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Author

Settje, David

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Protestant "Righteous Indignation": The Roosevelt Vatican Appointment of 1940

DAVID SETTJE

Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1940 appointment of a personal representative to the Vatican outraged most Protestant churches. Indeed, an accounting of the Protestant protests regarding the Holy See appointment reveals several aspects of American religious life at that time. As the United States moved closer to becoming a religiously pluralistic society and shed its Protestant hegemony, mainline Protestant churches sought to maintain leverage by denouncing any ties to the Vatican. Efforts to avert this papal affiliation also stemmed from traditional American anti-Catholicism. Therefore, the attempt to preserve Protestant influence with anti-Catholic rhetoric against a Vatican envoy demonstrates how mainline churches wanted to sway governmental policy, even in the area of foreign affairs. Protestant churches asserted that they were defending the principle of the separation of church and state. But an inspection of their protests against the Vatican appointment illustrates that they were also concerned about how such representation would affect their place in U.S. society and proves that they still distrusted Catholicism. In short, although they cloaked their arguments in the guise of defending the separation of church and state, the Vatican appointment became a forum in which Protestant denominations displayed their anxiety about the development of religious pluralism in America, voiced traditional anti-Catholicism, and ultimately influenced diplomatic policy.¹

The first official hint of American ties with the Vatican occurred seven years into Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. In March 1939, Roosevelt sent the current ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph P. Kennedy, to the coronation of Pius XII. Although Kennedy only stayed through the coronation and no U.S. official remained thereafter, this marked the first time an American president had been represented at a papal coronation ceremony. The mainline Protestant churches balked slightly at this move, but most ignored the

event or merely reported about the new pope's personal background. Roosevelt saw Kennedy's attendance at the coronation as a trial balloon and assumed that the low level of opposition indicated an ambivalent populace. This lack of a public reaction changed drastically later that year.

On 24 December 1939, Roosevelt announced the appointment of Myron C. Taylor as his "personal representative" to the Vatican. Roosevelt gave Taylor this ambiguous title to avoid having to ask for Senate approval. This dodging was possible because Taylor, who had recently retired from the chairmanship of the U.S. Steel Corporation, owned his own home in Italy and needed no government funding to travel to Europe. Although much speculation has surrounded Roosevelt's motives for sending Taylor, William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason offer the most plausible explanation. They state that the president hoped to persuade the Vatican to use moral suasion to force European countries to end the war. Recent scholarship has further speculated that Roosevelt wanted to secure the Catholic voting bloc in the upcoming 1940 election and gain inside information into the activities of other European nations, especially Italy and Germany. Regardless of Roosevelt's motives, throughout the next decade Taylor served as the president's representative by voyaging off and on to the Holy See and conferring with Pius XII. But no significant diplomatic developments occurred. Generally, Taylor tried unsuccessfully to win papal support for U.S. policy and to nudge the Catholic church away from neutrality.²

At the initial announcement of the appointment, Roosevelt carefully outlined to the press that Taylor's presence at the Vatican would not constitute formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Because he foresaw the negative reaction this decision might generate, he underlined the limited nature of the appointment. Publicly, the president stressed the need to establish European contacts that could aid the United States in efforts for peace in Europe. However, Roosevelt typically responded to questions about the appointment by brushing the subject aside or ignoring Protestant objections. In fact, the president avoided public pronouncements about the matter until April, when he reiterated the temporary nature of Taylor's post and allowed the release of a letter he had sent to Dr. George Buttrick, president of the Federal Council of Churches. Just like Roosevelt's public statements, the letter accented his hope for peace and emphasized the temporary nature of Taylor's mission. Other than these small references and an occasional White House meeting with Protestant leaders to assure them of their continued influence on presidential policy, Roosevelt remained silent about the appointment in order to maintain Catholic support and dodge Protestant ire.

Although historians have investigated the political and diplomatic aspects of the Taylor mission, no detailed analysis of religious opinion respecting the

appointment exists. In fact, only a few scholars have attempted general conjectures regarding the meaning of the strong Protestant outcry against Roosevelt's announcement. Alex Karmarkovic defends the Protestant protests, uses only a few sources, and never gives credence to larger religious trends of the twentieth century. Other studies either concentrate merely on one denomination or focus on the political and diplomatic effects of the appointment. For example, George Q. Flynn directs his discussion of public opinion to Roosevelt's efforts to maintain electoral support. Furthermore, Dorsey Milan Deaton does not begin his examination of the controversy until 1952, well after the initial 1940 furor over Roosevelt's move. The best sources available to understand public reaction are the religious periodicals, newspapers, and news magazines from 1940. The religious leaders who wrote in these publications held great leverage over their members because they served as spiritual mentors. Furthermore, the periodicals contain lay letters to the editor and represent the literature that many Protestants looked to for religious guidance.³

Despite Roosevelt's efforts to elude Protestant disapproval of the appointment, most Protestant denominations distrusted such a move; two historical factors led to this demonstration of intense anti-Catholicism. First, denunciations of Taylor's mission reveal the continued persistence of a nativist-driven anti-Catholicism in America. John Higham defines nativism as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections"; he further breaks nativism down into three primary components: anti-Catholicism, anti-radicalism, and anti-immigration. As Higham explains, nativism was a nationalistic spirit gone afoul. It propelled its proponents to defend the majority way of life against an imagined enemy of foreign infiltrators trying to transform American institutions. According to historians of nativism, the Protestant majority displayed their fear by combating Catholicism's different structure and even exaggerating this to mean that Catholics wanted the U.S. government to mirror their church polity. The history of such anti-Catholicism began before the Civil War and peaked again after Reconstruction with the formation of the Ku Klux Klan. Thereafter, it fluctuated in national importance until 1928, when Al Smith made inroads against anti-Catholicism by becoming the first Catholic presidential candidate. Later, Roosevelt embraced Catholic support during his presidential campaigns. But it was his Vatican appointment that recharged nativist suspicions of Catholic motives, especially in light of the fact that the Catholic church's membership had grown during the 1930s.⁴

The second historical factor that led to the 1940 display of anti-Catholicism occurred in conjunction with these nativist fears. Vatican pronouncements had always intensified Protestant misgivings because their

dread of the Catholic church included a suspicion that the pope wanted to take over the world as temporal ruler. The 1870 papal proclamation of infallibility did nothing to allay these fears. In 1928, as Protestants worked diligently to form ecumenical ties, Pius XI refused to participate on the grounds that the Roman Catholic church was the only true church. Moreover, Pius XII's visit to the United States as Vatican Secretary of State prior to his papal election antagonized fears that he had plotted for years to subvert American democracy. Such Vatican actions did little to alleviate American anti-Catholicism, and Roosevelt's 1940 appointment merely fueled this long-standing fire. Although anti-Catholicism waxed and waned over time, it appeared readily at the mention of papal authority because many Protestants feared that the pope wanted to control American politics.

Another factor, a more recent development than nativist anti-Catholicism, that led to Protestant protest against the appointment involved the gradual pluralism that emerged onto the American religious scene. William R. Hutchison states that, between 1900 and 1960, Protestant mainline churches went through a "gradual and somewhat painful adjustment from one social reality to another" because they lost their dominant role in shaping societal religious opinion. Rather, they had to begin sharing this task with other religions, especially Catholicism and Judaism. In addition, the controversy over Biblical authority that pitted fundamentalists against modernists further eroded Protestant cohesiveness. But Hutchison also points out that Protestant leaders were unprepared to accept this reality and fought to maintain their hegemony well into the 1950s. His volume further illustrates that church leaders were actually concerned about their perceived loss of influence. Prior to the gradual twentieth-century transformation of Protestant hegemony, mainline churches had traditionally held all of the power in influencing presidents and setting governmental policy. Furthermore, the fact that Catholic membership numbers swelled during the 1930s added to these Protestant fears. In addition, the formation of a strong ecumenical movement during the twentieth century demonstrates how Protestants worked to hold onto their power by presenting a unified front. The opponents of the Vatican appointment largely reflected the denominations within this alliance.⁵

The 1940 Vatican controversy commanded so much attention because traditional anti-Catholicism persisted as Protestant churches felt that they were losing clout. Most Protestants worried about the fact that Roosevelt courted the Catholic vote and gave Catholics a significant voice in politics not long after a Catholic had won the Democratic nomination for president. Ultimately, Protestant attempts to stifle this Catholic voice by opposing the Vatican appointment revealed a traditional paradox in their thinking. They fought to maintain a separation of church and state, but this effort therefore

sought to preserve their influence over the government. Although this was the case throughout the nineteenth century, documenting its persistence into the twentieth century aids an overall understanding of how Protestants tried to maintain their central voice in American policy amid the profound religious changes of this century.

During the first five months of 1940, almost every Protestant denomination came to view the Taylor appointment as antithetical to American ideals. But not every denomination arrived at this conclusion in the same manner. In fact, close scrutiny of the specific reaction by the most prominent Christian denominations in America reveals four distinct categories. Several Protestant groups, including the Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, immediately condemned the president's action, sustained this posture throughout the controversy, and spurred other Protestant groups to join the protest. A second cluster of denominations, encompassing Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Universalist followers, originally sanctioned the Taylor mission but quickly changed their stance to one of opposition. A minority of Protestant churches make up a third category of denominations that split over the issue. The Disciples of Christ and Episcopalians debated whether or not the appointment would help find a solution to the war in Europe; some leaders and adherents supported this attempt while others joined the majority of Protestants in questioning Roosevelt's decision. Yet, even the supportive voices within these divided denominations only advocated the idea of a representative to the Vatican so long as it remained temporary and unofficial. The obvious backing from the Catholic church in America represents the final category; it was the only denomination that totally supported the appointment.

The first group of churches is the most important for this study because their response best depicted the continuance of anti-Catholicism amid the Protestant loss of status. These denominations began protesting Taylor's appointment before the end of the holiday season. Although they insisted that the appointment violated the separation of church and state, their rhetoric contained anxiety about their continued influence and anti-Catholic sentiments. For example, Walter A. Maier, a Missouri Synod Lutheran minister who broadcast a weekly radio program entitled "The Lutheran Hour," spoke out immediately against the Taylor mission by using rhetoric that became common among religious leaders throughout the debate. He declared that the government was "desert[ing] a traditional American policy by entering the church life of the nation." In another opening argument, the Christian Century editor Charles Clayton Morrison maintained that Roosevelt made the appointment only to secure the Catholic voting bloc. These first denunciations in January 1940 called the appointment a "step with

ominous implications" for the future of American religious freedom. In fact, the initial outcry often called the Vatican appointment "unfair" because it provided the Holy See with access to Washington unavailable to Protestant churches. Therefore, religious leaders considered any ties with the Vatican a threat to religious liberty and discounted the theory that a Vatican envoy could help the United States gain vital information about the European war.⁶

Even Roosevelt's assurances that "no church would receive better treatment or greater recognition than any other" failed to assuage Protestant allegations that the appointment was "unfair." Most periodicals defined their reason for objecting to the appointment by stating that a diplomatic relationship with the Holy See was "un-American" because it violated the separation of church and state. This fact reveals that most Protestant periodicals viewed the pope as a monarch who opposed religious liberty and would try to infiltrate American institutions. Thus, the *Christian Century* reported the appointment as "repugnant not only to American tradition, but to democratic principles." Later in the year, Louie D. Newton, the vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, stated that the appointment favored one church body over another and concluded that only Protestant convictions had uncovered the danger to American principles. These religious leaders established the need for Protestants to assert their majority opinion in order to hinder Roosevelt's perceived efforts to erode religious freedom by recognizing the Catholic church.⁷ *Christian Century* 57 (10 January 1940): 38-40; "Dr. Newton Answers Archbishop Francis J. Spellman," *Baptist Standard* 52 (28 March 1940): 3.

Another key anti-Catholic element to the protests centered around a fear that Roosevelt would allow the pope to control administrative policy. This uneasiness about papal motives revealed American anti-Catholicism's persistent history of thinking that the pope wanted to rule the world. No proof existed that the pope had such a motive, and Roosevelt was unlikely to share his authority with another ruler. But Protestants could not understand this historic factor and instead claimed that the appointment endangered the separation of church and state. The growth of the Catholic church in the 1930s furthered this fear because Protestants worried that this would lead to an increased ability for the pope to influence more Americans' voting behavior. The Lutheran church especially warned against ties with the pope, professing that popes throughout history had declared their supreme status and infallibility on earth. The Lutheran linked such past papal statements with the current appointment and cautioned that diplomatic ties meant agreement with these principles. Further heightening Protestant, and especially Lutheran, qualms about the pope, the *Lutheran Standard* stated that "history teaches us that the temporal designs and aspirations of the Vatican are nothing to trifle

with.”⁸

Other denominations also raised concerns about papal motives. An article by a Baptist minister asked: If the pope wanted world peace would he also be willing to “agree to liberate the world from slavery to papal intrigue in national affairs?” Finally, this pastor stated that the pope’s “political power is more greatly feared than his piety is admired.” Even the liberal *Christian Century* proclaimed that the appointment represented the “first step along a road which in Catholic diplomacy is always expected to arrive ultimately at a concordat.” In short, the Protestant churches that immediately fought the appointment followed the editors of the *Lutheran Standard* in maintaining that “because Rome thinks in terms of centuries and makes plans today for things which she will do her best to bring to pass fifty or a hundred or five hundred years from today,” the Protestant majority had to protest posthaste. Therefore, Protestant denunciations of Roosevelt’s Vatican appointment used old nativist prejudices against the pope to allow anti-Catholicism to influence opinions about the Vatican envoy.⁹

Other forms of anti-Catholicism accompanied these anxieties about the pope. In an April interview with *Time* magazine, Charles Clayton Morrison responded to the attempt by Roosevelt to calm Protestant fears in the aforementioned letter to Dr. Buttrick: “Protestantism is the majority faith in the United States. The so-called interfaith movement derived its initiative from Protestantism. The movement arose because Protestants said: We who are the dominant faith in American democracy ought to exercise tolerance toward Catholics and Jews.” In short, Morrison felt that Protestant denominations, through their democratic impulses, allowed all faiths to flourish in America. But he indicated that Catholics currently agreed with the separation of church and state because they constituted a minority religion; later, when Catholics had a larger percentage of the population, Morrison worried that they would attempt to force their convictions upon all Americans. The *Lutheran* more pointedly warned its readership to prevent Catholics from entering public office because their Roman affiliation would lead them blindly to do whatever the pope dictated. The tradition of anti-Catholicism so embedded itself in American society that even these intelligent, ecumenically minded, and respected religious leaders continued to worry about the aims of the Catholic church. Thus, fear of Catholicism in 1940 allowed Protestants to link their traditional anti-Catholicism with the Vatican appointment because they thought that it was another deliberate step toward Catholic domination that would hasten a decline in Protestant influence.¹⁰

Protestant periodicals also accused the president of masking the truth that Taylor acted as a full ambassador. Dr. J. L. McElhany, spokesperson for the Seventh-day Adventists, asserted that the Vatican already acted as if formal

ties existed when the pope announced his satisfaction with the president's goodwill gesture. The *Christian Century* called the appointment "devious" and said it certainly constituted the first step toward a permanent ambassadorship. After discovering that the Vatican had received Taylor in the same manner it accepted other diplomats, the periodical's editors stated that Roosevelt was ignoring the Constitution. A Methodist periodical, the *Christian Advocate*, also questioned the president's hidden objectives. Referring to the meeting Roosevelt had with Buttrick, the editors called it an "obvious device" for trying to trick America. In short, Protestants thought that there was no difference between formal recognition and a personal representative. These arguments outline two important points: They indicate that Protestants knew Roosevelt merely used the "temporary" rhetoric to appease their outcries despite indications that Taylor functioned as a full ambassador. And Roosevelt's attempt to cloak his motives by avoiding public discussion or by manipulating semantics helped fuel Protestant anxieties. These presidential efforts underscored Protestant fear about an underhanded Catholic church and added to their belief that they were losing influence over the president. Roosevelt's coyness gave Protestants proof that he tried to mislead them about Taylor's appointment.¹¹

Although a few letters to the editor and some religious leaders within the first group of denominations supported the president's appointment, they constituted a small minority. Strong reactions against the appointment characterize the Protestant response from those churches that immediately fought the appointment and maintained this stance throughout the controversy. These denominations focused on the "inequality" of the appointment, the concern about papal motives, and a traditional fear that Catholicism would try to replace Protestantism as the dominant force in American religious life. Additionally, these leading protestors accused the president of hiding secret ambitions to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See and cited the reception Taylor received at the Vatican as proof. Due to the persistence of anti-Catholicism and anxieties about Protestantism's ability to maintain its influence, many editors and lay people agreed with the words of a *Lutheran Standard* editor who proclaimed that he could not "write on this subject without righteous indignation."¹²

The second group of denominations diverged little from the first by the end of May 1940. The Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Universalists began the year supporting the appointment and its efforts for world peace. But as the controversy progressed and the original Protestant protestors persisted in denouncing the move, even these churches fell in line with the majority of Protestants and began fearing the onset of papal influence in American culture due to Myron C. Taylor's presence in Rome.

The United Presbyterian initially supported Roosevelt because the editors believed that the president really was trying to foster world peace and keep the United States from entering the European fray. It is crucial to note, however, that Presbyterian leaders accepted Taylor's appointment only on condition that it remain temporary. Indeed, a majority of the Protestants who supported the appointment insisted that this backing was subject to Taylor's return once the war ended. Thus, they also feared U.S. contacts with papal power, but momentarily suspended these misgivings with the hope that such a relationship could help end the war. The editors explained this acceptance by arguing that "however strong our prejudice against the Roman Church and papal claims," the pope still had power to influence a large number of people away from the violence of a world war. Nevertheless, they tempered this favor with the fear that Roosevelt really wanted to secure the Catholic voting bloc and admitted to misgivings about recognizing the temporal authority of the Holy See. The Congregational periodical *Advance* echoed this reluctant acceptance by the Presbyterian journal, stating that Protestant churches must use caution but could support Roosevelt because he was trying to keep the United States out of war.¹³

This consent of early 1940 quickly dissipated for the Presbyterian and Congregationalist denominations. Already on 18 January, the United Presbyterian mirrored the first group of denominations when it asserted that the president hid the true circumstances behind the official diplomatic arrangements to send Taylor to Rome. Additionally, the editors assumed that Taylor's reception by the pope "was planned apparently to make it perfectly clear that Mr. Taylor will occupy the position of a regular ambassador." In addition to questioning Roosevelt's motives and wondering about papal aims, the Presbyterian journal's arguments against the appointment revealed anti-Catholicism. The periodical reported on a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in which a bishop of the Catholic church supported the Vatican envoy. The United Presbyterian stated that this bishop labored "under the handicap of being an official in a totalitarian Church and, as such, is incapable of understanding the spirit of men who hold to democracy in religion as well as in government." Once again, the Congregational *Advance* paralleled the Presbyterians by changing their initial support to opposition. They criticized the president for his "too clever manner" and claimed that his actions hindered his efforts for peace by alienating the American people. Therefore, these two denominations fell in line with the first category of Protestants by revealing Roosevelt's deceit, combining it with a fear of the pope, and persisting with anti-Catholic rhetoric when they denounced the Vatican appointment.¹⁴

The *Christian Leader*, a Universalist periodical, also demonstrated early

acceptance of the appointment by asking whether "the Christian ideals of good will and Brotherhood" were to be "an exclusively Protestant project." But like the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists, the editors stressed the condition that the Taylor appointment remain temporary. Furthermore, they doubted that Roosevelt wished to end the separation of church and state and thus trusted him to work only toward peace in Europe. The Christian Leader's editors maintained their support of the appointment throughout the year but always cautioned against a permanent ambassador. This periodical differed from others by trusting Roosevelt and asking for Protestant denominations to continue ecumenical efforts to support a worldwide drive for peace, even if it meant temporary cooperation with the Vatican.¹⁵

In contrast to the editors' tempered support, readers of the Christian Leader denounced the appointment and thus disagreed with the periodical's qualified endorsement. A minister wrote to the editors and asserted that Roosevelt's willingness to listen to advice from the Vatican hierarchy threatened American religious freedom. Another writer proclaimed his tolerance for efforts for peace but "not at any price" and implored the president to stop defacing the Constitution. Yet another reader dreaded the rising tide of fascism and warned that allowing Roosevelt to subvert the Constitution in even this seemingly insignificant manner would lead him to grasp for more and more power. Thus, Universalist adherents followed other Protestants and objected to the appointment. Like the Presbyterians and Congregationalists who came to oppose ardently a Vatican tie, the Universalists had misgivings about associating with what they perceived to be a totalitarian dictator (the pope) who opposed religious freedom.¹⁶

Although a majority of Protestant faiths protested the decision to send an ambassador to the Holy See, a few denominations split over the Taylor mission. Not every Episcopalian or Disciples of Christ editor denounced the president's move, even though readers and most church leaders objected. The Episcopal church may have shied away from the controversy because both Roosevelt and Taylor belonged to that denomination. Furthermore, the Episcopal church polity paralleled that of the Catholic church more than any other denomination and thus produced less fear of papal infiltration. The case of Disciples of Christ support remains less clear. Most likely, those who advocated the move hoped such efforts would indeed contribute to staving off American involvement in the war. Yet both denominations' periodicals made it clear that their backing of Taylor's efforts rested on the temporary nature of his assignment: if the appointment became permanent, they threatened to withdraw their support because they, like their Protestant colleagues, feared that a prolonged affiliation with the Vatican could harm American religious liberty.¹⁷

The supporters of the appointment within denominations with divided opinions reprimanded fellow Protestant protestors. One predominant thrust in their argument against the majority stated that "bigotry would even obscure the principle of church and state which the opposition believes Mr. Roosevelt violated." In short, by condemning the appointment, they claimed that these churches had entered the political arena in which they wanted religions to have no authority. The Episcopal periodicals *Living Church* and *Churchman* also applauded the Vatican envoy and disliked the negative Protestant attitudes. In addition, dissenters tried to expose the anti-Catholicism of many protestors. For example, the editors of a *Disciples of Christ* journal, the *Christian-Evangelist*, stated: "We fear that anti-Catholicism is so deeply ingrained in many Protestant leaders in the United States that they are blinded with passionate prejudice" and unable to accept the president's efforts for a stable world. These supportive Protestants also sarcastically accused the protestors of petty bickering, especially the *Christian Century*:

In a recent issue of *The New Republic*, a reviewer of the movie, "The Grapes of Wrath," characterizes it as the greatest show on the face of the earth. That may be an exaggerated opinion, but not having seen the film yet, we cannot gainsay this judgment or other reviewers' which are almost as praiseworthy. However, we are glad that what is the next best show is going on in the Chicago editorial offices of *The Christian Century* and that we are among the thousands cheering from the grandstands. On with the show!¹⁸

While the *Christian-Evangelist* supported Roosevelt, another *Disciples of Christ* journal agreed with the Protestant majority. The *Christian Standard* called efforts to change Roosevelt's policy "wise and patriotic" because "it has become the habit in Washington to send out 'trial balloons,' and we ought to act accordingly," meaning the editors felt Americans should denounce official ties with the Vatican. Even one editor of the supportive *Christian-Evangelist* dissented from his colleagues and stated that the president had blatantly disregarded the wishes of Americans. In fact, this editor claimed that Pius XII now had begun his plot to subvert American institutions. Furthermore, letters to the editor lamented "the editorial glee" of the periodical and forewarned that this "indifference" might miss the critical danger of Taylor's appointment. Still another response, this time by a minister, asserted that supporting the president condoned a "risky" involvement with the pope. These Protestant dissenters thus followed the original protestors and

denounced the Vatican envoy by using traditional anti-Catholicism and coupling it with a fear that Roosevelt intended to dilute Protestant influence.¹⁹

Most letters to Episcopal journals mirrored the attitudes of those in Disciples of Christ journals by questioning the editors for accepting a position that could ultimately harm the Protestant church. Also, the Protestant Episcopal Church League, representing a large number of church members, passed a resolution censuring Taylor's mission and calling for him to return to the United States. These two denominations clearly split over the subject of sending Taylor to Rome. Although similar in tone to the Universalists, only the Episcopalian and Disciples of Christ churches debated in their periodicals and showed distinct lines of division between the pro-Taylor faction and the anti-Vatican contingent. This indicates that no Protestant body fully supported sending Taylor to meet with the pope. In fact, the highest degree of Protestant acceptance came from the two denominations that split over the issue.

The Catholic church was the only Christian denomination that embraced the move and defended the president's action. Generally, Catholic journals believed Roosevelt's claim that Taylor's mission was only temporary, reiterated that the president had consulted with other Protestant leaders, and felt that this appointment was the best chance for "a peace that is greater than the mere absence of war." Additionally, the Catholic press discussed the nature of American anti-Catholicism. Commonweal editors summed up the problem by quoting William Howard Taft: "I decide every question that comes up on the merits as I understand them. . . . But it is useless to persuade a man with the anti-Catholic virus to look with patience at any treatment of the Catholic church that does not involve hostility." America editors worried that anti-Catholicism would plague the 1940 presidential election with a reprisal of the rhetoric that surrounded Al Smith's presidential bid: "Religious bigotry won the election in 1928. We pray to God to avert a similar calamity in 1940."²⁰

Catholic denunciations of Protestant protests also sounded a cynical tone. One editor pointed out that the United States had an ambassador to the government of George VI, who also served as head of the Church of England. Thus, the column's headlines read, "Let's Investigate Ambassador Kennedy." Other editors supplemented the argument about the King of England by pointing out that no one complained of relations with the Japanese government, whose emperor claimed to be the Son of Heaven, which "mean[t] a union of the Japanese religion and the United States government." Commonweal further reported that other world democracies "have survived 'unscathed' from their diplomatic relations with the Vatican." Other editorials took special umbrage at the fact that so many accused the Catholic church

of being dictatorial, asserting that "human dignity and liberty" belonged to all Christians, not only Protestants. They also chided the Christian Century's constant protesting by entitling one article, "The 'Christian Century' Carries On."²¹

Furthermore, the American Catholic leadership vocally defended their denomination. One Catholic archbishop spoke against the fear of a papal takeover, stating that "there are still un-instructed Americans who think that the Catholic church is a foreign institution and that we Catholics owe allegiance to a foreign potentate, namely the pope." He denied such "silly but harmful insinuations." Furthermore, Archbishop Francis J. Spellman publicly defended the pope and the president. The bishop of Omaha, James H. Ryan, additionally admonished Protestant ire in a New York Times editorial. He questioned the argument that a diplomatic tie to the Vatican threatened the separation of church and state because those opposed never explained how this association affected the division of powers. In short, he resolved that a Vatican envoy did not jeopardize American autonomy. Thus, the Catholic church defended the Taylor mission by accusing Protestants of anti-Catholicism, asserting that the U.S. government was not in danger, and supporting all efforts for peace. Indeed, given American Catholics' traditional independence from and challenges to Roman authority, had they suspected that the pope wanted to try to govern American secular or religious policy they in all probability would have responded negatively.²²

The subject of sending Myron C. Taylor to the Vatican as President Roosevelt's personal representative, a position that did not require Senate approval or federal funding, erupted onto the American scene in early 1940. Traditional anti-Catholicism, based on nativist fears and misgivings that the pope was plotting to reign over the world spiritually and secularly, underlay much of the rhetoric against Taylor's mission. Furthermore, the protestors of the appointment accused Roosevelt of hiding an ambition to allow Catholic influence to hold sway over political considerations, an arena that had been traditionally reserved for Protestant leverage. In fact, the denunciations of Taylor's mission were often repetitious; editorials and letters to the editor repeatedly called the pope a dictator, feared a papal takeover, accused Roosevelt of underhanded politics, and persisted with a suspicion of Catholicism. Finally, mainline Protestants became apprehensive about the emergence of religious pluralism. As the American Catholic church grew during the 1930s, Protestant numbers declined and its adherents divided between modernist and fundamentalist ideologies. Protestants tried to quell this change and maintain their leverage over U.S. society in part by disallowing U.S.-Vatican interactions. In this manner, the Protestant majority continued to have influence over the sphere they wanted to shelter from Catholic

sway, namely politics. Indeed, the Protestant community successfully altered diplomatic policy by stopping Roosevelt from formally appointing Taylor and by forcing him to remain quiet about the United States' Vatican tie. On the other hand, the few defenses of the move applauded the efforts for peace and outlined how such a representative could not harm the government.

Despite the harsh outcry during the first half of 1940, the controversy died away later that year because World War II pulled the United States into its fray and provided people with larger worries. Still, the seeds were planted for a future problem because the Vatican issue went unresolved. Taylor remained as the Vatican envoy through the Roosevelt administration and stayed there as Truman's representative until he retired in 1950 due to poor health, when his departure again raised the question of Vatican recognition. President Truman attempted to have him replaced, but with no major world wars to concern them, the Protestant protestors' campaign against a Vatican representative was successful. They forced Truman to give up and the United States once again went without ties to the Holy See.²³

NOTES

- 1 *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), edited by William R. Hutchison, offers a good survey of the Protestant denominations' encounter with religious pluralism in America before 1960. The essays demonstrate that Protestants recognized the imminent changes in U.S. religious life but resisted relinquishing their traditional hegemony.
- 2 For the view that Roosevelt appointed Taylor to inject moral convictions into European politics, see William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952). By no means a complete list, the following sources may be consulted to obtain detailed answers regarding Roosevelt's motives, knowledge held by the Catholic church about European events, the results of the affiliation between the Vatican and the United States, the constitutional implications of sending an ambassador, and the actual events surrounding Taylor's appointment from 1940 to 1950: James E. Wood, Jr., "U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican," *Journal of Church and State* 26 (Spring 1984): 197-207; Robert A. Graham, *Vatican Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); John S. Conway, "Myron C. Taylor's Mission to the Vatican, 1940-1950," *Church History* 44 (March 1975): 85-99; and Martin Hastings, "United States-Vatican Relations," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 69 (March and June 1958): 20-55. See also *Wartime Correspondence Between President Roosevelt and Pius XII* (New York:

- Macmillan, 1947).
- 3 Alex Karmarkovic, "The Myron Taylor Appointment: Background; Religious Reaction; Constitutionality" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1967). Karmarkovic focuses on the religious leaders' reaction without addressing the larger public outcry, and his research mirrors 1940s anti-Catholicism by fearing the authoritarian pope and criticizing American Catholics for blindly following Pius XII. George Q. Flynn, "Franklin Roosevelt and the Vatican: The Myron Taylor Appointment," *Catholic Historical Review* 58 (July 1972): 171-88; Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism: Catholics and American Diplomacy, 1937-1945* (London: Greenwood Press, 1976), 98-126. Flynn merely states that Protestant anger existed and therefore forced Roosevelt to respond. Dorsey Milan Deaton, "The Protestant Crisis: Truman's Vatican Ambassador Controversy of 1951" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1970). Deaton understood that the emergence of religious pluralism played a role in fomenting Protestant outrage, but he primarily studies Harry S. Truman's failed effort to have Congress approve an official ambassador in 1951. Therefore, he cites postwar circumstances, such as the Red Scare, as the primary causes for the protest; this approach fails to understand fully the fact that the outcry began before World War II and persisted throughout the 1940s. Thus, Deaton downplays the continued effects of nativism and anti-Catholicism. Vicki Ann Crumpton's "An Analysis of Southern Baptist Response to Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and the Vatican" (Ph.D. diss., South Western Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988) and Donald Bert Morlan's "The Persuasive Campaign of the Christian Century Against Diplomatic Relations with the Vatican, 1940-1952" (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1969) prove too narrow to understand the larger implications of the opposition. Crumpton theorizes that anti-Catholicism alone led to Baptist anger, while Morlan claims that only the Christian Century instigated the protesting.
 - 4 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955); 4. Anti-Catholic prejudices existed well before 1860: see Ray Allen Billington's *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963).
 - 5 Hutchison, vii, viii, 4; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 875-950; Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 387-412; Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 431-36; Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 323-28. For this study, mainline Protestantism refers to Williams's definition as encompassing white, middle- and upper-class Protestant churches, including Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists,

- Lutherans, and Disciples of Christ. Hutchison's volume concurs with this definition. Franklin H. Littel provides solid proof that Protestant churches feared the emerging pluralism in *From State Church to Pluralism: A Protestant Interpretation of Religion in American History* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962), 129-69. Quantitative proof of Catholic growth and Protestant decline can be found in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).
- 6 *New York Times*, 1 January 1940; "How 'Personal' is this Representative?" *Christian Century* 57 (3 January 1940): 5. The last quotation was by Joseph Lewis, president of the New York League for the Separation of Church and State, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 January 1940. In researching this study, I investigated over forty religious journals from various denominations; but due to space constraints not all consulted journals appear in the footnotes. For example, I investigated six different Lutheran periodicals representing the various divisions within the Lutheran church but cannot cite each of them without redundancy. The same situation applies to other denominations, such as the separation of the Northern and Southern Baptists and the split in the Presbyterian church. Unless otherwise noted, denominational factions tended to agree with one another about the need to protest Roosevelt's Vatican appointment.
 - 7 *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 January 1940; "An Unamerican Appointment," *Christian Century* 57 (10 January 1940): 38-40; "Dr. Newton Answer Archbishop Francis J. Spellman," *Baptist Standard* 52 (28 March 1940): 3.
 - 8 "Against Vatican Relations" and "The Vatican-White House Peace Axis," *Lutheran* 22 (10 January 1940): 6-8, 12; "We Must Speak Out," *Lutheran Standard* 98 (13 January 1940): 5.
 - 9 "The President's Vatican Appointment," *Baptist Standard* 52 (25 January 1940): 5; "Background of the Taylor Embassy," *Christian Century* 57 (13 March 1940): 350-52.
 - 10 "An Illegal Ambassador," *Christian Century* 57 (13 March 1940): 343-45; "Protestants v. Pope," *Time*, 15 April 1940, 47-48; "Absolute Monarch," *Lutheran* 22 (8 May 1940): 15.
 - 11 *Christian Science Monitor*, 5-6 January 1940; "An Unamerican Appointment," *Christian Century* 57 (10 January 1940): 38-40; "Call Mr. Taylor Home," *Christian Century* 57 (28 February 1940): 272-73; Harold Paul Sloan, "The American Representative at the Vatican" and "Of Ambassadorial Rank," *Christian Advocate* 62 (25 January 1940): 89, 92; "The American Unamerican Ambassador to the Vatican," *Baptist Standard* 52 (25 April 1940): 4.
 - 12 "Adding Insult to Injury," *Lutheran Standard* 98 (20 April 1940): 7.
 - 13 "President Roosevelt's Letter to the Pope" and "President Roosevelt's Personal Representative," *United Presbyterian* 98 (4 January 1940): 7-8; "The Pope and the President," *United Presbyterian* 98 (11 January 1940): 6; "Cooperation for World

- Peace," *Advance* 132 (February 1940): 58-59.
- 14 "Our Ambassador to 'Rome,'" *United Presbyterian* 98 (18 January 1940): 5; "Vatican Welcomes U.S. Ambassador," *United Presbyterian* 98 (7 March 1940): 6, 11; "The Catholic Case for Taylor," *United Presbyterian* 98 (23 May 1940): 8-9; "Vatican Jurist not 'a responsible source' President Indicates," *Advance* 132 (1 May 1940): 205-6.
- 15 "How the Christian Century Rages!" *Christian Leader* 122 (23 March 1940): 272; "An American Way," *Christian Leader* 122 (27 January 1940): 81.
- 16 "McKnight Protests," *Christian Leader* 122 (10 January 1940): 139; "That Envoy to the Vatican State," *Christian Leader* 122 (2 March 1940): 210; "On the Taylor Appointment," *Christian Leader* 122 (11 May 1940): 451.
- 17 "Christian Century' Hits Roosevelt Move," *Living Church* 102 (10 January 1940): 15.
- 18 "The Appointment to the Vatican," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (25 January 1940): 103; "Anti-Catholicism and the Vatican Envoy," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (28 March 1940): 339-40; "An Open Forum for Readers," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (2 May 1940): 205-6; "Next Best, Anyhow," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (29 February 1940): 232.
- 19 "Americans On Guard," *Christian Standard* 75 (20 January 1940): 5; "Pacelli Story," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (1 February 1940): 138; "Protests 'Sarcastic Snicker,'" *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (14 March 1940): 301; "Our 'Silence' Oppressive," *Christian-Evangelist* 78 (11 April 1940): 404.
- 20 "World's Men of Good Will," *Commonweal* 31 (5 January 1940): 233; Cyril Clemens, "Myron T. [sic] Taylor," *Commonweal* 31 (23 February 1940): 386; "Let's Investigate Ambassador Kennedy," *America* 62 (9 March 1940): 602-3.
- 21 "Let's Investigate Ambassador Kennedy," *America* 62 (9 March 1940): 602-3; "The Appointment to the Vatican," *Commonweal* 31 (22 March 1940): 461; "The 'Christian Century' Carries On," *Commonweal* 32 (26 April 1940): 3.
- 22 The archbishop's comments appeared in Walton H. Greever, "The Vatican-White House Peace Axis," *Lutheran Standard* 98 (17 February 1940): 3-4, 7; "Archbishop and U.S.," *Time*, 25 March 1940, 72; *New York Times*, 12 May 1940.
- 23 The best discussion of the Truman attempt is George J. Gill's "The Truman Administration and Vatican Relations," *Catholic Historical Review* 73 (July 1987): 408-23; also see Dorsey Milan Deaton's dissertation. After Taylor's term, the United States went without a Vatican ambassador until Ronald W. Reagan successfully appointed an official representative in the 1980s.