetic, aligning America with the "beast power"; many declared this alliance as having total disregard for the separation of church and state, while still others argued that a temporal power engaging a religious power to be contrary to tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Opposition to formalizing U.S.-Vatican relations became somewhat muffled by World War II efforts. But, by 1946, during a July meeting with President Harry S. Truman (1945-1953), a sizeable number of Protestant clergy emphatically reaffirmed their displeasure over the continuance of Roosevelt's personal representative to the Vatican. They held that since the war had ended, there was no longer need of a relationship with the Vatican. Yet Truman's position on the Vatican harmonized with that of his predecessor. He would discontinue the post "only when peace reigns all over the world."<sup>31</sup>

In a letter to his wife, Bess, dated October 2, 1947, Truman wrote that he had "sought to talk to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Lutheran Church, the Metropolitan of the Greek Church at Istanbul, and the Pope. I may send him [Myron Taylor] to see the top Buddhist and the Grand Lama of Tibet. If I can mobilize the people who believe in a moral world . . . we can win this fight."<sup>32</sup> By this fight, he meant halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, caring for the growing number of refugees, addressing human rights, global warming, and growing concern over the illegal drug trade.<sup>33</sup>

Truman's July 15, 1950, correspondence with Taylor reiterated the unofficial status of his diplomatic relationship with the Vatican. It reads in part:

So I invite you again to go to Europe. I ask you to resume with such leaders as are free to talk with you, the possibility of a common peace effort among free people. Your mission will be personal and quite informal. You will go without rank or any official commission, as an American citizen of goodwill

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 105-107.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>31</sup>Manhattan, 390.

<sup>32</sup>Letter, Harry S. Truman to wife Bess Truman, October 2, 1947 (Personal papers, Harry S. Truman Library).

<sup>33</sup>Abigail McCarthy, "Active Duty: L. Boggs, Envoy to the Vatican," *Commonwealth* 125, January 16, 1998, 8-9.

seeking to enlist leaders in religion of various and varying allegiances in a quest for peace. We have no other objective. . . . It is my earnest hope that you will continue to discuss with men of open minds—wherever you find them—whether leaders in church or state or civic affairs generally, the possibility of a meeting here in our Capital City to lay the groundwork for peace and to promote good will among men.<sup>34</sup>

Repeatedly, Truman called for “men of good will” to renew their resolve to reset the foundation toward an “enduring peace organized and maintained in a moral world order.”<sup>35</sup>

The President thought to underscore his commitment toward world peace by making permanent and official America’s relations with the Vatican. On October 20, 1951, Truman sent the name of Mark W. Clark to the Senate for confirmation as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United State to the State of Vatican City. Yet Congress adjourned that same day, having taken no action on the appointment. An informal survey of the Senate revealed that only nine of the ninety-six members would have supported confirmation<sup>36</sup> and, more likely, the nomination would have died in the Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>37</sup> The Senate held apprehension over the position, disdain for the person having been nominated, and, accordingly, never did act on the nomination.

Truman keenly felt what he described as “sectarian rebuffs” and Congressional controversy over the idea. Moreover, the nomination of a U.S. ambassador to the Vatican haunted his 1952 presidential race,<sup>38</sup> just as it had in the election of 1884 between candidates Grover Cleveland and James Blaine,<sup>39</sup> and would become a central, overriding issue when Roman Catholic candidate John F. Kennedy bid on the presidency.

### *United States and Vatican Relations: The Cold War Era*

Opposition to formal ties with the Vatican persisted throughout subsequent administrations. The Southern Baptist Convention sent word to the newly elected Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) that its seven million Baptists in twenty-two states and the District of Columbia “unanimously join in the

<sup>34</sup>Letter, Harry S. Truman to Myron C. Taylor, July 15, 1950 (Folder Confidential Files, Box 83, Myron C. Taylor Papers [1], Dwight D. Eisenhower Library).

<sup>35</sup>Letter, Myron C. Taylor to Pope Pius XII, December 13, 1949 (Folder Confidential Files, Box 83, Myron C. Taylor Papers [1], Dwight D. Eisenhower Library).

<sup>36</sup>George J. Gill, “The Truman Administration and Vatican Relations,” *Catholic Historical Review* 73 (1987): 408-423.

<sup>37</sup>Gerald Fogarty, *The Vatican and the American Hierarchy from 1870-1965* (Germany: Anton Hiersemann, 1985), 330.

<sup>38</sup>Roland Flamini, *Pope, Premier, President: The Cold War Summit That Never Was* (New York: MacMillan, 1980), 32.

<sup>39</sup>Stokes and Pfeffer, 330.

earnest hope, based on the conviction that religious liberty and the separation of church and state are the foundation stones of our democratic way of life, that the new Administration will not renew any form of diplomatic relations with the Vatican or any other ecclesiastical body.”<sup>40</sup>

Despite these sentiments, there were a few who voiced support for the initiative. David Beck was one who urged Eisenhower to appoint a United States diplomatic representative to the Vatican. Although a non-Catholic, this Teamster’s Union President stated, in an August 11, 1954, meeting with the President, that America was failing to take advantage of the Vatican’s remarkable intelligence system. Eisenhower agreed that “the United States has more to gain from Vatican recognition than did the Vatican itself” yet, he concluded, “the political problems associated with such an action are too great.”<sup>41</sup>

The international community was confronting countless challenges, and with these crises, the need for closer collaboration. There was the U.S. engagement in the Vietnam War beginning in 1955, Fidel Castro’s 1959 takeover in Cuba, and Cold War tensions building in Europe, eventually leading to the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall.

Eisenhower’s position was concretized in a March 26, 1954, letter from his Special Counsel, Bernard Shanley, to William Lippard of the Associated Church Press. “You will be interested to know,” wrote Shanley, “that at present there are no plans to establish representation at the Vatican.”<sup>42</sup> And throughout his administration, Eisenhower held firm to his position, never engaging the Vatican in discussions beyond perfunctory ceremonial duties, such as the October 1958 funeral of Pope Pius XII and the subsequent enthronement of Pope John XXIII.

It was one thing to contemplate U.S. relations with the Vatican and quite another to accept the idea of a Catholic moving into the White House. John F. Kennedy’s pursuit of America’s highest political office framed religion as a tough and persistent theme throughout the whole presidential campaign. A group known as Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State demanded that each of the candidates declare their positions on the diplomatic recognition of the Holy See.

In a statement in *LOOK* magazine in early 1959, John F. Kennedy articulated his views. He saw diplomatic relations with the Holy See as counterproductive because of the divisiveness that would result from the nomination of an ambassador. Further, Kennedy expressed the belief that present methods of

<sup>40</sup>Letter and Resolution, Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to Dwight D. Eisenhower, December 18, 1952 (White House Central Files, OF144-B-2-A, Box 736, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library).

<sup>41</sup>Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1952-1961 (Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 3, Folder: ACW Diary, August 16, 1954 [2]).

<sup>42</sup>Letter, Bernard M. Shanley, Special Counsel to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, to William B. Lippard, Executive Secretary, The Associated Church Press, March 26, 1954 (White House Central Files, OF 144-B-2-A, Box 736, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library).

communicating through the Embassy in Italy would serve him well.<sup>43</sup> These oft-sought and repeated assurances throughout the campaign proved sufficient to win Kennedy the election (1961-1963), and he struck one as remaining seemingly committed to his campaign position on U.S.-Vatican relations.

But, as Kennedy made his way to his first audience with the newly elected Pope, Ralph Dungan, a veteran of Kennedy's presidential campaign, proposed the return of Roosevelt's personal representative to the Vatican. "You know, Mr. President," chimed in Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "I think the time has come when we should certainly think about establishing diplomatic relations with the Holy See. It would be beneficial." Kennedy made the rather terse reply: "Maybe the time has come for someone else, but it isn't right for me, the first Catholic president. If Harry Truman, a Baptist, didn't feel he could do it, I certainly don't."<sup>44</sup> The Pope had hoped otherwise. As Roland Flamini describes it,

Pope Paul VI summoned the archbishop of Boston to the Vatican Palace to ask him what topics President Kennedy would want to discuss at his papal audience. . . . The Pope was full of praise for Kennedy and expressed great pleasure that his first official visit should be with the President of the United States. He said he wanted to discuss world peace with the President, and to make a statement on racial discrimination. He also wanted to transmit words of encouragement to [Catholic] Church schools in the United States which were then in the throes of a congressional battle to win federal funding. . . . Well, Cushing replied, such subjects . . . carried strong political implications. "I strongly recommend that any problem of national significance be avoided."<sup>45</sup>

Following Cardinal Cushing's advice, Pope Paul VI only hinted in conversation with Kennedy about the idea of reestablishing diplomatic ties, but it was Diulio Andreotti, the Vatican's Minister of Defense, who unhesitatingly pursued the subject. While accompanying Kennedy to place a wreath at Italy's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Andreotti questioned: "You feel you cannot take the step [to establish diplomatic ties] because you are a Catholic, a Protestant president would have little interest in doing so because he is not Catholic, so who will?" To this Kennedy rejoined, "If I'm re-elected in 1964, I'll do it in my second term."<sup>46</sup>

#### *United States and Vatican Relations: The Vietnam War*

An assassin's bullet prematurely ended Kennedy's chance at a second term and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency. The Johnson administration (1963-1969) was particularly sensitive to the Pope's open criticism of U.S. fighting in Southeast Asia. Papal encyclicals had frequently spoken out against global military aggression. Thus, in the spring of 1965,

<sup>43</sup>Flamini, 24.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 197-198.

Johnson sought an audience with Pope Paul in an effort to gain the Pontiff's support of America's position in the Vietnam War or, at least, to gain his aid in easing international tensions. Unbeknown to the President, the Pope had already begun activating prelates in Cambodia, the United Nations, and elsewhere in an effort to bring about a cease-fire.<sup>47</sup>

Neither Johnson nor his staff underestimated the key role that the Vatican played in international affairs and, as such, the issue of diplomatic ties with the Vatican resurfaced. The National Security Council's declassified memos provide Nathaniel Davis's arguments in favor of establishing relations based on the facts that:

(1) Increasingly the Vatican is an active force, pressing for peace negotiations in Vietnam. . . . (2) Relations with the Vatican would strengthen America's worldwide peace image. It would be a demonstration of America's concern for the moral opinion of mankind. (3) Relations would remove the anomaly of the United States, along with the Soviet Union and Red China, being among the very few powers which fail to maintain relations [with the Vatican]. (4) With the increasing ecumenical spirit in American Protestantism, relations with the Vatican would have considerable support among the Protestant churches associated with the National Council, although *not* with the Southern Baptists and fundamentalists. (5) Recognition would be welcomed by the American Catholics as an important step, taken by a Protestant President, and the removal of a long-standing and senseless indignity. (6) Relations with the Vatican would facilitate cooperation in matters like the Cardinal Mindzenty case. There is no doubt that the Vatican is involved in political situations throughout the world where United States interests are deeply affected. (7) The Vatican would be a source of information about conditions in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. We would have access to one of the important diplomatic capitals of the world. (8) The President's decision would be historic, a landmark among the overall accomplishments of this Administration.<sup>48</sup>

According to Davis, "the Holy See is prepared to become fully engaged in world affairs."<sup>49</sup> Reasons against establishing full diplomatic ties with the Vatican, he claimed, were few. They included:

the anticipated opposition from Baptist stronghold states; channels of discreet communication with the Vatican already exist by way of Ambassador Rhinehart in Rome; it might compromise the Vatican's neutrality in the Cold War; the American Catholic hierarchy might see the proposed formalization of diplomacy as a downgrading of their intermediary work between the U.S. and the Vatican; and a U.S. diplomatic office at the Vatican would need to assume the arranging of approximately 65,000 Papal audiences each year.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 216-218.

<sup>48</sup>Memo, Nathaniel Davis to W. W. Rostow, October 13, 1966 (National Security File, Country File, Vatican, Volume 1, Box 231, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library).

<sup>49</sup>Memo, Nathaniel Davis for the President, December 27, 1966 (National Security File, Country File, Vatican, Volume 1, Box 231, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library).

<sup>50</sup>Memo, Nathaniel Davis to W. W. Rostow, October 13, 1966 (National Security

Although the facts seemed to support a move toward formalizing ties with the Vatican, Johnson never took any such action, relying rather on personal visits and communiques.

The Vietnam War persisted three months into his presidency, Richard Nixon (1969-1974) visited the Vatican. Like Johnson, he hoped to gain support for further intensification of America's military engagement in the war. However, on that occasion, the Pope blamed the lack of a regular and official channel with Washington as a reason for his failed attempts at resolving the Vietnam conflict. But Nixon was keenly aware of persistent public sentiment at home against formal engagement with the Holy See.

Nixon's audience with the Pope generated a bevy of correspondence from religious groups, among them, the Baptists. With measured forethought, they transmitted their dissent of U.S. representation to the Vatican via "the President's personal friend, Billy Graham."<sup>51</sup> Both the American Lutheran Church<sup>52</sup> and Seventh-day Adventists<sup>53</sup> spoke out in opposition. President Frank Gigliotti, National Vice-Chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals, representing forty-four Protestant denominations, weighed in as well against the appointing of a U.S. representative to the Vatican.<sup>54</sup> The United Church of Christ's *Mayflower Church Bulletin* questioned, "Why doesn't the President send an envoy to the World Council of Churches' headquarters in Geneva?"<sup>55</sup>

Other voices of dissent from the religious community included Henry Van Dusen, President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, New York. During a speech at Princeton, Van Dusen claimed: [W]e thought that the matter [of an envoy to the Vatican] had been settled once and for all in 1951 when, you will recall, President Truman nominated General Mark Clark for such an appointment but withdrew the nomination before congressional consideration

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File, Country File, Vatican, Volume 1, Box 231, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library).

<sup>51</sup>Letter T. W. Wilson, Associate to Billy Graham to Dwight L. Chapin, Special Assistant in Charge of White House Appointments, June 23, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>52</sup>Telegram, Fredrik A. Schiotz, President of the American Lutheran Church, to President Richard M. Nixon, March 3, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>53</sup>Letter, Kenneth H. Wood, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Editor, *Review and Herald Magazine* to President Richard M. Nixon, June 10, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>54</sup>Letter, Rev. Frank B. Gigliotti, Vice-Chairman, National Association of Evangelicals, to President Richard M. Nixon, June 15, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>55</sup>Letter along with church bulletin from Pastor Philip W. Sarles of the United Church of Christ, to President Richard M. Nixon, July 8, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

in response to strong representations from church and religious leaders.”<sup>56</sup>

Besides the Protestant religious community, opposition came from private businesses, such as Leslie Brooks & Associates of Oklahoma. They held that the United State should “establish ambassadorships with political entity.”<sup>57</sup> These and like businessmen urged continued use of the Italian Embassy, “just a few blocks away [from the Vatican]” should there be any communication to be had with the Pope.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, protests were received from representatives of Masonic temples,<sup>59</sup> county judges,<sup>60</sup> and from Congressmen, such as H. R. Gross of Iowa, whose brief comment on the President’s proposal to nominate a United States Ambassador to the Vatican was summed up in three words, “Don’t do it.”<sup>61</sup>

Opposition to U.S. political appointments to the Vatican similarly arose from a most unexpected source, the American Catholic hierarchy. While newly appointed Papal Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Jean Jadot, declared that “there is real community only when there is a deep will for communion,”<sup>62</sup> the U.S. Catholic Conference made clear its differing position. Its members held that presidential communication with the Vatican should go through them, not around them, as would be the case with a U.S. Ambassadorship to the Holy See.<sup>63</sup>

The alternative devised by Nixon was to ask that “a series of Cabinet officers call on the Holy Father, and that where possible return visits be made to this country.” The Pope accepted this proposal when Nixon’s staffer, Peter Flanigan, put it forward in July. Thus, between July and mid-December 1969, six calls were

<sup>56</sup>Letter, Henry P. Van Dusen, President Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, to President Richard M. Nixon, March 13, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>57</sup>Letter, Leslie Brooks to President Richard M. Nixon, March 19, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Letter, Floyd R. Kea, Secretary of the Masonic Temple Norview Lodge No. 113, to President Richard M. Nixon, June 18, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>60</sup>Letter, G. F. Middlebrook Jr., County Judge of Nacogdoches, Texas, to President Richard M. Nixon, June 25, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>61</sup>Letter, The Honorable H. R. Gross of Iowa, to President Richard M. Nixon, March 19, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>62</sup>Speech, Most Reverend Jean Jadot, Apostolic Delegate to the United States of America, upon his arrival in Washington DC, July 12, 1973 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>63</sup>Memo, Patrick J. Buchanan to President Richard M. Nixon, March 21, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

paid to the Pope by Nixon's cabinet members.<sup>64</sup> But this system proved ineffective, which might explain why the President ultimately requested Henry Cabot Lodge "to undertake periodic visits to Rome in order to maintain some continuing of our contacts with the Vatican. This will enable us to obtain its views on important international and humanitarian questions and to explain ours."<sup>65</sup>

Henry Cabot Lodge was thought to be an ideal choice for the time. As Nixon's running mate against Kennedy and Johnson in 1960, Lodge could properly represent the President's position on issues. He was also serving as U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, and thus was the best informed regarding the current conflicts in Vietnam. As with Taylor, Roosevelt's personal representative, Lodge agreed to receive no salary for his services, nor have any title or rank conferred upon him, and to maintain no permanent office nor residence in Rome.<sup>66</sup>

Two years into the association, at a June 26, 1972, White House Press Conference, Lodge acclaimed the Pope as being "a definite factor" in helping make possible an increase in the amount of mail that U.S. prisoners sent and received in Vietnam. He further recognized the Vatican as being of "utmost help" in curbing worldwide drug trafficking.<sup>67</sup> Other U.S.-Vatican deliberations at that time included the problems of Biafra and the attempts to alleviate starvation in that country,<sup>68</sup> the mutual concern with regard to political assassinations in developing and advanced societies,<sup>69</sup> the political trend toward communism in Italy's 1970 regional, provincial, and communal elections,<sup>70</sup> and Middle East pressures between Israel and Lebanon as noted in appeals from Egyptian President Nasser to the U.S. funneled through the Vatican.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Memo, Peter M. Flanigan to President Richard M. Nixon, December 12, 1969 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>65</sup>Letter, William E. Timmons, Assistant to President Nixon, to the Honorable William H. Ayres, House of Representatives, July 7, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>66</sup>Letter, Henry A. Kissinger to Reverend Frank B. Gigliotti of the National Association of Evangelicals, July 3, 1970 (White House Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>67</sup>White House Press Conference of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Special Representative of President Nixon to the Vatican, June 26, 1972 (National Security Briefing Book [4], Ron Nessen Papers, Box 63, Gerald R. Ford Library).

<sup>68</sup>Memo, Peter M. Flanigan to President Richard M. Nixon, January 16, 1970 (Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Memo, Peter Flanigan to Henry Kissinger, March 19, 1970 (White Central Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>71</sup>Memo, Conversation of Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of Public Affairs at the Vatican, Peter Flanigan, Special Assistant to President Nixon, Richard D. Christiansen, Second Secretary at the American Embassy, and Monsignor Luigi Dossena of the Council for Public Affairs at the Vatican, May 15, 1970 (White House Central

*U.S. and Vatican Relations: Seeking National  
and International Healings*

Having served as part of Nixon's White House years, President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) was naturally inclined to continue the unofficial services of Henry Cabot Lodge to the Holy See. The Vatican's ever-expanding involvement in world politics was the topic of discussion at a Monday morning White House meeting, April 21, 1975. Discussants included Henry Cabot Lodge, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and President Ford. As the recorded conversation addressed:

The Vatican is particularly concerned about humanitarian problems and the future of the Church in Vietnam in the event that the Communists are victorious. . . . In Portugal, Church bishops—reflecting Vatican unease about Portugal's "fatal slide" toward Communist control—have begun . . . supporting the moderate parties at the expense of the Communists. In the Middle East, the Pope has publically stated his desire that Jerusalem be protected by an international agreement guaranteeing equality of rights for the three religions with interests in the city. . . . Since the beginning of the current crisis on Cyprus last July, the Pope has indicated concern over events there and . . . over the problem of displacing refugees as a result of the war.<sup>72</sup>

Church leaders, such as Associate Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance Carol W. Tiller, hurried off a note to the Office of the President, May 21, 1975, when learning that Ford's proposed European itinerary included a stop at the Vatican, an outcome of the earlier reported White House meeting. Tiller wrote:

I note with interest that President Ford plans to see His Holiness, the Pope, on his next European visit. May I respectfully suggest that the President find time in his schedule to confer, either individually or in a group experience, with the heads of other world religious bodies, such as Lutheran World Federation, Baptist World Alliance, Anglican Consultative Council, Heads of Eastern Orthodox Churches, World Methodist Council, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and World Council of Synagogues. The heads of these bodies are in positions similar in many respects to the position of the Pope.<sup>73</sup>

The President's response was cordial, but Tiller's proposal went unheeded.

In 1977, when self-professed Christian fundamentalist Jimmy Carter won favor with the American electorate, the Protestant community confidently assumed that their opposition to U.S. diplomatic ties with the Vatican would no longer fall on deaf ears. But, to their complete surprise, it was this Southern

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Files FG 1-2, Country File, Vatican, Richard M. Nixon Library).

<sup>72</sup>Meeting, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Personal Representative of the President to the Vatican, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and President Gerald R. Ford, April 21, 1975 (White House Central Files, Country File, Vatican, Box 14, Gerald R. Ford Library).

<sup>73</sup>Letter, Carol W. Tiller to Ralph L. Elliott, Special Assistant to the President, May 21, 1975 (White House Central Files, Subject Files, Box 56, Folder TR 33-5, Vatican City, Gerald R. Ford Library).

Baptist President who appointed David Walters, the first Catholic, as his personal representative to the Holy See. Up to this time, U.S. presidential couriers to the Vatican had been Protestants. Then another Catholic and former mayor of New York, Robert Wagner, succeeded Walters in 1978. Further dismay was uttered by some, given the unlikely sight of the President shaking hands with Pope John Paul II on the South Lawn of the White House in October 1979. While the Protestant clerics found this expression of familiarity with the Pope unconscionable, the news media claimed this openness to have been "nothing short of a miracle."<sup>74</sup>

Despite all these expressions of solidarity and friendship, there still was little indication that the President was ready to establish formal diplomatic ties with the Vatican. Thus, at a time when the Vatican held diplomatic ties with 107 nations, including all the Western nations, the United States remained virtually alone. Even Great Britain had reestablished ties with the Vatican in 1980 after a lapse of 448 years.<sup>75</sup>

#### *United States and Vatican Relations Become a Reality*

By the time of Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989), the issue of U.S. relations with the Vatican had ceased to be a nationally divisive issue, or so it seemed to America's newest leader, as well as to the Congress. The *Congressional Quarterly* identifies Senator Richard Lugar, a Methodist, as sponsoring the amendment that repealed the 1867 law barring U.S.-Vatican diplomatic relations. The amendment was added to legislation authorizing State Department funding for the fiscal year 1984-1985 and President Reagan signed the measure into law on November 22, 1983.<sup>76</sup>

For Reagan, the U.S. government required some measure of cooperation from the Vatican in relation to the threat posed by grass-roots Catholic liberationists in Latin America. Here the nation's political discussions turned from ideological issues about church-state separation to more pragmatic questions such as how to deal with turbulent Catholic-majority states found in America's backyard.

Beyond this, more favorable public response to U.S. representation at the Vatican might have been attributable to the popular and martyred Kennedy, the rising spirit of ecumenical tolerance among mainline Protestants, the growing ethical solidarity of Roman Catholics with evangelicals, particularly over issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and growing secularizing tendencies in Western society. Of equal importance were the positive statements promulgated in canons

<sup>74</sup>Fogarty, 400.

<sup>75</sup>Gerald Fogarty, "Congress Repeals 1867 Ban," *Congressional Quarterly* (December 17, 1983), 2678.

<sup>76</sup>Gerald Fogarty, "Religious Organizations Urge Administration Not to Name Ambassador to the Vatican," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (December 17, 1983), 2677-2678.

of Vatican Council II, referring to Protestants as “separated brethren,” not heretics, and the personal magnetism of both John XXIII and John Paul II.

Thus it was that, on January 10, 1984, the U.S. State Department and the Holy See announced full and formal diplomatic relations. On March 7, the Senate confirmed William A. Wilson, a wealthy Catholic associate of Reagan, and a veteran diplomat and intelligence officer, as the first U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. At the Senate Foreign Relation Committee’s confirmation hearings on Reagan’s nomination, Senator Pete Wilson remarked that “The establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican simply took into account the reality that the Holy See is in many respects a world power with great influence upon the opinions and the lives of a great many people throughout the world and, in particular, in areas where vital American interests are at stake.”<sup>77</sup> Religious groups challenged the action in the U.S. Court of Appeals, pressing their case to the Supreme Court in autumn 1986, but the High Court refused to hear the case.<sup>78</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The American public shared long-standing concerns about national alliances with Papal powers. This uneasiness arose, for some, from a perceived comingling of church and state issues; others were put off by Papal claims to be Christ’s representative on earth and to infallibility. Some individuals reacted based on biblical references to “the little horn power,” while others’ thoughts turned to the Papacy’s religious intolerance in Europe in centuries past.

Despite the public’s reservations, U.S. presidents seemed intent on aligning with the Vatican. The latter occupied a key geographic position close to Europe’s and Asia’s rogue nations, of no small consequence in America’s attempts at intelligence-gathering during World Wars I and II and the Cold War. Furthermore, the Catholic Church contributed vital humanitarian relief on behalf of refugees and war criminals. Consequently, U.S. presidents often found their foreign-policy interests to be better achieved in diplomatic cooperation with the Vatican.

The United States maintained a consular post with the Papal States from 1797 to 1870. But, from 1870 to 1984, the United States was without official diplomatic ties to the Holy See. As a way around public opposition and Congressional disputation, presidents dispatched personal representatives and cabinet members, supplemented by personal visits with the various pontiffs, regarding international affairs. But, on January 10, 1984, for the first time in U.S. history, President Ronald Reagan announced the establishment of full and official diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

This case study provides one example of how the interplay between a nation’s religions and its internal politics can affect its involvement in international affairs.

<sup>77</sup>Letter, Jim Nicholson, U.S. Ambassador the Holy See, to the author, December 18, 2001.

<sup>78</sup>Schmidt, 259-273.