INTRODUCTION

Even God cannot change the past.
Agathon.

The present volume deals with the history of the third and last phase of the Counter-Reformation proper in the countries of the far North. Normally, this period comprises the years 1622 to 1648. However, in this work the time-scale has been purposely stretched in order to include the aftermath covering the work of the Spanish and French embassies for the Roman Catholic cause and the conversion to Roman Catholicism of Queen Christina of Sweden.

The third phase takes into account three distinctly different stages of development: (1) the successive attempts by the S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (now known as the Sacra Congregazione l’Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o ‘de Propaganda Fide’) through its missionary priests to gain a foothold in Scandinavia; (2) the endeavour of the foreign embassy chaplains stationed in Copenhagen and Stockholm either alone or in close contact and agreement with their respective resident Ambassadors and at times with the S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide to obtain the same end; and finally (3) the various moves taken in order to procure the religious re-orientation of the sovereign lords and masters of the kingdoms in which they served.

The material drawn upon to form the basis for this presentation is principally the Archivo Segreto Vaticano, the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, the Archivum S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, and the Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, on the one hand, and the various Public Record Offices, libraries, and private collections in many parts of Europe and not least in Scandinavia, on the other. Some of the source material presented in this volume had been hidden away for centuries out of reach of scholars of history and is used here, it is believed, for the first time. This is particularly true of the original documents drawn from the Jesuit Archives in Rome covering the various stages of the conversion to Roman Catholicism of Queen Christina of Sweden. In addition, all major scholarly works dealing with parts of the subject matter found in this volume—a comprehensive study of the whole period in its entirety has hitherto never seen the light of day—have been consulted and taken into consideration.
As will be seen in the sequel, the copious stores of first-hand evidence now made available to the author have rendered many long-cherished views untenable on both sides of the denominational borderline. It is to be feared that the historical truth on very important subjects will still have much prejudice to encounter before it can win general acceptance. It is essential to stress this point here, particularly since it has long been a cherished belief among a certain school of staunch Protestant historians that sensational information of the cloak-and-dagger type would emerge once the archives of the Jesuit Order opened its doors to scholarly research. As will be shown in the sequel, any such conviction is a mere figment of the imagination and has nothing to do with reality.

From this it is clear that the learned German early nineteenth-century historian W.H. Grauert was not exaggerating when, in 1837, he stated with reference to the reign of Queen Christina of Sweden: ‘Wir können daher diese Gesandtschaftsberichte für die letzten Regierungsjahre Christina’s nicht als eine lautere Quelle betrachten, sondern müssen sie, wie das schon bei allen Gesandtschaftsberichten der Fall ist, mit grosser Vorsicht benutzen, und stets andere Berichte damit confrontiren: dass man diess nicht beachtet, sondern diese Schriften, durch ihre Reichhaltigkeit veranlasst, unbedingt als Hauptquelle gebraucht hat, ist Veranlassung zu vielen unbildigen Urtheilen über Christina gewesen’. (Cf. Grauert, Christina, Königinn von Schweden und ihr Hof Vol. I (1837) p. 436). Obviously, Grauert’s words of caution concern not only the period with which he was dealing, but also the decades leading up to it.

Against this background it is obvious that any attempt to get at the very truth of the events described in this study demands access to the authentic documents in many parts of Europe in order to compare their contents with each other, and, in cases concerning published material, to collate the text with the original. Thus, it is necessary not only to analyse the strata of a source, but also to ferret out and discard the false and the worthless, thereby laying bare the material from which the historical facts can be reconstructed. It is this method which will be adopted in the following, as was done in the earlier volumes of this series. Hence, the copious information in the notes’ section and the comments on archivistic provenance and the like.