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# Vatican Policies and the “New State” in Portugal (1940-1955)

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**Abstract:** The Vatican's foreign policy between the two Great World Wars. The new mechanisms of foreign policy of the Vatican: The Concordats. Policies in Africa in relation to the Settler States. The relationship with the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar. Papal diplomacy towards the NAZIS. Vatican's geopolitics has taken on a transnational and global character in a totally systematic and active way. Church in Europe would be the great purposes, eliminate the communism this is also the Salazar politic. Vatican diplomacy with the United States.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, Vatican Policies, António Oliveira Salazar, Portugal

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## 1. Introduction

Vatican policies have always been changing in the course of time and adapting to the international contexts. [1]

This Vatican policy has always been set up as a triangular relationship between Rome, national catholic communities and their respective States. [2] And it has always been quite complex, both by its structuring as well as by the motivations and impulses that condition it. In any case, we may say that Vatican policy has been quite different from other states, with very specific characteristics, regardless of the point of view in which they are analyzed. [3]

## 2. After First World War and Until the Second World War

During the expansion of dictatorships in Europe, Vatican did not remain inert. It avoids making direct policies and has privileged relations with Governments, taking eminently religious attitudes and avoiding political connotations. This Church that was going to live war, has attended in the previous decade to a strengthening of its ecclesiastical frames structures. [3]

For Pius XI, Catholic Action represented something extremely important, an irrefutable instrument for the Roman Church, a way of being present in all civil societies. This association, with a set of restructuring and imbued with a new pastoral, would be part of the basic structures of national

Churches. Catholic Action became diocesan, subject to the authority of bishops and parish priests, while in its center it was guided by the cardinal commission, which became a form of clergy, but which enabled Vatican to create a connection with civil and Catholic populations, regardless the relations with their respective States and Governments, conferring Vatican a great power. This issue has brought some problems to several Governments, including Oliveira Salazar's. [3]

Pius XII, following a very similar line to that of his predecessor, was never satisfied with the guarantees that concordat systems offered him. Pius XII Church intended to have its autonomous characteristics and this is where Catholic Action will be joining. The model of priest was not of the fascist organizations, or even armed forces or militias chaplain, congenital to the regimes themselves. The model of priest Pius XII intended was the “Father Leader”, head of a real community, distinct from civil society, which might even be gagged by regimes, that is, a community of laymen attached to Church, that shares their motivations and guidelines, but this could be pernicious to some governments, as we will further on see. Catholic Action came to give social consistency to a Church that wasn't based on the confessional trait of civil institutions. [3]

However, Church didn't make a clear commitment to anti-fascist action either, hence in this period, on the pages of the catholic press, a similar inspiration to that of the fascist press was noticed and not by imposition of the respective regimes. There has always been, mainly in Italy and Portugal, a non-

political religious approach to fascist regimes, even in the years 1938 to 1943. In the Italian case, there was never a problem of church unity, as Holy See feared to happen in Germany. All the bishops and other clergy supported Vatican if church entered into open conflict with Mussolini, and the Duce himself was aware of the problems, due to his refuse to confessionalize the Italian State. In 1938, Italy undid the misconception of a catholic nation with racial laws, which, among other things, a relevant fact of the Vatican's view, were not in line with the concordat regime. [3]

To deepen the perspective that Pius XI had on the racial issue, there is the insistence on the Semitic root of Christianity. The Pope thought that the cut with Judeo-Eastern roots would mean the closure of Christianity in a political-ideological model that deeply displeased him and was also dangerous to his religious identity. This perspective was also clear to Mussolini, though in a very crude way: "a gesture of mine would be enough to trigger this people's anti clericalism, whom had difficulty swallowing a Jewish God...". [4]

At the end of the thirties, the political horizon of European Catholics was marked by barriers, whose overcoming triggered a worried or negative reaction. There was a clear consensus crisis, mainly on the participation of the Mediterranean countries in World War II. Overall, Catholics didn't want war. Pius XII's radio message on his 24 August, 1939 on the eve of the conflict, expressed a collective Catholic feeling, at least in Italy and Portugal: "Nothing is lost with peace. But we can lose everything through war...", [4] and the Vatican sympathized with Salazar's position, that is, officially, of neutrality.

However, this position did not mean a denial of fascism, although it expressed some antipathy, sometimes smoother and sometimes less, in relation to it, such as happened with Catholic Action movements as well as in the faithful's communities. Vatican's reports on clergy's behavior between 1940 and 1942 provided a panorama away from opposition to fascism, an attempt to focus on religious issues and to be apart from political issues, along with a certain coldness of positions on war. This implied the growth of the episcopal role, but never got to the point of questioning civil authority, which was always formally respected.

At the height of the war, Catholic Church appeared as a great supranational institution, rooted in all strata of the population, which will pass unscathed at the end of the war as well as at the collapse of fascism. [5]

### 3. During Second World War

The Secretariat of State was Vatican's body with greater responsibility on war problems, not only because its activity's diplomatic nature, but also because it was under its role to gather information from all world countries, including those at war. The Secretariat of State was who addressed Pope's directives to the different institutions and ecclesiastical authorities as well as to all other authorities and civil institutions. This was the cabinet which has collaborated

more directly with the Pope, it was his closest team of advisers. [6]

The experience at First World War was still truly present to the Secretariat of State and to the Pope himself, which would affect his whole performance during and after Second World War. This was what led Pius XII to declare "impartiality" in 1939. Vatican staff was aware of the fragile guarantees in the Lateran Pacts, which didn't isolate them, in fact, from the occupied Rome. Furthermore, at some point the Secretary of State feared that the Pope could be deported by the Nazis. [7]

There was a very wide expectation with respect to the action of the Holy See, the hypothesis of having a mediating role between belligerents was taken into account for several times, however, it was never enforced. The Holy See didn't have good relations with the various parties, hence relations with Hitler and Mussolini were quite difficult as well as with the Allies. Due to Stalin's hostile lack of communication, De Gaulle, the only truly Catholic leader, after victory, he was quite tough with the French Church, which was accused of collaboration with Petain. In this climate of isolation prior to Rome's liberation, Pius XII and his collaborators eagerly followed the diplomatic relations with the United States.

Despite all these diplomacy issues, the crisis in Vatican and the siege against the Vatican State, with Rome's occupation by the Nazis, hundreds of people went to the Pope and Vatican City aiming for relief or support to their requests. Vatican's position was not comparable to Swiss' neutrality, which could be outside the conflict, with its borders closed, hence it was surrounded by the Germans. Vatican State was a hundred square meters, without real physical boundaries, the only one existing was a yellow line. Thus, Vatican's action was identical to that of the International Red Cross, which remained at a humanitarian level on the issue of prisoners, avoiding any strictly political position. This lack of direct intervention was considered an essential condition for carrying out humanitarian operations without alignment by any of the parties, which led to the debate on Pius XII "silences". In fact, these "silences" were indeed an option of the Pope and the Secretariat of State and, perhaps, it has influenced the Pontiff to act this way for the simple fact of being perfectly aware of Nazis' politics and their methods in the occupied territories, without however, during the war, having a perception of the amplitude of massacres perpetrated in the occupied zones. [8]

However, these "silences" could also be a way of preserving the future of the Church in face of a warlike outcome, considered as uncertain, and, it was in this context that Salazar was perfectly supported by the Holy See, hence his dictatorship didn't have the totalitarian characteristics of the Nazis and openly cooperated with the Church.

During the war Pius XII realized that these "silences" were not always understood by the Christian community, especially by Catholics who lived under very difficult circumstances, so the Pope argued that Holy See's cautious action allow him to work in order that war would end faster. Moreover, it was obvious that the Vatican had a terrible dread of a hypothetical German victory in Europe.

Considering that it would be a total danger for the future of Christianity.

The conspiracy against Hitler had the collaboration of some clergy's members, such as the religious Bonhoeffer. The words of Bishop Von Galen, one of the members of the German Episcopate who had a very close relationship with Pope Pius XII, was totally enlightening on this issue: "It is true that we Christians do not make the revolution! We will continue to be faithful to our duty of obeying God for the sake of our beloved German people. Our soldiers will fight for Germany, but not for those men who dishonor the German name before God and before men. We will continue to strike valiantly against the external enemies. But we cannot fight the internal enemies with weapons, we feel pity and desolation. We only have one way to fight: resist strongly, actively, harshly! We become hard! We stand firm!" [9]

In the last years of war, the Secretary of State worked in order to attract American interests in the country, in face of a real political crisis and a growing communist presence, already foreseeable by the end of the war. [6]

The unity of the Catholic Church was always Vatican's main concern, and it was especially relevant during Second World War. That's why the Holy See was prudent in judging and condemning anyone who was always taking into consideration the positions of the national Churches.

This is what happened in Portugal and concerning to Oliveira Salazar. The Catholic Church in general and the hierarchy of the Portuguese Church explicitly and officially supported the policies and the very person of Oliveira Salazar, communing with him his policies, Portuguese Church's hierarchy saw Salazar as someone who could give them back what the First Republic had withdrawn from them. In view of this relationship of brotherhood between the Portuguese clergy and Salazar, the Holy See acted in accordance and with a lot of diplomacy, only noting a dissonant note on Overseas issues, as we will later see. [10]

In the German case, the Pope, who had been a nuncio in Germany, was well aware that German Catholics were involved in a nationalist sentiment, largely as a result of the mismanagement of the end of the First World War by the allies. Thus, each episcopate should judge and decide on its form of action as well as on communications to the public about the positions emanated by Vatican.

On the US side, as well, one looked closely at Vatican's positions, especially in the last days of war. By 1944 the Holy See had already reached a remarkable pace of engagement in favor of the Jews, to the extent that the United States proposed a joint action on the Jewish question. However, Mons. Tardini, Head of the Secretariat of State, refused so: «It's not appropriate for the Holy See to travel this path: The Holy See cannot be related (nor by any means associated) to the American car, especially in the Jewish question. Holy See's action and activity must be independent and specifically of itself", [11] which summarized all of Vatican policy during Second World War.

## 4. Vatican After Second World War

After war was over and Rome liberated the Church assumed a special role, both within Italy and in the world. Vatican diplomacy has been constantly consulted by the United States. Vatican's geopolitics has taken on a transnational and global character in a totally systematic and active way. In the view of the Holy See, limiting communist parties and USSR's range as well as strengthening Church in Europe would be the great purposes, and it would be according to these that Salazar was put up with, for both the Holy See and him had a common enemy: communism. The Holy See rather preferred a more right-wing dictatorship than a democratic country in which there was a left-wing tendency. This was postwar reality in Vatican policy. [12]

In 1948, Pius XII spoke to French ambassador, d'Ormesson, *"about the capital error committed by the Americans and British at Yalta and Potsdam, by granting Marshal Stalin far more considerable advantages than reason advised."* [13] To which the diplomat later commented: *"It is clear that the Pope is positively dominated by Russian-Communist concern. Everything seems secondary and relative when compared to it. Whether Moscow's policy will lead to a new conflagration, whether it is to sow disorder and misery, the germs of civil war, in Europe and in a part of the world, the two terms of the alternative are equally hateful. The Holy See stands before a tide of anti-Christianity. It is about stopping and fight it by all means"*. [14]

This point is crucial for a later understanding of Vatican's position on Portuguese colonies in Africa, where, in their view, an authoritarian Portugal was preferred over Angola and Mozambique as geo-strategic points dominated by the Soviet Union, as the support for liberation movements suggested.

In July 1948, Vatican and the US have straightened relations, thanks to the Marshal Plan for Italy. The Pope wrote to Truman welcoming him for the Economic Cooperation Administration and the Americans would ask suggestions to the Holy See about the Marshal Plan in Italy, which were promptly transmitted to the US Administration.

The American military and economic presence in Italy was, since the beginning of Second World War one of the objectives of the Vatican and of his diplomatic policy. After 1946 the Holy See circumscribed its commitment to specific problems and closely collaborated with the Italian Government on a common goal, which was that Italy should stay out of the Soviet system and the Communists to be marginalized from politics. But the Holy See was careful about the argument of some who said that victory over the Communists should be at any price. Vatican did not endorse this point of view, Italy, above all, should be a democracy. However, this anti-Soviet position was very welcome by USA as well as Oliveira Salazar. [15]

In 1947, Pius XII had a remarkable speech. Saint Benedict, Patron of Europe, proclaimed Gospel and Romanity as the elements which "may powerfully unite the peoples of Europe", [16] and Italy should be part of this European world,

here creating a cultural border with the Union Soviet Union. In the 1940s, Italy should be a bastion against communism, with no internal yields, the Holy See was in favor of a Christian Europe in a suprablocs' perspective.

The end of Second World War led to nation's repositing as well as of their respective social and religious forces at an international level. The main factors were the creation of NATO (1949), the European integration process, the creation of the World Council of Churches (1948) and the birth of the Arab League (1945) as well as of UN in 1945. The Holy See welcomed the formation and composition of the various nations in unitary organizations, namely African self-determination movements, where Angola and Mozambique are inserted. At this point, Holy See diverged in relation to Salazar, and even received leaders of the African movements and missionaries expelled from these Portuguese colonies. [17]

Pius XII's message was clear: although the Church was unknown to state discussions or outside the decisions that governed the new world political chess, Catholicism was not indifferent to people's life. With the end of the war, the Pope celebrated two important events, giving it an international tone, the Consistory of 1946 and the Holy Year of 1950. Pius XII said at Christmas of 1945: "... after the end of the world conflict, we have the consolation, with the Lord's grace, to see new members of the Sacred College come from the five parts of the world. In this way, Rome will appear as the Eternal City, the Universal City, the City caput mundi, the Urbs par excellence, the City of which all are citizens, the Headquarters of the Vicar of Christ, where the eyes of the Catholic world are directed "... [18] and strategically added, "Church is supranational, because it is an indivisible and universal whole, it does not accept to be or being a prisoner or either slave of this or that particular people, within the narrow limits of one nation...". [18]

In 1947 Pius XII told the Associated Press that he hoped UN would soon be in a position to ensure an effective and lasting peace.

However, UN's condemnation of Franco's exclusion policy was not corroborated by the Holy See, hence for her hazard was East, not Europe's remaining dictatorships of Spain and Portugal.

In 1946, the Holy See sent an observer to FAO, which was Rome based, and the first international organization to receive such a representative from Vatican. In 1951, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) appointed the Holy See a member of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in recognition of the service provided by Vatican's Information Office during the war. This was the first time the Holy See has actively participated in a UN body. In 1952, the Vatican already had an observer in UNESCO, in the person of the nuncio Roncalli. At the end of Pius XII pontificate there was an intense coordination of international Catholic activities, particularly focused on the Conference of International Catholic Organizations, with a permanent secretariat in Friborg. In addition, international Catholic organizations held

three contact and information centers: in Geneva, for UN activity, in Paris for UNESCO, and in Rome for relations with Catholic Church's missionary activity. [19] This last one would give Salazar some displeasures, as we will later see.

It was necessary to clarify the relationship between Church and the contemporary world, as it happened in the Second Vatican Council, to form a better framework of Vatican's policies with those of other states. This clarification was the basis of a renewed relationship with the UN, which was considered the necessary forum of nations, though in a totally secularized way. UN formally condemned those countries who did not collaborate in peoples' self-determination and condemned the colonizing nations of Africa, where Oliveira Salazar's Portugal was directly included. It was within these parallel barriers that Vatican diplomacy came to act to our country and its colonies. However, Vatican Council II made his position clearer with regard to African countries and their mission. Analyzed in a literal way, Council's immanent philosophy was not favorable to Oliveira Salazar' ideas, although, there were other conditions, which were signed in a Concordat with Portugal. [20, 21]

## 5. Conclusion

In the period between the two Great World Wars, Vatican has played a major role in international politics. Officially neutral, but without defense capabilities in relation to European dictatorships.

Before World War II clergy's diplomatic guidelines were that priests should assume a role as leaders of their communities, intervening even civically and politically. This role during World War II changes radically, the priest should be an attentive observer and not intervening in social and political terms.

During the Second World War, the Church has not engaged itself on an anti-fascist action.

Catholic Church's greatest purpose during both World Wars was not to support and intervene actively with its Catholic communities, but rather playing a role of pure self-preservation.

After the end of the wars its policy was completely reversed, as it is no longer threatened, latched directly onto American politics and applauds the creation of the UN.

Even today, diplomatic relationship between the Vatican and Nazi Germany are truly dubious.

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