

## *Perspective of The Vatican's Peace Diplomacy in the Region Dispute*

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### **Abstract**

*The peace process of regional dispute is handled with various processes and the sides who are concerned about the conflict, including the Vatican's aid by using its peace diplomacy. The Vatican knew that mitigating the regional dispute had to face several challenges. However, the process and efforts to mitigate many areas of regional dispute are still the Vatican's belief that peace becomes part of human rights and universal values. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to review the perspective of the Vatican's mission to mitigate the regional dispute based on the Pope's leadership and the Catholic Church's teaching. This article uses descriptive analysis by seeking the relevant literature review as a source of the review. The analysis then found that some regional conflicts in the American continent have been successfully negotiated. However, some current regional disputes, either in African content, European, or Asian countries, still happen without proper solutions. In Asia, the civil war between Myanmar and the Korean Peninsula conflict became an actual sample of why religious-based diplomacy needed another approach, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which was still ongoing until 2024. This unsuccessful-always-mission peace diplomacy did not dwarf the Vatican and the Catholic Church in keeping consistent with continuing their peace diplomacy mission, even though they had to open up and collaborate with other sides.*

**Keywords** — *Diplomacy, Dispute, Peace, Region, Vatican*

### **1. Introduction**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has brought the Vatican's leading authority into the spotlight as it attempts to play a crucial role as a peacemaker. The conflict, which began with Russia's military aggression in Ukraine in February 2022, has a deeper history dating back to 2014. This ongoing dispute has not only prompted several heads of state and international organizations, including the Vatican, to call for peace, but has also highlighted the Vatican's unique position as a potential peacemaker. The Vatican's decision to pursue peace is not driven by political interests or personal gain, but by a genuine desire to bring about a resolution to this conflict.

The Vatican's stance on political and personal benefits is clear-it is not the motivation of the Vatican's leader. The Vatican's unique approach to diplomacy, always promoting peace in all kinds of human disputes, is a key part of its mission. This mission is to consciously control unsavory human behavior and undertake it based on divine purposes and the doctrine of mercy (Crespo & C. Gregory, 2020). The Vatican believes that its diplomacy has become part of the values, teachings, and role of the Catholic Church in the secular system. In this context, the Vatican's role in the secular system is to advocate for peace and justice, and its diplomatic efforts manifest this role (Carletti, 2015), which is evolving in the 21st century. In contrast, other people or organizations

sometimes interpret the Vatican's diplomatic relations with several countries and international organizations (Joustra, 2018) as a part of the Vatican's political stance.

Vatican peace diplomacy aligns with constructivism, a theory in which values, ideas, norms, and identities become the rules for how a state can make changes and influence. Constructivism theory opens up the role of non-state actors to become agents of peace who are expected to form identities from social constructions. These social constructions, which are the shared understandings and interpretations that shape our reality, are formed from social processes within one community or between communities. They are not inherent or natural but created and maintained by social interactions and practices. Social constructions can be seen as the collective beliefs, norms, and values that a society shares, and they play a significant role in shaping the behavior and actions of individuals and groups.

Gusti et al. (2023) observed the transformative power of constructivism theory in their research on the role of Christianity as a means of inter-state relations. This topic, with its potential for transformation, inspires hope and enlightenment. A similar research topic connected with the constructivism theory, Hidayatullah et al. (2022) found that Confucian norms affect China's foreign policy and interconnections, providing a transformative perspective on China's international relations. On the other side, Nainggolan et al. (2022) also stated that domestic norms *Pacem In Terris*, part of the Catholic doctrines, greatly support peace territory in Syria, offering a hopeful and inspiring insight into peace efforts. Therefore, these previous religious studies that emphasize religion as part of the social construction are not just a matter of faith. They have also functioned as a guideline to build an inter-state relations construction, a transformative and

significant concept that enlightens and inspires.

Inter-state relations can sometimes lead to friction, escalating into geopolitical tensions in certain regions. In such situations, the Vatican's diplomacy, guided by the Supreme Power of the Vatican, plays a crucial and reassuring role in reconciling conflicting parties. When enacted by the entire Catholic Church in all countries, the results of the Vatican's diplomacy serve as directives of the Pope, fostering a sense of connection and involvement, even if some may hold ambivalent views. This role of the Vatican's diplomacy, with its unwavering focus on reconciliation, offers hope and reassurance in the face of geopolitical tensions.

To alleviate conflict, Pope Francis and Pope Benedict pursued their roles as representatives of the Vatican. Pope Francis positioned himself as a peacemaker, dedicating his mission to finding solutions to geopolitical disputes. Pope Benedict (O'Connor, 2006) also ran his diplomacy with the same peacemaking goal but with a focus on legitimizing the Catholic Church's efforts to build the beliefs and values of the Catholic Church. They transcend the boundaries of the churches, assuming the crucial role of intermediaries in horizontal and vertical conflicts, thereby underscoring the importance of their diplomatic roles.

Nevertheless, what the Vatican has done does not always bear the wanted results. The unresolved Russia-Ukraine conflict is evidence of the unsuccessful peace diplomacy the Vatican runs. However, the Pope Francis, as a mediator, once said there are no just wars but peace (De Volder, 2023). His statements remind us peace must be fought for, not a reward. Pope has consistently carried out his mission to fortify humanity from the injustices that fellow humans often commit. His role as a mediator to reconcile conflicting parties, as a rabbi sent by God, also constitutes his action

and witness, demanding our utmost respect and reverence.

Throughout history, the Vatican has consistently demonstrated its unwavering commitment to peace diplomacy, effectively quelling conflicts in the American regions. Randriamanantena (2020) delves into this history in his dissertation, where he identifies three significant disputes in the Americas. His analysis highlights the influence of doctrine, theological perspective, and the role of religion (Ottuh et al., 2022) on the Vatican's efforts to reconcile each conflict. This steadfast commitment to peace serves as a reassuring testament to the Vatican's role in conflict resolution.

The Vatican, under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, played a pivotal role in resolving the Beagle Channel border conflict between Chile and Argentina. This long-standing dispute was successfully ended in 1984 when the two countries signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (Van Aert, 2016), a testament to the Vatican's impressive diplomatic prowess. The subsequent resolution of the conflict between the United States and Cuba (Danyliuk, 2019) further adds to the Vatican's record of success in resolving conflicts in the Americas, leaving us all impressed by its role in conflict resolution.

The United States and Cuba reached a diplomatic agreement in 2014, during President Barack Obama's administration, to resolve their conflicting countries. However, this short-conflict resolution period stipulated was short-lived, as President Donald Trump's policies, which were more confrontational towards Cuba, blunted the progress made in improving relations between the two countries.

Donald Trump tightened trade mobility, especially Cuban military trade, and remittances (*Havana Struggles to Manage Economy, Cuba-US Relations*, 2024). Therefore, the tourism industry transformation promoted by the Cuban Government was less attractive due to the US's restricted policy for

US citizens who want to travel to Cuba. These US policy changes certainly discouraged the role of the Vatican, which always seeks to build peace in the North American region where the majority of the population is Catholic.

In addition to the Cuba-US dispute, Randriamanantena (2020) also analyzed the case of a territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru. This territorial dispute ended in 1998 through a comprehensive agreement. The Catholic Church, through Pope John Paul II, contributed to resolving this dispute through its centralized and exclusive mode of social teaching renewal through Pope John Paul II's salvation mission (Gierycz, 2022). However, both sides' political consciousness became the dominant baseline to end the dispute.

Randriamanantena's findings highlight the Catholic Church's significant role, particularly Saint Peter's Basilica, as a mediator in conflicts. The Vatican's use of religious influence emerges as a powerful tool to influence the conflicting parties and facilitate resolution. The unity of local churches further strengthens the Vatican's Papal Supremacy, validating its mission to create a better world by integrating church and universal values.

The Catholic Church's involvement in reconciling warring parties can be seen from the Supreme Pontiff's efforts to enter the conflict through constructive and truthful arguments. In every speech delivered, Pope Francis emphasizes the value of the church in line with universal human values. Golan et al. (2019) analysis reinforces this evidence by analyzing several contexts of the Pope's speeches. They found that each speech narrative was constructed by universal identity and values. The Pope, as the leader of the Catholic Church, plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and direction of the church's involvement in conflict resolution. In addition, the shared responsibility and direction of the Catholic Church as a party that

spreads goodness so that Catholicism is valued positively in the eyes of religious people, both Catholics and non-Catholics, are also part of the context of the speech that the Vatican wants to call out to the world.

The Vatican's call for peace is a concern for several countries, including Italy, the closest country to the Vatican. Despite a dark history of crisis in relations between the two countries, particularly during the Vatican's conflict with the Italian Fascist Government in 1929-1932 (Cassels & Pollard, 1987), the Italian Government now fully supports every step and decision of the Vatican. This support has been in place since establishing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Italian Government on June 24, 1929, through the Lateran Treaty. Since then, Italy-Vatican diplomatic relations have significantly promoted the acceptance of the Catholic Church's values in the consolidation and cooperation of Government and society. This emphasis on the promotion of Catholic values underscores the impact of the Vatican's diplomatic relations on societal acceptance and cooperation.

With its independence of authority through the Pope as supreme leader, the Vatican is a significant player in remedying global issues. In 2022, the Catholic Church in Sudan is hopeful that Pope Francis will be willing to visit South Sudan to convince several parties to resolve the conflict. This request is a testament to the Vatican's role as an independent authority, a role that reassures us of its ability to contribute to global solutions. The Vatican's independence and leadership under the Pope's guidance provide a strong foundation for its potential to influence global issues. The hope is that Pope Francis' visit will not only encourage the reconciliation of the warring parties but also serve as a beacon of hope for the resolution of global conflicts (*Everyone Hopes That Pope Francis' Visit Will Promote Peace*, 2022).

Despite the challenges, the Christian population in Sudan, comprising Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, stands strong at around 60 percent. They are the three largest religions in South Sudan. In recognition of their resilience, Pope Francis agreed to embark on a peace-efforts journey to Sudan in February 2023. However, the Pope's visit, while a significant gesture, did not lead to a substantial resolution of the tribal conflicts in Eastern Africa. This underscores the ongoing struggle to address these issues through a religious and humanitarian lens.

Pope Francis's intervention did not bring about the impactful peace reconciliation of civil conflict in Sudan, but the Vatican is still concerned about and following what is happening in Sudan. It's important to understand the historical context of Sudan's division into Northern Sudan and Southern Sudan since 2011. Southern Sudan seceded and formed a new state called the Republic of South Sudan. The civil war that occurred between 1983 and 2005 also caused Sudan to experience famine, crime, and poverty.

Different ethnic and regional characteristics have caused Sudan to experience a civil war that has not been resolved entirely. The condition of the civil war that still occurs until 2023 indicates that the civil war in Sudan is not over. The United States, which always provides humanitarian assistance, has been involved in mitigating the conflict even though US assistance has also been unable to reduce the conflict in Sudan. After the visit of Pope Francis in February 2023, approximately 9,000 lives were lost due to the civil conflict in Sudan (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). The definition of the Pope's visit indicates that there was no change in the mindset of the people in solving conflict. Hence, faith or religion is not practical yet enough to be an embracing approach to defusing conflict in Sudan.

What about conflicts that extend beyond the borders of a single country and

involve nations with diverse religious demographics? Can the Vatican's peace diplomacy be applied in such global contexts? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Korean Peninsula conflict, the Myanmar Civil Conflict, the China-Taiwan sovereignty issue conflict, and social conflicts in South Asian countries are all examples of such global conflicts. These cases, where Christians or Catholics are part of the minority community, underscore the relevance of the topic of religious diplomacy in conflict resolution.

Although the dispute occurred in a Catholic religious minority area, the Vatican took a stand to call for humanity as a form of peace diplomacy, which is also the goal of the values of the Catholic Church. The Vatican's role in mediating the conflict, with the support of the United Nations Agency, international institutions, the European Union, and other countries, is a reassuring sign of its commitment to peace. However, it needs to be emphasized again that the Vatican's efforts to realize peace are a challenging mission. Anti-Catholicism and rejection of the mission of missionaries is a challenge in itself. Cultural differences and different views on religious values and principles are also challenges that the leadership of the Catholic Church and the Vatican must face.

That is the challenge the United States faces today. The United States is a country with a majority Catholic population. Amidst the dynamics and acculturation of global culture and social norms, Catholics have begun to express their critical thoughts, leading to distrust of their faith. Some no longer believe in the principles of life and Catholic values taught by the Catholic Church. Transformation of beliefs occurred, both those who changed their beliefs and those who decided to be atheists. Missionaries must have faced a faith struggle as they sought to re-establish the Catholic faith in American society.

It was a similar story when the Catholic faith first spread in the Americas. At that time,

the struggles of missionaries were able to fight for the dogmas and teachings of the Catholic Church to be widely accepted by the people of the United States. This led to a significant growth and development of the Catholic faith within the multiethnic American society. The missionaries' ongoing efforts to adapt to the changing global knowledge and culture, which inevitably influence the faith and teachings of the Catholic Church, are a testament to their resilience. Despite the challenges, the Catholic faith continues to thrive. The political choices and the rejection of certain values, principles, and rules of the Catholic Church are indeed challenges, but they also signify the enduring influence and relevance of the Catholic faith in the Americas today (McCormick, 2020).

The change in attitudes and adherence to the Catholic faith of American citizens provides a pivotal record to the Vatican. It underscores the adaptability and relevance of Catholic teachings to current conditions. This renewal can significantly influence the behavior of the Catholic Church in conflicted societies. For the Catholic Church, the social, cultural, political, and power dynamics that give rise to strife and conflict must be mediated with a choice of solutions. These solutions should take into account the sacrifices experienced by the conflicting parties, such as the loss of lives, livelihoods, and dignity. This is crucial for the Vatican's mission of building peace, which has the potential to bring about real impact and change, inspiring hope and optimism.

From the perspective of the Vatican's peace diplomacy in region disputes in American, European, and African regions, this review will provide another angle on how the Vatican operates its diplomacy in different regions. The Asian region's dispute is another continent where the Vatican's effectiveness in dealing with conflict can be observed. Therefore, exploring the Vatican's role in mitigating conflict in all regional disputes becomes the main goal of this review. The

Vatican's diplomacy is not just about initiating and pursuing a peace process, but also about effectively mitigating the challenges that follow. This is particularly reassuring when the Vatican embarks on its peace mission in Asia, a region with fewer Catholic believers.

The remainder of this review will delve deeper into the Vatican's distinctive perspective on peace diplomacy, particularly in its handling of regional disputes in Asian countries. This unique viewpoint is of significant importance as it illuminates the Vatican's novel approach to conflict resolution. The review will then conclude with a discussion on the future of the peace process, as envisioned by the Supreme Pontiff of the Vatican and the Catholic Church.

## **2. The Literature Review**

The context of peace diplomacy is intricately woven with the technical roles of both state and non-state actors in resolving social conflicts, disputes, and crises. It's crucial to recognize that these actors, driven by political, economic, and social issues, can inadvertently escalate regional disputes, which often stem from differences in traits and perspectives.

In the intricate fabric of global politics, regional disputes have long been a source of tension and instability. These conflicts, deeply rooted in historical grievances, competing interests, and power dynamics, present significant challenges to regional and international cooperation (Paul, 2020).

From an international relations perspective, managing regional conflicts has become an increasingly important focus. Scholars and policymakers have recognized the need for a nuanced understanding of the forces that shape regional orders and the strategies that can foster greater cooperation and peaceful interaction.

One such example is the case of the Egyptian-Israeli security cooperation in the aftermath of the 1973 conflict. The

confidence-building process, facilitated by the United States, culminated in a historic shift with the signing of a formal peace treaty in 1979. This transition from a state of war to a less destructive adversarial relationship underscores the potential for regional actors to insulate themselves from the destabilizing tendencies that often characterize regional conflict systems. Political, security, and economic stability has continued in the Arab world since Israel-Arab relations were established to avoid the fear of Iran's hegemonic (Zisser, 2023).

Similarly, the role of regional organizations in conflict management has gained increasing attention. Traditionally focused on economic or political objectives, member states have more recently leveraged these organizations to facilitate their involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. However, the efficacy of this approach remains a subject of debate, as some argue that the involvement of regional organizations can complicate the path to peace and harmony.

The blockade on Qatar, imposed by its Gulf neighbors in 2017, exemplifies the complexities of regional conflict management. The failure of efforts to mediate an end to the blockade underscores the consequences of a breakdown in internal consensus among regional leaders and the impact of policy shifts by global powers like the United States (Milton-Edwards, 2020).

Qatar's emergence as a "reliable peace broker" in regional disputes through its "niche diplomacy" has also drawn attention to the potential role of smaller states in conflict resolution. However, the extent to which Qatar's mediation efforts have successfully addressed the root causes of regional tensions remains a subject of ongoing analysis.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Palestine dispute, an ongoing regional conflict with profound societal implications, remains unresolved as of mid-2024. The Madrid

Conference of 1991, a significant step towards peace, fostered a collective willingness to end the inter-communal violence that had deeply affected society due to the prolonged conflict. However, the efforts to redeem the conflict seem in vain. This reality serves as a stark reminder of the limited success in achieving peace through diplomacy (Alghafli, 2019). The ongoing nature of the Israel-Palestine dispute demands continued attention and underscores the need for persistent efforts in peace diplomacy.

From the perspectives of peace diplomacy and regional disputes, the management of regional disputes and the pursuit of peace diplomacy necessitate a nuanced and multifaceted approach. International relations scholars have underscored the significance of a profound comprehension of the historical, political, and cultural factors that mold regional dynamics and the strategic considerations that guide state and non-state actors (Kamrava, 2011). These perspectives also highlight the influential role of Vatican diplomacy in navigating regional disputes in any hemisphere.

### 3. Methodology

This article stands out in its approach, employing a qualitative methodology that involves descriptive analysis based on a comprehensive study of relevant literature review resources. This method effectively organizes articles and sources from credible journals, social media, and online newspapers. The standard measure of studying literature review typically involves selecting and organizing reviews based on state-of-the-art resources (Barry et al., 2022; Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). This adaptable methodology applies to all significant or multidisciplinary studies, allowing for a thorough analysis of various situations or cases, including the computer

science research undertaken by Carrera-Rivera et al. (2022).

On another note, Mergoni and De Witte (2022) conducted a literature review to explore decision-making efficiency, providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the policy in the educational, health, and environmental sectors. In a similar vein, Koburtay et al. (2023) undertook a comprehensive review of the literature on religion and psychology, with a particular focus on religiosity, spirituality, and psychology, instilling confidence in the robustness of their findings.

This review underscores the pivotal and profound role of the Catholic Church's values in the Vatican's peace diplomacy, filling significant research gaps and shedding light on the Vatican's role in mitigating regional disputes. The Supreme of the Vatican, guided by these values, operates within the principle of peace diplomacy. These values, which transcend human relations and are independent of state law, ethics, and norms, represent intra-human relations as integral to fostering peace in human social life. This moral foundation not only inspires but also instills hope in us all with the Vatican's efforts.

The historical records of the Catholic Church's peace diplomacy, meticulously documented through all media channels, including print and online, serve as invaluable literature resources for this research. Information and communication technology modernization has significantly streamlined the research process, particularly in gathering and analyzing digitized reviews. This digital transformation has preserved these records and made them more accessible, inviting the audience to actively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the Vatican's efforts in peace diplomacy.

Finally, the research employs a set of specific keywords as tools to navigate the vast digital literature resources. These keywords, including 'peace diplomacy,' 'Vatican peace

diplomacy,' and 'region dispute,' have been meticulously selected to ensure the review's relevance and suitability. This careful selection enhances the research's thoroughness and precision, instilling confidence in the audience about the comprehensive understanding of the Vatican's peace diplomacy and its implications.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### **4.1 A Brief Standpoint to the Vatican's Peace Diplomacy in Asia**

Regarding mitigating conflicts in the Asian region, replacing the Supreme Pontiff at the Vatican does not affect the Vatican's perspective on mitigating disputes in several Asian countries, such as the Myanmar civil war, India's Manipur conflict, and South China's territorial dispute. Several Asian countries have a significant number of Catholics, especially the Philippines. Most people in Asia hold their belief in Islam. According to population statistics as of 2020, the majority of the population of the Asian region adheres to Islam, namely 1.29 billion. They were followed by Hinduism, Asia's second-majority religion, with 1.15 billion adherents (*Religious Affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing)*, 2023). Meanwhile, Christian adherents only account for 6.53% or 298 million adherents of the 4.5 billion population in Asia.

Nevertheless, the small number of Catholics in Asia remains a concern for the Vatican and the entire Catholic Church. The Vatican, represented by the Pope, has built good relations with several countries, marked by establishing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and 181 countries, including the Philippines (*Diplomatic Relations of The Holy See*, 2021). The Philippines constitutes an Asian country with the most significant number of Catholics. Based on Philippine

population statistics, as of 2020, the number of Catholics reached 78.8% or more than 85 million people (*Religion in Asia and Future Projections*, 2024). The Vatican and the Philippines have established diplomatic relations since April 8, 1951.

Apart from the Philippines, China also has built relations with the Vatican. Diplomatic relations between the two countries officially began on October 23, 1942. Nonetheless, before 1942, China-Vatican had good relations. According to Peternicb (2013), the government of Viceroy Zhili Li Hongzhang (1842-1901) once approached the Vatican. As a statesman and diplomat, Li once asked the British Governor of Hong Kong, John Pope Hennessy (1834-1891), to write a letter to the Cardinal Secretary of State expressing his interest in building close relations with the Vatican and inviting Papal Nuncio to come to Beijing. The letter, written in 1881, then opened Vatican-Sino relations.

Meanwhile, from the demographic and socio-cultural context of Chinese society, the People's Republic of China lacks a Catholic majority. However, Catholicism is one of the religions that is starting to develop and is recognized by the Chinese communist government. The number of people who adhere to Catholicism is much smaller than those who adhere to Buddhism, Taoism or Daoism, Protestantism, and Islam. However, the communist government system wants to treat all religions, including Catholicism, as part of the transformation of the Chinese government, which wants to provide religious freedom for its people (Lynch, 2014). In the middle of freedom of religion, the challenging situation still concerns communities of all religious sects in China.

Therefore, the phenomenon of Sino-Vatican relations has become a concern for several parties amidst the paradoxical attitude of the Xi Jinping Government. On the one hand, regulations provide freedom to adhere to government-recognized beliefs. On the other



hand, the sinicization of religion policy wants to control how the government regulates manners, morality, ethics, customs, and doctrine over developing religions, including Catholicism (*10 Things to Know About China's Policies on Religion*, 2023). Automatically, ecclesiastical values are directed to follow the traditions, customs, and norms of Chinese society, including communist ideology. The Chinese government wants to direct the Catholic Church to have independent principles without following what is stated in every policy and direction of the Vatican Church leadership.

Xi Jinping then opened up about establishing relations with the Vatican to restore a relationship that had experienced a breakdown. The Catholic Church was once separated into two sides. On the one hand, the Catholic Church obeys and is loyal to Catholic authorities centralized in the Vatican, including the government-controlled Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Meanwhile, on the other hand, there are groups of Catholics who founded churches in secret. They call themselves part of the Underground Catholic Church. They went into hiding because they were concerned about the regulations and punishments imposed by the Chinese communist government on several bishops, priests, and lay Christians.

Those who were separated turned back into one after Vatican-Sino relations improved since the Provisional Agreement was enacted for both countries (Mok, 2021). The Provisional Agreement was signed on September 22, 2018 (Madsen R., 2019). The restoration of Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations was then realized through the election of a Chinese bishop by combining cooperation between the Vatican and the Chinese Communist Party. As the highest Vatican authority, the Vatican legitimizes the elected Bishop. The legitimacy of the elected Bishop finally paved the way for Sino-Vatican reconciliation (Zhu, 2017). Reconciliation

unites all the separate Catholic Churches and forms an alliance of all Catholic Churches in China with the Pope as the supreme leader of the Catholic community (Stout, 2021).

The Provisional Agreement also became a form of Sino-Vatican mediation after the Chinese government assessed the relationship between Taiwan and the Vatican as an anomalous relationship (Moody, 2020). Disharmony in China-Taiwan relations has been going on for a long time since Chiang Kai-shek established the Kuomintang government with a dictatorship system on the Taiwan Islands. The existence of the Kuomintang government sparked polemics for the Chinese government at that time. The emergence of Vatican-Taiwan relations has indeed worsened Sino-Vatican relations. However, history has recorded that the revitalization of Sino-Vatican relations has been open since 1979 when the Chinese Communist Government opened diplomatic channels with several other countries. Percara (2023) even sees this relationship as the beginning of a constructive relationship but full of political, sovereignty, and national security challenges (Leung & Wang, 2016), religion, and culture.

For the leadership of the Catholic Church at the Vatican, diplomacy in building close relations with Asian countries in conflict is the aim of the Vatican Government to prevent the world from damage caused by human activities and maintain diplomatic relations with non-majority Catholic countries. The Pope's visit to Japan and Thailand in November 2019 was a realization of the Vatican's actions to show the world that there are no boundaries between the Catholic Church and global society. The Pope's visit is an added value for the Vatican as a missionary of peace. History also records the visit of Pope John Paul II to Indonesia from 8 to October 12, 1989. As is known, Indonesia is a country with a majority Muslim population. Pope John Paul II's visit manifests Vatican diplomacy in

establishing good relations with non-majority Catholic countries in Asian countries.

In the 21st century, the Vatican's peacekeeping mission is increasingly challenging. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict cannot even be resolved with the approach to the values of the Catholic Church brought by Pope Francis. However, the world still recognizes the Vatican's role in bridging the resolution of global conflicts, including all forms of conflict currently taking place in the Asian region. Pope Francis was once asked to reconcile disputes on the Korean Peninsula. The dispute that Pope Francis considers cannot be resolved with the methods and thoughts of the Catholic Church because North Korea is not a country with a leadership and population that believes in the Catholic faith. So Pope Francis submitted this request by looking at developments and whether North Korea was willing to invite the Pope's presence amid the two countries in conflict.

The Korean War physically, if seen from facts and history, has stopped since 1953. However, the reality of reducing differences in views on the Korean Peninsula has not been fully resolved comprehensively. Normalization of relations between the two Koreas is still being pursued despite repeated acts of provocation that lead to conflict between the two countries. South Korea and North Korea essentially have a very close kinship relationship, which, if it can be applied, conflict resolution with a pure brotherly relationship approach is the most appropriate way to be applied.

North Korea still sees South Korea as a different sibling, so the reconciliation of the Korean Peninsula has never been resolved. Therefore, the reconciliation of the Korean Peninsula is still a long road that has yet to find an end. The attack on Yeonpyeong Island and the sinking of the submarine Cheonan in 2010 were one of the triggers for tensions that resurfaced after the end of the Korean War. Similarly, the provocation of a series of North

Korean missile firing tests and, most recently, the test launch of a new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile on March 19, 2024. A series of missile tests have been a consequence of the slowing down of the reconciliation process on the Korean Peninsula. Reconciliation efforts have been pursued since 1991. It was continued by the administration of President Moon Jae-In (2017-2022) despite concerns over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD).

President Moon Jae-In's visit to Vatican City in October 2021 is part of South Korea's efforts to realize the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. President Moon Jae-in hopes to receive a return visit from Pope Francis to South Korea. The visit will likely build North Korea's confidence in continuing to reunite the two disparate regions. Moon Jae-In's hope of asking Pope Francis for support in building peaceful reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula is a constructive step for the South Korean government in the region. However, this step also requires external support from the Apostolic Catholic Church in South Korea. Pope Francis acknowledged the difficulties of communicating with North Korea because there were no official ties and relations between the Vatican and North Korea.

Internal political changes in South Korea, especially since the transition from the Moon Jae-In government to Yoon Suk Yeol, closed the Korean Peninsula's peace gap. Regardless of the political process on the Korean Peninsula, the Vatican continues to dedicate itself to the Northeast Asia region as part of its mission to build a spirit of peace diplomacy. The Catholic Church and its missionaries have spread to several Asian countries, including South Korea. Catholicism in South Korea is not the majority religion. However, the number of Catholics in South Korean society has increased since the penetration of Catholic Church teachings in the 18th century. This condition is a strategic key

for the Vatican to keep abreast of further developments in the Korean Peninsula conflict area.

Apart from the Korean Peninsula, the conflicts between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are part of the South Asia region, are also of concern to the UN and the Vatican. The upheaval of the transition of power from the official government of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, to the Taliban (*Afghanistan: Fall of The Government and The Transition of Power 2 Commons Library Research Briefing*, 2021) became one of the critical events that occurred in 2021. Amid the conflict, the Catholic Church in Afghanistan, which is a minority community with only a chapel, is the only Catholic Church in the area of the Italian embassy in Kabul (*The Only Catholic Church in Afghanistan Closes for the Covid-19 Emergency*, 2020), has become a symbol of the Vatican's less strong position for running its peace mission. However, the Vatican still views the unrest in Afghanistan as a humanitarian problem that needs international support to be resolved without weapons and violence. Because the Vatican realizes that the interests and role of the Catholic Church in the Afghan region are not very large and considering that the majority of the Afghan population is Muslim, the struggle to resolve the Afghan conflict is voiced through international forums.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is the basis of the Vatican's peace diplomacy that embraces all communities, including communities with different cultures. For this reason, this doctrine does not problematic the cultural and religious differences in Afghanistan for missionaries carrying out their missions. Differences become additional new knowledge for missionaries to continue to support the goodness of universal human values. The Vatican carries out its peace mission elegantly because it looks at several aspects, such as politics, ideology, culture, and society. For the

Vatican, the different cultures of Asia and Europe can still adapt to each other as long as Catholic teachings are well integrated with each country's culture and societal norms.

However, differences can still be a challenge for missionaries. Often, society cannot accept the culture and character of different people. Vatican diplomats must train themselves to develop appropriate penetration models to open the community's views. Changes in the missionaries' work methods changed the Vatican's existing business processes, encouraging the Vatican to be open and flexible in seeing increasingly complex and diverse dimensions of knowledge and social problems. The meeting of Buddhist religious figures in the Mongolian religious community with Vatican missionaries in May 2022 is evidence of the Vatican's efforts to carry out inter-religion influence penetration, that differences strengthen the legitimacy of Vatican diplomacy to position the Catholic Church in Mongolia as a representative that unites different human aspects.

Mongolia is a small country with a significant historical and civilizational influence in Northeast Asia and parts of Europe. The history of Mongolia, from 1206 to 1368, shows that the existence of the religions that developed at that time was greatly influenced by local powers and religious leaders who succeeded in conquering the region. Atwood (2022) adds that broad and imprecise ways of life and nom, overlapping with groups of religious leaders, also became the basis for forming religion in Mongolia, apart from social norms that saw Mongol rulers able to survive on the principle of free obedience to heaven.

Beliefs, cultural norms, and the involvement of the ruler meant that the outside world, especially Europe, did not heavily influence Mongolia's religious diffusion. Since Europe is the center of Christianity, which was spread through a colonial system of government by some European countries,

Mongolia did not have much Christian influence spread by church missionaries in Europe. Therefore, Buddhism is the majority religion practiced by the Mongolian people. According to a 2020 US Department of State census report, 59.4% of Mongolians have a religion. According to the same information, 40.6% of the population declared themselves atheists. Of the 59.4%, 87.1% of the population claim to be Buddhist. Christianity is believed to be the religion of only 2.2% of the population (*2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia*, 2022). The large number of Buddhists does not close the door for the Catholic Church to continue to serve and provide support for peace missions in the conflict that used to occur between Mongolia and China in 2015.

Pope Francis, the supreme leader of Catholics, who began his pontificate on March 13, 2013, addresses the differences between Buddhists and Catholics in Mongolia as religious communities that provide input and complement each other. The Vatican's attitude towards religious diversity in Mongolia, where the Catholic Church is a minority community, is that diversity strengthens commitment to peace and promotes non-violence. When this information was collected, the number of Catholics in Mongolia was only 1,200. Only 6 Catholic churches have 33 priests and 44 Catholic nuns (Watkins, 2022). The sum of Catholic adherence is a minimal number compared to Mongolia's population of more than 3 million by 2020. Although the Catholic community in some Asian countries is still minimal, the Vatican continues to carry out its mission of building a constructive civilization through inter-communal dialogue. The Vatican's peace diplomacy in Asia and all countries in different regions remain active as long as the world exhibits unbalanced security, defense, and power politics.

#### **4.2 The Future of Peace Process Under Vatican Mission**

The world peace process remains dynamic because not all state and non-state actors have the same strategic foreign policy. Changes will occur when the leader's foundation and character bring the country and its surroundings into a critical phase to outspread the conflict. The same applies to Vatican peace diplomacy. Although the mission of peace remains dynamically fought by the global community, the Vatican and Catholic Church still keep fighting for the same thing because this has become a world commitment. One of the commitments to world peace is inseparable from nuclear disarmament, where the Vatican, as a non-state actor (Kulska, 2019), also contributes ideas and support so that nuclear weapons are not used to fight human civilization.

Despite the daunting task of halting the use of nuclear weapons, the Vatican's unwavering voice continues to echo. Even as nuclear weapon-producing countries persist in their use of nuclear technology as a destructive defense weapon, the Vatican's commitment remains steadfast. The use of nuclear weapons in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli army since the terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, in Kibbuz has triggered tension in several Arab countries, such as Iran. As a producer of nuclear weapons, Iran can mobilize the use of its nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, a series of North Korean nuclear weapons tests also triggered concerns on the Korean Peninsula. The high use of nuclear weapons in several regions is proof that persuasive efforts and dialogue through unilateral diplomacy have not been able to smooth out the denuclearization program. Yet, the Vatican's perseverance in the face of these challenges is a testament to its unwavering commitment to peace.uclearization program.

However, Vatican diplomats and missionaries are trying to adjust to the changing attitudes of the people and the global community towards the role of the Catholic Church in following the flow of information

related to the nuclear arms race. The Vatican's efforts are certainly not easy amid the Catholic Church's crisis of confidence due to the issue of scandals and the emergence of differences in people's views on Catholic dogma and teachings. Different views have caused several Christians to transfer their Christian faith to different beliefs or stand on their stance on atheism. As a consequence, the number of adherents of Christianity, including Catholicism, began to degrade. This shift in faith, according to projections, has impacted the sum of Christians and some other religions (*Statistics and Forecasts for World Religions: 1800-2025*, 2013).

In the 1900s, the number of Christians reached 558 million. Islam and Hinduism reached 200 and 203 million people, respectively. According to projections in 2025, the number of Christians is estimated to reach 2,707 million. Muslims and Hindus will reach 1,972 and 1,104 million people, respectively. Those increasing believers composition follows the growth rate of the world's population. However, the disparity between the three faith groups is getting smaller, although Christians are still dominant in numbers. The projection also shows that the composition of the two major religions, Christianity and Islam, is becoming more balanced.

Regardless of the projected composition of the number of religious believers worldwide, the Vatican's mission of peace diplomacy remains consistent. The Vatican's ability to build and maintain its global partners is a testament to its enduring influence. Although the challenge of guarding Christian ethics takes work to implement, the Vatican's long-term diplomatic relations with all nations, including Italy-Vatican relations, which were officially established by the treaty in 1929, have stood the test of time. The dimension of building relationships with foreign countries and international organizations is necessary for the Vatican to

maintain the Catholic Church's existence amid the growing secular vision of internationalism that developed around the 1910s.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the mission to save Catholicism during imperial internationalism was carried out through the formation of L'Union Catholique d'Études Internationales (UCEI). The UCEI became a religious community-based in Geneva. This community became the institutional forum for Catholic internationalism in the League of Nations. The existence of the UCEI called for dogmas of the Catholic Church amidst the development of secularism after the end of the First World War. The formation of the UCEI represents the Vatican's interest in embracing parties with an interest in the Catholic Church.

The formation of the UCEI was a significant step in the Vatican's efforts to counterbalance international secular groups. UCEI was formed by Gonzague de Reynold and Baron Georges de Montenach in 1917 in the Swiss city of Fribourg. Montenach first led the organization as president and Reynold as vice president. Montenach passed away in 1925, and the leadership of UCEI was then taken over by Gonzague de Reynold (Shine, 2018). A similar association to the UCEI was also formed by Heinrich Lammasch in Austria in 1919. Heinrich Lammasch formed the International Catholic League as the last Austrian Prime Minister of the newly dissolved Habsburg Empire. The formation of the International Catholic League was intended to counterbalance international secular groups that tended to see world interests from the spiritual interests taught by the Catholic Church. The Vatican's determination to counterbalance these secular groups is a testament to its unwavering commitment to its values and beliefs.

The history of the organization of the Catholic Church's struggle in Europe forged the Vatican to continue to adjust amid the dynamics of world society and geopolitics that aggressively echoed the issue of the third

world war in the 21st century. The Vatican has been vocal about its opposition to any form of war, advocating for peaceful resolutions to conflicts. Meanwhile, the Vatican also still has to mitigate internal problems that erode the trust of some of its adherents in the sanctity of the Catholic Church and the celibate life choices of Catholic Church priests. On the other side, the Vatican does not have the power to suppress the use of nuclear weapons. The Vatican's peace mission to mediate the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has not had a positive impact, is proof that the Vatican's influence has not been able to change the mindset of the warring parties. However, ecclesiastical values are still a sacred part of life for some world leaders and political movements in European countries, although the Vatican cannot fully resolve any efforts to restore disputes.

Nevertheless, Pope can undertake another approach by aligning cooperation between the European Union and non-EU countries, especially Germany and France, as the countries with the most vital position in the European region. The Vatican has been actively engaging in diplomatic discussions and negotiations with these countries, seeking their support and cooperation in resolving conflicts and promoting peace. The support of France and Germany is considered to generate alternative ways in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, although the relationship between Germany, France, and Russia cannot be guaranteed. The United Kingdom and Turkey could be an alternative as neutral countries outside the European Union. The coalition of the Vatican, Turkey, and the United Kingdom becomes the Vatican's alternative measures in a neutral position.

Apart from unilateral peace diplomacy, the Vatican also utilizes the papal leadership figure of the Vatican Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II became one of the figures and representatives of the Catholic Church who positioned himself as the mediator of the conflict. The elected Pope John Paul II as

Supreme Pontiff reversed an unwritten rule that the chosen Pope always positioned the office of Pope with Italian nationality. Similarly, Pope Francis is from Buenos Aires, Argentina. Pope Francis' attitude is moderate in negotiating conflicts, especially conflict negotiations in Eastern Europe.

One of Pope Francis's achievements was to reduce the feud between Cuba and the United States, a conflict that attracted worldwide attention around 2014 (Vukićević, 2015). The realization of the US-Cuba peace proves that Vatican diplomacy builds a constructive public perspective that the Vatican and the Catholic Church have spread transcendental human values and human rights. Every mission and diplomacy of the Vatican is inseparable from the church's teachings, which direct the maintenance of relationships and respect for human life. The values and mission of the Catholic Church entrusted to the leadership of the Vatican stimulate changes in the mindset of every human being, including those outside the Catholic Church. Consequently, non-Catholic actors will also respect the Vatican and the Catholic Church because they believe in the attitude and diplomacy carried out by the Vatican.

Similar to the peace efforts in the Americas and Europe, the Vatican also remains involved in the problems experienced by Asian countries. The Supreme Pontiff stations Asia in the same light as countries outside the Asian region. It is undeniable that the Vatican continues to prioritize the recovery of conflict areas that have populations with the Catholic faith. Meanwhile, the adjustment of church services and the recovery of internal issues are contemplations for the Vatican to get closer to the people and the international community, especially the non-Catholic community, in bridging differences in perceptions and principles.

The Vatican is actively involved in harmonizing the values of the Catholic Church

with universal values that align with the norms and order of social life. Every contemporary global issue is considered in determining the attitude and service of the church to save human civilization and other living beings from extinction. Extinction is caused by climate change due to the excessive use of technology and war. The proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and the resulting wars have damaged the environment and human civilization. Therefore, denuclearization is a commitment that needs to be carried out by all countries, except nuclear technology, which is used to change the ecosystem of living things for the better. The ethos and values of the Catholic Church also teach humans to save the environment and human behavior to save others.

Therefore, the Vatican's peace diplomacy can quickly adapt to the life patterns of a democratic society. Missionaries are present in society, manifesting peace through the church's message through a combination of dogma enshrined in the Holy Gospel (Sodano, 2001) and empirical knowledge learned from formal and non-formal education. Modern science greatly helps the peace mission of the multilayered actors of the Vatican diplomats (Barbato, 2013) to get closer to the social environment that is always dynamic in every era.

Scientific developments and social changes in interpreting differences have made it easier for Catholic Missionaries to work. Therefore, contemporary issues are part of the lessons to be learned to draw correlations that align with the Catholic Church's values. The establishment of several universities in Vatican City has made it a center of knowledge dissemination for anyone interested in the papal academies in the Vatican City area.

The knowledge base strengthens the Vatican's ability to analyze the shortcomings of its peace missions. Most of the knowledge developed in Vatican City and Rome emphasizes social and astronomical

knowledge, so paramount peace, protection, and defense are not part of the papal knowledge taught in the academies.

Nevertheless, education is still a means for the Vatican to expand and to build individuals' constructive mindsets in responding to or criticizing conflicts in people's lives. Higher education, represented by universities in the Italian region and the Vatican, is a bridge for the Vatican to enrich existing knowledge. As additional information, here some universities specialize in teaching the field of papal academies, such as the University of St. Anthony, Gregorian University, Lateran University, Salesian University, University of the Holy Cross, University of St. Thomas Aquinas, and Urban University (Rousseau, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

The Vatican consistently calls for peace in regional conflicts. In the American landscape, the Vatican played a significant role in calling for peace in the US-Cuba and US-Argentina disputes. In the case of the US-Cuba conflict, the Vatican facilitated secret negotiations between the two countries, leading to the historic thaw in relations. Similarly, in the US-Argentina dispute, the Vatican used its diplomatic channels to urge both parties to seek peaceful resolutions. In Europe, Pope Francis also stands closer to the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a peacemaker. In Asia, based on the history of Northeast Asia, the Vatican became a connector of Vatican-Sino relations again amid the dispute between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. Accordingly, for what the Vatican has done, the Vatican's efforts have had a positive impact on religious-based diplomacy.

However, regional conflicts do not seem over yet. In Southeast Asia, civil war in Myanmar is still raging, including the Pakistan-India and Korean Peninsula disputes.

Looking back at the Russia-Ukraine dispute, Pope Francis, as a representative of the Vatican and the Catholic Church, has been unable to mediate and reduce that conflict. It's important to note that the Vatican has consistently condemned the violence and called for a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The Vatican's breakthrough, or even Catholic teaching and values, are seemingly meaningless. All regional dispute leaders kept their stance without respecting what the Vatican had done.

Despite the ongoing conflicts, the Vatican's peace diplomacy persists. The Vatican has forged crucial partnerships with the European Union and other Catholic-minority countries, aligning with its mission and universal values. This steadfast commitment to protecting human rights is not just a powerful testament to the Vatican's belief system, it is a source of reassurance. The Vatican's belief that this mission will safeguard human rights while respecting diplomatic norms is unwavering. The Catholic Church's stance against injustice and conflict in the region is a testament to the Vatican's consistent peace diplomacy despite the sacrifices and challenges church missionaries and the Supreme Pontiff at the Vatican face.

Social conflicts in international relations are only sometimes resolved entirely and thoroughly. Human views and the dynamics of the social economy of society that differ from one country to another create space for disputes due to the hegemony of power and the use of nuclear weapons. The chaotic interests of superpowers and developing countries test the determination of the Vatican and the Catholic Church to continue to make contributions that impact humanity and the continuity of human civilization.

The Vatican's role as a mediator in regional conflicts is not just significant, it is inspiring. The Papal legacy at the Vatican has led to contributions and breakthroughs in creating a space for consolidation among

conflicting parties. The Vatican has established bilateral and unilateral forums, serving as a platform for countries to engage in dialogue. By leveraging its dogma, knowledge, and experience, the Vatican's peace diplomacy is poised to be championed by future generations facing unique challenges.

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