



Marek Šmíd

Mission: Apostolic Nuncio in Prague

Czechoslovakian-Vatican
Diplomatic Relations
between 1920 and 1950

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To Zuzana, Nikodém and Dominik

Foreword

One hundred years have passed since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia, when the first Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Clemente Micara, took up residence in Prague and the first Envoy of Czechoslovakia, Kamil Krofta, began his mission in Rome.

As the current successor of Archbishop Micara, I express my gratitude and appreciation to Marek Šmíd for publishing this book about the history of the Mission of the Apostolic Nuncio in Prague during the period of thirty years between the establishment of the Apostolic Nunciature, in 1920, and the cessation of its functions, in 1950.

I served as the Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature, from 1996 until 1999, at the time when Archbishop, later Cardinal, Giovanni Coppa, was Apostolic Nuncio. After his arrival in Prague, in September 1990, he witnessed the unforgettable experience of the rebirth of both the country and the Church, after the Velvet Revolution. He served initially as Apostolic Nuncio to Czechoslovakia and then, after the first of January 1993, he continued his mission in Prague as the Pontifical Representative to the Czech Republic and at the same time as the first Apostolic Nuncio to the Slovak Republic. Following the appointment of a resident Apostolic Nuncio in Bratislava, in 1994, he remained as Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech Republic.

When the Apostolic Nunciature reopened, after a hiatus of forty years, the premises needed a great deal of restoration and repair. In the course of the works, Archbishop Coppa decided to honor his predecessors – Archbishops Clemente Micara, Francesco Marmaggi, Pietro Ciriaci and Saverio Ritter – by taking the time to make contacts with

people, including family members, to obtain their photographs and then displaying them in a prominent place. Yet, the extant files of the Apostolic Nunciature contained little or no information about them since whatever archives existed before 1950 had been sent to the Secretariat of State.

In this light, Marek Šmíd's book, which is the fruit of extensive research, sheds invaluable light on the history of the relationship between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia and on the persons and activities of the Apostolic Nuncios who served in Prague from 1920 until 1950.

The book offers interesting insights into a crucial period in history, beginning with the establishment and consolidation of Czechoslovakia, after the end of World War I, continuing with political, social and ecclesiastical developments in the nineteen thirties and during World War II, and concluding with the first years of the Communist government and the effective ending of the mission of the Apostolic Nunciature in 1950.

The work also sheds light on some of the inner workings of the diplomatic activity of the Holy See, in the context of the evolving political and social situation between the wars, in Czechoslovakia and in Europe.

At the same time, the monograph provides a rather comprehensive view of the life of the Church during those years and of the relationship between the Apostolic Nuncios and the bishops, priests, religious and lay organizations.

At the beginning of the second century of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Czech Republic, the Mission of the Apostolic Nuncio remains much the same, namely, to make stronger and more effective the bonds of unity that exist between the Holy See and the local Churches as well as to promote and foster good relations between the Holy See and the authorities of the state. The context in which these relations exist has changed greatly. The Czech Republic is engaged not only in bilateral diplomacy but also, and if not more, in multilateral diplomacy, as a member of the United Nations Organization, the European Union and other international bodies. The life of the Church has been renewed by the Second Vatican Council and the diplomacy of the Holy See has become much more engaged as well in the multilateral field.

Just before the concluding chapter, the author made mention of the Apostolic Nuncios who have served in Prague since the reopening of the Apostolic Nunciature in 1990, namely, Archbishops Giovanni Coppa, Erwin Josef Ender, Diego Causero and Giuseppe Leanza. I consider it a privilege to follow in their footsteps and I thank Marek Šmíd for opening a window to a world that was heretofore unknown to

me personally, in the hope that his book can make its own contribution for the future of good relations in all fields between the Holy See and the Czech Republic.

*Archbishop Charles D. Balvo
Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech Republic
January 6, 2020*

1. Introduction

Research of Apostolic Nunciatures in the Czech Lands and the Personage of the Apostolic Nuncio

While research into the Apostolic Nunciatures in the 16th and 17th centuries has more than a 100-year-old tradition in the Czech Lands, research into the Nunciatures of the 20th century is almost in its beginnings. It is thus a new phenomenon which logically—with respect to the unavailable Vatican archives—could not be studied before 2006, when Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013) made the Vatican archives available up to the pontificate of Pope Pius XI (February 1922–February 1939).

Although the first diplomatic representations were established in the 15th century, when Spain, France and the Republic of Venice appointed their permanent Envoys to the Holy See and received the Pope's Envoys (i.e., Apostolic Nuncios), representatives of the Holy See resided in Prague much later. The first residence was from the period of the Habsburg Imperial Court in Prague, i.e. from November 26, 1583, when the Apostolic Nuncio, Giovanni Francesco Bonhomini (1536–1587) relocated from Vienna to Prague to join Emperor Rudolf II (1576–1611). They remained there until November 11, 1612, when Nuncio Placido de Marra left Prague for Vienna, along with Matyáš's Court. Altogether 12 Nuncios resided at the Court of Rudolf II in Prague between 1583 and 1612. However, Nuncios had temporarily resided in Prague already before 1583, in the times of Ferdinand I. Two of them, Bartolomeo Portia (1578) and Ottavio Santacroce (1581), even died there.¹ At that time, the stay of Apostolic Nuncios in Prague was only temporary, dependent on

1 AMFA, Krofta's archive, box file number 1, Novák January 1, 1931.

the presence of the Imperial Court. When the Court relocated to Vienna, so did the Nunciature. Nuncios did not reside in Prague until 1920.

The number of representations of the Holy See increased during the 18th century, when numerous representations were established in important governments around the world.² The establishment of Nunciatures did not follow rigid rules; it rather reflected the current priorities of the Holy See. The diplomatic representations of the Holy See expanded out of Europe during the 19th century, and their number significantly increased, mainly in South America where new Nunciatures were established in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Columbia. Besides the above-mentioned Nunciature in Vienna, those in Madrid and Paris were among the oldest Nunciatures in Europe.

The rank of Apostolic Nuncio was provided for in Article IV of the Protocol of the Congress of Vienna of June 9, 1815, known as the Vienna Reglement. The Nuncio was awarded the rank of Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, making him the representative of the entire Diplomatic Corps in a host country.³ This divided the diplomatic representatives into three classes according to importance. Class I consisted of Ambassadors, (Papal) Legates and Apostolic Nuncios, all of the same rank. Class II comprised Envoys, Ministers and other persons accredited to a sovereign. Class III comprised *chargés d'affaires*, who were accredited to Ministers of Foreign Affairs. This title usually referred to diplomatic representatives in countries where the Envoy was temporarily absent.⁴ In 1818, this classification was extended by another class of ministerial residents (i.e., Plenipotentiary Ministers), whose rank was between Classes II and III. The Vienna Reglement was effective until 1961, when it was substituted by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.⁵

An Apostolic Nunciature denotes a historical form of a permanent representation of the Holy See abroad, whose titular head is an Apostolic Nuncio. The Heads of diplomatic missions are divided into three classes: 1. Ambassadors and Nuncios, 2. Envoys, Ministers and Internuncios, and 3. *chargés d'affaires*. These, however, have no influence on the rank of the diplomats as Heads of diplomatic missions. The difference is rather related to protocol, i.e. to the question of etiquette.⁶ The post of

2 De Marchi, *Le nunziature apostoliche dal 1800 al 1956*, XVI.

3 NA, MFA-NCA I, box file number 1953, sign. 725, October 28 May 5 1925.

4 Veselý, *Diplomacie*, 113.

5 *Ibid.*, 113–114.

6 *Ibid.*, 127.

chargé d'affaires is filled by a diplomat charged to head an office which is not held by any extraordinary or Plenipotentiary Ambassador. Unlike the Nuncio, he does not need to ask the host country for *agrément* — the Foreign Ministry of the country is only advised of his appointment. If a distinction is made between *chargé d'affaires en pied* and *chargé d'affaires ad interim*, it refers to the length of the mission. The former is appointed as a permanent Head of the office, while the latter temporarily heads the office in the absence of an extraordinary or plenipotentiary representative. The office of *chargé d'affaires* bears no relation to diplomatic ranks.

The lowest diplomatic rank is Attaché. It denotes a diplomat charged with a specific task or special agenda. Therefore, the Apostolic Nuncio ranks among higher (senior) diplomats. Secretaries, chargés d'affaires and Attachés are lower (junior) diplomats.⁷

Apostolic Nuncios who, since the pontificate of Pope Pius XI, have been ordained as a titular (Arch)bishops before their diplomatic mission, enjoy a number of privileges and immunities as diplomats.

The appointment of Apostolic Nuncios is determined by nomination letters, which are to be found in the Vatican Secret Archive. The host country was advised of the nomination of a Nuncio via personal correspondence or sometimes by telegram.⁸ In the case of the nomination letters not remaining preserved, specific information can be found in *Diario di Roma*, which often refers to the date of nomination letters, in *Breve*. This, however, often presents inaccurate dates of particular documents (e.g., credentials, communication with the Chancery of Apostolic Briefs, the date of departure or arrival of an Apostolic Nuncio, the date of his first letters to the Holy See). The beginning of the Nuncio's diplomatic mission is determined by a Letter of Credence (*lettere di richiamo*), according to which the Nuncio is transferred to a new position or remains at the disposal of the Holy See.⁹

Before the outbreak of WWI, there were 5 Nuncios and 11 Internuncios and Apostolic Delegates with diplomatic missions representing the Holy See abroad. Some of these diplomats were, however, in charge of several missions at a time, so the Holy See maintained contact with a great number of countries. In 1933, the number of Apostolic Nuncios

7 Ibid., 128–129.

8 De Marchi, *Le nunziature apostoliche*, XVII.

9 Ibid., XVIII.

and Internuncios abroad amounted to 33; even more countries had their representatives to the Holy See.¹⁰

But who was the Apostolic Nuncio, and what was the nature of his diplomatic mission? The position of Apostolic Nuncios to Prague at that time and their agenda were based on the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which was largely the work of the former Secretary of State, P. Gasparri.¹¹ The activities of the Legates of the Roman Pontiff are described in Chapter V, canons 265–270. The Pope has the right, independent of civil power, to send Legates into any country of the world, with or without ecclesiastical jurisdiction (canon 265). Among these are Apostolic Nuncios and Internuncios who foster relations between the Holy See and the governments of host countries, supervise Church conditions in host countries, informing the Holy See about them, and have other authorities delegated to them (canon 267).¹² Their mission does not end with the vacancy of the Holy See, as it does e.g. with the Secretary of State, but upon completion of their task, upon recall or resignation and acceptance by the Pope (canon 268).¹³ The length of their mission is not firmly fixed, depending on the diplomatic practice of a host country. Apostolic Nuncios and Internuncios leave the free exercise of their jurisdiction to local ordinaries. In the hierarchy of local ordinaries, Nuncios—from their title of Legate—take precedence over all ordinaries, even if they lack episcopal ordination; only Cardinals take precedence over them. If they have been ordained as bishops, Nuncios can, without the permission of ordinaries, e.g. hold pontifical masses in all their churches (canon 269).¹⁴

The mission of the Apostolic Nuncio was thus primarily to represent the Holy Father to all Catholics and to represent the Holy See in the host country. His task was, by his authority, to spread confidence in the Holy See, its sincerity and responsiveness, strengthen the local Catholic community, be in contact with the local clergy, and, by means of his authority, assuage any potential anti-Catholic feeling among the population. As a diplomatic Envoy of the Holy See, he was a Doyen, i.e. the spokesman of the Diplomatic Corps during ceremonial events. He protected the interests of the Catholic Church and informed the Holy

10 Hobza, *Poměr mezi státem a církví*, 134; Fuchs, *Novější papežská politika*, 286.

11 Filipazzi, “Missione ecclesiale e diplomatica dei nunzi apostolici,” 24.

12 The Code of Canon Law was created at the command of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius X, and promulgated by Pope Benedict XV; the Czech translation was carried out by František Kop et al., 92–93.

13 *Ibid.*, 93.

14 *Ibid.*, 8.

See about the position of Catholicism in the country. He assumed the role of observer and possible advisor of the local clergy. Without the Pope's orders, he did not intervene in the religious life and management of dioceses. From his position of titular Archbishop and Nuncio, he took precedence over the local clergy (except for the Cardinal), which enabled him to preside at Episcopal conferences.¹⁵ He was also in active contact with representatives of various religious orders and congregations in Czechoslovakia, e.g. the Benedictines, Premonstratensians, Dominicans, Capuchins, Augustinians, Jesuits, Redemptorists, Basilians, Piarists, Barefoot Carmelites, Minorites, Salesians and Cistercians, in whose affairs he also intervened.¹⁶

The position of the Apostolic Nuncio was specific in that he represented the Holy See not only to the government, but also to bishops and priests, over whom he had extensive authority.¹⁷ It is thus obvious that the left-wing press repeatedly protested at the broad scope of authority of Apostolic Nuncios, and struggled for their exclusion from the Diplomatic Corps and for restriction of their intervention in Czechoslovakia.¹⁸

During discussions about *modus vivendi* in 1927, P. Ciriaci acted quite independently, mainly because he was also a high official of the Roman Curia—Under-Secretary of the Section for Relations with States—and he was personally interested in reaching an agreement. A role was possibly also played by the retreat of the aging Secretary of State, P. Gasparri, from the everyday agenda of the protracted dispute with Czechoslovakia.¹⁹ The Nuncio also formulated statements for the Czechoslovakian government in letters, which he was instructed or indicated to do by the Holy See, often in a brief or incomplete way. He mediated contacts between the Holy See and bishops, or, more generally, the faithful in Czechoslovakia; he reported on pilgrimages to Rome and helped to co-organize them.²⁰ Unlike a mere Secretary of the Nunciature, the Apostolic Nuncio enjoyed the substantial respect of the Church hierarchy in the country and embodied a dignified representative of the Holy Father in Czechoslovakia.²¹

15 Zlámál, *Příručka českých církevních dějin*, 7:72, 75; Hrabovec, “Svatá stolice,” 7.

16 Filipazzi, “Missione ecclesiale e diplomatica dei nunzi apostolici,” 3.

17 AMFA, PR Vatican, 1922, Pallier August 15, 1922.

18 *České Slovo*, September 9, 1922.

19 AMFA, PR Vatican, 1927, Jelen July 22, 1927.

20 Ibid., 1931, Radimský, May 19, 1931.

21 MFA, PR Vatican, 1927, Jelen November 9, 1927.