SOVEREIGNTY, SUPRANATIONALISM, AND SOFT POWER: THE HOLY SEE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

By Timothy A. Byrnes

The Holy See is a pervasive participant in international relations. Its unique legal status, its institutional reach through its leadership of the ubiquitous transnational Catholic Church, and its especially prominent moral megaphone combine to provide its singular leader, the Roman Catholic Pope, with remarkable access to multiple layers of global politics. This has long been true, of course, and Popes have played significant roles in all sorts of international political processes over the centuries. But the fact that this is still the case, despite the presumed secularizing effects of the Westphalian state system and the complex dynamics of modernity is a remarkable testament to the depth and stability of the Holy See's and Pope's political status. In some ways, indeed, we are seeing the Holy See and the Pope playing today even broader roles in international relations than they did in the past. The affirmation of the Pope's legal status on the global stage, the strengthening of the Pope's centralized institutional role in the Roman Catholic Church, and the intensity of the media's focus on the papacy's global celebrity have all reinforced the prominence and significance of a political actor who might have been expected, as the saying goes, to fade away by now.

This article will begin with an examination of the Holy See as a non-territorial, sovereign actor in international diplomacy. Casual observers may have a vague notion that the Pope participates in the diplomatic element of international relations, but most of those observers probably believe that this is grounded in the Pope's leadership of a microstate called Vatican City. This is incorrect, as incorrect as the common shorthand of referring to the Pope's diplomatic outposts around the world (182 at time of writing) as "Vatican Embassies." These 182 countries do not have diplomatic relations with Vatican City; they have diplomatic relations with the Holy See (Arangio-Ruiz 1996; Araujo 2001; Barbato 2013; Bathon 2001; Troy 2016). The Vatican City State, as such, does participate in some limited international institutional arrangements related directly to territoriality, such as the International Postal Union. But, by and large, the Pope does not act through formal diplomatic channels as the sovereign ruler of the Vatican City State

Timothy A. Byrnes is Charles A. Dana Professor of Political Science at Colgate University. He received a B.A. from LeMoyne College, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Cornell University. His books include *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, *Transnational Catholicism in Postcommunist Europe*, and *Reverse Mission: Transnational Religious Communities and the Making of US Foreign Policy.*

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(although he is that); he acts through formal diplomatic channels as the embodiment of the Holy See, as the leader, in other words, of "the supreme organ of government of the [Catholic] Church" (Cardinale 1976, 85).

This status of the Holy See as a juridical actor in international affairs has a long and complex history that I will not recount here (Graham 1959; Duchesne 1908; Hanson 1987). Suffice it to go back only as far as 1929 and the signing of the Lateran Accords by Benito Mussolini for the unified state of Italy and Pope Pius XI for the Catholic Church (Geraud and Pertinax 1929; Kertzer 2014). For many centuries, successive Popes had ruled the so-called Papal States, stretching the Church's "temporal power" across much of central Italy. This territory had been lost by 1929 to the processes of unification and consolidation of the Italian state throughout the Mediterranean peninsula. Indeed from 1870 on, three individual Popes spent over a half century as "prisoners of the Vatican," never leaving the Apostolic Palace and its immediate environs in order to graphically illustrate their refusal to accept the loss of "their" territory.

The agreements signed by Pius and Il Duce in 1929 carved out 113 acres in Rome as a "territory" under the "leadership" of the papacy. More specifically, Italy formally recognized that the Holy See has "full ownership, exclusive and absolute power, and sovereign jurisdiction over the Vatican." The understanding, at the time and since, is that the territorial integrity and legal autonomy of Vatican City exist as the logistical and geographic guarantors of the integrity and autonomy of the Holy See itself. Rule over a microstate in Rome is not the source of the Pope's legal and diplomatic standing. But rule over that microstate is the necessary condition for the endurance of that legal and diplomatic standing. The Pope is a "juridical actor" in international relations as the embodiment of the hierarchical leadership of the Catholic Church. Vatican City was created in order to make sure that the Pope would never have his status threatened by having to live and "rule" under some other state's forbearance.

I will turn shortly to the significance of this legal status, and to the many ways in which the Holy See participates, as a non-territorial sovereign entity, in diplomatic relations. But I want to stress from the beginning that this is not the only way that the Pope and the Holy See participate in world politics. I want also to draw our attention to the ways in which the Pope is able to transform into political activity and influence the simple fact that he leads a transnational church that is for all intents and purposes present throughout the globe. As the US Embassy to the Holy See once put it in a report to President George W. Bush: "the Vatican is one of the very few sovereign entities that have a presence and reach in virtually every country of the world" (*The Guardian* 2010). This means that the Pope and his Church have "interests" pretty much everywhere, and that they have institutional presence and resources in virtually any political context that one could imagine. Note also how unusual in this context is the term "sovereign" to describe an entity that has "presence and reach in virtually every country of the world."

Moreover, a related significance of this universal presence is that Catholic religious leaders and Catholic communities participate as domestic actors in a wide array of political contexts that can often have international ramifications. To be sure, there are no actual "national" or "autocephalous" churches in the Catholic tradition as there are in the Eastern Orthodox tradition (Meyendorff 1966). Unlike that tradition which encompasses the Russian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and several others, there is in a deep institutional sense only one Roman Catholic Church. What this means in actual ecclesiastical terms is that there is no such actual thing as the Polish Catholic Church or the US Catholic Church or the Nicaraguan Catholic Church. But the experience of Catholic leaders and believers in these three national contexts (each of which we will return to later, by the way) makes the point that "the Pope's Church" (itself an awkward phrase) involves itself at all levels of world politics, as well as at the various structural intersecting points of national politics and international relations.

Finally, I will look here at how the Pope plays a role in world politics as a function of the very fact that he is, well, the Pope. One of the best known human beings on earth, and in the words of a US Embassy report to President Obama, a spiritual leader who "wield[s] an unparalleled moral megaphone" (*The Guardian* 2010a) various Popes at various times have exercised what Nye (2004) has famously termed "soft power." "Hard power" is what we traditionally think of as state capacity, and is based in traditional measures of "military and economic might," and sometimes exercised through "inducements ('carrots') or threats ('sticks')" (5). But Nye defined a "second face of power," that "rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (5). This "soft power," Nye argued, involves "getting others to want the outcomes that you want [by] coopt[ing] people rather than coerc[ing] them." It is, he continued, "the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence" (6). Today's Pope Francis seems particularly interested in playing this aspect of his papal role with gusto. While always careful to couch his pronouncements and interventions in terms of moral teaching rather than political exhortation, the former Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina has aggressively and persistently inserted himself—and by extension the Church he leads—into global policy debates on issues ranging from climate change, to migration, to the role of the family, to the definitions of economic justice and injustice.

Diplomatic Relations

To start with its most formal international role, however, the Holy See currently conducts official diplomatic relations with 182 countries. That means that territorially defined states from Albania to Zimbabwe send ambassadors to Rome to represent their interests formally before the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church and his institutional bureaucracy known as the Roman curia. In return, the Pope sends his own diplomatic representatives, commonly known as nuncios, to capitals in all corners of the globe. These nuncios (who also represent the Pope in his dealings with the Catholic clergy and faithful of a given country) are fully accredited members of a legitimately sovereign entity, and in many national settings they play the ceremonial role of Dean of the local diplomatic corps. On the other side of the coin, ambassadors *to* rather than *from* the Holy See are similarly accredited members of the diplomatic corps, generally working from embassies in Rome, residing in official ambassadorial residences, and working on a regular basis with members of the curial Section for Relations of States in the Secretariat of State in Vatican City.

It is tempting to dismiss all of this official scaffolding as little more than a stage set on which colorfully dressed functionaries play outdated roles in a well-choreographed but not all that meaningful ballet. But such a view would obscure the many ways and many instances in which Popes have actually used the unique access their diplomatic status affords them to bend world affairs at least a bit in their preferred direction. One example involved the Holy See's role in bestowing formal diplomatic relations in 1992 to the breakaway Yugoslav Republics of Croatia and Slovenia. Germany, and then the rest of the European Union, followed closely behind the Holy See's example (in fact Germany formally announced its intentions before the Holy See acted). But the decision by Pope John Paul II to offer recognition to Slovenia and Croatia, and the diplomatic role that his "Foreign Minister," Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, played in acknowledging and legitimizing the independence of the two predominantly Catholic elements of Yugoslavia, were significant political factors at the time (Cowell 1992). The subsequent Croatian Ambassador to the Holy See may be forgiven for a bit of hyperbole in terming Archbishop Tauran's support as "decisive" in terms of bringing about Croatian independence (Sunjic 1999, Personal interview with author, October 16). But less obviously self-interested parties agreed with the general thrust of the Ambassador's judgment. French President Francois Mitterrand, for one, alleged a pro-Croatian conspiracy between the Holy See and Germany, and reportedly told Archbishop Tauran personally that the Holy See's formal diplomatic recognition of independent Croatia and Slovenia was directly responsible for the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation (Weigel 1999, 652–653).

It is interesting to note here, moreover, that this was not a case of the Holy See acting as some sort of disinterested moral arbiter of political processes and structures. To the contrary, Celestine Migliore—now an Archbishop and the Pope's nuncio to Russia, but then the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States—was at the time anything but shy about acknowledging that the Holy See's interest in Slovenia and Croatia's independence was grounded in the fact that the populations of those two Yugoslav Republics were predominantly Roman Catholic. Declaring that it was "normal that the Holy See would intervene in cases where the interests of Catholic states were involved," Migliore admitted (if that is the right word) that "the Holy See's favoring of Catholic communities is natural, normal" (Migliore 1999, Personal interview with author, October 15). A cable from the US Embassy to the Holy See in 2001 captured this wholly unique status when it described in telling terms the primary "'national' self-interest" of the Holy See as seeking "to protect Catholics around the world, its own position of influence, and its vast wealth" (*The Guardian* 2010). Note, again, the telling use of the phrase "national self-interest" to describe the preferences and actions of a transnational, non-territorial religious entity.

The Holy See's diplomatic role, however, goes well beyond the formal matter of legal recognition. A number of years ago, Wikileaks released a huge number of diplomatic cables that shone a unique light on how the US and many other countries conduct international affairs away from the media's lights and cameras. Included in these documents were a number of internal documents from the US State Department that highlighted the depth and breadth of interactions between the US and the Holy See as routed through the relevant embassies in Washington and Rome. So-called scene setters sent by embassy officials in Rome to the White House in anticipation of presidential audiences with Supreme Pontiffs, for example, were full scale reviews of the role played in world affairs by "The Vatican—The Supranational Power."

Particular attention was given by the authors of these memos to "areas in which we can work constructively with the Vatican" as well as "areas in which we should expect continued difficulties." A cable prepared for Barack Obama in 2009, for example, lauded the US President's upcoming visit to "the world's smallest sovereign state, and one with global clout" (*The Guardian* 2010a). The issues mentioned in the "scene setter" ran the gamut from "bioethical issues" and the global "financial crisis" through "food security," "environmental issues," and "arms reduction," to specific national and regional matters such as the "Middle East Peace Process," "Iraq and Christians," "Africa," "Cuba," and "Turkey EU Accession."

Other cables dealt with matters as diverse as the Holy See's potential influence on US–Cuba relations (a subject to which I will return), the legal, political, and financial implications of the Church's sexual abuse scandal in the US and elsewhere, and the possibility that the Bush 43 administration and "the Vatican" could work together in encouraging the international community to ban human cloning, a practice opposed at the time by both President George W. Bush and Pope John Paul II. While this issue might not rise to the status of high international politics, the interesting thing about this particular cable from the Embassy at the Holy See to the State Department was that it focused predominantly on discussion of "the opportunity the Holy See's United Nations (UN) mission had, particularly among predominantly Catholic countries to expand support for [a General Assembly] resolution banning all forms of embryonic cloning." A representative of the Holy See's Secretariat of State, in a consultation with embassy officials, "observed that while the Holy See would concentrate on the moral side of the argument, the US might be able to sway some [UN] missions by being more aggressive in making the scientific case for alternatives to embryonic stem cell research" (*The Guardian* 2010b).

Permanent Observer

I am emphasizing this discussion of votes in the General Assembly in order to highlight the truly remarkable circumstance that the Holy See —a non-territorial sovereign entity—also enjoys the status and access of being an official

Permanent Observer at the UN. One of only two so-designated Permanent Observers (the other being Palestine), this means that the Holy See "has received a standing invitation to participate as [an] observer in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and maintain [a] permanent observer mission at Headquarters" (United Nations 2003). Again, it is important to emphasize here that the entity enjoying this Observer status is the Holy See (the ecclesiastical leadership of the Roman Catholic Church embodied in the Supreme Pontiff) and not the territorial microstate of Vatican City (Chong and Troy 2011; Gratsch 1997). This definitional matter was discussed at length, by the way, at the time the Holy See was welcomed to the UN in 1964. It was agreed by both sides that granting Observer status to Vatican City would lead to an over-emphasis on limited matters related to territorial sovereignty (Cardinale 1976, 256). Admitting the Holy See, on the other hand, would make clear that the Catholic Church, as such, was being welcomed to offer its views and extend its influence to the full range of political, social, and economic issues facing the human family.

In formal terms, being a "Permanent Observer" at the UN means that the Holy See is accorded "the rights and privileges of participation and work of the General Assembly and the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the UN, as well as [other] United Nations conferences" (United Nations 2003). That this is a "privilege" not granted to other religious bodies or other religious or secular non-governmental organizations (NGOs) almost goes without saying. Though the Holy See cannot actually vote in General Assembly sessions, its representatives can participate in debates, have their interventions included in official recordings of proceedings, and co-sponsor resolutions "that make reference to the Holy See." But the clear "inequality of actor-ness," as one account phrased it (Chong and Troy 2011, 339), between the Holy See and other non-territorial entities is most clearly manifest in the fact that the Holy See is welcomed as a full member "state" at UN-sponsored conferences, where much of the UN's most significant work in the contemporary era actually takes place. While in the words of one critic, other NGOs "must collar delegates in hallways and restrooms to make their points" (Omang 2013, 20), Holy See representatives are "automatically considered to be a state for the purpose of the conference" (Abdullah 1996, 1844). The Pope's delegations enjoy full access to conference agendas and reports, and exercise full voting rights in the context of proceedings that often seek to operate by global consensus.

The Global Is Local

As I indicated in the opening section of this article, the international political roles of the Holy See and the Pope stretch far beyond the confines of these formal diplomatic matters, regardless of how remarkable and pervasive they are. The Pope, in addition to his leadership of the global diplomatic corps and the Roman Curia, is also the uncontested central leader of a religious community numbering over a billion souls and present in virtually every corner of the globe. This global community is overseen and led in specific national contexts by Catholic bishops who are themselves members of a global "catholic" episcopacy under the authoritative (in some limited contexts purportedly infallible!) leadership of the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. What this means in practice is that the Holy See's organic connections to local bishops amount to another avenue for participation in relations among states. These local hierarchies can at times be fairly significant players in the domestic political processes of given states. And as a matter of day-to-day "governance" of the Church, the role of local bishops and/or national bishops' conferences is often shaped in significant ways by the levers of authority held at the Vatican. Three brief examples should be sufficient to make this important point.

Poland

The first involves the part that the Polish Pope, John Paul II, played in shaping the deeply significant role that Polish bishops played in the transition to democracy in Poland, and in the relationship that subsequently developed between

Poland and the rest of the "European community." It is by now a truism to argue that the Catholic Church played a significant role in precipitating the downfall of communism in Poland, or at the very least in providing crucial institutional and societal support to the trade union activists and public intellectuals who actually carried out the revolution (Osa 1997). The Catholic Church was for centuries a central player in Polish society and politics, and its role in maintaining relatively free space within which an authentic Polish national identity could withstand the indignities and imperial oppression of Soviet communism has been well documented (Michnik 1993; Szajkowski 1983). But the fact that the Roman Catholic College of Cardinals placed a living embodiment of that national identity on the throne of St. Peter in October 1978 was a crucial factor in how the Church approached communism—from Warsaw no less than from Rome—and in how the Church envisioned the geo-political status of Poland (and the rest of East Central Europe) once the ideological divisions of the European continent had been torn down.

Pope John Paul II used all the levers of his global position to advance the revolutionary events taking place in his homeland. And one of those levers, of course, was the diplomatic relationships that the Pope could engage in with significant state actors like the Reagan Administration in the US. But at the same time, Pope John Paul II also exercised the power of the papacy and influenced events in East Central Europe through his authoritative leadership of the Polish Catholic hierarchy itself. From the moment he accepted his fellow cardinals' summons to occupy the papal throne, Karol Wojtyla, as Pope John Paul II, effectively became the central figure of Polish Catholicism, institutionally and politically. He remained deeply and constantly involved in the ecclesiastical affairs of his home church; he appointed his successor as Archbishop of Krakow and in time the successor to Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski as Polish Primate as well; and just as he acted as Pope to transform the relative conciliation of his predecessor's Ostpolitik into a vision of actual revolution in the Communist states of Europe, so he also moved his brother bishops in Poland to a more open and uncompromising embrace of the possibility of real and lasting change.

Those Polish bishops were not merely the Pope's pawns, of course; they remained participants in the teaching magisterium of the Church in their one right. But over the course of roughly 25 historic years—from the founding of Solidarity in 1980 through Poland's entrance into the European Union in 2004—the political voice of the Catholic Church in Poland was amplified by the megaphone held by their leader at the Holy See and also, in substantive terms, given specific shape by his uncompromising vision of change. And in that way, his own role in these events in European history were shaped not only by Pope John Paul II's extraordinary use of papal diplomacy and soft power, but also by his organic relationship with the Church's leadership structure "on the ground" in Poland and elsewhere in East Central Europe.

The United States

The Holy See has had a long and complex relationship with the US. For much of American history, formal diplomatic relations with "the Vatican" were precluded by a powerful admixture of anti-Catholicism and devotion to a particular understanding of the separation between church and state. Franklin Roosevelt sidestepped these objections during World War II when he appointed Myron Taylor as his "personal emissary" to Pope Pius XII, holed up in a Vatican city–state that was then widely considered an indispensable listening post and Allied geostrategic asset. Harry Truman's efforts after the war to replace Taylor with General Matthew Clark as a formal ambassador to the Holy See came to naught, but in time Ronald Reagan was finally able to establish formal diplomatic relations in 1984. The story of these diplomatic relations is a fascinating one, often told by observers and participants alike (Melady 1994; Rooney 2013; Taylor 1947). But here I want to focus, as in the Polish case, not so much on the formal relationship between the Holy See and the US government, but instead on the relationship between the Holy See and the American Catholic hierarchy, and on how that relationship—and the papacy's authoritative place in it—has provided individual Popes with another avenue in which to participate in global affairs (Byrnes 1991, 92–107).

In the early 1980s, the US Catholic bishops conference embarked upon a formal collective teaching exercise that resulted in 1983 with the promulgation of a "Pastoral Letter" entitled "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response." The subject of the letter was nuclear weapons and the role they ought (or more accurately ought not) to play in US defense policy. Concerned by what they interpreted as a lessening commitment to nuclear arms control by the new Reagan Administration in Washington, and frankly alarmed by what they took to be an increased confidence that nuclear weapons might actually be constructively used in war, the US bishops set out to fulfill the Second Vatican Council's call to apply the lessons of the Gospel to "the signs of the times" by (a) clearly articulating the appropriate principles concerning nuclear weaponry that ought be derived from Catholic teaching on war and peace and (b) applying those principles to some of the most specific and pressing questions facing the US as it continued its decades long nuclear face-off with the Soviet Union.

"The Challenge of Peace" (NCCB/USCC 1984) was a very strongly worded call for a rejection of complacency concerning the threat of nuclear war, and an unambiguous insistence that Catholic teaching—properly understood and appropriately applied—posed a stark challenge to the US government and its policies regarding the possession and/or use of nuclear weapons. Ranging widely across the breadth of US defense doctrine, the American Catholic hierarchy (among other pronouncements) stated that "under no circumstances may nuclear weapons … be used for the purpose of destroying population centers or other predominantly civilian targets"; (532) declared that they did "not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare, on however restricted a scale, can be morally justified" (533); and urged negotiations between the US and the Soviet Union to "halt the testing, production, and deployment of new nuclear systems" (548).

"The Challenge of Peace" still stands as one of the most forthright interventions by the Catholic hierarchy into a public policy debate in the history of the US. But what interests me here is not so much what the bishops had to say, but rather how what they ultimately could say was shaped by Pope John Paul II and other leading officials of the Holy See. More specifically, the American Catholic bishops were powerfully constrained in what they could actually say on this topic by what their Supreme Pontiff had said previously. Catholic bishops are by virtue of their episcopal ordinations members of the collegial magisterium of their Church. But they are not free to articulate Catholic teachings or even applications of Catholic teaching that directly contradict clear statements by the Pope. In this context, that meant that no matter how skeptical the US bishops may have been about the morality of nuclear deterrence as a centerpiece of US defense policy—and they were very skeptical indeed—they were not free to denounce the practice of nuclear deterrence itself. Just a year before the US bishops drafted their pastoral letter, Pope John Paul II had portentously declared that "in current conditions, 'deterrence' based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable" (NCCB/USCC 1984, 539). Despite enormous skepticism concerning the moral appropriateness of deterrence within the US conference, therefore, the final US pastoral letter document could not avoid concluding that "a balance of forces preventing either side from achieving superiority, can be seen as safeguarding" against the danger of nuclear war *and* the independence of vulnerable nations (540). Hemmed in by their Pope, as it were, the US bishops grudgingly offered their "strictly conditioned moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence," while also stressing that they did not "consider it adequate as a long-term basis of peace" (543).

Nicaragua

To be sure, the application of Catholic teaching to specific circumstances can show some legitimate variance from national context to national context. But as the Polish and US examples have illustrated, Popes have at their disposal several levers of internal institutional power that can allow them if they so choose to fundamentally shape those applications in ways that have ramifications in international relations as well as domestic political affairs. Perhaps nowhere was this complex dynamic more clearly played out than in the efforts that Pope John Paul II expended in setting limitations on the influence of Liberation Theology in Latin America.

Liberation Theology is a Catholic mode of thought (and related action) that was born out of the social, economic, and political inequalities of Latin America (Gutierrez 1971). Grounded in the strong belief that the Christian Gospel is inconsistent with the structures and practices that created and sustained these inequalities, and devoted to the so-called preferential option for the poor, Liberation Theology came rather quickly to define for much of the clergy and laity of the region the role that the Catholic Church should play in the revolutions (both real and symbolic) playing out in the 1970s and 1980s across Central and South America.

Pope John Paul II saw two fundamental problems with Liberation Theology, as such. The first was that he rejected any depiction and analysis of societal relations based in an understanding of inevitable conflicts between social classes. Viewing such an understanding as grounded in Marxist thought that he presumed to be antithetical to Christianity, the former Karol Wojtyla of Krakow preferred to work toward the conversion of all participants in social and economic structures and for the reconciliation of individual and communal relationships across class lines (Weigel 1999, 281–287).

Second, John Paul II harbored deep concerns about the legitimacy and appropriateness of what came to be called throughout the region “the people’s church.” First articulated during a period of cozy cronyism between state and church across Latin America, Liberation Theology called for and celebrated so-called Christian Base Communities, small groups of believers who met (often without the “benefit” of clerical leadership) for the purposes of religious consciousness raising, mutual support, and political mobilization. In some contexts, these CBCs became the primary organized articulation of local Catholicism, as groups of laypersons and supportive lower clergy worked to form an expression of Catholicism and “Church” that was often as distinctive politically from local bishops as it was unmoored from those bishops’ formal lines of institutional authority. For Pope John Paul II, all of this represented a dangerous form of independence and autonomy that would challenge the appropriate lines of authority from the Vatican through the episcopacy, just as it would at the same time allow for very different applications of Catholic social teaching to domestic political challenges.

These dynamics were multi-faceted and provocatively complex. I cannot do them justice in a few paragraphs, nor do my purposes here require an attempt to do so. But what I do want to point out is that Pope John Paul II’s efforts to reign in the political and ecclesiastical effects of Liberation Theology led him to use all of the levers of papal authority at his disposal to control and shape from the Holy See the ways in which local bishops, clergy, and laity articulated and applied Catholic teaching. The first and probably the most basic of these levers was the Pope’s purposeful and clearly understood use of his power of episcopal appointment. Indeed, the simple fact that Catholic Popes personally choose and empower each and every bishop across the globe is a crucial element of the institutional centralization that is a defining feature of the Roman Church. In this case, the men that John Paul II chose to replace iconic figures like Archbishop Camara in Brazil or Archbishop Romero in El Salvador were at one in the same time practical reins on the influence of Liberation Theology in those countries and symbolic refutations of it from Rome.

Second, Pope John Paul II made aggressive use of his status as the authoritative voice of the Catholic magisterium to “silence” in practical terms liberationist voices within the Church, while at the same time sending clear signals as to what was an acceptable application of the Gospel and what was an illegitimate distortion of it. Brazilian Franciscan Leonardo Boff was not the only liberation theologian called on the carpet of the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, but his treatment there was surely the most instructive. Informed that the "relativizing logic" at the heart of his book *Church: Charism and Power* "endanger[ed] the doctrine of the faith," Father Boff was sentenced to a year of silence for "adequate reflection," and prohibited from publishing or speaking in public on matters related to his theological work (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1985).

Popes, bishops, and priests had always conflicted with each other on the finer points of theology. The very word "Inquisition" makes the historical background clear. But what was different in the modern era was that a Pope like John Paul II could not only interfere from Rome with publications or statements that he deemed problematic from an institutional or theological point of view. Now, with the possibilities offered by "television and the jet age," a Pope who was inclined to do so could "in effect, replace a local bishop," as one close observer phrased it (Hebblethwaite 1995, 115). The Pope, in other words, could travel to the local setting, publicly admonish local clergy he found wanting, and communicate directly to the local faithful what its clerical leadership was and was not authorized to do or advocate in the name of the Church. In the Spring of 1983, for example, John Paul traveled to Nicaragua and loudly (and I literally mean in the loud voice of a vigorous man) denied the Christian character of the Sandinista revolution, publicly ordered Nicaraguan priests serving in the Sandinista government to "make themselves right with the Church," and engaged in what amounted to a shouting match with Sandinista supporters protesting (during Mass!) his delineation of the ways in which Liberation Theology and the Nicaraguan revolution misappropriated the Catholic Church and its teachings (Weigel 1999, 451–457).

For centuries, local Catholic leaders across Latin America (with the complicity of the Holy See) had firmly placed their Church on the side of the moneyed and propertied interests in a system of systemic inequality and oppression. Obviously, this had enormous political significance in local domestic consequences. The central religious institution of many individual countries was conspiring, as it were, to keep the peasantry and the urban poor powerless and silent. Liberation Theology and its "preferential option for the poor" was (and is) an effort to reorient that emphasis and redress those wrongs by not only placing the instrumentalities of the Church on the side of the dispossessed, but also by preaching that those dispossessed are themselves *the* Church in its deepest meaning, free to organize and act as Christians independent from the Church's hierarchical structures and even in opposition to them if necessary. Pope John Paul II's effort to blunt that reorientation—or at least to channel it in ways more consistent with his own views on political economy and ecclesiology—had significant ramifications in the individual countries like Nicaragua where these struggles were being waged in day-to-day politics. But the Polish Pope's interventions in places like Nicaragua also had global political implications in an era of superpower competition where every national civil conflict was defined at least in part as a constituent element of a bipolar struggle for global influence.

AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, THE POPE'S ROLE IN DEFINING AND DISCUSSING GLOBAL ISSUES IS UNLIKE THAT OF ANY OTHER MORAL LEADER OR CELEBRITY ACTIVIST

Soft Power

The Pope is a global celebrity, and his words and actions receive the media and public attention common to that status. But at a fundamental level, the Pope's role in defining and discussing global issues is unlike that of any other moral leader or celebrity activist. As the embodiment of the sovereign entity known as the Holy See, the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church speaks and acts from the multifaceted legal and institutional platform that I have been describing throughout this article. Pope Francis leads a global church with unparalleled geographic breadth and enormous institutional resources; he also has personal representatives at the UN, sends full participants to global inter-*state* conferences, and maintains bilateral diplomatic relations with state actors of great international scope and significant political influence.

I want to look briefly at three policy areas—climate change, refugee reception, and definition of marriage—and focus on the current Pope's efforts to marshal his institutional, legal, and moral resources in support of an exercise of soft power in favor of his preferred policy emphases. In this context, the actual effects of the Pope's words and actions—like all effects of "soft power"—are notoriously hard to gauge. Nevertheless, his every utterance is intensely covered by the global media, and his voice is greatly magnified by the institutional mechanisms and sovereign standing of his global church. One scholar (Casanova 1997) has called the Pope (any Pope) "the first citizen of the emerging global civil society" (131) and the current Pope is an active participant in several sharp public debates that at the moment straddle the borders of national policy and global norms. In that structural context, his own global standing and national institutional reach make him a moral leader whose exercise of soft power is very much worthy of our attention.

Climate Change

Given the dire warnings emanating from the transnational scientific community, it is no wonder that Catholic Popes have been speaking out for some time on this issue and its grave significance for the future of humankind. But Pope Francis has upped the ante, as it were, in a number of ways. For one thing, his statements have been more frequent and much sharper in tone than any of his predecessors were. The reality of climate change and the need to address it aggressively could be defined, in fact, as one of the central emphases of Francis' pontificate to date. The Pope has repeatedly referred to faithful stewardship of "God's creation" as one of the central responsibilities of all authentic Christians in our modern world. And in a formal encyclical entitled *Laudato Si'* Francis placed himself and the Holy See squarely on the side of those calling for profound changes in the relationship between humankind and "our common home" (Laudato Si' 2017).

What makes Francis' various statements on climate and stewardship distinctive to him and most notable, however, is the ways in which he applies to the issue his moral voice as the authoritative leader of a large, global religious community. Commemorating 2016's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, for example, Francis, like many other world leaders, denounced the role that human beings are playing in contaminating the earth and squandering its resources. But turning to explicitly religious terminology that has particular resonance and significance within his own Catholic tradition, the Pope also decreed that "to commit a crime against the natural world is [to commit] a sin against ourselves and a sin against God" (Richardson 2016). Moreover, Pope Francis has repeatedly defined the scope of this "sin" as not only a violation of the Christian responsibility to steward creation, but also as a violation of *the* central Christian social obligation to protect and minister to the poor. "The world's poor," he has said, "though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact" (Richardson 2016). In his most authoritative statement on the subject, *Laudato Si'*, the Pope listed many ways in which various effects of the climate changes caused by the consumption practices of the complacent rich pose particular dangers to the most innocent and most vulnerable members of the human community. And he pointedly lauded "those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest" (Laudato Si' 2017). The first Pope from the Global South has made abundantly clear that climate change ought to be a central concern for all Christians because in his view insatiable appetites for fossil-fueled energy and purposeful disregard for the catastrophic despoiling of air and water are disrespectful responses to God's gift of creation. The Argentine Pope has made equally clear, however, that such appetites and such disregard are also tantamount to unconscionable attacks on the lives and well-being of the very people whom Christians should actively be seeking to protect, nurture, and love.

Refugees

If possible, the ways in which Francis defines the world's contemporary refugee and migration crises, and the ways in which he calls Catholics and other Christians to respond to the "stranger" at their door is even more radical in tone, even more concretely political in effect, and even more deeply grounded in the central tenets of his religion than his comments on the environment are. As he put it most bluntly in an apparently direct response to Donald Trump's oft-stated plan to build a "big beautiful wall" on the US border with Mexico: "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel" (Yardley 2016). Francis does not speak on this issue as a political leader seeking nuance or consensus on a complex policy matter; he speaks, instead, as a religious leader articulating what he sees as the clear policy implications of a central religious teaching of his Church. Particularly in the European context where Britain's UKIP, France's National Front, and the governments of countries like Hungary and Poland have been fomenting political opposition to refugees and other migrants, the Pope has stood as a prominent voice for the simple proposition that Christians *must* as a matter of religious obligation welcome vulnerable strangers when they arrive at their borders.

"Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity," the Pope declared in a representative statement in 2013. "They are children, women, men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons" (Allen 2013). Migrants, he said during a dramatic visit to the Greek island of Lesbos in Spring of 2016, "are first of all persons who have faces, names, and individual stories," members of a human race "that before all else recognizes others as brothers and sisters" (Winters 2016). Christians *are* their brothers and sisters' keeper, the Pope is saying, and refugees are just that, brothers and sisters in need. And although the Pope does not have to satisfy a national constituency or navigate electoral politics when he addresses the question of how refugees should be treated by European states, he does have sovereign instruments at hand that allow him to offer symbolic examples of how he believes elected leaders of those states ought to behave. During his visit to Lesbos, for example, he pointedly offered three Syrian families legal asylum at the Holy See, and then ferried those refugees back to Vatican City on his plane (Witte and Faiola 2016). Very few political leaders would be free to articulate such an uncompromising position on this freighted issue. And no other religious leader would have such a legal instrument of sovereignty at his disposal.

Definition of Marriage

Lest I leave the impression that the Pope raises his sovereign religious voice only in support of policy positions associated with progressive social movements, it is also important to note the ways in which the Pope uses the prominent platforms of his celebrity and institution to advance a number of socially conservative causes as well. During Francis' pontificate to date, the most prominent example of this phenomenon has been the Pope's efforts to resist the re-definition of marriage to include same-sex unions. Many misunderstood the Pope's intentions in this regard when early in his pontificate he was quoted as saying "Who am I to judge" in the context of discussing homosexuality. The problem, however, was that Francis was responding to a very specific question about same-sex attraction among clergy—not about homosexuality in general—and that he was engaging in a particularly colorfully expressed reiteration of the Church's distinction between same-sex preference as a personal identity and same-sex activity and relationships as a concrete circumstance (Donadio 2013).

Regardless of his views on sexual preference as a matter of personal morality and Church doctrine, however, the Pope has been unambiguous in his affirmation of his Church's teaching that "there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family" (Crux Staff 2015). And in an action that made clear whose side the Catholic Pope is on, as it were, in the global culture war over marriage equality, Francis released a joint statement of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church expressing "regret that other forms of cohabitation have been placed on the same level as this union [between a man and a woman]."

Conclusion

Sovereignty, supranationalism, and soft power, this is the unique constellation of resources and status that the Holy See brings to its participation in global politics. Nearly a century removed from the Lateran Accords, Catholic pontiffs still preside over an independent city–state at the center of Rome that serves as the guarantor of the broadly recognized sovereignty of the Holy See. On the basis of that sovereignty, Pope Francis, like his predecessors, is able to engage in bilateral diplomatic relationships with most countries in the world, participate actively in multi-lateral institutions and conferences, and work through "official" channels of all kinds to advance the interests of his Church as he defines them. It is, to put it bluntly, an astounding platform for a religious leader, any religious leader, to possess.

At the same time, the Catholic Pontiff also sits atop a transnational Church of unparalleled scope and breadth. Often deeply enmeshed in the cultural and political lives of individual countries, Catholic Bishops Conferences and individual prelates play significant roles in national contexts as diverse as Poland, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and yes, the US. The close relationship between these national actors and the Holy See dramatically multiplies the presence of the latter on the world stage, and offers the papacy the opportunity to affect world politics by influencing the non-Church actors who are the central players on the global stage. It is not just that certain national political processes cannot be fully understood without reference to the role that the "local" Catholic Church plays in them; it is also that global debates and global diplomacy are themselves arenas of participation by the Catholic Church because national delegations to them come from places where the voice of the Holy See is clearly and powerfully expressed.

Finally, of course, the role of the Holy See is shaped and in some ways defined by the development of the modern papacy into a megaphone of global celebrity and soft power. Catholic historians will long debate the effects that John Paul II (the second longest serving Pope in history) had (and will have) on the institutional structures and doctrinal strictures of his Church. But what already seems beyond contradiction is that John Paul II's decision to define his papacy through constant travel and aggressive use of his own personal presence as an instrument of institutional centralization has had world historic consequences for the nature of the papal role in global politics.

I want to end this examination of the Pope's participation in global politics with a brief look at a circumstance that highlights both the complexity of the political dynamics at the heart of contemporary international affairs and the variety of the tools available to the transnational Catholic Church for ensuring its participation in those complex dynamics. I am referring to the Holy See's role in facilitating the resumption of formal diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba. The Holy See has served from time to time as a forum of international mediation in cases where parties to a dispute have either sought or accepted the "good offices" of the Pope as a forum, as it were, for conflict resolution. But the Holy See's role in facilitating talks between the US and Cuba illustrated with particular clarity the three paths of political participation I have been highlighting in this article. Moreover, this case also shows how these three paths can intersect with each other, and place the Holy See and the Pope at the very center of international political processes of great significance. The Holy See had diplomatic relations with the US and Cuba; local Catholic leaders in both countries played significant political roles in their respective political settings and were able to cooperate with each other as "brother bishops" in the transnational Catholic Church; and a determined Latin American Pope, trusted on all sides, had made clear through his own prominent public statements that he viewed the continuing estrangement across ninety miles of the Florida Straits to be politically nonsensical and morally unacceptable.

There is no need for me to rehearse here the tortured history of relations between the USA and

Cuba. Suffice it to say that by 2010 fifty years of fractured diplomatic relations, trade embargo, and mutual recrimination rendered the US–Cuban relationship one of the most dysfunctional bilateral relationships in the world. We now know that Barack Obama came to office in 2009 hoping to engineer a breakthrough that would restore relations with Cuba and remove from the agenda of US foreign policy (and domestic politics) one of the most intractable and confounding issues in American public life (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 418–453). Desire for a change in policy, however, was in the case of Cuba not nearly enough. Faced with enduring truculence and hostility from Havana, and hemmed in by a domestic political context that made any attempt even to communicate with the Castros unacceptable, Obama spent frustrating years probing any and all opportunities to open channels to the Cuban government that might lead to direct discussions, negotiations, and agreements. In this context, it is not surprising that President Obama ultimately accepted offers of mediation from the Holy See that included personal intervention by the Pope, clandestine meetings in Rome, and perhaps most importantly, high-level courier service by Cuban and American prelates (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 442–447).

In our age of instantaneous electronic communication—and constant threats of hacking—it is crucial to acknowledge in this case how difficult and politically risky it was for the Presidents of Cuba and the US to communicate with each other directly. Barack Obama could not call Fidel (and then Raul) Castro on the phone or e-mail them in order to suggest a thaw in relations; nor could he rely on usual diplomatic channels—even non-direct back channels—to signal a new willingness to engage with his Cuban counterparts. Any perception within politically important communities in the US that the American President was approaching the Cuban government and proposing a change in the status of the relationship between the two countries held the very real possibility of blowing up in the president's face.

But the Holy See enjoyed formal diplomatic relations with both the US and Cuba. The Pope could and did communicate in complete diplomatic confidence with both sides of the fractured relationship, encouraging them "to resolve humanitarian questions of common interest, including the situation of certain prisoners, in order to initiate a new phase in relations" (Hooper 2014). At the same time, as the first Lain American Pope in history, Francis had a particular interest in the position of Cuba on the world stage (as well as of course the status of the Church within the Communist state), and a clear desire to use his moral authority and the trust he enjoyed from both sides to advance the potential for an historic agreement. And once the Pope had taken the initiative of encouraging President Obama and President Castro to consider forging a new path, the transnational networks at the very heart of the modern Catholic Church were set in motion.

Jaime Cardinal Ortega of Havana, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick of Washington DC, and Sean Cardinal O'Malley of Boston are prominent examples of the complex identities and complex interconnections that define the modern Catholic hierarchy, identities, and interconnections that present unique opportunities for meaningful participation in International Relations. Shuttling from Rome to Washington to Havana, these three members of an exclusive transnational College of Cardinals carried and delivered messages of encouragement from their Supreme Pontiff, and received messages of wary willingness from leaders of two countries that had not had direct relations in over a half century (Hooper 2014; Vallely 2015).

Most news accounts of the Catholic Church's role in the US–Cuba thaw stress Pope Francis' personal interventions with Presidents Obama and Castro, and the Holy See's role as host to direct secret talks in Rome that led to long sought after prisoner exchanges that opened a path to resumption of diplomatic relations. Those events are clear testament to the diplomatic resources the Holy See could bring to the process and to the personal standing of Pope Francis in both Washington and Havana. But the role of the Catholic Church was more complex (and frankly more interesting) than even those emphases would imply. One of the most indispensable resources the Holy See was able to provide in this context was the service of highly trusted intermediaries who were at one and the same time citizens of the states involved and officials of the institution providing the mediation. Cardinals McCarrick and O'Malley are Americans (or perhaps, in this context, I should say *estadounidenses*) and also bishops of a global church. Cardinal Ortega is their close institutional colleague and a Cuban citizen. And all three have deep personal and professional ties with Pope Francis who heads a sovereign entity that maintains formal diplomatic relations with Cuba and the US. The story of the US–Cuba rapprochement is multi-faceted and should not be reduced in any way to the mediating role of the Holy See and members of the College of Cardinals. But the diplomatic levers that the Holy See could push in two world capitals, the prominent place that the Pope plays on the global stage, and the fascinating institutional relationships at the heart of the Holy See's leadership of the transnational Catholic Church offered Presidents Obama and Castro uniquely relevant "connections" through which they could bring a major diplomatic initiative to fruition. ❖

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