

The pope's man in London: Anglo-Vatican relations, the nuncio question and Irish concerns, 1938-82

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Although a British mission to the Holy See was established in 1914, the diplomatic relationship was not on a basis of reciprocity. From 1938 the pope was represented in London not by a nuncio (the Vatican equivalent of an ambassador) but by an apostolic delegate whose mission was to the hierarchy alone and not the British government. The evolution of the nuncio question sheds light on the nature of Anglo-Vatican relations, the place of Catholicism in British public life, inter-church rapprochement and British foreign policy considerations. This article assesses the divergent positions of the Foreign and Home Offices. The former was sympathetic to a change of status, whereas the latter was cautious due to the opposition of the archbishop of Canterbury and concerns about anti-Catholicism. The nuncio question was also of great interest to the Irish government. It feared that a nuncio in London would exert jurisdiction over Northern Ireland and undermine the all-island unity of the Irish Catholic Church. The Northern Ireland Troubles and the support displayed by the apostolic delegate for British policy hastened the restoration of full ambassadorial relations between London and the Holy See in 1982, ending a diplomatic breach that had existed for more than four centuries. It paved the way for Pope John Paul II's historic pastoral visit to Britain which helped to consolidate the position of Roman Catholicism in British national life.

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As he came to the end of his term as British minister to the Holy See in 1965, Peter Scarlett reflected on the anomalous state of diplomatic relations between London and the Vatican. It seemed puzzling to him that relations 'with some Communist satellites should be conducted at normal ambassadorial level while those with the Holy See – an enduring force for good in the world – are neither reciprocal nor up to that level'.¹ A British mission to the Holy See was established in 1914 but unusually the relationship remained unilateral as there was no corresponding papal diplomatic mission in London. From 1938 the pope was represented by an apostolic delegate – a Vatican representative with no diplomatic status and hence without powers to deal with the civil government. The apostolic delegate's mission was to the hierarchies of England and Wales and Scotland and his function was to channel information about local church conditions to the Holy See. The Vatican was the only state with which British diplomatic relations were not on a basis of reciprocity. Rectification of this anomaly was periodically considered by successive governments but the *sui generis* arrangement persisted. It was feared that the appointment of an internuncio (a Vatican diplomat with the rank of minister plenipotentiary) or nuncio (the Vatican equivalent of an ambassador accredited to a civil government) would stir up latent anti-Catholicism or damage improving inter-church relations after 1960. The Irish government had a keen interest in the nuncio question, as it viewed close relations with the Vatican as a foreign policy priority until the 1970s.² Despite the advent of political partition in 1920, the Irish Catholic Church continued to operate on an all-Ireland basis. The prospect of a nuncio in London occasioned fears that

¹ Peter Scarlett (Holy See) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Office), 15 April 1965, Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 371/183258, The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA).

² For an overview of Irish foreign policy, see Michael Kennedy, 'Irish Foreign Policy: 1919 to 1973' in Thomas Bartlett, ed. *The Cambridge History of Ireland: Volume IV 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 604-38; on relations between Ireland and the Vatican, see Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican: The Politics and Diplomacy of Church-State Relations* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995).

his jurisdiction would extend to Northern Ireland and thus damage the unity of the Irish church. Drawing on material in state and diocesan archives in Britain and Ireland, this article explores how the nuncio question, an overlooked aspect of British Catholic and diplomatic history, evolved over almost half a century. It demonstrates how Britain's declining world role, the growing self-confidence and acceptance of Catholicism in Britain, improving inter-church relations, a more dynamic papacy, pragmatism in foreign policy, and, in particular, the quagmire of the Northern Ireland Troubles contributed to the eventual restoration of full diplomatic relations in 1982.

At the prompting of Francis Aidan Gasquet, an English curial cardinal, the British government dispatched Sir Henry Howard, an experienced diplomat, to the Vatican in December 1914 as 'special envoy'.³ The mission was ostensibly to congratulate Pope Benedict XV on his election but more particularly it sought to present the motives that compelled Britain to intervene in the war, to counter the influence of the Central Powers and to ensure the adequate representation of the British point of view at the Vatican.⁴ The initial intention was for the mission to be temporary but during the 1920s withdrawal was regarded, as Austen Chamberlain explained to parliament, as 'highly impolitic'.⁵ Sir Odo Russell, British minister to the Holy See from 1922 until 1928, raised the general question of British relations with the Holy See with Pietro Gasparri, the cardinal secretary of state, in May 1926. When Gasparri promised to give greater consideration to ecclesiastical appointments within the British Empire, Russell emphasized that this would furnish Chamberlain with a significant argument 'for defending the existence of the Legation which many in my country were constantly seeking to suppress either through anti-Papal or economical motives'.⁶ And so, despite the objections of extreme Protestant groups, the legation to the Holy See became a permanent part of the Foreign Service in 1926. Howard and his successor, Count John de Salis, were Roman Catholic but thereafter an informal custom was established of appointing a non-Catholic as head of mission, supported by a Catholic secretary. Although formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican had been re-established, they remained anomalous in that the Holy See had no diplomatic representative in the UK. Instead, Archbishop Francis Bourne of Westminster and his successor Arthur Hinsley acted as an unofficial channel of communication between the Vatican and the British government. After Bourne's death in 1935, Bishop Peter Amigo of Southwark headed a strong English Catholic lobby in the Vatican that pressed for the appointment of an apostolic delegate to the UK.⁷ The timing was auspicious as the pontificate of Pius XI had witnessed an expansion of the papal diplomatic network. For this reason, Giuseppe Pizzardo, acting secretary of state, was receptive when in November 1936 D'Arcy Osborne, the British minister to the Holy See, raised the matter of clearer liaison between London and the Vatican for the benefit

³ On this see Stella Fletcher, *The Popes and Britain: A History of Rule, Rupture and Reconciliation* (London: IB Tauris, 2017), 164-65.

⁴ *Despatch to Sir Henry Howard containing instructions respecting his mission to the Vatican* (London: Stationery Office, 1915), Cd. 7736.

⁵ *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard, fifth series), House of Commons*, 206, cols 360-1, 11 May 1927 (London: H.M.S.O, 1927).

⁶ Russell to Chamberlain, 30 May 1926, General correspondence, 1926 A-Y, Austen Chamberlain papers, University of Birmingham.

⁷ Thomas Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1985), 87.

both of Catholics in the UK and in the Empire.⁸ The following year Pizzardo visited London as papal legate (a personal representative of the pope) for the coronation of George VI and met members of the government. He used the occasion to comment on the shared international outlook of Britain and the Vatican and on the necessity of a means of communication between them.⁹ Monsignor William Godfrey, rector of the English College since 1930, accompanied Pizzardo and, in the months that followed, he was the chief intermediary with the Foreign Office about papal representation in London.

In early 1938 Osborne impressed on Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, the feasibility of an apostolic delegate, a personal representative of the pope with ecclesiastical duties, rather than a nuncio, who was accredited to the government. Osborne cited the examples of Washington DC, Canada, Australia and South Africa, where apostolic delegates without diplomatic status had been appointed. Given the gathering clouds on the European political horizon, he maintained that the Vatican was motivated by an appreciation of the British government's interest in peace and international stability. It seemed to Osborne 'somewhat illogical on our part ... to harbour the suspicion that the Vatican is too much under Fascist influence and to reject a proposal intended to ensure closer contact with British democracy'.¹⁰ The inevitability of an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria prompted the Holy See to step up its efforts. In March 1938 the pope appointed Godfrey as visitor apostolic to inspect seminaries and ecclesiastical colleges in England, Wales and Malta. More significantly, while in England, he was also instructed to enquire about the attitude of the government towards a Vatican representative. Before Godfrey left Rome, he prepared the ground by underlining two points of significance in an interview with Osborne. The first was the importance of having someone in London 'able to explain authoritatively the Vatican's point of view on problems', a task beyond the capacity of the local bishops. Second, as no question of official recognition was involved, there was nothing to stop the pope appointing a delegate. Godfrey intimated that the Holy See had first raised the matter with the Foreign Office as a courtesy.¹¹

The diversity of Vatican representatives – nuncio, internuncio, chargé d'affaires, delegate apostolic with diplomatic status and without – was poorly understood by the Foreign Office. It insisted that a nuncio was out of the question because it would outrage the 'substantial substratum of anti-Catholic feeling in this country'.¹² Godfrey had recognized this from the outset. In an interview with Maurice Ingram of the Foreign Office on 20 May 1938, he emphasized that an apostolic delegate was the most appropriate form of representation. Ingram indicated the government's 'most friendly feelings towards the Vatican', observing that London and the Holy See 'both had the interests of peace and humanity equally at heart'.¹³ The following month Osborne was instructed to make the necessary official intimation to Eugenio Pacelli, the cardinal secretary of state and soon to be Pope Pius XII, and to seek an appointee who would be *persona grata* to the government and ideally a British subject.¹⁴ Stephen Gaselee, the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹ Osborne to Lord Halifax, 13 May 1938, FO 371/22433, TNA.

¹⁰ Osborne to Eden, 4 January 1938, *ibid.*

¹¹ Osborne to Philip Nichols (FO), 22 March 1938, *ibid.*

¹² Minute on Vatican representative, 12 May 1938, *ibid.*

¹³ Minute of conversation between William Godfrey and E.M.B. Ingram, 20 May 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁴ 'Private and confidential' Ingram to Godfrey, 14 June 1938, *ibid.*

urbane Foreign Office librarian and an expert on Roman Catholicism, heard from Paschal Robinson, the papal nuncio in Dublin, that both the pope and Pacelli were 'delighted' at the prospect of an apostolic delegate in England.¹⁵ Pius XI was willing to appoint an Englishman but was reluctant to undertake that all future delegates should be English.¹⁶ In the event, the Foreign Office dropped its insistence on British nationality in favour of being given advanced notice of the Vatican's appointee.¹⁷ When Godfrey was revealed as the inaugural apostolic delegate Gaselee suggested that from the British government's perspective 'the Vatican could hardly have made a better choice'.¹⁸ The bishops of England and Wales were less enamoured. According to Cardinal Hinsley, some prelates feared that they would 'be supervised and interfered with', though the archbishop of Westminster was confident that they would soon appreciate the value of a direct conduit with the Vatican.¹⁹

The apostolic delegation was formally established on 21 November 1938 with jurisdiction over Britain, Malta and Gibraltar.²⁰ Godfrey's appointment passed largely unnoticed. That he was an unostentatious papal representative was symbolized by his decision to purchase a house for the delegation in Wimbledon. Godfrey's linguistic skills were put to wide use during the Second World War and he acted as chargé d'affaires when the Polish government in exile sought diplomatic links with the Holy See.²¹ Godfrey remained in Wimbledon until 1953 and helped to alter the complexion of the episcopal conference by recommending English College alumni as vacancies arose.²² Meanwhile, D'Arcy Osborne was the only Allied diplomat to remain in Rome during the Second World War. He maintained contact with London by way of the diplomatic bag through neutral Portugal. He stayed in a small annex of the Convent of Santa Marta but used the flat of Giovanni Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, to bathe and store his valuables.²³ As will be discussed below, Montini's favourable disposition towards Britain influenced the nuncio question in the 1960s.

The Irish government monitored developments between London and the Holy See with apprehension. The political division of the island of Ireland into northern and southern states in 1920 did not occasion ecclesiastical partition. Although all the main Christian churches were subsequently obliged to operate in two political jurisdictions, their confessional frame of reference remained an all-Ireland one.²⁴ Until the 1970s,

¹⁵ Minute by Stephen Gaselee, 7 June 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Eugenio Pacelli to Osborne, 14 July 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Osborne to Ingram, 12 July 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Minute by Gaselee, 13 September 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Osborne to Ingram, 19 October 1938, *ibid.*

²⁰ Chris Larsen, *Catholic Bishops of Great Britain: A Reference to Roman Catholic Bishops from 1850 to 2015* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2016), 33.

²¹ Michael Gainé, 'Godfrey, William (1889-1963)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn September 2004 [<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33431>]. Accessed 11 October 2019].

²² Kester Aspden, *Fortress Church: The English Roman Catholic Bishops and Politics, 1903-63* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), 272.

²³ Frederick Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome: A History* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), 18-19; see also Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Moloney, *Westminster*.

²⁴ Daithí Ó Corráin, *Rendering to God and Caesar: The Irish Churches and the Two States in Ireland, 1949-73* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2.

opposition to political partition was a recurring trope in Irish foreign policy. Another important motif was the projection of southern Ireland's Catholic identity and its maintenance of close ties with the Vatican. Diplomatic relations between the Irish Free State and the Vatican were established in November 1929. Under canon 267 of the Code of Canon Law, a papal nuncio has two discrete functions: as a diplomat to cultivate relations between the Holy See and civil governments; and, secondly, as an ecclesiastic to advance Catholic affairs in the territory entrusted to him.²⁵ In normal circumstances the territory in which the diplomatic and ecclesiastical functions were pursued would be coterminous but that was not so in Ireland. The Holy See's apostolic letter of 27 November 1929, which established a nunciature in Dublin, recognized and accepted that although the island was partitioned politically, there was no such division in the organization of the church.²⁶ Accordingly, Monsignor Paschal Robinson, the affable first incumbent who occupied the position until his death in 1948, was accredited to the government of the Irish Free State but ecclesiastically his jurisdiction covered the entire island. By contrast, and to Irish relief, the apostolic letter governing the establishment of the apostolic delegation in London limited its jurisdiction to England, Scotland and Wales.

The Irish government, the Department of External Affairs²⁷ and the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy strove to preserve the respective ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the nuncio in Dublin and the apostolic delegate in London. In 1948 Joseph Walshe, Irish ambassador to the Holy See, made known to Vatican authorities Irish sensitivities surrounding partition and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the papal nuncio to Ireland.²⁸ The possibility of a nuncio in London raised the disquieting prospect that he would become responsible for Northern Ireland; this threatened the carefully cultivated image of Ireland's ecclesiastical unity. From the end of the Second World War until the early 1980s, Irish ambassadors to the Vatican and London were alert to the possibility of a change to the Holy See's representation in London. From the 1950s, there were a number of alarms for the Irish authorities as the question of raising the diplomatic status of the apostolic delegate was periodically mooted.

The theoretical implications of an internuncio were assessed by the Foreign Office in 1952. Downplaying the possibility of protest by militant Protestants, the main obstacle envisaged was a technical difficulty that would arise if a British Catholic were appointed: it was a settled principle that British subjects could not be given diplomatic privileges and immunities.²⁹ In any event, the view of Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, the home secretary, was that 'nothing should be done to encourage such a proposal, the results of which might well prove to be embarrassing to Her Majesty's Government'.³⁰ The impending coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 reinforced the desire not to stir up

²⁵ Edward N. Peters (curator), *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law: In English Translation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 114.

²⁶ 'Appointment of Papal Nuncio in Ireland (Monsignor Paschal Robinson), 1929', Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DFA) /5/318/77, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin (hereafter NAI).

²⁷ In March 1971 the title of this department was changed to Foreign Affairs.

²⁸ Secret report from Walsh to secretary Department of External Affairs (hereafter DEA), 13 November 1948, DFA/10/2/22, NAI.

²⁹ N. J. A. Cheetham (FO) to Sir Walter Roberts (Holy See), 20 May 1952, Home Office (hereafter HO) 304/12, TNA. Roberts (1893-1978) was minister to the Holy See from 1951 until 1953.

³⁰ H. A. Strutt (HO) to Cheetham, 13 June 1952, HO 304/12, TNA.

sectarian trouble. This difference of approach proved revealing. Over the next two decades, the Foreign Office was generally more open to normalizing diplomatic relations with the Holy See than the Home Office, which made the case for prudence, protocol and maintaining the status quo.

In November 1953 Godfrey was appointed seventh archbishop of his native Liverpool. The question of his successor reignited discussion, and press rumour, about the diplomatic status of the papal representative in London.³¹ The Catholic Union, the most influential organ of Catholic lay opinion in Britain, pressed the government for an internuncio. Founded in 1871, the object of the Catholic Union was the defence of Catholic interests through, among other means, petitions or deputations to the authorities.³² In December 1953 the duke of Norfolk, president of the Catholic Union, asked Jock Colville, joint principal secretary to Winston Churchill, to enquire about the possibility of the new apostolic delegate being given the status of an internuncio were he a foreigner. Colville related the Foreign Office's stance. First, no change was possible because diplomatic status could not be conferred on an Englishman. Secondly, it could stir up anti-Catholic sentiment which the Conservative government wished to avoid.³³ Little importance was attached to the duke's instancing of the appointment of an internuncio in the Netherlands.

The case of Dutch Catholicism merits some brief comment as it exhibited both parallels and important differences with the position of Roman Catholicism in Britain. In both Britain and the Netherlands, the ethos was traditionally Protestant, but there was a significant Catholic minority. Catholics accounted for almost forty per cent of the Dutch population or four times the proportion in Britain. The traditional *verzuiling* (pillarization) of Dutch society and politics gave rise, from the nineteenth century until after the Second World War, to separate organizations for Calvinists and Catholics in every sphere, from broadcasting to trade unions. Proportional representation allowed Dutch Catholics to exert considerable political influence through the Catholic People's Party, which was one of the two biggest parties in the Dutch parliament between 1918 and the 1970s. Between 1930 and 1960, the Catholic Church 'became an accepted institution in Dutch society', decades before the same could be said in Britain.³⁴

On his return from Rome in January 1954, Godfrey privately and informally discussed his successor with Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, permanent under-secretary and a Roman Catholic. Given the Vatican's reluctance to appoint another Englishman, the new archbishop enquired if an American, Dutch or Commonwealth nominee would be acceptable.³⁵ This occasioned a flurry of memoranda and correspondence within and between the Foreign and Home Offices. Eventually, a preferred order of English,

³¹ For example, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 1954.

³² 'Catholic Union of Great Britain: Its Objects and Work' (1928), 2-3, 2/145a, William Godfrey papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London (hereafter WDA).

³³ J.R. Colville to duke of Norfolk, 6 January 1954, FO 371/113150, TNA.

³⁴ Erik Sengers, "'Although We Are Catholic, We Are Dutch': The Transition of the Dutch Catholic Church from Sect to Church as an Explanation of its Growth and Decline', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43:1 (2004): 134; Paul Lucardie & Hans-Martien ten Napel, 'Between Confessionalism and Liberal Conservatism: The Christian Democratic Parties of Belgium and the Netherlands' in David Hanley ed. *Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Pinter, 1994), 51-70.

³⁵ Minute by Kirkpatrick, 15 January 1954, FO 371/113150, TNA.

Commonwealth or non-Italian foreigner emerged. Resistance to any suggestion of an internuncio hardened between January and May 1954. The Home Office was strongly opposed as it anticipated opposition from 'certain Low-Church groups with strong sectarian prejudices and loud voices'.³⁶ It attached significant weight to the views of Geoffrey Fisher, archbishop of Canterbury, who was, as his biographer put it, 'convinced that the Roman Catholic must be watched carefully lest they should increasingly infiltrate the national life'.³⁷ Fisher opposed a change of status for four reasons. First, it might arouse disquiet even in moderate Anglican circles. This raised the potential danger that the archbishop might be forced to comment publicly should a non-conformist peer put down a motion in the House of Lords. Second, an internuncio would provide the Roman Catholic community with a 'special and undesired means of access to the ear of H.M. Government'. Third, should the government receive an internuncio it would confirm 'the fiction that the Vatican was a state like other states'. Lastly, it was feared that an internuncio would 'merely be the thin end of the wedge' and that pressure would follow for a full nuncio.³⁸ The prospect of an internuncio at this juncture was remote and there is no evidence that the Vatican encouraged it. In mid-May 1954 Sir Douglas Howard reported from the Vatican that the pope intended to appoint an American prelate as apostolic delegate in London – Gerald O'Hara, who had been nuncio in Ireland since 1951.³⁹ Anthony Eden, in his third stint in the Foreign Office and at the time absorbed by his leading role as joint chair of the Geneva Conference that settled the Indo-China war, wired from Switzerland that he was 'not enthusiastic about an Irish-American' but felt the government could not object.⁴⁰

Godfrey's translation and the efforts of the Catholic Union alarmed the Irish government. In a pre-emptive move, Joseph Walshe, the Irish ambassador to the Vatican, registered his government's concerns in December 1953 in the strongest terms. He submitted that any extension to Ireland of the jurisdiction of the apostolic delegate 'would be considered by the Irish people, in the whole world, as an act destined to confirm and perpetuate English tyranny in Ireland'.⁴¹ Con Cremin, who succeeded Walshe, raised the matter again in 1954 because 'it would be clearly unacceptable to the Irish Church and public opinion if the Holy See's representative for the Primate of All-Ireland and the other Bishops of the Six Counties should be accredited to the English monarch'.⁴² Angelo Dell'Acqua, substitute secretary of state for ordinary affairs, soothed Irish anxieties by assuring the ambassador that there was 'no real possibility' of that transpiring, and full consideration would be taken of Irish concerns should this ever develop. For good measure, the special importance the Holy See attached to Ireland was

³⁶ Confidential memorandum 'Status of the Vatican representative', 10 May 1954, FO 371/113150, TNA.

³⁷ Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1991), 347-8.

³⁸ Confidential record of conversation between C. W. Harrison and the private secretary to the archbishop of Canterbury, 12 February 1954, FO 371/113150, TNA.

³⁹ Confidential report from Howard (Holy See) to FO, 15 May 1954, *ibid.* Howard succeeded Sir Walter Roberts and was the British minister to the Holy See from 1954 until 1957.

⁴⁰ Cypher from Eden (Geneva) to FO, 19 May 1954, FO 371/113150, TNA.

⁴¹ Memorandum by Joseph Walshe, 15 December 1953, DFA 313/6A, NAI.

⁴² Secret report from Cremin to Liam Cosgrave (Minister for External Affairs), 6 November 1954, DFA 14/21/1, NAI.

emphasized.⁴³ In general, the Holy See avoided altering existing arrangements where doing so might convey recognition of boundaries or areas in dispute.

Discreet lobbying by the Catholic Union did not cease with O'Hara's arrival in London on 30 July 1954. Its vice-president Sir George Rendel lunched with J. G. Ward, deputy under-secretary at the Foreign Office, in mid-June 1955 to discuss raising the status of the apostolic delegate to that of an internuncio. Rendel maintained that the difficulty of according diplomatic status to a British subject was no longer applicable as O'Hara was American. Furthermore, as an internuncio he would rank after ambassadors. This would remove official concerns that he would become doyen of the diplomatic corps, as was customary in Catholic countries since the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Rendel cited international precedents such as the appointment of internuncios in the Netherlands, Pakistan and Egypt, and suggested that inter-church relations in Britain had improved sufficiently for the government not to be deterred by extreme Protestants. For Ward the very fact of improved relations meant there was no official desire to re-open old controversies.⁴⁴ Undeterred, Norfolk tested the waters again in December 1955. Through Lord Salisbury, lord president and leader of the Lords, he sent a memorandum to Harold Macmillan highlighting the anomalous position of diplomatic relations with the Vatican.⁴⁵ Selwyn-Lloyd, who succeeded Macmillan as foreign secretary, directed Salisbury to discourage Norfolk from pursuing the question. The main objections – the opposition of the Church of England and the political difficulty of accepting a foreigner as internuncio – remained unchanged.⁴⁶ Yet within a year the nuncio question was making front page headlines in the *Daily Telegraph*, and, at the end of May 1957, the Foreign Office reassured the secretary of the Protestant Alliance that the appointment of an ambassador was not contemplated.⁴⁷ Sensitivities around issues with a religious dimension had been heightened following widespread condemnation by various religious groups of the premium bonds scheme introduced by the Conservative government in 1956. Sir Marcus Cheke, British minister to the Holy See from 1957 until 1960, also emphasized that fears of a public backlash by Conservative supporters – hardly surprising in the wake of the Suez crisis and amidst a deteriorating security situation in Cyprus – made a London nunciature impracticable, though personally favoured by Selwyn-Lloyd and Salisbury.⁴⁸

The apprehensions of the Irish government were heightened by a series of minor developments. The appointment of an Italian counsellor, Monsignor Righi Lambertini, a career Vatican diplomat, to the staff of the apostolic delegation in February 1956 gave rise to fresh speculation about the status of the apostolic delegate.⁴⁹ So too did a visit to the pope that month by the duke of Norfolk. O'Hara did little to quell these anxieties and

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Confidential minute by J. G. Ward on status of the Vatican representative in the UK, 17 June 1955, FO 371/118006, TNA.

⁴⁵ Salisbury to Macmillan, 6 December 1955, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Selwyn-Lloyd to Salisbury, 2 January 1956, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 28 January 1957; *The Times*, 29 May 1957.

⁴⁸ Confidential report from Leo McCauley (Irish ambassador to the Holy See) to Seán Murphy (secretary DEA), 24 June 1957, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁴⁹ F. H. Boland (Irish ambassador in London) to Murphy, 15 February 1956, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

gave F.H. Boland, Irish ambassador in London, to understand that the nuncio issue was being revived. However, the ambassador was unconvinced because

The idea of constantly having a foreigner as papal representative in this country clearly runs counter to the whole policy and tradition of the Catholic Church in England which is always leaning over backwards to establish its essential "Englishness" – so much so that (up to recently, at any rate) it has always ignored and deplored the Irish and other alien elements in its ranks and even today it still tends to outdo even the Protestant denominations in protesting its loyalty to the Crown and its stout British patriotism.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, a hypothetical danger remained. If the Vatican limited the jurisdiction of an inter-nunciature to the UK and if, consequently, the British government 'demurred to this, the Holy See might be tempted to revise the present arrangements and give the Inter-Nuncio some measure of jurisdiction in respect of Northern Ireland'.⁵¹ The concerns of the Irish government were sufficiently real for Liam Cosgrave, minister for external affairs, to instruct the Irish ambassador to the Holy See to make discreet enquiries and if necessary express Irish concerns.⁵² Once again Dell'Acqua offered reassurances but admitted that the issue had been 'canvassed for several years' without making progress, an allusion to Norfolk.⁵³ Cosgrave visited the Vatican in March 1956 for the celebrations to mark the eightieth birthday of the pope. He received the Grand Cross of Pius IX, a papal honour which had also been conferred on his father in 1925.⁵⁴ Cosgrave used the occasion to step up representations on the nuncio question. On 14 March he discussed the status of the apostolic delegation with Dell'Acqua, while the Irish nuncio's jurisdiction and the cross-border nature of some of the Irish dioceses were raised with Domenico Tardini, pro-secretary of state for extraordinary ecclesiastical affairs and future cardinal secretary of state. Both officials informed Cosgrave that there had been no developments. For good measure, Tardini reiterated the 'most friendly dispositions' the Vatican had for Ireland.⁵⁵

As apostolic delegate between 1954 and 1963, O'Hara seemed personally anxious to achieve diplomatic status and the efforts of the Catholic Union in this regard continued. O'Hara's enthusiasm was not shared by members of the hierarchy of England and Wales or Scotland who preferred to consolidate the notable advances made by their community in terms of recognition, institutional expansion and self-confidence. Controversy over the question of an inter-nunciature might imperil that progress. During the first half of the twentieth century the Catholic community in Scotland and in England and Wales formed a sub-culture sharply distinct from the rest of British society. The perception of insularity or a fortress mentality heightened sectarian tensions, particularly in Scotland.⁵⁶ As Gerald Parsons has observed, the Catholic community lacked a strong

⁵⁰ Confidential report from Boland to Murphy, 28 January 1956, *ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Liam Cosgrave to Con Cremin (Irish ambassador to the Holy See), 1 February 1956, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁵³ Confidential report from Cremin to Cosgrave, 18 February 1956, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, 12 March 1956. W.T. Cosgrave was head of the first government of independent Ireland between 1922 and 1932 and was a devout Catholic.

⁵⁵ Secret report by Cremin on diplomatic representation of the Holy See in London, 20 March 1956, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁵⁶ The literature on Scotland is extensive: for example, Steve Bruce, Tony Glendinning, Iain Paterson and Michael Rosie, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Tom Gallagher, *Divided Scotland: Ethnic Friction and Christian Crisis* (Glendaruel: Argyll Publishing, 2013). Anti-

middle class and was comprised of a working class, largely resulting from Irish immigration, and a small aristocratically-based recusant tradition.⁵⁷ The advent of the welfare state and the extension of educational opportunity decisively changed that situation. In this respect the Butler Education Act of 1944 was a landmark as all children in England and Wales were to receive post-primary education to the age of fifteen. The state continued to subsidize the cost of new buildings and running costs without interfering with denominational autonomy over admissions, appointments and the curriculum.⁵⁸ In Scotland state control of education was introduced in 1918 with safeguards for preserving the religious character of schools. The underwriting of Catholic education by the state facilitated a degree of Catholic embourgeoisement as a new university-educated, geographically mobile Catholic middle class emerged. With a post-war baby boom and an influx of central and eastern European and Irish emigrants, the Roman Catholic population in England and Wales increased from an estimated 2.37 million in 1939 to 3.4 million in 1959, the number of secular clergy grew by one thousand to 4,617 and there were over 13,000 converts.⁵⁹ Godfrey reported to the apostolic delegate that seminaries in England and the English colleges were full.⁶⁰ There was a similar increase in the estimated size of the Catholic population in Scotland which reached a peak of 827,000 in 1966.⁶¹ This period before the Second Vatican Council has sometimes been depicted as a golden age for Catholicism in Britain.⁶² Godfrey became archbishop of Westminster in 1956 and a cardinal in 1958. His stewardship was moderate. He was largely 'unruffled by ideas, politically conservative in his instincts, though resistant to the more extreme manifestations of contemporary conservative Catholic social thinking'.⁶³ Successive Irish ambassadors were reassured by Godfrey's lack of conviction about the desirability of an internuncio. Cyril Restieaux, bishop of

Catholicism in Wales was more a nineteenth-century phenomenon, see Paul O'Leary, 'When was Anti-Catholicism? The Case of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Wales', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56:2 (2005): 308-25.

⁵⁷ Gerald Parsons, 'Contrasts and Continuities: The Traditional Christian Churches in Britain since 1945' in Gerald Parsons, ed. *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945. Volume 1 Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1993), 33. Catholicism in Wales in the twentieth century is less well studied, see Trystan Owain Hughes, *Winds of Change: The Roman Catholic Church and Society in Wales, 1916-1962* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999). For some useful comments on the increase in the Catholic population in Wales, see D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Kit Elliott, "'A Very Pushy Kind of Folk": Educational Reform 1944 and the Catholic Laity of England and Wales', *History of Education* 35:1 (2006): 119.

⁵⁹ *Catholic Directory 1939* (London: Burns and Oates): 657; *Catholic Directory 1959*: 701; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* (3rd edn., London: SCM Press, 1991), 561.

⁶⁰ Godfrey to O'Hara, 12 December 1957, 2/128, Godfrey papers, WDA.

⁶¹ Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 159. For an overview of the fortunes of the Catholic community in Scotland see Irene Maver, 'The Catholic Community' in T. M. Devine & R. J. Finlay, eds. *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 269-82.

⁶² This has been the subject of considerable debate among historians and sociologists. For a thorough overview see Alana Harris, *Faith in the Family: A Lived Religious History of English Catholicism, 1945-82* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 32-56.

⁶³ Aspden, *Fortress Church*, 279.

Plymouth, believed that any move by the Vatican would occasion an outburst from Nonconformists and Anglicans.⁶⁴

The election of Pope John XXIII in October 1958 prompted Norfolk to raise the issue with Harold Macmillan. The duke's contention that an internuncio would now meet with 'a wide measure of approval' was not shared by Rab Butler in the Home Office who maintained it had 'no justification' in a country with so small a Catholic minority, and where 'there is a latent anti-Romanism which is only just below the surface'.⁶⁵ The matter of an internuncio was discussed by the cabinet in January 1959. Although Macmillan was in favour of the appointment, it was thought unwise to take any steps in an election year.⁶⁶ When the foreign secretary brought a memorandum on the issue to cabinet in 1960 the Home Office refused to budge and rehearsed its customary list of reasons.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding residual Protestant distrust of Catholicism, opinion polls reveal that the fears of the Home Office were overstated. In February 1959 a Gallup poll was the first to measure attitudes to Catholics in Britain. Revealingly, seventeen per cent of respondents professed a dislike for Roman Catholicism; a decade later the figure stood at fifteen per cent.⁶⁸ In both November 1958 and September 1965, sixteen per cent were unwilling to vote for a parliamentary candidate who was Catholic, but more significantly over four-fifths of the electorate had no such difficulties.⁶⁹ By contrast, anti-Catholicism was far more prevalent in the political domain in Scandinavia. In Norway the exclusion of the Jesuits contained in the 1814 constitution was not repealed until the 1960s. In Sweden, 'the Catholic danger' was a perennial topic of debate in the media and came to the fore during the parliamentary debate on the Act on Freedom of Religion in 1951.⁷⁰

John XXIII's remarkable papacy created conditions that made the prospect of an internuncio less remote. In January 1959, less than three months after his election, he announced an ecumenical council that was concerned with two great issues: *aggiornamento* (renewal) and *ecumenismo* (reunion).⁷¹ John XXIII's use of the term 'brothers in Christ' to refer to Christians not in communion with Roman Catholicism signalled a decisive change of mentality. This was given more concrete form in June 1960 with the establishment of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity (SPCU) under the presidency of the Jesuit Cardinal Augustin Bea, who had been rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and confessor to Pius XII, with Monsignor Jan Willebrands as secretary. This bold development heralded an even more audacious one. In August 1960, Rev. J.R. Satterthwaite, general secretary of the council on inter-church relations at Lambeth Palace, raised Archbishop Fisher's desire to pay a courtesy visit to

⁶⁴ Confidential note of conversation between Con Cremin and Restieaux, 1 February 1957, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁶⁵ Norfolk to Macmillan, 1 November 1958; minute by R.A.B. Butler, 21 November 1958, HO 304/16, TNA.

⁶⁶ Minute by Macmillan, 16 January 1959, HO 304/16, TNA.

⁶⁷ Memorandum on representation of the Vatican in the United Kingdom, 23 February 1960, HO 304/16, TNA.

⁶⁸ Clive D. Field, 'No Popery's Ghost: Does Popular Anti-Catholicism Survive in Contemporary Britain?', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 7 (2014): 119.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁰ Yvonne Maria Werner, "'The Catholic Danger': The Changing Patterns of Swedish Anti-Catholicism – 1850-1965", *European Studies* 31 (2013): 141.

⁷¹ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London: Chapman, 1984), 317-20.

the pope on his return from the Near East.⁷² The first meeting of an archbishop of Canterbury and a pope since the Reformation took place on 2 December 1960.

Fisher's intention to visit the Vatican surprised the British government. Macmillan, with whom Fisher had a testy relationship, was hurt not to have been informed.⁷³ The English and Welsh hierarchy and the apostolic delegate were just as surprised. Notably, Willebrands only made Cardinal Godfrey aware of the background to the visit on 7 November by which time all the arrangements were in place. Domenico Tardini, the secretary of state, conveyed to Peter Scarlett, the British minister to the Holy See, four conditions to ensure that the visit remained a private one: there would be no official photograph, no press release, no invitation by the British legation for Vatican officials to meet Fisher, and no visit to Cardinal Bea.⁷³ In the event, at John XXIII's insistence, the last stipulation was ignored. That Fisher was conscious of a changed ecumenical climate in his final months in office was made clear in a letter to the queen. The archbishop suggested the visit would prove 'revolutionary' and he drew attention to the encouragement of John XXIII and others in the Vatican who took a special interest in the Church of England 'but conspicuously *not* the Hierarchy here in England'. The Vatican authorities, he wrote, 'want to be on friendly terms with us; and we have long desired to be on happier terms with them'.⁷⁴ Godfrey informed O'Hara of the archbishop of Canterbury's 'personal animosity towards members of the Hierarchy of England and Wales', his frequent attempts to depict the Catholic body as 'a foreign element, and his periodic accusations of Catholic intolerance and suppression of religious liberty'.⁷⁵ When the Irish ambassador discussed the archbishop of Canterbury at the Vatican with Godfrey, his auxiliary and O'Hara, they maintained that 'nothing would come out of the visit'.⁷⁶ Such a bleak prognostication did not come to pass.

Fisher's visit was highly symbolic. Not only was contact re-established but a rapport between Canterbury and the Vatican developed. In this the SPCU played a pivotal role. During Fisher's meeting with Bea it was agreed that a personal representative of the archbishops of Canterbury and York would be dispatched to the Vatican to follow the work of the council and the SPCU. This was Canon Bernard Pawley. His appointment inaugurated a new era in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations. Five Catholic observers attended the third assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 and in return those churches were invited to send delegated observers to the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁷ The

⁷² Willebrands to Godfrey, 7 November 1960, 2/86, Godfrey papers, WDA.

⁷³ Minute by home secretary for prime minister, 31 August 1960; confidential minute from prime minister to home secretary, 3 September 1960, HO 304/11, TNA. On disagreement between Fisher and Macmillan see John Anderson, 'The Tory Party at Prayer? The Church of England and British Politics in the 1950s', *Journal of Church and State* 58:3 (2016): 423-4

⁷³ Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome*, 47.

⁷⁴ Fisher's emphasis; confidential letter from Fisher to Queen Elizabeth, 18 October 1960, PREM 11/4594, TNA.

⁷⁵ Godfrey to O'Hara, 14 November 1960, enclosing 7-page 'Memorandum on the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Holy Father', 2/86, Godfrey papers, WDA.

⁷⁶ Secret report by Hugh McCann to secretary DEA, 29 December 1960, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁷⁷ Bea to Archbishop Michael Ramsey, 19 June 1962, vol. 26, folios 151-2, Ramsey papers, Lambeth Palace Library, London. The observers were led by John Moorman, bishop of Ripon, who later published *Vatican observed: An Anglican impression of Vatican II* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967) and 'Observers and Guests of the Council' in Alberic Stacpoole, ed. *Vatican II by those who were there* (London: Chapman, 1986), 155-69.

observers were able to comment on conciliar documents and were fully briefed on all aspects of the council. In October 1961 Hugh McCann, Irish ambassador to the UK, reported the English hierarchy's 'dislike' of the Church of England being granted direct access to the Vatican through the SPCU.⁷⁸ The momentum created by the council saw the establishment in 1964 of the Commission on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations. The new atmosphere convinced the major Protestant denominations in Britain that 'it was unnecessarily offensive to continue to advance classic Reformation polemics'.⁷⁹ But there were some exceptions. The leaders of smaller hard-line groups in divided localities such as Ian Paisley in Northern Ireland and Jack Glass in Glasgow continued to tap into a strong vein of popular anti-Catholicism.

Domestically, the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a higher public profile in the 1960s as it moved 'into the ecumenical mainstream of British Christianity'.⁸⁰ John Heenan, Godfrey's successor, first at Liverpool and then at Westminster, proved an energetic prelate, a capable media performer and genuine in his commitment to ecumenical progress, despite being under considerable pressure not to make concessions.⁸¹ The popular perception of Catholicism was softened as the older model of a clerically dominated and hierarchical church gave way to a more inclusive model of the people of God. Against this background and John XXIII's call for Christian unity, the nuncio question was discussed by the British cabinet at the end of February 1963. It was suggested that closer co-operation with the Vatican might be of value in containing communism and in securing better treatment for Protestant minorities in Catholic countries. The prime minister asked Burke Trend, the cabinet secretary, to consider the implications of the foreign secretary's proposal that the Vatican should be represented by an internuncio. Michael Ramsey, Fisher's successor, was formally consulted. Despite undoubted ecumenical progress, the traditional hostility of the Church of England continued to thwart any progress on an internuncio. According to his biographer, the Anglo-Catholic Ramsey was less enthusiastic about relations with Rome than Fisher had been.⁸² Ramsey advised Macmillan against altering the status quo. He was mindful that enhanced diplomatic status might provoke passions and endanger the passage of church measures through parliament.⁸³

In the warmer ecumenical climate of the early 1960s changes of personnel at the British legation or apostolic delegation, as well as high profile visits to the Vatican by the queen and the British prime minister of the day caused Irish observers to speculate that an internuncio was in the offing. The Irish ambassador to the Holy See wondered if the transfer of Peter Scarlett to the Vatican in 1960 might portend change. Scarlett had

⁷⁸ Secret report from McCann to secretary DEA, 10 October 1961, DFA/10/2/309, NAI.

⁷⁹ John Wolffe, 'Protestant-Catholic Divisions in Europe and the United States: An Historical and Comparative Perspective', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 12:3 (2011): 253. See also John Wolffe, 'Contentious Christians: Protestant-Catholic Conflict since the Reformation' in John Wolffe, ed. *Religion in History: Conflict, Conversion and Coexistence* (Manchester: The Open University, 2004), 97-128.

⁸⁰ Gerald Parsons, 'How the Times They were A-Changing: Exploring the Context of Religious Transformation in Britain in the 1960s' in Wolffe, ed. *Religion in History*, 164.

⁸¹ Hastings, *English Christianity*, 564; Peter Webster, *Archbishop Ramsey: The Shape of the Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 33.

⁸² Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 314.

⁸³ Minute by Burke Trend on representation of the Vatican, 13 March 1963, HO 304/16, TNA; Ramsey to Macmillan, 15 March 1963, vol. 46, folio 192, Ramsey papers, London, Lambeth Palace Library; Webster, *Archbishop Ramsey*, 34-5.

previously been British ambassador to Norway, whereas his predecessor Marcus Cheke had never attained ambassadorial rank. Similarly, it was feared the papal audience accorded to the British prime minister in December 1960 might betoken an advance towards an internuncio. In fact, according to Dell'Acqua, the main purpose of the audience was to prepare for Queen Elizabeth II's visit to John XXIII in May 1961.⁸⁴ A more significant development was the choice of Monsignor Iginio Cardinale to succeed O'Hara as apostolic delegate in London. The urbane Cardinale, born in Italy, raised in Boston and trained in Rome, was fluent in French, English and Italian. Moreover, he had worked closely with Dell'Acqua in the secretariat of state and had become the principal contact for Anglicans and others interested in church unity. Scarlett spoke well of him, and Sir Philip de Zulueta, private secretary to Harold Macmillan, described Cardinale as 'most agreeable' and a 'strong ecumenist'.⁸⁵ Within two weeks of Cardinale taking up his post in mid-January 1964, Con Cremin, the Irish ambassador to the UK, paid a courtesy call and tentatively raised the status of the mission. The new apostolic delegate indicated the growing strength of British opinion, official and otherwise, which viewed the situation as anomalous. In a report to Dublin, Cremin suggested that Cardinale would give the matter 'continuous attention' while posted in Wimbledon.⁸⁶ His surmise was soon confirmed by Monsignor Gordon Wheeler, administrator of Westminster Cathedral, who revealed that 'right from the moment of his appointment Monsignor Cardinale made all sorts of enquiries in Rome about having the Mission given diplomatic status'.⁸⁷

The pontificate of Pope Paul VI witnessed a much firmer effort to maximise the influence of the Holy See diplomatically in opposing communism and providing leadership on moral issues such as human rights, poverty, and international development.⁸⁸ One manifestation of this was Paul VI's intervention in international affairs such as his support for the principles underlying British action in Southern Rhodesia. Another was the appointment of pro-nuncios. This was an innovation by the Vatican in diplomatic affairs. Traditionally, under the Treaty of Vienna (1815), a nuncio enjoyed automatic precedence *as de jure* doyen of the diplomatic corps. By contrast, pro-nuncios were full ambassadors who took their place among other ambassadors in the normal way by reference to the date on which they presented their letters of credence. The new formula was used in Finland, Indonesia and Pakistan.⁸⁹ It prompted Sir Alec Randall, a former chargé d'affaires at the Holy See in the late 1920s and later an ambassador to Denmark, to pen an article in the *Tablet* in April 1966. He suggested that the new category of pro-nuncio presented an opportunity to reconsider the question of receiving a papal representative in London with full diplomatic status and without the complication of precedence.⁹⁰ For Thomas Commins, Irish ambassador to the Holy See, it was inconceivable that the article had not first received Cardinale's imprimatur.⁹¹ Paul

⁸⁴ Confidential report from Leo McCauley (Holy See) to secretary DEA, 15 December 1960, DFA/10/2/308, NAI.

⁸⁵ Confidential minute from Lord Privy Seal to prime minister, 2 October 1963; De Zulueta to prime minister, 3 October 1963, PREM 11/4167, TNA.

⁸⁶ Confidential report from Cremin (London) to secretary DEA, 31 January 1964, DFA/10/2/309, NAI.

⁸⁷ Personal and confidential Cremin to secretary DEA, 4 February 1964, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Peter Hebblethwaite's *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: Harper Collins, 1993) remains the best treatment of Paul VI.

⁸⁹ Thomas Commins (Holy See) to Hugh McCann (secretary DEA), 21 March 1966, DFA/10/2/309, NAI.

⁹⁰ *Tablet*, 16 April 1966, 443-4.

⁹¹ 'Highly confidential' report from Commins to McCann, 7 May 1966, DFA/10/2/23, NAI.

VI was also more Anglophile than his predecessors and maintained an informal network of personal contacts. In the 1930s he had visited England and Scotland and during the Second World War was close to the British ministers to the Holy See. Montini received a number of Anglican visitors in the late 1940s and 1950s, including George Prestige, editor of the *Church Times*, and George Bell, bishop of Chichester.⁹²

The anomalous diplomatic position of the British minister to the Holy See became even more pronounced from 1964, when British missions to Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania were raised to embassies. The Vatican was the only remaining legation and its minister ranked last in point of diplomatic precedence. The Catholic Union campaigned through private channels and in parliament for this diplomatic oddity to be rectified. For example, Norman St John-Stevas, Conservative MP for Chelmsford, posed parliamentary questions on the matter.⁹³ When Sir George Rendel, vice-president of the Union, raised diplomatic relations during an audience with Paul VI in 1965, the pope expressed a hope that the existing anomalies would in due course be set right.⁹⁴ The Catholic Union pressed Michael Stewart, foreign secretary in Harold Wilson's Labour government, to reconsider the status of the British mission to the Holy See.⁹⁵ In April 1965 Stewart brought a memorandum to cabinet which recommended an exchange of ambassadors with the Vatican. It suggested the timeliness of ending the anomaly of diplomatic relations not being on a basis of reciprocity before the prime minister visited the pope on 28 April.⁹⁶ Once again both the Home Office and the archbishop of Canterbury remained opposed, believing that it would impair rather than assist inter-church relations.⁹⁷

Notably, from 1965 the government attached less significance to the opposition of the archbishop of Canterbury.⁹⁸ Vatican representation returned to the cabinet agenda on 9 December 1965 but again no action was taken. Neither the meeting between Wilson and Paul VI in January 1967 nor that between Edward Heath and the pope in 1972 touched on the question of diplomatic relations. The lack of progress on the issue was more a case of inertia than fears of a Protestant backlash given the advance of secularization and the decline in institutional Christianity in Britain since the 1960s.⁹⁹

The Northern Ireland Troubles transformed the context of Anglo-Vatican relations during the 1970s and with it the question of a nuncio in London. Following the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in 1972 and the collapse of the Sunningdale power-sharing executive in 1974, security policy and strengthening the Northern Ireland economy became the focus of British attention for the remainder of the decade.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹² Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome*, 32-6.

⁹³ See, for example, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 725, no. 52 col. 29 (21 February 1966); 732, no. 56 cols 20-1 (18 July 1966).

⁹⁴ Catholic Union of Great Britain Council Meeting, 6 July 1965, HE1/C10a, John Heenan papers, WDA.

⁹⁵ Catholic Union of Great Britain AGM, 4 November 1965, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Stewart to Wilson, 26 March 1965; memorandum by Stewart, 31 March 1965, PREM 13/1911, TNA.

⁹⁷ Frank Soskice to Wilson, 12 April 1965; Ramsey to Wilson, 18 June 1965, *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Confidential minute on 'Relations with the Vatican', 1965, PREM 13/1911, TNA.

⁹⁹ For an overview of the historiography of religious decline since the 1960s and the secularization thesis, see Parsons, 'How the Times', 161-89; Clive D. Field, 'Another Window on British Secularization: Public Attitudes to Church and Clergy since the 1960s', *Contemporary British History*, 28:2 (2014): 190-218.

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of British policy, see Michael Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The*

British minister to the Holy See and, in particular, the apostolic delegate played a critical role in informing the Vatican about Northern Ireland and the papacy was generally sympathetic to the British interest. In April 1969 Archbishop Domenico Enrici, who had previously served as apostolic delegate in Australia and New Zealand, succeeded Cardinale in London.¹⁰¹ In the charged atmosphere of the time Enrici acted with considerable discretion.¹⁰² This was in marked contrast to Gaetano Alibrandi, the maverick papal nuncio in Dublin since May 1969. As the assistant-secretary of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs observed, Alibrandi's weak understanding of the Northern Ireland situation did 'not inhibit him from expressing a strong view that the only "solution" to the problem is for the British to withdraw and for Ireland to be reunited'.¹⁰³

In July 1973 Bruno Heim, a Swiss, succeeded Enrici and remained in London for the next twelve years. He had wide diplomatic experience having served as apostolic delegate in Scandinavia from 1961 until 1966 and as pro-nuncio in Finland until 1969 before his transfer to Cairo in the same capacity. Heim had greater semi-official contact with the British government than any of his predecessors. By the late 1970s the British minister to the Holy See regarded Heim as 'a precious ally' in the Northern Ireland problem and in countering the reports of Alibrandi, whom Heim described as 'an emotional Catholic extremist'.¹⁰⁴ Heim enjoyed a strong working relationship with Basil Hume, the abbot of Ampleforth, and played a pivotal role in his appointment as archbishop of Westminster in 1976 over the candidacy of Derek Worlock, who was translated from Portsmouth to Liverpool.¹⁰⁵ A surprise successor to the late John Heenan, Hume was made a cardinal in May 1976. Under his dexterous leadership, English Catholicism grew in self-confidence and gained greater acceptance in national life.¹⁰⁶ This was aided by Hume's background, good relations with the archbishop of Canterbury and access to government through his brother-in-law, Sir John Hunt, who was secretary to the cabinet, head of the civil service, and the first Catholic to hold this pivotal role.

There were also new appointments in the Irish church at this time. Alibrandi remained in Dublin until January 1989 and during his twenty-year term, the longest by a nuncio to any one country, advised on the appointment of thirty-six Irish prelates.¹⁰⁷ The Irish ambassador to the Holy See was informed that the nuncio had been instrumental in having Tomás Ó Fiaich, president of St Patrick's College Maynooth, appointed to

Politics of War and Peace (2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); S.C. Aveyard, *No Solution: The Labour Government and the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1974-79* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

¹⁰¹ Larsen, *Catholic Bishops*, 37.

¹⁰² Heenan to Archbishop Giovanni Benelli (secretariat of state), 17 July 1973, HE1/A5c, Heenan papers, WDA.

¹⁰³ Seán Donlon (assistant secretary DFA) to Gerald Woods (Holy See), 17 June 1975, DFA/2009/22/28, NAI.

¹⁰⁴ Crossley to David Goodall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office hereafter FCO), 11 December 1978, CJ 4/4530, TNA.

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher, *Pope and Britain*, 184-5; Clifford Longley, *The Worlock Archive* (London: Chapman, 2000), 210-11.

¹⁰⁶ Clifford Longley, 'Hume, George Haliburton [name in religion Basil Hume] (1923-1999)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online edn September 2004 [<https://doi.org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/72406>]. Accessed 11 October 2019].

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times*, 12 July 2003.

succeed to the late Cardinal William Conway as archbishop of Armagh in 1977.¹⁰⁸ Garret FitzGerald, the Irish minister for foreign affairs, intimated to W.R. Haydon, the British ambassador in Dublin, his government's preference for the translation of Cahal Daly, bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise and a native of County Antrim, to Armagh. He also expressed dissatisfaction with Alibrandi, who was deemed 'a complete disaster and a dangerous man'.¹⁰⁹ The Irish government was deeply critical of the nuncio's unwarranted interventions on Northern Ireland.¹¹⁰ Daly was also favoured by the British government because of his record of unflinching criticism of the IRA, whereas Ó Fiaich was deemed 'an unknown quantity'.¹¹¹ On 6 July 1977 the secretary of state for Northern Ireland held a meeting with Heim and Hume and presented an aide memoire on the qualities that the British government would like in the new archbishop.¹¹² Heim considered Daly the ablest of the Northern Ireland candidates but Hume expressed some doubts about his lack of charismatic qualities.¹¹³ The following month Ó Fiaich was announced as the new archbishop of Armagh and primate of All Ireland. He was the first for over a century to be elevated to Armagh without prior episcopal experience. Neither that appointment nor enhancing diplomatic relations was raised during James Callaghan's lengthy private audience with Paul VI in September 1977. The prime minister briefed the pope on efforts to suppress violence in Northern Ireland and the pursuit of power sharing; he later recalled that no settlement was in view and that his government did little more than 'breasting the tide'.¹¹⁴

Callaghan's Vatican visit was one manifestation of a growing concern in Whitehall at the strength of Irish influence in the Holy See. By the late 1970s the Foreign & Commonwealth and Northern Ireland Offices were keen to utilize the assistance of Heim and the mission to the Holy See in respect of the Northern Ireland question and, in particular, to refute any misleading statements.¹¹⁵ In January 1978 the experienced diplomat Geoffrey Crossley was appointed British minister to the Holy See. Unusually, the Vatican authorities requested, and Crossley agreed, to make two alterations to the text of his credentials speech in respect of Rhodesia and Northern Ireland. Credentials speeches were published in *Osservatore Romano* and in this way had a public character. There was sensitivity in the Vatican not to be too closely identified with British policy. A reference to the IRA, which had been drafted by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), was deleted in favour of a form of words condemning terrorism from whatever source.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ 'Personal & confidential' report of conversation between Ambassador David Donoghue and Audrys Backis (council for the public affairs of the Church) on 1 December 1977, DFA/2009/22/26, NAI. On the appointment of Ó Fiaich, see Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican*, 364; Oliver P. Rafferty, 'The British Government and the Appointment of Tomás Ó Fiaich as Archbishop of Armagh', *Seanchas Ard Mhaca*, 25 (2014): 27-62.

¹⁰⁹ Minute by W. R. Haydon (British ambassador to Republic), 11 May 1977; John Hickman (British embassy Dublin) to Philip Mallet (FCO), 19 May 1977, CJ 4/1546, TNA.

¹¹⁰ Garret FitzGerald, *All in a Life: An Autobiography* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), 189.

¹¹¹ Draft brief for secretary of state on primate of all Ireland, 24 May 1977, CJ 4/1546, TNA.

¹¹² Brief for secretary of state's meeting with Cardinal Hume on 6 July 1977, *ibid.*

¹¹³ Confidential note of a meeting between the secretary of state and Cardinal Hume and the Apostolic Delegate, Northern Ireland Office, London, 6 July 1977, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Gerard Woods (Irish ambassador) to Seán Donlon (assistant secretary DFA), 26 and 27 September 1977, DFA/2009/22/29, NAI; James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: Collins, 1987), 500.

¹¹⁵ Minute by J.A. Marshall, 28 February 1978, CJ 4/3837, TNA.

¹¹⁶ Draft of Crossley's credentials speech; text of presented credentials speech, 13 January 1978, FCO 33/3791, TNA.

When Crossley presented his credentials his papal audience lasted forty-five minutes instead of the expected fifteen. The diplomat took this to indicate the pope's interest in relations with the UK. In addition, at a subsequent New Year diplomatic reception, Monsignor Achille Silvestrini, deputy foreign minister of the Vatican, raised informally the question of making the apostolic delegation in London a pro-nunciature.¹¹⁷ Crossley's reports articulated a growing frustration with the lowly standing of the British minister in the diplomatic hierarchy at the Vatican. Of ninety-three accredited representatives in early 1979 only the UK and three others did not have full ambassadors. Paul VI treated all ambassadors and ministers to the Holy See as a single group but John Paul II, who was elected pope in October 1978, did not. Not only did Crossley find himself in the second rank but opportunities for a private papal audience declined as more countries established diplomatic relations with the Holy See at ambassadorial level. 'It has been bad enough', Crossley wrote, 'that the British Minister should always come after the Irish Ambassador and be among the last to meet the pope in the distinguished company of Monaco, San Marino and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta; it will be far worse in future if, unlike the Irish Ambassador, he is not allowed to meet him at all.'¹¹⁸ Presciently, Crossley also argued that the Vatican's impact on world affairs was likely to increase under the new pope.

There was regular contact between the NIO and Heim during 1978 against a background of the La Mon restaurant bombing and an intensification of the 'dirty protest' in the Maze Prison. That protest originated in the British government's decision in 1976 to remove special category status from republican prisoners who had demanded to be treated as political prisoners, distinct from those jailed for criminal offences. When the policy of criminalization was put into effect by Roy Mason, secretary of state for Northern Ireland from September 1976, republican prisoners in the Maze refused to wear prison garb and wore only their prison blankets. The blanket protest graduated to a dirty protest and eventually to two hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981. At a meeting with Mason in mid-February 1978, Heim signalled his willingness to brief the Holy See as fully as possible on the British government's policies in Northern Ireland.¹¹⁹ Mason was subsequently guest of honour at a luncheon given by Heim in London on 26 April 1978. This was also attended by Hume, who had organized a thirty-day prayer for peace in Northern Ireland. On 1 August Ó Fiaich visited the Maze and issued a strong statement criticizing the 'inhuman conditions' which he compared to the slums of Calcutta:

One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being ... The stench and filth of some cells, with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls, was almost unbearable. In two of them I was unable to speak for fear of vomiting.

More problematically for the British government, the archbishop maintained that the prisoners were in 'a different category to the ordinary'.¹²⁰ The intervention was widely criticized by unionists, other church leaders and the British government. Mason was

¹¹⁷ Crossley to David Owen (foreign secretary), 18 January 1978, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Minute by A.G.L. Turner (Overseas Information Department), 26 March 1979, FCO 33/4260, TNA.

¹¹⁹ Note of a meeting between the secretary of state and the Apostolic Delegate on 15 February 1978, FCO 33/3791, TNA.

¹²⁰ Haydon (Dublin) to FCO, 1 August 1978, FCO 97/827, TNA; *Irish Times*, 2 August 1978.

‘appalled’ and ‘sickened by the irresponsibility’ of the statement.¹²¹ To a degree, the death of Paul VI on 6 August 1978 drew attention away from Ó Fiaich’s intervention. Heim discussed the remarks with the Irish ambassador in London before offering a corrective in his reports to the Vatican by emphasizing the prisoners’ own responsibility for the conditions in the Maze.¹²² Before Heim’s first meeting with Pope John Paul II on 8 December 1978 he was supplied in confidence with material by the NIO. This included criticism of Ó Fiaich’s statement by prominent nationalists such as Gerry Fitt, SDLP MP for West Belfast.¹²³ This criticism of the archbishop, and to a lesser extent the deteriorating relationship between Mason and the new Fianna Fáil government in Dublin, was at the heart of rumours, reported in the Irish press in November 1978, that pressure was being exerted by Heim, Hume and the British government to deny Ó Fiaich a cardinal’s hat.¹²⁴ This was vigorously denied by the apostolic delegate and by Hume who assured Ó Fiaich by telephone of the falsity of these reports.¹²⁵ When Heim briefed the pope about Northern Ireland he also referred to what he regarded as a smear campaign against him.¹²⁶ Subsequently, the pope made a specific reference to Northern Ireland during his address to the diplomatic corps on 12 January 1979 when he referred to the ‘virus of violence in the form of terrorism and reprisals’.¹²⁷ For Crossley, Heim’s support on Northern Ireland was ‘a very serious reason along with the other more evident ones for grasping at last the nettle of his status’ and for keeping him in London.¹²⁸ Not for the first time, however, the possibility of a general election put the nuncio question on ice.

Over the course of his pontificate John Paul made over one hundred foreign journeys and became the most travelled pope in history. His third pastoral visit in September 1979 was to Ireland. The British legation first reported on press speculation about a visit in December 1978; the Irish hierarchy had in fact delivered an invitation that month.¹²⁹ Normal protocol dictated that the pope would visit the primatial see of Armagh in Northern Ireland. This diplomatic headache posed obvious security and public order risks. Although the Irish hierarchy had not informed the Irish government officially of the invitation, by March 1979 the Irish ambassador to the Holy See had received informal reports of the pope’s definite desire to visit Ireland.¹³⁰ In May Archbishop Joseph Cunnane of Tuam confirmed that the pope, a fervent devotee of the Virgin Mary, had accepted an invitation to attend the centenary celebrations of the Marian shrine at Knock in County Mayo.¹³¹ In July it was revealed that John Paul II would visit Ireland between 29 September and 1 October en route to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. At this point there was no indication that the pope would visit Northern Ireland and the Irish hierarchy had not consulted the two governments about the itinerary.

¹²¹ Roy Mason, *Paying the Price* (London: Robert Hale, 1999), 210-11.

¹²² John Campbell (Irish ambassador to the UK) to Seán Donlon, 8 August 1978, DFA/2014/33/8, NAI.

¹²³ J. G. Pilling (private secretary to secretary of state) to Dennis Pehrson (press secretary apostolic delegation), 6 December 1978; Pehrson to Pilling, 21 December 1978, CJ 4/4530, TNA.

¹²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 29 November 1978; *Sunday Press*, 3 December 1978.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 8 December 1978; *Guardian*, 6 December 1978.

¹²⁶ Crossley to David Goodall (FCO), 11 December 1978, CJ 4/4530, TNA.

¹²⁷ Crossley to FCO, 15 January 1979, FCO 33/4251, TNA.

¹²⁸ Crossley to Goodall, 11 December 1978, CJ 4/4530, TNA.

¹²⁹ M.A. Cafferty (British legation to the Holy See) to David G. Blunt (Republic of Ireland Department FCO), 13 December 1978, FCO 33/4251, TNA.

¹³⁰ Minute for minister of foreign affairs, 27 March 1979; Report from John Molloy (Irish ambassador to Holy See), 17 March 1979, DFA/2012/58/3, NAI.

¹³¹ *Irish Independent*, 9 May 1979.

Nonetheless, Jim Molyneux, Unionist MP for South Antrim, made it clear to Humphrey Atkins, who succeeded Mason in the NIO, that ‘a Papal visit to Ulster would be calamitous’. It would, he said, be tantamount ‘to treating Ulster in the face of the world not as a part of the United Kingdom but as a part of Ireland’, and would give encouragement to the IRA.¹³² Ian Paisley also reacted sharply to the news.

The British legation was instructed by Peter Carrington, the foreign secretary, to make informal enquiries to establish if the pope was contemplating a visit to Armagh. Atkins believed that the pope could hardly be refused. The political priority for the NIO was that the British government would first be consulted and that any visit would be at its invitation. Atkins was willing to contemplate a quick in and out symbolic gesture – such as praying for peace and reconciliation at the grave of Cardinal Conway – but not an open or more spectacular visit.¹³³ On 26 July Crossley presented an aide memoire to Substitute Secretary of State Martinez who later confirmed that suggestions of a visit to Northern Ireland were ‘pure speculation’.¹³⁴ This was somewhat undone by a widely reported claim by the Irish hierarchy that a visit to the North was ‘not excluded’. Pressure to include a visit to Armagh came from Ó Fiaich and from the Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh who extended an invitation to the pope.¹³⁵ To compound matters, Alibrandi made an ill-considered statement in Rome on 23 August that it was more than probable that the pope would go north. Silvestrini was ‘extremely angry’ at such ‘a stupidity’ when Alibrandi’s statement was raised by Crossley.¹³⁶ Ó Fiaich was invited to see the pope on 27 August and to talk to Agostino Casaroli, the cardinal secretary of state. He agreed to Crossley’s request that there should be no comment on the programme until it was approved by the pope.¹³⁷ Although serious consideration had been given to adding Armagh to the pope’s itinerary, the matter was effectively settled by events in Ireland. On 27 August an IRA bomb killed Lord Mountbatten, the queen’s cousin, when it exploded on his yacht off Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo. On the same day eighteen British soldiers were killed by the IRA at Warrenpoint, close to the Irish border, the highest casualty toll inflicted on the British army during the Troubles.

With a visit to Armagh off the agenda, the priority for the British government then switched to influencing any possible papal statement touching on Northern Ireland and neutralizing the views of Alibrandi and to a lesser extent Ó Fiaich. At a meeting with Heim in London on 4 September 1979, Atkins hoped that the pope would ‘not be declaring support for Irish unity’ and that he might ‘appeal to those who used violence, supposedly for political ends, to abandon this hopeless course’.¹³⁸ Heim expressed surprise at the myths that persisted in the United States and his press secretary added that there seemed to be widespread ignorance in Britain of the government’s efforts to bring peace and economic stability to Northern Ireland. At the close of the meeting, the apostolic delegate promised ‘to help on the question of the Pope’s statements during the

¹³² Molyneux to Atkins, 26 July 1979, CJ 4/3837, TNA.

¹³³ J. G. Pilling to Bryan Cartledge (private secretary to the prime minister), 24 August 1979, FCO 33/4252, TNA.

¹³⁴ Crossley to FCO, 27 July 1979, FCO 33/4251, TNA.

¹³⁵ Crossley to FCO, 25 August 1979, FCO 33/4252, TNA.

¹³⁶ Crossley to FCO, 24 August 1979, *ibid.*

¹³⁷ Crossley to FCO, 25 August 1979, *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Note of meeting between the Secretary of State and the Apostolic Delegate at NIO London on 4 September 1979, FCO 33/4249, TNA.

visit' and undertook that both he and Hume would 'continue to try to curb Cardinal O'Fee's [Ó Fiaich's] nationalistic behaviour'.¹³⁹ Churchmen were not the only background influencers. Before a papal audience on 11 September, Roy Jenkins, then president of the European Commission, enquired informally of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office if there were any points he could make in a personal capacity. The foreign secretary, with whom Jenkins got on well, suggested that it would have 'a profound effect' in Ireland and the US if the pope were to speak out against terrorists and those who assisted or supported them.¹⁴⁰ During the course of a thirty-five minute audience, Jenkins emphasized the importance of influencing 'the sizeable minority who gave passive support to violence' and John Paul II repeated the phrase 'passive support' a number of times.¹⁴¹ Another concern was that the pope might refer to the republican protest in the Maze Prison. The Royal Ulster Constabulary reported that Alibrandi – described by Carrington as 'notorious for his Provo sympathies' – had meetings with the families of republican protesters.¹⁴² Two days before the pope arrived in Ireland, Gerry Fitt sent a private message to the Vatican through the FCO urging the pontiff not to mention the protest which would only 'alienate the Protestants and divide the Catholics'.¹⁴³

On 29 September Pope John Paul II arrived in Ireland. After celebrating Mass in Dublin's Phoenix Park, he travelled by helicopter to Killineer, near Drogheda in the diocese of Armagh. His speech, believed to have been written by Cahal Daly, addressed the problem of peace, justice and reconciliation. Famously, he appealed to those engaged in violence: 'On my knees I beg you to turn away from the paths of violence and to return to the ways of peace.' The pope's call for an end to violence and appeal for reconciliation was almost unanimously welcomed by the press, north and south.¹⁴⁴ It was also applauded by Margaret Thatcher, who hoped it would 'help to create a new spirit of cooperation and understanding among all the people of Northern Ireland and will help to free them from terrorism and fear'.¹⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, the pope's appeal was dismissed by the Provisional IRA. The British legation reflected with considerable satisfaction on the pope's Irish visit. The absence of diplomatic incidents which might have embarrassed the British government was attributed to Heim who ensured that the pope 'listened to the voice of reason rather than to the impassioned pleas' of Ó Fiaich and Alibrandi.¹⁴⁶ In November 1979 Heim was granted diplomatic immunity, for which he had long campaigned, by the FCO.¹⁴⁷ This was a precursor to the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the UK. The Irish ambassador in London observed that Heim 'has played his cards skilfully with the Establishment and the British

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Carrington to Crossley, 10 September 1979, FCO 33/4249, TNA; on Jenkins see N. Piers Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

¹⁴¹ Roy Jenkins, *European Diary, 1977-1981* (London: Collins, 1989), 499; UK representative in Brussels to FCO, 13 September 1979, PREM 19/128 TNA.

¹⁴² Carrington to Crossley, 24 September 1979, FCO 33/4252, TNA.

¹⁴³ Carrington to Crossley, 27 September 1979, PREM 19/128, TNA.

¹⁴⁴ An exception was Conor Cruise O'Brien in the *Observer*, 30 September 1979.

¹⁴⁵ Statement, 1 October 1979, PREM 19/128, TNA.

¹⁴⁶ J. H. Callan (Crossley's deputy) to S. Hilton (FCO), 15 October 1979, FCO 33/4252, TNA.

¹⁴⁷ *The Times*, 13 November 1979.

Government and has promoted the British policies on Northern Ireland forcefully in Rome'.¹⁴⁸

In advance of Thatcher's visit to the Vatican in November 1980, Carrington prepared a lengthy memorandum that set out three significant political reasons for upgrading relations with the Holy See.¹⁴⁹ The first was the influence of John Paul II in areas where British interests were at stake: Eastern Europe, the Middle East and, in particular, Northern Ireland. It was noted that the Vatican had consistently refrained from unhelpful comment on Northern Ireland and better channels of communication would be to Britain's benefit. That position was endorsed by the NIO.¹⁵⁰ Secondly, the traditional hostility of the Church of England to all things Roman had waned. In 1976 Mervyn Stockwood, bishop of Southwark, wrote to the foreign secretary to suggest that the apostolic delegate be given full diplomatic status as papal pro-nuncio. Stockwood had been the first cleric to send Heim a telegram of welcome on his arrival in London and they forged an enduring friendship.¹⁵¹ Soundings from the established churches of England and Scotland as well as the Roman Catholic Church welcomed the proposed change. The election of Archbishop Robert Runcie to Canterbury in 1980 was viewed as significant in Vatican circles because, as was explained to the Irish ambassador, he 'displayed a far more ecumenical attitude than his predecessor Archbishop Coggan who was suspicious of any rapprochement with the Catholic Church'.¹⁵² Lastly, a distinction was drawn between the diplomatic responsibilities of a pro-nuncio which, it was maintained, should cover all of the United Kingdom, and his pastoral responsibilities which were a matter for the authorities of the Catholic Church. This remained a sensitive issue. In October 1980 an Irish newspaper reported a claim by Ó Fiaich that if the appointment of a nuncio to London threatened the status and jurisdictional powers of the nuncio in Dublin there was likely to be 'one heck of a row'.¹⁵³

The only remaining issue was the timing of any announcement. In August 1980 it was revealed that the pope intended to visit Britain in 1982, which intensified speculation about the upgrading of diplomatic links.¹⁵⁴ The Irish government was largely powerless to intervene as the matter of a nuncio was now a *fait accompli*. While not opposing the normalization of relations, an aide-mémoire presented to Silvestrini on 18 May 1981 maintained that extending the jurisdiction of a pro-nuncio in Britain to include Northern Ireland would effectively partition the Irish church in its dealings with the Holy See. It would also it was argued, diminish the positions of the archbishop of Armagh and papal nuncio to Ireland, create dismay in the minds of Irish Catholics, and exacerbate Anglo-Irish relations.¹⁵⁵ Assurances were subsequently offered that the ecclesiastical

¹⁴⁸ Éamon Kennedy (Irish ambassador to the UK) to secretary DFA, 24 December 1979, DFA/2014/33/8, NAI.

¹⁴⁹ Confidential minute by Carrington to prime minister, 27 October 1980, CJ 4/3837, TNA.

¹⁵⁰ Atkins to Carrington, [?] July 1980, FCO 33/4536, TNA.

¹⁵¹ 'Obituary of The Most Reverend Bruno Heim', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 2003.

¹⁵² Report of a conversation with Monsignor Giovanni Tonucci of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, 1 December 1981, DFA/2014/33/8, NAI.

¹⁵³ *Irish Press*, 20 October 1980.

¹⁵⁴ On the papal visit see Catherine Pepinster, *The Keys and the Kingdom: The British and the Papacy from John Paul II to Francis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 29-36.

¹⁵⁵ Coffey to Andrew O'Rourke (secretary DFA), 19 May 1981 with copy of Aide-Mémoire, DFA/2014/33/8, NAI.

jurisdiction of the papal representatives in Dublin and London would not be altered. In January 1982 the upgrading of diplomatic relations with the Holy See was announced. In confidence and unofficially, the British embassy in Dublin informed the assistant secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs on 11 January 1982 of the request for reciprocal diplomatic representation and emphasized the distinction between a pro-nuncio's diplomatic and pastoral functions.¹⁵⁶ In the Vatican Silvestrini informed the Irish ambassador the day before the pope publicly revealed the change on 16 January. He indicated that the bishops in Ireland and in the UK had raised no objection and that the pope hoped the move would be 'beneficial in the context of Northern Ireland's problem'.¹⁵⁷ Since his visit to Ireland, John Paul II had closely monitored the situation in Northern Ireland. He had corresponded with Thatcher about the humanitarian dimension of the hunger strikes. In May 1981, with the cooperation of the British government, he dispatched his private secretary, Father John Magee¹⁵⁸, who was from Newry, as a special envoy to Northern Ireland to plead with Bobby Sands, the leader of the IRA hunger strikers, to no avail. The Vatican press release confirmed that the 'ecclesiastical competences of the Pontifical Representations in London and Dublin will naturally remain unaltered'.¹⁵⁹

The restoration of full ambassadorial relations between London and the Vatican in 1982 ended a diplomatic breach that had existed for more than four centuries. On 1 March Heim's rank was upgraded to pro-nuncio with the status of a head of mission; a month later Sir Mark Heath became the first ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the Holy See. Remarkably, eighty years had elapsed since the opening of the British mission in 1914. The Irish government could not demur. Its fears about the jurisdiction of a nuncio in London had become groundless. Heim remained pro-nuncio until his retirement in 1985. During his twelve years in London, Anglo-Vatican relations had improved immeasurably. A combination of heraldic expertise (he designed the coats of arms for four popes), culinary skills and generosity as a host led to an extraordinary array of friendships with members of the establishment. Following Heim's death in 2003, one obituarist suggested unkindly that he would be remembered by many 'less for his place in history or his deep piety than as an intimate of the Queen Mother who delighted in the private dinners he cooked for her at his residence'.¹⁶⁰ Heim's place in history was secured by two important legacies. The first was the appointment of the charismatic Basil Hume to Westminster. His presentation of the Roman Catholic faith 'made it seem less alien and anachronistic to the English'.¹⁶¹ This was aided by the dissolution of a distinctive Catholic sub-culture by the mid-1980s, a process that took place gradually over several decades.¹⁶² The second was Heim's integral role in the restoration of full

¹⁵⁶ Secret minute on diplomatic relations between Britain and the Holy See, 12 January 1982, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Coffey to David Neligan (assistant secretary DFA), 18 Jan 1982 enclosing note of interview with Monsignor Achille Silvestrini on 15 January 1982, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Magee was ordained for St Patrick's Society for the Foreign Missions and was one of Paul VI's two private secretaries. He retained this position under John Paul I and John Paul II until 1982 when he became master of pontifical ceremonies.

¹⁵⁹ Vatican Press Release, 16 January 1982, DFA/2014/33/8, NAI.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Stanford, 'The Most Rev Bruno Heim: Indiscreet Catholic Diplomat Who Enjoyed Repairing the Reformation Rift', *Guardian*, 25 March 2003.

¹⁶¹ Longley, 'Hume'

¹⁶² Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in Social Structure since the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

diplomatic relations to which a coping stone was added in 1994 when the pro-nunciature was upgraded to an apostolic nunciature.

The high point of Heim's tenure as pro-nuncio was the papal visit to Britain from 28 May to 3 June 1982. The outbreak of the Falklands War in early April put the papal visit in jeopardy but Heim, Archbishop Winning of Glasgow and Archbishop Worlock of Liverpool rescued the situation. The FCO proposed that the political dimension of the papal visit, including a meeting between pontiff and prime minister, be abandoned. In addition, a papal visit to Argentina was hastily arranged to balance the British one.¹⁶³ The programme in England and Wales was based around the seven sacraments with, for example, an emphasis on baptism at Westminster, confirmation at Coventry and penance and reconciliation at Liverpool.¹⁶⁴ Large crowds turned out in the sunshine to greet the pope and there was extensive television coverage. Three set piece events captured the ecumenical spirit and demonstrated the extent to which old animosities lay dormant. The first was the reception of the pope by Archbishop Runcie in Canterbury Cathedral in the presence of the Prince of Wales. For the Irish ambassador the sight of the two church leaders embracing 'seemed to turn a page and to write a whole new chapter of history'.¹⁶⁵ The second was in Edinburgh where John Paul II met the moderator of the Church of Scotland beneath the General Assembly's statue of John Knox. Significantly, less than one hundred demonstrators, led by Ian Paisley, protested at 'the admission of the pope to the palace of world Presbyterianism'.¹⁶⁶ The third was in Buckingham Place where the pope had tea with the queen. If the restoration of full ambassadorial relations was an institutional expression of mutual Anglo-Vatican regard, then John Paul II's historic visit consolidated the position of the Roman Catholic community in the mainstream of British national life. As one editorial put it, the success of the visit helped to liberate the Roman Catholic community 'from their long probation as a slightly un-British minority'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Fletcher, *The Popes and Britain*, 600.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 601.

¹⁶⁵ Éamon Kennedy to secretary DFA, 7 June 1982, DFA/2016/22/2017, NAI.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 196.

¹⁶⁷ 'A Man for Our Seasons', *The Times*, 3 June 1982.