

MELITA THEOLOGICA  
Journal of the Faculty of Theology  
University of Malta  
68/2 (2018): 173-200

Nicholas Joseph Doublet\*

## A Historiographical Reading of the Pontificate of Benedict XV (1914-1922) Following the Opening of the Vatican Archives

In the quarter century following Spoleto, no substantial developments had been made until the documentation relative to Benedict XV at the Vatican Archives was made available in 1985. Following the enthusiasm that normally accompanies such openings, it remains to be ascertained what use historians have truly made of the now available material. As will be shown the historiographical analysis is now characterized not by the quantity, but rather by the quality of the studies produced. There is a clear continuity with the themes that have already captured the attention of historians in this field. Interest continues to be determined by the nationalistic concerns, especially as regards the diplomatic relationship between the Holy See and the states during the war, and with the newly formed states that now arise from its ashes. Given their specific nature, most studies are published as part of collective works. Yet attempts at a thorough biography of the Benedict XV is made by John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope. Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace*, which remains until now one of the best introductions to this pontificate.<sup>1</sup>

---

\* Nicholas Joseph Doublet obtained a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the University of Malta, and a Doctorate in Church History at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome with a study on the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs during the pontificate of Benedict XV (1914-1922). He also holds a *Diploma in Archivistica* from the Vatican School. He lectures in Palaeography and Diplomatics in the Department of Library information and Archive Sciences, and has also been invited to lecture on Church History at the Faculty of Theology, at the University of Malta.

<sup>1</sup> John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London-New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999). John Francis Pollard (1944- ) is a British

A revisiting of the themes already set out in Spoleto is undertaken in the volume edited by Giorgio Rumi, *Benedetto e la Pace - 1918*. This volume presents a remarkable re-evaluation of Benedict XV's efforts during the war and shows how much the study of a pontificate stands to gain even from nationalistic viewpoints. In his introduction, Rumi succinctly but clearly, delineates the coordinates of this pontificate placed as it were at the passing of a world order and the dawning of the contemporary age, which sees the Catholic Church established as a key player "non superata, non retriua, non importuna, ma viva, ma benefica, ma amica, madre e maestra."<sup>2</sup> In this light this pontificate truly set the agenda that was to determine the new face of the papacy on the world stage.

Alberto Monticone in *Benedetto XV e la Germania* sets out with great clarity, the main elements that determined a certain privileged German presence and influence in the Roman curia at the beginning of the war. The diplomatic break with France for a decade, and the relationship between the Italian modernist culture and its French counterpart, assured a certain preference for the German cultural, theological and spiritual tradition among the members of the Roman curia. Such a position was further advanced through the presence of eminent German Jesuit theologians, as well as the presence of Germans in significant roles within the curia itself. Among these, Gerlach<sup>3</sup> clearly stands out for the confidence he enjoyed both with the pope and the German emperor. Having set clearly this premise of German influence within the Curia, the author uses the

---

historian, a fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and Emeritus Professor of Modern European History at Anglia Polytechnic University. He has published particularly on fascist movements, political and social Catholicism and the history of the papacy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Rumi, "Introduzione," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, ed. Giorgio Rumi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1990), 8. Giorgio Rumi (1938-2006) was an Italian liberal catholic historian, and professor of contemporary history at the University of Milan. Of a lay mentality, and a friend of Montini, he rendered great service to the Holy See, and can be justly considered an authority as to study of the role played by the papacy in international relations, especially that carved out by Benedict XV.

<sup>3</sup> Mgr. Rudolf Gerlach, a papal secret chamberlain and as such one of Benedict XV's closest personal assistants. In 1917, following the blowing up of two Italian battleships, he was accused by the Italian authorities of being "the leading light in an Italian espionage ring, with the role of financier and link to German and Austrian intelligence." Evidence against him remains controversial. Benedict XV remained unshakeably in favour of Gerlach's innocence, much to the consternation of cardinals De Lai and Gasparri. The case, known as the "the Gerlach affair," placed great stress on the relations between Italy and the Holy See and could have caused substantial damage to the credibility of the Holy See's impartiality. He was made to leave Italy before his trial began. See Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV*, 103-107.

available documentation to trace out the development of the relations between the Holy See and German relations during the war. Contrary to the illusory hopes that some authors have imputed to Benedict XV's efforts with Germany, the author shows that these efforts were built on a clear understanding on the Roman part that Germany held the key to the resolution of this conflict, the so-called "via tedesca." For this reason the pope's efforts were directed to achieve a clarification by Germany about its reasons for the war, and towards a "diplomazia dell'assistenza," necessarily channelled towards Germany, for it held the greatest number of prisoners, camps and occupied territories.<sup>4</sup> The influence of certain key players, among which Bülow,<sup>5</sup> Erzberger,<sup>6</sup> Bethmann-Hollweg<sup>7</sup> and Pacelli, emerges as the relationship oscillates, from one of proximity (as the Holy See's use of German mediation between Austria and Italy so as to keep the latter out of the war) to the distancing generated by the lack of response, this time on the Holy See's part to a rarely quoted peace note, prepared by the Central Powers in December 1916. The author claims that the papal *Peace Note* of August 1917, "ha indubiamente una nascita tedesca, nel senso che è collegata a questo esperire - da parte della Santa Sede - la possibilità di intermediazione presso la Germania"<sup>8</sup> that this note proves that the Holy See's great hope in the availability of the German government but the diffidence of the new German chancellor, Michaelis, and German knowledge of Article 15 of the London Treaty, stood in the way of any mediatory role on the Holy See's part.

Giorgio Rumi, through the publication of twenty letters exchanged between Benedict XV and the last Habsburg emperor, Charles I, seeks to clarify the relationship between these two men, and their respective responsibilities. The relationship is clearly marked by mutual devotion, but contrary to the charge

---

<sup>4</sup> Alberto Monticone, "Benedetto XV e la Germania," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 17. Alberto Monticone (1931- ) is an Italian historian and senator. He was professor of modern history at the *Università di Roma* from 1972-1992 and also served as president of the Italian Catholic Action from 1980-1986.

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Heinrich Karl Martin von Bülow (1849–1929) served as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Kaiser Wilhelm II, as well as Chancellor of the German Empire from 1900 to 1909.

<sup>6</sup> Matthias Erzberger (1875–1921), a prominent member of the German Catholic Centre Party, was a journalist and politician, and served as Reich Minister of Finance from 1919 to 1920. Although initially in favour of the war, by 1917 he had changed his position, and rose in the Reichstag to urge the government to conclude a negotiated end to the war. He was the one who signed the armistice between Germany and the Allies on 11 November 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Theobald Theodor Friedrich Alfred von Bethmann-Hollweg (1856–1921) served as Chancellor of the German Empire from 1909 to 1917.

<sup>8</sup> A. Monticone, "Benedetto XV e la Germania," 14.

of filo-Austrian tendencies on Benedict XV's part, the letters show that his proximity to the said monarchy stemmed from a true interest in the service of peace steering away from any legitimistic tendencies. Although Charles I, notwithstanding his good intentions, was clearly limited as to his sphere of action, Benedict XV perseveres in his intent for the settlement of a peace with Italy. Clearly preoccupied that the revolutionaries would be those who would decide the fate of the war, he attempts to carve out a role for the Austrian monarch as "pacificatore dell'umanità,"<sup>9</sup> a role the latter was unable to fulfil. This role was taken up by the protestant and democratic Woodrow Wilson, and this marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>10</sup>

Enrico Serra's *La Nota del Primo Agosto 1917 e il Governo Italiano: Qualche osservazione*, returns to the Allied lack of response to the Papal Note, a position spearheaded by Sonnino. The author also considers the reactions to the note in public opinion. By way of conclusion, a number of questions are put forward: as to whether the note was truly "inopportune" as the American Secretary of State Lansing had said, a claim falsified by the tragic military events that followed; as to whether the Holy See had prepared the note in a diplomatically correct way (in this regard too much trust may have been placed in Vienna and Berlin's readiness for concessions); and about the extent of the Holy See's knowledge of Article 15 of the London Treaty. In agreement with Martin, Serra concludes that the note was born out of the need to make the Catholic voice for peace heard, when socialist movements were clearly taking up such a stand. Going beyond the stupor created by the phrase "inutile strage," the lasting legacy of the note is to be found in the proposed principles defining "a new doctrine" of international relations.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Rumi, "Corrispondenza fra Benedetto e Carlo I d'Asburgo," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 25: As cited by the author: Documento 14: Lettera di Benedetto XV a Carlo I d'Asburgo (S.R.R.SS., AA.EE.SS, Stati Ecclesiastici, 216, vol. XII): "Il Signore, avendo finalmente misericordia della povera umanità, benedica il Suo proposito e faccia sì che la pace ritorni per l'opera della legittima Autorità e non già per l'imposizione degli elementi sovversivi, che riserverebbero ai popoli altre e forse più gravi sciagure [...] La Maestà Vostra, ringraziando il Signore, può dire con tutta verità che esce da questa guerra salvatore della Monarchia; se a questo titolo volesse aggiungere l'altro, non men bello, di pacificatore dell'umanità, avrebbe posto il colmo alla sua Gloria."

<sup>10</sup> See G. Rumi, "Corrispondenza fra Benedetto e Carlo I d'Asburgo," 19-47: A selection of letters had already been published by Friedrich Engel-Janosi, *Die politische Korrespondenz der Päpste mit den Österreichischen Kaisern 1804-1918* (Wien-München, 1964), 379f.

<sup>11</sup> See Enrico Serra, "La Nota del Primo Agosto 1917 e il Governo Italiano: Qualche osservazione," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 49-63 for more information regarding the complex relationship between Italy and the rest of the Allies during the war. Enrico Serra was professor of the history of international relations at the University of Bologna; See also Luca

Vittorio De Marco, in *L'intervento della Santa Sede a Versailles in favore delle missioni tedesche*, sheds important light on Cerretti's mission during the Paris Peace conference. The strength of a dynamic and realistic Vatican diplomacy<sup>12</sup> fully emerges, as the Holy See sought to protect the missionaries themselves and their work, while safeguarding their Catholic property for continual Catholic use. On the other hand, in the interest of true peace, the Holy See also tried to reduce further humiliation for Germany. Some concessions were gained in the Chinese case, already before the actual Peace Conference, in the form of exemptions in favour of German missionaries, and later, against all odds,<sup>13</sup> through Cerretti's mission, the modification requested by the Holy See to Article 438 of the peace treaty, protecting Catholic interests as regards missionary property.

Andrea Riccardi, famous for his work on inter-religious dialogue, in *Benedetto XV e la crisi della convivenza multireligiosa nell'Impero Ottomano*, returns to a theme introduced by Tamborra in Spoleto, exploring whether it is indeed possible to speak of a specific policy towards the Eastern Churches in Benedict XV. Opening up a new theme in the historiographical tradition being reviewed, Riccardi revisits the tragedy of the Armenian genocide<sup>14</sup> of 1915-1916 in the ailing Ottoman

---

Riccardi, *Alleati non amici. Le relazioni politiche tra l'Italia e l'Intesa durante la prima guerra mondiale* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1992), specifically 536-537; as regards the negative reaction to the Peace note, Luca Riccardi notes, given that Sonnino "temeva che gli anglo-francesi potessero, in qualche modo, aderire alle proposte di Benedetto XV, danneggiando così gli interessi e le aspirazioni dell'Italia. In questa trovò un'immediata risponda dal governo di Parigi [...] Se quest'ultima avesse accettato la logica del passo papale, avrebbe dovuto inevitabilmente rinunciare alle proprie pretese sull'Alsazia, da sempre considerata parte integrante della Repubblica. All'interno del complesso dei rapporti politici dell'Intesa, quindi, il tentativo di Benedetto XV ebbe una risonanza limitata, poiché si scontrava con le aspirazioni "primogenie" sia della Francia che dell'Italia"; Luca Riccardi lectures at the *Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio meridionale*.

<sup>12</sup> See Vittorio De Marco, "L'intervento della Santa Sede a Versailles in favore delle missioni tedesche," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 66. Vittorio De Marco (1957- ) is a professor of Contemporary history at the *Università del Salento*.

<sup>13</sup> "L'alto profilo della diplomazia vaticana, espresso in quel periodo da prelati che possedevano un grande acume politico, si scontrava con una diplomazia europea arroccata su posizioni di un geloso particolarismo nazionale, quasi del tutto priva in quel momento della capacità di vedere lucidamente ben oltre l'oscura selva della guerra e dei suoi disastri immediati." *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> For an authoritative study of the Armenian genocide, from the Hamidian massacres of 1894 to the consideration of the Armenian question by the League of Nations in 1925: See Georges-Henri Ruyssen ed. *La Questione Armena*, 7v (Roma: Edizioni "Orientalia Christiana," 2013-2015). Ruyssen (1967- ), a Belgian Jesuit, lectures at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. Through his publication of the documents on this issue, conserved at the ASV, at the Archive of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (A.C.O.), and at the AA.EE.SS, the author allows

Empire, and studies the manner Benedict XV reacts to this Christian “holocaust.” The author attests to Benedict XV’s vivid interest to the fate of Christian minorities in the region, as shown by the foundation of the Congregation for the Oriental Church in 1917. It is clear that the Holy See sought to strengthen these Eastern Churches and carry out a humanitarian mission in their favour through a direct dialogue with the authorities involved or through allies, but with the general desire of avoiding the protectorates altogether. Riccardi laments that so little has been done in studying Benedict XV’s action in this regard, an action to which Pius XII returns to when faced with the Jewish holocaust in the Second World War. Whereas so many have sought to condemn Pius XII, Benedict XV’s politico-diplomatic action to avoid the Armenian tragedy has remained shrouded in silence firstly because of a historiography of active denial on the Turkish side and secondly due to the Vatican’s discretion in the archival records it renders available, not least out of concern for a residual Catholic presence in the region.<sup>15</sup> He enters into the details of these secret diplomatic negotiations and the public denunciations of the Armenian tragedy advanced by Benedict XV and Gasparri.

In *Santa Sede e Stati Uniti negli anni della Grande Guerra*, Luigi Bruti Liberati explains Wilson’s unwillingness to cooperate with Benedict XV for the achievement of peace, as he saw in the pope a dangerous competitor against his aim of reserving for the United States the role of sole mediator in the European conflict, thus assuring a dominant role for the United States in international affairs.<sup>16</sup> The author seeks to show that contrary to those who assume a Benedict XV’s predominantly conservative attitude towards the United States, the pope,

---

a vivid reading of the events through the eyes of Vatican diplomacy and its informants, as well as doing justice to the concrete efforts by the Holy See in favour of the Armenians. Of particular importance to our study are the v.4-6 which publish the documentation held at the ASV and the AA.EE.SS. pertaining to the period 1908-1925.

<sup>15</sup> See Andrea Riccardi, “Benedetto XV e la crisi della convivenza multireligiosa nell’Impero Ottomano,” in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 89-95. Andrea Riccardi (1950-) is a historian and Italian politician. He is notably known for founding in 1968 the *Comunità di Sant’Egidio*.

<sup>16</sup> See Luigi Bruti Liberati, “Santa Sede e Stati Uniti negli anni della Grande Guerra,” in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 131-132. According to Bruti Liberati, Wilson’s approach to the European war; 131: “fosse perennemente in bilico tra idealismo e ‘Realpolitik’, tra i toni messianici e la realistica considerazione delle conseguenze di un’eventuale egemonia tedesca sull’Europa.” Bruti Liberati is contesting the diverse interpretation given by Dragon Živojinovic, *The United States and the Vatican policies* (Boulder, 1978), 23-24. The latter, polemical as regards the Holy See, proposed that the two approaches to the problem of mediation were diametrically opposed, the United States wanting to preserve its friendship with Great Britain, while the Vatican held that the Central Powers were not responsible for the outbreak of war. Luigi Bruti Liberati is ordinary professor of contemporary history at the University of Milan.

in reality, was truly convinced that only Wilson had the power to bring the war to an end showing he fully understood the centrality of the United States in the new world order. Taking into account the available documentation, the author approaches the problem in a novel manner to that defined by traditional Anglo-Saxon historiography, that had tried to interpret Benedict XV's and Wilson's relationship in terms of a clash between the old and new world, the old and new style of diplomacy. This conventional interpretation sought to clearly contrast a conservative pope to the democratic Wilson, whereas the documentation cited by Bruti Liberati reveals a change of attitude over time in Wilson: from a willingness to work together with the Pope to achieve peace to an attitude of distrust towards Benedict XV. The pontiff had to suffer the accusation of favouring the Central Powers for the steps taken to keep the United States from entering into the war with Germany. The author concludes that Benedict XV suffered not only being misinterpreted by his own fold, as indeed his master Rampolla had been before him (given the thirst for American world dominance), but also the Catholic bishops' fear of being considered unpatriotic.<sup>17</sup>

Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, in *Santa Sede e Russia Rivoluzionaria*, vividly describes the difficult situation in which Christians found themselves in Russia due to the total political chaos following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on 15 March 1917. The author explains how once again the realism of Benedict XV stands out, in contrast to a certain enthusiasm, widespread among Catholics at the time, for the conversion of Russia. The Holy See was primarily interested in reorganizing the Catholic communities spread all over the Russian territories, now further divided by the nationalistic sentiments that quickly took over and not in chimeras of a messianic or apologetic tone.<sup>18</sup>

Another issue historiography battles with is that of clarifying the prevailing nationalistic influences within the Roman Curia at the time, and their resulting effect, or lack thereof in determining policy and action. Massimo De Leonardis reflects on Great Britain's reasons for re-establishing a temporary mission at the Vatican in November 1914 to counterbalance the perceived Austrian and German preponderant influence in the Roman Curia, that necessarily placed the Allies at a disadvantage. Through a careful study of the documentation available, De Leonardis clarifies what British diplomacy understood to be the twofold aim of the Holy See's interest in the war: that of assuring its presence in the eventual Peace Conference (and this independently from the resolution of the Roman Question),

---

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>18</sup> See Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, "Santa Sede e Russia rivoluzionaria," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 151-169.

and salvaging the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He argues against the filo-Germanic depiction of Benedict XV, by showing that even prominent members of the British mission, such as John Duncan Gregory,<sup>19</sup> were in no doubt that:

Benedetto XV era personalmente francofilo ma proprio per questo era meno libero di condannare certi comportamenti della Germania; inoltre era stato eletto un nuovo papa, non era stato eletto un 'nuovo Vaticano,' la Curia era largamente favorevole agli Imperi Centrali ed il pontefice non poteva modificarne subito l'orientamento.<sup>20</sup>

De Leonardis provides various such British and American testimonies, to show how much these were convinced that the pope was in fact siding with the Allies. Similar was the position assumed by the Catholic media towards the papal *Peace Note*. The author shows how nationalism prompted the lack of enthusiasm shown by English Catholics, always afraid of being considered unpatriotic, towards the papal initiative.<sup>21</sup> More enthusiastic was the protest shown by Catholic members of the House of Commons, following the publication of a draft of the infamous London Treaty and its Article 15, in demanding an explanation for the exclusion of the Holy See, which caused Lord Cecil himself to seek a less offensive interpretation of that clause.<sup>22</sup> As to the diplomatic mission

---

<sup>19</sup> See Massimo De Leonardis, "Le Relazioni Anglo-Vaticane durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale: l'imparzialità di Benedetto XV e la sua Nota dell'Agosto 1917," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 185. John Duncan Gregory (1878-1951) was a British diplomat, and served at the British mission to the Holy See between 1915 and 1920.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 174: The author is here quoting from Gregory Drummond (private secretary to Grey, Foreign Secretary), 26 June 1915, which included the Memorandum "The Pope and the War," Fo 800/67, ff. 267-289. See De Leonardis, "Le Relazioni Anglo-Vaticane durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale," 200, ft. 12: "Gregory descriveva il papa come 'del tutto franco e sincero,' 'tremendo lavoratore e di forte carattere,' 'un geniale vivace piccoletto;,' il cardinale Gasparri era 'estremamente ben intenzionato e del tutto caloroso;,'" Massimo De Leonardis is a professor of the history of relations and international institutions at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 183-184. On p.185 he quotes from the commentary to the *Peace Note* in *The Tablet* (18 August 1917), translated "Fondamentalmente gli obiettivi di guerra degli alleati sono esattamente quelli che Papa Benedetto XV ha più vicini al suo cuore - sosteneva ancora il settimanale - [...] certamente non potrebbe esservi fondamento per il suggerimento che le proposte tradiscono un pregiudizio filo-tedesco o filo-austriaco." John Duncan Gregory changed his previous positive evaluation of Benedict XV, over the papal *Peace Note*, in a *Memorandum* described him as provincial and absolutely mediocre, even if not filo-Germanic, he was as to his sympathies filo-Italian and for the rest filo-French. He was nevertheless in favour of maintaining the British mission to the Holy See, for the war had shown that the pope was a first that could not be ignored.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, 187-189.



to the Holy See, the author illustrates the debate for and against it, showing how notwithstanding the traditional anti-Catholic sentiment of the British establishment, it was decided that it should be kept, for the war had proved that, theological differences aside, the pope was probably the highest moral authority in existence, and as such could not be ignored, even if they could in no way accept him as a mediator.<sup>23</sup>

Continuing on nationalistic concerns, Stanislaw Sierpowski's *Benedetto XV e la Questione Polacca negli anni della Grande Guerra* explores the papal *Peace Note's* influence for the internationalization of the Polish question. In so doing he explores the mixed reactions to its reception: those who applauded Benedict XV for the notion of justice he proposed, whereas others read in the papal initiative an understanding of peace based on the philosophy of the *status quo ante bellum*, the desire to limit Polish aspirations for a resurrected Poland only to what had been the "Polish kingdom" comprising only the Russian territories and leaving the Austro-Hungarian Empire intact. The author traces a certain development in Benedict XV's attitude towards an independent Poland, and argues that for the Holy See's interest in safeguarding the religious interests came before the political aspects that resulting from the rise of the new states.<sup>24</sup>

Fundamental as to an understanding the relationship between the Holy See and Russia in the tumultuous events following the 1917 revolution, is the work of Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono. Russia rivoluzionaria, Polonia indipendente e Santa Sede* in which he expands on a theme he had already explored. Taking his lead from this famous phrase of Benedict XV, contextualizing it, he probably give its proper interpretation, and through it provides the key to understanding what is truly at stake in this relationship. According to him both Benedict XV and Lenin shared a common concern: the problem of a surging nationalism and the nationalistic movements that were agitating Eastern Europe following the dissolution of the Tsarist Empire. Granted that for both this concern was due to completely different reasons and concerns, he insists that in reality the often misinterpreted phrase of Benedict XV:

Non era un complimento ai patrioti militanti [...] Benedetto XV chiedeva di tener conto delle aspirazioni nazionali dei diversi popoli per evitare lutti e guerre, non perché riconosceva giusta e santa la politica della nazionalità. Che anzi per lui e per la teologia cattolica, la convivenza di popoli differenti in un medesimo

---

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, 193-198

<sup>24</sup> See Stanislaw Sierpowski, "Benedetto XV e la questione Polacca negli anni della Grande Guerra," in *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918*, 213-230; Stanislaw Sierpowski (1942-) is a professor at the University of Poznan.

Stato era fattore di bene comune e di civiltà, mentre i particolarismi nazionali erano considerati elementi di divisione di quella società umana in cui tutti erano chiamati a riconoscersi fratelli.<sup>25</sup>

Through an attentive reading of the sources Della Rocca clarifies many a complex situation, highlighting Benedict XV's and his Curia's understanding and response to an evolving situation, while avoiding the common pitfalls of an anachronistic or ideological reading of the events, one born of imposing on these early years problems that were only to come to the fore later, namely under Stalinism. For the Roman Curia, Bolshevism was nothing more than the latest passing political fancy. Of a traditional nature, the Roman Curia interpreted all revolutions in the light of a common ancestor, this being the French revolution; something that indeed brought about great change, but in itself was quickly extinguished. In truth, they were amazed how such an anarchic form of government inspired by revolution, could persist. The Holy See and Bolshevism clearly saw each other as being substantially unnatural; yet out of a certain sense of realism, at first, still tried to set aside their ideological concerns, so as not to immediately create an enemy out of each other.

As previously discussed, the primary concern of Benedict XV and his Curia, was not the the conversion of Russia, but rather the more concrete aims of, firstly assuring for Catholicism the religious freedom it was denied under Tzarism and secondly organizing the Catholic Church to be able to survive, once the Old Russian spirit returned.<sup>26</sup> Concerns for the *reconquista* of Orthodox Russia to the Roman See only emerged later. In adopting this policy, Benedict XV and his Curia were clearly driven by Uniatism. Even here a judgmental understanding of history must be avoided. Other than the study of the persecution of both Orthodox and Catholic faithful at the hands of the Bolshevists, the author also delves in the study of a related problem, the 1919-20 Polish-Russian conflict. The Holy See, understood that the conflict would have serious repercussions for the survival of the Russian Catholic Church: in Russia Catholic meant Polish, and the Pole was the enemy.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono: Russia rivoluzionaria, Polonia indipendente e Santa Sede* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 8. See also Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, "Benedetto XV e l'Oriente Cristiano," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 116/1 (2004): 281-288.

<sup>26</sup> See Della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> "In un'Europa orientale dove nazione e religione sono visceralmente connaturale, la Polonia cattolica e la Russia ortodossa hanno fatto dell'opposizione radicale tra due nazioni anche un'opposizione tra due fedi che, pure, vantano una comune origine." *Ibid.*, 15:

The volume also explores another problematic side of nationalism. Although Catholicism was present in Russia, no Russian Catholicism in effect existed, for the Catholics spread within the Russian diaspora were Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians etc. Firstly, the nationalistic sentiments set ablaze by the revolution, placed these Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians against each other, as their respective National Churches were instrumental in promoting their individual patriotic sense. A second level to this problem was tied to the issue of rites. For the Poles, Latinization equalled Polonization, and thus a conversion to Catholicism necessarily meant a conversion to the Polish identity, which essentially meant a conversion from Russian barbarity to Latin civilization. Consequently, they were fully in agreement with the Tzarist policy against Uniatism. Two contrasting models emerge: that favouring Latinization promoted by the Poles as part of their expansionistic desires, and that favouring Uniatism, promoted by the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics who had survived in Galizia,<sup>28</sup> led by outstanding metropolitan Szeptycky. Evidently, through his meticulous research in the Vatican Archives, and the lucidity in interpreting the events narrated, Morozzo della Rocca sheds light on the development of a very complex situation.

In contrast, Stewart A. Stalin's *The Emergence of a New Vatican Diplomacy during the Great War and its aftermath* seems a rather shallow attempt to cover more than a decade, 1914-1929, of intense diplomatic activity in a few pages. He describes the means by which the Holy See who "by the First World War appeared to many observers as if the Papacy for the Christian world, like the Caliphate for the Muslim world, was on the way out"<sup>29</sup> emerged from its position of isolation, thanks to the untiring efforts of Gasparri who at the service of two pontiffs, tirelessly worked for the achievement of a lasting peace, notwithstanding France's unwillingness to come to a just solution to German's reparation issue. The author seeks to show how Benedict XV and Gasparri "in a blend of moral vision and political realism"<sup>30</sup> worked to relieve human suffering, while assuring

---

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the persecution suffered by the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics in Galizia under the Tzarist occupation of this territory: See S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., Austria-Ungheria, 1914-15, Pos. 1051, fasc. 447, ff. 2r.-59v.: especially ff. 2r.-25r.: "La persecuzione religiosa in Galizia. Documentata dalla pubblicazione dei giornali russi, 10 novembre 1914."

<sup>29</sup> Stewart A. Stehlin, "The Emergence of a New Vatican Diplomacy During the Great War and its Aftermath, 1914-1929," in *Papal Diplomacy in the Modern Age*, ed. Peter C. Kent and John F. Pollard (Westport/CT: Praeger, 1994), 75. Stewart A. Stehlin is a professor emeritus of history at Yale University.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. Characteristics with which the author describes the pontiffs involved, but could easily be extended to Gasparri.

the Church's position in the new Europe, coupled with the effort to prevent the emergence of one dominant power.

Reaping the fruits of an attentive reading of the sources available, the monograph of Jan de Volder, *Benoît XV et la Belgique durant la Grande Guerre*,<sup>31</sup> explored an aspect of this pontificate until then largely ignored. Such is surprising considering that the occupation of Belgium constituted the very heart of the conflict. In fact, it was greatly used by Allied propaganda to justify their war with Germany. De Volder's study exemplifies how much the Holy See stands to gain from the interest that the various national historical institutes present in Rome continue to show by investing in the study of its archives. It, not only promotes a nationalistic interest, but also reveals the complex situation that an international organization, in this case the Holy See, found itself in when confronted by a World War, in which her members were to be found on both sides of the conflict. The author shows that the 'Belgian question' constituted a major dilemma for the Holy See, as it struggled to maintain both its impartiality and yet find the way to respond through a moral condemnation of the unjust act perpetuated by Germany, a condemnation desired by a large part of the international public opinion. The attentive study of the sources available, such as those of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs sessions devoted to the study of the issues relating to Belgium, published in appendix by the author, allow him to explore another aspect of this conflict: the struggle between the demands of a nation episcopate spearheaded by Cardinal Mercier that fully equated the patriotic cause with that of religion, and those of the Holy See, an international organization that had to preserve its neutrality.

The documentation studied shows how much the Holy See did for the Belgian cause, which it raised above simply patriotic concerns, by inserting it within the wider plan of obtaining a lasting peace for the whole of Europe. It is in this wider spectrum that the Holy See's efforts for a separate German-Belgian peace must be interpreted, as well as in its attention to counsel moderation on the part of the Belgian bishops and their action in favour of the patriotic cause. This study also serves to clarify the figure of Mercier, explain the Holy See's attitude towards him and how much the Holy See was indeed conscious of the stature he enjoyed on the international plane. De Volder's study shows the complex situation the Holy See found itself in, the prudence it had to incarnate, as it sought to promote a just peace and undertake its humanitarian efforts, while the respective sides

---

<sup>31</sup> See Jan De Volder ed. *Benoît XV et la Belgique durant le Grande Guerre* (Bruxelles-Rome, Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1996). Jan De Volder (1967- ) is a Belgian journalist and historian.

in conflict sought to bring the very centre of Catholicism, universal by its very nature, to their side. The seriousness with which the Holy See considers local issues, in this case the Flemish question, taking into account all the risks and possibilities it involved for the Church, shows as Riccardi concludes, that:

On voit comment la perspective supranationale de l'Église ne porte pas à sous-estimer un problème national aussi fondateur de la réalité belge [...] Identité et droit des nations doivent se concilier avec des exigences de caractère supérieur. Mais les nations ne meurent pas [...] C'est précisément dans cette perspective que le cas de la Belgique revêt une grande valeur pour le Vatican de Benoît XV. Ce petit pays catholique, dans lequel vivent deux "nations" différentes, a une valeur symbolique et stratégique de grand relief.<sup>32</sup>

Of singular importance has been the publication of Baron Carlo Monti's diary. Monti, a long-time personal friend of Giacomo della Chiesa, served during the latter's pontificate, as the *incaricato d'affari* of the Italian government to the Holy See., His diary opens up an unprecedented window into the understanding of the day to day unfolding of the Holy See's political and diplomatic mission in general, and on the activity and thoughts of the Pope and his Secretary of State in particular. Through this work historiography is strengthened by its preference for the diplomatic realm. Antonio Scottà's introduction to *La Conciliazione Ufficiosa*, also traces out a revealing portrait of Benedict XV<sup>33</sup> and Gasparri,<sup>34</sup> based on the reflections of Monti, who in seven years had around 175 audiences with the pope, normally accompanied, before or after, by a meeting with Gasparri. Since a commentary on this diary or memoirs, of singular value,<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Andrea Riccardi, "Préface," in *Benoît XV et la Belgique durant le Grande Guerre*, 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> See Antonio Scottà, "Introduzione," in *La Conciliazione Ufficiosa. Diario del barone Carlo Monti "incaricato d'affari" del governo italiano presso la Santa Sede (1914-1922)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1:29-57. Antonio Scottà is an Italian priest and historian. Through his research in the Vatican Archives, he has published on various aspects of Benedict XV's pontificate, of particular importance being the publication of this diary of Baron Carlo Monti in 1997.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 57-62.

<sup>35</sup> "Nessun laico ha avuto la possibilità di accesso e di dialogo con Benedetto XV, quanto il barone Monti [...] La conoscenza e l'amicizia del Monti con Benedetto XV sin dagli anni infantili, la consuetudine dei rapporti personali, la familiarità e la confidenza affettuosissima, non priva di franchezza, non hanno l'eguale fra le persone che stanno attorno al papa, la libertà concessa al Monti stesso di muoversi in Vaticano, la possibilità di scambio d'idee, valutazioni, verifiche con il segretario di stato, cardinal Pietro Gasparri, o con il sostituto della segreteria, mgr. Federico Tedeschini danno al documento un alto grado di attendibilità, considerate anche le qualità morali dell'autore." *Ibid.*, 2-3. See also Giovanni Battista Varnier, "Benedetto XV e i problemi della società contemporanea," in *Benedetto XV: Profeta di pace in un mondo in crisi*,

goes beyond the scope of this study, our interest remains limited to what Scottà reveals regarding the relationship between Gasparri and Benedict XV, largely unexplored in previous works. Scottà's comments show how these two men, coming from completely different family background (Benedict descending from one of the noblest families of Italy, in contrast to Gasparri's humble origins), are shown to be unanimous in their views, to the point that "nelle relazioni sulle udienze si trova spesso di fronte a delle ripetizioni."<sup>36</sup> However, they were diverse in their style, this being due to differences "sia sul piano del carattere che in quello del tratto diplomatico."<sup>37</sup> Compared to the reserved attitude of Benedict XV, Gasparri emerges as spirited, affable and simple, indeed:

"Sua eminenza" – scrive il Monti – "è uomo di grande ingegno, di carattere molto alla mano ed ha una conversazione piacevolissima"; ed altrove sottolinea più di una volta la "conosciuta bonomia, [lo] spirito umoristico, facile alle battute." Ma era del cuore tenerissimo, come attesta il Monti vedendo il Gasparri in lacrime al capezzale del papa morente.<sup>38</sup>

Once again the theme of war and peace takes precedence and the diary stands witness to the rigour by which the pope and his Secretary of State carried out their work, the minute preparation on every argument, corroborated by ample evidence, that failure in these matters was mostly due to the:

[...] imponderabile e dell'irrazionale [...] le insufficienze politiche dei protagonisti, o la stessa indifferenza ed inerzia, ma anche le passioni o i fantasmi ideologici, sia personali che collettivi.<sup>39</sup>

Another point of contrast emerges between Gasparri's patriotic spirit and Benedict XV's greater discretion on this matter. United in their constant preoccupation over the suffering of the soldiers at war, "ma anche del prevedibile

---

ed. Letterio Mauro (Bologna: Minerva, 2008), 328-329: "Il Monti fu amico d'infanzia di Giacomo della Chiesa ma anche direttore generale del Fondo per il Culto del ministero di Grazia e giustizia; respirò l'ansia di quella parte della classe dirigente del Risorgimento desiderosa di giungere alla conciliazione e nel contempo fu il canale delle comunicazioni tra Italia e Vaticano durante il pontificato di Benedetto XV, rendendo marginale il ruolo di altri intermediari." Giovanni Battista Varnier lectures in the History and systems of the relationship between State and Church at the department of political sciences of the *Università degli Studi di Genova*.

<sup>36</sup> Scottà, "Introduzione," 58.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Quoting *Diario*, 1915, 34; *Diario*, 1916, 65; Gasparri shows a great capability for synthesis, at going straight to the heart of the matter, the tact with which he discusses the political and diplomatic situations with Monti.

<sup>39</sup> Scottà, "Introduzione," 59.

deperimento della razza,”<sup>40</sup> Gasparri does not keep back from expressing his joy for the resistance shown by the Italian army in the “battle of the solstice” in June 1918 and his disillusion at the way the papal peace notes were received. The cardinal is said to have abandoned the ‘neutrality’, he had sought so much to defend, exclaiming: “Nessuno può essere neutralista ormai, nessun italiano che ami il proprio paese può volere la pace a condizioni che sarebbero vergognose e quindi può essere neutralista.”<sup>41</sup>

A man for his time, Benedict’s openness to modernity and its liberties transpires through his work, reflected in his readiness to confront the burden of the *non expedit* that still hindered Catholic participation in Italian politics, as Scottà concludes, by the time of his death:

La questione romana, una delle congiunture più aspre della storia d’Italia, che aveva dilacerato per decenni la coscienza dei cattolici non meno che dei laici, si poteva dire sostanzialmente risolta [...] Ai posteriori rimanevano, più che altro, le formalità dell’accordo.<sup>42</sup>

Returning once again to what by now had become an established *topos*, the insistence on the historiographical obscurity that envelopes this pope, John F. Pollard, an established author in the field, most aptly entitled his well-researched biography, *The Unknown Pope. Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace*. His aim is clearly to present a critical, yet highly accessible, holistic presentation of the life of whom he considers a greatly neglected Pope. For the purpose of our study, it serves to highlight salient aspects, especially the manner in which he illustrates the relationship between Benedict XV and Gasparri, as his closest collaborator.<sup>43</sup> The keyword in this work is “peace,” as the pair, Benedict XV

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 61: quoting *Diario*, 1917, 99; Gasparri is shown as being liable to such outbursts of passion, defining Sonnino as “uomo nefasto per l’Italia,” ardent, frank and explicit in his language, especially in some letters of protest sent to Monti. On this point, Scottà comments, that according to Monti “il lato debole del cardinale Gasparri [...] era la diplomazia, meglio il tratto diplomatico, giudizio condiviso anche dal papa.” Precisely because of this bluntness often shown by Gasparri, that Monti emphasizes that the political and diplomatic direction assumed by the Holy See during the war are to be credited to the pope in person.

<sup>42</sup> Scottà, “Introduzione,” 57.

<sup>43</sup> This study serves to illustrate this relationship between Benedict XV and Gasparri, as one of friendship and service, and in so doing, the author brings out nuances neglected by others, as he develops this account, based on the wealth of archival material now available, yet written in a flowing style. Access to such a broad spectrum of archival material, from the family archives of the Della Chiesa, to the *Archivio Arcivescovile di Bologna*, and most importantly the Vatican Archives, as well as the *Archivio Generale dello Stato* (Italian), and various diplomatic archives,

and Gasparri, are considered in the context of the world wide theatre in which they operate, as they tirelessly work to achieve peace at every level: peace among nations entangled and embittered in war; peace with a society torn by class struggle and the emergent ideologies; peace within a Church divided by the modernist crisis.<sup>44</sup> What is said of Benedict, is also largely applied by the author to Gasparri.<sup>45</sup> Once Gasparri became Secretary of State, Pollard shows how they worked in union of thought and action<sup>46</sup> in order to revitalize papal diplomacy, inherited in a very sorry state of isolation from Pius X, as “the Holy See assumed a high profile in international affairs, becoming a major diplomatic player in its own right, in a far better and stronger position to defend its interests.”<sup>47</sup>

The war issue could not but take precedence. Pollard’s account lends new depth to understanding the Holy See’s impartiality throughout the conflict, especially in the light of accusations of favouring the Central Powers, a charge advanced both by contemporaries, as well as by later historians, that would continue to haunt Benedict XV. Given the poor diplomatic relations between the Entente Powers and the Vatican, it was not surprising that the Central Powers enjoyed both greater influence, and to a certain extent, greater sympathy within the Vatican. Pollard examines the reasons why both Benedict XV and Gasparri “could not be indifferent to the fate of Austria-Hungary, the last Catholic great power and a bulwark against Russian orthodoxy and Pan-Slavism”<sup>48</sup> and its possible demise

---

allow the author to set his protagonists within the wider historical context in which they operate, allowing him to survey the workings of a difficult pontificate from within. This work is further enriched by an exhaustive bibliography pertaining to the subject matter.

<sup>44</sup> See Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV*, xiii-xv.

<sup>45</sup> See *ibid.*, 144; See also *ibid.*, 17. 25. 27. Their relationship went as far back as 1901, during their collaboration in the Secretariat of State, where Gasparri worked as the Secretary for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and Giacomo della Chiesa as the Sostituto. It is illuminating to see that both have been referred to as a new Consalvi, and both found resistance from Merry del Val. Pollard comments “While Merry del Val was not the ‘evil genius’ of the Vatican during Pius X’s pontificate, he certainly had a powerful influence upon its policies which did not please either Della Chiesa or Gasparri, his two immediate subordinates,” both of whom were marginalized together in December 1907, separated for their opposition to the anti-modernist crusade. “Equally, like his friend Gasparri, he could not have enjoyed executing policies with which he profoundly disagreed.”

<sup>46</sup> “On the other hand, it could be argued that in some important respects Benedict XV returned to the policies of Leo XIII, and of his mentor, Rampolla. This is certainly true in regard to the diplomatic policies of Benedict XV and Gasparri.” *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.



would also “leave Germany more powerful than ever.”<sup>49</sup> Serious is the charge that Gasparri “had little time for Belgian claims of victimization, declaring that the little kingdom should have given way to the German invasion.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, Pollard shows that Benedict and Gasparri were capable of changing their views in response to the developing circumstances, showing that although their main aim was that of limiting the war and the advancement of “a peace offensive that would culminate with the famous *Peace Note* of August 1917,”<sup>51</sup> the Vatican was in no way a “disinterested observer” as it sought to obtain the desired “‘greater international presence’ for the Holy See,”<sup>52</sup> that was in effect achieved. Benedict XV’s unwillingness to respond to the insistent calls for condemnation by the opposing sides in war, was also motivated by Gasparri’s concern for the “supreme interest of the Church.”<sup>53</sup>

According to Pollard, even the opposition to Italy’s entry into the war was not disinterested for this further complicated the Vatican’s diplomatic position as it could no longer defend its neutrality by claiming it was “the guest of another neutral power.”<sup>54</sup> Pollard concludes that although Benedict XV’s and Gasparri’s peace efforts had failed, eventually they did bear fruit in carving for the contemporary papacy “a new peace-making role,”<sup>55</sup> a role that gained such moral prestige for the Holy See, that made future negotiations with the new realities emerging from the war possible, and that opened up a new era for a transformed instrument – the concordat. The connection between the new *Code of canon law* and the new style of concordats is hinted at by Pollard who speaks of the German case as the “first major guinea pig” through which Gasparri and his disciple Pacelli “began their campaign to use concordats, that is treaties between the Holy See and other powers, as a means of effectively enforcing the writ of canon law inside states.”<sup>56</sup> In this expression the author successfully encapsulates the aim of this new politics of concordats.

Although, Benedict XV and Gasparri emerge as preferring the multi-ethnic dynastic state that was the Habsburg Empire, and were uneasy, to say the least,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 91: Pollard is here quoting Italo Garzia, *La questione Romana durante la I guerra mondiale* (Naples, 1981), 68. Italo Garzia lectures on the history of Vatican diplomacy and international relations at the *Università degli Studi di Bari*.

<sup>53</sup> Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV*, 94.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 194.

with the emergent nationalism, the author argues that once faced with the application of Wilson's principle of 'National Self-determination', they were ready to adapt their views out of pragmatic considerations.<sup>57</sup> Examining the post-war scenario through Benedict XV's encyclical *De Pacis*, Pollard shows how both the Pope and his Secretary of State were critical of the policies followed by the Allied powers after the First World War: from the League of Nations; their failure to settle the problems in Russia, ultimately leading to a state of civil war and the victory of Bolshevism; the way they treated the issues of the extinguished Ottoman Empire. Benedict XV and Gasparri were also drawn into the issue of Palestine. Their opposition to Zionist claims were motivated by their concerns for the fate of the Christian communities in that region. Feeling freer to express his views than the Pope, Gasparri's position on the issue was clearer,<sup>58</sup> to the great disappointment of many Jews world-wide.

Given the strengthening of Britain as a world super-power after the Versailles treaty, Pollard reports how the Holy See was especially concerned in maintaining good relations with Britain out of concern for the fate of Catholics in its vast empire. Although not supportive of the Irish nationalistic cause, this being in line also with their uneasiness with national self-determination *per se*, both Benedict XV and Gasparri were clearly concerned for the plight of Irish Catholics. A delicate diplomatic balance had to be maintained between the concerns of the British crown and refraining from condemning the Irish nationalistic movement.<sup>59</sup>

Pollard claims that Benedict XV and Gasparri's success in diplomacy is not only to be judged by the number of countries diplomatic relations had been established with, but by the fact that the Holy See had truly become a new force in international affairs. Merry del Val's criticism that the "prevalence of too much politics, worldly diplomacy and intrigue are hardly in keeping with the lofty ideals of our mission, nor profitable to the best interests of God and his Church," is both unjust and false, for it cannot be denied that Benedict XV's and Gasparri's

---

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, 145. Pollard shows that their fear was motivated by the rise of Bolshevism "that is that the creation of the successor States was not a good thing because they could not be self-sufficient, they would be vulnerable to the Bolshevik menace (a fear that had also prompted worries about too harsh a treatment of Germany), and that they would tend to fight among themselves, which history proved only too painfully to be correct."

<sup>58</sup> "As Sergio Minerbi has recognized, Benedict XV's policy boiled down to this: the great powers must guarantee the rights to Catholics, although without impairing the rights of Jews and also without giving Jews any privileges." *Ibid.*, 151. See Sergio Minerbi, *The Vatican, the Holy Land and Zionism, 1895-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 149.

<sup>59</sup> See Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV*, 152-155.

motivation lay in seeking the greatest good for the Church, or that they did not “set before the world the Christian principles on the basis of which alone, he believed, a just and lasting peace was possible.”<sup>60</sup> Pollard also investigates how Gasparri “was not averse to playing off one colonial power against the other,”<sup>61</sup> in order to promote Benedict’s missionary policy through the entanglements of nationalism and colonialism.

Pollard considers the sending of Cerretti as the Holy See’s representative to France as the “crowning triumph”<sup>62</sup> of Benedict and Gasparri’s diplomacy; a good step towards reversing the damage done by Pius X and Merry del Val. These efforts are read within the “lunga durata,” the real chance of Leo XIII’s policy of *ralliement* to give fruit.

Pollard also dedicates some space in his work to show how concern over the spread of Bolshevism determined a lot of the Holy See’s foreign policy. There was clear anxiety over the Entente’s support for Russia’s ambitious claims on the Bosphorus, precisely out of this fear. So, also Benedict and Gasparri entertained high hopes that the ‘schismatic’ churches of Bulgaria and Romania would return to Rome. All these hopes came to nothing, just as the extravagant hope of Russia’s conversion. Gasparri is said to have seen the fall of Tzarism in the February Revolution of 1917, as “a glimmer of light”<sup>63</sup> for the future of Roman Catholicism in Russia. The Kerensky government’s willingness to establish reciprocal relations strengthened this hope. Even the separation between Church and State in January 1918, the fruit of the rising Bolshevik’s militant atheism, was seen as possibly being advantageous for the Catholic Church. According to Pollard, it is difficult to understand Gasparri’s and Benedict’s optimism in this regard and even their willingness to negotiate with the threat they feared most, Bolshevism, entertaining the illusion that the Bolsheviks’ weakening of the Orthodox Church would somehow facilitate a conversion towards Rome. These unrealistic hopes of coming to terms with the Bolsheviks were not abandoned before 1929.<sup>64</sup>

Pollard’s study benefits from the availability of greater archival material when dealing with the Holy See’s relationship with the Italian State. Thus the author is critical of Benedict’s and Gasparri’s continual denial that they indeed desired a place at the peace conference. The fact that various attempts were made to assure

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>64</sup> See *ibid.*, 195-200.

such a place, as well as their opposition to Sonnino, prove otherwise. In effect, efforts carried out behind the scenes between Cerretti and Orlando<sup>65</sup> achieved more for the Holy See than what it could have achieved at the peace table, as according to Pollard, this could have alienated Italy, setting back any progress made, for many years.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding Luigi Sturzo and the formation of the *Partito Popolare Italiano*, Pollard argues that this was certainly one area for which Gasparri and Benedict did not share the same enthusiasm, even though they agreed as to the attitude that such a party was to maintain regarding the Roman Question. According to Pollard, and here he cites Monti, Gasparri had tied himself too closely to Francesco Nitti and the old liberal political class. Thus, the judgement that Carlo Monti, the intermediary between the two, passes on Gasparri's approach to Italian politics, that "Gasparri [...] though he is an able, if somewhat crude, diplomatist and a distinguished canon lawyer, does not understand internal politics very well"<sup>67</sup> is revealing and worthy of further study. But by 1920, the threat of socialism, which Benedict described as "the enemy,"<sup>68</sup> as well as the news of the horrors of Bolshevism, coupled by Sturzo's intransigent refusal to enter into an alliance with the liberals against socialism, fuelled Gasparri's and Benedict's anxieties over this *Partito Popolare Italiano*. However, Pollard considers it unfortunate, indeed a betrayal of Benedict's memory that Giuseppe Dalla Torre and Gasparri were to use his name after his death, in a letter they clearly had authored, but which appeared under the name of Monti-Guarnieri, in which the Pope is said to have had "nothing to do with the *Partito Popolare Italiano*. I have not recognized

---

<sup>65</sup> Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (1860-1952), was an Italian politician and jurist. As the person responsible for the government ministry "Grazia e Giustizia," he maintained the unofficial relationship between the Italian State and the Holy See, during the pontificate of Pius X. Later Minister for Internal affairs, he was then called to lead the Italian government as "Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri del Regno d'Italia" following the defeat of Caporetto, between 30 October 1917- 23 June 1919, when he gave his resignation. After having abandoned the Peace Conference in Paris during which he came in sharp contrast with Sonnino's imperialistic designs and was publicly humiliated by Wilson. Initially, a benevolent supporter of Fascism, even though he insisted to have always maintained his liberal democratic credentials, it was he who prepared Badoglio's proclamation decreeing the end of fascism. He remained active in various political posts, and present in the senate (1948-1952), till the end of his life. See Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, *I miei rapporti con la Santa Sede* (Milano: Edizioni Garzanti, 1944); Orlando, *Memorie* (1915-1919), R. Mosca (ed.) (Milano: Rizzoli, 1960); Orlando, *Su alcuni miei rapporti con la Santa Sede* (Napoli: Sabina, 1930).

<sup>66</sup> See Pollard, *The Unknown Pope Benedict XV*, 143.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

it as a party and I do not wish to recognize it now so that I may disown it later.”<sup>69</sup> Pollard’s issue here is with the rise of Fascism, although he clearly admits that the end of Benedict XV’s pontificate had anyway already sealed the fate of the *Partito Popolare Italiano*. In treating such a wide spectrum of issues, a common weakness in such works emerges, as in certain respects, certain judgements are too generalised, betraying a certain degree of superficiality.

Going beyond the geographical limits generally set by the historiography reviewed so far, the volume edited by Agostino Giovagnoli, *Roma e Pechino. La svolta extraeuropea di Benedetto XV*, true to its title, explores another largely ignored aspect of this pontificate: the revolution one might say, brought about by this pontiff in the sphere of Catholic missionary activity, a true “svolta,” according to the various contributors to this volume.<sup>70</sup> This decisive change, coinciding with the peace of Versailles, finds its concrete expression in the publication of the apostolic letter *Maximum illud*. As Claude Soetens<sup>71</sup> explains it illustrates Benedict XV’s determination “(per il) superamento del nazionalismo in favore di un progetto universale.”<sup>72</sup> In the dialectic between continuity and discontinuity with the pontificate of Leo XIII that Rumi<sup>73</sup> further explores, the volume highlights the contribution of the various players involved in asserting the centrality of Rome in the government of Catholic missions, a desire many a time contrary to the colonial interests advanced by the very missionaries themselves. The change brought about by Benedict XV and his Curia sought to free the Holy See “dal condizionamento delle potenze europee sul terreno religioso, politico e finanziario: veniva in qualche modo ridefinita la stessa collocazione della Chiesa cattolica nel contesto internazionale contemporaneo.”<sup>74</sup> Thus Andrea Riccardi traces the historical background that led the Church to overcome the limited missionary vision of the “Patronato,” in a struggle extending over centuries while *Propaganda Fide* sought to vindicate its claims over Catholic missionary activity, its vision of *plantatio*

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>70</sup> Agostino Giovagnoli, “Introduzione,” in *Roma e Pechino, la svolta extraeuropea di Benedetto XV*, ed. Agostino Giovagnoli (Roma: Studium, 1999), 5. Giovagnoli (1952- ) lectures in Contemporary history at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan.

<sup>71</sup> See Claude Soetens, “La svolta della Maximum Illud,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 69-90; See also C. Soetens, “La Chine entre Propagande et Secrétairerie d’État. De Benoît XV à Pie XI,” *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 116/1 (2004): 289-301.

<sup>72</sup> Giovagnoli, “Introduzione,” 4.

<sup>73</sup> See Giorgio Rumi, “Benedetto XV e il sistema delle relazioni internazionali,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 21-37.

<sup>74</sup> Giovagnoli, “Introduzione,” 7.

*Ecclesia*, a vision that saw in “Roma (è) la garanzia dell’internazionalizzazione delle missioni, perché non siano assorbite in un’ottica nazionale.”<sup>75</sup>

It is in this context that China emerges, as the constant interest accorded to it by the Holy See shows, in particular to the controversy over the Chinese rites. This action, in favour of a universal Catholic project, spearheaded by Benedict XV, Gasparri, Van Rossum and their collaborators, traces its roots to the political action of Leo XIII, but is now strengthened by the experience achieved during the First World War, and the difficult circumstances that Catholic missions had found themselves in by its end. As Giovagnoli shows, the Chinese case stands out, in that Benedict XV, as Leo XIII before him, in his attempt to establish a diplomatic relationship with Beijing, had to face the same resistance from France with its claims to the protectorate of Catholic interests in this area. Whereas Leo XIII felt that he could not stand up to France, Benedict XV was determined to march ahead.<sup>76</sup>

Returning concretely to the study of the key apostolic letter in question, Claude Soetens in *La svolta della Maximum Illud*, seeks to explain, firstly, to what extent this document constitutes “una svolta decisiva per l’evangelizzazione, un testo di “eccezionale importanza,”<sup>77</sup> una “ouverture sinfonica,”<sup>78</sup> un “colpo di

<sup>75</sup> Andrea Riccardi, “La Chiesa fuori della ‘Cristianità,’” in *Roma e Pechino*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> See A. Giovagnoli, “Rapporti diplomatici fra Santa Sede e Cina,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 39-67. On pp 66-67 we read that the direction taken by Benedict XV was continued by Pius XI who “[Pio XI], appena eletto papa, riprendeva e realizzava, con la massima celerità, la decisione del suo predecessore di istituire una delegazione apostolica in Cina, nominando per quell’ufficio mons. Celso Costantini, [...] comprese che la missione del delegato apostolico in Cina, benché prevalentemente religiosa, non era priva di qualche aspetto politico-diplomatico. [...] Come si vede, si trattava di una “politica” ispirata ad un progressivo distacco dagli interessi nazionali delle potenze europee, mentre nella Chiesa cattolica si rafforzavano contemporaneamente tanto la dimensione universalistica che la spinta verso l’adattamento.” Regarding Mgr. Celso Costantini as the first apostolic delegate in China: he received two directives from *Propaganda Fide*, to prepare for the celebration of a Chinese council, and to lay the foundation for the creation of a native hierarchy: See Ruggero Simonato, “Oltre l’Occidentalismo’: Mons. Celso Costantini,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 201-220; Gu Wei Ming, “Costantini e la ‘Naturalizzazione’ della Chiesa in Cina,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 221-225; J. Bruls, “Dalle missioni alle giovani chiese,” in *Nuova storia della Chiesa*, 5/II, 237-299. Costantini is clear in his negative evaluation of the French protectorate in China, and the hurdle it constitutes against the implantation of a local church. See Ruggero Simonato, 208: “Per lui il protettorato era diventato soltanto uno strumento di propaganda indiretta utilizzato dai governi europei, uno schermo frapposto tra Roma e le missioni, come dimostrava l’impossibilità di stabilire una nunziatura a Pechino, stanti le opposizioni di parte francese. Si trattava di avviare, invece, le missioni verso la semplice tutela del diritto comune.”

<sup>77</sup> See A. Battandier, in *Annuaire Pontifical catholique*, 33 (1920) 561.

<sup>78</sup> See A. Retif, *Les Papes contemporains et la mission* (Paris, 1966), 35.

gong”:<sup>79</sup> in sostanza la carta delle missioni contemporanee”; secondly, the role played by Cardinal Van Rossum, considered by some to be the second founder of *Propaganda Fide*, in developing this new missionary strategy and in the genesis of this apostolic letter itself.<sup>80</sup> Soetens considers the historical circumstances and motives behind the letter, the wider context of the war, with the concrete threat that German missions faced as to their fate, at its end. For the Holy See the missions provided the possibility of exerting a strong leverage on the international plane. In the wider spectrum of this pontificate, Benedict XV truly believed that Catholic universalism was the antidote to the exasperated nationalism that had brought about the war in the first place. In substance, according to Soetens, three factors occasioned the publication of this apostolic letter on the 30 November 1919: firstly, it was made possible due to the fact that Benedict XV could avail himself of a diplomatic *équipe* who like him were formed under Rampolla, promoters of the Holy See’s political presence on the international plane; secondly, through the successful modification of Article 438 of the Peace treaty, the Holy See is recognized as the supreme Catholic authority on the international plane; thirdly, by the concrete circumstances provided by that solidarity inaugurated between the Holy See and China.<sup>81</sup> China provided the concrete occasion, for the Holy See to express its willingness:

di desolidarizzare le missioni dalle imprese coloniali e imperialiste [...] un documento che, certo, ricentra la responsabilità missionaria su Roma, ma la cui intenzione universale e la prospettiva di cattolicità sono innegabili.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> See *ibid.*, 40.

<sup>80</sup> See C. Soetens, “La svolta della *Maximum Illud*,” in *Roma e Pechino*, 69; See Giuseppe Buttarini, “Il ‘Problema delle missioni,’” in *Roma e Pechino*, 91-128. Buttarini offers a diverse reading as to the genesis of *Maximum Illud*, a more critical approach to the “svolta” brought about by this apostolic letter, a change which was to find great resistance among the missionaries themselves: 126-127. In Benedict XV he sees a greater emphasis on the “Catholicity” of the Church, that is the “creazione di delegazioni apostoliche rispondono molto di più alle esigenze di una mobilitazione del cattolicesimo su scala universale, in vista di una nuova civiltà cristiana, che all’istanza di estendere le Chiese locali “autonome,” sia pure in più stretta comunione con la Santa Sede. Decentramento e adattamento - oggi potremmo chiamarlo inculturazione - non rispondevano ancora al disegno della Santa Sede, la cui azione sembrava più volta a instaurare la civiltà cristiana e la creazione di una Chiesa universale rispondente ai canoni tridentini, che alla costituzione di Chiese locali veramente autoctoni. Questo sarà l’approdo del Vaticano II, al quale comunque, la “svolta” di papa Benedetto apriva la strada.”

<sup>81</sup> See *ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Returning once again, specifically, to the *Peace Note*, Roberto Ricci in his essay *Il Papa del novecento*, hails Benedict XV as having been truly the pope for the contemporary age. In asserting this, he returns to established models, interpreting his pontificate in terms of both the hermeneutic of continuity (for he shows that with him we have a clear return to the diplomatic school of Leo XIII and Rampolla) but also change, as to the novel understanding of the proposed peace. His was the challenge of promoting a truly just peace addressed to all men of goodwill, which truly understands the challenges of the age with all the horror that the war had unleashed. Using the correspondence between Benedict XV and Valfrè di Bonzo,<sup>83</sup> the author provides a key to understanding the pontiff's particular conception of peace, promoting a religious understanding, which underpinned his diplomatic and political action pursued in its service, for truly:

in buona sostanza ci si affidava alla giustizia umana e civile per riportare il mondo alla pace cristiana; cioè si adoperavano gli strumenti della diplomazia per di comporre il dissidio egoistico delle Nazioni, fino a piegare le ragioni della diplomazia medesima a quelle morali e religiose.<sup>84</sup>

This, the author explains, is the prophetic dimension, that regains for the Church a moral primacy in the Europe that rises from the ashes of war, as the Catholic Church entered into a new relationship with a world that had itself radically changed:

Benedetto ha agito in modo da risolvere e da avviare a soluzione problemi che i suoi predecessori avevano lasciato insoluti associando intimamente il suo nome ad una posizione della Chiesa indubbiamente cresciuta d'importanza internazionale e politica. I suoi predecessori hanno predicato le parole della vita *importune* ed *opportune*, egli ha avuto, e meritata, la ventura di predicarle soltanto *opportune*.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> See G. Rumi, "L'epistolario tra Benedetto XV e monsignore Valfrè di Bonzo," in *Civitas* (1991/1): 3-83.

<sup>84</sup> Roberto Ricci, *Il Papa del novecento. Benedetto XV e la Nota di pace del 1917* (Teramo: Interlinea editrice, 1999), 17-18. Roberto Ricci (1959-) researches mainly on the history and historiography of the 17th and 18th centuries; See also Ennio Bezzone, *Papa Benedetto XV e la nuova presenza della Chiesa nella società internazionale a partire della Nota di Pace del 1° Agosto 1917. Excerptum thesios ad Doctoratum in Iuro Canonico* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2004). Ennio Bezzone (1967-) has served in the diplomatic service of the Holy See in various countries.

<sup>85</sup> Ricci, *Il Papa del novecento*, 16: The author through these words of L. Degli Occhi, emphasizes the role of Benedict XV as pastor. L. Degli Occhi, *Benedetto XV* (Milano: R. Caddeo, 1921), 7.



Not only the peace efforts during the war, but also the Holy See's presence in the peace process that followed, demand constant interest in this historiographical tradition. So much so, that at a distance of eighty years from the Peace Conference in Paris, Antonio Scottà felt the need of bringing together various historians in order to reflect on the enduring influence of the treaty it produced, together with another four peace treatises in the fourteen months that followed, and the Europe to which they gave birth.<sup>86</sup> As regards Benedict XV, Emma Fattorini's *La Germania e la Nota di pace di Benedetto XV* is of certain interest. She contextualizes the famous note within the complex diplomatic and political relationships through a detailed step-by-step reconstruction of the events that led to it.<sup>87</sup> Fattorini concludes that "il Vaticano, pur coltivando il desiderio di un Europa cristiana, non sposa mai tesi pangermaniste e 'caroline'."<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> See Pietro Pastorelli, "Presentazione," in *La Conferenza di pace di Parigi fra ieri e domani (1919-1920). Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studi Portogruaro-Bibione 31 maggio-4 giugno 2000*, ed. Antonio Scottà (Catanzaro: Rubbettino Editore, 2003), 16.

<sup>87</sup> See Emma Fattorini, "La Germania e la Nota di pace di Benedetto XV," in *La Conferenza di pace di Parigi fra ieri e domani (1919-1920)*, 229-252: Fattorini enumerates the following events as determining the publication of the papal *Peace Note*. Bethmann-Hollweg's openness towards Pacelli's demands for the liberation of Belgium and the Alsazia-Lorena during their meeting in Berlin between 26-29 June 1917, and Erzberger's discourse in favour of peace by compromise followed by Reichstag's vote in its favour (19 July 1917), the substitution of Bethmann-Hollweg, considered by the military and the political right to open towards democratic tendencies, for Michaelis, the taking over of the German army by Hindenburg and Ludendorff and its predominance over the Reichstag, all these factors coupled with the accusation on the Allies' part of a preliminary agreement between Germany and the Holy See, the lack of concrete steps by Germany, led Benedict XV to issue the *Peace Note* on 1 August 1917 without further ado. Fattorini further examines the divided reaction of German Catholics to the *Note*, as well as Wilson's rejection of it, demanding the liberation of the peoples subject to the Central powers from their military regimes and irresponsible governments. For a thorough study of Eugenio Pacelli's tenure as nuncio in Monaco; See Emma Fattorini, *Germania e Santa Sede fra la Grande Guerra e la Repubblica di Weimar* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992). In this monograph the author specifically delves deep into the study of the whole German context occasioning the papal *Peace Note* during the 1918 revolution when he was personally attacked by communist revolutionaries, regarding catholic participation in the Weimar Republic, regarding the situation created by the Treaty of Versailles, the nunciature in Berlin and the concordat concluded with Hitler, regarding polish nationalism and the plebiscite in Upper Silesia, regarding the occupation of the Ruhr. In appendix the author publishes a number of documents from the AA.EE.SS., mainly correspondence between Pacelli and Gasparri, relating to the various issues treated. Emma Fattorini (1952- ) is a centre-left Italian politician and historian. She lectures in contemporary history at the Sapienza University in Rome, and her work *Pio XI, Hitler e Mussolini. La Solitudine di un papa* (Einaudi: Torino, 2007) has been the source of great polemic.

<sup>88</sup> Fattorini, "La Germania e la Nota di pace di Benedetto XV," 252.

Studying a selection of the *Intercettazioni del Comando Supremo italiano dei dispacci telegrafici tra Benedetto XV e Carlo I d'Asburgo*, Giorgio Rumi<sup>89</sup> shows how in violation of that very *Legge delle Guarentigie* that it itself unilaterally stipulated, through these interceptions Italy had added access to key information on the enemy at crucial moments of the war. Such studies, which might seem at first verging on the minute, in effect allow historiography to dig deeper thus making greater clarity possible. Particularly moving is Benedict XV's plea to Wilson on the 7th October 1918, in whose hands lay the power to bring the war to an end, to accept the Central powers' request for an armistice and peace negotiations. Benedict's realism shines out in his confession to Charles, "Maestà né io né voi contiamo più nulla, quello che conta è il presidente della grande Repubblica Americana."<sup>90</sup> Benedict's affection towards Carlo and the Imperial family, and his desire to save this last Catholic empire, allows him to go beyond protocol in inviting him, even in the last hour, to undertake a courageous reform of his empire, suggesting the federal form and the concession of greater autonomy to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Even when all was lost, Benedict never abandons the Imperial family in its time of dire need, and delicately offers even his financial support. Such studies clarify the motives behind the actions undertaken, and invite historians to go beyond superficial judgements.

Returning to the theme of peace, Antonio Scottà, in *Benedetto XV, la pace e la Conferenza di Parigi*, goes to the core of the papal peace initiatives. The author explains how Benedict traced the true root of this war to human greed, a result of that spiritual and moral decadence of society that found its concrete expression in the unbridled affirmation of a nationalistic spirit and exalted forms of patriotism. This in turn destabilized the international community and created the crisis in which international law found itself. In his understanding, the reasons for this war were not political, but economical in nature.<sup>91</sup> Against this unbridled nationalism, Benedict offered the antidote of a Christian universalism that must find in fraternal love and mutual trust the source of a true and lasting

---

<sup>89</sup> See Giorgio Rumi, "Intercettazioni del Comando Supremo italiano dei dispacci telegrafici tra Benedetto XV e Carlo I d'Asburgo," in *La conferenza di pace di Parigi fra ieri e domani (1919-1920)*, 267-275.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>91</sup> "Come attesta il barone Monti il papa gli confidava che a suo parere le cause della guerra non erano politiche, ma economiche: ed esse puntavano alla eliminazione della Germania, da parte della Gran Bretagna e degli Stati Uniti, per timore della perdita della leadership dell'economia europea soprattutto per la crescente potenza marittima teutonica." Antonio Scottà, "Benedetto XV, la pace e la Conferenza di Parigi," in *La conferenza di pace di Parigi fra ieri e domani (1919-1920)*, 446. See S.RR.SS., AA.EE.SS., *Stati Ecclesiastici*, 216, vol. III, pp.1 e 3.

peace. Above all Benedict refused to allow the instrumentalisation of religion for war propaganda, indeed of confusing the cause of war with the causes of religion, an error from which other prominent cardinals and bishops were not immune. All this constitutes the logic at play in Benedict's numerous attempts for the achievement of just peace; from his protest against the confiscation of Palazzo Venezia, his protest to Wilson's rejection of the *Peace Note*,<sup>92</sup> his understanding of the Balkan question, the peace conference itself and the unjust peace it imposed, and the missionary situation in China. Scottà shows how Benedict's attempts in trying to save the Austro-Hungarian empire to the very end, must be rooted in his desire for the universalism it expressed, concretized in the ample freedom it gave on the local level while maintaining a centralized system of government. Especially in the Balkans, Benedict XV understood the importance of ethnicity over and above any imposed system of states.

## **Conclusion**

Obviously the treatment of this relatively short pontificate remains determined by interest in the war that conditioned it. Authors continue returning to the same themes, namely the peace efforts promoted by this pope on every front, amongst which the 1917 *Peace Note* occupies pride of place as the very fulcrum of this pontificate, coupled with his humanitarian action, both during the war and in its aftermath. Ironically, the very nationalism, the enemy against which Benedict XV fought, now, even if in another sense altogether, is acting to his advantage, for most studies on the Great War are motivated by a certain nationalistic interest, as historians from a diversity of backgrounds approach the Holy See's papers to unravel the role of this or that particular nation, and in so doing also shed light on Benedict XV, the Holy See and its diplomatic efforts in favour of a just and lasting peace. Such studies have clarified the neutrality of the Holy See, and have freed Benedict XV from a certain caricature imposed on him during the war itself by those who wanted to present him as being pro-German, or even pro-Allies, an effort either to win him over to their side or to discredit his efforts.

---

<sup>92</sup> See Scottà, "Benedetto XV, la pace e la Conferenza di Parigi," 441-447: Scottà examines the protest presented in an article by Giuseppe Dalla Torre, in *Nuova Antologia*, September 1917, which Benedict XV declares as inspired by the ideas of the Holy See, published even before receiving Germany's definitive response. Scottà, 443, comments "Il testo, anche se tendenzialmente polemico, rappresenta in forma organica la visione politica di Benedetto XV, non solo in merito al conflitto, ma alla organizzazione interna delle nazioni, ispirata al sistema democratico, ed a quella della comunità internazionale."

Not foreign to such motivations are also those tied to the birth of new nations, the Slav countries and the Balkans, out of the demise of the four empires brought about by the war. Even if the Holy See was excluded from the Peace Conference, it still proved to be a major player on the international plane, as various studies have proved. Themes explored in this regard include, Benedict XV's efforts in favour of Austria and Germany, brought to their feet by the unjust peace imposed by the Allies, the Holy See's interest in the near and middle east, and its action in favour of the Armenians and other Christian minorities. Another area of study, which has been opened up, has to do with the Holy See's relationship with the newly formed League of Nations and the limits it envisaged in this regard. Some interest has been shown in the new politics of concordats, but evidently much more remains to be done as to its true motivations, and to the ecclesial vision on which it was founded and from which it found its bearing. A certain interest has been shown in the restoration of the diplomatic relationship with France, as well as a critical study of the steps accomplished towards the resolution of the Roman Question.

Historiography has also timidly opened up to the missionary aspects of this pontificate, what has been defined by some a "revolution", namely a certain renewed vision for missionary activity, as it struggled to free itself from the nationalistic interests of colonialism, a vision which found in *Maximum illud* its articulation, and in the Holy See's interest in China its concrete expression and motivation.

Nicholas Joseph Doublet  
The Archbishop's Curia  
Saint Calcedonius' Square  
Floriana  
Malta

[nicholas.doublet@maltadiocese.org](mailto:nicholas.doublet@maltadiocese.org)