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**Beyond protest**

**The treaties of Westphalia and the papacy's culture of peace**

*Summary*

*The systematic protests by the nuncio Fabio Chigi against the peace treaties negotiated during the Congress of Westphalia (1643–1649) have long been interpreted as a reflection of a papacy at sea, at a time when the ideal of Christianity would definitively give way to a Europe made up of states. Instead, this paper seeks to move away from this unequivocal interpretation of this phenomenon. By studying the correspondence of the nuncios stationed in Madrid, Paris, Brussels and Vienna, the aim is to analyse how the treaties of Westphalia were received, which contrasts with the protest politics adopted by Chigi in Münster. As a result, the nunciatures developed varied reactions concerning the treaties, within fragmented contexts where the peace in Germany only represented a portion of the current events, which were dominated by continuing conflicts. The primary characteristic of these reactions is that they are subject to the localised activity of each nuncio. By paying attention to the differences, this study offers a polycentric and interconnected understanding of papal diplomacy at the time of the Congress of Westphalia. It aims to provide a better understanding of the 'agency' of the apostolic nuncios in redefining the diplomatic culture of the Holy See, through their varied practices and uses of peace notion.*

It is accepted by historiography that the denominational division of the 16th century is one of the keys to understanding the stakes of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). Similarly, it is accepted that the Treaty of Westphalia of 24 October 1648 played a role in the religious pacification of central Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.[[1]](#footnote-1) By recognising the legal existence of Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist denominations within the Empire, and setting aside the dogmatic elements of the treaties, the plenipotentiaries who had gathered in Münster and Osnabrück were indeed able to establish a political peace that legally discredited any recourse to denominational violence.[[2]](#footnote-2) These two observations raise one question: in the context of the Thirty Years’ War and the Treaty of Westphalia, was religion more responsible for conflict than peace? Would the now-sundered former Christendom only find salvation in strictly political dialogue between states? The answer, of course, is no. Research has been re-evaluating this overly simplistic dichotomy for nearly twenty-five years.[[3]](#footnote-3) Religion played a role in the processes that led to the signing of the peace treaty in 1648, in accordance with the varied uses entailed by this phenomenon. This can be used to build theological and legal arguments in favour of, and against, continuing the war, the instruments of peace were placed under divine protection and aimed to established a 'Christian peace treaty', it played a role in celebrations following the ratifications of the treaties and, finally, it was part of the conflicting denominational memories of the Congress of Westphalia, with the latter being revived upon commemorations of the treaties, at least until the 18th century.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Holy See, the official mediator to the Congress of Westphalia, alongside Venice, was one of the main proponents of the role of religion in the search for peace. Three keywords sum up the historiographical reception to relationships between the treaties of Westphalia and the Papacy: ‘Fabio Chigi’, ‘protest politics’ and the *Zelo Domus Dei* breve. First, Fabio Chigi (1599–1667) was the extraordinary apostolic nuncio sent to Münster by the Apostolic Palace between 1644 and 1649 to mediate between the Catholic powers who were engaged in the Thirty Years’ War. He left this role with recognised geopolitical expertise in European affairs and an established reputation in the Curia. He was appointed cardinal secretary of state by the pope Innocent X (1644–1655) upon returning from the banks of the Rhine, and was elected pope during the 1655 conclave. He went by the name Alexander VII.[[5]](#footnote-5) For its part, protest politics was the name given by historian Konrad Repgen to the attitude adopted by Fabio Chigi towards the peace negotiations from 1645–1646 onwards. In conjunction with the secretary of state in Rome, the nuncio did indeed systematically protest, in writing, against any articles in the treaties that undermined the reasons of the Holy See, the ecclesiastical assets of the Catholic Church and canonical law.[[6]](#footnote-6) Finally, the *Zelo Domus Dei* breve was the name given to the document used by the Roman Curia to solemnly conduct the protest politics led by Fabio Chigi. In effect, the Papal breve declared any portion of the signed treaties that contravened the interests of the Holy See and the rights of the Church null and void and devoid of legal value. Published in 1651, after the Execution Diet of Nuremberg, it was backdated to November 1648, to serve as Rome’s legal response to the signing of the instruments on 24 October 1648.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Since the works of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and Ludwig von Pastor (1854–1928), these three keywords have intersected and merged to form the core of a well-structured historiographical narrative.[[8]](#footnote-8) Indeed, this triptych has often formed the interpretation of the position of the Holy See in the face of the Treaty of Westphalia. It reflects the image of a weakened and out-of-touch papacy, at a time when the ideal of Christianity would be definitively rendered obsolete by the progressive development of a multi-denominational Europe made of sovereign states. This interpretation continues to influence contemporary research, despite criticism. Indeed, while the idea of the Holy See being washed up in Westphalia has now found a degree of nuance in studies by experts,[[9]](#footnote-9) it still serves as the foundation for some of the narratives proposed when summarising the relations between the papacy and the West in the early modern period.[[10]](#footnote-10)

We would like to take a detour here to look at what is happening alongside the common narrative of the protest. The aim of this study is to place Fabio Chigi’s mediation efforts on the fringes of the analysis, in order to highlight the different receptions of the treaties of Westphalia that the apostolic nuncio stationed north of the Alps experienced in the middle of the 17th century. This approach must underscore the need to consider the variety of representations that pontifical diplomacy was able to simultaneously offer to Europe during that period, and the theological and political role that Rome seeks to play in it. Coming from the perspective of the new field of research around the cultural history of peace, this analysis will therefore serve as an opportunity to understand how the culture of peace of the early modern papacy interfered with the treaties of Westphalia.[[11]](#footnote-11)

An approach like this allows a polycentric and interconnected understanding of the diplomatic machine of the Holy See, which takes divergences and accommodations into account. It will demonstrate that the protest politics led by Fabio Chigi from 1645 were only one facet of the reaction of papal diplomacy to the Congress of Westphalia. While this should not be minimised, it is also interesting to note that it interacts with other interpretations of the events, ones that are often more favourable to the treaty and whose histories can be retraced[[12]](#footnote-12).

**A diplomatic network on paper**

In the early modern time, correspondence between the nuncios is characterised by its operation in a network and the variety of ways in which information can be processed.[[13]](#footnote-13) In the middle of the 17th century, it was also part of an extremely unstable context: a series of conflicts – the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648) and the Thirty Years’ War, to start with – whose primary characteristic, for Rome, was that they stretched on too long. This media refinement, on one hand, and the precarious nature of the events that the papacy was seeking to bring to an end, on the other, influenced the discourse around peace that came from the pontifical diplomatic system.

The diplomatic network established north of the Alps by Rome was largely renewed at the start of the 1640s. Fabio Chigi was appointed to the nunciature of the Rhine in 1639 and was the first to come from this new generation. He resided in the free imperial city of Cologne and was immediately surrounded by the pacifying politics that Pope Urban VIII had deployed to end the conflict that was tearing Christendom apart. Indeed, hope remained for a few months that peace would be achieved in the city of Cologne, where Rome had been maintaining, at great expense to itself, the legate *a latere* Marzio Ginetti (1585–1671) since 1636.[[14]](#footnote-14) Fabio Chigi took his sister’s son, Antonio Bichi (1614–1691), under his wing in this spot by the Rhine. The young prelate served as the auditor of his uncle’s nunciature, before being appointed as the head of Brussels's internunciature in 1642, thanks to support from Chigi.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Finally, the Congress of Cologne fell when France, Spain and the emperor found it impossible to come to an agreement regarding whether it would be possible to welcome representatives from the states and the cities of the Empire. After new negotiations, the cities of Münster and Osnabrück were chosen, in turn, to welcome the diplomatic delegations. In the interim, the nature of the congress had changed considerably. At the peak of the negotiations, sixteen states and one hundred and forty principalities and cities from the Empire were represented, while thirty-eight principalities or cities were hosted as observers, making Westphalia the first congress in western history. The new diplomatic agreement led to the Apostolic Palace appointing Fabio Chigi as *mediator pacis* for the Catholic powers at the congress on 23 December 1643. From this point on, he became the cornerstone of the Holy See’s diplomatic system. Camillo Melzi (1590–1659), Giulio Rospigliosi (1600–1669) and Niccolò Guidi di Bagno (1583–1663), the three new crown nuncios appointed in 1644, in Vienna, Madrid and Paris respectively, were therefore responsible for assisting him in striving for peace, by using their proximity to princes, their councils and their courts.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Born at the intersection of the 16th and 17th centuries, these five prelates embodied the new generation of diplomats that the Barberini government put in place at the end of the reign of Urban VIII (1623–1644). As the heirs to the generation that ended the Council of Trent, they cut their teeth at the Curia at a time when the legitimacy of Rome’s power was steeped in the ink of this vast polemical and apologetic enterprise that Gérard Labrot referred to as the ‘Image of Rome’.[[17]](#footnote-17) This image, which was built around the dual antique and Christian heritage of Rome, was drawn diplomatically through the doctrine of the pope’s indirect power in temporal matters, theorised by the Jesuit Roberto Bellarmino, and by the doctrine of the *padre comune*, which made the pontiff the common father of the Catholic princes and the mediator of choice for their conflicts.[[18]](#footnote-18) These men were interested in politics, like all young people of good breeding who then tried their hand at the *Gran teatro del mondo*, and deployed their professional strategies between the 1620s and 1640s, in a Rome – the Rome of the Ludovisi and the Barberini families – with universal ambitions, where knowledge about the world had converged since the end of the 16th century.[[19]](#footnote-19) Following the death of Urban VIII in 1644, they all remained in their roles in the nunciature under his successor, Innocent X.

They were thrust into European geopolitics and, as a result, dealt with a subcontinent at war for several decades. However, unlike belligerent states whose diplomatic channels of communication were often subject to change, the Holy See maintained an operating information network, since it was not a party to conflicts. This network was based on the regular exchange of letters between the different nuncios, on one hand, and weekly correspondence with the apostolic palace in Rome, on the other. Therefore, each of the nunciatures should be considered as its own centre of knowledge, capable of gathering, disseminating and using original information, with a view to acting in the diplomatic, denominational and legal-canonical interests of the Holy See.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**Peace as a legal process and festive ritualisation**

The epistolary practice of modern pontifical diplomacy has been well studied: letters from nuncios served as tools of the Roman government and have been standardised since the second half of the 16th century. They generally include an inventory listing all of the letters contained in the package, possibly encrypted originals, annexes and *avvisi. Avvisi* were handwritten sheets with news. They highlighted the public events that were deemed noteworthy, divided by geographical area. The way information was treated was keen: they strived for an objective and detached tone.[[21]](#footnote-21) When analysing the content of the *avvisi* that the internuncio of Brussels, Antonio Bichi, sent to Rome regarding the treaty signed on 30 January 1648 between the Dutch Republic and the Spanish monarchy, it is interesting to see what these documents say about the treaty. Focusing on this case study should allow us to reflect on the ability the handwritten news that flooded the Roman Curia with information had to offer a plural intelligibility for the legal establishment of the treaty and its ritualisation.

Preliminary treaties were signed between the plenipotentiaries of Philip IV and the Dutch Republic from 8 January 1647.[[22]](#footnote-22) The imminence of a possible definitive agreement was already known by the internuncio, who received regular letters from his uncle Fabio Chigi in Münster. However, on 12 January 1648, Bichi send the following *avviso* to the cardinal secretary of state in Rome:

„Non si hà ancora alcuna certezza se segua accordo fra li Stati di Olanda et Sua Maestà Cattolica. Si sta ancora con speranza per la inclinatione che quei popoli mostrano, et si stà con timore che non succeda per esservisi trasferito da Munster il Signore de Servient uno dei Plenipotentiarii francesi che fà credere a molti che la sua andata in Olanda habbia cagionato questa tardanza.‟[[23]](#footnote-23)

The passive, distant interpretation of the events offered by the *avvisi* sent by Bichi was subject to the comings and goings of the postal carriers, who linked Westphalia and Castile, by way of Brussels. It highlights an expected reconciliation by the people of the countries surrounding the internunciature. This reconciliation was slow to come. It pinned on the news of the war and the many tangled negotiations between the congresses. Furthermore, this reconciliation was fragile. Indeed, the many legal steps that were responsible for bringing it about posed a systematic threat to the entire edifice, since there were so many who opposed the treaty; the French delegation in particular – personified here by the plenipotentiary Abel Servien (1593–1659) – who sought to prevent the Dutch ally from emerging alone from the common war against the Habsburgs.

After the treaty was signed on 30 January 1648, it was then necessary to wait until 15 May for the exchange of ratifications between the delegations from the Dutch Republic and Philip IV to take place in the *Rathaus* in Münster. It was this event, which was immortalised in oil on copper by Gerard Ter Borch, which signalled the legal execution of the treaty. Between May and June of 1648, ten celebrations were organised in the northern part of the Empire, the United Provinces and the southern Netherlands, based on the first Westphalian celebrations. The city served as the festive backdrop for them all. Brussels, which was the seat of the court and the administration of the Governor General, was one of the two cities in the southern Netherlands to organise festivities, along with Antwerp.[[24]](#footnote-24) The *avvisi* from internuncio Antonio Bichi serve as testimonials to the festivities and are a media echo of these celebrations of the treaty.[[25]](#footnote-25) While they still aim to be transparent regarding the facts, they became active interpreters of the celebrations, through a series of procedures borrowed from the festive relationship, with the goal of being able to have the same effect on readers in the Curia.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The festivities in Brussels started on 7 June 1648. They lasted for three days. Antonio Bichi attended the celebrations and sent the *avvisi* about them in his packet on 13 June. According to the handwritten news, the public space in the city was transformed into a revamped, ephemeral space with Place du Grand-Marché (the current Grand-Place) at its centre. Ships lined with barrels filled with flammable materials, machines, boats, castles, pyrotechnics and more – everything came together to transform the city into a stage on which peace was celebrated:

„Domenica sera si vedde comminciar in questa città i fuochi d'allegrezzia per la publicatione della pace d'Olanda, trovandosi in tutte le piazze publiche disposti altissimi alberi, con gran quantità di botte all'intorno, oltre a diverse barche, castelli et macchine ripiene di razzi et altri fuochi artificiati che più di in ogni altro luogo si vedevano nel gran mercato di modo che quasi tutte le dame et cavalieri con numerosissimo concorso di popolo si son trovati a vederle con gusto particolare di ogni uno.‟[[27]](#footnote-27)

The party, which was contained geographically (the city of Brussels), in terms of time (three days) and in a socio-political context (the Brussels urban community in its plurality), perfectly espoused the elements of the setting that defined it: it lasted for three days without letting up, took up all the public space in Brussels and incorporated all of the residents of the city. It thus became the personification of a rediscovered ‘*bene comune*’, through the effects of the *avvisi*, which is the Aristotelian term for what civil peace among men should look like in its perfect form.

These extracts show that the handwritten news sent to Rome by Bichi was particularly susceptible to the local reception of the treaties, presenting it, in turn, as a long legal process that was simultaneously bumpy, up and down and deeply desired by the general populace. Once the agreement had been formalised by the exchange of the ratifications, they also showed that the treaties were, more than anything, contained in terms of their effects: freedom of trade returned, borders opened and cities celebrated. Borrowing from the codified genre of festive relations, they participated in the celebrations of the treaty by taking part in the general razzle-dazzle. The letters from the internuncio, which insisted on the communally shared aspect of the celebrations, highlighted the symbolism of the festivities, making them the image of the treaty as social order and civic harmony. Through this interpretive process, they became a 'lieu de mémoire' of these celebrations. They were sent and retained by the Roman Curia and acted on the representations of the treaty held by the Apostolic Palace, without, however, engaging the pontifical authority. In short, they helped to create a complex view of contemporary European events, which also coexisted easily with the protest politics that Fabio Chigi led at that time, by protesting to a notary against the agreement signed between Spain and the United Provinces.

**Peace as an opportunity**

By focusing on the protests of the Holy See against the treaties in Münster and Osnabrück, scholars have tended to overlook the fact that, in the middle of the 17th century, the main diplomatic activity of the papacy was still to serve as a mediator for the benefit of peace between Catholic powers, before, during and after the Congress of Westphalia. In this context, it is necessary to underscore the fact that protest politics do not represent the rigorous epilogue and, as a result, an admission of failure with respect to fifteen years of diplomatic activity in the service of establishing peace. Protest does not take the place of mediation. The two diplomatic positions work hand in hand. For the early modern papacy, looking after the interests of the Catholic religion, and interceding to put an end to conflicts between secular states, were indeed two sides of the same coin, minted in the name of the theological and political position of the *padre commune.*[[28]](#footnote-28)

The importance of mediation for peace adopted by the pontifical diplomatic system in the middle of the 17th century is particularly noticeable when we take a step back and look at the network of nunciatures north of the Alps as a whole. The internuncio Antonio Bichi, as well as the nuncios Niccolò Guidi di Bagno and Giulio Rospigliosi, developed, through interaction with Fabio Chigi, a primarily geopolitical interpretation of the situation in Europe, one that took the influence of the three successively signed peace treaties in Westphalia between the two Catholic crowns of France and Spain into account. The nunciatures’ understanding of the stakes of peace is part of the providential hermeneutics of history and an art of concealment, opportunity and action that was typical of Italian political culture in the first half of the 17th century. Through their insistence on interpreting events based on their duty in the service of peace between the Catholic powers, the ambassadors of the Holy See remained attached to the instructions they were issued in 1643, at the end of the Barberini government’s reign. Their action, which paid little attention to the deployment of a policy of intransigence, which had occurred in the interim in exchanges between Rome and Fabio Chigi, opened up another major aspect of papal diplomacy during the Westphalia era, an aspect that is part of the centuries-old peace mediations of the Holy See and, in particular, the institutional memory, with triumphant emphasis on the role played by the papacy in the Treaty of Vervins in 1598.[[29]](#footnote-29)

According to the Christian notion of Salvation, peace is, like Christianity, an offspring of Christ. It can only be whole and perfect. It represents an intersection between the political city and the City of God, in reference to rest in the afterlife and the Salvation of humanity.[[30]](#footnote-30) As a result, it is only partially contained in the treaties that govern peace on Earth. With respect to contemporary events, the ability to transcend each partial peace in order to establish universal peace resides in the favourable intersections embodied by each of these treaties. The hope – which was, in part, rhetorical – remained that peace would bring about peace and that, through accumulation, this would all lead to public peace between the states and tend towards universal peace. This is what Giulio Rospigliosi wrote to Fabio Chigi on 21 November 1648 after learning of the signing of the *instrumentum pacis* by the emperor's plenipotentiaries on 24 October:

„Dopo l'avviso che si compiacque Vostra Signoria Illustrissima parteciparmi d'esser già molto avanti il trattato della pace frà l'Imperio, la Francia e la Svetia, n'é giunta à questa corte alcuni giorni sono la confermatione per corriero straordinario, col quale io ricevo l'humanissima di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima de'25 del passato, in cui mi significa esser seguita la sottoscrittione de'plenipotentiarij cesarei alla medesima pace, dalla quale piaccia a Dio risultino quei buoni effetti che si sperano in ordine alla quiete publica et al totale aggiustamento delle calamità del Christianesimo.‟[[31]](#footnote-31)

These diplomatic reflections are not only theological. Their rationale was also based on expert knowledge of current events and a legal understanding of the system of alliances that influenced the war and the complex negotiations in Westphalia. Each of the belligerent powers was indeed connected to the others through interlocking agreements, forcing the nuncios to consider the transition towards peace in terms of blocks. This is what Fabio Chigi wrote in early 1648, when he sought to predict the consequences of the secret signing of preliminary peace agreements between Dutch Republic and Spain on 8 January 1648 on other negotiations in progress, when, in France, the first upheavals of the Fronde were viewed by pontifical diplomacy as a fresh opportunity for peace:

„Quest'atto l'hanno fatto con gran segreto, mà per l'intervento di tante persone presto sarà publicato, benche questi deputati siano per continuar à trattar con i Francesi, perche ancor essi faccino la pace [...]. Se continuassero i moti de sudditi à non voler contribuir a Sua Maestà Christianissima danari per la guerra, come già hanno cominciato, potrebbono facilitarsi le cose et haversi la pace, quando gli Svetesi non prevalessero troppo, giache senz'essi non possono far la lor pace, ne meno con la Spagna i Francesi, ne gli Spagnuoli con la Francia se l'Imperatore non la facci con la Svetia e con la Francia, come se ne sono tutte le parti concordemente impegnate.‟[[32]](#footnote-32)

The jigsaw puzzle of bilateral alliances between the United Provinces, France, Sweden, Spain and the emperor represented a structural difficulty for the congresses: how to succeed in tamping down such a dense patchwork of wars? However, it also represented a series of contextual opportunities, since any individual peace treaty could lead to more. Whether at the time of signing the peace treaty between the Dutch Republic and Spain on 30 January 1648, or the signing of the instruments in Osnabrück and Münster on 24 October, pontifical diplomacy exploited the intersections by trying to bring negotiations between the Catholic monarchies to a conclusion.

Thus, starting in spring of 1648, Guidi di Bagno, Rospigliosi and Bichi took over Chigi’s mediation in Münster by interceding for peace between France and Spain. The handover originated from the gradual displacement of the Spanish and French delegations at the Congress of Westphalia, with the plenipotentiaries returning gradually to their respective courts after the signing of the treaty between the Netherlands and Spain. The intervention of the ordinary ambassadors of the Holy See, supported by their Venetian counterparts, led to the establishment of new bilateral negotiations between the two Catholic crowns, which continued throughout the period of the Fronde, despite being interspersed with long periods of silence.[[33]](#footnote-33) The three prelates kept an eye out from their positions for the development of conditions that were favourable to peace and met regularly with those in power, soliciting audiences and seizing any opportunity that was likely to bring war to an end. To put it simply, they exerted regular diplomatic pressure; this led to the risk, on occasion, of becoming involved in local disputes that put the doctrine of the *padre comune* on which their actions were founded to the test. This was particularly true with the regency government of Anne of Austria, where the nuncio Niccolò Guidi di Bagno gradually alienated Mazarin by exploiting the upheaval of the parliamentary Fronde with a zeal that the cardinal minister took umbrage with.

Of course, Guidi di Bagno and Mazarin knew each other and did not fail to exchange goods and favours on the eve of the Fronde.[[34]](#footnote-34) Indeed, the two men ran in the same circles under the reign of Urban VIII. Niccolò’s older brother, Cardinal Giovanni Francesco, was notably one of the main patrons of the young Mazzarino in Rome under the Barberini government.[[35]](#footnote-35) However, the fidelity induced by the interests of clientèle and lineage was paired with the nuncios’ concern for their own advancement in the Curia, which presupposed complying with the duties of their diplomatic office. Throughout his long nunciature between 1644 and 1656, Guidi di Bagno remained attentive to the evolution of the authority of the cardinal minister and the creation of a credible faction that was favourable to peace between the crowns. The link between the Franco-Spanish peace treaty and the stage games brought on by the events of the parliamentary Fronde is particularly noticeable in the letter that Guidi di Bagno sent to Bichi on 24 July 1648. In this communication, the nuncio argued the need to re-establish negotiations between the regency council and Philip IV from Brussels, through the intermediary of Archduke Léopold-Guillaume, the governor general of the Southern Netherlands, as well as the Count of Peñaranda, the main plenipotentiary of the *Monarquía* at the Congress of Westphalia. In this endeavour, the pressure exerted by the sovereign courts on the authority of the cardinal minister appeared, once again, as an opportunity to be seized:

„Le dirò con la solita confidenzà che continuando quà li soliti officii e mie preghiere più che mai efficaci per la pace, incontro che mi si risponde che li Signori Spagnuoli non la vogliono, et che forse devono concepir speranza di turbolenze in questo Regno per esser partito il Signor Conte di Pignoranda da’Munster et per altri riscontri che dicono haverne. Al che io replico quel che Sua Eccelenza disse [...] nella detta sua partenza [...], mostrando più che mai desiderio della pace. Mà se si potesse far ciò con stare con qualche altra maggior sicurezza, crederei che la congiontura fosse ottima, perche questi Parlamentari ancor loro farebbono le loro preghiere e remonstranze per la pace. Il tutto hò avvisato à Monsignore Nuntio à Munster et avviso a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima, acciò parendole conferire questo mio pensiero al Serrenissimo Arciduca et al medesimo Signor Conte, possa farlo, et crederei che fosse meglio di non publicare questo mio motivo, acciò quà non havessero da concepire, ch’io havessi avvisata qualche facilità in loro pregiuditio, se ben il tutto cessarebbe.‟[[36]](#footnote-36)

**Peace as a necessity of the times**

Like Fabio Chigi, Camillo Melzi, the nuncio stationed with Emperor Ferdinand III, was concerned about the damage that the Treaty of Westphalia caused to the Catholic religion. He was sent as an observer to the Diet of Pressburg (Bratislava) between 1646 and 1647 and did not miss the opportunity to write and record a protest, alongside the pontifical mediator, against the decisions made by the diet against Catholicism in Royal Hungary.[[37]](#footnote-37) Furthermore, like Fabio Chigi, Melzi was attentive to the negotiations that affected the denominational future of the Empire, given his duties as nuncio.[[38]](#footnote-38) However, unlike his counterpart in Münster, he did not unilaterally condemn the conciliatory policy pursued by Ferdinand III with respect to protestants. Thus, on 30 July 1650, two days after the *Te Deum* organised in the Vienna cathedral to celebrate the end of the Thirty Years’ War, following the conclusion of the Nuremberg congress organising the departure of troops stationed in the Empire, Melzi wrote to Rome that he had just had a meeting with the emperor. During this audience, the emperor justified the choices he had to make for the sake of peace. The nuncio writes:

„Hoggi all'udienza mi hà discorso alquanto, soggiungendo però, che se bene nell'Imperio la Religione haveva patito, che tuttavia egli l'havea preservata nei suoi Stati hereditarij, e che da questi sperava diffonderla un altra volta nell'Imperio. Hò approvato il concetto, e siamo passati avanti con scambievole sodisfattione.‟[[39]](#footnote-39)

Melzi's consent to the justifications of Ferdinand III is part of the news of the war and the negotiations that preceded the signing of the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück. At the end of the summer of 1648, after routing the last army of the emperor at the Battle of Zusmarhausen on 17 May, some of the Swedish troops entered Bohemia and besieged northern Prague in a surprise attack. On 31 July, Melzi provided the cardinal secretary of state, Panciroli, with the first detailed explanations of what he considered to be a catastrophe that would lead to further disaster from the neighbouring city of Linz: „Pare, che il Regno di Bohemia sia quasi perso, e si accresce al nemico forza sufficiente per debellar il resto de Paesi hereditarii. Non par, che vi sia altra speranza, se non in quanto le armi cesarea prevalessero nella Baviera.‟[[40]](#footnote-40) While the Old Town in Prague resisted in the months that followed, belief in the imminent ruin of the city coloured the correspondence of the nuncio on many occasions. On 3 October, after receiving notice of a new imperial rout, the nuncio foresaw the final fall of the capital of Bohemia and the arrival of the Swedes in Vienna. In his opinion, the ruin of the Habsburgs’ heritage states heralded the increase of Swedish claims in Westphalia and, as a result, greater ruin for Catholicism in the Empire:

„Le cose di Sua Maestà Cesarea vanno continuamente di male in peggio, e questà perdita del general Pucham con lo scomponimento della sua cavalleria preclude la strada al soccorso di Praga, la quale perciò probabilmente caderà nelle mani de Suetesi. Ciò fatto si potrebbono unir insieme il Chinismarch, il Wittembergh, et il Conte Carlo Gustavo Palatino, e venendo verso il Danubio, se quello non si potrà difendere, come è assai dubio, la guerra si ridurrà in quest’Austria Inferiore, e forse alle stesse mura di Vienna.‟[[41]](#footnote-41)

Melzi, having noted the disastrous military situation of the Austrian leader and their Bavarian ally in the final years of the Thirty Years’ War, made the Holy See admit that the treaties signed on 24 October 1648 were, on the one hand, the achievement of peace under political and religious conditions that could have been much more unfavourable if negotiations had been further delayed and, on the other hand, a happy end to the campaign for the emperor’s armies and the Catholic League, with Prague successfully repelling a final Swedish attack the day after the instruments of peace were signed on 25 October.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Subsequently, in January 1649, the nuncio learned that the Count of Trauttmansdorff, the main plenipotentiary for Ferdinand III in Westphalia, had successfully negotiated the sum of 300,000 florins with Swedish diplomats, so that the emperor’s heritage territories could be withdrawn from the pages of the Osnabrück instrument, which governed denominational matters within the Empire:

„Si dice assai constantemente che per mezo del Conte di Trautmanstorf si sia negotiato coi capi svetesi di fargli un donativo di 300 mille fiorini, acciò nella Pace si contentassero che la Religione non si alterasse nei Stati hereditarii di Sua Maiestà Cesarea.‟[[43]](#footnote-43)

Melzi’s interpretation of the treaties of Westphalia should be viewed as the result of this final reversal. During his audience with the emperor during the summer of 1650, the preservation of the heritage states was given as reassurance. Coming from the recent past, this is seen as the first legal and diplomatic step in the reconquest of Catholicism in Bohemia, and then in the rest of the Habsburg states. Melzi was faithful to this interpretation in the years that followed and, in a letter dated 4 March 1651, was able to narrate the reconquest of Bohemia and the rest of the heritage states by a triumphant Catholicism, whose success, he insisted, fell within the legal framework established by the instruments of peace from 1648:

„Questa pace di Germania, per altro tanto pregiuditiale alli beni e giurisdizioni ecclesiastiche, hà peró recato questo di buono che hà stabilita maggiormente Sua Maestà Cesarea nelli suoi Stati hereditarii, et anco nel *Ius* di disporre in essi più liberamente delle cose della Religione. Quindi è che Sua Maestà dopo la sudetta pace hà usato maggiore rigore in Bohemia nel cacciar gl'heretici, et hora forse và meditando di usarlo parimente non solo nella Silesia e nella Moravia, mà in queste due Austrie superiore et inferiore, et in altri Stati parimente sudditi all'Augustissima Casa.‟[[44]](#footnote-44)

**Conclusions**

Caught up in the interests of their own nunciatures and depictions of the world that are, at once, Roman, local and interconnected, the apostolic nuncios studied in this paper offer an interpretation that is both anchored in, and removed from, the treaties of Westphalia. Contradictory feelings that welcome and reject peace are found in their letters. The desire for general peace is shared with the fear of a wrong kind of peace. The weariness of war is confronted by the blind hope of a reversal of alliances in favour of Catholicism. In this ambiguous understanding of events, religion is naturally all present. It is subject to a need to give meaning to a world that has gone backwards and splinters into a variety of arguments and feelings that are in line with current events. It turns out to be a difficult task, then, for the historian approaching these diplomatic correspondences to separate war and peace, or politics and religion. Instead, we must take note of this interweaving, make it a socio-historical fact and a key to interpreting events. The diplomatic activity of the early modern papacy and the multiple texts permanently navigate between „confessional intransigence and diplomatic casuistry‟, to quote Alain Tallon, who seeks to characterise the nuances of pontifical diplomacy at the time of the denominational division by establishing these two poles.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The apostolic nuncios were men of peace, men of faith, men of the court and agents of a power whose interests simultaneously spanned the Italian peninsula, Christianity and Christendom, but, more than anything, they were men of action. In any case, this is how they can be viewed when they are studied through their official correspondence. Indeed these prelates deployed a complex and polycentric understanding of the world, built on the need to act as often as possible. In return, the pragmatic nature of the meaning they ascribe to events allows them to intervene at all times and on all fronts, in accordance with the universalist logic of the *padre commune*. If we are to take the polyphony of pontifical diplomacy seriously, it is then possible to interpret it as a specific characteristic – one that is both forced and voluntary – of the way in which the pontifical diplomatic machine operated during the early modern time.

However, a recurring theme emerges from the correspondences studied. The letters from the nuncios – those of Fabio Chigi included – are all imbued with the regularly invoked certainty that pontifical diplomacy was acting and moving in the right direction. This celebration of the institution was based on a providential interpretation of contemporary events, the political effectiveness of which needs to be taken into account. Through their display of virtuous behaviour, the apostolic nuncios collectively show that they embody the divine Justice and Truth of which the Holy See is the guarantor. Indeed, at the time of the Congress of Westphalia, there was little or no fear in the mail sent by the nuncios, as seen in this final extract from a letter by Guidi di Bagno to Chigi:

„Et stiamo pur forti nella solita forteza d'animo per conscienza, non curandosi di qualunque cosa che possa succedere purche facciamo il servizio di Dio et il debito nostro.‟[[46]](#footnote-46)

This, then, is perhaps the dual theological and political response from the pontifical diplomacy machine to the geopolitical turmoil during the middle of the 17th century: to resist loudly, by writing a protest breve and publishing it in the Catholic courts, which would hinder divine truth and the Roman orthodoxy and, at the same time, looking at themselves and their virtues and becoming confident that they were players in a story that was going in the right direction, in spite of everything; the one laid out by God, which leads to Salvation and which the papacy is the mediator for on Earth. In short, the treaties of Westphalia should certainly be viewed as a test of the Holy See’s diplomatic culture, but in political terms, also as an opportunity for the papacy to claim the glory of constant diplomatic position, as both a consequence and proof of the authenticity of its role as the spiritual guide for Christian society.

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