

A Controversial Neutrality and Thwarted Peace Efforts: *The Month* and Pope Benedict XV's Great War Record

Introduction

Throughout the Great War of 1914-1918 and the “six months that changed the world” which followed in 1919,² the Jesuit British Province’s journal, *The Month*,³ highlighted Pope Benedict XV’s role and activity in the face of the ensuing conflict. The Pope’s political stance of an “impartial neutrality,” and diplomatic efforts in favour of humanitarian aid, were the special object of a “running commentary” of articles and news briefs⁴ by the said journal, written in an informative and analytical style. They attempted to correct misinterpretations of Pope Benedict’s policies, by the two sides of the conflict, the *Entente*⁵ and Central Powers⁶ and, especially, his vilification by their respective press.

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² See Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002).

³ *The Month* was a Jesuit review published in the period 1865-2000 by the British Province of the Society of Jesus. This article sifts through the numbers for War years 1914-18 and the following year 1919 - sixty issues in all.

⁴ *The Month* had a section called “Miscellanea: Topics of the Month,” which analyzed War news briefs and other specific topics.

⁵ The *Entente* was a coalition of Britain, France, Russia and Italy.

⁶ The Central Powers (or Quadruple Alliance) were the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and dependent territories, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

This article will therefore follow *The Month* as it sought out the reasons and consequences of this Pontiff's neutral/impartial position and the reactions to it, his appeals for peace, and the difficult road leading to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and its purportedly re-established peace signed in the multiple treaties which followed, especially in the notorious Treaty of Versailles!

Pope Benedict XV's Controversial Neutrality

In its comments on Pope Benedict XV's first encyclical letter, *Ad Beatissimi*,⁷ *The Month* pointed out that:

Far be it from us to expect or desire that the Vicar of Christ should incline to one side or the other. What is best for us all is that he should embrace as he has done all the contending nations in a spirit of absolute neutrality... not neutrality in the sense of a mere standoff from a quarrel of others, but ... a father's heart deeply distressed to see his children engaged in this internecine strife, who holds himself apart because his affection is equal for them all, and that he may the better be able to appeal to the consciences of each in striving to bring them back to thoughts of peace.⁸

The above statement unequivocally indicated the Jesuit journals' position vis-à-vis Pope Benedict XV's neutral stand. At the same time, it was conscious of the general public opinion and that of their sovereigns who were caught in the conflict: they expected the Pope to pronounce some "dogmatic" statement in favour of one side or another (more likely the *Entente/Allies*) while condemning the other (more likely the Central Powers and the Kaiser). *The Month* pointed out that it was impossible and impractical for the Pope to follow such a course of action. It was difficult for him to obtain impartial material and verify the facts, on which to base his judgements.⁹ The pressure put on Benedict XV to violate his neutrality in favour of the *Entente* was therefore, "mere journalism and ill-informed Protestant polemic, which was equally ready to blame the Pope for speaking as well as for being silent."¹⁰

⁷ Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (November 1, 1914), w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/la/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_01111914_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum.html.

⁸ "The Pope's First Encyclical," *The Month*, no. 607 (Jan. 1915): 2.

⁹ "Critical and Historical Notes," *ibid.*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412-414, 421-423.

¹⁰ "Papal Neutrality," *Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month*, *ibid.*, no. 614 (Aug 1915): 193.

Pope Benedict himself in his 22 January 1915 allocution¹¹ stated his reasons for maintaining an impartial neutrality vis-à-vis this "carnage."¹² The Pope claimed that his office, which included the role of Vicar of Christ, did not interfere in secular disputes: Jesus Himself refused to act as judge in the civil affairs presented to Him. Therefore, "His Vicar has no claim as part of his office to interfere in the secular disputes of nations."¹³

The situation could have been different during the Great War had the Holy See been invited to, rather than excluded from, the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907.¹⁴ In its own interpretation of such a blunder, *The Month*¹⁵ opined that had the Holy See been accorded its rightful place among nations and been a signatory to the resolutions then adopted, the Pope would have been able to speak with greater moral authority during the current conflict. He would have been able to recall the belligerent nations to their duties in the present circumstances and rally around him other neutral countries. The Holy See would have been able to act as an intermediary among warring nations and provide space for a network of collaboration among neutral ones. Such intervention would have accorded with the Pope's traditional role: condemning transgressions against justice and morality. Moreover, it would not have gone against what rulers were accustomed to for centuries "hearing and taking such firm and frank 'free speaking' from a pontiff, which they would not accept from anyone else."¹⁶

The Holy See's neutrality fell within the context of the "league of neutral nations,"¹⁷ and their "discreet leanings" towards one belligerent nation or

¹¹ "Discorso del Santo Padre Benedetto XV, *Convocare Vos*, 22 gennaio 1915," www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-07-1915-ocr.pdf.

¹² "Purtroppo i mesi si succedono ai mesi senza che si manifesti una lontana speranza che questa funestissima guerra, o piuttosto carneficina, abbia presto a cessare," "Papa Benedetto XV, Discorsi," <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/it/speeches.index.2.html>.

¹³ *Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month*, *The Month*, no. 609 (Mar. 1915): 311.

¹⁴ The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, suggested by the Tsar of Russia, were convened in order to discuss disarmament, the arbitration of international disputes and the rules of land warfare, amid an increasing climate of unease and international conflict. Cf. Norman Davis, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 874-875.

¹⁵ Sydney Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," *The Month*, no. 637 (Jul. 1917): 1-14. In his article, Rev. Smith mentions a two-volume work, by the Abbé Gustave Arnaud d'Agnel, *Benoit XV et le Conflict Européen* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1916). The subtitle of the first volume, *A la lumière de l'Évangile*, and of the second *A la lumière de l'histoire*, etched out the historical aspect of papal activity for peace. The author gives the background to the manoeuvrings to exclude the Holy See from the conferences and the ramifications of this blunder during the Great War.

¹⁶ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 12-13; *Miscellanea 2: Topic of The Month*, *The Month*, no. 609 (Mar. 1915): 311.

¹⁷ The "League of neutrals" included The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and perhaps even

another. Both sides tried to influence the neutral nations and presented their case to them strongly and plausibly. As a result, for example, Spain was pro-Austrian, rather than pro-German, which was understandable, since both were Catholic countries, in a way, which France was not!¹⁸ The USA leaned more towards the *Entente*, until it definitely entered the War on their side. The reader notices that *The Month* underlined in so many words the Holy See's genuine and substantial neutrality, unlike that of other neutral nations, as biographies of Benedict XV in later decades were to corroborate.¹⁹

The Catholic Hierarchy's Reaction to the Pope's Neutrality

How did the Catholic hierarchy react to the Pope's neutrality? In a fair analysis of the German hierarchy's pastoral letter on the War, *The Month* pointed out that it was dignified and temperate. The German bishops were convinced of the moral righteousness of the German cause just as much as the British hierarchy were convinced of the righteousness of that of the *Entente's* cause. *The Month* took pains to clarify to its readers that the Church, notwithstanding the hierarchy's divided opinions as to which side the righteousness of the cause belonged, was not compromised in her teachings about war. No truth of faith or morals was at stake. No authoritative decision was called for in this matter.²⁰ The arguments in favour of the righteousness of the cause was a matter of conviction to the hierarchy and many educated people within the ranks of the Central Powers: such people could not be branded as conscious liars. Although there were weaknesses in the German hierarchy's argument, the contrary arguments had to have sustainable proofs together with an accurate weight of evidence. Prejudice was apt to hinder such evidence, *The Month* pointed out.²¹ There was also an assumption, against which *The Month* argued, that Catholic ecclesiastics could not have their own political pro-German views or even try to win others to it. *The Month* pointed out that to expect the Vatican to see the cause of England, France and Russia, as "holy" was rather an insular idea. The background to the Holy See's experience of these nations prompted the Jesuit journal to ask, "What

the United States. In collaboration with other neutral countries, the Holy See was building the potential for a serious peace effort. Italy, which sought to undermine rather than help the Holy See's international standing, entered the war in 1915. See John F. Pollard, *Benedict XV: The Unknown Pope and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Continuum, 2005), 92.

¹⁸ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 604 (Oct. 1914): 420-428.

¹⁹ Pollard, *Benedict XV*, 92ff.

²⁰ Miscellanea 2. Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 609 (Mar. 1915): 310-311.

²¹ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *ibid.*, no. 614 (Aug. 1915): 197.

reason can the Vatican find in the past relations of these Three Powers with the Holy See to assume that their motives and conduct must be upright?"²²

In spite of their differences, bishops on both sides of the War divide shared common moral principles on, "the sacredness of treaties, the binding force of international law, the wickedness of rapine, theft, lust and wanton slaughter." This was not surprising since the textbooks they studied from throughout their formation were used in all major seminaries and ecclesiastical universities. Some members of the hierarchy even attended "the same schools."²³ The division among the Catholic hierarchy ensued not because of any divergence in their teaching of principles. The significant part of their divergences lay in their interpretation of those principles: bishops believed in the righteousness of their own nation's cause.²⁴

The Month clearly distinguished between the common Catholic doctrine, which bishops shared regarding warfare, and the interpretation of this teaching - each hierarchy proposing its own government's interpretation. This interpretation was linked to the basic issue of "who ignited the War and why?" The factual incidents regarding the behaviour of the warring nations' respective armies were also placed under the microscope. On the other hand, insofar as nonfactual interpretation was concerned, *The Month* argued that there was "a German as well as an English version." Pope Benedict's wisdom and prudence manifested themselves in choosing not to impose a pro-German or a pro-English manifesto upon Catholics.²⁵ Catholics of different nationalities, because of the sharing of the common ground of Catholic principles on the morality of war, were better equipped to arrive at a reasonable conclusion regarding the War.²⁶

The English hierarchy too defended the Pope's position. In a Lenten pastoral letter, the Bishop of Northampton²⁷ pointed out that had Pope Benedict taken sides in the War, his action would have eventually backfired. It would have placed a terrible strain on the loyalty of Austrian and German Catholics.²⁸ The Cardinal

²² "Some Critics of the Pope," Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *ibid.*, 195. The papacy had historically lived through difficult periods in its relations with England, France and Russia.

²³ Most probably, "schools" refers to the seminaries or even the pontifical universities such as the Gregorian and Lateran universities in Rome, which are international.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 609 (Mar. 1915): 311.

²⁶ Herbert Thurson, "The ProGerman Press Propaganda," *ibid.*, no. 630 (Dec. 1916): 531-532; no. 631 (Jan. 1917): 46-57.

²⁷ Bishop Frederick William Keating, Bishop of Northampton 1908-1921, Archbishop of Liverpool 1921-1918.

²⁸ "Critical and Historical Notes," *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412-414, 421, 423. (Cf. The Bishop of Northampton's Lenten Pastoral Letter 1915).

Archbishop of Westminster²⁹ on his part, pointed out the fallacy of supposing that Benedict XV had not remonstrated against German barbarities because he had not done so publicly: the Holy See avoided rash judgements and did not act on alleged reports, such as the persecution of Catholics in Galicia by the Russian Governor, Count Bobrinski.³⁰

The members of the hierarchy who defended the Pope's neutrality, were not spared criticism themselves either! An anti-papal pamphlet, declared that thousands of English and American Catholics disapproved of the English Cardinal's position during his Brook Green³¹ address of 30 May 1915. The pamphlet, biased in content, expected the Pope to condemn German methods of warfare, while expecting him to maintain silence on Russian atrocities in Galicia.³² Other articles - irrespective of the nation or continent of provenience - cut across the board in trying to cast a shadow on Pope Benedict's moral integrity regarding the War!³³

What about other Christian denominations? How did they view Benedict XV's neutrality? It seems that the non-condemnation of German outrages during the War, caused misunderstandings among them too! Various Orthodox writers elaborated upon the Pope's supremacy and commented that in the face of the development of the principle of nationality, the Roman system was untenable and its breakup would favour the establishment of national Churches. A less bigoted and more restrained article, which appeared in the *Church Review* of October 1915, presented Catholicism as lacking in freedom of thought because of papal infallibility, which in matters of faith and morals had a numbing effect upon all speculation and research. It concluded that central papal authority extinguished all initiative throughout the Church!³⁴

²⁹ Francis Alphonsus Bourne, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, 1908-1935.

³⁰ "Papal Neutrality," 200-201. The Imperial Russian army invaded and occupied the Austrian Crownland of Galicia on 18 August 1918. Count Bobrinski was the first Russian Governor.

³¹ The area is an affluent London neighbourhood in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

³² "Papal Neutrality," 200-201.

³³ There were articles penned with anti-papal Protestant bigotry in the *Morning Post* of 2 July 1915, as well as others from the French "infidel" press, and open criticism by some Catholics. See "Some Critics of the Pope," *Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, The Month*, no. 614 (Aug. 1915): 193-195.

³⁴ *Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, ibid.*, no. 617 (Nov. 1915): 542-544.

The Pope's Neutrality and European Sovereigns

A central question regarding the War focused on the moral obligation of those Catholic sovereigns involved in it to heed the Pope's appeals for a just solution and a lasting peace. Pope Benedict's strict neutrality in fact generated misunderstanding and irritation among the rulers and governments of both sides of the belligerent nations.³⁵ It was improbable that Europe's rulers, who were mostly non-Catholic, yet having Catholic subjects within their domains, would heed the Pope. Their reaction proved to be a missed opportunity to have recourse to an international tribunal able to arbitrate grievances, and "soften down the wounded feelings that are usually the chief obstacle to peaceful settlements of international quarrels."³⁶

On the other hand, Pope Benedict, wisely, did not bind Catholic sovereigns with any spiritual or religious sanctions to follow his advice in their decisions regarding the War. The Pope and the Holy See correctly interpreted that official reprimands needed to be substantiated by an in-depth enquiry into proven facts of every sovereign's - Catholic or otherwise - action in the conflict. Such an impractical process would have entailed probing into Tsarist Russia's treatment of Ukrainians in Galicia, the Emperor of Germany's treatment of Belgians, or of Austria's handling of Serbs and Montenegrins. In formally condemning the rulers of both sides, "the Sovereign Pontiff would have irritated the entire world against him, and would in the long run have drawn down upon himself the universal enmities..."³⁷

In fact, Pope Benedict had already expressed the major premise in the necessary syllogism regarding the principles of justice and humanity in the treatment of occupied countries. It was up to the rulers of the belligerent countries to apply these principles in concrete terms, such as with regard to Belgium's situation and that of other occupied nations.³⁸

The Secular Press' Misunderstanding of Benedict XV's Policies

In the early years of the War, the hostile sources of misunderstanding, opposition and unfair judgement regarding Pope Benedict XV's and the Holy See's neutral and impartial stand, originated from the British and foreign secular

³⁵ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 1- 14.

³⁶ The Pope's First Encyclical," 30.

³⁷ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 7.

³⁸ Ibid.

press³⁹ which were hostile to the Holy See; while the Catholic press, among them *La Civiltà Cattolica*, *The Month* and *The Tablet*, acknowledged and endorsed the Pope's activity earlier on in the War.⁴⁰ The motivation of the former could have been twofold: either to get a score against the adherents of papal infallibility or else, setting store on the influence of the Holy See, expected it to pronounce itself in their (nation's) favour as having right on its side in the War. Because of a misconceived understanding of the Pope's role, office and duties, national prepossession in Great Britain desired an almost *ex cathedra* condemnation of the Kaiser's⁴¹ actions.⁴²

The *Fortnightly* in an article "The Vatican and the War," attempted to interpret papal policy in a sinister light, ascribing to Benedict XV opportunism and a desperate devotion to the "interests of the Vatican." Extracts from the encyclical *Ad Beatissimi* were taken out of context and twisted to insinuate that the Church of the poor, "the one institution in the world that could make any headway against caesarism in politics and capitalism in economics" was opposed to democracy!

This newspaper article completely ignored the Pontiff's wholehearted acceptance of the wise and humane social teaching of his two immediate predecessors.⁴³ The same newspaper in another article of its May 1915 issue, tried to represent the Holy See as subordinating the Church's spiritual interests to so-called "political exigencies," a reference to the Pope's efforts to guarantee his freedom and independence, which the "Italian Revolution" had robbed him of. The article likewise tried to link the Holy See's political interest with that of Germany in order to rouse anti-Catholic sentiments in Protestants.⁴⁴

³⁹ Miscellanea: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412-414, 421, 423.

⁴⁰ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 10; S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," *The Month*, no. 650 (Aug. 1918): 120, 126. It would be interesting to study what other periodicals published by the Society of Jesus within the territories belonging to the Central Powers wrote in this regard. Such periodicals would include the German journals *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* (1871), which changed title in 1916 to *Stimmen der Zeit*, and the journal *Studien*. A study of the Jesuit publications within "neutral" countries, such as Spain's *Razón y Fé* (1901), would give yet another perspective.

⁴¹ Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany, from 15 June 1888 to 9 November 1918.

⁴² Miscellanea: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412-414, 421, 423.

⁴³ Miscellanea II: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 423-424. The article refers to pope's Leo XIII (1878-1903) and Pius X (1903-1914).

⁴⁴ Miscellanea: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 611 (May 1915): 650-651.

In defending Benedict XV, *The Month* pointed out that, while it was not outside the Pope's competence to pronounce himself on matters which had a moral bearing in a united Christendom where secular rulers would have accepted such pronouncements, his so doing in the present context of "divided opinion and highly developed lines of national cleavages" would have been fatal. Such pronouncements would have left a barren satisfaction on the one side and an irritate proportionality on the other. Besides, the consequences would have rendered the Holy See's post-War efforts to restore catholic life in several countries more difficult! The present policy, stated *The Month*, was more likely to help in healing the divisions caused by the War and to aid Pope Benedict's peace efforts.⁴⁵

Besides Anglo-Saxon newspapers, French newspapers, among them *La Liberté*, were not particularly sympathetic towards Pope Benedict either. French misinterpretation of his stance during the War, probably because there was no French representative or minister accredited to the Holy See, was particularly strong and lasting! The idea stuck that over the previous fifteen years German diplomacy had deceived the Holy See! Accusations revolved around the Pope's perceived leniency regarding the violation of Belgium. Other inaccuracies, initiated by the authorities of the Central Powers regarding facts, were, nevertheless, laid at the Pope's door as originating from him. The Pope's explanation that as a father he loved all his children equally, as well as the Cardinal Secretary of State's attempt at correcting such false notions, were unsuccessful in changing these notions.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Pope Benedict took every opportunity to allay French fears in his regard. Notwithstanding this, even his prayer for peace was misinterpreted and taken as an offence! In an audience he granted to a former member of the French Embassy to the Holy See who had become director of the *Revue hebdomadaire*, M. Ternaude Laudet, the Pope explained that his neutrality did not mean indifference. He explained that he condemned atrocities both in principle and factual ones. Moreover, his love for "Catholic France" and France itself, found expression in concrete intervention, among which his charging the Cardinal-Archbishop of Cologne⁴⁷ to convey his protest to the German Emperor when Rheims cathedral was bombarded.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ S.F.S., "The Pope and *La Liberté*," Miscellanea: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 614 (Aug. 1915): 183.

⁴⁷ Felix von Hartman was the Archbishop of the German City of Cologne from 1912 to 1919.

⁴⁸ S.F.S., "The Pope and *La Liberté*," 185-186. Besides *The Tablet* and *The Month*, misconceptions about Pope Benedict XV's policies were corrected by Catholic periodicals such

Even Pope Benedict's 1915 Easter message, sent to the American people through an American of German extraction, Mr. von Wiegard, came under attack! The passage, "If your country avoids everything that might prolong the struggle of nations ...then America...can contribute much towards a rapid ending of this terrible war," was interpreted by Germans as being in their favour, and by English journalists as asking America to abandon her neutrality. In short the Pope was siding with Germany!

The Month probed into the genuineness of the reaction to the Pope's message, asking whether the reaction would have been the same, had the journalist to whom the Pope had entrusted the message been of British origin. What Benedict XV had done, in accordance with his spirit of disinterested impartiality, was to appeal to the American people to use their nation's power and influence in the interest of humanity and peace. He had promised the Holy See's utmost support to America when the favourable moment towards a peace solution arrived. The Pope had not asked that America tactlessly intervene to press upon the *Entente* to accept a peace, which could only pave the way for a still more terrible war.⁴⁹

Neutrality's Reward- Results of Benedict XV's Stand

In the end, the Pope's impartial position yielded a positive result. His intervention, negotiation, initiatives and projects throughout the War years, had, as far as possible, mitigated the War's "mournful consequences."⁵⁰ Through his influence and will, Pope Benedict XV had succeeded in obtaining from the opposing powers various agreements. These included the relief of wounded prisoners, the return of soldiers from Germany, and the visiting of wounded soldiers who were held in secure shelters in Switzerland.⁵¹ The Pontiff also intervened on behalf of members of the British army deported to Germany⁵² and their families,⁵³ by providing information and consolation in answer to their letters.⁵⁴ British diplomats appreciated such gestures, and the Germans, on their part, kept their word to him.⁵⁵

as *Civiltà Cattolica*, Feb. 20, 1915, *Etudes*, Mar. 1915, and *Revue Pratique d'Apologetique*, Feb.-Mar. 1915.

⁴⁹ Miscellanea 1: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 611 (May 1915): 528.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 7. The Pope's intervention mentioned by Rev. Smith was corroborated by an article written by Ernesto Vergesi and translated into English, in *The Tablet* of 14 April 1917. Cf. S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 119-129.

⁵³ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 9.

⁵⁴ Miscellanea 2: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412- 414, 421, 423.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; See Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 7-9.

Even though the beneficiaries of such treatment did not link their fortune to the Holy See's intervention on their behalf, this low-key activity went far more towards attaining a lasting peace than the premature judicial pronouncements, which Pope Benedict's critics wanted him to declare.⁵⁶ As the War progressed and entered its final phase, diplomats and governments, including the British government, recognized and appreciated the Pope's impartial solicitude and humanitarian achievements, which had become universally known, and thanked him accordingly.⁵⁷ Indeed, "while the Americans were paid homage to, and King Alfonso XIII of Spain lauded for his humanitarian and revictualling of Belgium and the invaded French provinces, the Pope's service rendered to humanity does not admit of any comparison."⁵⁸

By 1918, the Pope's networking system, which had started with three main offices - headed by Pope Benedict himself - extended and opened subordinate outlets. It eventually extended from Rome, to London and Constantinople, from Palermo to Stockholm, Paderborn, Freiburg and Vienna. Daily exchange of letters of inquiry and replies extended over all those areas.⁵⁹ The four hundred thousand cases which, on being investigated, bore such satisfactory results,⁶⁰ were made possible because, besides the network mentioned above, there existed another of even more vital importance within the Catholic Church - the vast communication between Pope and the local hierarchy.

The origin of such a successful networking had started early in the War, when Cardinal Hartman of Cologne had obtained from the Kaiser the concession that French priests be treated in the same manner as officers. On the 23rd October 1914, Pope Benedict wrote to the Cardinal commending him for his humanity and suggested through him, that the German bishops obtain the extension of this humane treatment to all prisoners, "without distinction of country or religion," and provide suitable priests to visit them, offer consolation and do everything possible to alleviate their lot. Later the Pope wrote to the belligerent sovereigns, and succeeded in obtaining an agreement from them to introduce the practice of exchanging and sending home to their families those wounded prisoners, irrespective of race or religion, who had no chance of returning to combat.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Miscellanea 2: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412- 414, 421; 423.

⁵⁷ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 10; S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 120, 126.

⁵⁸ Smith, "The Popes as Peacemakers," 9.

⁵⁹ S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 129.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 127; Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 649 (Jul. 1918): 61-62, 64.

⁶¹ Miscellanea 2: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 610 (Apr. 1915): 412- 414, 421, 423.

These negotiations formed part of ten long-term initiatives.⁶²

Two other initiatives of importance, not listed with the others, were Benedict XV's appeal to the belligerents not to bombard the cities of Cologne and Paris on the feast of Corpus Christi in order to avoid casualties during the procession; and his defense of the Armenians. As to the former initiative, the *Entente* abstained from bombarding Cologne on that feast-day, unlike the Germans who did not comply with the Pope's request and bombarded Paris (where no processions were held). The secular English press exhibited its usual ignorant ill will towards the papacy by criticizing this initiative as futile and arrogant and faulted the Pope, to which *The Month* responded. In the case of Cologne and other parts of Germany, it was a different matter. *The Month* did not hesitate to comment that the French had two years previously, bombed Karlsruhe on Corpus Christi and killed many participants in procession.⁶³

Regarding the second initiative, Pope Benedict's impartiality did not hinder him from sending a strongly worded letter of protest against the Armenian massacre⁶⁴ to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, because of a

⁶² The long-term initiatives fell under ten major achievements: 1. The initiative taken by the Pope for the liberation, exchange, and hospitalization of prisoners, both military and civil; 2. The initiative taken by the Pope for the permission of epistolary correspondence between prisoners and their families; 3. The initiatives taken by the Pope for the granting of Sunday rest from work to prisoners, the granting of truces for the burial of the dead, the restriction of airplane attacks to places within the zone of battle, and the guarantee of respect towards the tombs of those who fell whilst fighting in the Dardanelles; 4. Some of the innumerable initiatives taken by the Pope on behalf of private sufferers during the war; 5. What the Pope did for the material succour of the more needy population during the war; 6. The Pope's work for their religious and moral relief; 7. The pope's solicitude for those nations that have had to suffer most during the war; 8. What the pope did during the war for the prisoners through the establishment of a bureau of inquiry at Rome, at Paderborn, at Fribourg, and at Vienna; 9. The work of the Pope during the war on behalf of the principles of right and justice; 10. The work of the Pope for the establishment of a just and durable peace. Cf. S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 128.

⁶³ Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 649 (Jul. 1918): 61-62, 64.

⁶⁴ The author of this article has retained the word "massacre" in order to respect the historical context as the word was used when the article in *The Month* was written. Today, *Metz Yegherm*, the Great Crime, as it is officially called by Armenia, is recognized as a genocide by countries such as Germany and France. Pope Francis himself during his visit to Armenia, 24 June 2016, did not hesitate, as he had the previous year, to refer to the "massacre" of the Armenians by the Ottomans-era Young Turks, as a real genocide. See *The Tablet*, July 9, 2016, 27. Cf also "Armeni," *30 Giorni*, no. 6 (2005), www.30giorni.it/articoli_id-8992_11.htm; "Dalla lettera di Benedetto XV al Sultano Mehmet V [Sett. 1915]: Una supplica al Sultano," www.difenderela fede-freeforumzone.com/d/10335618/-discussione.aspx; James Bryce and Edward Gray, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918).

lack of knowledge of the facts about this massacre, other Catholic voices did not add theirs in support of the Pope's protest!⁶⁵

Pope Benedict XV's achievements are even more pronounced when one considers that initially, as noticed above, politicians and journalists misinterpreted the Pope's every initiative! It was difficult to make them understand that the Pontiff could act independently and freely from all political or self-regarding motives,⁶⁶ and that he was rendering a service which no other secular ruler could carry out.⁶⁷ When the truth of Benedict XV's main War achievements started to become more evident - which included the publication of a documented article in an Italian newspaper⁶⁸ - it proved to be of great value, especially in helping Catholics remove their suspicions that the Pope, by observing strict neutrality, had acted callously. Benedict XV finally received, at least from Catholics, his well-deserved recognition for his War efforts.⁶⁹

The Papal Appeal for Peace

Pope Benedict XV took every opportunity to appeal for peace. Two articles in *The Month* gave prominence to the Pontiff's appeal which was made on the first anniversary of the opening of hostilities,⁷⁰ and to that of the 4th March 1916⁷¹ expressed in a letter to his Cardinal Vicar.⁷² In both appeals, the Pope

⁶⁵ Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 617 (Nov. 1915): 542-544.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 129.

⁶⁸ The article, "Fatti e non parole," was taken on board by *The Month*, which sourced its information from the *Glasgow Observer* of July 13, 1918, and *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in conjunction with the *Opera Nazionale Della Buona Stampa*. Cf. S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 128.

⁶⁹ Cf. S.F.S., "The Pope's Work for the Prisoners," 129. At the end of World War I the Turks erected a monument in honour of Benedict XV in the courtyard of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul. The gesture recognized the Pope's War efforts to alleviate the suffering and hunger caused by the War. "The great Pope of the world tragedy...the benefactor of all peoples, irrespective of nationality or religion ...," John Julius Norwich, *Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy* (New York: Random House, 2011), 428.

⁷⁰ Sydney F. Smith, "The Pope's Appeal for Peace," *The Month* no. 615 (Sept. 1915): 225-233.

⁷¹ "Epistola al tremendo conflitto del Papa Benedetto XV al Cardinale Presbitero Basileo Pompili, Vicario Generale di Roma, per Esortate i cattolici ad effettuare elimonise a Favore degli orfani di guerra," http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/it/letters/1916/documents/hf_ben-xv_jet_19160304_tremendo-conflitto.html.

⁷² Smith, "The Pope's Appeal for Peace," 225-233 and "The Pope's Latest Appeal for Peace," *The Month*, no. 623 (May 1916): 401-410. Cf. Terry Philpot, "1914's Pope Benedict XV and the Pursuit of Peace," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 18-31, 2014. In July 1915, Pope Benedict

addressed himself to the belligerent nations and their rulers and expressed his resolve to concentrate all his energies to bring about a reconciliation between the warring nations. He was aware that his repeated calls were either being ignored or that the desired effects did not materialize. Through these appeals Benedict XV exhorted rulers to work together in a spirit of reconciliation in order to end the bloodshed, find happier and more peaceable solutions other than battles to end the conflict, and look towards the future. The Pope extended his invitation to promoters of peace all over the world to help him in hastening the end of the War which had changed Europe into “one vast battlefield.”⁷³ Pope Benedict XV also warned Europe not to move towards its own suicide. He also reiterated his common fatherhood regarding the Christian victims of the War, whether Germans, Russians, French, English, Serbs, or Italians⁷⁴

The issue of annexed nations, the rightful aspirations of peoples, and the principle of arbitration in order to settle international disputes among nations, also formed part of the Pope’s appeal.⁷⁵ A lack of respect towards these core values would breed suspicion and resentment well beyond the War since, “nations do not die; humbled and oppressed they chaff 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 vendetta.”⁷⁶ Pope Benedict indicated that a nation’s equilibrium, prosperity and tranquility rested upon mutual benevolence and respect for the rights and dignity of others, “much more than upon hosts of armed men and the ring of powerful fortresses.”⁷⁷

Once again, the press, especially British and Italian, failed, as they had done regarding to his neutrality, to grasp the meaning of the principles underlying the Pope’s appeal. They interpreted Pope Benedict XV as harbouring a secret sympathy and siding with the Central Powers: he was treating the belligerents on an equal footing, blaming them equally for the atrocities committed, and

published the apostolic exhortation “To the Peoples now at War and to their Rulers.” This marked a change to active diplomacy that culminated two years later with the seven-point plan, or *Peace Note*, as it was modestly termed, presented to the warring parties in August 1917. Pope Benedict explained that his neutrality was “appropriate to him who is the common father and who loves all his children with equal affection.”

⁷³ Smith, “The Pope’s Appeal for Peace,” 227- 228.

⁷⁴ Smith, “The Pope’s Latest Appeal for Peace,” 405.

⁷⁵ The Pope’s indication of the necessity of arbitration was not exceptional since, before the outbreak of the War, Sir Edward Grey had proposed it to the governments of the Central powers with no results.

⁷⁶ Smith, “The Pope’s Appeal for Peace,” 228.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

his appeal for a seemingly inconclusive peace was a collusion with the Kaiser and an act to force the *Entente’s* hand in that direction.⁷⁸

According to *The Month*, this interpretation was unfounded. The journal pointed out that ample proof existed to demonstrate that Pope Benedict XV intended to exercise his paternal duties towards all and continue with his policy of impartiality without blaming either side. The Pope’s appeal indicated that war was a cruel way of settling international disputes and therefore it was much better to pursue the peaceful method of holding conferences and arbitration.⁷⁹

In stating the above, the Pope, continued *The Month*, was not suggesting that both sides of the war divide were equally to blame. All he asked of sovereigns and their peoples was that they overcome bias and passion and endeavour to get at the truth through an examination of conscience in the light of the Hague Conventions, which their respective nations had signed.⁸⁰ Such an examination of conscience, proposed *The Month*, would lead to the ability to make a distinction between those morally responsible for the outbreak of the War, the German and Austrian populations, and the sovereigns of the constituent states of those empires.

In continuing with its analysis of the situation, *The Month* sympathized with the vast masses of Germans who were misled by false statements that other nations had taken the initiative to assail them. As good Christians and Catholics, they would listen to the Pope’s appeal for peace, which would encourage them to work harder towards “a solid peace based on the removal of misunderstandings, the renewal of friendships, and the “return to the peaceful rivalry of studies, arts and industries.”⁸¹

While recognizing that this subject was a difficult one,⁸² as was the possibility of the adversaries meeting around a conference table, *The Month* defended the Pope’s suggestion. It pointed out that the difficulty, which impeded such an amicable conference, lay in the suspicion that not all the contracting parties would stand firm to the morally binding force of the agreed terms. The *Entente* feared that, since the Germans had repudiated the Hague Convention of 1907 and treated it as a scrap of paper, were such a conference as the Pope suggested to be held, a guarantee, that promises would be obtained and kept, was suspect.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., 227, 229.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 232-233. A subsequent article updated and elaborated the issue. See Smith “The Pope’s Latest Appeal for Peace,” 405.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 406.

A change in attitude, brought about through heeding the Pope's appeal, would however have opened the way to a peace conference. Such a summit had been mooted to the Central Empires by Britain's foreign secretary and sanctioned by the Allied Governments a few days before the outbreak of the War,⁸⁴

The Response to the Papal *Peace Note* of August 1, 1917

Pope Benedict published his "Peace Note" to the heads of the belligerent nations, on the 1 August 1917.⁸⁵ Cynically, *The Month*⁸⁶ commented that the *Note* had not had the effect of making the belligerents fall over each other's necks in order to guarantee peace!⁸⁷ America and Germany published their replies to the *Note*, while the British, French and Russian governments did not. In his reply, President Wilson reiterated the American ideal that the main objective of the War was to deliver the free people of the world from the menace and actual power of the vast military establishment controlled by an irresponsible government. The President longed for peace as much as the Pope did. According to *The Month*, President Wilson differed from Pope Benedict only in the way he read the facts.⁸⁸ In Wilson's view, Germany was a criminal power. Since the Kaiser was an unrepentant criminal and a treaty breaker, he could not be trusted to make peace.⁸⁹ Against such a scenario, a premature and inconclusive peace was dangerous.⁹⁰

There was one point in the Pope's *Note* which influenced President Wilson and which *The Month* quoted:

No peace can rest securely upon political or economic restrictions meant to benefit some nations and cripple or embarrass others, upon vindictive action of any sort, or any kind of revenge or deliberate injury. Punitive damages, the dismemberment of empires, the establishment of selfish and exclusive economic leagues, we deem inexpedient and in the end worse than futile, [and as] no proper basis for a peace of any kind, least of all for an enduring peace. That must be based upon justice and fairness and the common rights of mankind.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Pope Benedict XV, *Note to the Heads of the Belligerent Peoples, August 1, 1917*, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/papalpeacenote.htm>.

⁸⁶ Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month 2, *The Month*, no. 640 (Oct. 1917): 355-361; 362-363.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 355.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 356.

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month 2, *The Month*, no. 640 (Oct. 1917): 360.

The American President, like Benedict XV, distinguished between the German government and the German people. In its comment on this subject, *The Month* showed its opposition to and condemnation of the continuing punishment of the German population because of the atrocities of its government. Germans, torn between their government - which foresaw economic ruin unless supported by them - and the Allies who threatened them with punishment if they continued to support their government,⁹² had a right to trade in order to live. Moreover, the threat of an economic boycott would stiffen German resistance even more!⁹³

At one point, though, the Kaiser seemed to have repudiated war as a national policy in a state document, and was seemingly sympathetic to the leading idea of the Pope, "that in the future the material power of arms must be suspended by the moral power of right." Unfortunately, eminent Prussians, among them General von Freytag-Loringhoven,⁹⁴ did not approve.⁹⁵ The Kaiser's seemingly change of attitude and his answer to the Pope did not convince *The Month*. This sovereign's utterance did not square with his acts. He had disregarded some of the Pope's concrete proposals, such as the evacuation of France and Belgium, and demonstrated that Germany still wanted to determine its vital interests.⁹⁶

The neglect of the British government to reply to Pope Benedict's *Peace Note* had been the subject of a question presented in Parliament on the 13 February 1918.⁹⁷ Great Britain's choice to refrain from replying to the Pope, seems to have been the result of an article (Article 15) spearheaded by Italy, which had been inserted in a secret treaty of 1915, between the Governments of the *Entente* and Italy before it joined their alliance. In this treaty, the British Government had bound itself to, "preclude the intervention of the greatest influence on earth for the purpose of effecting a just and enduring peace."⁹⁸

⁹² Ibid., 361.

⁹³ Miscellanea 1: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 262- 265; 280- 281.

⁹⁴ Hugo Friedrich Philipp Johann Freier von Freytag-Loringhoven (1855-1924), Prussian general and military historian.

⁹⁵ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month 2, *The Month*, no. 640 (Oct. 1917): 357. The Emperor of Austria, Karl I who alone among the belligerent nations tried to comply with the Pope's Note, initiated concrete action towards that end. Unfortunately, his Minister of War thwarted him in this!

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Miscellanea 1: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 262- 265; 280- 281,

⁹⁸ Ibid., 262- 263. In fact, in the Treaty of London (1915), Italy had shown that it did not want the Holy See anywhere within the circles of international influence.

The Month reported that Lord Cecil, Minister of Blockade,⁹⁹ on behalf of the British government, and Baron Sonnino¹⁰⁰ on the part of the Italian government, had denied any intended discourtesy to the Pope. It was not their wish to exclude him from the efforts for the establishment of a just peace. The reasons for issuing their denial in the face of a Bolshevik interpretation of events was that Italy did not want to alienate a great part of the Italian nation, who were devoted to the Holy See; while in Great Britain's case, the reason was not to demoralize the feelings of many Catholics in the army, as well as the millions of Catholic subjects within the British Empire.¹⁰¹

While both nations clarified their position and disassociated the absence of a reply to the papal *Note* from any secret treaty which they had signed,¹⁰² *The Month* suspected that the clause in the secret treaty was intended to exclude not only the Holy See, but all non-belligerents, from the Peace Conference, unless the Allies consented to their participation.¹⁰³ It was a complex matter. *The Month's* suspicion, notwithstanding the denials of both Italy and Great Britain and their distancing themselves from such an action was not far from the mark! It transpired that a secret treaty - condemned by President Wilson¹⁰⁴ - had been signed and that a clause intending to exclude the Holy See from any diplomatic action had been added to it. While Italy maintained its denial, Lord Cecil, when questioned in Parliament admitted his awareness of the clause.¹⁰⁵

The British Government's dilemma in this case was whether to identify itself with President Wilson's letter, which had been published on the 29 August 1917, or whether to send a reasoned statement of its own together with the European Allies. The conclusion, in line with that of the French and Italian governments,

⁹⁹ Lord Robert Cecil, British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the coalition government formed on May 30, 1915. On June 16, he became a member of the Privy Council and was promoted to Assistant Secretary in 1918-1919. He additionally served as Minister of Blockade from February 23, 1916 to July 18, 1918.

¹⁰⁰ Baron Luigi Sydney Sonnino was Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs during World War I.

¹⁰¹ Miscellanea 1: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 262- 263. Lord Cecil admitted that the British Government had received the Pope's proposals with sincere appreciation of their lofty and benevolent intentions. It had intended to examine them with the closest and most serious attention.

¹⁰² Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 649 (Jul. 1918): 64. A possible link existed between the lack of response by most governments to Pope Benedict XV's *Peace Note*, and article 15 of the Italian Treaty.

¹⁰³ Miscellanea 1: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 263.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 281. Rather than secret diplomacy, the President opted for more openly brokered covenant to peace.

¹⁰⁵ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 643 (Jan. 1918): 80-85, 87.

was that nothing would be gained by adding anything further to what President Wilson had written.¹⁰⁶ *The Month* considered this lack of an official public reply as a serious mistake¹⁰⁷

How did the British Catholic hierarchy respond to Benedict XV's *Peace Note*? Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster defended the *Note* and spoke about it publicly on the 11 February 1918. He did not fail to point out that politicians lacked an understanding of the Holy See's role as the constituted centre of Christian unity, and of the historic place which it enjoyed in all great world events. The Cardinal pointed out that the leaders of public opinion had without even having considered or weighed the terms of the *Peace Note*, given a false conception of what the Holy Father had done, resulting in the inability to send any reply to the Holy Father's invitation.¹⁰⁸ Other members of the English hierarchy and some of the Irish bishops joined the Cardinal and indicated plainly that such a course of action had been an affront to their religion and to "English speaking Catholics all over the world."¹⁰⁹

The Month did not refrain from taking the opportunity to point out the difference, which a temporal ruler - such as the King of Spain - and the Pope could contribute towards mediation. While the King of Spain's representatives among the belligerent nations worked to tone down misunderstandings, the Pope, in inspiring populations and their rulers, went beyond considerations of each country's military strength in removing some of the causes that kept nations apart.¹¹⁰ The Holy See, it added, worked to ease suspicions through many religious and peace-loving channels diffused throughout the countries concerned.¹¹¹

Unexpectedly, however, Pope Benedict XV's *Peace Note* found support in the Labour Movement! In its memorandum read during the inter Allied Conference of the Socialist and Labour Parties, which took place on 24 February 1918, the Labour Movement declared its support of democracy, stressing the fundamental point of the papal *Peace Note*: "Of all the conditions of peace none is so important to the peoples of the world as that there should be henceforth on earth no more war." Moreover, the memorandum stressed the importance of having a supra-national authority to protect peace, viz. the League of Nations.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Miscellanea 1: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 263.

¹⁰⁷ Miscellanea 2: Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 643 (Jan. 1918): 80-85, 87-88.

¹⁰⁸ Miscellanea 1, Topics of the Month, *The Month*, no. 645 (Mar. 1918): 264.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 264, 265.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² J. Keating, "The Hope of the World," *The Month*, no. 650 (Aug. 1918): 84.

Peace Movements and Central Power Catholics

Pope Benedict XV was not daunted by his failure to garner the desired support of Europe's rulers and governments regarding his peace initiatives. He therefore turned his attention to the faithful and "stimulated them to make a fuller and extended use of the arms of prayer." *The Month* indicated that many a pious family and religious houses heeded the Pope's appeal.¹¹³ This was not all. The *Peace Note* had an impact within the wider peace movements, which were then gaining momentum on a European scale.¹¹⁴ Such movements started in Bavaria and in Austria-Hungary, where a fervent and undisguised longing for peace manifested itself among the population, foremost among whom was Austria's Emperor Karl I, who in line with this popular desire, endeavoured to bring about a speedy peace.¹¹⁵

While German Catholics were similar to their French and British co-religionists in the conspicuous support they gave to their government, the leading Catholics of Germany refrained from hurling insults and abusing the nations their country was at war with. They recognized that the horrors of the War were due to the sins of the German people too, as the pastoral letter of the German hierarchy, read on the third Sunday of Advent 1914, confirmed.¹¹⁶ Indeed, German Catholics had not been entirely indifferent to the fate of Belgium; neither did they accept the lies issued by their government, which uncritically excused the outrages and atrocities committed. *The Month* cited the example of Fr Bernhard Duhr S.J.,¹¹⁷ a German Jesuit based in Munich, who in his book *Der Lügengeist im Völkerkrieg*,¹¹⁸ wrote an account of his investigations into the numerous stories of *franc-tireur*¹¹⁹ warfare on the part of Belgian priests. His research conclusively showed that not a single case was substantiated; including the case where a false accusation had led to an innocent Belgian priest's execution. As a reaction, the German military authorities forbade the book's exportation out of Germany.¹²⁰ In such a situation, it was regrettable that open-minded German Catholics were

unable to make their influence felt in the political sphere.¹²¹ Their views could only be deduced from the Catholic newspapers and from those politicians who had the power to put those views into practice.

By 1917, Catholics - including the *Zentrum Party*¹²² - did not attempt to hide their ardent desire and yearning for peace.¹²³ They followed the example of parties of a social democratic bent, who sought to promote, through their international connections, discussions among members of enemy states; the so-called Stockholm gatherings.¹²⁴ In February 1917 an International Congress in Zürich convened Catholics from neutral and allied nations in order for them to set about working on how to bring peace about. The Congress was a failure. Only Catholics from Germany, Austria-Hungary and pro-German Switzerland attended. A repeat Congress in May of 1917, proved to be another failure; nobody from the *Entent* countries and only one or two pro-German neutrals were induced to attend.¹²⁵

In spite of these failures in the first move towards an enduring peace, a new peace organization, the *Weltfriedenswerk Weisses Kreuz*¹²⁶ was started in Graz, Austria. Its advantage over other peace movements lay in that besides its approval by Catholic newspapers, Prussian radical organs such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung*,¹²⁷ accepted it! Besides the cessation of battles, this organization proposed the abandonment of those policies which were conducive to more warfare in order to settle moral disputes among nations. The establishment of a lasting world peace would enable nations to direct their attention to the real enemies found on home soil: intemperance, immorality and disease. The organization proposed a limit, agreed upon by the nations, to the production of armaments. All chauvinistic aims and race-struggles were to be discarded; at the same time due recognition was to be given to the natural rights of every people to possess its own speech, culture and religion.¹²⁸ Catholic newspapers as well as the Berlin Catholic newspaper *Germania* appreciated the above proposals. The Cologne

¹¹³ Smith, "The Pope's Latest Appeal for Peace," 409-410.

¹¹⁴ "German Catholics and Peace," *The Month*, no. 639 (Sept. 1917), 193-200.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195-196. *The Month* divulged that one of the Emperor's initiatives was the December 1916 peace proposal. Emperor Karl was also the only sovereign to heed Pope Benedict's *Peace Note*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹⁷ Fr. Bernhard Duhr S.J. (1852 - 1930) was a Jesuit German scholar and prolific writer.

¹¹⁸ *The Spirit of Lies in the War of the Nations*, published in Munich: Regensburg, 1915.

¹¹⁹ French for "free-shooter." The word originated during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) to describe an irregular combatant. Nowadays one may use the terms "sniper" or "guerilla."

¹²⁰ "German Catholics and Peace," 194.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² The Catholic Centre Party (1870-1957). It was a lay catholic political party especially active during the *Kulturkampf* and the Weimar Republic. When a National Socialist government (Nazism) assumed dictatorial powers in 1933 the Centre Party was auto-dissolved. It briefly resurged after WWII, but was superseded by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

¹²³ "German Catholics and Peace," 195.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ The White Cross World's Peace Organization.

¹²⁷ The *Frankfurter Zeitung* (1856-1943) was a German language newspaper with democratic leanings.

¹²⁸ "German Catholics and Peace," 196.

newspaper, *Kölnische Volkszeitung*,¹²⁹ however did not agree with the pacifist programme and remarked that this organization did not have the ecclesiastical authorities' approval.¹³⁰

In Germany itself, "peace feeling" was gathering momentum. Political parties, including the Catholic *Zentrum* Party led by Herr Erzberger,¹³¹ took up the issue. The pivotal point among politicians was whether to work for a peace which excluded the retention of annexed territories and non-payment of indemnities, or else the inclusion of territorial annexations in negotiations for peace. The *Zentrum* had initially opted for annexations, while the Catholic Workers Party passed a resolution in favour of a peace without annexations. In the end, the Reichstag's Peace Resolution, proposed by Herr Erzberger and the *Zentrum* Party, which after much debate had renounced annexations, was passed¹³² on 19 July 1917.

The Pope and the League of Nations

President Wilson's own *Peace Note* of 18 December 1916 to the belligerent nations,¹³³ followed by his "peace without victory" speech to the Senate on the 22 January 1917,¹³⁴ highlighted the difference between the American stand and that of the *Entente* regarding war aims and peace.¹³⁵ Notwithstanding this divergence of opinion, the Europeans explicitly agreed with President Wilson's suggestion of founding a League of Nations in order to ensure worldwide peace and justice.

The Month approved of such a League and its pledge for "the abolition of war by the abolition of its causes."¹³⁶ It also showed its surprise that some jingo journals, such as the *Saturday Review* in its 20 January 1917 issue, did not

accept this proposal and instead sneered at such a suggestion.¹³⁷ The argument in favour of the League put forward by *The Month*, was based on the premise that militant Catholicism was a contradiction in terms: peace presupposed justice as its foundation. It was natural then that the Pope, Vicar of the Prince of Peace, should support any scheme, which had, as its objective, the prevention of aggressive warfare.¹³⁸ Sustained by the Pope's backing, *The Month* hoped that Catholics would realize the opportunities - which would go beyond Catholic public opinion expectations - for security and world peace which the League, were it to be founded, would provide.¹³⁹ The only fear, remarked *The Month*, about such an enterprise was a lack of its efficient administration because of a lack of unity (among nations).¹⁴⁰

The Peace Conference, Italy and the Holy See

By 1917, the momentum for an eventual peace conference was gaining ground. The League of Nations Conference Committee¹⁴¹ had convened, on 17 July 1917, an inter-denominational meeting of clergymen at Westminster. The agenda purported to discuss the formation of a union of States pledged to give substance and reality to international law by forcibly preventing or punishing its violation in certain definite cases.¹⁴²

The Catholic representative at this meeting, Mgr H.J. Grosch,¹⁴³ presented a well-argued case for the inclusion of the Holy See in any future peace conference. The prelate's argument rested on the universality of the Catholic Church and the Pope's status as "God appointed guardian of faith and morals" and, consequently his being, "incomparably the greatest moral force in the world." As expected, the majority of the audience - "representatives of dissident communities in

¹²⁹ *Kölnische Volkszeitung* (Cologne Gazette) was published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During WWI it veered towards political centre.

¹³⁰ "German Catholics and Peace," 196-197.

¹³¹ Matthias Erzberger (1875-1921) German politician within the Catholic *Zentrum* Party. From 1917 onwards, he spoke out against WWI.

¹³² "German Catholics and Peace," 193.

¹³³ For a full reading of the *Peace Note*, see https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Peace_Note,_December_18,_1916.

¹³⁴ For a full reading of the speech, see <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/ww15.htm>.

¹³⁵ The *Entente* wanted a peace based on a total victory over Germany and militarism and the crime against justice and international law. The USA wanted a negotiated peace on an equal footing.

¹³⁶ Keating, "The Hope of the World," 81-91.

¹³⁷ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 632 (Feb. 1917), 164-168; J. Keating, "The Death Knell of Autocracy," *The Month*, no. 635 (May 1917), 385-398; Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 640 (Oct. 1917), 355-363.

¹³⁸ Keating, "The Hope of the World," 81-91.

¹³⁹ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 640 (Oct. 1917), 358.

¹⁴⁰ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 651 (Sept. 1918), 224. Such a League, headed by the Pope, existed in the medieval system. Once destroyed by Protestantism, it was difficult to restore. See Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 651 (Sept. 1918), 225-226.

¹⁴¹ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 638 (Aug. 1917), 169-172.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴³ A prominent English prelate, who delivered several lectures. See *The Tablet* numbers from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

disagreement with Rome” - did not receive his arguments with enthusiasm.¹⁴⁴ For his part, Mgr Grosch warned devout Anglicans and others who took pleasure in “belittling the Holy Father,” to consider the company they kept. This was interpreted by *The Month* as being a possible reference to dissident Church members, or more likely to the British rationalist clique and their continental counterparts, as well as to freemasons. The prelate warned the participants that the same forces, which had obstructed the Pope from being invited to the Hague Conference in 1907, were now working to prevent the Holy See’s attendance at the *post bellum* peace conference.¹⁴⁵

The Holy See’s relationship with Italy was another obstacle, besides the continual campaign inimical to the papacy, which impeded Benedict XV’s invitation to attend an eventual peace conference. In its July 1915 issue,¹⁴⁶ *The Month* had commented that: “The present war showed up the Italian state’s unilateral Law of Guarantees of 1871,¹⁴⁷ which purported to ‘secure the moral and material independence of the pontiff and his court, as also the most complete and unfettered freedom of intercourse with the Catholic world’, to be what it really was: ineffective to make good these promises.”¹⁴⁸

A report stating that both the German and Austrian ambassadors accredited to the Holy See had prudently withdrawn from the papal court seemed to corroborate the impression that the Holy See was restricted in its international relations, as was the Pope’s free communication with his subjects.¹⁴⁹ A statement by the Cardinal Secretary of State,¹⁵⁰ while avoiding to embarrass the Italian state regarding neutrality, sought to clarify the impression that all was well between the Holy See and Italy notwithstanding certain positive elements that existed.¹⁵¹ This unresolved “Roman Question,” blocked the Holy See’s participation in international summits as an independent and sovereign interlocutor and caused dismay to Catholics who considered it as an affront and a discrimination against the Pope.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁴ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 638 (Aug. 1917), 171-172.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 169-172.

¹⁴⁶ Miscellanea 2: Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 613 (Jul. 1915), 83-84, 89-90.

¹⁴⁷ The unresolved “Roman Question” had its repercussions on the Holy See’s participation in European and international affairs, and to some extent on the Pope’s neutral impartiality during the Great War.

¹⁴⁸ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 613 (Jul. 1915), 84.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934) served as Secretary of State under Pope Benedict XV and Pope Pius XI. He was the Cardinal Secretary of State who negotiated the Lateran Pacts with the Kingdom of Italy and was signatory to them on behalf of the Holy See, on February 11, 1929.

¹⁵¹ S.F.S., “The Pope and *La Liberté*,” Miscellanea: Critical and Historical Notes, *The Month*, no. 614 (Aug. 1915), 186.

¹⁵² Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 649 (Jul. 1918), 61-62, 64.

In this regard, *The Month* pointed out that in a settlement that concerned the welfare of the whole world, it was advisable that the whole world should concur in peace talks. It was understandable though, that it was up to the belligerent nations to decide whether to invite neutral countries - the Holy See among them - to a future peace conference.¹⁵³ The Pope, though impartial, had worked for peace and justice in the measure of his opportunities: his achievements surpassed those of any other neutral sovereign.¹⁵⁴

The Month called for Italy to expunge the obnoxious Article 15 of the Italian Treaty - which it understood to be an obstacle to the normalization of relations between the Holy See and that country.¹⁵⁵ The enemies of Christianity would do anything, warned *The Month*, “to exclude the Pope once more from any place in the deliberations.” The forces behind such an exclusion were the Rationalistic Press Association, together with “all classes of men whose names are bywords as leaders of the forces of anarchy and irreligion as well as of religious persecution throughout Europe.”¹⁵⁶

The Month interpreted Italy’s ambivalent diplomacy towards the Holy See as a sign of fear of the papacy’s temporal power! Italy failed to understand the symbolic significance of the Holy See’s “temporal power,” which, reduced to Vatican City, was a sign of its independence. Such a small area was not incompatible with Italy’s prosperity. Indeed, Italy’s misreading of the significance of Vatican City caused it either to ignore the Holy See’s existence or to secretly undermine it, as the offensive stipulation of “the secret clause” demonstrated. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster pointed out the meaning of the Holy See’s independence when he wrote in *The Westminster Cathedral Chronicle* for January 1918 that “...the size of the independent territory is of small importance. It is the reality of the independence that is of paramount importance in the eyes of Catholics.”¹⁵⁷ This reality materialized a decade later, with the signing of the Lateran Pacts on the 11 February 1929!¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵⁴ Miscellanea 2, Topics of The Month, *The Month*, no. 649 (Jul. 1918), 65.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, “The Popes as Peacemakers,” *The Month*, no. 637 (Jul. 1917), 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁸ Throughout the period of the so-called “Roman Question” (1870-1929), International Law and the Family of Nations never ceased to recognize the Holy See as a sovereign and juridical person. On the February 11, 1919, with the signing of the Lateran Pacts between Italy and the Holy See, Vatican City became Vatican City State, recognized by Italy and the international community.

Conclusion

The articles and news comments in *The Month*, are confirmed in their veracity by later publications regarding Pope Benedict XV and his Great War record.¹⁵⁹ *The Month* sought to be fair and intellectually honest in its comments and counter arguments regarding the news coverage and press comments concerning Pope Benedict XV. It focused on his War activity and achievements amid continuous criticism from both sides of the “fratricidal” conflict. On the other hand, the reader could not help but notice, that fair as it tried to be, *The Month*, was well within the *Entente* camp in its own vision of the Great War!

The main issue at stake was the Pope’s neutral and impartial stand during the Great War. Misunderstood at first by the secular press, common public opinion, and by ruling monarchs and their governments, the wisdom of Pope Benedict’s choices came to be better appreciated as the War progressed in years and in “useless carnage.” Both sides of the War divide wanted the Pope, notwithstanding, to be on “their side.” Had Benedict XV submitted to their pressure, the achievements in humanitarian aid and relief, which his neutral position paved the way for, would have been compromised, and never realized. As it turned out, sovereigns and their governments of both the *Entente* and Central Powers, followed by the secular press, gradually came around to understanding the Pope’s genuine impartiality, and responded accordingly.

Pope Benedict not only created a space for humanitarian aid. He appealed for a negotiated just peace, and made proposals through his 1917 *Peace Note* as to how this could be achieved. That it was ignored, except by Emperor Karl I of Austria - Hungary,¹⁶⁰ was Europe’s loss and resulted in the War’s extension by another year! *The Month* hinted at Italy’s manoeuvring as one of the possible reasons for this failure, especially if this is interpreted in the light of President Wilson’s own *Note*, which resembled the Pope’s in a number of aspects,¹⁶¹ and which was published some time later! However, the seed sown by Pope Benedict

bore fruit in the different peace movements, which sprouted all over the war-torn Continent.

Besides the growing momentum towards peace, *The Month*’s articles indicated the growing idea of a worldwide organization (eventually the League of Nations) which would help maintain world peace. The Jesuit journal pointed out the reasons why both the Pope and Catholics ought to be in favour of such an initiative. As the end of the War approached and discussion on the forthcoming peace conference increased, *The Month* reminded its readers of the folly which had been committed in excluding the Holy See from participating in the Hague Conference of 1907. It warned against a repetition of that same blunder and the ensuing pitiful results. Although not calling the “Roman Question” problem by its name, *The Month* underscored Italy’s backstage dealings, pointing out that these were made in order to diminish the Holy See’s role and influence in international affairs. Another possible reason it offered was that other neutral countries were not going to be invited to the eventual peace conferences.¹⁶² This is the point where *The Month*’s arguments stop. The years following the “peace,” such as Benedict XV’s reaction to the Treaty of Versailles, is material for further reading beyond the events of 1919.

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¹⁵⁹ Besides Church history reference works, see e.g. Robert John Araujo and John A. Lual, *Papal Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 20014); Frank J. Coppa, *The Modern Papacy since 1789* (New York: Longmann, 1998); Anthony Rhodes, *The Power of Rome in the Twentieth Century: The Vatican in the Age of Liberal Democracies, 1870-1922* (New York: F. Watts, 1983). The most comprehensive book to date is John F. Pollard, *Benedict XV: The Unknown Pope and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Continuum, 2005); Terry Philpot, “1914’s Pope Benedict XV and the Pursuit of Peace,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 18-31, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Beatified by Pope St. John Paul II on October 3, 2004.

¹⁶¹ President Wilson’s “fourteen points” speech made in January 1918 seems to have drawn heavily from and was inspired by Benedict XV’s own *Peace Note*. Cf. Pollard, *Benedict XV*, 128.

¹⁶² When the Paris Peace Conference officially opened on January 18, 1919, representatives of the world nations, which had sided with the Allied cause, were invited. “In December the French foreign ministry had sent out invitations to every country, from Liberia to Siam, that could claim, however improbably, to be on the Allied side. By January, there were twenty-nine countries represented in Paris, all expecting to take part.” Cf. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, 64. The Holy See, as expected, was not among those invited.