

1917–1923: СВЯТОЙ ПРЕСТОЛ В СИТУАЦИИ ПАДЕНИЯ ИМПЕРИЙ И УСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ НОВОГО МИРОПОРЯДКА

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1917-1923: THE HOLY SEE FACING THE FALL OF THE EMPIRES AND THE RAISING OF A NEW WORLD ORDER

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Поражение Австро-Венгрии и Германии в ноябре 1918 г. не только положило конец Первой мировой войне, но и обозначило крах старого политического порядка как внутри стран, так и на международной арене. В данной статье этот важный поворотный момент освещен под неожиданным углом: основное внимание уделяется неожиданному участнику системы международных отношений — Святому Престолу. Как этот проверенный защитник власти реагировал на политические изменения внутри разных стран? Как опытный актер международной сцены вписался в обстановку «новой дипломатии», воплощенной в личности Вильсона? Опираясь на архивы Ватикана, особенно Конгрегации по чрезвычайным церковным вопросам, а также на печатные источники, автор показывает, что Святой Престол сразу после войны принял прагматическую политику в отношении новых государств, стремясь установить двусторонние отношения. Святой Престол также продолжал осуществлять стратегию, начатую во время войны, реализуя многосторонние действия через дипломатическую сеть, сотрудничая с неправительственными организациями в гуманитарной деятельности... Однако положение Святого Престола оставалось неоднозначным: исключенный из мирных конференций и открыто критикующий новый мировой порядок, он по-прежнему сосредоточивался на собственном проекте христианизации послевоенных национальных и международных обществ.

The defeat of Austria-Hungary and Germany in November 1918 not only put an end to the First World War but also meant the collapse of the old political order on both domestic and international arenas. To question this important turn-

ing point, this article focuses on an atypical actor of the international system — the Holy See. How did this proven defender of the authority react to the political internal changes in various countries? How did this experienced actor of the international scene fit into the setting of a “new diplomacy” incarnated in Mr. Wilson? Based on the Vatican Archives, the Sacred Congregation for the Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs in particular, and on printed sources, the article demonstrates that, far from the backward-looking perspective, immediately after the War, the Holy See adopted a pragmatic policy towards the new States, seeking to establish bilateral relations. The Holy See also continued to pursue the strategy adopted during the War, performing multilateral actions through its diplomatic network, collaborating with non-governmental organisations on humanitarian action... The position of the Holy See, however, remained ambiguous: being excluded from peace conferences and openly critical of the new world order, it remained concentrated on its own project of re-Christianisation of the post-war national and international societies.

Ключевые слова: Святой престол, Первая мировая война, мирные договоры, новая дипломатия, гуманитарная деятельность.

Keywords: the Holy See, World War I, Peace treaties, New diplomacy, Humanitarian action.

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The defeat of Austria-Hungary and Germany in November 1918 officially marked the end of the First World War, while also meaning the collapse of the old political order. From an internal point of view, the values of monarchy, imperial ideology and social multi-ethnicity were ruined in the single States of Europe and of the Middle East. And, from an international point of view, the previous interstate system — the so-called “concert européen”, with its international conferences and balance of power, yet vitiated by secret and offensive treaties — was not governing international relations anymore. To question this important turning point, I will select a broad chronological frame, from the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 to the end of the so-called “peace treaties period” in 1923 (The Treaty of Lausanne), and focus on an atypical actor of the international system: the Holy See. Even though it dates back to the medieval period, and its states were restored by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Holy See is not a mere shadow of the past. Acting less and less as a state¹ and more and more as a spiritual power², after the

¹ Jankowiak, 2007.

² On the new role of the Holy See in the international relations since the pontificate of Leo XIII, see Ticchi, 2002: 239–262.

loss of the Papal States and the temporal power in 1870, the Holy See nonetheless continues to cultivate diplomatic relations with the fourteen States on the eve of the World War¹ and, during that War, often intervenes with intrusive actions, ensuring humanitarian aid for the civilians and prisoners of war, organising prayers for peace or encouraging a peace-building process².

To study how the Holy See perceived the fall of the Empires, I will examine internal political changes in various countries before moving on to research the new international order.

1. Pragmatism and bilateralism: the Holy See facing new political regimes

In this part, I will question the emergence of new States, most of them of republican nature and with new frontiers. Facing these great changes, does the Holy See keep focused on the past, staying loyal to the ruling dynasties and the monarchical regimes?

1.1. Encountering new States: a surprising openness?

Fairly quickly did the Holy See accept the contacts with the new States that had emerged on the ruins of the empires. The first cases are obviously related to the Russian Empire. In December 1917, the recognition of independent Finland is justified, in a reunion of cardinals, by the consensus of the various States on this issue³. In Poland, an “apostolic visitor” was appointed in April 1918: Mgr Achille Ratti (the future pope Pius XI)⁴. In doing so, the Holy See recognizes *de facto* the Polish State, which will be only proclaimed in November. However, Ratti would be officially appointed as a Nuncio in June 1919, that is at the end of the Versailles process⁵. More generally, the Holy See pursues two policies in this period: openness to the self-determination process⁶ and respect of the decisions of the peace conferences, the authority of which is fully recognised, especially regarding the

¹ In 1914, fourteen States have a representative in Rome and the Holy See has twelve diplomatic representations abroad (nuncios or internuncios): *Annuario Pontificio*, 1914, pp. 552–555.

² Latour, 1996; Pollard, 2000; Renoton-Beine, 2004; Melloni-Cavagnini-Grossi, 2017. The great progresses made in the study of the peace initiatives of the Holy See must not lead us to forget the interventions of the Vatican diplomacy to defend the specific interests of the Church, even opposing to certain States, as Imperial Russia in the case of Constantinople: Morozzo della Rocca, 1993. On the feigned neutrality of the Holy See and its “germanophilia”, see Lacroix-Riz, 1995.

³ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Rapporti delle Sessioni*, N°1216, 1918, proceedings of the reunion of the cardinals, 08.04.1918, 2. *Lituania — Riconoscimento della Lituania*.

⁴ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Rapporti delle Sessioni*, N°1215, 1918, proceedings of the reunion of the cardinals, 03 or 04.04.1918, p. 18.

⁵ Pease, 2009: 1–29; Morozzo della Rocca, 1996.

⁶ The letter — preceding the Armistice — of Benedict XV to cardinal Kakowski clearly states the position of the Holy See, that is a support to self-determination for the “nationalities (...) formerly subjected to the Russian Empire” 15.10.1918, in *La Civiltà cattolica*, 07.12.1918 (69-4-1643), pp. 430–431, translated from Italian.

Baltic States and Ukraine¹. One may think that this attitude towards the collapse of the tsarist empire could be explained by the tensions between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Empire: this is true to a certain extent, as cardinal Gasparri, at a reunion of cardinals on the 15th of July 1917, defined the “Russian revolution” as “providential”².

However, the Holy See also implements this policy of openness to the nationalities on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which the Vatican had close ties with³. The most significant source is the letter of Benedict XV to Gasparri dated November, 8th 1918, after the Armistice of Villa Giusti between Italy and Austria (November, 3rd), in which the Pope writes that the Holy See “admits without difficulty the legitimate political and territorial changes”⁴.

This attitude is not really surprising because, since the end of the 19th century, the popes had been underlining that the Church was a “perfect society” (*societas perfecta*) which could go along with any kind of political regime, if the latter preserved the “divine rights” of the Church (performing Liturgy, teaching its doctrine...). In addition, we may recall an increasing recognition of the “national idea” under Benedict XV, which was the development of the national genius even within a new and independent political frame⁵. His famous motto “Nations do not die” dated July 28th, 1915⁶ and the “aspirations of peoples” in the “peace note” of August 1917 were clearly mentioned as an important basis for the future peace⁷.

The major consequence of this openness was fast creation of an extensive diplomatic network in Europe⁸, which allowed the Holy See to strengthen more specific relations with lands which were previously mostly approached through Vienna. For example, we can note the popular Hungarian enthusiasm when nuncio Schioppa arrived in Budapest in 1920⁹.

¹ Pettinaroli, 2015: 271-273.

² S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Rapporti delle Sessioni*, N°1207, 1917, proceedings of the reunion of the cardinals, 15.07.1917, pp. 9–10.

³ Engel-Janosi, 1958–1960.

⁴ Letter *Dopo gli ultimi*, Benedict XV to Gasparri, 08.11.1918, in *Actes de S.S. Benoît XV*, tome I, p. 204 (translated from French).

⁵ Cf. Alix, 1962: this pioneer book underlines the pragmatism of the Holy See but also the priority given to the interests of the Church in front of the various forms of nationalism.

⁶ https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati.html (26.07.2019).

⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, IX (1917), pp. 417–420. <http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/en/magisterium/benedictxv/1august1917.pdf> (26.07.2019).

⁸ Between 1919 and 1933, nine States of Central Europe opened official diplomatic relations with the Holy See (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Germany, Reign of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), the first six in 1919–1920. See de Marchi, 1957.

⁹ Érszegi 2016: 103–105.

1.2. *The monarchical deal: care for the crowned heads
and recovery of dethroned sacredness*

Regarding relationships of the Holy See with the political regimes themselves, many historians have pointed out the solidarity between Pope Giacomo Della Chiesa (himself from a noble Italian family) and the crowned heads, in particular with Charles I who was a sincere Catholic (and was beatified in 2004)¹. The help provided to the family of Charles and Zita after November 1918 is renowned, and I will rather recall the diplomatic mission led by Mgr Pacelli (at that time nuncio in Bavaria) for the family of the Russian tsar (also canonised — by the Orthodox Church — in 2000). In August 1918, as it was not clear yet who exactly had been shot, the Vatican Secretary of State intervened to encourage the release and extradition of the women of the imperial family — the wife of the tsar and their four daughters². For the Hohenzollern, let us recall that the *Civiltà cattolica* (the journal of the Roman Jesuits which was biased to the position of the Secretary of State) criticized the idea to judge Wilhelm II, because the Entente would be both the judge and the jury³.

In fact, within the international action of the Holy See, these interventions for the crowned heads were anecdotes. More important was the strong moral support offered to the bishops of the defeated countries in 1919 and 1920⁴ and, interestingly, its reinvestments of the dethroned royal sacredness. Historian Rupert Klieber has shown the effort to capture the “legitimist” affection in the Austrian lands and to transfer them to the Sovereign Pontiff⁵. The Pope coronation ceremony, which took place during the reign pontificate Pius XI, on February, 12th, was observed with great devotion in Austria since its first edition in 1924. More generally, we can point out that Pius XI strongly insists on the spiritualisation of the monarchical principle, with his motto “Pax Christi in Regno Christi” and the emphasis on the feast of Christ-the-King (encyclical *Quas Primas*, 1925⁶).

However, the Papacy did not only lament the situation of the crowned heads and of the defeated countries, it developed pragmatic efforts to fit into the new map of Europe.

¹ Rumi, 1990; Gottsmann, 2007.

² S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, Russia, pos. 983, fasc. 348, f. 67: telegram of Gasparri to Valfrè di Bonzo, 11.08.1918, N°189 and f. 68: telegram of Gasparri to Pacelli, 11.08.1918, N°190. See also ASV, *Arch. Nunz. Berlino*, b. 29, fasc. 3, f. 6: ciphred telegram of Gasparri to Pacelli, 09.08.1918, N°124. For more details, see Pettinaroli, 2015: 281–282.

³ *La rivoluzione sociale e suoi prodromi negli ultimi trattati di pace*, in *La Civiltà cattolica*, anno 70, 1919, vol. III, quad. 1661 and 1662, 06 and 20.09.1919, pp. 337–352. On this issue, see Fattorini, 1992: 167–168.

⁴ For example: the letter *Diuturni luctuosissimque* to the German bishops of July 15th, 1919 (*Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, 1919 — Septembre 1920*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 56–59); the letter to card. Csernoch of September 11th, 1919 (*Ibid.*, pp. 60–62); the letter to cardinal Piffl, archbishop of Vienna and to the bishops of Austria of November 26th, 1920 (*Actes de Benoît XV (1914–1922). T. III (octobre 1920–1921)*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 30–31).

⁵ Klieber, 2013: 699 sq.

⁶ *Actes de S.S. Pie XI, tome III (années 1925–1926)*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1932, pp. 63–93. See also Bouthillon, 1996.

1.3. *The new map of Europe: a long process of adjustment*

The map of Europe changed drastically after the War. Some changes offered great opportunities to the Catholic Church. In Poland, for example, the Holy See quickly nominated bishops for the vacant dioceses, as these vacancies were often due to tensions with the Russian Government, as in Lublin, Kamenec or Vilna¹.

However, other changes were more problematic and provoked diplomatic interventions of the Holy See. The seizure of the German colonies at Versailles worried the Holy See, which meant to preserve the missionary work: an emissary was sent to the Peace Conference — Mons Cerretti achieved certain success². Let us also mention the Palestine question here: after happiness caused by the “liberation” of Jerusalem in 1917, the setting of the British mandate and of the Jewish national home raised great fears in Rome and Popes Benedict XV and Pius XI frequently spoke for the rights of the Christians in their public speeches between 1919 and 1923³.

In addition to these interventions of a clear religious origin, the Holy See also used political and humanitarian reasons to intervene. In January 1921, Benedict XV wrote a letter in which he pointed out that new Austria — a fruit of the peace treaty of Saint-Germain with a population of 6 million inhabitants, one third of which lived in the city of Vienna — could not provide for itself; the Pope urged the “governments (...) especially those that append their signature to the peace treaty” to find “a practical solution to this problem”, defined as a “unique and awful situation”⁴. Let us also mention the case of Montenegro which was integrated in the new Reign of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes: in August 1921, with crude details, the *Civiltà cattolica* sharply denounced the atrocity committed against the civilians by the Serbian Army and the abandonment of the “little oppressed nations” by the Entente⁵.

Particularly, the new map of Europe and of the Middle East obliged the Holy See to face the ecclesiastical consequences of the collapse of the empires and to fill in the gaps between the frontiers of the dioceses and those of the new States. This complicated work took years to be accomplished and lots of negotiations with the new States. Besides, the 1920s and 1930s were also a period of high tensions between nationalities inside the Catholic Church itself: Rome being the superior

¹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1918 (10), pp. 451–452.

² De Marco, 1990; Croce, 1997.

³ Mayeres-Rebernik, 2015: 137–191.

⁴ Letter of Benedict XV to Gasparri, “La singolare”, January 24th, 1921, in *Actes de Benoît XV (1914–1922). T. III (octobre 1920–1921)*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 62–63, translated from French.

⁵ *Il grido di dolore delle piccole nazionalità oppresse*, in *La Civiltà cattolica*, anno 72, 1921, volume III, quad. 1707, 06.08.1921, pp. 245–248.

authority, the Vatican archives preserved lots of materials on these issues. The case of the archdiocese of Esztergom, in the north-east of Budapest, is a good example of these tensions. After the peace treaties, the See remained in Hungary, but the most important part of the diocese was in Czechoslovakia. At first, the Hungarian cardinal Csernoch nominated a general vicar for the “Czechoslovak” part of his diocese, giving him very little powers. Then, in 1921, for this part of his diocese, Csernoch had the project to nominate two apostolic administrators with more power, one for the Hungarians and one for the Slovaks. But Rome did not agree to this linguistic and national division of the Church, which should have traditionally been territory-wise: in 1922, the Holy See transformed the general vicariate in Trnava into an apostolic administration and, in 1925, entrusted a bishop, Pavol Jantausch, with it. This situation remained stable until 1939¹.

1.4. *With the new States: the “concordat” way of negotiating*

To resolve these dedicated problems, the Holy See adopted the same strategy in most of the countries of the Central Europe, starting negotiations for concordats — bilateral agreements systemizing the whole State and Church relations in each country². However, the situation was not *tabula rasa*. Almost all “successor” states of Austria-Hungary tried to preserve the concessions the Holy See had granted to the Empire (Concordat of 1855), in particular the “right of patronage”, which was the right conceded by Rome to the King to present the candidates to the ecclesiastical benefices, like the episcopate³. To solve the problem, Benedict XV affirmed in his speech to the cardinals on November 21, 1921 that the former concordats had been definitively worthless, and that the new states had to negotiate new ones⁴. During the interwar period, almost all new states of the Central Europe opened concordat negotiations with the Holy See, sometimes encountering great difficulties⁵, but with a global success: eleven concordats or *modus vivendi* were signed between 1922 and 1935⁶.

Thus, the Holy See pragmatically adapted to the new political situation and to the new map of Europe, trying to defend the interests of the Catholic Church, sometimes on humanitarian grounds. Its answer to the increasing number of States was the development of bilateral diplomatic relations and the conclusion of concordats

¹ We here follow the analysis of Hrabovec, 2013.

² Minnerath, 2012: 61–71.

³ Zanotti, 1986: 153–156.

⁴ *Actes de Benoît XV (1914–1922). T. III (octobre 1920–1921)*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 105–109, especially pp. 105–106.

⁵ Salmič, 2015.

⁶ Latvia 30.05.1922; Bavaria 29.03.1924; Poland 10.02.1925; Rumania 10.05.1927; Lithuania 27.09.1927; Czechoslovakia (*modus vivendi*) 17.09.1927/02.02.1928; Prussia 14.04.1929; Bade 12.10.1932; Austria 05.06.1933; German Reich 20.07.1933; Yugoslavia 25.07.1935. See Mercati, 1954.

in a clearly forward-looking perspective. However, to face some bigger issues, the Holy See did not restrict itself to a bilateral prospective but also got involved in multilateral activities.

2. The collapse of the Empires and the “new diplomacy”: the incomplete adaptation of the Holy See to the new multilateral order

In the second part, I will describe how the Holy See adapted to the new international system, increasingly marked by multilateral dynamics. The Holy See which, since the pontificate of Leo XIII, had integrated the ideas of arbitrage and disarmament¹, seemed very close to the Wilsonian principles. During this period, however, it remained in an ambivalent position: on the one hand, as an outsider of the peace conferences, the Holy See sharply criticizes the new world order; on the other hand, it got involved in humanitarian action, pioneering the multilateral governance of world affairs.

2.1. Affinity with the Wilsonian “New diplomacy” and support to the multilateral peace-building process

The peace ideal promoted by Benedict XV in his famous peace note of August 1917 is close to Wilson’s (disarmament, commercial liberty, recognition of the people’s will of self-determination...)². Besides, the Catholic propaganda frequently underlines the fact that the peace note was published six months before the “fourteen points” presented by President Wilson in January 1918³.

In this context, historians note a brief “Wilsonian wave” in the history of the Papacy: already begun during the World War, it reached its peak at the turn of 1918–1919 (in January 1919, Wilson even paid a visit to the Pope) and collapsed rapidly during the Peace Conference in Paris⁴. At the reunion in Rome on November 3rd 1918, Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli sets high hopes for the “creation of new systems” (a league of nations, arbitration, the end of militarism...) which would be “the very principles proclaimed by the Holy Father”⁵. In line with this perspective, the Holy See always supports the multilateral peace-building process in its official statements. On December 1st, 1918, Benedict XV calls to pray for the

¹ Ticchi, 2002.

² See Ticchi, 2002: 368–374, see also Canavero, 2017, Houlihan, 2017, Cavagnini, 2017, Boniface, 2017.

³ For example, following the journal of the Roman Jesuits, the ideas of Wilson were successful among the Christian audience, not because they were “new” but only because the field had been prepared by the previous appeals of the Pope (*L'appello di un protestante al Papa per la ristaurazione del diritto internazionale*, in *La Civiltà cattolica*, anno 70, 1919, volume I, quad. 1646, 18.01.1919, p. 89–96, especially p. 93–94).

⁴ Bressan, 1990 ; Scottà, 2009: 327–333.

⁵ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Rapporti delle Sessioni*, N°1224, 1918, Proceedings of the session of November 3rd 1918, f. 532^v, translated from Italian.

Peace Conference¹; in the Encyclical *Pacem* (May 23th, 1920), he recognized the importance of the League of Nations to prevent war and reduce militarism²; in November 1921, the Pope underlined the importance of the Washington Conference on naval disarmament³. Even in April 1922, the newly-elected Pope Pius XI prayed for the “happy outcome” of the Genoa conference, which would “bring together the victorious and the defeated countries in the Pacific talks”⁴.

2.2. Political and religious criticism of the new world order

Despite the firm support to the multilateral peace-building process, the Holy See did not participate in the peace conferences and the new League of Nations. This is not by choice: the Holy See was excluded from the peace conferences, because of the explicit will of Italy — which wanted to resolve the “Roman question” in a bilateral way — to put down in the London Agreement of 1915⁵. However, this exclusion soon appears to be an opportunity to remain outside a shaky process. On November, 3rd, 1918, Cardinal Gasparri, the Secretary of State, considered the invitation of the Holy See to the Peace Conference as an “absurd” hypothesis and, anticipating a bad peace elaborated by the victorious nations, concludes that in any case the Holy See should sign it⁶.

Being an outsider also enables one to criticize the treaties. The Holy See denounces a failed peace, a peace without reconciliation which entertains militarism. In December 1919, a speech to the cardinals highlights the severity of the treaties: for the defeated countries, the treaties should have been “a fair punishment and not the road to destruction”⁷. The encyclical *Pacem* (May 23rd, 1920) underlines the fact that “there can be no stable peace or lasting treaties, though made after long and difficult negotiations and duly signed, unless there be a return of mutual charity to appease hate and banish enmity”⁸. In a more direct way, the comments on

¹ Encyclical Letter of December, 1st, 1918, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_01121918_quod-iam-diu.html

² Encyclical *Pacem, Dei munus*, May 23th, 1920, in *Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, (1919 — Septembre 1920)*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 132–147, especially pp. 143–144.

³ Consistorial Allocution, November 21st, 1921, in *Actes de Benoît XV (1914–1922). T. III (octobre 1920–1921)*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 105–109, especially pp. 105–106.

⁴ Autograph letter of Pius XI to Mgr Signori, archbishop of Genova, 07.04.1922, in *Actes de S.S. Pie XI, tome I (années 1922–1923)*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 36–37, cit. p. 36, translated from French. On the Genoa Conference, see Croce, 2002.

⁵ Miranda, 2009; Marchisio, 2017.

⁶ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Rapporti delle Sessioni*, N°1224, 1918, Proceedings of the session of November 3rd 1918, f. 550^v–551^r.

⁷ Speech to the Sacred College, December 24th, 1919, in *Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, 1919 — Septembre 1920*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 111–114, cit. p. 114.

⁸ Encyclical *Pacem, Dei munus*, May 23th, 1920, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_23051920_pacem-dei-munus-pulcherrimum.html (29.07.2019).

this encyclical published in the *Civiltà Cattolica* criticized treaties built on “harsh exclusions”, in which “the true peace and prosperity of the peoples doesn’t take the precedence over the *egoistic* and *nationalistic* reasons of politics”¹. And again, in April 1922, Pius XI reminded that “the best guarantee of tranquillity is not a forest of bayonets, but mutual trust and friendship”².

Focusing on the issue of reconciliation, the popes progressively moved from a political criticism of the treaties towards a religious one. In an interesting encyclical on saint Boniface addressed to the German bishops, a week after the publication of the peace conditions of Versailles (May 14th 1919), Benedict XV insisted on the necessity to restore the rights of God and of the Church and to unite the peoples with “a stronger treaty”, which could only be the “unity of the faith”³. From this perspective of re-Christianisation of Europe, the encyclical *Pacem* of May 1920 appealed for a league of “States united under the Christian law”, inspired by the Catholic experience of the international governance⁴. In December 1922, Pius XI pointed out the failure of the League of Nations and offered that the Catholic Church take the international leadership to promote peace⁵.

The strong criticism — indissolubly political and religious — of the treaties is also made possible by the new authority gained by the Holy See in various international actions.

2.3. Humanitarian action: the Holy See, a leading actor in multilateral collaborations

Immediately after the War, the Holy See committed itself to several humanitarian actions, using the potential of their diplomatic and financial networks. In 1919–1920, the Holy See intervenes to the benefit of the Prisoners of War of the central empires, blocked in Siberia (cc. 200.000 men). As early as in January 1919, the Holy See provided a multilateral diplomatic action, despite its contacts with the Entente in Washington, Rome and Paris⁶. In December 1919, the president of

¹ *La pace e la carità sociale nella Enciclica Pacem Dei*, in *La Civiltà cattolica*, anno 71, 1920, volume II, quad. 1680, 19.06.1920, pp. 502–515, cit. p. 514, translated from Italian.

² Autograph letter of Pius XI to Mgr Signori, archbishop of Genova, 07.04.1922, in *Actes de S.S. Pie XI, tome I (années 1922–1923)*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 36–37, cit. p. 36, translated from French.

³ *Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, 1919-Septembre 1920*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 49–50.

⁴ http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_23051920_pacem-dei-munus-pulcherrimum.html, § 18 (29.07.2019).

⁵ Encyclical *Ubi Arcano*, December 23rd, 1922, in *Actes de S.S. Pie XI, tome I (années 1922–1923)*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 136–179, cit. p. 161.

⁶ The Secretary of State intervenes with the apostolic Delegate in Washington, the British representative in Rome and the cardinal of Paris: S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Austria*, pos. 1425, fasc. 570, f. 47: ciphered telegram of Gasparri to Bonzano, 13.01.1919; f. 48: Gasparri to the count of Salis, 14.01.1919, Seg. Stato N°85487; f. 49: Gasparri to Amette, 14.01.1919, Seg. Stato N°85489.

the International Red Cross Committee, Gustav Ador, also asked Benedict XV for help on this issue¹ and the Holy See gave official support to raise public awareness². In January-February 1920, new diplomatic interventions were again made through Italy³ and the United States⁴.

At the same time, the Papacy also got engaged in humanitarian action for the children of the Central Europe. In November 1919, the Pope launched an appeal to donations and for special prayers to be held in all Catholic churches on the feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28th)⁵. In January 1920, Benedict XV asked for collaboration with similar initiatives, being led by Herbert Hoover and by the humanitarian organisation Save the children⁶. Later on, in December 1920, the action was renewed, and a letter of Pope Benedict publicly mentioned Save The Children, to which the Catholics were encouraged to make donations⁷.

In a similar way (cooperation with humanitarian organisations, which symbolise a new world order also composed of non-state actors⁸), let us also recall the launching in 1921 of an action against starvation in Russia. On August 5th 1921, answering the public appeals of the Soviet Government, Benedict XV underlined the “necessity of a rapid and efficient concerted action”⁹. The Holy See immediately launched a global intervention, through its diplomatic network, to “promote a mutual action of the civilized States”¹⁰. Interestingly, for its donations, the Holy See chose to work with humanitarian groups such as Save the Children, Fridtjof Nansen and the International Red Cross Committee, rather than participating in a committee launched in Paris with the “Allied States”¹¹, which would not

¹ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Svizzera*, pos. 551, fasc. 296, f. 24: Gustave Ador to Benedict XV, Geneva, 16.12.1919.

² The *Osservatore romano* published the letters of Ador and Benedict XV, the latter been said to be “perfectly in line” with the IRCC: *Il Santo Padre pei prigionieri internati in Siberia*, in *L'Osservatore romano*, 02.01.1920 (60–2), p. 1. See also Pettinaroli, 2015: 282–286.

³ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Austria*, pos. 1425, fasc. 571, f. 63–64: Gasparri to Nitti, Vatican, 04.01.1920, №B-554.

⁴ The Holy See, while thanking President Wilson to have sent ships for the Czecho-slovakian, Polish and Yugoslav soldiers, asks for similar help for the German, Austrian and Hungarian soldiers: the telegram to Wilson is transmitted to the Apostolic Delegate in the United States: S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Austria*, pos. 1425, fasc. 571, f. 74 : ciphred telegram from Gasparri to Bonzano, 16.02.1920, №87.

⁵ Encyclical Letter *Parterno iam diu*, November 24th, 1919, in *Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, 1919 — Septembre 1920*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 73–77.

⁶ Letter of Benedict XV to Herbert Hoover, January 9th, 1920, in *Actes de Benoît XV. Tome II, 1919 — Septembre 1920*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1926, pp. 115–116.

⁷ Encyclical *Annus Iam plenus*, December 1st 1920, in *Actes de Benoît XV (1914–1922). T. III (octobre 1920–1921)*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1927, pp. 32–38, cit. p. 33.

⁸ See Cabanes, 2014.

⁹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 08/09.08.1921 (61–187), p. 1, translated from Italian.

¹⁰ S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Russia*, pos. 1023, fasc. 370, f. 32: Gasparri to the ambassadors, ministers and *chargés d'affaires* to the Holy See, 12.08.1921, №24162, translated from Italian.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 13: ciphred telegram of Gasparri to Cerretti, [no date].08.1921.

have pleased the Soviet government¹. It is on this occasion that Benedict XV, approached by William MacKenzie, a member of Save the Children², applied directly to the League of Nations, asking for interstate support to the Nansen committee³.

Despite these three examples, right after the War, the Holy See clearly appeared as one of the most agile actors of the new international system, able to work with both state and non-state partners in order to promote multilateral operations.

Conclusion

Far from a backward-looking perspective, soon after the War the Holy See adopted a pragmatic policy regarding the new States, seeking to establish bilateral relations and to seal official agreements with them. Apart from this traditional diplomacy, the Holy See also continued to experiment with new ways of being present in the international field, launching multilateral actions through its diplomatic network, collaborating with non-governmental organisations on humanitarian actions, taking contacts with the League of Nations... However, the Holy See did not fully fit in the new international order: excluded from the peace conferences, it remains at distance in order to promote its own religious perspectives and its project of re-Christianisation of the post-war national and international societies.

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¹ *Ibid.*, f. 16: telegram of Ador, Geneva, 09.08.1921.

² S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., III, *Russia*, pos. 1023, fasc. 371, f. 34: William Andrew MacKenzie to Maglione, Geneva, 13.09.1921.

³ *Ibid.*, f. 36–37: Benedict XV to Van Karnebeek, president of the Assembly of the League of Nations, 19.09.1921. The telegrams of Benedict XV and Van Karnebeek were published in the *Osservatore romano: Il Santo Padre per la Russia affamata*, in *OR*, 25.09.1921 (61–227), p. 3. More generally on the Holy See and the League of Nations, see Araujo-Lucal, 2004, especially pp. 131 *sq.* The Holy See also directly intervened to the League of Nations on the issue of Palestine in 1922.

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