

The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Canada and the Vatican, 1969

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Consideration was given to the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See both before and after the Second World War. Officials in the Department of External Affairs believed that the Vatican, with its worldwide presence, would be a valuable source of information and served as an important Western ally in the Cold War. However, this question also had serious domestic political repercussions. Protestant opposition to such a step was virtually monolithic, and was reiterated frequently and in the strongest terms. The perceived benefits were not worth the risk of splitting the country along religious lines, nor damaging the government's support within one section of the electorate.¹ Domestic considerations would remain of primary importance to the government in proceeding on this issue; however, the need to show the increasingly nationalistic province of Quebec that the federal government was prepared to look after francophone and Catholic interests became a major argument for going forward.

By 1963 interfaith relations had improved dramatically as the ecumenical movement grew and the Catholic Church opened itself to the world through the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, Protestant opinion remained suspicious of any governmental link with the papacy, a view expressed by G.P. Albaugh, the Chairman of the Inter-Church Committee on Protestant-Roman Catholic Relations. Writing to Prime Minister L.B. Pearson, he restated the traditional objections to official relations with the Holy See: it would give the Catholic Church and Catholic hierarchy a privileged position; the Pope was essentially the head of a church and not a head of state in the accepted meaning of that phrase; and any possible benefit was far outweighed by the threat of "the damage that would

¹ F.J. McEvoy, "Religion and Politics in Foreign Policy: Canadian Government Relations with the Vatican," *CCHA Historical Studies* 51 (1984), 121-44.

be done to Canadian national unity.” Albaugh stressed that even the improvement in inter-church relations had no effect on this question, which would only “jeopardize this new ecumenical spirit.”²

Pearson responded that the establishment of a mission to the Vatican was a question “which is examined periodically within the context of Canadian representation abroad” and that, while no decision would be taken in the near future, the Committee’s views would be considered at the next review.³ This left the question very much open.

The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Marcel Cadieux, felt that the ecumenical movement had made sufficient inroads that the government could contemplate inviting Pope Paul VI to visit Canada following his address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York in the fall of 1965. “[I]f he did wish to visit his Church in Canada,” Cadieux believed, “there would be no serious demonstrations or protests even in predominantly Protestant sections of the country. The Pope's strong stand for peace and the progress of the ecumenical movement are surely changing old attitudes quite rapidly.”⁴ The invitation was duly made; however, Paul VI did not wish to pay an official visit to either the United States or Canada, lest it detract from the impact of his appearance at the UN.⁵

Cadieux was also supportive of his Minister, Paul Martin, representing Canada at the closing ceremonies of Vatican II in December 1965. “I assume,” he wrote,

that you have not changed your view that it would be premature for Canada to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican. By personally representing Canada at the closing session of the Council, you would be assuaging pressures for the establishment of diplomatic relations, without, I think, offending non-Catholic Canadians. They have, on the whole, been much impressed and touched by the truly ecumenical spirit of the Second Council and (no doubt with a few exceptions) would not feel it inappropriate for you to attend. Indeed many Protestants would, I think, welcome this positive gesture.⁶

² National Archives of Canada (NA), Records of Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, RG 25, vol. 10062, file 20-1-2-VAT (1), G.P., Albaugh to L.B. Pearson, 31 October, 1963. The Committee represented the Anglican Church, Baptists, the United Church, Presbyterians, the Church of Christ (Disciples), the Evangelical United Brethren, and the Salvation Army.

³ *Ibid.*, Pearson to Albaugh, 31 October 1963.

⁴ NA, vol. 9218, file 20-VAT-9 (1), Marcel Cadieux to the Minister, 7 July 1965.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Paul Martin to L.B. Pearson, 10 September 1965.

⁶ NA, vol. 10265, file 20-VAT (1), Cadieux to the Minister, 9 November 1965.

Although Martin was unable to attend, Canada was represented by the Minister of Forestry, Maurice Sauvé.

Despite Martin's misgivings, Cadieux continued to contemplate the prospect of establishing full diplomatic relations with the Holy See. In October 1965 he discussed the matter with G.G. Crean, the Canadian Ambassador in Italy, one of the department's most experienced diplomats. After giving it some thought, Crean responded in February 1966 with an alternative proposal. He suggested that he or a member of his staff initiate unofficial contacts with the Vatican Secretariat of State, which was the procedure adopted by the American government. Such a channel of contact "would not only be useful for matters such as Viet Nam in which we have a special role and interest, but for a periodic review of political questions generally" if Vatican officials were so willing. This would also enable Canada to make "a more realistic judgement" as to the value of a mission to the Vatican.⁷

Cadieux raised Crean's proposal with the Minister. He noted that Protestant opposition to an envoy to the Vatican was expressed less frequently and less vehemently than in the past, nor had Sauvé's presence at the closing ceremonies of the Council attracted criticism. At the same time, the Pope was playing a much larger role on the international stage as an advocate of peace. Many countries that did not have a majority Catholic population, including the United Kingdom, were represented at the Vatican, while the Americans had adopted the expedient recommended by Crean.⁸

Martin instructed Crean to make an unofficial call on Cardinal Secretary of State Cicognani, during which he could discuss Viet Nam and the situation in communist countries. He was not to raise the issue of direct diplomatic relations.⁹ During a twenty minute conversation on 29 March 1966, the Cardinal agreed that they should have occasional informal meetings, and that Crean should establish contact with Archbishop Samore, the senior Secretary in charge of intergovernmental relations.¹⁰

Crean met with Samore on 24 May. The Archbishop stressed that, while the Vatican was willing to discuss questions of mutual interest, Crean's position as Canadian representative to the Italian government made it a delicate situation – the Vatican did not accept dual representation of other governments' ambassadors to Italy. It was imperative that any meetings receive no publicity whatsoever, a caveat with which Crean was in full

⁷ NA, vol. 10062, file 20-1-2-VAT (1), G.G. Crean to Marcel Cadieux, 11 February 1966.

⁸ Ibid., Cadieux to the Minister, 24 February 1966

⁹ Ibid., Ottawa to Embassy in Rome, tel. 19, 24 February 1966.

¹⁰ Ibid., Embassy in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 384, 30 March 1966.

agreement as he did not wish in any way to “prejudice” his position with the Italian government. Samore briefed Crean on the Pope’s recent meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Crean in return provided him with some information on Canada’s role on the International Commissions for Supervision and Control in Viet Nam. “I think we can say,” Crean reported to Ottawa, “that our initiative in seeking to establish direct contacts has been given a fair wind at the Vatican, and that providing we act with discretion they will be continued and be fruitful.”¹¹

However, Samore was less forthcoming at their next meeting on 14 June. He stated that the Vatican would find it difficult to accept “regular” visits from Crean but that he would be received when matters of importance arose. “Clearly and understandably,” Crean reported, “Vatican cannot agree officially to any procedure which on one hand could be taken as a satisfactory substitute to a diplomatic mission, or on other as setting a precedent which could undermine their policy of refusing double accreditation to missions established with Italian government.” Calls by the ambassador or his officers would be accepted “providing subject matter of calls is important and fact of such calls is dealt with very discreetly, and providing we do not overdo number of calls. I doubt if we can expect more.” Crean suggested that, as the Pope was “vitaly interested” in Viet Nam, irregular exchanges could be made on that subject.¹²

That issue, among others, was discussed when Paul Martin met with the Pope in November. Cadieux, who accompanied the Minister, reported that the Pontiff

reiterated the very high regard that he had for Canadian leaders and the admiration that he felt concerning the role which Canada was playing in the affairs of the world. He felt that as a powerful country, close to the United States, Canada had a position of influence and that its leaders, because of their moderation, were being listened to in all quarters ... [he] felt that the activities of Canada in seeking peace were in harmony with those of the Church.¹³

In February 1967, at the Minister’s request, Cadieux submitted a memorandum examining the factors involved in establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican. He began with the usual statement that domestic considerations remained primary. He himself believed that, while there might still be “vocal protests,” opposition would be far less vociferous than it would have been even in the recent past. He attributed this in part to the increasing secularization of Canadian society, but primarily to the growth of the ecumenical spirit and to general awareness of the Pope’s role in seeking

¹¹ Ibid., Crean to Cadieux, 24 May 1966.

¹² Ibid., Ambassador in Italy to Ottawa, tel. 723, 14 June 1966.

¹³ Ibid., Marcel Cadieux, “Audience with His Holiness Pope Paul VI,” 15 November 1966.

world peace. However another domestic factor to be considered was the attitude of the Canadian hierarchy as “there have in the past been suggestions to the effect that the hierarchy was not enthusiastic about the establishment of formal relations between Ottawa and the Vatican, presumably because this might limit their independence by involving the government in matters which can now be dealt with directly.”

An increasingly significant issue was the growing involvement of the government of Quebec in foreign affairs.¹⁴ A Canadian mission to the Vatican might discourage Quebec from seeking its own office in Rome. In international relations, the Vatican and Canada shared many objectives, and the Holy See exercised its influence in many parts of the world “in accordance with the broad lines of enlightened western policies in resisting totalitarianism and working for an end to racial strife and for the rule of law and increasing harmony throughout the world.” In summation, Cadieux emphasised that “in my view the foreign policy aspects, though important, are subordinate to the domestic political implications and that it is chiefly on this latter ground that a decision should be based.”¹⁵

Martin forwarded this memo to the Prime Minister, asking if he felt the time was ripe to put the question before cabinet. Pearson effectively shelved the issue for the immediate future, replying “No – not in 1967.”¹⁶ He did not wish to raise a potentially divisive issue during Canada’s centennial year.

This did not affect the informal channel established by Crean. In July 1967 he reported that Samore had been succeeded by Mgr. Agostino Casaroli and proposed calling on him to maintain the relationship. Ottawa authorized him to do so and to discuss the future status of the holy places and Jerusalem, as well as the perennial topic of Viet Nam.¹⁷ Crean found Casaroli quite prepared to continue the practice already in place and, if anything, more forthcoming than his predecessor.¹⁸

Crean also met several times with the newly appointed Apostolic Delegate to Canada, Archbishop Emanuele Clarizio. On the basis of his brief meetings Crean characterized Clarizio as “more a man of good will rather than a person with a profound penetrating mind.” In discussing the role of a Nuncio or Delegate in the selection of local bishops, Clarizio stated that

¹⁴ On this issue see John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs: Coming of Age 1946-1968* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995), 2:391-8.

¹⁵ NA, RG 25, vol. 10062, file 20-1-2-VAT (1), Cadieux to the Minister, 23 February 1967.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Martin to Prime Minister, 7 March 1967.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Ambassador to Italy to Ottawa, tel. 663, 6 July 1967; Ottawa to Ambassador to Italy, tel. S-938, 27 July 1967.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ambassador to Italy to Ottawa, tel. 962, 6 Sept. 1967.

a Nuncio would not hesitate to add his own opinions to those of the local hierarchy or even overrule their recommendations if necessary. In referring to the situation in Canada, where recommendations passed through the Apostolic Delegate, “he gave the impression that he considered he had a considerable role to play in these matters.”¹⁹ This was rather ominous for future relations between the Delegate and the Canadian bishops.

There was also political change at the top in Ottawa. Pierre Elliott Trudeau succeeded Pearson as Prime Minister in April 1968, cruising to a comfortable electoral victory in June. He came to office determined to shake up the system, immediately launching fundamental reviews of Canadian defence and foreign policy. He was determined, he later noted, “to cut through much of the hesitation which has prevented us from solving problems in the past,” listing recognition of the Vatican as one of the goals he wished to achieve.²⁰ As was the case with the People’s Republic of China, Trudeau believed it made no sense for Canada not to be represented there; it also fit with Trudeau’s desire to increase the attention given to aspects of Canadian foreign relations that particularly concerned francophone Canada as part of his general policy of preserving national unity.²¹

During the election campaign Trudeau mentioned at a press conference the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican, eliciting a memorandum on the subject from Mitchell Sharp, his External Affairs Minister. Sharp noted that Pearson had been unwilling to consider it during Centennial Year. The ecumenical movement, he stressed, had continued to progress, aided by the efforts of the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Clarizio. Diplomatically, the advantages for Canada outlined in previous memoranda had not changed. Clarizio had told Sharp that the Vatican would welcome a Canadian initiative, although some of the Canadian bishops had reservations. Sharp concluded by suggesting that an election campaign was perhaps not the best time to raise an emotive issue for discussion.²²

Trudeau’s comment aroused little immediate interest in Canada. It did, however, catch the attention of the Vatican. On Cicognani’s instructions, Clarizio wrote to the Coadjutor Archbishop of Toronto, Philip Pocock, on 8 July, seeking his opinion on whether it was an opportune moment to

¹⁹ Ibid., Crean to Cadieux, 31 Aug. 1967.

²⁰ George Radwanski, *Trudeau* (Toronto, 1978), 160.

²¹ J.L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto, 1990), 6; Tom Keating, “Continuity and Change: Trudeau and the World,” in Andrew Cohen and J.L. Granatstein, eds. *Trudeau’s Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (Toronto, 1998), 198.

²² N.A., RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (2), Sharp to the Prime Minister, 28 May 1968.

discuss diplomatic relations, and what the reaction among both Catholics and non-Catholics would be.²³ “It is my opinion,” Pocock responded,

that if negotiations between Canada and the Holy See to establish diplomatic relations at the present time are to be successful, it would be necessary for the Canadian Government to take the entire initiative, and for the Canadian Church including all Catholic organizations to maintain public silence regarding the project. If the Canadian public were to gain the impression that the Church was seeking to establish relations, opposition would undoubtedly arise and at least a section of the secular press would state that the Catholic Church was seeking a privileged position. I believe that the most favourable attitude for us to take would be to reply to the initiative of the Canadian Government by stating that the Church is willing to render this service to the Canadian Government and people if such is their desire.²⁴

In November Crean filed lengthy reports on several discussions he had held with Clarizio in Rome. The Delegate stressed that the establishment of diplomatic relations would allow Canada and the Vatican to work closely together on common objectives and “would be good for peace and humanity.” He said that he found that the clergy as opposed to the hierarchy were in favour, intimating the existence of at least some opposition among the bishops. Crean then raised the Quebec question. Was that issue, divisive for Canadian Catholics as well as for Canadians in general, a factor in the Vatican's thinking? Clarizio responded “that there was no doubt that a mission would avoid a possible future dilemma for the Vatican. If a mission existed there could be no question of entertaining relations with the Quebec Government. If it did not exist, the Vatican could not accept a mission from Quebec either, but it would be much more difficult both to conduct the Church's business in Canada and to resist contacts of an unofficial character with the Quebec Government (or words to that effect).” When directly asked about the Pope's attitude, Clarizio responded that “the Holy Father would take no action concerning the establishment of diplomatic relations but he would be very happy if it occurred.”²⁵

Crean enclosed his reports with a lengthy personal letter to Marcel Cadieux. In light of Clarizio's comments on the Canadian domestic situation, Crean analyzed conversations he had had with various members of the Canadian hierarchy in Rome over the past several years, though emphasising that this “can hardly be taken as representing a consensus either of the Council of Bishops or the hierarchy as a whole.” He noted that during the

²³ Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), PODS 70.25(A), Clarizio to Pocock, 8 July 1968.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, PODS 70.25 (B), Pocock to Clarizio, 22 July 1968.

²⁵ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, 20-1-2-VAT (2), G.G. Crean, “Memorandum on discussions on Nov 17 and Nov 18 with Mgr. Clarizio, Apostolic Delegate to Canada,” 22 November 1968.

period of the Vatican Council a number of prominent bishops believed that a nuncio “would be in a stronger position to interfere with strictly internal Church matters” and would derogate from the hierarchy’s current freedom of access to the Vatican. Lately, however, and perhaps because of the increase in collegiality brought about by Vatican II, individuals showed less concern about the effect of diplomatic relations and the appointment of a nuncio. He also reported different opinions on the question of federal-Quebec relations, with one prominent cleric expressing the view that Quebec was no longer interested in direct relations with the Vatican. Crean tended to agree, stating that he could find no evidence that Quebec wanted such a relationship; in any event, should Quebec and the Vatican wish to maintain unofficial relations, as had been done in the past, nothing could be done to prevent it. What was clear was Clarizio’s strong support for diplomatic relations, and Crean’s distrust of what he termed “his somewhat devious approach to problems.”²⁶

Trudeau, who was to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London in January 1969, had also arranged to visit Italy afterwards where he would meet with Italian officials and have an audience with Paul VI. Yet another memorandum was prepared for him as the year drew to a close. In it Sharp stressed that the strongest reason for proceeding with diplomatic relations was “la capacité que le Gouvernement fédéral doit assumer tant pour la population canadienne que pour les provinces (et surtout le Québec) de les représenter à l’étranger.” Trudeau agreed that the issue should be submitted to a Cabinet Committee, but noted that after his visit to the Vatican they would be better able to judge public reaction.²⁷ Sharp himself was strongly in favour. As he later wrote in his memoirs, “In my opinion as a Protestant ... religious prejudice in Canada had diminished, and the time was ripe to take this long-delayed step to complete our structure of diplomatic contacts.”²⁸

Crean briefed the Prime Minister on his way to the papal audience on 16 January. Trudeau was particularly interested in hearing about Crean’s exchanges with members of the Canadian hierarchy, and in information he had gleaned concerning the opposition of the American hierarchy to an American mission on the grounds of limiting access to the Vatican and possible interference with the appointment of bishops. Crean’s own conclusion was that “given the entry of the Pope so fully into world political affairs ... there would be considerable advantages in having a mission at the Vatican from a professional point of view.” A possible disadvantage would

²⁶ Ibid., Crean to Cadieux, 27 November 1968.

²⁷ Ibid., Sharp to the Prime Minister, 23 December 1968, minuted by Trudeau.

²⁸ Mitchell Sharp, *Which Reminds Me ... : A Memoir* (Toronto, 1994), 202.

occur should the Church, through the nuncio, press the government on aspects of domestic legislation to which it was opposed. Trudeau responded to Crean's observations by saying that "it looked as though they should sound out the hierarchy and other groups in Canada."²⁹

Trudeau in return briefed Crean following his audience with Paul VI. When he raised the issue of exchanging missions the Pope replied that he would be "honoured" should Canada open a mission but that it was entirely a matter for the Canadian government to decide on the basis of how such a step would affect Canada.³⁰ He also said that the Canadian bishops might have their own thoughts on the matter, though adding that they would of course be pleased by a favourable decision. Trudeau interpreted this remark as hinting at possible opposition within the hierarchy.³¹

Following his audience Trudeau met with the press. He stressed the importance of the Vatican as an information source, the number of Canadian Catholic missionaries around the world, and the fact that the population of Canada was nearly fifty per cent Catholic. He noted, however, that a final decision had not been made and the opinion of Canadians would be sought as "we don't want to shove this down the throats of the Canadian people."³²

By this time reactions in Canada had already begun to appear, following Trudeau's revelation on 11 January that he would raise the question of diplomatic relations when he met with the Pope. The United Church Moderator, Dr. Robert McClure, said it "would only serve to introduce more division into Canada" and would be an unjustifiable expense at a time when the government was cutting back in other areas. The Inter-Church Committee on Protestant-Roman Catholic Relations feared that a nuncio in Ottawa "would provide the Roman Catholic Church with unique opportunities to press the advancement of Roman Catholicism in Canada."³³

The secular press, on the other hand, was largely, though not unanimously, supportive. "The question," according to the *Toronto Star*, "should be treated as one of practical diplomacy, not as one of religious competition."³⁴ *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), in an editorial, praised the

²⁹NA, RG 25, vol. 8588, file 20-VAT (3), Embassy in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 56, 20 January 1969.

³⁰NA, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (2), Embassy in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 58, 20 January 1969.

³¹ *Ibid.*, R.E.C[ollins] to Cadieux, 23 January 1969.

³² "Pope, Trudeau Plan Formal Tie," *Western Catholic Reporter*, 26 January 1969, 1.

³³ "'Violent' reactions seen if Vatican recognized," *Toronto Star*, 15 January 1969, 43.

³⁴ "It's not a religious issue," *ibid.*, 14 January 1969, 6.

effectiveness of the Vatican's diplomatic machine, declaring that "not to tap into that splendid listening-post can only help to keep us ignorant. We gain nothing by not being there."³⁵ The *Globe's* Ottawa columnist, George Bain, felt that the move would not have the positive impact in Quebec that it would have had in a previous era, but on the other hand "only in the last strongholds of Waspishness will it seem that the country has been sold into popery."³⁶

More sceptical views came from western Canada. "Mr. Trudeau would be well advised," warned the *Winnipeg Free Press*, "to weigh the possible advantages of representation at the Vatican by Canada against the very certain controversy that such a step would engender."³⁷ The *Calgary Herald* was considerably more blunt, declaring the move to be "the same as according official recognition to one denomination of religion over all others ... The Vatican cannot be regarded as a political state in the normal use of the word. It is a religious centre."³⁸

The francophone press was solidly in favour. Claude Ryan, the influential editor of *Le Devoir*, asserted that the Vatican was indeed a political as well as religious entity, pointing to the number of countries that maintained relations with the Holy See and the Vatican's status as an observer on United Nations bodies.³⁹ Other papers followed suit, denouncing McClure's "intemperate" reaction and stressing the importance of the Vatican as an information centre and as a moral force in the world; *Le Soleil* added that representation at the Vatican would allow Canada to project abroad the image of a bicultural and religiously pluralistic country.⁴⁰

The campaign against representation at the Vatican continued in the religious press, with varying degrees of vehemence. *The Canadian Baptist* denounced it as "a step backward – to a darker age!" and described the Vatican as "only in the most artificial sense a state."⁴¹ The *Presbyterian Record* believed that "such an appointment would divide, not unite, the people of Canada, at a time when we need to come together for the good of our country."⁴² The Anglicans were more moderate. Maurice Western, the

³⁵ "A Sound Political Move," *The Globe and Mail*, 15 January 1969, 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, George Bain, "Ottawa and the Vatican."

³⁷ "Controversial Step," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 January 1969, 55.

³⁸ "Church and State," *Calgary Herald*, 18 January 1969, 4.

³⁹ "Faut-il confondre oecuménisme et rapports diplomatiques?" *Le Devoir*, 17 January 1969, 4.

⁴⁰ "La Visite de Trudeau au Pape," *Le Soleil*, 18 January 1969, 4. See also "L'absent a toujours tort," *La Presse*, 18 January 1969, 4, and "Une ambassade canadienne au Vatican," *L'Action-Québec*, 18 January 1969, 4.

⁴¹ "Envoy To Vatican – A Backward Step!" *The Canadian Baptist*, 15 February 1969, 3, 6.

⁴² "A Vatican Envoy," *Presbyterian Record*, March 1969, 4.

Ottawa correspondent for the *Canadian Churchman*, felt that the question should be debated “openly but strictly in terms of foreign policy”; for that reason he deplored Trudeau’s reference to the nearly half of the population that was Catholic as “it moves the debate immediately to the religious plane. Manifestly there can be no trade-off ... because there is not, and could not be, a Protestant equivalent of the Vatican.”⁴³

Perhaps surprisingly, the editor of the main Catholic paper, the *Register*, accepted a number of these arguments. He felt that the Vatican’s importance as a listening post was “vastly over-rated” and he regarded the Vatican as “a religious entity, not a nation-state.” Still, he agreed that the Vatican exerted a significant influence in the world, particularly in “socio-moral matters” and concluded that a decision on representation “should be made on a purely political, not a religious, basis. It certainly should not be made just because some 50 percent of Canadians are Catholics.”⁴⁴ The editor of the *Western Catholic Reporter* was much more enthusiastic. He saw a closer relationship to the Vatican as forwarding world peace and international development, but agreed that it should not be forced on an unwilling public as the improved ecumenical climate “would obviously be wrecked if Protestants felt that their views were being run over by the government with the support of the Catholic Church.”⁴⁵

While Trudeau had said that the government would seek the views of the public, it is clear from the official documents that its mind was already made up. A cabinet memorandum prepared at the end of January, while noting the opposition voiced by figures such as McClure, cited “the general moderation of the public reaction to this once very controversial issue.” The usual reasons for proceeding were adduced, including the need to represent “all Canadians, including those in Quebec, in this important area of diplomatic relations” and “the Church’s growing importance in international affairs.” The number of Catholics in Canada was not mentioned. Since the Department of External Affairs had other priorities to consider as well, Sharp concluded by recommending that a mission to the Vatican be opened in the 1970-71 fiscal year.⁴⁶

The issue was discussed in Cabinet Committee on 14 February. Marcel Cadieux stressed that “Ministers were faced with a domestic political

⁴³ Maurice Western, “Do we need a Vatican ambassador?” *Canadian Churchman*, March 1969, 5.

⁴⁴ “Envoy to Vatican idea rouses old prejudices,” *Register*, 25 January 1969, 3.

⁴⁵ “Canada’s Double Peace Move,” *Western Catholic Reporter*, 26 January 1969, 4.

⁴⁶ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (2), Memorandum to the Cabinet, 28 January 1969.

problem and that ultimately the decision would have to be made in these terms.” He noted again the advantages of cooperating with the Vatican on the international stage, citing disarmament and Viet Nam as areas of mutual concern. He also raised the Quebec issue, stressing that “if we did not have a mission to the Vatican to arrange audiences with the Pope for visitors from Canada, Quebec was likely to do so and to claim that this was another example where it had to act to serve French-Canadians and Catholics because Ottawa was unwilling to do so.”

Ministers were favourable to proceeding in the 1970-71 fiscal year but thought that the question would be best served by avoiding a public debate which could get out of hand and lead to a split along religious and ethnic lines. On the whole “their judgement was that while the decision would not be popular and while the Government stood to lose some support, the opposition likely to be generated by the extremists would be manageable.” How to sell the decision to the public was, however, problematic. Opponents would not be impressed by talk of arranging papal audiences for Quebec Catholics or such issues as discussing church appointments with the Vatican, which “might provoke [sic] very serious controversy.”⁴⁷

The Committee’s report was discussed by full Cabinet on 27 February. The Prime Minister believed that, if it were decided to proceed, it would be best to act immediately since “it would be no easier to recognize the Vatican a year hence than now.” Others felt that whatever political losses were involved had probably already been incurred “and it was better to dispose of it one way or the other than leave it in abeyance”; the greatest problem would arise in the west. It was also noted that neither the Catholic population in general, or the hierarchy itself seemed particularly favourable, while it was feared that “recognition would also tend to superimpose religion on the language question at a time when progress was being made with the latter.” In the end Cabinet decided to give the matter further consideration.⁴⁸

It did so on 1 May. Trudeau believed that the time had now come to reach a decision. He noted that most of the correspondence received opposing the Vatican mission “had been motivated by religious bias; very few letters presented substantive political arguments.” There was some disagreement among Cabinet members. A number of ministers felt the time was not right to proceed, particularly in regards to western Canada and western Ontario. The Minister of Justice, John Turner, noted that there was no support within the Catholic hierarchy, and he feared that in the west the issue would be tied to the government’s language policy – official

⁴⁷ Ibid., Cadieux to Halstead, 14 February 1969.

⁴⁸ NA, Privy Council Office Records, RG 2, vol. 6340, Cabinet Minutes, 27 February 1969.

bilingualism – which was meeting resistance there; a case, he argued, of “attacking too many sets of bigotry all at once.” The majority of ministers, however, felt that “Canadians in general wanted a government that was brave and would assert its rights, i.e., act within its sphere of jurisdiction. Failure to act now would be interpreted as a sign of weakness.” In the end the majority view prevailed; the decision was to open a mission in the current fiscal year, 1969-70, but not to encourage further public debate.⁴⁹

The government was assisted by the lack of unanimity among opponents. While the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church unanimously adopted a resolution opposing the appointment,⁵⁰ the Anglican Church continued to be more moderate. The Primate, Archbishop Howard Clark, wrote to the Prime Minister to say that his church would not oppose the appointment “if there are positive reasons why such a move would advance the cause of Canada,” though adding that he had not been impressed by the reasons put forward to date. As well, a task force of the Church's International Affairs Unit found among Canadians, regardless of denomination, a recognition of the Vatican as an important international entity.⁵¹

Following Cabinet approval, Cadieux submitted a memorandum to Mitchell Sharp analysing the opposition to date. More than half of the opposing mail consisted of printed cards, indicating a concerted campaign “probably by one Church denomination.” Though they represented the largest number of protests the Trudeau government had received on any issue, he was dismissive of their impact, concluding that “I think the Government’s announcement is likely to elicit a generally favourable reaction from a largely acquiescent public, countered by some strong opposition among a relatively small minority.” As for opposition within the Catholic hierarchy, the government had “no concrete information,” and the President of the Canadian Catholic Conference, Bishop Alexander Carter, had noted that “this was a matter between governments. While this may illustrate the delicacy of the question, it is unlikely that Catholic Church leaders would have any choice but to abide by the Pope’s decision in welcoming the Canadian Government’s move.”⁵² Cadieux’s views on the nature of the opposition were echoed by journalist Douglas Fisher, whose

⁴⁹ Ibid., Cabinet Minutes, 1 May 1969.

⁵⁰ *Presbyterian Record*, July-August 1969, 10.

⁵¹ “Primate comments on Vatican envoy” and “International affairs’ statement,” *Canadian Churchman*, March 1969, 10.

⁵² NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (3), Cadieux to the Minister, 16 May 1969.

soundings led him to conclude that it largely came from “middle-aged and elderly people, particularly from small towns and rural areas.”⁵³

On 27 May Crean informed Clarizio in Rome that the Canadian government was prepared to proceed with the establishment of diplomatic relations. The next day Clarizio reported that this approach had been favourably received by Vatican officials and would now be discussed with the Secretary of State, Cardinal Villot, and the Pope, indicating that he expected smooth sailing.⁵⁴ He was much more cautious when he saw Crean on 3 June, informing him that the Pope would likely require reassurance that the exchange of missions would not cause problems in Canada, and particularly within the Church. Crean thought it likely that the Pope would make his own soundings among the Canadian hierarchy, and a response should not be expected for up to six weeks.⁵⁵

On 29 July Clarizio informed Cadieux that the Pope “did not wish to proceed unless the Canadian Government is quite satisfied that the opening of missions would not cause division in the country.” Cadieux reassured him that the government had carefully considered public reaction, but in reporting to Sharp he suggested that the Prime Minister be asked if he would be willing to give the Pope the assurances he wanted. Trudeau agreed to see Clarizio on this issue, noting that “I will also ask him what he knows about RC [sic] hierarchy feeling in Canada. This is an instance where full consultation with the ‘interested party’ is not too easy, since our decision is meant to be based on political rather than religious reasons. Nonetheless, if Clarizio shows great doubts, I might secretly see the Canadian Cardinals. Otherwise we should make the announcement by mid-September.”⁵⁶

Trudeau met with Clarizio on 14 August, reporting the results to Cadieux. Asked about Catholic opinion, the Delegate replied that his soundings showed “there was no wild enthusiasm but generally the results were positive.” However, he felt the Vatican might ask him to investigate further. Trudeau responded that the ball was now in the Vatican’s court: “the Canadian Government was prepared to face the political consequences of the move. It was up to the Vatican to face the music on the religious side.” He had the impression that the Vatican was still hesitant. Cadieux suggested “that the Holy Father had recently encountered some difficulties with a number of national churches and I suspected that he might not wish to

⁵³ Douglas Fisher, “Who speaks for the United Church? Just about everybody,” *United Church Observer*, 1 June 1969, 36.

⁵⁴ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, 20-1-2-VAT (3), Embassy in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 640, 27 May 1969 and tel. 642, 28 May 1969.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Embassy in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 671, 3 June 1969.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Cadieux to the Minister, 29 July 1969, minuted by Trudeau.

proceed with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Canada if this were to lead to criticism from Catholic Church quarters in Canada.”⁵⁷

With no further word by early September, Mitchell Sharp asked Senator John Connolly, who was very well connected in the Catholic community, to make discreet enquiries. He reported that the hierarchy was agreeable to the exchange of missions but would not press for it and “publicly they would take the line that this was a diplomatic and therefore a political matter and not a religious matter.” The major obstacle seemed to be that the bishops clearly did not want Clarizio to be appointed pro-nuncio.⁵⁸ Connolly gave no reasons for this attitude, but it seems likely that the bishops felt Clarizio was too inclined to interfere in domestic church matters.

On 17 September Mitchell Sharp told Clarizio that enough time had now elapsed and the government wanted a decision; further delay would be embarrassing to the government, which definitely did not want the issue to be raised when Parliament met again on 22 October. Clarizio was put on the defensive, responding that “the Vatican was preoccupied with the future of oecumenism and harmony with the bishops and clergy. If there was not a quick answer it would not be for lack of appreciation or desire for relations.” It was evident that the difficulty lay within the Canadian Church. Clarizio stated that Sharp had put the matter in “too brusque” terms and particularly opposed any deadline.⁵⁹ On 3 October, however, Cabinet decided that the Delegate be immediately informed that the government wanted a definitive answer within one week or the matter would be postponed indefinitely.⁶⁰

Meanwhile Clarizio had followed instructions by beginning further consultation with the hierarchy. On 30 September he sent out letters enquiring whether the recipient thought the time was opportune to proceed, and what would be the reaction of Protestants, the general public and Canadian Catholics.⁶¹ Although this consultation was preempted by the government’s deadline, the available replies are informative. Bishop Emmett Carter of London believed it was a matter to be decided by the Canadian government and the Pope; he would not oppose it but “I do admit to a certain detachment on the whole issue,” hardly a ringing endorsement.⁶² Archbishop Pocock of Toronto felt that a minority of Protestant groups and a few

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Cadieux to the Minister, 14 August 1969.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Marcel Cadieux, Memorandum for File, 10 September 1969.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, “Record of Conversation between Secretary of State for External Affairs and Mgr. Clarizio, on September 17, 1969,” 17 September 1969.

⁶⁰ NA, RG 2, vol. 6340, Cabinet Minutes, 3 October 1969.

⁶¹ ARCAT, PODS 71.29A, Clarizio to Archbishop Pocock, 30 September 1969.

⁶² *Ibid.*, PODA 19.102, Carter to Clarizio, 6 October 1969.

individual Catholics would object but that “the matter would then be accepted as a ‘fait accompli’.”⁶³

On 3 October Cadieux informed Clarizio of the government’s ultimatum. The Delegate protested that he had been instructed to take further soundings which would take several months to complete. He doubted that the Vatican would accept the Canadian ultimatum.⁶⁴ On that, however, he was wrong. Cardinal Villot immediately called in Bishop Alexander Carter and other members of the hierarchy who were in Rome to attend the Synod of Bishops. A member of Crean’s staff in Rome spoke with Cardinals Flahiff and Roy, Bishop Carter, and Archbishop Plourde of Ottawa, among others, who informed him that they had told Cardinal Villot that there was no objection within the Canadian Church to the proposal. On 10 October the Vatican accepted the proposed exchange of diplomatic representation.⁶⁵

The public announcement was made on 15 October. Clarizio was appointed Pro-Nuncio in Ottawa while the Canadian Ambassador would be a distinguished Canadian, John E. Robbins, President of Brandon University in Manitoba. Mitchell Sharp had felt it essential that the first Canadian Ambassador to the Vatican should be a Protestant, particularly a non-conformist, which he felt would lessen Protestant opposition to the appointment.⁶⁶ In fact Robbins, though not irreligious, was a self-described humanist who felt closest to the Unitarian Church.⁶⁷

Defending his government’s action, Trudeau admitted that the correspondence on the issue had been overwhelmingly negative but observed that much of it “was form correspondence and obviously organized lobbies. And I daresay if we had wanted to organize contrary lobbies we could have had probably as much correspondence for it. But we didn’t want to make it a religious issue.” All government actions are divisive, he asserted, “in the sense that some people don’t like it ... But I don’t see that it will go any deeper in dividing the Canadian consensus than most of the other issues that we’ve brought to the fore.” He also defended opening a mission in the Vatican at a time when the government was closing missions in other countries as part of an austerity campaign on the grounds that “the

⁶³ Ibid., PODS 71.29A, Pocock to Clarizio, 10 October 1969.

⁶⁴ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (4), Ottawa to Ambassador in Rome, tel. G-261, 3 October 1969.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Ambassador in Rome to Ottawa, tel. 1211, 14 October 1969; ARCAT, PODS 71.29A, Clarizio to the Archbishops and Bishops of Canada, 12 October 1969; author interview with Archbishop J-A. Plourde, 28 November 2001.

⁶⁶ Sharp, *Which Reminds Me ...*, 202.

⁶⁷ John A.B. McLeish, *A Canadian for all Seasons: The John E. Robbins Story* (Toronto, 1978), 245; “Our man for all religions,” *Toronto Telegram*, 16 October 1969, 7.

Vatican will give us much more grass roots information about the countries of the world than these particular posts which we will have to close ... It's not just to save money, it's in order that we use the money we have more efficiently."⁶⁸

Public reaction echoed that of January, after Trudeau's visit to the Pope; those that had been opposed then were not convinced otherwise. This was true of the secular press, both francophone and anglophone.⁶⁹ The Anglicans remained neither condemnatory nor favourable, while the other mainline churches continued to be strongly opposed.⁷⁰ According to T.E.F. Honey, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, his organization was not opposed, "we merely look upon it as not productive." However, an unexpected endorsement came from Richard D. Jones, President of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, who declared that "a Canadian representative at the Vatican is added proof that a spirit of confidence and trust among our major religious groups exists in this country."⁷¹

Catholic reaction was muted and somewhat ambivalent. The Canadian Catholic Conference issued a bland statement describing it as "a governmental matter ... The Bishops are concerned only with their pastoral role in the Church in Canada and are not involved." The Church sought no new status or privileges and would continue its ecumenical activities as before.⁷² The *Register* declared it a "mature diplomatic step, at the same time asserting that it "runs counter to a valid current in the Church today which would re-examine all the trappings of another age which still cling to the Holy See."⁷³ The *Western Catholic Reporter* welcomed the move "if

⁶⁸ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (4), Excerpts from the transcript of Prime Minister's press conference National Press Building, 15 October 1969.

⁶⁹ For favourable comments see "Vatican can help," *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 October 1969, 6; "For Pragmatic Reasons," *Globe and Mail*, 18 October 1969, 6; "Vatican and Canada," *Montreal Gazette*, 17 October 1969, 6; "The Vatican and Ottawa," *Toronto Telegram*, 16 October 1969, 6; "Le Canada et le Vatican," *Le Droit*, 16 October 1969, 6; "Enfin, une ambassade canadienne au Vatican!" *L'Action-Québec*, 17 October 1969, 4; "Le Canada au Vatican," *Le Soleil*, 17 October 1969, 4; "Le Canada et le Vatican," *Le Devoir*, 17 October 1969, 4. For unfavourable comments see "Not Necessary," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 October 1969, 37; "Trudeau Finesse?" *Vancouver Province*, 17 October 1969, 4; "The Wrong Decision," *Calgary Herald*, 17 October 1969, 4.

⁷⁰ "Ottawa link to Vatican angers churchmen," *Toronto Telegram*, 16 October 1969, 1; "Is Mr. Trudeau listening?" *Presbyterian Record*, November 1969, 4; "Mr. Trudeau and the Vatican," *United Church Observer*, 15 November 1969, 10.

⁷¹ Honey and Jones are cited in McLeish, *A Canadian for all Seasons*, 250.

⁷² Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Archives, file A8000-9 (1), Statement by Bishop Alexander Carter, President of the Canadian Catholic Conference, on diplomatic relations between Canada and the Holy See, 16 October 1969.

⁷³ "A mature diplomatic step," *Register*, 25 October 1969, 4.

international assets do accrue from the diplomatic tie,” but felt it would be judged regrettable if it resulted in a cooling of ecumenical relations.⁷⁴

Ambassador Crean saw Clarizio in Rome on 14 November. He told Crean that he “thought the Prime Minister’s toughness had had the right effect on the Church in Canada, through the Vatican, and had ensured a quick conclusion. He stressed that the hold-up had not been in the Vatican itself, but with the Church in Canada. In fact the matter had been settled at the Synod in Rome ... partly to avoid the impression, which some of the hierarchy in Canada had, that both the urgency and even the proposal itself for exchanging missions, were Clarizio’s own idea.” In that context Crean reported to Marcel Cadieux that Cardinal Roy, when asked what he thought of the exchange of missions, had replied that “the advice of the Church had not been taken; but that was right because it was a political matter.”⁷⁵

Clarizio presented his credentials to the Governor-General on 24 November. In early December he made his first formal call on the Prime Minister, praising the pressure he had applied as “a stroke of genius.” Trudeau commented that opposition had died down to one or two letters a week, while many favourable letters had been received.⁷⁶ Pope Paul VI also praised “the initiative and courage of the Prime Minister.”⁷⁷

Ambassador Robbins presented his credentials to the Pope on 23 April 1970. In reporting to Ottawa he commented on “the warmth of feeling expressed over the establishment of formal relations between Canada and the Vatican. I was left in no doubt that the Pope personally holds in high regard Canada and its record in international affairs.”⁷⁸ Robbins served a three-year term as Ambassador, leaving in 1973. Clarizio was not so fortunate. Within less than a year he was recalled from his post. “I have been given to understand,” Robbins reported, “that his recall was on the initiative of the Canadian hierarchy, or at least certain members of it who considered that he

⁷⁴ “Vatican Recognition: A Political Decision,” *Western Catholic Reporter*, 26 October 1969, 4.

⁷⁵ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (4), Crean to Cadieux, 17 November 1969. The reluctance exhibited by the bishops echoed the position of the Canadian hierarchy when the Apostolic Delegation was originally established in 1899. The moving force then, as in 1969, was the Prime Minister of the day, Wilfrid Laurier. See Roberto Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age* (Toronto, 1990), 57-69.

⁷⁶ NA, RG 25, vol. 8801, file 20-1-2-VAT (4), A.P. Sherwood to J.H. Halstead, 8 December 1969.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Ambassador in Rome to Ottawa, letter 14, 8 January 1970.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, file 20-1-2-VAT (5), Ambassador to Holy See to Ottawa, letter V-67, 24 April 1970.

was attempting to exercise external influence on affairs that the Canadian Church considered of a domestic nature.”⁷⁹

On leaving his post Robbins concluded that the “listening-post” function was somewhat overrated, but that “the Vatican *connection* was of vital importance. It had the high role of lifting the sights of both External Affairs and thoughtful Canadians, while for the Holy See the official representation of Canada added continuing encouragement to its unique efforts on behalf of world peace.”⁸⁰ The controversy, as Archbishop Pocock among others had predicted, quickly died away. All of Robbins’ successors to date have been career diplomats as Canada’s embassy to the Vatican became one among many missions abroad.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Ambassador to Holy See to Ottawa, letter V-145, 15 October 1970.

⁸⁰ McLeish, *A Canadian for all Seasons*, 264, emphasis in original.