

The modern world has faced numerous challenges since the emergence of multipolarity in 2014. One of the key aspects worth analysing in this context is the role of Vatican diplomacy in the current political landscape. Since the outbreak of the full-scale Russian - Ukrainian war in 2022, the role of Vatican diplomacy has been widely discussed around the world, not only within Catholic circles. In my PhD project, I investigate the complexity and uniqueness of Holy See diplomacy and its contribution to the peace process in the ongoing war until the end of Pope Francis' pontificate.

I use the term "Vatican diplomacy" because it is widely recognised in the discourse of the secular media and political actors. However, the more accurate term for describing the Church's socio-political role in international affairs is the diplomacy of the Holy See (Morss, 2015). While the Vatican City State is a sovereign state with defined borders, its own legal system, and governmental institutions that guarantee the independence of the Catholic Church, the Holy See is a sovereign subject of international law headed by the Pope (Morss, 2015).

Participation in the CST Toolbox programme provided me with a unique opportunity to understand the relationships between the various Vatican institutions, the Pope, and the institutions of the Holy See. Drawing on both the academic literature and the insights gained through interviews and discussions conducted during the study visits, I decided to structure my doctoral research around three thematic areas: an analysis of Pope Francis' statements and actions concerning the war in Ukraine, the diplomatic initiatives and official visits undertaken by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and the diplomacy of mercy, that is, the humanitarian initiatives carried out by the Papal Almoner, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, and by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, which he headed during the period 2022-2026.

In research on international relations, a well-defined theoretical framework is of fundamental importance. A particularly

valuable theoretical framework from the perspective of the Catholic understanding of international relations is proposed by Pope Leo XIV in the encyclical "Magnifica Humanitas". The Pope introduces the concept of *healthy realism*, which he explains as follows: "Authentic realism does not give up on changing the world; indeed, it starts by clearly identifying interests, fears, constraints and power dynamics, precisely in order to determine what can be achieved, and the measures needed to achieve it. It does not reduce politics to morality; neither does it surrender to violence" (Magnifica Humanitas, 218). I have chosen this theoretical framework - the Catholic understanding of realism - as the conceptual framework for my research.

My participation in the CST Toolbox 2026 programme was an exceptional period of spiritual, intellectual, and academic growth. Spending a semester at the Angelicum enabled me to make significant progress on my doctoral research project. Every component of the programme made a valuable contribution to deepening my research on Holy See diplomacy. The intensive study of Catholic Social Teaching and Christian social thought provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the principles, values, and historical development of the Church's social mission, from Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum" (1891) to Pope Leo XIV's "Magnifica Humanitas" (2026). It also allowed me to become familiar with the

biographies of numerous individuals who have made significant contributions to the proclamation of the Social Gospel, as well as with the various schools of thought concerning the Church's social role and the diverse approaches to its implementation. The complementary courses offered valuable insights into the application of the principles of CST within the contemporary social sciences, while the programme of visits to Vatican dicasteries and institutions provided a unique opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of how the Vatican's institutional structures operate in practice.

Without doubt, my experience in the CST Toolbox programme has been the most significant milestone in my academic journey. It also became a form of personal retreat, offering me an opportunity to reflect on the Social Gospel in relation to my own life and inviting me to integrate my academic work with its practical application.

Bibliography

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The Russian-Ukrainian war and the Role of Vatican Diplomacy

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