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Pope Francis: Holy See Diplomacy under the first Jesuit Pope

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It is an honour and really a great pleasure to be here in Glasgow and invited to speak as one of the 2014 Gonzaga lecturers here at St Aloysius. I bring greetings from one of your own, Msgr. Charles Burns, my embassy's honorary ecclesiastical adviser, born, baptised and educated in this parish. This has in some ways been rather a Scottish few months for the British Embassy to the Holy See. Last June, in Rome, we helped Archbishop Tartaglia celebrate his receipt of the Pallium from Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica. And on 21 September I had the pleasure of attending the Episcopal consecration of Msgr. Leo Cushley as the new Archbishop of St Andrew's and Edinburgh at St Mary's Cathedral there. You are very lucky to have two wonderful pastors here in Scotland at the head of the Catholic Church, bishops who I believe fulfil the standard as set out in Pope Francis's own words when he addressed the Nuncios last June: "close to the people, fathers and brothers … gentle, patient and merciful; animated by inner poverty, the freedom of the Lord and also by outward simplicity and austerity of life", without "the psychology of Princes".

The Global Reality of the Holy See under a Jesuit Pope

But I would like, this evening, to talk about another element in that same speech. When Pope Francis received his Nuncios – his Papal ambassadors – in June last year, he reminded them that: "You represent me in Churches spread throughout the world and with the Governments, but seeing so many of you today also gives me the sense of catholicity of the Church, of its universality". When I give talks about the role of the British Embassy to the Holy See, I often have to remind my audience that I am accredited not to the Vatican City State – that 110 acre plot in the heart of Rome – but to the Holy See, the governance of the global Catholic Church. In diplomatic terms, this means that extraordinary network of 106 resident diplomatic missions across the 180 countries with which the Holy See has diplomatic relations. It also means the 5,100 bishops and over 400,000 priests in every corner of the world. And the Catholic NGOs like SCIAF or CAFOD working especially in developing countries. Or the religious congregations with their missionaries, religious houses and health workers, from the Jesuit Refugee Service working with displaced Syrian children, to the Benedictine Order whose largest house, I discovered recently, is not in Europe but in South Korea.

This is one important reality of the global Catholic Church today, and something of which Pope Francis, the Pope “from the far side of the world”, as he himself put it immediately after his election, is very much aware. One of the objectives of the reforms under way in the Roman Curia are, without doubt, to make that global Church more visible, to show it as it is – a truly global organisation – and in a sense making a reality through the Church of that noble aspiration that has eluded statesmen and world leaders for years, despite the creation of the United Nations: to join together the family of mankind as one community. This was especially evident at the Consistory at St Peter’s Basilica two weeks ago, where Pope Francis appointed his first new Cardinals. Amongst them were the first ever cardinals from Burkina Faso and Haiti, both known for their work with the poor, and the first ever Cardinal from the Antilles. Archbishops from Korea and the Philippines represented Asia. The Archbishop of Abidjan in Ivory Coast also received a red hat, as did senior churchmen from Santiago in Chile, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Buenos Aires in Argentina and Managua in Nicaragua. Germany, Italy and England provided the European contingent. The Archbishop of Quebec represented North America. Their supporters from all around the world filled the Basilica. It was a truly international occasion, even down to the liturgy: I recall that on 23 February the prayers of the faithful were in Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, French and Indonesian. Just the other day, the Argentine Pope appointed his new Prefect for the Secretariat of the Economy in the Holy See, the Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney, Australia.

This global reality of the Catholic Church and the Holy See is something very easy to forget when are focused on our own, parochial concerns. It is worth remembering that less than a quarter of all Catholics live in Europe, and that proportion continues to shrink as numbers in Africa and Asia, in particular, grow. This is something that the Pope bears consciously in mind. “I am a pastor of a Church without frontiers”, he wrote in his Apostolic Letter Evangelii Gaudium. “A people of many faces”. Pope Francis is a Jesuit, something we should always remember. And he therefore brings to the Papacy that Jesuit genius for facing outwards, confidently, towards the world. When he was a young priest, Father Bergoglio had wanted to be sent by the Order to Japan in the footsteps of the first great Jesuit missionaries, like Matteo Ricci in China. He could not go because of poor health, but the missionary is still a powerful force within him, as is clear from his writings and speeches. Evangelising is in his blood and integral to his vocation. That continues now he sits on the Chair of St Peter.

This is important, because what we might speak of as a Holy See ‘foreign policy’ – even though the Holy See itself would never use this phrase, something to which I will return in a moment – is very much linked to the person and views of the Pope. In an interview he gave just last month, the new Holy See Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, set out the reality of the outward facing Holy See: “The Pope”, he said”, is the Holy See’s number one diplomatic ‘agent’ … an authoritative and sought after voice internationally”. It is the Pope who outlines the tasks and objectives of papal diplomacy. As Pope Francis himself put it in his address to the Nuncios in June: “I would like to thank each of you for your service which

aids me in solicitude for all of the churches, in the ministry of unity that is central to the Successor of Peter". This is no abstract thought. Nuncios are Papal Representatives. And it is the Pope's voice that carries weight and impact around the world. When governments want the Holy See to intervene in a global issue, it is the authentic voice of the Pope which they wish to hear. Which is why when the Pope tweets – and his tweets contain the same earthy and simple language of his writings and homilies – millions listen: 12 million followers, to be precise, with 60 million re-tweets, making him the most followed leader on the planet.

Holy See Diplomacy

If this is the reality of the Holy See in the world under the first Jesuit Pope – a global organization led by an evangelizing missionary with tremendous clout beyond the confines of the Church - what, then, is the focus of Holy See diplomacy? Pope Francis told the Nuncios that they must be "Pastors: always seek the good, the good of all, the good of the church and of every person". But what does that boil down to in the world of global politics, in relation to the conflicts, confusions and frictions that make up the complex interplay between states, and in which the Holy See is, amongst its many roles, a diplomatic actor?

Cardinal Parolin set it out very clearly in the same interview he gave in February. Let me quote him: "The … objectives of papal diplomacy are those which the Pope outlined in his first meeting with the various ambassadors to the Holy See in March 2013: to build bridges in order to promote dialogue and use negotiation as a means to solve conflicts, spread fraternity, fight against poverty and build peace. The Pope has no other 'interests' or 'strategies' and neither do those who represent him abroad … In a diverse world which risks being divided, Vatican diplomacy can and must stand by the side of the people and populations in order to help them realize that their differences are an asset and a resource and to help bridge those differences as peacefully as possible, to build a human and fraternal world, where there is room for everyone, particularly the weak and vulnerable". Parolin himself has characterized this in the past as "the diplomacy of hope".

"Reference Points for a Journey": The 'foreign policy' Mission Statement

So let us go back to that Papal address to the diplomatic corps on 22 March last year, just under a year ago today. I think Cardinal Parolin was right. It is a key text, and what we might understand as Holy See 'foreign policy' - the Holy See's engagement with the world - has flowed pretty coherently from the guidelines given by the Pope then, in the magnificence of the Sala Regia in the Apostolic Palace. It explains what Pope Francis himself described as "the reference points for a journey that I want to invite each of the countries here represented to take up". He told us he wished "to express the Pope's embrace of the world" – itself a phrase redolent of his outward facing mission - and set out four points of reference for us to ponder.

First, he spoke of the need to fight poverty. The Pope reminded the assembled diplomats of the global role of the Catholic Church in mitigating poverty: "… the Church in every corner of the globe has always tried to care for and look after those who suffer from want, and I think that in many of your countries you can attest to the generous activity of Christians to dedicate themselves to helping the sick, orphans, the homeless and all the marginalised, thus striving to make society more humane and just". He reminded us, in his straightforward way, of: "How many poor people there still are in the world! And what great suffering they have to endure!". And that one of the principal reasons why he chose the name, Francis, was St Francis of Assisi's love for the poor.

Second, he called on us to be builders of peace. To do this requires, above all, a reaching out to the other, and he reminded us of the "tyranny of relativism, which makes everyone his own criterion and endangers the coexistence of peoples". "There cannot be true peace", Pope Francis argued, "if everyone is the measure of himself, if everyone can always claim exclusively his own rights, without at the same time caring for the good of others, of everyone, on the basis of our shared human nature uniting every human being on this earth". Countries have to be less selfish, less exclusive, he was saying. More ready to open our arms in solidarity with others.

How to go about doing this was his third reference point. Recalling his own title of Pontifex - 'the bridge builder' – he urged countries to build bridges to each other through greater efforts at dialogue "to build true links of friendship between all peoples, despite their diversity". This was a very personal appeal. Recalling the immigrant origins of his family, he noted that "this dialogue between places and cultures a great distance apart matters greatly to me, this dialogue between one end of the world and the other, which today are growing ever closer, more interdependent, more in need of opportunities to meet and to create real spaces of authentic fraternity". He noted that: "In this work, the role of religion is fundamental. It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God". And he made a particular point of calling for dialogue with Islam.

So fighting poverty, building peace and constructing bridges were and are Pope Francis's global reference points. But he added a crucial fourth, building on his short homily at his inauguration Mass earlier that week, during which he had referred to "nature", "the environment" and "creation" at least eight times. "Learn to grow in love for this world of ours", he told the diplomats on 22 March. "Here too, it helps me to think of the name of Francis, who teaches us profound respect for the whole of creation and the protection of our environment, which all too often, instead of using for the good, we exploit greedily, to one another's detriment".

If I were a politician, or a politician's spokesperson, I would be tempted to encapsulate this Papal foreign policy "mission statement" – for that is, in effect, what it was – into four 'Ps': Poverty, Peace, People and the Planet. It's quite a useful aide memoire. But it is also, really,

a bit too glib. What I would like to do now is to examine whether, and if so how, that “mission statement”, underpinned by the realities of the global Church as we understand them, has been put into practice over the last year by the Pope and the global Holy See network.

Putting Papal ‘foreign policy’ into action

There has been no shortage of statements from Pope Francis about poverty. It is central to Evangelii Gaudium, and clearly central to the Pope’s own reading of the gospel. Intimately linked to the dignity of the individual human being, the Pope encapsulated his own vision for a decent life most succinctly in his letter to the Prime Minister, David Cameron, before the Lough Erne G8 Summit last July. “Every economic and political theory or action”, wrote Pope Francis, “must set about providing each inhabitant of the planet with the minimum wherewithal to live in dignity and freedom, with the possibility of supporting a family, educating children, praising God and developing one’s own human potential. This is the main thing: in the absence of such a vision, all economic activity is meaningless”. But in terms of what one might call ‘foreign policy’, the Pope’s most striking intervention on poverty, the vulnerable and the marginalised – and where we have seen the network following up – is in the area of human trafficking.

On 8 July last year, the Pope visited the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, his first trip outside his Rome diocese since his election in March. He was aware of the daily dramas faced by migrants from North Africa arriving here. It was also a personal decision, and prophetically pre-dated the tragedy the following October when hundreds of migrants were drowned when their boat was shipwrecked off the island’s coast. In fact, Lampedusa has been the first port of call of large numbers of migrants from Africa and the Middle East for some years, and many others have died in the over-crowded and rickety boats. Sant’Egidio, a Catholic organisation which champions immigrants’ rights, estimates that almost 20,000 people have died since 1998 attempting to cross the Mediterranean. The Pope laid a wreath at sea, met a group of refugees, and celebrated mass at a sports arena on the island. More importantly, he used his homily to criticise those who stood by while others suffered – what he referred to in a now famous phrase as “the globalisation of indifference” caused by “the culture of well-being… that makes us insensitive to the cries of others”. He quoted God’s question to Cain: “where is your brother?”, and closed with a prayer for forgiveness; for those with indifference towards their brothers and sisters; and “for those who with their decisions at the global level have created situations that lead to these tragedies”.

This was powerful stuff, and galvanised a response. The Italian government immediately tabled the issue of migration and trafficking at EU ministerial level discussions. The President of the European Commission visited Lampedusa shortly afterwards. The International Organisation for Migration immediately contacted the Holy See to explore how it could work better with them to respond to migration and people trafficking. And the Pope used his convening power to organise an international gathering at the Pontifical Academy of Social

Sciences at the Vatican the following November to address the issue of modern slavery and produce a set of practical recommendations which different organisations are following up. One result of the Pope's concern will be a further gathering next month in the Vatican, organised by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. This will bring together civil authorities, law enforcement agencies and religious leaders from around 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, to hammer out practical ways in which religious networks and police forces can work together better, more effectively, and in a way that focuses on supporting the 'victim', against human trafficking. It is a striking example of the Holy See network "striving to make society more humane and just".

In terms of the Holy See's engagement in international politics, there is over the last year no better example of "building peace" than Syria. Some of you may have participated in the day of fasting and 'prayer for peace in Syria, the Middle East and the world' that Pope Francis proclaimed for 7 September last year. You will remember the context. There had been a terrible chemical weapons attack on civilians and children in a district of Damascus, almost certainly perpetrated by the Assad regime, breaking all norms of civilised behaviour and international law. Western countries were considering how they should respond. The Pope's Angelus message in which he invited people in Rome and across the world – "fellow Christians, followers of other religions, and all men of good will" – to participate in the day of prayer was his third appeal for peace in Syria in a week.

The impact of the day of prayer was extraordinarily powerful. I remember Italian television covering it live. Muslim leaders responded positively. Catholic politicians in particular, in this country and elsewhere, were clearly and deeply moved, as we saw in the interventions in the Parliament at Westminster in subsequent days. And again, as with human trafficking, Pope Francis did not leave Holy See action to a single, Papal intervention. The Holy See Foreign Minister, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, called in ambassadors accredited to the Holy See to set out a plan of action for Syria that the Holy See was circulating at the UN. Pope Francis wrote to President Putin, as the Chair of the G20 group then meeting in Moscow, to urge world leaders to lay aside differences and "to renew commitment to a peaceful solution". It is no coincidence,

I think, that President Putin visited Pope Francis in November chiefly to discuss the situation in the Middle East; nor that Secretary of State Kerry did the same in early January; nor indeed that the Holy See was invited to the Geneva 2 talks that began later that month. The Foreign Office Minister of State for the Middle East, Hugh Robertson, was in the Vatican only last week to discuss with the Holy See ways in which more pressure might be brought to bear on the Syrian government to permit greater humanitarian access for the thousands of Syrian families trapped in areas of conflict under the control or bombardment of the Assad regime. He also discussed with the Holy See what more we might do to help buttress the hard-pressed Christian communities in the region. Sadly, we are still a long way from peace in

Syria. But the Holy See's policy towards the conflict has been clear, consistent and coherent with Pope Francis's message to diplomats of March 2013.

Our third reference point, building bridges, is, in a sense, hardwired into the DNA of the Holy See global network. We see it in the Central African Republic, where the Archbishop of Bangui has played a brave and significant role in bringing together Muslim and other Christian leaders to ensure safe haven for civilians of all faiths caught up in the fighting, and to work together against those trying to exploit religious differences to maximise conflict under the banner of sectarianism. When the Pope travels to the Holy Land in May, each of his principal stops will provide an opportunity to deliver messages about the divides we need to cross in order to live in peace: the importance of good and reciprocal inter religious dialogue when he is in Amman, the need for peoples scarred by decades of conflict to come together for mutual benefit when he is in Bethlehem, and the need for better understanding between Christians and Jews, and between Christians of different denominations, when he is in Jerusalem. Inter-religious relationships are very much a key element in the Holy See's bridge building engagement.

But so are more secular events. On 1 March, addressing the situation in Ukraine at the Angelus, the Pope reached out to the Ukrainians themselves – "it is my wish that the citizens of the country strive to overcome misunderstandings and to build the future of the nation together" – as well as international leaders, "to support every initiative on behalf of dialogue and concord." In a world of mistrust and suspicion of the motives or perceived interests of others, such an approach can sometimes lead to frustration. 'Why is the Pope not doing more', people ask, 'than "just" praying for peace and dialogue'? The United Kingdom public position on Ukraine, for example, is somewhat more forceful. I believe the response lies in the Holy See's recognition that it might help to build the bridges, but it cannot force people to cross them. Sometimes its strict sense of neutrality will, inevitably, lead to complaints that the Holy See cannot decide which side it should take in a conflict, even if that seems to us or others to be obvious. At a time of centenary commemorations of WWI, it is worth remembering that the Holy See and Pope Benedict XV received considerable opprobrium from both Entente and Central Powers precisely because it did not take sides, and was in fact the only international actor consistently to argue for peace and dialogue. In a sense, I think that this illustrates well the self-imposed limits the Holy See places upon itself when dealing with the international community. If it is to address the universal human family, it cannot take sides. At the United Nations, it doesn't vote, or sign political declarations. One of the roles of a bridge builder is to ensure that even the heaviest loads can cross, and that the bridge remains open for all comers.

As far as protecting creation is concerned, the Pope has been outspoken about aspects of the relationship between man and the planet. His message on World Environment Day on 5 June last year, was the first time he used the phrase "the culture of waste" to describe the

systemic imbalance in what he terms human ecology. He talked about the need for “the members of the human family” to be “grounded in our common responsibility for the earth”. Similar messages were delivered in Evangelii Gaudium, and there is a lot of talk in the Holy See about the likelihood of a Papal encyclical on man’s relationship to the planet.

That is important teaching. But again, as with other international issues of priority for the Holy See, we have also seen the global Catholic network respond in ‘policy’ terms. In this case, it was the turn of the Caritas Internationalis confederation of 164 members to lead from its headquarters in Rome by launching its first ever global campaign, “One Human Family, Food for All”, in December last year. The objective is ambitious – to eradicate hunger by 2025. A vital aspect of the campaign will be advocacy work and lobbying at the United Nations, especially the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and with national governments, to ensure that the post-2015 sustainable development goal negotiations give a voice to poor farmers, understand the impact of developments like agro-fuels on food production, and consider alternative policies in line with the Pope’s aim to end “the culture of waste”. Pope Francis recorded a video message for the launch, in which he urged a better and more efficient use of the world’s resources to ensure no one would go hungry. I am sure SCIAF is already playing its part in the campaign. And it is no surprise that the Foreign Secretary’s Climate Change Envoy, the former Chief Scientist Sir David King, was in Rome just last Thursday to talk to Holy See officials. What we are seeing is the Holy See mobilising the Papal voice and the reach of the Caritas network to reinforce its voice in the corridors of the UN and make an impact on an issue of paramount importance to human civilisation.

Conclusions

So what do I conclude from this brief and far from comprehensive tour of Papal diplomacy in the first year of the Pontificate of the first Jesuit Pope? First, that we are seeing the development of a more proactive, energetic engagement with the major global issues of our time, using all the resources of the capillary network that the Holy See has at its disposal, as well as a full range of instruments: diplomatic engagement, speeches, visits, letters, campaigning, conferences, mobilising local Church networks, and NGO operations. Second, that this engagement is based on a clear set of priorities, outlined by Pope Francis right at the beginning of his mandate: our four reference points, his ‘foreign policy’ mission statement. Third, that the personal character and beliefs of the Pope himself, imbued as they are by his understanding of the Gospel and Catholic Church teaching, his evangelising mission to the universal human family, and especially by his Jesuit formation, are significant and essential elements in the Holy See’s outreach to the world. Fourth, that the Pope’s own global impact is a powerful multiplying factor in the voice of the Holy See as it expands its global ‘foreign policy’ role, especially in terms of communicating the message to the world’s media. And fifth, that we are already seeing very practical manifestations of this outreach, from Syria to

Ukraine, climate change to human rights; a diplomatic version, if you like, of the Pope's call to the Church to take risks and get out into the streets.

And risks there definitely are. The risk of expectations being raised. Of the Holy See taking on problems – like human trafficking, or global food security – that it cannot hope to resolve on its own without close interaction with other actors, and the inevitable compromises that go with it. And even, it has to be said, of the Holy See getting it wrong, through lack of resources, inadequate information, or choosing the wrong partners. It is worth remembering that despite the extraordinary reach of the networks I have described, there are in fact only 50 or so people working on what we would recognise as 'foreign policy' within the Secretariat of State in Rome, on top of the 300 or so staff in Apostolic Nunciatures around the world, compared with the 4,000 British and 10,000 local staff employed by the British Foreign Office.

I think, though, that these are risks worth taking. There are few institutions like the Holy See allied to the global Catholic Church that are capable of taking a universal view of 'the human family'. The British government certainly welcomes a bold Holy See voice in the corridors of international diplomacy, and while there are issues on which we would take a different approach, there is a great deal on which we do agree and can work together. That is, after all, why we have an embassy to the Holy See, and why I am standing before you this evening. Sometimes we would like the Holy See to be more forthright. We occasionally argue that they are taking the wrong line. What we must continue to bear in mind is that the Holy See will never conduct its 'foreign policy' in the same way as other states. We always have to remember that it is a very different beast from the 193 member states of the United Nations. And, in that sense, that is why we have to return to the Pope's address to the Nuncios last June. There, he described the work of his Papal 'ambassadors' as "a continuous pilgrimage … a life on the road, but always with Jesus Christ who holds you by the hand". That, in a nutshell, describes Holy See diplomacy under Pope Francis, and is why, even when it appears to be operating on the same field, it will always draw on different inspiration and impulses from the diplomacy of nations. We shall hear a great deal more about the Holy See's global engagement before this Pontificate is over.

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