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The power politics of the Holy See: the church, the state, and its citizens

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Abstract

This paper examines the Holy See as a political actor amid hard power conflict. While many debate the legal and religious personalities of the Holy See, few engage with an approach that illustrates the Holy See and its citizen-like laity in light of its combinative religious–political dynamic. This paper argues that resulting from this dynamic, the Holy See’s *sui generis* statehood enables the comprehension of a similar *sui generis* citizenry. These citizens, which this paper labels pseudo-citizens, are the result of connections between the recognized sovereignty of the Holy See and its role over the Roman Catholic Church. This paper examines this connection contextually amid the Holy See’s interaction with the underlying international moral framework on just conflict and the protective motivating factors associated with its pseudo-citizens. This motivation is consistent with historical Holy See positions, and is significant for understanding the Holy See’s approach amid future hard power events.

Keywords: citizens; Holy See; Iraq War; just war; statehood

Introduction

With 2023 marking the 20th anniversary of the launch of the U.S.-led Iraq War, it is prudent to reflect upon the activities of the main power actors in and around the event. The Holy See, while often overlooked in *hard power* debates in international relations, was a significant figure in the movement against the invasion of Iraq by the United States. The Holy See stood *toe-to-toe* with the big power players of the day—France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States—despite its territorial restrictions—Vatican City is about 109 acres—and the nature of the Holy See as being primarily clerical. In many cases, recent history included, the Holy See has been ignored in power relations; Joseph Stalin’s memorable quip “How many divisions does the pope have?” is a prime example (Hebblethwaite, 2000, 202). And while the Holy See was unsuccessful in deterring the United States on Iraq, it nevertheless engaged within the same circles of influence, like the United Nations (UN), and continues to do so today.

Scholarly literature has already engaged with the various Iraq War arguments, ranging from the influence of the just war tradition (Johnson, 2005b) to those

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examining specifically the Holy See's motivations concerning its *milieu* and possession goals according to the mission of the Catholic Church (Wolfers, 1962; Ryall, 1998; Troy, 2018; Cahill, 2019, 2022; Ferrara, 2019). The arguments in this paper, however, illustrate the Holy See's just war arguments as a specific counter framework to those associated with the United States, while also extending further than Cahill's conclusions of protecting Chaldean Catholics to recognizing their citizen-like status within the Holy See. Linked to this are the numerous reflections within scholarship associated with the Holy See in international relations (Kunz, 1952; Troy, 2008; Barbato, 2013, among others) which highlight the Catholic laity as the essential underpinning of the Holy See's sovereignty. This paper does not contest this point; rather it focuses on the connection between the Holy See and the laity amid a special responsibility which arises beyond normal religious adherence.

By examining the Holy See as a *sui generis* state, this paper highlights its possession of a similarly *sui generis* citizenry. These citizens, of which the paper labels pseudo-citizens, are a product of the recognized sovereignty of the Holy See and its leadership position in the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic laity become distinct as pseudo-citizens because they share a common relationship through baptism which is experienced in other forms of citizenship traditionally, while sovereignty denotes certain political and social responsibilities, particularly the protection of pseudo-citizens from harm in conflict zones.

To that end, this paper will first explore the contemporary scholarly literature on the Holy See to contextualize the discussion before then demonstrating the existence of the Holy See's pseudo-citizenry. This will point to the elements which form the basis of this citizen status, with a protection example from Pius XII. Next, this paper examines the Holy See's interpretation of the Iraq War within its just war framework in order to underpin a case of protection in modern times. The just war tradition is presented as the base moral-legalistic framework for this discussion as James Turner Johnson notes "[m]odern international law is one of the bearers of this tradition" (Johnson, 1984, 14). The Iraq War of 2003 is chosen as it presents a clear and logical outline of argument directed at the protection of pseudo-citizens by the Holy See. Overall, this paper argues that the Holy See, functioning as a state, promotes the protection of its pseudo-citizenry as *the central feature* of its anti-conflict policy.

The Holy See in international relations

In discussions of international relations and power politics, the Holy See is often overlooked. Much of scholarship remains considerably susceptible to the general neglect of the Holy See in these contexts, as it remains largely synonymous with the Catholic Church and thus often relegated to purely religious rather than political discourses. In fact, it has been noted that the unique nature of the Holy See as both church and state is thought to impede comparative research, as "the Holy See demonstrates a combined traditional temporal and religious ontology, which is why it is difficult to make direct comparisons to other states" (Cahill, 2022, 179).

Interest within scholarship generally observes the Holy See amid soft power roles. Mathias Albert, somewhat unusually, contends that the Holy See draws upon a "hard

power tradition” that “assigns it a privileged position in the system of world politics compared to other ‘soft power’ actors” (Albert, 2017, 29). Generally, the Holy See’s soft power is envisioned as stemming from its “ethical reservoir” (Troy, 2008, 66). The Holy See leverages its ancient institution, the Catholic Church, and the breadth of papal authority in the field of international relations to press its religious and political agendas (cf. Kurth, 1993; Troy, 2008, 67–68; Barbato, 2013). This ultimately offers “an important token of morality” thereby rendering the Holy See a desirable international collaborator (Gayte, 2011, 736). This was especially evident during the Cold War among politicians pursuing anti-Communist policies (Kosicki, 2022, 135). However, recent work has focused on the affect certain scandals like clerical sex abuse (Formicola, 2011, 523–524; Cahill, 2019; Reginbogin, 2022) and financial scandals (Reginbogin, 2022) which have weakened the Holy See’s moral credibility. This weakening of moral credibility contributes to the erosion of its soft power among the international community.

Much of the discussion surrounding the Holy See in international relations often involves questions pertaining to its relevance. Modern international relation is generally composed of two main actors: sovereign states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Holy See possesses certain NGO qualities through the Catholic Church (Ferrari, 2006), in which the Church acts through canon law in a manner similar to that of a “state-like, trans-territorially centralized administrative system” (Teschke, 2003, 103). We find this historically shown vis-à-vis Pope Gregory VII’s 1075 *Dictatus papae*, which essentially declared the papacy “to be politically and legally supreme over the entire Church, the clergy to be independent from [temporal] control and the emperor to be subordinate to ultimate papal supremacy even in [temporal] affairs” (Axtmann, 1990, 298). In modern times, the Holy See acts as the centralized administration for the clerical, financial, and sociological considerations of the global Church through institutions within the Roman Curia and the Institute for the Works of Religion, colloquially known as the Vatican Bank.

However, modern international law designates the Holy See as a sovereign state actor (Barbato, 2013), while at the same time remaining “a non-territorial entity composed of the Pope and the Roman Curia” (Abdullah, 1996, 1837). This status is *sui generis*, that which is “of its own kind” (Cornell Law School, 2021). Accordingly, “[t]he grant of [such] recognition is an act on the international plane, affecting the mutual rights and obligations of states, and their status or legal capacity in general” (Oppenheim, 1992, 128). This status allows the Holy See to remain independent of external state interference derived from sovereignty in international law.

Pursuant with Article 3 of the Lateran Treaty, the Holy See is declared to possess “full ownership, exclusive and absolute power, and sovereign jurisdiction over [Vatican City],” while Article 24 dictates that “the City of the Vatican shall always and in every case be considered as neutral and inviolable territory” (Holy See and the Kingdom of Italy, 1950, 435, 441). This in effect established a physical territory from which the non-territorial Holy See can operate its spiritual agenda. The command of this sovereignty, while formally linked to the 1929 Lateran Treaty, has long held a historical enjoyment, predating contemporary international structures.

There are those, however, who argue that the Holy See lost its sovereignty with the 1870 loss of the Papal State (Morss, 2015), while others claim that the Holy See enjoys

its modern claims to sovereignty vis-à-vis its spiritual authority amid the law of guarantees (Oppenheim, 1992, 326). Cedric Ryngaert rejects the Holy See's claim to statehood in and of itself and designates Vatican City as a "(mini)-State" (Ryngaert, 2011, 830). Reginbogin (2022), however, points to the Holy See as possessing a statehood derived through the sovereignty of Vatican City. Meanwhile, Kunz (1952) denotes Vatican City, not as a sovereign state, but as a vassal state of the Holy See. Nevertheless, it has been asserted that the protection of the Church from external pressures requires only sovereign status, not statehood (Zambian-Tévar, 2022). The linking of sovereignty to statehood in contemporary international law drives the latter element by which the Holy See must defend (*ibid.*).

Irrespective of territorial statehood, the Holy See has long embarked upon sovereign activities. For example, while from 1870 to 1929 the Holy See lacked traditional access to sovereignty through territorial possession, it remained active in diplomatic circles (Reginbogin, 2022). Mediation, for example, has long been a competence of the Holy See, owed to its recognized sovereignty (Barbato, 2013; Byrnes, 2017; Cahill, 2017; Faggioli, 2022; Reginbogin, 2022). The historical exercise of mediation includes the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal, the support of Christian Democrats in post-war Italy, and an aspired containment of communism prior to even the United States (Linden, 1916; Barbato, 2013). In 1994, the Holy See used its diplomatic service to form an agreement with Israel to both recognize the Church within its borders and to protect Christian access to various holy land sites (Weigel, 2020, 697–713). More recently, the Holy See has acted as mediator for the return of mutual diplomatic recognition between Cuba and the United States (Baker, 2014; Dwight, 2015).

Much of the Holy See's international activity can be understood as underpinning a model of state-based values (Troy, 2008, 70–71). Luke Cahill notes this as presenting certain *milieu* goals, that seek to shape the environment in which states operate (Cahill, 2019, 2022). *Milieu* goals—that which seek to alter the operating environment—contrast with possession goals—that which desire to preserve material entities (Wolfers, 1962; Ryall, 1998; Troy, 2018). Keukeleire and Delreux (2022, 35–36) frame *milieu* goals (called "structural reforms") as the "the capacity to shape the organizing principles and rules of the game and to determine how others will play that game." The Holy See's *milieu* goals align to its salvific mission, unifying peace and social justice concerns within Church and state activities (Ryall, 1998; Barbato, 2017; Stummvoll, 2018; Troy, 2018, Ferrara, 2019).

The activity of nuncios (Holy See ambassadors) remains an area of international relations competence for which *milieu* goals of the Holy See have long persisted (Reginbogin, 2022). Contemporary nuncio activity adopts a hybrid personality, with nuncios acting in both a religious and political capacity. Nuncios participate on equal footing to their ambassador peers, harboring possession goals vis-à-vis the use of diplomatic immunity alongside *milieu* goals that seek to benefit the Church relative to its universal salvific mission (Agensky, 2017; Troy, 2018, 528, 532). Nuncio agency has developed amid certain creative space found within international diplomacy (Constantinou *et al.*, 2016), while formal relations with governments, signified by the deployment of nuncios, present opportunities for the Holy See to maintain its geopolitical interests (Agnew, 2010). In an effort to highlight

their importance, Pope Francis has developed a third branch of the Secretariat of State dedicated specifically to nuncios (Agasso Jr, 2017).

Through its unique merging of secular politics and the Church's sacred mission (Barbato, 2013; Parolin, 2017), the Holy See shares diplomatic relations with nearly all states regardless of common character (Cahill, 2017). We may think of the Ostpolitik of John XXIII and Paul VI toward communism (Kosicki, 2022, 132) contrasted with the more direct, some might say confrontational, language of John Paul II (Kosicki, 2022, 135), or the language of neutrality expressed by Benedict XVI on the 2011 Syria conflict (Benedict XVI, 2011a, 2011b). Francis in particular has stunned many observers in his 2018 agreement with China over the appointment of bishops, as well as in its 2022 renewal (Francis, 2018; Holy See Press Office, 2022).

The UN serves as a prime platform for the Holy See's *milieu* activities. Alan Chong and Jodok Troy note the similarities between the UN and the Holy See, with both "concerned with forging unity among the human race and mitigate[ing] conflict" (Chong and Troy, 2011, 336), pointing to the transnational non-nationalism of the two bodies (Chong and Troy, 2011; cf. Turina, 2015; Albert, 2017). The Holy See's Non-Member State, Permanent Observer status (United Nations, 2020) maintains a recognition of participation that is "on the same level as if it were a [full] member" in non-voting areas (Abdullah, 1996, 1843). This distinguishes it from other bodies like NGOs. Abdullah (1996) notes the importance of this Permanent Observer status, particularly toward its access to the consensus-driven model at UN Conferences (cf. Weigel, 2020; Reginbogin, 2022). Examples like the 1994 Cairo conference on reproduction and the 1995 Beijing conference on gender showcase the success of the Holy See in achieving its *milieu* goals vis-à-vis coalition building among unusual partners to block that which runs contra to its established mission (Cahill, 2020). On conflict, the Holy See maintains that the UN Security Council holds the greatest authority toward a justified force (Paul VI, 1965; Feuerherd, 2003; Laghi, 2003; John Paul II, 2003c). This reflects the Holy See's desire to mitigate large state, hard power dominance in international relations (Allen Jr, 2003a, 2003e).

With respect to the area of conflict—of which this paper is concerned—it would be a mistake to consider the Holy See, due to its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, as holding a completely anti-war position. To suggest this restrains oneself solely to a surface-level interpretation, insofar as both historical and contemporary examples exist to reject this claim. Both the Crusades and the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrate a historical permissiveness, while support for 1990s humanitarian interventions (John Paul II, 1992; Coste, 1993; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993), its response to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in New York (Allen Jr, 2001; Guenois, 2001; John Paul II, 2001), and subsequent statements related to the defense of innocents (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; Powers, 2009) demonstrate points where modern force may be just.

The just war tradition forms the Holy See's foundational reflections on force and finds clear expression in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Church, 1997, 615–617). The *Catechism* maintains that "governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed ... [and] the damages inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting,

grave, and certain” (Catholic Church, 1997, 615). Novak (2003) maintains that the *Catechism* “assigns primary responsibility, not to distant commentators, but to such public authorities themselves.” This reflects a concern for moral legitimacy as belonging to the “prudential judgement of those who have responsibility for the common good” (Catholic Church, 1997, 615). Yet at the same time, the *Catechism* maintains that “[a]ll citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war” (Catholic Church, 1997, 615).

John Paul II makes clear his view: “Today the scale and horror of modern warfare—whether nuclear or not—make it totally unacceptable as a means of settling difference between nations” (John Paul II, 1982). For John Paul there exists “a right to defend oneself,” yet this right must be “exercised with respect for moral and legal limits in the choice of ends and means” (John Paul II, 2002*b*). In John Paul’s opinion, “War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity” (John Paul II, 2003*a*).

These statements suggest a just war logic that begins “with a presumption against [force], then places the burden of proof on the actor who seeks to legitimate the use of force as a valid exception to the presumption” (Hehir, 1995, 46–47; cf. Johnson, 1996, 30). This position is rooted in a Westphalian wisdom that “the [just war] ethic should protect the presumption of nonintervention” (Hehir, 1995, 47). However, O’Brien (2003) notes this lends more toward a humanist peacebuilding than a just war rhetoric.

Johnson (2005*a*) and Weigel (2002*b*) reject the above view as emasculating the just war tradition. Furthermore, Johnson (2005*a*), Weigel (2002*a*), and Griffiths (2002) have each argued the above presumption against war forms a shift toward a “functional pacifism.” However, Norris (2014) rejects this label. While acknowledging recent shifts in just war narratives toward pacifist ideals, Norris notes the Holy See “leaves open too many possibilities for justified armed conflict to be labelled as functional pacifism due to traditional Catholic theological commitments that place limits on any movement toward pacifism” (Norris, 2014, 110). The Holy See is therefore offering space for the continued teaching of the just war tradition, while maintaining a “recognition of a vocation to pacifism” for individuals (Curran, 1984, 78).

A major consideration for the Holy See, particularly relative to areas of conflict, is the ability of the Church to operate freely and ensure the safety of the Catholic laity (Cahill, 2019, 2022; Faggioli, 2022). However, those analyses which address the laity focus on the way in which the Holy See acts as a Church among states and not the underpinning of the sovereign dimensions of this activity. Overlooking the connection to sovereignty weakens the understanding of the relationship between the laity, the Church, and the sovereign Holy See vis-à-vis international relations. This paper seeks to fill this gap by showcasing the alignment of state and Church in the Holy See, the elevation of Catholics to a citizen-like status, and how the Holy See actively seeks to protect them through diplomatic means.

The Holy See and the laity

Since the 1929 Lateran Treaty, the Holy See has maintained a formal, globalized presence within the modern world through its unique position as both a sovereign state

and the head of the global Catholic Church. Through its recognized sovereignty, the Holy See is independent from external state influences which might seek to undermine its overall mission. For example, the election of a new pope is, at present, an independent process void of direct external state influence. This has not always been the case, such as the circumstances surrounding the election of Pius X in 1903 (Hebblethwaite, 2000). Yet papal elections since the return of territorial sovereignty have arguably been exclusive Church events. Contrast this with the selection of the Archbishop of Canterbury where the Church of England must submit names to the UK government for approval, or the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople whom the Turkish government have imposed strict conditions of citizenship, and you find a distinct advantage derived by independent statehood.

The Holy See further maintains a unique position as the head of the Roman Catholic Church. In this capacity, the Holy See oversees a transnational membership of more than 1 billion and can influence the moral and political behavior of its faithful. This has manifested a unique relationship of church and state, whereby Church interests are represented uniquely within international relations while the size and breadth of the laity dispenses an influence to the Holy See that is beyond the norm for its metric size. This political–religious relationship has ultimately transformed the Catholic laity into something akin to citizens. It is, of course, not an actual citizenship, rather a relationship which mirrors aspects of citizenship (social belonging, monetary funding of the state, adherence to authority) and of which gives greater credence to the aspect of the Holy See as a contemporary state.

In the modern system, two primary types of citizenship exist: bounded and unbounded. Bounded citizenship accounts for a “membership of a given group as well as determining the legitimacy of claims to identity and rights” which encompasses “the civil, the political and the social” elements of a particular nation-state (Hennebry-Leung and Gayton, 2019, 11–12). It is geographically bound and beholden to a common internal history. Alternatively, unbounded citizenship exists with an “absence of geographical or legal border” (ibid., 12). In this case, citizenship is derived through an acknowledgment of a “human connection that goes beyond geo-political borders and ties the individual to one’s fellow man by virtue of the values one holds rather than the geography of where one was born” (ibid., 14–15). We find such unbounded citizenship in the European Union (EU), for example.

For the Church, this “common connection” finds itself in the sacrament of baptism; that which creates “an ontological and permanent bond which is not lost by reason of any act or fact of defection” (Herranz, 2006). Benedict XVI’s 2009 *motu proprio Omnia in mentem* (For the Attention of All) moved to underpin this permanence by highlighting the irrenunciability of baptism. While the *motu proprio* deals in particular with canonical marriage requirements, in answering the question of formal defection from the Church the document highlights that “the definition and practical configuration of such a *formal act* of separation from the Church has proved difficult to establish, from both a theological and a canonical standpoint” (Benedict XVI, 2009, emphasis in original). Therefore, the associated vague language surrounding defection was removed, thereby closing any means to renounce one’s baptism. This draws comparatively with Argentine citizenship

which cannot be renounced (Argentina Const. art. 75, §12; Argentina Decree 3213/84, art. 16).

In highlighting these elements, we find that the Church unites congregants amid a common value system under the Holy See's sovereign status, thereby deriving the basis for what we may deem as the Holy See's *pseudo-citizenry*. The term pseudo-citizen remains an important distinction on two grounds. First, pseudo-citizen is not a formal designation, insofar as you cannot, for example, obtain a passport through claims of pseudo-citizenship. It is instead a social-value component of belonging through religious conditions associated with membership in the Catholic Church. Second, the Holy See does operate actual citizenship in such cases as Vatican City staff and the diplomatic services. This designation includes the actual administering of passports. Therefore, the term pseudo-citizen is used to identify those associated via the transnational Church rather than the traditional means of citizenship. To a certain extent, we may find comparable patterns among the existence of citizenship to the EU—that which is measurable by external forces, but primarily an internal consideration. EU citizens remain citizens of their nationality despite the Union's recognition of a special EU-specific belonging.

Through the role of the Church, the pseudo-citizenry is relied upon for monetary services and placed beneath the authority of the magisterium. Monetarily, Peter's Pence, for example, is a collection that provides for the administration of the Holy See and the philanthropic work of the pope. The church in the United States is a major donor to this fund. Authority, however, is a delicate matter which relies heavily on the religious and juridical components of the Church. The general approach through traditional teaching documents has acquired a mobilization power toward addressing considerable concerns held by the Holy See (Ferrari, 2006). For example, Samuel P. Huntington considered the "third wave of democratization" as having been influenced strongly by the Church's support of democracy over communism (Huntington, 1970). Documents like Pius XI's 1937 encyclical *Divini redemptoris* (The Promise of a Divine Redeemer) and the Holy Office's 1949 decree of communist-related excommunications under Pius XII encapsulate the influence with which Church-based teachings may sway social and political alignments beyond the walls of the Vatican. Furthermore, canon law procedures on annulments have placed juridical restrictions on the laity which complicate marital separation in countries with civil divorce. Overall, the global reach of the Church extends the soft power influence of the Holy See, enabling the penetration of this power into the local and national discourse of foreign states through the Holy See's pseudo-citizens abroad.

Church teaching documents, such as papal encyclicals, are considerable resources for recognizing the breadth of topics over which the Holy See seeks to influence the Catholic faithful. For example, in the aftermath of the World War I, two encyclicals by Benedict XV were specifically devoted to the necessity of peace. The first, *Quod iam diu* (On the Future Peace Conference), encouraged the global Church to pray for a "just and lasting peace" amid an armistice only a few weeks old (Benedict XV, 1918, §1). The second, *Pacem, dei munus pulcherrimum* (Peace, the Beautiful Gift of God), implored reconciliation (Benedict XV, 1920). Similar addresses may be found among Benedict's successors.

John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth) commenting on, among other things, the necessity that "every institution, whether economic, social, cultural or political, be such as not to obstruct but rather to facilitate man's self betterment [sic]" (John XXIII, 1963, §146), provides a strong juxtaposition amid the backdrop of the iron curtain, the arms race, and active military engagements globally. More recently in *Laudato si'* (Praised be), Pope Francis amasses a social instruction detailing how climate change, inequality, technology, and modern anthropocentrism have delivered a global crisis to "our common home" in vast need of address (Francis, 2015). These elements insist upon some kind of behavioral adherence, which links to the Holy See's exercise of its soft power in international relations.

While the pseudo-citizen treatment of the laity is very much an internal Holy See mentality, it is not a one-sided view of Catholics. External observers of Catholicism similarly find justification in perpetuating this view. Historically, non-Catholics have held certain questions regarding the loyalty of Catholic citizens relationally to their Catholic faith (e.g., Britain, the United States, etc.). One twentieth-century example is the 1960 U.S. election of John F. Kennedy, in which anti-Catholic sentiment expressed itself in the "Big John and Little John" political cartoon. The cartoon depicted Pope John XXIII on a throne patting Kennedy's head with the caption "be sure to do what Poppa tells you" (McAuley, 2015). Similar concerns were reflected in Kennedy's post-election audience with Pope Paul VI and whether or not he would follow the Catholic custom of kissing the papal ring—a concern which was met with a solemn handshake between the pair (McAuley, 2015). Had Kennedy kissed the pope's ring, he would have reflected American concerns over citizen loyalty and the debasement of the Presidential office against the papacy, as the aforementioned political cartoon suggests. Kennedy's behavior is contrasted by his Catholic contemporary, Éamon de Valera, who as President of Ireland was well versed in kissing the rings of Catholic prelates (UCD Archives, 1960/1969; O'Brien, 2017). The year before President Kennedy met Paul VI, de Valera met John XXIII and performed the traditional Catholic genuflections (RTÉ Archives, 1962).

Local churches have also demonstrated this unique relationship between home nation and the Holy See. Since the August 2018 visit by Pope Francis to Ireland, the flag of the Holy See has been visible across the country, particularly at various Dublin parishes. While the flag holds a special connection to the Roman Catholic Church itself, flags are internationally recognized representations of political actors, in this case a foreign state. In particular, the Dublin-based Church of the Annunciation, Rathfarnham raises the Holy See flag alongside the Irish and EU flags throughout the year.

Taken together, the elements of formalized statehood, a geographically unbounded "common connection" via the sacrament of baptism, the existence of certain state-citizen interdependencies such as monetary relations, and the exercising of Church voice and authority upon its members via outlets such as encyclicals combine to produce a *sui generis* Catholic citizenship that belongs to the *sui generis* Holy See state. As set forth previously in this paper's introduction, our general context rests within arenas of conflict. Uniting that which we have discussed so far in this context, we find that concerns for pseudo-citizens ultimately shape the Holy See's external relations in the international community. A prime example of this condition may be observed

vis-à-vis Pope Pius XII and the World War II, whereby the Holy See's focus concerned the protection of, on the one hand, the Church as an institution and, on the other, the protection of pseudo-citizens amid fascist and Nazi persecution of Jews.

In his recent book *The Pope at War*, which dives into the newly opened Vatican archives of Pius XII, David I. Kertzer points to a number of instances across 1939–1944 where the Holy See successfully lobbied the Italian, and later German, government in Rome for the protection of Catholics, converts, and their children. One instance of this which stands out is the deportation of the Jews from Rome in 1943. After the German occupation of Rome and the declaration of the Italian Social Republic, Italian police carried out an arrest of 1,259 Roman Jews on Saturday, October 16, 1943. By the next morning, German officers were examining lists provided from the Vatican, resulting in the reduction of those ultimately deported the following Monday to 1,007 persons (Kertzer, 2022, 363, 367). These lists held the names of Catholic converts and the baptized children of mixed marriages, i.e., those of a born-Catholic parent and a convert (Kertzer, 2022, 54). According to Lutz Klinkhammer, an expert on the German occupation of Italy, “It is more than clear that all [the Holy See’s] efforts were aimed above all at saving the baptized or the ‘half-Jews’ born from mixed marriages” (Klinkhammer, 1993, 404).

What is important to note from this example is the diplomatic efforts of the Holy See vis-à-vis the Vatican lists. This, like other efforts, utilized established diplomatic channels to save only those considered possessions of the Holy See. Throughout the war, Pius XII failed to make any significant public protest of fascist treatment toward any groups of persons, including Catholics. What few objections he noted publicly, such as those within his annual Christmas messages, remained limited to and muddled by the Pope’s diplomatic language, of which was greatly lost on the laity (Kertzer, 2022). Instead, the Holy See relied on official and unofficial diplomatic channels to press its concerns which centered on specific politically inclined goals, that of the defense of the Lateran Treaty, the institutional Church across Europe, and the Catholic faithful, as noted above.

An argument may be made that the defense of the laity may be viewed as a distinctly religious matter: baptism provides exclusive membership to a particular community, of which the Church deems as inviolable. However, religious tolerance is not a protective barrier in and of itself. For example, Protestant baptism of Jews would not have garnered the same protective argument by the Holy See, despite also being a Christian denomination, given that Pius XI consistently opposed Protestant proselytizing to the Italian government following the 1929 Lateran Treaty (Kertzer, 2014, 185, 191–193). Yet when baptism is treated as a form of “naturalized citizenship” for converted Catholics, then the sacrament forms the basis of countrymen to the Holy See, negotiated and protested through papal legates within ambassadorial, foreign ministerial, and private diplomatic channels. Ultimately, the nature of the link between the Holy See and its pseudo-citizens remains easily recognizable and is fundamental in understanding the Holy See as a political actor in international relations, both in the past and the present day.

The characteristics painted above give rise to a certain picture, that which underpins the uniqueness of the Holy See. The underlying nature of the clerical element, as

understood in its post-Vatican II manifestation, is neither militaristic nor coercive. Soft power, that of persuasion through international organizations, bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations, and its voice as a global Church, demonstrates the continued manner of influence that the Holy See acts in international affairs. The moral authority of the Church forms the basis of the Holy See's soft power and grants a continuity with the long-held activity of the Holy See in its international influence. Meanwhile, its essence of statehood underscores how the Holy See can speak on the international level in a manner that cannot be ignored. If the Holy See was like other Christian denominations, insofar as they function solely as religious NGO, the prestige through which the Pope and Curia operate would be significantly reduced. Furthermore, the focal relationship between the Holy See and its pseudo-citizenry has given rise to a unique religious-political dynamic which asserts itself among international relations in ways beyond the norm for the Holy See's physical size. The next sections shall explore this phenomenon in a more recent case vis-à-vis the 2003 Iraq War.

The Iraq War contextualized

When the Holy See acts within the international system relative to matters of war, it remains guided by the moral framework of the just war tradition. This framework underpins its soft power approach while simultaneously acting as a common language among interstate actors (Johnson, 1984). Since the Holy See has no recourse to military deterrent, it leans on moral imperatives to present a soft power deterrent.

Within the modern international community, the tradition represents a common "legitimacy framework" required in debates on war and peace (Bellamy, 2006, 7). This framework, however, is not merely theoretical as the just war tradition supplies:

a fund of practical moral wisdom, based not in abstract speculation or theorization, but in reflection on actual problems encountered in war as these have presented themselves in different historical circumstances (Johnson, 1984, 15).

Oliver O'Donovan concurs, noting that just war "is not, in the first place, a 'theory', but a proposal of practical reason; and it is not, in the second place, about 'just wars', but how we may enact just judgement even in the theatre of war" (O'Donovan, 2003, 6-7).

In practical terms, just war exists to outline a range of criteria which act as a benchmark for justice, classically categorized as *ad bellum* (before war) and *in bello* (during war). A newer *post bellum* (after war) has emerged in recent years. The *ad bellum* conditions in particular align themselves along a conceptual marriage of moral thought—right authority, just cause, right intention, and the aim of peace—with consequentialist considerations—last resort, proportionality, and the reasonable hope of success (Johnson, 2005b)—thereby fulfilling the requirements of decision-making in contemporary international relations.

The use of force by a sovereign entity has traditionally been a tool employed to protect the "just and peaceful order in a world in which serious threats are not only possible but actual" (Johnson, 2005b, 36). In the modern international era,

Johnson (1984) observes that the just war principles have achieved a defining status within international law and are among the defining aspects of interstate diplomatic and security organizations. For example, the *ad bellum* criteria have emerged in Article 2(4) and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, while the *in bello* criteria are represented within the 1949 Geneva Convention, subsequent Protocols, and various conventions including 2001 The Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines.

In the case of the 2003 Iraq War, the tradition offers itself as a benchmark against which the U.S.-led war may be judged. Through this framework, the Holy See posits an insufficiency for military action. The United States, for their part, supported a preventative war against Iraq on three bases: the past actions of the Saddam Hussein regime in the region (Bush, 2003a, 2003b), the present duplicity of the regime amid UN-sanctioned inspections (The White House, 2003), and the potential threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (Bush, 2003b; Powell, 2003). All three points were made amid claims of protecting international freedom and a reluctant UN Security Council. However, like other states, the Holy See maintained that the United States inadequately portrayed just reasons for military action.

In the modern era, the Holy See has maintained that any just determination of war must come from within the framework of the UN (Paul VI, 1965; John Paul II, 2003c). To this end, the modern international system maintains that “war must always be rejected and priority given to negotiation and the use of juridical instruments” (Tauran, 2002), which positions the UN as the medium through which the greatest legitimacy can be ascribed. This position might be construed as derived from the Holy See’s lack of traditional hard power. However, the UN provides a space for smaller and less powerful states to provide input into security and diplomatic arrangements, thereby making any required intervention more “democratic,” and therefore legitimate (Allen Jr, 2003e).

In the context of the Iraq War, the Holy See maintained that the movement of the United States toward intervention was a unilateral action, having failed to gain UN Security Council approval, thus failing the right authority criterion of the just war tradition. As Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran noted to ambassadors accredited to the Holy See around the time of the invasion:

No rule of international law authorizes one or more states to resort unilaterally to the use of force ... because, for example, it is considered to possess weapons of mass destruction ... only the Security Council can make this decision (Allen Jr, 2003e; cf. Allen Jr, 2006, 234).

Cardinal Pio Laghi, Papal Envoy to the United States in 2003, similarly considered the proposed U.S. intervention as unactionable, describing the move as both “unjust” and “illegal” since the “decision regarding the use of military force can only be taken within the framework of the United Nations” (Feuerherd, 2003; Laghi, 2003). These expectations of multilateralism within the UN broke from historical instances of military engagement whereby dominant states exercised power relatively unchecked, yet encompassed the spirit of the UN design.

Furthermore, the Holy See presented the unilateral action of the United States as a product that “would destroy the system of alliances and amount to a challenge to the

role and prestige of the United Nations” (Allen Jr, 2003a), directly confronting U.S. assertions that any military action was to “uphold the dignity of the United Nations” and mitigate those limitations which befell the 1930s League of Nations (Bush, 2002). The Holy See understood unilateral action, even under the guise of protecting against UN ineffectiveness, as representing an “imposition of hegemony by a superpower founded on force and not on law” (Allen Jr, 2003a). Right authority dictated “choosing between the law of force or the force of law” (Allen Jr, 2003e).

The Holy See also argued against the American insistence that pre-emptive measures were required, even to the degree of prevention. Cardinal James Francis Stafford, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (1996–2003), argued that a “legitimate public authority cannot decide for war unless the nation or community of nations has undergone prior damages from an aggressor or is actually under a very imminent threat” (Stafford, 2003). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed ... [and] the damages inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain” (Catholic Church, 1997, 615). The Holy See considers a state’s right to exercise its defensive functions of national security as a legitimate provision of state sovereignty. However, as noted by Cardinal Stafford, any permissible defense must be preceded by lasting and grave damages. This defense would override certain presumptions against the use of force held by the Holy See in their interpretation of the just war tradition, particularly toward pre-emptive measures.

Furthermore, Cardinal Stafford rejected the American embracement of “preventive war” which he claimed as having “no limits, is a relative term, and subject to self-serving interpretations” (Stafford, 2003). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1981–2005), additionally noted in September 2002 that “[t]he concept of preventive war does not appear in the *Catechism*” (Ratzinger, 2002). He maintained:

One cannot simply say that the *Catechism* does not legitimate war, but it’s true that the *Catechism* has developed a doctrine such that, on the one hand, there are values and populations to defend in certain circumstances, but on the other, it proposes a very precise doctrine on the limits of these possibilities (ibid.).

For the Holy See, there remained an inherent failure on the part of the Bush Administration to provide “conclusive evidence” relating to the necessity for military action (Stafford, 2003). With this came certain contentions surrounding the intentions of the United States in their demand for war.

Right intention plays a significant role within the moral considerations of the just war tradition. The Holy See, among others, considered the possibility that the United States desired to take control over Iraq’s oil reserves, given the historical ties between members of the Administration, including President Bush, and oil corporations (Allen Jr, 2003d). Alternatively, Fr. Pasquale Borgomeo, director of Vatican Radio (1985–2005), offered that the extensive media coverage on the mobilization toward war was ultimately linked to a desire among TV networks for an increase in ratings

(Allen Jr, 2003a). While media coverage itself is not concerning, and can be considered consistent with civic responsibility, the “rally-around-the-flag” elements of said coverage remained a point of contention. Others in the Curia questioned if the proposed invasion was foremost to effect regime change, rather than the stated aim of neutralizing a possible weapon of mass destruction (WMD) threat and enacting regional peace (Allen Jr, 2003e; cf. Allen Jr, 2006, 234).

Further contentions remained within the Holy See relative to the degree of proportionality to which military intervention would imbue. Warnings on the potential dangers of a U.S. invasion in relation to lives lost were expressed by Archbishop Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2002–2009), who in an interview with the *National Catholic Reporter* (February 4, 2003) stated with clear certainty that a war of this kind would have an “unimaginable” cost (Allen Jr, 2003b). He claimed:

At Sigonella [a U.S. naval base in Sicily] 100,000 bags, the kind used for dead bodies, have been brought there, along with 6,000 coffins. Those are not for the Iraqi soldiers! There’s a floating hospital with 1,000 beds, and it will not be treating soldiers who just got a scratch. We’re talking about incredible loss of life ... [and] that the Americans foresee a loss of 15,000 American soldiers (ibid.).

These figures, to which in hindsight are only a fraction of the total human costs of the war, demonstrate the dangers that this invasion represented and the concerns with which surrounded the possibility of success even before military action began. Martino noted that “[w]hoever is preparing a war has to take into account the cost that any strike will provoke on the enemies, in the area, on friends, and on its own side” (ibid.). These considerations, he claimed, would cause “fire, tumult, all over the Middle East” (ibid.). Therefore, for the Holy See, the success of the proposed war would be measured by “the maintenance of peace and development” (Allen Jr, 2003e). Ultimately, the danger that the invasion might destabilize the region was too great a risk for the Holy See to support the Americans. These concerns surrounding destabilization directly correlate with the Holy See’s responsibility for the protection of their pseudo-citizens.

The motivation of the Holy See

The aim of peace for the Holy See amid the Iraq War debate homes in on that which underpins its motivations against the war, namely the protection of Catholics in war-torn regions. This condition ultimately pertains to concerns over religiously motivated violence and the protection of Catholics in Iraq and the wider Middle East to practice their faith freely. Given the connection between the Church and the pseudo-citizenry of the Holy See, the desire to avoid war for the sake of protecting these Catholics underpins not just the religious dimensions but also the sovereign dimensions of the Holy See’s anti-conflict policy. Understanding this principle shall provide insight into the Holy See’s approach toward the Iraq War, as well as suggest its position on future military-linked events.

The essence of peace for the Holy See may be understood as encapsulating two distinct features. First, that peace is found through hope, originating within the promise of salvation in the birth of Christ. In this sense, sin emerges as conflict and suffering which can find salvation in peace. Furthermore, peace remains “not merely the absence of war” nor is it “reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, 247). Rather, “it is founded on a correct understanding of the human person and requires the establishment of an order based on justice and charity ... [p]eace is the fruit of justice” (ibid., 247–248). In his 2002 Christmas Eve homily, John Paul II noted the birth of Christ as

a sign of hope for the whole human family; a sign of peace for those suffering from conflicts of every kind; a sign of freedom for the poor and oppressed ... a humble and quiet sign, but one filled with the power of God ... (John Paul II, 2002a).

Here, the engagement with peace reflects the ending of conflict, rather than its unnecessary instigation. At this point in the Iraq invasion debate, the American interpretation of peace gave centrality to a type of freedom designed around democracy and capitalism, whereas the Holy See saw the achievement of peace in Iraq as the end of poverty and oppression. While these points are not incompletable, they represent a divergent mindset relative to the aim of military engagement in Iraq, thus pointing to divided aims of peace.

Second, that the just war tradition places war as a last resort. Only when alternative measures fail may the use of force ever be justified. Peace among states, John Paul II noted, remains only possible through “genuine and constructive dialogue, in harmony with the principles of international law” (John Paul II, 2003b). The Holy See found this position represented within international law through the authority of the UN as a platform for diplomatic solutions to worldly affairs. This is the perspective through which John Paul calls war a “defeat for humanity” (John Paul II, 2002a).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* maintains that “[a]ll citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war” (Catholic Church, 1997, 615). This remains of particular importance given “the power of modern means of destruction” (ibid.). Therefore, the Holy See reaffirmed that the requirement for force must be clear. As John Paul noted:

war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations (John Paul II, 2002a).

In reacting to John Paul, Archbishop Martino urged the United States and its coalition allies to remain committed to the inspection regime under Security Council Resolution 1441, as the Resolution contained the necessary ingredients for the avoidance of war (Allen Jr, 2003b).

Throughout the debate on Iraq, the obligation to avoid war was underscored, from the perspective of the Holy See, on a concern around religious reprisals, insofar as an unjust American-led attack may be construed as a Christian assault on the Islamic world itself (Evans, 2007). As Archbishop Tauran noted:

We need to think about the consequences for the civilian population and about the repercussions in the Islamic world. A type of anti-Christian, anti-Western crusade could be incited because some ignorant masses mix everything together (Allen Jr, 2003c; cf. Zenit Staff, 2002).

This shares concerns with those raised by Archbishop Stephen Hamao, president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (1998–2006), in 2002. In his interview with *National Catholic Reporter* (September 24, 2002), Hamao suggested that “a war between the United States and Iraq could not help but seem to many of the world’s people [as] a war between white Westerners and Arabs” (Allen Jr, 2003c). Cardinal Pio Laghi similarly raised this concern, asserting that any invasion risked “the suffering of the people of Iraq and those involved in the military operation, a further instability in the region and a new gulf between Islam and Christianity” (Laghi, 2003).

This forms the basis of the whole rejection: that regardless of the other components of just war, which the Holy See finds insufficient in and of themselves, the ultimate destabilization among the Iraqi religions, and of the wider Middle East more generally, is a motivation for rejecting war. The action of war in the name of peace is narrowly defined by St. Augustine under the sole condition of corrective justice. Under Augustine’s *disciplina*, coercive force is likened to that of a parent with a child: “Just as parents discipline, correct, and punish their children through love, so the Church should act to bring back those who had erred from it” (Harrison, 2000, 153; Andreicut, 2010, 220). As R. A. Markus notes: “Augustine’s ‘theory’ of coercion, was from beginning to end, part of a pastoral strategy” (Markus, 1970, 140; Andreicut, 2010, 219). Therefore, with respect to states, corrective justice remains a matter oriented toward the maintenance of a peaceful society, with the ultimate goal of attaining the *tranquillitas ordinis* (Elshtain, 2003). And while one may argue that action against Iraq, particularly the U.S. goal of deposing Saddam Hussein, is an act of corrective justice toward the maintenance of peace, the religious dimensions underpinning the Holy See’s concerns will only be exacerbated as pinned by the aforementioned just war rejections.

Furthermore, this concern was not held by the Holy See alone. At a conference held between the Holy See and Cairo’s al-Azhar Institute (February 24–25, 2003), members of the Joint Committee offered in their concluding statement an interreligious argument that “war is a proof that humanity has failed” (Zafzaf and Fitzgerald, 2003). The Joint Committee “condemned recourse to war as a means of resolving conflicts between nations” as it brings about “enormous loss of human life, great damage to the basic structures of human livelihood and the environment, displacement of large populations, and further political instability” (*ibid.*). The Joint Committee expressed their concern that:

In the present circumstances there is the added factor of increased tension between Muslims and Christians on account of the mistaken identification of some Western powers with Christianity, and of Iraq with Islam (*ibid.*).

The members warned against this conflation.

What is perhaps most valuable to note amid these aims of peace provisions is the stressed concern around religious violence. This concern is not a one-off concern tied solely to this particular Iraqi context. Rather, it is *the central feature* of the Holy See's anti-conflict policy which has been maintained irrespective of papal leadership or curial composition.

Examining recent papacies presents a range of leadership styles, yet each one remains in continuity with the overall goal of protecting Catholics in conflict areas. John XXIII and Paul VI took a more open approach in dealing with communist regimes, utilizing their diplomatic services to engage in quiet negotiation (Hebblethwaite, 1993, 2000; Sarros, 2020). John Paul II, however, sought a public-oriented approach by challenging communist rhetoric directly (Sarros, 2020; Weigel, 2020). John Paul's style was more assertive insofar as he utilized his apostolic journeys to communist countries to evoke a sense of religious prosperity and encourage action by laypeople. John Paul also addressed the Holy See's relationship with Israel, forming an agreement in 1994 that established an Israeli recognition of the Catholic Church in the country and maintained access to holy sites in Jerusalem amid Palestinian–Israel violence of which many Catholics were caught in the cross-fire. This agreement was achieved in exchange for the Holy See entering into formal diplomatic relations with Israel, of which the Israeli government desired (Weigel, 2020, 697–713).

In more recent times, the Holy See possesses increasingly grave concerns over the Russian invasion of Ukraine, not only for the general welfare of the population, but the religious dimensions related to Catholic–Russian Orthodox tensions amid a war morally justified by Moscow Patriarch Kirill (Gallagher, 2022; Houston and Mandaville, 2022; Kelly, 2022; Kirill, 2022). Given that Moscow's Patriarch Kirill has sanctioned Russia's actions as encompassing moral justice, the Holy See retains anxiety that should they aggravate Russian Orthodoxy and should Russia win the war, then violence against Catholics might occur (Luxmoore, 2021). That Kirill claims the war is a mission within the Orthodox sphere—citing the “one Kieven baptismal font” between Russia and Ukraine as a source of justification—demonstrates his desired outcome *vis-à-vis* Ukrainian religion (Houston and Mandaville, 2022; Kelly, 2022; Kirill, 2022).

In citing the common baptism narrative, Patriarch Kirill offers a claim of pseudo-citizenship on the part of Russian Orthodoxy over the Ukrainian people. However, this claim falls short due to a lack of state sovereignty for Russian Orthodoxy. Despite being the dominant church in Russia, the Orthodox Patriarch holds limited influence politically and is subject to laws imposed by the state regime (Payne, 2010; Lamoreaux and Flake, 2018). At the same time, Ukrainians maintain the existence of a historical independence that extends beyond any common historical origins (Houston and Mandaville, 2022). This distinction is important to avoid misconceptions on *sui generis* citizenry.

Returning to Iraq, the Holy See held deep anxiety over the safety of the Iraqi-based Chaldean Church. These concerns underpinned the Christian–Islam tensions articulated above, which ultimately bore fruition. Before the invasion there were between 1.3 and 1.5 million Christians in Iraq. This was reduced to about 500,000 between the invasion and the rise of Islamic State in 2014. In March 2016, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called the reduced Christian presence a genocide. Fewer than 250,000 Christians now remain, most of which belong to the Chaldean Church (White, 2021). In continuity with the concerns of the Holy See, Pope Francis visited the Chaldean Church in 2021. This trip included a rare meeting with Ayatollah Sistani on the desire for peace between their religions.

These concerns are not solely that of a Church magisterium seeking to protect its ability to function in regions of conflict, nor is it solely about defending the right of churchgoers against rising secularization or religious conversions. Rather, it is a defensive position taken by the Holy See in keeping with its position of sovereignty and its relationship with its pseudo-citizenry. As any state would concern itself with the welfare of its citizens abroad, the Holy See is seeking to protect those within its field of influence. Historically this has occurred through the promulgation of crusades or religious warfare. In more recent times this has involved diplomatic negotiation and international pressures. In the case of Iraq, the Chaldean Catholics were an already vulnerable population even before the war—a similar condition for Catholics across the Middle East. Using its international role to stand amid inter-state debate underpins the connection with the Holy See’s pseudo-citizenry.

Conclusion: what underpins the Holy See’s diplomacy

This paper has argued that the Holy See’s international affairs are a projection of its domestic concerns, namely those of and for its pseudo-citizens. By utilizing the case study of the Holy See’s rejection of the use of force in the 2003 Iraq War, it has been argued that the Holy See can and should be understood as a sovereign political actor, with a membership of pseudo-citizens unique to its own statehood. This is the result of the unique religious–political dynamics that characterize the Holy See’s position in the international landscape. Like other sovereign states, the Holy See as a political actor is motivated in the international realm by its obligation to protect its citizenry. In undertaking this task, the Holy See has given itself a reputation of being anti-war. While in many respects this reputation remains accurate, such a simplistic summarization is misrepresentative of the Holy See’s actual guiding belief system. As such, the Holy See opposes war, not because it is anti-war, but because such conflicts would produce disproportionate vulnerabilities to its pseudo-citizenry relative a non-violent outcome.

The protection of its pseudo-citizenry has taken varying forms over the last century. Pius XII, John XIII, and Paul VI each weighed heavily on diplomacy, from concordats to ambassadors to Ostpolitik, in their efforts to protect Catholics amid fascism, Nazism, and communist violence. While similarly disposed to traditional diplomacy, John Paul II additionally pressed a moral legalism through the just war tradition, of which enjoyed a renaissance across his papacy, to engage with a wide range of conflicts, at least not Iraq in 2003. Benedict XVI, following the fallout

from the Iraq War, took a different diplomatic approach than his predecessor, one which stressed individual neutrality and social cohesion. Thus when the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, Benedict sought to pin down “the inalienable dignity of each human person” and the social solidarity which Christians as citizens of Syria share with their Muslim countrymen (Benedict XVI, 2011a, 2011b; Cahill, 2022).

Pope Francis, however, has approached the protection of pseudo-citizens from a slightly different lens. While engaging in traditional diplomatic efforts, as demonstrated in the U.S.–Cuba rapprochement, Francis has approached peace through the lens of covenant. Francis remains focused primarily on the marginalized within society, generally those who are most affected by conflict. By emphasizing the covenantal responsibilities of states toward their people, he is pressing for less geo-political dictation from afar and more of a direct focus on the systemic causes of conflict (Francis, 2013, esp. §59–60; Ferrara, 2015; Ilo, 2019; Troy, 2019, 2021). His February 2023 visit to South Sudan saw the pope enter a juxtaposition of meeting with both high-ranking diplomats and victims of violence, using his audiences to directly speak the truths of suffering to all parties involved in the conflict (cf. Francis, 2013, §233; Bordoni, 2023a; Pulella and Wudu, 2023). In doing so, Francis is manifesting the gospel action of “turn the other cheek” (cf. Mt. 5:39). Often thought of as a pacifist practice, in reality the practice is a non-violent turning-the-tables—a power-reducing, social interaction humbling the target amid his peers and subjects. The desired effect was to press the President into returning to the Rome Peace talks, of which Francis was successful (Bordoni, 2023b).

The defense of its pseudo-citizens similarly motivates the Holy See amid other conflicts. The situation in Ukraine underscores this point insofar as the Holy See rejects the use of force by Russia. Yet by rejecting Russian aggression, the Holy See remains careful to avoid offending the Russian Orthodox Church. Francis remains forceful in his denunciation of the deaths of innocents (Francis, 2022a, 2022b), while at the same time is careful not to paint victims based on Christian denomination. In doing so, Francis perpetuates his narrative of the “common good” (Ferrara, 2015; Ilo, 2019; Troy, 2019, 2021), focusing on the totality of victimhood over specific denominations (Lomonaco and Lubov, 2023), while at the same time maintaining a Holy See presence in Ukraine to reflect Francis’ particular closeness to Catholics (Cernuzio, 2022; Wells, 2022; Yoder, 2022; Lubov, 2023).

The *sui generis* nature of the Holy See has created a *sui generis* citizenry vis-à-vis the Catholic laity. Through their sovereign actorhood amid the international community, the Holy See is chiefly motivated to ensure the protection of Catholics amid ongoing conflict. This should be understood as consistent with history and perpetual amid future events. A failure to recognize this religious–political link would limit the comparability of the Holy See to other states in scholarship, while minimizing the likelihood of successful collaboration with the Holy See by states in practice.

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