

Willem Visser 't Hooft (1900-1985), Dutch pastor and theologian, was one of the most significant personalities in the Protestant Ecumenical movement. Deeply influenced by Karl Barth, and filled with a strong Ecumenical spirit, he was closely involved in the founding of the World Council of Churches, of which he was elected General Secretary. During the Second World War, many Protestants became convinced of the need for an international political system which, beside uniting the nations and peoples of Europe, would guarantee them fundamental freedoms and mutual respect for their historical, cultural and confessional traditions.

The directors of the WWC were strongly committed to federalism, partly because of the political traditions of the states from which their member churches originated (Switzerland; Great Britain and its Commonwealth; the United States), and partly because of their conviction that a simple confederation of states, based on the model of the League of Nations, would be completely incapable of containing national ambitions. In spring 1944, Visser 't Hooft welcomed into his Geneva home the representatives of the European Resistance, who, under the leadership of Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, signed the International Federalist Declaration of the Resistance Movements. These historic transnational encounters, aimed not only at coordinating military action or seeking diplomatic contacts but at exploring ways to "build" peace and re-establish the future of the Continent on new foundations, marked a profound break with the past.

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P.I.E. Peter Lang
Brussels

ISBN 978-2-87574-219-3



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www.peterlang.com



Filippo Maria Giordano and Stefano Dell'Acqua (eds.)
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Federalism

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Preface by Hans Küng

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Federalism
No. 4

This book was made possible by the Centre for Studies on Federalism of Turin (<http://www.csfederalismo.it>)

The book was subject to a double blind refereeing process.

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Éditions scientifiques internationales
Brussels, 2014
1 avenue Maurice, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium
info@peterlang.com; www.peterlang.com

ISSN 2294-6969
ISBN 978-2-87574-219-3
eISBN 978-3-0352-6439-5
D/2014/5678/59

Printed in Germany

CIP available from the British Library and from the Library of Congress, USA.

Bibliographic information published by “Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek”.

“Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek” lists this publication in the “Deutsche National-bibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at [<http://dnb.de>](http://dnb.de).

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W. A. Visser 't Hooft between Ecumenism and Federalism: The Idea of European Unity

Filippo MARIA GIORDANO

Biographical Background: Ecumenism and Europeanism

Dutch pastor Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft devoted an entire chapter of his *Mémoires* to the European Resistance movements, whose representatives met in Geneva at the beginning of 1944 “afin de coopérer et dans leur combat commun et dans l’organisation de la paix”¹, which, in the vision of the then Secretary of the newly formed World Council of Churches, was to be achieved through the political unity of the European states. According to Visser 't Hooft, only a European federation, “[...] [would] probably be [...] accepted by the large masses of Europeans who seek above all a real guarantee against further wars and economic ruin”².

What was the starting point and when did he start conceiving of the idea of European federation? What role did the Dutch pastor play in fostering the spread of this political ideal during the Resistance? What ideological reasons led him to make the federal unity of Europe the ultimate goal of his Christian commitment? Finally, which religious principles influenced his political thought on the re-establishment of a new European and world order, shifting his interests from the traditional concept of the nation-state to that of a supranational organisation able to overcome and restrain all of the most harmful particularisms?

Some preliminary remarks on Visser 't Hooft and his importance to European Protestant culture during the 1920s and 1930s ought to be made to provide an appropriate response to these questions as well as adequate background for his thought within the framework of our studies on the

¹ Visser 't Hooft W.A., *Le temps du rassemblement. Mémoires*, Paris, Édition du Seuil, 1973, p. 225.

² Lipgens W. (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1986, p. 721.

European integration process. Despite his reputation in the international evangelical world, both Italian and Catholic culture are still unfamiliar with Visser 't Hooft.

Visser 't Hooft was born in 1900 in Haarlem, The Netherlands, to a family of liberal-oriented lawyers, judges and diplomats. Following his discovery of Karl Barth's³ "dialectical theology", he decided to study theology at Leiden University, thus breaking a long-established family tradition. The Swiss theologian's *Epistle to the Romans* made Wim – as he was nicknamed – discover "the authority of the word of God"⁴, and he gradually broke away from modernism.

In 1924, he became the Secretary of the Youth Affairs of the World Alliance of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Geneva. This event was the starting point of his long career in the Protestant youth movements most influenced by Barth's "crisis theology" and bearers of a stronger ecumenical message. In 1932, Visser 't Hooft was appointed Secretary General of the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF), and in 1938 he became the first Secretary of the yet-to-be-established World Council of Churches (WCC). By the end of the Second World War, he had become the undisputed leader of the reorganisation of the Council during the most critical period of the Cold War, when the WCC itself was split between East and West. Visser 't Hooft remained in office from 1948 to 1966, and ardently supported the European integration process throughout his life, despite the internal disputes and different positions of the members of the ecumenical Council.

As A. J. van der Bent stated, Visser 't Hooft was "one of the chief architects of the ecumenical movement and the undisputed leader of the World Council of Churches"⁵. His name will be forever linked to the history of the Ecumenical Movement and the establishment of the WCC in Geneva, where he played a crucial and groundbreaking role. However, the deepest reasons that led Visser 't Hooft to federalism can be more clearly traced back to the ecumenical experience itself.

³ Karl Barth (1886-1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian and one of the most prominent figures in the 20th century Christian theological world. His thought inspired and guided the German Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), established on the initiative of some pastors, notably Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to distinguish themselves from the Evangelical Church, aligned with National Socialism. Following the "Barmen Declaration" in 1934, the Confessing Church began to fiercely oppose the NSM and its totalitarian claims. See Barth K., *Agire politico e libertà dell'evangelo*, Troina, Città aperta, 2004; Bologna S., *La Chiesa confessante sotto il nazismo: 1933-1936*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1967.

⁴ Van der Bent A. J., *W. A. Visser 't Hooft 1900-1915. Fisherman of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2000, p. 4.

⁵ *Id.*, p. 1.

The Ecumenical Movement was “created” at the beginning of the 20th century at the initiative of the World Conference of the Anglican and Protestant Missionary Societies (1910)⁶. The progressive emergence of the ecumenical spirit within the Protestant world between the two wars was also fostered by the work of movements such as Faith and Order and Life and Work, which supported the unity of the Christian world against confessional churches and the ethical and political drift of totalitarian regimes. However, Visser 't Hooft's concept of federalism was aimed not only at reconciling and binding all Christian Churches by a common faith, but most of all at establishing a model of interconfessional and interdenominational unity wherein the unifying elements of a shared theological heritage could stand up against the particularism of the great historical confessions without renouncing the experiences of each Church. The establishment of such unity would therefore rely on a common theological ground within confessional diversity⁷.

In addition, the Ecumenical Movement was characterised by a traditional Christian universalistic vision, which was naturally opposed to national particularisms, while stating the centrality of man and his basic rights over all superior entities. Protestant ecumenism was also involved in the debate on the issue of unity/plurality within religious freedom, and was therefore naturally prone to analysing the same issue, even at the political level, in order to establish a pluralistic culture open to integration with the aim of creating the moral and spiritual conditions needed for the development of European unity and the political clearing of national borders.

The Secretary of the WCC believed that Ecumenism had a double meaning, which was expressed in the churches' and humanity's pursuit of unity⁸. This belief was an important milestone in Visser 't Hooft's thought and significantly influenced his political ideas, thus leading the Council to accept the theological reflections which were better suited to ecumenical feeling and spirit, as far as political planning was concerned. In short, the Dutch theologian espoused the Christian assumption that all men of faith had to take part in worldly events and play an active role

⁶ Regarding the history of the Ecumenical Movement, see Rouse R., Neill S.C. (eds.), *A History of Ecumenical Movement (1517-1948)*, 3 Vols., Geneva, WCC Publications, 2000, Vol. I, pp. 171 and ff.

⁷ For an in-depth analysis of Visser 't Hooft's theological and ideological thoughts on the unity of the Churches, see: Visser 't Hooft W.A., *Les exigences de notre vocation commune*, Genève, Édition Labor et Fides, 1960 and *Id.*, *No Other Name*, London, S.C.M. Press, 1963.

⁸ See also De Lignerolles P. and Meynard J.-P., *Storia della spiritualità cristiana: 700 autori spirituali*, Milano, Gribaudi Editore, 2005, pp. 372-373.

in the construction of the world, so as to establish a government system as close as possible to the unattainable ideal of the Kingdom of God. This idea was widespread in the 1930s, particularly in some of the Anglo-Saxon political and religious environments with whom the Secretary of the WCC had established and maintained uninterrupted contact⁹. In this regard, Lionel Curtis, co-founder with Lord Lothian¹⁰ of the Round Table movement, explained in his *Civitas Dei* that “the material world was the sphere in which men were called to cooperate with God in the work of spiritual creation” in order to contribute to the establishment of the “Kingdom of God on this Earth”, which, in turn, corresponded to “a system of society [...] ordered by men themselves in accordance with the mind of God”¹¹. According to the English author, this system was envisaged by the “Commonwealth of Nations”, or rather by a large federal union of the countries and the people of the world¹². Curtis’s thought fitted particularly well into Visser ’t Hooft’s ecumenical vision. It is no coincidence that, at the end of the 1930s, the Secretary of the WCC had established contact with both the Federal Union (a British federalist movement founded in 1938) and Lord Lothian¹³.

⁹ See Visser ’t Hooft W.A., *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1987.

¹⁰ Regarding Lord Lothian, see Bosco A., *Lord Lothian: un pioniere del federalismo, 1882-1940*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1989. Regarding his thought, see Lord Lothian, *Il pacifismo non basta*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1990.

¹¹ Curtis L., *Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God*, London, Macmillan, 1938, p. 122. Curtis, at the end of his reflections on the task assigned to mankind in this world while awaiting the Kingdom of God, stated that “their fundamental task on this Earth was the ordering of men’s relations on with another in accordance with the mind of God – that is to say, on the basis of the infinite duty which each owes to God and his brethren the children of God” (*Id.*, p. 122). Regarding his thought, see Lavin D., *From Empire to International Commonwealth. A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹² Derek Drinkwater wrote: he “argued that an international commonwealth or world government would succeed the nation-state as the latter had superseded tribal life. He warned, however, that such a government would endure only if anchored in Christian teaching. The member-states of the British Commonwealth and Empire offered the best present stepping-stone to a world commonwealth – a supremely ill-time utopian schema for its day”. Drinkwater D., *Sir Harold Nicolson and International Relations. The Practitioner as Theorist*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 179.

¹³ The relationships between the “cliquey” WCC Secretariat, centred around Visser ’t Hooft, and some of the members of British federalism have been illustrated by German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer – at that time a close collaborator of the WCC Secretary General and the main referent of the anti-Nazi resistance in Geneva – who, in a letter written in November 1940 to Hans von Dohnanyi, a member of the German Resistance, included Lord Lothian as one of the most important WCC “political” points of reference. See Bonhoeffer D., *Scritti scelti (1933-1945)*, Brescia, Queriniana Edizioni, 2010, p. 648.

From the Criticism of the Nation-State System to the Federalist Perspective

In the light of the above-mentioned, it may be reasonably stated that Visser 't Hooft had “developed” a federalist perspective by the end of the 1930s, on the basis of his religious beliefs and the political remarks of the British federalists, who had involved some of the European Protestants associated with the Ecumenical Movement in the general debate on the establishment of a supranational federal government¹⁴. According to Jeane-Paul Willaime, the Secretary General of the WCC “established and maintained contact with various Churches in Europe during the war”, and started planning “already in 1941, the establishment of a ‘European federation’”¹⁵. In fact, Visser 't Hooft's ideas on federalism as a political system supposedly date back to 1939. That year, a conference organised by the *International Consultative Group for Peace and Disarmament*¹⁶

¹⁴ From the 1930s onwards, the WCC established a series of relationships with various representatives of the international political, religious and academic world; in a letter to Hans von Dohnanyi in November 1940, Bonhoeffer wrote: “It is not even thinkable, in just one letter, to outline the many relationships between the Ecumenical Movement and the *leaders* of the political, economic, educational and scientific world. [...] In the last few years, the importance awarded to such relationships by the Ecumenical Movement has grown more and more important, to the extent that the last conferences were more focused on ‘lay’ matters than on theological discussions, and some prominent representatives of all areas of expertise, coming from all countries, spoke of highly topical issues”. Bonhoeffer D., *Scritti scelti (1933-1945)*, op. cit., p. 648 (Original text in Italian). One of the most important achievements of this relationship network was the publication of a series of acts resulting from conferences and meetings held in Oxford in the 1930s by several religious, academic and political personalities, such as Visser 't Hooft, Ernest Barker, Marc Boegner, John F. Dulles, Nils Ehrenström, Henry S. Leiper, Lord Lothian, Reinhold Niebuhr, Joseph H. Oldham, Charles E. Raven, Hans Schönfeld, Paul Tillich, and Alfred Zimmern. The *Official Oxford Conference* featured a wide collection of essays on the role of the Christian Churches concerning European society in that period, as well as a reasoned criticism of the international political system. Among the most relevant publications, see: Lord Lothian, Piper O.A. et al. (eds.), *The Universal Church and the World of Nations*, Vol. 7 of the series *The Official Oxford Conference Books*, Chicago, Willet, Clark & Company, 1938.

¹⁵ Willaime J.-P., “Il Consiglio ecumenico delle Chiese e la Conferenza delle Chiese europee di fronte all'unificazione dell'Europa”, in Canavero A. and Durand J.-D. (eds.), *Il fattore religioso nell'integrazione europea*, Milano, Edizioni Unicopli, 1999, p. 145.

¹⁶ Visser 't Hooft had been a member of the *International Consultative Group for Peace and Disarmament* since 1935. This informal Geneva-based association included representatives of various international peace-oriented organisations. The young theologian had already taken part in the deliberations of the International Council, at first as the Secretary General of the World's Student Christian Federation, then as the provisional Secretary-General of the WCC. During the war, he was one of the main promoters of the International Council meetings in Geneva, and the author of many of its reports.

took place, and there the limits of the League of Nations and “various causes for the failure of the peace process between 1919 and 1939”¹⁷ were debated. These considerations paved the way to the idea that the main reasons for the failure of the League lay in the “doctrine of sovereignty”¹⁸, which eroded the foundations of international safety and generated a state of permanent anarchy. Political criticism of the nation-state system was followed by some considerations on the spiritual condition of European society, which stemmed from the need to fight against the atheistic vision of contemporary ideologies with the ethical dimension of Christian universalism, so as to establish an “integrating force in Western civilisation”¹⁹, renewed by a “new ecumenical consciousness”. The Secretary of the WCC even stated that all future political regimes “[should] not be imposed from the outside, but all countries which accept a regime which is not based on state-absolutism and totalitarianism” should be given “an international guarantee against violent revolutions”; therefore, he declared that “Continental Europe must be conceived of as a federation”²⁰. Visser ’t Hooft, just like many of his collaborators and colleagues, firmly believed that the future political structure of Europe at the end of the war should be federal in nature. In a confidential document, the Dutch theologian explained that the idea of a European federation had already been accepted by the WCC *entourage* and it was also shared by the British ecclesiastical authorities:

With regard to war aims it is interesting to note that the idea of some sort of federal union of European states seems to make considerable headway. It would seem that British Christians are genuinely interested in a generous and radical solution of European problems²¹.

The vague idea of a federal-like European union had already started circulating within the Ecumenical Council in the mid-1930s, notably on the initiative of the Secretary General and his collaborators. The provisional Committee of the WCC was made up of men from different

¹⁷ See the document drawn up on the official stationery of the International Consultative Group dated November 1939, in War Files: Peace and disarmament, 1928-1940, box No. 7: International Consultative Group: surveys and reports, Correspondence, in the Archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva (hereafter, WCCA).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ See the document drawn up on the official stationery of the International Consultative Group dated May 1940, in The WCC: in process of formation, 1929-1970, box No. 6: Spiritual and moral issues, in WCCA.

²⁰ Lippens W. (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, *op. cit.*, p. 722.

²¹ See “confidential document – 13 November 1939”, *Notes on the Attitudes of Christians to this War*, in The WCC: in process of formation, 1939-1940, box No. 8: Correspondence Paton UK re docs Sept-Dec 1939, in WCCA.

political and religious backgrounds, from situations and countries where federalism – ideologically and practically considered an articulated and multi-level institutional system – was already an established reality. Visser 't Hooft's main collaborators included: Anglican Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944), theologian, member of the Labour Party and author of many essays on the relationship between the State and churches²²; pastor Marc Boegner (1881-1970), the first president of the French Protestant Federation and a strong proponent of unity between Christians and European federalism²³; John Mott (1865-1955), American Methodist pacifist, leader of the YMCA and the World Student Christian Federation, and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1946²⁴; Henry Smith Leiper (1891-1975), Congregationalist, representative of the WCC in New York and Bonhoeffer's main American contact, with whom he helped many Jews to flee Nazi Germany during the war²⁵; Hans Schönfeld (1900-1954), theologian and political economy expert, member of the German resistance movement and firm supporter of a "federally organised Europe"²⁶; Nils Ehrenström (1903-1984), member of the Church of Sweden and promoter of the active role of the WCC in the establishment of a new international order oriented towards the principles of federalism²⁷; and

²² Temple was the first president of the WCC. Among his main works are: *Church and Nation* (1915), *Christianity and the State* (1928), *Christianity and the Social Order* (1942) and his "ecumenical legacy", *The Church Looks Forward* (1944).

²³ Boegner was one of the two Vice Presidents of the WCC. After the war, he actively took part in the International Committee, promoting the petition for a *Federal Pact of Union*.

²⁴ Mott was the other Vice President of the WCC; see Fisher G.M., *John R. Mott: Architect of Cooperation and Unity*, New York, Association Press, 1953.

²⁵ Leiper was one of the two associated Secretaries of the WCC and supported, like Paton and Mott, a group of theologians of the "new world order", also known as "realist Christians", who stressed the need for the United States to take part in the war and the subsequent establishment of a new international structure, founded and organised around American leadership. See Warren H.A., *Theologians of a New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realists, 1920-1948*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 1997. Regarding his ecumenical and political perspective, see Leiper H.S., *Christ's Way and the World's, in Church, State, and Society*, New York. Abingdon Press, 1936.

²⁶ Lipgens W. (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 3, *Continental Plans for European Union 1939-1945*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1986, pp. 407-408. Schönfeld was part of the central office of the Geneva WCC and was the director of its study office. He was also connected to the *Kreisau* circle, a German conspiratorial organisation whose leading figure was Helmuth James von Moltke. See Von Klemperer K., *German Resistance Against Hitler. The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938-1945*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 264-314.

²⁷ Schönfeld and Ehrenström were Visser 't Hooft's closest collaborators in Geneva, with whom he drew up some important documents on the role of the Ecumenical Council in the establishment of a new postwar order for continental Europe, which "[should]

finally William Paton (1886-1943), one of the most important members of the International Missionary Council and a representative of the WCC in London²⁸, where he established relationships with the Federal Union²⁹. Both Paton and Visser 't Hooft believed in the federal model and the need to overcome “absolute national sovereignty”, whose prerequisite, however, was to be the establishment of the “Universal Church” through ecumenical action³⁰. They were both convinced that it was crucial to outline the principles and tools that could give rise to a new international political and economic system after the war, also in harmony with Christian and ecumenical values. In this regard, Visser 't Hooft stated that “the problem of international order includes the problem of international law”; therefore, “the specific Christian contribution in this respect is to test the projects of federalism (whether on a world, European, or more limited scale) or proposals for a reorganised League of Nations, on the basis of the realistic Christian conception of history and man, of nation and state”. However, the great uncertainty of the historical context in which he lived made Visser 't Hooft sadly wonder: “to what extent would the creation of federal organisms on each Continent be a useful step towards the organic organisation of the world in regional bodies?”³¹

be conceived of as a federation”. See Visser 't Hooft W.A. and Schönfeld H., “The Responsibility of the Church for International Order (November 1939)”, pp. 708-710; Visser 't Hooft W.A., “The Ecumenical Church and the International Situation (April 1940)”, pp. 713-716; Visser 't Hooft W.A., “Some Considerations Concerning the Postwar Settlement (March 1941)”, pp. 719-722, in Lipgens W. (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Paton was the other associated Secretary General of the WCC and was particularly active in maintaining ecumenical relationships among the churches during the Second World War. Regarding his political and religious thought, see Paton W., “Britain, America and the Future (July 1941)”, in Lipgens W. (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, *op. cit.*, pp. 722-726. See also Paton W., *World Community*, London, Student Christian Movement Press, 1938.

²⁹ This is demonstrated in the correspondence – mostly telegrams, letters and some *confidential drafts* – between Paton and Charles Kimber, co-founder with Derek Rawnsley and Patrick Ransome of the Federal Union. See the documents in War Files: Peace and disarmament, 1928-1940, box No. 3: Federal Union; correspondence W. Paton, in WCCA. Regarding the British federalist movement, see Bosco A., *Federal Union e l'Unione franco-britannica*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2009; on the same issue, see also Mayne R. and Pinder J., *Federal Union: The Pioneers. A History of Federal Union*, London, Macmillan, 1990.

³⁰ Paton W., *World Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-163.

³¹ See the report of the *Study Department of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work*, in The WCC: in process of formation, 1929-1970, box No. 3: Study Department docs: Responsibility of the Church for international order Jan 1940, in WCCA.

Later, with the war nearing its end, the idea of a European Federation was more comprehensively formulated, and its ideological value was defined according to its own objectives, namely: to dismantle old nationalisms, expand and consolidate democracy, link European and American interests, and prevent Soviet Communism from spreading over Central and Eastern Europe³².

Visser 't Hooft's Contribution to European Resistance: Towards a New World Order

Besides the ideological debate on the planning of the future European political system³³, Visser 't Hooft was the nerve centre of a large network of secret political relationships among the representatives of the European resistance during the war. Notably, both his office in Geneva and the two branches in New York and London acted as actual links between the *intelligence* agencies of the Allied governments and several members of the Dutch, German, French and Italian Resistance³⁴. In fact, some members of the WCC Provisional Committee played a pivotal role within the spy system set up by Allen Welsh Dulles, who was in charge of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe at that time³⁵. At the beginning of the 1940s, Neal Petersen explains, Dulles made use of some “religious groups to get contact and information”³⁶, also thanks to the help of his brother, John Foster Dulles, who was engaged in the ecumenical movement and played the “external” role of co-founder of the *Commission on a Just and Durable Peace* of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America among the members of the WCC Office

³² Bertella Farnetti P., *Gli Stati Uniti e l'unità europea, 1940-1950. Percorsi di un'idea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2004.

³³ Regarding the events and the most important moments in the political thought of the WCC representatives, see Nurser J., “The ‘Ecumenical Movement’ Churches, ‘Global Order’, and Human Rights: 1938-1948”, in *Human Rights Quarterly*, 4, 25 (November 2003), pp. 841-881.

³⁴ Regarding the contact among Visser 't Hooft, the representatives of the Allied governments and the members of the European Resistance, see Visser 't Hooft W.A., *Le temps du rassemblement*, *op. cit.*; Lippens W. and Loth W. (eds.), *Documents on the History of European Integration*, 4 Vols., Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1985-1991; Petersen N.H. (ed.), *From Hitler's Doorstep. The Wartime Intelligence Reports of Allen Dulles, 1942-1945*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. See also the documents on Visser 't Hooft in the Archive of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and in the Archive of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) in Amsterdam.

³⁵ The European headquarters of the OSS were located in Bern. See Srodes J., *Allen Dulles. Master of Spies*, Washington, Regnery Publishing, 1999.

³⁶ Petersen N.H., *From Hitler's Doorstep*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

of Studies³⁷. Later, he became the American Secretary of State under Eisenhower's Presidency, where he was one of the firmest supporters of European unity³⁸. Switzerland played a crucial role within the anti-Nazi spy system established all over Europe, where all resistance forces converged to get support from the Allies to organise liberation wars in their own countries. One of A. W. Dulles's (who was appointed Director of the Central Intelligence Agency – CIA in 1953) main collaborators was the Secretary General of the WCC, marked with the code “Source 474”³⁹. Petersen explains that the director of the OSS “maintained close ties with Visser 't Hooft throughout the war”, especially because of his “extensive international connections”⁴⁰. This was confirmed during a public conference in New York by the Dutch theologian himself, who added that many “representatives of the Resistance movements of several countries had regularly met in Geneva and attempted to elaborate a common plan for postwar order in Europe”⁴¹; he also stressed that many “Christian leaders had a very large share in the organisation and dissemination of underground press”⁴², in the hope of spreading the ambitious federal-oriented reconstruction plan of the European order.

Besides the WCC, Visser 't Hooft's Genevan house became an informal gathering point where the ideas circulating within the many European Resistance movements were collected, shared and sorted out. Geneva – and the whole of Switzerland – provided an ideal breeding ground to share the programmes elaborated by anti-fascist groups while in hiding. In this regard, Visser 't Hooft wrote in his *Mémoires* that some crucial experiences of the Resistance relied on a common ideological background, surprisingly connected to the considerations on world order previously made by the WCC, and they all agreed on “la nécessité urgente d'une grande fédération des nations européennes”⁴³. This project, the reformed theologian recalls, was partially shared by the French, Dutch,

³⁷ Toulouse M.G., *The transformation of John Foster Dulles. From Prophet of Realism to Priest of Nationalism*, Macon (GA), Mercer University Press, 1985, pp. 61-86. Regarding the relationship between Visser 't Hooft and John Foster Dulles, see Nurser J., *For All Peoples and All Nations. The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2005.

³⁸ Cf. Bertella Farnetti P., *Gli Stati Uniti e l'unità europea, 1940-1950*, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Petersen N.H., *From Hitler's Doorstep*, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

⁴⁰ *Id.*, p. 565.

⁴¹ Extract from the *Morning and Evening Papers* (June 1945), titled “Churches Share in Anti-Hitler Revolt. Revealed by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft”, in The WCC: in process of formation, 1943-1957, box No. 4: Articles on Resistance movements by Visser 't Hooft and Bp Bell, 1945 and 1957, in WCCA.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Visser 't Hooft W.A., *Le temps du rassemblement*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

German and Italian Resistance movements, which “n’avaient pas eu l’occasion de discuter de leurs idées”; now, however, “l’initiative d’une consultation internationale [...] [venait] des Italiens”. In fact, “Ernesto Rossi et Altiero Spinelli, qui avaient élaboré ensemble le projet d’une fédération européenne dans une prison fasciste, étaient arrivés en Suisse pour prendre contact avec la Résistance d’autres pays”⁴⁴.

The authors of the *Ventotene Manifesto* aimed at moving to Switzerland to start intense propaganda campaigns to spread federalist ideas north of the Alps. In September 1943, the founders of the European Federalist Movement (MFE) started establishing contact with refugees coming from other occupied countries to organise a conference to be attended by the representatives of the various resistance movements. However, Spinelli recalled the many difficulties in “organising an international federalist conference in Switzerland”⁴⁵ because of the impossibility of obtaining the “official support” of any organisation because foreigners were not allowed to take part in political activities. He noticed, however, that in Switzerland there were “not-strictly political groups and people of great importance sharing our ideas and beliefs”. This group of people almost certainly included the Secretary of the WCC who, later in his *Mémoires*, wrote that he had “aucun mal à [...] décider de collaborer avec eux, car ce qu’ils proposaient cadrait tout à fait avec les pensées et les projets du mouvement œcuménique”⁴⁶. Spinelli wrote most of the documents to be discussed by the representatives of the European Resistance during the meetings at Visser 't Hooft’s house. These collected documents would later form the *International Federalist Declaration of the Resistance Movements* (May, 20th, 1944)⁴⁷.

Visser 't Hooft acted as a real catalyst, as well as the link between the experiences of international evangelical Europeanism, which originated from the ecumenical movement, and the experiences of European federalism, which stemmed from the *Ventotene Manifesto*. Both of these experiences were closely linked to the life of another Evangelical –

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ Pantagruel’s [Altiero Spinelli] letter to the Active Pessimist [Mario Alberto Rollier], undated (presumably October-December 1943), “*Fondo Partito d’Azione, archivio clandestino*”, b. 2, fasc. 8, in Archive of the Institute for the History of the Resistance and the History of the Contemporary Italian Society of Turin (Istoretto).

⁴⁶ Visser 't Hooft W.A., *Le temps du rassemblement, op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁴⁷ Regarding Rossi and Spinelli’s activities in Switzerland and the Geneva meetings, see Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo. Da “Giustizia e Libertà” ad Altiero Spinelli*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1996, pp. 145-204; *Id.*, *Altiero Spinelli*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, pp. 91-282. Regarding the *draft federalist declaration*, see Spinelli A., *Machiavelli nel secolo XX. Scritti del confino e della clandestinità 1941-1944*, edited by P.S. Graglia, Bologna: il Mulino, 1993, pp. 263-272.

equally influenced by Barth's theology and the Ecumenical Movement –, Italian chemist Mario Alberto Rollier, in whose house the European Federalist Movement was founded in August 1943⁴⁸. These events clearly demonstrate the ideological convergence of Geneva – reformed, ecumenical and aiming at a federal-like world and European order – and some federalist leaders of the European Resistance, despite the fact that their political, ethical and religious characteristics were based on different strategies and motivations.

A Draft Federalist Declaration by the European Resistance Movements

As above-mentioned, the idea of drawing up a document epitomising the ideas shared by the representatives of the European Resistance and supporting federalism at the international level stemmed from the intense propaganda campaigns carried out by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi during their stay in Switzerland⁴⁹.

At first, Rossi and Spinelli contacted some local Europeanist associations and tried to involve several top diplomats and members of the Allied *intelligence* services. However, afterwards, they realised it would have been more effective to make contact with some anti-fascist refugees with direct contact with the Resistance movements in other European countries, so as to promote a more productive ideological debate and to carry out a common political action⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ Regarding the establishment of the MFE, Rognoni Vercelli C., *Mario Alberto Rollier. Un valdese federalista*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1991.

⁴⁹ The idea of spreading federalist ideas at the international level had already been announced by Mario Alberto Rollier in the fourth issue of the clandestine edition of *L'Unità Europea*. See "L'azione federalista sul terreno internazionale", in *L'Unità Europea*, No. 4, May-June 1944.

⁵⁰ The founders of the MFE soon abandoned their attempts to work in close collaboration with Swiss associations such as *Europa-Union* and *Mouvement Populaire Suisse en faveur d'une Fédération de peuples* because the latter wanted to remain thoroughly neutral and adopted a low militant profile. Spinelli himself almost immediately gave up all strategies aimed at sensitising the most influential Allied diplomats, notably following his conversation with Allen Welsh Dulles, head of the American secret services in Europe, who "skated" over the issue of the political reorganisation of postwar Europe and stated that the Allies' only priority was to win the war. Regarding Rossi and Spinelli's activities in Switzerland and the Geneva meetings during which the document was drawn up, see Graglia P.S., *Altiero Spinelli, op. cit.*, pp. 191-282; *Id.*, *Unità europea e federalismo, op. cit.*, pp. 145-204; Pozzoli F., "Svizzera e Federalismo europeo durante la seconda guerra mondiale", in Preda D., Rognoni Vercelli C. (eds.), *Storia e percorsi del federalismo. L'eredità di Carlo Cattaneo*, 2 Vols., Bologna, il Mulino, 2005, pp. 465-517, Vol. I; Rognoni Vercelli C., *Mario Alberto Rollier, op. cit.*, pp. 129-165; Spinelli A., *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio. La goccia e la roccia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1987, pp. 379-414.

Ignazio Silone was one of the first intellectuals contacted by Spinelli because of his support for the idea of federalism and Silvio Trentin's movement *Libérer et Fédérer*⁵¹. Silone introduced him to Swiss journalist François Bondy, who was well established both in the Allied espionage network and the anti-Nazi Resistance movements⁵², and who, in turn, introduced the Italian federalists to René Bertholet, a Swiss socialist in charge of maintaining secret contact with the German conspiracy⁵³. A key role was played by Egidio Reale, a republican antifascist, who moved to Switzerland in 1927 and actively collaborated with the League of Nations as well as the World Council of Churches⁵⁴. Reale, who met Rossi in Locarno in 1943, became a member of the MFE and introduced Jean Laloy and Jean-Marie Soutou⁵⁵, two members of the French Resistance movement, to the international federalist group that was being formed. Furthermore, Spinelli recalls, Reale made Visser 't Hooft aware of the cause of the Italian federalists, and he is likely to have asked the Dutch pastor to host the first international federalist meetings at his house in

⁵¹ Regarding Ignazio Silone, see Malandrino C., *Socialismo e libertà. Autonomie, federalismo. Europa da Rosselli a Silone*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1990. Regarding his federalist thought, see Silone I., "Socialismo federalista", in *L'Avvenire dei Lavoratori*, No. 1-2, February 1st, 1944; *Id.*, "Per la federazione europea. Compiti e responsabilità dei socialisti inglesi", in *L'Avvenire dei Lavoratori*, May 30th, 1944; *Id.*, "Federalismo e socialismo", in *L'Avvenire dei Lavoratori*, June 30th, 1944; *Id.*, "Per il federalismo", in *Critica sociale*, June 30th, 1949. Regarding Silvio Trentin, see Malandrino C., *Silvio Trentin pensatore politico antifascista, rivoluzionario, federalista*, Manduria, Piero Lacaita Editore, 2007. Regarding his political thought, see Trentin S., *Federalismo e libertà – Scritti teorici (1935-1943)*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1987.

⁵² The meeting between Spinelli and A. Welsh Dulles had been arranged by Bondy himself. See Spinelli A., *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

⁵³ Bertholet was an *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampf-bund* (ISK) activist and, just like Bondy, an informer for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe, directed by A. Welsh Dulles. Bertholet adhered to Rossi and Spinelli's project, together with his wife Hanna and one of her friends, Hilda Monte (whose real name was Meisel), both German.

⁵⁴ Reale's stay in Switzerland, see Zanetti A., "L'esilio ginevrino" and De Ziegler H., "Egidio Reale a Ginevra", in Ingusci P., De Donno A., Schiavetti F. *et al.*, *Egidio Reale e il suo tempo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1961, pp. 107-148. See also Castro S., *Egidio Reale tra Italia, Svizzera e Europa*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2011; Castro S., "Alla ricerca di un nuovo ordine giuridico internazionale: il problema della pace europea nelle riflessioni di Egidio Reale", in Di Sarcina F., Grazi L., Scichilone L. (eds.), *Europa vicina e lontana. Idee e percorsi dell'integrazione europea*, Firenze, Centro Editore Toscano, 2008, pp. 27-37; Di Sarcina F., "Italia e Svizzera nell'Europa da costruire. Una biografia intellettuale e politica di Egidio Reale tra fascismo e democrazia", in Grazi L., Scichilone L. (eds.), *Dialogo sull'Europa. Laboratorio di studi sull'integrazione europea*, Siena, Centro di Ricerca sull'Integrazione europea, University of Siena, 2004, pp. 21-30. Reale was also an OSS informer in Switzerland. His number code was Agent "506" (Drumbee). See Petersen N.H., *From Hitler's Doorstep*, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

⁵⁵ Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Geneva⁵⁶. These meetings were attended by various members of the European resistance and some “diplomats of the League of Nation, who were isolated in Geneva, and some refugees from other countries”⁵⁷.

Therefore, following Spinelli’s drawing up of a *First Project of a Federalist Conference* in October 1943⁵⁸, a series of crucial meetings regularly took place at Visser ’t Hooft’s from March 1944 onwards⁵⁹. In the above-mentioned meetings, which aimed at discussing the contents and the political purposes of Spinelli’s document, several other issues were discussed, including those related to Germany and the nature of the future European federation⁶⁰. The final version of the *Federalist Declaration of the European Resistance Movements* was drawn up on May 20th. This document, published in “L’Unità Europea”, is made up of a preamble and six sections, wherein the declaration of intent (I)⁶¹ is followed by: the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations and the need for its replacement by a “Federal Union among European People” (II), a list of the advantages of such a political-institutional organisation in fostering peace at the European and global levels (III), the key features of its geographical limits, the authority and the structure of the Federation (IV). The document also dealt with Germany and its integration into

⁵⁶ Spinelli A., *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*, *op. cit.*, p. 398. Spinelli actually stated that he had met Visser ’t Hooft through Soutou and not through Reale. See Rognoni Vercelli C., *Mario Alberto Rollier*, *op. cit.*, p. 155. In addition to the above-mentioned texts, see also Lippens W., “Transnational Contacts”, in *Id.* (ed.) *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, *op. cit.*, pp. 659-697, an essential documentary source, and Voigt’s very useful article to reconstruct the Geneva meetings: Voigt K., “Die Genfer Föderalistentreffen im Frühjahr 1944”, in *Risorgimento. Rivista di storia italiana e contemporanea*, 1, 1980, pp. 59-79.

⁵⁷ Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 162. The five meetings were attended by Rossi, Spinelli, Reale, Soutou (under the name of Pierre), Laloy, Bertholet, his wife and her friend Hilda Monte, Bondy (under the name of Süß), occasionally Luigi Einaudi and, obviously, Visser ’t Hooft, along with other Norwegian, Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian participants, whose names are unfortunately unknown. On the meeting at Visser ’t Hooft’s house, see Braga A., *Un federalista giacobino. Ernesto Rossi, pioniere degli Stati Uniti d’Europa*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993.

⁵⁸ See *Primo progetto di un convegno federalista* [Bellinzona], October 19th, 1943, in the Historical Archives of the European Union (hereafter the HAEU), Spinelli Fund, Dep. 1/3. See also Spinelli A., *Machiavelli nel secolo XX*, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-272.

⁵⁹ The meetings took place on March 31st, April 29th, May 20th and July 7th, 1944.

⁶⁰ As Graglia explained, “as far as the proposals and the suggestions on Spinelli and Rossi’s drafts were concerned”, a particularly active role was played by “Jean-Marie Soutou, Lazar Latinovic, the Norwegian representative and Luigi Einaudi himself, even though his participation was limited to the last meeting”. Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 187 (Original text in Italian).

⁶¹ The Roman numbers in brackets refer to the sections or the points into which the document has been divided, according to the original numbering of the *Declaration*.

the future Federal Union (V), a goal to be pursued with the help of the United Nations and the collective and permanent efforts of the European resistance (VI). Therefore, once these Geneva meetings ended, a *Comité Provisoire pour la Fédération Européenne* was set up to coordinate all propaganda campaigns and the many European Resistance movements⁶².

Who were the authors of the six sections of the document⁶³? The first (I), dealing with the reasons underlying the document, was drawn up by Soutou, who stressed that the life of the European people should be based on “personal respect, safety, social justice, the exploitation of all economic resources to help the entire community, and the development of independent national life”⁶⁴. The part regarding the federal organisation of the future European state (II) was written by Spinelli, while the one dealing with European peace as a preliminary solution to the establishment of world peace (III-IV) was written by Rossi. Finally, the German issue and the return of Germany to civil life in postwar Europe (V) and the need to “make use” of the United Nations to establish the European Federation (VI) were addressed respectively by Spinelli and Soutou⁶⁵.

Despite the great ideal value of the document and its pivotal role in making the representatives of the European Resistance politically aware of the need for a federal reorganisation of Europe to overcome the risks related to the absolute sovereignty of the States and to international anarchy, the *Declaration* did not live up to its expectations. As Graglia rightly noticed, the Geneva document was a “federalist flare-up”⁶⁶, bound to fade after the invasion of Normandy, which diverted Northern European movements away from all theoretical considerations and engaged them in more and more consistent military action. The work started at Visser 't Hooft's house was continued by Spinelli in Paris, during the federalist Congress in March 1945 when Europe was about to enter “a period of full and vigorous reconstruction of the sovereign nation-states”⁶⁷.

⁶² Regarding the support given to the *Declaration* by some of the liberation movements and various political parties from many countries which took place in the meetings, see Lippens W., “Transnational Contacts”, *op. cit.*; Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-192. The *Comité Provisoire* was then replaced by the *Centre d'Action pour la Fédération Européenne*, created and organised by Rossi.

⁶³ See Rossi's letter to Spinelli (August 16th, 1944) in HAEU, Spinelli Fund, Dep. 1/4.

⁶⁴ Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 188 (Original text in Italian). See also the (official) French version of the *Declaration* in “Il progetto di dichiarazione federalista dei movimenti di resistenza europei”, in *L'Unità Europea*, No. 5, July-August 1944.

⁶⁵ For an in-depth analysis, see Graglia P.S., *Unità europea e federalismo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-189.

⁶⁶ *Id.*, p. 197 (Original text in Italian).

⁶⁷ *Id.*

The Commitment to European Unity within the Communitarian Integration Process

After the war, Visser 't Hooft continued supporting the cause of the European Federation, even after the formal establishment of the WCC in 1948 and his official appointment as Secretary General. However, the international political situation and the division of the world into spheres of influence had troubled both the Council and the Ecumenical Movement, notably concerning the stance to be taken on Communism and the need to preserve the unity of the Christian Churches, undermined by the Cold War and the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe. Between the 1940s and the 1950s, the Secretary of the WCC had to face a challenging issue, he had to work towards European unity in a federation of free people, on the one hand, and towards the ecumenical unity of the Christians who were divided by the ideological wall built up by superpowers, on the other.

After the establishment of the European Council in 1949, Visser 't Hooft questioned what stance the WCC should take on the initiative of a Europe finally freed from all nationalisms and close to the achievement of its own political unity – such circumstances would later be defined by Mario Albertini as the “psychological phase” of the European integration process⁶⁸. Pastor Boegner, Visser 't Hooft's long-time collaborator, believed that some caution was needed, even if he encouraged Protestants to engage in the establishment of Europe because a clearer stance in favour of European unity would have been detrimental to the Eastern European Churches. According to Willaime, Boegner “did not want to go beyond a conversational stage and the exchange of information among Protestants interested in the establishment of Europe”, without “supporting any particular political trend”⁶⁹. However, the Secretary General had different opinions and hoped for “the creation of a group able to ponder the Protestant stances on Europe”⁷⁰. Therefore, Visser 't Hooft decided to act independently of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and looked for the broader approval of the political and religious idea of a federal and ecumenical Europe. Following his decision, in 1950, the Dutch pastor promoted the creation of an informal study group, the Ecumenical Commission for European Cooperation – later renamed

⁶⁸ The two other phases are “economic” and “political” in nature. See Albertini M., *Tutti gli scritti*, Vol. V, 1965-1979, edited by N. Mosconi, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, pp. 148-158.

⁶⁹ Willaime J.-P., “Il Consiglio ecumenico delle Chiese e la Conferenza delle Chiese europee di fronte all'unificazione dell'Europa”, *op. cit.*, p. 145 (Original text in Italian).

⁷⁰ *Id.*

Committee on the Christian Responsibility for European Cooperation⁷¹ – aimed at updating the WCC regarding the developments in European unification carried out by the communitarian integration process. This study group included liberal, socialist and Christian-democratic politicians, members of federalist and Europeanist movements, university professors and important members of ecclesiastical institutions⁷², such as John Edwards⁷³, André Philip⁷⁴, Constantijn. L. Patijn⁷⁵ and Max Kohnstamm⁷⁶, Jean Rey⁷⁷, Mario Alberto Rollier, Gustav Heinemann⁷⁸ and pastor Paul Albrecht⁷⁹.

In November 1953, the Commission held a meeting in Paris to foster a debate and come to a common position among Protestants in Europe, in the light of the recent developments in the communitarian integration process. However, this meeting soon proved to be a wasted opportunity because the Eastern delegations blamed the Western Churches for their poor ecumenism and deplored “the unilateral westward trend of the

⁷¹ For further information on the initiatives and the activities of the Ecumenical Commission of European Cooperation, see Martin Greschat and Loth W., “Protestantismus und die Entstehung der Europäischen Gemeinschaft”, in Greschat M., and Loth W. (eds.), *Christen und die Entstehung der Europäischen*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1994, pp. 25-96.

⁷² See also Fey H.C. (ed.), *A History of Ecumenical Movement (1948-1968)*, 3 Vols., Geneva, WCC Publications, 2004, pp. 242-244, Vol. II.

⁷³ Edwards, the well-known leader of the English Labour Party, was president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1959.

⁷⁴ André Philip was a famous professor of Economics at Sorbonne University, the President of the *Mouvement socialiste pour les États-Unis d'Europe*, and a member of the European Movement.

⁷⁵ Patijn was a professor of Public International Law at Utrecht University.

⁷⁶ Kohnstamm was a Dutch historian and diplomat, the Vice President of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, and first Secretary of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). See Winand P., “Max Kohnstamm et le Plan Schuman: ‘On change les assiettes’ ou ‘Plus est en vous’”, in Wilkens A. (ed.), *Le Plan Schuman dans l'histoire. Intérêts nationaux et projet européen*, Bruxelles, Bruyant, 2004, pp. 357-358.

⁷⁷ Rey was the European Commissioner for External Relationships (1958-70) and the President of the European Commission from 1967 to 1970. See Tilly P., “Jean Rey et Altiero Spinelli: parcours croisés de deux pères de l'Europe”, in *Annali de la Fondazione Ugo La Malfa*, 24 (2010), pp. 339-349.

⁷⁸ Heinemann was the President of the Federal Republic of Germany (1969-1974) and Karl Barth's friend. In the 1930s, he joined the German Confessing Church and fiercely fought against Nazism. After the war, he declared himself in favour of the unity of Europe. See Heinemann G. W., *Im Schnittpunkt der Zeit. Reden und Aufsätze*, Darmstadt, Verlag Stimme der Gemeinde, 1957.

⁷⁹ Pastor Paul Albrecht planned to create a European Council of Churches to express ecumenical cooperation in Europe alongside the Council of Europe.

Commission”⁸⁰, whose position in favour of a federation of the free States of Europe was, in Visser ’t Hooft’s view, the discriminating element “between those who believed in the need to establish a new European structure, and those who were highly suspicious of such efforts”⁸¹. These views were also shared by Rollier, who deplored “the inability of the Protestant Churches to think of the future of Europe” – because they were literally paralysed by factious ideological considerations, or because they were unable to overcome the now impossible-to-fulfil utopia of the “Great Europe” – to achieve “European unity in the West”⁸² through a supranational government which also included Western Germany. The historical moment was particularly serious: the fateful French vote on the European Defence Community (EDC), which was to curb Europeanist enthusiasm for many years and halt the political integration process of Europe was nearing. Visser ’t Hooft was fully aware that “the time to decide for Europe”⁸³ had arrived. According to the Dutch pastor, Europe could “only be built if it is able to express the tradition of cultural diversity – its contribution to mankind – in new forms”⁸⁴. Such tradition, he added, could hardly survive without political unity in a modern federation.

The negative outcome of the French vote (which deeply disappointed Visser ’t Hooft) did not dampen interest in the European constitution. On the contrary, it led to a rethinking of the strategy of the Ecumenical Commission and some critical considerations on the role of the Christian Churches in Europe and the actual contribution of ecumenism to the idea of European unity. Visser ’t Hooft never stopped fighting to promote “la naissance d’une véritable Europe spirituelle”⁸⁵ which, just like the sectorial and functionally oriented integration carried out by the Communitarian Treaties, would have helped pave the spiritual way to political Europe. “Cet acte de foi”, Alfredo Canavero and Jean-Dominique Durand remarked, “comme pari formidable sur un avenir que toutes les conditions extérieures s’obstinaient à boucher”⁸⁶, was common to many Christian politicians and intellectuals who were committed to the unity of

⁸⁰ Willaime J.-P., “Il Consiglio ecumenico delle Chiese e la Conferenza delle Chiese europee di fronte all’unificazione dell’Europa”, pp. 146-147 (Original text in Italian).

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ Canavero A. and Durand J. D., “Les phénomènes religieux et l’identification européenne”, in Frank R. and Bossuat G. (eds.), *Les identités européennes au XX^e siècle: diversités, convergences et solidarités*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004, pp. 161-162.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

Europe; it was “bien à la base de la démarche de Robert Schuman, [ainsi que] de Willem Visser 't Hooft”⁸⁷.

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