Luca Castagna

A Bridge Across the Ocean: The United States and the Holy See Between the Two World Wars. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014. Pp. 193. Hb, \$49.95.

Luca Castagna's *A Bridge Across the Ocean* adds to and complements two very fine books on the subject of U.S. relations with the Holy See: *Roosevelt and Romanism* by George Q. Flynn (1976) and Gerald P. Fogarty's more ecclesiastic-centered *The Vatican and the American Hierarchy* (1982). While Castagna's work does not altogether alter the presuppositions of these previous authors, his book adds much-needed depth and argumentation in light of the latest archival materials open for research at the Archivio Segreto Vaticano. One new argument put forward is that contacts, sympathy, and cautious optimism about a Vatican-U.S. nexus emerged much earlier, and was much more robust, than previous accounts indicate. Castagna forthrightly argues that the apotheosis of U.S.-Vatican contacts occurred during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (when one Catholic referred to FDR as a "savior") but to view this period as the dominant "Catholic" era of church-state relations undercuts the behind-the-scenes and second-tier diplomatic efforts and mutual agreements which had been percolating since the end of World War I. More controversially, Castagna argues that the diplomatic relationship between the United States and the Holy See was cemented in the late 1930s over the issue of a mutually robust anti-fascism.

In connection to Castagna's excellent new research chronicling the two track diplomacy after World War I, a person who moves to the forefront is Father John J. Burke, C.S.P., of the National Catholic War Council (later the National Catholic Welfare Conference). Burke's activities on behalf of the Holy See have been heretofore underappreciated by historians, even though, as Sydney Ahlstrom once noted, Father Burke held "personal negotiations with the government of Mexico in 1928." (*A Religious History of the American People*, 1972, p. 1001). Castagna's book, along with Stephen J.C. Andes's *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile* (2014) will move Burke's work into the forefront of the discussion of the so-called *Christero* War. In the larger sense, Castagna rightly casts Burke not simply as a major player, but more generally as a prototype for how U.S.-Vatican relations would be advanced during the 1920s and through the mid-1930s. Due to lingering Protestant opposition, Ku Klux Klan activism, and ambient anti-Catholicism, low-level diplomats and clerics without high public profiles were the ones who prepared the groundwork for the eventual "Catholic moment" under Roosevelt.

The files of the Apostolic Delegation to the United States are a rich resource, of immense value to historians. They include periodic reports and subject files sent to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington from every diocese in the United States. The material was then used by the delegate to prepare memoranda and reports for the Holy See. As such, this collection presents a virtual clearing-house of social history on American ecclesiastical issues, problems, and experiences, categorized by geography. These files are masterfully mined by Castagna for their diplomatic and church-state relevance. With this book, for the first time we get background material about some of the most important events of the First World War and the interwar period. For example, Castagna's work highlights how American churchmen viewed the secret Treaty of London of 1915. The Holy See was appalled when the anti-Vatican contents of the treaty became public in 1916, and U.S. bishops were prevailed upon to influence the Wilson administration to make a correction. Such issues, as well as the internal feedback of bishops on Wilson's 1917 peace note, show the grumblings of American ecclesiastics as they attempted to reconcile Wilson's innate distrust of Catholicism while asking Catholics to fight a war for democracy. The overall trajectory of Castagna's narrative is that the "incompatible universalisms" of Catholicism and democracy would eventually subside as fascism and communism grew in Europe. As skittish as the papacy was about democracy, Castagna argues, it was the rise of these two threatening political ideologies that by 1939 pushed the Holy See into Roosevelt's welcoming embrace.

Readers should know that this work does not claim to be a social history. In this telling, we have a story of the operation of elites. The protagonists building the "bridge across the ocean" are men who wear either red hats or white spats. Clerics, State Department officials, dignitaries, and millionaires move the action along. Larger Catholic social movements emerging in the U.S. at the same time – international labor unionism, women, Catholic Action, and the Catholic press – seemingly have little or no role to play in the creation and contextualization of this new relationship.

Castagna argues that after 1935 the relationship became grounded in a "shared mission" of "anti-totalitarian action" (151). While the Roman side of this anti-totalitarian alignment is well-chronicled, the diplomatic import of American side has yet to be explored in full. The pro-fascist Jesuit Charles Coughlin, for example, who receives scant attention in relation to his wild popularity, remained active in the United States well into the 1940s. Moreover, Coughlin was silenced not by his church, but by the attorney general of the United States. Grassroots Catholic anti-fascist organizations in the United States, such as the Committee of Catholics for Human Rights, received no

support from the Vatican, and were rebuffed by local bishops trained in Rome. More significantly, as David Kertzer has pointed out, when the anti-fascist editor of New York's *America* magazine, Wilfred Parsons, S.J., wrote an editorial critical of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, the papal confidant and Jesuit superior general Włodzimierz Ledóchowski summarily sacked him with dizzying speed, and replaced him with an editor of fascist sympathies. While these episodic instances do not diminish Castagna's superlative work, they do show that U.S.-Vatican diplomatic relations during the twentieth century is still a robust and thought-provoking field of inquiry.

Charles R. Gallagher, S.J.

Boston College

charles.gallagher@bc.edu

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00203005-21