

## **Papal Legates**

The legate, in the most general sense of the word, is an extra-ordinary representative of the Holy See. According to the Code of Canon Law, the category includes papal nuncios, who have been permanent representatives of the Apostolic See from circa 1500, and cardinals entrusted with a specific mission for a limited time period, most often to represent the pope at an event of particular importance.

From the Council of Arles in 314, to which a legate of Pope Silvester (314-335) was invited, to our own day, with the *Decretum* of Gratian a landmark on the way, a legate had to be accredited and carried out his mission in accordance with the norms and within the limits set by the pope who had dispatched him. A 'Legate a latere' has the power to settle cases put before him. Even during the period from 1870 to 1929, when the Holy See no longer had a territory of its own, the pope, who had his legally autonomous status, kept the legation system going both actively, by sending out nuncios, and passively, by receiving ambassadors.

Following on Vatican II, all papal legates, including apostolic nuncios, prioritize ecclesiastical over purely diplomatic functions.

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