

Paolo Zanini, Department of Historical Studies, State University of Milan

*The Apostolic Delegation to Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan (1929): cause or effect of the changes in Vatican Middle East policy?*

## *I. Introduction*

It is well known that the period of British Mandate in Palestine was central in the formation of the modern Middle East, with a profound influence on the following events. It was during that period that the Zionist movement became a real political force, developing its pre-State organization, and which also saw a rise in Arab nationalism, partly as a response to the growth of Zionism but also as an independent dynamic. At the same time the British administration and Jewish immigration brought about significant industrial and agricultural modernization of the region, profoundly changing the socio-economic structure and ethnic mix of its population. At the beginning of the 1920s, from the British perspective, Palestine was considered a relatively quiet and peaceful corner of the Empire. Fifteen years on it had become a thorn in the side of the British administration, torn apart by interethnic conflict.

From a Catholic point of view, the period was beset with several challenges, primarily from the emergence of new adversaries and the re-emergence of older ones: the Greek Orthodox presence now backed, after the collapse of Imperial Russia, by the British government; Protestant proselytism, threatening for its links with the mandatory administration and the growth in the influence of the American missionary societies; and the Zionist movement and its drive to achieve Jewish sovereignty over the region or part thereof<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the Catholic Church was forced to reorganize its local structure and hierarchy in order to face the new political situation and equip itself with a modern approach on how to conduct its missionary activities in the local communities.

From any standpoint, 1929 was a crucial year. The massacres in August marked a sudden worsening of the political situation in the region, intensifying the clash between Arab-Palestinian nationalism and Zionism and heralding the start of a most difficult decade, during which the British authorities had to face ever-increasing tension<sup>2</sup>. From a Catholic perspective, however, the turning point which the events of August 1929 represented can only be fully understood by considering the profound reorganization of Catholic institutions which the creation of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem brought about between February and March<sup>3</sup>. Unlike the Apostolic Nunciature, which is a Vatican embassy in foreign countries that have official relations with the Holy See, an Apostolic Delegation doesn't generally play a proper diplomatic role, being the Vatican representative and responsible in a foreign country or region only to coordinate the whole Catholic activity. Despite this, it's easy to understand how this institution played also a collateral political role in a chaotic situation such as the Palestinian one of the Thirties.

The establishment of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem had important consequences on the Vatican policy in the region and even on the Catholic perception of the Middle Eastern issue: for the first time the Holy See found itself with direct and permanent representation in the Holy Land where, until then, it had been obliged to go either through the offices of the main Catholic institutions present there – the Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate – or temporary envoys or the protection of consulates of the Catholic nations<sup>4</sup>.

From the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation through the mid-1930s, the attitude of the Holy See and the local Catholic authorities towards some aspects of the Palestine question changed markedly. Hostility toward Zionism remained unmodified,

and would become one of the enduring features of Catholic policy for the region. Perceptions about the Arab-Palestinian Nationalist movement, however, which had hitherto been regarded favorably by Palestinian Catholics and the Church authorities themselves, changed significantly<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, on the Vatican side there was a complete rethink about the role of the British in Palestine. The continual arguments gave ground to a growing appreciation for the Mandatory administration, a development which emerges clearly when considering the attitude of the Holy See to the presentation of the Peel Plan in July 1937. Faced with the hypothesis of an imminent partition of Palestine, which would have divided the Christian Holy Land between two non-Christian States, the Secretariat of State showed that it regarded the continuation of the British Mandate the best guarantee for Catholic interests in the region<sup>6</sup>.

In light of these developments, the questions this paper seeks to answer concern the role of the Apostolic Delegation in Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan. The following pages will inquire if its establishment contributed significantly in influencing the new attitude of the Holy See toward the Palestinian situation, or if the institution of the new Delegation was the first manifestation of a change in the policy hitherto adopted by the Vatican.

Parallel to these “political” questions were others concerning the relationship between the Catholic institutions in Palestine and the Vatican Congregations they answered to. These focused on the fractious dialogue which persisted in the Middle East and in particular in Palestine between the Latin Catholic institutions – led by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide – and those of the Eastern Catholic Churches, led by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, established in 1917.

Regarding these interactions, what was the significance of the creation of the Apostolic Delegation? And how did this influence the relations between the various elements of the well-established but fragmented Catholic minority in Palestine?

## *II. The Catholic Church and Palestine in the early 1920s: Institutional Questions and Political Problems*

To answer these questions, it is necessary to take a step back and trace how the Catholic presence in the Holy Land had reorganized itself in the period immediately after the First World War through the 1920s. The conquest of Jerusalem by the Allies was greeted with joy by the international Catholic community as well as Church institutions in the Holy Land<sup>7</sup>. The latter, in particular, welcomed this ‘liberation’ from Ottoman domination as this had become especially repressive for Christians during the war years<sup>8</sup>. Catholics had had to endure the deportation of the Latin Patriarch Filippo Camassei to Nazareth, whilst the Custody, deprived of effective leadership and subject to the restrictions of the Ottoman military government, had lost most of its capacity for action<sup>9</sup>. Added to these difficulties was the structural problem posed by the fragmented nature of the Catholic presence in the Holy Land, divided as it was into the Latin rite, predominant in Jerusalem, and five different Eastern rites: Coptic, Armenian, Syriac, limited to just a few dozen believers, Maronite and Greek-Catholic or Melkite, rooted in Galilee<sup>10</sup>.

The reorganization of the Catholic Church’s presence in Palestine began immediately after the liberation of Jerusalem, while the war was still being fought. In 1917 the new *Custos* of the Holy Land was nominated, Ferdinando Diotallevi, and a few

months later, in August 1918, Mgr. Luigi Barlassina reached Jerusalem to take office as the Deputy for the old and prostrate Patriarch, Camassei<sup>11</sup>. The appointments of Diotallevi and Barlassina heralded the return of a competitive climate in the Holy Land between the two main Latin Catholic institutions in the region: the Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate.

Relations between the two offices had been stormy ever since the reestablishment of the Patriarchate in 1847<sup>12</sup>. During the first fifteen years of the twentieth century the situation had improved and an equilibrium had been found. The early post-war years, however, saw tensions return, and it was to become more acute when Barlassina was appointed Patriarch in March 1920<sup>13</sup>. This situation was brought about by the uncertainty about which responsibilities fell to the Custody – present for centuries in the Holy Land to preserve the sanctuaries and jealous of its ancient prerogative – and which to the Patriarchate. This was a younger institution, created in the Nineteenth century to counter growing Protestant activity, which had the canonic status of a normal diocese<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, the Patriarchate, despite being theoretically responsible for all Latin Catholics in Palestine, struggled to establish its primary role, which was obscured by the traditional importance of the Franciscans in that region.

To understand the difficulties that beset the Catholic Church in Palestine, alongside these ancient rivalries must be considered the rapidly changing geopolitical and ecclesiastical realities in the region. First and foremost, the war had left the Catholic Church in Palestine in a state of disorder, not least because of the difficulties in communicating with Europe. Things did not improve after the war ended. The preponderance of a power such as Great Britain, considered anti-Catholic,

notwithstanding the good formal relations held with the Holy See, raised fears of a reviving Protestant proselytism in the region. Lastly, of even greater concern was the growing of Zionism which seemed to enjoy full British support after the Balfour declaration<sup>15</sup>.

The Custody and the Patriarchate took differing views of these factors. The Patriarch Barlassina, despite his profound skepticism regarding Christian-Muslim relations, saw himself as a local actor and the only legitimate representative of the Arab-Catholic population in Palestine. He used harsh tones to talk about the Jewish presence, considered to blame for the decline in public morals and the spreading of materialistic lifestyles, dragging into its polemic the British administration, which he accused of anti-Catholic prejudice<sup>16</sup>. This political activism would lead Barlassina to look on the activities of Islamic-Christian associations with sympathy. These had been formed at the end of 1918 on a nationalist, anti-Zionist platform<sup>17</sup>. At the same time he tried on various occasions to limit the role traditionally played by the Catholic foreign powers such as France and Italy in the politics of the region, presenting the Patriarchate as the only representative of Catholic interests in the Holy Land<sup>18</sup>.

Diotallevi's position was different: whilst sharing the fear that the British predominance could turn out as advantageous for the Protestants and the Orthodox, the *Custos* tried to develop good relations with the British authorities. Moreover, he did not share the fear of Zionism that was spreading in some Catholic quarters, regarding this as a scare tactic used by the British and one that was destined to exhaust itself once the area had been pacified. Compared to Barlassina, Diotallevi displayed more appreciation for

the traditional role played by the Catholic powers, and he did not hide a complete skepticism about Arab nationalism<sup>19</sup>.

One of the aspects that makes it interesting to analyze the counter-positioning between Patriarchate and Custody is the fact that this inserted itself into the general politics of the Vatican. Immediately after the end of the First World War the Holy See conducted a general re-evaluation of the role of native clerics and episcopates in the “mission lands”. This policy, which became clear during Pius XI’s papacy, was first revealed by Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter, *Maximud Illud*, in November 1919. There were various factors behind this, but a significant role was played by the perception of the negative effects of mixing politics and religion, and the desire to reduce these in a missionary context, where they were particularly marked. As a result, fixing the Church at the local level seemed the only way to avoid the complete identification of Catholicism with colonial power: a situation which appeared dangerous in an age where colonized peoples were starting to claim their independence<sup>20</sup>.

In the context of the Middle East, such developments would have led to a progressive reevaluation of Eastern Catholic rites, and in particular, the Melkites, more closely identifiable with the Arab nation<sup>21</sup>. In the period immediately following the war, however, the desire to hinge things on the local Church in the mission lands led to a significant strengthening of the Latin Patriarchate. Being able to call on both European and Arab personnel made this institution better suited to represent Palestine Catholicism than the religious orders, which were the hegemony of Italians, as was the case of the Salesians and Franciscans, or the French, in the case of the Assumptionists, Dominicans and White Fathers.



The general situation and the personal assessments of Cardinal Willem Van Rossum, head of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, which was responsible for the Latin institutions in Palestine, put Barlassina in a strong position, consolidated and defined in the *modus vivendi* of June 1920<sup>22</sup>. This document illustrated in detail the relationship between Patriarchate and Custody, attributing a coordination role to the Patriarch in the protection of the sanctuaries and indicating it as the Holy See's representative in the region<sup>23</sup>.

The pre-eminence established by Barlassina in 1920 was immediately challenged: primarily by the Custody, the main loser in the redefinition of the power struggle, but also by the Greek-Catholic episcopate and clergy, as well as some Latin Arab priests, who wanted the replacement of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem by an Arab one<sup>24</sup>. This opposition did not manage to stop Barlassina from having considerable influence in the early 1920s, contributing to his steering of Vatican policy in the Middle East. The Patriarch sent very frequent reports to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, painting an alarming picture of conditions in the region, subject to unjust British rule and threatened by the growing Jewish presence<sup>25</sup>.

In a period marked by much tension between the Holy See, Zionism and the British administration, Barlassina's activism must not have appeared excessive to the Vatican. In 1922, the first year of Pius XI's papacy and at a climactic moment in the Catholic-Zionist struggle, the Patriarch went on official missions to Rome and Britain during which he denounced the difficult conditions facing the Catholics in the Holy Land<sup>26</sup>.

The situation began to gradually change after that. Following ratification of the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922, Catholic opposition to Zionism and to the British lost much of its urgency. A clue to this is that Zionist observers, who in the early 1920s had indicated the Holy See as one of the most hostile power centers to their cause, starting from 1926 noted that Vatican diplomatic opposition was decreasing significantly<sup>27</sup>. With the prospect of the British being in power in Palestine for a long time, moreover, it became necessary to establish positive contacts with the Mandatory administration, a role that Barlassina was clearly unfit for, as was shown by the numerous British protests that reached the Vatican<sup>28</sup>.

Additionally, despite the Patriarch's efforts, the situation of the Jerusalem diocese was unsatisfactory even when just considering the religious aspect. The *modus vivendi* of 1920 had generated even greater hostility between the Patriarchate and the Custody, which believed itself to have been defrauded of its traditional function as guardian of the sanctuaries and found no help from Barlassina's actions. The relations of the Patriarch with the powerful French religious orders, who had at first been favorable toward him, had deteriorated rapidly, whilst those with the Greek-Catholics remained as tenuous as ever. In this situation, while in Jerusalem and European capitals rumors circulated about the Patriarch possibly being transferred, the Vatican decided to put the brakes on Barlassina's "political" activism.

During 1923 the decisions taken in June 1920 were rectified and the Custody got back many of its traditional prerogatives in a move that left the Patriarchate frustrated<sup>29</sup>. Lastly, in 1924, crowning a long diplomatic exchange between the Vatican Secretary of State and the British Foreign Office, the English priest Mgr. Godric Kean was nominated

Deputy to the Patriarch<sup>30</sup>. This choice did not entirely satisfy the British, who would have preferred the nomination of the Irish Franciscan Pascal Robinson<sup>31</sup>. Barlassina, on his part, staunchly opposed the appointment, which he believed would be just the first step in the appeasement to British interests in the region, and therefore also to Zionism<sup>32</sup>.

### *III. Father Robinson's pastoral visits: toward the institution of the Apostolic Delegation*

Notwithstanding the changes made over 1923-1924, the uncertainty about ecclesiastical jurisdictions reemerged clamorously in June 1924. It happened during the visit of the Italian Cardinal Oreste Giorgi who was in the Holy Land to oversee the consecration of the Franciscan basilicas on Mount Tabor and in Gethsemane. When he arrived in Haifa and during the celebrations, there were incidents regarding protocol between Barlassina and Mgr. Frediano Giannini, Apostolic Delegate in Beirut and former *Custos* of the Holy Land, because both believed they were entitled to the place of honor immediately behind the Cardinal. This episode, apparently trivial, actually was significant: it was caused by the fact that Giannini claimed that the Delegation which he headed, centered on Syria, also included Palestine in its scope, as it had until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, Barlassina refused any such connection and supported his argument with a ream of documents demonstrating the total independence of the Latin Patriarchate from the Delegation in Beirut<sup>33</sup>.

Over and above the question in itself, this incident raised two more general issues: the need to clarify who represented the Holy See in a strategically important territory that

was subject to rapid changes such as Palestine; the necessity to put an end to the rivalry between the various Catholic institutions, particularly since the Church's rivals in the region, be they Greek Orthodox, Protestant or Jews, seemed able to operate with far better effect. Both these needs were recognized by the Vatican Secretariat of State, which received unsettling reports about the situation, and in particular the inveterate bickering between Latin and Greek-Catholic clergy which made vain the efforts to encourage the conversion of Orthodox believers to Eastern Catholic rites.

All of these issues, and the need to find a solution, required the dispatch of an Apostolic Visitor<sup>34</sup> to Palestine who could report on the exact situation to Rome and seek to mediate between the various local claims, as an anonymous note by the Secretariat of State underlined:

a person who, free of the onus of governing any Diocese, being among but above all the complex, local movement, studies how to paralyze insofar as is possible the currents of evil, promotes and encourages good works, unites to a common purpose all Catholics, conciliating the differences which divide them, and rejoining any dissenters in the Union whilst keeping the Holy See truthfully informed of the situation in all things both general and specific<sup>35</sup>.

For this delicate job the Vatican chose Father Robinson, proposed by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches<sup>36</sup>. The British had attempted to impose him as Patriarch on many occasions in place of Barlassina. He knew the Middle East well, and Palestine in particular, having been there various times. One which was especially important was in 1920, when he visited the region in an attempt to smooth things between Patriarchate and Custody and facilitate relations with the British. The last was early 1925, to investigate the feared collaboration between Anglicans and Greek Orthodox<sup>37</sup>.

Fortified by the new mandate from the Holy See, Robinson reached Palestine in October 1925 to be warmly welcomed by the British, who expected his arrival to coincide with a drastic reduction in Barlassina's prerogatives. It was not lost on the British that behind the Franciscan's visit was a desire in the Vatican to institute an autonomous representation of the Papacy in Palestine, one which could separate the interests of the Holy See from the squabbling amongst the local Catholic institutions<sup>38</sup>.

Between October 1925 and May 1926, Father Robinson investigated the situation of the Eastern Catholic communities and their relations with the Latin clergy. His efforts were cautiously supported by the brotherhood of the Custody and the clergy and episcopate of the Melkites. Unsurprisingly, Barlassina disapproved of the visit from the start. The Patriarch, in a terse letter to Van Rossum dated November 1925, complained about the Franciscan's mission. He underlined how Robinson was just a passive pawn in the hands of the Greek-Catholics, and in particular those of the Bishop of St John of Acre, Gregorio Hajjar: they were using his presence to continue their anti-European, anti-Latin and anti-Patriarchal agitation which had begun some years back<sup>39</sup>. Although in public meetings and contacts with figures outside the Catholic world Robinson tended to defend the doings of the Patriarch, explaining his bad relations with the British and his anti-Zionist obsessions as questions of character and poor diplomatic qualities, he was fully aware of Barlassina's hostility<sup>40</sup>. Along with this, as his visit progressed, Robinson became more aware that in order to reinforce the Melkites and facilitate the "passage" of the Orthodox believers to Greek-Catholic rites a permanent Vatican representative was necessary: one able to contain the "Latinisation" policies prosecuted by the Patriarchal clergy.

The necessity of this solution emerged with even more urgency during 1926. In that year the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, involved by the Secretary of State over the arguments between Barlassina and Giannini, communicated its opinion in favor of the Delegate in Syria. The Congregation underlined how the documentation examined, whilst not showing the Patriarch could be regarded as “representative of the Holy See in Palestine”, supported the claim that the Apostolic Delegate in Syria should be considered also the Delegate “for all the Bishops of all ranks in Palestine, with no exception being made for the Latin Patriarch”<sup>41</sup>.

This opinion expressed by the Secretary of State was communicated in February 1926 to Giannini. The following month, whilst Barlassina was in Rome, Robinson passed the news on to the Deputy of the Latin Patriarchate, Mgr. Kean, and to the Deputies of the Eastern Catholic Patriarchates present in Jerusalem. The Secretary of State’s decision did not, however, lead to a resolution of the dispute. Barlassina returned to Jerusalem after he had been told the news and immediately adopted a very argumentative attitude towards Robinson and the way the news had been spread. Moreover, he protested repeatedly both to Cardinal Gasparri and to Cardinal Van Rossum, to whom he sent a memorandum in order to demonstrate that the conclusions of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches were groundless and that never had the Apostolic Delegates in Syria had jurisdiction over the Latin Patriarch<sup>42</sup>. Over and above the juridical aspects of the dispute, what is worth underlining is the fact that Barlassina had no intention whatsoever of placing himself under the jurisdiction of Giannini. This was for one reason in particular: the Delegate in Syria was a Franciscan and, therefore, strengthening his role in

Palestine would have translated into growth of the Custody's prerogatives with regard to the other Catholic institutions and a miserable sidelining of the Patriarchate<sup>43</sup>.

Barlassina's opposition and the Vatican's desire not to humiliate the Patriarch, whose work in the purely spiritual sphere continued to be appreciated, played an important role in subsequent decisions. However, some objective factors were of even greater importance. In a report sent in November 1926 to Cardinal Luigi Sincero, Deputy Secretary of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, Robinson put forward a series of points that led him to suggest setting up an autonomous Papal representation in Jerusalem and abandoning the idea that protection of Catholic interests could be left to the far-off Delegation in Beirut<sup>44</sup>. The first reason was political in nature. At the time of the Ottoman Empire Syria and Palestine had been both part of the same state administration. Now, on the contrary, Syria was administered by the French whereas Palestine and Transjordan were ruled by the British: this made it difficult for the Delegate in Beirut, who had to deal with governments that had opposite opinions and interests. Furthermore, the physical distance between Beirut and Palestine, and the many duties the Delegate had in Syria, a region with many Eastern Catholic Patriarchs, made his influence in Jerusalem slight and practically non-existent in Transjordan. The consequence was that the Eastern Catholics in Palestine and Transjordan found themselves without any direct protection on the part of the Holy See. This situation was made worse by Barlassina's attitude who, unlike his predecessor Camassei, had no empathy for the Eastern rites and did not tone down in the slightest the claims for "Latinisation" made by the clergy of the Latin Patriarchate. The presence of an Apostolic Delegate with fixed residence in Jerusalem would have reinforced the position of the Eastern Catholics, in line with a policy of

openness towards the Eastern Catholic rites which the Holy See had adopted since the papacy of Leo XIII; moreover, this would have served as a call to the Greek-Orthodox believers, who should have been drawn to Catholicism following the favorable treatment of the Eastern Catholic Churches. This policy gave another advantage from Robinson's standpoint: it would have helped to "Arabise" the Catholic Church in Palestine even more, making it more a local institution than a foreign mission<sup>45</sup>.

If these were the reasons pushing the Apostolic Visitor to view favorably the institution of a Delegation guaranteeing the Eastern rites, other reasons seem to suggest the possibility that the future Delegation would become responsible for all Catholics, whatever rites they observed, in Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus. Thus, all believers would be included from the Diocese of the Latin Patriarch in its jurisdiction. A solution of this sort would have made contact easier with the Holy See and the Mandate administration and thus ending the dispute about Giannini's jurisdiction which Barlassina continued to oppose<sup>46</sup>.

In the subsequent years Robinson had the occasion to further deepen his understanding of the situation in Palestine. In December 1926 he returned to the region to complete the visit of the Eastern Catholic institutions<sup>47</sup>. Between August 1927 and April 1928, he was Apostolic Visitor to the Latin institutions in the region, entrusted by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide to smooth the differences between Patriarchate and Custody, which had re-emerged over a property dispute, as well as those between the various religious orders<sup>48</sup>. It was a mission which, whilst being crowned with a certain measure of success in resolving the controversies, placed him in direct opposition to



Barlassina: the Patriarch regarded Robinson's new appointment as a further demonstration of the Holy See's reduced faith in himself and the Latin Patriarchate<sup>49</sup>.

After nearly three years in Palestine the conclusions reached by the Apostolic Visitor were not flattering to the Catholic institutions. In a summary report sent to Rome in 1928, Robinson highlighted the disunity and rivalry existing between the Latin and Eastern rites. This conflict was regarded as more serious because it made conversion from the Orthodox Church more difficult than they would have been otherwise. The repercussions of such a state of affairs were especially grave in Transjordan, where the open conflict between the Patriarchal and Greek-Catholic missions caused numerous difficulties and made vain most of the sizeable movement toward conversion from Orthodoxy<sup>50</sup>.

Relations within the Latin institutions were no better, dominated as they were by the long-standing dispute between Patriarchate and Custody. A controversy, Robinson went on, which had started up again in the early years following the war due to the contrary positions of Dotallevi and Barlassina, was now kept alive almost exclusively by the aggressive attitude of the latter. The consequences of this state of affairs were regarded as very grave, given that the rivalry between Patriarchate and Custody seemed to favor the Greek and Armenian Orthodox Churches and undermine the Latin rights to the sanctuaries. Both the main Latin Catholic institutions in the Holy Land were judged to be responsible for this situation. The Custody appeared to be tied to an antiquated *modus operandi*, unable to meet the challenges of the socio-economic developments in Palestine, starting from the need for modern schools that could stand comparison with the Protestant ones. However, there is no doubt that in Robinson's analysis it was the

Patriarch who was considered mainly to blame for the situation, to the extent that his resignation was openly wished for<sup>51</sup>.

That Robinson took a very negative view of Barlassina appears confirmed in writing to Gasparri in February 1929, when he comments on the latest protest raised by the Patriarch with the British authorities about an unimportant question of procedure:

The inconvenience of reopening this question at the present time is obvious to anyone except evidently Mgr. Barlassina who, because of his overly litigious nature, is always looking for an argument, creating disputes and divergences which could easily be avoided. I am most reluctant to criticize the attitude and behaviour of Mgr. Barlassina in any way, given that he is an excellent priest, full of zeal, self-sacrifice and force of will, and also a man of uncommon ability, initiative and courage. But even the Latin Patriarch's most ardent supporters and closest friends will admit to and complain about his quarrelsome nature and his awkward dealings with people. He has always placed himself in opposition to the Palestine Government – which will never be friendly towards him – and he has alienated not just the Muslims, the Jews and the Protestants, but also the *Uniat*: that he has alienated all the religious congregations and exhausted and exasperated all the Latin faithful of good sense who would wish to help him [...]. In fact, speaking from 20 years of personally knowing the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, I distinctly doubt that his prestige or influence have ever been lower than they are at present<sup>52</sup>.

Despite this damning judgement of Barlassina's responsibility, Robinson did not want the Latin Patriarchate to be completely reformed or, as many Greek Catholics hoped, suppressed and replaced by a Melkite Patriarchate<sup>53</sup>.

His moderate attitude, oriented towards containing Barlassina's excesses without compromising the prestige of the Patriarchate, clearly emerges in the question of the institution of the Apostolic Delegation. In 1926 he declared himself in favor of setting up an autonomous Delegation that would be able to give help to the Eastern Catholics in Palestine and co-ordinate all Catholic activities in the region. During 1928, however, after repeated consultations with the Delegate in Syria, Giannini, Robinson revised his position. In a memo sent directly to the Pope he confirmed the need for the action of a

Delegation in the territory, because Giannini's jurisdiction over Palestine continued to be just nominal. However, he also suggested that they should not create an independent Apostolic Delegation, but instead to incorporate Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus into the Delegation to Egypt. There were three reasons behind this: a permanent delegate to Jerusalem would have risked months of inactivity, due to the reduced amount of business to deal with; his continued presence would have diminished too much the role of the Latin Patriarch; the requirements of Egypt and Palestine, both under British rule, could easily be harmonized, thus avoiding the ambiguity that had built up around the Delegation to Beirut. In addition, contrary to the Delegate in Syria, who had to deal with a Catholic presence that was splintered but sizeable, the Vatican's representative in Egypt had a much smaller task with the limited number of Catholics there, be they Latin or Eastern<sup>54</sup>.

#### *IV. The Institution of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem and the political and religious consequences*

At the beginning of 1929 Father Robinson's suggestions became reality. The preceding November, having obtained a favorable opinion for the institution of the Apostolic Delegate from the Greek-Catholic Patriarch, Cyril IX, the heads of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and Pius XI himself decided to move rapidly on to the operational phase, with a view to avoiding uncontrollable rumors regarding Vatican decisions and the forthcoming new appointments from spreading<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, in February 1929 the Apostolic Delegation to Palestine, Transjordan and Cyprus was

formally constituted, headed by the Apostolic Delegate to Egypt, Mgr. Valerio Valeri, who was committed to live part of the year in Jerusalem<sup>56</sup>. He had two tasks in his new job. From a strictly ecclesiastical standpoint Valeri would have to play the role of referee in all the controversies between the various institutions and different Catholic rites. For this reason he would have to harmonize the sensibilities of Custody and Patriarchate; smooth the differences between Patriarchate and the Jerusalem seminary of Saint Anne, led by the French White Fathers, where the Greek Catholic clergy were trained; improve the situation in Transjordan, putting an end to the counter-productive competitiveness between the Latin and Melkite missions; check the administrative situation of the Melkite diocese of St John of Acre, which seemed opaque; solve the problem of the Maronite faithful in Cyprus, who declared themselves overlooked by their own bishop; and verify the feasibility of restoring the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Jerusalem (a request put forward by some lay and religious Melkites, behind which the Holy See believed there were political maneuvers designed to reinforce Arab-Palestinian nationalism). Regarding relations with the civil authorities, Valeri would have to take on himself the responsibility for all dealings with the British, becoming the sole interlocutor with the Mandate authorities. For this very reason, the Delegate was instructed to pay particular attention to the Catholic schools, which appeared to be threatened by some legislative changes proposed by the British<sup>57</sup>.

Backed with these instructions, and preceded by an article in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the unofficial Vatican daily newspaper, which clarified the extension and nature of his jurisdiction, Valeri reached Jerusalem in April and was met by the civil and religious authorities of the city<sup>58</sup>. The solemnity of the welcome accorded the Delegate

did not suggest, however, that the main players were unaware that his appointment profoundly changed the existing balance between Catholic institutions in Palestine and their relations with the political context. In communicating the institution of the Delegation to the Catholic heads in the Holy Land, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, had underlined how, from then on, all relations with the British High Commission and all civil authorities would now need to be through the Delegate<sup>59</sup>: news which must have been particularly galling to Barlassina who, up to then, had continued to act as a sort of semi-official Papal representative, notwithstanding all the contradictions, denials and corrections<sup>60</sup>.

Nor would it seem incidental that in the Custody the nomination of Valeri was perceived as a victory for the Franciscans in a context of more than ten years of opposition to the Patriarch<sup>61</sup>. At first glance, therefore, the institution of the Delegation seemed to be a defeat for the strategy of political activism and involvement of the Church in local issues as promoted by Barlassina, and a confirmation of the more traditional approach of the Franciscans, aimed at defending Catholic interests in the sanctuaries. In reality this element was just one of the many aspects involved in the change and probably not the most important; in the Vatican, the institution of the Delegation was also regarded as a way to better direct the actions of the Custody, which often seemed to be not up to the job of serving modern pastoral needs<sup>62</sup>.

Efforts to place a limit on the competition between Latin and Greek-Catholic initiatives were at the center of Valeri's activities in Palestine. The Delegate tried to limit as far as possible the number of the faithful who passed from Eastern Catholic rites to Latin ones: a phenomenon, often for family reasons or mere material interest, which

contradicted openly the instructions of the Holy See, and in particular the 1894 Constitution *Orientalium dignitas ecclesiarum*, which held that converts from the Orthodox Churches should be welcomed in the corresponding Eastern rites and that the Eastern presence should be favored in the Levant<sup>63</sup>. In this attempt to impede the process of “Latinisation” the Delegate clashed with the deaf opposition of the Latin institutions and, most of all, with the Patriarchate and Custody, who were for once united in their views. Nor were the protests destined to die down with the successors to Valeri, nominated in the spring of 1933 as Apostolic Nuncio in Romania. On the contrary, they were aggravated during the long years of Mgr. Gustavo Testa’s Delegation, less sympathetic to the Easterners than his predecessor and very skeptical about the vitality of all the Palestine Catholic communities<sup>64</sup>.

A clear clue of this situation can be found in the fact that, still in the summer of 1937, the French Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, newly-appointed Secretary of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, had to intervene with Barlassina deploring the rivalry between Greek Catholic and Patriarchal missions in Transjordan and reminding him of the Vatican’s instructions favoring the Eastern rites in cases of conversion from Orthodoxy<sup>65</sup>. It was an intervention which, whilst proving the determination of the Congregation to resolve controversial cases in favor of the Melkites, appears generated by the persistence of the endemic competitiveness between the different rites in Transjordan, which flared up once again in 1935, despite the reorganization of the Greek-Catholic presence in the region with the creation of a single, autonomous eparchy<sup>66</sup>.

The difficulties which the Apostolic Delegates encountered in favoring the Melkites were caused by the resistance of the Latin clergy. They were the most numerous

in the region, and often the richest and most learned, frequently of European origin, who found it difficult to give up missionary attitudes even when resident for a long time in Palestine, speaking fluent Arabic and in many other respects identifying completely with the local Catholic population. The Patriarch Barlassina is a perfect example of this attitude. However, it should not be thought that the resistance of the Latin clerics constituted the only obstacle to moving the way the Holy See wished. Another significant problem consisted in the intrinsic limits of the Melkite community and its leaders, first and foremost Mgr. Hajjar. The poor theological and pastoral training of the Greek-Catholic clergy and a political activism that often crossed the line of open nationalism, united with numerous examples of venality, resulted in strengthening the hand of the supporters of “Latinisation”<sup>67</sup>. On this point it is worth underlining how the financial and administrative situation of the diocese of St John of Acre, the main Melkite center in Western Galilee, remained unviable for a long time, despite this being one of the problems to solve according to the instructions Valeri was given at the beginning of his mandate. Again, in the second half of the 1930s an inspection visit to assess the financial state of the diocese revealed the incorrect practices as well as misappropriations that continued to typify the administration there<sup>68</sup>.

The Apostolic Delegate’s efforts to improve the vital relations with the British administration met with more success than in the intra-ecclesiastic issues he faced. From this standpoint the situation had been improving for some years already and the period of toughest opposition between Catholics and the British administration appeared to be over. With the creation of the Delegation in Jerusalem and the appointment of Valeri, however, for the first time the Mandate government found themselves facing a sole interlocutor,

clearly backed by the Vatican and accepted by all the local Catholic hierarchy. Moreover, Valeri was a tactful diplomat with a solid career behind him, as well as being a knowledgeable admirer of British culture. Qualities these which, alongside the good relations he enjoyed with the British in Cairo, where he had been Delegate since 1927, made the British observers believe that his appointment was the best name possible<sup>69</sup>. As Henry Chilton, British envoy to the Vatican, noted, Robinson's nomination as Delegate, which would have been the ideal choice for the Foreign Office, was rendered impossible by his belonging to the Franciscan Order, which would have made the whole operation look like a victory for the Custody and a humiliation for the Patriarchate<sup>70</sup>.

In relations with the British administration the changes brought about by the appointment of Valeri were evident from the outset and took concrete form in the successful attempt to develop cordial and direct contact with British functionaries<sup>71</sup>. At the same time it contributed to underline the independence of Vatican policy from the Italian one, in a moment when, due to the so called *Conciliazione*, the Italian political circles tried to use the protection of Catholic rights and interest in Palestine to spread Italian influence in the Middle East<sup>72</sup>.

The good relations established between the Delegation and the British administrations did not weaken under Valeri's successors. In particular, Mgr. Riccardo Bartoloni established very positive relations with the British in his brief stint as Apostolic Delegate, which concluded dramatically in Jerusalem in October 1933<sup>73</sup>. The brief relationship with the British enjoyed by Mgr. Torquato Dini – before his sudden death in Cairo on March 26, 1934, only a few weeks after his appointment – was also inspired by a spirit of trust and friendship when he took over from Bartoloni<sup>74</sup>.



The sudden deaths of the two Apostolic Delegates and the worry that Barlassina would succeed in obtaining the nomination of a replacement more to his liking, caused the resurgence in some British diplomatic circles the desire to be able to count on a British national as representative of the Holy See in Palestine. In this design, the Delegation in Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan would have had to be detached from that of Egypt and entrusted to a British cleric<sup>75</sup>. Once again, such hopes were groundless and the Apostolic Delegation in Egypt and Palestine stayed as it was under the new leadership of Mgr. Gustavo Testa: a career diplomat who, whilst having served his most significant role in the Saar region in Germany, nevertheless gave solid guarantees of a positive attitude towards the British government<sup>76</sup>. In line with this, and despite the reserved attitude of Testa about political questions and his sympathy for the Fascist regime, it would seem that under his management the relations of the Apostolic Delegation with the British administration continued to be excellent, following the direction established since 1929<sup>77</sup>.

It is more difficult to understand whether this continued improvement was due to the actions of the Apostolic Delegates as they made their way to Jerusalem or was rather the natural outcome of an international political situation which seemed to induce the Vatican to abandon its long-standing diffidence towards British policy around the mid-1930s<sup>78</sup>. In a Europe and a world that was ever more turbulent, with many openly anti-Christian governments, the British Empire, nominally Anglican but *de facto* liberal, must have seemed to the Vatican one of the few guarantees of Catholic interests in the Middle East. Whatever the deeper reasons were, the fact is that starting from the institution of the Apostolic Delegation in 1929, the relations between Catholic authorities in Palestine and

the Mandatory administration improved constantly, despite some recurrent tensions over the *status quo* of the sanctuaries, Protestant proselytism and the incautious activism of Barlassina.

In comparison with the changes that took place in relations with the British and those between the various Catholic institutions, the creation of the Jerusalem Delegation had less impact on the Arab-Zionist conflict, with regard to which it limited itself to accelerating some processes that were already underway. On this point, it is worth observing how opinion changed in Catholic circles regarding the Arab nationalist movement. From 1929 onward, the Vatican view was increasingly cold towards Palestinian nationalism. This derived from the horror felt after the August massacres and became felt more and more over the subsequent years as one incident after another occurred, seeming to threaten the cooperation or even the coexistence of the Muslim majority with the Christian minority in the Arab population. These events gave Catholic observers the impression that the Arab nationalist movement was taking on a more Islamic character, one that was potentially dangerous for Catholic interests<sup>79</sup>.

In this new situation, only the Melkite community continued to side with the nationalists, despite the interdenominational incidents which took place in Haifa at the beginning of the 1930s<sup>80</sup>. Its leader Hajjar never missed a chance to show his firm support for anti-Zionist initiatives. The involvement of the Latin prelates was less committed, however. These had always attributed a mainly tactical function to the Arab nationalist movement, aimed at joining the Palestinian community, be it Christian or Muslim, in a common objective. With respect to these positions, Valeri was decidedly a moderating influence, trying to avoid Catholic involvement in the political dynamics and

keeping the episcopate, clergy and faithful at a distance from the more radical positions<sup>81</sup>. This policy was imitated, with more or less success, by his successors, beginning with Testa, who always expressed his distaste for the excessive involvement of the Arab clergy in politics<sup>82</sup>.

In the light of the above, it would seem reasonable to assert that since 1929 the presence in Palestine of Apostolic Delegates played an important role in the detachment of the Catholic institutions and clergy from open contiguity with Arab nationalism. The basis of this attitude was the more general evolving of events and the potentially dangerous nature that Arab nationalism had taken on as far as Christian interests were concerned over the course of the decade. There is no doubt, however, that the possibility of being able to make use of local representatives who directly answered to the Secretary of State gave the Holy See the chance to act independently of the moods and feeling of the local Catholic hierarchy in the progressive distancing of itself from Arab-Palestinian nationalism.

It is more difficult to know how the attitude of Latin laity change during the decade as our sources are very fragmented. There were many different positions toward the Palestinian-Arab movement, and these became even more diverse during the second half of the Thirties, during the Great Revolt. The only aspect that can be brought to light is that the Latin laity was more involved in nationalistic activities than the clergy, but at the same time they were the less nationalistic group among the main Christian Palestinian communities.

Starting from 1929 there was a diminution in sympathy for Arab-Palestinian nationalism amongst Catholics in the Holy Land. However, this development was not the

prelude to some decisive shift in the view of Zionism. Although from the mid-1920s the Catholic polemic against Zionism became less intense compared to previously, the reasons lying behind it remained alive and these were behind a hostility that was at once theological, political and customary. From this standpoint, the institution of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem could not change matters significantly. Some cautious approaches were sometimes shown by Valeri, who was certainly the Apostolic Delegate which showed the most interest in the internal dynamics of the Zionist movement. In fact, he showed signs of sympathy and understanding for the more moderate parts of the Jewish nationalist movement, gathered around the Rector of the University of Jerusalem, Judah Magnes, and committed to the search for *modus vivendi* with the Arabs in view of a future independent, binational and federal Palestine<sup>83</sup>. Apart from this interesting appreciation, Valeri too shared the basic view that Zionist and Catholic interests were antithetical. Such a view remained unwaveringly firm during the Delegation of Gustavo Testa, who was less interested in the inner workings of *Yishuv* and certainly less sympathetic to the Jewish cause. Rather, it should be underlined how, during the last phase of Pius XI's Papacy, characterized by a growing fear of Communism on a global level, Zionism went back to being considered as the main vehicle for carrying Marxist ideology and materialistic lifestyles in the Middle East: a region that was otherwise regarded as immune from Bolshevik contamination<sup>84</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

After having reconstructed how the Apostolic Delegates who took their place in Jerusalem between 1929 and the second half of the 1930s dealt with the unfolding of the political and ecclesiastical situation, trying to translate the Holy See's wishes into concrete policy, it would seem possible to attempt to answer the questions this paper addresses.

The first point concerns the timetable for setting up the Apostolic Delegation for Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan. This was the Vatican's response to the change that had redrawn the map of the Levant following the First World War. Because this did not happen until 1929 it shows the slowness and difficulty of the Vatican in responding to political changes after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and its indecision among the different options of ecclesiastical policy on the ground. The result of this uncertainty was that, for more than a decade, the management of the Catholic presence in Palestine had stuck to the same principles that were made obsolete by the changes produced by World War One.

At the same time, the choice of joining the Vatican representation in Palestine with that in Cairo shows how the Holy See intended to match the boundaries of Papal representation in the Middle East with those corresponding to European spheres of influence. This policy, whilst helping to improve relations with the British, shows the pervasiveness of a Eurocentric mentality in the Vatican Congregations and diplomacy: an attitude which seems to be in direct contrast with the effort to develop local, native clergy and episcopate, which was evident in many other initiatives led by the Vatican in the region.

Alongside these aspects, which would seem to collocate the constitution of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem in a rather traditional dynamic, others emerge which give us the image of a Holy See readier to meet the new political situation. In that sense, the need to have a Papal representative in the Holy Land was born also from a desire to balance the prestige and influence of the Latin institutions with a strengthening of the Eastern Catholic rites. This was a long-term perspective that had its roots in the Papacy of Leo XIII and was re-launched by Benedict XV and Pius XI. From this standpoint, 1929 with its creation of the Apostolic Delegation, can be seen as the arrival point of a long process, and also as a further development in this direction, because the Delegates after 1929 often acted in defense of the prerogatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

On this point it seems significant to note that at the end of Pius XI's papacy in 1938, the entire "Easternization" process of the Catholic Church in the Levant found its arrival point in the decision to entrust the government of all Catholic institutions in those regions, be they Eastern or Latin, to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches<sup>85</sup>. It was a measure which put an end to the duality between the jurisdictions of the Congregation led by Tisserant and that of Propaganda Fide and which translated into a further sidelining of the Latin Patriarchate's role: an institution that, after having reached the peak of its influence in the early 1920s, had seen a continual scaling down of its prerogatives.

The significance and the consequences of setting up the Apostolic Delegation as far as political aspects are concerned would appear to be less clear. If improved relations with the British are overlooked, the outcomes of the Vatican's policy in Palestine in the 1930s seem contradictory. On the one hand, the presence of the Delegation and the action of the Delegates limited the participation of Catholics, and especially the clergy, in the

Arab-Palestinian nationalist movement. On the other, however, the complete rejection of Zionism remained unchanged at all levels. It was also the continued favoring of the Melkites that made impossible any change in direction there, because they were the Catholic component more closely connected with the Arab national movement: so their promotion contributed to maintain the contacts and overlaps with Arab nationalism which would otherwise have been intentionally superseded.

The constitution of the Apostolic Delegation thus appears at once the consequence of the Holy See's new Middle Eastern policy after the mid-1920s, and the cause of the stronger trends which appeared in the subsequent decade. However, even this did not succeed in giving a more unitary character to Vatican policy, which pursued two partially conflicting aims: "Arabizing" the Church in Palestine, emphasizing its local nature and the role of the Greek-Catholics, and, at the same time, promoting greater detachment from Arab nationalism. A contradiction which, after the Second World War, would emerge dramatically with the proclamation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war.

The result of these complex dynamics was that, on the eve of the Second World War, despite having centered many sectorial objectives, the Vatican policy in Holy Land continued to be ineffective regarding its main goal: the capacity to influence the future settlement of the region and to avoid that such an important territory from the Catholic standpoint would finish under non-Christian rule. There is no doubt that the Middle Eastern policy of the Holy See during the inter-war period was a complete failure. It is more difficult to know if, with a more coordinated and less conflictual approach among the different Catholic actors in the region and in Rome, the Vatican could have achieved more substantial results.

---

1 On this Vatican perception see: Historical Archive of the Vatican Secretariat of State, Archives for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, Turkey 4<sup>th</sup> period (hereafter AAEESS, T. IV), pos. 105, fasc. 101, f. 30r, note, January 12, 1932.

2 See Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab Jewish Conflict 1917-1929* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), 235; Charles Townshend, “Going to the Wall: The Failure of British Rule in Palestine, 1928-31,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30, no. 2 (2002): 25-52 at p. 27; Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2015).

3 Paolo Zanini, “Italia e Santa Sede di fronte ai disordini del 1929 in Palestina,” *Italia Contemporanea* 63, no. 264 (2011): 406-424 at p. 413.

4 Notwithstanding the importance of the change, historical studies, which have been conducted into the main Catholic institutions in Palestine in the Twentieth Century, have not yet been devoted to the investigation of the creation of the Apostolic Delegation. On the Custody of the Holy Land during the Twentieth Century see Andrea Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede e la Palestina. La Custodia di Terra santa tra la fine dell'impero ottomano e la guerra dei sei giorni* (Rome: Studium, 2000). On the Patriarchate see Paolo Pieraccini, “Il patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme (1918-1940). Ritratto di un patriarca scomodo: mons. Luigi Barlassina,” *Il Politico* 63, no. 2 and 4 (1998): 207-256, 591-639.



---

5 On this change see Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement 1918-1919* (London: Cass, 1974), 293-303; Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian-Arab National Movement from Riots to Rebellion 1929-1939* (London: Cass, 1977), 269-271; Daphne Tsimhoni, “The Arab Christians and the Palestinian Arab National Movement during the Formative Stage,” in Gabriel Ben-Dor (ed.), *The Palestinians and the Middle East Conflict* (Ramat Gan: Turtledove, 1978), 73-98; Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 36-43, 158-161; Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine. Communalism and Nationalism, 1917-1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 88-90, 138-144, 152-156.

6 See Paolo Zanini, “Italia e Santa Sede di fronte al piano Peel di spartizione della Palestina: il tramonto della *carta cattolica*,” *Studi Storici* 54, no. 1 (2013): 51-77 at 71-77.

7 Andrej Kreutz, *Vatican Policy on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. The Struggle for the Holy Land* (New York-Westport-London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 36; Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism. Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 18. For the reactions of the Italian and French episcopates see: Luigi Bruti Liberati, *Il clero italiano nella grande guerra* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1982), 106-109; Agathe Mayeres-Rebernik, *Le Saint-Siège face à la «Question de Palestine». De la Déclaration Balfour à la création de l'État d'Israël* (Paris: Honoré

---

Champion, 2015), 100-101.

8 On the condition of the Christian institutions during the war see Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem from the Ottomans to the British* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 58-68. On the feeling of freedom, after the entrance of general Allenby into the city, see: Historical Archive of the Custody of the Holy Land (hereafter ACTS), Curia custodiale, Cronache, Cronache generali, 35, *Cronaca di Terra Santa 1906-1931*, 277-279.

9 Daniela Fabrizio, *La questione dei Luoghi santi e l'assetto della Palestina, 1914-1922* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000) 158-159; Paolo Pieraccini, "Il custodiato di Ferdinando Diotallevi (1918-1924) e la nascita della rivista La Terra Santa (15 gennaio 1921)," in *Una voce per la Terra Santa* (Milan: Terra Santa, 2012), 25-84 at p. 34.

10 On the organization and presence of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Middle East see Joseph Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens Uniates du Proche-Orient* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962); Agathe Mayeres-Rebernik, *La Saint-Siège face à la question de Palestine*, 269-424.

11 Pieraccini, "Il patriarcato," 211-212; Pieraccini, "Il custodiato," 30-31. Ferdinando Diotallevi (1869-1958) entered the Franciscan order in 1884. In 1910 he was sent to Istanbul as father superior of the Franciscan mission. He was elected *Custos* of the Holy Land in December 1917, just a month after the conquest of Jerusalem by Allenby, remaining in this position until August 1924. During his tenure he restored the Custody's

---

proprieties, affected by the war, and was able to defend the Franciscans' prerogatives in the shrines. After 1924 he was once again in Jerusalem, as president of the Franciscan *Studium Biblicum* between 1927 and 1929. Luigi Barlassina (1872-1947) from Turin became a priest in 1894. In November 1911 he was appointed spiritual director of the Collegio Urbaniano, in Rome. He arrived in Jerusalem during October 1918, sent by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide as deputy of Patriarch Camassei. He became Latin Patriarch himself on March 8, 1920, remaining in this post until his death in September 1947. He remained Patriarch during the entire mandatory period, trying to rebuild the Patriarchate's structures and to modernize the Latin Catholic presence in Palestine and finding himself in conflict with the British administration. On them see Paolo Pieraccini, *Padre Girolamo Golubovich (1865-1941). L'attività scientifica, il Diario e altri documenti inediti tratti dall'archivio personale (1898-1941)* (Milan: Terra Santa, 2016) 538-540, 566-569.

12 Paolo Pieraccini, *Il ristabilimento del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme e la Custodia di Terra Santa. La dialettica istituzionale al tempo del primo patriarca Mons. Giuseppe Valerga (1847-1872)* (Cairo-Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2006).

13 Daniela Fabrizio, *Identità nazionali e identità religiose. Diplomazia internazionale, istituzioni ecclesiastiche e comunità cristiane di Terra Santa tra Otto e Novecento* (Rome: Studium, 2004), 142-143.

---

14 See Pierre Médebielle, *La diocesi del Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme* (Jerusalem: Tipografia del Patriarcato, 1963), 27.

15 Silvio Ferrari, “Pio XI, la Palestina e i Luoghi santi,” in *Achille Ratti Pape Pie XI* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1996), 909-924 at 910-912. On the relations between the Catholic Church and the Zionist movement see Minerbi, *The Vatican*; Andrej Kreutz, *Vatican Policy*; Michael Perko, “Toward a ‘sound and lasting basis’: relations between the Holy See, the Zionist movement and Israel, 1886-1996,” *Israel Studies* 2, no. 1 (1998): 1-26; Mayeres-Rebernik, *La Saint-Siège*, 111-136; Agnes de Dreuzy, *The Holy See and the Emergence of Modern Middle East. Benedict XV’s Diplomacy in Greater Syria (1914-1922)* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 222-253. For the specific attitude of American Catholics toward Zionism see Adriano E. Ciani, “The Vatican, American Catholics and the Struggle for Palestine, 1917-1958: A Study of Cold War Roman Catholic Transnationalism,” unpublished PhD. Dissertation (London Ontario: Western University, 2011).

16 Paolo Pieraccini, “La Custodia di Terra Santa, il sionismo e lo Stato d’Israele (1897-1951),” *Studi francescani* 110, no. 3-4 (2013), 367-428 at 380-381. On the skepticism of Barlassina toward the Arab national movement see Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 31.

17 Archive of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (hereafter APLJ), b. Propaganda Fide 1921-1929, Barlassina to Van Rossum, August 27, 1922. On the formation of the

---

Islamic-Christian associations see Porath, *The Emergence*, 31-34; Minerbi, *The Vatican*, 124-126; Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 158-163; May Seikaly, *Haifa: The Transformation of a Palestinian Arab Society 1918-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 166-183; Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 38-51.

18 See APLJ, b. Propaganda Fide 1921-1929, Barlassina to Van Rossum, April 22, 1921; May 14, 1921; July 2, 1921. On the strong transnational character of the Catholic institutions in Palestine see K.M.J. Sanchez Summerer, “Preserving the Catholics of the Holy Land or Integrating Them into the Palestine Nation (1920–1950)?,” in Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, eds., *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 121-152.

19 Daniela Fabrizio, “Premessa,” in Ferdinando Diotallevi, *Diario di Terrasanta* (Milan: Biblioteca francescana, 2002), 1-33 at 28; Pieraccini, “La Custodia,” 375-377, 381-383. On the relations between the Custody and the European powers see ACTS, Curia Custodiale, Copialettere 1, Segreteria di Stato Vaticana, 384-394.

20 Cfr. Josef Metzler, “La Santa Sede e le missioni,” in Josef Metzler, ed., *Dalle missioni alle Chiese locali*, vol. XXIV *Storia della Chiesa* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1990), 20-119 at 83-87; Agostino Giovagnoli, “Pio XII e la decolonizzazione,” in Andrea Riccardi, ed., *Pio XII* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1985), 179-209 at 181-184.

- 
- 21 Silvio Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele dal secondo conflitto mondiale alla guerra del Golfo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991), 23-24; Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 12; Mayeres-Rebernik, *La Saint-Siège*, 273-289.
- 22 Fabrizio, “Premessa,” 28-31. On the action of Cardinal Van Rossum as head of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide see Claude Prudhomme, “Le Cardinal Van Rossum et la politique missionnaire du Saint-Siège sous Benoît XV e Pie XI, 1918-1932,” in Vefie Poeles, Theo Salemink and Hans de Valk, eds., *Life with a Mission: Cardinal Willem Marinus Van Rossum CSsR, 1854-1932* (Gent: Redactie Trajecta, 2011), 123-141.
- 23 See Fabrizio, *Identità nazionali*, 156-165; Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede*, 89-94.
- 24 Pieraccini, “Il patriarcato,” 604.
- 25 Pieraccini, “La Custodia,” 385-386.
- 26 Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism*, 67-69.
- 27 Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), S25\736\9, Lattes to Zionist Executive, January 27, 1926. It is also of interest to note that in the Weizmann Letters and Papers where, until 1924, notes regarding Vatican opposition were frequent after 1925 any kind of reference linked with the Palestinian policy of the Holy See disappeared.

---

28 On the mistrust of the British administration towards Barlassina's initiatives and action at the beginning of the Twenties, see Thomas E. Hachey, ed., *Anglo-Vatican Relations, 1914-1939. Confidential Annual Reports of the British Ministers to the Holy See* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1972), 44.

29 Pieraccini, "Il custodiato," 67-68.

30 Pieraccini, "Il Patriarcato," 591-596. See also *Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 61.

31 Paschal Robinson (1870-1948) was an Irish born Franciscan who grew up in the United States, where he moved with his family when he was a child. He worked as journalist, before entering the Franciscan order. After making this commitment, he taught Medieval History at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC. During 1919 he was in Versailles at the peace conference, with the *Custos* of the Holy Land Diotallevi, trying to defend Catholic rights to the Holy Land's sanctuaries. Between 1920 and 1928 he was in Palestine several times as Apostolic Visitor, envoy of the Vatican Secretariat of State. In 1929 he was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Malta and the following year, Apostolic Nuncio to Dublin, where he remained until his death, exercising great political influence. On him see Pieraccini, *Padre Girolamo Golubovich*, 620-621.

32 APLJ, b. Propaganda Fide 1921-1929, Barlassina to Van Rossum, July 1, 1923.

---

33 APLJ, b. Propaganda Fide 1921-1929, Giannini to Respighi, May 30, 1924; Barlassina to Van Rossum, June 18, 1924. On this episode see also Pieraccini, “Il patriarcato,” 599-600.

34 In the Catholic hierarchy, the Apostolic Visitor is a Vatican envoy with a temporary mission to perform an enquiry, called a “canonical visitation”. The Visitor is charged to investigate one or more specific issues in a diocese or country and to report to the Holy See, suggesting solutions and actions.

35 AAEES, T. IV, pos. 61, fasc. 64, ff. 3-4. On the role and targets of the Apostolic Visitor see also: Archive of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches (hereafter ACO), Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, ff. 1-7, “Istruzioni della S.C. per la Chiesa orientale per il visitatore apostolic della Palestina”; f. 49, note “Per l’udienza del Santo Padre”. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

36 ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 932/28, ff. 14-15 and ff. 35-36, draft and letter to Pius XI, June 3, 1925.

37 See Minerbi, *The Vatican*, 56-58; Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede*, 91-93.



- 
- 38 On this issue see The National Archives, Foreign Office (hereafter TNA, FO) 141/667/6, Dormer to Chamberlain, July 17, 1925; Dormer to Chamberlain, July 29, 1925; Russel to Chamberlain, October 5, 1925.
- 39 APLJ, b. Propaganda Fide, 1921-1929, Barlassina to Van Rossum, November 24, 1925.
- 40 This attitude emerges clearly in CZA, S25/736/9, Palestine Zionist Executive to Political Secretary of Zionist Organization, February 19, 1926.
- 41 ACTS, Carteggio, Santa Sede, fasc. Segreteria di Stato, s.f. 10, Gasparri to Giannini, February 25, 1926.
- 42 On this complicated dispute see APLJ, b. Delegati apostolici, s.f. Vertenza, Robinson to Kean, March 16, 1926; Kean to Barlassina, February 14, 1926; Barlassina to Robinson, May 8 and 10, 1926; Barlassina to Van Rossum, May 17, 1926, and its attachments; Barlassina to Gasparri, May 17, 1926.
- 43 APLJ, b. Delegati apostolici, s.f. Vertenza, Barlassina to Van Rossum, October 25, 1926.
- 44 ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, ff. 24-31, Robinson to Sincero, November 22, 1926.

---

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid. It is of interest to note how, during 1927, Giannini took a position in favour of the passing of the whole territories within the borders of the diocese of the Latin Patriarchate to the forthcoming Delegation. On it see ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, f. 43, Giannini to Sincero, July 5, 1927.

47 On the last part of his mission see ACO Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 932/28, ff. 74-75, Robinson to Sincero, March 22, 1927; f. 80, Robinson to Sincero, May 3, 1928.

48 ACO, Latini, Palestina, pos. 429/Prop, Robinson to Van Rossum, February 28, 1928, and April 19, 1928.

49 ACO, Latini, Palestina, pos. 429/Prop, Barlassina to Van Rossum, December 1, 1926.

50 Vatican Secret Archive, Archive of the Apostolic Delegation to Jerusalem and Palestine, Archive Testa (hereafter ADAGP) b. 3, fasc. 13, ff. 1r-30r, "Relazione della Visita Apostolica sulla situazione dei Latini del Patriarcato di Gerusalemme". On the situation in Transjordan see also ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in

---

Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 932/28, ff. 87-94, “Relazione sulla situazione religiosa della Transgiordania”, memorandum sent by Robinson to Sincero, January 27, 1926; ACO, Latini, Patriarcato di Gerusalemme, pos. 335/37, “Relazione sui rapporti tra il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme ed il clero greco cattolico della Palestina e della Transgiordania”.

51 ADAGP, b. 3, fasc. 13, ff. 1r-30r.

52 AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 102, fasc. 99, ff. 55-56, Robinson to Gasparri, January 24, 1929.

53 On these hopes see ADAGP, b. 3, fasc. 13, ff. 13-14.

54 See ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, ff. 45-48, memorandum by Robinson, June 6, 1928; ff. 56-57, Giannini to Cicognani, August 22, 1928; f. 58, note, September 6, 1928; ff. 61-64, Giannini to Sincero, September 25, 1928; ff. 75-76, Robinson to Sincero, December 4, 1928.

55 ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, ff. 70-71, Mogabgab to Sincero, November 19, 1928; f. 73, note *Per l'udienza del Santo Padre*, November 1928.

---

56 Valerio Valeri (1883-1963) became a priest in 1907. In 1920, he entered the service of the Secretariat of State, being sent as auditor of the French Nunciature between 1921 and 1927. In that year he was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Egypt and two years later also joined the Delegation to Jerusalem. In 1933 he was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Bucharest and in 1936 to Paris. He remained Nuncio to France until 1944, serving during the highly dramatic period of the Nazi occupation and the puppet regime of Vichy. In 1944, at the insistence of De Gaulle's government, he was replaced by Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, and returned to the Roman Curia. In 1953, he was elevated to cardinal by Pius XII.

57 On these instructions see AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 78, fasc. 85, ff. 44-45, "Istruzioni a Mons. Valeri"; ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, f. 84, note, February 27, 1929; ff. 112-117 *Istruzione a Mons. Valeri quale Delegato Ap. della Transgiordania, Palestina e Cipro*.

58 On the arrival of Valeri at Jerusalem see AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 78, fasc. 85, ff. 66-67, Valeri to Gasparri, April 12, 1929; ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, ff. 125-126, Valeri to Sincero, April 12, 1929. See also: *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 9, 1929; Fidelis, "L'arrivo del Delegato Apostolico", *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 23, 1929.

---

59 APLJ, b. Delegati Apostolici, Gasparri to Barlassina, February 23, 1929; ACTS, Carteggio, Santa Sede, fasc. Segreteria di Stato, s.f. 10, Gasparri to Marotta, February 23, 1929.

60 Regarding the reaction of Barlassina see APLJ, b. Delegati Apostolici, Barlassina to Valeri, March 25, 1929.

61 ACTS, Curia Custodiale, Cronache, Cronache generali, 35 Cronaca di Terra Santa, Cronaca 1906-1931, 723-727. On the different attitudes of the Patriarchate and the Custody towards the appointment and arrival of Valeri see ACTS, Curia Custodiale, Cronache, Cronache dei Custodi, 17 Giornale del custode Marotta, March 8, 10-11 and 14, 1929; APLJ, b. Delegati Apostolici, Barlassina's note dated "S. Giuseppe 1929".

62 On this issue see ACO, Oriente, Rappresentanza pontificia in Gerusalemme e Palestina, pos. 930/28, f. 51, note, August 27, 1928.

63 ADAGP, b. 6, fasc. 27, f. 106, Sincero to Salman, October 19, 1934. On the reasons underlying the conversions see ADAGP, b. 3, fasc. 13, f. 11; APLJ, b. Congregazione orientale, Barlassina to Sincero, December 8, 1934.

64 On this issue see ADAGP, b. 3, fasc. 13, ff. 52-53, draft by Testa, February 23, 1937.

- 
- 65 APLJ, b. Congregazione Chiese orientali, Tisserant to Barlassina, July 29, 1937.
- 66 See ADAGP, b. 6, fasc. 27, ff. 107-109, Sincero to Testa, May 13, 1935. In the same archive folder, there are many other documents on the same quarrel.
- 67 On the nationalist actions and opinions of Mgr. Hajjar see G. Brunella, "Sulla posizione nazionalistica del vescovo melchita Grigurius al-Hajjar (1875-1940)," *Alifba* 4, no. 6-7 (1986): 57-78; Robson, *Colonialism*, 35-36. On the Latin claims and accusations against the Greek-Catholic clergy see AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 61, fasc. 64, ff. 26-61; ADAGP, b. 6, fasc. 27, ff. 121r-123r.
- 68 ADAGP, b. 5, fasc. 23, ff. 257-263, Testa to Tisserant, August 15, 1936; ff. 303r-306r, Testa to Tisserant, June 26, 1937; ff. 349r-357r, Tisserant to Hajjar, January 12, 1938.
- 69 See *Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 158; The National Archives, Colonial Office (hereafter TNA, CO) 732/40/7, Rendel to Chamberlin, September 9, 1927; Russel to Chamberlin, September 30, 1927 and November 7, 1927.
- 70 TNA CO 732/40/7, Chilton to Chamberlin, January 18, 1929.
- 71 On this issue see AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 78, fasc. 85, ff. 68-70, Valeri to Gasparri, April 18, 1929; pos. 105, fasc. 101, ff. 21-22, Valeri to Pacelli, December 19, 1931.

---

72 On the situation created by the Lateran Pacts in February 1929 and their possible consequences in the Middle Eastern theatre see Paolo Zanini, “The Holy See, Italian Catholics and Palestine under the British Mandate: Two Turning Points,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67, no. 4 (2016): 799-818 at 802-803.

73 On the positive evaluation of Bartoloni by British diplomats and officials, see TNA CO 733/262/1, Hall to Williams, October 6, 1934; *Anglo-Vatican Relations*, p. 246. Regarding the death of the Apostolic delegate and reactions to it, see ASV, Archive of the Apostolic Delegation to Egypt, b. 36, fasc. 296, ff. 50r-53r, Mazzoli to Sincero, October 18, 1935.

74 See *Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 272.

75 TNA CO 733/262/1, Rendel to Williams, May 9, 1934, and the attached note.

76 TNA CO 733/262/1, Wingfield to Simon, November 23, 1934; *Anglo-Vatican Relations*, 272. On the mission of Testa in Germany see Marie Levant, “Mgr Testa, envoyé spécial en pays rhénan (1923-1924)”, in Laura Pettinaroli, ed., *Le gouvernement pontifical sous Pie XI: pratiques romaines et gestion de l'universel* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 2013), 117-136.

---

77 On the entire issue of relations between the Apostolic delegation and the British see Pieraccini, “Il patriarcato,” pp. 602-604, 631-634. On the pro-fascist attitude of Testa see Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre. How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue Their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79-80.

78 On the pro-British evolution of the Vatican’s Middle-Eastern policy during the second half of the Twenties and the Thirties, see Kreutz, *Vatican Policy*, p. 45.

79 Zanini, “Italia e Santa Sede di fronte ai disordini,” 421-423.

80 On these Muslim-Christian tensions see Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 103-109.

81 AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 108, fasc. 102, ff. 52-56, Valeri to Gasparri, September 18, 1929; fasc. 103, ff. 3-6, Valeri to Gasparri, December 22, 1929.

82 Among many possible examples, see ADAGP, b. 2, fasc. 8, f. 116, archive note, July 14, 1937.

83 These kinds of suggestions, quite common in Valeri’s reports, were particularly stressed in AAEESS, T. IV, pos. 108, fasc. 102, ff. 90-92, Valeri to Gasparri, December 29, 1929.



---

84 See AAEES, Stati Ecclesiastici 4<sup>th</sup> period, pos. 474, fasc. 482, ff. 6-7, Testa to Pacelli, March 27, 1936.

85 On this decision and its consequences in Palestine see Étienne Fouilloux, “Comment la Congrégation orientale a-t-elle acquis un territoire? Le décret de 1938,” in Pettinaroli, ed., *Le gouvernement pontifical sous Pie XI*, 343-357.