A Universal Sacred Mission and the Universal Secular Organization: The Holy See and the United Nations

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ABSTRACT

Today, the Holy See has formal diplomatic relations with almost all nations around the globe as well as with the United Nations where it holds the curious position of a Permanent Observer. Representing a universal sacred mission, the Holy See views the UN as one of the most important approaches to international relations to pursue its aims. Vatican diplomats have thus been at the forefront of lobbying for human dignity at the UN in various conferences and even Popes have directly addressed the UN’s General Assembly. In examining relations between the Holy See and the UN, at least two issues are obvious and of primary importance: first, both institutions share a universal approach: the latter to represent all nations of the world and the Holy See to represent all Catholics. Furthermore, both preach to their constituencies that they represent a universal idealist mission – to pursue peace and work towards the universalization of human rights. Second, the Holy See enjoys a Permanent Observer status within the UN and, also a seemingly privileged status among all other religious communities. By adopting short studies of the Holy See’s interventions in three dimensions of human rights advocacy at the UN, along with its supplement of the UN’s mission in correcting capitalist development, the paper concludes that the Catholic religion has returned in a role that reaffirms the possibilities of enhancing society on a globalist scale rather than merely reinforcing an international society of sovereign states.

KEY WORDS
Catholic Church, Holy See, International Relations, Pope, Religion, United Nations, Vatican

1 The authors would like to thank Mr Gustav Boëthius from the Rajaratnam School’s MSc Strategic Studies programme for rendering invaluable research assistance for the preparation of this paper.
The relationship between the Holy See and the United Nations (UN) tends to revolve around the disparity between sovereign powers and extra-sovereign powers. This is despite some simple comparisons between the UN and the Vatican City State. On the occasion of his visit to the United Nations (UN) in 2008 Pope Benedict XVI drew an interesting parallel between the United Nations Headquarters in New York City and the Vatican. Basically, he called them both small entities with world-wide influence. The 110-acre Vatican City with a population of some 800 people is the smallest independent nation-state worldwide. The UN headquarters, which is international territory, is about 18 acres and has no permanent residents. Despite the size differential, Pope Benedict XVI stressed a more idealistic point: “the worldwide mission to promote peace and justice” of the UN and the “universal mission and apostolate” of the Church. Indeed, both “organizations” claim to represent a universal mission according to universal standards. The UN holds in the first four articles of its Charter:

1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;
2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;
3. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and
4. To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

Through the language of religious universalism, the Roman Catholic Church (“the Church”) holds in its “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” Lumen Gentium—a central document of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)—that Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of

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2 UN News Centre, *Vatican City and UN Headquarters have geographical similarities, says Pope* (18 April 2008); available from http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26384&Crl=pope&Cr1=#; Internet. The Catholic Church has some 1.13 billion followers; the population of the UN member states – almost all states on earth – is about 6.6 billion.
previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.\(^3\) The diplomatic comparisons between the two organizations are clear. Both are concerned with forging unity among the human race and mitigating conflict among nation-states \textit{qua} peoples. But unlike the UN, the Catholic Church possesses an extra-temporal dimension to its mission to convert souls to Catholicism. As a recognized entity in international law, the Holy See \textit{exercises} firstly, sovereignty in its physical trappings as the \textit{government} of the Vatican City State, as well as the extra-sovereign powers of guiding the transnational flock of Catholic Christians throughout the globe living under various national jurisdictions. Furthermore, the Holy See aims to fulfil its religious mission to non-Catholics by offering an ethical voice amongst temporal political debates regardless of their legal, historical, sovereign or cultural location. This aspect of the Holy See’s diplomacy stokes controversy, resentment and even respect from some of its detractors. The UN, in serving as the ultimate congregation of diplomatic intercourse among 192 of the world’s sovereign nation-states and numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), offers a perfect entry point for steering temporal sovereignties and their populations towards moral clarity. As the official website of the Holy See’s Mission to the UN explains it, ‘Political support or material aid they [nation-states and their peoples] will certainly not expect. What they do seek is what the Holy See, by its very nature and tradition, can offer: orientation and spiritual inspiration that should animate the life of nations and their mutual relationships.’\(^4\)

This paper therefore looks at the multidimensional interactions between the Holy See and the UN in order to assess the nature and ramifications of the relationship between two ecumenical organizations in international politics. Consequently, this paper will also address the theoretical possibilities of this study in pursuing a dialogue with the English School of international relations theory. A survey of existing literature under the label of ‘the Vatican’s foreign relations’ suggests that there is a dearth of research in the area of its relations with the UN. Books have been published on the Vatican’s expressive powers in international relations or on its key bilateral relations with the Italian state, the United States, the erstwhile Soviet


bloc, and China.\textsuperscript{5} Others focus upon the personal legacies of the most widely travelled Pope in history, John Paul II, and cover the Pope’s foreign policy roles as an adjunct to his wider role in international politics.\textsuperscript{6} There is however only one work to date that treats the subject of the controversy arising over the Vatican’s chameleon ability to switch between church and state in representing its causes in UN sponsored conferences.\textsuperscript{7} This work concluded strongly upon the view that the Vatican City State should be reduced to NGO status since it lags behind the criteria of fully-accredited nation-states, and yet exercises disproportionate political influence. This was, after all, a perspective from the legal and diplomatic fields published in the \textit{Columbia Law Review}. This paper attempts to plumb the depths of the Holy See’s relationship with the UN by surveying its activism in two areas: firstly, the Holy See’s religious perspectives on human rights, encompassing debates on women’s rights, reproductive rights, children’s rights, and the struggle against racism; and secondly, the Holy See’s moral critique of capitalism, and concomitantly its advancement of charity as justice. These two sets of themes have been selected by scanning the Vatican’s news profile through the UN’s official website \url{www.un.org}. These issues also resonate in mainstream news coverage worldwide. Ultimately, the conclusion will suggest that the Holy See’s diplomacy, framed as it were between religious and temporal dimensions of its global mission, offers some insights into the question of forging society among states reaching for moral rectitude among their citizens. The strength of papal diplomacy lies in its spiritual force, transfigured into temporal quasi-governmental power that virtually enlarges its impact, hence its fungible power lies in discourse. This paper commences its arguments with a brief treatment of why the Holy See is the official directing agency of the Vatican City State’s foreign relations even though most academic, legal and media sources use both labels interchangeably.


1 The Holy See in international relations

Before taking a closer look at the relationship between the Holy See and the UN several clarifications have to be outlined. The most pressing one among them is the legal definition of the Holy See and the Vatican. In terms of international law, the Vatican (or the “State of the Vatican City”) and the Holy See are two different entities, each with international legal personality. The connection between these two is the personal-union of the Pope who is, at the same time supreme head of the Roman Catholic Church as well as head of state of the (territorial) state of the Vatican City. The foreign relations of the Vatican City state are managed by the Holy See, which in operational terms means the latter’s Secretary of State and his subordinate, a Secretary of Relations with States. There are also diplomats from other states who are accredited to the Holy See, but who are not physically resident at the Vatican City State. In international relations the Holy See is therefore an actor sui generis. This oldest religious and political institution poses some problems to social scientists. This is because, as the English School scholar Herbert Butterfield observed, religion and religious actors are most often approached from the “outside” rather than from “inside.”

In 1929, the Lateran Treaties, between the Holy See and the government of Italy, allowed the Holy See, in the form of the international legal personality of the “State of the Vatican City,” to join the international society of states. This was done without straining the principles and primary institutions which constitute the international society (like territoriality, sovereignty, international law, balance of power, etc.) too much. This integration into international society produced two basic conditions: First, the Holy See has been integrated into a world of states. The responsibilities and various tasks streaming from this (world) political system of states are carried out by the Holy See till this day quite comprehensively, for example in engaging in active diplomacy in favour of multilateralism and international law. Second, it illustrated a possible way of letting religions “back” on the

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10 “International institutions” in terms of the English School is something rather different compared to other theoretical approaches. They are historically evolved and not intentionally constructed or designed practices which are constitutive for the actors. Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161–204. See also Nicholas G. Onuf, “Institutions, Intentions and International Relations”, *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002). Sovereignty therefore is a primary institution of international society and international law its derivative.
international (secular) stage if a shift in the balance between secular and sacred power makes it necessary.\(^{11}\) It is, however, quite questionable if the Holy See and its simultaneously territorial integration into the international society can indeed serve as a role model since this would produce an almost unending discussion about which religious community can claim the same privilege, if any. Nonetheless, as recent scholarship has pointed out, the Holy See enjoys unparalleled soft power by virtue of its extra-sovereign religious influence in diplomatic mediation and good governance.\(^{12}\)

2 The Holy See in the UN

Especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the changes it brought with it, as well as the visit of Pope Paul VI to the General Assembly of the UN in 1965, the Holy See intensified its relationship with the UN. The most basic political aim of the Holy See at the UN is the empowerment of a law-based international society as well as the pursuit of global governance. At the same time, this is also the case for the Holy See’s representation in the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Interestingly, the relations of the Holy See also reach out to sub-organizations of the UN such as the IAEA or UNESCO which do not, directly, serve peaceful aims.\(^{13}\)

Following the English School tradition of International Relations, if one acknowledges that law and diplomacy are one, if not the fundamental plank of international relations,\(^{14}\) the Holy See gained influence in this field as well. This is most evident in its Observer Status at the UN. Only Switzerland possessed, next to the Holy See, such a status before joining the UN in 2002. This status provides the Holy See with channels of gaining influence among sovereign states as their equal, unlike the consultative status of comparable religious

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\(^{11}\) Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 262–263.

\(^{12}\) Chong, "Small State Soft Power", *op cit*.


organisations taking up seats at intergovernmental institutions.\textsuperscript{15} The observer status provides the Holy See, within the UN, the power to enter alliances with other states. “Fundamentalist alliances” therefore have been a consequence for example between the Holy See and states like Sudan and Libya in the course of international conferences regarding the rights of women.\textsuperscript{16} From the perspective of the Holy See, such alliances are a necessary strategy for projecting Catholic social teachings on the international level. This will be evident in our subsequent study of the Holy See’s activities at the UN world population conference in 1994 in Cairo.\textsuperscript{17}

The extent of the rights of the Holy See in the UN, as an Observer, are indicated within the UN resolution 58/314:

1. The right to participate in the general debate of the General Assembly;
2. Without prejudice to the priority of Member States, the Holy See shall have the right of inscription on the list of speakers under agenda items at any plenary meeting of the General Assembly, after the last Member State inscribed on the list;
3. The right to make interventions, with a precursory explanation or the recall of relevant General Assembly resolutions being made only once by the President of the General Assembly at the start of each session of the Assembly;
4. The right of reply;
5. The right to have its communications relating to the sessions and work of the General Assembly issued and circulated directly, and without intermediary, as official documents of the Assembly;
6. The right to have its communications relating to the sessions and work of all international conferences convened under the auspices of the General Assembly issued and circulated directly, and without intermediary, as official documents of those conferences;
7. The right to raise points of order relating to any proceedings involving the Holy See, provided that the right to raise such a point of order shall not include the right to challenge the decision of the presiding officer;
8. The right to co-sponsor draft resolutions and decisions that make reference to the Holy See; such draft resolutions and decisions shall be put to a vote only upon request from a Member State;
9. Seating for the Holy See shall be arranged immediately after Member States and before the other observers when it participates as a non-member State observer, with the allocation of six seats in the General Assembly Hall;
10. The Holy See shall not have the right to vote or to put forward candidates in the General Assembly.

\textsuperscript{15} Jelka Mayr-Singer, "Unheilige Allianz oder segensreiche Partnerschaft: Der Heilige Stuhl und die Vereinten Nationen," 195.
\textsuperscript{17} Palena R. Neale, "The Bodies of Christ as International Bodies: The Holy See, Wom(B)an and the Cairo Conference,".
Despite all calls for more protection and help for the individual (i.e. human security), for the Holy See the basic organizational framework of international relations remains the world of states as it is represented at the UN. Although the Holy See pronounces upon elements like transnational issues and solidarism, for example in calling for the “opening” of states like the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), it is obvious that the state remains the benchmark of political order on the global scale. A “world-state,” requested by some agents of global governance, would be opposite to the ideals of the Holy See since it would be opposed to the principle of subsidiarity. In his 2009 encyclical Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI clearly states that point. Within the same encyclical, he also calls for a reform of the UN.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, the Holy See in 2005 unsurprisingly supported the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission within the framework of the UN.\textsuperscript{19} There is in fact extensive biblical justification, which the Holy See has trotted out from time to time, to support the view that States, however established, bear some traces of divine approval linked to a moral universe.

3 The Holy See’s Human Rights Campaign at the UN

The Holy See’s religious mission is intrinsically bound up with a divine understanding of human rights that is simultaneously expansive and conservative. Through its dedicated website, the Holy See leaves no one in doubt that it is adopting an explicitly religiously universalist frame:

The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a `child in the Son' and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for eternal life of blessed communion with God. For this very reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual.\textsuperscript{20}

This can justify having a say in just about every possible arena of human rights promotion. Giovanni Lajolo, the last Secretary for Relations with States under John Paul II’s papacy,
explained that the ‘first and foremost’ principle of papal foreign policy is the promotion and protection of human dignity in consonance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Within proximate paragraphs, Secretary Lajolo makes it clear that the Holy See ‘does not depend on’ exercising political and economic power. It practises diplomacy on the basis of the Pope’s ‘moral and spiritual authority as supreme Head of the Catholic Church’. Such a diplomacy expects that political authority exists for the purpose of serving and furthering the common good of the human person. No state can command the obedience of its citizens if it violates such an understanding of the legitimacy of authority. Likewise, the dignity of the human person in both individual and social dimensions must be served by ‘every law, every system, every structure, every programme...That is why the Holy See participates actively in international conferences on human rights, and has signed and ratified international treaties and conventions aimed at promoting and defending human rights...’. This resonates with one of Pope John Paul II’s major addresses to the UN General Assembly made in 1995 where he addressed the plight of humanity in the era of a globalizing world in the following terms:

It is important for us to grasp what might be called the *inner structure* of this worldwide movement. It is precisely its global character which offers us its first and fundamental "key" and confirms that there are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a *universal moral law*. These are not abstract points; rather, these rights tell us something important about the actual life of every individual and of every social group. They also remind us that we do not live in an irrational or meaningless world. On the contrary, there is a *moral logic* which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples. If we want a *century of violent coercion* to be succeeded by a *century of persuasion*, we must find a way to discuss the human future intelligibly. The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of "grammar" which is needed if the world is to engage this discussion of its future.

This underscores the need to expedite the rest of our examination of the UN-Holy See relationship on the basis of how both interact on the plane of soft power, or in Eric Hanson’s phrase ‘expressive powers’. The papacy intends very overtly to influence the grammar of universal human rights so as to guide humanity towards a progressive religious orientation that privileges peace between diversities of race and creed. The Holy See perceives its

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mission to be one of authoring a universal moral law or at least guiding the society of humanity organised into states into producing a reasonable standard of world morality. To fulfil this mission, the Holy See needs to provide moral clarity in word and exemplary behaviour. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the current Pope Benedict XVI, had also illuminated the thrust of papal diplomacy when he reflected upon what he criticised as the misguided quality of Liberation Theology in the 1980s. The following view of Ratzinger might perhaps vindicate the school of thought popularly known as constructivism in International Relations. Ratzinger was objecting to the fallacy of Liberation Theology in blaming oppressive social structures for the wretchedness of mankind and observing that

Nor can one localize evil principally or uniquely in bad social, political, or economic ‘structures’ as though all other evils came from them so that the creation of the ‘new man’ would depend on the establishment of different economic and socio-political structures. To be sure, there are structures which are evil and which cause evil and which we must have the courage to change. Structures, whether they are good or bad, are the result of man’s actions and so are consequences more than causes. The root of evil, then, lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self-control, and the exercise of virtue.24

To understand the Holy See’s intense involvement with the UN, one has therefore to appreciate its instrumental employment of discourse under the label of providing moral clarity to the society of sovereign states regardless of the latter’s preferences. Therefore, the subsequent analysis will have to invoke discursive analysis of the Holy See’s diplomacy at or through the UN. The citation of long quotes will be inevitable since one needs to dissect the moral impact of diplomacy-as-sermonising from the Vatican. Admittedly, presenting this argument seems somewhat difficult in 2010 given the ongoing outbreak of a series of controversies engulfing the local Catholic clergy in the USA, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, and Chile concerning revelations of the predations of paedophile priests since the 1980s. Nonetheless, this paper hopes to show that notwithstanding these bouts of political turbulence, there are constituencies supporting the Holy See’s role in warning global humanity of the need for moral rectitude aligned with Catholic beliefs.

3.1 Women’s Rights

Women’s rights have provided a veritable battleground for the Vatican’s campaign at the UN on behalf of human rights. It has been the Holy See’s position that women and men

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are destined towards marriage. Consequently, ‘authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church.’

As a result, it has been made consistently clear that the woman’s providentially assigned role can only be intelligible within the heterosexual family unit. The Second Vatican Council document with its portentous subtitle ‘The Church in the Modern World’ reiterated in 1965 that despite the industrial revolution and other modern revolutions in social mobility that accompanied it, ‘the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity...The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their [children’s] formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account.’

With this delicate ambivalence, the Holy See has gone out of its way to undercut any movement legitimising abortion at virtually all standard-setting conferences.

One such venue was the UN-sponsored International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held at Cairo in 1994. This was convened as a culmination of a series of preparatory seminars and workshops designed to outline a standard of aspiration for linking population growth and status to the wider aims of national development. The ICPD was all the more symbolic for its prelude to a series of millennial conferences organised by the UN to chart mankind’s progress towards a new era in global politics. Understandably, the Holy See perceived this as a perfect opportunity for attaining its social objectives linked to the sanctity of the family as it has interpreted it from the Scriptures. The Holy See employed its State-equivalent status as a Permanent Observer at the UN to obstruct what it saw as an evil, worldly draft of sexual permissiveness and excessive individualism that went against the grain of Christian teaching. The Holy See wished to amend the clauses that either granted or approved the right of women to practise abortion and other forms of life choices independent of a marital context. According to one scholarly account, Pope John Paul II applied a range of pressures including working on Latin American governments to align their positions, as well as convening a meeting of ambassadors accredited to the Vatican four months prior to the ICPD to register his concerns. The erstwhile Clinton Administration was likewise appealed to in terms of ending a ‘war against the family’. Just weeks before the ICPD began, the Holy See extended its hand to the radical Middle Eastern governments of Libya and Iran to close ranks

26 Ibid, p.52.
on a joint-religious position on terminating the spread of permissive population and sexual policies. It was rumoured that the Pope promised quiet *quid pro quo* to the Libyans in exchange for Tripoli’s condemnation of the Cairo conference: the Holy See would intercede for the Libyans in the ongoing fracas with London and Washington over the Lockerbie airliner bombing of 1988. More importantly, the Holy See could mobilize the assorted ‘bodies of Christ’ to obstruct the advance of liberal sexual standards in the drafting of the Cairo declaration: national Catholic churches, Catholic family planning associations and the like. In this way, it appeared that a chorus of universal Catholic protest was acting in unison on the Holy See’s behalf. Ultimately, the drafters of the Cairo Declaration were sufficiently conciliatory towards the Vatican to include paragraphs such as the following in moderating the liberal tenor of the final document:

> With reference to the terms ‘contraception’, ‘family planning’, ‘sexual and reproductive health’, ‘sexual and reproductive rights’, and ‘women’s ability to control their own fertility’, ‘widest range of family planning services’, and any other terms regarding family planning services and regulation of fertility concepts in the document, the Holy See’s joining the consensus should in no way be interpreted as constituting a change in its well-known position concerning those family planning methods which the Catholic Church considers morally unacceptable or on family planning services which do not respect the liberty of the spouses, human dignity, and the human rights of those concerned.

This significant qualification lodged together with the final declaration signified the institutional prestige the Holy See enjoys in the UN. One objector to the Holy See’s aversion to contraception and abortion noted that the ‘moral triumph’ of the Cairo Conference had been ‘sadly...overshadowed’ by the Holy See’s ‘idiosyncratic fixation’ on these two issues, and registering the impression that ‘religions have once again been made to look like obstructive icebergs in the shipping lanes of progress.’ This objector was Daniel Maguire, a Catholic theologian by profession based at a reputable North American university. He attributed the triumph of the Holy See at articulating all its preferred qualifications, and thereby dominating debates at Cairo, to a systematic campaign of opposition, high-profile lobbying and the adoption of rigid positions. Yet another NGO intervention recorded at the Cairo proceedings expressed frustration at the widespread claim that the Holy See spoke on behalf of all Catholic women, when in actual fact, ‘in my country [the USA], where Catholic women have the legal right to make their own choice, they have abortions at the same rate as

28 Ibid, p.111.
29 Ibid, p.113.
In short, the Holy See’s UN membership had allowed it to exercise its extra-sovereign power to set the parameters of moralized gender discourse at a UN-affiliated conference even if it did not achieve a complete victory in deleting the liberal provisions pertaining to women.

At the follow-up, UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Holy See continued to maintain its opposition to contraception and abortion, but surprised all the delegates by declaring that it saw no benefit in ‘reopening’ issues that had been concluded to the satisfaction of the majority of nation-states at Cairo. Even Mervat Tallawy, the chair of the conference committee that negotiated the phraseology of health-related issues at Beijing, approved of the subdued activity by the Holy See’s Beijing delegation, saying that ‘As a matter of fact, the Holy See has been very cooperative.’ A report on the Beijing conference noted that even though some US-based stridently anti-abortion and conservative women’s groups participated in the Beijing conference to roll back more vigorously the liberal language in parts of the Cairo Declaration, their efforts made negligible impact without the enthusiastic backing of the Holy See. In fact, this same report now acknowledged that the following stock phrase in UN population declarations had acquired the status of being a standard formulated by the Holy See: ‘taking into account the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for children...’ Yet another survey of news coverage of the conference showed that ‘the Vatican’ and ‘John Paul II’ scored favourably in terms of the percentage of mentions in the headlines of two leading developed world newspapers – the New York Times and the The Los Angeles Times. Although these two names were associated with conflict over the wording of reproductive rights, ‘the Vatican’ hogged 12% of the headlines and ‘John Paul II’ 2%. Collectively, these percentages showed a rough parity with the ‘Chinese government or China’ (19%), ‘Hilary Clinton’ (18%) and ‘US government’ (11%). The ‘UN or UN Officials of the conference’ fared poorly at 5% of headline coverage. This is a rough but convincing measure of the size of the Holy See’s media impact.

33 Quoted in Ibid.
in terms of news coverage. Its message was getting out even if it did not command a majority of world public opinion in adhering to its views.

Upon reflection, another academic report deposited at the UN posits another explanation, other than the mobilization of the ‘bodies of Christ’ and random conservative NGOs, for the Holy See’s distinct advantage in mobilizing its biases onto UN standards. The Holy See’s ‘fifth column’ in Latin American domestic politics lies within conservative party political movements who acquire or reinforce their popular legitimacy on the basis of appearing as authentically Catholic as possible. Fiona Macaulay’s report for the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs’ Division for the Advancement of Women in 2005 draws attention to the domestic dynamics behind the structuring of certain Latin American governments’ positions in line with the Holy See’s preferences. Women in Latin America can only advance their feminist agendas only to the extent that they can parlay the religious-secular political cleavages to their advantage. For parties traditionally on the political Rights, such as Nicaragua’s Liberal Party and El Salvador’s ARENA, alignment with Vatican positions is a sure way of regaining acceptability among wide sections of the electorate. This is accentuated by the fact that often inter-party ideological rivalries demand a degree of loyalties that trump gender alliances within and across party boundaries. As Macaulay notes, this is also the case in the more developed and socially-progressive states such as Brazil and Chile. Token gains in legislation favouring gender equality in El Salvador and Panama have found their gains watered down by party elites stiffened in their resistance by the Holy See’s support via the local Catholic Churches. Another scholar of Latin American feminism has studied the politics of the Holy See’s manoeuvres in Latin American domestic politics and concluded that even though the Holy See had aligned itself with pro-democracy forces since the 1980s in tandem with the growing corruption of military juntas in the region, their campaign [for a traditional perspective of women’s roles within a patriarchal family] raises questions about the role of fundamentalist and conservative religions in alliance with neoliberalism, despite the contradiction between the Church’s attitude to

reproductive rights and the demographic policies of international organizations [such as the World Bank and the UN]...whose population control policies are of a piece with strategies of capitalist development. What explains this alliance is the ethical vacuum of late twentieth century capitalism; with the welfare state delegitimized, there is not much left to hold the dike against the rising tide of poverty. 

Poverty can be rendered tolerable up to a point when the discourse of faith holds out hope for reconciliation with one’s circumstances until such time when providential deliverance from material want becomes manifest. This is another dimension of the Holy See’s UN politics which shall be taken up in a later section of this paper.

3.2 Children’s Rights

The position the Holy See adopts on children is derived directly from their assumption of the sanctity of roles within a divinely guided family. Children ought to grow up in subordination to father and mother in an environment of care and nurture. Children’s rights throughout the world, especially in conflict-torn developing regions, have been politicised and require defending via the UN because of the unnatural deployment of children as prostitutes, criminal accessories, military reconnaissance assets and soldierly ranks in paramilitary and military formations. In fact, the sheer desperation of insurgent movements in areas such as the Congo Republic, Somalia and Israel/Palestine have seen children pressed into service for force replenishment purposes. As a result, children are forced to take on the reprehensible adult roles of serving as sexual commodities, infiltrating the enemy compounds, ruthlessly guarding checkpoints, the taking of others’ lives under premeditated orders from adult superiors and other extreme experiences in war. This perverts the growing up process and constitutes a crime against both secular and religiously-inspired standards of behaviour joining both the UN and Holy See causes together. The UN Secretary General has openly commended the Holy See and along with other religious NGOs as partners in the worldwide endeavour to ameliorate the post-conflict palliative care of children victimised by conflict. A chunk of Section VII of the Secretary General’s report to both the General Assembly and Security Council issued on 19 July 2000 deserves quoting here as proof of special relations between the Holy See and the UN in this area:

*Communities of faith* have a crucial role to play in the protection of children through their advocacy efforts and work on the ground. Their spiritual leaders and institutions should use their moral influence, leadership and presence within communities to promote the protection of children and women. My Special Representative has

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38 Franco, ‘Defrocking the Vatican’, p.284.
developed an active dialogue with communities of faith with these objectives in view….

I also welcome the strong support expressed by the Vatican for the agenda of children affected by armed conflict and the engagement of the Catholic Church in communities affected by conflict. My Special Representative has also held consultations with the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I am encouraging my Special Representative to deepen this engagement and to continue exploring possibilities for collaboration with all major communities of faith.\textsuperscript{39}

Surely this is evidence that certain transnational issues in international politics require a normative approach where the Holy See offers a particular specialty – a philosophy of condemning wrongs and simultaneously a philosophy of care and moral responsibility.

3.3 The Struggle Against Racism

The Holy See framed its participation in the UN’s campaign against racism in terms of present dangers and forward looking tasks. At the inaugural World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa in September 2001, the Head of the Holy See’s delegation stressed that although the theme of the conference was phrased negatively, he wished to call attention to the promise of restructuring interpersonal and international relations for the new millennium:

Racism is a sin. It is fundamentally a lie, a concept deliberately invented to create division in humanity. This Conference must be about the truth: the truth concerning human dignity, the truth concerning the fundamental unity of the human family. \textit{This is a Conference about the ethical foundations of a new world community.}

From an honest appraisal of the errors and practices of the past - and indeed, let it be said, of the present - we must together boldly seek a different future, in which each person and each people will be recognised and fostered in their unique dignity and in their inalienable rights.

Despite this contemporary period of unprecedented humanitarian and scientific progress, we have to admit that all too many dimensions of our world community are still marked by exclusion, division and crass inequality, with consequent dramatic human suffering.\textsuperscript{40}


While admitting to skeletons in both the Holy See’s, and humanity’s metaphorical closets, the Holy See was calling upon peoples, as individuals, NGOs and governments, to transcend the culture of exclusions to embrace a truly open globalization where peoples are free to travel everywhere with equal regard for their dignity. The rest of this speech is remarkable for calling for the ‘individual and collective conversion of hearts’, care for migrants, refugees and their families, appraising the fundamental role of education for cultivating non-racist public opinion, and finally the special responsibility of religious communities in combating racism. Presciently, this was uttered just eight days before the tumultuous events of ‘9/11’. The relevant paragraph of the speech is worth quoting here for it calls for an amplification of the dimensions of hospitality to strangers and non-believers exiting in every religion:

The Holy See has, finally, especially addressed the contribution and the responsibility of religious communities in the fight against racism. In speaking of this Conference some days ago, Pope John Paul II made an appeal to all believers, noting that we cannot truly call on God, the father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any person, created in the image of God. Religion has all too often been exploited as a means to further deepen existing political, economic or social divisions. Religious leaders must recall that all religions by their nature appeal to the unity of the human race. True religious belief is absolutely incompatible with racist attitudes and racist practices. Recent experiences of inter-religious dialogue offer the hope of greater understanding among religions. In many recent conflicts, in fact, the unity shown by religious leaders has been a significant factor in preventing or reducing conflict and in fostering reconciliation.41

This is a Catholic version of Kantian cosmopolitanism applied directly to the real world problems of a globalizing world where there is both deliberate and unplanned commingling of races, classes and creeds across porous political and social borders. The italicised portions in the above-mentioned quote reveal a very tolerant Catholicism that is somewhat at odds with what historians have uncovered and debated of the Vatican’s interwar diplomacy between the Allied Powers and the Axis totalitarianisms. In particular, the controversy over the purportedly ingrained anti-Semitism of Pope Pius XII still lingers with evidence suggesting that this wartime Pope was walking a spiritual and diplomatic tightrope that could collapse into the morass of utter political helplessness in the face of relentless war.42 Perhaps this has always detracted from the vitality of all aspects of the Holy See’s foreign policy – the inconsistencies between principle and practice. That said, the Holy See’s intervention on the

41 Ibid.
question of global racism should still be welcome on grounds of debating global political theory. Few secular ventures on global political theorising admit of the role of spiritual conversion as a fundamental principle of going forward with peace-building. Most global political thought tend to employ the default frames of a secular liberalism. This is in many ways a clarion call to those in the Academy theorising international political thought, and to diplomats at the UN, to begin treading, even if furtively so, on matters of inter-religious collaboration on stabilising the tensions arising from a globalizing world. The Holy See has attempted to goad UNESCO into taking bolder steps in this direction by initiating its own series of informal interfaith dialogues which were initiated after 9/11 and continued under Pope Benedict XVI.

Leaving aside the call for frank and open debate, the African public opinion, as expressed in the continent’s leading newspapers and popular journals have queried whether the Holy See has ignored the residual effects of structural or ‘systemic’ racism. One African Catholic priest, Father Dabula Mpako, General Secretary of the African Catholic Priests’ Solidarity Movement reminded participants in a workshop on racism that early Catholic missionaries had carried the baggage of European superiority with them in their proselytizing mission in colonial Africa. Even today, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the mentality of subservience still persists. In his interview with the journalist Cathy Majtenyi, it was reported that Father Mpako phrased his explanation in the following way, along with an affirmative view from a lay Catholic:

For instance, he explained that there is a mentality among missionaries and white priests that most Africans are not “ready” to take over church projects, programs, and leadership structures. "There is an idea of guardianship," he said. "The African is presented as a child who is under the perpetual guardianship of the European, who will decide when the African has evolved enough to be able to be given full responsibility of his or her life." Nkululeko Godfrey Devulana, a lay Catholic with the Diakonia Council of Churches, an ecumenical social justice group in South Africa, agreed. He bemoaned the overwhelming presence of foreign priests in many black communities in South Africa, and said that community members often feel that the priest does not listen to them. He told a workshop that many people superficially go along with what the priest says. "It's a survival skill," he said. "I will agree with you because I need to survive."

Assuming that Pope Benedict XVI has taken cognizance of these internal forms of obscured racism, his move to appoint Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, a native of Bolghatty, India,\textsuperscript{44} as the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the UN with effect from July 2010 is definitely a sign of a more globalized Vatican bureaucracy. This is a trend that is certainly in keeping with the polycentric, all embracing ‘it’s your world’ rebranding of the UN in the twenty-first century.

\section*{4 Critique of Capitalism, Charity as Justice}

It is an intrinsic article of faith in Catholic belief that materialism should be put in its proper place: as a means towards orienting lives towards righteousness under the gaze of God. To love one’s neighbour as thyself is to adore the Lord according to the Christian Bible. The current Pope Benedict XVI has continued with his predecessors’ attacks on the consumerist ‘religion’ inspired by capitalism through its interlinked strategies of mass consumption, intensive advertising, lifestyle reproduction and the generation of an insatiable appetite for self-indulgent luxuries. In his encyclical of June 2009, Benedict made it clear that charity ought to be a Catholic response to capitalism’s wanton encouragement towards wealth accumulation and indulgences in luxury:

Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36-40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God is love” (\textit{Deus Caritas Est}): \textit{everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it.}\textsuperscript{45}

In the Church’s understanding, capitalism should be recast in terms of a holistic conception of development encompassing the dignity of the human being, who is God’s creation, as well the human being’s desire for justice and the common good. \textit{Caritas in Veritate}, or charity via truth, has two aspects in guiding human action to alleviate the plight of others:

\textsuperscript{44} See Archbishop Chullikatt’s biography at \url{http://www.holyseemission.org/Chullikatt.html}, accessed 4 November 2010.

First of all, justice. *Ubi societas, ibi ius*: every society draws up its own system of justice. *Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his”, what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI’s words, “the minimum measure” of it, an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.

Another important consideration is the common good. To love someone is to desire that person’s good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a *requirement of justice and charity*.46

These long passages from *Caritas in Veritate* deserve quotation for they represent a perfect summary of the thrust of the Holy See’s world mission of development allied to, or through, the work of the UN’s multiple development agencies. Development must operate according to a view that mankind’s actions must be contextualised within some notion of a universal good, hence the call to build ‘relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion’. In this regard, in 2008, the Holy See made world news when it published a supplementary list of seven deadly sins: bioethical ‘violations’ such as birth control; ‘morally dubious’ scientific experiments such as stem cell research; drug abuse; polluting the environment; contributing to the widening income gap between the rich and poor; possessing excessive wealth; and creating poverty.47 This was an apparently updated supplement to the original seven sins of pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth. The Holy See’s message since the advent of the ‘Third World’ as a political economic category has been to appeal to individuals and nations to undergo personal conversion as well as to practice charity within a context of social

46 Ibid, paragraphs 6-7.
conscience and order. Evidently, these teachings are virtually inextricable from the earlier-mentioned approaches by the Holy See on human rights.

The Holy See goes about promoting charity not by donating large sums to UNCTAD, UNESCO, the UN Relief and Works Agency, or the UN Department of Peacekeeping. Its work in assisting the universalist goals of the United Nations lies with Catholic NGOs such as Caritas Internationalis. Founded in 1897 by a German catholic, Lorenz Werthmann, it has since developed ‘local chapters’ in 165 countries ‘but...work in many more places, always without regard to race or religion’. While headquartered in Vatican City, it claimed a multinational membership of 440,000 paid staff and 625,000 volunteers in 2010. Its total asset value is estimated to be US$5.5 billion.\(^48\) According to the history revealed on its website, Caritas was the initiative of the controversial Pope Pius XII in 1950 to create a worldwide organization for charity and relief activities. It was perhaps no coincidence that this initiative came about when the UN was beginning to be confronted by tasks other than the Cold War confrontation between the superpowers. In his letter bestowing canonical status upon Caritas in September 2004, which has traditionally been headed by a Cardinal, Pope John Paul II made it clear that the office of the Pope contained rights of oversight in relation to Caritas highest appointments and that the NGO’s actions would be subject to review by ‘the Pontifical Council Cor Unum’ as well as by the Secretariat of State (foreign and interior ministry equivalent) of the Roman Curia (the Pope’s cabinet-equivalent).\(^49\) This highlight goes to show that like the UN, the Holy See does operate a dedicated ‘foreign aid’ arm. What is equally notable is the full range of developmental activities that stretches into what the UN would regard as peacemaking. Indeed, Caritas describes its missions as ranging from straightforward humanitarian relief in range of delivering and coordinating supplies of food, water, shelter and medical aid in disaster or conflict-ravaged zones; up to and including serving as liaisons and mediators in situations of both internal and international conflict. Advocacy for the downtrodden and marginalised peoples are also within their ambit.\(^50\)

According to the Caritas Annual Report of 2008, the organization’s volunteers have arranged for peacebuilding courses between Iraqi children at primary school level to help school future generations of Iraqis in the ways of peaceful tolerance and accommodation. In Sri Lanka, the

\(^{50}\) ‘About Caritas Internationalis’, op cit.
local Caritas chapter acknowledges that its work transcends religious affiliation and actively supports the Inter-religious Peace Commitment Foundation comprising Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist representatives. In South Africa, Caritas is helping to sponsor the peace groups where people across racial and religious divides come together in ‘safe spaces’ to share their stories of resentment and marginalisation, thereby generating awareness of common ground. In tandem with often under-reported UN peace efforts in Africa, Caritas has pursued advocacy activities at the UN Headquarters in New York in relation to the Central Africa Policy Forum on Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. Caritas intervened to support local representatives’ attempts to construct ‘safe spaces’ for engaging in empathy between enemies. Following post-election violence in Kenya that year, Caritas also joined another Catholic lobby group, Franciscans International, to assist the UN in pressuring the Kenyan parties to observe human rights. Catholic Relief Services is another NGO performing humanitarian work in parallel with Caritas. As a fully-fledged development arm of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, it has participated in efforts to uphold dialogue between conflict parties in the troubled southern Philippine province of Mindanao; supported reconciliation programmes in Croatia; and collaborated with the Peace and Justice Commissions of the Catholic Church on the East Timor Peace, Reconciliation and Dialogue initiative. The Communities of Sant’ Egidio are also busy in the same field of peacemaking in diverse Global South locations supporting UN efforts on the ground. But unlike Caritas and Catholic Relief Services, Sant’ Egidio comprise lay Catholics at their helm. All in all these are the ‘bodies of Christ’ alluded to in Palena Neale’s study of the Holy See’s allied support structure in relation to UN efforts.

The Holy See’s mission to further the welfare and unity of global humanity is perhaps expressed in the encouragement given to the internationalist orientation of individual Bishops around the world in their pursuit of peacemaking efforts at the confluence between local and international initiatives. A United States Institute of Peace Report in 2001 has specifically highlighted the crucial roles of the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador; Archbishop Monswengo of the Congo; Don Samuel Ruiz from Chiapas Mexico; and Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo of East Timor (now Timor Leste). In Romero’s case, he spoke

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out forcefully against extra-judicial murders conducted by right-wing and government-linked paramilitary forces against their political opponents. He riled the right-wing paramilitaries to the point where he was targeted for assassination during mass. His death in 1980 provoked an outpouring of public sympathy and one of Latin America’s largest street demonstrations (250,000-strong) against the practice of ‘death squads’ operated by the Latin American regimes at the time. Monswengo served as the ‘official conciliator’ amongst civil war factions in the Congo. Don Samuel Ruiz in his capacity as a friend of the indigenous Indians of Mexico’s Chiapas state, was widely recognized by both the Mexican government and external public opinion as a desirable mediator of the long running Chiapas conflict in the 1990s. Bishop Belo of then-East Timor performed a politically delicate role amidst the chaos engulfing the Indonesian separatist province by defending human rights, calling for the territory’s independence from Indonesia while also attempting to restrain the various parties’ temptations to resort to violent solutions. Although the UN was eventually called in to provide a peacekeeping force and an interim administration following an outburst of violence on the ground, Bishop Belo’s status as an acceptable mediator allowed him to assist in the peaceful transition towards eventual independence and an Indonesian withdrawal. Therefore, in these individualistic ways, and through its own affiliated aid NGOs, the Holy See is providing critical non-financial backbone for the UN’s peace and development missions. In many ways, the Holy See envisions ‘saving the world’ for Christ as tantamount to working for UN aims globally, albeit this role is often under-publicised.

5 Conclusion: The Holy See and the UN – Enhancing International Society through Extra-Sovereign Power?

Clearly, the Holy See and the UN represent on paper two overlapping sets of universal aspirations. The former defines the universal through the lens of religion, while the latter does so through the international legal negotiations among secular sovereignties. What has also emerged from the brief illustrative sketches of the Holy See’s activities within and alongside the UN is that there is no dogmatic contradiction, thus far, between both universal missions. In fact, the aim of the UN in saving future generations from the scourges of war, human rights violations and poverty appear to be advanced stealthily, on the margins of the international society of states, through a religiously inspired globalist vocation practised by a friendly partner in the Holy See.

Since the UN is often insinuated by Manning, Bull and Wight of the English School of International Relations as a manifestation of society among states, this paper seems to suggest that the society being produced by the UN’s aspirations and its multiple agencies is more than just the sum of sovereignties and their elite decisions produced by politico-bureaucratic machinery if one factors in the role of the Holy See in assisting the UN’s mission. Where the English School thinkers defined an ‘international society’ in terms of states as the only actors ‘conscious of certain common interests and common values...in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions’, the Holy See perceives its mission as covering the globe and the peoples within it regardless of socio-political boundaries. The Holy See’s mission is accomplished through an extra-sovereign power called Catholic Christian idealism which motivates human action beyond the majesty and punitive sanction of either earthly sovereignty, or worldly nationalism. Catholic Christian idealism is transcendental and personal at the same time; it motivates through appeals to Providence, and to spirituality. This suits the UN’s mission perhaps more efficiently since individuals and NGOs can be motivated to achieve what national and state loyalties inhibit within their earthly embrace of order. One might reasonably conclude that a Catholic vision of society such as that espoused collectively by the Holy See and its ‘bodies of Christ’ is far less abstract than if one were to ponder the still-hypothetical meaning of a citizenship of the UN.

While the Holy See’s moral discourse tries to work within the limitations of sovereign states, it also finds ways to transcend them by appealing to human conscience. The human heart responds to stirrings of the soul and the moral warning ascribed to Providence. In this regard, when the Holy See pronounces upon women’s rights through the moral frame of the family, and by extension denigrates homosexual freedoms, the personal becomes the political. Likewise, the normative framing of the defence of the proper place of children and persons of diverse cultures in modern nation-state societies trigger an emotive response that cannot wait upon the deliberative politics of national governments. Capitalism, in its long evolved practices, turns a blind eye to moral excesses arising from them, and frequently treats development as a straightforward benign by-product of profit motivations. This is where, once again, the Holy See makes the personal political through its sheer discursive presence as an

extra-sovereign power that pronounces on the ills of development through the concept of *Caritas*, via social justice and the common good. In sum, this study of the Holy See makes it clear that the Catholic religion has returned in a role that reaffirms the possibilities of enhancing society on a globalist scale. This is a healthy corrective considering how Al Qaeda style fundamentalism is tragically undermining religious tolerance in the relations within and without the Islamic world.
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