

The Power of the Pope



I'm excited to find an audio talk about the power of the Popes of Rome from an authoritative website, CFR.ORG! CFR is the acronym for The Council On Foreign Relations. Former Hollywood playwright Myron Fagan called the [CFR the American branch of the Illuminati](#). Most conspiracy researchers talk about the Deep State or shadow government in America, but not many identify the primary body of the Deep State as The Council On Foreign Relations. I believe it is. Moreover, it's all under the rule and control of the Vatican.

You can listen to the audio from www.cfr.org/podcasts/power-of-the-pope.

"Gabrielle Sierra is the director of podcasting at the Council on Foreign Relations, overseeing the production of four shows. She is also the host of the Webby Award-winning Why It Matters podcast. Prior to her time at CFR, she spent several years as an editor at Facebook, and has written for a number of publications including InStyle, Billboard, and Gothamist." (Source: www.cfr.org/bio/gabrielle-sierra)

Transcript of the first 12 minutes 40 seconds

Gabrielle Sierra: You know you've made it to the highest level of prestige when you get to meet the Pope. Actors, artists, athletes, and politicians, they all clamor for a handshake with his holiness. But aside from his star power, the Pope also has a lot of actual power.

He runs a massive organization that serves over 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide, nearly a fifth of the global population. On any given issue, you may find the Church's position agreeable or egregious. What you may not realize, though, is that for some 2,000 years, **the Pope has been at the center of global affairs.**

He has a seat at the table alongside heads of state and is sought after for his distinct form of influence and diplomacy. I'm Gabrielle Sierra, and this is Why It Matters. Today, the Pope's one-of-a-kind role in international relations.

Pope #1: If men and women hope to transform society, they must begin by changing their own hearts first.

Pope? #2: As a nation faces increasingly complex political and ethical issues of our time, I am confident that the American people will find in their

religious beliefs a precious source of insight to build a more human and free society.

Pope #3: Peace is not simply the absence of war, but the work of justice.

Gabrielle Sierra: Let's sort of dive right into it. When you look at lists of the most powerful people in the world that come out every year, you often find the Pope in top 10. And he's next to people like Joe Biden or Vladimir Putin or, probably a Kardashian (laughter).

And it occurs to me that I don't really understand why the Pope is powerful. So is the Pope powerful? And what kind of power does he wield?

Timothy Burns: The question of whether he's powerful is a difficult question. I think he is. I think there are three reasons. First is, as we know, he leads this huge global institution of the Catholic Church. There's over a billion Catholics. He has ready access to them through encyclicals, through sermons that priests and bishops give. So because of that, and because I think he's sort of prominently dressed and presented as a religious figure in a world that takes that seriously, he's surrounded by a media circus of incredible intensity and attention.

Gabrielle Sierra: This is Timothy Burns. He's a professor of political science at Colgate University (a private college in Hamilton, New York). He's also the author of four books about the Catholic Church's role in politics and global affairs.

Timothy Burns: And since the middle of the 20th century, popes have used modern forms of communication and travel to take advantage of this. So he's on Twitter, for example. Millions of followers. He travels all over the world. So he's this major sort of religious figure leading the largest single religious institution in the world. That's one reason.

But he's also the leader of the Catholic hierarchy throughout the world. And by that, I mean every bishop in the world is appointed by the Pope, personally. And he is the leader of each national hierarchy.

So when you think about world politics or international relations, whatever country is interacting with another country, there are Catholics in those countries, and they are led by bishops who are appointed by and led by the Pope. He's involved with all of these national hierarchies all over the world.

And then finally, and really kind of oddly, to be honest with you, he's a formal participant in diplomatic relations. **The Pope, the Holy See, at the moment has diplomatic relations with 183 countries, including the United States**, for example. So he has access to international relations *in a way that no other religious leader could even imagine happening*. He's a permanent observer at the United Nations. He's invited as a formal participant in UN conferences and conventions.

Gabrielle Sierra: Did you get that? Relations with 183 countries. For perspective, that's more than the U.S. And the U.S. does a lot of diplomacy.

And this gets at the crux of it. The **Pope's role on the world stage is not just symbolic or religious**. He's involved in negotiations and diplomacy on a daily basis.

Can you tell me a little bit about the structure of the Vatican's foreign policy arm? Do they have a state department?

Timothy Burns: They do. There's a person who's called the Vatican Secretary of State, interestingly enough. There's two people below him. One runs the kind of internal church matters. And the other, well, the undersecretary for relations with states. He runs, they're all he, of course, runs relations with states. So, yes, it's a kind of a state department. And they have country desks. They have regional leaders, just like any state department would in a country.

And then they have these ambassadors. They're called nuncios or apostolic delegates, but mostly nuncios. And those are sent to these countries with which the Vatican has diplomatic relations.

And then, interestingly enough, the countries with whom the Holy See has diplomatic relations, there are ambassadors from those countries in Rome. So, like, the United States has an ambassador who lives in Rome and who interacts with the Holy See and the Pope, pretty much as any other diplomat would.

So he has this really unique place in the world. He leads this huge religious institution, which brings with it an enormous amount, I'm interested you mentioned Kardashians, a sort of celebrity focus of this global religious figure. **He heads the hierarchies in all countries around the world that they interact with politics and international relations**. And then he's a diplomatic legal player in international relations and UN processes.

Gabrielle Sierra: Is the Pope the only religious leader welcomed into these discussions?

Timothy Burns: Formally, yes. I mean, you don't have diplomatic relations with Islam or [Eastern] Orthodoxy or Judaism or any other religion. So in formal terms, for sure he is.

But there are other religious leaders. We can think about Islamic leaders in Iran, for example, who are certainly players in international relations largely through their leadership in an individual state. And so those religious leaders do have a certain political role to play. But in terms of transnational global religious leaders, no, I'm waiting for someone to come along who can mention anyone who's even in the same category.

Gabrielle Sierra: Before we go any further, there are three phrases we're using in this episode. The Pope, the Holy See, and the Vatican. They refer to different things, but they often get used interchangeably. You can think about it sort of like the president, the executive branch, and the White House. One is a person, one is an organization, and one is a place.

The Pope is the person in charge. The Holy See is the organization he's in charge of. And the Vatican, or Vatican City, is the place where that

organization is located.

Timothy Burns: The Vatican is the headquarters of the International Catholic Church in Rome. So it comprises St. Peter's, it comprises a bunch of other buildings that are used administratively, residentially. Vatican City is about a hundred acre microstate, which was ceded to the church and the Holy See in the 1920s as part of the Lateran Accord.

So Vatican City, if anyone's ever been there as a tourist, that's when you walk into St. Peter's Square and you're no longer in Italy. The Vatican are those buildings that house the international headquarters of the Catholic Church.

Gabrielle Sierra: So it's its own country to itself?

Timothy Burns: It is.

Gabrielle Sierra: Because I went as a kid, I don't remember doing a passport thing.

Timothy Burns: No, there are no passports, but I'm surprised you didn't do what my kids did, which is they put one foot in Italy and one foot in Vatican City and come back and forth.

Gabrielle Sierra: I mean, that's pretty cool. And the Pope lives there?

Timothy Burns: Yeah. The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, actually. He's elected by the College of Cardinals to serve as the Bishop of Rome. And as Bishop of Rome, he also serves as what's called the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. So he is, in a sense, the head bishop of all Catholics throughout the world.

Gabrielle Sierra: And the president or king of the Vatican in that sense, then?

Timothy Burns: Well, again, I would say Vatican City. He is the absolute ruler. They don't use the word king or certainly not president. But he is, in fact, legally the absolute ruler of the micro-state of Vatican City.

Gabrielle Sierra: So the Pope has a unique combination of institutional, diplomatic, and soft power. But what does this look like in reality? Well, a lot of it is happening every day behind the scenes. But every once in a while, these interactions make history.

Timothy Burns: When Julian Assange released WikiLeaks, one of the things that was released that drew my attention, but maybe not yours, was that there were a huge number of documents within the United States State Department which reflected the communications between the U.S. State Department and the Holy See. And they were fascinating. You know, this was under President George W. Bush and Obama mostly.

The U.S. diplomatic leaders acknowledged and recognized that **the Holy See was a unique actor in international relations** because it wasn't just a state. And

so you read cables and documents from State Department leaders in the Obama administration, for example, saying, like I would, there's nobody else like this. These people are kind of diplomatic representatives of a *global institution*.

And we can work with them on all kinds of issues. Having to do with Middle Eastern politics, having to do with climate change, having to do with diplomatic relations with Cuba, which is a fascinating story I'd like to tell.

So as I'm sure you know, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba after the Castro revolution. The United States imposed an economic embargo on Cuba for decades. And so the United States and Cuba not only didn't have diplomatic relations, they almost didn't talk to each other at all. It was like a basic fact of American electoral college dynamics that you just couldn't even talk about in relation to Cuba.

Obama was interested in reaching out to Cuba. This was just something he thought would be a kind of historic step that he could take. But he knew that he couldn't do it himself. And so what he did was he contacted prominent Catholic bishops in the U.S. who, remember, are not only American citizens. They're also bishops of the Catholic Church who are in communion with the Bishop of Rome and the Pope and have these kind of relationships with other bishops around the world. And so Catholic bishops in the U.S. and Catholic bishops in Cuba began to communicate to each other through diplomatic pouches sent from the Holy See and the Vatican to the U.S. State Department in the United States. So the Vatican or the Holy See served as a kind of a honest broker with full secrecy and discretion between the Cuban government and the United States government as mediated by Cuban bishops and American bishops.

And then one day Barack Obama called a press conference and said,

"Good afternoon. Today the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba and the most significant changes in our policy in more than 50 years. We will end an outdated approach that for decades has failed to advance our interests and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries."

And that was done *through the Church*.

Gabrielle Sierra: The Vatican had contacts on both sides in part because there were large Catholic communities on both sides and they used that trust to open a door that had been closed for decades. Now, we should mention that the Trump administration undid this diplomatic progress with Cuba a few years later. But that's another story.

(End of transcript.)

I didn't feel it necessary to transcribe the entire audio file, only about a little over 1/3rd. I think the speakers pretty much confirm what other articles on this website are saying, namely, the Holy See is a world superpower to be reckoned with, and the Pope is acknowledged by governments

as a world ruler.