

The Holy See and the Question of Sending Observers to the World Conferences of the International Ecumenical Movement

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the attitude of the Holy See towards the international ecumenical movement during the pontificate of Pius XII, analysing in particular the debates triggered by the question of the participation of Catholic observers in the various international conferences and assemblies of the Faith and Order movement and the constituent Ecumenical Council of Churches. This analysis will be carried out through the study of Vatican documents, in particular from the archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Secretariat of State and the nunciatures, in order to trace the choices and strategies adopted by the Holy See in the face of the challenges posed by the growing importance of the World Council of Churches on the international scene.

Keywords Ecumenism. World council of churches. Pius XII. Faith and order. Catholic theology.

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Peer review

Submitted 2024-01-30
Accepted 2024-02-22
Published 2024-04-23

Open access

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Citation Marotta, S. (2024). "The Holy See and the Question of Sending Observers to the World Conferences of the International Ecumenical Movement". *JoMaCC*, 3(1), 195-226.

DOI 10.30687/JoMaCC/2785-6046/2024/01/007

1 Introduction: Antecedents under Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI

The Catholic Church was not invited to send representatives to the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, which, as recent historiography has pointed out, was not really an ecumenical conference but an assembly conceived within and addressed exclusively to the Protestant missionary movement.¹ Of the 1,200 delegates who took part, none was in fact the ecclesial expression of a specific Christian denomination but rather of missionary associations and federations. It is true, however, that this event was the impetus that led some of the participants, notably the American Episcopalian Charles Brent, to convene another world conference of Christian confessions, this time to deal with the theological and ecclesiological issues that had not been addressed in Edinburgh. Thus Brent's proposal, approved by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States, meeting in Cincinnati in October 1910, marked the real beginning of the Faith and Order movement.² In Edinburgh, however, although there were no Catholics present, either officially or unofficially, the Catholic Church was represented in some way through the initiative of the Bishop of Cremona, Geremia Bonomelli, who sent a heartfelt message to one of the delegates, the Episcopalian Silas McBee, to be read to the assembly:

From the various Churches and religious denominations into which you Christians are divided there arises a new unifying element, a noble aspiration, restraining too great impulsiveness, leveling dividing barriers, and working for the realisation of the one Holy Church through all the children of redemption. And now, I ask, are not these elements more than sufficient to constitute a common ground of agreement, and to afford a sound basis for further discussion, tending to promote the union of all believers in Christ?³

A few years later, in a letter to the same interlocutors, Bonomelli would reiterate more decisively:

This paper presents research carried out as part of a project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No. 945361. Documentary sources are given in English in the body of the text and in the original language in the footnotes. Translations, unless otherwise indicated, are by the Author.

1 On the gap between the historiographical representation of the Edinburgh event and the reality of what actually happened see Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 7-17.

2 Woolverton, *Robert Gardiner and the Reunification*, 107-52.

3 Full text in: *World Missionary Conference, 1910*, 220-3, here 222-3.

we must reduce doctrines within their just limits and place them in their true light; we must separate what is essential and irreducible from what can be modified; we must endeavour to cut down distances as much as possible.⁴

Beyond the anecdotal aspect of the affair, Bonomelli's initiative certainly has the distinction of having initiated an albeit tenuous channel of dialogue and correspondence between the leaders of the nascent movement, in particular the secretary of the provisional committee, Robert Gardiner, and some exponents of the Catholic hierarchy, including later, in addition to Bonomelli, the Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore James Gibbons.⁵ Shortly after Bonomelli's death on 3 August 1914, the same days as the outbreak of the First World War, Gardiner, without abandoning the project of a world ecumenical conference, which had obviously been put on hold, sought to overcome the limits of his hitherto 'peripheral' correspondence with the Catholic world by seeking direct contact with the Holy See. Thus, on 2 November 1914, he addressed to Pietro Gasparri, Benedict XV's new Secretary of State,⁶ the first of a famous but succinct series of letters which received a most cordial reply.⁷ Through this not very frequent contact, Gardiner kept the Holy See somewhat abreast of developments in the Faith and Order movement over the next three years and kept its attention focused on the issue of Christian unity. Only towards the end of the war did this contact reach the crucial point, namely whether or not the Catholic Church wanted to participate in the Movement.

The question was raised directly in the audience granted by Benedict XV on 16 May 1919 to a delegation of five American Episcopalians (Gardiner was not one of them) who had been on a special mission to the continent during these months to visit the different Churches (from the Patriarch of Constantinople to the Archbishop of Canterbury and so on) and seek their approval for the movement. The Pope was cordial and affable but by reiterating the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church that the only solution to the problem of Christian unity was for the dissidents to return to the Catholic fold, he put an end to hopes that the See of Rome could take part in the planned

⁴ Bonomelli to McBee, 20 June 1913, text published in English translation (with Bonomelli's permission) by *The Constructive Quarterly*, September 1913, and reproduced in Gnocchi, "La dimensione ecumenica in Bonomelli", 201.

⁵ See the documentation studied by Ferracci, "Charles Brent and the Faith and Order Project", in particular 626-8.

⁶ Domenico Ferrata, Benedict XV's first Secretary of State, died on 10 October.

⁷ For the content of the exchange (about ten letters in all), see Epting, *Ein Gespräch Beginnt*, 182-4 and the appendix of documents, 360-5.

conference.⁸ Less than two months after the audience, on 4 July 1919, a decree of the Holy Office intervened to clarify definitively the impossibility for Catholics to collaborate with non-Catholics in associations seeking Christian unity.⁹

This decree did not, however, prevent Gardiner from putting personal pressure on the Archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Desiré Mercier,¹⁰ to send a delegate to the movement's preparatory conference, which was held in Geneva from 12 to 20 August 1920 and in which a Catholic journalist from the *Stimmen der Zeit*, the Jesuit Heinrich Sierp, finally took part, albeit informally.¹¹ According to the present state of the sources, it is not clear who authorised or encouraged Sierp's participation. But it seems no coincidence that seven years later it was again two Germans who were the only ones allowed to attend the first Faith and Order World Conference, held in Lausanne in August 1927. Lausanne and Geneva were actually under the jurisdiction of the same diocese, known until 1924 as Lausanne and Geneva, and from 1924 onwards as Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg. From 15 May 1920, Marius Besson was the bishop of this diocese.¹² Despite the fact that on 6 July 1927¹³ the Holy See had confirmed the content of the 1919 decree by issuing a further document that made it even clearer that Catholics could not participate in the international conference planned for that year, Besson allowed two Catholic priests to attend as observers.¹⁴ They were Max Josef Metzger and Hermann Hoffman, of the German pacifist movement *Weltfriedensbund von Weissen Kreuz* (World Peace League of the White Cross), which already anticipated the ecumenical zeal of the *Una Sancta* movement that Metzger would found ten years later.¹⁵ When it was all over, Besson justified the permission given by saying that he needed to obtain reliable information about the course of the conference in order to fulfil Gasparri's instructions to report back to Rome.¹⁶ However, both in the

⁸ Cf. the statement made by the delegation to the press on leaving the Apostolic Palace and reported by Epting, *Ein Gespräch Beginnt*, 263.

⁹ S.O., "Decretum de participatione", 4 July 1919. The decree was ratified by the particular congregation of Feria IV on 2 July 1919. Cf. Minutes in ADDF, R.V. 1940 n. 2. Fouilloux pointed out that this prohibition was based on "une jurisprudence définie cinquante-cinq ans auparavant", at the time of the Oxford Movement (Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 177-8).

¹⁰ See Mercier's letter to Benedict XV, 21 December 1920, reproduced in Aubert, "Les Conversations de Malines", 421-2.

¹¹ Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 178.

¹² Cf. Jehle-Wildberger, "Marius Besson"; Python, "Prudence pastorale".

¹³ S.O., "Dubium de conventibus", 8 July 1927. Cf. Minutes of Feria IV, 6 July 1927.

¹⁴ Chenaux, "Le Saint-Siège et les débuts", 220-2.

¹⁵ Among the first reconstructions of this participation: Swidler, "Max Josef Metzger", 167.

¹⁶ Chenaux, "Le Saint-Siège et les débuts", 222.

case of Geneva, and even more so in the case of Lausanne in 1927, it is legitimate to speculate that these were real coups de main by one (or perhaps two, if for Geneva 1920 the mediation of Mercier is not entirely excluded) courageous representative of the episcopate, who more or less consciously disregarded the explicit instructions of the Holy See. Once again, as with Bonomelli in 1910, bishops who were among the most sensitive to ecumenical issues tried to compensate for the steps that the Holy See had not yet dared to take.

2 The Case of the Edinburgh (1937) and Birmingham (1941) Conferences

Despite the fact that Pius XI's 1928 encyclical *Mortalium animos* seemed to have put a definitive end to the question of Catholic participation in movements for unity of Protestant origin, there were still some Catholics present at the second world conference of Faith and Order, held in Edinburgh in 1937. Indeed, on that occasion some English Jesuits, including Maurice Bévenot, were able to obtain permission from their Superior General to attend as observers. This followed confidential arrangements made by Pius XI personally with the Jesuit Superior General, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, without the knowledge of the Congregations of the Roman Curia.¹⁷ In fact, the Holy Office only became aware of this participation in 1940, when Bévenot, through the apostolic delegate William Godfrey, requested official authorisation not only for his own participation in the constitutive congress of the WCC – a congress which was thought to be imminent but which was postponed until 1948 by the war – but also for the meetings of the preparatory committee that were to be held shortly afterwards in Birmingham in 1941. In order to ask for this, he finally sent the report of his own participation in the Edinburgh Assembly, which he had not sent to the Roman Curia in 1937, since he had not received an official mandate from the Holy See, but only from his own superior to attend the Conference.¹⁸ When the Congregation of the Holy Office learned of the Pope's initiative, which

¹⁷ The circumstances of the permission were reconstructed a few years later by Ledóchowski at the request of the General Commissary of the S.O., the Dominican Giovanni Lottini: "Non abbiamo trovato nessun documento della Santa Sede che concedesse al p. Bévenot [...] la facoltà di intervenire al congresso panprotestante sulla Fede e l'Organizzazione, tenutosi ad Edimburgo in Inghilterra l'anno 1937. Sembra però che il Santo Padre Pio XI, il quale non una volta sola si degnò di parlarci delle tendenze degli anglicani, desiderasse la presenza di qualche padre; e allora scrissi a quel p. Provinciale [...] Il Provinciale, assecondando i miei desideri, vi mandò Bévenot, non in qualità di membro, ma come semplice osservatore", Ledóchowski to Lottini, 29 May 1940.

¹⁸ Cf. Bévenot's report on the Edinburgh conference, written in Latin and sent on 4 April 1940.

had taken place less than three years earlier, it could only agree to Bévenot's request and decided on 17 July 1940 to

entrust the matter to the Most Reverend Father General of the Society of Jesus, so that, without mentioning the Holy See, and after consulting the Ordinaries, [...] he may select suitable persons.¹⁹

This is the origin of the letter sent to Ledochowski in July 1940, in which the Secretary of the Holy Office, Francesco Marchetti Selvaggi, informed him that:

This Supreme Congregation is not averse to your allowing – *as by yourself, without ever mentioning the Holy See*, and in agreement with H.E. the Most Rev. Archbishop of Westminster and with H.E. the Archbishop of Edinburgh – such participation to some Fathers of the Society of Jesus within the limits and under the conditions indicated below, namely:

1. To submit to the Preparatory Commission an exposition of Catholic doctrine on the subject to be dealt with at the Congress, so that it may be published, together with the other writings, in the volume intended for the Congress participants. The author must, however, include a declaration that he does not belong to the Association;
2. to attend the meetings of the Preparatory Commission as observers, and to speak only in the following cases: a) at the request of the Commission, to clarify a point which has remained unclear in the written treatment; b) at the request of the Commission, to illustrate a point of doctrine connected with the main argument; c) to correct the erroneous attribution to the Catholic Church of a doctrine which is not its own. [...]

This Supreme Congregation has full confidence that Your Most Reverend Paternity will choose for such a grave and delicate task persons who are outstanding, especially in terms of theological competence and orthodoxy of thought.²⁰

19 “Affidare la cosa al Rev.mo Padre Generale della C.d.G. affinché egli, senza far menzione della Santa Sede, e sentendo prima gli ordinari [...] scelga le persone adatte”, Minutes of Feria II, 8 July 1940. This decision, which accepted the *votum* drawn up by the Dominican Luigi Romoli, second companion of the S.O. Commissary, was approved by a majority of thirteen out of fifteen consultors (the only dissenters being Alois Hudal and Franz Hürth). It was then approved by Feria IV on 17 July 1940 and ratified by the Pope the following day.

20 “Questa Suprema non è aliena dal consentire che, previo accordo con S.E. il Signor Card. Arcivescovo di Westminster e con S.E. l'arcivescovo di Edimburgo, Ella permetta *come da sé, e senza far mai menzione della S. Sede*, tale partecipazione ad alcuni Padri della Compagnia di Gesù nei limiti e alle condizioni qui sotto indicate, cioè: 1) di presentare alla Commissione preparatoria una esposizione della Dottrina Cattolica

This authorisation is not surprising when compared with the attitude of the Secretariat of State at the time: on 14 February 1939, the Archbishop of York, William Temple, the Anglican Primate of England and Chairman of the Provisional Committee of the WCC, had written to Secretary of State Luigi Maglione expressing his desire to cooperate, albeit he knew “that the Church of Rome would not desire to be formally associated with the Council”:

We hope that it may be permissible to exchange information with agencies of the Church of Rome on matters of common interest and that we should have the help from time to time of unofficial consultation with Roman Catholic theologians and scholars. Such sharing in our activities as Roman Catholics may be ready to undertake will be cordially welcomed by us as a manifestation of fellowship in Christ. At a time when all that Christians hold in common is menaced by forces of demonic power we venture to hope that we may have the benevolent sympathy of our Roman Catholic brethren as we attempt to recall men to the faith and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one hope for the salvation of the world.²¹

Maglione, through his Apostolic Delegate Godfrey, replied to this invitation with a substantially positive response:

Your Most Reverend Excellency is requested to reply on my behalf to Mr William Ebor, explaining to him that there is nothing to prevent him from confidentially consulting the Bishops and the Apostolic Delegate, just as there is nothing to prevent him from confidentially exchanging information and seeking the opinion of Catholic theologians, who will of course reply in their own name. Your Excellency will have the courtesy to add that the Cardinal Secretary of State did not reply to him directly, since, as is

sull'argomento che sarà trattato al Congresso, perché possa essere pubblicata, insieme con gli altri scritti, nel volume destinato ai Congressisti. L'Autore però dovrà annettere la dichiarazione che egli non appartiene alla Associazione; 2) di presenziare alle adunanze della commissione preparatoria, a titolo di osservatori, prendendo la parola soltanto nei casi seguenti: a) a richiesta della Commissione, per chiarire qualche punto rimasto oscuro nella trattazione scritta; b) a richiesta della Commissione per illustrare qualche punto di dottrina connesso con l'argomento principale; c) per correggere la falsa attribuzione alla Chiesa Cattolica di qualche dottrina non sua [...] Questa Suprema ha piena fiducia che la Paternità Vostra Reverendissima sceglierà per un compito così grave e delicato persone superiori ad ogni eccezione, specialmente per quanto riguarda la competenza teologica e l'ortodossia delle idee”, Marchetti Selvaggiani to Ledóchowski, 27 July 1940.

²¹ Temple to Maglione, 14 March 1939. The letter had actually been prepared on 10 February 1939, but was not sent because of the simultaneous news of Pius XI's death. As Temple himself explained, the WCC delayed sending it until after the conclave had ended and the Secretary of State had been chosen.

customary, he wished to inform the Holy See's representative in England of the matter and to give him the necessary instructions.²²

Presumably, therefore, the WCC provisional committee's request for Bévenot's cooperation was merely a follow-up to these agreements. Given this precedent, it is easy to understand why, on 23 April 1946, Domenico Tardini received a visit from two members of the study department of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Howard V. Yergin and James Hutchison, who were instructed to make contact with the Holy See in order to seek cooperation on the preparatory documents for the World Conference planned for 1948, particularly on social issues and refugee relief.²³ Their request was not entirely unfounded, since it was based on a history of contacts and moderate cooperation, interrupted only by the world conflict. However, Tardini was quick to rebuff the two guests, stating that, while the Holy See "cannot but welcome with satisfaction any initiative that has charity as its goal and is inspired by feelings of rapprochement, etc...", "Catholics have their own organisations and act through them" and that "this is an action that does not hinder others, since the field of charity is so vast".²⁴

The 1939 correspondence between Maglione and Temple was never brought to the attention of the Holy Office, nor was the authorisation given by Tardini to George Bell many years later, in November 1947, to publish this correspondence.²⁵ However, when in 1946-48 the

22 "L'Eccellenza Vostra Reverendissima è pregata di rispondere in mio nome al Sig. William Ebor [= William Temple. The Bishops of York are entitled by custom to sign with the Latin name of the See of York, namely Ebor] spiegandogli che nulla vieta che egli consulti confidenzialmente i Vescovi e il Delegato Apostolico; come pure nulla vieta che egli, sempre in via confidenziale, scambi informazioni e chieda il parere a teologi cattolici, i quali, rispondendo, lo faranno, naturalmente, in nome proprio. L'Eccellenza Vostra avrà la cortesia di aggiungere che il Cardinale Segretario di Stato non gli ha risposto direttamente, poiché, com'è consuetudine, ha voluto informare della cosa il Rappresentante della Santa Sede in Inghilterra, e dargli le necessarie istruzioni", Maglione to Godfrey, 12 July 1939. On 26 July, Temple replied to Godfrey that he was "most happy that the way is open for the measure of cooperation intimated in your letter", Temple to Godfrey, 26 July 1939.

23 Ehrenström, *Notes for Dr. Cockburn*, 16 April 1946.

24 "Gli dissi: 1. Che la S. Sede non può che vedere con soddisfazione ogni iniziativa che abbia per scopo la carità, sia ispirata a sentimenti di incontro ecc.; 2. Che la S. Sede e i cattolici hanno le loro organizzazioni e con quelle agiscono; 3. Che è questa un'azione che non ostacola le altre, tanto grande è il campo della beneficenza; 4. Che i cattolici aiutano anche i non cattolici, per spirito di carità cristiana", Tardini, *Colloquio di mons. Segretario*, 30 April 1946.

25 In September 1947 George Bell sent a request through Godfrey to the Secretariat of State to publish the correspondence between Temple and Maglione (in the volume Bell, *Documents of Christian Unity*) as evidence, albeit indirect, of the cooperation between the WCC and the Catholic Church. Surprisingly, Tardini replied that "tutto considerato, nulla osta a tale pubblicazione" and even suggested that Maglione's dispatch to Godfrey of 12 July 1939 be published instead of Godfrey's consequent letter to Temple (Tardini to Godfrey, 12 November 1947).

question of Rome's participation in the efforts to found the WCC arose again, the permission given to Bévenot in 1937, and even more so in 1940, would set an important precedent that could not be overlooked.

3 Amsterdam (1948)

When, after the war, plans to found the WCC were resumed and the first meeting of the provisional committee of the Ecumenical Council was held in Geneva in February 1946, something similar to Bonomelli's message in Edinburgh happened again. In fact, the new Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, François Charrière, who had recently succeeded the late Marius Besson, had sent a message to the Ecumenical Council drawing the attention of Catholics and Rome to the event.²⁶ On learning of this letter, the Cardinals of the Holy Office, taking advantage of the forthcoming *ad limina* visit of the new Bishop, decided:

As soon as he arrives in Rome, have him interrogated by Monsignor Montini and, if it is true that he wrote it, give him a *miramur*.²⁷

In any case, also because of the growing expectation in the minds of many Catholic ecumenists caused by such preparations,²⁸ the Holy Office decided to begin immediately and well in advance the study of the question of whether or not to send Catholic observers to the first World Assembly of the WCC, scheduled for 1948. On 15 April 1946, just a few days before Tardini was to receive the two WCC delegates Cockburn and Yergin, the study of the problem was entrusted to the Dutch consultor Sebastiaan Tromp.²⁹ His vote, delivered at the end

²⁶ Charrière to Brilioth, 21 February 1946: "Nous ne voyons pas encore comment cette union pourra se réaliser, car nous ne pouvons pas supprimer nos différences par un commun dénominateur purement superficiel qui ne serait qu'un commun dénominateur. Ce serait une trahison que d'abandonner un iota des vérités que nous avons reçues. Mais, par ailleurs, l'union ne pourra pas se faire non plus à la manière d'un triomphe des uns sur les autres, comme cela se voit sur le plan temporel. Au-dessus de ces deux extrêmes: mélange corrupteur du vrai, ou suppression de l'adversaire, il y a place pour la solution vraiment conforme à l'esprit de Jésus: la réconciliation. Comment se fera-t-elle? Il est prématuré de le dire. Mais encore faut-il, pour que ce miracle s'opère, que nous le demandions tous au Père par Notre-Seigneur, afin que son règne arrive dans la vérité et la charité".

²⁷ "Appena il vescovo arriva a Roma farlo interrogare da mons. Montini e, se il fatto risponde a verità, dargli un *miramur*", Minutes of Feria IV, 20 March 1946.

²⁸ A case in point is that of Robert Prévost, a priest from Lille, who, supported by his Archbishop, Achille Liénart, wanted to set up a Catholic ecumenical secretariat in Geneva that would deal with dialogue between the Catholic Church and the WCC. The details of the affair are reconstructed in Marotta, "The 'Controlled Growth'".

²⁹ Ottaviani to Tromp, 15 April 1946. It is worth noting that while Tromp was busy drafting this *votum*, he received a visit from Yves Congar, who was temporarily in

of May 1946, was strongly in favour of sending observers to the Assembly, on the basis of the previous permissions given to Bévenot for the Edinburgh Assembly in 1937 and the Birmingham Meeting in 1941. Tromp was also convinced that the Pope should send “a short and very simple letter” to the ecumenical congress explaining why the Roman Church could not be present “not out of pride or desire for domination, but out of love for the truth and obedience to Christ” and inviting Protestants and Orthodox to rejoin the Church in Rome.³⁰

Partly because of the prestige that Tromp enjoyed in the Roman theological curia, the Consultors of the Holy Office at their meeting in July 1946 unanimously agreed with Tromp.³¹ However, the Cardinal at Feria IV³² preferred to wait for more information about the Ecumenical Congress before deciding what to do, so the question was postponed until a year later, when Amsterdam was confirmed as the venue for the WCC assembly.³³ When the question was raised again in July 1947, Tromp was instructed to write to Johannes de Jong, Archbishop of Utrecht, to ask for his opinion and a list of observers.³⁴ On 11 March 1948, encouraged by de Jong’s positive response,³⁵ the

Rome at the time and thus made the Gregorian Jesuit’s acquaintance for the first time. Cf. Congar, *Journal of a Theologian*, 100-1. On the possible influence of the conversation with Congar on the drafting of the votum, see Marotta, “The ‘Controlled Growth’”.

30 “Forsan quaestio poni possit num expediat, ut Romanos Pontifex futuro Congressui Oecumenico anno 1948 mittat epistolam brevem et verbis simplicissimis compositam, in qua: a) Laudet desiderium collaborationis omnium, ut ordinem a Deo et Christo volitam defendant contra impiorum conamina; b) Exponat Ecclesiam Romanam, non superbia vel desiderio dominationis, sed ex amore Veritatis, et ut Christo oboediat, praesentem esse non posse; c) Invitet protestantes, orthodoxos, anglicanos, ut considerent quomodo Evangelium, Concilia septem oecumenica, consideratio quoque Ecclesiae ipsius Romanae ob suam oecumenica unitatem et stabilitatem invictam, convergant ad Sedem illius, qui licet indignus, sit Vicarius Christi in terra”, Tromp, *De habitudine quorundam catholicorum*, 29-30.

31 They showed themselves aware that “hoc exigi a magno momento ipsius rei” and that “hucusque positionem Ecclesiae catholicae fuisse generatim negativam, sed expedire ut positive quoque agatur”, Minutes of Feria II, 22 July 1946.

32 The sessions of Feria II (on Tuesdays) concerned only the Consultors of the Congregation, that is, the Periti (theologians, canonists, moralists, biblical scholars, etc.) who were in charge of studying the dossiers to be examined by the S.O. and the Vota, prepared in turn by one or two of them. They usually met ten days before the solemn meeting of the cardinals, members of the Congregation, who instead met during Feria IV (on Thursdays). Cf. Castelli, “*La Lex et Ordo*”, 124-6. In this case, because of the summer break, the Consultor’s decision of 22 July could not be ratified in Feria IV until the autumn, on 23 October.

33 Minutes of Feria IV, 23 October 1946.

34 The Cardinals decided: “Quanto al consiglio ecumenico sentire in proposito il P. Generale dei Gesuiti e incaricare il P. Tromp di sentire l’arcivescovo di Utrecht”, Minutes of Feria IV, 23 July 1947.

35 “Non videtur nobis expedire, ut Ecclesia catholica prorsus absistens maneat, et Congressum quodammodo ignoret. [...] Si comitatus, qui praeparat hunc Congressum, catholicis observatoribus possibilitatem offert, ut in voto quodam exponant mentem Ecclesiae catholicae, mihi expedire videtur ut occasio arripiatur”, De Jong to Tromp, 29 October 1947.

pontiff confirmed all the decisions of the previous year with the following directives:

Concerning the papal letter: *non expedire* (The Holy Father does not wish, with a document of his own, to enhance the value of the Conference, nor to confer on it the prestige that a papal act would give it, by giving it greater attention in the world).

As for the observers: *mittantur* [= let them be sent], with the precautions taken for the Birmingham meeting [...] But they should not be more than 5 or 6 (The Holy Father wants Father Congar to be excluded).³⁶

The explicit reference to Congar in Pius XII's instructions shows the extent to which the selection of the Catholic observers to be sent to Amsterdam promised to be one of the most difficult knots to untie in the whole question. It is no coincidence that the second vote prepared by Tromp in February 1948 specifically referred to this:

It is clear that the observers must be people who are liked by both sides: the Church and the Ecumenical Congress. Because if the dissidents don't like them, it doesn't work psychologically; if the Church does not like them because they concede too much to their opponents, the dissidents will have false hopes, and the result will be great disillusionment and ultimately aversion to Church authority. Certainly, many Catholics now serving the ecumenical cause will be acceptable to the dissidents, but can they be acceptable to the Church? [...] The observers must be people acceptable to both sides. However, we had the impression that both Congar and Villain had already been chosen by the other side.³⁷

36 "SS.mus haec statuit: 1) Quoad epistolam pontificiam: non expedire (Il S. Padre non vuole, con un suo documento, valorizzare il convegno, né conferirgli quel prestigio che un atto pontificio gli procurerebbe conciliandogli di più l'attenzione mondiale); 2) Quoad observatores: mittantur, cum cautionibus adhibitis pro conventu Birminghamensi etc. [...] Non sint tamen plus quam 5 aut 6 (Il S. Padre vuole che si escluda il P. Congar)", Minutes of Feria V, 11 March 1948. The Pope also approved the plan to publish a pastoral letter from De Jong in which, "tra l'altro dica che nessuno senza il suo permesso può andare a far da osservatore".

37 "Clarum est observatores esse debere personas gratas utrique parti: Ecclesiae videlicet et Congressui Oecumenico. Quod si dissidentibus grati non sunt, psychologicae nil efficitur; si Ecclesiae non placent, quia nimium concedentes adversariis, dissidentes favebunt spes falsas, et finis erit magna disillusio, imo auctoritas ecclesiastica in invidiam adducetur. Certe persona grata erunt dissidentibus multi catholici, qui nunc operam dant rei oecumenicae; sed possuntne iidem esse persona grata Ecclesiae? [...] Observatores debent esse personae gratae utrique parti. De facto autem vidimus tum Congar tum Villain iam esse electos ab altera parte", Tromp, *De Congressu oecumenico dissidentium*, 11, 14.

It was precisely the issue of Congar's participation in Amsterdam that would have ultimately scuppered the whole operation of sending observers to the WCC's first world assembly. While the Pope's decision of 11 March was in the process of being implemented, Tromp received from de Jong the forwarding of an explosive letter that the Archbishop of Utrecht had received from Congar himself at the end of February.³⁸ In this letter, the French Dominican informed De Jong that he had

recently been consulted, in a completely unofficial way, by the *Ecumenical* Organisation of Geneva concerning the presence, desired by this organisation, of a certain number of Catholic priests at the Congress to be held next August in Amsterdam, that is, the World Council of Churches.³⁹

Congar explained that Geneva had received "more than *twenty requests* from Catholic priests" to attend the assembly and that he had therefore been asked to act as an intermediary with the Dutch Catholic hierarchy so that the WCC could receive "a list of about ten names" of Catholics who, according to the bishops, could receive a direct invitation from Geneva.⁴⁰

This alleged mission of mediation from Geneva was probably a misunderstanding on the part of Congar who, in a conversation with Georges Florovsky, misinterpreted what was no more than a warm invitation to propose to the WCC some names prepared and "safe" from the point of view of hierarchical approval.⁴¹ Later, the secretary of the WCC would have firmly stated to his own staff the irrelevance of Geneva to Congar's private initiative.⁴²

38 De Jong to Tromp, 1 March 1948, text reported in *Circa le idee diffuse*, 3-4.

39 "J'ai été consulté récemment, d'une manière toute officieuse, par l'organisation *œcuménique* de Genève, au sujet de la présence, désirée par cette organisation, d'un certain nombre de prêtres catholiques, au Congrès que doit tenir en aout prochain à Amsterdam, le Conseil *Œcuménique des Églises*", Congar to De Jong, 23 February 1948.

40 "Le Conseil a reçu plus de *vingt demandes* de prêtres catholiques, d'assister, à titre privé, à l'une ou à l'autre séance de la Conférence. Sachant que l'Église catholique ne peut prendre officiellement aucune part dans la Conférence d'Amsterdam, mais désirant y avoir, à titre *d'observateurs*, la présence d'un certain nombre de prêtres catholiques, le Conseil demandait une liste d'une dizaine de noms de prêtres catholiques qui recevraient, à titre personnel, une invitation de Genève", Congar to De Jong, 23 February 1948.

41 See Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, 145. Florovsky had told him of Geneva's embarrassment at what he described as a shower of "une bonne quarantaine" of Catholic requests for invitations.

42 "I must make it clear that these conversations which Father Congar had had were of course wholly his own initiative. We had never asked Father Congar to be our representative or liaison-officer in this matter. I must also make it clear that Father Congar seems to have been under the impression that his list was the only list which we had before us. In fact his list was only one of the many lists and two of the six persons who

Indeed, if the Geneva leaders had really chosen to turn to the author of *Chrétiens désunis* for these negotiations, rather than to a local bishop of some competent jurisdiction, as Charrière or De Jong might have been, they would not have chosen the most fortunate path. In fact, the examination of Congar's petition in the Holy Office could only begin by summarising all the precedents against him in the Congregation's archives, and in particular the denunciation by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange of *Chrétiens désunis* and the entire series *Unam Sanctam*, edited by Congar himself for the Éditions du Cerf.⁴³ Although there were no practical consequences for Congar as a result of that denunciation (at the time several Jesuit theologians, including Henri De Lubac and Bévenot, came to the defence of the volume, and the matter ended with a simple warning), the episode was certainly a first stain on the Dominican's reputation for orthodoxy. The list of ten people drawn up by Congar "de mon mieux (to the best of my ability)" and submitted to De Jong for selection could therefore be tainted by such suspicions, and even be reason enough for the Holy Office to open a dossier on each of them.⁴⁴

After Congar's letter, the Secretary of the Holy Office, Marchetti Selvaggiani, asked the Pope to authorise Tromp to travel urgently to the Netherlands to discuss personally with De Jong and the other local Ordinaries all the matters relating to the Amsterdam Assembly, especially the selection of Catholic observers.⁴⁵ As early as October 1947, De Jong had already drawn up a list of three Dutch names for this purpose, namely Willem Hendrik Van de Pol, the Jesuit Jan Witte, and the Franciscan Peter van Leeuwen.⁴⁶ Van de Pol, himself a convert, was de Jong's chief adviser on ecumenical matters.

At the meeting in the bishop's palace in Utrecht between Tromp, De Jong, his vicar of the diocese, the Bishop Johannes Huibers of Harlem, and van de Pol, it was the latter who persuaded Tromp to reject

have been invited do not appear on that list", Visser 't Hooft, *Memorandum Concerning Roman Catholic Observers*. In the same confidential report, undated but probably written in late April or early May 1948, Visser 't Hooft had previously revealed: "On the basis of the material thus gathered and of further inquiries I began to send out a number of invitations. So far four persons were invited by me and two by Oliver Tomkins".

43 The dossier is in ADDE, C.L. 15/1939. On the effects of the denunciation, see Fouilloux, *Yves Congar*, 79-82.

44 Maurice Villain, Maurice Bévenot, Willem Hendrik Van De Pol, Alphonse Heitz, Vincent-Marie Pollet, Clément Lialine, Joseph Casper, Jean Daniélou, Max Pribilla, Jérôme Hamer, with the addition of Henri Desmettre and Louis Kammerer as reserves, were all names that Congar presented as "prêtres catholiques travaillant pour la réunion de nos frères séparés, et dont la présence à Amsterdam paraît désirable" (Congar to De Jong, 23 February 1948).

45 Ottaviani to Pius XII, 19 March 1948. Having received approval from the Pope the following day, Tromp departed on the evening of 23 March.

46 De Jong to Tromp, 29 October 1947.

Congar's request and leave the choice of observers to de Jong alone.⁴⁷ These could include instead three foreign names in addition to the three Dutch already chosen by the Cardinal, and the group agreed to add Bévenot as an English speaker, Max Pribilla among the Germans, and a Dominican, possibly the Father General himself (anyone but Congar), as a French one.⁴⁸ Father Congar was therefore told that the decision was now in De Jong's hands and was asked to inform Geneva that De Jong would use Van de Pol's mediation instead of Congar himself.⁴⁹

These decisions had not yet been implemented when a memorandum sent by Van de Pol to Tromp on 10 May changed the picture once again and definitively. As agreed, the Dutch convert had contacted Geneva (through his Protestant compatriot, Dr. Hendrik Van Der Linde, who was also close to conversion) to send the list of observers, whom it was Geneva's task to invite in a personal capacity, since the ecclesiastical authority could not send them officially on its own initiative. The response from Geneva was sharp:

1. The list of observers given to Archbishop [De Jong] by Father Congar is only one of the lists. The Ecumenical Council does not intend to invite all the people indicated by Father Congar, but to make a selection from all the lists, namely *ten people*.
2. Since the Catholic Church does not officially indicate either representatives or observers, the choice of observers depends on Geneva. However, if it were officially communicated that a certain person would certainly not be accepted by the Catholic ecclesiastical authority, or, conversely, that such a person, who is very expert in ecumenical matters, would be welcomed by the Catholic Church, Geneva would take such a communication into account.
3. The Ecumenical Council would not wish to invite as observers anyone other than those who have had extensive experience in such matters, thanks either to studies of great importance or to ecumenical meetings.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Van de Pol, in fact, would not tolerate "ut isti observatores exclusive pertinent ad illam factionem, quae in mundo oecumenico noti sunt ut irenici" (Van De Pol to De Jong, 27 February 1948).

⁴⁸ Cf. the report of the meeting: Tromp, *Colloquia cum Archiepiscopo*, 571-2.

⁴⁹ De Jong to Congar, 6 April 1948.

⁵⁰ "1. Elenchus observatorum, quem dedit p. Congar Archiepiscopo, est tantum unus ex elenchis. Non intendit Consilium Oecumenicum invitare omnes personas indicatas a P. Congar; sed vult facere selectionem ex omnibus elenchis, vid. *decem personas*; 2. Quia Ecclesia Catholica modo officiali non indicat nec repraesentantes nec observatores, electio observatorum spectat ad Genevam. Si autem modo officiali communicaretur, determinatam personam certe non accepturam veniam ab auctoritate ecclesiastica catholica, vel

Geneva also made it clear, with reference to the Dutch candidates, that it could not appoint three observers of the same nationality but only one. At the same time, the WCC clarified that it would be impossible for it to turn down requests for invitations from Catholics “with whom we have had a relationship of cooperation for many years”, especially if such requests were made in agreement with Catholic bishops or cardinals, “as has already happened in some cases”.⁵¹

Such an answer from Van der Linde was the death knell for the issue of sending observers, as Tromp well summed up:

The opposition between Geneva and the Holy Office (by papal decree) is clear. The Holy Office wants no more than six observers, Geneva ten. The Holy Office wanted three Dutch, Geneva only

vice versa determinatam personam, in rebus oecumenicis optime versatam, fore gratam Eccl. Catholicae Geneva huius communicationis rationem habebit; 3. Consilium Oecumenicum non libenter tamquam observatores invitaret, qui non studiis maioris momenti vel colloquiis oecumenicis gaudeant diuturna experientia in hac materia”, Van de Pol’s Memorandum, 10 May 1948. Van de Pol’s memorandum is based on correspondence between Van der Linde and Willem Adolph Visser ‘t Hooft that occurred between April and May 1948. This correspondence is kept in the WCC archives’ collection of documents on “Relations with the Roman Catholic Church”, which can be consulted in the Brill online database of primary sources. However, this documentation does not seem to be complete, as it would certainly need to be integrated with the other series in the WCC Archives, which include in particular the internal communications and correspondence of the Geneva leaders, and especially the correspondence between them and the Catholic ecumenists. For instance, in the above-mentioned collection there is no trace of the letters which, according to an information note in the same archive (Visser ‘t Hooft, *Personnalités catholiques*), were addressed to Visser ‘t Hooft by Maurice Bévenot, Charles Boyer, Henri Desmettre, Geneviève Gendron, Alphonse Heitz, Otto Iserland, Alfred Martin, Maurice Villain, Clément Lialine. The same document says that other Catholics had contacted the WCC’s London office instead, and their names did not appear on Visser ‘t Hooft’s list.

51 “4. Consilio Oecumenico omnino impossibile est non habere rationem petitionum ad accipiendam invitationem, quae fiunt a Catholicis, cum quibus iam per multas annos habetur relatio: maximopere si dictae petitiones fiunt ex desiderio determinati Episcopi catholici, vel Cardinalis: sicut iam reapse in quibusdam casibus accidit”, Van de Pol’s Memorandum, 10 May 1948. Cf. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Memorandum Concerning Roman Catholic Observers* (“One of the curious elements in the situation is that at least two of the names on Father Congar’s list are those of persons who are in the closest touch with Cardinal Suhard of Paris and Cardinal Liénart of Lille’s”) and Visser ‘t Hooft to Van der Linde, 30 April 1948: “Daarbij komt, dat ik reeds van twee uitgenodigd personen heb gehoord, dat zij menen toch te kunnen gaan, daar ze zich genoegzaam gedekt voelen door de leden van de hiërarchie, die hun permissie gegeven hebben [...] Op dit moment ben ik nog niet bereid de namen te noemen van de personen, die ik uitgenodigd heb. Wanneer de zaken zo scherp toegaan als naar Uw brief gevreesd moet worden, dan zal ik die namen voorlopig geheim houden. Blijkt echter dat er een zekere modus vivendi gevonden kan worden, dan zou ik eventueel de namen kunnen mededelen. (In addition, I have already heard from two invited people that they feel they can go anyway because they feel sufficiently covered by the members of the hierarchy who have given them permission [...] At the moment, I am not willing to reveal the names of the people I have invited. If things get as heated as your letter suggests, I will keep the names secret for the time being. However, if it turns out that some sort of modus vivendi can be found, I may be able to reveal the names)”.

one. The Pope does not want the observers to go as observers of the Catholic Church, but only as private persons, so he reserves the final decision on the appointment of observers by the other side for himself; Geneva claims the final decision for itself and wants to invite its own friends before the others, leaving it to the hatred of the Catholic Church to exclude almost publicly those friends who may have been recommended by a bishop or a cardinal.⁵²

On 24 May 1948 the Holy Office Consultors met again, for the first time since Congar's intervention and Tromp's subsequent trip, to pronounce a definitive word on the question of the Amsterdam Assembly. Impressed by Van der Linde's communications, through which it had become "self-evident that the organisers of the Congress want to compromise the Holy See", they had become convinced of the need to "curb the exhibitionism of many Catholics".⁵³ Their resolutions, therefore, merely embodied a foreseen tragedy, deciding

to publish in the *Osservatore Romano*, and then in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, an official statement recalling the provision of canon 1325 which prohibits the intervention of Catholics in such congresses without the permission of the Holy See.⁵⁴

Two days later the Cardinals confirmed the need

to propose a pontifical document which, starting from the fact of the *'Una Sancta'*, would also deal with ecumenical congresses and would also recall the provision of canon 1325.⁵⁵

52 "Clara est oppositio Genevae et S.O. (ex iussu Pont.). S.O. non vult nisi sex observatores; Geneva decem. S. Officium voluit tres heerlandicos; Geneva unum tantum Neerlandicum. Pontifex non vult ut observatores eant ut observatores Ecclesiae Catholicae, sed unice ut personae privatae, dum ex altera parte in nominandis observatoribus sibi reservat ultimam decisionem; Geneva ultimam decisionem sibi vindicat, et vult prae ceteris invitare suos amicos, relinquens Ecclesiae Catholicae odium ut illos amicos, qui forsann commmendati sunt ab Episcopo vel Cardinali, quasi publice excludat", S. Tromp, *Nota seu Votum*, n.d., text reported in S.O., *Assemblea di Amsterdam*, 606.

53 "È evidente che gli organizzatori del Congresso vogliono compromettere la S. Sede; gli osservatori verrebbero a trovarsi in condizioni di disagio e di inferiorità. È necessario frenare l'esibizionismo di molti cattolici", Minutes of Feria II, 24 May 1948.

54 "Publicare nell'Osservatore Romano e poi negli Acta Ap. Sedis una dichiarazione ufficiale per ricordare il disposto del can. 1325 che proibisce l'intervento dei cattolici in simili congressi senza un permesso della S. Sede", Minutes of Feria II, 24 May 1948.

55 "Proporre un documento Pontificio, che partendo dal fatto dell'UNA SANCTA', tratti anche dei Congressi ecumenici e richiami anche il disposto del can. 1325", Minutes of Feria IV, 26 May 1948.

While a group of consultors led by the Jesuit Franz Hürth⁵⁶ drew up a draft declaration, the papal instructions arrived on 3 June, approving the text.⁵⁷ Thus, although also prompted by other factors such as the parallel study by the Holy Office of the German ecumenical movement *Una Sancta* (to which the Cardinals actually referred in their decision of 26 May), the publication of what was to become the *Monitum Cum Compertum* was finally decided.⁵⁸

4 The Road to Lund (1952)

On 18 June 1948, a letter from Marchetti Selvaggiani sent De Jong the page of the *L'Osservatore Romano* of 6 June containing the text of the *Monitum Cum Compertum*. The words that accompanied the dispatch left no room for doubt as to its interpretation:

It is clear from the above *Monitum* that the question of sending Catholic observers to the Amsterdam Congress has been resolved, and with a changed opinion: in order to participate in the Congress, the express and prior authorisation of the Holy See is indeed required.

I inform you, however, that the Apostolic See will not grant this permission to anyone.⁵⁹

In the present state of the documentation, the reasons for this choice can only be hypothesised, but they probably lie in the fact that, given the impossibility of drawing up an *a priori* list of observers, a list which Geneva had refused to accept,⁶⁰ the Holy See expected to be

⁵⁶ On him, see Dauftratshofer, *Das päpstliche Lehramt*.

⁵⁷ Minutes of FERIA V, 3 June 1948. The drafts can be found in ADDF, R.V. 1948 n. 39, b. 1, ff. 623 and 701-7. Final text is in AAS, 40, 1948, 257.

⁵⁸ For a reconstruction of the genesis of the *Monitum*, which only at the last moment was also used for the question of the Amsterdam Assembly, see Marotta, "The 'Controlled Growth'".

⁵⁹ "Ex memorato monitu perspicitur quod quaestio de observatoribus catholicis ad Congressum Amstellodamensem mittendis soluta est, et quidem mutato consilio: requiritur enim expressa ac praevia licentiam S. Sedis ut catholico Congressui interesse liceat. Praenuntio autem Eminentiae Tuae hanc veniam Apostolicam Sedem nulli concessuram", Marchetti Selvaggiani to De Jong, 18 June 1948.

⁶⁰ The refusal was, of course, motivated by the fact that the Holy See rejected official contact with the WCC, so the invitations could only be personal: "It was natural to conclude that the Dutch bishops were acting for the Vatican. [...] It was therefore proposed that the Roman Catholic authorities in the Netherlands should be asked to suggest the names of persons who might be invited. To this the General Secretariat replied indirectly that it was the responsibility of each individual Roman Catholic who had already been invited, and not of the World Council, to obtain the necessary permission. All that the World Council could do was to inform those who had already been invited

inundated with dozens of requests from Catholic theologians, through bishops or apostolic delegates. The Holy Office's concern in this case was probably to avoid having to decide on a case-by-case basis whether to deny someone the permission granted to others. In short, there was a risk that the few lines of an answer to a question about participation in the Amsterdam Assembly might reveal that Rome had doubts about some people or that some publications were under investigation. Normally, in most cases, all these procedures would have ended without consequences and even without the knowledge of the persons concerned, but the requests for permission to be observers would have brought all these doubts to light and made them known to a wide public: all this would have been contrary to the great caution exercised by the Holy Office in dealing with these personal cases. These implications could therefore explain why all the applications received by the Holy Office during this period were systematically rejected (albeit for "general and not personal reasons"), such as those of Maurice Villain, Henri Desmettre, even Charles Boyer (a very "Roman" theologian, sustained by Giovanni Battista Montini), Otto Iserland, recommended by Charrière, and so on.⁶¹ However, some of these applicants managed to attend the conference, if not as representatives of the Catholic Church, at least in the more discreet role of 'journalists': this was the case, for example, of four Dutch Catholics, including Witte and van De Pol, each of whom was able to follow the work of one of the four working groups into which the assembly was divided. But in those days in Amsterdam, although they did not follow the work of the conference directly, there were also some foreign Catholics present, such as, for instance, Charles Boyer, who was there on the pretext of attending concurrent academic conferences in the Dutch capital.⁶² Under the same pretext of academic duties, Sebastiaan Tromp was also there, sent by the Holy Office with the specific task of supervising the presence of these Catholic journalists at the event.⁶³

On a more official level, the Catholic Church had expressed its interest in the event through the collective pastoral letter of the Dutch Episcopate to the Assembly, the modalities and content of which had

that Cardinal de Jong desired that only those who had his approval should attend the Assembly", WCC, *The Roman Catholic Church*, 3.

61 Many of them, such as Villain, Boyer and Iserland, had been urged by the WCC itself to apply to Rome for permission to attend the conference. Others, like Desmettre, had instead approached Geneva on their own initiative to obtain an invitation (Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 785-9). For the request of Otto Iserland, see Charrière's letter to Bernardini, 25 June 1948. The documents concerning the applications of Villain, Desmettre, Lialine, Witte, Van de Pol and Boyer are in ADDF, R.V. 1948 n. 39, b. 1, ff. 750 e ss.

62 Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 793-6.

63 Congar, *Journal d'un théologien*, 149-50.

been previously agreed with the Holy Office. Although it reaffirmed traditional Catholic teaching on Christian unity and therefore the impossibility for the Catholic Church to participate in the congress, the letter was seen by the delegates present in Amsterdam as a clear sign of goodwill and benevolence towards the fledgling WCC. Especially when it warmly invited the faithful to pray for the holding of the congress and urged them to recognise that “we are not without fault in the discord that has arisen between us and non-Catholic Christians”:

We will however follow the Congress with the greatest interest. It issues from a great and sincere desire for that unity willed by Christ and desired by many who want acknowledge Him as their God and Saviour. And how can we, who have received from the Holy Spirit the mission of preserving and building up the Church in her unity, acting under the guidance of the Successor of Peter, ignore a sincere desire for unity? Whether the Congress marks a step forward or a step backward, it cannot leave us indifferent.⁶⁴

Although the letter was dated 31 July and was read out in all the churches of the country on 22 August, the day the WCC Assembly began, it did not reach the leaders of the World Council until 31 August, when the Assembly had already been in session for nine days, due to a misunderstanding on the part of the Vicar of Utrecht (or perhaps his deliberate boycott).⁶⁵ As a result, the delegates did not have the text in

64 “Attamen acta Congressus attento sequemur animo. Natus enim est ex magno et sincere desiderio, quo multi, qui Christum volunt agnoscere ut Deum suum ac Salvatore, unitatem a Christo volitam exoptant. Quomodo autem Nos, qui positi sumus a Spiritu Sancto, ut duce Petri Successore Ecclesiam unitam conservemus unitamque extendamus, transcurare et negligere potuerimus sincerum unitatis desiderium? Nec curae nobis esse nequit, num hic congressus progressum significaturus sit vel regressum”, Tromp, *De Congressu Oecumenico Amstelodamensi*, 22. Although the English translation of the text was distributed to the delegates in Amsterdam, it was not published in the volume of the proceedings. The Dutch magazine *In de Waagschaal* published it on 17 September, but an English translation of the letter appeared in *The Catholic Standard and Times* already on 10 September 1948. It differs slightly from Tromp’s version, which is closer to the Italian version published in *L’Osservatore romano*, 15-16 November 1948. For example, the entire phrase “And how can we...”, alluding to the Pope’s role as guarantor of unity, is completely missing, replaced by the final phrase “We should not remain indifferent to the fact that this Congress may mean a step forward or a step back”. Given that Tromp was familiar with the text of the letter, having drafted it himself with the Utrecht Curia and supervised the English translation by Van de Pol, it is safe to assume that some newspapers altered the more ‘traditional’ and therefore controversial passages. Cf. also the French translation appeared in *La Documentation Catholique*, 22 May 1949, 693-6.

65 “By a regrettable misunderstanding you did not receive officially a copy of the pastoral letter which the episcopate of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands have issued on the occasion of the Ecumenical Conference in Amsterdam. We have the honour to send you a copy of this pastoral letter, accompanied by a very careful English translation which has possibly come to your notice. In the hope that this pastoral letter

their hands until the final days of the conference (it was read to them on 3 September, to be precise), when the debate of the first session had already taken place, heated by the controversy over the absence of the Catholic Church. From this experience of the late arrival of the letter from the Dutch bishops, Tromp, who during his mission in the Dutch capital was able to follow all the debates in detail, drew the conviction that, in spite of all the negative aspects (and in particular the strong anti-Catholic tone adopted by the Assembly), it was more necessary than ever to establish contact with the ecumenical movement 'in good time', in order to effectively contain the accusations against the Catholic Church of lack of interest in the ecumenical question. Moreover, in his opinion, expressed in the *Votum* sent to the Holy Office at the end of 1948, the presence of Catholic observers at the Assembly would have been itself an effective antidote, both psychological and factual, to the anti-Catholic psychosis, since their presence could have exposed false interpretations and defused prejudicial attacks.⁶⁶

It was therefore thanks to Tromp's impressions of the Amsterdam experience that it was possible to send observers to the Faith and Order Conference in Lund in 1952:

Having examined the matter, this Supreme Congregation authorises Your Excellency to select Catholic men, exclusively from this Apostolic Vicariate, who will attend the said Conference as 'observers'.⁶⁷

The idea of restricting the choice of Catholic observers to the local context, by re-proposing the criterion already postulated by De Jong for the WCC Assembly, should have avoided, in the Roman intentions, the multiplication of the requests for dispensation.⁶⁸ In practice, how-

may contribute to a right understanding of the attitude of the Catholic Church in this so important matter, we sign with feelings of respect", De Jong to Visser 't Hooft, 31 August 1948, text reported in Visser 't Hooft, *The First Assembly*, 43. The error of the diocesan vicar is denounced in the report Tromp, *De Congressu Oecumenico Amstelodamensi*, 17: "Negligentia autem Vicarii generalis hoc factum non est, sive ob errorem humanum, sive ob inoleum Vicarii non valde irenicam. Cardinalis autem et alii Hanc omissionem omnino ignorabant".

66 "Si in Congressu Amstelodamensi adfuissent observatores catholici, Epistola Pastoralis Episcoporum Neerlandicae statim communicate fuisset cum Congressu, et certe mutasset adspectum sectionis primae, quando actum fuit de habitudine ad Ecclesiam Catholicam", Tromp, *De Congressu Oecumenico Amstelodamensi*, 29-33, here 31.

67 "Re mature perpensa, haec Suprema permittit ut Excellentia Tua viros catholicos, tantum ex isto Vicariatu Apostolico, seligat, qui praedicto Conventui intersint ut 'observatores'", Giuseppe Pizzardo to Johannes Müller, 31 January 1952, text reported in Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 814.

68 "Mitti posse observatores ex Suecia tantum, a vicario apostolico designatos, ad impediendam invitationem aliorum ex aliis nationibus", Minutes of FERIA II, 15 January 1952. This decision was taken at the instigation of a *Votum* written by Tromp on 28 June 1951.

ever, it led to the participation of four Swedish (or Swedish-based) observers, not all of whom were experts in ecumenical matters: with the exception of the Dominican Bonnet de Paillerets, of French origin, the others were in fact chosen either because they were converts or because of their language skills.⁶⁹ They were joined by Tromp, who, as in Amsterdam, was the incognito guest of the apostolic nuncio, Johannes Müller, during the days of the conference,⁷⁰ and the Dominican Christoph-Jean Dumont, director of the Istina Centre in Paris, who had obtained a journalist's permit.⁷¹

The Lund experience did not, however, guarantee the consolidation of a new practice on the question of observers. Although they were not experienced ecumenists, three out of four (Doyle being the exception) of the Catholic observers at Lund recommended to the ecclesiastical authorities that the Catholic Church should continue to be present as an observer at these ecumenical meetings, stressing that the presence of Catholic observers had been warmly welcomed by the conference leaders. However, in his own report written in February 1953, Tromp was rather skeptical about the possibility of giving continuity to this decision.⁷² This was for several reasons. Firstly, he had returned from Lund with the impression that the anti-Catholic current within the WCC had continued to gain ground and become more threatening, without the gesture of the Church of Rome to send official observers having in any way weakened this polemical approach. On the other hand, the theme planned for the Second World Assembly of the WCC, to be held in Evanston in 1954, promised to give rise to an endless and heated debate within the ecumenical council, revealing all the insurmountable divisions within it between the different confessions. In fact, the theme "Christ, the Hope of the World" would have been a "stone of scandal" even for the theologians

⁶⁹ Impressions reported by Dumont in his letter to Willebrands, 24 September 1952. Besides Bonnet de Paillerets, whom Dumont considered competent, the other three observers were Berndt David Assarsson, R.M. Doyle and the Jesuit Joseph Gerlach.

⁷⁰ Pizzardo to Müller, 1 August 1952: "Exc.me ac Rev.me domine, Proximis diebus, tempore suae vacationis, iter per Sueciam faciet R.P. Sebastianus TROMP, S.J., professor in Pont. Universitate Gregoriana et consultor S.Officii. Etsi nullum mandatum accepit ad 'conventum' quem in loco LUND habebit adsociatio 'Faith and Order', tamen Excellentia Tua Rev.ma et theologi, qui ut 'observatores' ad praedictum conventum selecti sunt, opportune consiliis et opera eiusdem P. Tromp uti et cum eo libere ad rem communicare poterunt (In the next few days, during the holidays, the Rev. Fr. Sebastian Tromp, S.J., professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University and consultant to the Holy Office, will be travelling around Sweden. Although he has not received a mandate for the 'meeting' of the Faith and Order Association to be held in Lund, Your Excellency and the theologians selected as 'observers' for the aforementioned meeting will be able to avail themselves of the relevant advice and work of Fr. Tromp himself and will be able to communicate freely with him)".

⁷¹ Cf. Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité*, 814.

⁷² Tromp, *Congressus Lundensis*, 24 February 1953.

of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions, who, encouraged by the positive precedent of Lund, had committed themselves to drafting a sort of Catholic memorandum on the conference themes to offer to the delegates of the assembly.⁷³

5 Epilogue: Evanston (1954)

Both in the Catholic camp and even more so in the WCC, the theme chosen for the Evanston Assembly seemed destined to bring out the whole drama of the difficult compatibility between the different ecclesiological sensibilities present within them: from the more eschatological ones, which shifted the problem of Christian hope and thus the preparation for the concrete advent of the Kingdom of God to the Day of Judgement (and thus to the dimension of faith), to the more pragmatic sensibilities (identified in American Protestantism, which would certainly have been overrepresented in Evanston), which wanted to see the theme of Christian hope translated into a recipe book of policies and social solutions to be presented to the various governments, through what they called “responsible action in the world and for the world”. A votum of the Jesuit Consultor Augustin Bea (who was informed of developments in the preparations for the Evanston Assembly through his correspondence with Johannes Willebrands)⁷⁴ well illustrates the concern with which the Roman Curia followed recent developments in the internal debate within the WCC:

The Commission entrusted with the preparation of the new Congress had produced a *first report* on how to develop the theme of the Congress “Jesus Christ, our Lord, the only hope of the Church and of the world”. This first report, written under the influence of “continental” (European) theologians, had linked Christian hope to Christ crucified and focused on the return of the Lord at the end of the world (parousia), so as not to offer ideological reform programmes instead of the Gospel. The Americans protested strongly against this way of arguing, saying that the subject should be

73 The Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions (CCEQ) worked for almost two years on a document to be presented to the delegates in Evanston as a Catholic contribution to the theme of Christian hope. Unable to reach a common position on the subject within the CCEQ, this document was published in the journal *Istina* as the result of the reflections of “some theologians of the CCEQ”. (Cf. *Le Christ, l'église et la grâce*, 130). Yves Congar also worked on the text until 1954, when he was struck by the measure that removed him from teaching. Cf. De Mey, Marotta, “The Catholic Conference”.

74 Marotta, *Gli anni della pazienza*, 294-9. Bea's correspondence with Willebrands, and especially with the journalist Johannes Peter Michael, clearly documents his increasing skepticism about the possibility of a Catholic contribution to the Evanston theme. This gradually developed into the total pessimism of the Votum quoted here.

abandoned if it could not offer Christians hope *that could be realised in this world*. [...]

One might ask: what interest can the Church have in being represented at a conference which, from the very beginning of its preparation, seeks to eliminate the supernatural element and to focus primarily on the problems of our present world?⁷⁵

“I do not believe that the danger of aversion to Catholics in Evanston is entirely excluded,” Tromp commented in his report of February 1953, urging the members of the Holy Office to consider carefully, and this time well in advance (“That is why we must not have too much discussion about it. The congress is just around the corner”), whether to send observers to the American meeting.⁷⁶ This time, in fact, he seemed determined to advise against it. When, four months later, the matter was discussed at a meeting of the Consultors of the Holy Office, Bea added to the dose, pointing out that

the environment [of Evanston] will be quite different from that of Lund. [...] It may be useful to have some (unofficial) ‘informers’. But it seems unlikely that official ‘informers’ could contribute to a more solid and ‘Christian’ conduct of the argument in such an environment.⁷⁷

75 “La Commissione incaricata della preparazione del nuovo Congresso aveva preparato una *prima relazione* sul modo di svolgere l’argomento del Congresso ‘Gesù Cristo, Signor Nostro, unica speranza della Chiesa e del mondo’. Questa prima relazione redatta sotto l’influsso dei teologi ‘continentali’ (europei) aveva legato la speranza cristiana a Cristo crocefisso e messo nel centro il ritorno del Signore alla fine del mondo (parusia), per non offrire, in vece del Vangelo, dei programmi di riforma ideologici. Contro questo modo di svolgere l’argomento gli Americani mossero una forte protesta, dicendo che bisognerebbe abbandonare questo argomento, se non potessero presentare ai cristiani delle speranze *realizzabili in questo mondo* [...] Si può domandare: che interesse può avere la Chiesa di essere rappresentata in un Congresso il quale, fin dalla prima preparazione, studia eliminare l’elemento soprannaturale e fermarsi principalmente nei problemi del nostro mondo attuale?”, Bea, *Votum*, 8 June 1953.

76 “Non puto in Evanston omnino exclusam esse periculum aversionis erga catholicos. Ex hucusque expositis quoad Evanston concludo. a) Si mittuntur observatores, debent esse bene praeparati; b) Hac de causa non nimis deliberandum est. Instat Congressus; c) Mea opinione non possumus facere decisionem, nisi cognoscamus mentem Episcopatus Americae Septentrionalis; d) Hac de re subito interrogentur Episcopi”, Tromp, *Congressus Lundensis*, 9.

77 “Non siamo sicuri che la Chiesa non verrà attaccata dai rappresentanti di alcune sette americane molto ostili al cattolicesimo (l’ambiente è del tutto differente da quello di Lund), e dall’altra parte il Congresso non promette nessun risultato positivo per la questione dell’‘unione’ o di una migliore comprensione? Secondo lo Statuto fatto a Lund, 53 dei voti dei membri del Congresso sono sempre sicuri alla tendenza *adommatica* (americana), la quale si era già fatta sentire nella stessa preparazione del congresso [...] Potrà essere utile avere alcuni ‘informatori’ (inufficiali), ma non sembra probabile che ‘osservatori’ ufficiali potrebbero contribuire, in un tale ambiente, a uno svolgimento più solido e più ‘cristiano’ dell’argomento”, Bea, *Votum*, 8 June 1953.

The internal debates within the WCC and the change in the balance of power brought about by the statute may explain the change in attitude of Tromp and Bea within a few years on the question of observers. Their pessimism soon affected the Consultors and, even more so, the Cardinals of the Holy Office. If the former, meeting on 8 June, had confined themselves to recommending that “the opinion of the American bishops should be sought through the Apostolic Delegate”, while admitting that, “in the present state of information”, they were of the opinion that “it would not be advisable to send observers”,⁷⁸ the Cardinals Inquisitors, fifteen days later, were much more drastic: “Neither observers nor informers should be sent”.⁷⁹ On the 7th of August 1953, therefore, the American Bishops, whom the Consultors wished to consult before taking a final decision from Rome, were sent a circular letter from the Apostolic Delegate, Amleto Cicognani, in which it was stated:

His Eminence, Cardinal Pizzardo, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, has requested that I bring to your attention the following matter. [...] Previous congresses were attended by a few Catholic theologians as observers. In view of the negative results of past experiences and because of the distinct anti-Catholic note in the program for 1954, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, on the 17th of June, 1953, issued the following Decree: “Ad Congressum Evanstonensem Consilii Oecumenici Ecclesiarum neque informatores neque observatores mittendos esse ex parte Catholicorum”.⁸⁰

Thus, by the end of June 1953, a full year before Evanston, the question of sending observers had already been decided and the result communicated to the American Bishops. That is why, in the autumn of 1953, Tromp rightly told Willebrands and the leaders of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Affairs that it was now “too late” for Rome to give its consent to the matter.⁸¹ Willebrands misunderstood him: he was surprised that ten months was not enough time for the Holy Office to make a decision on the matter, but he did not know

78 “Domandare il parere dei Vescovi americani, tramite il Delegato Apostolico; allo stato delle informazioni, i Rev.mi consultori sono piuttosto del parere che non convenga mandare Osservatori”, Minutes of Feria II, 8 June 1953.

79 “Non esse mittendos nequeee observatores neque informatores”, Minutes of Feria IV, 17 June 1953.

80 Cicognani, *Circular letter*, 7 August 1953.

81 “De brief van P. Bèvenot is zeer interessant, maar waarschijnlijk te laat, om nog van invloed te kunnen zijn op een mogelijke beslissing [P. Bèvenot’s letter is very interesting, but probably too late to influence a possible decision]”, Tromp to Willebrands, 21 October 1953.

that such a decision had already been made four months earlier. Refusing to give up, Dumont prepared a memorandum for the Holy Office, which he sent in November 1953, arguing for the sending of observers to Evanston and also asking that this time, unlike Lund, they be qualified, because

it is evident that a good general theological education is not sufficient to follow effectively the work and deliberations of the Assembly.⁸²

A similar request came in December 1953 through Mario Crovini, an official of the Holy Office, on behalf of Charles Boyer, who was also a member of the CCEQ and who this time was even refused permission to travel to Evanston on a pretext, as had happened at the time of the Amsterdam Assembly.⁸³

The persistence of the leaders of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions went as far as the spring of 1954, when they asked the president of the Commission on Ecumenism of the Fulda Conference, Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger of Paderborn, who was also involved in the CCEQ, to write to the Bishop of Chicago, Samuel Stritch, encouraging him to allow Catholic observers to attend the WCC conference.⁸⁴ The reaction of Stritch, in whose diocese the jurisdiction of Evanston fell, was one of extreme irritation: Jaeger's request, sent in April 1954, was all the more untimely. The Bishop of Chicago did not hesitate to report the letter to Pizzardo, urging the Holy Office itself to intervene with

certain bishops who are in favor of sending observers to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches

in order to inform them of the decisions taken by the Holy See a year earlier:

The Holy Office has given a clear, definite decision on this matter, and that decision is very wise [...] It seems from the enclosure that some bishops in Europe are not aware of this decision. Would it be asking too much to ask that the Archbishop of Paderborn be

⁸² "Il parâit évident que pour suivre efficacement les travaux et deliberations de l'assemblée il ne suffit pas d'une bonne formation théologique générale", Dumont, *Note sur l'opportunité*, 11 November 1953.

⁸³ Crovini, *Appunto su una richiesta*, 15 December 1953. Another attempt was made with Montini's letter to Ottaviani, 26 May 1954.

⁸⁴ Velati, *Una difficile transizione*, 68-72. Actually, Jaeger merely forwarded, with a few accompanying words, the letter from Willebrands to Stritch, 29 March 1954. About him see Priesching, Otto, *Lorenz Jaeger als Ökumeniker*.

informed of the decision of the Holy office, so that he may rightly direct this group? [...] Pardon me for writing you in this matter, but it seems to me very important not to give these people who are arranging this meeting the idea that Catholics here are taking a different position than some Catholics in Europe. [...] In my humble opinion, there is the indication in this letter that some Catholics are going farther than is prudent in this whole matter.⁸⁵

On 4 June 1954, the Holy Office issued therefore a brief warning to Jaeger.⁸⁶ However, the game was not entirely lost. Although there was no room for a change, since a definitive decision had long been communicated to the American episcopate, the Holy Office, as the archival documentation shows, paid much attention to Dumont's Memorandum. The archive did not record any votes or value judgements on the texts examined, but the extensive dossier collected alongside the memorandum suggests that similar care was taken in examining the whole of the CCEQ's work on the Evanston theme, and even the texts presented by individual speakers at the annual CCEQ conferences.⁸⁷ This kind of dedicated attention may explain why the conditions were created for Dumont to be present in Evanston as an accredited journalist, in contrast to Boyer, who was denied such permission.⁸⁸ The question arises not least because the S.O. letter to Jaeger clearly stated that even the sending of mere journalists would require the consent of the Bishop of Chicago.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the archival sources examined for this article cannot shed any more light on this matter.

6 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the American bishops had adhered with full conviction to the directives they had received from the Holy Office in August 1953. In Stritch's words, one cannot fail to detect a certain self-satisfaction in being able to prevent European theologians and bishops from interfering in the ecclesiastical affairs of his own territory. This attitude was also shared by the English Catholic hierarchy, which found itself repeatedly having to protest against the interference of

⁸⁵ Stritch to Pizzardo, 7 May 1954.

⁸⁶ Pizzardo to Jaeger, 4 June 1954.

⁸⁷ See the dossier in ADDF, R.V. 1948 n. 39, b. 6.

⁸⁸ The costs of Dumont's trip were covered by Willebrands' ecumenical society, the Dutch Sint-Willibrord Vereniging. Cf. Schelkens, "Pioneers at the crossroads", 31.

⁸⁹ "Ut autem, aliquis vir catholicus interesse possit ut "diurnarius" (journalist), necessaria est licentia Odiarii loci, seu Em.mi Card. Archiepiscopi Chicagensis", Pizzardo to Jaeger, 4 June 1954.

“continental theologians” in its relations with its Anglican counterparts: the Malines conversations, led by the Belgian Cardinal Desiré Mercier, had only opened a long series of such initiatives, which the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions had also taken up in the 1950s, for example through its dialogue with the International League for Apostolic Faith and Order (ILAFO), a movement within pro-Catholic Anglicanism.⁹⁰

While there was no shortage of occasions during the pontificate of Pius XII when the Holy Office had to consider allowing limited meetings between Catholic theologians and WCC theologians,⁹¹ in the years following Evanston there were no further world conferences of either the World Council of Churches or the Faith and Order movement. In fact, the first such meeting would have been the Third WCC World Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. But this was a very different historical epoch, even though it took place only a few years later. Not only was it in the midst of another pontificate, that of John XXIII, but it was also on the eve of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which is why the presence of Catholic observers in the Indian capital was used as a bargaining chip to get the various Christian denominations to send their own observers to the Catholic synodal assembly.

As we have seen in the course of this contribution, during the pontificate of Pius XII there was no opposition in principle to the possibility of Catholic participation (as observers) in the appointments of the international ecumenical movement. Rather, it was the internal evolution of the World Council of Churches, i.e. the split between its most anti-Catholic liberal tendencies and those most open to dialogue with Catholics, that led the Holy See to feel a progressive and increasingly paralysing fear of being confronted with a “superchurch” that would seek to supplant the primacy of the Catholic Church as universal Church. It has been a history of mutual misunderstandings, but also of mutual errors – such as the handling of the Observers’

⁹⁰ In this the CCEQ found itself opposed by some English bishops, emblematic of which is the following letter from the Bishop of Southwark, Cyril Cowderoy, to Willebrands: “I do not feel justified in giving any *approval* or *recommendation* such as you describe. At the most, I would *tolerate* the presence of the delegation at the conference, but I do *not* agree with it and I do not like it. If these non-catholics desire to know what the Catholic Church teaches and what its views are on the points you mention, there are plenty of Catholic Bishops and Clergy in England to whom they can address their enquiries. The idea that Continental theologians will be more ‘broadminded’, ‘more tolerant’ and more ‘understanding of the ‘Catholic’ party in the church of England’ is ridiculous and impertinent. Much harm has been done by meddlesome activities of Catholics from abroad who without any real understanding of the problem have formed contacts with English heretics which only serve to confirm them in their opinions. Naturally if the Holy See were to tell me that it desired this conference to take place with Catholic representation I would accept this at once. If the Holy See leaves it to me to judge, I would say No. God bless you”, Cowderoy to Willebrands, 23 February 1957.

⁹¹ Cf. Marotta, “The ‘Controlled Growth’”.

affair through Congar's mediation, or the sending of theologians ignorant of ecumenism to the Lund meeting – which have widened the distance between the two bodies rather than bringing them closer together. In this context, the work of those individual pioneers who, by concealing initiatives reserved to a few intimates and by the laborious but skillful interweaving of personal contacts, prepared the fertile ground for the fruitful dialogue which opened with the Second Vatican Council, is all the more valuable.

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