
Intransigent anti-communism and/or pragmatic diplomacy? Pius XII's Eastern policy between world war and cold war

*¿Anticomunismo intransigente y/o diplomacia pragmática?
La política oriental de Pío XII entre la guerra mundial y la guerra fría*

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Resumen: En una investigación que utiliza fuentes vaticanas que han sido recientemente abiertas a la investigación, el artículo reevalúa la historia de los intentos reales o supuestos de acercamiento entre el Vaticano y la Unión Soviética iniciados durante y después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial con el objetivo de explorar las consideraciones que dieron forma a la política oriental del Vaticano hasta el final de la guerra. Sobre la base de un examen más detallado de la misión de Orlemanski en la primavera de 1944, la misión de Flynn en marzo de 1945 y las negociaciones iniciadas en 1946 a través de los jesuitas húngaros, sostiene que a pesar de la breve muestra aparente de Moscú de voluntad de cooperar al final de la guerra, el fracaso de los intentos reales de acercamiento se debió principalmente a la falta de interés del Kremlin. Por el contrario, el Vaticano estaba realmente abierto al diálogo, si se daban las condiciones adecuadas. En consecuencia, la política oriental de Pío XII debe interpretarse a través del paradigma no de la intransigencia, sino de la tradicional política de concordato vaticana. Sin embargo, el término *Ostpolitik*, a menos que se utilice con algún matiz distintivo, parece inapropiado para la postura de Pío XII sobre la política oriental. A pesar de las similitudes con la *Ostpolitik* vaticana de los años sesenta, una comparación minuciosa pone de manifiesto varias diferencias básicas.

Palabras clave: política concordataria, diplomacia vaticana, *Ostpolitik*, comunismo, Unión Soviética, Pío XII, bloque soviético, Segunda Guerra Mundial, Guerra Fría, intransigencia.

Abstract: In an investigation involving Vatican sources that have recently been opened for research, the paper reassesses the story of the actual or alleged Vatican-Soviet attempts at rapprochement initiated during and after World War II with the aim to explore the considerations that shaped Vatican eastern policy at the end of the war. On the basis of a closer examination of the Orlemanski mission in the spring of 1944, the Flynn mission in March 1945, and the negotiations initiated in 1946 through Hungarian Jesuits it argues that despite Moscow's brief apparent display of willingness to cooperate at the end of the war, the failure of actual attempts at rapprochement was primarily due to the Kremlin's lack of interest. By contrast, the Vatican was truly open to dialogue, given the right conditions. Consequently, Pius XII's Eastern policy is to be interpreted through the paradigm not of intransigence but traditional Vatican concordat policy. The term *Ostpolitik*, however, unless used with some distinguishing qualification, seems inappropriate to Pius XII's stance on Eastern policy. Despite the similarities with the Vatican *Ostpolitik* of the 1960s, a close comparison shows up several basic differences.

Keywords: concordat policy, Vatican diplomacy, *Ostpolitik*, communism, Soviet Union, Pius XII, soviet bloc, World War II, Cold War, intransigence.

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«The Holy See is always prepared to enter into contact with the Moscow government.»¹ It was with these words, on 18 March 1946, that Pius XII's personal secretary, the Jesuit Fr. Robert Leiber, conveyed the Pope's position to the Hungarian Fr. Töhötöm Nagy, who had brought a message about the Soviets' alleged willingness to negotiate. Preliminary to this statement from the highest Vatican authority, in early November 1945, Leiber had told Nagy, a fellow Jesuit who was already involved in seeking a *modus vivendi*,

It is not true that Moscow has made an approach. By contrast, we have several times communicated to Moscow that we are willing to make contact. Firstly via Ankara several years ago, to which no effective answer was received, and then when Roosevelt was still alive, when one of the president's excellent Catholic diplomats mentioned the Vatican's intention to make an approach when talking to Molotov, who partly avoided the question, but gave some little encouragement. Both sides are now taking steps in Stockholm but without any result to speak of. The Vatican would definitely like to make contact with Moscow.²

The Soviet Union's advance into Central and Eastern Europe at the end of World War II presented the Holy See with a serious challenge. Now that the region's «Catholic zone»³ was within the sphere of influence of a regime that followed atheist communist ideology, there was no avoiding the question of whether some kind of *modus vivendi* could be reached with Moscow. What led to the failure of the dialogue as envisaged in the opening quote, or indeed an agreement, is still a point of dispute in the literature. Was it due to the caution and principled anti-communism of Pius XII or the reticence of the Soviet Union? In other words: as regards Pius XII, can we reasonably speak about *Ostpolitik* in

¹ «Der Heilige Stuhl is jederzeit bereit, sich mit der Moskauer Regierung ins Benehmen zu setzen» Leiber to Nagy, 18 March 1946 (morning). Facsimile published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare? Alternative dei Cattolici nel dopoguerra in Ungheria alla luce di alcuni documenti Vaticani. Ütközni vagy időt nyerni? Katolikus alternatívák 1945 után néhány vatikáni dokumentum fényében*, METEM, Budapest, 2020, p. 200.

² «Nem igaz, hogy Moszkva közeledett volna. Ellenben mi hoztuk már többször Moszkva tudomására, hogy hajlandók vagyunk a kapcsolatokat felvenni. Először évekkel ezelőtt Ankarán keresztül, de semmi érdemleges válasz nem jött, majd még Roosevelt életében, az elnök egy kiváló katolikus diplomatája megemlítette a Vatikán közeledő szándékát magának Molotovnak, aki részint kitért a válasz elől, részint pedig valami kis biztatást adott. Stockholmon keresztül is történnék jelenleg közeledő lépések, most már mindkét oldalról, de kialakult eredményről még nem beszélhetünk. A Vatikán feltétlenül fel akarja venni a kapcsolatot Moszkvával.» Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló 1944-1946, kapcsolódó dokumentumokkal*, ed por András Keresztes, EFO, Százhalombatta, 2019, p. 83. (Entry of 1 November 1945.)

³ This expression is used by Pietro PASTORELLI, *La Santa Sede e l'Europa centro-orientale nella seconda metà del Novecento*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2013, p. 7.

the sense it is applied to his successors, John XXIII and Paul VI, or must we accept the view that Pope Pacelli's intransigent anti-communism was the decisive factor in his policy towards the East?

To address this question, in an investigation involving Vatican sources that have recently been opened for research, we reassess the story of the actual or alleged Vatican-Soviet attempts at rapprochement initiated during and after World War II. We present several specific cases, analysing their context and outcome, and above all explore what we have learned from the Vatican background documents about the considerations that shaped Vatican Eastern policy at the end of World War II. We argue that despite Moscow's brief apparent display of willingness to cooperate at the end of the war, the failure of actual attempts at rapprochement was primarily due to the Kremlin's lack of interest. By contrast, the Vatican was truly open to dialogue, given the right conditions. Consequently, Pius XII's Eastern policy is to be interpreted through the paradigm not of intransigence but traditional Vatican concordat policy. The term *Ostpolitik*, however, unless used with some distinguishing qualification, seems inappropriate to Pius XII's stance on Eastern policy. Despite the similarities with the Vatican *Ostpolitik* of the 1960s, a close comparison shows up several basic differences.

I. «WE HAVE SEVERAL TIMES ALREADY BROUGHT TO MOSCOW'S ATTENTION OUR WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONTACT»

In Fr. Leiber's briefing to Fr. Nagy, quoted in our introduction, he said that the Vatican had «several times already» brought to Moscow's attention its willingness to make contact. The Pope's confidant mentioned three specific cases up to November 1945. What do we know about these?

Our research has not yet discovered precise information on the attempt at making contact via the Vatican's diplomatic representation in Ankara. If we accept Leiber's assertion that the attempt was made «several years» before November 1945, it is conceivable he was alluding to the rumours, including press rumours, that the Vatican made several attempts to obtain information about Italian soldiers held as Soviet prisoners of war.⁴ Cases are mentioned without

⁴ Diplomatiche Initiative des Kremls im Vatikan. Eine Nuntiatur in Moskau? *Basler Nachrichten* 12/13 August 1944. For a copy of the newspaper, see CITTÀ DEL VATICANO, SEGRETERIA DI STATO, SEZIONE PER I RAPPORTI CON GLI STATI, ARCHIVIO STORICO, Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari (= ASRS, AA.EE.SS.) Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 513rv. On

identifying the channels of communication or the dates, and the details remain unknown. Another possibility is that he was actually referring to a move made by the Vatican in early 1945. Although this is chronologically at odds with Leiber's narrative, it cannot be excluded, and is consistent with what was written in a memorandum prepared in March 1945 for Edward J. Flynn, an American Democratic politician of Irish extraction and political adviser to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who wished to mediate between the Vatican and Moscow. The memorandum covers all of the initiatives taken between 1918 and 1926 aimed at cooperation or agreement between the two sides. It states that no further attempts at rapprochement were made from 1926, when a series of talks entered into following the World War I were broken off, until an approach was made in 1945, the year the memorandum was written. This was an unsuccessful attempt by the Vatican, via the apostolic delegation to Turkey, to make unofficial contact with the Soviet Union and request information about prisoners of war.⁵ Whatever the truth, the available crumbs of information do not at all point to a comprehensive attempt at rapprochement, but rather to a very specific matter, the Vatican's humanitarian action on behalf of prisoners of war, presumably Italians.

The second attempt at rapprochement, through the good offices of an American diplomat «when Roosevelt was still alive,» was Edward J. Flynn's well-documented attempt to mediate between the Kremlin and the Vatican.⁶ Although Leiber does not name the erroneously-entitled «Catholic diplomat», his description of the case leave no doubt that it was the Flynn mission.⁷ Contrary to Leiber's interpretation, however, it was not the Vatican that took the initiative

the Vatican's activity on behalf of prisoners of war, see also: Francesca DI GIOVANNI, Giuseppina ROSELLI (eds.), *Inter arma caritas. L'Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano per i prigionieri di Guerra, istituito da Pio XII (1939-1947)*. I. Inventario, II. Documenti, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Collectanea Archivi Vaticani 52), Città del Vaticano, 2004.

⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 101-106. Appunto consegnato il 28 marzo 1945 da S.E. Monsignor Segretario al Sig. Edward J. Flynn.

⁶ For a detailed account of the Flynn mission, see András FEJÉRDY, *Modus vivendi with Moscow? The 1945 Flynn Mission and the Eastern Policy of Pius XII*, en *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 117 (2022), pp. 711-734.

⁷ Johan Ickx was the first researcher to notice that the American «diplomat» mentioned in Leiber's memorandum was actually Edward J. Flynn. Johan ICKX: *L'Ostpolitik di Pio XII. Il «modus vivendi» proposto a Mosca 1946-1947. Il caso di padre Alessandro Töbötöm Nagy S. J.*, en Emilia HRABOVEC, Giuliano BRUGNOTTO, Peter JURČAGA (coords.), *Chiesa del silenzio e diplomazia pontificia 1945-1965. / Umlčaná církev a pápežská diplomacia 1945-1965*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Atti e documenti 49), Città del Vaticano, 2018, pp. 163-164.

in that attempt a rapprochement. The US president himself put forward the idea that Flynn should accompany him to Yalta and then travel on to Moscow to find out about the possibility of establishing contacts between the Vatican and the Kremlin, and about the situation of the Catholic Church in Soviet-occupied territories.⁸ With Molotov's permission, Flynn spent about three weeks in Moscow as the special guest of American ambassador Averell Harriman. Between 12 February and 10 March 1944, he held talks with Georgi Karpov, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church attached to the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, and Ivan Polyanski, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, which supervised the non-Orthodox denominations.⁹

After his visit to Moscow, Flynn travelled to Rome to report to Pius XII and his colleagues on his observations and to urge a Vatican-Soviet rapprochement. During his talks in the Vatican he backed the proposal of putting to Molotov, via the US ambassador to Moscow, Averill Harriman, the idea that an apostolic visitor might be sent to the Soviet Union with the task of preparing an agreement. Pius XII agreed with the need to keep open the possibility of negotiation, because a complete break would have been very damaging for the several million Catholics on the territory occupied by the steadily-advancing Red Army. Nonetheless, he considered that a sufficient first step in maintaining the «very thin remaining thread», one that would also gain time, was for Flynn to refute the accusations and slanders expressed by the Soviet foreign minister, thus demonstrating the Vatican's good intentions towards the Soviet Union.¹⁰ This was the tenor of the written reply that Tardini handed over to Flynn during the latter's farewell visit to Pius XII on 28 March.¹¹ The document concluded that the Vatican «has

⁸ Serhii PLOKHY, *Yalta, the Price of peace*. Viking, New York, 2010, pp. 31-32; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 67. Memorandum del Sig. Flynn, 23 March 1945.

⁹ Serhii PLOKHY, *Yalta...* [vid. n. 8], pp. 444-446; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 67-73; Memorandum del Sig. Flynn, 23 March 1945.

¹⁰ «pur tenue filo che rimane» ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 92r-93v. Tardini's notes on the papal audience of 25 March 1945 (Ex. audientia Sanctissimi). See also: ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 83. Colloquio del 24 marzo 1945 fra il Mons. Segretario e il Signor Edward J. Flynn in merito all'eventuale invio di un Visitatore Apostolico in Russia.

¹¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 101-106. Appunto consegnato il 28 marzo 1945 da S.E. Monsignor Segretario al Sig. Edward J. Flynn; Di Nolfo published it in Italian, but could not clearly identify the purpose of the document. Ennio DI NOLFO, *Dear Pope. Vaticano e Stati Uniti. La corrispondenza segreta di Roosevelt e Truman con Papa Pacelli dalle carte di Myron Taylor*, IN-EDIT-A, Roma, 2003, doc. no. 228.

not abandoned any valid programme of peace, and maintains its desire for the realization of essential conditions for the Catholic religion.»¹²

Given the imprecision of Leiber's information concerning previous attempts at Vatican-Soviet rapprochement, we might ask what he meant when he said that «at present» (autumn 1945), «steps are being taken from both sides via Stockholm.»¹³ We have not yet found a source that directly confirms that this contact-seeking process took place or tells us what it consisted of. The only source that gives some – indirect – confirmation of an attempt to make contact via Sweden is the 1993 book *La Croce e la Stella* by Sergio Trasatti, former editor-in-chief of *L'Osservatore Romano*. This includes a long – unsourced – quotation of the minutes of a meeting between Pope Pius XII and Gunnar Häggglöf, the Swedish ambassador to Moscow, on 22 July 1946. In this conversation, the Pope confirmed that the Vatican was always ready for a *modus vivendi* with the right conditions and guarantees, and he considered that seeking contact with Moscow on behalf of Catholics was even more important for the Vatican at that time than it had been after World War I.¹⁴ Further research is therefore required to establish whether there is a connection between the two items of information concerning the Swedes, and what came out of the alleged mutual attempt at rapprochement in autumn 1945.

II. «IT IS NOT TRUE THAT MOSCOW HAS MADE AN APPROACH»

Leiber said that all the contact-seeking endeavours he mentioned were either unilateral Vatican initiatives or – as in the case of the talks going on via Stockholm – mutual steps towards rapprochement. Consequently, he ignored all real or alleged attempts that at least seemed to have come from the Kremlin. To what extent was his categorical statement, «It is not true that Moscow has made an approach», actually correct?

Leiber could quite reasonably have ignored at least some of the episodes reported in the contemporary press. These were rumours that the Secretariat of State itself had rebutted at the time. One such was a report by the Roman

¹² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 101-106. Appunto consegnato il 28 marzo 1945 da S.E. Monsignor Segretario al Sig. Edward J. Flynn.

¹³ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 83. (Entry of 1 November 1945.)

¹⁴ Sergio TRASATTI, *Vatican Kremlin. Les secrets d'un face-à-face*, Payot, Paris, 1993, p. 135. A book on the memoirs of the Swedish diplomat: Gunnar HÄGGLÖF, *Fredens vägar 1945-1950*, Norstedt, Stockholm, 1973.

news agency Urbe, on 3 March 1942, that Stalin had sent the Pope a letter in his own hand transmitting his good intentions regarding religion and the Catholic Church. The Vatican considered this groundless report to be a disinformation ruse by the Italian Fascist government, and protested its publication and dissemination. It could not, however, prevent German and Allied propaganda presenting the information as true, if for opposite purposes. The Germans, to discredit the Pope, and the Allies, to demonstrate that the religious situation in the Soviet Union had greatly improved.¹⁵

Shortly afterwards, in summer 1942, the Syrian apostolic delegate Rémy Lepretre reported to his superiors a French offer to mediate. He reported that according to a member of the French mission in Moscow, the Soviet government was moving towards the provision of religious freedom and even towards a rapprochement with Catholicism. He added that the leader of the Moscow mission, Roger Garreau, considered himself to be in a position to assist in this approach between the Vatican and the Soviet government.¹⁶

The next story in the press, in summer 1944, was that the Soviet Union wanted to make an approach to the Vatican via the Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti. Secretary of State Luigi Maglione immediately denied¹⁷ press claims that a secret meeting had taken place between Togliatti and the *Sostituto*, Giovanni Battista Montini, and that this was a good sign.¹⁸ In the United

¹⁵ Documents concerning the report are published in: Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 5, *Le Saint Siège et la guerre mondiale juillet 1941-Octobre 1942*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1969, pp. 461-463, 470-472, 474-476 (documents no. 274, 275, 276, 284, 287, 288). On the propaganda exploitation of the false news, see: Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 3b, *Le Saint Siège et la situation religieuse en Pologne et dans les pays Baltes 1939-1945*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1967, pp. 566-567, note 2. See also: Antoine WENGER, *Rome et Moscou 1900-1950*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1987, p. 583. Hansjakob STEHLE, *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans 1917-1975*, Piper, München-Zürich, 1975, p. 249.

¹⁶ Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (coords.), *Actes et documents...* [vid. n. 15], vol. 5, pp. 637-638; Hansjakob STEHLE, *Die Ostpolitik...* [vid. n. 15], p. 250; Sergio TRASATTI, *Vatican Kremlin...* [vid. n. 14], pp. 118, 137. Subsequently, in autumn 1944, a view emerged in the Secretariat of State that Ambassador Garreau may have been one of those who leaked to the press confidential information about the Orlemanski mission and a possible Soviet-Vatican modus vivendi. Cf. ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 719, ff. 671-672. Memorandum on Braun's letter. 23 October 1944.

¹⁷ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 33. Maglione's telegram no. 1742 to Cicognani. 18 July 1944.

¹⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, ff. 27-28. Coded telegram from Cicognani no. 2238, 15/16 July 1944.

Kingdom, *News Chronicle* reported in August 1944 that Stalin had delivered a memorandum to the Vatican via Palmiro Togliatti and General Peri about the possibility of cooperating after the war, but this was denied in *L'Osservatore Romano*.¹⁹ Similarly false news was a report in *Basler Nachrichten* after the liberation of Rome attributing similar Soviet attempts at seeking contact and offers of cooperation – once again through «Comrade Ercoli», i.e. Togliatti – to Mihail Kostylev, the representative of the Soviet Union in Rome.²⁰

The false or groundless press reports of summer 1944 may have stemmed from, or used, some combination of the elements of, an event that really did take place: the visit to Moscow in spring of that year by Stanislaus Orlemanski, the Polish-born priest of the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Springfield Massachusetts, USA.²¹

During his stay in Moscow between 17 April and 10 May 1944, Orlemanski had two two-hour meetings with Stalin, and he returned with a document addressed to Pius XII signed by the Generalissimo. Interestingly, as far as we presently know, promotion of a rapprochement between the Kremlin and the Vatican was not the original purpose of the visit. The invitation was clearly framed in the context of the great power agreements about the fate of Poland after World War II, for which the Soviet Union intended to redraw the country's eastern and western borders and to set up a Polish government loyal to Moscow instead of what it considered to be the hostile government-in-exile in London. As the founder of the Koszciuszko League, founded in 1943 to support the Koszciuszko Division, a Polish force fighting on the side of the Soviet Union, Orlemanski seemed well qualified to join a new Polish government that would be acceptable to the Soviets, an alternative to the government-in-exile in London. As a priest, he would also legitimize the government for the majority Catholic Polish society and the Polish immigrant community in the USA.

Although the original purpose of Orlemanski's visit was purely political, concentrating on plans to set up a Polish coalition government as an alternative

¹⁹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 480. Coded telegram from Godfrey no. 432, 18/19 August 1944; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 483. Draught telegram to Godfrey. 21 August 1944.

²⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Russia, Pos. 718, ff. 486r-490v. Telegram from Braunstumm to the Vatican. Berlin, 17 August 1944. Cfr. Hansjakob STEHLE, *Die Ostpolitik...* [vid. n. 15], p. 276.

²¹ For a detailed account of the case based on Vatican and Soviet archive material, see: Margit BALOGH, András FEJÉRDY, *Az Orlemanski-akció, avagy egy amerikai pap különös útja a Szovjetunióba*, en István ZOMBORI (coord.), *Ecclisiae et historiae servus infatigabilis. Tanulmányok Somorjai Adám 70. születésnapjára*, METEM, Budapest, 2022, pp. 165-195.

to the Polish government in London, questions of religion and Catholicism almost immediately came up at Orlemanski's first meeting with Stalin on 28 April 1944, although unambiguously in the context of the future of Poland. To Orlemanski's remark that the Poles were afraid of the Soviet Union's anti-church policy, Stalin gave him a historical explanation of how committed he was to granting religious freedom.²²

It was reports by two US reporters in Moscow that Orlemanski's visit went beyond the purely Polish dimension. Harrison E. Salisbury of UP and Jim Fleming of CSB, seeing Orlemanski's naive simplicity and credulousness, but assuming that the priest could only have come to the Soviet capital with church approval, concluded that the far from positive press reception in the USA of the visit could easily make him a pawn, or even a sacrificial victim, of high Soviet and Vatican politics. To protect him from this, they warned him before the second Stalin-Orlemanski meeting not to be satisfied with verbal promises, but make sure he returned to America with a document signed by Stalin. Orlemanski accepted the reporters' advice, and at his meeting of 4 May asked Stalin to put his position regarding the Catholic Church and the Vatican in writing.²³ Stalin accepted, and the next day, 5 May, Orlemanski received the answers to his written questions – rewritten by the Soviet apparatus – in a document endorsed with Stalin's signature.²⁴ Following Orlemanski's press

²² МОСКВА, АРХИВ ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ [MOSCUA, ARKHIV VNESHNEI POLITIKI ROSSIISKOI FEDERATSII, (The Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation)] (= AVP RF), fond 06, opis 6, papka 42, dielo 548. l. 9-15:9. Published in Russian: Галина П. МУРАШКО, *Восточная Европа в документах российских архивов 1944-1953 гг. Том 1. 1944-1948*, Сибир. хронограф, Москва-Новосибирск, 1997, pp. 36-42; <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/indexes/values/1081195>; For an English version see: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123130>

²³ Donald E. DAVIS, Eugene P. TRANI, *The Reporter Who Knew Too Much. Harrison Salisbury and the New York Times*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2012, pp. 27-28; E. Ralph PERKINS, S. Everett GLEASON, Rogers P. CHURCHILL, John G. REID, N. O. SAPPINGTON, Douglas W. HOUSTON, John RISON JONES, Warren H. REYNOLDS (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, Europe, IV*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1966, doc. 794. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v04/d794>; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 719, ff. 653-658. Leopold Braun AA to Domenico Tardini, 12 May 1944.

²⁴ Margit BALOGH, András FEJÉRDY, *Az Orlemanski-akció...* [vid. n. 20], 183-186. For two photocopies of the original Russian-language document signed by Stalin, see ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, ff. 768, 771. The original, which Orlemanski sent to Amleto Cicognani, apostolic delegate to Washington, on 14 May 1944, is presumably held in the archives of the Washington nunciature. We certainly could find no trace of it in the Vatican Apostolic Archives (CITTÀ DEL VATICANO, ARCHIVIO APOSTOLICO VATICANO, Arch. Deleg. Stati Uniti fond).

conference in Chicago on 12 May, the document's contents became very well known and made his visit to Moscow originally aimed at discussing the Polish question look as if it was all centred around an attempt at a Vatican-Soviet rapprochement.

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF A RAPPROCHEMENT OR MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE SOVIET UNION AS APPRAISED IN THE VATICAN

In early 1944, even before Orlemanski's visit to Moscow, the Vatican received rumours of the Soviet Union's willingness to make contact.²⁵ At the same time, there was a clear realization in the Vatican that the United States placed a high priority on creating and maintaining European peace, and therefore had a particular interest in a rapprochement between its war ally and the Catholic Church.²⁶ Soviet influence in the Central and Eastern Europe region did not seem dangerous to Roosevelt and his advisers, who thought that the Soviet Union had changed during the war. In particular, the adjustment to Soviet policy towards the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943²⁷ seemed to warrant the view that Stalin's policy was no longer primarily driven by the ideology of atheistic communism, but by traditional, and therefore pragmatic, great-power considerations.

The Vatican was of course concerned with the post-war situation of Central and Eastern Europe, and particularly with the fate of Catholic nations coming

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²⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 582. Coded telegram from Maglion no. 1394. to Cicognani, 16 February 1944.

²⁶ See p. e. ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 555-557. Coded telegram from Cicognani no. 1618. 2 January 1944.

²⁷ See on this: Adriano ROCCUCCI, *Stalin e il patriarca. La Chiesa ortodossa e il potere sovietico*, Einaudi, Torino, 2011, pp. 117-295; Anna DICKINSON, *Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations and the Origins of Post-war Soviet Church-State Relations, 1941-6.* en Dianne KIRBY (coord.), *Religion and the Cold War*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, pp. 23-36.

under the Soviet sphere of interest. A cable from the secretary of state, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, to the apostolic delegation to Washington on 17 January 1944 precisely sets out the considerations and principles that guided the Vatican's stance towards the Soviet Union. Maglione stresses that although the Vatican has good wishes towards the Russian people, but possibility of peaceful coexistence is called into question by the anti-church communist ideology, of which there is no sign of a change. Consequently, any approach on the part of the Vatican will only be possible if there are solid facts demonstrating the existence of religious freedom in the Soviet Union.²⁸

Cicognani's report of 16 March 1944 concerning Roosevelt's optimistic stance and Stalin's declarations concerning religious freedom and Catholicism to the US ambassador to Moscow, Averell Harriman, also confirmed the cautious Vatican stance. According to Harriman Stalin had admitted that the people wanted religion. He had also declared that he was not opposed to religion being practised within national frameworks, under the control of state authorities. He also stated, however, that he would not permit the Catholic religion because it had an international organization, and so neither he nor his government would feel secure with this religion. He closed his explanation by saying that in his opinion, the people would have more say in the government and be better able to have their voice heard. These unavoidable changes would have the consequence that in twenty years, Catholics could become a strong religious group in Russia.²⁹ Responding to Stalin's contradictory statements about freedom of religion and Catholicism, Maglione concluded that it was still not clear «how communism might recognize and guarantee real freedom of religion.»³⁰

²⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 554. Coded telegram from Maglione no. 1339 to Cicognani, 17 January 1944.

²⁹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 581. Coded telegram from Cicognani no. 1796. 15 March 1944. Published in: Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale*, vol. 11, *Le Saint Siège et la Guerre mondiale Janvier 1944-Mai 1945*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1981, pp. 212-213. On this, see also, dated somewhat after the Teheran conference: Antoine WENGER, *Rome et Moscou...* [vid. n. 15], 591. Cicognani's source for his report was almost certainly a memorandum by Mgr Walter S. Carroll of 29 February 1944, a copy of which reached Rome only in July 1944. ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 577. Published in: Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Actes et documents...*, vol. 11, pp. 213-214.

³⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 579. Telegram from Maglione no. 1482 to Cicognani, 23 March 1944.

The Vatican's assessment remained fundamentally untouched by Orlemanski's visit to Moscow and Stalin's signature on a document offering «guarantees». In the Secretariat of State, the whole visit – which had taken the Vatican unprepared despite recurrent talk of Soviet propensity for a rapprochement – was appraised as an obvious political manoeuvre, with a dual purpose. The American political leadership wanted to obtain Soviet guarantees so as to boost Polish-born citizens' support for Roosevelt in the forthcoming presidential election. For the Soviet Union, it formed part of preparations to annex the eastern strip of Poland. Although the latter was a sensitive issue for the Vatican considering the large number of Catholics living there, the Secretariat of State did not see a possibility of changing the Vatican position.³¹

Specifically, they did not regard the document signed by Stalin as an actual commitment to guarantee religious freedom. They viewed the first question in the document, where Stalin asked whether it was permissible for the Soviet Union to continue its coercive and persecuting policy against the Catholic Church, to be somewhat vague, and the same went for his answer. In their interpretation, it was not as the defender of religious freedom that Stalin called such policy impermissible, but as a supporter of freedom of conscience and worship, which could be viewed more narrowly. As for the second point, they detected a political message even in the way the question was put. The question regarding the possibility of cooperation with Pope Pius XII was not about cooperation in general, but about collaboration against «coercive persecution of the Catholic Church.»³² This was a clear reference to German church oppression that was extended to occupied Polish territory, and so Stalin's answer confirming the possibility of cooperation was effectively restricted to collaboration against Germany. What Stalin really wanted was the Pope's blessing for an anti-Fascist war against the «crusade» urged by the Germans three years previously.³³

Taking all this together, the Vatican thought best to distance itself from the Orlemanski mediation attempt. Its reasons are most precisely set out by a memorandum written – and translated into English – by Pius XII himself for an audi-

³¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos 718, ff. 780–781. Russia – Caso Orlemanski. Internal official note of the Secretariat of State. 26 May 1944; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 778. Coded telegram from Maglione no 1634. to Cicognani, 4 June 1944.

³² «насилия и преследования католической церкви». Татьяна В. Волокитина (ed.), *Власть и церковь...* [vid. n. 24], p. 35.

³³ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos 718, ff. 780. Russia – Caso Orlemanski. Internal official note of the Secretariat of State. 26 May 1944.

ence with Myron Taylor on 12 July 1944. He was concerned that with a view to promoting a Soviet-Vatican rapprochement, the US president's personal envoy might urge the Pope to hear Orlemanski:

Your Excellency well knows how much we would like to fulfil the President's request. We are sure, however, that the President will understand that if Russia – changing its position – really wishes to establish contact with the Holy See, then it should do so via authorized bodies and not via a priest already suspended from service and looked on with disapproval by almost the entire Polish people, and whom in the current sensitive circumstances could not be received by the Holy Father.³⁴

At the same time as rejecting Orlemanski's mediation, which was received through an unofficial channel, the Secretariat of State started to compile relevant observations beyond the level of that specific case and to refine the Vatican's strategy. Tardini set down the conditions for the Vatican to take up contact with the Soviet Union in a memorandum of 14 July 1944, also approved by the Pope. First of all, he declared that although «the political and military constraints of the war have caused Stalin to suspend the atheist propaganda and allow clerics to operate churches, and the faithful to visit them, the Soviet Union's communist programme is unchanged.» It was also in Stalin's political interest to give the impression of good relations with the Vatican, so as to reassure the Poles and the Allies. To achieve his political ends, Stalin was really entangling two separate things: «a) the admission of freedom of religion and b) relations with the Vatican. He is aiming for these [relations with the Vatican] before (and without) fulfilling his obligations concerning religious freedom.» This assessment led Tardini to conclude that any feasible development of relations between the Soviet Union and the Holy See must take place in two consecutive phases: «1. Stalin first properly recognizes and proclaims religious freedom. 2. In a later stage, when this freedom has been confirmed as real and sustained, the Holy See

³⁴ «V. E. sa bene, quanto Noi siamo desiderosi di soddisfare le richieste del sig. Presidente. Siamo tuttavia convinti che il Presidente comprenderà che se la Russia cambiando il suo atteggiamento, desidera veramente di entrare in relazioni con la S. Sede, dovrebbe farlo per mezzo degli organi autorizzati, e non per il tramite di un sacerdote già sospeso da divinis, e assai malvisto da quasi tutto il popolo polacco, con il quale, per conseguenza, dati le delicate circostanze presenti, non potrebbe essere ricevuto dal S. Padre.» ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 16. Handwritten note by Pius XII on the back of an envelope. On what led to this note being written: ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 15. Handwritten note by Tardini. 13 July 1944.

may explore the possibility of establishing links with Stalin.» He considered an attempt to pursue this strategy as essential for the Holy See, despite the obvious expectation that Stalin «will insist and demand that the two stages be linked and mixed together.»³⁵

Tardini made an addition to his strategy even before Edward Flynn's attempt at mediation with a plan to send an apostolic visitor to the Soviet Union. The background to this was that the only Catholic priest remaining in Moscow since 1936, the Assumptionist monk Leopold S. Braun, priest of St Louis' Church in Moscow and apostolic administrator of Russia (although not recognized as such by the Soviet government), had formed what the Vatican considered an erroneous impression of Orlemanski's Moscow visit and the document signed by Stalin. He saw this development as an opportunity for the Vatican to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union. Braun therefore persistently urged the Vatican to give a positive response to Stalin's gesture as delivered through Orlemanski. Braun's almost ecstatic enthusiasm was all the more incomprehensible in the Vatican for the absence of any detectable change in the Soviet oppression of the church. Braun himself, despite being the apostolic administrator, was not allowed to leave Moscow and could therefore give only a fragmentary account of the state of Catholicism in Russia. *Rebus sic stantibus*, Tardini thought it useful and necessary to send an apostolic visitor to Russia and the occupied states to make a precise assessment of the situation.³⁶

Within a few days, the possibility of sending an apostolic visitor went beyond the idea in principle to become a specific proposal. Tardini considered Edward

³⁵ «per le esigenze politiche e militari della guerra, Stalin ha sospeso la propaganda ateista ed ha lasciato che le chiese fossero officiate dal clero e frequentate dai fedeli, il programma comunista dell'Unione Sovietica è rimasto immutato. [...] Cioè: a) il riconoscimento della libertà religiosa e b) le relazioni con la Santa Sede. Egli tende a queste [i.e. alle relazioni con la S. Sede] anche prima (e senza) aver fatto il suo dovere per quanto riguarda la libertà religiosa. [...] 1. In un primo tempo Stalin riconosce e proclama debitamente la libertà religiosa. 2. In un secondo tempo, quando cioè, si sarà constatato che questa libertà è reale e perseverante, la S. Sede potrà studiare il problema per allacciare relazioni con Stalin. [...] Stalin] insisterà e pretenderà che i due tempi si fondano e si confondano.» ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 718, f. 18rv. Santa Sede e Russia. Handwritten note by Tardini. 14 July 1944. The document is published in: Pierre BLET, Robert A. GRAHAM, Angelo MARTINI, Burckhardt SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Actes et documents...*, vol. 11, pp. 462-463.

³⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 719, ff. 749-755. Santa Sede e Russia. Internal official note of the Secretariat of State. 16 March 1945. (Restituitomi dal S. P. il 19 marzo 1945.) For a list of the document submitted to Pius XII together with the official note, see ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 719, f. 763. See also: ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 719, ff. 653-658. Braun to Tardini, 12 May 1944.

Flynn's mediation attempt – like Orlemanski's visit to Moscow – as a «primarily political» step aimed at strengthening Roosevelt's domestic and international position.³⁷ Nonetheless, he did not want to refuse the American offer to mediate, even though Flynn had received little more from Molotov than accusations about the Vatican's behaviour, replied to American proposal urging a rapprochement between the two parties by saying merely that «he would give the entire matter consideration» and «inform his colleagues of his conversation.»³⁸

Tardini therefore, after repeating the main points of the Vatican's position in the question (its resistance to communism as an ideology had a religious basis and could not change; to move forward, therefore, Stalin would have to change his policy and show respect for real freedom of religion³⁹ by offering solid guarantees),⁴⁰ he put to Flynn, as his own private opinion, the proposal that instead of talks aimed at a *modus vivendi*, an apostolic visitor should be sent to Russia to assess the situation.⁴¹ Although Flynn himself took up the idea enthusiastically, the Pope finally decided to maintain the previous cautious stance. He agreed that the possibility of negotiation should remain open, but thought that before sending an apostolic visitor to Moscow, they should first, via the Americans, rebut the Soviet accusations against the Vatican and signal that the Catholic Church was striving for peace with everyone. Pius XII took the position that this move would gain as much time for the Vatican as an apostolic visitation, and the subsequent developments would enable it to draw up future plans.⁴²

In the event, the developments bore out the Vatican's fears that there was indeed no real Soviet intention to improve relations. While Flynn was trying to persuade his negotiating partners in Moscow and Rome of the possibility of agreement, the Kremlin was already planning the elimination of the Ukrainian

³⁷ «soprattutto politico». ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 36-37. Minutes of Tardini's and Flynn's conversation of 23 March 1945.

³⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 73. Memorandum del Sig. Flynn, 23 March 1945.

³⁹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 36-37. Minutes of Tardini's and Flynn's conversation of 23 March 1945.

⁴⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 43-44. Minutes of Tardini's and Flynn's conversation of 23 March 1945.

⁴¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 83. Colloquio del 24 marzo 1945 fra il Mons. Segretario e il Signor Edward J. Flynn in merito all'eventuale invio di un Visitatore Apostolico in Russia; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Russia, Pos. 723, f. 84. Progetto di comunicazione del Sig. Flynn all'Ambasciatore degli Stati Uniti in Russia, Sig. Harriman.

⁴² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 723, ff. 92r-93v. Tardini's notes on the papal audience of 25 March 1945 (Ex. audientia Sanctissimi).

Greek Catholic Church. That plan went into action on 11 April 1945 (less than two weeks after Flynn's departure from Rome) with the arrest of Archbishop Josyf Slipyj.⁴³ Events did not follow the optimistic scenario Flynn – and Roosevelt – had hoped for, and merely confirmed the information that, at least within the borders of the Soviet Union, Stalin would not make any concessions towards Catholicism.

IV. MODUS VIVENDI IN 1946?

Despite the negative experiences, hardly one year later, in February 1946, Hungarian Jesuits brought to the Vatican an indication that the Soviets were prepared to make concessions not only in the Catholic states invaded at the end of the war but also in the Soviet Union, and even to make an agreement with the Vatican.

This information came from Father Töhötöm Nagy, who as one of the leaders of the Catholic agricultural youth organization, KALOT, set up by the Jesuits in 1935, was one of the proponents of a modus vivendi with the new system being established in Hungary after the war. The KALOT leadership had been preparing to establish good relations with the new forces since 1943, aiming to secure the future of the organization and in general to enable Christian political forces to participate in government. After it became obvious, in 1944, that Hungary would come within the Soviet sphere of interest, Nagy slipped through the front line and made contact with the Soviets in an attempt to preserve KALOT. He thus managed to have KALOT, at the last minute, taken off the list of Fascist parties and organizations to be dissolved under Article 15 of the Ceasefire Agreement, and it remained in operation.⁴⁴

Following this success, the KALOT strategy was restricted solely to a modus vivendi in the internal Hungarian dimension, as became clear after the atrocities suffered by the church, when the KALOT leadership continued to avoid confrontation and sought a route of adapting to the new system and taking part in government. Töhötöm Nagy's first visit in summer 1945, and particularly his second,

⁴³ Serhii PLOKHY, *Yalta...* [vid. n. 8], pp. 444-446; Adriano ROCCUCCI, *Stalin e il patriarca...* [vid. n. 27], pp. 270-275.

⁴⁴ Margit BALOGH, *A KALOT és a katolikus társadalompolitika 1935-1946*, MTA Történettudományi Intézete (Társadalom és művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok 23), Budapest, 1998, pp. 160-164; Éva PETRÁS, *Alarcok mögött. Nagy Töhötöm életei*, ÁBTL-Kronosz, Budapest-Pécs, 2019, pp. 47-66.

the same autumn, was also aimed at obtaining financial and moral support from the Vatican for KALOT's work in Hungary and its strategy in following a *modus vivendi*.⁴⁵ His diary entries and reports record that the Vatican assured KALOT of its support and approved even in the international context the strategy chosen by its leaders: the Pope stated that what was to be expected was not war but the maintenance of the emergent status quo. Leiber, as we have seen, pointed out that the Vatican had never made a hostile statement against the Soviet Union. On the contrary, Rome had been taking steps to make contact – with little result – before Moscow made any approach.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the Vatican's encouragement expressed support for continuing the exercise of caution to suit the conditions in Hungary and was not aimed at a possible comprehensive Soviet-Vatican *modus vivendi*.

Eventually, however, a move was made in late January 1946 to extend the *modus vivendi* to the Vatican-Soviet relationship, in an initiative that came not from the Vatican or even the Hungarian Jesuits, but from the Soviets. According to the minutes of a meeting that Béla Illés, a close colleague of Marshall Voroshilov, the leader of the Allied Control Committee, held with two KALOT leaders – Nagy himself and another Jesuit, Jenő Kerkai – and the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, István Barankovics, the move was prompted by the anti-Russian activity of József Mindszenty.⁴⁷ This document shows that by holding out the possibility of mission work in the Soviet Union on the one hand and threatening reprisals on the other, the Soviets wished to bring the Vatican into talks aimed at having Mindszenty removed or at least restrained.⁴⁸ Despite the offer from Voroshilov's people, which arrived in late January 1946, Ambassador Pushkin did not receive Töhötöm Nagy, because in the climate of worsening conflict with Mindszenty, he did not see the time as right for negotiations.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Nagy travelled to Rome again to convince the Pope that a Vatican-Soviet *modus vivendi* was possible and timely.

⁴⁵ For more detail on this see András Fejérdy, *Nagy Töhötöm, a KALOT és XII. Piusz pápa keleti politikája*, (Soon to be published). The main documents of Nagy's first two visits to Rome are published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?... [vid. n. 44]*. An overview of the events: Töhötöm NAGY, *Jezsuiták...* [vid. n. 1], pp. 222-258; Éva PETRÁS, *Álarcok mögött...* [vid. n. 43], pp. 67-90. See also: Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], pp. 36-92.

⁴⁶ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], pp. 82-83. (Entry of 1 November 1945.)

⁴⁷ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 101. (Entry of 29 January 1946.) See also the entries of 23 and 24 January 1946: Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], pp. 98-100.

⁴⁸ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], pp. 99, 103. (Entries of 24 January and 4 February 1946.)

⁴⁹ In his autobiographical essay, he writes of a promised audience with Voroshilov rather than Pushkin.

Relying on information from a Hungarian informer who had worked his way into the Soviet system, Nagy reported – in a document written in Budapest on 15 February 1946 and a supplement he prepared for the Pope in Rome on 6 March – that two tendencies of Soviet foreign and church policy were vying with each other. The more dangerous, intransigent Leninist tendency, led by Molotov, aimed to set off a world revolution. Against this was a more civic-based line built on pan-Slavic traditions, directed by Stalin and backed by the army, aiming at peaceful coexistence with Europe. Nagy interpreted the gesture initiating a Vatican-Soviet rapprochement as having come from representatives of the Stalinist tendency, but Mindszenty's confrontation-seeking behaviour led the Hungarian communists of the Molotov tendency wishing to bring forward an attack against the church that was planned for the following year. In this situation, the Stalinist tendency, although still desiring a rapprochement with the Vatican, was determined to make the most of the Soviet Union's strategic advantage, and as the offended party, they wanted the Vatican to take the first steps towards commencing talks. In his submission, Nagy attempted to persuade the Vatican decision-makers to initiate talks. This could avoid provoking a culture war, gain time for strengthening the internal forces of the Church, and perhaps even win over the moderate Stalinist tendency for the cause of the Church.⁵⁰

Nagy himself had doubts about the correctness of his appraisal,⁵¹ and it is clear now that several items of his information were in error. Although the Soviet leadership was certainly not homogeneous, neither was there internal polarization at anything like the extent he outlined. From the available sources, it seems that Nagy's information about a conflict between the Stalin and Molotov lines arose from the undoubted fact of rivalry among the local Soviet authorities in the occupied territories⁵² and from a misunderstanding of a previous conflict.

⁵⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Russia, Pos. 727, ff. 3-24. Les aspirations soviétiques en Europe Sud-Oriental. 15 February 1946. The later addition to the report gives the erroneous date of 16 February. ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Russie, Pos. 727, ff. 46-47. Supplément confidentiel à la relation du 16 février 1946 (exclusivement pour Sa Sainteté). 6 March 1946. On the basis of a copy held in the Archives of the Hungarian Province of the Society of Jesus the later document is published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?... [vid. n. 44]*, pp. 362-363.

⁵¹ Tőhötöm Nagy SJ to Norbert de Boynes SJ. Rome, 25 April 1946. Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?... [vid. n. 44]*, pp. 363-364.

⁵² Rivalry between the Soviet army and the Soviet embassies is mentioned by, among others, Lieutenant Lev Kvin, who was serving in Budapest and was in direct contact with the KALOT leadership. Квин ЛЕВ, *Улица Королевы Вильгельмины. Повесть о странностях времени*, АОЗТ «Полиграфист», 1996. <https://antpoz.wixsite.com/lev-kvin/ulica1>

In autumn 1945, when Stalin withdrew for an extended period to rest in his dacha in Sochi, speculations appeared in the Western press about his alleged illness, and about possible successors. The perceived candidates were Marshall Zhukov, who had gained great authority and fame during the war, and the foreign minister, Molotov. Suspicious that Molotov might indeed be aiming for his position, Stalin, in November 1945, accused his foreign minister of taking decisions independent of the government line and showing himself – at talks on the post-war geopolitical alignment – to be more flexible and liberal than the Soviet government. Put on the defensive, Molotov eventually exercised self-criticism and accepted Stalin's sole authority, which in foreign policy regarded the use of stubborn force as preferable to conciliation towards the Allies. Nonetheless, with a view to resolving previous conflicts they thought had arisen because of Molotov's rigid stance, the Americans proposed in December 1945 that the next conference of foreign ministers should take place in Moscow, in the presence of Stalin, whom they considered more flexible.⁵³

The sources studied to date do not fully reveal how the Holy See appraised the proposals Töhotöm Nagy submitted in spring 1946. They are not accompanied in the archives of the Secretariat of State by any major analytical memoranda or preparatory documents. There are two contemporary sources, ultimately traceable to Pius XII, that clearly imply the Pope's acceptance of the Hungarian Jesuit's proposals and his readiness to attempt bilateral talks, but they are not held in the Vatican collections. Firstly, there are the two autograph notes we have already discussed, written by the Pope's private secretary, Robert Leiber. These set out Pius XII's position to Töhotöm Nagy and make clear the Vatican's readiness to talk to the Soviets.⁵⁴ A letter Nagy wrote on 3 March 1946 to his co-Jesuit and founder of KALOT, Jenő Kerkai, also states that the Pope, at Nagy's audience with him on 29 April, also expressed his readiness to make contact with the Moscow government, but on the condition «that they request and initiate it.» The Pope «expressed his well-grounded concerns that the Soviets only talk and make promises, but their actions consistently speak

⁵³ Vladimir O. PLECHATNOV, «*The Allies are Pressing on you to Break your Will...*» *Foreign Policy Correspondence Between Stalin and Molotov and other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946*, en <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ACFB29.PDF>

⁵⁴ Leiber to Nagy, 18 March 1946 (morning). Facsimile published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?... [vid. n. 44]*, p. 200; Leiber to Nagy, 18 March 1946 (evening). Facsimile published in: Töhotöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 107.

otherwise.»⁵⁵ Despite the basic distrust and reasonable reservations, Pius XII was certainly prepared to talk. The best evidence for this is that he appointed Nagy as official mediator with the Soviets, and not just verbally. Leiber provided him with a «letter of authorization» and at his own request⁵⁶ – but clearly with the Pope's approval – he received a service passport (*Passaporto di Servizio per l'estero*) from Substitute Montini on 2 May.⁵⁷

Returning to Hungary in his official capacity as mediator, Nagy had two interconnected tasks: to prepare for the return of the nunciature, and to engage in talks with Soviet representatives.⁵⁸ On 25 May 1946, he visited Boris Pavlovich Osokin, political adviser to the Allied Control Committee in Budapest, but the Russian officer set as a precondition for the return of the nunciature that, as a clear sign of its good intentions, the Vatican should restrain Mindszenty, and only if this was carried out, and following an official request from the Hungarian government, did he hold out the prospect of the Allied Control Committee consenting to its fulfilment. As to the possibility of contacts between the Vatican and Moscow, Osokin gave no proper reply, but only expressed his lack of trust in the sincerity of Vatican intentions.⁵⁹

Soviet foot-dragging was not the only factor in the delayed outcome. By summer 1946, the KALOT leadership – including Nagy – finally came into confrontation with Cardinal Mindszenty, who preferred the strategy of confrontation rather than *modus vivendi*, and at the end of June lodged a complaint in Rome about the Jesuits following the policy of adaptation.⁶⁰ The KALOT leaders found their position further weakened when their organization, along with many others, was banned from operating in the middle of July following the

⁵⁵ «Ha ezt ők kérik és kezdeményezik. [...] alapos aggodalmának adott kifejezést, hogy a szovjet csak beszél és ígér, de tettei következetesen mást mondanak.» Töhötöm Nagy SJ to Jenő Kerkai SJ. Rome, 3 May 1946. Published in: András KERESZTES (ed.): *Kerkai Jenő és Nagy Töhötöm levelezése (1939-1969)*. EFO, Százhalombatta, 2019, p. 58.

⁵⁶ Töhötöm Nagy SJ to Jenő Kerkai SJ. Rome, 3 May 1946. Published in: András KERESZTES (ed.): *Kerkai Jenő...* [vid. n. 54], p. 59.

⁵⁷ Facsimile of the passport published in: Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 109.

⁵⁸ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 113. (Entry of 24 May 1946.)

⁵⁹ «Report of my conversation with Mr Ostyukin Central European head of the NKVD.» Budapest, 25 May 1946. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 165-168; Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 113-115. (Entry of 25 May 1946.)

⁶⁰ József Mindszenty to Substitute Giovanni Battista Montini. Esztergom, 27 June 1946. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 239-244.

assassination of two Russian soldiers on 17 June (the Teréz körút murders). The investigating authorities linked the incident to a KALOT member.⁶¹ Despite all the attacks, Nagy held that the *modus vivendi* was still a viable way forward, as he reported in writing when he made another visit to Rome,⁶² but his argument was weakened by the only tangible evidence of this policy's outcome: the closure of KALOT.

Neither was there any substantial convergence of views in autumn when Nagy – joined in October by another Jesuit, József Jánosi – held further talks with Osokin.⁶³ To preserve the possibility of a *modus vivendi* in Hungary and keep up the possibility of a Vatican-Soviet rapprochement in the uncertain future, Jánosi travelled to Rome in late October 1946 as official delegate, followed by Nagy once again as semi-official mediator, but they could no longer pursue any meaningful negotiations. The two Jesuits submitted a series of further reports trying to bring the Pope to their side in the embittered dispute between Mindszenty and the representatives of a *modus vivendi* or, if this was not to succeed, at least to divest themselves of responsibility for any consequences in the judgement of history.⁶⁴

In the end, without taking one side or the other,⁶⁵ the Vatican resolved the dispute about the proper direction for the Hungarian church by removing the

⁶¹ Margit BALOGH, *A KALOT...* [vid. n. 43], 198–199. Osokin presented this argument to Töhötöm Nagy on 6 November 1946: KALOT had been disbanded for collaboration with the «Levente» and the murders of Soviet soldiers. Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 155. (Entry of 6 September 1946.)

⁶² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 129, f. 25. Nagy's report on the situation of Hungarian Catholicism. 31 July 1946. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 365–378.

⁶³ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], pp. 155, 175–183. (Entries of 6, 11, 18, 20 and 24 September 1946.) On Jánosi's talks, see: ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 129, ff. 50–56. Vorbemerkungen zu den Besprechungen mit einem russischen Herrn. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 266–271; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 129, ff. 586–590. Gespräch mit einem Russen in verantwortlicher Stellung in Ungarn. November 1946. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 275–278.

⁶⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 135, ff. 325–340. Als die Russen in Ungarn einmarschierten... Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 291–302; ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 129, ff. 11–16. «Modus vivendi» Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 308–311; Outline and collected material for a report to be written for His Holiness. Budapest, 15 October 1946. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 169–183; Rapporto sulla situazione del cattolicesimo ungherese. 1946. november 12. Published in: Johan ICKX, András KERESZTES, Ádám SOMORJAI (eds), *Scontrarsi o negoziare?...* [vid. n. 44], pp. 382–394.

⁶⁵ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 207. (Entry of 19 November 1946).

participants on one side – the two Jesuits – and leaving Mindszenty in place.⁶⁶ The story of the Vatican decision on reaching a *modus vivendi* with the Soviets, and the factors involved, are also areas where no Secretariat of State documents can be found from this period, but we may conjecture that the removal of the Jesuits who had to some extent won Soviet trust was not the primary reason that negotiations were broken off. Jánosi, indeed, was sent back to Hungary with a reply in December and stayed there for a short time.⁶⁷ Rather, it was the perceived absence, in the period since the Vatican, in spring 1946, declared its preparedness to reach a *rapprochement*, of any serious Soviet intention to negotiate.⁶⁸ This all served to strengthen the existing caution and reserve of the Holy See.

V. «PASSIVE» AND «ACTIVE» EASTERN POLICY

Our review does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the issue and so does not permit us to draw an ultimate conclusion. Nonetheless, our observations of the three thoroughly-investigated attempts at *rapprochement* – the Orlemanski operation, the Flynn mission, and the negotiations begun through the Hungarian Jesuits – and findings in the literature about Vatican Eastern policy, do suggest a few overall remarks.

First of all, our research shows that the Vatican did not initiate any of the efforts aimed at *rapprochement*. The idea for improving Vatican-Soviet relations that emerged during Orlemanski's visit to Moscow came not from the Russians but from American journalists. Stalin did not present the Polish-American priest with an outright refusal, but gave somewhat ambiguous answers to his questions. The Flynn mission, which was an indisputably American initiative, again elicited a response from Moscow that was not an open refusal but did no more than maintain the theoretical possibility of negotiations. The attempt at *rapprochement* that started with Töhötöm Nagy's mediation in spring 1946 may seem at first to have been a Soviet initiative, but whether it actually came from Moscow is

⁶⁶ Éva PETRÁS, *Álarcok mögött...* [vid. n. 43], pp. 135-139.

⁶⁷ Töhötöm NAGY, *Napló...* [vid. n. 2], p. 220. (Entry of 21 December 1946).

⁶⁸ It was already clear to the Vatican that the reopening of the Budapest nunciature – which the Pope regarded as the measure of the sincerity of the Soviet propensity to negotiate signalled via Töhötöm Nagy – was not going to happen. The Vatican had learned from British diplomatic sources that the Soviet authorities had categorically prohibited the Hungarian government from accepting a papal nuncio. ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I, Ungheria, Pos. 130, f. 86. British legation to the Holy See to Tardini. 17 July 1946.

highly questionable. Unlike the cases of attempted mediation by Orlemanski and Flynn, where we have some idea of the stance of the top Soviet leadership, this involved only the initiatives and tactical moves of subordinate local functionaries, which should warn us to caution. We currently have no information whatsoever on whether it was a Soviet government decision that lay behind an offer of negotiations made by Béla Illés and other military officers in January 1946, and if so, what intentions lay behind it.

It also clearly emerges from our investigation that the Vatican response to all three external attempts at rapprochement followed the same logic: the Vatican did not reject the possibility of negotiations, but insisted that the initiative must come from the Soviet side, and practical talks could start only after the Soviets had demonstrated their sincerity through tangible measures guaranteeing freedom of religion. The Vatican's thoughts on the possibility of direct negotiations became progressively more refined as time went by. In contrast with the wait-and-see attitude displayed when Orlemanski made his journey to Moscow in spring 1944,⁶⁹ a plan emerged only shortly afterwards, and before the Flynn mission, for taking the preparatory step of sending an apostolic visitor.⁷⁰ Although the Pope decided in March 1945 that the time was not right for the plan, we find what was effectively a modified version of this idea one year later: Töhötöm Nagy, provided with a Vatican passport, was effectively an official Vatican delegate with the task of preparing direct talks. The reason might have been that for a while, the permission for KALOT to operate was appraised as a sign of real freedom of religion being granted by the communists. This cautious opening by the Vatican, however, ended in failure. The banning of KALOT and information about a Soviet decision to prevent the re-opening of the nunciature confirmed for the Vatican their suspicion that the signs of Soviet propensity to talk were insincere and no more than tactical manoeuvres serving immediate political interests.

We have seen that after World War II, Pius XII sent cautious but increasingly clear signs that he was prepared to enter negotiations with the Soviets. A rapprochement, however, was not in Moscow's interests at the time.⁷¹ The division of the world into spheres of interest put the Vatican's Eastern policy

⁶⁹ Margit BALOGH, András FEJÉRDY, *Az Orlemanski-akció...* [vid. n. 20], pp. 165-195.

⁷⁰ András FEJÉRDY, *Modus vivendi...* [vid. n. 6] pp. 711-734.

⁷¹ Hansjakob STEHLE, *Die Ostpolitik...* [vid. n. 15], pp. 241-245; Heinz HÜRTE, *Was heißt Vatikanische Ostpolitik? Eine einführende Skizze*, en Karl-Joseph HUMMEL (coord.), *Vatikanische Ostpolitik unter Johannes XXIII. und Paul VI. 1958-1978*. Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich, 1999. 3-4; Johan ICKX: *L'Ostpolitik...* [vid. n. 7], 155-179.

into an increasingly difficult context, as religion and, in particular, the cause of the Catholic Church became important subjects of the geopolitical strategy of both great powers as they entered the Cold War. The United States looked to the Christian world for support in arresting the spread of communism,⁷² and the Soviet Union wanted the opposite: to prevent the emergence of a Central and Eastern European Catholic bloc. This lay behind the dissolution of the Greek Catholic churches and attempts to set up national Catholic churches.⁷³ Pius XII had been warned to caution not only by the Soviet rejection and the communist takeover of Central European states, but also by his negative experiences with another totalitarian dictatorship of the twentieth century, National Socialism. The concordat with Germany, signed in 1933, did not deliver the promised benefits because the Vatican lacked the means to enforce its terms. As a high-ranking prelate noted in May 1956 concerning dialogue with the communist system, «We do not speak the same language. There is a risk that they will breach the treaties, as Hitler did with the concordat.»⁷⁴ Seeing the Soviet approach in summer 1956, Pius XII again wished to obtain preliminary guarantees of the good faith of the communist side before starting direct negotiations, guarantees that they were not only starting the dialogue as a tactical ruse. The experiences of autumn 1956, particularly the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, eventually turned Pius XII's caution to outright disengagement. Events proved to him that there was no sense in the dialogue being urged from various quarters. Quite apart from the difference in ideology between the two sides, all approaches from Moscow even to talk about practical issues were no more than tactical moves

⁷² P. e. Dianne KIRBY (coord.), *Religion and the Cold War*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2002; William INBODEN, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960. The Soul of Containment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008; Jonathan P. HERZOG, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex. America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011; James C. WALLACE, *A Religious War? The Cold War and Religion*, en *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15 (2013), pp. 162-180.

⁷³ Margit BALOGH, *Lehetőségek és zsákutcák. Szentszéki képviselők Kelet-Közép-Európában 1945 után*, en Mihály Zoltán NAGY, István ZOMBORI (coords.), *Allam és egyház kapcsolata Kelet-Közép-Európában 1945 és 1989 között. Intézmények és módszerek*, METEM, Budapest, 2014, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁴ «Non parliamo lo stesso linguaggio, vi è da temere che straccerebbero i patti, come fece Hitler con il concordato» ROMA, ARCHIVIO STORICO DIPLOMATICO DEL MINISTERO PER GLI AFFARI ESTERI (= ASDMAE), Affari Politici (1950-1957), Santa Sede, b. 1671. Interviste pubblicate da «L'Unità» con il vescovo lituano Majelis e con il vescovo cecoslovaccho Picha – Ripercussioni in Segreteria di Stato. *Telepresso* N. 966/713 di Francesco Giorgio Mameli. Roma, 5 May 1956, 5.

aimed at increasing its influence in the West, in which the Vatican risked being exploited for Soviet purposes.⁷⁵

Under the papacy of John XXIII, the Vatican's Eastern policy entered a new phase. He displayed important differences from his predecessor, taking a pastoral tone and avoiding judgemental statements, which made the Vatican's impartiality towards the opposing blocs more tangible. John XXIII also stood apart from Pius XII in the conclusion he drew from the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. He saw it as evidence that the church had to face the prospect of communist systems being in place in the long term. He therefore considered that the Vatican policy of aiming at full freedom for the Catholic Church in the region was not feasible. Instead of endeavouring for a fundamental change in the status quo of church policy, like Pius XII, who looked to maximum restoration of *libertas ecclesiae*, he was ready to tacitly acknowledge the control and influence over the church exercised by communist governments, and he considered only the attainment of partial results, the relative widening of church freedom, as a reasonable goal.⁷⁶ He therefore first attempted to establish contact with the heads of churches cut off by the Iron Curtain. For example, in February 1959, he invited Hungarian bishops, among others, to an *ad limina* visit.⁷⁷ Resistance by communist governments stifled this initiative, after which he hoped that the ecumenical council then in preparation might be the catalyst to the hoped-for dialogue.⁷⁸

John XXIII's efforts eventually led to a limited number of «church delegates» from Central and Eastern Europe being allowed to attend the first session of the Second Vatican Council. After talks with them, the Secretariat of State still wanted to start negotiations with governments of the Soviet bloc in accordance with the logic that had crystallized under Pius XII. It was proposed that an apostolic visitor should be sent first, to obtain up-to-date information on the situation of local

⁷⁵ András FEJÉRDY, *Il 1956 come punto di svolta? La rivoluzione ungherese nella politica orientale della Santa Sede*, en: András FEJÉRDY (coord.), *La rivoluzione ungherese del 1956 e l'Italia*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2017, p. 137.

⁷⁶ András FEJÉRDY, *Pressed by a Double Loyalty. Hungarian Attendance at the Second Vatican Council, 1959-1965*, CEU Press, Budapest-New York, 2016, pp. 15-19.

⁷⁷ András FEJÉRDY, *Aux origines de la nouvelle Ostpolitik du Saint-Siège. La première tentative de Jean XXIII pour reprendre le contact avec les évêques hongrois en 1959*, en *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 46 (2008), pp. 389-411.

⁷⁸ BUDAPEST, ÁLLAMBIZTONSÁGI SZOLGÁLATOK TÖRTÉNETI LEVÉLTÁRA [Historical Archives of the State Security Services] (= ÁBTL), 3.2.3. Mt-764/4. «Amadeo», 157-158. Preparations for the ecumenical council. Report of agent «Amadeo» of 21 July 1959.

churches. Then the minimum conditions of religious freedom that must be provided as a guarantee of commencing negotiations were set out item by item.⁷⁹ By contrast, the new feature of Eastern policy introduced by John XXIII – and continued by Paul VI – was that the Vatican should dare to enter negotiations without guarantees.

Overall, this detailed investigation of the attempts at rapprochement between 1944 and 1946 yields a clear answer to the question we started with: the Eastern policy of Pope Pius XII was defined not by intransigent rejection arising from principled anti-communism, but by an openness to dialogue deriving from the possibilist-realist line and the traditions of Vatican concordat policy. Neither was the policy of John XXIII and Paul VI in Eastern affairs the product of a new basic thesis, but the organic continuation of the concordat policy drawn up in the nineteenth century in response to the consequences of the French Revolution and adjusted between the two world wars. The new element was that in the practical application of the traditional «thesis and hypothesis» theory of Vatican diplomacy, in contrast with Pius XII's endeavours to attain the fullest extent of church freedom (thesis), John XIII showed himself ready to make major concession for partial improvement, with due heed to the actual situation (hypothesis). He started by relinquishing the demand for minimum religious freedom before talks could start. Taking together the common and divergent features of the Eastern policy of Pius XII and his successors, it seems reasonable to use the term *Ostpolitik*, analogous to developments in German diplomacy and primarily applied in historiography for the papacy of John XXIII and Paul VI, but with the constraint that in the case of Pius XII, unlike the later «classic,» «active» Vatican *Ostpolitik*, we should rather talk of «passive» *Ostpolitik*.

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⁷⁹ ASRS, Spogli, Card. Agostino Casaroli, Pos. 61. ff. 127-140. Draft proposal for the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, 27 November 1962. Published in: Giovanni BARBERINI (ed.), *La politica del dialogo. Le Carte Casaroli sull'Ostpolitik vaticana*, Il Mulino (Santa Sede e politica del Novecento 7), Bologna, 2009, pp. 25-36. (Particularly pp. 35-36.)

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