

## CURRENT ISSUES

### POPE BENEDICT XV'S NEGOTIATIONS AND THE LAST YEARS OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE\*

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The Vatican Insider published an impressive article on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014, under the title: *A hundred years ago Benedict XV denounced the Great War as a “useless massacre”*. I am convinced that no one could describe better the period of 1914–1918.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introductory Remarks

*First:* In order to understand the Holy See and Benedict XV's negotiations and their effects during the Great War, we must consider the delicate status of the Holy See, without territorial sovereignty.

*Second:* If we take a glance at the general descriptions and timelines of World War I – even at the most current scholarly ones – those are still arguing based on the English, French and American point of view, listing important statistics and facts, making several contemporary political, military, economical, sociological, etc. analyses, but their conclusions essentially are far away from the “objective” picture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://www.lastampa.it/2014/09/02/vaticaninsider/a-hundred-years-ago-benedict-xv-denounced-the-great-war-as-a-useless-massacre-dol4eUAvGb9xTv79DoWWDN/pagina.html>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ann-Marie EINHAUS: *The Short Story and the First World War*. Cambridge, 2013.; John C. G. RÖHL: *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. Cambridge, 2014. 143–177.; Elisabeth GREENHALGH: *The French Army and the First World War*. [Armies of the Great War]. Cambridge, 2014.; John GOOCH: *The Italian Army and the First World War*. [Armies of the Great War]. Cambridge, 2014.; David R. WOODWORD: *The American Army and the First World War*. [Armies of the Great War]. Cambridge, 2014.; Ian BECKETT: *The British Army and the First World War*. [Armies of the Great War]. Cambridge, 2017.;

Following Michael Ray's "timeline", the so called Great War had begun on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 (exactly one month later than the Sarajevo assassination) with war declaration on Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and escalated between August 1<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 1914, by entry of the main Powers of both sides; which was supplemented on November 5<sup>th</sup>, involving the Ottoman Empire. Italy stepped into the war only on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1915 at the side of the Entente Powers (after a secret treaty of London). This date is crucial not only for Italy, but also for the Holy See.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, thanks to several researchers and authors, publications and researches in different National and private archives – beside *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* – for now is quite clear that Pope Benedict was a pope of peace, not a romanticist, but a Holy Pontiff with strong will, who tried to use every channel which was available for him on the international legal basis, and as a Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church to hinder the war and further bloodshed. Walter H. PETERS<sup>4</sup> and John F. Pollard<sup>5</sup> made particular effort for historians to enlighten Pope Benedict XV' indispensable role in promoting peace among the great powers, even his instruments were extremely limited, and his international legal status was very weak. He was elected Pope on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914; a little more than a month later when the so called "Great War" had begun. Already five days after he had accepted St. Peter's Chair, on September 8<sup>th</sup> 1914 he addressed a speech to the involved powers, asking them "put down your weapons" and expressed his prayers – calling the peoples to do the same – for ending the war. This brave act shows well his commitment for peace, not a romantic idea, but a clear voice in a confuse time.

Obviously, in the focus of this summary must be the famous peace initiative of August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917. However, it was a concluding – failed – act of the Roman Pontiff, after many previous humanitarian and peace negotiations. Therefore, to get a whole picture, we must deal with the reasons of difficult neutrality; papal speeches and humanitarian actions; and the interest of the Holy See in the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

## 1. Difficult neutrality

At the very beginning I must emphasize: Benedict XV did not like to be considered "neutral". If we following his phrasing, he used the expression of "impartiality".

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Jan VERMEIREN: *The First World War and German Identity. The Dual Alliance at War*. Cambridge, 2016.; Jack S. LEVY: *The Outbreak of the First World War. Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making*. Cambridge, 2014.; William MULLIGAN: *The Origins of the First World War*. Cambridge, 2017.; Jay WINTER: *War beyond Words. Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present*. Cambridge, 2017.; Roger L. RANSOM: *Gambling on War. Confidence, Fear, and Tragedy of the First World War*. Cambridge, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.britannica.com/list/timeline-of-world-war-i>

<sup>4</sup> Walter H. PETERS: *The Life of Benedict XV*. Milwaukee, WI, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> John F. POLLARD: *The Unknown Pope. Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace*. London – New York, 1999.

This distinction perhaps seems archaic and too sophisticated – and seemed already hundred years ago – but expressed precisely Benedict's conviction and his wise responsibility: "The Holy See has not been, nor wishes to be neutral in the European War. It has, in turn, the right and the duty to be impartial" as the Holy Father said.<sup>6</sup> Comparing this statement with his *Ad Beatissimi* Encyclical Letter's (November 1<sup>st</sup> 1914) contents, there is no way for misinterpretation: the head of the Catholic Church could not be indifferent – with other word: neutral – in wartime, as spiritual father of all nations, he did must do everything impartially for peace, for human dignity, against any barbarian act of both sides.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping in mind what I have said above, the meaning of "difficult neutrality" refers basically to the international legal status, because the so called "Law of Guarantees" could not protect the Vatican in Italian territory during wartime. I do not want get into a deep analysis of the "Roman Question", only to mention those relevant facts which had caused this difficult diplomatic situation for Benedict XV.<sup>8</sup> After the annexation of the Papal State by popular vote the 'Patrimonium S. Petri' was declared as part of Italy by the Royal Decree 5903, on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1870.<sup>9</sup> Based on the contemporary international law the situation was delicate, because the military occupation could claim to be lawful only, if it established on common official agreement, tacit consent, or on legal prescription.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the pope *de jure* had still his sovereign authority over the entire – former – Papal State (until the Lateran Treaty in 1929).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, even Italy recognized several times during the annexation the independent status of the Holy See in numerous official memorandum letters, which were delivered to several states. This legal concept had become described by Emilio Visconti-Venosta (†1914) minister of foreign affairs on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1870. It was the basis for the document of May 13<sup>th</sup> 1871: *Legge sulle prerogative del Sommo Pontefice e della S. Sede e sulle relazioni dello Stato colla Chiesa*, which named in brief form "Law of Guarantees". This "Law" tried to guarantee the independence of the Holy See and the right to keep or develop further diplomatic relations, including rights of accredited ambassadors (nuncios) to states or international legal entities.<sup>12</sup> This is that particular political – legal situation which created the "Roman Question", and which caused that limited diplomatic capacity of the Roman Pontiff and the Holy See what we could see during the World War I (1914–1918). These circumstances had become worse when Italy entered into the war on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1915, making impossible

<sup>6</sup> PETERS op. cit. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>8</sup> In detailed cf. Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: An Overview on the International Relations of the Holy See Since the 'Roman Question' until 1967. Correlated with the first Codification (1917). *Folia Theologica et Canonica*, VI (2017) 105–117.

<sup>9</sup> In detailed, cf. H. JEDIN (Hrsg.): *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*. Freiburg–Basel–Wien, 1971. 696–705., VI. Die Kirche in der Gegenwart.

<sup>10</sup> BÁNK, József: *Egyházi jog. Az egyházi alkotmányjog alapjai*. Budapest, 1958. 61.

<sup>11</sup> In detailed, cf. John R. MORSS: The International Legal Status of the Vatican/Holy See Complex. *The European Journal of International Law*, vol. 26., no. 4. (2016) 927–946., especially 927–931.

<sup>12</sup> Federico CAMMEO: *Ordinamento giuridico dello Stato della città del Vaticano*. Firenze, 1932. 18–23.

to the Holy See to continue independent diplomatic relations and negotiations without get into conflict with Italian Governments and authorities. This problem especially had arisen regarding the embassies and diplomats accredited to the Holy See. The “extraterritoriality” status – which was mentioned in the “Law of Guarantees” – could not be a basis to protect the real independence – without Italian or foreign intervention – for enforce the Papal policy. It is also well known that the Holy See – because the lack of the Vatican’s international legal situation – had to withdraw the Austrian and German Embassies to Switzerland as the only solution to protect them. The “Law of Guarantees” did let the Vatican to take “moral responsibility” for them, which actually was an impossible task, because there was now legal instrument of the Holy See to guarantee their security within Italian territory.<sup>13</sup>

This unacceptable situation can be supported well by the Italian censorship of the Holy See’s diplomatic communications and diplomatic packages. The Holy See was not even able to use freely her own newspapers – including *L’Osservatore Romano* – for protesting against the unlawful activities. We can also indicate the impossibility of creation cardinals to the territory of Central Powers. On one hand Spain offered to the pope to move to Spanish territory (into the Escorial) as temporary residence, on other hand this initiative could not serve the goal of the Papacy and the entire Catholic Church, particularly during this war-time.

The Central Powers – namely Germany – proposed the reconsideration of the “Law of Guarantees” in October 1915, to grant territorial sovereignty to the Papacy. Nevertheless, this initiative happened without any previous consultation with the Holy See, and even Gasparri had reacted very vigorously against this external intervention, saying “we are not interested in foreign schemes”. For the end of 1915 and beginning of 1916 had been crystallized within the international common sense, that the Entente Powers did not wish to give any room for the Holy See to take place at a possible peace treaty. France, Great Britain and even Russia opposed Papal representative’s presence on any peace negotiation.<sup>14</sup> Italy also worried about any peace conference where the Holy See could appear, because the possibility the revising the explained “Roman Question”.

## 2. Speeches, Peace and Humanitarian Actions

After the above mentioned *Ad Beatissimi* Encyclical Letter on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1914 which was perfectly viciously misinterpreted by the Entente Powers, I should mention that active negotiation – initiated by the Holy See – which intended to prevent the war between Italy and Austro-Hungary (involving Emperor Franz-Joseph II<sup>15</sup> and Card. John Chernoch, primate of Hungary) unfortunately without any success. It happened

<sup>13</sup> POLLARD op. cit. 97–98.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Pietro Gasparri’s dramatic letter through the nuncio of Vienna to the Emperor: “The salvation of the Empire requires the Emperor to make this painful sacrifice and to make it immediately.” (January 17<sup>th</sup> 1915).

again right after the Caporetto defeat (October 24<sup>th</sup> November 19<sup>th</sup> 1917, where the Italian Army confronted with the central Austro-Hungarian Army, together with seven German divisions of land forces. This battle concluded into a terrible catastrophe for Italy: 300 000 dead and 250 000 captured soldiers – majority was wounded – at the Italian side). Pope Benedict XV's intention to intercede for peace in this tragic moment was rejected by the Central Powers again. When the pope tried the same intervene almost a year later for favor of Austro-Hungary, he had received similar rejection by the Entente Powers.

These few examples sufficiently enlighten that the papal peace initiatives, but even his requests for ceasefire were doomed to failure since the beginning of the war, and the weak status of the Holy See – based on the “Law of Guaranties” – had determined this diplomatic situation. Nevertheless, Benedict was capable to use two other channels to express the Church's opinion and also to arrange practical – humanitarian – help for indigents.

From December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914 – through the *L'Osservatore Romano* – he argued for spiritual and material aid to prisoners of the war. The central institute for organization by the Holy See was the *Opera dei Prisioneieri*. The statistic shows sufficiently that the Holy See had become some “second Red Cross” regarding the indigents, which meant investigation for missing persons, dealing with wounded and sick soldiers, and helping in letter-transmissions for families of prisoners. This activity had crystallized an internal system of the *Opera dei Prisioneieri* for the last period of the war, which was arranged into four sections: 1) general cases; 2) taking care of pastoral help of prisoners by sending priests but also pastors from other denominations (it was supplied with bishop and nuncio visits [i.e. Brussels, Munich, Vienna] of the prisoner-camps); 3) particular attention on young-wounded soldiers; 4) special care of prisoners with large families. It is well known that Switzerland took a very important role in Pope Benedict XV's humanitarian activity. It includes the so-called “Papal Train” which signifies that several transports arranged by the Holy Father which carried until January 1917 more than 26 000 prisoner-soldiers and more than 3 000 civilian to Switzerland for hospital treatment or for sanatorian-rehabilitation. However, it did not work for Austro-Hungarian and Italian indigents, because the political situation. Finally, I like to mention here the famine problem, which belonged to Benedict agenda to be release, in particular regarding children with the help of USA in several countries.

### 3. Interest in the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

For the Holy See the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was crucial in order to keep a religious and geopolitical balance in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Pietro Gasparri on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1915 wrote to Scapinelli, nuncio in Vienna:

“At this moment, the Holy Father, who has the greatest of concern for the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy due to a particular affection towards it and its

<sup>16</sup> POLLARD op. cit. 97.

August and Venerable Sovereign, as well as the highest interest of the Church itself, notably the survival of the only Catholic great power, not to mention peace in Italy, wishes to open his heart to the Emperor, through your good offices, advising him in the strongest possible terms to avoid war with Italy at all costs.”<sup>17</sup>

We must notice that Hungarian soldiers – following the phrase of Ferenc Pollmann – were present at every military stage of the Great War.<sup>18</sup>

After the death of Emperor Franz-Joseph II on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1916 the new Emperor, Karl I appeared more concerned in peace negotiation, while the Austro-Hungarian forces had a strong dependence on the German Army. Karl I did not want to see the already most possible conclusion of the war, the final collapse of the Empire. For Benedict XV it seemed a good timing to promote peace through Austro-Hungary, the last Christian power in Europe. It was also the time when Germany in the name of Austro-Hungary, together with Bulgaria and Turkey initiated peace, which act was delivered to Pope Benedict too. The reaction of Great Britain and France was entire rejection, as powers which believed in “total victory”. The pope could not risk the further negotiations’ success to get into arguing with the Entente Powers. The initiative therefore failed. The only hope was Austro-Hungary for a new peace negotiation, which had to contain concrete terms, sufficient for both sides.

Focusing on Austro-Hungary and its new emperor, here I must refer to Robert A. Kann, who has composed a complex overview on the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1974. His research is particularly significant among Western scholars, because he was able to use not only the Western primary and secondary sources (including the archival material, supplemented with several monographs and articles, but he used several Hungarian sources and analysis too).<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, his point of view is based on the general impressions and concepts of the American, English and French sources, even he refers to many German and some Hungarian documents and analyses within his book.

Nevertheless, he lists three secret negotiations of Karl I in 1917, in the following classification: I. unsuccessful secret negotiation; II. a “transitory” peace with Soviet Russia and Romania; III. unsuccessful secret negotiation.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the failed initiatives of Karl I Robert A. Kann notes:

“[...] Neither Charles nor his more energetic consort were disloyal to the Austrian alliance, but the new emperor was not raised in the tradition of Austria as the presiding power in the German Confederation and of the Habsburgs as Holy Roman emperors. [...]”

<sup>17</sup> ASV, SS, Guerra, 1914–1918, rub. 244, fasc. 29 (Gasparri to Scapinelli: January 12<sup>th</sup> 1915).

<sup>18</sup> POLLMANN, Ferenc: Magyarország és az első világháború. In: KIRÁLY, Béla – VESZPRÉMY, László (szerk.): *A magyar hadtörténelem évszázadai*. Budapest, 2003. 215–224., especially 219.

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. KANN: *A History of the Habsburg Empire. 1526–1918*. London, 1974. 468–483.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 469.

Therefore, Professor Kann concludes that the new emperor's goal to achieve peace – in coordination with Germany or without that – was an unrealistic idea. Kann summarizes: a man who could not be trusted entirely by his own people, by Germany, and by the French and British leaders, was doomed to fail.<sup>21</sup> I must emphasize regarding Kann's conclusion that this image on Karl I basically reflects to the French and English concept on the young emperor. We must notice, the causalities of the Empire – like of Italy – were extremely high. The Austro-Hungarian armed force had been almost entirely perished during the war. Therefore, after one hundred years we should speak more objectively about Karl I, as it is precisely explained in the “position” of his beatification process. He was anxious and thirsty for peace as a good husband and father. His naivety appeared only in his trust that Austro-Hungary could exit from the war without cooperation of Emperor Wilhelm II. However, if we analyze the loss of Austro-Hungary, this naivety can be understandable. There are several statistics regarding number of causalities in the scholarly literature. The most accepted one is by Rudolf Kiszling, who mentions 1 016 200 of the 8 million Austro-Hungarian soldiers. More than half million died at the battlefield. It must be supply with 2 200 000 soldiers in captivity and 3 620 000 wounded.<sup>22</sup> The geopolitical important of the last great Catholic power has disappeared after the so called Versailles Treaty. The last episodes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire dramatically and authentically described by Johannes Sachslehner in 2005 (*Der Infarkt – Österreich – Ungarn*).<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Papal Peace Note of 1917

Many researchers analyze the Papal peace note of August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917, without mentioning its preparing steps. These negotiations link to Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli. He was nuncio accredited to Bavaria, who began his new office on May 26<sup>th</sup> 1917, paying his visit at King Ludwig III, then a month later he had his official meeting with Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Chancellor of the German Empire. During this second visit, Pacelli already explained concrete terms for peace in the name of Pope Benedict: 1) general limitation of armaments; 2) establishment of international courts; 3) restoration of the independence of Belgium; 4) Alsace-Lorraine and other such territorial questions were to be settled by agreements (not dictation) between the countries concerned.<sup>24</sup> Bethman-Hollweg – who was always seriously circumspect – agreed with the listed clear peace terms. However, the meeting with Emperor Wilhelm II concluded differently, indicating several obstacles.<sup>25</sup> Based on Peters' analysis it is highly feasible, that if Benedict could make a direct contact in that very

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 477.

<sup>22</sup> POLLMANN op. cit. 221.

<sup>23</sup> Johannes SACHSLEHNER: *Der Infarkt – Österreich – Ungarn an 28. Oktober 1918*. Vienna, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> PETERS op. cit. 141–142.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 143.

time, Germany very possible could accept the mentioned terms in order to stop the war.

While the Entente Powers had strong conviction of getting close to the total victory on the Central Powers – and the entry of the United States on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1917 supported their confidence<sup>26</sup> –, Pope Benedict XV – after a several negotiations and consulting discussions – on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917 (sent on August 15<sup>th</sup>) addressed a well prepared peace proposal in French, to terminate the still going war. The international atmosphere looked better than before to end the war.<sup>27</sup> This is the famous Letter *Dès le Début*<sup>28</sup>, which intended to make influence on the Governments at both sides. The Holy Father said:

“From the beginning of our Pontificate, amidst the horrors of the terrible war unleashed upon Europe, We have kept before Our attention three things above all: to preserve complete impartiality in relation to all the belligerents, as is appropriate to him who is the common father and who loves all his children with an equal affection; to endeavor constantly to do to all the most possible good, without personal exceptions and without national or religious distinctions, a duty which the universal law of charity, as well as the supreme spiritual charge entrusted to Us by Christ, dictates to Us; finally, as Our peace-making mission equality demands, to leave nothing undone within Our power, which could assist in hastening the end of his calamity, by trying to lead the peoples and their heads to more moderate frames of mind and to the calm deliberations of peace, of a “just and lasting” peace [...]. Once the supremacy of law has been established, let every obstacle to the ways of communication between the peoples be removed, by ensuring through rules to be fixed in similar fashion, the true freedom and common use of the seas. This would, on the one hand, remove many reasons for conflict and, on the other, would open new sources of prosperity and progress to all.”<sup>29</sup>

The Pope listed strict terms, which included: 1) material force of arms should be substituted the moral force of law – it means only agreements by all; 2) simultaneous and reciprocal reduction of armaments; 3) the sufficient rules and guarantees must be established and maintenance of public order in each State; 4) instead of armies and institution of arbitration, according to the standards; 5) sanctions against the state which might refuse to submit international questions to arbitration, or to accept its

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Arthur WALWORTH: *Woodrow Wilson. II*. Norwalk, CT, 1978. 101–122.

<sup>27</sup> POLLARD op. cit. 117–123.

<sup>28</sup> BENEDICTUS XV, Litt. *Dès le Début* (1 aug. 1917). *AAS*, 9 (1917) 417–420.

<sup>29</sup> Sidney Z. EHLER – John B. MORRALL (eds.): *Church and State Through the Centuries*. Westminster, MD, 1954. 374–376.



decisions.<sup>30</sup> He also suggested to examine the territorial questions in a “conciliatory frame of mind [...] as far as it is just and practicable” regarding the conflict between Italy and Austro-Hungary; and between Germany and France. He mentioned also Armenia,<sup>31</sup> the Balkan States, and reestablishment of the Polish Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

Even the pope settled practical, articulated suggestions for peace negotiation, the reaction was humiliating refusal. The Entente and Central Powers basically not even reply to the Holy Father initiative (two official negative replies happened by USA and Great Britain). Karl I was the only one who replied positively in the name of Austro-Hungary.

Nevertheless, Pope Benedict XV declaration supported well the classical legal concept of the Holy See and her sovereignty as basis for negotiation with states. This standpoint was consequent and clear: rejecting the “just war” theory, and to be “respectful of the rights of the defeated” in order to avoid an “unjust peace after an unjust war”. It must be emphasized, that because the several failed international negotiations and proposals in the time of the Great War, the other results in diplomatic fields of the Holy See are more valuable.<sup>33</sup> The World War I (July 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 – November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918) had overshadowed the papacy of Benedict XV, however – as I have underlined – particularly during that dark time the Holy Father was able to express his governing, pastoral, international diplomatic and humanitarian activity, which clearly expressed and improved the Holy See's active membership in the international law and relations.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

On November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918 the Central Powers – trustfully in President Wilson's fourteen points – laid down their arms. However, the following “peace process” was essentially opposite to Wilson's romanticist offer. Citing Arnold J. Toynbee's article *The Main Features of the Landscape* written in 1935 on the conclusion of the so called Great War: “The armistice in 1918, based on the Wilsonian “Fourteen Points” promised self-determination, justice, and peace for all – winners and losers; but its promises did not soften the post-war treatment of the defeated nations.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 375–376.

<sup>31</sup> About Armenians within the Ottoman Empire during the Great War and about the Armenian Genocide cf. Anahit ASTOYAN: *The pillage of the century exploration of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1914–1923*. Yerevan, 2015. 29–64.

<sup>32</sup> EHLER–MORRALL op. cit. 376.

<sup>33</sup> POLLARD op. cit. 123–128.

<sup>34</sup> Yves BRIÈRE: Concordats postérieurs a la Grande Guerre. In: Raoul NAZ (ed.): *Dictionnaire de droit canonique. III*. Paris, 1942. 1431–1472.; cf. Walter LEISNER: Geglaubtes Recht. Säkularisierte religiöse Grundlagen der Demokratie. In: Josef INSENSEE – Wilhelm REES – Wolfgang RÜFNER (Hrsg.): *Dem Staate, was des Staates – der Kirche, was der Kirche ist. Festschrift für Joseph Listl zum 70. Geburtstag*. [Staatskirchenrechtliche Abhandlungen 33]. Berlin, 1999. 115–128.

<sup>35</sup> Arnold J. TOYNEEBE: *The Main Features of the Landscape in The Treaty of Versailles and After*. London, 1935.

In fact, the Holy See initiatives had not inserted into the document which has entry into World history as “Versailles Treaty” (signed on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1919) without any single mandatory juridical element of an international lawful treaty. The three central figures – President Wilson, Prime Minister Lloyd George and Prime Minister Georges Benjamin Clemenceau – used political force to determine those terms which – based on the concept which was rejected expressively by Pope Benedict XV – laid on revenge, without any negotiation (only observations were allowed to add to that by the Central Powers). As one of the catastrophic conclusions, the last Catholic empire in Europe, which seemed many countries – including the Holy See – the guarantee for a geopolitical balance within Europe, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had been ceased to exist. Germany had been stigmatized as “the only responsible nation of every act which was done against humanity during the war” – as was emphasized by President Clemenceau during the Versailles Summit. Based on Card. Gasparri’s note this conclusion was: “the voice of imperialism, hegemonic ambitions, commercial egotism and the overpowering nationalism of the winners.”<sup>36</sup>

The international status of the Vatican’s territorial sovereignty has got suitable guarantee only in 1929 through the “Lateran Treaty”, just a decade before the new war. The “useless massacre” had been repeated from 1939 in much more terrible form as a new cataclysm of many millions peoples’ life.

As closing note I would like to mention again Arnold J. Toynbee’s contemporary prophetic vision<sup>37</sup>: “[...] That desperate war which has been fought by our generation will be fought again within our lifetime by us and our children.”

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<sup>36</sup> Pietro GASPARRI: *Diario*. II. 467 (24<sup>th</sup> April 1919).

<sup>37</sup> Arnold J. TOYNBEE: *The World after the Peace Conference, Being an Epilogue to the “History of Peace Conference of Paris” and a Prologue to the “Survey of International Affairs, 1920–1923”*. Oxford, 1925.