

Milla Bergström & Kirsi Salonen

The Holy See and the New Map of Europe after the First World War

The Holy See was – and it still is – the highest representative body of the whole Catholic Church. It had a twofold sense: it comprised both the Roman Pontiff and the central government of the Catholic Church, the Roman Curia.¹

Most of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia had been founded between the 12th and the 16th centuries, when the papal administration had begun to become more systematic, concentrated and universal. The central government of the Catholic Church had taken, however, different forms after several curial reforms.² According to the structure created in the curial reform of Pope Pius X in 1908,³ the Roman Curia consisted of five offices, three tribunals⁴, eleven congregations⁵ and various councils

1 CIC 1917 2001, Canon 7. The older term *Apostolic* See is used for example in the official papal documents, but in its own administrative sources and in the scholarly studies the Holy See is more commonly used. *Del Re* 1995, 952.

2 On the Roman Curia and curial reforms, see for example *Del Re* 1998; Jankowiak 2007.

3 The curial reform was introduced by the Apostolic Constitution *Sapienti consilio* (29 June 1908) and confirmed and reinforced in the 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law. AAS 1909, 7–19; CIC 1917 2001; *Del Re* 1995, 974; *Del Re* 1998, 81; Jankowiak 2004, 153.

4 The three tribunals were the Sacred Penitentiary, the Sacred Roman Rota, and the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Segnatura. *CIC 1917* 2001, Canons 258–259, 1600 and 1603.

5 The eleven congregations were: the Congregation of the Holy Office; the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith; the Congregation for the Oriental Church; the Congregation of the Consistory; the Congregation of the discipline of the Sacraments; the Congregation of the Council; the Congregation for matters of religious members; the Congregation for Sacred Rites; the Congregation for Ceremonies; the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, and the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. *CIC 1917* 2001, Canons 247–257. About the activity of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, see *Suvi Rytty's* essay (pp. x–x in this volume), in which she examines the missionary priorities of Cardinal Willem van Rossum, the prefect of the Congregation. The essay by *Milla Bergström* (pp. x–x) concentrates on the activity of the Congregation of the Consistory and the application of the Holy See's procedures for selecting new bishops, and *Aappo Laitinen* (pp. x–x) analyses the role of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs in the linguistic-national conflict between English, Maltese and Italian speaking populations in Malta.

and commissions⁶. As for the foreign affairs, the most important of all the dicasteries was the Secretariat of State. Until the late 19th century it had been responsible for the administration of the Papal States, the Holy See's foreign relations and in general for all ecclesiastical-political questions. After the fall of the Papal States in 1870, the Secretariat of State had gradually become the Holy See's operational centre for the whole universal church,⁷ and it was headed by the cardinal secretary of state, who was the closest collaborator and right-hand man of the pope.⁸

The Roman Pontiff had, as the 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law clearly stated, "supreme and full power of jurisdiction over the universal Church both in those things that pertain[ed] to faith and morals, and in those things that affect[ed] the discipline and government of the Church".⁹ Accordingly, the Holy See's policies and its *modus operandi* were based on the decisions of Popes Benedict XV (1914–1922) and Pius XI (1922–1939) in the tumultuous years of 1914–1939.

Giacomo Paolo Giovanni Battista Della Chiesa, Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna, was elected to the See of St. Peter on 3 September 1914. The new Pontiff, who chose the name of Benedict XV, had not been a well-known figure among cardinals or citizens of Rome because he had spent the past years in his archiepiscopal city. He was, however, well acquainted with the papal administration due to his earlier career at the Roman Curia.¹⁰

6 In addition to the permanent dicasteries, the pope could erect temporary or permanent pontifical commissions, which were committees of Catholic experts convened for a specific purpose. The essays by *Mikko Ketola* (pp. x–x in this volume) and *Laura Pettinaroli* (pp. x–x) deal with matters closely related to the activity of the Pontifical Commission for Russia.

7 *Cardinale* 1976, 131–132, 135; *Del Re* 1995, 972–974; *De Volder* 1998, 453, 445; *Jankowiak* 2004, 166–167.

8 The cardinal secretary of state's task, among other things, was to obtain information from reliable sources on everything that might have significance to the Holy See and to convey this information to the pontiff. In addition, his task was to communicate to various parties the pope's will in each case. Since the cardinal secretary of state was more or less the equivalent of a prime minister, in certain situations he acted as the official representative of the Roman Pontiff. *Giobbio* 1899, 246, 250; *Bendiscioli* 1939, 28; *Del Re* 1995, 969–970; *De Volder* 1998, 459; *Levillain* 2004, 14–15. The other four offices of the Roman Curia were the Apostolic Chancery, the Apostolic Camera, the Apostolic Datary, and the Secretariat of State and the Secretary for Briefs to Princes and to Latin Letters. *CIC 1917* 2001, Canons 260–262 and 264.

9 *CIC 1917* 2001, Canon 218.

10 Della Chiesa worked at the Secretariat of State in 1887–1907. About the earlier life and career of Benedict XV, see *Pollard* 1999, Chapters 1–3, here esp. 1–23, 51–54, 73–74.

The Great War had broken out just a few months prior to Benedict XV's election. Continuing the legacy of his predecessors, Benedict XV stressed the neutrality of the Holy See and worked hard for promoting peace by trying to mediate between the belligerent countries but, for his profound disappointment, both sides rejected his peace proposals. Due to distrust and political controversies and especially the opposition of the Italian government, the pontiff and the Holy See were excluded from the peace negotiations in Versailles. The adversities did not discourage Benedict XV in his peace mission. Instead, he concentrated on humanitarian work and alleviated the suffering of people for example by organizing exchange of prisoners of war and by delivering food and necessary items not only for soldiers but also for civilians.¹¹

The end of the First World War with the signing of armistice between the last belligerent countries on 11 November 1918 and with the consequent signing of the treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 changed radically the political map of Europe. Four large empires in Central and Eastern Europe – the Austro-Hungarian, the German, the Ottoman and the Russian – were brought down as the consequence of the war. The first three had to cede territories to their neighbours in north, east and south: Germany ceded Schleswig to Denmark and Alsace-Lorraine to France, and Austro-Hungary handed over the territory of Trieste to Italy. Additionally, Germany had to agree upon the demilitarization of the territory of Rhineland and its occupation by the troops of the Entente powers as well as the loss of the Prussian port city of Danzig and the area that came to be called the “Polish Corridor”.

The changes on the map of Eastern Europe were even more significant. The western parts of the Russian Empire were divided because Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had declared their independence as a consequence of the Russian revolution. The politically most complicated issue in Eastern Europe was without doubt the creation of the Second Republic of Poland, the territory of which encompassed vast areas that had earlier belonged to Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was further divided so that after the war its previous territory covered the three newly created countries of Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia as well as the northwestern parts of Romania and northern parts of the state of Yugoslavia, which was created in the aftermath of the war on the eastern

11 About the actions of Benedict XV during the war, see *Rumi* (ed.) 1990; *Pollard* 1999, 85–87, 92–102, 112–115, 117–128 and Chapters 4–5 in general.

shore of the Adriatic Sea. The Ottoman Empire in its turn was divided into Turkey as well as Syria-Lebanon governed by French Mandate and Iraq governed by British Mandate.¹²

The establishment of the new states involved a great deal of political manoeuvring in the aftermath of the First World War. In fact, the new borders were not created immediately after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, but it required several referendums, numerous local conflicts and hundreds of hours of political negotiations before the new power balance in Europe was established by the mid-1920s.¹³

Despite its political neutrality, the Holy See could not ignore the new political situation in post-war Europe for two main reasons. Firstly, it was important for the Holy See to create good and stable relationships with all countries with a Catholic population. In particular, the Vatican was concerned about the territories in Eastern Europe, where Communism with antireligious tendencies was rising. The threat of the growth of Communism only became worse with the birth of an atheist and Communist Soviet Union. The Holy See feared that Communism might spread from the east to the rest of Europe and therefore the Church was particularly keen on defending its rights in the new nation states founded in the border areas of the former Russian empire as in the Baltic countries or Poland. Secondly, the new geographical borders did not coincide with the old borders of ecclesiastical provinces and dioceses, which were based on the pre-war state borders. Therefore, the ecclesiastical borders had to be adapted to the new political situation and the Vatican had to make sure that the establishment of new ecclesiastical territories did not endanger the cure of souls of the faithful in their own language. In doing so, the Holy See had to balance its policies in order to remain neutral in local nationalistic disputes.

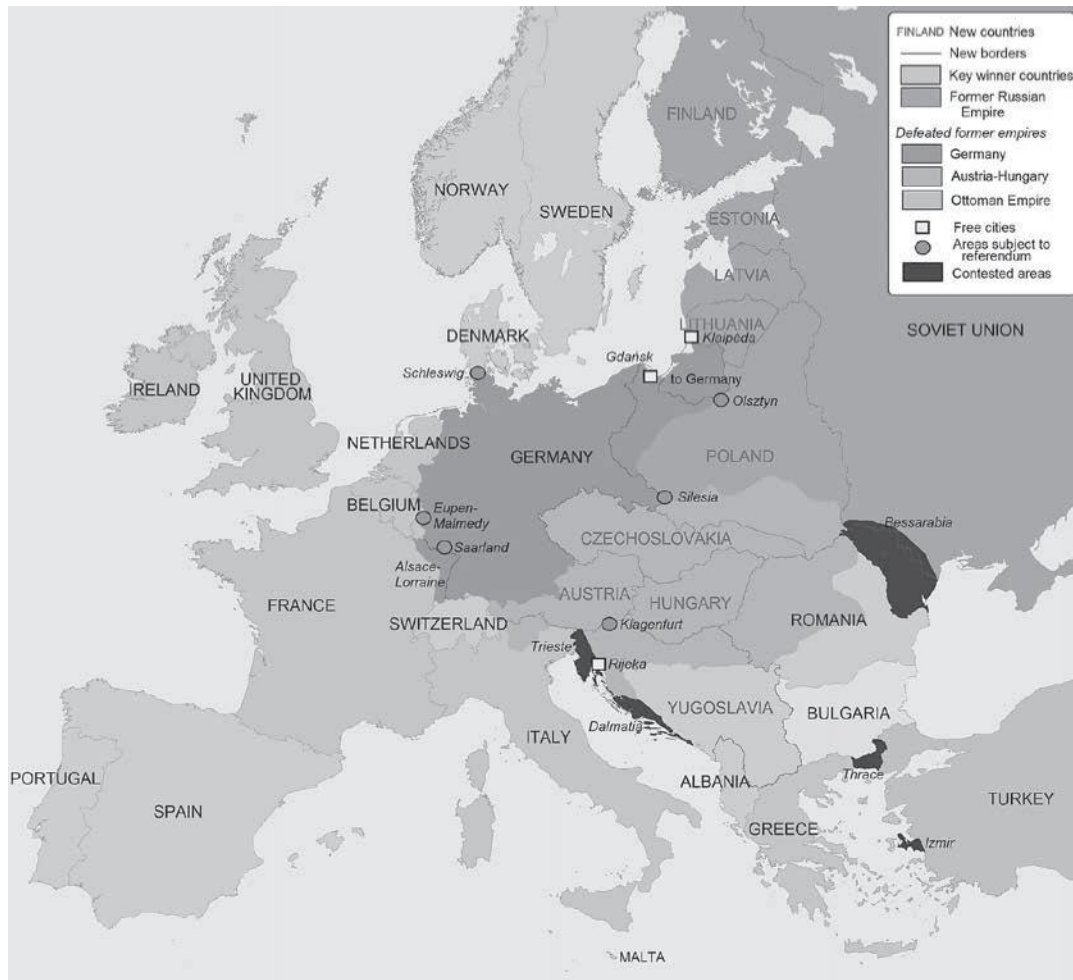
The establishment of new borders was often complicated by nationalistic, linguistic, ethnic and religious tensions both across and within the new boundaries. For example, Poland and Czechoslovakia struggled with creating national unity while large minority populations found it difficult to identify themselves as “Poles” or “Czechoslovaks”.¹⁴ Additional problems occurred in territories where a population representing a minority within the whole

12 About the First World War and its consequences, see among others *Stevenson* 1988; *Ross* 2003, esp. 56–62; *Stevenson* 2004; *Neiberg* 2005.

13 About peace settlement after the First World War, see *Pollard* 1999, 143–146; *MacMillan* 2003.

14 For the religious tensions in Czechoslovakia, see *Schulze Wessel* 2002, 73–102. About the Catholic Church in inter-war Poland, *Pease* 2009. On the Holy See and the Polish-Ukrainian Tensions in Eastern Galicia, *McVay* 2008; *Bergström* 2013; *Bergström* 2015.

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New Europe in 1923. Map by Johnny Jakobsen.

country formed a majority within a smaller, often peripheral, border region. Very often, the populations of such regions thought that they had remained on the wrong side of the new border and tried to do what they could in order to adjust this issue – by either emigrating to the other side, by trying to alter the borderline or by trying to gain independence. This was the case for example in Eastern Galicia (Poland) where the majority population were Ukrainian-speaking Greek Catholics, or in Upper Silesia, a border area between Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia, where nationalistic, religious,

ethnic and linguistic disputes escalated into uprisings and where the borders were changed as a consequence of a local referendum.¹⁵ Sometimes, though, linguistic and religious differences were overcome, as in Finland where Finnish and Swedish were both accepted as official languages of the state and where Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Catholics could peacefully live together.¹⁶

The Holy See traditionally upheld the claim that it had no interest or right to interfere in purely secular-political questions, as political activity as such was alien to the primary function of the Church, preaching the Gospel and saving souls. Also after the Great War, the principal aim of the Holy See was that of creating and securing all over the world the prerequisites for practicing both the Catholic faith and life as well as spreading the Catholic faith.¹⁷ The main tool of the Holy See for the advancement of its overall mission was diplomacy. The diplomacy of the Holy See aimed to maintain good relations with local bishops and the states as well as to identify those means with which the Vatican could ensure and defend the rights of the Church and its freedom without harming the good relations between the Church and the national states.¹⁸

The pontificate of Benedict XV was marked with intensification of the Holy See's diplomatic relationships with various nation states. This development is illustrated well by the fact that when Benedict XV was elected pope the Holy See had diplomatic relations with seventeen countries, while the number of countries with which the Vatican had diplomatic relations had increased to twenty-seven by the end of his pontificate. Many of them were new states that had emerged after the First World War, such as Estonia and Finland,¹⁹ and some were states with which the Holy See had earlier had long relations, such as France with which the Holy See had cut off the official relations in 1905 because of tensions over church-state separation and anticlericalism.²⁰

15 Tooley 1988, 57; Tooley 1997, 218–252; Wilson 2010, 5, 10.

16 Murtorinne 1995, 140–145, 154–157, 218–230.

17 Bendiscioli 1939, 9–11; Martini 1951, 377–378.

18 Giobbio 1899, 9–10; Martini 1951, 374. The official embassy of the Holy See was called the apostolic nunciature, and the head of the diplomatic mission was the apostolic nuncio. The nunciature was the official party through which the Holy See, inter alia, announced its position and decisions to a civil government, the Church hierarchy as well as Catholic laymen. Local clergy, faithful, and the civil government in turn approached the nunciature to make their issues and pleas for help known to the Holy See. Historical overview of papal legates and nunciatures, see for example De Marchi 1957; Feldkamp 1998, 15–83. On “Papal diplomacy in the modern age”, see Kent & Pollard (eds.) 1994.

19 On the relationship between the Holy See and Finland, Salo 1997. On the Holy See and the Baltic States, Perna 2010.

20 Dansette 1951, 487–489; Pollard 1999, 89, 155; Morozzo della Rocca 2001, 410.

After the death of Benedict XV on 22 January 1922, the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan and former apostolic nuncio to Poland, Achille Ratti, was elected as his successor on 6 February 1922. Ratti, who was an old school comrade of Della Chiesa, chose Pius XI as his regnal name.²¹ Pius XI fully divided the ideas and *modus operandi* of his predecessor. He continued to emphasize the neutrality of the Holy See in political and nationalistic controversies and stressed the importance of bilateral contracts with various nations in defining the legal status and the privileges of the Catholic Church.

In fact, concordats or agreements on a *modus vivendi* were, in addition to diplomacy, important instruments for the Holy See to regulate its relationships with the old and new post-war nations. Concordats regulated different aspects of religious life and ecclesiastical administration, for example Catholic instruction in schools, the right to appoint bishops, the establishment of seminaries and the role of a papal representative in the country in question. If necessary, the concordats could include certain specific issues characteristic only for the country with which the concordat was concluded. For example, the Polish concordat mentioned the special situation of the Free City of Danzig.²²

It is sometimes claimed that the concordatory diplomacy was a new instrument for the Vatican in gaining political authority in the inter-war period.²³ This assumption is, however, wrong in the sense that concordats were not a novelty as a political instrument for the Catholic Church, since the papacy had signed its first concordat, the Concordat of Worms, already in 1122. This treaty, signed by Pope Callixtus II and the German Emperor Henry V, brought to an end the power struggle between the papacy and the emperors known as the Investiture Controversy. The papacy continued the policy of making concordats throughout the centuries.²⁴

However, it is true that after the First World War, the Holy See clearly initiated a new and accelerated policy of negotiating concordats with European countries. During the inter-war period, the Vatican negotiated as many as nine concordats, two *modus vivendi* and nine other agreements with different European states. The concordatory policy was directed on the one hand towards the newly established states in the eastern parts of Europe such as Latvia, with which the Holy See signed a concordat on 30 May 1922,

21 On the earlier life of Achille Ratti and on the pontificate of Pius XI, see *Actes* 1996; *Chiron* 2004.

22 AAS 1925, 274. See also the essay by *Suvi Kansikas* (pp. xx–xx in this volume).

23 *Chamedes* 2013, 956.

24 *Classen* 1973, 411–460. The texts of the concordats are edited in *Mercati* (ed.) 1919.

and Poland, with which a concordat was signed on 10 February 1925. On the other hand, the Vatican also negotiated concordats with central European nations, which resulted for example in the signing of the Reichskonkordat with Germany on 27 July 1933.²⁵ One of the most important achievements was the conclusion of the Lateran Pacts with the Kingdom of Italy on 11 February 1929, which finally ended the Roman Question, defined the borders of the Vatican City State, and regulated the relations between the Catholic Church and the Italian state.²⁶

Other common denominator of the pontificates of Benedict XV and Pius XI was their interest in the Eastern Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox.²⁷ Following the ideas of Leo XIII (1878–1903) and Pius X (1903–1914), Benedict XV had taken an important step towards ecclesiastical unity by hiving off the Congregation for the Oriental Church from the Congregation for Propagation of the Faith in May 1917. The competences of this new independent congregation included matters that referred to persons or to the discipline or to the rites of the oriental Catholic Churches, and its mandate was to be in contact with the oriental Churches and to protect their rights and traditions.²⁸ The particular importance of the Congregation for the Oriental Church for the pope and its close relationship to papal functions was demonstrated by the fact that it was one of the three congregations that were presided over by the pontiff himself.²⁹ Pius XI, on his behalf, founded the Pontical Commission for Russia in June 1925. It was responsible for matters concerning Catholics of all rites inside the Soviet Union and Russians in the Diaspora.³⁰

Benedict XV had also intensified the missionary activity of the Holy See in different parts of the world, and Pius XI continued these efforts.³¹ Between 1914 and 1939, the number of subjects of the missionary activities of the

25 *Morozzo della Rocca* 2001, 412; *Chamedes* 2013, 956, 964–976. The texts of the concordats are edited in *Lora* (ed.) 2003.

26 *AAS* 1929, the so-called political treaties on pp. 209–274 and the concordate on pp. 275–294; *Beales & Biagini* 2002; *Kertzer* 2004; *Pertici* 2009.

27 On Pius XI and the Eastern Churches, see *Coco* 2010b.

28 On the Congregation for the Oriental Church[es], see *CIC 1917* 2001, Canon 257; *Vattappalam* 1999; *Rigotti* 2009. In 1967, Pope Paul VI changed the name of the Congregation for the Oriental Church to Congregation for the Oriental Churches. *AAS* 1967, 899; *Vattappalam* 1999, 12.

29 Typically, the congregations were presided over by a prefect, usually a cardinal. The other two congregations that were presided over by the pope himself were the Holy Office and the Congregation of the Consistory. *CIC 1917* 2001, Canons 247–248.

30 About the Vatican's policy towards Russia in 1905–1939, see *Pettinaroli* 2008.

31 On Pius XI and the missionary activity of the Holy See, see for example *Prudhomme* 2010; *Zerbini* 2013.

Congregation for the Propagation of Faith grew from twelve to eighteen million, when new territories were included in its jurisdiction.³²

The continuum of the two pontificates can be seen in the choice of persons around the pontiffs too. Both Benedict XV and Pius XI chose as their Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri (1852–1934; Secretary of State 1914–1930). Gasparri, disciple of both Leo XIII and Pius X, was a long term curialist, known as a skilful diplomat, firm decision-maker and expert both in Theology and Canon Law.³³ He guided with a firm hand the Vatican's policies during the tumultuous years during and after the First World War until he eventually was replaced by another long term servant of the Holy See, Eugenio Pacelli (1876–1958, Secretary of State 1930–1939), who followed Pius XI in the See of St. Peter after the death of *Papa Ratti* on 10 February 1939.

³² Pollard 1999, 195–204.

³³ Taliani 1938; Aubert 1981. Coco has composed an interesting analysis of the differences of Secretaries of State Gasparri and Pacelli. Coco 2010a.

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