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*Verso il disgelo:
Stati Uniti e Santa Sede, 1914-1940*

Coordinatore
Ch.mo Prof. Antonio Scocozza

Tutor
Ch.mo Prof. Luigino Rossi

Dottorando
Luca Castagna

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Abstract

(english version)

The study of the relationship between the United States and the Vatican is particularly complex as it has had quite a contradictory development. This PhD study tries to give an interpretation to better understand the relations between Washington and the Vatican during the two decades before the World War II.

The period analyzed is mainly due to the fact that there was a convergence between the American Episcopate and Roosevelt's administration on the social reforms and a synergic concrete action in terms of diplomacy between the Vatican Secretary of State and the White House when the war broke out.

During the "Early Republic", the Catholic Church had been considered by the majority of the protestants as the maximum expression of European obscurantism, opposing the liberal democratic principles stated by the Founding Fathers.

Despite the consolidation of their presence due to the migration between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century, the Catholic communities had met several obstacles while they were trying to be part of the American society.

They were often targeted as a "foreign body", "alien" or even "un-American", and even though these communities were growing significantly in number, they were continuously marginalized and excluded from the main political, social and economical issues of the country.

From a political and diplomatic point of view, moreover, the relationship between Washington and the Vatican, started in 1797 with the first American diplomat sent to Rome, were stopped in 1867, when the U.S. Senate decided to cut the expenses of the mission to the Pope. This decision froze, *de facto*, unilaterally, the relationship with the Vatican even though not on official terms.

The continuous decrease in maritime trade with Lazio region (that was the only Italian territory still in the Pope's hand in 1867) and the consequent possible prohibition of the Protestant cult in the Vatican, probably, represented, only an opportunity to realize what some people thought to be a unjust privilege in the relation with the Roman Catholic Church. Actually the consequences of the Italian unification, in particular Pius XI's opposition to the new Italian Kingdom, determined the sudden interruption of the relationship with the United States.

Basically, the more the Pope's territory was reduced and politically questioned, the more the American Senate became aware, in advance to the fall of the Papal State, of the purely, or mainly, religious feature of the mission of the Holy See all over the world. This, according to Ennio Di

Nolfo's pioneer book on the Vatican relationship with the United States, altered the American legislators' view on the meaning of the relations with the Vatican. The disregard for the resumption of relations with the Vatican was, therefore, a constant policy since 1867. The cut in the expenses of the Roman mission decided by the Congress, independently from the legislators' political ideas, was never questioned while the Republican administrations, almost always in power after the Civil War, just ignored the "Vatican Question" in order to keep the votes of the Protestant electors, and, with the victory of the Democrats at the 1912 elections, the anti-catholicism found in the figure of Woodrow Wilson its main supporter.

The years before the World War II, instead, was a new period in the relationship between the United States and the Vatican thanks to a common effort against the totalitarian regimes. After the initial idyll between Mussolini and Pius XI, which led to the Lateran Treaty in 1929, the latter condemned the anti-Christian and inhuman aspects of both Nazism and Fascism during the last years of his pontificate, helped by the skilful diplomacy of Eugenio Pacelli in building a profitable relationship with Roosevelt's establishment through some representatives of American Catholic Hierarchy. At the same time, Roosevelt, aware of the importance of the Catholic vote in the elections since 1933, restored a "dialogue" with the Vatican at the beginning of 1940, sending Myron Taylor a personal representative to the Pope Pius XII.

Basically, the period considered marked a transition: a turning point in which the United States and the Vatican started the rapprochement, whose importance goes beyond the relationship between the two and it becomes a crucial point in the definition of the international relationships throughout the XX Century.

Therefore, starting from the methodological suggestions and interpretations of historical studies, for this research I have used both American primary sources, the Vatican Secret Archives relating to the pontificate of Pope Pius XI recently opened to the public, and, moreover, the "Political Matters" files (1919-1930 and 1931-1945) in the Historical and Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The aim of my research is, therefore, a further investigation into the matter which goes mainly in two directions: the development, after almost 70 years of cold relationships between the United States and the Vatican, from the end of the Twenties up to the rapprochement in 1939; the relevance of the rapprochement in relation to the intervention of the United States in the World War II.

As it is clear from what the Italian ambassador to the Vatican, Bonifacio Pignatti, communicated to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Eugenio Pacelli and Franklin D. Roosevelt talked about the possibility of restoring an official relationship already in November 1936 during the cardinal's visit in the

United States. After two years, the American Catholics Hierarchy moved towards that direction intensifying the relationship with Roosevelt's establishment, particularly with the President's son, James, and the American ambassador at St. James' Court, the catholic Joseph Kennedy.

The turning point started just after the outbreak of the war, in December 1939, when Roosevelt, in his letter to Pius XII, announced that he would have sent Myron Taylor as his own representative to the Pope.

Being a skilful diplomat, and having a great knowledge of Germany, Pope Pacelli understood that the encyclicals and the agreement procedure would never be enough to reduce Hitler's crazy plans.

It was necessary to the Holy See a strong reliable and neutral, ally, that would also represent, even symbolically, the antithesis of the totalitarianism. The United States had those requisites and this gave the opportunity to go on with the rapprochement.

Roosevelt, explaining Taylor's mission, talked about the common desire of alleviating the sufferings caused by the war, and the common ideals which would help to keep a parallel effort also after the hostilities.

The president's motives were several and strictly connected on short and long terms. Above all, the desire to have a permanent source of information with the Vatican, as they had information about Italy, Spain and Germany, not accessible to the American diplomats, prevailed – especially if we consider that Sumner Welles' mission in Europe began almost in the same period of Taylor's one.

With the World War II the United States got back the motivations, adapting them to the Thirties, which had led its political elite – precisely, senator Lewis Cass – to define the Vatican as the “emporium of the European intelligence” in the mid-XIX Century, even though they had a deep anti-catholic feelings.

The turning point in 1939 did not cancelled the historical contrasts but started a long lasting period of distention which would allow both the United States and the Vatican to cooperate during the XX Century's wars, fought and not, up to the institution of official diplomatic relations in 1984.