Jnl of Ecclesiastical History, 2023.

doi:10.1017/S0022046923000945

Catholic Clergy of Italian Nationality in the British Middle East, 1939–1944

by JACOPO PILI
Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia
E-mail: Jacopo.pili.sc@gmail.com

During the Second World War, the British Government interned or asked the Holy See to replace many of the Italian clergy within the territories that it controlled. This led to a political conflict between London and the Vatican which was not resolved until the end of the war. This article addresses the development of the controversy and its causes, concluding that it stemmed from traditional imperial hegemonic goals rather than from anti-Catholicism. It also stresses that the Church's response was weakened by national rivalries within the Catholic clergy in the region, and the fundamentally different views of the war of London and the Vatican.

During the Second World War, the British authorities attempted to remove clergy of Italian nationality within the British Empire, its Dominions and other regions under its control. This policy led to heightened tensions between London and the Vatican and resulted in a diplomatic controversy which peaked between 1941 and 1942 but was not resolved until the end of the conflict. The matter has received limited attention from historians.[1] Drawing on newly-released documents

AAV = Archivio Apostolico Vaticano; *ADSS* = *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Vatican City 1965–81; ASMAE = Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri; ASRS = Archivio segreteria di Stato: sezione raporti con gli stati; TNA = The National Archives

The research on which this article is based was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No 101004539).

[1] See Donatella Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra: la questione degli ecclesiastici cattolici di nazionalità neica', *Il Politico* lxix (2004), 275–31; Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War*, Cambridge 1981, 189–90; and Anthony Rhodes, *Il Vaticano e le dittature, 1922–1945*, Milan 1975, 257–8.

in Pius XII's archive and on Foreign Office papers, this article sheds light on the genesis of the British policy and the internal dynamics of the Church in the Middle East which facilitated its implementation. In doing so, the article situates itself within the recent historiographical strand that stresses the importance of individual or peripheral actors in shaping Vatican diplomacy, in contrast with the perception of a monolithic Catholic Church.[2] On the British side, the historiographical assumption of the centrality of anti-Catholic motives behind British decision-making on the matter of Italian clergy is contested, connecting it rather to traditional imperial politics. On the other hand, this article underlines the importance of internecine divisions along national lines within the Catholic Church as a factor severely increasing its vulnerability in times of crisis. Finally, it stresses the fundamental incompatibility between the Church's vision of its own neutrality and the British perception of the war.

The 1930s: contrasts and suspicions

Relations between the Holy See and the British Empire had never been smooth. Age-old hostility and theological differences meant that, around the mid-nineteenth century, London had no ambassador in Rome, but merely an unofficial envoy. After the conquest of the Papal States by the kingdom of Italy in 1870, even that was perceived as superfluous and was thus withdrawn. Despite some unofficial cooperation during the papacy of Leo III, it was only with the beginning of the Great War and the increased strategic importance of Rome that a permanent mission was re-established. London, worried by the Vatican tendency to lean towards the Central Powers, decided to re-establish official although unilateral relations.[3] After the end of the conflict, the Vatican also felt the need to pursue a *rapprochement* with Britain in order to expand the presence of Catholic missionaries in the British Empire. This led to an improvement in Anglo-Vatican relations, but the underlying tensions never disappeared.[4] The rise of Italian Fascism put them under new strain. While at first relatively restrained in foreign policy, Mussolini envisioned the Mediterranean as

[2] See, for example, Maria Chiara Rioli, *A liminal church: refugees, conversions and the Latin diocese of Jerusalem, 1946–1956,* Leiden 2020.

[3] Lorenzo Botrugno, 'Gasparri ed i rapporti con il Regno Unito nel pontificato di Pio XI', in Laura Pettinaroli and Massimiliano Valente (eds), *Il cardinale Pietro Gasparri segretario di Stato (1914–1930)*, Heidelberg 2020, 149; Umberto Castagnino Berlinghieri, 'Le relazioni tra Santa Sede e Regno Unito tra il Venti Settembre e lo scoppio della Grande Guerra', in *Fede e diplomazia: le relazioni diplomatiche della Santa Sede nell'età contemporanea*, Milan 2014, 51–68; Massimo de Leonardis, 'Appunti per una storia delle relazioni anglo-vaticane', *Nova Historica* i/3 (2002), 27–45.

[4] Botrugno, 'Gasparri ed i rapporti con il Regno Unito', 148–9, 156–60; Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican*, 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923000945 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rightfully Italian. The weakening of international order caused by the rise of Nazi Germany convinced Benito Mussolini to try to fulfil his imperial ambitions. Replacing Britain as the greatest colonial power in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East was among the Italian dictator's goals. Italian hostility towards London grew exponentially when, in reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the British led the League of Nations campaign which established sanctions against Italy. While the Italian Catholic hierarchies overwhelmingly supported the Fascist war in East Africa, the pope was privately against it.[5] Despite this, eager to avoid conflict with an angry Mussolini, Pius XI and his Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pius XII) adopted a cautious attitude during the Ethiopian conflict, neither restraining the martial fervour of Italian bishops nor condemning the Fascist war effort.[6] The British government of the day identified the Holy See with the Fascist government, and complained about the Anglophobic excesses of Italian bishops.[7]

Both before and after the conflict ended in 1936, Mussolini endeavoured to expand Italian influence in the Middle East and win the loyalty of the Arab population by spreading anti-British propaganda.[8] Indeed, the Middle East became the key area in Anglo-Italian rivalry. In keeping with the tradition of Liberal Italy, the Fascist regime attempted to do so by weaponising Catholic institutions – often successfully.[9] Nor were such attempts uniquely Italian. The attempt to make use of the religious presence in colonial theatres had been underpinning European imperialism for centuries.[10] During the Ethiopian War, the massive support the Fascist regime's colonial endeavour received from the Italian Catholic clergy and even the Vatican Apostolic Delegates abroad was amplified by the Italian press and diplomacy for the whole world to see.[11] This caused some embarrassment to the Vatican, especially as the British government protested against Anglophobic utterances from some Italian bishops.[12] The local Catholic authorities were well aware of the

[5] Lucia Ceci, *L'interesse superior: Il Vaticano e l'Italia di Mussolini*, Rome–Bari 2013, 182. For an in-depth analysis of the subject see preface by Angelo del Boca to Lucia Ceci, *Il Papa non deve parlare: Chiesa, fascismo e guerra d'Etiopia*, Rome 2010.

[6] Eadem, *L'interesse superiore*, 185–9.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy in the Middle East, 1933–1940*, Basingstoke 2010; Arturo Marzano, *Onde Fasciste: la propaganda araba di Radio Bari*, Rome 2015.

[9] Roberto Mazza, 'A coherent inconsistency: Italian cultural diplomacy in Palestine, 1918–1938', in Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri (eds), *European cultural diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine, 1918–1948*, 332. See also John Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929–32: a study in conflict*, Cambridge 1985, 90, and Paolo Zanini, 'The Holy See, Italian Catholics and Palestine under the British mandate: two turning points', this JOURNAL lxvii (2016), 802.

[10] See, for example, Lucia Ceci, *Il vessillo e la croce: colonialismo, missioni cattoliche e islam in Somalia (1903–1924)*, Rome 2006.

[11] Eadem, *L'interesse superiore*, 185–92.

[12] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923000945 Published online by Cambridge University Press

problem, with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Luigi Barlassina stating in 1935 that, while he was sure his own ecclesiastics did not engage in politics, he was far less sure about others, who conducted themselves quite differently.'[13]

London had all the more reason to worry as, in 1936, Palestinian Arabs began a revolt against British rule that lasted until 1938; as a consequence, the Secretariat of State and Catholic institutions in Palestine tried to distance themselves from growing Arab nationalism.[14] Meanwhile, a new European war was looming. With the deterioration of the diplomatic situation on the continent, and Mussolini's growing ties with Hitler, the situation of clergy of Italian nationality within British and especially French colonies and mandates became increasingly tense during the latter half of the 1930s. A series of incidents in the French Levant, beginning with the recall of Monsignor Frediano Giannini, Apostolic Delegate in Beirut, on the basis of alleged pro-Italian leanings, set an important precedent.[15] Other cases involving the expulsion of Italian clergymen by French authorities followed, a survey of which underlines how this friction was not merely between the French authorities and the Italian clergy, but between the French and Italian clergy as well. In December, the Italian consul in Aleppo reported that the Apostolic Delegate in Syria, Monsignor Rémy-Louis Leprêtre, had 'won another manche in his crusade for the extirpation of Italian-ness from the Levant' by convincing the Custodian of the Holy Land, Alberto Gori, to force two Italian missionaries to resign with false accusations of pro-Italian activities.[16] The Italian ambassador in Egypt, Serafino Mazzolini, reported that Gori had tried to resist the Delegate's pressures, and had expressed his regret at this struggle with the Apostolic Delegate in the countries under French Mandate.[17] All this was part, Mazzolini wrote, of the harsh struggle begun by the French and British authorities to retain the position they had acquired, as seemed to

[13] Luigi Barlassina to Carlo Perico, 6 Oct. 1935, Delegazione Apostolica Gerusalemme e Palestina, AVV, b.2, fasc.12, n.1030/35.

[14] Paolo Zanini, 'Vatican diplomacy and Palestine, 1900–1950', *Jerusalem Quarterly* lxxi (2017), 120–31 at p. 125.

[15] Henry Hopkinson to FO, 6 Aug. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 5346. Theoretically simply coordinators of Catholic activities in a region rather than diplomatic representatives, Apostolic Delegates often played a central political role: Paolo Zanini, 'The establishment of the Apostolic Delegation to Palestine, Cyprus and Transjordan (1929): cause or effect of the changes in Vatican Middle East policy?', *Church History* lxxxvii (2018), 797–822 at p. 800.

[16] See Regio Consolato ad Aleppo al Ministero degli Esteri, situazione nel Gebel Aqrà – Missione di Kessab, 22 Dec. 1939, and Ministero degli Affari Esteri alla R. Ambasciata presso la Santa Sede, situazione nel Gebel Aqrà, 8 Dec. 1939, without signature, Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede (1929–46), ASMAE, b. 125.

[17] Serafino Mazzolini to the Ministero degli Esteri, Religiosi francescani della missione di Baggiagaz, 28 Sept. 1939, ibid.

be the case by reading the communications from royal representatives in other countries in the Near and Middle East.[18] The Italian clergy, Gori believed, suffered daily persecution by foreign superiors.[19] The Holy See had to tread carefully, and not only with regard to the Italians. When, in early 1938, Monsignor Edward Tonna, archbishop of Izmir, was transferred because of conflicts with the Italian element of his flock, the British Legation to the Holy See protested that, despite the Vatican claim that the bishop's removal had nothing to do with pressure from Rome, it would still be widely perceived as an Italian victory over the British.[20]

Vatican diplomacy and the problem of neutrality

Pius XII's pontificate, beginning in March 1939, immediately had to define the Vatican's position in the upcoming conflict. The Holy See's attitude towards Nazism had been increasingly hostile under his predecessor Pius XI. Despite appreciating the Nazis' implacable hostility towards Bolshevism and providing enthusiastic support to Francisco Franco's Axis-backed war against the Spanish Republic, Hitler's persecution of the German clergy and the regime's anti-Christian character had convinced the pope to promulgate the unambiguously anti-Nazi *Mit brennender Sorge* in 1937.[21] Despite an exaggerated trust in Mussolini's ability to balance Hitler's influence within European Fascism, the rapid move towards totalitarianism in Italy and an openly bellicose foreign policy begun to worry the Holy See. At the same time, an Apostolic Delegation was established in London, a sign of the Vatican's intention to strengthen its relations with Britain.[22] Pacelli had played a central role during these years and, influenced by the French clergy which was instrumental in his election to the papacy, he contributed to the stiffening of the attitude towards Germany.[23] Despite that, preventing a European war which he saw as the product of modern society's apostasy from Catholicism and which would lead in his view to inevitable subversion of civilisation, was the pope's priority.[24] In order to achieve that, Pius worked with the democratic powers

[18] Ibid. [19] Ibid.

[20] D'Arcy Osborne to William Godfrey, 3 Feb. 1938, Delegazione Apostolica in Gran Bretagna, AAV, b. 94, fasc. 249, 28/8/38.

[21] See David Bidussa, *La misura del potere: Pio XII e i totalitarismi tra il 1932 e il 1948*, Milan 2020, 81–8, and Ceci, *L'interesse superiore*, 201–4.

[22] Daithí Ó Corráin, *The pope's man in London: Anglo-Vatican relations, the nuncio question and Irish concerns, 1938–82*, Cambridge 2020; Robert Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ: the life of Pope Pius XII*, Cambridge 2013, 101.

[23] Bidussa, *La misura del potere*, 94–5.

[24] Daniele Menozzi, *Chiesa, pace e guerra nel Novecento: verso una delegittimazione religiosa dei conflitti*, Bologna 2008, 149–55.

(establishing a connection with Washington which in time would prove particularly important) but also attempted to improve Vatican relations with Germany and strengthen those with the Fascist regime.[25] Following in the footsteps of Benedict XV during the Great War, Pius decided to adopt a position of complete neutrality and impartiality concerning armed conflicts, to the point of rejecting Britain's and France's appeals to take a firmer position against Germany. This policy, based on refusal to take sides but also an ambition to act as a neutral channel for peace negotiations, would continue throughout the war.[26] The world had changed from the days of Benedict XV, however. The ideological character of the conflict and its unique brutality meant that an impartial position was far harder to sustain than had been the case in the previous war. In a duel to the death, the Church's appeals to a just peace and Christian solidarity were unlikely to be appreciated by either side.[27] Another important difference was that, while the Vatican had learned to consider totalitarian regimes as particularly undesirable, it had little liking for liberal democracy either, many leading personalities being quite favourable to traditional authoritarianism.[28] Despite its hostility towards Nazism and its growing issues with Italian Fascist moves towards totalitarianism, it was difficult to envision the Church as part of a global anti-Fascist alliance. Unwillingness to take sides, alongside this ideological ambiguity, was perceived by the British as a refusal to acknowledge the clear difference between them and the barbarous Nazi regime. This would have important consequences later. Vatican attempts to provide aid to the populations of German and Italian-occupied Europe made things worse, as the British felt that that would only help the occupiers. This did little to dispel London's feeling that the Vatican was helping the Axis war effort.[29]

British policy after the beginning of the Second World War

At the beginning of the Second World War, there were more than five hundred Catholic clergy of Italian origin in the Middle East. Most of them were members of religious orders, priests and missionaries. The Apostolic Delegates in Egypt and Palestine, the Latin Patriarch and the Custodian of the Holy Land, on the other hand, were also Italian. The

[25] Ceci, *L'interesse superiore*, 265–70. On the relationship with the United States see Luca Castagna, *Un ponte oltre l'oceano: assetti politici e strategie diplomatiche tra Stati Uniti e Santa Sede nella prima metà del Novecento (1914–1940)*, Bologna 2010.

[26] Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ*, 151–2.

[27] Bidussa, *La misura del potere*, 105.

[28] Ibid. See also Giuliana Chamedes, *A twentieth-century crusade: the Vatican's battle to remake Christian Europe*, Cambridge, MA 2019.

[29] John Pollard, *The papacy in the age of totalitarianism, 1914–1958*, Oxford 2014, 348–9.

situation was similar in the rest of the world. The outbreak of the war immediately jeopardised their position. As early as September 1939, while some missionaries of German origin were interned in the Middle East, the British placed Father Engelbert Giersbach, secretary of the Apostolic Delegation in Mombasa, under house arrest, later allowing him limited freedom of movement.[30] This had been clearly foreseen by the Apostolic Delegates abroad. In 1939, reports reached the Secretary of State warning about the consequences of a war in Europe for Catholic clergy in Africa, the Middle East and beyond.[31]

It was not until Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, however, that the real crisis in Anglo-Vatican relations began.[32] While around 450 of the 500 Italian members of the clergy – both men and women – were interned in monasteries and hospices, Monsignor Antonio Riberi, the Apostolic Delegate in Mombasa, had his movements restricted, and the Foreign Office debated whether the Kenyan case should be the beginning of a broader attempt to pressurise the Vatican into replacing Italian and German clergy. Initially, this was fuelled by pressure from one section of the British Catholic clergy. In mid-June 1940, Monsignor Vance, a member of the Planning Committee for Enemy Propaganda and a close associate of Cardinal Hinsley, urged the Foreign Office to follow the French example of disallowing the presence of enemy ecclesiastics in its territories, especially where clergymen of Axis nationality held undue influence in the British Empire, as for example in Egypt. He added that such a policy would be strongly approved by British Catholics and would not be regarded by the Vatican as unreasonable. After investigating the matter, the Foreign Office concluded that Vance's proposal did indeed reflect the views of British Catholics.[33]

The Foreign Office knew, however, that the Vatican would not comply meekly, for already on 19 June Monsignor William Godfrey, Apostolic Delegate in London, had strongly protested about the restrictions implemented in Kenya. Furthermore, reports from the Eastern and Mediterranean Departments of the Foreign Office suggested that there was little to fear from Apostolic Delegates of Italian nationality from a security point of view. Concerning the Middle East, one report stated that the only Italian Delegate His Majesty's Government was interested in was Gustavo Testa, now Apostolic Delegate in Egypt and Palestine who, 'in view of the general policy of the Vatican', was unlikely to be an ardent Fascist. The report concluded that transferring him would put

[30] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 278–9.

[31] These documents, which also contain in-depth reports on the national make-up of European clergy abroad, are in ASRS, AA.EE.SS, Pius XII, 1, Stati Ecclesiastici, Pos 588, situazione delle missioni in caso di Guerra.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Reginald Leeper minute, 18 June 1940, TNA, FO, 371/24955, R 2951/153/22.

unnecessary strain on Anglo-Vatican relations.[34] Balancing the need to maintain good relations with the Vatican and these relatively negligible security concerns, the Foreign Office briefly refrained from piling further pressure on the Delegates. This cautious attitude persisted for some time. Soon, however, requests for the expulsion of Catholic clergy of Axis nationality, justified by alleged pro-Fascist sympathies, started to arrive from various parts of the Empire, from India, Canada and Egypt.[35]

On 3 September 1940, Miles Lampson, British Ambassador to Egypt, communicated to the Foreign Office that he and Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, considered it 'most desirable' that certain Italian and German priests in Egypt, who were perceived as being guilty of pro-Fascist activities and were considered a potential enemy fifth column, be repatriated.[36] The answer was that Lampson could 'certainly act as proposed', leaving it to the Foreign Office to deal with any Vatican reaction, 'if or when' it materialised.[37] In an attempt to circumvent the problem, the Holy See proposed to grant the clergy Vatican nationality, but the Foreign Office replied that this would not alter the situation.[38] The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, instead expressed Britain's wish that the Holy See replace all Apostolic Delegates with Axis citizenship with Allied nationals. Although for the moment this request was limited to Kenya, the establishment of such a general principle was extremely worrisome for the Vatican.[39] Nevertheless, the British request was accepted and by late September Riberi had to leave the country.[40]

At this point, the 'offensive' against the Italian clergy slowed down but did not completely stop: Monsignor Iginio Nuti, Apostolic Vicar in Egypt, was repatriated in March 1941.[41] Not expecting the Holy See to be so co-operative in the future, the British set about gathering information, especially through the work of one particular intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Colonel John de Salis, who, a Catholic himself, enjoyed good relations with clerics in the Middle East. Indeed, rivalry amongst the Catholic clergy in the region proved instrumental in providing the British with ammunition for their diplomatic offensive.

In January 1941 Fr Louis Amiel, Superior of the Latin Patriarchate Seminar in Jerusalem, wrote to Cardinal Hinsley and to Archbishop Godfrey, stating that the local population in Egypt and Palestine was greatly disturbed by the fact that most of the Church's representatives in

[34] Ibid.
[35] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 283.
[36] Miles Lampson to FO, 3 Sept. 1940, TNA, FO, 371/24955, No. 1036.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 280–7.
[39] Ibid. [40] Ibid. [41] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923000945 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their countries were Italian, something later confirmed by Amiel.[42] In October, Leprêtre's vicar-general expressed to a Free French colonel his surprise at the presence of two Italians in high office, referring to Testa and Barlassina and stating that they were providing Italy with sensitive information.[43] Meanwhile, military authorities in East Africa dispatched reports stating that many Catholic missions in Ethiopia had become instruments of political penetration and Fascist culture, to the point of posing a military danger. While the evidence gathered by de Salis against Testa was unsatisfactory, he was, however, still seen as unsuitable for the role of Apostolic Delegate because he was 'thoroughly Italian', and therefore incapable of appreciating the British point of view.[44] Drawing on this information, in December 1941 Olivier Lyttleton, Minister of State for the Middle East, drafted a comprehensive report requesting that the Holy See repatriate Nuti's *de facto* replacement, Fr Nazzareno Jacopozzi, the Apostolic Delegate in Ethiopia, Monsignor Giovanni Castellani, together with all Italian priests in East Africa. The main challenge would however still be to achieve this result without unduly straining relations with the Vatican. While the goal remained to 'object to Italians as such', it was decided to act in a piecemeal fashion, collecting reports on any unsavoury activities of the local clergy and obtaining removals on a case-per-case basis.[45] This was partly due to the fact that local authorities did not always agree to the removal of Italian clergy. The inclusion in the list of the Italian bishops in the Sudan, Francesco Saverio Bini and Rodofo Orler, for example, was opposed by that country's governor-general, who claimed that conditions conducive to the development of pro-Axis activities in the Egyptian and Ethiopian Catholic Church were not present there and endorsed the bishops' anti-Nazi (if not anti-Fascist) credentials.[46]

Despite this, the British were determined to continue down this path. They were afforded a good opportunity by the arrival of Free French authorities in Syria and Lebanon, after the bloody conquest of those regions from Vichy France in summer 1941. The position of the French clergy, which was perceived as hostile to the Gaullist movement, then grew precarious – in particular that of the Jesuits. According to the British, while the Jesuits in Egypt had proven trustworthy, those in Syria and Lebanon had first tied themselves to the Vichy government and

[42] Arthur Hughes memorandum, 'The Foreign Office and the situation of the Palestinian clergy', 2 Jan. 1941, Archivio S.E. Mons Hughes (1942–8), AAV, b.10, fasc. 43.

[43] Newton report, John de Salis to FO, 27 Jan. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 1452.

[44] GSI, GHQ Middle East Force, weekly military newsletter, no. 56 of 2' Oct. 1941 (23 Oct. 1941), appendix B, AAV, b.10, fasc. 43.

[45] Report of 3 Jan. 1942, TNA, FO, 371, R 568/509/67.

[46] Hubert Huddleston, governor-general of the Sudan to Ambassador Sir Miles Lampson, in Cairo, 21 Dec. 1941, TNA, FO, 371, 33/414.

were now hostile to both the Gaullists and the British.[47] The Jesuits de Bonneville and Bonnet Eymard, for example, had, as Leprêtre wrote to Luigi Maglione, disapproved of the Gaullist enthusiasm of some clergymen, and had insisted on maintaining a chilly attitude towards the new government. According to the Apostolic Delegate, pro-German elements were deeply embedded in the local clergy.[48] When, on 12 February 1942, Osborne dispatched an official note to the Secretary of State, seeking the recall of the two Jesuits, he also included Testa and Jacopozzi in that request. The note contained a heavy indictment of the Catholic Church in the Middle East, accusing it of acting in Axis interests. Testa might be personally innocent, Osborne went on, but he was considered responsible for the Church's general failure in the region and, in a personal communication, Osborne suggested replacing him with a Apostolic Delegate of British nationality.[49]

The Vatican reaction was particularly harsh, stating once again that clergy observed the strictest neutrality, none more so than the Apostolic Delegates, direct representatives of the pope. Maglione's assurances were not completely true, as a matter of principle, for many of the Catholic clergy of Italian nationality evinced enthusiastic Fascist Anglophobia at the time of the Ethiopian War. The current circumstances had however made Vatican representatives more cautious. Maglione could therefore assure Osborne that, in the event of failure to conform to this standard, the Church would be ready to recall anyone, but stressed that no evidence of such behaviour had been provided.[50] The bluntness of Maglione's reaction altered the methodology but not the general direction of the British policy. The Foreign Office maintained that the right policy was to raise the question without further delay but was nevertheless anxious to avoid provoking Vatican hostility as much as possible. To this end, stronger evidence was needed. In internal communications, de Salis's material was described as disappointing, and it was hoped that he could, as promised, provide Osborne with better ammunition in the future.[51] The main source of a new round of information was to be Fr Carriere, Superior of the Dominicans. In a conversation with de Salis, he stated that the Catholic Church in the Middle East was in Italian hands at the expense of ecclesiastical interests, and that the Italian clergy – Barlassina in

[47] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 288.

[48] Rémy-Louis Lepetre to Luigi Maglione, 11 Oct. 1941, Archivio Leprêtre, Volume 47: n.d'ordre 1–76, annee 1938, 13– 1929–1946, rappresentanze pontificie. 1. Gerusalemme 2. Cairo 3. Iran 4. Iraq 5. Istanbul 6. Parigi 7. Vichy 8. Congo, situazione politico-religiosa 1. Alto commissariato francese 2. Autorità locali 3. Corpo consolare 4. France libre. (Collocazione provvisoria). n.344/41.

[49] 12 Feb. 1942, *ADSS* v, 250, 251.

[50] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 289.

[51] Howard Douglas to Hopkinson, 4 Mar. 1942, TNA, FO, R 1205/509/57.

particular – acted as a fifth column.[52]. Carriere believed that the Vatican was perfectly aware of the nature of the Italian clergy in the Middle East, and that it would be more than prepared to put an end to it if a suitable motive for taking action could be provided.[53] Accusations against Barlassina also came from Fr Howell, senior chaplain to the forces in Cyprus, who stated that Barlassina's removal was 'a solution devoutly to be prayed for', and would solve two-thirds of the Church's problems in the Middle East, and from Fr O'Callaghan, a Provincial of the Carmelites, who claimed that the Vatican was eager to get rid of the Patriarch.[54]

Patriarch Luigi Barlassina

When confronted with these accusations, Testa wrote a detailed reply defending Barlassina and dismissing any charge of Italianisation (and, even more strongly, of supporting anti-British activities).[55] Testa was correct in stating that Barlassina was not a fanatic Italophile but overlooked the complexity of his character and the ambiguity of his role. Arriving in Palestine at the end of the Great War, his hostility towards the British authorities had been considered a given from the beginning. Barlassina had identified Zionism and Protestant propaganda as the main enemies of the Catholic Church in the region, and the British government as a facilitating force for both, so that he looked favourably to the end of the British Mandate.[56]

Nor was he hostile to the Fascist government in Italy: when, in March 1939, he received anti-Fascist propaganda from an Italian anti-Fascist in Paris, he swiftly sent it to the Italian consul, commenting that it was an example of Protestant action, and that it should not be hard to track down its author.[57] However, neither was he an ardent supporter of the regime, showing great independence and scandalising the Italian consul

[52] De Salis conversation with Père Carrière, 9 Feb. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 1452.

[53] Ibid.

[54] R. Meade minute, 20 Feb. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 1205/509/57.

[55] Note sull'attività politica di mons. Barlassina, n.d., Delegazione Apostolica Gerusalemme e Palestina, AAV, b.10, F.43,

[56] See Paolo Pieraccini, 'Il patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme (1918–1940): ritratto di un patriarca scomodo: mons. Luigi Barlassina', *Il Politico* lxiii (1998), 591–639 at p. 591, and Paolo Maggiolini, 'European cultural diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine, 1918–1948', in *The International Centre for the Protection of Catholic Interests in Palestine: cultural diplomacy and outreach in the British mandate period*, London 2021, 353–79 at p. 360.

[57] Ministero degli Esteri alle R. ambasciate di Parigi e della S. Sede, Propaganda religiosa antitaliana, 14 Apr. 1939, b. 125, Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede (1929–46), ASMAE.

by stating that Hitler was no better than Stalin. Barlassina's centralising attitude led him to sideline both French and Italian influence as powers protecting Catholicism in an attempt to frame the Latin Patriarchate as the only representative of Catholic interests in the region.[58] He was Catholic before Italian, and although the Fascist authorities were glad to have an Italian Patriarch, they never completely trusted him, while the French authorities recognised that he was not the worst Italian who could have held that position.[59] The main issue was Barlassina's pugnacious attitude, which caused strife not just with the Mandate authorities, but also with the religious orders, with the Custody of the Holy Land, also traditionally held by Italians, as well with Catholics of non-Latin Rite.[60]

Arthur Hughes, who always defended Barlassina from British accusations, would write in 1944 that the Patriarch's character and activities were nevertheless disastrous for the Church. Incapable of dealing normally with affairs, he resorted to spying, bribery and underhand methods, to the point that during the war he bribed intelligence personnel to gain information as to the intentions of the government in his regard, causing a grave scandal. His anti-Arab activities forced the local priests into habits of intrigue in order to protect themselves or to curry favour with them.[61] Essentially, Barlassina's anti-British attitude was very real, but it was not caused by Fascist zeal. It had diminished from the 1920s, and it had certainly not taken the form of active support for the Axis. For the British, however, his good relations with the Fascist authorities would have been damning enough even without his anti-British attitude. On the other hand, the Patriarch's character, his often-underhand methods, and his penchant for antagonising local clerics played a very important role in the British construction of a narrative of an Anglophobic, pro-Fascist Church. The fact that, when the Free French Consul arrived in Jerusalem in August 1942, having replaced one loyal to the Vichy government, Barlassina immediately antagonised him because of a perceived slight to the importance of his role, did little to improve his position in the eyes of the Allies.[62]

Despite Barlassina's obvious faults, the Foreign Office realised that this second instalment of evidence contained little or no material which could help Osborne.[63] The Colonial Office, in turn, stated that it had received no unfavourable reports regarding Barlassina's activities.[64]

[58] Zanini, 'The establishment of the Apostolic Delegation', 797–822.
[59] Pieraccini, *Il Patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme*, 603–35.
[60] Ibid.
[61] ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc. 2–210, 1944, Udienza S. Padre.
[62] Nota d'archivio, 28 Aug. 1942, Delegazione Apostolica Gerusalemme e Palestina, AAV, b. 9.
[63] Hopkinson to Douglas Howard, 4 Mar. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 1452.
[64] Meade minute, 23 Apr. 1942, ibid. R 2757.

However, in May, the removal of Gori and Barlassina was still described by Foreign Office correspondence as a clear advantage both for Britain and the Catholic Church.[65] The fundamental point was still that, until the Patriarch and the Custodian of the Holy Places were recalled, the Catholic Church would be 'Italianate' and therefore not to be trusted.[66] Summer 1942 saw strong British pressure in other areas as well. In June, the British authorities decided to intern Francesco Benedetto Cialeo, the bishop of the Indian city of Multan.[67] The authorities' *modus operandi* was very close to the one employed elsewhere. Cialeo was accused of being an ardent Fascist, a great admirer of Mussolini and guilty of repeated Anglophobic utterances and actions. His frequent visits to Italy were one more reason for suspicion, and there were doubts about the nature of his financial dealings.[68] In this case, the British decided not to inform the Holy See and, given the difficulties of communication with India, Maglione only learned of Cialeo's internment in January 1943. The Secretary of State commented bitterly to William Godfrey that, despite the Holy See's frequent reassurances of being ready to address any accusations, this time the British had not even seen fit to address the matter.[69] Despite Vatican protests, however, the British did not relent and the only concession Maglione could obtain was that the bishop would not be expelled as *persona non grata*.[70]

Arthur Hughes

When, in August 1942, the Vatican finally capitulated on the Egyptian issue, and Testa was recalled, it became necessary to replace him with someone who, as an acting Apostolic Delegate, could please the British government. The choice eventually fell on Monsignor Arthur Hughes, a White Father, who had been in Uganda since 1933, first as secretary then as secretary of education to the Apostolic Vicar, then as secretary-general for education for all the Catholic missions of the Protectorate. Most important, he had been responsible for relations with the local British authorities. He would later be described thus in a *Segreteria di Stato* note:

> he is a little over forty years old; he is short in stature, rather pudgy, with an almost completely white beard and hair; he has lively, clear eyes. Of a cheerful and facetious character, he is immediately very likeable. In conversation, which he

[65] Hopkinson to Howard, 17 May 1942, ibid. R 3615.
[66] [?] Boyd to Pierson Dixon, 5 Aug. 1942, ibid. R 5179.
[67] Godfrey to Montini, 18 Jan. 1943, Delegazione Apostolica in Gran Bretagna, AAV, b.11, fasc. 211, 59/43.
[68] Note with no date and signature, ibid.
[69] Maglione to Godfrey, 20 Apr. 1943, ibid. R 2479/43.
[70] Godfrey to Maglione, 1 Mar. 1944, ibid. R 217/44.

can hold very well in French and quite well in Italian (which he only started studying at the beginning of last May), he reveals himself to be quick-witted and lively.[71]

More important, the Foreign Office was satisfied by Testa being replaced by a British subject, which exceeded their original request. On the other hand, neither Testa nor Nuti were to be officially replaced: their posts were to be held by acting appointees. The Colonial Office investigated Hughes's credentials, and approved the choice.[72] By June, with the Axis forces marching towards Cairo, the Minister of State repeatedly urged the Foreign Office to hasten Hughes's appointment and arrival in Cairo for security reasons and in the face of Vatican procrastination.[73] Upon his arrival in Egypt, he made a favourable impression on the British authorities.[74] In October, the Foreign Office described the situation in Cairo as immeasurably improved since Hughes's arrival, with the acting Apostolic Delegate described as a 'first class man'.[75] Hughes's appointment was celebrated by both Leprêtre and Cardinal Ignatius Gabriel Tappouni who, in a meeting with de Salis, declared that they were looking forward to a continuation of the policy of de-Italianisation of the Church, starting with Barlassina. They believed it particularly important that Hughes's reporting on the dangers of the Italian influence on the Middle Eastern Church should reach the Vatican and be strengthened by Osborne.[76] Without fully realising it, Hughes played a central role in deciding the future of this 'anti-Italian' offensive, as is made clear in the minutes of a Foreign Office meeting held in October 1942:

Mr. Hopkinson [Lyttleton's private secretary] states that the Government of Palestine and our Security officers are anxious to secure [the Italian clergy's] removal, and he added that Father Hughes was proposing to make a recommendation in the same sense to the Vatican. We decided that the first step should … be to find out from the Ministry of State whether Father Hughes had in fact taken any decision in this matter, since if he did independently make similar

[71] 'Conta poco più di quarant'anni; è di bassa statura, piuttosto pingue, con barba e capelli quasi completamente bianchi; ha l'occhio vivo e limpido. Di carattere allegro e faceto, riesce subito molto simpatico. Nella conversazione, che può tenere benissimo anche in francese ed abbastanza bene in italiano (che ha cominciato a studiare soltanto ai primi dello scorso maggio) si rivela d'ingegno pronto e vivace': note without signature, 'circa il padre Arturo Hughes', Vaticano, 2 Feb. 1942, ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc. 171–381,.

[72] Meade minutes, 19 Mar., 9 Apr. 1942, TNA, FO, R 1901/509/57, Y5564/42; Hopkinson to FO, 20 Apr. 1942, FO, 371/33414, R 2592.

[73] Olivier Lyttleton to FO, 1 June 1942, and Hopkinson to FO, 27 June 1942, TNA, FO 371/33414, R 3644, R 4247.

[74] D'Arcy Osborne to Howard, 20 Aug. 1942, TNA, FO 371/33414.

[75] Howard to Osborne, 13 Oct. 1942, ibid.

[76] Hopkinson to FO, 7 Oct. 1942, ibid. R 6646.

recommendations to the Vatican our own representations would be strongly reinforced.[77]

The acting Apostolic Delegate, however, proved unreliable. One early hint of this was in a report drafted on September 11 by the British Legation in Addis Ababa, stating that while Hughes had supported the evacuation of all Italian priests from Ethiopia while he was in the country, to the point of attempting to persuade Castellani of the expediency of calling allied and neutral replacements in, he had completely 'changed his tune' since his arrival in Cairo, now suggesting that the priests remain. This transformation puzzled the British diplomats: it might have been motivated by hopes of acquiring merit in Vatican circles, and thereby consolidating his position in Cairo, but the only thing that was certain at that moment was that Hughes was very astute.[78] As Hughes later described the situation, the British Embassy in Egypt regarded it as an affront that the Vatican should not have removed all Italian personnel, and as a failure the fact that he should not have agitated for that.[79] What caused this change of heart? In truth, Hughes was singularly ill-suited to the role of British pawn. In 1943, he wrote that he had chosen the White Fathers because of his irritation at nationalism, which he considered as the last refuge of egoism. Convinced that racial differences were more imaginary than real, he found the White Fathers to be the most ecumenical of all orders.[80]

His experience in Africa strengthened this inclination. In a long memorandum drafted in December 1942, Hughes provided an account of his experience with the Italian clergy since before the conflict. Even before the Second World War, Hughes wrote, rumours of the nationalistic attitude of the Italian clergy had begun to spread throughout central Africa as a consequence of the Ethiopian War, and Hughes admitted to having believed much of it.[81] Regardless, he asked and obtained, in December 1941, the release of the interned Italian priests and nuns in Uganda.[82]

When, in February 1942, Hughes went to Kenya to consult Fr McCarthy on affairs of the Vicariate, he heard many stories about the nefarious activities of the Italian fathers in Kenya, and especially in Abyssinia, and was reproached by the local prelates for his doubts on the

[77] Howard minutes, 9 Oct. 1942, ibid. R 6710,

[78] Howe to Mackereth, 31 Oct. 1942, ibid. R 7280.

[79] Official note from Fr Hughes concerning relations with the authorities in the Delegation (Egypt and Palestine), ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc. 2–210, 6508/44.

[80] Note without signature, 'circa il padre Arturo Hughes', 2 Feb. 1942.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Hughes to Anthony Eden on matters concerning the Italian colony in Egypt, 10 Nov. 1943, ibid.

matter.[83] However, Hughes wrote, he continued to tactfully investigate the subject, even as, in May, he obeyed McCarthy's instructions to proceed to Addis Ababa.[84] There, he lived with the Italian missionaries, remaining in the country after the Italian defeat. His first impression was negative, mostly because of Archbishop Giovanni Castellani, Apostolic Delegate to Italian East Africa, and Vicar Apostolic of Addis Ababa, who would later be expelled from the country in November 1942.[85] While he rejected the accusations levied against Castellani, and believed that the British authorities were gravely at fault in expelling the Italian missionaries in Ethiopia, Hughes criticised the archbishop's refusal to replace them with missionaries of other nationalities and consequent risking of the Church's survival in the region. As misguided as this procrastination was, Hughes did not believe it was due to anti-British or pro-Fascist feelings. How correct was this assessment? Hughes admitted that Castellani was certainly 'more interested in the radio and war news than other prelates' whom he had known during the war. He also remembered that

> I think I ought to say that perhaps it is a justification of Mons. Castellani to say that he hoped for a speedy return of the Italians. When in June the Italians advanced so near to Alexandria and Cairo, he used to have the map spread out on the table and he once explained to me how easy it would be within two months for one or two Italian divisions to come down and retake Asmara and Abyssinia while the rest crossed the canal and occupied Asia Minor.[86]

It is hard to imagine that Castellani's enthusiasm for the Axis victories was uniquely motivated, as claimed by Hughes, by desire for a speedy return of Italian missionaries.[87]

The general accusations against Italian clergy in the country mirrored those against Castellani: hiding Italian officers, concealing arms and ammunition within churches, hiding radio sets, spreading pro-Italian propaganda. After investigating the matter, Hughes concluded that the accusations were likely untrue, and that many of the accusations against the Italians came from some of the native clergy.[88] He had to admit,

[83] Note without signature, 'Circa il padre Arturo Hughes', 2 Feb. 1942.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 192.
[86] Hughes's notes, 7 Dec. 1942, ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc.171–381.
[87] Decades after the war, Castellani wrote that the British hostility was caused by their disappointment in finding that the Italians in Ethiopia had remained faithful to Fascism: 'by them considered uniquely as tyrannical government and heresy', rather than joining the 'so-called Free Italy' movement: Maria Genoino Caravaglios and G. M. Castellani, 'La Santa Sede e l'Inghilterra in Etiopia durante il secondo conflitto mondiale', *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* xxxv (1980), 217–54 at p. 248.
[88] Hughes's notes, 7 Dec. 1942.

however, that the Consolata Fathers had been unfortunate in their 'perhaps exaggerated' profession of attachment to the Fascist regime: 'they, more than other congregations, admire the Italian regime for its benefits to religion: but in this (even though they perhaps advertised it too much) they were not wrong'.[89] From there, he described the Italian presence in Ethiopia in positive terms, stating that the people had the greatest affection for Italians, and that while Graziani's administration had done much to dishonour Italy, successive administrations had done so much good that when he arrived the British were much less liked than the Italians.[90]

When he arrived in Cairo on 12 June, Hughes felt relief at being finally out of Ethiopia. He was well-received by the local authorities in Cairo. His first contact was de Salis, who presented himself both as a Catholic – who consequently had the interests of the Church in these countries at heart – and, even more, as 'officier de liaison' between the Minister of State and the Apostolic delegate. De Salis immediately repeated to Hughes the accusations against the Italians, claiming that the Roman Catholic Church had gone 'from Catholic to Roman, from Roman to Italian, and from Italian to fascist'. As we have seen, Hughes was at this point less than ready to believe accusations against Italian clergy, but de Salis's account was so grim and full of details that he later admitted to having been convinced by it at the time.[91] De Salis, apparently sure of Hughes's collaboration, mentioned his informants, so that the Apostolic Delegate could later name names with precision. His investigations, he wrote, would however eventually prove the falsity of the facts he had been presented with. By December, he was ready to report to Rome that his experience in Uganda, Abyssinia and in this Delegation of Cairo had persuaded him that the Italian clergy had not deserved the British government's mistrust. At the same time, while the British were ready to act against the Church, the main source of accusations against the clergy came from within, and not always from the lower clergy.[92] Hughes's conversations with de Salis had convinced him that the French clergy were particularly guilty, because of a perhaps natural but extremely regrettable hatred of Italians, and yet there were many others who were to be held responsible.[93] De Salis told Hughes about the French delegate's disquiet over the Italian predominance in the government of the Catholic Church and the consequent small number of French cardinals, as well as the ultimate risk of 'having fascist cardinals and perhaps finally a fascist Pope'.[94] Hughes gathered the names of the 'informants'. These included Leprêtre, the French Frs Lacoin and Marc Hadour, the American Fr Leonard Henry, and the

[89] Ibid. [90] Ibid.
[91] Hughes's draft note, n.d., Delegazione Apostolica Gerusalemme e Palestina, AAV, b.10, fasc. 43. [92] Ibid. [93] Hughes's notes, 7 Dec. 1942. [94] Ibid.

Irishman John Dunne – the latter described as veritable espionage agents.[95] Hughes's report made a great impression in the Vatican, to the point that Domenico Tardini mentioned to Osborne that the French in Cairo had something to do with the pressure on the Italian clergy.[96] On the other hand, the British reaction was initially one of disappointment and relative hostility thereafter. In 1944, Hughes recalled that the British had wanted him to be on their side, while they falsely accused Testa of being on the Italian side: 'Having made it clear that he could not do it, the British embassy's attitude towards me could not be friendly.'[97] His relations with the embassy, he added, could 'never be cordial as long as the world is divided into the City of God and the City of Satan: there are things we represent that cannot go with what the embassy represents'.[98]

The roots of British policy

Hughes's correspondence helps to shed light on the broader motives of British diplomacy. Bolech Cecchi identified two reasons for the British insistence on the expulsion of the Italian clergy: the growing embarrassment at having to deal with Vatican representatives of enemy birth, and anti-Catholic prejudice.[99] In a note which is undated but probably drafted in winter 1942, Arthur Hughes appeared convinced that the anti-Catholic argument was the stronger one:

> It has to be noted and always borne in mind that the people dealing with these questions on the British side are always if not fervent Christians of the Protestant persuasion, at least ardent anti-Catholics brought up on the voluminous calumnies of protestant history books and *a priori* regarding the catholic church with suspicion.

Good-hearted and tolerant people on the whole, they however had 'that one insane spot in their mental make-up', a consequence of the 'unbelievable ignorance of English Protestantism and the lack of intellectual

[95] Hughes's draft note, n.d..

[96] Osborne to Howard, 20 Aug. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 5931.

[97] Hughes, official note concerning relations with the authorities in the Delegation (Egypt and Palestine), ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc. 2–210, 6508/44.

[98] Ibid. Hughes's work to protect Italian civilians in wartime Egypt is the focus of Annalaura Turiano and Joseph Viscomi, 'Delegazione apostolica, internati italiani e carità transnazionale in Egitto (1939–1945)', *Melanges di l'Ecole francaise de Rome* cxxxiv/2 (2022), 215–30,

[99] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 280–3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923000945 Published online by Cambridge University Press

formation of most educated Britishers'.[100] The war had therefore turned into a happy hunting ground for Protestant hatred, as demonstrated by the much greater severity used against Italian Catholic priests than against German Protestants. The telegram, and the British policies against the Catholic clergy, should not therefore be read as a desire to reduce Italian influence in the Middle East after the war, but as a desire to reduce and if possible destroy Catholic influence in the region. Nor was this in contradiction with British imperialism, for nobody was 'so political as the Anglican Bishop'.[101] Security concerns were dismissed early on as insubstantial. While certainly diffident towards the Catholic Church as a whole, there is scarce evidence that the Foreign Office aimed to weaken the position of the Catholic Church in the region. This is further confirmed by the fact that there was very little pressure on French ecclesiastics who were not suspected of harbouring pro-Vichy sympathies, and none at all on those from countries, like Spain, which, although neutral, were close to the Axis. What was, then, the real objective? In January 1943, Hughes had become convinced that it was the eradication of Italian influence. After five months in the Delegation, he wrote to Maglione that he was convinced that the real reason the British government demanded Testa's departure was 'political and imperial'. London's objective was a post-war situation of cultural and political prosperity in Europe and of political and cultural domination in the countries of the Levant and along the road to India. The presence of Italian clergy in the Middle East was an obstacle to this policy, and Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War, wanted to present a *fait accompli* at the future peace conference: it was therefore necessary to hasten the adoption of exclusion measures now, so that they could be justified under the banner of military necessity. This had been successfully done in Abyssinia, and the temptation to continue the process must naturally have been very great. If the British could obtain a British-born Apostolic Delegate, a neutral Patriarch, a Canadian bishop of Alexandria, an American Custodian of the Holy Places and a discreet infusion of British, Irish and American elements among the clergy, fears of Italian domination in these countries would disappear.[102] In 1944, he stated that the interned ecclesiastics were punished more for their utterances during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia than for anything they had done in the current war, and that the British wanted another bishop of Alexandria, the Custodian of the Holy Places to have no authority over the religious in Egypt, English clergymen and schools, and Canadian Franciscans to replace

[100] See, oggetto: documenti, 11 febbraio 1943: (1) richiamo di mons. Testa, di mons. Barlassina, di mons. Nuti e di P. Gori; (2) nomina di P. Jacopozzi ad Amm. Ap. di Alessandria; (3) rimpatrio del clero italiano di Egitto e Palestina, documenti inglesi, ASRS, AA.EE.SS, Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 66, fasc. 119–58. [101] Ibid.
[102] 15 Jan. 1943, *ADSS* vii. 90.

the Italians in the Canal area.[103] Once again, the focus was not on diminishing Catholic influence, but on diminishing Italian influence within Middle Eastern Catholicism.

Evidence on the British side confirms this conclusion. A few months earlier, in August 1942, Osborne had described the British purpose to Eden in almost the same exact same terms, stating that the purpose of His Majesty's Government was to eliminate as far as possible, in the interests of political and military security, Italian occupancy of important ecclesiastical positions and Italian missionary enterprise in the Middle East and East Africa.[104] Rather than signifying an anti-Catholic crusade, British requests were just one more iteration of the politics of power and influence which had been intertwined with religious matters in the colonies for so long.

The need to 'free' the Middle East from Italian influence explains the British insistence on the internment of hundreds of ecclesiastics who clearly posed little military threat. London had often attempted to have the interned clergy repatriated to Italy, but the Vatican had always resolutely refused.[105] In Egypt, Hughes's attempts to obtain the liberation of the interned clergy continued with slow, but steady success. In his first days at the Delegation, he had rebuked the British authorities' attempts to obtain his support for the deportation of the interned clergy. At that time, the number of interned ecclesiastics, both Italians and Germans, was 568; by October 1943, it had decreased to 50 and, by January 1944, to 2.[106] This relative softening of British attitudes reflected the course of the conflict. By then, the war had long moved from the Mediterranean to the European continent. More important, the collapse of Fascism and the occupation of Italy by both Germans and Allies had put an end to any Italian great power ambitions. In the end, Barlassina remained Patriarch until his death in 1947. Hughes, now an archbishop, became Apostolic Nuncio for the newly established Nunciature of Egypt that same year, but he died, a relatively young man, in 1949. Testa then managed to return to the Levant as the new Nuncio. By then, the rivalry among European powers had given way to the struggle between the new Israeli state and the Arab countries.

[103] Official Hughes note concerning relations with the authorities in the Delegation (Egypt and Palestine), ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pius XII, 1, Africa-Egitto, 75, fasc. 2–210, 6508/44.

[104] Osborne to Eden, 6 Aug. 1942, TNA, FO, 371/33414, R 5682.

[105] Bolech Cecchi, 'La Santa Sede, la Gran Bretagna e la guerra', 293–4.

[106] Hughes to Guiseppe Micossi, 6 Dec. 1942, AAV, Delegazione Apostolica in Gran Bretagna, b.10, fasc.17; Hughes to O'Flaherty, 30 Oct. 1944, Africa-Egitto, Pos. 75, fasc. 2–210.

The decision to remove clergy of enemy nationality from the Middle East was the product of a gradual and complex process on the part of the British. Security needs were assessed from the beginning but were much less central than the ambition to strengthen the British position in a hypothetical post-war conference. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest a deliberate attempt to destroy Catholic influence in the region, with British Catholics being supporters of the hard line, and the idea that the elimination of Axis influence would benefit the Catholic Church first and foremost. The need to balance these imperial ambitions with the maintenance of good relations with the Catholic Church forced the Foreign Office to act piecemeal and gather evidence for its accusations against individual clergymen – while never renouncing the general principle of the necessity to remove enemy nationals. Local divisions, rivalries and hostility among the Catholic clergy in the Middle East played a key role during this phase. Patriarch Barlassina's character and methods, while hardly an example of Italian chauvinism, had roused intense hostility and created a fertile terrain for that atmosphere of suspicion and resentment which greatly facilitated de Salis's actions. Similarly, Hughes's personality and personal convictions played an important role in shaping British policy in the region: by proving much less malleable than expected, he seriously hindered the British project.

Hughes's writings underline one fundamental disagreement between the many Vatican representatives and the British: for the former, it was the duty of the clergy in any area to develop positive relations with the local government: there was therefore nothing wrong in having collaborated with Fascist authorities. While the Holy See agreed that a line had to be drawn at open anti-British utterances, material help provided to the Italians, having had good relations with or even holding good opinion of the Fascist regime should not damn any prelate. On the other hand, the British, embroiled in a deadly conflict against the Fascist powers, were not inclined to draw such distinctions: benevolent neutrality was not enough in an era of ideological war.