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Roman Catholics

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By [Cheryl K. Chumley](#) - The Washington Times

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The Obama administration, in what's been called an egregious slap in the face to the Vatican, has moved to shut down the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See — a free-standing facility — and relocate offices onto the grounds of the larger American Embassy in Italy.

The new offices will be in a separate building on the property, Breitbart reported.

And while U.S. officials are touting the relocation as a security measure that's a cautionary reaction to last year's attacks on America's facility in Benghazi, several former American envoys are raising the red flag.

It's a "massive downgrade of U.S.-Vatican ties," said former U.S. Ambassador James Nicholson in the National Catholic Reporter. "It's turning this embassy into a stepchild of the embassy to Italy. The Holy See is a pivot point for international affairs and a major listening post for the United States, and ... [it's] an insult to American Catholics and to the Vatican."

Mr. Nicholson — whose views were echoed by former envoys Francis Rooney, Mary Ann Glendon, Raymond Flynn and Thomas Melady — also called the justification for closing the existing facility a "smokescreen," Breitbart reported.

"That's like saying people get killed on highways because they drive cars on them," he said in the report. "We're not a pauper nation ... if we want to secure an embassy, we certainly can."

Moreover, the existing facility has "state of the art" security, he said.

Mr. Flynn, meanwhile, said the administration's announcement reflects a hostility toward the Catholic Church.

"It's not just those who bomb churches and kill Catholics in the Middle East who are our antagonists, but it's also those who restrict our religious freedoms and want to close down our embassy to the Holy See," he said in the National Catholic Reporter. "[There's no] diplomatic or political benefit to the United States" from the relocation at all, he added.

Catholic Vote, a publication for the Church community, called the move "an unmistakable slap in the face" that clearly communicates that the United States cares little for the diplomatic facility.

And Mr. Nicholson went on, as Breitbart reported: "It's another manifestation of the antipathy of this administration both to Catholics and to the Vatican — and to Christians in the Middle East. This is a key post for intermediation in so many sovereignties but particularly in the Middle East. This is anything but a good time to diminish the stature of this post. To diminish the stature of this post is to diminish its influence."