A Papal Delegate in Texas: the Visit of His Eminence Cardinal Satolli in 1896

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The appointment of the first Apostolic Delegate to the Catholic hierarchy of the United States in 1893 coincided with a period of virulent religious bigotry. In 1887 the American Protective Association, a notoriously nativist and anti-Catholic body, was established in Clinton, Iowa. Often referred to as the A.P.A., the organization concerned itself primarily with Catholic schools, their influence in society, and the question of government aid for such institutions.¹

In the early 1890s when the A.P.A. reached the height of its influence, knowledgeable men in the American Catholic hierarchy believed that Roman authorities seriously considered the appointment of an Apostolic Delegate for the United States. The knowledge led to fears among many American bishops that such an appointment would further inflame the A.P.A. and intensify nativist and anti-Catholic sentiments throughout the country.² Fearful American archbishops, who met in late November, 1892, advised the Holy See that the appointment of an Apostolic Delegate would not be expedient at that particular time.³

In 1893 Pope Leo XIII, despite the advice of the American prelates, appointed Archbishop Francesco Satolli as Apostolic Delegate, and protest erupted in the United States. Henry Bowers, founder of the A.P.A., saw the appointment as an attempt by the Vatican to direct the enactment of a legislative program in the United States. Subsequent visits by the Archbishop to the principal American cities where he delivered addresses extolling the Catholic school system effected even more fears.⁴ Uninformed Americans regarded Satolli as a Vice Pope. Bishop A. C. Coxe of the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York reflected such an attitude in a letter to the Archbishop dated May 30, 1894. Coxe's letter so perfectly reflected the sentiments of the A.P.A. that it appeared in full in The A.P.A. Magazine in September, 1896.⁵ When Pope Leo XIII promoted Satolli to the College of Cardinals in 1895, the A.P.A. viewed the action as proof that the Delegate was a Vice Pope who would influence the future of America. An A.P.A. member in the State of Washington even pressed for the passage of a legislative resolution calling upon Congress to order Satolli's expulsion from the United States as a "menace to our free institutions."⁶ Only when the new cardinal returned to Rome several months after his elevation did many Americans finally conclude that the allegations of the A.P.A. were groundless.⁷

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The turmoil surrounding his appointment must have dismayed Satolli, who was one of the most noted Thomists of the nineteenth century. He was born in Marsciano, Italy on July 21, 1839. He studied at the seminary in Perugia where he earned a doctorate and received ordination to the priesthood in the mid 1850s. With the election of Pope Leo XIII in 1878, Satolli came to Rome to assist in the revival of Thomistic studies, a cherished goal of the new pontiff. In subsequent years, Satolli served as Professor of Dogma at the Propaganda Roman Seminary, Rector of the Greek College, and President of the Academia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici, a training ground for future Vatican diplomats. While serving as Archbishop of Lepanto, Satolli became Apostolic Delegate to the United States. Less than three years after his appointment, he became a Cardinal on November 29, 1895.

The elevation of an apostolic delegate or papal nuncio to the College of Cardinals normally entails the termination of the diplomatic assignment and effects a return to Rome for assignment to a position in the Curia. Cardinal Satolli anticipated becoming Prefect of the Congregation of Studies and Archpriest of the Lateran Basilica. Despite custom, Cardinal Satolli remained in the United States until the fall of 1896 acting as pro-Delegate pending the arrival of his successor, Archbishop Sebastiano Martinelli. During his last months in the United States, Cardinal Satolli undertook a tour of various southern and western states in order to meet with the faithful and to facilitate the resolution of ecclesiastical difficulties in a few dioceses.

Bishop Nicholas A. Gallagher of the Diocese of Galveston invited Cardinal Satolli to visit the see city. Father Alexis Orban, secretary to Cardinal Satolli, accepted the invitation on behalf of the Cardinal on February 3, 1896. The Cardinal planned to be in New Orleans immediately prior to his visit in Galveston. The principal reason for Satolli's New Orleans visit was to preside over the opening of the Catholic Winter School, a type of Catholic Chautauqua. His presence countered that of Bishop John J. Keane of the Catholic University, a churchman under some suspicion because of his allegedly liberal sentiments.

Prior to the Cardinal's departure from New Orleans on February 21, he received a petition from some laymen in Galveston requesting an audience with His Eminence during his stay in the city. They indicated that they wished to discuss "matters gravely affecting the prosperity of the Church in this diocese..." This was undoubtedly the first indication that the Cardinal's visit to Galveston would involve more than ceremonial formalities. Cardinal Satolli departed New Orleans as scheduled and changed trains in Houston. The Cardinal arrived in Galveston at 11:30 a.m., accompanied by a delegation of priests from
the Diocese of Galveston headed by the Vicar-General, Father J. B. Weimer. Bishop Gallagher entered the Cardinal's private car and escorted him to the station platform where a procession formed to conduct the members of the clergy to St. Mary's Cathedral. The procession passed through streets lined with spectators, and, upon arrival at the Cathedral, Bishop Gallagher presented holy water and incense to the Cardinal and conducted him to the bishop's throne. Cardinal Satolli responded to Bishop Gallagher's welcoming address with a brief speech in English expressing his great love and admiration for the United States as well as gratitude for the friendly reception accorded him on his travels. The Cardinal took care to invoke God's blessings on both Catholics and non-Catholics. The speech was the first public address in English delivered by the Cardinal during his tenure in America. At the conclusion of the formal ceremonies at the Cathedral, the Cardinal departed for visits to the convent of the Sisters of St. Dominic, St. Mary's Infirmary, St. Mary's Orphanage, and the Ursuline Convent where the students of the academy presented a brief program.

On Sunday, Cardinal Satolli celebrated Solemn Pontifical Mass at the Cathedral. Even Father Orban, often a caustic observer, commented on the excellence of the music provided by the choir and orchestra. Following the Mass and the conclusion of the mid-day meal, the Cardinal attended a lengthy reception given in his honor at the Cathedral school. Approximately six thousand people arrived for the gathering and heard addresses of welcome by C. S. Ott on behalf of the laity and by Father Weimer on behalf of the clergy, the latter address being in Latin. At the conclusion of the welcoming remarks, the guests individually met the Cardinal. Many non-Catholics who wished to pay their respects to the Cardinal attended the reception. When the reception ended, Cardinal Satolli officiated at Vespers in the Cathedral at 7:00 p.m. whereupon he adjourned to Sacred Heart Church for an evening meal and entertainment provided by the students of St. Mary's University.

The beauty of Sacred Heart Church, designed by Galveston architect Nicholas J. Clayton, so impressed the Cardinal that he remarked "Ecce Ecclesia" or "behold the Church." The Jesuits entertained their guests with musical selections, speeches in English and Latin, and an elegant meal. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the evening was the presence of Rabbi Henry Cohen, the only non-Catholic guest. The Rabbi, one of the most revered clergymen in the history of Galveston, was a practitioner of ecumenism long before it became popular. At the conclusion of the meal, the Cardinal, also a man of generous spirit, invited Rabbi Cohen to deliver the benediction. Following prayers in English, Latin, and Hebrew, the Rabbi presented Cardinal Satolli with a small book that he assembled which consisted of quotations from the Talmud. Rabbi Cohen also made a brief speech in which he voiced his
admiration for everything noble and just and, as a consequence, his great respect for Pope Leo XIII and Cardinal Satolli. The Cardinal concluded the program by expressing his appreciation to the Rabbi for his presence and his hope that all men might be brothers in heart."

The Cardinal arose early on Monday morning to offer Mass at the Ursuline Convent prior to leaving on the 7:30 a.m. train for San Antonio. Following Mass and the blessing of religious articles, Cardinal Satolli rode to the railroad station with Bishop Gallagher. A delegation of Galveston priests accompanied His Eminence on the train as far as the western limits of the Diocese of Galveston."

Prior to his departure, Cardinal Satolli sought to resolve an ecclesiastical problem by obtaining a promise from Bishop Gallagher that he would re-open the Ursuline Chapel. The closing of the chapel in February, 1894 was one of the major grievances voiced against the Bishop. In fact, petitioners requested that he re-open the chapel on January 25, 1895. A misunderstanding resulted because Bishop Gallagher's predecessor, Bishop C. M. Dubuis, encouraged the Ursulines to build a large school and chapel. The chapel would be a public oratory and funds from the collections would help defray expenses incurred by the sisters. Bishop Gallagher ordered the chapel closed in an effort to encourage attendance at the local parish churches. The Bishop's action caused much concern among Catholics and Protestants. Galvestonians of all faiths held the Ursulines in great esteem because of assistance provided stricken citizens during storms and yellow fever epidemics. In response to a request from a number of prominent laymen, Cardinal Satolli changed his schedule to provide for the Monday morning Mass at the Convent."

Although Cardinal Satolli remained interested in the Ursuline problem and other difficulties in the Diocese of Galveston, he did not take any substantive action to secure a resolution until his return to Washington around the middle of March. His next concern was his visit to San Antonio where his host would be the newly installed Bishop John A. Forest. The Cardinal arrived in San Antonio at 4:30 p.m. Monday escorted by a committee of priests and laymen who boarded the train at the eastern limits of the diocese. A huge crowd greeted Cardinal Satolli at the station. Father H. Pefferkorn, Pastor of St. Joseph's Church, represented Bishop Forest. A procession moved from the depot through the Alamo Plaza to the Cathedral. Bishop Forest received Cardinal Satolli at the entrance and led him to the throne for a ceremonial welcome. The Bishop, speaking in French, welcomed the Cardinal to San Antonio and paid tribute to his piety and learning. Cardinal Satolli responded in Italian and expressed his admiration for the United States and stressed that moral progress must always accom-
pany material advancement. Later, the Cardinal and Bishop Forest joined various Catholic societies and proceeded to the Bishop's residence on Dwyer Avenue where Mr. Edward F. Dwyer, a prominent layman, delivered an address of welcome on behalf of the laity. Following Mr. Dwyer's talk, the Cardinal bestowed a blessing on the crowd and adjourned indoors for dinner. Bishop Peter Verdaguer, Vicar-Apostolic of Brownsville, joined Cardinal Satolli, Bishop Forest, and the clergy of San Antonio for the evening meal.

Tuesday's activities began with 9:00 a.m. Mass in the Cathedral. Later, Cardinal Satolli worked on correspondence and, in the early afternoon, received the presidents of the Catholic organizations of the city. Together with Bishops Forest and Verdaguer, several priests, and the presidents of the Catholic societies, the Cardinal also visited the Alamo, some churches, and other Catholic institutions in the city.

The evening reception reflected the multicultural climate of San Antonio. The Italian community called on the Cardinal, a Mexican band played, and the Liederkranz and other German singing societies provided entertainment. Cardinal Satolli made a brief speech in English wherein he expressed his appreciation for the entertainment and thanked the people of San Antonio for their hospitality.

Cardinal Satolli departed San Antonio shortly before eight o'clock the following morning and rode for twenty-five hours by train to El Paso. Bishop Forest accompanied the Cardinal as far as Devil's River, a short distance to the west of Del Rio. In El Paso, the Cardinal visited briefly at a hospital maintained by the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, toured the city, and crossed the Rio Grande to Juarez prior to his departure shortly before noon. Cardinal Satolli visited points west including Denver and Cheyenne before his return to Washington on March 13.

Although the Cardinal's visit to the Lone Star state involved ceremonial and social matters to a great extent, His Eminence maintained an interest in problems in the Diocese of Galveston and expressed his concern even before returning to Washington. While in Galveston, he obtained written and oral promises from Bishop Gallagher that the Ursuline Chapel would be re-opened. Furthermore, the Cardinal made the agreement known to the laity in Galveston. Cardinal Satolli also asked Bishop Gallagher to respond to charges brought against his management of diocesan finances as well as his treatment of the clergy, religious, and laity of the Diocese of Galveston. The Cardinal and Bishop Gallagher agreed to a review of the material in the case by Archbishop Francis Janssens of New Orleans, metropolitan of the province of which Galveston was a part, for the purpose of effecting a solution. Cardinal Satolli assured the Archbishop that he would "approve whatever measures you may think best to take."
Archbishop Janssens compiled a list of charges and questions for Bishop Gallagher's accusers to answer. The Archbishop wrote Mr. J. Z. H. Scott, a spokesman for the dissident laymen in Galveston, that he and his associates should be prepared to substantiate the charges in the near future. Bishop Gallagher's accusers charged him with: 1. driving a number of priests out of the Diocese by his unkindness, 2. employing priests of arrogant dispositions to replace those who had left, 3. the new priests and the Bishop come from an area of the country where much prejudice exists against the people of the former Confederate states, 4. the Bishop addresses the people in an oppressive and offensive manner, 5. he maintains arbitrary regulations relative to mixed marriages, 6. he places hardships on Christian burial, 7. he deals spitefully with the Ursulines, 8. he incurs heavy indebtedness for the Diocese as well as for the Cathedral parish, 9. he is in the habit of making large purchases of "wild lands," 10. he diverts funds to doubtful areas of investment, 11. he withholds funds given for designated purposes and uses them for other things, 12. he declines to repay a substantial amount of money borrowed from a diocesan community of nuns, 13. the same nuns are being deprived of a substantial investment, 14. he gives offense to virtually every adult in the Diocese. When he weighed the charges, Archbishop Janssens refused to entertain the final allegation on the basis that it was so vague as to be impossible to prove.

When he began a formal investigation, Archbishop Janssens declined Bishop Gallagher's invitation to come to Galveston because a visit would give publicity to a matter that should be handled with the utmost discretion. The Archbishop determined that no serious charges against Bishop Gallagher could be proved, that the Bishop was above reproach in regard to personal integrity, and that some problems did exist in the administration of the Diocese of Galveston that could be remedied by the adjustment of policies. Archbishop Janssens concluded that the good qualities of Bishop Dubuis's administration had been exaggerated by the accusers in contrast to the regime of Bishop Gallagher. The Archbishop noted that even J. Z. H. Scott agreed. With regard to the specific charges, the Archbishop ruled that: 1. Bishop Gallagher did not drive any priests out of the Diocese although some may have left because they found the Bishop cold and reserved, 2. there was no evidence to suggest that the Bishop filled places with unworthy priests, 3. the priests brought in by Bishop Gallagher did not entertain any prejudices against the people, 4. the Bishop had been too rigorous in his regulations concerning mixed marriages as a result of his inability to understand the people, 5. there appeared to be no valid complaints against diocesan cemetery regulations, 6. Bishop Gallagher was not guilty of injustices concerning finances although he had acted imprudently in increasing the Cathedral debt, 7. the Sisters of Charity of the
Incarnate Word had no complaint against the Bishop on matters of justice but merely wanted to have control over St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum. 8. the Bishop appeared to favor the Dominican Nuns over the Ursulines, 9. the Bishop was cold and reserved by nature and not popular with the clergy or laity."

At the conclusion of his investigation, Archbishop Janssens wrote Bishop Gallagher recommending changes in diocesan administration and informing him that Cardinal Satolli would have the option of modifying or canceling the proposals. In view of the Cardinal’s prior pledge to accept the Archbishop’s recommendations, any changes would be most unlikely. The essential suggestions to Bishop Gallagher were: 1. to install in the rectorship of the Cathedral a priest who would enjoy the confidence of the Bishop and the members of the parish and who would be able to reduce the Cathedral debt, 2. to appoint a chaplain and confessor for the Dominican Nuns so that the Bishop would no longer give the appearance of favoritism by serving in that capacity, 3. to open the Ursuline Chapel, 4. to permit the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word to maintain full administration of St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum and to conduct fund raising projects as in former times, 5. to confer with the diocesan Board of Consultors in weighty matters, 6. to be more open and friendly with the Ursulines and with the clergy and laity in general."

Bishop Gallagher moved with reasonable speed to implement the suggestions. He even anticipated the recommendations in some areas and moved to solve the problems before hearing from Archbishop Janssens. While the investigation was still in progress, Bishop Gallagher began to consult more with his priests and to overcome his cold, reserved manner."

The Bishop sought to resolve problems connected with the Cathedral by appointing Father James M. Kirwin to the rectorship of the Cathedral parish on August 15, 1896. The appointment was an unusual one since Father Kirwin was a very junior member of the diocesan clergy. The unique appointment was a happy one since Father Kirwin distinguished himself as a public-spirited citizen of the City of Galveston during the almost thirty years of his rectorship and was one of the most beloved priests in the history of the Church in Galveston."

With respect to the chaplaincy of the Dominican Nuns, Bishop Gallagher was not as quick to act on the Archbishop’s recommendations, for he continued to serve as chaplain to the community until some time in 1898."

The question of the status of the Ursuline Chapel remained the most difficult matter to resolve. Cardinal Satolli refrained from issuing an immediate order requiring the opening of the chapel during his visit to Galveston because of his respect for Bishop Gallagher’s authority and because of his conviction that the matter would soon be resolved by the
Bishop.  

Bishop Gallagher later expressed reluctance to open the chapel in the present tense climate and while an investigation was in progress for fear that it would compromise his authority. At the same time, the Bishop announced his willingness to re-open the Ursuline Chapel should Cardinal Satolli issue a specific command to that effect.  

Although Cardinal Satolli was reluctant to issue a direct order concerning the Ursuline Chapel, he did insist on the re-opening of the chapel because of the principles of justice, the promise of the Bishop, and the Cardinal's commitment in the matter.  

The Cardinal's insistence and the Bishop's realization of the importance of his promise finally produced the desired result thereby resolving the most difficult portion of the problem relative to the Diocese of Galveston.  

The visit of Cardinal Satolli to Texas reveals some important things about the first Apostolic Delegate to the American Church. The uniformly cordial reception accorded the Cardinal suggests that his openness, tact, and often-expressed admiration for American life and institutions had overcome A.P.A.-type bigotry. The Cardinal's friendly relations with non-Catholics and his judicious handling of problems in the Diocese of Galveston indicate that Satolli was an able diplomat well qualified for the position of Apostolic Delegate. In dealing with problems in the Diocese of Galveston, he demonstrated concern for the principles of justice, a keen awareness of the interests of many of the laity, and a healthy respect for the position of the diocesan bishop. The Cardinal's demonstrated ability to resolve ecclesiastical problems without taking a heavy-handed approach must have allayed the misgivings voiced at the time of his appointment. The Galveston Daily News described perfectly the Cardinal's diplomatic aplomb when it described Satolli as a man who embodied "...dignity without pomp; cordiality without effusiveness; religion without fanaticism."  

NOTES  


2Roemer, Catholic Church, 306.  

3John Tracy Ellis, The Life of James Cardinal Gibbons Archbishop of Baltimore 1834-1921, 2 volumes (Milwaukee, 1921), II, 644.  


6Myers, History of Bigotry, 237.  

7Myers, History of Bigotry, 245.  

was the Cardinal's secretary and accompanied him on his journey. *Historical Records and Studies* is published annually by the Catholic Historical Society of New York.

*Orban, "Tour of His Eminence,"* 27.


*Orban, "Tour of His Eminence,"* 46.


*Orban, "Tour of His Eminence,"* 49.


*Orban, "Tour of His Eminence,"* 51-52.

*Galveston Daily News, February 24, 1896, St. Mary's University, commonly known as the “Jesuit College,” was staffed by the Jesuit Fathers who also had charge of Sacred Heart Church.

*Robert C. Giles, Changing Times, the Story of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston in Commemoration of its Founding (Houston, 1972), 102-03. The church visited by Cardinal Satolli was destroyed in the 1900 storm and replaced by the present structure.


*Catholic Archives of Texas, Petition of Laity to Bishop Gallagher, January 25, 1895.


*The Southern Messenger, February 27, 1896.

*The Southern Messenger, February 27, 1896.


Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, "Charges and Questions to be "Answered." This document (undated) was apparently a worksheet used by Archbishop Janssens.

Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Letter of Rev. Thomas Hennessy to Most Rev. Francis Janssens, April 16, 1896. Father Hennessy was pastor of Annunciation Church in Houston and a member of the diocesan Board of Consultors, Official Catholic Directory (1896), 310-311.

Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Findings and Recommendations of Archbishop Janssens (undated). The document was apparently a rough draft of a letter of Cardinal Satolli. Archbishop Janssens' view regarding lack of prejudice on the part of the clergy was confirmed by Father Thomas Hennessy, Hennessy to Janssens, April 16, 1896. Archbishop Janssens' contention that the charges against Bishop Gallagher were lacking in substance was confirmed by Father Hennessy, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Letter of Rev. Thomas Hennessy to Most Rev. Francis Janssens, April 23, 1896.


Mary I. Drees, O.S.U., Ursulines of Galveston Women of Faith (no date), 50, unpublished manuscript, Rosenberg Library, Galveston. The author does not provide a specific date for the re-opening of the Ursuline Chapel.