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Vatican Foreign Relations with Latin America since Independence

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Summary and Keywords

Vatican foreign relations with Latin America comprise both bilateral diplomatic negotiations with states and the Holy See's spiritual leadership of national Catholic Churches in the region. Apostolic nuncios—papal diplomatic representatives—are the principal intermediaries of Vatican foreign relations. Since the early 19th century, Vatican diplomacy has been the purview of the Papal Secretariat of State, the “foreign relations” branch of the Roman curia.

The beginning of modern Vatican foreign relations with Latin America should be dated to the Napoleonic wars in Europe and the movements for home rule in Spain's colonies. From 1810–1820, the papacy stood unwavering in its defense of Spanish absolutist claims to the peninsula and to its colonies. Latin American Independence shattered Spanish Royal Patronage and left a legacy of regalism in the region, with which the ultramontane papacy of the 19th century would contend. The professionalization of the Vatican diplomatic corps (1889–1914) conformed papal diplomacy to the norms of the international state system, incrementally increasing the political and spiritual legitimacy of the Holy See after its loss of temporal power to the Italian state, sparking the so-called “Roman Question” (1870–1929).

During the interwar period, Vatican policy centered on concordats and Catholic Action, evincing both a pragmatic approach to diplomacy and a highly regimented and non-party political model of lay activism. Mexico's Cristero Rebellion (1926–1929) represented the most strident conflict in the period, where Rome's concordat/Catholic Action policy neither negotiated a durable *modus vivendi* nor managed to pacify radical lay Catholics until the 1940s. During the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958), a strident anti-communism marked the policy of the Holy See, aligning the Catholic Church in Latin America with conservatives and authoritarian leaders. After the Second Vatican Council

(1962–1965), the policy of *Ostpolitik* guided diplomats towards rapprochement with communist and revolutionary states such as Cuba and Nicaragua.

The end of the Cold War temporized the relationship between progressive sectors in the Latin American Church, which had been influenced by Liberation Theology, and the Vatican under John Paul II (1978–2005). A “New Evangelization” campaign was heralded by Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013). Argentine Jesuit and Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio crafted many of the seminal documents for the New Evangelization. Bergoglio, elected Pope Francis in 2013, emphasized the socio-economic and the spiritual aspects of Vatican policy, bring issues of poverty, economic inequality, and justice to center stage, fostering a diplomacy of *piccoli passi* (small steps) and brokering improved relations between the United States and Cuba.

Keywords: Vatican, Holy See, church and state in Latin America, Catholic Action, concordats, ostpolitik, papal nuncios, apostolic delegates, Cristero Rebellion, liberation theology

Modern Papal Diplomacy

The Vatican is an entity like no other in modern international relations. The Roman Catholic Church is not a monolithic entity, composed as it is, of a variety of ordained leaders (archbishops, bishops, priests, male and female religious, etc.) and the non-ordained laity. The pope is spiritual head of the Roman Catholic Church worldwide *and* head of a sovereign state—Vatican City—a tiny autonomous territory in the heart of Rome. The pope today is leader and pastor to some 1.2 billion Catholics; roughly 40 percent live in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Holy See, the official term covering the office of the papacy and its administration, maintains diplomatic relations with 180 nations.¹ No other international organization, world religion, or nation-state lays claim to the same dual legitimacy, both spiritual and political.

Curiously, the political legitimacy of the papacy does not rest primarily on its temporal sovereignty. The settlement establishing Vatican City is relatively new. The Lateran Accords of 1929 carved out a state for the pope, thereby solving a fifty-nine year standoff known as the “Roman Question”—a dispute instigated by the loss, in 1870, of the pope’s temporal power to liberal Italy. Even during these rancorous decades, when the popes had no state to call their own, the Vatican maintained a foreign service. While the political reputation of the Holy See certainly diminished during the period—at its nadir Rome had diplomatic relations with just fifteen states in 1878, eight of them in Latin America—papal bureaucratic reform and centralization of spiritual control over the lives of Catholics worldwide increased.² As Pollard writes, “after 1870, the popes took upon

themselves more and more the task of laying down to the Catholic hierarchy, clergy, and laity of the world rules and regulations regarding not only matters of spirituality, religious doctrine, and discipline, but political, economic and social issues as well.”³ During the crisis of European total war, the Vatican leveraged its moral authority to an unprecedented degree in relation to its actual political standing. Pope Benedict XV (1914–1922) negotiated with the Great Powers for peace during the First World War. His 1917 “Peace Note” went unheeded, but the intervention set a firm precedent whereby the papacy has, ever since, endeavored to broker international agreements and peace settlements. By 1922, at the time of Benedict’s death, diplomatic relations had increased to twenty-five states; the number inched to thirty-eight states before Europe and the world once again plunged into war in 1939. After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) in 1973, seventy states had established diplomacy with the Holy See. The number skyrocketed during the pontificate of John Paul II (1978–2005), especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union: 144 states by 1993.⁴ Thus, while the creation of Vatican City certainly made the diplomatic and political functions of the papacy easier, its creation was not the basis for recognition granted by secular nation-states, but the symbolic acknowledgement of a legitimacy that continued to be operative even throughout the period of the Roman Question, and which only increased thereafter.

The political and diplomatic legitimacy of the papacy can best be described as *sui generis*, established by the fact of its existence, buttressed by its longevity, durability, and continuity. Today, twenty-eight states in Latin America and the Caribbean have formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican.⁵ Not all states now recognize the Holy See in its dual spiritual/political capacity, nor have they in the past; indeed many Latin American nations refused to establish diplomacy with the Vatican. For example, after independence, the Holy See first established bilateral relations with Brazil in 1829, followed by Colombia in 1835. While Brazil maintained uninterrupted relations with Rome, Colombia broke its diplomatic ties in 1853, reestablished a less formal relationship in 1881, and an apostolic nuncio was only permitted in 1917.⁶ The on-again-off again relationship between the Vatican and Latin American states is perhaps an ironic fact of history, given that the region is often stereotyped as a perennial Catholic stronghold. Irony or not, the fact that the Vatican has played a pronounced, even tumultuous, role in the history of Latin America since independence makes the Holy See an important topic of study for students and scholars of Latin American foreign relations, and of Latin American religion generally.

Vatican diplomacy is an anomaly in the international state system. As an international power it has different aims and different mechanisms for carrying out these aims. The Holy See’s aims are not primarily political, but cultural in nature, endeavoring to “promote spiritual and humane values” and “to establish the hegemony of these values”

when possible.⁷ Politics, for the Holy See, is a continuation of religion by other means. The Holy See does not today recognize war as a mechanism of policy, although this has changed over time. The Vatican's enemies and allies are defined according to its cultural and spiritual mission; its enemies are those institutions, ideologies, and indeed historically, states that challenge its spiritual objectives; its allies are those cobelligerents who "can assist it to achieve its goals of cultural hegemony."⁸

In Latin American perspective, the Holy See's principal "enemies" from the early 19th century have been regalism, liberalism, revolutionary anticlericalism, atheistic communism, religious competition (principally of the Protestant variety), and secularization. If the Vatican's enemies have been clear, its allies have been tenuous and problematic: the colonial state, conservatives and their political projects, unruly and rebellious lay Catholics, dictators and authoritarian powerbrokers. It was the painful history of the failures of these allies to deliver on the promise of a confessional state that led to a gradual reassessment of Vatican strategy in Latin America, and indeed elsewhere worldwide. Liberal democracy was the first redeemed enemy after the Second World War. Only with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, when the principle of religious freedom was accepted as a guiding lodestar in the Church's relationship to the modern world, did the Holy See relinquish its vision of the confessional state.⁹ It was then that the moral legitimacy of the Vatican developed in earnest, now able to weigh in on issues of poverty, international justice, and peace, without the need to defend the state as an ally crucial to its institutional survival.

Vatican diplomacy differs from its secular equivalents in another crucial aspect: the ambassadors of the Holy See—papal nuncios—carry a dual mission: they serve as accredited representatives of the Vatican to secular states *and* spiritual representatives of the pope to the national churches to which they are sent.¹⁰ The study of Vatican foreign relations thus requires a triangular vision: one side leading from the Vatican to secular nations; the other side from the Vatican to national churches; the final side between state and church. Within each of these relationships, power is negotiated and multidirectional. And in reality, the power dynamics between national churches and the Vatican have always been extremely complex. But over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, an increasingly transnational identity of the Church in Latin America emerged, further complicating the Vatican's foreign relations with states and with Catholics in the region. Over the *longue durée*—if such a term is apt for a period of two hundred years in relation to the Catholic Church's two thousand year history—the papacy has endeavored to control power in the ecclesiastical ranks, wary of relinquishing diplomatic negotiations to lay activists, Catholic politicians, or other intermediaries besides those of its choosing, namely its papal nuncios.

Origins of the Papal Nuncio and the Vatican Secretariat of State

Papal diplomacy evolved in tandem with the development of the spiritual and temporal powers of the popes. As early as the 5th century, under Leo the Great (440–461), papal legates had residence in the imperial courts at Constantinople. From this tradition evolved a system whereby the Roman pontiffs tasked local bishops—*legati nati*—as permanent papal representatives of the pope in their realms. The popes conceded the *legati nati* special ecclesiastical powers and functions; they became the pope’s proxies across the vast distances that separated Rome from the reaches of Christendom. The special role granted to the *legati nati* survives today in the office of “Primate”: archbishops with preeminence over their fellow prelates in national hierarchies. Gregory the Great (1073–1085) developed a new category of papal representative, distinct from the homegrown *legati nati*: the *legati missi*, or “sent legates.” The most common *legati missi* were the *legati a latere* (“legates from the pope’s side”), given special instructions from Rome, and viewed as more loyal to the popes than resident legates, who could be swayed by local concerns over and above the prerogatives of papal mandates. The *legati a latere* were sent on an ad hoc basis; the office would become honorific over time, and is still used today, albeit infrequently, often for special envoys sent to international gatherings, Eucharistic congresses, and the like. By the 13th and 14th centuries, a new category of papal representative emerged, *nuntii apostolici* (“apostolic nuncios”), which would form the foundation for modern papal diplomacy. These “apostolic messengers” were originally tax collectors, sent from Rome to requisition funds for the papal court. Eventually, they were given ecclesiastical tasks and became more fixed in nature, taking on a pronounced diplomatic role. During the second half of the 16th century, their function as papal representatives to the sovereigns of Western Europe became more permanent, as the incipient state system expanded.¹¹

Modern papal diplomacy took shape in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, with the new balance of power among European states established at the Congress of Vienna (1815). During the pontificate of Pius VII (1800–1823), the pope established a special artery of the Secretariat of State, the Holy See’s bureaucratic channel for dealing with issues concerning Church and state. Revolutionary anticlericalism in France, and the Napoleonic adventure that followed, most notably the forced Concordat of 1801, confirmed to Pius VII and his successors the need for a more astute and organized diplomatic front. The special artery was organized as the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (*Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari*, or SCAES).¹² The Cardinal Secretary of State—the “Foreign Minister” in analogous terms—headed the congregation as its prefect. The SCAES became the first section of the Secretariat of State; the second section was for “ordinary affairs,” or issues

without a pronounced civil aspect that still fell under the purview of the Secretariat. This would remain the basic structure of Rome's diplomatic bureaucracy until Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) reorganized the Secretariat of State in 1967 with the Apostolic Constitution, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*. At that time, the SCAES was renamed the Council for Public Affairs of the Church. In 1988, John Paul II (1978–2005) further reorganized the Secretariat of State, this time rechristening the foreign relations branch as the second section, while the department for ordinary affairs became the first section, a complete reversal of the previous institutional structure. Whatever the precise nature of the organizational schema—the SCAES, the Council for Public Affairs of the Church, the second section of the Secretariat of State—this Vatican artery, composed of a group of select cardinals, a support staff of Roman curial undersecretaries, and the Papal Secretary of State as prefect, has directed the foreign relations of the papacy since the early 19th century. The papacy's foreign policy was debated, refined, and implemented by this Vatican department, including relations with Latin America.

Latin American Independence and the Ultramontane Papacy in the 19th Century

Latin American independence provoked a profound battle between competing visions of sovereignty in Church-state relations. For over three hundred years, the Spanish crown had controlled the administration of the Catholic Church in its colonies, a right conceded by the papacy to the Spanish monarchy in what became known as the Royal Patronage of the Indies (*Patronato Real de la Indias*). As Hebblethwaite describes, “the first ‘Vatican Policy’ towards Latin America consisted in leaving it all to the Spanish (and later Portuguese) Crown.”¹³ The characterization is an overstatement, but it does capture the unprecedented powers delegated to the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs over the Catholic Church in their colonial dominions. Royal Patronage meant that the Spanish state oversaw episcopal appointments, administration of religious and sacramental life, and support for the institutional Church. Especially in the 16th and 17th centuries the colonial Church operated with a good deal of latitude in terms of clerical discipline, parish regulation, and devotional culture. By the 18th century, the absolutist monarchs of France, Spain, and Portugal had enlarged the powers of the state, enveloping religious matters and consolidating power in the name of a newly emerging idea of indivisible sovereignty. A number of ideological, and indeed geographical, manifestations of state supremacy emerged: Gallicanism, Febronianism, Caesaropapism, Regalism, Erastianism, and Jurisdictionalism.¹⁴ While certainly evincing differences, at root these movements all challenged papal claims to sovereignty over both temporal and spiritual issues. To increase wealth and centralize power, the Spanish Bourbon state endeavored to

subordinate the American Church in a much stricter way in the late colonial period (c. 1750–1810). Even while the papacy fought in Europe against the trend of Catholic absolutism, in Spanish America the Bourbon regime’s claim over the colonial Church strengthened, providing a legacy of regalism with which the 19th century pontiffs would have to contend.

Latin American independence resulted in the destruction of Spanish colonialism in the majority of the region by 1825. After independence, as colonies became republics, the new Latin American states worked to maintain the right to administer the Church under a system of national patronage (*patronato nacional*). The papacy, for its part, rejected this regalist claim of the Spanish American republics, arguing that the concessions provided in the royal patronage had been precisely that: concessions given to the Spanish colonial regime for the good of religion, for the conversion of its peoples to the faith, and the administration of its resources in the establishment of an institutional presence. For its part, the papacy argued that these concessions had ended with the Spanish colonial project.¹⁵ Thus, with the removal of Spanish colonialism, the era of Vatican foreign relations with Latin America began in earnest.

The problem of regalism vexed papal policy in the decades following the recognition of Latin American Independence. Regalism, however, was not unfamiliar to the papacy. At least since the reign of Louis XIV of France, the Holy See’s problem in Europe was dealing with Catholic absolutist monarchs and their claims to the indivisibility of state sovereignty: the refusal to recognize the Church as an autonomous entity within national borders. In Latin America, early 19th-century caudillos, military leaders with popular support and authoritarian power, represented rough equivalents to European absolutists. Caudillos such as Antonio López de Santa Anna (Mexico), Simón Bolívar (Gran Colombia), and Juan Manuel de Rosas (La Plata, later Argentina) endeavored to control the machinery of state, centralize power in the executive, and claimed a measure of “divine right”: Santa Anna demanded the title “His Most Serene Highness”; Rosas had his portrait and that of his wife hung above the altars of many of the republic’s churches.¹⁶

Attacks on religion, such as would come from anticlerical liberals in the late 19th century, were not Rome’s chief worry in the aftermath of independence; rather, absolute state control of the Church, especially represented in national patronage—the power to appoint bishops—was the central problem for the papacy. Early organic laws of the fledgling republics, and later initial constitutions, upheld the Catholic religion as supreme, lending the national churches a monopoly, but at the cost of state supremacy over appointments of the clergy.¹⁷ Negotiations between the papacy and Latin American governments broke down over national patronage; in some countries, national patronage was abandoned, as in Mexico under Santa Anna, while in others, such as Argentina, national patronage remained a perennial tradition. Thus, in the first twenty-five years after independence, a

strong continuity existed between the Spanish Royal patronage, and its national inheritance. The shift from a predominantly regalist Latin American tradition, to an ultramontane church, was generational. Ultramontanism, referring to the principle of papal power and primacy in the affairs of the Catholic Church, emerged unevenly in 19th century Latin America, but grew steadily with the rise of the liberal state in the region, and in tandem with ultramontanism's growth in global Catholicism.

The rise and development of the ultramontane papacy in Europe had important effects on Rome's foreign relations with Latin America. On the one hand, the ultramontane papacy made gains in conforming the sacramental life of the Latin America church to a European norm. On the other hand, Rome faced Church-state disestablishment and growing secularization throughout the region: losing control over civil registries, marriage, and education. Pius IX's election as pope in 1846 seemed to herald positive relations between Rome and the liberal nationalist impulses of the era. However, these hopes were dashed when Pius IX refused to support Italian nationalists' petitions for a papal condemnation of the Franco-Austrian intervention in the peninsula, which postponed the loss of the papacy's temporal power.¹⁸ Thereafter, Pius rejected the Italian *Risorgimento*, and with it, the proposed ideologies behind it; liberalism being the chief culprit among them. The papacy's slackening grip on temporal power produced an intransigent, unbending policy towards liberal nationalism. To the Holy See, the Italian national takeover of the Papal States in 1861, and finally, the loss of Rome to the new Italian State in 1870, signaled the historical manifestation of the worst ills of the so-called modern world to the pontiff. Pius IX rejected both the Italian threat and the ideologies propelling the loss of Christendom. A flurry of papal condemnations fulminated from Rome in the 1850s and 1860s. The encyclical *Quanta cura* (1864) and its attached compendium of pernicious ideologies—the “Syllabus of Errors”—named the exact insidious ideas threatening the Catholic world. Pius IX condemned the idea that “the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”¹⁹

Papal intransigence represented one side of the anti-modernist stance of the ultramontane papacy. The other side was the increasing claim of spiritual supremacy demanded by the Holy See, the teaching and theological legitimacy of the papacy in Europe, and indeed, throughout the Catholic world. New devotions and dogmas were proclaimed (e.g., the Immaculate Conception of Mary, 1854), as well as the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. Canonists developed a new branch of study—public ecclesiastical law—to combat the neo-regalism of the liberal state. The canonists defined the Church, not as a state per se, but as a “perfect society,” an autonomous and self-sufficient power in its own right.²⁰ But the pope, shorn of his temporal power, was on the defensive, claiming after 1870 to be a “prisoner in the Vatican,” held hostage by the pretensions to illegitimate authority of the Italian state. The

foreign relations of the Holy See slackened as a result, maintaining diplomacy with just fifteen states in 1870, over half of them countries in Latin America.

The ultramontane and anti-modernist framework provided the lens through which the Holy See viewed relations with Latin American states. Securing the rights of the Church through negotiated settlement was of first priority. However, the papacy under Pius IX was cautious in signing concordats—official Church-state treaties—with Latin American states because the governments often continued to claim national patronage, and often made it the *sine quo non* of signing concordats. In addition to nuncios, Vatican diplomacy in the mid-19th century relied on special missions sent to negotiate with Latin American states. The Vincentian Bishop Joseph Rosati carried out the most successful missions in Haiti.²¹ But securing some legal protection for the Church became necessary to the papacy, even if not ideal, because the threat from liberal radicals seemed a larger problem. Thus, even as Pius IX solidified his intransigent and ultramontane position in Europe, the Holy See negotiated a large number of concordats in Latin America. Treaties were signed with Bolivia (1851), Guatemala (1852; 1884), Costa Rica (1852), Haiti (1860), Honduras (1861), Nicaragua (1861), El Salvador (1862), Venezuela (1862), Ecuador (1862; 1882), and Colombia (1887; 1892). The ecclesiastical treaties confirmed Roman Catholicism as the official religion of state. They usually provided financial assistance to the Church hierarchy and its institutions. And, crucially, concordats stipulated that Catholic education be taught in state-supported schools.²²

Success in these negotiations was paralleled with difficulties elsewhere. The liberal revolution in Mexico, in 1855, followed by disestablishment under President Benito Juárez, heralded the modernist impulse loathed by Pius IX closer to home in Europe. Pius IX condemned Mexico's Reform Laws and the 1857 Constitution for the liberal assault on Church property, legal privileges, and the right of priests to exact fees for the sacraments.²³ As in Mexico, religious education, marriage, and baptismal registries—the state's establishment of Catholicism itself—was under threat by emerging liberal governments throughout the region. As a result, diplomatic relations were severed between the papacy and Colombia (1853; resumed 1881), Mexico (1861), Argentina (1884; resumed 1900), Chile (1882; resumed 1902), Ecuador (1901; resumed 1937), Paraguay (1884; resumed 1919), and Uruguay (1884; resumed 1939). Mexico would not formally recognize an apostolic nuncio until 1992. The new threat from liberals indeed threatened the diplomatic sovereignty of the papacy as a recognized entity in international affairs. However, the liberal rejection of regalism solidified the ultramontane control of the papacy over spiritual matters. Now the papacy was given a free hand in communicating directly with the national hierarchies of Latin America; the popes no longer had to gain permission to publish papal documents as was common in the era of regalism, and often the papacy was able to establish new dioceses and

ecclesiastical institutions such as seminaries. The unforeseen upshot of the liberal attack on the Catholic Church in Latin America actually aided a process of Romanization in the late 19th century, fueled by new European religious orders and bishops trained at the Latin American Seminary in Rome. In 1899, the Latin American Plenary Council, held in the Eternal City, established new pastoral and sacramental guidelines for the region, to conform the Church in Latin America to an emerging global Catholic norm established by the ultramontane papacy.²⁴

The Professionalization of the Vatican Diplomatic Corps

The professionalization of the Vatican diplomatic corps during the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878–1903) marked an important step in conforming certain aspects of the papal Foreign Service to the conventions of modern civil diplomacy.²⁵ As Graham put it, papal diplomacy “grew up in its turn as a practical way for conducting the business of the universal Church in the existing state of international society.”²⁶ Reform and professionalization focused on two main tasks; first, streamlining the diplomatic ranks of papal representatives, adapting them to the contemporary conventions of modern diplomatics; and, second, establishing a structured training program for future papal diplomats.

The new ranking system revealed the extent to which the Vatican Foreign Service was desired by the papacy to have a professional operation and bureaucratic muscle, which paralleled the foreign service of modern states.²⁷ In 1889, Papal Secretary of State Mariano Rampolla della Tindaro published the retooled diplomatic hierarchy. Apostolic nuncios, first and second class, were to have full ambassadorial functions, recognized as such by the states to which they were sent; it signified that the state would duly name an ambassador to the Vatican. The rankings of first or second-class nuncio usually simply referred to the importance of the diplomatic post, or the longevity of the nunciature, the name given to the papacy’s foreign consulates. Apostolic internuncios ranked below nuncios; the rank of internuncio corresponded to “ministers plenipotentiary” in civil diplomatic usage. Apostolic Delegates followed on the ranking system and signified ecclesiastical envoys not recognized as diplomatic functionaries by the states to which they were sent, although the Vatican used them as fully-accredited agents to negotiate Church-state relations should state governments oblige. Officially, they were only envoys to the national hierarchies, but often were active in civil negotiations. Lastly, the office of *chargé d’affaires* was used as an interim position, should a nuncio be transferred elsewhere, or as happened occasionally, a nuncio should die unexpectedly. The secretary of the nunciature, or apostolic delegation as the case might be, usually took on the role of *chargé d’affaires* in the absence of an officially appointed diplomat. Support staff was also

detailed in Rampolla's regulation, including a secretary, the *uditori* (literally "listeners"), *minutanti* (office personnel), and the like.²⁸

In 1900, Papal Secretary of State Rampolla, with Leo XIII's approval, spelled out the education for aspirants to the Vatican Foreign Service in a new document. The training program highlighted the need for nuncios to have a broad intellectual and spiritual formation: doctorates in both civil and canon law, initiated in Holy Orders, educated in ecclesiastical history, law, and proficient in French, and at least one additional language. The Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy of Nobles in Rome was slated as one of the preferred institutions where future nuncios would learn the craft of modern papal diplomatics. For one hundred years, from 1850–1950, the Academy trained "approximately 374 students [...], including 23 future papal representatives, 21 cardinals, at least five junior officials in the Roman curia, two Vatican secretaries of state, and three popes."²⁹ Newly minted papal representatives often were first appointed to posts in Latin America, then later promoted to more prestigious nunciatures in Europe, or to staff positions in the Secretariat of State; eventually, they made cardinal if their service was noteworthy. For example, Giuseppe Aversa and Alberto Vassallo di Torregrossa both began their careers in South America—in Venezuela and Argentina, respectively—and were later made nuncios in Bavaria, one of Europe's most important nunciatures. Pietro Gasparri held a post in Ecuador, before being appointed cardinal and later Vatican Secretary of State (1914–1930). The diplomatic sojourn of at least 20 percent of papal representatives in the late 19th and early 20th centuries included assignments in both Latin America and Europe.³⁰ Thus, many of the Vatican's top foreign policy-makers had firsthand knowledge and experience in Latin America.

Vatican Diplomacy in Latin America after World War I

Concordats received new emphasis as instruments for Vatican legitimacy in international affairs during World War I. Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri was the chief architect of this policy. Appointed in 1914 with the election of Pope Benedict XV, and serving until 1930 after successfully reaching conciliation with Italy the year previous, Gasparri fostered a pragmatic, incremental approach to Vatican diplomacy. The Holy See's top diplomat articulated his vision soon after taking office, emphasizing in a 1914 meeting of the SCAES, that concordats, and even lesser agreements such as a *modus vivendi*, were to be actively pursued where and when possible.³¹ According to Gasparri's logic, if some understanding could be reached, some official base established, then this could be a starting point for further, more enduring agreements. The concordat provided a legal mechanism, recognized under international law, for protecting Church rights and preserving Church control over education, ecclesiastical property, and the nomination of

bishops. The revived concordat policy found fertile ground in the aftermath of the First World War. A multitude of new successor states to the dynastic empires of Europe looked to the papacy for legitimacy in the interwar period. Nascent states endeavored to bolster their claims to national identity by appealing to Catholic religion and tradition. In negotiating with the Holy See, the successor states leveraged the papacy's longevity in European international affairs.³²

Gasparri's concordat policy did not have the same success in Latin America as it did in Europe. In the region, only Ecuador negotiated a new concordat with the papacy in the interwar period.³³ Yet the same emphasis on negotiations, even if not achieving a concordat, was applied to Church-state relations in Latin America. The Holy See believed it could proceed even without a concordat given the right circumstances. In Chile, the Vatican managed to secure a favorable separation of Church and state in 1925. Negotiations between Gasparri and President Arturo Alessandri in Rome underscored the Vatican's desire to come to direct agreements with states. In 1928, the Vatican decided not to pursue a concordat with Chile, considering that the disestablishment arrangement would not result in a better settlement.³⁴ Elsewhere in the region, Vatican diplomats formalized relations with the Central American republics of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Panama, as well as with Cuba in the Caribbean.

Reviving the activity of lay Catholics figured as a second crucial aspect in Vatican policy after World War I. The Vatican increasingly looked to its base for allies in meeting threats posed by liberals, anticlericals, socialists, communists, and Protestant proselytism. However, lay activism came with its benefits and its drawbacks. As early as the 1870s, Pius IX saw the tactical benefit of the Catholic Centre Party in Germany in the struggle against Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. Pope Leo XIII recognized the lure of socialism and articulated an emerging social doctrine in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), calling for a Catholic "third way" between liberalism and socialism. Leo further rallied Catholics of the French Third Republic to take part in civic life of that nation. Heeding the papal call to arms, Catholics in Latin America felt justified in strengthening ties between party politics and the Church. What better way to protect Church interests than through political organizations? The Conservative Party in Chile developed closer ties with the hierarchy in the late 19th century, and likewise elsewhere, such as Colombia. In Mexico, in the wake of revolutionary upheaval, Catholics founded their own National Party in 1911. Yet, Catholic activism posed a problem for Vatican policy, as it represented a threat to Rome's diplomacy. Catholic party politics, especially if wedded too closely to the national churches, could derail the Vatican's drive to deal directly, in bi-lateral fashion, with states. With important precedents in the 19th century, both concordats and Catholic activism emerged as the two-sided phalanx of Vatican policy after World War I. The

question became whether and how lay Catholic political activism would support the Vatican's diplomatic assault on the modern world without outflanking it in the process.

With the election of Pius XI in 1922, the concordat-cum-Catholic activism policy crystallized further in a new form of lay activism: the hierarchical, and highly regimented, organization of Catholic Action. Catholic Action, in its new form, avowedly non-party political, came to replace the multitude of modes in which lay activism existed previously. Before Vatican reform efforts, "Catholic action," had been simply a generic catchall, a term ascribed to social reform, religious revival, and even Catholic labor and political activism. The Italian context was key in the increasing development of Catholic Action as a movement separated—at least in discourse, if not always in practice—from party politics. The initial shift came in 1918, when the Italian Popular Party of priest-activist Luigi Sturzo was separated from the associations of Italian "Catholic action." Then, as Pius XI moved closer to conciliation with Benito Mussolini in the 1920s, the organizations of a retooled Catholic Action were mandated to remain "outside and above" party politics.³⁵ Concordats were signed with Italy (1929) and Germany (1933) with this basic configuration: the state would recognize and respect the Church; the cost would require the Church to keep its Catholic Action groups outside party politics. The policy was unevenly implemented throughout the 1920s, especially in Latin America. But by 1931, the Roman Model of Catholic Action was ready for export; superimposed on the existing Catholic movements worldwide.³⁶

The Roman model of Catholic Action envisioned a corporatist organization of the laity: men, women, young men, students, and workers. Each branch would have its parish, diocesan, and national counterparts, with lower clergy and episcopal oversight. The apostolic authority and mandate given to bishops was extended to the laity to participate in Christianizing the world. "The Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ" was the motto of Pius XI's papacy. Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus were retooled to inspire Catholic Action cadres. Catholics were called to "enthron" the Sacred Heart as "Christ the King" in public dedication ceremonies. In 1925, the encyclical *Quas Primas*, published by Pius XI, established a worldwide feast to the new devotion. Christ the King represented a battle of dueling sovereignties: Christ, the model of legitimate earthly authority, versus all secular "Caesars," who pretended to power if not submitted to the rulership of the Savior.³⁷

Nowhere was the tension between Vatican authority vis-à-vis both state power and Catholic lay activism more apparent than in Mexico after the conflict of the 1920s. The Cristero Rebellion represented the most acute point of the conflict, where Catholic activists managed, if momentarily, to outflank Gasparri's diplomatic strategy. From 1926 to 1929, and again sporadically throughout the 1930s, a coalition of rural Catholic actors, townsfolk, and middle class urbanites took up arms against the Mexican government, and

its perceived overreach into the cultural and sacramental lives of its citizens; as many as fifty thousand Catholics were involved in the fighting by 1929. The Catholic rebels took their name from their war cry: “Long Live Christ the King!” Vatican diplomacy prevailed, however, when Rome backed a cease-fire agreement, a *modus vivendi*, negotiated between U.S. Ambassador Dwight Morrow, assisted by two Mexican Bishops (Pascual Díaz of Tabasco, and Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores of Morelia), several U. S. Catholic intermediaries, and the administration of Mexican President Emilio Portes Gil. In June 1929, Catholic worship resumed in Mexico, as during the previous thirty-five months the Mexican episcopate had declared an interdict—a sacramental Church-strike—prohibiting the functions of the Catholic cult in Mexico’s churches and temples. Despite the resumption of sacramental worship, and the cease-fire *modus vivendi*, the anticlerical laws of the 1917 Mexican Constitution were left unchanged. Priests still had to be registered with the government, religious primary education was still outlawed, and public worship was still prohibited. The cease-fire therefore led to renewed conflict and outright rebellion, though far smaller, in the 1930s. Moreover, the trauma of the rebellion left a lasting mark on the Mexican laity, who felt betrayed by its conciliating pastors and misunderstood by the Holy See. The organization of Catholic Action on the Roman model suffered as a result, barely getting off the ground in the 1930s, except for urban centers such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Puebla.³⁸

Vatican Foreign Relations during Latin America’s Cold War

Mexico’s Cristero Rebellion remained the sole exemplar of a Catholic insurgency against an anticlerical regime in Latin America. Yet, secularization continued to pose a threat to the maintenance of the Church throughout the region. Liberalism, as carrier of anticlerical and secular nation building, inspired fear in Latin American bishops throughout the region. Conservative parties in Latin America continued to offer hope for protection against secular liberalism. In Roman Catholicism, conservatives saw their own interests aligned. The Church had been a major force in protecting class hierarchies, elite politics, and landed monopolies. Yet, the mobilization of popular forces, workers movements, socialists, and Communist parties represented a new and imminent threat to the institutional Church. Social Catholics throughout the region sought for an elusive “third way” between liberal capitalism and socialism. To the Vatican at mid-century, conservative politics and arrangements with authoritarian populism, offered promise of at least temporary restoration of Church interests. In Brazil, Cardinal Sebastião Leme negotiated the terms of Church survival with the populist president, Getulio Vargas (1930–1945), as the prelate mobilized thousands of Catholics into an Electoral League, and through cadres of Catholic Action militants.³⁹ In Nicaragua, Vatican officials viewed the assassination of the revolutionary leader Augusto César Sandino (d. 1934) as

lamentable, but the country's new strongman, Anastacio Somoza, held out an olive branch that the Vatican could not pass up.⁴⁰ In 1954, the Vatican negotiated a concordat with Rafael Trujillo, generalissimo and military dictator of the Dominican Republic. In Argentina, Juan Peron's (1946–1955) discourse of tradition and stability wooed the Holy See into support, although this was temporary, as Peron's populism shifted into anticlericalism by the 1950s.⁴¹ In Colombia, the Church hierarchy became party to the chaos and violence that decimated the country from 1946 to 1958. The episcopate found itself allied with the reactionary conservative government of Laureano Gómez who came to power in 1950, during which time local violence against liberals was bolstered with religious zeal from the lower clergy. But the Church hierarchy, backed by the Vatican, publicly distanced itself from his national leadership, urged the clergy to promote peace among combatants, and supported the unification government in 1958.⁴² Elsewhere in the region, the Vatican stood by as Church leaders came to accept Bolivia's National Revolutionary Movement (MNR, *Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario*), which between 1952 and 1953, nationalized mines, expropriated U. S.-owned properties, and was supported by the Communist Party.⁴³ This was partially due to the fact that the miners remained an important supporter of the Church, which allowed the hierarchy to play an intermediary role between workers groups and the MNR.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of WWII, as Cold War tensions mounted, the papacy increasingly aligned with the anti-communism and containment policies of the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Pius XII (1939–1958), a fervent anti-communist, prohibited Catholics from joining Communist parties and restricted the faithful from even reading communist books and literature, with the threat of exclusion from the sacraments. But one tempering factor induced Pius XII to make initial steps toward negotiation with the Soviet Union—the fear of nuclear war. In the realm of partisan politics, Pius XII reluctantly supported the emerging Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America. The Chilean Christian Democratic party, officially established in 1957, was led by a generation of Catholic activists such as Eduardo Frei, whom understood the benefits of separation between the Catholic movement and party politics enshrined in the Roman model of Catholic Action.⁴⁵ In essence, Pius XII's tentative rapprochement with liberal democracy was preferable to the threat posed by an expanding Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, as well as the growth of leftist movements in Latin America.

Under Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), Vatican diplomacy pivoted from Pius XII's anticommunist intransigence, taking up a more pragmatic approach to relations with states, which had characterized the Gasparri era after the First World War. But the context and theological thrust of John XXIII and his successors had changed. As with Gasparri, Pope John signaled openness to negotiations with states, regardless of their ideological content. John XXIII encouraged a strategy of dialogue with the Communist

eastern bloc, “distinguishing between communism as an atheistic creed, with which the church could not compromise, and communism as a social, political, and economic theory, which he deemed a reality that could not be ignored.”⁴⁶ Pope John utilized a rising star in the Secretariat of State, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, as his personal emissary in seeking informal accords with communist governments, negotiating the release of imprisoned clergy and bishops in Eastern Europe, as well as in the nomination of new bishops to those regions. Casaroli led the way to establishing the eastern politics—*Ostpolitik*—of the Holy See, later further developed by Paul VI (1963–1978) and John Paul II (1978–2005).⁴⁷

The Vatican’s *Ostpolitik* developed in a new theological context from the concordat-Catholic Action strategy forged by Gasparri and Pius XI. Pope John’s emphasis on *aggiornamento* (updating) and *aperturismo* (openness) in relation to the modern world represented a complete reversal of 19th century papal intransigence *a la* Pius IX’s “Syllabus of Errors.” Pope John called for a new council to pursue a fresh understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world: Vatican II (1962–1965). The Vatican’s *Ostpolitik* and the openness to the modern world converged in Rome’s assurances to Soviet Premier Khrushchev that the Vatican Council would not explicitly condemn Communism. As a result, Eastern Orthodox bishops were allowed to travel to Rome as observers, and Eastern European bishops joined the council fathers in Vatican II’s sessions.⁴⁸

The three sessions of Vatican II saw the participation of Latin American bishops to some degree, and a new generation of progressives such as Manuel Larraín (Chile) and Dom Hélder Câmara (Brazil) urged the council and Pope Paul VI to focus on issues of poverty. The progressives came of age in a time when Church-state issues lessened in ferocity and a growing awareness of Latin America’s socio-economic underdevelopment came to the fore. Larraín told the pope that “every year more people die of hunger and disease in the Third World than perished in the four years of the Second World War,” while Câmara often repeated that “[Social] development is the number one problem of the Council.”⁴⁹ Two papal documents from the period, *Gaudium et spes* (1965) and *Populorum progressio* (1967), would be applauded by many Latin American bishops and theologians. In the latter, the pope stated that people in the developing world, those suffering poverty and endemic diseases, had the attention of the Church.

Emerging progressive sectors within the national Churches of Latin America took heart from the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II. The 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops meeting in Medellín endeavored to apply Vatican II to the Latin American context, one where an increasing disenchantment with economic developmentalist strategies had given way to a forceful call for liberation. A new pastoral strategy of accompanying the people of God came to replace the rigid hierarchical formulation of Catholic Action. The

progressive turn of sectors within the Church had real effects in social and political activism. A minority of priests embraced revolutionary participation. Camilo Torres, a Colombian priest and labor activist, joined the Army of National Liberation (ELN, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) in 1965. His radical decision to take up arms was short-lived, and he was killed in an ambush during his first military action.⁵⁰ Torres became a divisive figure in Latin American Catholic circles. Yet, although Torres' decision to actively join a revolutionary movement was in the minority, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, priests had established several left-wing groups. ONIS in Peru, Golconda in Colombia, the Priests of the Third World in Argentina, and Christians for Socialism in Chile, represented the most well known. The arrival of new missionary orders such as the Maryknolls also contributed to the progressive trajectory.⁵¹ These groups sought a new relationship between Christianity and socialist-Communist political movements, where many committed believers tried to implement Christian principles in revolutionary projects.⁵² Once again, lay activism in Latin America had the potential to outflank Vatican diplomacy, but this time in a progressive trajectory.

During the 1970s, the nascent liberationist perspective of the progressive sector of the Latin American Church came under attack. This took place from two directions. The first was embodied by the military governments, already in power in the case of Brazil (1964), or that toppled civilian governments in Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973), and Argentina (1976). State terror, leveled against student subversives and radical Catholics alike, resulted in the torture, murder, and disappearance of bishops, priests, and nuns throughout the region. The second attack came from within the Church hierarchy, many of whom had only reluctantly supported the most progressive documents from Medellín. For example, the leadership of the Conference of Latin American Bishops (*Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana*, or CELAM) passed from progressive hands to conservative control under Colombian bishop Alfonso López Trujillo in 1972. However, the violations against both lay and clerical leaders often served to mute the critiques of the Church hierarchy, many of whom felt compelled to protect the lives of their clergy and parishioners. In Chile, the hierarchy came out and denounced the abuses of the regime of Augusto Pinochet; in Brazil, Church leaders took up a similar position. In Argentina, in contrast, the conservative hierarchy, for the most part, remained silent, complicit in the so-called "Dirty War" waged against perceived leftist radicals.⁵³ In terms of Vatican diplomacy, Rome appointed nuncios with a conservative perspective in Brazil (Sabastiano Baggio, 1964–1969), Chile (Angelo Sodano, 1977–1988), and Argentina (Pío Laghi, 1974–1980), whose job was to maintain cordial relations with the military juntas and not to decry its abuses.⁵⁴

In 1979, the stage was set for a confrontation between the liberationists and an increasingly conservative leadership of CELAM. The next plenary session of the Latin

American bishops met at Puebla. The meeting represented rearguard action from the conservative leaders of CELAM to undo the most radical findings at Medellín, especially the extent to which the Church's mission encompassed direct action in promoting liberation. However, the progressives managed to maintain a voice within the delegates, emerging with an official endorsement that articulated that the Church would emphasize a "preferential option for the poor."⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II attended the meeting at Puebla: the first visit of a sitting pope to Latin America. John Paul viewed Latin American liberation theology through the prism of his own experiences in Communist Poland and, after Puebla, oversaw a hardening of the anti-Marxist reaction to Vatican II and Medellín. Over the next decade, the pontiff appointed conservative bishops who shared his distrust of the liberationist position. Under the direction of John Paul's chief doctrinal official, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI, 2005–2013), liberationist theologians felt the brunt of the conservative reaction, especially those who employed Marxian analysis. In 1984, Cardinal Ratzinger published a clear Vatican rebuke of the liberationist movement, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*. Ratzinger chided the liberationist theologians for arguing that Christian love should be offered based on class factors, which excluded some, in particular the rich, from an encounter with Gospel transformation.⁵⁶ Rome increasingly tried to marginalize the movement, sanctioning theologians for their written work in the 1980s and 1990s. The most notorious conflict involved Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian priest, whom the Vatican officially silenced for a year for his ideas on ecclesiology (1985). After the Vatican placed a teaching ban on Boff in 1992, he decided to leave the priesthood.⁵⁷

For the Vatican under John Paul II, aggiornamento had clear ideological limits in terms of the relationship between Catholicism and Marxism. Meanwhile, its foreign relations with states evinced the pragmatic, diplomatic approach. The Vatican's Ostpolitik fostered dialogue with revolutionary regimes in Cuba after 1959, and in Nicaragua after 1979. The Vatican never severed relations with either state, even as national bishops clashed with both revolutionary governments. In Cuba, the diplomacy of *chargé d'affaires* Monsignor Cesare Zacchi enabled the Vatican to remain in contact with Fidel Castro, even as Castro refused to recognize the conservative and counterrevolutionary bishops during the 1960s.⁵⁸ As a younger and more pragmatic hierarchy came to the fore in Cuba after 1969, Castro regularized relations with the Vatican in 1974, and during the 1980s eased religious restrictions on Catholics over the next decade. By 1992, Castro amended the religious articles of the Constitution; by 1998, John Paul's historic visit to the island was heralded as an important step in state-Church relations, though impartial and subject to reversal.⁵⁹

In Nicaragua, Catholic progressive elements played a key role in the Sandinistas' grassroots base of support. The Vatican was forced into an uncomfortable diplomatic

position in that four priests held ministerial positions in the Sandinista government. This led to increased tension with the role of Catholics in party politics, as the revised 1983 Code of Canon Law explicitly forbade clergy from holding secular office. However, through Nicaragua's minister to the Holy See, Ricardo Peter, Vatican officials privately and cautiously sought to temper Nicaraguan conservative bishops such as Miguel Obando y Bravo, even while publicly chastising the Sandinista priests. In 1983, John Paul II, visiting Nicaragua, wagged his finger at one of the priests who held political office—Father Ernesto Cardenal—before the watching international media.⁶⁰

Central America became a battleground in the 1980s. After the Second World War, Christian Democrats provided the main counterweight to traditional rule in El Salvador, but by the late 1970s, the party's leader, José Napoleon Duarte, was marginalized by the military and sent into exile. An alliance of leftist groups, including communists, formed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), and in the wake of the Sandinista victory in nearby Nicaragua, the military stepped in to prevent the spread of revolution. Civil war, repression, and counter-attacks from insurgents plunged the nation into chaos during the 1980s. As in Nicaragua, a similar pattern emerged in El Salvador whereby grassroots Catholic groups became deeply engaged with popular mobilization. Radical priests and lay militants spread the message of Christian liberation in Christian base communities (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*, CEBs), peasant associations, and workers groups, many of which collaborated with rebels and lent support to a nascent Revolutionary Army of the People (EPR, *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*).⁶¹

In 1977, the Archbishop of San Salvador died and a successor was named—Oscar Romero, a consensus candidate, viewed by progressive Catholics as a rather weak choice, a signal that the status quo would continue. However, after a 1979 coup brought a reformist military junta to power, which was quickly taken over by a right-wing faction, violence against rebels and church people alike increased. The Jesuit Rutilio Grande, a close friend of Romero, was an early victim of the violence. Romero increasingly spoke out against abuses, disappearances, and torture. Moreover, Romero criticized American foreign policy in the region, pleading that weapons not be sent to his nation, which had only served to increase the new wave of terror. In one homily, broadcast on the radio to a nationwide audience, Archbishop Romero called for an end to hostilities:

We want the government to understand seriously that reforms are worth nothing if they are stained with so much blood. In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!⁶²

His oppositional stance toward the military resulted in his assassination in 1980, while saying mass. Evidence indicates that his killer was connected with the right-wing party

ARENA (Republican Nationalist Alliance). With Romero's death, a new archbishop, Arturo Rivera Damas, continued to oppose military violence as well as leftist terrorist atrocities. With the end of the Cold War, Rivera managed to retain confidence among a wide array of Salvadorans, which enabled his mediation in peace negotiations.⁶³

Guatemala's revolutionary history stretched from the 1950s to the mid-1990s. Two important features distinguished it from both Nicaragua and El Salvador. First, Guatemala contained a majority indigenous population, and native communities suffered under decades of political repression and violence. Second, Protestant evangelization was particularly successful in the country, especially in the post-1945 era, leading to a marked participation of evangelicals in civil war. When President Jacobo Arbenz nationalized foreign-owned land, held by the United Fruit Company, in the early 1950s, a CIA-backed coup installed a military regime.⁶⁴ In the following decades, both leftists and moderate opposition forces were seen as an existential threat to order and stability. Often, rural areas, inhabited by Maya natives, became the locus of repression.⁶⁵ In 1982, a successful military coup brought to power a General named Efraín Ríos Montt. A former Catholic and Christian Democratic presidential contender, Ríos Montt converted to evangelical Protestantism through the Church of the Word (*Iglesia Cristiana Verbo*), a California-based ministry that had established churches in the country. Exerting his power within the military junta, Ríos Montt surrounded himself with other Protestants and declared "God put me here."⁶⁶ Over the course of 1982 and 1983, Ríos Montt increased strikes against rural villages, burning many to the ground, and forcing *ladinos* (mestizos) and indigenous people to participate in the campaigns. In August 1983, the military junta forced the removal of Ríos Montt, but terror and political atrocities contributed to continued conflict and civil war as leftist insurgents regrouped. In 1983, Pope John Paul II visited the country, galvanizing the faithful, reviving "a bleeding and debilitated Catholic Church" through his public addresses.⁶⁷ Moreover, after the death of Archbishop Mario Casariego, the Catholic Church became a vocal opponent of repression and participated in peace negotiations, which lasted nearly a decade, between 1987 and 1996.

The end of the Cold War provided an ideological cooling between the Vatican and progressive sectors within the Latin American churches. Between 1979 and 2002, John Paul II made eighteen apostolic visits to Latin America, logging some one million miles in visits to every continent except Antarctica.⁶⁸ Vatican strategy in Latin America shifted to a New Evangelization, seeking a renewal of grassroots piety and a return of Catholics to Mother Church, recognizing the threat of growing Protestant conversion. Under Benedict XVI (2005–2013), the pope relied on Argentine Jesuit and Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the runner up in the papal conclave of 2005. It was Bergoglio who helped draft the papal message during Benedict's visit to Aparecida, Brazil in 2007, for the Latin American

Bishops Conference.⁶⁹ The New Evangelization certainly carried a spiritual imperative, but social and economic concerns also figured prominently. Bergoglio's vocal critique of Argentine neoliberalism in the 1990s and after the devastating financial crisis of 2001 reflected a general appropriation of the moderate aspects of the liberationist perspective. As Bergoglio became Pope Francis, in 2013, the first Latin American and the first from the Western Hemisphere, the new pontiff made so-called third world concerns a chief priority of his infant pontificate. He held out a conciliating hand to liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, who was hosted by the Vatican's Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. The Vatican department, which had led the crackdown on liberation theologians under then-Cardinal Ratzinger, was now led by Gerhard Ludwig Müller, a prelate sympathetic to the value of the liberationist perspective and its enduring place in the Church's social doctrine. Moreover, it was Francis who helped play an intermediary role between the United States and Cuba during 2013–2014. The pope leveraged his relationship with U. S. President Barak Obama and Cuba's Raúl Castro, urging both parties to negotiate a regularization of diplomatic relations. Francis' diplomacy of *piccolo passi* ("baby steps") reflected the recurrent theme of Vatican relations with Latin America since Independence.⁷⁰ Understanding the limits of the political power of the papacy, Pope Francis "told papal diplomats to take risks," measured against the potential gains to be won in the diplomatic sphere: rapprochement in Cuba represented perhaps the opportunity of small steps to be made elsewhere: in Colombia with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), in China between the government and the unrecognized underground Catholic Church, and even in Palestinian and Israeli talks in the Middle East.⁷¹ The diplomacy of the Holy See remains rooted in its moral authority, in its longevity and endurance, and in pragmatism, with a continued willingness to intervene in Latin American politics, as well as geopolitics more generally.

Discussion of the Literature

The topic of Vatican foreign relations with Latin America remains an understudied field of research. This is partly due to historiographical trends in the field of Catholicism in Latin America, veering away from the high politics of the Church and Church-state relations in general, as well as the relative unavailability of Vatican sources for the 20th century until very recently. Reflecting an earlier generation's concern with Church-state conflict at the level of institutions, the high clergy, and partisan political positions (i.e., conservatives and liberals), the period of Latin American independence and 19th-century state building has the most scholarly coverage. For Rome's activity in the Wars of Independence, the numerous works of Pedro de Leturia stand out in both volume and wealth of material.⁷² John Lloyd Mechem's admirable synthesis of Church-state relations from independence to

the 1930s (in a first edition) and the 1960s (in a second edition) remains foundational reading.⁷³ Recent general surveys of both the Catholic Church and Christianity in Latin America by Penyak and Petry, Schwaller, and Lynch are also notable for their inclusion of Vatican relations with the region, stretching from the colonial period to the present.⁷⁴ Vatican diplomacy figures in a variety of national histories of the Catholic Church in Latin America.⁷⁵

The predominant focus on local religion in Latin America has recuperated important parish-based and regional studies of the Catholic Church. However, a growing trend toward transnational interactions within the region as well as between Europe and the Americas has begun to incorporate Vatican diplomacy and policy. For Mexico, the work of Wright-Rios describes the brokering role played by Romanized bishops, such as Oaxaca's Gillow, between local Catholic piety and mandates from Rome.⁷⁶ Lisa Edwards' study of the Latin American clergy trained in Rome provides an important avenue for understanding the formation of an ultramontane leadership in the region.⁷⁷ Papal nuncios as intermediaries of Vatican diplomacy, both to the states to which they are accredited as well as the national Catholic churches, is still vastly missing from the historiography.

The duration and acuteness of Mexico's religious conflict has spawned a particularly rich historiography.⁷⁸ The opening of the Vatican archives for the period 1922–1939 has enabled a new generation of scholars to begin to write the papacy's important, if under-the-radar, role played in the conflict. Ben Fallaw's study of Catholicism as an obstacle to Mexico's post-revolutionary projects provides some discussion of Vatican policy.⁷⁹ Yves Solis has provided invaluable information from the Vatican archives on clandestine Catholic organizations during the revolutionary period, and Paolo Valvo describes in detail the Vatican reactions to the conflict between church and state in Mexico.⁸⁰ Outside of Mexico, Henández's article on papal activities in Guatemala in the 1950s is a path-breaking example.⁸¹

Vatican foreign relations during Latin America's Cold War are chronicled principally in a host of political science research.⁸² These works focus mainly on the progressive and liberationist sectors of the Church in the region, with tangential mentions of the Vatican's role in the conflict. A longer history of the relationship between Catholic activism and the Holy See is needed to contextualize the watershed of the Second Vatican Council and Medellín. The Latin American context from which Pope Francis emerged is beginning to receive scholarly attention. Ivereigh's biography is an exceptional example, paying attention to the pope's Argentine background.⁸³

The Vatican Secret Archives houses the most important materials for the study of Vatican foreign relations with Latin America. The archive has been opened to scholars since 1880, established and commissioned by Pope Leo XIII. In 2006, Benedict XVI permitted

access to the materials pertaining to the pontificate of Pius XI (1922–1939). Currently, a selection of files for the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) have been made available, specifically the nunciatures of Munich and Berlin pertaining to prisoners of war (1939–1947). The remaining files from Pius XII’s pontificate, including materials germane to Latin America, are in a process of cataloguing and editing. It is unclear when the bulk of sources for Pius XII’s papacy will be ready for general access to scholars. Pope Francis announced in 2015 that the Vatican archival material relating to the “Dirty War” in Argentina would be opened to researchers.

Generally, the Vatican files are categorized by pontificate and/or by the Vatican congregation (i.e., the administrative department of the Roman curia) responsible for the material in question. Thus, for example, the Vatican Secretariat of State, which handles the foreign relations of the Holy See, has preserved the correspondence and papers associated with nunciatures and apostolic delegations established with various nations and national hierarchies. These are of enormous value to an understanding of the mechanisms of papal diplomacy. The archives of the nunciatures and apostolic delegations consist of reports from papal diplomats to the Vatican Secretary of State and his various administrative staff. They contain reports on religious life, political relations, newspaper clippings with commentary, correspondence between the nuncio or apostolic delegate and the national bishops, as well as letters sent from lay Catholics. Often, reports on the status of religious orders ministering in a particular nation are among the materials, although a separate Vatican congregation handles religious orders, and another deals with so-called “mission territories.” Although the Holy See’s official policy has been to open files for consultation to 1939, not all nunciatures and apostolic delegations have the same level of access (whether they are still simply in a process of cataloguing, or because they have been deemed too “sensitive” is hard to tell). Perhaps another simpler reason might be at work: as the tenure of nuncios/apostolic delegates did not map exactly with the pontiffs they served under, many papal diplomats overlapped the period open for consultation with the post-1939 period. Nunciature and apostolic delegations files for Cuba are not currently accessible to scholars.

The indexes for the nunciatures and apostolic delegations to Latin America, and indeed elsewhere, are found in the Leo XIII reading room. The indexes are not published online and it is prohibited to take photographs of these listings. Materials are accessible for Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Additional material for Mexico is to be found in the Apostolic Delegation files of the United States. Vatican foreign relations with the nations of Central America was handled through one or two nuncios, who resided in a particular capitol, but who were responsible for other nations as well. Thus, the nunciature files for the nations of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama can be found in the “America Centrale” index. Nunciature and apostolic delegation materials are generally in

Italian (reports from nuncios to the secretary of state, for example), but a large amount is also in Spanish, especially correspondence between bishops and the nuncios. For access to the , researchers should consult the archive's website.

The archive of the Sacred Congregation of Ecclesiastical and Extraordinary Affairs is no longer held at the Vatican Secret Archive. It is currently in the offices of the Secretariat of State, across the Belvedere Courtyard. Scholars must request separate access to these archives through the Secretariat of State, not the Vatican archival administrators. The SCAES files are more purely “political” in nature, as they deal directly with matters of Church-state affairs. These materials allow the researcher to gain a further understanding of the policy-making activities of the Holy See. Whereas, the nunciature/apostolic delegations files present the information streaming into the Vatican from Latin American national churches, the SCAES files contain materials crafted in response to events on the ground. The files of the SCAES meetings are particularly illuminating, because they allow a nuanced picture of the debates, disagreements, and convergences of the cardinals involved in developing Vatican policy. Topics considered by the SCAES are listed in an Index of the Sessions of the *Sagrada Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari*, covering the years 1814–1940.

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