

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**“THE UNITED STATES AND THE HOLY SEE: A WORLDWIDE FORCE FOR GOOD”**  
**OPENING OF AN EXHIBIT IN CELEBRATION OF THE 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE HOLY SEE**  
**BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**  
**SEPTEMBER 11, 2019**

Your Excellency Ambassador Gingrich, Monsignor Rossi, Distinguished Guests,

It is my great privilege to be with you this evening as the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States and to greet you in the name of Pope Francis, expressing his closeness and paternal affection for all gathered, as this evening we open an exhibit commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Holy See. I especially wish to thank Ambassador Gingrich who has been tireless in her efforts to draw attention to the significance of this occasion through events both in Rome and here in the United States.

Although diplomatic relations, with the exchange of ambassadors, occurred only in 1984, the United States maintained some form of consular relations with the Papal States from 1797 to 1867. In 1867, at a time when there was still great anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, Congress passed legislation prohibiting funding of diplomatic missions to the Holy See. With the loss of the papal states in 1870, the issue of diplomatic relations remained dormant.

For its part, the Holy See had non-diplomatic representation to the United States through the Apostolic Delegation, which was continuous until its transformation in 1984. Although the United States did not always reciprocate, Presidents continued to send personal envoys to the Holy See. Most notable was Myron C. Taylor who was the personal representative of President Roosevelt. In a letter addressed to Pope Pius XII, President Roosevelt stated that the reason for his gesture was “in order that their parallel endeavors for peace and the alleviation of suffering may be assisted.”

Although Presidents sent personal envoys to the Holy See, it was only after Congress repealed the prohibition on funding for a diplomatic mission to the Holy See in 1983, that President Reagan appointed his personal envoy, William A. Wilson, as ambassador to the Holy See, on January 10, 1984.

Testifying before Congress, then-Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam stressed the importance of recognizing the Holy See and cooperating with it, stating:

“This is not a question of establishing relations with the Church or with religion. The fact of the matter is that the Vatican has been very active all over the world on many, many different kinds of questions. ... There are immigration questions. There are narcotics questions, and questions on education, and humanitarian distribution of food and medicine. These are the things we want to talk to them about ...” (Dep. Sec. State Kenneth Dam, Testimony before Congress, Nomination of William A. Wilson, 1984)

The Holy See obviously agreed. Without jettisoning the evangelical mandate of the Gospel, the Holy See believed that mutual cooperation served the interests of humanity. Shortly after the confirmation of Ambassador Wilson, Pope John Paul II addressed him with these words:

“On the part of the Holy See, this collaboration means striving earnestly to be of service. It means entering into an extended dialogue on the important issues which are the basis of civilization itself. It means exerting common efforts to defend human dignity and the rights of the human person – every person, every man, woman and child on this earth. In this collaboration, the Holy See envisions a useful and respectful exchange of ideas on world peace and development, and on the conditions essential to their attainment, beginning with the need to protect freedom, promote justice, and vindicate truth against every attempted manipulation. And since freedom, justice and truth are related to global problems of world hunger, the arms race, human misery, the oppression of the weak, the plight of the poor, the condition of refugees, the violation of consciences and the integral development of individuals, communities and nations. All of these points have vital interests for the Government of the United States and of the world, because they deeply affect the lives of people – the American people and all the other peoples of the world – and because of the very special position of the United States on the international scene.” (Address of Pope John Paul II to His Excellency Mr. William A. Wilson, 9 April 1984)

These common interests could be witnessed, when in April 2008, President George W. Bush and Pope Benedict XVI could stand together on the White House lawn and appreciate the common values shared by the Holy See and The United States, which include the defense of freedom, which Pope Benedict said is “not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. ... The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good, and a sense of responsibility towards the less fortunate.” (Benedict XVI, “Address at Welcoming Ceremony”, Washington, D.C., 16 April 2008)

Pope Francis continues this legacy as an ambassador for peace, drawing the world’s attention to problems of poverty at the peripheries, to the crisis of migration, to the trafficking of persons, to environmental dangers, and to threats to human life, dignity, and religious liberty. Without the so-called “hard power”, that is military or economic power, the Holy See, under the leadership of Pope Francis, exercises “soft power”, that is, the power of persuasion, which is so intimately connected with moral authority, to awaken the consciences of the world to the demands of justice, a pre-requisite for peace. Indeed, in its diplomatic service, the Holy See seeks to persuade with discretion and to act with prudence. The Holy Father has been instrumental in his promotion of dialogue, fraternity, solidarity, and peace, which necessarily involves relieving human suffering and misery at the peripheries.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, considers the diplomatic work of the Holy See as a privileged instrument for building peace:

“If governments elaborated that which is called the Reason of State, exercising a Hard Power through economic-financial power or weapons, the Holy See should elaborate a Reason of the Church, through a Soft Power made of convictions and exemplar behaviors. She must work, also through diplomatic action, to create more justice, the first condition to reach peace.” (Cardinal Pietro Parolin, “Lectio Magistralis”, Dies Academicus della Facoltà Teologica del Triveneto, 4 aprile 2015)

In this work building a just world, the Holy See is happy to celebrate this anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United State of America, recognizing the good that can be done together in our common home.