

# Vatican Policy on the Ukrainian-Polish War of 1918–1919 as an Example of the Catholic Church’s Response to National Conflicts

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“Remember that Nations do not die.” These words in Pope Benedict XV’s apostolic exhortation “To the Peoples Now at War and to Their Rulers”<sup>1</sup> of 28 July 1915 have been understood in many ways. Leaders of national governments supposed that the pope shared the *raison d’être* of the national state, while leaders of various national movements saw in this phrase his deep understanding and support of the struggle for national emancipation. Count Mykhailo Tyshkevych, who led the diplomatic missions of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) at the Apostolic See and then at the Paris Peace Conference, used these same words to stress that Ukrainians had the right to be independent.<sup>2</sup> Much later, after the Second World War, the founder of Italian Christian Democracy, Rev. Luigi Sturzo, saw in Benedict’s phrase a guide for the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, conservatives regarded these words as a warning against the destructive forces of nationalism. They were more focused on the remainder of Benedict’s sentence after the phrase “Nations do not die.” What was he thinking when he wrote these words? It is quite probable that Benedict’s views on nations and nationalism were different from many of those he addressed, and that is why his words were so differently understood. After his statement “Nations do not die,” Benedict pointed out that the “humbled and oppressed” nations “chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the combat, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hatred and revenge.”<sup>4</sup> He urged the leaders of the “peoples at war” to find a peaceful way of dealing with international conflicts and problems, because in his opinion “peace and prosperity are based on mutual cordiality and respect for the rights and dignity of others.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On-line at <[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xv/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_exh\\_19150728\\_fummo-chiamati\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xv/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati_en.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents historiques sur l’Ukraine et ses relations avec la Pologne, la Russie et la Suède 1569–1764, publiés avec notices explicatives et cartes par Michel Tyszkiewicz* (Lausanne, 1919). The book’s aim was to promote support for Ukrainian independence abroad.

<sup>3</sup> G. Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale: Atti del Convegno di Studi tenuto a Spoleto nei giorni 7–8–9 settembre 1962* (Rome, 1963), 244–45.

<sup>4</sup> On-line at <[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xv/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_exh\\_19150728\\_fummo-chiamati\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xv/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati_en.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> Ernesto Vercesi, *Tre Papi: Leone XII – Pio X – Benedetto XV* (Milan, 1929), 249–50.

It is difficult to agree with scholars who see in Pope Benedict's official documents and pronouncements a hostile attitude towards nationalism and his desire to distance himself from the problems connected with nationalism and national issues.<sup>6</sup> For him nationalism was connected to the Great War: he saw national conflicts and struggles between nations, as well as national agitation based on hatred towards the other, as factors mainly responsible for the outbreak of the war. Benedict made that clear in his first encyclical, "Ad beatissimi apostolorum" (1 November 1914), pointing out that "race hatred" had "reached its climax" in the war.<sup>7</sup> In his vocabulary he often used "race" and "nation" interchangeably.<sup>8</sup> Benedict focused very much on the dark sides of nationalism, and his analysis of these aspects was deeper than that of many political leaders of his time. Yet he never stated that nationalism only has an unattractive side. In his documents there are no traces of criticism towards the nation-state as a form of political organization or towards nationalism as a phenomenon.

Benedict's analysis of nationalism was prompted by the Great War, towards which he had a very distinctive and strongly felt attitude. In all of his wartime encyclicals, letters, and appeals, he regarded that war as an absolute evil: all of its participants were guilty of wrongdoing because the war could not be justified in any way and because it brought suffering to millions of people. Such ideas were a novelty in Catholic teachings. Traditional early twentieth-century Catholic theology distinguished between the unjust and the just war, which granted to the state the "full natural right of war, whether defensive ... or offensive; or punitive in the infliction of punishment for evil done against itself or in some case against others."<sup>9</sup> Benedict rejected such justification and censured the First World War as a crime against humanity and as the "suicide of civilization."<sup>10</sup> His anti-war ideas remained influential in the Catholic Church throughout the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Benedict's attention to nationalism and the rights of nations was not a sign of support and special benevolence towards struggles for independence by oppressed nations that some nationalists thought it was. Benedict believed that nationalism could provoke war and should therefore be approached with care and treated seriously. Accordingly, the Catholic Church had to play the role of moral arbiter and maintain absolute neutrality. "[T]he Apostolic See is not simply neutral, it is beyond, supra" the fighting sides in the war and national conflicts or, as Benedict called it, "*lotte di nazionalità*."<sup>12</sup> But being neutral did not mean being passive. The church had to stand on the side of victims, of those who suffered, giving them not

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono: Russia rivoluzionaria, Polonia indipendente, e Santa Sede* (Bologna, 1992), 8–9.

<sup>7</sup> On-line at <[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xv/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_enc\\_01111914\\_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xv/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_01111914_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum_en.html)>.

<sup>8</sup> See John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London and New York, 2000), 86.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Macksey, "War," in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1913), 547.

<sup>10</sup> Vercesi, *Tre Papi*, 252.

<sup>11</sup> Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 245.

only spiritual comfort but also fighting for justice on their behalf and easing their sufferings in all possible ways.<sup>13</sup>

Benedict viewed the nation and nationalism as products of the modern era and modern society. He considered them *faits accomplis* and, unlike his predecessors, he did not resist them by the Syllabus of Errors or an anti-modernist purge. Benedict sought rapprochement with the modern world, and his introduction of a new approach to nationalism was an important step toward modernity. The pope—in both his official documents and letters—articulated positions on such issues as nations' rights ("*diritti di nazioni*"), the national principle ("*principio di nazionalità*"), the rights of small nations, and the equality of rights for all nations; he also pointed out the necessity of a supranational authority for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Famously, he stressed his belief in equal rights for small, new nations during his official meeting with Finnish diplomatic representatives in 1918.

While supporting the idea of nations' rights and various demands for national emancipation, the Vatican opposed the use of violence in national struggles. This explains, for example, its cautious position on Irish nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

Benedict's attitude toward nationalism can be better understood through his views on colonialism. On 30 November 1919 he issued the encyclical *Maximum illud* about postwar Catholic missionary activity among non-Europeans. In it Benedict warned missionaries against serving their countries' national interests if they damaged the church's interests, and against becoming tools of the national/colonial oppression of native peoples by making them believe that "Christianity is only the religion of a given nation."<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, it may be said that Pope Benedict elaborated the modern Catholic outlook on nationalism and developed the principles to deal with it. His attention to the issues of nationalism and nation building could be explained by his experience of growing up in a unified Italy.<sup>16</sup> His familiarity with the intellectual discussions that Catholic modernists<sup>17</sup> led stimulated a critical approach and an understanding of why it was important for the church to adapt to modernity. Benedict's way of dealing with nationalism and the nation-state was such an accommodation.

<sup>13</sup> During the war Benedict initiated the creation of several Vatican and Swiss organizations that channeled church aid and resources to various humanitarian initiatives.

<sup>14</sup> Christine Alix, *Le Saint-Siège et les nationalismes en Europe, 1870–1960* (Paris, 1962), 133–34.

<sup>15</sup> Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 203–204.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict (né Giacomo della Chiesa) was born a few years before the unification of Italy into a Genoese aristocratic family. His father, Marquess Giuseppe della Chiesa, served King Victor Emmanuel II. Benedict received a doctorate in law from the University of Genoa in 1875 and then studied for the priesthood at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome. He was the first pope (1914–22) to recognize the Italian state: immediately after the conclave that elected him, he gave the symbolic "Urbi et orbi" blessing, which Pius IX, Leo XIII, and Pius X had withheld after Rome was proclaimed Italy's capital.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict developed a great respect for some modernists, including Msgr. Giovanni Genocchi, whom he appointed the first apostolic delegate to Ukraine and Eastern Galicia.

In real politics, of course, in many instances Benedict and his curia had to manoeuvre between idealistic visions and wartime reality. The Vatican's policies towards nation formation and attempts to constitute independent nation-states in Eastern Europe during the years 1917–22 are a very good illustration of this struggle between the pope's ideal scheme and reality. They also provide good material to study the development of the Vatican's vision of nationalism and the "rights of nations."

From the spring of 1917 the Vatican consciously started considering the prospects of the creation of new, independent states in Central and Eastern Europe. The Poles received the most active support for their independence project. While preparing the Vatican's peace note, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, conducted talks through the apostolic nuncio in Bavaria, Eugenio Pacelli, with the German chancellor, Georg Michaelis, in July 1917. Their main goal was to set the grounds for future peace negotiations. Both sides agreed that Polish independence had to be re-established for the sake of future peace and stability in Europe; and they both agreed to support Ukraine's, Finland's, the Baltic States', Ireland's, Egypt's, and Persia's claims to independence.<sup>18</sup> However, support for Polish independence was not intrinsic to the Vatican's wartime diplomacy. From the beginning of the Great War to the spring of 1917, the Vatican held a rather different opinion. There is evidence it was inclined to solve the Polish question within the Habsburg Empire. In January 1916, when the Polish leader Roman Dmowski approached the Vatican with a plea to support Polish independence, Cardinal Gasparri openly responded that, in the Vatican's opinion, Poland's future lay "with Austria."<sup>19</sup> Yet a bit earlier, in 1915, the Vatican organized an international campaign in support of Polish war victims. On Pope Benedict's initiative, on 21 November 1915 Sunday mass was offered for Poland in all Catholic churches around the world, after which Catholics worldwide donated more than 3,877,000 Swiss francs for humanitarian aid.<sup>20</sup> This initiative attracted the attention of millions of people to the Polish issue and made many of them aware of Poland: the mass was offered for Poland, but not for the Polish lands or the Polish people.<sup>21</sup>

The Vatican's next initiative dealing with the probable successor-states in Europe was the pope's peace note of August 1917. In this appeal to all belligerent states, Benedict tried to lay the groundwork for an armistice and productive peace talks. In it he stated the need for justice and impartiality in solving the territorial and political issues of "lands that in times past constituted the ancient Polish kingdom." Benedict was thinking not only about a Polish independent state but also

<sup>18</sup> Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, 379.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Pease, "Poland and the Holy See, 1918–1939," *Slavic Review* 50, no 3 (1991): 522; and Stanisław Sierpowski, "Benedetto XV e la questione polacca negli anni della 'grande guerra,'" in *Benedetto XV e la pace, 1918*, ed. Giorgio Rumi (Brescia, 1990), 219–20.

<sup>20</sup> Sierpowski, "Benedetto XV e la questione polacca," 218.

<sup>21</sup> Later a similar action of support and charity was organized for Lithuania, and in March 1917 Nuncio Eugenio Pacelli assured Count Tyshkevych that the pope was ready to launch the same action on behalf of Galicia's Ruthenians/Ukrainians should the Greek Catholic bishops there officially turn to the pope, as the Polish and Lithuanian hierarchs had done earlier.

about other peoples who were formerly subjects of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth but were now fighting for national emancipation. This was the second time he indirectly mentioned Ukraine.<sup>22</sup>

In the late autumn of 1917, after he exchanged official letters with the Polish Regency Council,<sup>23</sup> of which the archbishop of Warsaw, Alexander Kakowski, was a member, Benedict decided to send an apostolic visitator to Poland—Rev. Achille Ratti (later Pope Pius XI), the Vatican's chief librarian. In the instructions that Ratti received in May 1918, his mission was characterized as ecclesiastic, meaning that he was being sent to the Catholic hierarchs of Poland and would not be accredited by the new Polish government, the Regency Council.<sup>24</sup>

In early November 1918 Benedict gave orders to his nuncio in Vienna “to establish friendly relations with the various nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that at this moment are constituting their independent states” and to convey to their leaderships that because “the church is an ideal society, whose goal is the spiritual well-being of all people at all times and in every state, therefore the church can adapt without serious difficulties to legitimate territorial and political changes.”<sup>25</sup> Thus the pope's politics underwent a reorientation toward active contacts with the newly independent states, whose legitimacy the Vatican accepted. Step by step Benedict's understanding of the “rights of nations” evolved toward the “right of nations to self-determination.” One can argue whether his actions were an experienced diplomat's purely pragmatic accommodation with reality or the result of an evolution in his thinking. They were probably both. The Vatican was very much interested in establishing relations with the new states in order to guarantee the rights of the Catholic Church there. But by introducing into church discourse such notions as the “national principle,” “nations' rights,” and the “equality of nations” and by using them as grounds for numerous international statements, it was rather difficult to ultimately avoid support for the “right to self-determination.” However, in the Vatican that latter right had a slightly different connotation. In general, the Catholic Church under Benedict recognized that nations have the “right to self-determination,” but in the church's opinion this right had to be exercised with thorough consideration of all its pros and cons not only for one nation, but also for other nations. The Vatican tried to impose limits on the realization of this right: i.e., it should not contradict Christian moral principles and should be considered together with the well-being of other nations and with supranational interests.<sup>26</sup> In his letter of October 1918 to Archbishop Kakowski, Benedict quite easily conceded the right of self-determination to the nations of another empire—the Russian. Here he again expressed his support

<sup>22</sup> Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, 860.

<sup>23</sup> Austria-Hungary and Germany created the Regency Council in October 1917 to govern over the Polish lands, which at that time were almost completely under the authority of the two imperial powers.

<sup>24</sup> Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia (hereafter ANV), vol. 191, f. 1117.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XV's letter to Cardinal Gasparri of 8 November 1918, in Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 247.

<sup>26</sup> “Le giuste aspirazioni dei popoli,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 7 June 1918, 490–502.

for Polish independence, saying that he “even more ardently than before is praying for Poland’s complete independence” and for “other nationalities, including non-Catholic [ones], of the Russian Empire, that they gain the possibility to determine their future fate themselves and become prosperous thanks to their talented people and resources.”<sup>27</sup> It was quite obvious that the pope supported the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the right of its nations to determine their future.

It is important to note that Pope Benedict and the Vatican quite easily, without any special alternative thoughts, came to the conclusion that the collapse of the Russian Empire and the constitution of new national entities in its place could be favourable for the Catholic Church. In his peace note as well as in other documents, there is no trace of any consideration of that empire’s reorganization or revival under a different leadership. In this case the Vatican was quite consistent in its views on nation building and was ready to support the non-Russian peoples’ demands without hesitation. Relations with the UNR became a very clear example of such politics. In 1917 and early 1918 the Vatican showed genuine interest in the non-Russian peoples of the former Romanov empire, paying especially close attention to Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, but also to Georgia and Armenia. Sometime toward the end of 1917 the nunciature in Vienna received an order to study the religious and political situation in Ukraine carefully. In January 1918 the nunciature sent a report on the “Church Situation in Ukraine” to the Vatican. Vatican diplomats in Vienna and Warsaw were involved in monitoring developments in Ukraine and establishing contacts with representatives of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky’s Ukrainian State and then of Symon Petliura’s UNR Directory. From these first contacts as well as from later developments, it is obvious that the Vatican desired to discuss the futures of Ukraine and Eastern Galicia separately.<sup>28</sup> The main reason was the adherence of most Galician Ukrainians to the Greek Catholic Church: in this light the unification of Galicia with much larger Orthodox Ukraine was viewed at the Vatican as dangerous for the Catholic churches, especially for the Greek Catholics. This approach changed somewhat as a result of the activity of the UNR’s diplomatic missions in 1919 and 1920.

The end of tsarist rule gave the Vatican some hope for a better future for the Catholic Church in Russia. In 1917 the Russian Provisional Government not only proclaimed the separation of church and state and the equality of rights of various denominations, but also expressed its interest and desire to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican. With political changes sweeping over the former empire, the Vatican was taken up by new plans about how to bring Russia into unity with the Apostolic See. The discussion around the prospects and projects in Russia deepened the Vatican’s interest in Eastern Europe and considerably influenced its relations with the new national and political entities there.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 248.

<sup>28</sup> See Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Archivio della Sacra Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinarii (hereafter AES), *Austria-Ungeria*, 685. I consulted the former Archive of the Secretary of the Vatican State before its reorganization as the AES collection. Therefore I cite the documents according to their old signatures.

<sup>29</sup> See my book *Vatykan i vyklyky modernosti: Skhidnoievropeis'ka polityka papy Benedykta XV ta ukraïns'ko-pol's'kyi konflikt u Halychyni, 1914–1923* (Lviv, 2006), 150–51.

For the Vatican, Poland became the most important of those new entities. With its history and tradition of “Polonia semper fidelis” and with the extremely important role of the Catholic Church in Polish national, political, and social life, Poland promised to replace the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the role of Rome’s devoted daughter and also promised to be the key to Eastern Europe. Polish bishops and the Roman Catholic hierarchs in the former Russian Empire, all of whom were Polish by nationality, were deeply involved in articulating and designing plans for Russia’s union with the Holy See. But relations with the new Poland became more complicated, and the new “daughter” turned out to be less obedient than the Vatican had hoped it would be.

Poland became the first of the new states to receive an apostolic visitor: Msgr. Ratti arrived in Warsaw in May 1918. In March 1919 the Vatican was among the first states to recognize independent Poland, and in June 1919 Benedict elevated Ratti to the rank of nuncio, who thus became the dean of the diplomatic corps in Warsaw. Ratti received several additional diplomatic appointments that made him the most important Vatican representative in Eastern Europe—apostolic visitor in Lithuania, apostolic commissioner for the plebiscite in Upper Silesia, and later, from July 1918, apostolic visitor for all the territories of the former Russian Empire.<sup>30</sup>

Thus Ratti became the first diplomat of the modern age to deal with Russia, Poland, and all ethnic Ukrainian lands. He received special, detailed instructions from the main subdivisions of the Roman Curia dealing with the UNR and the Western Ukrainian National Republic (ZUNR). In those instructions, which the Congregation of Cardinals handed to him, the religious and political situation in the Kholm region and Podlachia was analyzed, and the main concern of the Roman cardinals was linked to the liberal and socialist orientation of the UNR’s Central Rada, which had laid claim to those ethnic Ukrainian territories. The Curia’s instructions acquainted Ratti with the history, situation, and role of the Uniate church in Galicia and pointed out its openly Ukrainian national identity, which for the Vatican’s officials explained the resistance of the Polish episcopate and politicians to allowing that church to be active in Volhynia and the Kholm region.<sup>31</sup> The Congregation for the Oriental Churches, whose main concerns were with the legal situation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics, gave Ratti separate instructions. The congregation instructed Ratti to investigate whether the Poles had respected the Ukrainian Catholics’ human and civil rights in constituting the new Polish Republic, how freely the Ukrainians under Poland could practice their rite, and whether their Byzantine rite was free of Latin-rite elements.<sup>32</sup>

During almost the entire first year of his mission in Poland, Msgr. Ratti sent to the Roman Curia reports full of praise and words of great esteem for Poland and the Polish Catholic Church. But sometime in the spring of 1919 he began focusing in his letters and reports on some peculiarities of Polish Catholicism—the very strong

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<sup>30</sup> Giuseppe De Marchi, *Le Nunziature apostoliche dal 1800 al 1956* (Rome, 1957), 397.

<sup>31</sup> ANV, vol. 191, ff. 1117r-v, 1122.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1125v.

presence of a nationalist agenda in the Polish church,<sup>33</sup> the strong popular belief in the equation Pole = Catholic and vice-versa, and the Polish church's involvement in nation and state building.<sup>34</sup> The Vatican was aware of some of these developments and instructed Ratti about them before he had left for his mission. The real extent of the problem became obvious to the Vatican and its diplomat at the beginning of 1919, when, as Poland's conflicts with its Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German neighbours became bloody and ferocious, the Polish Catholic Church supported the Polish government and military. What was most unpleasant for the Vatican was that the conflict was between Catholic nations.

In November 1918 Msgr. Ratti reported to the Apostolic See about the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Galicia, which had developed into an openly bitter war. He sent out his first information on that issue on 4 November 1918,<sup>35</sup> four days after the crucial street battles for Lviv. Ratti immediately received instructions from Pope Benedict to write official letters on behalf of the pope to the Polish Catholic archbishop of Lviv, Józef Bilczewski, and the Greek Catholic metropolitan, Andrei Sheptytsky. The two identical letters stressed that the Polish-Ukrainian War was between two Catholic, fraternal peoples that had coexisted for centuries,<sup>36</sup> reflected the main idea of Benedict's peace note about the inhumane character of war, and demanded that both hierarchs do everything possible to initiate negotiations between the warring sides and promote reconciliation. Benedict and Ratti turned to both of the hierarchs in Lviv because they knew that they played pivotal roles in Galicia's Polish and Ukrainian communities. Ratti received quick replies from both of them, each of whom expressed the rationale of their co-nationals and stressed the grievances of one side vis-à-vis the other.<sup>37</sup> Archbishop Bilczewski pointed out that he felt almost offended that the Vatican had addressed him in the same way as it had Metropolitan Sheptytsky, without making a distinction between the two sides in the bloody conflict.<sup>38</sup> Sheptytsky's response was different in tone. In it he expressed fear that it would be very difficult for the Vatican to be impartial because the Poles were known for their devotion to the Apostolic See. Meanwhile the Ukrainian people, most of which was Orthodox, would feel like a Cinderella among the rich and powerful Catholic nations. Sheptytsky posed the question of "how successfully the Catholic Church could spread its influence in Orthodox Ukraine while operating under the authority of such a Catholic state as Poland" that was persecuting the Catholic Ukrainians of Galicia.<sup>39</sup>

The metropolitan also addressed the spread of Catholicism to the rest of Ukraine and to Russia. His remarks were not accidental. Sheptytsky wanted to draw the

<sup>33</sup> AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>34</sup> ANV, vol. 193, f. 463.

<sup>35</sup> ANV, vol. 192, f. 589. Ratti warned the Roman Curia about the "dangerous events that could develop in Eastern Galicia." He presumed that Eastern "Galicia is in the hands of the Ukrainians."

<sup>36</sup> AES, *Russia*, 560, f. 144v.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 145.

<sup>38</sup> See Morozzo della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 124; and AES, *Repubblica Polonia*, 483.

<sup>39</sup> AES, *Repubblica Polonia*, 483.



Vatican's attention to the consequences that the Polish-Ukrainian War would have for the Roman Curia's ambitious plans in Russia, which began circulating with unprecedented intensity from 1917 on.<sup>40</sup> Within the curia the possibilities that the February Revolution offered were evaluated as being especially favourable for the Catholic Church in Russia. There the Russian Provisional Government had granted the church equality with the Russian Orthodox Church and had returned its former properties. The Provisional Government attempted to establish diplomatic relations with the Apostolic See by sending an emissary, Aleksandr Lysakovsky, to the Vatican. The Bolshevik coup in November 1917 did not initially threaten the Vatican: during the first year of Bolshevik rule the Catholic Church received much better treatment than the Orthodox Church because the Bolsheviks viewed the Catholic Church as a victim of oppressive tsarist policy.

Two projects regarding the lands of the former Russian Empire were considered by the Roman Curia. The first one was advocated by a group of Polish clergy headed by the archbishop of Mahilioŭ in Belarus, Baron Eduard von Ropp. His concept was known as the bi-ritualist project, because its main thrust was that Russia had to become the area of missionary activity in two rites—the Greek Catholic (for the lower classes) and the Roman Catholic (for the upper classes, whose members must adopt “Catholicism in its refined version”)—but subordinated only to the Latin-rite hierarchy. The second project was elaborated by Metropolitan Sheptytsky and was known as the Uniate one. According to Sheptytsky and his supporters in the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the Catholic Church could successfully spread its influence among the population of the former Russian Empire only by strictly defending and preserving the Byzantine rite on the basis of the 1596 Church Union of Brest and the resulting Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church, which still existed in Galicia. Sheptytsky and his supporters shared the idea of the importance of that rite as the complex unity of religious, liturgical traditions, and practices with the cultural heritage of the Orthodox Eastern Slavs.<sup>41</sup>

Sheptytsky's and von Ropp's projects existed only as concepts and had many weak points.<sup>42</sup> Each of them had its own party of supporters within the Vatican. Sheptytsky's plan was strongly advocated by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and some Vatican Library scholars; UNR diplomats also tried to gain support for it. Von Ropp's bi-ritualist project was highly appreciated and promoted by the influential Polish episcopate, representatives of their interests in the Vatican, and by a number of influential cardinals in the Roman Curia; very often it was an object of concern by Polish ambassadors to the Apostolic See. Both projects

<sup>40</sup> On the Vatican's projects concerning the former Russian Empire, see my *Vatykan i vyklyky modernosti*, 177–228; and Maciej Mróz, *Kościół katolicki wobec kwestii ukraińskiej i białoruskiej w Polsce w latach 1918–1925* (Toruń, 2003), 47–52.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to point out that Sheptytsky first started implementing his concept without Pope Benedict's consent. In the spring of 1917, when he was released from imprisonment in Russia by the personal order of the Russian minister of justice, Alexander Kerensky, Sheptytsky came to Petrograd and officially established the Russian Greek Catholic Church there. For that purpose he relied on special secret documents he had received from Pope Pius X in 1908.

<sup>42</sup> See my book *Vatykan i vyklyky modernosti*, 210–28.

generated lively discussions in the Roman Curia until the autumn of 1921. Many interesting ideas, issues, and events were connected directly and indirectly to the Russian issue and influenced by these discussions.<sup>43</sup> The Vatican's concern with and position on the Ukrainian-Polish War could also be explained by the Russian issue to some extent.

On 13 February 1919 Nuncio Ratti wrote to Lviv's archbishops a second time. But this time he chose to write different letters to Metropolitan Sheptytsky and Archbishop Bilczewski.<sup>44</sup> Ratti again called upon both hierarchs to make every effort to reach a peaceful understanding and expressed his hope that they could influence the leaders of the belligerent sides to negotiate an armistice. He believed that both hierarchs should demonstrate Catholic solidarity in order to initiate peace talks between the Ukrainians and the Poles. However, reality proved that such goals were unattainable. The Polish Catholic and Ukrainian Greek Catholic episcopates as well as the majority of their respective clergy had taken the sides of their respective ethnic communities in the war in Eastern Galicia. The Roman Catholic clergy promoted the state-building efforts of reborn, independent Poland, whose territorial claims included predominantly ethnic Ukrainian Eastern Galicia, while the Greek Catholic clergy and their metropolitan supported the demands for the independence of Eastern Galicia advanced by the newly formed ZUNR and defended by its Ukrainian Galician Army. By positioning themselves on opposite sides of the conflict, the Catholic clergy undermined their own ability to oppose the war.

The Ukrainian-Polish War evoked another set of problems that the Apostolic See and its diplomats had to confront—the great atrocities that both Ukrainian and Polish troops committed, bordering on ethnic cleansing of Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish civilians. Ukrainian troops and armed volunteers were responsible for numerous war crimes, for example in the mostly Polish village of Sokilnyky near Lviv.<sup>45</sup> In turn, subsequently victorious Polish troops persecuted the Ukrainian population of Galicia.<sup>46</sup> Numerous arrests, several executions, and all sorts of abuses of Ukrainians caused great concern in Nuncio Ratti about the situation in Western Ukraine in 1919.<sup>47</sup> He wrote a number of letters to various officials of the Polish state and army, including General Józef Haller<sup>48</sup> and Poland's chief of state, Józef Piłsudski.<sup>49</sup> Because he was the Vatican's representative, Ratti successfully

<sup>43</sup> See *ibid.*, 222–27.

<sup>44</sup> The letters are in ANV, vol. 192, ff. 965–66.

<sup>45</sup> See Józef Wołczański, ed., *Nieznana korespondencja Arcybiskupów Metropolitów Lwowskich Józefa Bilczewskiego z Andrzejem Szeptyckim w czasie wojny Polsko-Ukraińskiej 1918–1919* (Lviv and Cracow, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> See the documents in ANV, vol. 200, ff. 94–103; Olivier Jacquot, “La Polonia e il problema della nazionalità: Il caso degli Uniaty della Galicia Orientale, 1918–1923,” *Religione e storia*, May–June 1994, 65; and *Pages sanglantes: Faits concernant l'invasion de l'armée polonaise en terre ukrainienne de la Galicie, 1918–1919* (Vienna, 1919), 94–100.

<sup>47</sup> See AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>48</sup> See AES, *Russia*, 592; and ANV, vol. 194, ff. 1003–1004, 1033, and 1021.

<sup>49</sup> See Ermenegildo Pellegrinetti, *I diari del cardinale Ermenegildo Pellegrinetti, 1916–1922* (Vatican City, 1994), 237.

negotiated the release of many Ukrainian Catholic clerics from prisons and typhus-infected concentration camps. They were often arrested and imprisoned because Polish authorities regarded them as ZUNR activists and enemies of the Polish state. In November and December 1919, the nuncio managed to gain the release of nearly five hundred incarcerated Greek Catholic priests, monks, and seminarians. Ratti paid special attention to the problems of the Ukrainian detainees in several camps who had been suspected of disloyalty. He facilitated the activity of the Ukrainian Red Cross among the internees, many of whom were suffering and then died from the severe typhus they had contracted.<sup>50</sup>

Nuncio Ratti sent detailed information on the Ukrainian-Polish War and especially the Polish atrocities to the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri, and to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches. In his letters to the prefect of the congregation, Niccolo Marini, Ratti elaborated his understanding of the Polish government's goals. He was convinced that the Polish government sought the annihilation of "religious Ruthenianism," that is, the Greek Catholic Church, because of that church's staunch support for "political Ruthenianism." Ratti was especially disturbed by the attitude of many Polish Catholic clergy towards the government's plans. He shared with Cardinal Marini his observation that Polish bishops and priests "would not shed a single tear if the government would succeed" in destroying the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>51</sup>

The complete and abrupt assimilation of the Polish state's non-Polish subjects could hardly be approved by the Vatican, and the Roman Curia was ready to protest the Polish atrocities against the Ukrainian population of Galicia. The Polish government prevented that act by threatening to recall its representative at the Vatican and to break off diplomatic relations. The Polish clergy shared this harsh reaction: their attitude towards Galicia's Ukrainians and the Greek Catholic Church was generally hostile, with a commonly shared belief in the inferiority of the Ukrainians, their culture, and their Byzantine rite.<sup>52</sup>

Nuncio Ratti suffered severe repercussions from the heightened tensions between the Vatican and the Polish state and episcopate on the Ukrainian and Silesian issues. He was pilloried in the Polish press and by Polish public opinion. His efforts on behalf of the Ukrainians of Galicia would be on the list of his "transgressions" against the Warsaw government, the last and most serious of which was his position on the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. In December 1920 these Polish condemnations prompted Ratti to leave Poland in a hurry before the official termination of his mission and without writing a final report or engaging in an official farewell with the Polish government.<sup>53</sup>

It would be untrue to say that Vatican diplomacy focused only on one partner in Central and Eastern Europe—newly independent Poland. Despite abortive efforts

<sup>50</sup> See ANV, vol. 200, ff. 64–65, 69.

<sup>51</sup> See AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>52</sup> See my *Vatykan i vyklyky modernosti*, 254–89.

<sup>53</sup> Ratti left for consultations and then returned to Poland briefly in the spring of 1921. He was recalled officially in April 1921.

in establishing diplomatic relations with post-tsarist Russia, the Roman Curia sought to establish diplomatic relations with other new entities. That is why UNR's efforts to gain the Vatican's support for its drive to be acknowledged as an independent state and to establish diplomatic relations with the Apostolic See for that purpose found sympathy and understanding in the Roman Curia. At the end of 1918 the predominantly socialist UNR government took decisive steps to establish a diplomatic representation at the Vatican.<sup>54</sup> On 15 February 1919 Symon Petliura, the head of the UNR government, nominated Count Tyshkevych head of the Ukrainian diplomatic mission at the Apostolic See.

Petliura actively supported the choice of Tyshkevych, a descendant of the Ruthenian nobility that had been Polonized centuries earlier, because Tyshkevych had good connections in European high society and with Catholic hierarchs. Tyshkevych managed to arrive in Rome only in May 1919. On 20 May he submitted a letter to the secretary of the Roman Curia declaring the Ukrainian government's intentions.<sup>55</sup> In it he raised important issues of future Ukrainian-Vatican relations: opening a nunciature in Kyiv and compensating the Catholic Church for losses or confiscations during the agrarian reform while stressing the UNR government's desire to establish cordial relations with the Apostolic See. In his letter Tyshkevych made a clear declaration in defense of the rights of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics of Eastern Galicia (the ZUNR), which after the act of unification in January 1919 had integrated with the UNR. The Ukrainian envoy was especially concerned with the situation of the persecuted Galician Ukrainians and urged the Vatican to condemn the Polish government's abuses. He also called attention to the negative role played in Ukraine by the Polish Catholic clergy, who used the church as a Polonization tool, and the danger from these practices for the church's future in Ukraine. Tyshkevych also passed on a request from the UNR government to the Roman Curia to honour Metropolitan Sheptytsky's sufferings for the faith by conferring on him the "cardinal's purple."<sup>56</sup>

During the few months of his activity at the Vatican, Count Tyshkevych submitted to the Roman Curia a variety of letters, petitions, notes, and protests concerning the atrocities General Haller's troops had committed in Galicia, the persecution of the civilian population and the Greek Catholic clergy there, the Polish clergy's anti-Ukrainian propaganda in Ukraine, and the prospects for Catholic education there.<sup>57</sup> The Vatican appreciated Tyshkevych's activity. In June 1919 the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri, wrote a letter to Symon Petliura.<sup>58</sup> In it he informed Petliura about the acceptance of Tyshkevych's creden-

<sup>54</sup> See my *Vatykan i vyklyky modernosti*, 289–91.

<sup>55</sup> The letter is in AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>56</sup> AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>57</sup> See Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Protocolli della Segreteria di Stato*, vol. 622, nos. 92346–47, and vol. 623, no. 93573; and AES, *Russia*, 592.

<sup>58</sup> Gasparri's original letter was lost in the turbulence of the Russo-Ukrainian War. But in late 1920 UNR representatives asked the Roman Curia for a copy. This copy and apparently a very long letter from Count Tyshkevych and other confidential letters to Petliura ended up in the hands of the Special Department of the Red Army's Southwestern Front and attracted the attention of

tials, acknowledged the noble character of the Ukrainian nation, for the prosperity of which the Apostolic See will raise its prayers, and expressed his belief in “a prompt recognition of the right of self-determination of nations in Ukraine.”<sup>59</sup>

The case of Ukraine is an example of how the idea of supporting the state building of new nations was crushed by reality. As already mentioned, the Vatican was eager to recognize Ukrainian independence and showed a considerable interest in such a new state even though most of its inhabitants were Orthodox. The Vatican was ready to build relations with the UNR, especially since Petliura promised that his government would grant the church very good conditions for activity and missionary work. Once that government fell, those plans did not materialize. The Vatican’s relations with the UNR in 1919 and 1920 serve as an example of the openness and flexibility of Vatican diplomacy toward new nation-states, even ones not recognized internationally and with non-Catholic populations. Developments in Ukrainian-Vatican and Polish-Vatican diplomatic relations significantly influenced the Apostolic See’s attitude towards the Ukrainian-Polish War in Galicia.

That war was not the only issue that complicated Polish-Vatican relations. So did the Polish-Lithuanian War over the city of Vilnius. In that case the Roman Curia tried to balance the interests of both sides again through the activity of Nuncio Ratti. Ratti initially supported the federalist ideas of Pilsudski, whom he respected and with whom he had established good relations. In his letters to the curia and to Italian diplomats in Warsaw, Ratti expressed hopes in a common political future for the Lithuanians and the Poles, from which he thought the church would benefit. But he was very clear about the basis for a possible future Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian federation—justice and equal rights, as well as no special role for the Poles’ “civilizing” mission, in which he did not believe.<sup>60</sup>

In the situation of the Ukrainian-Polish and Lithuanian-Polish conflicts the Vatican was caught between Poland’s claims to non-Polish territories and the interests of the Galician Ukrainian and Lithuanian struggles for independence. The situation was a very complicated one for the Vatican. It supported Polish independence actively and placed high hopes in Poland’s special role in the Catholic world at the same time that Pope Benedict pursued the principle of equal rights for all nations. At the time of the Battle of Warsaw in 1920 during the Soviet-Polish War, when Polish independence was seriously endangered, Benedict called upon the public to pray for a Polish victory, and Nuncio Ratti was one of three foreign diplomats who stayed in Warsaw and even visited soldiers at the front. But while offering the Poles moral support, the Vatican again showed its determination to follow its own ideas, as stated in *L’Osservatore Romano*: “the Apostolic See, while supporting the fighting Poles, is not willing to stop [its] pressure on the Polish

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Leon Trotsky (at that time the front’s Bolshevik commissar). Trotsky used this letter in his propaganda war against the UNR. In his article in Russian titled “Petliura, the Pope of Rome, and French Freemasons” in *Kommunisticheskii trud*, he accused the Apostolic See of supporting Petliura and supplying the UNR with munitions in its attempts to spread Catholicism in Ukraine.

<sup>59</sup> Rev. Ivan Khoma, *Apostols'kyi Prestil i Ukraïna, 1919–1922 / Relationes diplomaticae inter S. Sedem et Republicam Popularem Ucrainae annis 1919–1922* (Rome, 1987), 40.

<sup>60</sup> Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, 868.

government to seek peaceful agreements with the Lithuanians, Ruthenians, and Germans.”<sup>61</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1921 relations between the Polish government and the Vatican became very tense. Openly anti-Vatican articles in the Polish press appeared, and in the Sejm the insufficiency of the Polish diplomatic mission at the Apostolic See and Nuncio Ratti’s supposedly hostile activity were discussed. Both the press and the Sejm painted the Vatican’s sympathies as pro-German and pro-Ruthenian. The Polish press published Pope Benedict’s letter to Metropolitan Sheptytsky praising the “heroic Ruthenian people, which suffered so much in order to preserve its church and rite, [and] which at the same time is the guardian of its nationality.” In that letter Benedict also expressed his desire that with the help of “the Ruthenians always so close to Apostolic See” the Eastern Slavs could attain unity with the Apostolic See. The reaction in Poland to his letter was very unpleasant for the Vatican.<sup>62</sup>

In the summer of 1921 Benedict sent an apostolic letter to the Polish hierarchs. In it he again stressed his desire to remain impartial and to pursue peaceful resolutions to inter-nationality conflicts, emphasizing that he “could not favour the state interests of one nation, [one] even very close to his heart, over others.” The Polish episcopate shunned the letter and did not publish it or read it from the pulpit.<sup>63</sup>

The rather cordial initial relations between the Vatican and Poland, which the Vatican hoped would become its major partner in East-Central Europe, were on the verge of rupturing in mid-1921. The general reason was the Polish government’s expansionist policies, which the Polish clergy, who were actively involved in state building, shared. The Vatican’s relations with Poland during the first years after it gained independence serve as an example of relations with a new nation-state pursuing aggressive nationalizing policies. These relations survived despite all the problems. In many ways they became more productive after the crises had passed, and Poland did become the Vatican’s most important partner in East-Central Europe.

The Ukrainian-Polish War in Galicia is a very productive example for analyzing of the Vatican’s approaches towards several very important issues of modern

<sup>61</sup> The issue of Upper Silesia further aggravated Polish-Vatican diplomatic relations. The Vatican supported the March 1921 plebiscite in Upper Silesia mandated by the Treaty of Versailles, and Ratti was appointed the Vatican’s commissioner for that purpose. He and the Roman Curia shared the decision of the archbishop of Breslau (Polish: Wrocław), Adolf Cardinal Bertram, to forbid any political agitation from the pulpit and any activity by clergy from outside his archdiocese. The Polish government and episcopate criticized this decision as being pro-German because Bertram and many local clergy were German; in Warsaw, Bertram’s orders were viewed as part of an anti-Polish agenda. See Rossini, ed., *Benedetto XV, i Cattolici e la prima guerra mondiale*, 870.

<sup>62</sup> See *Lvivs'ko-arkhyeparkhiial'ni vidomosti*, 20 April 1921.

<sup>63</sup> As a result of three major inter-ethnic conflicts, it appears that Warsaw and the Vatican froze their relations in 1921: Nuncio Ratti left Warsaw without official termination of his mission at the beginning of the anti-Vatican campaign, the Polish ambassador at the Holy See was recalled home for consultations, and another, more experienced diplomat was appointed in his stead. See della Rocca, *Le Nazioni non muoiono*, 301.

politics. Polish and Ukrainian nationalisms challenging each other presented the Apostolic See with a dilemma regarding its plans in Eastern Europe: how to deal with an armed conflict between two Catholic peoples, both of which were trying to build nation-states on the same territory.

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During the pontificate of Benedict XV the Catholic Church adopted new approaches to nationalism and the nation-state and adapted them to Catholic doctrine. The pope's thoughts about nationalism built the foundation for much more open and flexible diplomacy by the Vatican, which from 1917 paid special attention to its relations with the new nation-states in East-Central Europe. Those relations themselves became a testing ground for the Vatican's new approaches. The Vatican had to work out a scheme in reaction to the inter-ethnic conflicts in accordance with its proclaimed principles of justice and equal rights for all nations. In practice this became a rather complicated effort to balance various interests. In its approach the Vatican tried, not always very successfully, to put pressure on the belligerent governments to find peaceful solutions and strove, more successfully, to organize and extend humanitarian aid to both sides in the conflicts. The new challenges that these conflicts presented prompted the Vatican to develop practical schemes to deal with such situations while playing the dual role, assumed for the first time during the Great War, of conflict mediator and humanitarian-aid provider.

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