

## BRITISH DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION AT THE HOLY SEE

SIR ALEC RANDALL, K.C.M.G.

**I**N a book called *Vatican Assignment*, which is shortly to be published, I give an account, from some years of experience in Rome, of the establishment in 1914 and subsequent development of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the Holy See. I also deal with several other related topics, social and political, such as American diplomatic relations during the nineteenth century, where I show that the American Government—then aloof from European politics—did not have to contend with the difficulties and prejudices which affected Great Britain during that period. The present article will be limited to giving a brief account of the most interesting attempts that were made, after the Reformation and before 1914, to bring about diplomatic contact, official or not, between Great Britain and the Vatican. In the space available it can be no more than an outline, but there is a mass of fascinating material available, most of it unused, some of it known only to specialist researchers, and I hope to be able to fill in the details in the fairly near future.

Most British and American visitors to Rome will be familiar with the church of San Gregorio, from the steps of which the Pope sent St Augustine to England on his mission in 596 A.D. In the forecourt of this church is the memorial tablet to Sir Edward Carne, last British diplomatic envoy to the Holy See before relations were severed in Queen Elizabeth's reign. Thereafter, until James II's unhappy experience, the laws prohibiting foreign jurisdiction in either Church or state and establishing the Royal Supremacy in religion made illegal any link between London and Rome. There were occasional special, unofficial missions; Queen Henrietta Maria, for example, in 1633 sent Sir Robert Douglas, with Charles I's knowledge, to try to get the Pope to appoint an English or Scottish Cardinal; James II sent the dramatist John Caryl, but soon replaced him with a fully-accredited ambassador. This was Earl Castlemaine, appointed in 1686. As already hinted, it was not a happy choice. The careful Catholic historian Lingard said the Earl accepted 'with unfeigned reluctance', and

well he might, for it was hardly to be thought that his sufferings in prison at the time of the Titus Oates plot would efface the notoriety of his name as the husband of Charles II's mistress Barbara Villiers. With studied understatement Macaulay speaks of the 'obvious impropriety' of the appointment 'to a Pontiff of primitive austerity'. There were other reasons for failure. Innocent XI, who is to be beatified this year, disapproved of James II; he thought his Catholic zeal unwise; he disliked the King's reliance on Jesuit advisers, for that Order was then supporting Louis XIV, with whom the Pope had a serious contention. To crown all, Castlemaine pressed the Pope to agree to make the Jesuit Father Petre Cardinal and Archbishop of York. The Pope firmly refused and the Ambassador, who had conducted his mission with extreme pomp, threatened to return to London. The Pope in effect said he could please himself, and James recalled him. Later Castlemaine, on account of this futile mission, was tried on the capital charge of trying to reconcile England to the Church of Rome. He was acquitted, but there were no further attempts at making regular contact with the Pope until the French Revolution, followed by the Napoleonic Wars, brought many French priests and laity to this country, where they received much generous hospitality from Protestants and also helped to mitigate prejudice. Further, Great Britain and the Papal State had a common interest in resisting French aggression, and in these circumstances Pius VI in 1793 sent Monsignor Erskine as his unofficial envoy to London; a similar informal mission in Rome on behalf of the British Government was carried out by Sir John Coxe Hippisley in 1779-80 and again in 1792-96. His work, according to the Dictionary of National Biography, was 'acknowledged in flattering terms' by the British Government. As for Monsignor Erskine, he later became Cardinal, and the story of his work in London<sup>1</sup> is full of interest. He was well received by Pitt and even given a financial allowance by George III, when the fall of Rome cut him off from the Vatican. According to his own account his mission was equally valuable to Pope and King.

Pius VII's resistance to Napoleon and the consequent sufferings he endured brought him much respect in England, and at the Congress of Vienna his Cardinal Secretary of State, Consalvi, won the high regard of Lord Castlereagh and secured British support

1 See W. M. Brady: *Memoirs of Cardinal Erskine*, in *Anglo-Roman Papers*, 1890.

in the practically entire restitution of the Papal States. There were many contacts between the Cardinal and Castlereagh, and even a personal royal letter—the first since the Reformation, James II excepted—addressed to the Pope by the Prince Regent, in reply to a letter of thanks for British aid in restoring to the Vatican the works of art which Napoleon had carried off to Paris. All this cordiality, however, led to no official diplomatic contact. The Cardinal Secretary of State answered with an emphatic affirmative an enquiry by Castlereagh whether the Pope would be ready to enter on regular diplomatic relations, but the idea was not pursued.<sup>2</sup> Mutual commercial interests were looked after by British consular officers; religious questions of political importance which arose, as in Gibraltar, Malta or the Ionian Islands, were treated either by direct correspondence or through unofficial agents. One among these whose activities are described by Dr Miko was Mr Maitland, who on Castlereagh's behalf induced Cardinal Consalvi to sit for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence—a picture now in Windsor Castle.

But all this cordiality and the prospect of a renewal of formal diplomatic relations with the Papal States were ended when the Prince Regent ascended the throne in 1820, when Lord Castlereagh died in 1822, to be succeeded by Canning, and when the next year Cardinal Consalvi was succeeded by Cardinal Somaglia. The notification of the Sacred College to the British Government of Pius VII's death received no official acknowledgment. All the Vatican communications were sent to the Law Officers of the Crown, who gave their opinion that acknowledgment might be interpreted as recognition of the Pope's jurisdiction, and even bring British Ministers under the charge of violating the Statute of Praemunire. Thereupon Canning explained the position in a private letter to Cardinal Consalvi; as he was not personally acquainted with Cardinal Somaglia he could not write to him officially. Negotiations were, however, still conducted when necessary. Lord Burghesh, British Minister in Florence, for example, served as an intermediary, but was ordered to cease all communication with Rome as soon as the particular topic of mutual interest (it was again the Ionian Islands) had been disposed

<sup>2</sup> For this part of my article I am indebted for much material to Dr Norbert Miko's essay, 'Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen England und dem Heiligen Stuhl', in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, Vol. 78, 1956; a very useful study, based on extensive research in the Public Record Office in London.

of. Obviously the intense anti-Catholic agitation which preceded the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act influenced the situation—but, as Dr Miko has discovered in a letter of Canning's, it also, incidentally, prevented the opening of an Anglican chapel in Rome, since the Government refused to grant money for this purpose in a city where there was no consular or other representative; the British Consul in the Papal States resided at Ancona.

In 1827 Canning died; in 1828 the Duke of Wellington succeeded him and the next year carried through the Catholic Relief Bill. Two Popes held their reigns in quick succession—Leo XII in February, 1829, Pius VIII in November, 1830. With the latter's successor, Gregory XVI, who became Pope in February, 1831, the Papacy as a European sovereign state again acquired exceptional international interest and importance, and the British Government decided to give it close attention. The Romagna disturbances in 1831 and the Austrian occupation determined Palmerston to send an authorized, even if unofficial, agent to Rome in the person of Sir Brook Taylor, who had been British Ambassador in Berlin. He was the first of a series of such agents. They were generally seconded from the British Legation in Florence, and they dealt regularly with the ever-increasing number of questions which the British Government felt it advisable to discuss with the Holy See, the state of Ireland, ecclesiastical appointments in Malta, later the promise by Pius IX of liberal reforms in his dominions (in which he was naively encouraged by Lord Minto, Palmerston's special envoy<sup>3</sup>), then the Pope's reaction and the long-drawn-out complications of the 'Roman Question'; finally the conflict with Italian nationalism, the triumph of which—a familiar story—closed the line of British residential representatives at the Papal Court for the remainder of the century. In all this period there were still occasional reminders from London to the agents of the dangers of *Praemunire*, but in 1844 Palmerston secured a ruling from the Attorney-General that there was no law against accrediting a representative of the British Crown to the Holy See. In 1848 a law was actually passed enabling the Queen to enter into diplomatic relations with the Pope. An amendment was carried in the House of Lords making this conditional on no ecclesiastic being

<sup>3</sup> See *Pio Nono; a Study in European Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*. By E. E. Y. Hales. 1954.

received in London as Papal envoy.<sup>4</sup> This seems to have given some offence in Rome; in any event full diplomatic representation was dropped. The succession of unofficial agents was instead maintained from 1844 to 1874. In 1853 it was Mr Petre; then Lord Lyons (later H.M. Ambassador in Paris) from 1853 to 1858, when he was succeeded by the most remarkable in this line. This was Mr (later Lord) Odo Russell, son of the diplomat Lord George William Russell, and nephew of Lord John Russell. He remained twelve years, a crucial period covering the rise of Piedmont, the exploits of Garibaldi, the Franco-Austrian War, the Franco-Prussian War, the issue of the Syllabus of Modern Errors, the Vatican Council and the Definition of Infallibility. Although highly critical of Papal policy, Russell kept the best of personal relations with Pius IX, to whom—he had a good tenor voice—he used to sing occasionally.<sup>5</sup> The mass of despatches he wrote during his long and active service give a graphic picture of those times. In particular his correspondence, both official and private,<sup>6</sup> deserves the prominence it receives in any authoritative account of the Vatican Council;<sup>7</sup> especially his letters to his father-in-law, Lord Clarendon, when the latter became Foreign Secretary. Russell himself, however, does not seem to deserve the judgment of Lytton Strachey in his essay on Manning in *Eminent Victorians*, that he was merely ‘a little fly buzzing in Manning’s gossamer’. Strachey’s remark was occasioned by Purcell’s statement<sup>8</sup> that it was through Manning’s information, conveyed through Russell to Clarendon, that the latter was able to thwart Gladstone’s efforts (inspired by Lord Acton) to get the British Government to join other European Governments in intervening in the matter of Infallibility. Had Lytton Strachey read all the documents instead of merely making his own deductions from Purcell he would, in my view, have seen that Russell had an intelligent and intelligible judgment; after all, he rose to be the first British Ambassador to the German Empire, and was made

4 See *Memoirs of an ex-Minister*. By the Earl of Malmesbury. 1885.

5 For some of these details I am indebted to Lady Russell, to a privately-printed book by her husband, Sir Odo Russell, and my own reading of Mr Odo Russell’s correspondence in the Public Record Office.

6 See E. S. Purcell: *Life of Cardinal Manning*, 1896.

7 See Cuthbert Butler: *The Vatican Council*, 1930.

8 In writing his *Life of Manning* Purcell had been allowed by Lady Amptill to use Odo Russell’s correspondence with Cardinal Manning and Lord Clarendon, but I understand the originals were destroyed. On the other hand, all Lord Clarendon’s informative letters to Russell have been preserved.

Baron Amphill for his eminent services. Russell's view was that intervention would prove worse than useless and that, from the Catholic point of view, definition of Papal Infallibility was necessary. Moreover, it is quite clear from Clarendon's letters to Odo Russell that he thought that it was of paramount importance to maintain the latter's valuable influence in Rome in connexion with Ireland.

Odo Russell left for Berlin before the entry of Garibaldi's troops into Rome. His successor Jervoise who, on the British Government's instructions, offered wise advice—inspired by the Italian Government—intended to restrain the Pope from abandoning Rome, was withdrawn by Disraeli in 1874. The next year the law enabling the British monarch to accredit a full diplomatic representative to the Holy See was repealed. The interest which various succeeding British Governments had in conveying their views to the Pope was not, however, abandoned. Various Prime Ministers (Lord Salisbury among them) wished to enter into diplomatic contact, but consideration of Anglo-Italian relations and British public opinion prevented the establishment of any permanent mission. The opposition in England did not by any means all come from Protestants. The Irish had no wish to see any increase of English influence at the Vatican.<sup>9</sup> There was also the opposition of Cardinal Manning, who seemed to think that a permanent British representative in Rome might mean government interference in ecclesiastical questions, and that if there was any intermediary at all it should be the Bishops and above all himself. In any case, according to Purcell, he was relieved when the reception of an official Papal representative at Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 proved not to be the stepping-stone to a regular diplomatic exchange.

In default of such an exchange there were various *ad hoc*, though fully accredited, missions. The first was the appointment of the Duke of Norfolk as Special Ambassador to congratulate Leo XIII on his Jubilee, a return for the Papal Mission just mentioned, earlier the same year. Then there was the sending in 1889 of Sir Linton Simmonds, former Governor of Malta, as Minister to discuss Maltese questions—a never-failing topic.<sup>10</sup> The last

<sup>9</sup> See Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning*.

<sup>10</sup> Discussed at length in Dr Miko's essay already cited. On later Maltese developments I may be permitted to refer to my book.

mission was in 1902 when the Earl of Denbigh was appointed by Edward VII to congratulate Leo XIII on his Golden Jubilee.

It was not until the First World War that the British Government became convinced of the advisability of having at the Vatican regular and sustained diplomatic representation. Begun in December, 1914, as a 'Special Mission', it was in 1920 transformed into a regular Legation. The first non-Catholic to hold appointment as Minister—the first two, Sir Henry Howard and Count de Salis, were Catholics—was, by a happy choice, Sir Odo Russell, who, as younger son of the Odo Russell already discussed, was born in the Palazzo Chigi in Rome while his father served there. He took up his duties in 1923. Under him, so ably and charmingly seconded by Lady Russell, the Legation built up a fund of goodwill and understanding at the Vatican, where British policy and character had too often been misrepresented or underestimated, with consequent prejudice to British political interests in various parts of the world. Great Britain has now for over thirty years taken her place with the increasing number of countries who signify their appreciation of the Holy See as a post of observation and the importance of the Catholic Church in international affairs by maintaining regular diplomatic missions. In 1914 there were sixteen such missions; in 1955 there were fifty, not only from traditionally Catholic or even Christian countries, but from such countries as India, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia.

In reply to protests against the continuance of the British Mission after the First World War the Government stated in Parliament in 1920 that it had decided 'after full and careful consideration that it is desirable in the public interest to continue diplomatic representation of Great Britain at the Vatican, which has been in existence since the first year of the war and has been attended by useful results'. That view has more than once been re-affirmed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The actions of Pius XI in resisting totalitarianism and urging Christian unity, and the continuance of the same policy by the present Holy Father, have raised the prestige of the Papacy in the world at large, and contributed much to lessening the hostility which prevailed in this country and to whose force in the last century more than one government had, sometimes unwillingly, to bow. It should, however, be made clear—and this, among other things, I do in my forthcoming book already mentioned—that repre-

sentation at the Vatican is political, not religious, in its scope, and that it can be, has been and is, carried on by competent trained diplomats without reference to their personal beliefs. It has, in a word, settled down to being a normal part of the British Foreign Service, as it is of the Foreign Services of so many other Governments.

---

## RELIGIOUS TRANSLATION: FOUR EXAMPLES

EDMUND HILL, O.P., AND HERBERT McCABE, O.P.

**I**N our January number we published an article on religious translation. One of our readers, the Rev. J. B. O'Connell, who has himself collaborated in a fairly recent translation of the missal, asked the writer of the article to provide some examples which would embody the principles of translation he had formulated. This seemed a very just request, and so we are printing here four pieces of translation, two from the breviary and two from the missal. The extracts from St Leo and St Augustine were chosen for the contrast of style. These two, and the translation of the prayers from the missal, are by Fr E. Hill, O.P., the writer of the aforementioned article; the translation of the Consecration Prayer is by Fr H. McCabe, O.P. It will be observed that there are some small points on which they differ, for example on the use of 'thou' or 'you' in formal prayers to God. They would both welcome the comments and criticisms of readers.

(I) FROM ST LEO'S 8TH SERMON ON THE PASSION (3rd nocturn lesson, Good Friday)

Pilate's guilt was certainly surpassed by the wickedness of the Jews, who made use of Caesar's name to overawe him, and so drove him to carry out their villainy. Yet he did not come out of it guiltless either, since he forsook his own judgment and lent himself to other men's wrongdoing. But that Pilate allowed Jesus to be ignominiously ridiculed and maltreated, that he had him flogged and crowned with thorns and dressed up in the trappings of mock grandeur, and then paraded him in such state before the